Protecting our members and their greatest interest—their students—is the hallmark of the Chicago Teachers Union. If there is ever a need in the classroom or the community to stand up to injustice, we have a responsibility to be there.

PAGES 8-10 AND 15
Peace on earth, and good will towards children

Even something as simple as tasting the unadorned sweetness of an orange can bring beauty and serenity into the lives of our students. In addition to knowledge, we should strive to provide students with a sense of tranquility.

By MICHELLE STRATER GUNDERSON

When I was small and my world was safe, I would wake up on Christmas morning and there would always be an orange at the bottom of my stocking—a “store-bought orange,” as my mother would say. On our family farm it was always a source of pride that almost everything we ate and used came from the work of our hands. I long for these simpler times, when an orange could mean so much.

That simpler time was 1968, a time that historically many of us consider to be one of the most tumultuous in our nation’s history. Yet my family was able to envelope me in a sense of peace and caring.

I teach first grade in the Chicago Public Schools district. I know my job well, and according to all the Christmas cards from my students, I am very good at it. And this is what I can tell you: In spite of the politics and policy of education that get harmfully thrown around, the most important part of this job is to keep children safe and care for them deeply so they can live the lives they were meant to live.

That is it. The rest is extra.
I have been struggling with what safety and caring look like inside of a society that seems to care very little for children. Education budgets have been cut to the bone; teachers are overrun with needless mandates for paperwork and policy that take us away from the heart of teaching; both adults and children are judged and labeled by meaningless tests; and the list goes on.

And then we have the forthcoming presidency of Donald Trump and his incoming secretary of education, Betsy DeVos. If we believe their words, schools will be the best educator that I can be. I give him small as I am?” And it carols is “In the Bleak Midwinter.” The last verse says, “What can I give him small as I am?” And it ends with “give my heart.” Let us set our hearts and minds to love. The time is now.

Michelle Strater Gundersen is a teacher at Sethlow Elementary School.

A gathering of gentlemen

By MARIO JOVAN SHAW AND WALTER TAYLOR, NBCT

On Thursday, Nov. 10, the Chicago Teachers Union Foundation (CTUF) Quest Center partnered with Profound Gentlemen Inc. (PG) to provide a space for Black and brown male educators in Chicago. PG, a grantee of the CTUF, was founded nearly two years ago to build a community of male educators of color who provide a profound impact through social-emotional learning and cultivating a cradle-to-career pipeline for boys of color. From its roots in North Carolina, PG has spread across the nation to Washington D.C., Atlanta and now Chicago.

PG and the CTUF have partnered to help create an activist and social group where male educators of color can be of assistance to one another; maintain and grow their numbers; and establish a mentoring group for young Black and brown boys and youth. Approximately 50 male educators of color assembled to discuss the importance of maintaining their presence in public schools and increasing the presence of Black and brown males in the education profession.

During the event, educators were able to link with individuals from other schools and formulate systems that allowed resource-sharing amongst PG members teaching similar subjects. It was the beginning of a brotherhood.

PG also shared a presentation on the perks and benefits of being a member of its group, as educators who join the brotherhood receive the opportunity to network with other male educators of color from around the country, free professional development opportunities and quarterly incentives.

Camerin Simms, a second-year Chicago teacher, brought along a male African-American student who expressed to the audience of educators why faces like his are important to see in his school building. Simms also shared his story on why he loves teaching in Chicago and how he has benefit from his association with PG. “I have never been in a room with this many Black male teachers,” he said. “This encourages me to be the best educator that I can be for my students and the Chicago community.”

PG invites all male educators of color to attend its Community Impact Assembly held March 10-12, 2017, in Charlotte, N.C. The Assembly is a conference to “create extraordinary outcomes for boys of color” through informational sessions, community engagement activities and networking opportunities. Please visit PG online at http://profoundgentlemen.org to learn more about other CTUF community engagement and professional development opportunities.

Walter Taylor, NBCT is the Director of Professional Development for the CTUF. Mario Jovan Shaw is co-CEO of Profound Gentlemen Inc.
The issue is justice

Sisters and Brothers,

It seems as though every time we turn around, Chicago Public Schools has made it harder to work in our schools. On Friday the 13th—appropriately, TKPS CEO Forrest Claypool declared four furlough days for the district. It’s no surprise that the announcement came on the same day as the release of a U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) report on Chicago policing. It was a page right out of City Hall’s “bury the story” playbook, but for our union, the same-day announcement of the DOJ report and CPS furlough days highlights the intersection of social justice and the work we do on behalf of our members.

The Chicago Teachers Union’s position on issues related to social justice and notions of social justice unionism was strengthened when the current CTU administration took office in 2010. Today, we stand as a union of nearly 30,000 active and retired teachers, clinicians and paraprofessionals, and have a responsibility not just to our members, but to the communities in which they live. In a city with nearly 900 homicides and more than 4,000 shootings last year, and a mayor who refuses to fund wraparound services for students living with this trauma, it is imperative that we are among those taking a stand.

The Chicago Housing Authority is boarding a nearly half-billion dollar surplus when we have close to 20,000 homeless students in our district. Special education cuts in CPS have left our most vulnerable students without services and resources they so desperately need. So we will fight—as we always do—for justice.

We will fight even more ardently for our members. When Claypool and his boss, Mayor or Rahm Emanuel, mandated four furlough days, they continued their willingness to take from the pockets of hard-working educators instead of from the pockets of bankers, developers and Illinois’ millionaires. Further, they want our members to miss out on self-directed planning and grading time, as well as on valuable professional development (PD). The district’s actions mean that even more work will be foisted upon us to do on our own time, and on weekends.

This is incomprehensible. The ink was barely dry on our contract when the mayor and his hapless CPS CEO forced—forced—us to make even more sacrifices. The furlough days are a violation of our contract and the Union is filing a grievance as the Chicago Board of Education attempts to cut our contractually determined 10 PD days.

It’s clear that even though we have a contract, the fight for the schools our students deserve isn’t over. As we increase our emphasis on contract enforcement, the CTU is gearing up for the fights ahead and working to launch campaigns to tackle some of our most critical issues such as: • Paperwork, testing and grading • Class size reductions • Restoring special education services • REACH evaluation • Developing more solidarity and alignment with the Chicago ACTS—charter local 4343 • Sustainable community schools • Ongoing attacks on our students by Chicago’s mayor, Gov. Bruce Rauner and President Donald Trump

Some of these areas will require a concerted effort from our staff and members through the use of organizing and grievance tactics, media outreach, and community and political pressure. This effort, however, is not in vain. We didn’t win a significant reduction of paperwork in special education and the procedural manual without members in the streets, parents raising Cain at Chicago Board of Education meetings, a survey of 900 members spelling out the many outrages our special education students are facing and the filing of grievances with the district and issuing legal complaints to the state. We didn’t get Network 12 to cut gradebook entry requirements in half or reduce testing by 80 percent without delegates speaking truth to power, without a willingness of our Professional Problems Committees (PPCs) to hold principals’ feet to the fire and without our collective efforts to be strike-ready that created the Network PPCs in the first place.

To hold the Board of Ed to its new contract, we will have to fight for those rights, for increased revenue for our schools and classrooms, and use all the tools at our disposal simultaneously. Just as we are committed to ensuring that staff and organizational resources are deployed to win in-school battles for our members, we must be willing to take that same fight to our communities. City Hall, Springfield and anywhere else injustice reigns supreme. As the saying goes, “An injury to one is an injury to all,” and we will use all of our power to protect our members, our students and their communities from injury.

In solidarity,

Karen GJ Lewis, NBCT

The president’s message

It’s clear that even though we have a contract, the fight for the schools our students deserve isn’t over.
The empty promise of “school choice”

Below is a letter sent by CTU retiree delegate George Milkowski to the Chicago Sun-Times in response to an op-ed by author and pundit John Stossel titled “What’s so wrong with giving parents school choices?”

