



October 27, 2015

The City Must Stop Stonewalling Demands for an Elected School Board

In Illinois, we have 863 regular public districts: 375 elementary school districts, 100 high school districts, and 388 unit school districts. In Illinois, 862 of the 863 regular public school districts have elected school boards. Chicago is the one and only school district in Illinois with an appointed school board accountable to the mayor of Chicago and not to the taxpayers. Twenty years ago, the Illinois General Assembly handed complete authority to the mayor of Chicago to appoint a chief executive officer and members of the Chicago Board of Education.

According to the Chicago Public School's web site, the district currently has 422 elementary schools and 95 high schools, 60 charter elementary schools, and 70 charter high schools, plus a few other non-traditional type schools. In all, student enrollment includes: preschool: 22,873; kindergarten: 28,278; elementary (1-8) 232,825; and secondary (9-12) 112,007. The student racial makeup includes: African American: 39.3%; Hispanic: 45.6%; White: 9.4%; and other at 5.7%, of which 86.02% are economically disadvantaged students. The teacher racial breakdown includes: African American: 22.7%; Hispanic: 19.6%; White: 50.5%; and other: 7.2%. The operating budget for fiscal year 2016 is \$ 5.69 Billion. Budget sources include: local: \$ 2.703 billion; state: \$2.057 billion; and federal \$0.853 billion.

Twenty years later, we have witnessed the closing of 80 schools during 2001-2008 and the closing of 49 schools in 2013 - mostly serving children and families on the city's South and West sides. Chicago continues to move away from the traditional style of neighborhood schooling. These changes are mostly affecting families on the city's West Side. It seems that the days of trying to fight for better quality neighborhood schools have been replaced with a fight and a move to increase the number of contract schools, charter schools, and alternative schools on the South and West sides of Chicago.

The Chicago Public Schools may be worse off today as a result of Springfield's action 20 years ago. A comprehensive plan is needed to improve the quality of education on the West Side. We have to ask ourselves, after 20 years and many different Chicago Public School CEOs and board members: where is the plan to help the children on the West Side?

We also have to ask the question of whether the General Assembly should reverse its decision made 20 years ago which handed over total control over the governance of Chicago schools.

I continue to hear the demand for an elected school board for the Chicago Public School System. The issues of an elected school board in Chicago continues to be one of the hottest political issues in Chicago.

Chicago's West Side must have a school board that would be more accountable to the students and the taxpayers of the Chicago. After many town hall meetings and meetings with education advocates, I sponsored House Bill 1152 which former Governor Pat Quinn signed the bill into law more than a year ago making Public Act 98-1053, which creates the Chicago Educational Governance Task Force to study whether an elected Chicago Public Schools School Board would be the best structure of governance. The Chicago Public Schools continues to ignore the law and refuses convene the first task force meeting.

It has also been less than a year since the Chicago's Municipal Election in February 2015 when voters in 37 wards voted yes with overwhelming margins - 83 to 93 % in favor - of a referendum for an elected school board for the Chicago Public School system.

If we are ever going to put an end to the ongoing violence in our city and state, we have to put a end to the games the city and state continue to play with educational opportunities on the West Side. We have to do everything we can do educate the students of this state, so everyone will have the opportunity to make better decisions in life.

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

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District