

**Marilyn Stewart's Address to the City Club of Chicago**

**October 1, 2009**

Thank you, Jay Doherty, Chris Robling and the members of the City Club of Chicago for inviting me here today to share my thoughts on how we can ensure quality teaching and learning in Chicago Public Schools.

Before I begin, I'd like to introduce my officers, Mary McGuire, the Recording Secretary & Mark Ochoa, my Financial Secretary.

For the past few weeks, I was thinking about the mission of the City Club and actually, the City Club of Chicago and the Chicago Teachers Union –CTU--have a lot in common. That may surprise many of you but let me give you a few examples.

Since 1903, the City Club has been in the business of creating a better Chicago. Likewise, since 1930 the Chicago Teachers Union has worked to support quality teachers and paraprofessionals with the same aim ---to educate the next generation of students for a better Chicago. After all, doesn't the future of Chicago, start in its classrooms?

The City Club serves as a venue for nonpartisan debates on public issues that pertain to Chicago metropolitan area residents. The CTU represents nearly 32,000 active and retired educators and paraprofessionals from around the Chicago metropolitan area...who play a role in shaping the very leaders you have here at your forums.

You have hosted many Chicago Public Schools alumni and those alumni were educated by members of our union. How many of you went to Chicago public schools? Or how many of you know leaders who attended CPS or have relatives who taught in Chicago Public Schools? Quite a few as I imagined.

So in essence, our goals and missions are very similar. We ALL want a better Chicago.

And it's for that reason that I am really glad to have the opportunity to talk to Chicago's business leaders today. You have every reason to care about the success of our students.

Just like teachers, you want Chicago public schools to graduate smart, motivated, well-rounded students who are well prepared for college or the world of work. For that to happen, we need to have the best-prepared teachers who are given the tools and resources necessary to do their job well.

As a union leader, I've learned that we solve problems better when we have a sense of urgency. I think most people feel a sense of urgency to boost our students' academic achievement and improve teacher quality.

I think—I hope—that each of you shares my belief that we need to work together and act now. It takes a major commitment from various stakeholders to make sure that this happens. This is a shared responsibility by everyone who wants our schools to improve and succeed.

I'm talking about the absolute necessity of engaging everyone from teachers, school staff, parents, school administrators, elected officials, business leaders, community partners, and, of course, the students.

I must say that these days I'm seeing some very encouraging signs of progress. There are great programs that have been created collaboratively between the Chicago Teachers Union and the school district, universities, businesses, community leaders and others.

And...we know from experience...collaboration works---and this is great news for Chicago.

Yes, there are still dark clouds that threaten success and I'll get to that in a few minutes. But first the good news.

There has been an unprecedented commitment—financial and otherwise—by the Obama administration to raise the level of teaching and learning. Thus far, the Obama administration has committed \$260 million in federal stimulus money for Chicago. That was about as clear as they can be that the administration views education as a key component to improving the economy.

That money is a lifeline to states like Illinois and cities like Chicago that would otherwise be forced into even greater budget cuts that would be more devastating to schools and children as the current CPS cuts threaten to be.

Further, the administration has allocated \$4.35 Billion for Race to the Top grants to fund innovative education reforms. Of that, it is estimated Illinois will get \$235 million dollars and Chicago will get nearly \$130 million of that.

We may not agree on all of the strings attached in order to get these funds, but I'm optimistic that we can work through our differences with the Obama administration.

And my point here is this is an unbelievable sum of money that, if spent well, can create the kinds of reforms that could be revolutionary.

Moreover, there is a lot going on in Chicago to raise the level of teacher quality...something that has been a priority for the Chicago Teachers Union. We want EVERY teacher to be a GREAT teacher.

Many years ago the late Albert Shanker-- the former president of our national parent union-- the American Federation of Teachers, who was as highly respected as an education reformer as he was as a union leader-- delivered this challenge to teacher unions across the country.

Al told his unions that quality public education has to be part of the mission of teacher unions. "It is as much your duty to preserve public education as it is to negotiate a good contract" is the way he put it. Well, I certainly feel it is the duty of the Chicago Teachers Union to help build and preserve a quality public education system here in the City of Chicago.

And I believe it is my duty, and that of CTU, to help ensure that every child has a great teacher.

