

CHICAGO STRIKE: AGREEMENT ON CARDS AS PATIENCE RUNS THIN: BOTH SIDES SAY END IN SIGHT, BUT NOT QUITE THERE



The strike is ending its first week and already the strains are beginning to show. Amidst signs of ego's thawing and spirits flagging, negotiators believe that, even as the contentious issues remained unresolved, they had accomplished a "framework" that could bring the children back to the classrooms as early as Monday. However both sides were quick to add, that the "framework" was not a final agreement but declined to release details, citing the need for weekend deliberations to sort this matter to its end. It is thought the unions will vote on Sunday to continue or to call off the strike. School Board President David Vitale said that the long hours of talks had been fruitful and major issues had been tackled and placed "frameworks around all the major issues." Union President Karen Lewis confirmed what Vitale said and said there were no "main sticking points right now," but emphasized that the as of now the strike was on and there was no contract. She said that the Unions are still wary of the district, having had their trust betrayed earlier. Mayor Rahm Emanuel called the framework an honest and principled compromise and said that it "preserves more time for learning in the classroom, provides more support for teachers to excel at their craft and gives principals the latitude and responsibility to build an environment in which our children can succeed." The teachers showed their determination to stand by the unions decisions. Adam Heenan, a delegate and teacher at Curie Metro High School said, "We are prepared to go back to teach. We are prepared to continue to walk." The strike will not affect the teachers of Chicago alone, but will have ramifications all across America. Terry Mazany, president and CEO of the Chicago Community Trust said that the strike "has magnified and elevated the public debate on school reform. It has become the focal point for the union movement and its future in this country." Similar issues are faced by school districts, other than Chicago and the results of this strike are being awaited with baited breath by teachers in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Boston. A swift and amicable end to the bitter dispute would also draw the curtains on an uncomfortable issue for President Obama. This is hometown and his refusal to take sides in the ongoing dispute was being questioned and drawing flak from the Republicans. Meanwhile parents, who had to juggle their work routines with unanticipated child care requirements, were expressing concern about what the future would hold if the strike stretched out further. Sarah Liebman, a mother of two children in school said that the parents were getting anxious for a resolution of the strike, "There is ... frustration, foremost. It's really affecting the kids right now." Although neither side wants to tell how things stand as of now, informed sources say that the two main sticking points in the talks, the implementation of the city's new proposed teacher evaluation system and the process for re-hiring of laid off teachers had found a mutually agreed solution. What can be said for certain is that both sides have realized that too much is at stake and it was time to put personal egos aside and work in the larger interests of the people. There is an uncertain agreement on the table which will likely metamorphose into a definite one and come Monday, the schools will once again reverberate to the sounds of children laughing and playing and learning.