

**August 24, 2022 Board Meeting Written Comments
Received between Monday, August 22nd and Thursday, August 25th
Submitted via Written Comments Form**

1	<p>For the past 7 years, I have served Chicago Public Schools in a variety of roles including substitute teacher, teacher assistant, and classroom teacher. As a black man, I understand the importance of proper representation in the classroom. Unfortunately, our students won't get to see me lead a classroom this school year. I have been passed up by multiple schools for my 2nd year as a lead teacher. My theory is that principals are leery to work with me because I admitted to resigning from CPS in February after being cyberbullied by my former students. It is a double injury to have students cyberbully me (without being punished) and not be able to receive another job offer to start from scratch. CPS was okay with rehiring me as a substitute in February. But some of the same principals I subbed for do not deem me qualified to lead their classrooms (despite my 7 year history with CPS.)</p> <p>I pray that the school board works to provide second chances for early career teachers who need to take a break from the classroom. I actually want to teach but the opportunities are not there. I want to give the Board the benefit of the doubt, but I start to believe that my identity is why my career is stagnant.</p>
2	<p>I believe that Ms. Fitz should be re-instated for whatever position she qualifies for. She has been an integral part of the community and has shown to be a respected, educational leader. I also find it concerning that the new principal made a recent Facebook post that referred to the Lindblom students, families and supporters as the "opposition" without properly addressing their concerns. The entire post came across very condescending and somewhat of a "trust me because I hang out with 'famous' people" instead of building genuine trust amongst the Lindblom community.</p>
3	<p>I'm just making a note of support for reinstating Ms. Karen Fitzpatrick Carpenter at Lindblom Math & Science Academy. I also want to state the current principal made a very inappropriate Facebook post referring to concerned parents, students and alumni as the opposition creating an adversarial environment for students instead of trying to understand the genuine concerns.</p>
4	<p>As Lindblom Alum, I would like to advocate for the reinstatement of Karen Fitzpatrick Carpenter as AP of Lindblom Math and Science academy. She was an integral part of my journey at LMSA. From personal experience I know she is fully invested in the children's future. Additionally, I would like to state that the interim principal made a distasteful post in regards to student, alum and parents concerns. In current state he is not up living up to Lindblom's high bar.</p>
5	<p>Please see attachment for supporting documents. August 23, 2022</p> <p>President Miguel del Valle, Board of Education members, CEO Pedro Martinez and staff;</p> <p>My name is Pete Leki. I was the Ecology Program Director at Waters School from 1992 until a few weeks ago when I was notified by the first year principal that my services were no longer needed and that I will not be allowed in the Waters Garden and property unless I followed CPS' volunteer procedures. I live in the Waters' community.</p> <p>I am here because the principal has directed me, and parents and community members, to talk to CPS because he says that he is done talking about it.</p> <p>The principal spent his first year as Principal talking to the LSC, community members, and CPS staff about turning my consulting position paid by a non-profit parent group, into a CPS position, with a 30% pay cut. The principal did not inform me of his intentions until this summer.</p> <p>The Principal states that he has been "in conversation with me" for the last month and a half". This is simply not true. I had no idea what the Principal was planning</p> <p>It is improper for the Principal to discuss my employment, salary and program with the LSC and in public.</p>

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The changes were that I would become a CPS employee, taking 30% pay cut.

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This was all improper and unprofessional behavior by the Principal

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Only You can help rescue this program at this time.

Pete Leki
Former Director of Ecology Programs
Waters School

-
- 6 Waters parent here. Me Leki is a fundamental part of the students ecology education. Over the years he has created a curriculum that tailored for kindergartners-8th graders. Mr Leki combines puppetry, songs, detailed observations and careful teaching, to help children understand deep time (geological time) and hyper-local current ecology. Mr Leki is not replaceable this easily. As a parent of a 5th grader, I would appreciate if Mr Leki could come back and work as an ecology teacher. Thank you.
-
- 7 I'm so disappointed in the lack of captions in the board meeting playback. Additionally, while ASL interpretation is provided, there is no option for live Spanish translation. This is something that can take place with ease - a spanish and english channel as options for viewers.
- It is so inconceivable that these simple measures are not being implemented.
-
- 8 These are the handouts that we would love to share, with some pictures of our garden work, from the August 24th CPS Board Meeting public comments. Thank you for allowing us to share our good news!
-
- 9 Hello,
Before you start the clock, I kindly please ask that every member of the Chicago Board of Education is listening to our concerns attentively and not looking at their laptops or phones. Truly appreciate it!
- I begin with the million dollar question
Who has or had the authority to enforce mask mandates or any mandates?
- February 4, 2022 court ruling stated that the governor, IDPH, ISBE and schools do not have the authority to enforce mask mandates.
Everyone always had the right to walk into the classroom, with or without a mask, this past school year.
- Miranda v. Arizona, "Where rights secured by the Constitution are involved, there can be no 'rule making' or legislation which would abrogate them."
So, no contract and policy can override our constitutional rights!

However, once again, you are requiring masking for 10 days if you are a close contact, when the CDC has always recommended it!! You need parents consent to do so and still do! What if they enter without a mask??

Those that entered without a mask from Feb. to March were punished, humiliated, isolated, written up, and have been traumatized. Masking is a form of quarantine per the legal definition in Illinois court rulings.

We expect a public apology from this board, principals, teachers and any staff that enforced and will enforce mask mandates. You all are not medically licensed to state that a child is a threat!

Where is your evidence stating a mask prevents anyone from getting COVID?

There is little doubt that masks do far more harm than good. Cloth masks are permeable to 97% of viral particles. A study by the University of East Anglia concluded that wearing masks was of no benefit and could increase infection. Experts in respiratory disease and infection protection from the University of Illinois have explained that face masks have no use in everyday life – neither as self-protection nor to protect other people.

A study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine concluded that neither fabric masks nor surgical masks can prevent the spread of COVID-19 by coughing. An article in the New England Journal of Medicine, published in May 2020 concluded that masks offer little or no protection and that the call for masks to be compulsory was an irrational fear reflex.

Also, sending healthy unvaccinated kids home for being a close contact, has always been discriminatory. Yes the CDC has changed it's guidelines to reflect that there is not a need to quarantine. However, it has always been only a recommendation since day one!

Moreover, unvaccinated students were punished and not allowed to attend an overnight out-of-state field trip that was later canceled. An in state field trip allowed all the children to participate without any discrimination.

We've asked, in several BOE meetings, for the law according to the Feb 4, 2022 court ruling, to be followed. We've stated that Mask mandates are just a policy guideline, not a law. It should have always been optional.

On August 10, 2022 Attorney Tom Devore represented parents in a lawsuit. In court, Attorney General Kwane Raoul's representative admitted that the CDC mandates were purely guidance and a recommendation, that no one is legally bound to it.

So, who has the authority to enforce mask mandates or any mandates?

No one on this board, not the CPS administrators, IDPH, CDPH, the Union, school administration or employees can enforce a mask mandate or any mandates. It's between the parents and their doctor.

Masking, testing, or vaccines should have never been enforceable. The school should not engage in harassment of kids and teachers who choose to assert their constitutional rights. Mask mandates are policy guidelines, not enforceable by you.

Therefore, myself and many parents expect a public apology starting with this board, the principals, teachers and anyone that harassed and forced kids and teachers to mask!

If children are harassed to mask again, parents will have no choice but to assert our rights via the legal system- and it will be this board, principals, and teachers who will have to face the consequences of their unlawful policy. You, all the principals, teachers and CTU have been put on mandatory judicial notice! Stop infringing on our constitutional rights!

Govern yourselves accordingly.

Thank you!

Hola,

Antes de comenzar el reloj, les pido amablemente que todos los miembros de la BOE escuchen nuestras inquietudes con atención y no miren sus computadoras portátiles o teléfonos.

¡Realmente lo aprecio!

empiezo con la pregunta del millón de dolares

¿Quién tiene o tenía la autoridad para hacer cumplir los mandatos de máscara o cualquier mandato?

