



THE CULTURE

Presidential candidate Sen. Elizabeth Warren visits Chicago's West Side to support teachers strike

By Maia McDonald

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On Tuesday, 2020 U.S. presidential candidate Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) visited Chicago's West Side to stand in solidarity with teachers on the fourth school day of their strike. She spoke at a rally at Oscar DePriest Elementary School in Austin, where hundreds of teachers and supported gathered for her speech.

Warren pledged her support for the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and Service Employees International Union Local 73 (SEIU), both of which represent about 32,000 Chicago Public School teachers, counselors and other staffers who are striking for more resources and improved learning conditions for students.

"I'm here to stand for Chicago teachers," Warren told the crowd. "I'm here to stand with Chicago nurses. I'm here to stand with Chicago librarians. I'm here to stand with Chicago's bus drivers. I'm here to stand with the low-wage workers in the Chicago schools. I'm here to stand with every one of the people who stand for our children, who stand with our children every day."

Warren also called for an overall greater investment in public education, calling attention to her recently unveiled \$800 billion education plan that includes \$450 billion dollars to quadruple funding for Title I schools, which are schools comprised of mostly low-income students and receives federal funding.

"I believe in public education and I believe it is time, in America, to make a new investment in public education and I got a plan for that," Warren said.

Most of the people in attendance seemed to positively respond to Warren's words, many of them cheering loudly and fervently flashing their protest signs after she spoke. Barbara Johnson, a third grade teacher at DePriest Elementary in Austin, thought it was nice to see a presidential candidate show support for Chicago's teachers and students.

"I'm glad to hear that we're getting the support from outside [of Chicago] and with her being a presidential candidate, that sounds great, her coming out here to support the teachers," said Johnson.



Strike supporters waiting for Warren's speech | Photo by Maia McDonald [The Real Chi]

Others like Cathy Wright, a teacher at Michael M. Byrne Elementary on the Southwest Side, said while support from politicians like Warren is good on the surface, it's important to be cautious of their motives as well.

"It's nice to see that someone coming in from so far would come to support us, but it's also political too. So you have to be very careful with that," Wright said.

Johnson says that despite her school generally having good funding, there are still key issues affecting both teachers and students that aren't being addressed. "There are different issues that are happening in the neighborhood," she said. "This last school year, on our way to dismiss the students, there was a shoot-out."

Johnson said a person was shot near the corner by the school. She wants city and CPS officials to understand how traumatic it is for a child to witness violence up close so frequently.

"The kids go through so much. They see so much, and they need so much help," Johnson said.

For Evie Brown and her colleagues at Tilton Elementary School in West Garfield Park, they are fighting specifically for the Black and brown students on the South and West Sides who have it a lot harder than white students. They also want to fight misconceptions that the strike is about pay for teachers. Brown said there are too many issues within CPS and not enough money to address them.

“There will never be enough,” Brown said about money for equity across CPS. “We’ve been doing this for our students[and] for ourselves. Everyone needs peace of mind.”

According to the [Chicago Sun-Times](#), a bargaining meeting between SEIU Local 73 and CPS reportedly lasted for 12 minutes before ending without a new contract. CPS and Mayor Lori Lightfoot have offered the unions a 16% pay raise over a five-year contract, among other benefits. But union representatives want other issues of student and family homelessness, full-time support staff and more to be addressed in the contract.

Lightfoot has previously stated that the CTU and SEIU’s demands would cost the city about \$2.5 billion.

On Tuesday, CPS announced no classes for students on Wednesday.

“These students face a lot of adversities coming here,” Brown said about her Tilton Elementary students. “We can’t do it all. We need a nurse. We need a psychologist. We need them to come in more than one day a week. These tragedies happen everyday and we do what we can, but there’s so much more that we need.”

Maia McDonald is a freelance contributor for The TRiIBE.

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