

Chicago Tribune



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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

As seven charter schools plan to close, Chicago Teachers Union asks district to step in and assume management of network serving mostly Latino students



Alyssa Dons, left, principal of Cruz K-12, an Acero charter school in Chicago, greets parent Carina Parra after the final bell on Thursday. The public charter school network announced plans to close seven schools starting next year, including Cruz K-12. **JOHN J. KIM/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

An uncertain future

By Nell Salzman
Chicago Tribune

At dismissal at Cruz K-12 in West Ridge on Thursday afternoon, kids walked out of school holding paper flyers.

Students skipped across the lawn on North Ridge Boulevard to greet expectant parents — most of whom hadn't heard about the charter school board's vote the previous day to close the middle and high school. "After 26 years of serving Chicago's communities, Acero Schools is planning a strategic reorganization," they read.

The news was surprising. "My son" has already made friends," said Tevin Willis, whose 10-year-old just transferred to the school because of its good reviews and academic records. "Now he'll have to go through the whole process again."

Thousands of students and hundreds of teachers were left in a lurch Wednesday after the Acero Charter Schools Board of Directors voted unanimously to close seven of Acero's 15 schools, the latest turn of events during a

CONTENTIOUS CLOSURES: The

Acero Charter Schools Board of Directors cited insufficient funds due to a lack of federal and state dollars and CPS' budget shortfall as one of the reasons it voted to close seven schools. Chicago Teachers Union Research Director Pavlyn Jankov acknowledged that "all our schools need more funding," but added that too much of that public support is going to charter school management instead of students.

week of turmoil for Chicago Public Schools.

Helena Stangle, Acero's chief culture officer, said the board of directors' decision to "consolidate their school system" did not come lightly.

Several factors informed the board's decision, including insufficient funds due to a lack of federal and state dollars and CPS' budget shortfall; declining enrollment; changes in the neighborhoods the schools serve; and inadequate spaces to ensure compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Stangle said.

"When you look at the finances, the enrollment, the limitations from the facilities — that is why these schools are a part of closure," she said. "But they are all excellent schools with great teachers and fantastic students and families."

Following Wednesday's announcement, Chicago Teachers Union President Stacy Davis Gates sent a letter to school district CEO Pedro Martinez, urging CPS to assume

Turn to Closures, Page 4

ELECTION 2024
CHICAGO SCHOOL BOARD

Money flows in for CPS seats

Donations top \$2.3 million one month before the vote

By Molly Morrow and A.D. Quig
Chicago Tribune

With a narrowed field of candidates and less than a month until the Nov. 5 election, the race for 10 seats on Chicago's new hybrid school board is heating up, as campaign donations pile in.

In the week following the major shake-up of the appointed Chicago Board of Education, state records show candidates for the elected school board seats have raised more than \$800,000, a considerable uptick in recent months.

Voters will choose a board member to represent each of 10 new school districts on Nov. 5, after which Mayor Brandon Johnson will appoint 11 additional members, including the board president.

The past week's haul brings the total raised in the race across the 10 districts since the start of the year to \$2.3 million, according to records from the Illinois State Board of Elections. That sum includes loans and in-kind donations of things like staffing, food and event space.

In that same span, super PACs affiliated with school choice groups — the Illinois Network of Charter Schools and the Urban Center — are also spending big, logging \$274,000 in spending in support of candidates in the past week, according to state records. Super PACs, also called independent expenditure committees, can raise and spend unlimited sums but cannot coordinate directly with candidates or donate to them.

This week's numbers are only a small glance into how the races are shaping up: Campaigns have until Tuesday to file quarterly reports showing how much they have raised and spent — and

Turn to Board, Page 4

As new virus strain spreads, experts urge vaccination

COVID variant 'just started to pop up' in Chicago area

By Angie Leventis Lourgos
Chicago Tribune

A new COVID variant called XEC has been spreading around the globe as respiratory virus season begins — and many public health experts are concerned about a pattern of troublingly low COVID and flu vaccination rates in recent years.

The XEC strain, a highly contagious omicron subvariant, was first detected in Germany in June and has since proliferated across Europe.

While the XEC variant appears to be highly contagious, public health officials say its symptoms and severity seem to be similar to other COVID subvariants that are in circulation.

"It has been growing quite rapidly (in Europe)," said Dr. Scott Roberts, assistant professor in infectious diseases at the Yale School of Medicine. "But behaviorally,



Ald. Anthony Beale, 9th, center, laughs as he holds the hand of the Rev. Gregory Terry, of Salem Baptist Church, before receiving a COVID-19 vaccine at a clinic in Pullman Community Center in Chicago on Thursday. **TESS CROWLEY/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

there's no indication it's causing changes in symptoms in any way. It looks more transmissible, but a lot of that is due to the fact that it's slightly more distinct than the current variants."

Erin Newcomer, a genomic epidemiologist at Rush University System for Health, said that XEC is considered a recombinant strain, which means "it's a mix of two strains that were already out and about."

"While the strain is new, none of the

features of the strain are new," she said.

Newcomer added that the XEC strain has "just started to pop up" in the Chicago area recently and in low levels, making up 3% to 5% of the virus circulating locally.

The strain is estimated to account for about 11% of the virus circulating nationwide, with rates a little higher on the West Coast, according to the most recent Centers

Turn to Virus, Page 2

Anti-nuke group given peace prize

Japanese WWII survivors 'soul-bearing witnesses' of atomic bomb's human cost

By Mike Corder
and Elena Becatoros
Associated Press

The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded Friday to Nihon Hidankyo, a Japanese organization of survivors of the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for its activism against nuclear weapons. Jorgen Watne Frydnes, chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, said the award was made as the "taboo against the use of nuclear weapons is under pressure."

Last month, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a shift in his country's nuclear doctrine, in a move aimed at discouraging the West from allowing Ukraine to strike Russia with longer-range weapons. It appeared to significantly lower the threshold for the possible use of Russia's nuclear arsenal.

Watne Frydnes said the Nobel committee "wishes to honor all survivors who, despite physical suffering and pain-

Turn to Nobel, Page 6

CTA unveils \$2.16B budget

The agency outlined plans Friday to boost service above prepandemic levels after years of struggling to provide frequent, reliable buses and trains. **Chicagoland, Page 3**

Florida assesses Milton's wrath

Residents slogged through flooded streets, gathered debris and assessed damage to homes on Friday after the storm smashed through the state. **Nation & World**

For Bears, it's next man up

The Bears' secondary is in a challenging spot with two starters out for Sunday morning's game in London against the Jacksonville Jaguars. **Chicago Sports**

TODAY'S WEATHER



High **68** Low **56**

Complete Chicagoland forecast on Page 8

\$4.00 city and suburbs and elsewhere
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