El fallo judicial del 4 de febrero de 2022 declaró que el gobernador, el IDPH, la ISBE y las escuelas no tienen la autoridad para hacer cumplir los mandatos de uso de mascarillas. Todos siempre tuvieron derecho a entrar al salón de clases, con o sin mascarilla, durante el último año escolar.

Miranda v. Arizona, "Cuando se trata de derechos garantizados por la Constitución, no puede haber 'elaboración de normas' o legislación que los derogue".

Por lo tanto, ¡ningún contrato ni política puede anular nuestros derechos constitucionales!

Sin embargo, una vez más, ¡usted requiere mascarilla durante 10 días si es un contacto cercano, cuando los CDC siempre lo han recomendado! ¡Necesitas el consentimiento de los padres para hacerlo y seguir haciéndolo! Y si entran sin mascarilla??

Los que ingresaron sin cubrebocas de febrero a marzo fueron castigados, humillados, aislados, amonestados y han sido traumatizados. El enmascaramiento es una forma de cuarentena según la definición legal en los fallos judiciales de Illinois.

Esperamos una disculpa pública de esta junta, directores, maestros y cualquier miembro del personal que hizo cumplir y hará cumplir los mandatos de máscara. ¡Todos ustedes no tienen licencia médica para declarar que un niño es una amenaza!

¿Dónde está su evidencia de que una máscara evita que alguien se contagie de covid?

No hay duda de que las máscaras hacen mucho más daño que bien. Las mascarillas de tela son permeables al 97% de las partículas virales. Un estudio de la Universidad de East Anglia concluyó que usar máscaras no tenía ningún beneficio y podría aumentar la infección. Expertos en protección contra infecciones y enfermedades respiratorias de la Universidad de Illinois han explicado que las máscaras faciales no tienen ningún uso en la vida cotidiana, ni como autoprotección ni para proteger a otras personas.

Un estudio publicado en Annals of Internal Medicine concluyó que ni las mascarillas de tela ni las mascarillas quirúrgicas pueden prevenir la propagación del covid-19 al toser. Un artículo del New England Journal of Medicine, publicado en mayo de 2020, concluyó que las máscaras ofrecen poca o ninguna protección y que el llamado a que las máscaras sean obligatorias fue un reflejo de miedo irracional.

Además, enviar a casa a niños sanos y no vacunados por ser un contacto cercano siempre ha sido discriminatorio. Sí, los CDC han cambiado sus pautas para reflejar que no es necesario ponerse en cuarentena. Sin embargo, ¡siempre ha sido solo una recomendación desde el primer día!

Además, los estudiantes no vacunados fueron castigados y no se les permitió asistir a una excursión de un día para otro fuera del estado que luego se canceló. Una excursión estatal permitió que todos los niños participaran sin discriminación alguna.

Hemos pedido, en varias reuniones del BOE, que se cumpla la ley según la sentencia judicial del 4 de febrero de 2022. Hemos declarado que los mandatos de máscara son solo una guía de política, no una ley. Siempre debería haber sido opcional.

El 10 de agosto de 2022, el abogado Tom Devore representó a los padres en una demanda. En

la corte, el representante del Fiscal General Kwane Raoul admitió que los mandatos de los CDC eran puramente una guía y una recomendación, que nadie está legalmente obligado a cumplirlos.

Entonces, ¿quién tiene la autoridad para hacer cumplir los mandatos de máscara o cualquier mandato?

Nadie en esta junta, ni los administradores de CPS, IDPH, CDPH, el Sindicato, la administración escolar o los empleados pueden hacer cumplir un mandato de máscara o cualquier otro mandato. Es entre los padres y su médico.

El enmascaramiento, las pruebas o las vacunas nunca deberían haber sido exigibles. La escuela no debe involucrarse en el acoso de niños y maestros que eligen hacer valer sus derechos constitucionales. Los mandatos de uso de mascarillas son lineamientos de políticas que usted no puede hacer cumplir.

¡Por lo tanto, muchos padres y yo esperamos una disculpa pública comenzando con esta junta, los directores, los maestros y cualquier persona que acosó y obligó a los niños y maestros a usar máscaras!

Si se acosa a los niños para que se vuelvan a enmascarar, los padres no tendrán más remedio que hacer valer nuestros derechos a través del sistema legal, y serán esta junta, los directores y los maestros quienes tendrán que enfrentar las consecuencias de su política ilegal. ¡Ustedes, todos los directores, maestros y CTU han sido puestos en aviso judicial obligatorio! ¡Dejen de vulnerar nuestros derechos constitucionales!

Gobiérnense en consecuencia.

Gracias!

10 To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Ben Helphand. I am the Executive Director of NeighborSpace, Chicago's nonprofit land trust for community managed open spaces. My organization protects more than 130 gardens, farms and natural areas encompassing 32 acres across the City of Chicago on behalf of dedicated neighbors and community groups. I am moved to write to you today to express my surprise and concern about the recent removal of Pete Leki from his role at the Waters Elementary School garden.

I have known Pete for 15 years through his work at the Waters garden as well as the NeighborSpace protected Riverbank Neighbors project, a community riparian habitat restoration project along the river between Montrose and Berteau. While I can't speak to the leadership dynamics at the school or speculate on politics I can speak to the impact the garden and Pete's work has had on the neighborhood and the City.

The Waters Garden as well as the Riverbank Neighbors project are beautiful spaces enjoyed by thousands of residents for community events, lifecycle celebrations, recreation and quiet contemplation. I have personally taken my family there every year during the Jewish New Year for a garden walk and riverside ritual. I have also seen the gardens in action as an educational spaces. Several years ago NeighborSpace partnered with the garden for a compost education series, which brought dozens to the Waters Garden for a hands on compost demonstration. We couldn't have asked for a more perfect site. Weaving together the children's vegetable beds, native plantings, berry patches, and oaks of various sizes, the Waters Garden is one of those unique places that, while small, looms large in one's imagination. It is a place that grows many vegetables, fruits and flowers, but even more so it grows memories, and these memories stich together the community and make it stronger and more resilient.

Waters Garden, Riverbank Neighbors and other similar spaces across the city, increase social cohesion and help build community. They are able to achieve this outcome because they are community-managed. These spaces are not tended by a landscape crew, rather, they are

stewarded by the members of the community itself. This governance structure allows residents to get deeply involved in their environment, take on leadership roles and connect with neighbors in ways that build bonds that last a lifetime. For young people in particular community managed open spaces provide accessible venues where they can create and grow together.

Behind every community managed garden there are local leaders that put their time, resources and vision into these spaces. They work with neighbors to keep the spaces tended and vibrant. For the Waters Garden Pete Leki has been one of those leaders. For several decades he has poured himself into that garden, helping it slowly become what it is today; a beacon for the neighborhood, the place you go to celebrate, the place you go to be alone, the place you go to connect with friends, the place you go to learn, the place you go to grow, the place you go to forage. My fear is that the abrupt removal of Pete from the Waters Garden will be like the abrupt removal of one of it's century-old oak trees. It will disrupt the fragile garden and community ecosystem and upend what makes the Waters Garden so inviting. This seems to me an unnecessary self-inflicted wound on the community. I hope CPS finds a way to bring Pete back to the garden.

Sincerely,

Ben Helphand
Executive Director
NeighborSpace

ATTACHMENTS

Regarding

The Conduct of First Year Principal Rutkowski,
The Waters School Ecology Program and Garden
and the position of Pete Leki,
Program Director and Garden Steward

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10. Letter from Colleen McVeigh of the Field Museum

More information at

WatersEcology.org



August 23, 2022

President Miguel del Valle, Board of Education members, CEO Pedro Martinez and staff;

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Pete Leki
Former Director of Ecology Programs
Waters School

Jul 25, 2022 - News

Green fight at North Side school



Monica Eng



Pete Leki, who directed the ecology program at Waters Elementary School for 25 years, leading nature programs for students. Courtesy of Alicia Mayorca

Last week, Waters Elementary principal Peter Rutkowski announced the departure of Pete Leki, the man who led the school's famous [ecology program](#) for 30 years.