Teacher unions today are about more than wages, benefits and working conditions. We're also about working with partners to put in place the best programs possible to improve teaching and learning. Our collective challenge is to give teachers the help, support, assistance, tools and resources they need to do a great job.

But most important, we need to keep those teachers we have hired, working in Chicago. Right now, the typical Chicago public school loses over half its teachers within five years, and this instability is simply not good for students.

Look at it this way, as a business person. You know it's very expensive to constantly hire and train new employees. Well, the price tag for replacing teachers is \$90 million a year for Chicago Public Schools.

So.....we are doing everything possible to make sure that teachers get the help they need right off the bat – when they first walk into a classroom, and during the course of their career.

Let me give you a few examples of what we're doing.

The vast majority of our teachers are performing well under often-extraordinary conditions and challenging circumstances. But...we know that brand-new teachers, fresh out of school, need help. Just as new pilots don't fly solo right away, we shouldn't be asking first-time teachers to figure out their complex craft all by themselves.

So in the Fall of 2006, we worked collaboratively with the Chicago Public Schools to introduce a peer evaluation and review program in 10 under-performing Fresh Start schools. We named those schools in need of improvement "Fresh Start," because that's what we planned to give them.

Experienced, trained master teachers work as mentors for new teachers and those who are struggling in the profession. The mentors observe, model, provide support and evaluate. Naturally, we hope the struggling teachers all get the seal of approval to stay.

But if, after getting the best help possible, they do not meet the standards, they are no longer retained as CPS teachers. Up to now, mentors have worked with about 300 new teachers. Of that group, about 10 percent have been released from the profession. It was agreed that they didn't have what it takes to be a high-quality CPS teacher.

Of the 15 tenured teachers who received support, one was successfully helped to the point where she became a much better teacher. Six are currently in the remediation process, four are appealing the principal's unsatisfactory rating, and four have resigned or left the system for one reason or another.

The Chicago Peer Mentoring and Evaluation Program was modeled after the award-winning Toledo Plan created over 25 years ago by Dal Lawrence, former President of the Toledo Federation of Teachers in Toledo, Ohio.

This program was so successful with the teachers there, that Toledo's school principals wanted this type of mentoring and evaluation program for themselves.

So today, I am calling for an expansion of this program in Chicago. If it's working well in 10 of our schools, it can and should work in more of our schools.

I'm urging the Board of Education and CEO Ron Huberman to work with us in expanding the peer evaluation program to at least 40 schools by the start of school next year.

Here are other Union programs that are helping to raise the bar for teachers.

The Chicago Teachers Union's own Quest Center--an entire department dedicated to improving teacher quality--is in a class by itself. It was created by a \$1.2 million dollar grant from the MacArthur Foundation 17 years ago--the first grant ever given by a foundation to a labor union.

The MacArthur Foundation continues to support our Union's educational reform efforts. We're pleased to announce that the MacArthur Foundation has pledged \$600,000 over the next three years to continue professional development programs that create and support high quality teaching in Chicago Public Schools.

What else makes for high quality teachers? Well, the gold standard for doctors is board certification. The same with teachers.

Teachers are at the top of their profession in the United States if they have achieved certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

A study from the University of Chicago's Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) affirms----that teacher quality is the single most important factor that drives student achievement.

So those who pass the rigorous national board certification, exemplify the highest level of teacher quality in Chicago's schools. Further, other research has found that students taught by National Board Certified Teachers make higher gains on achievement tests than those taught by other teachers. In fact, their students score between 7 to 15% percentage points higher on year-end tests.

The Chicago Teachers Union brought National Board Certification to Chicago twelve years ago by instituting the Nurturing Teacher Leadership—NTL---program. Our candidate support program boasts a 93% achievement rate--more than twice the national average. NTL provides weekly professional development and mentoring support over an 11-month period for teachers seeking National Board Certification.

Thanks to resources from the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Public Education Fund, the MacArthur Foundation, other philanthropic organizations, and the backing of Mayor Daley, we now have nearly 1,200 national board certified teachers in Chicago!

However, as you can see, teacher training takes money. We're glad that our new CEO Ron Huberman understands and appreciates the Union's success in improving teacher quality.

He has pledged additional money for the support of our Nurturing Teacher Leadership program for National Board Certification for the coming year. Thank you Ron.

Meanwhile, the other good news in Chicago Public Schools concerns the 10 Fresh Start schools I previously mentioned. They are using research-based programs to raise student performance. The eight elementary Fresh Start schools are showing significant improvement. More work needs to be done with the two high schools with their unique challenges, and we are committed to making sure that they are successful, as well.

So we're seeing a lot of progress and movement to raise student achievement and teacher quality. But a few minutes ago I talked about storm clouds. There's a two-ton elephant in the room that could impede the success of our students and teachers. That elephant is chronic disruptions and other discipline problems in classrooms.

All the professional development, mentoring, and gold-standard certified teachers I've been discussing will be for naught if teachers don't get the support they need to deal with this on-going problem. A teacher can't teach, and students can't learn in a constantly disruptive classroom.

Would a judge allow anyone in his or her courtroom to be disruptive? Would a storeowner allow a constantly misbehaving customer to stay in his or her store? Would a police officer allow a driver to stay on the road if he or she is weaving in and out of lanes and dangerously affecting other drivers? Would you tolerate behavior in your workplace that made it impossible to do your job?

Of course not.

Why, then, should a teacher be forced to have students remain in the classroom if they are constantly disobeying the rules and making teaching and learning nearly impossible?

How bad is this problem? Well, judging from what our teachers and other support staff throughout Chicago are telling us...there is no doubt--that the problem exists in the vast majority of our 600 plus schools.

Now, I want to make a distinction between chronically disruptive students and the gun-toting individuals who are committing crimes around our schools.

That's a very different situation. While life-threatening incidents involving weapons, drugs and other contraband are extremely serious--and get all the media attention...I'm referring to a problem that is almost the untold but far more prevalent problem in our schools... something that teachers and students are faced with nearly every day.

For example, striking or assaulting a teacher or staff person, verbally abusing a teacher or staff person, fighting with other students in class, disrupting a class by misbehaving or violent outbursts, and throwing objects or furniture.

There are a myriad of reasons why a child or teenager disrupts a class. For example, often they are acting out because of social and emotional reasons at home or outside the classroom.

But no matter what the reasons are, they are preventing teachers from teaching and other students from learning. Furthermore, they are not getting educated themselves.

You might be thinking – just send these offending students to the principal’s office or give them detention or suspend them. Here’s the problem. Teachers don’t always get the support they need from their principals. Too often, the principal returns disruptive students to the class like a boomerang.

Worse, teachers are often told – it’s your fault – you’re obviously not managing your classroom well enough. Detention often does not get to the heart of a child’s problem. And suspension usually doesn’t work because the child is out of school and on the streets creating even more harmful problems in the community.

Let’s deal with the elephant in the room, head-on, once and for all!

After all, discipline is probably the key difference between public and private schools. Private schools don’t have to take – or keep – misbehaving students. Public schools do—and we public school teachers take seriously our responsibility to educate all students.

But we can’t do right by the vast majority of students who behave and want to learn if we don’t have the support to deal with those students whose disruptive behavior robs themselves and their peers of their right to an education.

So, we need to be both creative and assertive about helping ALL our students.

Chicago Public Schools need an effective alternative school for chronically disruptive students. These children need separate placements so they can learn to manage their behavior AND get the education they need and deserve.

Therefore, what I am proposing today is that Chicago create a grade 6-12 alternative school to which teachers can FAST TRACK disruptive students out of the classroom.

What do I mean by FAST TRACK? Right now, because of all the paperwork and documentation required—it can take anywhere from 90 school days to six months to remove a disruptive student--if the teacher is able to do it all.

Under my proposal, chronically disruptive students would receive immediate placement in this alternative school, offering him or her the kind of intervention and support they need.

This school would provide comprehensive, direct behavioral intervention daily by specially trained teachers--and auxiliary staff such as: a nurse; counselor; and behavioral specialist for more individual guidance within smaller class size settings.

Once the team of specialists deems the student's behavior has improved, the student would be returned back into a regular school setting, the next school year.

Yes, Chicago has some alternative schools and programs now. However, this school would service students who do not fall into the category of criminal behavior—yet--landing them a spot in one of our department of corrections schools--or at the other end of the spectrum--placement in a school that addresses diagnosed behavioral disorders.

