The bottom line for Chicago teachers?

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As the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) holds fast to its strike deadline of Sept. 10, negotiations continue. It's always risky to trust reports in the mass media, especially the virulently anti-teachers union media that we have today, about what's happening in negotiations. They want to see the unions discredited, and one way to do that is to cast teachers as greedy and selfish. So we should be taking the recent article in the Chicago Sun-Times about negotiations as another salvo in the propaganda war against teachers.The article reports only on aspects of the contract dispute that take up teachers' wages and benefits. In contrast, what has made this mobilization of Chicago teachers so powerful and exciting is the CTU's commitment to locate demands about teachers' economic well-being in a package that addresses what needs to be done to give Chicago children the schools they deserve. The union has done this remarkably well in its report about the "apartheid" conditions in the schools. During my recent visit to Colombia, teachers in Bogota told me that their union should be issuing a similar report.The Chicago Sun-Times article illustrates that Chicago's power elite wants to make this struggle fit the mold of a "traditional" labor dispute, one that might be settled by giving a tiny bit more money to teachers. What the bankers, corporate chiefs, and politicians that do their bidding want is complete control over what children learn. The bigger picture that is often ignored in the US is that this is a global project, one spelled out in World Bank reports, to reduce education to vocational training, accomplished through the "accountability" of standardized testing. Yet, there is world-wide resistance to this project, little news of which appears in the popular media, and this global context frames the struggle in Chicago. CTU's leaders face enormous pressures, so I was relieved to that a bargaining update on the union's website still contains the CTU's demand for "A 'Better' Day—with Art, Music, World Language, Physical Education and other services like counseling" and lower class size. Certainly the union needs to fight for job protections and re-hiring teachers who have lost their jobs in school closings. Its struggle for the salary and economic benefits teachers deserve is essential. But it must also hold onto the demand for lower class size and restoring the subjects and services students (and their teachers) need so very much.Chicago's teachers should expect no help from the national union (American Federation of Teachers) in holding fast to what Chicago's students deserve. AFT President Randi Weingarten showed when she headed the union in New York City that she would give away everything and anything that mattered in having quality schools in exchange for paltry salary increases. My hunch is that she'll be using all the power she has to pressure the CTU to settle for the same kind of contract she negotiated in NYC. I don't think Obama wants a strike of Chicago teachers, so he'll be putting pressure on his guy Rahm to settle on money. Weingarten will be doing the same. The question is whether CTU's courageous and dedicated leaders will have the confidence in their ideals to lead Chicago's teachers in a new direction, one that will show what can be won when a teachers union really stands up for public education and so wins support from parents and students who deserve better schools.