

# Chicago Teachers Union’s “transformative” contract unravels, as mayor and school authorities prepare brutal cuts

**Joe Raymond, Jerry White**  
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The claims made by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and Democratic Party Mayor Brandon Johnson that the recently ratified labor agreement would protect educators and their students from massive federal, state and local spending cuts have unraveled within two weeks of the deal’s approval.

On Friday, the education website *Chalkbeat* posted an article, titled, “Chicago Public Schools floats hundreds of layoffs as one option to close \$529 million budget gap.” It states:

Chicago Public Schools is considering laying off hundreds of school-based staffers next school year—one of multiple scenarios being considered to close a \$529 million budget gap, *Chalkbeat* has learned. Between 1,600 and 1,700 positions based inside schools could be cut, according to a presentation used to brief board members obtained by *Chalkbeat*. ... While some of the belt-tightening could include cutting vacant positions, it would “overwhelmingly” involve layoffs, according to a CPS source who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak with the press.

It continues:

The plan could mean cuts to discretionary funding for high-needs schools, staff that provide additional support to struggling students, such as tutors, and social-emotional support, according to the presentation. However, it also said those potential cuts would keep class sizes at contractual limits in the new Chicago Teachers Union contract.

Cuts could also impact support staff, such as custodians, security guards, building engineers, lunchroom staff, and crossing guards paid for under the Safe Passage program. The internal presentation also mentioned trimming transportation costs that are not

legally mandated. That could impact recent increased efforts to restore transportation to general education students who largely attend magnet or selective enrollment schools.

Significantly, the *Chalkbeat* article notes the district’s projected spending gap *does not* include Trump’s massive cuts to federal school spending, including for Title 1, which provides additional funds to about 400 Chicago schools with high percentages of students from low-income families. The internal presentation outlined scenarios where the CPS deficit could grow and “require even deeper cuts.”

Claims that the four-year deal would “Trump-proof” the district and create a “force field” around the schools were cynical lies—and the CTU officials, the mayor’s office and their backers in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) knew it. The overriding concern of CTU President Stacy Davis Gates, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten and Mayor Johnson, a former CTU official on leave from the union, was to prevent a strike by 28,000 educators.

These forces correctly feared that a walkout in the nation’s fourth-largest school district could become a catalyst for a nationwide counter-offensive by educators against Trump’s war on public education, which the Democrats have been tasked with imposing in New York City, Los Angeles and other major urban school districts across the country.

The leaked plans for massive budget cuts completely vindicates the position taken by the *World Socialist Web Site*, which warned educators that the CTU apparatus, the Democratic Party and corporate-controlled media were deliberately concealing the real scope of the impending spending cuts, which would only be revealed after a deal was pushed through.

The WSWS calls on educators to reject the sellout agreement and build the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee in every school to prepare strike action and such a nationwide and international counter-offensive to defend the right to high quality public education.

With a looming \$1.2 billion budget deficit, financing to cover only the first-year of the four-year deal, massive federal funding cuts coming, the WSWS predicted in an April 6 article that soon after a deal was signed Mayor Johnson and school officials would declare a “financial emergency” to justify massive cuts.

This has been confirmed to a T. In a discussion about the looming financial crisis in the city and school system, Mayor Johnson told the *Chicago Sun Times* last Monday:

We will have to deal with the realities of the billions of dollars that are being threatened by the federal government. That’s a different scenario than we were under before. I am confident that the collective groups of the city of Chicago will stand firm in our values to ensure that we are investing in people, but we also have to make serious considerations based upon the Trump takeover.

These statements were made the same day Johnson signed an executive order to establish a “working group” of still unnamed business and labor leaders to provide key recommendations aimed at “streamlining operations” to address the “city’s structural budget gaps.” The city is currently facing a more than \$1 billion budget deficit that could be exacerbated by the loss of \$3 billion in federal funds.

Johnson’s move to formalize the implementation of these cuts under the guise of a “working group” shows that the union bureaucracy and the mayor are working together to enforce austerity, while pretending to offer a solution. This task force, which will present its findings next month, is nothing more than a mechanism to legitimize the attack on public services and present it as a consensus decision, when in fact it is a direct assault on the working class.

In other words, the conspiracy the CTU bureaucracy and Johnson used to pave the way for massive school cuts is being expanded to slash public transit and other city services. In this effort they are being aided by the DSA, *Labor Notes*, *In these Times* and other pseudo-left organizations and publications, which hailed the CTU sellout as a “victory.”

As word of the impending school cuts spread, opposition mounted. In a Facebook group for CTU members, rank-and-file educators denounced the claims by the CTU officials that they had won a “transformative” contract.

In response to the revelations published by *Chalkbeat*, one educator commented:

We need to start being honest about the ritual bloodletting that accompanies every “transformational” win. ... All these “wins” come at a very real cost

many of us and while [CTU] staffers cheer, members lose their jobs.

Another educator commented:

To be honest, I never even thought to ask about the layoff protection and then the announcement comes on the heels of us ratifying the contract.

The defense of public education cannot be won by relying on the CTU, the Democratic Party or any of the bureaucrats who oppose the interests of teachers and students. The WSWS has consistently argued that the only way to defend public education is by organizing independent rank-and-file committees of educators and school staff to oppose the austerity measures and to fight alongside the broader working class.

These committees will unite educators with transit workers and other city workers fighting budget cuts, immigrant workers facing mass deportations, students opposing genocide and their right to free speech and other sections of workers and young people fighting Trump’s efforts to destroy democratic rights.

Teachers must break from the CTU apparatus and the Democratic Party’s political straitjacket to prepare for the coming struggles in defense of jobs, public education and basic social rights. Only through this fight can the financial elite’s attacks on education and social services be repelled.

The task now is to unite educators across Chicago, the United States, and indeed internationally in a broader struggle to defend public education. This fight is part of a larger battle against the entire capitalist order as it moves to impose brutal austerity and dictatorship.

Teachers must reject the false promises of the CTU leadership and the Democratic Party and take up the fight for a socialist program that prioritizes education, healthcare, social services and social rights over the profit interests of the few.

*Join the fight to build the Chicago Educators Rank-and-File Committee by filling out the form below.*



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