

Chicago residents angry at planned school closings

A WSWS reporting team
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On March 21, the city of Chicago announced the closure of 61 public schools and the “turnaround” of 6 others, where all teachers and staff are fired and school management is privatized. About 30,000 students are affected and 1,000 teaching jobs are in jeopardy.

Against the deep popular opposition to the destruction of public education in the city, Democratic mayor Rahm Emanuel—Obama’s former chief of staff and chief political fundraiser—is ramming through the national policy of education “reform” of the Obama administration demanded by the country’s ruling elite in the wake of the 2007-2008 financial collapse.

Since the closures have been announced, the *World Socialist Web Site* has spoken with teachers, affected families and community members. Their comments reflect the immense anger felt by working people whose already tough conditions will definitely be worsened by the closures, which are based on the lie that there is no money for basic needs like public education.

Michael Kasprovicz lives near the Pershing West school, which will soon be closed and consolidated. He told the WSWS, “It’s a travesty. Where are the teachers going to go, and now in a recession, more skilled people will be without jobs? Vacant school buildings will drive down property values.”

“Rahm Emanuel can go to hell. This has been going on since 2008 when bankers and investors screwed the world after years without regulation. Chicago is not a poor city. It has a poor distribution of wealth.”

Kirwin Bradley, grandparent, said, “Rahm Emanuel and Barbara Byrd Bennett are not in touch with the community and the mayor is full of s---. Kids will run the risk of dying to get to schools outside their neighborhood, while we are forced to pay higher taxes so they can pay private institutions to educate.”

“It’s all about money for the mayor and governor. The mayor, city and state government are hypocrites. They can afford to give themselves a raise, when they should take a 70 percent pay cut!”

One early childhood education teacher who wished to remain anonymous works at a school that will be “turned around.” She said, “I feel awful for my colleagues who are losing their jobs. I don’t know whether I’m going to stay. We want to follow the teachers who have a lot of experience. I don’t know what I’m going to do, but I don’t have 20 years experience and a Master’s, so I’m not the worst affected.”

“I’m lucky that I have a lot of experience in the charter schools though. What I can say is they don’t develop appropriate practices. They teach to the test, and do whatever they can for the test scores. It ignores the reality of the situation and just focuses on a score that doesn’t tell you the whole story.”

Speaking on the action taken by CPS despite improvements her school has made in its standing, she said, “It is heartless to get us to build the schools up when they knew what the outcome was going to be all along—a turnaround.”

“People do want reform, they want better schools, but not the way they’re doing it.”

The majority of schools judged to be failing are in impoverished neighborhoods, already starved for funding. Teachers and students must make do with very little in the way of classroom resources and many regularly spend from hundreds and up to thousands of dollars of their own money to outfit the classroom and their students with needed supplies.

Mariama, a third grade teacher whose school will also be “turned around,” spoke about the inequality in the public schools exacerbated by the “reform” policies,

and how the city policies affect teachers very negatively.

She said, “Our school was on probation for six years—six years!—and they never made any capital improvements or gave the administration the opportunity to improve it. It’s going to be turned around.”

“When you interview at other jobs, they don’t understand what the social and economic situation is in the failing schools that don’t have a solid tax base,” Mariama explained. “They just see you as a failing school teacher.

“When there’s economic segregation, it’s not the teacher’s fault, but employers in other areas that have a solid tax base, they don’t understand that we’ve had to work doubly hard to provide instruction. People from the other side of town look down on us, but the problem is actually poverty.”

“I’m worried they’re going to carry out a strategy like Detroit’s,” Mariama said. “They have a financial manager now. They started out by closing schools too. I’m very worried. And you know, we’ve been quite polite compared with what I see in Egypt and the Middle East. Are we ready for that?”

“In the [Chicago teachers] union magazine, they write that teachers are in an abusive relationship with the Democratic Party,” she commented. “An abusive relationship! But they support them—the unions supported Obama.”



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