- Leki says he was "fired" and suspects it could be for his activism around his program. Many community members are furious.

Why it matters: Leki transformed the North Center school's asphalt yard into an ecological classroom that [inspired generations of students](#) and became a model for other schools.

a year.

Context: For years, Leki's position as director of the Waters ecology program was privately funded by community group [WatersToday](#) and was not an official Chicago Public Schools staff job.

- After Rutkowski proposed new terms, Leki says he "accepted the 30% wage cut and agreed to become a CPS 'miscellaneous employee.'"
- Still, Leki tells Axios he learned in Rutkowski's Wednesday announcement that he was "fired," and says he was "sickened" by it.

The other side: According to CPS officials, Leki declined the school's offer to become a CPS employee and take a 23% pay cut.

Between the lines: Leki has led many protests to save aspects of the garden, which he communicates through an email group.

- In his announcement, Rutkowski called these a "major barrier in coming to an arrangement."
- So Leki says he interprets his "firing" as a possible "reprisal for my public activism."

What's next: Rutkowski said in his announcement that some aspects of the ecology program will continue in the coming school year.

- But Leki supporters, who have submitted dozens of [letters](#) and gathered nearly 500 [petition signatures](#), say they are "heartbroken" and "angry" and still have many questions for CPS.



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Jul 28, 2022 - News

Pete Leki, CPS remain in dispute



Monica Eng



Pete Leki on a nature field trip with students. Photo courtesy of Waters Ecology

We recently reported that Waters Elementary School [lost Pete Leki](#), the director of its nationally celebrated ecology program and gardens.

- Chicago Public Schools officials claimed Leki was ousted after he wouldn't agree to a pay cut or to become an official CPS employee, but Leki insisted he'd agreed to both things and was "fired."

Reality check: Leki showed Axios email chains proving he had indeed agreed to become a CPS employee and take a pay cut.



- But the emails suggest those issues *were* resolved, and the two sides were collaborating on a statement when Waters Elementary principal Peter Rutkowski suddenly shut down talks and released a note about Leki's departure.

What's next: More than 600 people [have signed petitions](#) urging the school to retain Leki.

- But when Axios asked if Leki could still be a part of the garden he's tended for 30 years, Rutkowski answered, "No comment."



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Grants and Awards - Ecology Program, Garden, and Riverbank

Partial list

Friends of the Parks VIP Award - 2020

Field Foundation of Illinois Grant for Ecology Program 2014-2016

Prairie River Network's River Steward Award winner in 2014

Global Green One of ten finalists for Green School Makeover 2013

Friends of the Chicago River - Teacher of the Year 2013

US Dept of Education Green Ribbon School (2012 - the first cohort of schools recognized)

Annie's Homegrown Grants for Gardens 2012

Whole Kids Foundation School Garden Grant 2012

National Environmental Education Foundation Green Prize in Public Education (2011 - one of only three schools recognized)

Friends of the River Silver Ribbon - Riverbank Restoration 2011

Pepsi Refresh grant for Ecology 2010

Whole Kids Foundation Salad Bar Grant 2010

National Gardening Association Youth Gardening Grant 2009

Climate Change Grant for Solar Panels 2009

EPA / Chicago Wilderness - 1st Place in Native Landscaping 2007-08

Mayor Daley's Landscaping Awards - 1st Place Native Landscaping 2007-08

1st Place Conservation and Native Landscape Award, with Riverbank Neighbors, Chicago

Wilderness and USEPA 2006

1st Place, Mayor Daley's Native Landscape Award, for River Restoration 2006

Governor's Hometown Award, with Riverbank neighbors for river restoration 2005

1st Place Mayor Daley's School Garden Award 2004

Peggy Notebaert Award 2003-04

1st Place Chicago Academy of Science, Nature Museum Award for Best Environmental Program 2003

Greening of Ravenswood Award, Alderman Gene Schulner 2001

Ravenswood Community Council, Commendation to Waters School Garden 2000

American Rivers, National Award for Best River Educational Project 1996

Environmental Activism Commendation, President Bill Clinton, USEPA 1996

Director of Ecology Programs Waters School

The position of Director of Ecology programs was born more than 20 years ago and has evolved from our earliest gardens and first field outings, into the direction of a full blown K-8 program of field ecology, gardening (agriculture and native plant communities), and resource conservation. The position requires the director to have deep familiarity with the school's educational mission and philosophy. It requires an ability to work and plan with teachers and other staff, and to communicate well with the administration. Because of the extent of the field ecology program, the position requires that the director have good relationships with the organizations that sponsor our field outings and initiatives. The Director must have a background in education, ecology and neighborhood relations. As our school values integration of the disciplines, it is important for the Director to have interest and familiarity with subjects across the disciplines, from mathematics to music, art to astronomy, poetry to politics. The Director should also have a strong sense of the school's history and its relationship to the community.

The Director will seek out funding sources for the ecology program and garden and cooperate with the school's grant writing efforts.

The Director will seek out community and regional opportunities for our students and community to learn and contribute to a better environment. Examples include: the Chicago River Student Congress, Riverbank Neighbors work and celebration days, Horner Park natural areas work experiences, the North Branch Restoration Project, Friends of the Park's Earth Day events, work/study experiences at Montrose Point dunes and swale ecosystem, Mighty Acorns Dunes Summer camp, and Chicago River Day.

Field Ecology

The Director must schedule field outings for all classrooms at all grade levels during Fall, Winter and Spring. The director must plan the schedule with our external partners (the Forest Preserve District, Friends of the Chicago River, Riverbank Neighbors, Chicago Park District, and Friends of the Parks) to arrange for transportation and reservation of the natural area. The Director must obtain the required permits from the BOE for these trips and work out scheduling conflicts with the teachers and school. The Director must cultivate and organize parent and community volunteers to play meaningful roles in the field outings, teaching and learning along with the students. This may include preparatory workshops and volunteer outings.

The Director will teach pre-trip classes as necessary to prepare students for the educational focus of the trip. Director will prepare, with volunteers, all materials necessary (journals, maps, songs, leaf collections, etc) for students to successfully engage with their field experience. The Director will teach the songs that have been developed over the years to accompany the learning experiences.

The Director will lead the field outing with the help of the classroom teacher and volunteers, and will have broad knowledge of the ecology of the places visited. The Director will conduct post-trip debriefings and analysis of student experience and findings. The Director will, with the help of trained volunteers, respond to student journal work. The Director will teach additional classes as time allows.

During the growing season, especially between season field outings, the director will work with the garden Co-ordinator to bring classes out into the garden to experience maintenance tasks, harvesting and tasting garden crops, composting, and investigation of the various resources available in the garden (seeds, leaves, roots, insects, wildlife, etc).

The Director will attend conferences and meetings that build relationships and/or deepen knowledge and competencies in ecology, science and advocacy.

Waters School Gardens

The Director has broad responsibility to oversee the maintenance and health of natural areas of the school grounds that have been created by the school and community. These include a mosaic of natural areas, agricultural areas, commons, and the community gardens. The Director will accomplish this by organizing the help of school and community volunteers, and the students and teachers in the school.

The Director will have a strong background in native plant communities and their maintenance, will monitor the quality of the native plant community, and take necessary actions to move towards higher quality and bio-diversity.

The Director will have experience and knowledge of methods for growing agricultural crops and the maintenance of soil fertility.

The Director will have experience and skills in leading groups of students through their garden excursions, and working with volunteers and teachers to assure rich and rewarding education and life experiences in the Garden. The Director will organize class visitation schedules and meet with teachers to plan the content of the garden visit.

The Director has the responsibility to keep the garden in good health, in good order, and safe to the extent that this is possible. To this end the Director will organize school and community volunteers to assist in the various garden maintenance tasks. The Director, or the Garden Co-ordinator, will schedule and lead regular Garden Days during the Garden season, and special Garden events to invite maximum participation. The Director will organize, from time to time, as needed, workshops on all manner of garden, ecology, community and social areas of interest to raise the general knowledge base in the school community.

