

## HOPES BELIED AS CHICAGO TEACHERS STRIKE STRETCHES INTO SECOND WEEK: MAYOR RAHM TO FILE LAWSUIT TO FORCE END



The pre-conceived notion that all was hunky dory and that students could be back in school by Monday has turned out to be a mirage and the deal has come unstuck as the Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis was unable to convince union delegates on ending the teachers strike, bringing all negotiations back to square one. Lewis met with the delegates for almost three hours where they reviewed the tentative contract that had come after months of hard negotiations and posturing. Instead of inking their agreement, they decided to prolong the strike. "They're not happy with the agreement. They'd like it to be a lot better for us than it is," Lewis said. "This is the deal we got. This is not a good deal by any stretch of the imagination, not (compared) to what our members are (used) to having." Frustrated and aggravated that all the districts concessions had come to naught Mayor Rahm Emanuel said that the strike was "illegal" and threatened that he would file a lawsuit to seek an injunction in court to force an end, since a mutually agreeable end was not forthcoming. A miffed Mayor asked his officials "to explore every action possible" to ensure that the children are back into the classrooms where they belong. He has always maintained that the two points that the unions are disagreeing upon, evaluations and reinstating of laid-off teachers were not legally permissible reasons for stoppage of work. In a statement he said that he refused to be a mute spectator where children were being used as pawns, in what was essentially an internal dispute within a union. Sarah Hamilton spokeswoman for Emanuel said, "Our signal is that we're serious about getting kids back in school." Lewis said that the delegates needed more time to deliberate and not take any hasty decisions. Jay Rehak, a union delegate and veteran English teacher, said "To go on strike is pretty serious stuff, and to call off a strike is pretty serious," said "We need to go to our members to know how they feel about this. We didn't want to speculate." Refusal to accept the tentative agreement will seriously jeopardize the support and sympathy that the unions had received over the months. Moreover, it also belittles and demeans the trust and faith of those, students and parents, who are not sitting on the negotiating table. "It's very frustrating," said parent Humberto Ramirez. "We all kind of put everything on hold in finding different ways to watch the kids and keep them entertained. It's been very, very frustrating, especially knowing that (last week) they were close, that they were simply going to be putting it to a vote." Lewis said that the delegates don't want to be rushed. They want to talk it over and vote on Tuesday, Monday being a Jewish holiday. Moreover, she said that the 700 delegates have the authority to end the strike but cannot approve the contract. The entire 26,000 members will have a say on the contract. One primary apprehension is the fear that around 120 schools could be closed in the coming years. "That's what the big elephant in the room is with our members," she said. Emanuel blasted the unions and said, "This was a strike of choice and is now a delay of choice that is wrong for our children. Every day our kids are kept out of school is one more day we fail in our mission: to ensure that every child in every community has an education that matches their potential." "We obviously have very different world views," Lewis said. "They're a political spin machine."