

Chicago Teachers Union sanctions closures of two Acero schools as Democrats prepare massive assault on public education

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The permanent closure of Cruz K?12 and Paz Elementary—two Acero charter schools in Chicago that serve predominantly working-class, immigrant and Latino communities—was officially carried out in mid-June. June 11 marked the last day for students and June 12 saw teachers and staff barred from their classrooms by “end of business.”

These closures represent nothing less than social arson, orchestrated by the Acero Schools management in collaboration with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), Chicago Public Schools (CPS) officials and Mayor Brandon Johnson. The brazen attack will displace hundreds of students and nearly 100 educators, dissolving vital community institutions. Far from defending educators and students, the CTU bureaucracy has functioned as an enforcer of austerity.

These closures are part of a broader “transition agreement” signed March 21 between Acero and CPS. The deal allowed Acero to shut down Cruz and Paz at the end of the 2024–25 school year, while delaying the closure of five additional campuses by a year, after which they will supposedly become regular CPS schools. It is highly likely the district will attempt to shut down those five campuses following the transition to CPS.

This agreement, falsely framed as a compromise, was in reality the greenlighting of a growing assault on public education, coordinated at the highest levels of city government and rubber-stamped by the union bureaucracy. The closure of the two Acero schools is only the first shot in a far greater wave of school closures, teachers layoffs and program cuts being demanded by corporate and financial oligarchy, the Democratic Party and the Trump administration.

This is being done under the pretext of underenrollment as highlighted by a tendentious report published by *Chalkbeat* and *ProPublica*. Instead of assigning blame for the district’s financial crisis on decades of budget cuts, tax giveaways to the banks and real estate interests and the Trump administration’s looming attacks on federal funding, the report castigates officials for not shutting down enough “empty schools.”

Citing district claims that there are 47 schools operating at less than one-third capacity, *Chalkbeat* states:

That’s almost twice as many severely underenrolled buildings as Chicago had in 2013 when it carried out the largest mass school closings in the country’s history... The most extreme example is Frederick Douglass Academy High School, which has 28 students this year and a per-student cost of \$93,000.

The CTU leadership has long accepted school closures as long as it is involved in the process as it was in 2013, and now has one of its own members as mayor. Johnson who worked for years as a CTU staffer is

working closely with CTU leadership to present the union’s involvement in a new round of closures as a win in the face of what will no doubt be massive working class opposition.

A media blackout and union silence in the final days

The final closure of Cruz K-12 and Paz Elementary on June 11-12 was met with almost total silence from both the corporate media and the CTU. Only a single Spanish-language news outlet reported the last day students walked through the doors or the moment educators were barred from returning to their classrooms. The deliberate media blackout, despite the presence of media companies with journalists devoted to covering education matters, underscores the political calculations behind the closures: Cruz and Paz had to be disappeared, quietly and without resistance, lest their destruction provoke broader opposition among educators and working-class families throughout the city.

The silence of the CTU bureaucracy in these final days was even more damning. Having spent the previous months helping manage the closure process—meeting with Acero to coordinate layoff notices, advising members on how to file for vacant positions, bumping colleagues with less seniority at Acero’s remaining schools, or accepting termination—the union apparatus made no public statement, held no press conference and issued no call to defend the schools as their doors were sealed shut. In the final months the CTU bureaucracy abandoned even the pretense of opposing the school closures. There were no rallies to mobilize the broader union membership to stop the closures, no public condemnation of the “transition agreement” that they helped midwife. For all intents and purposes, Cruz and Paz were buried under a shroud of bureaucratic indifference.

This calculated silence is not a matter of oversight. It is driven by the CTU’s political role as a junior partner to the Democratic Party and the Johnson administration. That Cruz and Paz served overwhelmingly working-class and immigrant communities only deepens and exposes the political crime. The bureaucracy has fully integrated itself into the mechanisms of social counterrevolution, carrying out school closures, layoffs and budget cuts under a fraudulent banner of “racial equity” and “community engagement.”

CTU defends Acero’s “management right” to close classrooms and lay off teachers

In a May 19 email to Acero members, the CTU affirmed not only its acceptance of the closures but its endorsement of Acero's "management right" to shutter classrooms in its remaining schools and lay off educators. "Acero does have the right to close classrooms if we do not have enough students and the right to layoff members," the union wrote. This repudiation of the social rights of workers and young people exposes the CTU's role as a hired gun for the corporate and political establishment.

