

Parents' huge stake in the Chicago Teachers Union strike

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A harsh reality of teachers' strikes is that they hit parents - moms especially, who still do most of the work of caring for kids and housework - the hardest. Parents are left frantically searching for childcare options, especially if they support their families in low-wage jobs that pay hourly. Missed work means exhausting stress and financial hardship. At the same time school workers, teachers and especially paraprofessionals, who earn poverty wages themselves, feel the pain of lost wages and the uncertainty of what awaits when they return from their struggle to defend conditions for students, as many refer to them, "their kids."

When Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) VP Stacy Davis Gates noted the press and public wouldn't be interested in most of the contract issues because they're "not sexy," she captured the truth about the work women do, meaning in particular in our society Black and Hispanic women: cleaning, cooking, tending to our physical and emotional needs. Women's work isn't sexy. It's work, as even sex workers, yes, mostly women, are telling us.

There is nothing "sexy" in demanding paraprofessionals, whose work is mostly invisible outside the classroom, earning a salary that is above the poverty level. There's nothing exciting in a contract proposal for teachers to get 30 minutes to get their thoughts and materials together before they meet their students so as to give the class their best. If you haven't cared for kids you may not understand how painful it is to see children need help and be unable to provide it - so you may not understand why reducing class size is so central to teachers and the union, as well as parents who see their children's needs going unmet.

CTU members are staying on strike until these "not sexy" demands are met because the money is there to pay for them. The issue is not whether Chicago has the revenue but whether the people who control the purse strings are going to spend the money on kids' social and psychological welfare, their learning in schools. Despite campaigning for a different kind of city, Mayor Lightfoot is continuing Rahm Emanuel's morally bankrupt policy of directing city money for Lincoln Yards, the kind of "urban development" that benefits corporations and wealthy residents, tax breaks for corporations, and cops in schools. No one knows what's in her mind as she makes these decisions, but what we do know is the policies she is supporting harm kids by marginalizing care work and

devaluing the people who do it.

Every parent of a school age child should be rooting for the CTU. What happens in this strike has national implications for school funding and reform. Chicago parents, all who care about kids' well being, should be putting pressure on Lightfoot to settle this strike now by funding the contract demands that are keeping teachers on the streets, out of classrooms, and moms searching for ways to cope. Chicago, like our entire society, runs on the mostly invisible work of women, especially women of color. The stress this strike has heightened for both school workers and parents - women - is a result of the devaluation of women's work. These contract proposals and the union's use of the strike to insist the improvements be made are telling the powerful elites who control how money is spent that women and the work we do must be seen, valued, and respected so that the children on behalf of whom we do this work receive what they need and deserve from us.