

An open letter to Chicago parents

September 10, 2012

Dear Parents, Although we have never met, I've been involved indirectly in your children's education, as a researcher on urban teacher education. I've been told that my books and articles, which explain what makes urban teaching special, have really helped city teachers do better at helping all students succeed. When I started doing my research, urban teaching was very tough work but it could also be extraordinarily satisfying. However, conditions have greatly deteriorated in the past several years. Schools have eliminated time for anything that's not tested, including recess and the arts. Teachers are often not permitted to use their professional judgment, and worse, are blamed for situations over which they have no input. Support services have been cut, leaving children and families without the help they need to deal with problems beyond their control, like unemployment and financial stress. Yet, while city governments cut school budgets to save money, they give away millions of dollars to corporations in the form of tax breaks. As is the case in other big cities, children of the wealthy, powerful corporate and political elite that runs CPS go to (private) schools with small classes, art, music, and recess. Teachers in these elite private schools don't pay for tissues, crayons, and paper out of their own pocket. Nor do they worry about whether their school will be shut down and sold off to a charter school operator. Their classes are small so they can know all of their students as individuals. Don't your children deserve these conditions too? My daughter attended public schools in New York City, and as the breadwinner in my family, I know how difficult it is to make arrangements when the schools are closed. This strike is a hardship for you, no doubt about it. Who's responsible? The media are blaming (greedy) teachers. Some parents are saying both sides are at fault. The way I see it, the job of the Mayor and the CPS Board of Education is to find the money to give your children what they need and deserve. They have failed to carry out their responsibility, and Chicago's teachers are using the only power they have left, their right to strike, to insist that Mayor makes real the CPS slogan "Put Children First" and end the tax breaks for the wealthy that are impoverishing your children's schools. We know from research that children and teachers do best when their schools are caring communities in which everyone is treated with respect. This is what Chicago's teachers are demanding, no more and no less. Please join with me in supporting them.

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