

## RELATIONSHIPS DETERIORATE FURTHER AS CHICAGO TEACHERS VOTE FOR STRIKE



The Chicago Teachers Union says nearly 90 percent of its members have voted to authorize a strike, far more than the required 75 percent. The union says that the vote gives them the legal authority to call a strike and will also provide them with "added leverage" in the negotiations that are accepted to follow in its wake. The teachers' union spokeswoman Stephanie Gadlin issued a statement, saying, "While the Union has made no determination on whether a strike will be needed, leaders say the authorization vote has now given them added leverage at the bargaining table." The extraordinary response exposes the extent of bitterness and resentment. The vote attracted 90 percent voters who were inclined to it, much more than the 75 percent required by state law. Some schools voted 100 percent in favor of the strike. The strike authorization vote began on Wednesday, and according to union officials, 91.55 percent of union members cast a ballot. Union officials said 23,780 of its 26,502 members approved the strike- with 72.5 percent voting in favor of a strike on the first day of balloting Wednesday. There were however, 482 dissenting votes, with 2240 members abstaining from voting. The results delighted the union and Gadlin told NBCChicago.com, that they were very pleased. "The results are not a win," cautioned CTU President Karen Lewis. "They are an indictment on the state of the relationship between the management of CPS and its largest labor force." However, even though a strike can be called, it cannot take place till at least mid-August, under a process laid out in Illinois law, since more than 40,000 students would be affected. Chicago Public Schools chief Jean-Claude Brizard said he was disappointed in the timing of the vote, and called it premature. Brizard said that it would have been better had they waited until the district had made its final offer and the independent fact-finder had made his recommendations. "The Chicago Teachers Union leadership pushed their members to authorize a strike before giving them the opportunity to consider the independent fact finder's compromise report due in July," Brizard said in a statement. "That's a shame. The CTU leadership left the teachers with a choice between a strike and nothing -- that's a false choice. As a former teacher, I am disappointed that union leadership would rush their members to vote for a strike before having the complete information on the table." Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis refuted Brizard statement saying, the fact-finder's report would deal with only a handful of issues, and "we have an entire contract to negotiate." "Our members ... were loud, serious and clear. We want a contract that gives Chicago students the school they deserve. So we call on CPSs to take this process seriously and negotiate with us in good faith with an eye on the real prize, our children," he added. Teachers were very aggrieved when Mayor Rahm Emanuel, not only canceled a promised raise, but asked them to work longer, without adequate compensation. Class sizes and resources were also part of the disputed issues. District officials say that Mayor Emanuel wanted to lengthen the school day as Chicago public school students have the shortest school day – 5 hours and 45 minutes – among the nation's 50 largest districts. The proposals from both the sides are diverse and the gap is wide. Chicago Public Schools have proposed a five-year deal, with a guaranteed 2 percent raise in the first year. The raise however would lengthen the school day by 10 percent. However the union wants a two-year deal that reduces class size and calls for teachers to receive a 24 percent pay raise in the first year and a 5 percent pay raise in the second year. "This is a reflection of the treatment we as teachers have been subjected to this year," David Rose, a teacher at Roberto Clemente Community Academy told NBCChicago.com. "The posturing of the board of education has created such misery and suffering and discontent that we needed to send a message."