Had these decisions been placed in the hands of rank-and-file educators—as they must be—then class sizes would be reduced, jobs preserved and schools expanded to meet students' needs. Instead, the CTU accepts the logic of budget cuts and school downsizing, urging educators to work harder at "enrollment outreach" to fend off the next round of layoffs. Teachers are asked to act as unpaid marketers for the very network laying them off.

This is not an organization of, by or for the rank-and-file; it is a human resources department for the charter system and for CPS as a whole, committed to smoothing the implementation of every attack while mouthing empty slogans about "equity" and "solidarity."

Notably, the CTU's position on Acero's right to close classrooms is entirely consistent with its position over the years on school closures. Chalkbeat's report on underenrolled schools included the following from CTU Vice President Jackson Potter:

The union's real issue with school closures, Potter said, is that Chicago has done them without enough educator and community input and has rushed them, destabilizing other nearby schools.

In other words, the problem with the historic closure of 50 CPS schools in 2013 was not that it was carried out at all, but that it was carried out incompetently. As then CTU President Karen Lewis told the *Chicago Tribune* during the 2012 teachers strike, union officials "understand the whole movement of closing schools and doing it aggressively." But she urged school leaders to include the union leadership in these discussions, saying, "We either do this together in some reasonable way or we will always be fighting, and I think the key is that the people that are making these decisions want to make them unilaterally."

Then Vice President Jesse Sharkey, at the time a leading member of the pseudo-left International Socialist Organization (ISO), told an interviewer later that year, "No one in the union thinks you should keep an empty school building open. That doesn't make any sense."

Build rank-and-file committees to fight school closures, layoffs, and austerity

The destruction of Cruz and Paz must serve as a warning to educators everywhere. The union bureaucracy will not fight to defend a single job, classroom or school. Under conditions of mounting fiscal crisis, exploding social inequality and escalating attacks on public education, the CTU and its counterparts across the country are functioning as full partners in the war on the working class.

But this assault can and must be opposed—not through appeals to the Democrats, but through the independent organization of educators, parents and students themselves. This means building rank-and-file committees at every school, under the democratic control of educators committed to defending their students and coworkers—not balancing budgets or managing layoffs.

These committees must unite teachers and school workers across district

lines, rejecting the divide-and-conquer strategy that isolates Acero educators from even their own sisters and brothers within their same union, and instead to unite the struggles of educators nationwide with the struggles of the broader working class internationally. The real division is not between districts or industries, or between workers from different countries, but between the capitalist class and the working class, and between those who enforce austerity and those determined to fight it.

Indeed, this struggle is not confined to Chicago. Across the US, school districts are entering crucial contract expirations that threaten educators' livelihoods and working conditions. At the end of June 2025, California sees 77,000 educators in 32 districts—from Los Angeles and San Diego to San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento and more—face expiring contracts. In Philadelphia, 14,000 teachers, counselors, nurses, secretaries and support staff face a contract expiration on August 31—with a strike authorization already passed by 94 percent of voters. Some 600 teachers in Ithaca, New York will see their contract expire in late June.

The expansion of the network of Educators Rank-and-File Committees is critical to link up these struggles in order to launch a nationwide counter-offensive to defend public education, as part of the fight for a general strike to remove Trump and all those planning to establish a presidential dictatorship.

Public education vs. imperialist war

The attacks on schools part of a nationwide, bipartisan policy of austerity that prioritizes war and corporate profit over the most basic social rights—including the right to education. The closure of schools across the United States is the domestic expression of a ruling class that is spending trillions on imperialist war abroad while gutting public services at home and, through the attacks on immigrants by the ICE Gestapo, laying the groundwork for mass political repression.

The same ruling class that closes schools also arms the Israeli military to destroy the homes, hospitals and schools of Palestinian children. Now Trump has bombed Iran in a criminal and catastrophic escalation of global war. This is the true character of the capitalist system: It has no future to offer the youth—neither here in the United States, nor anywhere else on the planet—except repression, poverty, and war.

Teachers and school workers must reject the false narrative that the necessary funds do not exist. The money to build new schools, hire more educators, reduce class sizes and provide a rich and humane public education for every child exists many times over. It is being hoarded by the oligarchs, squandered on war and looted by the financial aristocracy.

The Socialist Equality Party and the WSWS call on educators to take up the fight for socialism—to place the needs of your students, their working-class families and your colleagues above the profit interests of hedge funds, charter operators and the ruling elite.

The experience of Cruz and Paz is not the end—it must be the beginning of a new offensive, led by the rank and file, to defend and expand public education across Chicago and beyond.

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



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