I believe John Stossel maligns citizens who oppose the nomination of Arne Duncan for the position of secretary of education because they object, among other things, to expanding charter schools. He is very clear that he thinks applying a “free market” philosophy to public education will improve education. Stossel maintains that students would do better if they were forced to hold schools ‘to one another academically,’ and that poor schools would end up going out of business. He objects tochart schools because they thrive on the status quo and often unaccountable to the taxpayers. He has conveniently overlooked some pertinent information.

First, no matter where one stands on the political spectrum, no one wants bad schools. Charter schools sound good if they are as successful as their proponents believe, but the truth is they are not the panacea that their supporters make it out to be. In 2009, Stanford University’s Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO) conducted the first nationwide study of charter schools of which I am aware. The study concluded that 37 percent of charter schools did worse than traditional public schools, 46 percent had academic results that were the same and only 17 percent were considered to be better. If 83 percent of charter schools were no better and often worse than traditional schools, how can one argue that we need more of them?

Stossel says, “A Stanford study concluded that charter students achieved two months of additional gains in reading and math.” He doesn’t explain which study this phrase came from, but I believe that it is from a paper that Stanford conducted a few years after its original CREDO study. If that is correct, I am glad that some charters showed improvement in some areas, but that does not mean that they are overall doing better than traditional schools.

Second, to claim that teachers unions are responsible for the poor performance of students because they thrive on the status quo is inaccurate. It was Albert Shanker, former president of the American Federation of Teachers who passed away in 1997, who recognized that there were serious problems in public education and proposed the idea of establishing charter schools about 40 years ago. Shanker believed that schools had to give decision-making power to those with the most direct knowledge of a child’s educational needs—parents and classroom teachers. Since Betsy DeVos, candidate for secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, does not have an education degree, never taught in a public school, never attended nor ever had her children in public schools, it seems that she is not the best qualified person to deal with educational problems. In an article about the system, he has consistently overlooked some pertinent information.

Third, the free-market philosophy that Stossel supports doesn’t exist. A free market should have a level playing field, but that is not the case involving many charter schools. Just this past year, the media reported that Chicago Public Schools student information was released to a charter school network so it could recruit from a larger pool and skim off the cream of potential students. There are also many reports of charter schools expanding widely, not just in Chicago, not accepting students who are considered difficult to teach, and often, when charter schools have students with learning or behavior problems, “they counsel” them to leave. Where do these students go? They then must be educated by so-called “underperforming” traditional schools.

Fourth, charter schools are too often unaccountable to the taxpayers funding them. “For-profit institutions serve the public and usually do it better than governments do,” according to Stossel, but in Chicago, for example, we have well-known accounting problems associated with the UNO charter network that led to state funding for its schools being suspended. This is not, however, a localized situation.

An extreme example of this involves a for-profit company in Ohio called White Hat Management. Starting in 2008, White Hat Management received more than $230 million from the state of Ohio to operate a number of charter schools, but after a few years its performance was so bad that the state and 10 of its own schools sued the company for failure to educate the students properly. In arguments over its poor results and questions as to how the taxpayer money was spent, White Hat Management’s lawyer, Charles R. Saxbe, publicly maintained that once public money is given to a private entity, it becomes private money. In other words, it is none of the taxpayers’ business.

It is unfortunate that when President Barack Obama appointed Arne Duncan to be secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, he did not hear the same complaints about Duncan. Now, I don’t know where Stossel lives, but it’s pretty clear that it is not here in the Chicago area. Many people complained publicly about Obama’s choice, with some stating that “at least he is out of Chicago,” but blaming the fact that Duncan’s education plan would be floated on the nation as a whole.

Lastly, I believe that the number one factor for educational success is a child’s overall environment. Unfortunately, too many parents are unable to provide the nurturing and supportive role that is necessary due to financial, physical or emotional conditions. The truth is that the U.S. has a huge underclass of people living in poverty and unable to break out of their condition, while we as a society are unwilling to face and effectively deal with this problem.

Charter schools and a free-market approach to education are not the magic bullets we need to make our schools better as long as we refer them to effectively deal with the problem of entrenched poverty. Until we face up to that, charters will always have severe problems.

George Milkowski, CTU retiree delegate, Chicago
Angelica, you’re pretty smart for a Black girl

The annual Project Soapbox Competition helps teach kids to give two-minute speeches. The self-discovery lasts a lot longer.

By JUANITA DOUGLAS

One of my greatest joys as a classroom teacher comes when I see my students face challenges. I absolutely love it when they start seeing themselves in a positive light. I love it when they move from developing confidence into showing confidence. But the only way that they can shine so brightly is if they prepare. Each year my students develop speeches for the Mikva Challenge-sponsored Project Soapbox Competition. The Project Soapbox curriculum is designed to provide students with the steps necessary to deliver a two-minute speech. Please keep in mind that most students begin the process in complete fear of public speaking. They are unsure that they will be able to incorporate the rubric requirements and passionately speak to an audience of their peers. Each year, however, they always accomplish their goals with an enormous amount of pride.

Students are encouraged to select a community, school or issue that is personal to them. I never influence the topics, nor sway them into discussing difficult periods of their lives. I am always amazed when they go deep inside of themselves and freely show their vulnerability to others. Here is a list of speeches on some of this year’s topics that allowed my students to open up and seriously share their emotions: becoming a foster child due to parental abandonment; suicide attempts; anxiety; depression and other mental illnesses; losing friends to gun violence; police brutality; poor grades; gender issues; the impact of racism.

Speeches on these topics level the “emotional currency” and bond students, which created a greater sense of community in the classroom. It is a very organic way to get to know one another.

In addition to the social and emotional benefits, the academic tasks are challenging as well. Students must find a variety of sources to substantiate their claims. They must also include a minimum of two rhetorical devices and craft a call to action. These are great challenges to reinforce research and writing skills, combining the power of language, word choice and passion to produce masterpieces.

This year I had eight students compete in the citywide finals. It was an incredible experience for all of us, especially Angelica Henney. Angelica is a junior in my Honors Law in American Society class and emerged as the citywide first prize winner for 2016. Her speech detailed her experiences of being a biracial African-American and Puerto Rican child adopted by white parents. Her speech discussed the impact of racial stigmatization in our society. Angelica had the entire audience wrapped around her finger as she spoke her truth. In her call to action, Angelica urged listeners to advocate for those who are stigmatized by becoming more knowledgeable on the subject and helping to uplift, empower and build the confidence of those who are victimized.

Juanita Douglas is a teacher at Lincoln Park High School.

Angelica’s winning Project Soapbox entry

By Angelica Henney

They wanted to remind me of where I come from. As if the slope of my nose, curve of my lips, and kink in my curls, failed to remind me of my roots that are ever so conditioned.

They wanted to remind me of where I come from. As if this brown skin that I wear ever so proudly, had never been built-up target in a sea of white flesh.

I was outraged.

See, they wanted to remind me of where I come from.

As if people had never set low expectations for me before I could even roll my name off of my tongue.

Angelica, you’re actually very smart for a black girl.

Angelica, you’re actually very pretty for a black girl.

Before I was even born people began to feed me their preconceived notions on who I was and who I was going to be. I am not a biracial African-American and Puerto Rican female, but I am a biracial daughter adopted into a white family. I am one of the many minority youth that continues to deal with different forms of discrimination and micro-aggressions. One form of the many discriminatory behaviors is known as racial stigmatization, which is the extreme disapproval of a person or group on socially characteristic grounds. Black youth in our city continue to inhibit their ability of realizing their “full human potential” due to the either conscious or unconscious judgment that comes from others.

At a young age I began to see how others viewed me. To people within the white community, I didn’t belong. I was told I struggled in school because I was Black and that I’d never achieve the goals my parents had sought for me. Instead of being looked at as a child with aspirations and potential, I was looked at as just another Black girl who wasn’t going to have much success in the first place—and I believed them.

