



October 12, 2016

A Deal For Teachers and Students

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. Let's steal the model of quality education from those in the city who do it best.

If we have a better delivery of educational opportunities on the West Side, our economy would improve, more money will flow on the West Side, and many of our negative problems would go away. Communities with great schools have strong businesses, less crime, and higher property values.

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 was hoping that the Chicago Public School Teachers were not forced to strike. I set up an online petition to encourage community and parental engagement in the process to urge CTU and CPS prevent a Chicago Public Schools strike, and we had great participation with this petition.

Serving in Springfield, I know that the state has not done nearly enough for schools. We're taking up pension reforms in the veto session that could yield another \$200 million for Chicago, but that's not guaranteed. We need to continue the work to try to support our schools.

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.

I want to thank the Chicago Teachers Union and the Chicago Public Schools for reaching a deal and averting a strike to keep our children in the classrooms. For us on the West Side, the fight must continue beyond contract negotiations. Let's not forget that the Austin community on the West Side is the largest neighborhood community in Chicago, and yet we still do not have our

own traditional public high school. Austin taxpayers are being cheated of real opportunities that we see afforded other communities.

If we want to see a change on the West Side, the system must change. The people must fight for their rights to live in a community where it is safe, affordable, and healthy, and much of that hinges on excellent schools and educational opportunities. We have to work to do whatever it takes so our children can 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