

Chicago Teachers Union backs shutdown of Acero charter schools and layoffs of CTU members

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On Friday, March 21, Chicago charter school operator Acero Schools and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) signed a “transition agreement” allowing Acero to close two of its 15 schools, Cruz K-12 and Paz Elementary, at the end of the current school year in June. Acero agreed to continue operating for one more year the five other schools the company had previously sought to close this June as well—these include the elementary schools Casas, Cisneros, Fuentes, Santiago, and Tamayo.

As Acero explained in a communication to families and staff last Monday, “the agreement states that Acero Schools will continue to operate these five campuses through June 30, 2026. After this date, these specific schools’ operations transition to the Chicago Public Schools (CPS).” In the course of this announcement, which Acero touted it was “happy to share,” the schools being closed in little more than two months, Cruz and Paz, are not even mentioned.

In the Chicago Teachers Union communication to its members at Acero Schools on March 21, the union begins cheerfully, “Happy Spring Break! ... We want to share the latest updates with you on the status of our schools [and] the layoff process. ... Acero still plans to close Paz and Cruz at the end of this school year. ... We have met with Acero twice this week to discuss the layoff process and timeline for the bargaining unit members at Paz and Cruz.

“The tentative timeline discussed with Acero is as follows:

“Week of March 31st: A WARN Act notice will be sent to members at Paz and Cruz per Illinois law. The WARN Act requires employers to give employees at least 60 days notice of any mass layoffs.

“Week of April 7th: Provisional Employee Termination Notices will be sent to Provisional Employees that Acero does not intend to renew. The CBA states, ‘The Employer shall strive to provide notice by the first Friday in May of each school year of the Employer’s intent to release a provisional employee.’ Acero expects to notify Provisional Employees much earlier this year as some Provisional

Employees will be released due to the layoffs of the closing schools as is the Employers’ right under the law.

“Week of April 14th: Layoff notices and meetings will begin for members at Paz and Cruz. Members at Paz and Cruz will be notified on their Acero email of layoff by Acero Human Resources with a scheduled date and time of their virtual meeting. All members are entitled to union representation during these meetings. Acero will inform members of their rights under the contract to accept the layoff, fill a vacancy, or bump another employee based on seniority. This process will take time as each member is entitled to 72 hours to make a decision.

“We understand this is painful for our entire community as the closure of Paz and Cruz is devastating for those school communities and will impact the entire Acero network.”

In other words, Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) officials not only plan to do nothing to stop the closure of the two schools, but are committed to enforcing the layoff of teachers and other educators at Acero.

On March 12 and 13, CPS and Acero Schools held two informational meetings on the closure of Paz Elementary and Cruz K-12. WSWS reporters were present at the informational meeting at Cruz.

During the course of the meeting, at which CTU Chair of the Acero Council Caroline Rutherford was present, the CTU leader raised no objections to the closing of Cruz and Paz; her brief remarks were limited to telling families and staff affected by the school closures that they should be thankful that two CPS board members were in attendance, Debby Pope and Ebony DeBerry.

During the meeting, a mother wept as she asked CPS Chief Portfolio Officer Alfonso Carmona through her tears why Acero’s millions of dollars in reserves can’t be used by CPS to keep schools open, a question which the audience applauded.

In his answer, Carmona provided legal cover for Acero, saying legally the only way for CPS to recover those funds would be if Acero closed all of its schools. The mother shook her head, thoroughly unsatisfied with this answer.

One Cruz teacher pointedly asked Carmona what CPS will do to support families other than providing a phone number for them to call, and whether Cruz staff members would have to bear the brunt of providing additional support to their students as they navigate the closure of their school and the transition to a new school.

The portion of the meeting on resources for staff members impacted by the school closure was brief, consisting of not much more than Acero's human resources representative telling staff members present to simply email HR if they have any questions.

Debby Pope, a former CTU staffer appointed to the board by Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, himself a former CTU staffer, defended CPS in Carmona's presence as he stood at the lectern at Cruz. In response to Carmona's earlier dismissive answer to the crying mother, Pope laid the blame entirely at Acero's feet.

The CTU's complicity in these obscene attacks on Acero raises the need for rank-and-file educators, along with parents and guardians at Acero schools, which have large immigrant enrollment, to build educators rank-and-file committees to mobilize the broadest support in the working class to fight the school closures.

For these committees to be effective they must be completely independent of the CTU bureaucracy, which is collaborating with Johnson and school authorities to impose yet another austerity contract on 25,000 CTU members employed by the Chicago Public Schools. CTU executives are trying to ram through a deal based on the lie that such an agreement will protect educators and students from Trump's savage attacks on public education.

This is a lie. The district stands to lose hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding for low-income, disabled and English learner students, which Johnson and the Democratic Party intend to wring out of educators in the form of job cuts and school closures.

Rank-and-file committees will unite Acero and CPS educators in a common fight and prepare strike action throughout the city as the spearhead of a counter-offensive across the country against Trump's drive to destroy public education.

Central to this fight is the struggle to defend students and workers against ICE terror. On February 26, ICE agents abducted the parent of two Acero students as he dropped his children off at the Idar elementary school.

Slides from an Acero training in February make it clear that CTU bureaucracy will do nothing as parents or even students and teachers are snatched from school grounds. Educators are being told to politely request that ICE agents not terrorize any

students they come to detain:

"Ask the ICE/federal agent if they can delay engaging and transporting the student until their family member arrives or is notified at minimum. They may choose not to do so."

"Ask the ICE/federal agent where they will take the student. ... Agents may decline to provide this information."

"Advise the ICE/federal agent that you would like to accompany the student to the detention center. If they indicate this isn't possible, advise that you would like to follow the agent to the detention facility as they transport the child."

"Ask the ICE/federal agent if they will agree to wait in a private room so that you can get the student and facilitate a peaceful exchange. They may decline this request."

"If ICE/federal agents refuse to allow you to bring the student to a private room, ask if they will agree to an alternative plan that does not disrupt and traumatize the student and other students and staff."

"Ask the ICE/federal agent if they will agree to not use restraints on the student while they are on school property. They may decline this request."

The Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee and the Socialist Equality Party are fighting to build a powerful movement in the working class, uniting industrial workers and educators and all sections of the working class, internationally, in a mass movement to defend the democratic and social rights of all. This will require expropriating the ill-gotten wealth of the oligarchy and reorganizing economic life to serve social needs, not private profit.



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