Looking at my homework I would instantly become overwhelmed and cry saying, “I can’t do it, there’s no point in trying.” There wasn’t a day when I didn’t compare myself to my peers, having more faith in their success than in my own. By allowing racial stigmas to continue cycling in the minds of youth, we continue to neglect the future.

To people within the Black community, I was considered not Black enough because I’m “too smart to be Black,” “I don’t talk like I’m Black” and I don’t live in the “right” neighborhood. I felt like a stranger in my own body, confused as to why as Black children, we are limited and constrained to live and be a certain way. Generation after generation has been fed poison for so long that they’ve forgotten that they have the power to beat all odds against them.

Although many have tried to dictate how far I go in life, I continue to excel with the heart, mind and soul I’ve inherited from my extraordinary Black birth mother. Adoption centers told my parents that she was emotionally challenged and limited, but all my parents saw was another Black woman who had fallen victim to the cycle of racial stigmas.

As individuals, we deal with our own unique encounters with stigmatization and the low expectations others might have set for us based on their own unmindful first glances. It is important that we become vocal and take action against a significant flaw that infects our society. It’s time for us to raise our voices and uplift those who are stigmatized due to the color of their skin or any other characteristic that might make them different from everyone else. I ask that we become more knowledgeable on the subject, and begin to speak about it in order to have the power to encourage achievements within all communities, build confidence and open-mindedness within our peers and grasp all the potential we might fail to see within ourselves on a daily basis.
CPS adamantly denies cutting special ed services...while cutting special ed services

CPS CEO Forrest Claypool has taken doublespeak to a whole new level in his attacks on special ed.

Dr. SARAH ROTHSCHILD

Dealing with Chicago Public Schools bureaucracy and its constant doublespeak is par for the course, and to some degree, many of us have accepted this as the reality in which we live. Those of us who have been around for at least five years have dealt with five different district CEOs, each with their own administrative teams and priorities. Current CPS CEO Forrest Claypool, however, has taken doublespeak to a whole new level in his attacks on special education (SPED) services.

Two years into a major overhaul of how SPED services are provided and funded, CPS adamantly claims that all student Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are being met and there have not been any service cuts anywhere in the district. Schools started this year, however, with 4 percent fewer funds than last year and the elimination of all vacant positions, so in what universe does that not amount to a cut?

In order to recoup the 4 percent cut, schools are required to submit an appeal. So far, only 31 appeals have been granted. CPS is also implementing a lengthy and complicated new “paraprofessional justification form” that requires significant detailed data to prove a student needs assistance from a paraprofessional. CTU Members Refute CPS Lies

Approximately 900 rank-and-file members responded to a survey that the Chicago Teachers Union sent out in November to assess how the new SPED funding allocation is affecting schools across the district. Nearly every single one of the responding schools (70 percent of the total) reported major cuts in SPED services and additional cuts to other programs and services that serve the entire school population as a result of schools being told to “fund SPED first.” Some key areas of concern and sample responses are below.

Reducing IEPs

Members are reporting at astonishing rates that students have been denied or delayed evaluations based on Multi-Tiered System of Supports data (378 members, or 42.5 percent). Forty percent of respondents (354 members) reported that IEP services have been cut in order to meet the resources available at their schools, including 18 percent reporting cuts to transportation services, 15 percent on bilingual services and 23 percent on clinician services.

Many students are getting literally no services because we’re so short-staffed. Data supports one of my students getting a dedicated paraprofessional, but I was told “we won’t have the staff and it will just put us out of compliance,” so I was pressured not to write in necessary supports for a student with a history of self-harm. Paraprofessionals do double as security so minutes go unnoticed with the limited [special education classroom assistant] support we do have.

Eliminating Pull-Out or Inclusion

SPED cuts are eliminating pull-out services and sending students into inclusion without any supports, which overwhelms general education teachers. Simultaneously, cuts are also resulting in the opposite situation where students are denied any inclusion because the school does not have a paraprofessional to assist them.

Now I hear that a meeting took place with the network, and in order to get another teaching position for diverse learner students, the school will have to rearrange the schedule providing services to all push-in students, leaving out the pull-out students in order to justify the need for another position. I am unsure how long this process will take; these 122 children have already been eight weeks without instruction. They are sitting in my room and are on my roster although they shouldn’t be.

Substitute Shortages

SPED teachers, paraprofessionals and special education classroom assistants are covering general education classes that do not have substitute teachers, leaving their own students without services.

We are down 20 SPED teachers from October 2015. Our caseloads have increased by 5-6 students. There are auto running self-contained classes. There have been inclusion classes without SPED teachers. The admin filled the empty inclusion positions with office positions for current teachers instead of hiring new teachers. Teachers are extremely overworked and students are not getting the appropriate services.

At least 600 vacant SPED positions are being filled by substitutes, by administrative personnel or remaining vacant.

The administration has spread the work of six missing SPED teachers to the rest of the pool, causing three tenured teachers to quit just this year due to the workload increases that are unrealistic. They also refuse to answer or hire new applicants to the open positions when they apply on Taleo.

Excessive Paperwork and Caseloads

Paperwork is at an unmanageable level, according to survey respondents. CPS is imposing such a ridiculous amount of detail to justify IEPs that SECAs and CTU members are mostly doing paperwork instead of providing services.

It takes a good eight hours to write a good IEP. A great IEP will take 12 hours. Now that we have to do the new paraprofessional justification section, to write that takes a good 5-7 hours and to get the data needed, at least 2 weeks. There is no additional prep time given to write our IEPs. The schedules (we have to keep just to include our children are horrific. A teacher misses a full lunch or misses a full prep.

As reported in the previous issue of Chicago Union Teacher, all of these cuts are based on the false narrative created by a consulting firm that claims it audited CPS and special education is over-staffed with too many aides and teachers. So now CPS is allegedly “right-sizing” the district.

What You Can Do

First and foremost, you should report to your Professional Problems Committee and Local School Council. Everyone at your school is probably not aware of how these cuts are affecting students’ rights to receive the necessary services to allow them to fully participate in school—especially since CPS is working hard to convince the public otherwise.

Talk to your students’ parents about their rights and connect them with outside organizations, if needed. Thirty-seven schools reported that they successfully fought back against the cuts and SPED services were restored. Two schools reported that they have flat-out refused to modify the IEPs. Three members at one school credit parental involvement for its successful push-back, so there are many ways to get involved in this citywide effort to ensure that every student receives the services they need.

Sarah Rothschild is a CTU researcher.
CPS’ segregationist present must be resisted like in the past

CPS is “broke” when it comes to providing the services students need, but has plenty of money to maintain segregation.

School integration works. It has a positive impact on all students, both academically and socially, yet CPS is determined to continue its segregated policies. CPS has turned its back on the thousands of students it has relegated to schools that are triply segregated by race, income and academic engagement. These schools are regularly under attack--threatened with closure (if not closed already), denied much-needed resources and subjected to a revolving door of failed programs.

Neighborhood segregation is used in Chicago as an excuse for school segregation, yet the two are inter-related. Mid-20th century federal government policies regarding loan guarantees to suburban developers required that new homes not be sold to African-Americans. Also, the federal government denied many Black workers the right to unionize, and thus have a higher standard of living, by explicitly excluding coverage for domestic and agricultural workers under labor laws. Today’s wealth gap between among differing races is directly related to these federal policies. School segregation, backed by federal court decisions, further exacerbates the gap and harms students in several ways.