The Director will work with the school engineer to maintain the irrigation systems and the rain catchment systems.

The Director should have basic knowledge of tool use, mechanics, and carpentry.

The Director will select, as funding and capacity allows, a Garden Co-ordinator, to lead the work described above, and will assist and supervise the Co-ordinator.

Resource Conservation

Waters School has long dedicated itself to resource conservation through:

Recycling;

Composting;

Rain harvesting,

Energy conservation and solar energy production.

The Director will organize the system of schoolwide recycling, and will train and monitor Recycling Captains from each classroom grades 1-8. The Director will work with the custodians and the engineer to assure that recycling goals are met and that problems that may arise are solved.

The Director will organize waste separation in the lunchroom, and will work with the lunchroom managers to train students in proper separation methods. The Director will work with 7 Generations Ahead to continue Commercial Composting at Waters School, and with the custodians to keep the system in good order.

The Director will seek out new sources for additional photo-voltaic arrays to harvest solar energy and reduce energy use in the school.

The Director will work to make maximum effective use of the rainwater catchment devices at school (cisterns, rain barrels, bioswales).

The Director will monitor and manage the compost bins in the gardens to assure that they are working well and in good repair. The Director will maintain tools and materials so that they are available for use by students and community volunteers. The Director will maintain the storage shed and the cedar tool shed in good condition.

The Director will organize, with the CPS, and conduct, City-wide composting workshops to help support the ecology program and to widen our network of advocates for school gardens, healthy foods, and healthy soils.

Draft December 7, 2018



Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Re: Proposal

1 message

Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Fri, Jul 15, 2022 at 10:25 AM

To: "Rutkowski, Peter" <parutkowski@cps.edu>

Cc: Elizabeth Chandran <LizChandranWatersLSC@gmail.com>

Bcc: Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Mr. Rutkowski,

Just to clarify, I said that I would accept the salary offer, either as Vendor or CPS employee, and that I would seek to restore the other 30% through grants and fundraising through an independent organization. This would allow me to deliver the full ecology program for the full year. All this to be fleshed out through good faith negotiations. I am available to meet and clarify any misunderstandings after 12 noon today.

Pete Leki

773-414-0626

On Fri, Jul 15, 2022 at 9:45 AM Rutkowski, Peter <parutkowski@cps.edu> wrote:

Hello,

You have rejected our proposal and we are not able to accept the conditions and structure of your proposal. The creation of this position will not be placed on the agenda for the July 19 LSC meeting. However, there will be an informational presentation regarding the ecology program.

I would advise that you refrain from sending out misinformation regarding this issue.

On Fri, Jul 15, 2022 at 8:48 AM Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com> wrote:

Yes. Also that we will try to find grants and other funding to make up the other 30%.

I think crafting a job description is most important.

Very stressful times for us of all. Little steps may build confidence.

Forward,

Pete

On Fri, Jul 15, 2022 at 8:00 AM Rutkowski, Peter <parutkowski@cps.edu> wrote:

Hello,

Received. To review:

Your response to the salary funding proposal sent on Monday was, "Same to you. Please let me know if you change your mind and insist on a crash landing"

Yesterday evening you sent a new proposal that covers 70% of the school year, as opposed to the full calendar year. Your proposal includes three additional conditions, one of which includes possible adjustments to salary.

1. To create a detailed job description or contract that reflects the full scope of the work necessary to fulfill the program, and including possible adjustments to the categories for which my salary will be based;
2. Begin discussion for finding permanent protection for the garden, an easement through a third party public entity,
3. Assurances on freedom of expression and speech.

I will follow up with you later today regarding the agenda for Tuesday's LSC meeting.

On Thu, Jul 14, 2022 at 5:59 PM Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Elizabeth and Mr. Rutkowski,

Please proceed with the budget vote with the understanding that the amount is 70% of the former salary and will only pay for 70% of the necessary work for the Garden and eco program, or, stated another way, will fully fund the ecology program for 70% of the school year.

I will offer to begin asap good faith negotiations with Principal Rutkowski, to work out the details of my employment:

- as CPS Vendor or CPS Misc Employee;
- to create a detailed job description or contract that reflects the full scope of the work necessary to fulfill the program, and including possible adjustments to the categories for which my salary will be based;
- begin discussion for finding permanent protection for the garden, an easement through a third party public entity,
- and assurances on freedom of expression and speech.

Waters ecology will organize efforts to restore the other 30% of ecology funding, by the creation of a non-profit ecology based fund raising organization dedicated to supporting those portions of the Ecology / Garden not able to be funded by the school.

We also hope that the LSC will be attentive to the collective voices of the vast majority of the community who will support and defend the garden and ecology

program so that it can continue to educate our students about ecology, about community and activism into the foreseeable future.

Thank you and let's get together asap.

Pete Leki
Director of Ecology Programs

--
Kind regards,

Peter Rutkowski
Principal
Waters Elementary
(he/his/him)

7735345090
parutkowski@cps.edu
waterselementary.org
4540 N Campbell Ave., Chicago, IL

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Kind regards,

Peter Rutkowski
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Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Re: Waters Ecology situation

1 message

Rutkowski, Peter <parutkowski@cps.edu>

Sat, Jul 16, 2022 at 10:12 AM

To: Nathan Hunter <nhunterwaterslsc@gmail.com>

Cc: Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

I will see you then. The two specific items I would like to discuss are:

- 1) The proposal Mr Leki sent Thursday 7/14
- 2) Emails sent from Mr Leki's address regarding this issue

I strongly recommend refraining from sending any more broadcast emails until after we meet.

On Saturday, July 16, 2022, Nathan Hunter <nhunterwaterslsc@gmail.com> wrote:

Mr. Rutkowski,

That works for me. If that works for Mr. Leki as well, I will see you then. Thank you for your willingness to work towards resolution.

Regards,
Nathan

On Sat, Jul 16, 2022 at 8:04 AM Rutkowski, Peter <parutkowski@cps.edu> wrote:

Hello,

I would be able to do 11 on Monday. Would that work for you?

On Fri, Jul 15, 2022 at 12:47 PM Nathan Hunter <nhunterwaterslsc@gmail.com> wrote:

Mr. Rutkowski and Mr. Leki,

It is my opinion that significant miscommunication and misunderstanding is getting in the way of reaching a positive resolution of the issues we have been dealing with related to Waters Ecology and Mr. Leki's position. Based on what you have each told me individually, I believe there is a high likelihood of success in ironing

these issues out through an in-person meeting. I would like to attend and help facilitate communication.

Mr. Rutkowski, I understand you are out of the office today, and unavailable to meet. I can make time any day next week between 9:30am and 2:00pm if you are both willing to participate in such a meeting and are interested in having me join you. As I have expressed to both of you, I feel strongly that resolving these issues is very important, and I believe that it is actually very doable if we can sit down together and talk.

Warm regards,
Nathan Hunter

--

Kind regards,

Peter Rutkowski
Principal
Waters Elementary
(*he/his/him*)

7735345090

parutkowski@cps.edu

waterselementary.org

[4540 N Campbell Ave., Chicago, IL](#)

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--

Kind regards,

Peter Rutkowski

Principal
Waters Elementary
(*he/his/him*)

7735345090

parutkowski@cps.edu

watersselementary.org

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Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Bullet Points

1 message

Rutkowski, Peter <parutkowski@cps.edu>

Mon, Jul 18, 2022 at 1:30 PM

To: Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Cc: Nathan Hunter <nhunterwaterslsc@gmail.com>, Judith Martin <jcgulan@cps.edu>

Mr. Leki,

In review, these are the bullet points we drafted and agreed upon today. Since this is coming from you, I changed "Mr. Leki's" to "I" so it is not confusing for people to read.

