



Data can provide powerful visualizations - they give us images that quantify the educational lives of children and teachers. All across the nation, teachers are used to school boards and administrators using data to both quantify and qualify the work of educators. Currently, the Champaign School Board is using data to justify an extension of the school day. We know the data in our district is bad - what they show can only be described as immoral. And it is part of the story - but it is not the story itself. We applaud the anti-racism resolution and the work of the Needs Assessment undertaken by the Board. Indeed, every single day teachers are working to become better at being culturally responsive, at addressing the social and emotional needs of students, at building classroom communities, and at understanding and confronting the systemic failures of our schools and our society. But beyond resolutions and needs assessment, what we see is that instead of financing opportunities to visit museums, local farms, laboratories, and cultural events, Unit 4 spends money on iPads so kindergartners can have the opportunity to take more standardized tests at an earlier age. While the Strategic Plan aspires to provide students with all the opportunities they need to feel valued in school, the vast majority of metrics used to determine their success are rooted in standardized testing. We are aligned with the Board and Administration in working to eradicate the disparity--disparity in both achievement and opportunity. However, our best teachers tell us the path to equity is through opportunities, and not through logistically fraught initiatives couched in a framework of adherence to global data as the measurable outcome.

Last week, CFT members spoke, both elementary and secondary, with a united voice: there are too many outstanding issues related to the Board's current proposal to extend the school day. CFT has gotten the impression that the Board preferred the extended day discussions to remain internal until a deal was reached. This is understandable, given the high profile of schooling during this pandemic. However, the District's "Last, Best, and Final" offer given in December forced leadership to bring their proposals to a vote, one that resulted in an overwhelming decision from the ~800 CFT members: 91% voted to authorize leadership to call a strike. We fear that the extended day, like many other initiatives in this district, will follow a predictable path-- from the promise of the theoretical to the logistical constraints of practice. Refusal to proactively address the impact of an extended day on current staffing and logistical issues, which are arguably more severe than ever, currently prevents a path toward agreement.

The Board says it is "committed to engaging and partnering with community organizations, updating curriculum..., and rethinking how our systems and structures impact (students)." Yet, educators have been asking for changes in the curriculum for years – as much of the existing elementary curriculum consists of "teaching from a box." Yes, there are timelines involved and curricular development is a behemoth task.

However, the focus on testing as the metric of success results in teachers balancing two value systems: the one grounded in the social and emotional health of a child, and the one that positions that child as a data point.

The infrastructure challenges and data-driven approach driving the extended day proposal breed skepticism, especially as the Board and Administration tout the Strategic Plan, much of which was completed during the pandemic. Simply put, the input from teachers on the extended day plan was not sufficient, just as educator voice wasn't sufficient during development of the strategic plan. There is a difference in asking "How do we address the achievement gap?" compared with "How do we implement an extended day?" As included in the Board's current proposal, the focus on extended day – while it may be a piece in a larger puzzle – obscures more urgent classroom needs, creates more issues than it solves, and fails to provide students with the opportunities they so urgently need.

The Board says it hears our ideas on the logistical, staffing, and other practical considerations of the extended day proposal, yet they will not engage in discussing the daily operations of the district. These two considerations cannot remain separate if there is any chance of coming to an understanding. The Board writes policy. The Administration implements policy. Teachers follow the directives associated with the policy. So please understand that our concerns are related to the daily operations of this change in working conditions -- something the Board has made clear is not their purview. Yet, the policy changes will have a direct impact on the daily operations of the District. As veteran teachers know, the devil is in the details: hence our calls for answers on the logistics. We are all too familiar with the path of good intentions. Even before the pandemic, our students who are the most in need of services are the first to lose out when a substitute teacher is needed. Our special education teachers, multi language learner teachers, and our interventionists are subbing on an all too frequent basis. The pandemic has exacerbated this crisis and it will only become more dire with an extended day unless proactive steps are taken. For us, that means an agreement to which all of us can be held accountable.

When the District provided a chart on the bell times of schools and Districts around the area, they failed to account for (again) the daily operations of those districts. There are significant differences in how other schools use their time in a given school day. We expect the Board understands that, but was trying to frame the discussion in a way that was suitable to their perspective. Some schools and districts the Board offered as points of comparison on their chart offer students two specials a day (for example, PE twice or computer literacy and in the case of private schools, religion). Others have lunch periods that last an hour. Some offer their teachers 55 minutes of plan time per day. And others don't require teachers to provide before and after school supervision. So while the Board would like to convey the idea that Unit 4 teachers have it easy, there is evidence to suggest just the opposite.

While the rhetoric surrounding negotiations may begin to become more heated, CFT wants our community to know we are committed to the work at hand, and remain committed to finding a workable path toward an agreement. We do this while also balancing the reality that we are losing educational practitioners at an alarming level, and fewer are joining the ranks each year. As a result, it is all the more important that we speak up - and we will. When you dedicate your professional life to the work of educating young people, you deserve the right to be heard on how to make the biggest impact on those lives. We believe there is a path that meets the objectives of the Board, the needs of our community, and the realities our teachers are facing. Not only are these things possible - they are necessary. [Our students deserve it](#). We will keep showing up until we can find that path. We trust the Board to follow suit.

Given this, we are offering opportunities for the community to hear more about teachers' perspectives and to ask any questions they might have, as we know that clear communication and transparency are an integral

part of any educational system. Please consider joining us next week, when we will host conversations on the state of our schools and the Board's proposal to increase the school day. (Public comment and questions will be welcome throughout each forum.)

2/8/22 at 7pm Virtual [Spanish](#) [English](#) [French](#)

Register in advance for this meeting:

<https://aft.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJAqdOGrrDMsGdFc-hfoU25UT6svlewMYkMW>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

2/10/22 at 7pm: [Spanish](#) [English](#) [French](#)

Calvary Baptist Church in Champaign.