

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

CHICAGO SCHOOL BOARD

Pritzker questions vetting of president

Aldermen seek resignation of newly appointed official

By Nell Salzman and Ikram Mohamed
Chicago Tribune

Gov. JB Pritzker and more than two dozen aldermen criticized Mayor Brandon Johnson for not fully vetting his choice for school board president — citing the hand-picked candidate's history of posting repeatedly about Israel's yearlong offensive in Gaza.

The Rev. Mitchell “Ikenna” Johnson was appointed by the mayor to the school board's top leadership role after all seven previous members resigned earlier this month. But some state legislators and City Council members questioned that decision and called for his resignation because of dozens of anti-Israel posts he'd made, first reported by Jewish Insider.

“To the extent that someone has been put up for a position, especially one as important as chair of the Chicago schools, I think vetting is vitally important. That doesn't seem to have occurred here,” Pritzker said when asked about the posts at a news conference in the Loop about a new state initiative, “Help Stop Hate.”

The Rev. Johnson, who is no relation to the mayor, has worked with the American Jewish Committee and the Simon Wiesenthal Center. Following Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, he started posting about the Israel-Hamas war on Facebook. He would often post several times a day, increasing in frequency over the winter.

“My Jewish colleagues appear drunk with the Israeli power and will live to see their payment,” he wrote in a post Dec. 19. “The Nazi Germans' ideology has been adopted by Zionist Jews,” in another dated Feb. 20. The dozens of Facebook posts by Rev. Johnson about Israel continued into the spring.

After the posts were made publicly

Turn to Board, Page 2

Graduation, literacy rates at new highs across state

Educators searching for solutions to math woes

By Sarah Macaraeg
Chicago Tribune

The graduation rate among Illinois students hit a historic high, of nearly 88%, last school year, as did student performance on literacy exams, state officials announced Wednesday with the release of the 2024 Illinois Report Card.

“These milestones demonstrate that our investments in students are delivering real results as Illinois continues to bounce back stronger from the challenges set by the Pandemic,” Gov. JB Pritzker said in a news release.

The Illinois State Board of Education's annual release of school- and district-level data also shows significant improvement in key indicators of student success, including chronic absenteeism and the percentage of ninth grade students on track to graduate. But, the data also show that Illinois students, like their peers across the country, continue to struggle in math.

A state math and numeracy plan, mirroring the spirit of the recently implemented Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan, is forthcoming, State Superintendent of Education Tony Sanders told reporters at a media briefing last week.

“Our educators, students and families came together after the pandemic to just not recover, but also emerge stronger,” Sanders said of graduation and

Turn to Schools, Page 2

CHICAGO BUDGET

MAYOR SEEKS \$300M PROPERTY TAX HIKE

Largest increase in almost a decade is part of Johnson's \$17.3B plan for next fiscal year

Sweeping TIF funds, hundreds of job cuts would cover projected \$982.4M shortfall



Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson gives his budget address during the City Council meeting Wednesday. STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

CAUTION AT BEST FOR JOHNSON'S PLAN: When lukewarm applause followed Mayor Brandon Johnson's budget address Wednesday, it was clear what had sucked the enthusiasm from City Council chambers. The foundation of Johnson's \$17.3 billion spending plan: a \$300 million property tax increase. That tax hike instantly led a large group of aldermen to outright oppose the mayor's budget proposal and say their constituents cannot bear the cost. Others, even progressive allies, expressed less final, but still serious concerns about the recommendation. **Page 4**

By Alice Yin, A.D. Quig and Jake Sheridan
Chicago Tribune

Mayor Brandon Johnson on Wednesday proposed Chicago's largest property tax hike in almost a decade as part of his \$17.3 billion budget plan for next year.

The \$300 million increase that would hit Chicago homeowners, landlords and other property owners is a major flip-flop from Johnson's campaign vow not to employ the widely unpopular, and often politically toxic, revenue-raising tactic. It is also one his team justified as necessary in order to balance a projected \$982.4 million shortfall in 2025, along with sweeping tax increment financing funds and eliminating hundreds

of vacant positions across city government. More than half of those will come from the Police Department.

In his budget address to the City Council, Johnson said the tax hike was the only path forward after previous administrations “governed with this veneer of fiscal responsibility, when in fact they weren't.”

“This budget currently includes a property tax increase of \$300 million to fund and keep our commitment to fund not just our pension contributions, but to fund the future of our city,” Johnson said to a packed room of aldermen, union officials, community organizers and concerned citizens. “This is tough. It is. It is something that I grappled

Turn to Budget, Page 4

INSIDE



VINCENT ALBAN/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

For witches and pagans, a holiday of reflection

Some in the Chicago area who practice witchcraft and paganism say they get a kick out of secular Halloween celebrations and pop-culture representations of themselves as old women with green skin and black hats. For others, the holiday is an opportunity for the living to confront their mortality and to try to connect with their dead loved ones. Above, Raven Burns Busot chants while participating in an ancestor ritual on Saturday at the Malliway Bros. Magic Store in Chicago. **Page 5**

Tossing the ‘garbage’

Vice President Kamala Harris on Wednesday called for Americans to “stop pointing fingers” as she tried to push past comments made by President Joe Biden about former President Donald Trump's supporters and “garbage.” **Nation & World**

Venerable Venable?

Wins were few and far between for the White Sox this season, so the news of the hiring of Will Venable as manager likely will be viewed with skepticism by a sizable segment of fans. But the Sox got this one right, says Paul Sullivan. **Chicago Sports**

ELECTION 2024

As neighboring states’ abortion access up in air, Illinois watches

By Angie Leventis Lourgos
Chicago Tribune

Illinois abortion providers are hopeful a wave of upcoming abortion-related ballot measures in other states will favor reproductive rights, but they predict these initiatives are unlikely to immediately quell the crush of out-of-state patients who have been traveling to Illinois following the fall of Roe v. Wade.

On Tuesday, millions of voters in 10 states will weigh in on how their state regulates abortion, including in parts of the country where the right to terminate a pregnancy has been almost entirely banned or severely restricted after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe in June 2022, ending nearly a half-century of federal abortion rights.

In neighboring Missouri, a ballot measure would enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution up to the point of fetal viability. Missouri prohibited nearly all terminations immediately after Roe was overturned.

In Nebraska, dueling initiatives could expand or restrict the right to terminate a pregnancy: One measure would enshrine abortion rights until viability — or later in cases that risk the health or life of the pregnant person — in the Nebraska Constitution. The other measure would

Turn to Abortion, Page 9