- Principal Rutkowski and the Waters LSC did not have plans to reduce the garden.
- Principal Rutkowski and the Waters LSC did not have plans to reduce the number of student-facing hours in the field ecology program.
- Funding for the ecology program was not based on a draft job description and I was invited to revise the job description in mid-June.
- The amount of fundraising dollars being allocated for the technology program for the coming school year is the same as the previous school year (Approximately \$65k).
- Principal Rutkowski and I did not agree on whether benefits would be included as part of the compensation for the new CPS ecology position when we met in March.

The next step in the process is to complete the finalized, mutually agreed upon message that will eventually be sent through Mr. Leki's and the school's distribution list. There will be no further action until a mutually agreed upon message is created.

Please share the draft by 1 PM tomorrow.

--

Kind regards,

Peter Rutkowski
Principal
Waters Elementary
(*he/his/him*)

7735345090

parutkowski@cps.edu

watselementary.org

[4540 N Campbell Ave., Chicago, IL](#)

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Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Re: Progress and Clarification Draft

1 message

Nathan Hunter <nathanahunter@gmail.com>

Tue, Jul 19, 2022 at 1:02 PM

To: Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Cc: "Rutkowski, Peter" <parutkowski@cps.edu>, "Martin, Judith" <jcgulan@cps.edu>

All,

I am happy to discuss any time, but to my reading, none of the proposed changes are out of line with our discussion yesterday of the intent of the bullet points. Please let me know if you would like me to participate in a follow-up meeting.

Warm regards,
Nathan

On Tue, Jul 19, 2022 at 12:24 PM Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Mr Rutkowski,

Below is the draft text that I will send out to my lists. The blue highlight words are ones that I propose to add clarity.

Let me know if this works for you,

Pete

Dear Waters Friends,

I am happy to say that I met with Principal Rutkowski on Monday and received assurances that the ecology program and the garden program would continue in their entirety. We still have issues to work out, but Principal Rutkowski asked that I share some clarifications of issues raised in former emails. For example,

- Principal Rutkowski and **the past** Waters LSC did not and **do not** have plans to reduce the garden.
- Principal Rutkowski and the Waters LSC did not have plans to reduce the number of student-facing hours in the field ecology program.
- Funding for the ecology program was not based on a draft job description, **but on the Principal's analysis of my schedule**, and I was invited to revise the job description **on June 22nd**.
- The amount of fundraising dollars being allocated for the technology program for the coming school year is the same as the previous school year (Approximately \$65k).
- Principal Rutkowski and I did not agree on whether benefits (**except liability insurance**) would be included as part of the compensation for the new CPS Miscellaneous employee position when we met in March.

Hopefully we will meet soon to come to consensus on other questions. I thank you all for your passionate messages of support for the Garden, Ecology program and Waters School.

Mr. Leki



Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Re: Progress and Clarification Draft

1 message

Rutkowski, Peter <parutkowski@cps.edu>

Tue, Jul 19, 2022 at 12:40 PM

To: Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Cc: Nathan Hunter <nathanahunter@gmail.com>, "Martin, Judith" <jcgulan@cps.edu>

Hello,

Received. I will respond within 24 hours.

On Tue, Jul 19, 2022 at 12:24 PM Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Mr Rutkowski,

Below is the draft text that I will send out to my lists. The blue highlight words are ones that I propose to add clarity.

Let me know if this works for you,

Pete

Dear Waters Friends,

I am happy to say that I met with Principal Rutkowski on Monday and received assurances that the ecology program and the garden program would continue in their entirety. We still have issues to work out, but Principal Rutkowski asked that I share some clarifications of issues raised in former emails. For example,

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Mr. Leki

--

Kind regards,

Peter Rutkowski
Principal
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(he/his/him)

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parutkowski@cps.edu

waters elementary.org

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Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Re: Progress and Clarification Draft

1 message

Rutkowski, Peter <parutkowski@cps.edu>

Wed, Jul 20, 2022 at 12:20 PM

To: Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Cc: Nathan Hunter <nathanahunter@gmail.com>, "Martin, Judith" <jcgulan@cps.edu>

Mr. Leki,

Thank you for your response.

The first sentence you propose belies the fact that, in your terms, assurances have been provided directly to you for weeks. Secondly, despite those assurances, you continued to send emails contradicting that information through your public distribution lists.

Also, the date you were invited to revise the job description is incorrect. The actual date was Friday, June 17. Please see attached email.

We are at the point where we have to commit to a plan for the coming school year that starts in one month. There has not been a significant enough amount of progress with the original plan to continue with the same programming as the '21-22 school year and the school will be implementing a new plan very soon.

We can discuss details related to transition at a later time.

As we have shared multiple times before, we truly respect and appreciate your legacy in both the program and the garden. We had been hopeful that things would work out for the '22-23 school year and are saddened we have reached this point.

On Tue, Jul 19, 2022 at 12:24 PM Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Mr Rutkowski,

Below is the draft text that I will send out to my lists. The blue highlight words are ones that I propose to add clarity.

Let me know if this works for you,

Pete

Dear Waters Friends,

I am happy to say that I met with Principal Rutkowski on Monday and received assurances that the ecology program and the garden program would continue in their entirety. We still have issues to work

out, but Principal Rutkowski asked that I share some clarifications of issues raised in former emails. For example,

- Principal Rutkowski and [the past](#) Waters LSC did not and [do not](#) have plans to reduce the garden.
- Principal Rutkowski and the Waters LSC did not have plans to reduce the number of student-facing hours in the field ecology program.
- Funding for the ecology program was not based on a draft job description, [but on the Principal's analysis of my schedule](#), and I was invited to revise the job description [on June 22nd](#).
- The amount of fundraising dollars being allocated for the technology program for the coming school year is the same as the previous school year (Approximately \$65k).
- Principal Rutkowski and I did not agree on whether benefits ([except liability insurance](#)) would be included as part of the compensation for the new CPS Miscellaneous employee position when we met in March.

Hopefully we will meet soon to come to consensus on other questions. I thank you all for your passionate messages of support for the Garden, Ecology program and Waters School.

Mr. Leki

--

Kind regards,

Peter Rutkowski
Principal
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Chicago Public Schools Mail - Job Description.pdf
78K



Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Waters Update - July 21

1 message

Waters Elementary <parutkowski@cps.edu>
Reply-To: Waters Elementary <parutkowski@cps.edu>
To: petelekisan@gmail.com

Wed, Jul 20, 2022 at 12:28 PM

[View this email in your browser](#)



Waters Elementary

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July 20, 2022

Waters Families,

Waters' original plan for ecology for the coming school year was to continue with the same programming that was provided to students last year and continue to build on the incredible achievements and inspiration that Mr. Leki has brought to Waters in the past. With the first day of school being only a month away, we are at the point when we have to commit to the plan for next school year.

Unfortunately, after many lengthy discussions with Mr. Leki, community members and Waters parents over the past months, we have not been able to come to a mutually agreeable arrangement for the coming school year. Notably, the communications sent on behalf of the "Waters School Community Gardens" throughout July, both in content and disposition, were a major barrier in coming to an arrangement and setting a solid foundation for moving forward together.

Below is an outline of Waters plan for ecology and the garden for the coming school year. We hope to add more components in the future as well:

- **ESSENTIALS CLASS** - Although we had planned to offer more of both, Waters will continue its commitment to both ecology and technology for all our students Kindergarten through 8th grade, by offering Environmental Science for half the year and Technology for the other half.

The study of Environmental Science builds off of ecology to work toward finding solutions to environmental problems. Starting with the beginning of this school year, every student will take Environmental Science on a weekly basis during the 1st and 4th quarters, the part of the school year when the school garden is most active. Creating an Environmental Science Essentials class will more than double the amount of on-campus instruction in this area from the previous school year and be during seasons when students can have the deepest level of engagement in their garden.

Technology will be offered to all students during the 2nd and 3rd quarters, coinciding with the winter months. These courses will both be taught by Ms. Rovito, who brings over ten years of experience teaching and developing courses to Waters.

