

Stop Acero's school closures in Chicago! For a unified struggle of teachers and workers against all budget cuts and school closures!

Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee
22 October 2024

Chicago teachers: Join the rank-and-file movement to defend public education! Contact the committee by filling out the form below.

On October 9, Acero Schools, a charter network within the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), announced it would close seven of its 15 schools. This brutal attack on the Chicago working class would mean the closure of Cruz, serving kindergarten through 12th grade, and six elementary schools: Fuentes, Santiago, Casas, Paz, Cisneros and Tamayo.

The Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee (CERFC) says, Enough is enough! No more school closures! We do not accept the dictates of the profit interests behind this decision. We urge educators, parents and students to join our committee and take the initiative to stop these closures.

This fight will find immediate support from educators who face draconian cuts in almost every district nationally. CERFC is part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committee (IWA-RFC), which is leading the fight in defense of public education around the world.

The closures at Acero are just the beginning in Chicago. The CPS faces a \$1 billion budgetary shortfall for this year and next. If Acero and Democratic Mayor Brandon Johnson succeed in closing these schools, CPS has already listed 100 others targeted for consolidation or closure. How many educators will lose their jobs? As it is, Chicago teachers—long underpaid—are working without a contract and are falling further behind inflation.

Johnson and the other Democrats tell us that the choice is between immediate cuts to schools, or bankrupting the district with a high-interest loan to be paid for by even bigger cuts later. Johnson, who is working hand in glove with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), advocates for the loan and claims his opponents are arguing in the racist vein of the Confederacy.

This is all a smokescreen to deflect from the real cause of the bankruptcy of Chicago schools. Public education is being

starved of resources while trillions are being funneled into America's rapidly expanding number of wars. Israeli butcher Netanyahu has only to put his hand out, and the Biden/Harris administration sends more 2,000-pound bombs to carry through the extermination of the Palestinian people. Now the US is providing Israel a THAAD missile battery system at a cost of \$23 billion, along with active-duty US military personnel to run it. But, we are told, there is "no money" for schools.

The defense of public education cannot be waged without a political struggle against imperialist war, the capitalist system that requires these wars, and their two political parties.

The attack on Acero schools, which targets some of the city's most vulnerable students, demonstrates how the Democrats and Republicans are both against the working class. Many Acero students come from migrant families who were bused into Chicago by fascist governor of Texas Greg Abbott.

Despite his crocodile tears for "black and brown children," Mayor Johnson had many of these migrant children housed in "shelters" that included warehouses and police station lobbies. At least one child, Carlos Martinez Rivero, died of multiple infections circulating in those inhumane conditions. CPS should be expanding its services to migrant families across the district, including bilingual language support, nutrition and health facilities in every school.

The Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee is uniting with educators—black, white and Hispanic—who are fighting exactly the same struggles nationally and internationally. The ending of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) under Biden and Harris has plunged districts into crisis across the US. Experts have predicted that 384,000 teachers will lose their jobs over the next year or two, threatening the very existence of public education in the US as we know it. There will be no shortage of struggles and Chicago teachers will find allies throughout

the working class.

History shows the CTU is on the other side

The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) has a long history of betraying Acero teachers. Their contracts were always worse, historically working for longer hours and lower pay. In 2018, Acero educators launched the first-ever teachers' strike against a charter school operator. Teachers showed immense determination to fight for better pay, smaller class sizes, and special education resources.

After a month, the CTU isolated the teachers and shut down the strike. Two contracts later, Acero educators still work more hours for less money than those at CPS. Paraprofessional pay remains low and class sizes of 30 (and higher) continue to keep educational standards low. Acero deliberately understaffs schools as part of its business model. The CTU's betrayal in 2018 allowed Acero a free hand.

In 2023, Acero educators again showed their determination to fight by voting overwhelmingly to authorize strike action by 95 percent overall, with 100 percent in favor of striking at some schools like Tamayo (now slated for closure). Ignoring this overwhelming mandate, the CTU leadership refused to call a strike. Instead, just two weeks before the end of the school year the union apparatus presented a deal containing raises below inflation and a no-strike clause, which is now in effect as Acero moves to close seven schools.

On October 9, Acero CEO Rodriguez announced the proposed shutdowns, specifically noting the fierce opposition of educators to the 2018 sellout agreement. The response of the CTU apparatus has been to call on its members to support a petition to Rodriguez and the Acero Board, and to campaign for CTU-endorsed school board candidates. In a recent memo, the CTU claimed it will bargain over the closures, meeting with Acero in November.

This is not a fight; it is a complete capitulation. The CTU is working to block the necessary mobilization of educators and parents. Frankly, the CTU bureaucracy has only ever "fought" to sit at the table making the cuts alongside the agents of big business. The union bureaucracy intends to follow the same playbook as it did in 2012-13, when it collaborated with Rahm Emanuel in the closure of 49 elementary schools.

Sitting on the Acero Board are Democratic Party state representative William D. Burns, lawyers and business operatives. Teachers should reject the idea of a worthless appeal to these for-profit interests. We must make our appeal to an exponentially more powerful force: to the Chicago

working class and rank-and-file educators and school workers in Chicago and throughout the region, and indeed throughout the country and internationally.

CPS educators can and must take a powerful stand on behalf of their sisters and brothers at Acero, just as Acero educators must join CPS teachers as they fight the sellout being prepared against them.

Build the Educators Rank-and-File Committee

To take the first step forward to oppose the closures at Acero, across Chicago and nationally, teachers must draw the lessons of these previous struggles. It is necessary to build independent rank-and-file committees that are not tied hand and foot to the Democrats (or Republicans) who are jointly de-funding education and prioritizing war. Our committee answers to educators themselves, not to a bureaucratic apparatus whose long record of betrayals proves they are pro-capitalist and hostile to struggle.

For the unity of charter and CPS teachers! Do not let the city administrators or CTU leadership divide us against each other. No schools should be closed.

Billions for education not war and repression! Billions are needed to increase the number and quality of CPS schools, to provide adequate staffing and resources, including libraries and librarians, art and music education, school nurses, counselors and high-quality nutrition to all students.

Build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC)! Educators and workers throughout the world are entering into struggle and face the same threats of austerity, war and dictatorship. We cannot fight these issues separately on a national basis but only together in a unified struggle. The ERFC stands in solidarity with and calls for workers to build the IWA-RFC!



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact