**Coronavirus & Schools – Union Action Case Study**

**Local/Council**

West Suburban Teachers Union, Local 571/Cicero Council

**Problem**

On October 6, the District 99 Superintendent made a surprise announcement that teachers were expected to return to classrooms within two weeks. Students would still be remote. Staff were expected to come off their rotating schedule and return to buildings full time as well. At the time, the COVID positivity rate exceeded 12% within the district, which was predominantly Latinx and hit hard by the pandemic, and neither building improvements nor safety measures were in place.

**Goal**

Mobilize members, parents, and the community to fight for teachers to continue teaching from home rather than add to the spread of COVID in Cicero.

**Organizing**

* Media blitz: a press release and several interviews with Council President Rachel Esposito
* Member action: changing work email avatars to a graphic of the current positivity rate OR a photo of a guinea pig to communicate that they thought they were being treated like guinea pigs in this demand to return to school buildings.
* Community connections:
  + Community members started a [petition](https://www.change.org/p/rodolfo-hernandez-cicero-do-not-open-our-schools-keep-everyone-safe-and-healthy-protejan-a-los-ni%C3%B1os-del-distrito-99-en-cicero) to keep schools closed, including to staff and teachers, which was shared widely by the union
  + The union reached out to churches, children’s centers, and other community organizations to ask for support and make sure parents were informed from multiple sources
  + Union members called upon local politicians and town officials for support
* Call to action: In addition to sharing the petition, the union used social media, email, their member newsletter, and texting trees to mobilize members to attend the school board meeting and send letters to the Board of Education.
  + Over 400 letters were sent! Members wrote about their fears about returning to the school buildings along with their successes with remote teaching.
  + Over 100 members signed up to make comments at the school board meeting

**External communications**

* [Media statement](https://www.ift-aft.org/post/cicero-teachers-union-president-condemns-early-return-to-in-person-instruction)
* [Petition](https://www.change.org/p/rodolfo-hernandez-cicero-do-not-open-our-schools-keep-everyone-safe-and-healthy-protejan-a-los-ni%C3%B1os-del-distrito-99-en-cicero)
* Coverage: [NBC](https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/cicero-teachers-say-positivity-rate-is-too-high-to-return-to-classroom/2350666/), [WBBM](https://www.radio.com/wbbm780/news/local/staff-at-cicero-district-99-objects-return-to-school-plan), the [Chicago Sun-Times](https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2020/10/9/21506886/cicero-school-district-99-staff-returning-remote-learning-continues), and the [Chicago Tribune](https://www.chicagotribune.com/coronavirus/ct-covid-19-remote-learning-cicero-teachers-20201009-jj62uv5gvbf7zne7xxvi42tr5a-story.html).

**Outcome**   
A day after the school board meeting, the push for teachers to return to buildings was rescinded. Though the district made a second attempt to call teachers to return once again by November 9, on November 2, that was also cancelled and staff working in the building were told to return to their safer, rotating schedule for in-person work.