A pilot program could begin next year with a few hundred students and if successful—and I know it will be—can be replicated throughout the city. Once replicated, this will help create conducive environments for teaching and learning in the regular public schools.

Teachers sorely need this. They are being asked to do so much these days to be successful, but they're being asked to do it all with one hand tied behind their backs.

We don't have to re-invent the wheel to do it. There are many examples of alternative schools that could work here – and could open in a matter of months or certainly by the beginning of the next school year. But we need the buy-in of the community, and that includes you – the business community.

In St. Louis, a school just opened this fall, called Innovative Concepts Academy. It's an all-day alternative public school that's the brainchild of a family court judge, Judge Jimmy Edwards, who said, "enough is enough." He was tired of seeing young criminals in his courtroom, throwing away their lives. Everything and everyone was failing them – including their schools.

In a matter of months, he received permission from the district to take a school building that had recently been closed, and turn it into a last-stop school for at-risk kids.

Students are required to wear uniforms, and must attend the school from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily. In addition to the public school teachers, retired nuns work with students on reading; a sorority group provides other tutoring; and businesses donated materials and equipment to the school.

Interestingly, more than 125 partners from both the public and private sectors –including about 45 local St. Louis businesses – contributed financially to the project. But because the school district contributed both the building and paid the teachers their salaries, the start-up cost wasn't that great. It took about \$2 million to launch the school, and it's estimated that it'll take about a half-million per year to keep it running.

Now in St. Louis, these kids were more hard-core than I am proposing for this alternative school.

But my point here is that it doesn't take a lot of money nor a lot of time if done correctly. In the time it takes one of our teachers to do the documentation required for ONE student, St. Louis opened an entire alternative school for 55 students! All it took was someone to say, "enough is enough."

Last month Chicago CEO Ron Huberman told this audience that the school district was going to spend \$30 million to start an anti-violence program as a result of all the shootings we've seen here in Chicago.

Well, that's greatly needed, and I'm glad he's doing it. But my feeling is if we can spend \$30 million on an anti-violence program, then we can find \$2 million to start an alternative school for chronic classroom disrupters.

Which, as I've said, is a much more prevalent problem.

When Arne Duncan, President Obama's education secretary was CEO of our city's public schools, I invited him to visit an alternative school in Philadelphia called Community Education Partners that dealt with students who have disruptive behavior.

This school, designed for grades 6-12 --like the one I'm proposing --was staffed daily with a nurse, social worker, multiple counselors and a school psychologist. The class ratio was 12-15 students to two adults...a teacher and a support staff person.

What makes this school work is the specialized staff available daily to help these disruptive students with issues on a more personalized level. Ron, I would be delighted to revisit the school with you.

By the way, St. Louis and Philadelphia are not the only places that are experimenting with alternative schools. My Quest team staff and I also had an opportunity to visit an alternative school in Phoenix, Arizona.

At this particular alternative school, the staff had a teaching philosophy where students were referred to as *Kids at Hope* instead of kids at risk. Our 10 Fresh Start schools have adopted the *Kids at Hope* philosophy of “all children are capable of success...no exceptions.”

Terry Rosch, Professor of Education at Roosevelt University and executive director of the Chicago Education Alliance, is responsible for introducing this teaching philosophy to our Fresh Start schools.

This philosophy involves all members of the school community including:

- Teachers
- School staff
- Parents
- School administrators
- Elected officials
- Community partners
- and Business leaders

In opening this proposed alternative school, we would recommend this same philosophy be adopted. We want these students to be *Kids at Hope* rather than kids at risk. Hope....not risk.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it's time to take some action here in Chicago—not just to eliminate the violence and shootings, but to end the chronic classroom disruptions that cripple the education process.

It can be done here. It MUST be done here. Enough is enough!

I am committed to working with all of the education stakeholders in Chicago – from: the mayor to the CEO’s office, to parent groups and to you--the business community--everyone who needs to be involved, to open this pilot alternative school.

If we can remove this elephant in the room in a positive, effective way, we will really make tremendous progress in raising the quality of education for ALL of our students.

I hope I can count on your support, help and ideas. Thank you so much for inviting me to be your guest today. In the time that remains, I’ll be glad to take any questions you have.

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