

COVID CASE STUDIES

PROVISO TEACHERS UNION

WHO

Proviso Teachers' Council, Local 571

WHAT

K-12 Teachers unit consisting of 300 members

WHY

The health and safety of teachers, other educational staff, and students were threatened when the district demanded teachers return to buildings during a time of rising COVID-19 case numbers in the community.

HOW

Members took immediate action in the courts, in the press, and in the community.

PROBLEM

“We had no choice but to take action. Not only has the superintendent violated our agreement allowing remote instruction, when we complied with his illegal directive to work on site, we found that building conditions are not just unsafe, they’re inhumane.”

Maggie Riley
Proviso Teachers' Union President

Members of the **Proviso Teachers' Union**, a council of Local 571 and President Maggie Riley reached Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) on COVID-19 safety related issues with the new superintendent of District 209 in August 2020. The MOA explicitly stated that teachers had the choice to work safely from remote locations while students were learning remotely. In early October, **the superintendent gave just two weeks' notice of his demand that teachers return to buildings to provide instruction from their classrooms, despite the dramatically rising case numbers in the community and the facts that students were still not in attendance.** A grievance was filed immediately after the superintendent's announcement as it was a violation of the MOA.

Upon returning to the buildings as directed, teachers found filthy classrooms, inconsistent availability of PPE, no heat in one high school building, and lack of hot in two school buildings. In addition, the superintendent visited the teachers in their classrooms and removed his mask, showing no concern for the pandemic or the health of the educators. In addition to the grievance, the union immediately filed an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charge in addition to seeking injunctive relief since the district failed to bargain over health and safety matters which could lead to irreparable harm.

PROBLEM

GOAL

ORGANIZING EFFORTS

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

OUTCOME

ABOUT IFT



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The union was seeking to win a legal decision that forced the district to comply with the original MOA and continue to allow teachers to work from safe remote locations.



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The union kept its members informed of the superintendent's directive to return and advising them that the union had taken immediate legal action to protect members' health and safety.

On the day of the return to buildings, **teachers organized “check in” lines at each of the three high schools, standing outside the doors, socially distanced awaiting entry in the morning. Each member asked the administrator present for PPE before entering the buildings.** The action made a powerful statement that members were complying with the directive but expecting safety to be prioritized as agreed to in the MOA.

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Working with the field service director and IFT's communications department, **the council issued a press release to Chicago area media to call attention to the unsafe conditions teachers were being forced to work in**, as well as to the fact that the district was in violation of the standing agreement between the parties.

PRESS STATEMENT

MEDIA COVERAGE

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The situation is ongoing and teachers were directed to teach from home effective November 12, 2020. However, **the union won a huge initial victory on November 5 when the IELRB granted the union injunctive relief, essentially authorizing the IELRB to take the case to the Circuit Court on the union's behalf.** Such a decision bodes well for an ultimate victory. The union continues to pursue its rights both under the grievance procedure and through the Circuit Court.



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