School integration benefits students academically. Studies of students in integrated versus segregated schools indicate positive impacts on African-American students with no academic downside to other students. All students benefit socially from interaction with those from different racial backgrounds. As Richard Rothstein, an economist and expert on race and education, points out: “School integration works. You can draw a straight line from segregated housing and school policies to today’s racist political climate. CPS has a role to play in this and so far, it is choosing the wrong side. It should again fight for the integrated line from segregated housing and school policies to today’s racist political climate. CPS has a role to play in this and so far, it is choosing the wrong side. It should again fight for the integrated”

CPS has a long history of ignoring parent pleas to keep their schools open, provide adequate funding and support teachers, the district did listen to this group of Ogden parents. As Janice Jackson, CPS Chief Education Officer, put it: “The same families that you’re talking about that are already segregated, have a revolving door of failed programs. They live in these communities have choices.”

CPS has a history of promoting segregation, going back to the days of “Willis Wagons,” which were temporary structures erected to keep Black students in Black neighborhoods while white schools sat half empty. Its segregationist policies continued into the 1980s, when CPS was forced to put some measures into effect to implement the 1954 Supreme Court decision against “separate but equal” schools. As the CPS website states: “In 1980, the Chicago Board of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice entered into a desegregation consent decree which, among other things, required CPS to implement a voluntary desegregation plan designed to create and maintain as many racially integrated schools as possible.” In September of 2009, it was ruled that CPS had achieved “unitary status,” which meant that “the remnants of past discrimination have been eliminated and judicial oversight is no longer warranted.” Now that it has gotten an end to the consent decree CPS goes out of its way to maintain segregation.

For example, even though parents at Lincoln Park’s Lincoln Elementary school lobbied for a merger with underutilized Manierre Elementary as an alternative to constructing a $19 million annex, CPS built the annex anyway. It spent 88.7 million to build a new South Loop school, with underutilized National Teachers Academy less than a mile away. Several million more was spent to build Skinner West, which opened in 2009, and now CPS will spend millions more to build an annex, even though Brown School sits a few blocks away and has room for more students.

CPS is “broke” when it comes to providing the services students need, but has plenty of money to maintain segregation.

You can draw a straight line from segregated housing and school policies to today’s racist political climate. CPS has a role to play in this and so far, it is choosing the wrong side. It should again fight for the integrated
One of our sisters makes no apology for her embrace of social justice unionism, saying that it “gave me a fighting chance and helped me to expand my occupation.” Here, she explains what social justice unionism is and why it’s a crucial part of being an effective trade unionist.

**Should I apologize for my belief in social justice unionism?**

By KIMBERLY GOLDBAUM

M onths ago, a responsible delegate stepped up and took the microphone at a House of Delegates meeting. Her next act involved bravery, because she had just said something controversial since our union started actively fighting for social justice.

We should be glad that she said it, because it gives us a chance to look at union history and at our own situation to clarify any misconceptions about our involvement in social movements. By disagreeing with what is perceived to be a tenet in our union, she demonstrated that within our union, we can air opposing viewpoints without destruction raining down on our heads.

No doubt, this opinion is shared by many people in our union who have not made the connection between our position as educators and workers that is the broader population in Chicago. Let’s attribute this to the use of jargon and the misunderstandings that can be created if people don’t know what “social justice” really means.

Social justice movements are movements that identify problems in society and set up structures to try to attack the problems and bring relief to the people affected by them. “Social,” because the problems deal with the interconnectivity between people’s decisions and the effects on society, and “justice,” because we all want to fight for fairness, dignity, quality, equality and ease. Unions were set up by laborers to address the same issues in the workplace. We’re educators and our students need social justice, but we find that districts look at products and purchases that fit certain agendas first then ascribe it to fulfilling the needs of the children.

Look at our city and our country, at large. Health care access has been reduced, even as insurance coverage has been expanded to children and to workers. Then there’s Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who has closed public mental health clinics. Services to the disabled and differently abled denizens have been reduced and contracted to private services. Wages have tanked, leaving families with less care for the young and less time for rest and leisure, and rented the adults overworked with less money and more debt. The environment suffers from pollution, not so that workers will have jobs, but so corporations will make millions. Race and poverty are tied to an economy that is not working for us.

And these social issues are just outside of school. Going inside the school, there are similar struggles. The presence of public school clinicians—nurses, psychologists, social workers, various therapists—has been reduced, so that these have become itinerant positions that help triage the students. There’s no consistent stream of health maintenance, save showing teachers how to administer treatment and blaming students for eating fast food. Privatized personnel have been brought in to do most of the paperwork, but not to attend to the social needs of students and the school. The food, packaged with fillers, preservatives, and too much salt and sugar, is warmed and served by our sisters and brothers who have been turned over to a private corporation as well as a private union. Our students are blamed for their own obesity with personal advice to “stop eating so much,” while their social needs are not being met.

The CPS lists 87 percent of our students as economically disadvantaged. Their parents don’t make enough money to keep up with the costs of living. But this is not because they all fit some stereotype of the unprepared youngster who wasn’t engaged by their teachers, dropped out of school, and now merits low-wage work as a punishment for past mistakes. Many of our students’ parents work several jobs, and our so-called “middle” class parents are struggling, too.

This is the system. It will not rectify itself, nor can we excuse a system that permits billion dollar corporations to pay a wage they try to shrink while charging our aforementioned earnings for necessities those corporations sell to us. That’s not justice.

The modern environmental movement has been steady for 50 years, and yet we are still talking about lead poisoning in 21st century schools. As for internal sanitation and maintenance, the district has privatized both janitors and engineers, making millions for corporations, but a mess of the schools. A few workers are cleaning and fixing where several hundreds more should be sharing in that work. It creates other social problems where things may look okay, but the lack of sanitation is dangerous, and the students and workers suffer.

The last analogy is gruesome. Black students, Latino students, non-conforming gender expression, special education students are still part of a growing group of students who are not being served appropriately. Racism and chauvinism regarding ability, sex and gender create hostile environments, and because of the lack of social services within the school, the lack of vision by school leaders, the farming out of jobs to privatized parties and the inability to properly address personal and collective needs, has created an awful solution: reliance on the school-to-prison pipeline.

Instead of a collective, healthy climate in the schools, students are thrown together in inclusion and educators are left to figure out logistics and worry about lessons, scores and scheduling in an inefficient way.

Forcing people to work in a way that binds wounds or stops gaps is very anachronistic. The idea that one person can make a difference is inspiring, but turns a few of us into heroes when we all just want to be humans. These are not the Dark Ages. We have faster communication, more exact technology and better understanding of human relations and science than ever, and the district is forcing a model of governance that ensures that the social maladjustments of society are repeated in its school structure. No individual teacher is enough of a hero to change that, and no member of the mayor’s handpicked Chicago Board of Education official is going to either. No human is an island; we are social creatures, and we want justice now.

This is why a union becomes critical to strengthening the resolve of its members so that we can fight together to shape policy and practice, both of which are always social. Separately, outside of our schools, allied and coalition groups have been working on the problems of employment, health, environment, ability, racism, gender and sex discrimination for years, with small wins and large setbacks. Inside the schools, many of our union units were stagnant, with some teachers starting clubs for students on the very issues mentioned above, but most of us not involving ourselves, justifying our work with “It is what it is” or “I just close my door, teach and stay focused on the kids.”

Forgetting that all we asked of our union was to fight for wages and benefits. We didn’t realize that such a narrow focus would become a work issue for those left behind, so when we changed the trajectory of our fight, we had already lost a lot of our union comrades. And the problems remain, and worsened in many cases, both inside and outside of the school.

With the Illinois budget stalled and revenues in, we see clearly how all of our futures are tied together. This is why the current leadership of the Chicago Teachers Union is committed to social justice. One segment of society shouldn’t get all the benefits. If it does, then there is imbalance, and those who are doing the work of society will pay immeasurably. So, back to the school(ies) that prefer we sever ourselves from fighting for social justice. Practically, I do not see how that is possible. Professionally, I cannot tell my students that my union and I will not fight for social justice, but only for ourselves—then teach students about Mary McLeod Bethune, Dolores Huerta, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Jonas Salk and mass movements for change, and tell them to build character. The union we belong to is the embodiment of social justice, and because of that, we have examples of positive change. We are beneficiaries of previous generations who paid the price so that men could nurture students openly, so that women could advance to doctoral levels and earn a decent wage and so that poor students could have access to technology and the opportunity to experiment on life and see the world up close.

