

WHAT IF RAHM WERE EVALUATED LIKE A TEACHER?

As you may have heard, the Chicago Teacher's Union went out on strike last night.

The traditional news has spun this to largely be about wages.

Late Sunday, Mr. Emanuel told reporters that school district officials had presented a strong offer to the union, including what some officials described as what would amount to a 16 percent raise for many teachers over four years – and that only two minor issues remained.

[snip]

Negotiations have taken place behind closed doors since November, concerning wages and benefits, whether laid-off teachers should be considered for new openings, extra pay for those with more experience and higher degrees, and evaluations. District officials said the teachers' average pay is \$76,000 a year.

Many of them neglect to mention the background: that last year Rahm withheld a scheduled 4% raise and expanded the school day by 20%. Over the summer, the Chicago Public Schools hired more teachers to do this work, but as some teachers went back to work in August, it became clear the expanded day still represented an increased work load for them (for example, some teachers were being asked to supervise recess during their prep period).

And while health care is a big remaining compensation-related issue, many of the other issues have to do with pedagogy and evaluation and with basic conditions for the students.

For example, the CTU objects to tying teacher pay to new high stakes tests, particularly given that the district is leaving teacher training at the same or lower levels, and that teachers believe the tests in question are inappropriate to their students.

And it objects to all the money Rahm is funneling into new charter schools, basically pulling money out of neighborhood schools and putting it into schools that often exclude disadvantaged students or those with learning challenges.

The union wants a limit to how many kids can be put in one class—and particularly ensure that inner city schools rival the student-teacher ratios of the suburbs.

Finally, teachers are striking to make sure the school roofs and climate control work adequately. Just a few weeks ago, they won the big concession of having textbooks in hand for the first day of school!

Ultimately, though, this strike is about whether the “reform” movement has to include teachers as partners, or instead can continue to treat them as obstacles to downsizing and privatizing schools.