



October 8, 2016

Keep Pushing for a Deal With Teachers

Although I grew up in some pretty difficult circumstances on the West Side of Chicago, I received one thing that has served me my entire life: an education. I was blessed to attend good Catholic elementary and high schools and, with lots of love and support, I became the first member of my family to earn a four-year college degree.

There are thousands of young people all across Chicago who have the same dreams I had when I was in school, but their dreams could be at risk because the Chicago Public Schools and the Chicago Teachers Union are struggling to reach agreement on a new teacher contract. The union plans to strike on October 11th if a deal isn't reached.

Although I taught social studies for six years as a unionized public school teacher with the Chicago Public Schools and I do everything possible to support public school teachers, I hope that the Chicago Public School Teachers are not forced to strike. An online petition was set up to encourage community and parental engagement in the process to urge CTU and CPS prevent a Chicago Public Schools strike. A strike would put the safety of children at risk and stall their academic progress. No one can predict the long-term effects of our second teacher strike in four years, but I know it won't be good.

Teachers deserve a fair deal and I won't comment on the details of the negotiations because Springfield can also do more to help the Chicago Public Schools. Keep negotiating. How far apart can you be? And what outcome do you expect a strike will bring?

Serving in Springfield, I know that the state has not done nearly enough for schools, but there is no way the state will come to the rescue right now. We're taking up pension reforms in the veto session that could yield another \$200 million for Chicago, but that's not guaranteed. If teachers strike, I worry that the governor and the legislature will be less likely to pass pension reform and we will face another round of layoffs midyear.

I share the concerns of teachers that too many classrooms are overcrowded and too many schools face tight budgets. I am frustrated by the cuts in special education services and librarians. Students learn more when teachers have the support of administrators to do their job well. Students are not learning as they should if they are not in school during a strike, and

being out of school could also place some students in physical danger. It is clear that a contract agreement to avoid a strike is the only solution.

I ask that everyone on all sides of this issue to do whatever it takes to keep our children safe and keep them in school to learn all they can to be our leaders of tomorrow.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District