SEIU LOCAL 73
ADV FOR TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2019
CONTACT:
Victoria Alvarez, valvarez@seiu73.org, 773-490-7324

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS WORKERS HOLD SCHOOL PICKET TO REJECT FACT FINDING REPORT AND TO CALL ON MAYOR LIGHTFOOT TO RETURN TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE TO SIGN A TRANSFORMATIVE CONTRACT

Workers Officially Rejected CPS Fact-Finding Report Monday, Setting Path to A Strike By Thousands of Chicago Public Schools Support Staff if an Agreement Cannot be Reached

The added cost of the Union's proposal is less than one-fourth of one percent of CPS's operating budget

WHAT: School picket protest rejecting fact finding report and setting path to strike
WHEN: Tuesday, September 17, 2019—6:30 A.M.
WHO: Chicago Public School workers with SEIU Local 73
WHERE:
Walter L. Newberry Math & Science Academy
700 W Willow St

*Full text of rejection release below

---------------

BREAKING:

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS SUPPORT STAFF WITH SEIU LOCAL 73 REJECT FACT FINDING REPORT, SETTING A PATH FOR SCHOOL STRIKE BY THOUSANDS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS, BUS AIDES, SECURITY OFFICERS, AND CUSTODIANS

---
Workers to hold a school picket Tuesday—calling on Mayor Lightfoot to return to the negotiating table to sign a transformative contract that improves the lives of workers and addresses the needs of students for safe, clean schools as well as one that provides the best education experience for special education students—not one that continues the harmful practices of Rahm Emanuel’s administration.

**Workers and unions officers available for interviews. Please contact Victoria Alvarez to schedule interviews: valvarez@seiu73.org, 773-490-7324.**

***Fact-finder report and dissenting opinion by union panel member available upon request.***

CHICAGO—Special education classroom assistants (SECAs), bus aides, security officers, custodians, and all workers represented by SEIU Local 73 formally rejected the recommendations in the neutral fact-finder’s report issued earlier today. The rejection sets a path for a strike as early as October 17, 2019 by thousands of Chicago Public School support staff if an agreement cannot be reached. While workers welcomed some positive incremental recommendations in the report, the report does not fully address the economic concerns and working conditions of hardworking members of SEIU Local 73. Most importantly, the report fails to address the well-being of special education students.

“The added cost of the Union's proposal is less than one-fourth of one percent of CPS's operating budget. We expect Mayor Lightfoot and the Chicago Board of Education to return to the negotiating table with the serious intent of resolving outstanding differences rather than continuing the practices of Rahm Emanuel’s administration of marginalizing the important work that our members do to make our schools safe, clean learning environments, especially for our most vulnerable special education students,” said Dian Palmer, President of SEIU Local 73.

“The report does not fully address the economic concerns and working conditions of SEIU Local 73 members, who are among the lowest paid at Chicago Public Schools,” said Don Villar, Chicago Federation of Labor Secretary-Treasurer and Union-appointed Fact-Finding Panel member, in the dissenting opinion. “Addressing their economic issues would not only improve their lives, but most importantly, further improve the quality of the educational environment for Chicago’s school children.”

Special education assistants are severely underpaid with a current starting rate of $31,720 per year and an average salary at about $36,000 per year. HUD’s current income guidelines for the City of Chicago define very low income as $35,650 annually and low income as $57,050 per year.
“As a SECA I work hard to make sure special education students get the best experience and education they can, but current conditions are challenging. I’m constantly pulled away to do other jobs and given other responsibilities. In addition to bad working conditions, I’m earning poverty wages, which makes it hard to make ends meet.” - Tracy Brown, Special Education Classroom Assistant, Richard Yates Elementary.

Bus aides face some of the harshest and most unfair working conditions. Their workdays start at 5:30 a.m. and end after 5:30 p.m. but because of split shifts, aides are paid for just four or six hours. Most bus aides need a second or third job to support their families and many are homeless. Similarly, school custodians have fallen behind their counterparts in the city and also struggle to survive.

“We’re tired of living paycheck to paycheck while we do the essential and hard work of making sure Chicago’s students have a bright future ahead of them. We want to do our jobs well and make sure our students succeed, but when we are living paycheck to paycheck, we can barely pay our rent! We need Mayor Lightfoot to negotiate a transformative contract now.” - Norma Price, Bus Aide

Moreover, the report does not address serious non-economic issues. For example, the current bargaining agreement does not make sure that Special Education Classroom Assistants are not pulled away from assigned special needs students or ends black-out periods for using paid leave. The report also does not address the continuing pouring of millions to private outside contractors like Sodexo and Aramark.

“The report is a reflection of a flawed statute and process that was written by and for the Chicago Public Schools’ management and their attorneys. It is a process that excludes important issues like the continued funneling of tens of millions of dollars to outside contractors like Sodexo and Aramark for their continued failure to provide a clean school environment for students. It allows the Chicago Board of Education the unilateral right to place the shareholders and profits of these two companies above the needs of Chicago’s students,” said Dian Palmer, President of Local 73.

The Fact-Finder report was issued after a process that included three all-day intensive mediation sessions and two days of hearings. The report contains the non-binding recommendations by the neutral chair of the three-person Fact-Finding Panel. The recommendations are based on the criteria in the Illinois statute that requires fact-finding as a necessary step prior to a strike in Chicago Public Schools. The criteria is skewed toward management and was largely drafted by CPS’s lead attorney James Franczek.
The workers hope that Mayor Lightfoot and the Chicago Public Schools board come back to the negotiating table and offer a transformative contract that puts the needs of Chicago student’s future first. The Mayor has a clear choice to sign a contract that transforms the lives of students and workers at Chicago Public Schools or continues Rahm Emanuel’s policies of harming our students and communities. The current bargaining agreement and the report’s recommendations do not go far enough in ensuring a bright future for Chicago’s students, specifically special education students, and fair working conditions for the thousands of support staff that work the halls of Chicago’s schools everyday.

SEIU Local 73 members are ready to go on strike to make sure Chicago public schools are safe and clean, special education students are getting the resources they need to succeed, and for improved working conditions.

###