

CHICAGO TEACHER'S STRIKE CLAIMS FIRST CASUALTY: CEO BRIZARD REPLACED BY BARBARA BYRD-BENNETT



Less than a month has passed in the bitter Chicago teachers' dispute and the first head has rolled. Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced that he is replacing his schools CEO Jean-Claude Brizard with an old hand Barbara Byrd-Bennett, who according to Rahm has the capacity and experience to take Chicago school reforms ahead. At a news conference the Mayor said that the outgoing CEO had resigned by mutual accord after questions continued to be raised about his leadership which became an impediment in the mayor's reform objectives. "We have a break point here with a new contract that has to be implemented. This is a unique opportunity. Executing on it down to the classroom is key. I don't want anything distracting from it. It's time for a clean break. What he said to me is, Barbara is the right person to pick up the baton and take it to the next level," he said. The new replacement, Barbara Byrd-Bennett, who had been serving as Chicago's interim chief education officer, had played a much more prominent role than Brizard in the dispute that made national headlines. Reports were doing the rounds that Emanuel was not very happy with Brizard's performance but when quizzed told reporters that the school CEO still had his confidence. However, a performance-evaluation by the school board found his communication and decision-making skills wanting, which led to his ouster. 62-year old Byrd-Bennett is a veteran educator, having served as a teacher and as an administrator. She was also the CEO in Cleveland Public Schools. She also served as the chief academic and accountability auditor for Detroit Public Schools, where her duties included putting into action a teaching and learning plan and auditing academic programs. Emanuel said the settlement with the teachers had the potential to usher in desired reforms. He added that to do that you had to have the right person at the helm, someone who understands the major school system, virtually admitting that Brizard did not have in him to push the reforms and hence was shown the door. In addition to Emanuel's lack of faith in him, Brizard did not share a cordial relationship with the teachers and an overwhelming 90 percent had given him vote of no-confidence. Chicago School Board President David Vitale said that Brizard himself realized that he would not be able to fulfill his work effectively in the vitiated atmosphere and himself asked to be relieved. Emanuel denied allegations of interfering in Brizard's work and said that it was unfortunate that he felt that way. "I am clear about what our goals are, I monitor and hold people accountable to achieving them," the mayor said. "But I don't do the day-to-day work." Byrd-Bennett said that she has the requisite experience in educational matters and she was prepared "for the long haul" ahead. Among the first calls she made after learning about her new appointment was to Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis. She said that she had great respect for her and acknowledged that only together they'd be able to accomplish things. Lewis said that Byrd-Bennett had the requisite academic qualifications and welcomed her appointment as "a good beginning." Praising her role in solving the week long crisis, she said "She has a reputation of doing well in labor-management relationships." Meanwhile the departing CEO will get a full year's salary as part of his severance pay. He had been given a two year contract at \$250,000 a year.