- **AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM** - There will be an after school program for students 4-8th Grade starting as soon as possible in the first quarter to learn about and tend to the garden. The program will be led by Ms. Smallwood, a fourth grade teacher with many years of experience teaching middle school and who also holds a certification in HS Biology.
- **MIGHTY ACORNS (Grades 3rd-5th)** - We are in contact with the [Field Museum](#) and will immediately begin exploring possibilities with them for adapting and continuing the Mighty Acorns program at Waters for the coming school year, including field trips.
- **FIELD TRIPS FOR 2ND, 6TH, 7TH & 8TH GRADES** - These field trips to the river, lake, etc. will also continue to the greatest extent possible. We will share more details as they become available.
- **GARDEN: RAISED BEDS** - Half of the garden is comprised of raised beds. Community members currently occupy 70% of the raised beds and will be able to continue taking care of the beds allotted to them. The remaining beds that are allotted to Waters classes can continue to be

cared for by the community until the students are back on campus, as outlined in the signage posted in the garden:

"The flowers and vegetables in the garden are cared for by community members. In exchange for being allowed these small plots, our gardeners care for all of the Waters School Gardens..."

- **GARDEN: NATIVE AREAS** - The native areas will continue to be protected by fencing. However, it takes much more than fencing to protect and preserve these areas and we will share more specific information about upkeep as it becomes available.

This is a major transition for Waters and we appreciate your patience and participation as we work to broaden our offerings with a student-centered approach. If you are interested in helping out with any of these efforts, please don't hesitate to contact either me or Ms. Martin.

Kind regards,
Mr. R.

Upcoming Dates

Kindergarten Family Meet & Greet - Wednesday, August 10 @5:00 PM

Kindergarten Kickoff - Wednesday, August 16 @1:45 PM

Classroom Visits & Back to School Bash ([WatersToday](#)) - Friday, August 19

Class Visits: 2:45-3:15 PM

Bash: 4:00-6:00 PM

First Day of School for Students - Monday, August 22

Curriculum Night - Wednesday, September 7, 5:30-7:30 PM



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Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>

Re: Progress and Clarification Draft

1 message

Nathan Hunter <nathanahunter@gmail.com>

Wed, Jul 20, 2022 at 2:30 PM

To: "Rutkowski, Peter" <parutkowski@cps.edu>

Cc: Pete Leki <petelekisan@gmail.com>, "Martin, Judith" <jcgulan@cps.edu>, nhunterwaterslsc@gmail.com

Mr. Rutkowski,

I am beyond disappointed by this turn of events. It was my understanding by the close of our meeting on Monday, July 18 that (1) Mr. Leki was to provide you with proposed language for the agreed upon "retraction" email, (2) you were to review and revise it, (3) you were to participate in reaching a mutually agreed upon draft, and (4) Mr. Leki was then to transmit the final draft to the public. It appears disingenuous to take action based on your disapproval of the "assurances" portion of Mr. Leki's email or to the "June 22 versus June 17" question (the attached email shows that the invitation was sent on June 17 to discuss revising the job description on June 21). The first statement of the proposed language is true based on what I perceived at the meeting, and the June date appears to be a simple mistake.

Mr. Leki's proposed language was provided to you and me, within the agreed upon timeframe, and it was prefaced with a request for your input. From my standpoint, good faith on your part would have been to address any concerns you had with the proposed language by email or in a meeting with Mr. Leki (as discussed). Nothing I read in Mr. Leki's email suggested he was dead set on any of the proposed email's language, and nothing in the email appeared to materially differ from what was agreed upon at the meeting. It is difficult for me to see consistency between the substance of our meeting on Monday and the schoolwide email you sent today (that gives the appearance of having been drafted some time ago, and calls into question statements made about the status of planning for a post-Leki ecology program).

Regards,
Nathan Hunter

On Wed, Jul 20, 2022 at 12:21 PM Rutkowski, Peter <parutkowski@cps.edu> wrote:

Mr. Leki,

Thank you for your response.

The first sentence you propose belies the fact that, in your terms, assurances have been provided directly to you for weeks. Secondly, despite those assurances, you

continued to send emails contradicting that information through your public distribution lists.

Also, the date you were invited to revise the job description is incorrect. The actual date was Friday, June 17. Please see attached email.

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Let me know if this works for you,

Pete

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For example,

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- Principal Rutkowski and the Waters LSC did not have plans to reduce the number of student-facing hours in the field ecology program.
- Funding for the ecology program was not based on a draft job description, **but on the Principal's analysis of my schedule**, and I was invited to revise the job description **on June 22nd**.
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Hopefully we will meet soon to come to consensus on other questions. I thank you all for your passionate messages of support for the Garden, Ecology program and Waters School.

Mr. Leki

--

Kind regards,

Peter Rutkowski
Principal
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This was delivered to me one week after I was informed that monies raised by the parents for the Ecology Program would be re-allocated for other uses in the school, my wage would be cut by 30%, and I learned that the principal had circulated an email to the LSC, behind my back, showing falsely that my hours were much below full time. P.L.

Ecology Miscellaneous - Waters ES CLASS TITLE: Miscellaneous CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CLASS: Under supervision, assists teachers holding a valid state certificate in the instruction of pupils at schools; and performs related duties as required. ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS: Provides instruction related support services under the direction of teachers, provides support and assistance to the local school planning team, assists in the supervision of students during field trips and garden activities, participates and assists with the implementation of innovative education activities; assists in the implementation of inservices for other staff, assists students in understanding and completing classroom assignments, greets and directs visitors to appropriate areas of the school, consults with teachers regarding problems, concerns, and special interests of individual students and contacts parents and guardians after consultation with the teacher; operates audio-visual equipment; assists in collecting and providing written and verbal feedback to students under the supervision of the classroom teacher; submits timesheets on a bi-weekly basis to school administration and meets with administration quarterly to review to progress of the program.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS: Knowledge, Abilities, and Skill. General knowledge of the behavior patterns of school-aged children, knowledge of basic educational methods and techniques, working knowledge of proper English grammar and spelling, good knowledge of Chicago Public Schools rules and regulations. Ability to follow and confer written and oral instructions, ability to work with and for school-aged children, ability to maintain an orderly classroom environment. Good oral and written communication skills, good skill in basic arithmetic, demonstrated skill in working with school-aged children. Physical Requirements. Light Work: Exerting up to twenty (20) pounds of force occasionally, or up to ten (10) pounds of force frequently, or a negligible amount of force frequently to move objects. Even though weight of force moved may be only a negligible amount, a position should be rated as Light Work (1) when it requires walking or standing to a significant degree; or (2) when it requires sitting most of the time but entails pushing or pulling of arm controls.

License Requirements There are no license requirements for this role.

Ecology Miscellaneous - Waters ES

CLASS TITLE: Miscellaneous

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CLASS: Under supervision, assists teachers holding a valid state certificate in the instruction of pupils at schools; and performs related duties as required.

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS: Provides instruction related support services under the direction of teachers, provides support and assistance to the local school planning team, assists in the supervision of students during field trips and garden activities, participates and assists with the implementation of innovative education activities; assists in the implementation of inservices for other staff, assists students in understanding and completing classroom assignments, greets and directs visitors to appropriate areas of the school, consults with teachers regarding problems, concerns, and special interests of individual students and contacts parents and guardians after consultation with the teacher; operates audio-visual equipment; assists in collecting and providing written and verbal feedback to students under the supervision of the classroom teacher; submits timesheets on a bi-weekly basis to school administration and meets with administration quarterly to review to progress of the program.

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Knowledge, Abilities, and Skill. General knowledge of the behavior patterns of school-aged children, knowledge of basic educational methods and techniques, working knowledge of proper English grammar and spelling, good knowledge of Chicago Public Schools rules and regulations.

Ability to follow and confer written and oral instructions, ability to work with and for school-aged children, ability to maintain an orderly classroom environment.

Good oral and written communication skills, good skill in basic arithmetic, demonstrated skill in working with school-aged children.

Physical Requirements. Light Work: Exerting up to twenty (20) pounds of force occasionally, or up to ten (10) pounds of force frequently, or a negligible amount of force frequently to move objects. Even though weight of force moved may be only a negligible amount, a position should be rated as Light Work (1) when it requires walking or standing to a significant degree; or (2) when it requires sitting most of the time but entails pushing or pulling of arm controls.