No district bestowed these things on workers from the goodness of their corporate hearts. Good old Horatio Alger-like individual industry didn’t change conditions, either. We all want to work hard, have a positive effect and be used to the best advantage of humanity. Our interests, however, are socially intertwined. Does the employer share that vision? Does “students first” create that vision? Or does social justice? Who makes that happen?

Heck, as a Black, working-class woman, social justice unionism gave me a fighting chance and helped me to expand my occupation. The district just supplied the position.
Through the eyes of an educator

Two of our members discuss how they meet the challenge of helping students of all backgrounds better understand race and privilege.

By MAYRA ALMARAZ-DE SANTIAGO AND DAVE STEIBER

Mayra Almaraz-de Santiago

I teach Ethnic Studies, a junior and senior year elective course at Taft High School. Taft is located on the far Northwest Side of the city in a mostly white, blue collar city worker Chicago neighborhood. My first unit of ethnic studies is always the most difficult. In this unit, I introduce students to the concept of systemic racism and privilege. We use readings and ideas from James Baldwin, Paulo Freire and Beverly Daniels. Tatum’s first chapter of her book, Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together In the Cafeteria? informs students of a new definition of racism. In short, she states that racism is not being mean to someone based on the color of their skin—this is discrimination. She defines racism as a system of advantage based on race. Tatum believes this definition is best because it holds people responsible for the systems in place that contribute to inequality and privilege, even if you’re not aware that you are benefiting.

To better understand the chapter and its concepts, I hold a Socratic Seminar and ask students to discuss if Tatum’s definition helps or hurts our society. For many of my students, this is a liberating conversation. This is where many of my students of color open up to the class about the ways in which they’ve felt that the color of their skin, ethnic background or religion made them feel less than. For many of my white students, this conversation is hurtful. Students have shared that when they first read this definition, they feel sad because they’ve never realized they have certain benefits or privileges that their peers don’t have. The discussions that emerge between my students during this difficult conversation are messy, tough and raw with emotion, yet so full of hope. And they are necessary.

“Ms. Almaraz, I’m not going to lie, when I first read Tatum, I was very mad at you,” said one of my students. “But after hearing my classmates’ experiences, I got it. I’m getting it. I’m still not there. But please be patient with me.”

In chapter one, Tatum describes the importance of being actively anti-racist. “I have never looked at racism this way before,” responds my student. “And it makes great sense to me. I get it. But Ms. Almaraz, I need help. How can I be anti-racist? I don’t have opportunities to be anti-racist. And I want to make a difference.”

My student’s words resonated with me. As a teacher of color, I am conscious of the fact that my experiences and realities are not my students’, especially those that have a different ethnic background. I try hard to incorporate what I teach my students in my everyday life and I struggled with this student’s request.

“How can I teach my white students to be anti-racist? I then remembered an experience with my white friend and teaching colleague, Dave Stieber. One evening, during our National Board Certification class, I mentioned that I was asked to write something for an online publication about the importance of having Latinx teachers. Unfortunately, because I took too long in submitting my piece, the publication’s deadline of Hispanic Heritage month was over. They would no longer need my piece. Dave asked me to send him my writing, and through one of his contacts, my piece got published. I will never forget the words he said to me: “I’m able to get my work published whenever I have something written—don’t have to wait for a specific month to publish it,” he said. “Everyone should have this privilege.”

To me, this was an example of my colleague using his white privilege to help someone without this benefit. So naturally, because of this experience and conversations with him regarding his work around racism, I thought about him when my student asked what she could do to be anti-racist.

Dave Stieber:

I teach at Chicago Vocational on the South Side of the city. I love my students and work to make strong connections with them by the curriculum I create, content I teach and the way in which I get to know them. Over my ten years of teaching in Chicago Public Schools, I have always worked hard to create a space where wasnt until feel comfortable sharing their stories. I’ve learned from them about their experiences with the police and what life is like for a kid growing up in the city. I’ve learned that the privileges and experiences I had growing up white were not the same as my students. Based on the education my students give me, I have been working on not only trying to be anti-racist in my life, but also creating a class that challenges the system of white supremacy. One of the ways that I do this is by bringing in guest speakers who work to change the systems in place in our city. I’ve found bringing in guest speakers to be very beneficial for my students and myself. A guest speaker makes the learning more relevant and real and exposes students to more viewpoints that may differ from or complement our curriculum. It also makes class up and lets the students hear a voice beside their teacher.

The day after guest speakers make my students always say something to the effect of, “The guest speaker who had yesterday was amazing—when are they coming back?” As the teacher, I tend to envy the novelty of the guest speaker. Their fresh voice captivates my students and they are excited to have them in the room.

It wasn’t until this year that the opportunity to be a guest speaker myself became an option. Mayra knew I had written articles for the Huffington Post about race and asked if I would be willing to come in and talk to her students about my experiences understanding whiteness and privilege. I was nervous to speak in front of a room of students, but I had never spoke with white students about work and how to overcome their privileges. When I got off the expressway near Taft, there were blue ribbons everywhere in support of Blue Lives Matter. Increasing my anxiety, I had been writing a lot recently about why white people should support the Movement for Black Lives. But regardless, I knew the work Mayra had been doing with her classes and I was excited.

I knew her students read an article that I wrote about ways in which white people could help with systemic racism. I decided to open my guest-speaking experience by saying, “Be wary of a white person speaking to you about race. Meaning, know that while working to be anti-racist, I am still operating in a place of privilege and so please call me out if necessary.”

The classes went really well. Students asked questions. Many asked ways in which they themselves could work to be anti-racist. Some challenged some of my comments. Some arranged to come back to a later period when I was speaking.

Among the many great questions and comments, there were two that really resonated with me. One student very quietly said to me in front of the entire class, “My parents are racist. What can I do?” Mayra created such a safe and respectful environment that her student felt comfortable enough...
A year of loss, fear and hope in a Chicago school

For many of our students, the politics and violence that defined their 2016 are not just fodder for smarmy comments or punchlines. Both hit close to home, and the loss and fear that accompanied them were visceral and palpable.

BY GREG MICHIE

As a longtime teacher, I usually don't pay much attention to New Year's retrospectives or celebrations. For me, the real new year starts in early September, when I hear the shuffle of teenage feet clambering up freshly polished stairs to my third-floor classroom. My year, my body clock, even my emotional ups and downs have long been synced to the academic calendar.

But this past year—the January to December one—was different.

By now that's almost a trite observation. In recent weeks, article after article, post after post, tweet after tweet have rejoiced in the long-awaited demise of 2016. Part of me has no quarrel with that. By now, I doubt anyone can have missed the loss and fear that accompanied them were visceral and palpable.

At 2016 began, late-night talk shows and social media were still having plenty of fun with the notion of a Trump presidency. But my students were already worried. The possibility of Trump landing in the White House had never felt like a joke to them, and as months went by, their concerns grew. They listened as he categorically disparaged Latinos and Muslims; threatened to end birthright citizenship; declared his answer to illegal immigration was a wall; repeatedly promised to build a wall; and then when the wall was not in the budget, he caved in. They were fearful—as were many of my students—of what might be. They were also afraid of what had been, and of what already was.

On a Monday evening in early May, I got a text from a former student: "Hey Mr. Michie, I don't know if you had heard, but Leo was in my homeroom—a bright, often quiet boy. He was my students—of what might be. But they also were afraid of what had been, and of what already was.

