

Chicago Public Schools announces 1,723 layoffs, exposing conspiracy between union and mayor

ICE kidnapping of CPS custodian underscores need for rank-and-file committees to fight layoffs and deportations

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The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) announced on July 15 plans to lay off 760 teachers, 801 teacher aides, and 162 central office and citywide staff—a total of 1,723 positions. CPS also announced a five-day furlough for all employees that will cut the average teacher’s pay by \$2,300. As predicted by the WSWs, these cuts are the outcome of the four-year contract that the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) bureaucrats and Democratic Mayor Brandon Johnson imposed on teachers in April 2025.

The cuts, which will be voted on by the CPS Board of Education at its July 30 meeting, are being imposed to close a \$732 million budget deficit. CPS CEO Macquiline King, handpicked by Johnson to replace former CEO Pedro Martinez, cynically described the budget as “responsible” and “entirely student-centered.” The district is also implementing a midyear spending freeze and counting on \$200 million in surplus from the city’s Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district slush fund. Both CPS and CTU officials maintain the pretense that Illinois’ billionaire governor JB Pritzker and the state legislature might yet ride to the rescue.

The furlough days, to be implemented between January and June 2027, would eliminate five work days previously set aside for teacher training, planning, and report card pickup when students are not in attendance. This is a flagrant violation of the teachers’ contract with CPS. Not paying staff for those days saves the district roughly \$85 million. For educators, it amounts to an outright pay cut of roughly 2.3 percent—effectively canceling the raises from last year’s “historic” contract.

“The union really doesn’t care about us”

In the wake of the layoff notices, educators shared on a Facebook group for CTU that they had been cut and were scrambling to find positions.

One veteran educator wrote: “When I first started with CPS in the 90’s, I was in so many different schools because positions, including mine because I could never establish seniority, were constantly cut. ... I always feel that the Union really doesn’t care about those of us who retire. If they did, maybe more of us older teachers would make room for new younger teachers because we could actually afford to retire.”

The teacher noted that retiree health insurance premiums would jump from \$130 to roughly \$700 a month, with a spouse’s coverage reaching \$1,200 — making retirement financially impossible for many who would

otherwise leave and open positions for younger educators.

Another educator, a social studies teacher with two years more seniority than several colleagues who were retained, asked: “Did CPS actually follow the contract for layoffs? I really don’t understand. ... Because I am [a] social studies [teacher] I get cut?”

A third teacher, responding to the furlough announcement, cited the contract’s no-strike clause: “I agree to put my name on a grievance if the furlough days occur. I see it as a violation of [the clause]. No Strike or Lockout.”

Another educator summed up the furloughs succinctly: “So basically, we lost our raise. Here we go again.”

The CTU bureaucracy’s fake opposition

The CTU leadership has presented the cuts as something to be managed rather than fought. Some “actions” touted by the union were revealing: leafletting at budget roundtables, disrupting a Board of Education meeting on July 8, public comment at Cook County board meetings, a picket and press conference on July 20, and—the centerpiece—“canvass to make sure we elect public school champions.” This is the same cynical lie which was used to promote the election of Johnson, a former CTU official, who is now overseeing these mass layoffs.

CTU President Stacy Davis Gates called the budget “dead on arrival” in a statement. “Students have had to learn in overcrowded classes, practice under unpaid coaches, and be counseled by caseworkers with loads beyond compare all year, and now CPS thinks they can plan a week of furloughs and tell the staff who serve them they don’t have a job? Please,” Gates said.

But Gates’s theatrical indignation is belied by the role of the CTU in ramming through a contract last year which it knew full well would lead to layoffs. The union refused to call a strike during 10 months of negotiations. It refused even to hold a strike authorization vote, the first time in 15 years it failed to do so. During the contract ratification process, it made no warning about the mass layoffs just over the horizon. Instead, it peddled the lie that the contract would “Trump-proof” the district.

CTU staffer Nora Flanagan sent around notes from a Tele-Town Hall held by the union on Monday, July 20, with the following pointed

question from a teacher: “Since they’re shredding our contract, should we consider striking? No one should go back into the classroom in August under these circumstances.”

CTU vice president Jackson Potter deflected, saying, “We need to keep all our options on the table, but first and foremost, we need to push Springfield to meet their obligations. Governor Pritzker considered a special session for a Bears [NFL] stadium, but not special education.”

The union’s deputy general counsel, Thad Goodchild, added, “Our strength as a union is always in our solidarity. We do need to keep all options on the table. Yes, CPS is talking about a serious breach of our contract. We need to look at what will solve the problem. We need to get folks organized to push for the revenue to solve the problem while keeping the mindset that all options are on the table.”