License Requirements

There are no license requirements for this role.

This was delivered to me one week after I was informed that monies raised by the parents for the Ecology Program would be re-allocated for other uses in the school, my wage would be cut by 30%, and I learned that the principal had circulated an email to the LSC, behind my back, showing falsely that my hours were much below full time. P.L.

Ecology Miscellaneous - Waters ES CLASS TITLE: Miscellaneous CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CLASS: Under supervision, assists teachers holding a valid state certificate in the instruction of pupils at schools; and performs related duties as required. ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS: Provides instruction related support services under the direction of teachers, provides support and assistance to the local school planning team, assists in the supervision of students during field trips and garden activities, participates and assists with the implementation of innovative education activities; assists in the implementation of inservices for other staff, assists students in understanding and completing classroom assignments, greets and directs visitors to appropriate areas of the school, consults with teachers regarding problems, concerns, and special interests of individual students and contacts parents and guardians after consultation with the teacher; operates audio-visual equipment; assists in collecting and providing written and verbal feedback to students under the supervision of the classroom teacher; submits timesheets on a bi-weekly basis to school administration and meets with administration quarterly to review to progress of the program.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS: Knowledge, Abilities, and Skill. General knowledge of the behavior patterns of school-aged children, knowledge of basic educational methods and techniques, working knowledge of proper English grammar and spelling, good knowledge of Chicago Public Schools rules and regulations. Ability to follow and confer written and oral instructions, ability to work with and for school-aged children, ability to maintain an orderly classroom environment. Good oral and written communication skills, good skill in basic arithmetic, demonstrated skill in working with school-aged children. Physical Requirements. Light Work: Exerting up to twenty (20) pounds of force occasionally, or up to ten (10) pounds of force frequently, or a negligible amount of force frequently to move objects. Even though weight of force moved may be only a negligible amount, a position should be rated as Light Work (1) when it requires walking or standing to a significant degree; or (2) when it requires sitting most of the time but entails pushing or pulling of arm controls.

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From the Aug '22 LSC mtg: question from Jack Fisher about garden maintenance

Jack Fisher:

“I just want to ask Principal Rutkowski to share with everyone here and with the LSC what the plans are in the fall for the maintenance of the garden, given that Pete is no longer in that position, because he did a lot of that work so I think that many of us are curious how that work is going to happen. We’ve received some emails from you, but none of them have detailed or given any indication of this, so I’d like to ask you at this moment to share any plans that you’ve developed. Thank you.”

Principal Rutkowski:

“Sure, so, as was previously shared a couple weeks ago, the community garden beds will just continue to be used by the community members that occupy them. Those spots are given to the community under the understanding that during the summer they help maintain the student plots on the other side of the garden, watering and things like that. The group that organizes the watering effort has continued and has their same process going. In terms of the native areas, we’re a little bit overdue for a controlled burn, “

[note: this is incorrect. The garden has been burned annually for 20 years, always managed by Mr Leki, who has the proper training and certification to manage the controlled burn. and gets the permits, trains the volunteer support crew, and completes the burn, always in the early spring. In August, the garden is not “a little bit overdue for a controlled burn” when all the flowers are in bloom. Controlled burns are conducted early in spring, before growth, or, alternatively, late in the fall. One thing is certain, is that the Principal is winging it and seems overconfident about his ability to manage Waters Garden. This is not his field of expertise.]

... more from Principal Rutkowski: “which is one of the ways of maintaining it, so we’ll be reaching out to CFD to get permits to be able to do those things and have people help come take care of the native areas. It’s a little bit unique in a pure great prairie area because there’s a lot more trees around it so there’s some considerations like that that need to be taken into account as well...”

Jack Fisher:

“Who’s going to be directing that? Who’s going to be managing or directing that work? That’s my question.”

Principal Rutkowski:

“As the principal, I’ll be.. you know.. the overall project we’re looking at, I won’t probably be doing the actual burning myself, but we’ll have people that are qualified come and be able to do it.”

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“So, you are taking over the work that formerly Pete did, in the garden, managing this?”

Liz Chandran (unintelligible) (LSC member)

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“Sorry, Liz, I didn’t know....”

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“It’s really supposed to be public comment, so I’m going to wrap it up, so if anyone else has a comment.. they can make a comment.”

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“I just will jump in and say, yes, Mr. Fisher, the principal is responsible for the school grounds, so that’s how it’s going to be.”



Waters Elementary
4540 North Campbell Avenue
Chicago, IL 60625
Tel 773-534-5090 | Fax 773-534-5096

Principal Peter Rutkowski | Assistant Principal Judith Martin

Tuesday, Aug 16, 2022

Pete Leki
2438 W. Berteau Ave.
Chicago, IL 60618

Re: Volunteer Services

Dear Mr. Leki,

We are very grateful for the service you have provided to Waters Elementary School.

After several discussions on how best to incorporate your role in the Waters Ecology Program for the upcoming school year, we are sorry that you were unable to accept our offers to transition as a Waters Elementary employee. As this is the case, the Waters Ecology Program will continue under a different model at the start of the school year.

If you are interested in volunteering at Waters in the future, you can do so by submitting your request to our clerk, Melissa Mendez, in accordance with the District's [Volunteer Policy](#). Should you need to come to the school for any reason, you must adhere to the school's visitor policies and call the main office to schedule an appointment. In accordance with our visitor policies, you may no longer enter the school building or come onto school grounds unless you call the school's main office to state the reason for your requested visit.

We also request that you change the name of the watersecology.org website in order to avoid any confusion in the school community about the ownership of the site. Please also return your keys to the main office at Waters by Friday, August 12.

Again, we thank you for your dedication and many contributions to Waters Elementary School and wish you the best in all of your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Peter Rutkowski
Principal
Waters Elementary School

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At 1,500 signatures, this petition is more likely to get picked up by local news!

ke you.



Petition details Comments Updates



Raise Your Voice for Waters Ecology

1,186 have signed. Let's get to 1,500!



At 1,500 signatures, this petition is more likely to get picked up by local news!



Gross Brendon signed this petition



Jerry Jaecks signed 6 hours ago



Douglas Pettay signed 15 hours ago



Gross Brendon started this petition to Waters School Principal Mr. Rutkowski and 1 other

Sign this petition

Petition text with over 1,100 signatures

We are deeply concerned about developments in the structuring and funding of the Waters Ecology program and garden. For over 25 years, students at Waters School have been able to participate in this unique program that has engaged teachers, parents, and the wider community in teaching them about nature and the environment.

With looming environmental crises threatening our childrens' future, this education is more important now than ever before.

There is a danger that, in the upcoming school year, Waters Ecology program founder and director Mr. Leki will no longer be a part of this program. We believe that allowing this to happen would be a grave mistake that would be detrimental to the future of the ecology program and the garden.

We ask therefore that Principal Rutkowski and the Local School Council continue negotiations with Mr. Leki and an outside mediator to allow for the ecology program to proceed with Mr. Leki this school year, and to seek a solution that will ensure continuity and certainty in the future of both the ecology program and community garden.

This petition is linked on the WatersEcology.org website.

There are over 1,100 signatures plus the 70+ comments which are included in the following pages.

