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CTU forces Mayor Lightfoot to back down as Chicago Public Schools continue remote learning

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Chicago educators are standing up for school safety.

Teachers demand safety before returning to classrooms

Chicago — Students in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) stayed home and learned remotely again on Thursday, January 28. The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) continued to demand that any return to in-person learning be done in a safe way.

Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot had ordered all teachers back to the classroom on Wednesday the 27th but was forced to backtrack and tell parents to keep their kids home again Thursday.

CPS has been demanding that 80% of school staff return in person and has refused to allow accommodations for staff who live in households with people who are in high-risk categories according to the Centers for Disease Control. CPS has also refused to provide weekly testing for unvaccinated staff and students at schools. In binding arbitration on Oct. 2, CPS was ordered to allow school clerks and technology coordinators to work remotely, but the school system has yet to comply with that order.

The Chicago Teachers Union is seeking a health metric based on CDC guidance, a phased reopening, access to vaccinations for educators, and enforceable safety standards in school buildings, which have struggled to meet even basic needs for PPE, adequate ventilation and clean facilities. Because Mayor Lori Lightfoot's CPS team has refused to offer vaccinations to educators before ordering them into school buildings, and has not been willing to agree to a phased-in resumption of in-person learning, the Chicago Teachers Union has now publicly called for mediation to resolve the impasse.

The teachers say that they continue to teach and want to continue to teach safely. To that end, their union has proposed critical precautions necessary for a safe return to in-person learning, but all of those precautions have been rejected by the Board of Education.

CTU President Jesse Sharkey said, "We are willing to keep teaching, but CPS has said they will lock us out. We are willing to keep negotiating, but CPS has refused to back down from insisting that 80% of educators and support staff return on February 1 to serve fewer than 20% of the students. Another 10,000 of our members became eligible for vaccinations on Jan. 25. We can make schools safe with a phased

reopening and enhanced COVID-19 testing for members of school communities.”

“It’s obvious to everyone but CPS and the mayor that parents aren’t sending their children back because they do not believe schools are safe or that COVID is under control,” said CTU Vice President Stacy Davis Gates. “This is especially true for Black and brown families. CPS does not need 80% of educators back in school to serve 19% of students. This makes no sense in a pandemic that continues to infect one in eight people in many of the Black and brown Chicago neighborhoods that have already shouldered a disproportionate burden of COVID disease and death. Our families want safety. Our educators want safety, yet CPS continues to refuse to negotiate an agreement that builds in that safety, and instead, has threatened to lock out tens of thousands of educators who have a right to safe workplaces to educate our schoolchildren.”

Only 19% of eligible students returned to pre-K and special education cluster programs on Jan. 11, and in some cases teachers are being told to come in to schools in which not one family has opted in to the hybrid model in person learning, which shows that there is broad agreement in the community that the current CPS plan is not safe.

Source: [FightBack! News](#)

