

GENERATION ALL STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBER PATRICK BROSNAN: “CPS STRIKE AVERTED—CAN WE HAVE OUR SOCIAL WORKERS AND LIBRARIANS BACK?”

OCTOBER 12, 2016

Like the rest of Chicago’s parents and students, we are relieved that [a strike has been averted](#) through a tentative deal between the Chicago Teachers Union and the Chicago Board of Education. Students belong in the classroom, and this deal accomplishes that.

However, many fundamental issues still persist in our schools and communities that this deal does not address.

It’s no coincidence that in late September, Mayor Rahm Emanuel presented his new plan to combat the surge in violence in Chicago on the same day that the Chicago Teachers Union voted overwhelmingly in favor of a strike. The violence in our communities is inextricably linked to Chicago’s divestment from students’ educations and futures.

Already this year, Brighton Park, like the rest of Chicago, has experienced [more homicides](#) than in any of the last three. Meanwhile, our neighborhood public schools have experienced almost \$8 million in [cuts](#) in the past two years. This includes the loss of dozens of teachers, counselors and support staff.

We cannot pretend there is no connection.

Students who are failing classes, skipping school, and having serious discipline issues are at high risk for becoming involved in gangs. The schools are ideally positioned to be the first line of defense to prevent this outcome.

Brighton Park Neighborhood Council partners with our neighborhood schools to provide education and support services to students and to advocate for education equity. In the past year, through our Full Service Community School Initiative, the council has brought more than \$1.5 million in after-school programs, parent programs and trauma-informed counseling and case management to our area schools. However, these external resources do not mitigate the overall divestment our neighborhood public schools have experienced. In the past two years, more than \$400 million has been cut from CPS' budget. These cuts have resulted in the loss of thousands of teachers, social workers and counselors. [Hundreds of teachers' assistants, librarians and school nurses](#) have also lost their jobs. These losses have an inordinate negative impact on at-risk students who need the most additional support.

This is why, in July, our council worked with Alderman George Cardenas to begin our campaign to [direct the expanded Tax Increment Financing surplus](#) to increase per-pupil funding for our schools. We are encouraged that the mayor has incorporated this surplus as a part of the deal with CTU. But it does not go far enough.

Fully funding our schools is instrumental to combating violence in our streets. But our schools have not been mentioned as a part of the city's violence-prevention strategy. When teachers help a student succeed in math class, they are preventing crime. When social workers call home to check on an absent student, they are combating gang involvement. When counselors help a student plan for college, they are deterring violence. When students graduate high school and go to college, they are preparing to be the productive, engaged, citizens our city needs to prosper.

Every position lost equals one less adult to connect with a struggling child. When schools cannot provide adequate support, students fall through the cracks. Yet we are reluctant to acknowledge this link. By not restoring the thousands of school positions and programs that were cut, we are undermining our attempts to develop an effective violence-prevention strategy.

We appreciate Mayor Rahm Emanuel's successful negotiation of a new contract with CTU, and we acknowledge his renewed focus on crime. But while we support some of his proposed strategies, our city's leaders must recognize that they cannot make our city safer without dramatically increasing resources for schools. They cannot cut education spending and hope to make up the difference with [more police](#). They cannot promise every child a mentor while ignoring the thousands that were recently laid off.

To build a safe Chicago—a Chicago where all our children have opportunities to learn, develop their talents and thrive—we need to dramatically increase the resources in our schools and make them the heart of our violence-prevention strategy.

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This piece appeared in *Crain's Chicago Business* [here](#).