A few minutes later, I received another text: "Mr. Michie, he passed away. He just texted me right now telling me that he didn't pull through." I had been to the funerals of several former students over the years. But I'd never had a current student killed and never had to face all his friends in class the next morning. I wasn’t sure what to say; what to do or how to proceed. I knew information traveled fast in the neighborhood—it always had, even before Facebook or texting—so I didn’t think I'd be the one to break the news to any of my students. But when one boy ambled in, hair tousled as if he'd woken up ten minutes earlier, I could tell by the way he looked around at the awkward stillness of his classmates that he had no inkling. Telling him was one of the toughest things I’ve had to do in my 20-plus years as a teacher.

My colleagues and I decided to let all the seventh and eighth graders spend the entire morning out in the hallway. We hugged. We cried. We stood around in clusters, speaking in whispers, still stunned. Later, my homeroom students gathered chairs in a circle and shared. We meditated, as we do every day, and we created a community memorial to Leo in the hallway with photos, drawings, poems and remembrances. A smaller version of it still graces our classroom all these months later.

The week after Leo was killed, a class of second graders—along with their teacher, Erika Gomez, who grew up in Back of the Yards and attended our school as a student—slowly filed into our classroom in the middle of a social studies lesson. My students watched, confused. “What are they doing?” one student asked aloud. When the last of the children had taken their places in a semi-circle that embraced the older students, three stopped forward.

“We know you are really sad about your friend, Leonardo,” one girl said.

“But we want you to know that there is hope. Don’t lose hope,” another student added. “We made little presents for you to keep and to know that life goes on.”

For the next few minutes, the second graders made their way around the room, handing out cards they’d made for the teens. ‘I’m sorry for your loss,’ one chubby-cheeked boy said. Near him, a pair of girls hugged as tears rolled down the eighth grader’s cheeks. She wiped them away, smiled and gave her card-bearer another tight squeeze.

It had been an unimaginably difficult two weeks, and this surprise visit had come at just the right time. At some point, we'd need to continue thinking about the root causes of violence in the neighborhood, about what the city needed to do to support young people in communities like ours and about our own roles in helping to bring about change.

But at that moment, we needed to remember Leo. We needed to hold on to each other. We needed just what those second graders provided.

# # #

That any school-based learning can happen when kids are experiencing such emotional upheaval, such an avalanche of sadness and fear, is something akin to a miracle. But it does. Young people are resilient—far more than they should have to be in a truly just world—and we do our best to move forward. As in many middle-school classrooms, my students this year were by turns deeply engaged, flat-out bored, lost in reflection or writhing in unexpressed laughter. They wrote poems and read novels and explored big questions like, “What is the meaning of patriotism?” and “What is the role of the media in a democracy?” They learned.

In October, in the midst of a unit on the presidential election, my social studies classes watched Khizr Khan’s speech from the Democratic convention. Almost none of
them had seen it before, and when Khan pulled a slim booklet out of his jacket pocket and said to the camera, “Donald Trump... let me ask you: Have you even read the United States Constitution? I will gladly lend you my copy,” their roar of applause seemed to shake the walls. One girl turned to me and said, “That right there gave me chills.”

The morning of November 9, the electricity generated by the Khan video seemed like a distant memory. Like much of America, many of my students believed that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would win. Or maybe they just wanted to believe it. Most of them weren’t huge Clinton fans—many had favored Bernie Sanders during the primary season—but Trump was frightening. When I asked if anybody wanted to share how they were feeling in the wake of the results, few did. “Angry,” “worried,” “afraid” and “disappointed” came up just one word. “That right there gave me chills.”

The philosophical turn of the year have pushed me to reconsider the textbook mythology and the America of their back yard, many want to believe that the country’s people will do right by themselves when it really matters. In that sense, the presidential election was another crushing loss in a year of crushing losses.

As painful as Leo’s death had been, it wasn’t the first, or last, to shake our school’s community during the past year. Sidewalk altars became a recurring feature of the neighborhood landscape—their white flowers and Virgen de Guadalupe prayer candles serving as reminders of the fragility of life for kids who walked past each day. Two of those killed were older brothers of one of our current eighth graders. Five had once been students at our school. The oldest among them was just 22.

I can almost see the question of “Were they gang members?” bubbling in the minds of some readers. My short answer is that it doesn’t matter. They were young—most of them still teens—and now they are gone. Asking if they were gang members seems little more than a pretext for concluding their deaths were justified, or at least undeserving of sympathy. It’s the same line of thinking, in reverse, that prompts journalists to alert readers that a murdered teen was an “honor student” as if a kid who failed a class or had a “C” average is somehow expendable. Of the young people our school’s community lost this year, some were affiliated with gangs. Others, like Leo, were not. Either way, the questions we should be asking in the wake of such violence are deeper ones: Why do so many Black and Latino young men feel a sense of hopelessness or despair? What can schools do to better embrace and connect with kids on the margins? Where are the job opportunities and mental health supports for young people in our city’s neediest neighborhoods?

Asking good questions is, of course, part of the territory for teachers. But for me, the best, most urgent question of the year was not part of any unit plan or asked by any adult at our school. It was posed by an eighth grader, toward the end of an assembly that addressed the violence in our community, how it was affecting us and how we might respond. The girl who asked it raised her hand tentatively before saying, “How does hope unfold?”

The philosophical turn of the question, as well as its somewhat unusual construction, seemed to take everyone by surprise. If anyone responded, I don’t remember what they said. The question stuck with me over the course of the year: “How does hope unfold?”

For many educators, the answer to “Where do we find hope?” is often simple and obvious: The kids. We find hope in our students—the next generation. It’s a cliché of sorts, but I’ve said it myself, many times, and there is truth to be found in the words. Still, the events of this year have pushed me to reconsider that response, to wonder if it is, in some ways, a cop-out for adults, and a way to place a weight onto the shoulders of young people who shouldn’t have to carry it.

That thought was echoed by one of my eighth-grade students, who closed a poem with these words:

They tell me to have hope, that everything’s going to be okay. But how can I believe them? How can I convince myself that everything’s gon’ be alright? How can you ask me to have hope when bodies are being dropped day after day?

If there is a way to get hope, teach us.

That, in turn, may be too formidable a load for teachers to bear alone. In times of tragedy, we all flail about, full of uncertainty. The only real way forward, it seems, is to trudge through the losses and pain in hand.

And that we continue to do. A colleague down the hall has instituted “peace circles” in her classroom. Our school administration set aside money for therapists to support students’ emotional health and devoted an entire professional development session to teachers’ wellness. In late November, in response to the election results, a number of students and teachers participated in a “We Belong” unity march and rally, where one of our eighth graders delivered a powerful speech in support of her undocumented brother. And every day, my class begins our meditation by remembering Leo.

Outside the school’s walls, the neighborhood is, as always, full of beautiful people and fierce love. Gun violence and gangs do not define it. Kids play soccer at the park. Some go to confirmation classes or play in a marimba ensemble at the local parish. Mothers lead parenting classes. A weekly reflection group draws 15 or so young men who discuss their struggles and ways to address them (“We don’t need more police. We need jobs.”). At a recent community meeting, a parent lamented the fact that outsiders often notice only negatives in the neighborhood and fail to see all the good things that are happening.

I’m glad 2016 is over. I know there’s no magic in turning the page on a calendar, and a peek at the latest news feed is enough of a reminder that difficult days lie ahead. Still, unlike in past years, I feel a certain healing in welcoming this New Year. I greet it with no resolutions—only a renewed challenge. Day by day, piece by piece, unfold hope. Together.

Greg Michie is a teacher at Seward Elementary School. This article was originally published on medium.com.
Who are our allies?

Solidarity is a two-way street, especially for transit workers. Our brothers and sisters who keep the Chicago Transit Authority moving are locked in a contract battle with the city. When and if they need us to move into active support of a possible job action, let’s be ready to give them our full backing.

Carol Hayse is a CTU retiree.

Vacancy on the CTU executive board

In addition to the three (3) executive board functional vice president vacancies that were announced in December via email and the Chicago Teachers Union website, a recent retirement has made available a fourth position: one (1) Elementary School Teacher Vice President.

