

Chicago Teachers Union claims deal to reopen schools amidst surging pandemic passes by 55 percent

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13 January 2022

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) is claiming that its deal with Democratic Mayor Lori Lightfoot and the Chicago Public Schools to reopen schools to in-person learning has passed by the narrow margin of 55.5 percent in favor. With 20 percent of teachers not recording a vote, this means that only 44 percent of teachers voted in favor of a return to class as the pandemic spreads out of control.

The official vote total released at a CTU House of Delegates meeting on Wednesday night showed 10,342 votes in favor of the agreement and 8,278 opposed. The CTU has about 25,000 voting members, which means that approximately 6,400 teachers did not vote at all, either as a conscious abstention or due to problems with balloting.

Teachers had only 24 hours to discuss and vote on the agreement following the CTU's move to shut down their remote work action after four days and send them back into schools before the vote ended. The CTU also made it clear that even if teachers voted against the deal, it would be up to the union's House of Delegates, made up of union building reps, to decide when and whether to resume any job action.

Having demobilized the teachers, the CTU made clear that it was opposed to any real struggle against Lightfoot and the Biden administration that backed her.

After teachers voted overwhelmingly for remote-only instruction, Lightfoot locked them out of their online accounts, preventing educators from conducting virtual classes with their students. She denounced teachers for "illegally striking," threatened to fine them and went on a national media tour to denounce educators for supposedly abandoning impoverished and minority children.

Teachers and parents furious at the CTU for caving into Lightfoot and the school district have assailed the union, which has resorted to the most pathetic attempts to save face. In a series of slides posted on Twitter, CTU President Jesse Sharkey said, "We accomplished more than nothing, but less than we wanted." Among the supposed "gains" he listed were "keeping students home for a few days," in keeping with their farcical claim on Facebook to have "absolutely flattened the curve."

"My biggest worry is the divisiveness of Covid in our union," Sharkey said. "Steady at the helm. We didn't get what we wanted, but don't take a difficult situation and turn it into evidence of bad faith." He added that teachers should not question the "integrity" of the union leadership.

One educator tweeted, "You think if CTU hadn't spent two hours yesterday waxing poetic about how their terrible agreement is 'good actually' that vote wouldn't have been this slim? Because multiple teachers at my school voted yes bc it's not going to get any better."

Several parents expressed their anger over the CTU's deal of death in comments sent to the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee, which issued a statement opposing the agreement and calling for a citywide walkout to keep the schools closed and convert to full remote learning.

"I am a parent with two children attending CPS, and I wanted to send this email to show my support and encourage rank-and-file members to vote 'no' and to walk out from school.

"The city administration has failed us, and I'm deeply disappointed, but not surprised. I appreciate

everything that teachers and all other school staff have been doing, and I only want everyone to be safe. My children don't feel safe going to school either. We would rather have remote classes or even no classes, instead of being in-person. Safety first."

Another parent wrote, "I am a mother of two CPS students. I am immunocompromised being a kidney transplant recipient. I also am undergoing Chemo treatment. I lost my mother and cousin last year one month apart from COVID. I implore to you to please vote NO on the agreement made yesterday. This causes danger to families like mine who have already suffered so much from COVID."

Hospitalizations in Chicago are higher than they have been throughout the entire pandemic, with 189 Chicagoans a day being hospitalized on a seven-day average. The city currently has a positivity rate of 17.9 percent. Hospitals in some parts of the city, including the heavily working class south and west sides, have no ICU beds available. Some are being placed on bypass, meaning they are no longer taking emergency patients. Many hospitals have been delaying elective procedures by request of Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker.

Chicago is seeing five pediatric hospitalizations a day, and the state's own contact tracing figures show that 43 percent of infections are traced to schools, with industrial workplaces following just after. In suburban Cook County, which surrounds Chicago, 59 percent of cases are traced to schools. It is likely the state's figures would look worse if Chicago's numbers were included, as it comprises around 20 percent of the state's population.

After posturing for months that it would reject any deal without a districtwide health metric to trigger a transition to remote learning, the CTU accepted Lightfoot's demand that only individual schools would close for five days if 30 percent or more teachers are absent for two consecutive days due to testing positive for COVID-19 or are in quarantine from exposure. Even this will happen only if substitute teachers cannot bring the number to under 25 percent. Schools could also be closed if 40 percent of students are infected or in quarantine.

The toleration of such high levels means the CTU has sanctioned the Democratic Party's adoption of the homicidal policy of "herd immunity." The overcrowded and poorly ventilated schools will become

superspreaders of the deadly disease through working class communities.

The CTU also dropped demands for widespread testing of students on an opt-out principle, with the district agreeing to merely test 10 percent of students at each school. These 10 percent would not even be tested every week. Rather, just a portion of them would be selected randomly.

The only other mitigation measure agreed to by CPS, which the CTU has touted as a "win," is that the school district will provide a limited supply of KN95 masks to CPS workers and students, which will likely amount to two masks per person.

The struggle is far from over. Teachers, parents and educators will not accept mass infections and deaths. But the sabotage by the CTU underscores the need to build new organizations that genuinely represent teachers and will fight to mobilize the working class to close schools and nonessential businesses, as part of the implementation of a public health policy to stop the transmission of the disease and eliminate it.

The Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee is leading this fight. As Chicago educators resume this struggle, they must fight to link up the growing national and international movement to close schools and save lives, including the student walkouts across the country and today's nationwide strike by French teachers. We urge educators to contact the WSWs to join and build the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact