

## CHICAGO TEACHERS TALKS FAIL: 26,000 TEACHERS PICKET, LEAVING 350,000 STUDENTS WITH NOWHERE TO GO



The one day that Mayor Rahm Emanuel's team and Chicago Teacher's Union would have prayed hard did not break, has alas dawned, as their combined efforts failed to resolve the impasse that has plagued the district for months on end. Chicago Public Schools and the union representing teachers have been involved for months in a contentious clash over wages, job security and teacher evaluations and extended class hours. On Sunday night, CTU made it official said that it was going on strike and that 26,000 of its members would be out picketing rather than teaching. The strike is going to affect 350,000 students, along with them their families, who will now have to arrange for baby sitters, rearrange work schedules and find something constructive for their children to do. Schools officials, frustrated that the negotiations had to be called off expressed concern about the children whom the strike would affect the most. David J. Vitale, president of the Chicago Board of Education, said that the negotiations were unusually difficult and said that they do not want a strike. Karen Lewis, president of the Chicago Teachers Union said that they had hoped that the walkout would not take place. She said it was a difficult decision to make and one which they would have much rather avoided. However, many teachers had already come together by early Monday morning, wearing red union T-shirts carrying placards that read, "Honk If You Love a Teacher," with relentless horn blowing by passing motorists, further emboldening the teachers. "We're ready to stay out as long as it takes to get a fair contract and protect our schools," said Steve Parsons, who teaches Advanced Placement psychology. "This is a difficult decision and one we hoped we could have avoided," said Karen Lewis, president of the Chicago Teachers Union. However, she was unyielding that now that the decision had been made, "In the morning, no CTU members will be inside our schools. We will walk the picket lines, we will talk to parents, we ... will demand a fair contract today, we demand a fair contract now." Emanuel said that only two things remained unsolved. The unions were against the principal's right to choose teachers for her school and the second bone of contention was implementation of standardized tests for teacher evaluations. "It's essential that the local principal who we hold accountable for producing the educational results not be told by the CPS bureaucracy ... and not be told by the union leadership who to hire," he said. "We're all very nervous about the outcome," Xian Barrett, a Chicago high school law and history teacher, said. "But I'm also hopeful that we're finally taking a stand on issues that have more to do with educating children than salary or benefits. It's about who has the right to determine how children are educated in the community." Negotiations have been taking place since November where a number of issues have been thrashed out, including whether laid-off teachers should be taken back, extra pay for those with more experience and higher degrees, and evaluations. District officials said the teachers' average pay is \$76,000 a year. However, many allege that the personal egos of the two main protagonists in the dispute Mayor Emanuel and Ms. Lewis came in the way of a resolution. Both are blunt and resolute personalities, neither prepared to budge an inch. Ms. Lewis had in an interview called the mayor a "bully," and a "liar." There was no love lost between the two, with Lewis talking of the mayor's working style saying, "I think the whole idea of an imperial mayoralty where you wave a magic wand or cuss someone out and things happen is untenable." The mayor on his part says that we have conceded as much as we could but it seems that they were determined to strike. "This is totally unnecessary, it's avoidable and our kids do not deserve this," Mr. Emanuel said, calling it "a strike of choice." "We will make sure our kids are safe, we will see our way through these issues and our kids will be back in the classroom where they belong," he concluded.