

Chicago teachers: Reject the CTU-Johnson sellout deal! Build rank-and-file committees for a counter-offensive against Trump's destruction of public education

Alexander Fangmann, Kristina Betinis

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Are you a Chicago teacher? Fill out the form at the end of this article to join the fight to build the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee to defeat this sellout and launch a counter-offensive against Trump's cuts.

Officials from the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and Chicago Public Schools (CPS) have agreed to a tentative deal for 26,000 Chicago teachers and educators working without a contract since last June. Worked out behind closed doors by union and school district leaders, the four-year deal was presented to the CTU's "Big Bargaining Team" on Monday afternoon, which gave its approval. On Wednesday evening, the CTU House of Delegates is set to vote on whether to send the agreement to teachers for ratification.

CTU officials and Democratic Mayor Brandon Johnson have presented the agreement as "transformative" from past deals, which were paid for through school closures, layoffs and the expansion of charter schools.

Along with the news media, however, they have been silent about the Trump administration's historic cuts to public education, which will reduce the Chicago school budget by hundreds of millions. The result will be massive cuts to jobs and programs and more school closures, no matter what meaningless "social justice" rhetoric is included in the contract.

The mayor, the CTU bureaucracy and its pseudo-left supporters are doing everything they can to conceal this reality from rank-and-file educators and public school students and parents who will bear the brunt of these attacks.

In what way is this contract "transformative?" For the first time in 15 years, the CTU did not even conduct a strike vote of its members. The last year has not been "negotiations" between antagonistic parties but a conspiracy between the CTU bureaucracy and Mayor Johnson, a former CTU lobbyist "on leave" from the union, to prevent a strike and ram through an agreement against the resistance of rank-and-file educators outraged over years of declining living standards, eroding school conditions, and now with Trump, mass deportations and an existential threat to public education.

The chief concern of the CTU, its parent union, the American Federation of Teachers, and the Democrats is to prevent a walkout by educators in the nation's third largest school district, which would win widespread support from educators, parents and young people across the country looking to fight Trump's efforts to destroy democratic rights and public education. CTU President Stacy Davis Gates' claims that the contract will "Trump-proof" the district and create a "forcefield" around schools, a comic-book fantasy, are beneath contempt. In fact, the demobilization of Chicago educators will only embolden the fascist president to accelerate his attacks.

Johnson's effusive praise for the CTU "avoiding strikes" exposes the

fact that the last thing the Democratic Party wants is a mass struggle against Trump's austerity policies which the Democrats fundamentally support. They fear that any such struggle would quickly escape their control.

Reject this sellout contract

After signing the rotten deal, CTU President Davis Gates declared, "I have never seen a document before that has win, win, win, win, win for every stakeholder. Our young people win, the people who provide their education win, the families that send them to the Chicago Public Schools win, principals win, the Board of Education wins, the CEO wins, the mayor of Chicago wins."

Who does Davis-Gates think she's kidding? There is no way a deal can be a "win-win" for educators and students on one hand and the corporate and political establishment that has been waging a decades-long war against CPS educators at the same time. CPS-CEO Pedro Martinez gave a far more sober assessment of the deal saying it was "responsible to our taxpayers," the interests of big business.

A review of the central tenets of the agreement reveals it is a huge attack on teachers and public education, which rank-and-file teachers should organize now to reject with the contempt it deserves.

Wages: CTU officials dropped the demand for nine percent annual raises and accepted the district's initial offer of 4 percent in the first year and 4-5 percent in years two through four depending on the consumer price index (CPI-U). If educators accept this TA, it will mean teachers on the whole will be making less than they did in 2019 due to inflation. Even the union's own highlights indicate average teacher raises will only be 23 percent in 2028 when steps are factored in.

A provision to increase veteran teacher pay only extends the step chart to 25 years, after which teachers will be subject to severe wage compression. Longevity payments of \$800 and \$2,100 after years 25 and 30, respectively, do little to prevent their purchasing power from being eroded, and far before many will qualify for retirement.

Staffing: The CTU dropped teachers' demands for the hiring of thousands of new support staff. While the fight for more school librarians featured prominently in the CTU's rhetoric, only 30 librarians per year will be added starting in year two in the 325,000-student school district. In other words, even by the end of the contract, about 60 percent of CPS's more than 500 schools will lack a librarian. The contract indicates 215

badly needed case managers will be hired for students with disabilities, but CPS sought to correct the record after a story was published in *Chalkbeat* that the number is 124. Tens of thousands of CPS students have disabilities, and the district routinely violates federal standards for students with special needs. Last August, CPS could not even provide a bus ride on the first day of school for as many as 20 percent of its disabled students.

