

Chicago Mayor Lightfoot orders CPS bargaining team to issue last, best and final offer

written by Struggle - La Lucha
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Elementary 1 teacher Melissa Vozar sits outside of Suder Elementary in Chicago to

teach a virtual class Monday, Jan. 11, 2021.

Chicago — At 11:15 p.m. on Thursday, February 4, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot walked away from the bargaining table again after instructing her Chicago Public Schools (CPS) leadership team to submit a “last, best and final offer” to the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU).

The union and the school system have been bargaining in an attempt to reach a deal over conditions for schools to reopen for in-person learning. The mayor has repeatedly issued ultimatums threatening to lock out teachers if they did not return to school in person. The teachers have instead defied those orders and continued to teach from home. So far, Mayor Lightfoot has backed down twice from her ultimatums and distanced learning has continued.

Now that CPS has walked away from the bargaining table it is unclear what the future holds. CTU has said that the offer is unacceptable and that they are continuing to fight for an agreement that will provide maximum safety for students, educators who serve them, and every family in their school’s communities.

Among many issues which the union says are unacceptable, the “last, best and final” offer that CPS made would pause in-person learning districtwide only if there are COVID-19 outbreaks in 50% of Chicago Public Schools buildings at the same time. The proposal denies remote work accommodations to 75% of educators with household members at high risk for COVID-19. Educators, school clerks and other CPS employees have continued to struggle to access COVID-19 vaccinations, and under the mayor’s plan CPS commits to vaccinating only about 1500 workers per week, with no prioritization of workers who are forced to return first, or who are in the hardest-hit communities. CPS will not make any improvement in remote learning, despite four out of five students remaining remote, and continues to refuse to bargain with the union on the safe reopening of high schools.

CTU leaders say they remain ready to bargain until they land an agreement that allows schools to reopen safely, with real equity for our students and school communities, and that they will continue to remain remote until an agreement is reached, because what they are fighting for is right and necessary.