All voting members of the functional group of the House of Delegates may vote for one (1) candidate, no matter how many are nominated. The procedure is as follows:

1. Vacancies and procedures for filling the vacancies shall be advertised on the CTU website, in the Chicago Teacher magazine, and via email preceding the nomination meeting, and in the meeting notice bulletin for the month of the election.

2. At the January House of Delegates meeting, an announcement was made of the vacancy and the dates of the nominations and election.

3. At the February and April House of Delegates meetings, citywide delegates will be asked to declare which functional group they will vote with—elementary or high school.

4. Nominations will take place at the February House of Delegates meeting.

5. Only those members of the House of Delegates, who represent the functional group to be voted on, may nominate, second the nomination and vote. Only persons in the functional group may be nominated. Associate delegates may vote. Citywide delegates will sign in as high school or elementary.

6. Prior to the House of Delegates meeting where voting will take place, all eligible candidate names will be posted on the CTU website in alphabetical order by functional group.

7. Voting shall take place at the April House of Delegates meeting.

8. At the meeting where the voting is to take place, each nominee shall have the opportunity to speak for one minute in the order in which they appear on the ballot, if they so desire.

9. Delegates will be called to the voting area to pick up the ballots, have their badges checked and sign the voters’ signature list.

10. Voters will place cast ballots in boxes at the designated locations.

11. When voting is complete, Rules-Elections Committee members will count the ballots.

12. Up to two representatives per candidate may be present during the counting. The candidate may be one of the representatives.

13. The results will be given to the President for announcement at the end of the meeting.

14. Any candidate who receives a majority (more than 50 percent) of the votes cast for their functional group will be automatically seated as functional vice president.

15. In case there is a vacancy for which no candidate receives a majority, the two candidates who receive the most votes in the first round will stand in a runoff election.

16. In the case of a runoff, each remaining nominee will be given one minute to speak in the order in which they appear on the ballot, at the meeting where the runoff voting is taking place.

The Rules-Elections committee requests that the voting take place at the meeting as early as possible.

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Restorative practice: a communal approach to conflict and accountability

The restorative practice approach to discipline has resulted in a more than 65 percent reduction in suspensions and 57 percent drop in expulsions in Chicago Public Schools since 2013.

What makes restorative practice important in our communities and in schools?

Restorative practice is important to our communities and our schools for a plethora of reasons. It repairs harm; centers itself upon restoration instead of punishment as a form of accountability; decreases punitive actions, entrance into the criminal justice system and reidivism; involves all parties (the person who does the harm, the person harmed, and the bystanders/witnesses) in the solution to a problem or a harm that was perpetuated; focuses on doing with opposed to doing to or doing for; establishes a sense of community; reduces crime, violence and bullying; improves human behavior; strengthens civil society; provides effective leadership; and builds, maintains and restores relationships.

Restorative practice teaches and reminds us that not every crime or harm (possibly none) has to be viewed as punishably. In fact, restorative practice provides an opportunity to engage people in a communal process, be it restorative conversation, talking circle or peer mediation. Restorative practice is communal in its process and therefore helps to establish a sense of community. This happens because a core principle of the philosophy calls upon the individuals and the community to engage with one another (whether a crime or a harm has taken place or not), opposed to isolating the individuals involved and creating a wider gap between the parties.

Historically, the practice in both the school and the wider community has been to punish and punish hard depending on the level of the offense. This, in many schools and communities, is how they understand making someone accountable and justice being served. The problem with that belief is punitive action is at the heart of the so-called accountability. Meanwhile, no skills are being learned—skills that will possibly not have the behavior happen again, or at least skills that would be useful in dealing with the situation properly if it does reoccur.

The problem is accountability and punishment are often seen as synonymous. Many schools and communities think that there can’t be any accountability if there is no punitive action taken. Restorative practice debunks this belief. From the restorative lens, being accountable really means that one must face what one has done and try and make it right – try to fix it – restore it – repair the harm. One must listen to the harm that was done from the person(s) that was/were affected by it. In this instance, accountability is at the core. To make it plain: statistically, it is shown that crime, violence, bullying and recidivism ALL decrease when restorative practices are employed within the school and in the wider community.

Who benefits the most from restorative practice?

I love this question! The answer is everyone. When restorative practice is used correctly and regularly, everyone benefits. There is no one person who benefits the most. That is the brilliance of restorative practice—it increases what many call “social and cultural capital.” When schools and communities invest in restoration as a common practice they will see improvements in individual and group behaviors, attitudes and even academic performance.

What ends up happening when restorative practice is utilized consistently is there’s an increase in trust and reciprocity both as a community and amongst individuals. Despite what many people may think, restorative practice is not pie in the sky or warm and fuzzy. It is, however, a philosophy that is based on common sense and humanity.

It’s altogether rational that people behave better when they feel good about themselves and their surroundings. This philosophy gets at that. Restorative practice is a way of life that first asks participants to build a relationship, then work to maintain it, and, when necessary, work to restore it. Therefore, it is not reactionary in its approach. It is proactive and preventative. We all know that everyone benefits when the members of a community, be it a school or otherwise, are in harmony with one another. Restorative practice makes solidarity a real possibility.

How do you see restorative practice in the next five years within the education community?

In the next five years, I see restorative practice as the primary way that teachers, administrators, security guards—really the whole of the school—will view “discipline.” I believe and hope that the education system will make the necessary paradigm shift to truly embrace restorative over punitive practices. I have faith that the education community will see restorative practice as a way to save itself from the cycle of punishment that it is caught in. That cycle is one that has no real destination except for more of the same: detentions, suspensions and even arrests.

It is my fervent prayer that the education community comes to realize that you can’t punish your way out of a complex social problem that, at its root, has to do with major societal ills: racism, sexism, poverty and adulthood. Therefore, restorative practice as an alternative must be utilized if we really are serious about keeping children and young people in school and being truly responsive to their social emotional and educational needs.

What are some things you would do to have people in the field of education really begin to understand and utilize restorative practice?

To have people in the field of education really begin to understand and utilize restorative practice, I would employ a holistic approach. What I mean by that is, I would gather each stakeholder—student, parent, teacher, clinician, P9RP, administrator, etc.—together and ask them a very simple question: What type of school do you want? More than likely, the answer to that question will align with what restorative practice is all about—skills like self-efficacy, leadership, listening, speaking, perspective taking and conflict resolution.

I would make presentations to policy-making bodies like the Local School Council, Parent Teacher Association and student government about the current state of affairs in terms of exclusionary practices and the clear and correct alternative (restorative practice). I would allot a substantial amount of dollars for training in restorative practice. That money would be used train the aforementioned stakeholders. In other words, I would make restorative practice a priority and stay true to a very important principle of restorative practice: doing things with others, as opposed to doing things to or for others.

Lavinia Owens is the CTUF Director of Development. Walter Taylor, NBCT, is the CTUF Quest Center Director of Professional Development. To learn more about restorative practices, please register for the CTUF Quest Center restorative practice intensive at http://www.ctuf.org/questcenter/pd/. If you would like to bring restorative practice to your school, please contact Walter Taylor at waltertaylor@ctuf.org.
DePaul, give back to Chicago’s public schools

My name is Erika Wozniak. I graduated from DePaul University in 2004 and have been a teacher in Chicago Public Schools ever since. I currently teach 4th grade at Oriole Park Elementary School.

As an alumnus, teacher, former tennis coach (before that program was cut), taxpayer and concerned citizen, I have been at the forefront of protesting the use of tax dollars for the DePaul stadium from the very beginning.

In 2013, I delivered more than 3,000 signatures to Mayor Rahm Emanuel asking that the city use the $35 million in public tax dollars for our schools rather than for a new stadium for DePaul.

