

CPS teachers must fight for real raises! Stop school closures at Acero and CPS!

Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee
21 November 2024

Teachers, paras, and educational staff: Build the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee! Don't allow the union bureaucracy to isolate your fight to stop all school closures and gain the real raises you deserve! To get more information about the rank-and-file committee, fill out the form at the end of this article.

Chicago educators are at a critical juncture. After keeping rank-and-file teachers working without a contract since June, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) leadership is seeking to wrap up its closed-door negotiations with Chicago Public Schools and Mayor Brandon Johnson and present teachers with a sellout tentative agreement.

CTU officials said this week that “additional movement” on raises was needed on the district’s original. This means they have likely agreed to around 4-5 percent, which would be a sizable pay cut given the 23 percent increase in living costs since the last contract was signed in 2019.

Johnson, a former CTU lobbyist, has insisted, “sacrifices will have to be made” to pay for the \$1 billion budgetary shortfall for this year and next. CPS has already listed 70 others targeted for consolidation and closure. Even if Johnson and the Democrats come up with some plan to partially offset the deficit, it will be paid for through regressive taxes that will increase the burden on educators and workers and the diversion of funding from other critical public services.

The Acero charter network is threatening to close seven schools by the end of the year, displace over 2,000 students, many of them migrants and refugees, and threaten the jobs of over 270 staff including teachers and school workers. Any claims that Johnson is an ally in the fight against school closures is belied by the fact that the mayor-appointed Board of Education accepts the school closures as a foregone conclusion.

In its resolution on Acero last week, the CPS board calls on Acero to simply “explore” *delaying* the school closures by one year. The board is apparently offering Acero an incentive to keep its unspent public funds if it chooses to close its schools in 2026 rather than 2025.

Teachers, school workers and parents must oppose the sellout being worked out behind their backs with the Johnson administration and the Democratic Party. They must reject the claim that there is “no money” for public education, while both corporate-controlled parties spend trillions on war and provide endless bailouts and tax cuts for the corporate and financial elite.

The Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee (CERFC) insists that the social and democratic rights must take precedence over the profit interests of big business. But this means organizing educators, working-class parents and students independently of the CTU bureaucracy to fight on the basis of the following program:

CPS teachers deserve *real* raises! No regressive taxes on workers! Due to skyrocketing inflation since the start of the last CPS-CTU contract in 2019, anything less than 25 percent is essentially a pay cut and simply unacceptable! We also don't accept the use of property taxes and other income forms of regressive taxation. Cancel the predatory debts to the big banks and sharply raise taxes on corporations and the wealthy!

Acero school closures must be stopped! While the CTU and the Chicago Board of Education talk about *delaying* school closures by one year, we say: Hands off all seven Acero schools threatened with closure! Do not let the city administrators or CTU leadership divide us against each other. Stop school closures at Acero and CPS! Defend all jobs and living standards.

• **Abolish the tiers in pensions!** Tier 2 pensions are rightfully hated by CPS teachers. CTU President Stacy Davis Gates has claimed that the union is “trying to undo” the tiers in pensions, but the fact is that the CTU’s CORE leadership has upheld Tier 2 pensions in two consecutive CPS-CTU contracts since the union conceded on pension tiers in 2016.

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.

The warmongering and pro-corporate character of the Democrats and Kamala Harris' indifference to the social crisis confronting the working class handed the White House to the fascist president Trump.

With his nomination of billionaire pro-wrestling tycoon Linda McMahon as Secretary of Education, Trump is setting out to destroy public education and funnel even more public money to for-profit and religious schools. Billionaires Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, who head Trump's unofficial "Department of Government Efficiency," are planning to cut \$2 trillion a year out of the federal budget and abolish the Department of Education.

In the face of this existential threat, Johnson and the Democrats are doing everything to conceal the enormous dangers the working class confront. In an absurd statement, Johnson appealed to Trump to use his unprecedented power to "fully fund our education system" and "strengthen our immigration policies so there's a clear pathway for families to be able to experience freedom in this country."

Who does he think he is kidding?

Trump is preparing to deploy the US military to carry out the largest mass deportation campaign in US history. As for the Democratic mayor, his crocodile tears for "black and brown children," Johnson had many 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.

As for the union bureaucracy, AFT President Randi Weingarten said if McMahon is confirmed, "We will reach out to her as we did with Betsy DeVos at the beginning of her tenure," in order to "work together."

Rank-and-file workers should be warned about UAW President Shawn Fain who has been brought in to bolster the credentials of CTU President Stacy Davis Gates and the union bureaucracy. In the factories, Fain is deeply hated by rank-and-file workers for selling out the 2023 contract struggle with his bogus "stand up" strike and then signing a labor agreement that has paved the way for thousands of job cuts in the auto industry. During the election campaign, he was the biggest union promoter of first "Genocide Joe" and then Kamala Harris and did everything to silence opposition by rank-and-file UAW members to US-backed Israeli slaughter of the Palestinians.

The CTU bureaucracy, despite its rhetoric about "social justice unionism," has long functioned as the enforcers for the Democratic Party, which is a party of Wall Street, the Pentagon and affluent sections of the middle class that promote identity politics and the trade union apparatus.

One of the chief reasons for the budgetary crisis in Chicago and in school districts around the country is the decision by the Biden-Harris administration to allow the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) to expire though the pandemic and its impact on public education continues. Because of this, Milwaukee, Seattle, San Francisco and school districts across the country are closing hundreds of schools and experts predict that 384,000 teachers will lose their jobs over the next year or two.

The Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee is uniting all educators—black, white, Latino, native born and immigrant—to defend the social right to free, high-quality public education. We oppose the plans of both parties to sacrifice the lives of our students in wars for corporate profits and to condemn them to a life of low-paid capitalist exploitation.

We know that the attacks by the incoming Trump administration will provoke massive resistance by the working class. If Chicago educators take a stand now, we send a message to all those who want to defend the right to public education and every other social and democratic right of the working class. If we do this, there will be no shortage of allies we will find throughout the working class in Chicago, across the country and internationally.

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 International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committee is fighting to unite these battles across national borders.

If you agree, join us in building the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee.

To get more information about the rank-and-file committee, fill out the form below.



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