



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on September 11, 2012

Day Two of the Chicago Teacher Strike; Parents Outraged

Day two of the Chicago teacher strike commenced Tuesday, leaving nearly 350,000 students between kindergarten and high school age without schooling for another day, while forcing parents to decide whether to stay home from work, pay for childcare, or leave their children at home to fend for themselves.

Thousands of public-school teachers took to the streets Monday to protest a failed contract that has left union leaders and school district officials in gridlock. Chicago Teachers Union president Karen Lewis [said](#) Sunday they had made progress on the contract, but “we have failed to reach an agreement that will prevent a labor strike.”

While the more obvious casualty of the strike is the large number of children not receiving an education, Chicago parents are facing decisions over what to do with their children. While some are taking their kids to work, others are staying home, or leaving their children without any supervision.

Rose Davis, who lives in one of the city’s most violent neighborhoods, wasn’t comfortable with allowing her two young grandchildren to walk to a school that was providing meals and childcare for students in the district. So Davis, who has a severe diabetic condition, walked her grandchildren six blocks to Benjamin E. Mays Elementary Academy, which is about five blocks farther than the school they ordinarily attend. “They had to go out of their home zone, and you never know what gang violence is going on on the other side of the zone,” [asserted](#) Davis, adding that she would continue to make the trek until the strike ends.

Meanwhile, Patricia Rodriguez, another parent in the nation’s third-largest school district, had to take her two children to work at a nearby laundromat. Rodriguez’s daughter Jasmine, a third-grader at Edwards Elementary, and her **big** sister Yaritza, who is 13 and in the seventh grade, said they would prefer going to school rather than accompanying their mother at her job.

The two Rodriguez children are among the nearly 180,000 Hispanics attending Chicago public schools, accounting for about 45 percent of the city’s entire student population. Many families — 27 percent, according to the latest census report — residing in one mostly Hispanic neighborhood on Chicago’s Southwest side, live in poverty and had to decide whether a mother or father could afford to stay home from work to watch their children, or pay the money for alternative childcare.

Rodriguez is thankful for her ability to take her children to work, but indicated that the greed of the Chicago union is imposing a financial burden on thousands of families living below the poverty line. “I’m lucky that I can take them to work with me because they can sit in the chairs, but I know that families had to leave kids home alone today or stay home and miss work to be with them and that’s not fair,” she [said](#). “The teachers want more and more money and while they fight for that, it’s us, the parents, that are spending money today that we don’t have either. It’s not a big thing today but what about tomorrow





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and next week if they don't go back?"

Juan Rangel, CEO of the United Neighborhood Organization's (UNO) Veterans Memorial Campus, hopes the strike will attract families to charter schools. While they are still under Charter Public School jurisdiction, teachers working at the city's charter schools are not unionized, and consequently, did not participate in the strike.

UNO is a prominent charter school network in Illinois, consisting of 13 schools in Chicago, all of them located in primarily Hispanic neighborhoods. Rangel says these non-unionized schools are a prime alternative to the failing neighborhood schools that impoverished families are forced to send their children to.

"The strike is actually raising awareness about charter schools because parents across the city are seeing that 52,000 kids are going to school today and they're going to start asking why their kids aren't among them," Rangel affirmed.

"To tell you the truth, I don't really know what the things are that the teachers are asking for right now," said Rodriguez, whose children are stuck in the kind of failed neighborhood school Rangel is referring to. "But what could be so important that they thought the best decision was to strike?"

As The New American [noted](#) Monday, Chicago teachers already earn an average salary of about \$75,000, yet union officials were not satisfied with the 16-percent raise over the next four years offered by school officials. Considering that the average family in Chicago earns only about [\\$47,000](#) a year — and that the union did not accept a 16-percent increase over their already well-above-average salaries — it's not surprising that low- and middle-income families would be outraged.



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