Recently, I delivered more than 1,300 signatures to DePaul’s leadership asking that the naming rights proceed from this stadium, sold to Wintrust Financial, be directed back to CPS. We urged DePaul, in the spirit of its namesake, St. Vincent DePaul, to step up and give back to the deserving students of Chicago.

The reason that I circulated this petition in the first place and the reason that I care so passionately about this issue is because I attended this university’s school of education, because of the Vincentian teachings I learned here and because of the values DePaul University instilled in me. My education there taught me to question, so I ask the question: “When did this become okay?”

When did it become okay to end elementary sports programs and stop funding sports teams for our students?

My education at DePaul taught me that this is not okay, especially not on the backs of our children, so I feel it is reasonable and responsible to ask that a small portion of the money made on this stadium deal be directed back to the students in Chicago’s public schools.

I am asking that the decision-makers at DePaul do the honorable thing and direct these naming rights proceeds back to the deserving students of the city of Chicago. I am also asking that we all stay vigilant and fight for the resources that our students deserve.

Erika Wozniak, Oriole Park Elementary

Wall Street banks continue to rob our schools and public services

Wells Fargo made headlines earlier this year for creating fake accounts to defraud its customers. Although the Wells Fargo fraud received much media attention, it shows just one of the ways Wall Street banks are stealing resources from our communities.

Chicago has paid out more than $1.4 billion since 2011 to Wall Street banks on complex predatory financial deals called interest rate swaps. Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s decision to pay off the banks instead of challenging the legally dubious deals helped create the Chicago Public Schools budget deficit. On the state level, these same types of predatory deals are costing state taxpayers close to 86 million every month. Unsurprisingly, Gov. Bruce Rauner has chosen a similar path to Emanuel. Rauner pays Wall Street banks even without a state budget, and public education and social service infrastructure in crisis.

But we can still get our money back. The Grassroots Collaborative—of which the Chicago Teachers Union is a key member—is a community-labor coalition working on economic and racial justice, and has been fighting bad bank deals for years now. The CTU and other member organizations are working to pressure Attorney General Lisa Madigan to do what Emanuel and Rauner have been unwilling to do: take on big banks by filing a lawsuit on behalf of taxpayers, and win back that money for our children and communities.

We’ve already forced Rauner to delay an $870 million payout he planned to make in November, but we need your help to keep up the fight. Visit http://grassrootscollaborative.org/suewallst for more information and to take action.
Cultural Competency—Valuing Diversity
3.5 ISBE PD Hours
In this session, teachers and paraprofessionals who work with students in all grades and subjects will learn what cultural competency and diversity means, and why it is important to develop cultural competencies, and identify and value diversities in their classrooms. They will learn the importance of strategically planning lessons that reflect the cultures representative of the children they teach.
Session Date: 1/26/2017

CPS Framework for Teaching Conversations
3.5 ISBE PD Hours per session
The CTUF Quest Center presents CPS Framework for Teaching (FFT) Conversations, a 3.5 hour session of FFT round table discussion and analysis of each of the four Domains at the element level. Participants will collaborate and focus on what they are already doing in the classroom to improve and to determine best practices to meet the “Distinguished” level for the domains and components discussed. Teachers will share past evaluation experiences, provide advice to each other, and troubleshoot ideas for meeting expectations in the FFT.
Session Dates: 1/31, 2/3, 2/8, 3/18, and 4/25/2017

Restorative Practices Learning Series Intensive
10.5 ISBE PD Hours
This 3-session Learning Series is designed to support K-12th grade teachers and school support staff in creating a positive learning environment by developing healthy and nurturing relationships with their students. Participants will analyze videos, articles and their own and each other’s teaching to determine why and how to integrate specific restorative practices such as reflective bell ringers, check ins/ check outs, and mediation, into their practice. During this 3-session Learning Series, attendees will engage in the practices of restoration: classroom community building; talking circles; restorative conversations; peer conferences; and conflict, healing and re-entry circles. This Learning Series will support teachers and school support staff in cultivating their classroom cultures and honing classroom management skills.
Dates: 2/7, 2/8, and 2/9/2017

Introduction to Trauma-Informed Pedagogy
3.5 ISBE PD Hours
This workshop provides an introduction to trauma-informed pedagogy for K-12th grade teachers and PSRPs. Participants will learn how to confront the wide-ranging, long-term impact of traumatic exposure that often results in grief and depression, adversely affecting their students learning and social/emotional well-being by creating a safe and supportive environment in which students feel nurtured, not only to learn but also to express their feelings.
Session Date: 2/16/2017

Collaborating in the Inclusion Classroom
14 ISBE PD Hours
In this 4-session course open to all teachers and PSRPs, teaching partners will learn ways in which to collaborate with one another, plan instruction together, and implement various research-based co-teaching instructional models. Participants will learn how to adapt to an inclusionary setting, what to expect from their special education teaching partner, and how to make their classroom more accessible and equitable to special education students who were previously in self-contained settings.
Course Dates: 2/21, 2/28, 3/7, and 3/14/2017

Nurturing Teacher Leadership
Nurturing Teacher Leadership, the CPS/CTU’s two-year program of professional development and candidate support, prepares the district’s candidates for National Board Certification—the advanced certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), the highest credential a teacher, who has completed at least three years of teaching in their certificate area, can achieve.
Nurturing Teacher Leadership boasts a 94% achievement rate, twice the national average. It includes: ● Weekly professional development and small-group facilitation ● Collaboration with a cohort of other CPS teachers going through the NBC process ● Preparation for rigorous content knowledge Assessment Center exercises ● Individual coaching and mentoring by CPS National Board Certified Teachers ● Assistance with writing required for the National Board portfolio
Register for a CTU/CPS National Board Certification informational meeting on Tuesday, 2/21/2017, 5:00 p.m.—8:30 p.m. or Tuesday, 2/28/2017, 5:00 p.m.—8:30 p.m.
Attend the meeting to learn how you can earn an annual stipend of more than $1,950. Learn about the union’s role in supporting National Board candidates and how you can apply to join our 2017-2019 cohort. We look forward to informing you about other financial and contractual incentives, full scholarship opportunities, program requirements, and how you can earn an optional Master’s Degree and/ or graduate and CPS Lane Placement salary credits, and attain the Illinois NBPTS Master Certification Endorsement in only two years.
For more information and to register go to www.ctuf.org/questcenter/ntl. Questions? Contact Lynn Cherkerbys-Davis at 312-329-6274 or LynnCherkerbys-Davis@ctuf.org

Learning Behavior Specialist I (LBS I) Endorsement
The Chicago Teachers Union Foundation Quest Center is partnering with National Louis University to offer a Learning Behavior Specialist I (LBS I) Endorsement.
Through your experiences with the CTUF Quest Center, you understand the importance of professional development, and our partnership with NLU brings you high-quality, career-focused curricula designed and taught by expert faculty, including CTU members, in a convenient, affordable format.
This LBS I Endorsement program gives you the knowledge and skills to work in inclusive classrooms and school settings, with the ability to use Universal Design for Learning strategies to effectively reach all students.
Earn your LBS I Endorsement from NLU if you want to:
● Learn from research-based instruction in differentiated curricular design, assessment, delivery strategies, and collaborative practice with families, school colleagues, and the school community ● Attend a blended program-with classes held both online and on campus—that provides the flexibility you need as a teacher ● Study with your colleagues in a special Chicago Teachers Union Foundation Quest Center Cohort
Receive a 40% discount.
With a CTUF Quest Center Cohort of 15+ students, you have the opportunity to earn your LBS I Endorsement at a 40% discount over our average NLU tuition rates. This means you will increase your knowledgable and employability for less than $6,000. Plus, there is no application or graduation fee.
Enrolling now for February 22 start!
Contact Nina Siffo at nsiffo@nlu.edu or call 800-448-5323 x5926. You can also find out more and request additional information at www.nlu.edu/partners/ctuf.

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ctuf.org/questcenter