Class sizes: Very small reductions in some class sizes may be enacted, but for kindergarten teachers, the change is almost insulting. Kindergarten teachers may have 23 students without an aide, but rooms that have 25 students, that is, rooms that exceed the ostensible cap, are promised an aide. Grades 4-8 are to have class sizes capped at 30, from 31. No changes to class size are promised for grades 1-3, which have 28 students.

Prep time: Teachers demanded increased time to prepare their curriculum, but CPS refused to budge on instructional time, lengthened under Mayor Rahm Emanuel. So the sum total increased prep time seems to be 20 minutes per week, after the addition of 10 minutes each day and the subtraction of twice weekly 15-minute prep periods. “No one’s happy with this,” Davis Gates said of the prep time compromise.

Layoffs: There are no protections from furloughs or layoffs in the contract due to budget cuts, as only the first year of the contract is funded. Indeed, the collaboration of CTU in the closure, consolidation and layoffs of teachers at least two Acero schools should capture teachers’ attention. None of this can be stopped without a fight.

Whatever promises for improvements there are, however, are not worth the paper they are written on because of impending federal funding cuts. Unless teachers, parents and students wage a political fight they will be made to pay for cuts.

According to *Chalkbeat*, “District officials estimated the tentative four-year deal would cost a total of \$1.5 billion over the life of the contract. District leaders said they can cover the cost of the first year, but questions remain about how the district will afford future years while holding onto a structural deficit.”

The jobs of thousands of teachers and support staff reportedly hired since 2020 under Biden’s Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) program are already in peril because the Democratic administration allowed the Covid-19 relief money to run out. On top of this, Trump’s Education Secretary Linda McMahon last Friday informed states that were granted extensions to use unspent COVID-19 funds that the extension ended at 5 p.m. March 28, stating that the pandemic had been over for “years” and districts “have had ample time to liquidate obligations.” Illinois is reportedly awaiting \$8 million in ESSER reimbursements since the beginning of March for programs that assist disabled students and that address learning loss.

In addition to the planned shutdown of the Education Department, Trump and the Republican-controlled Congress are planning to slash federal funding for low-income, disabled and English learner students by 25 percent or more. Free and reduced meal programs are also being slashed. In the 2025 fiscal year, CPS received \$1.3 billion in federal funds or 16 percent of its budget.

No matter what CTU officials claim about achieving a “Trump-proof” contract, the cuts in federal funding, on top of the more than \$500 million deficit caused by Biden letting the emergency funds run out, will mean school closures, mass layoffs and program cuts.

attacks on the right to public education and on immigrant students and their families who are being snatched off the street by ICE. This is combined with the elimination of free speech on the campuses and the deportation of anti-genocide protesters.

The Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee urges teachers to form rank-and-file committees, made up of the most class conscious, militant and trusted workers, in every school. Educators must be on guard and oppose any effort by the CTU bureaucracy to hold a snap vote before they have sufficient time to study and read the entire contract.

They must demand the holding of mass meetings and a full accounting of the financial implications of Trump’s funding cuts, which CTU officials have already discussed with district officials and the Johnson administration behind closed doors.

Educators should campaign for the largest “no” vote possible. At the same time, they should throw out the CTU bureaucrats who negotiated this sellout agreement and outline their own demands and strategy to fight for them. This means the preparation for an all-out strike of CPS, Acero and other school workers.

A strike by Chicago teachers in leading a counteroffensive against the Trump administration would be heard loud and clear by educators in Los Angeles and Philadelphia who also face massive cuts in upcoming contract negotiations, as well as other cities.

At the same time, teachers should reject the lie that Johnson and the Democrats are an “oppositional” party to Trump. Johnson was elected exactly two years ago, with millions of dollars in union funds and backing from the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), based on the claim that he would never impose the austerity and privatization measures backed by his opponent Paul Vallas. Now he is in charge of imposing Trump’s brutal cuts on educators and their students.

If a strike to defend the right to public education is not “appropriate” now when the very existence of public education and democracy is at stake then it *never* will be.

Teachers cannot wait for a green light from the wealthy collaborators in the union bureaucracy like AFT President Randi Weingarten (2024 salary \$499,874) who are accommodating themselves to Trump and his fascist policies. Instead, the rank and file must seize the initiative and launch an independent movement of teachers linking up with broader sections of workers opposed to both the Democratic and Republican parties and demanding full funding for schools and other social needs, not war and the further enrichment of the oligarchy.

If teachers can break the political handcuffs imposed by the CTU bureaucracy and Democrats, the momentum would be historic. They would join educators and other workers entering struggle across the US, and public sector workers in Belgium, Italy and Greece striking to fight the austerity and demand for war-funding that is driving the social cuts.

To join the Educators Rank-and-File Committee, fill out the form below.



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Chicago teachers can lead the struggle to defend public education!

Chicago teachers can and must spearhead a fight back to defend public education and democratic rights nationally. Teachers are furious at the