



Illinois Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

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Dear Esteemed Leaders and Members of the Legislative Black Caucus:

We write to you today to express our strong support for the protesters known as the "Dyett 12," who, as we write, are entering their twelfth day of a hunger strike. Their dramatic action was spurred by the mayoral-controlled Chicago Board of Education's refusal to engage with parents, community members, clergy, students, and teachers who support a community-envisioned school for global leadership and green technology. The hunger strikers are Black, white, and Latino. They are young and old. They are men and women. And they need and deserve your help.

The strikers, along with the community of Bronzeville, with the support of the CTU, IFT and IEA, are demanding that Mayor Emanuel and the Chicago Board of Education vote in favor of the Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology High School. This plan, developed by the community, will ensure that the community and, most importantly, the children of this community get the world-class education they deserve.

Since 2001, Chicago Public Schools have closed, turned around or converted to charter or selective enrollment 20 area schools near Dyett. Between 2005 and 2010, four high schools on the South Side near Dyett were closed. Students were sent from school to school, and schools that were community anchors closed, further destabilizing a community shaken by destruction of public housing and gentrification. This is not sustainable. This is not good for students. And, this must end.

This community time and again has demonstrated remarkable commitment to the students at this school.

- The Dyett school-community has worked tirelessly to enrich the students' education and improve Dyett.
- They fought for a school library and building improvements, including finding external funders to renovate the athletic facilities.
- They have helped Dyett youth become leaders in Voices of Youth in Community Education (VOYCE), a youth organizing collaborative for education justice led by Chicago students of color.
- Community organizations and Dyett's elected Local School Council developed an acclaimed Restorative Justice Program and Education to Success both hailed as models by former CPS CEO, and current US Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan.
- A community collaboration created the Dyett -Washington Park Green Youth Farm that provides youth summer employment, after-school programs, and a community garden.

- In 2010, parents, teachers and the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization began developing the Bronzeville Global Village Achievers plan to transform Dyett and five feeder schools.

Despite this, Chicago Public Schools' response to the community's initiative was to abandon this school and now trying to re-open it potentially to the highest bidder.

The Bronzeville community plan:

- Was submitted by an organized group of educators, parents, students and concerned citizens
- Was designed by expert practitioners who engaged the community in a multiyear process
- Focuses on culturally rich curricula, with an emphasis on leadership and green technology
- Promotes public-private partnerships and community collaboration
- Provides wraparound services for all students

The other two plans that have been submitted are wrong for this community, plain and simple. One was submitted by a contract operator who works at a school where only 5.6 percent of students meet or exceed state standards. The other reinforces historic stereotypes against African-Americans by focusing only on athletics. This is unacceptable.

We are now at a crisis stage with the health of the strikers in peril. Yesterday's Chicago Tribune detailed doctors' concerns about their immediate condition. The Chicago School Board, aldermen, and Mayor Emmanuel have the power to end the hunger strike today.

We are deeply grateful for the support many in the Black Caucus have already shown for the Dyett 12 and the Dyett community at large, including coming to Dyett and vocally supporting the hunger strikers. We are asking for you to take whatever other possible steps you can take as Illinois legislators to help bring this crisis to end, with the successful creation of Dyett Global Leadership and Green Technology High School, including using whatever influence you have on Alderman Will Burns and Mayor Rahm Emmanuel to end this hunger strike.

Thank you.

Yours for justice,

Dan Montgomery
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