

Acero teachers, parents, students speak out against school closures in Chicago: “I will not stand by and watch this happen to my children”

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11 December 2024

Teachers, parents and students: Send in your statements against school closures by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Opposition continues to grow against the closure of seven of 15 charter schools by the Acero charter operator in Chicago. Acero operates these schools under a contract with Chicago Public Schools (CPS).

In October, the Acero board announced it would close the seven schools at the end of the school year, citing financial problems. A recent report by WBEZ, however, found that Acero has over \$46 million in cash reserves. The proposed closures would affect over 2,000 students and 270 staff would be laid off.

At last Wednesday’s meeting of the Chicago Board of Education, educators, students, and parents of children at Acero schools gave powerful statements in both English and Spanish against the school closures. Multiple speakers pointed out that Acero has not fulfilled its promise to hold a town hall for families to discuss the threatened school closures.

Stephanie Gomez, a mother of students at Santiago, one of the Acero elementary schools threatened with closure, said, “This decision by Acero is not only reckless, it’s devastating to our community. I will not stand by and watch this happen to my children.”

The expansion of charters in Chicago and other cities has long been supported by both the Democrats and Republicans. It is the tip of the spear to destroy public education and funnel public funds into the hands of private operators, with staff at these schools making significantly less than their public counterparts. The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and the teachers union bureaucracies across the country have served as willing collaborators in this process while extracting dues money from educators.

Claudia Diaz, a mother of children at Cisneros, another

elementary school threatened with closure, made a powerful appeal on behalf of teachers, students, and workers: “I am here to raise my voice so as not to close our schools, Cisneros and the other schools.”

“My son this school year has speech therapy,” Claudia added. “At the moment he has gotten ahead with all his teachers at Cisneros. He has advanced so much. My son, when switching to another school, will suffer too much emotionally. It will not be speech therapy, but more emotional therapy that he would need.”

Claudia was outraged that Acero board members did not show up to the Chicago Board of Education meeting. “We want Acero to show their face, for all our questions. Why are they not here? Why have they done nothing to not close [schools]? Where is the money you’ve given to Acero? Why hurt our children? Why close our dreams, from graduating from these schools? Our school has approximately 320 students, plus all teachers, family members and our community.

“We ask CPS to not allow for the closure of our schools, because it would not only affect students, family, teachers, workers!”

Andrea, a 7th grade student at Cisneros, spoke in defense of keeping her school open: “I have built strong relationships with teachers and long-lasting friendships with classmates. Cisneros also provides fantastic support staff like office coordinator, social workers, lunch ladies, crossing guards, and cafeteria staff.

“These individuals also provide emotional support to all students they come across,” she added. “Cisneros has a lot of loyal teachers and students that call Cisneros a family. We are comfortable here and we want this school to stay open. Most importantly, I want to graduate from this school with my fellow classmates.”

Another mother of Cisneros students made reference to the

December 15 deadline for parents to have their children transfer from Acero schools to a CPS school, which was touted as a victory by the Democratic mayor-appointed Board of Brandon Johnson in extending the deadline for families to pull their children out of the Acero schools threatened with closure.

In her address to the Board and CEO Pedro Martinez, Cisneros parent Juvia Estrada told them in Spanish, “Today, I want to let you know that parents like myself have been receiving incorrect information in order to confuse us, when the time comes to apply to another school for the next school year should our school close.

“Many of us have also been pressured and intimidated to try to get us to remove our children from the schools as quickly as possible. Acero’s leaders are desperate, because they know closing our schools is wrong.”

Christine Binder, a teacher at Cisneros, said in her address, “Acero’s decision to close these schools threatens everything we’ve built. If Acero won’t listen, it is up to CPS to step in and keep these schools open. Closing these schools will cause irreparable harm to a community that has already endured so much of its share of challenges. We must do better.”

Daisy Urenda, office coordinator at Paz Elementary, pointed out the class nature of the attacks on Acero schools families: “So many of our students come from low-income households, and already struggle with a number of hardships. I stand here today and I ask you: think about the 2,000 plus students that will be affected by these closures. Do not allow Acero to take away our students’ safe havens. Our students deserve a quality education, and access to opportunities.”

Teachers, staff, parents and students affected directly by the threatened school closures, as well as the broader working class against whom the attacks on public education are targeted, must draw the lessons from not only the 2013 CPS-CTU school closures but also the betrayals currently being prepared.

While posturing publicly as opponents of school closures, the truth is that the CTU, as the union bureaucracy told members in a recent email, is seeking to “bargain the impact” of school closures. In other words, the CTU already accepts the school closures as a foregone conclusion.

This complacent attitude is not a fighting strategy. Just as in 2013, when the CTU accepted and facilitated the closure of 49 public schools, the union has again accepted the “reality” of the social arsonists who claim that nothing can be done to stop school closures.

Acero has millions in savings and investments alone. Despite this, far from waging a struggle against the charter operator’s moves to close schools while hoarding tens of

millions of dollars, the CTU has moved on to “bargaining the impact” of school closures, after the union has suppressed strike action against both Acero and CPS, where educators have been without a contract since June.

The lie that there is “no money” for schools is especially absurd in a country that makes trillions of dollars available for war and militarism, including seemingly endless money for the US-Israel genocide in Gaza and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. With the ending of federal pandemic funding going to schools, school districts across the country are preparing mass school closures.

At the national level and the local level, the Democratic Party works with the Republican Party to expand imperialist war abroad while attacking public education and gutting social spending at home. The incoming Trump administration, moreover, is preparing for a massive attack on education and social programs, which threatens to provoke mass opposition.

The CTU’s insistence that educators and families should place their faith in the Democratic mayor-appointed Chicago Board of Education has proven to be a dead end. Like their counterparts in the CTU, the Board pathetically invited Acero to work together with the Board to “explore” delaying school closures by one year, and Acero ignored this invitation.

In order to stop the betrayals being prepared, educators and school families must take urgent action to organize their own rank-and-file committees, independent of the CTU bureaucracy, to stop school closures and defend public education from the capitalist profit system. The fight against Acero must also be linked up with the struggle of CPS teachers against the sellout being worked out by the CTU to impose an austerity contract, as well as the hundreds of thousands of teachers and workers facing massive attacks across the country and internationally.



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