In other words, the CTU is opposed to strike action, instead telling teachers to waste their time calling the governor, emailing CPS board members and begging the Cook County treasurer to release property taxes faster. And above all: vote Democrat.

Johnson and King: The CTU’s people in power

The role of Mayor Brandon Johnson deserves note. He is a former CTU official on leave from the union who was elected mayor in 2023 with the backing of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the rest of the CTU bureaucracy. Although Johnson pretended to run as a “public school champion” and a fighter for working people, he made clear in a candidate forum that as a long-time CTU staffer, he would be in the best position to impose cuts on teachers.

As he put it, “There will be some tough decisions to be made when I am mayor of the city of Chicago. And there might be a point within negotiations that the Chicago Teachers Union quest and fight for more resources—we might not be able to do it. Who is better able to deliver bad news to a friend than a friend?”

Johnson installed Macqueline King as CPS CEO after forcing out Pedro Martinez, who had become a flashpoint in ruling-class divisions over how to manage the district’s fiscal crisis. King, who previously served as the district’s chief of teaching and learning, was elevated to carry out the long-planned cuts. At the July 15 press conference, King described the layoffs and furloughs as “disruptive to the education of our students”—more akin to an act of nature than a policy she is implementing.

The DSA, *Labor Notes*, *In These Times*, and the rest of the pseudo-left all celebrated the CTU contract as a “victory.” They now bear direct political responsibility for this outcome. They provided the “socialist” branding for a conspiracy to demobilize 28,000 educators.

The WSWs record

The mass layoffs and furloughs confirm, to the letter, the warnings issued by the *World Socialist Web Site* throughout the contract fight.

In an April 2, 2025 article, the WSWs warned that “CTU officials, Mayor Johnson and the news media are conspiring to conceal the full impact of Trump’s historic cuts on Chicago schools” and called on educators to reject the sellout deal and build rank-and-file committees to take control of the struggle against cuts and attacks on public education.

On April 15, 2025, the WSWs wrote that the agreement “was pushed through on entirely false pretenses,” that “there is only funding for the first of the four years of the contract,” and that “it will soon be followed

by demands for layoffs, school closures and program cuts.” The article exposed Gates’s complacent declaration that she was “not worried” about Trump’s cuts because Johnson was in the mayor’s office and DSA-backed figures sat on the school board and in the City Council.

Barely two weeks after ratification, on April 28, 2025, the WSWs reported that Chalkbeat had obtained an internal CPS presentation outlining plans for between 1,600 and 1,700 school-based layoffs. The article noted that the projected deficit did not even include Trump’s cuts to Title 1 funding and that “the leaked plans for massive budget cuts completely vindicate the position taken by the World Socialist Web Site.”

The current layoffs are the realization of precisely those plans. The CTU bureaucracy, the Johnson administration, and the Democratic Party knew these cuts were coming. They concealed them to prevent a strike. Now they are implementing them.

ICE kidnapping and the need for rank-and-file committees

The attack on educators extends beyond layoffs. On July 17, Josue Pire Hidalgo, a CPS custodian at Farnsworth Elementary School in Jefferson Park and father of two, was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at what he and his family believed would be a routine immigration check-in appointment in downtown Chicago. He is now being held at a jail in Clay County, Indiana, with his next hearing scheduled for July 28.

SEIU Local 73, which represents some CPS custodians, issued a statement saying it “stands behind” Pire Hidalgo and is “organizing its members and communities to demand his immediate release.” The CTU has said nothing publicly. Neither union has called for a single day of job action, a walkout, or any mobilization to demand his release.

The layoffs and the ICE kidnapping are not separate issues. They are components of the same class war being waged by the Trump administration and the Democratic Party against the working class. The CTU and SEIU bureaucracies, tied to the Democrats, are incapable of fighting either. Their role is to manage anger, channel it into electoral dead ends, and ensure that the organized power of workers is never deployed.

What is required is the building of rank-and-file committees in every CPS school — committees that unite teachers, teacher aides, paraprofessionals, custodians, lunchroom workers, crossing guards, and all school staff on an independent and democratic basis. The defense of public education and the defense of immigrant workers are inseparable.

These committees must fight the layoffs and furloughs through the mobilization of the combined strength of CPS workers, mobilizing for strike action. They must demand the immediate release of Josue Pire Hidalgo and all immigrant workers abducted by Trump’s ICE Gestapo. They must be completely independent from both big business parties and mobilize workers independently to fight for their rights.

Only the rank and file, organized in our own committees and linked to the broader working class nationally and internationally, can, must and will lead this fight.



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