



CTU President Karen Lewis * Press Conference Statement

Good Morning,

As you know this weekend a neutral Fact-Finder, Steven Bierig, presented a recommendation for language in our new collective bargaining agreement. His recommendation mirrors a January 29th offer that was formally rejected by CTU's membership. Therefore we say it was dead on arrival.

This weekend we have rejected it for a second time and I want to explain why. And, by the way the Chicago Public Schools has told us at the table that they can no longer even afford the same proposal. So why are we talking about this as if some magical revenue fix has suddenly appeared and all of our problems have gone away.

The CTU has bargained in good faith; CPS has not. The Board has stripped us of our steps and lanes, continues to threaten our pension and enforce a 7 percent pay cut, and just recently failed to pay contractual benefits to our paraprofessionals—which saves them a mere \$850,000 (some odd dollars).

CPS is searching for cash under rocks, seat cushions and in their uncle's pants pockets. Instead of robbing Peter to pay Paul, the Board should work aggressively to fight for progressive, long-term revenue options in order to stabilize the school district and protect public education in our city. Teachers and other education professionals are doing their jobs each and every day—and that is providing quality instruction to our students, despite the tremendous odds we face, and they face, living in a city enriched with poverty, violence, neighborhood disinvestment and lack of effective governance.

The Chicago Teachers Union will settle a contract when it meets the following criteria:

- 1) **Create enforceable class-size limits** so the Board doesn't decimate the classroom through attrition and layoffs.
- 2) **Be economically reasonable.** Educators have to live in the city, pay property taxes and dedicate their lives to this incredible profession. We cannot accept a situation where our standard of living is lower by the end of a multi-year contract than at the beginning.
- 3) **Close devastating loopholes.** The biggest drivers for the district's fiscal crisis are charter expansion and debt service. We need a real charter moratorium, an end to school closings and consolidations, a dedicated pension levy, and a commitment to enacting

progressive revenue solutions to stabilize our schools for the long term benefit of our students and their educators.

The previously-rejected contract proposal made by CPS on January 29 would result in teachers taking home less in earnings at the end of the proposed four-year contract than they earn today.

Teachers' take home pay would be less on June 30, 2019 than it was on July 1, 2014, when the last CPS raise occurred.

The January 29 proposal, which is the basis for the Fact Finder's recommendation—*and in itself was on life support when we presented it to our members*, also sought to freeze salary steps and lanes, which have been in effect for 50 consecutive years, and eliminate the 7 percent pension pickup, which has been in effect for 35 consecutive years.

All of this is unacceptable. These draconian cutbacks in salaries, pensions and benefits are an illicit attempt to cover-up bad fiscal policy that school employees have no say in.

When we hear this talk about "shared sacrifice" the only people being asked to suffer in these scenarios are working-class people. Why can't the mayor, his handpicked Board of Education, and Mr. Claypool unite with educators, parents, students and people across our state who are asking the rich to pay their fair share? Why can't they renegotiate the toxic swaps with Bank of America and other financial institutions and restore more than \$500 million to our schools. Why won't they stand with members of the Progressive Caucus of the City Council to demand the TIF surplus be invested in our schools and students? They can join with us in denouncing Governor Rauner, whose failure at governance has put the entire state at risk of collapse.

This is why we say CPS is broke on purpose.

- The district says it has a \$1.1 billion deficit and is \$6.7 billion in debt
- This means its total debt now exceeds CPS's entire budget of \$5.7 billion
- By June 30, 2016, CPS will have a negative cash position of negative \$846 million

Unless there is a source of stable, sustainable and increased funding to its operations, CPS will continue to be broke and we'll be in this same mess year after year after year.

With that said, our membership has already voted to authorize a strike. We now have 28 more days to cool off, as required by state law, which at any time thereafter we can file a 10-day notice to go on strike. If this happens, this will be the third teachers strike in Chicago since 2012. The first time we were out for 10 days; the second time we struck for one day to call

attention to revenue solutions that are being ignored by CPS; and this time we don't know how long we may be out—but if we must, understand we will not go back in bowed or bent.

No teacher ever wants to go on strike. This is not a joyous occasion. We prefer to be in front of our students doing what we love. But this Board leaves us no choice but to withhold our labor, organize our students, parents and school communities, to fight for revenue solutions, to protect public education, and to educate a generation of youth so they don't have to fight these same battles when they become adults.

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