PETITION COMMENTS

Name	Comment
Andrea Dennis	"Programs like this and educators like Mr. Lewki deserve full funding."
Jeremy Atherton	"The ecology program and garden under Mr Leki's stewardship have been an amazing part of my son's experiences at Waters so far. We would be heartbroken to see Mr Leki pushed aside."
Remza Theis	"To really understand reason for support, watch Waters Ecology Film Project May 2021 https://www.watersecology.org/ Will explain how important this is today and for all generations"
Penelope Bernstein	"Such an important program and Pete Leki has been the visionary behind it"
Eric Peyer	"Everyone likes to talk about treating people with respect and dignity. But when it comes down to it people are flawed and all the talk is means for distraction. We must judge the Principal and LSC based on their actions and not their words. What has been done to Mr. Leki from my perspective is hurtful, backhanded and unfair. When you walk around this neighborhood and the school grounds you can see the efforts and influence of Mr. Leki and all those who donate weekends and weeknights to support Mr. Leki's vision. Compensation must to be provided from the funds that parents graciously donated to fully restore the program. Also, to think that anyone is going to fill Mr. Leki's shoes with a CPS position is a complete joke. When Mr. Leki decides to step back from the role the gardens will never be the same. That's just the way it is."
Richard Hudson	"Pete Leki is one of the most important parts of what makes Waters stand out as an excellent school. His impact is hard to quantify but nevertheless quite apparent to those who pay attention. The best way to appreciate nature is to experience it; this is far better than reading about it or watching videos. it is important to realize that nature is not some distant thing that is someplace else such as in the Amazon rainforest and the African savanna, but that it is also something in our back yards, our City and County parks, and, especially, patches of restored prairie and woodland.Pete is not just a great teacher, he is a great naturalist. This knowledge is not easy to obtain; it accumulates with experience and observation. For example, I have enjoyed learning about native plants, edible nature, and roly-pollies from him. He knows much more than me despite my Ph.D. in Biology.To teach students about nature where it is takes effort. Outdoor field trips require a great deal of planning and supervision. This pre"
Julie Moore	"Mr Leki IS the ecology program. His expertise, enthusiasm, and vision is unmatched. Please don't allow yourself to think that this nationally lauded program would ever be as good without Mr Leki at the helm."
Kendra Stern	"The gardens will not be the same without Mr.Leki's constant attention and support. Community involvement may disappear as well. Please honor Mr. Leki's years of devotion to and development of the gardens and ecology program by continuing negotiations with him for a solution both sides can be satisfied with."
Huu Nguyen	"... bc Waters garden & specifically, Mr. Pete Leki is an inspiration"

"Budgetary decisions are difficult for principals and LSCs in a resource constrained system, but this isn't just a choice for a single year, a single staff member or a single program. The physical, cultural and social infrastructure that the Waters Garden embodies is a unique treasure that the city, the school district, and the officials with the most direct control over stewarding the garden---namely the Waters principal and the Waters Local School Council---should be doing their utmost to preserve (and provide the conditions for it to be replicated elsewhere.) A garden this beloved in the neighborhood and beyond can surely generate the interest and resources to support its long-term future if the current responsible parties think creatively and collaboratively. I am not a part of the Waters community, but as a Chicagoan who has benefited from Pete Leki's expertise and has visited and learned about the Waters Garden, its fate matters greatly to me."

Cassie Creswell

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Nothing but respect for Pete Leki and how he has transformed what was barren asphalt into a thriving landscape. If anything he demonstrates CPS schools could all benefit from having teachers using their grounds for programming that both educates and gives back to the community. Give the man a raise and some more institutional respect for Pete's sake, pun intended."

Carter O'Brien

"I'm signing because it is vital to educate young generations about our environment, especially those growing up in the city, and this program is crucial in introducing the young to nature in tangible ways. It is a fantastic program, bringing learning out of the classrooms into real settings. It is worth it to be continued for the sake of young generations living on our planet."

marzena ziejka

"Mr Leki is a true leader, building a thriving and vibrant community for both people and our environment. This is an incredible asset to Waters and the Lincoln Square community and it would be a terrible mistake to destroy it. I hope for a solution that maintains Mr Leki's role at Waters with fair compensation for his leadership and supports continued growth of this program."

Autumn Fox

"Waters School should honor and compensate the years of talent and dedication Mr. Leki has devoted. The ecology program is more important than ever before."

Gail Smith

"The ecology program is one of the things we are most looking forward to when we join the Waters family this fall!"

Allison Wehrle

"The gardens and Mr. Leki matter. There was not a lot of community input opportunity in this decision. I object cuts in this area."

Heather Parker

"My kids are going to Waters this fall and we are excited about the garden and ecology program"

Logan Ayala

Kolleen Blume

"Mee the budget the same."

"The most important thing we can teach our children - other than to be empathetic humans - is to love, appreciate, and care for our natural environment. The ecology program is ESSENTIAL education."

ilana federman

"The Ecology Program at Waters School is an exemplary model of environmental education and community-building. This program that Pete Leki has developed over decades enables all Waters students at every grade level to explore their local ecosystems and grow food through regular field trips year-round. These opportunities to connect with nature foster a sense of wonder and a sense of place for students which are more important now than ever. The Waters Ecology Program needs to be replicated, not cut back. Please find a solution that preserves full funding for Pete Leki and the Ecology Program."

Susan Casey

John Casey "Post pandemic, our children need as much time as possible outside engaging with each other and the natural world. Technology cannot address social emotional needs like a solid ecology program."

Colleen McVeigh "This garden belongs not to the principal or the LSC or even CPS. The garden has been stewarded under the direction of Pete Leki by the school community and the largerCommunity. It is a jewel that belongs to the neighborhood."

Agnes Klar "We are in an ecology crisis world wide and in U.S. and water is a crucial part. Children are our future and need good training!"

Holly Hutto "As the mother of a Waters graduate I want to speak on behalf of Mr. Leki and the garden that he has put his heart and soul into creating. Asking Mr. Leki to do the same job he has been doing for a 30% pay cut is a slap in the face. I know there are those out there arguing that it is not a pay cut because he wasn't paid through CPS before, but that is an argument of semantics. However you want to phrase it, he is being asked to do the same job for less money. I do not think any person out there, if put in the same situation, would not feel undervalued and unappreciated. Many would seek employment elsewhere. We do not want to lose Mr. Leki. We want him to continue helping the garden and ecology program thrive and to be able to train someone to take over the reins when he chooses it is time. I know I speak for many families when I say that the garden was one of the main reasons why we chose to go to Waters. It is a school treasure, a community treasure, and a model for garden projects throughout the city. It is"

Renee Costanzo "As an environmental educator it is so important to me to see that children get access to outdoor education for a lifelong journey of exploring."

Nathan Hack "So sad and troubling. I don't fully understand the history here. But as I understand it, this program and Mr. Leki have been supported by the community for over 20 years independent of CPS funds. Now within a year or so of Waters via the local school council taking control of that community raised money, Mr. Leki's salary is being cut (by about 30%). It's hard to understand this as a budgetary issue when the community seemed willing to support him all these years. The community sees the value and beauty of the gardens and Mr. Leki's work for both the school and for something larger in the neighborhood. Why doesn't Waters, the LSC and the new principal?"

Jonit Bookheim "The Waters community garden is a gem for the neighborhood and also for the Earth. It's a model that everyone should follow to restore damage to our ecosystems. It's not an easy endeavor, that's why most people don't do it - they just plant grass. Pete Leki is the reason why this native plant garden has been successful and has attracted much and varied wildlife. Did you know the Waters garden is home to a rare white squirrel? Please, let's protect the garden. The community/school would be wise to increase funding and expand the reach of this amazing program, not cut back on it and risk losing it."

MEGAN VANDEHEY "I used to live by this garden and really enjoyed it as a community member. I hope the garden continues to thrive."

Donald wleklinski "Needs looking into."

Michael Pavilon "The Ecology program has been a unique educational program. Pleeeaaase keep it!!"

Luke Grace "This one of the most valuable type of learning that we need for the next generation!!! Please resolve this and get him back in the field with youths."

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Kimberly Kowan "Mr. Leki & his ecology program was a big reason for buying in this area."

Suzanne Davenport "Waters School ecology program, with a school community garden, engages students in unusually rich hands-on learning with art, science, observing, recording and writing to use the land around us well."
Judith Pollock "We need this ecology program now more than ever"

William Dahl "Without Pete Leki's tireless dedication to that garden, it will fold like a cheap tent. A good buddy of mine who's very active in its upkeep told me the other day he won't be participating next year if Pete is gone. Here's a better idea: let's get up a petition to get hack principal Peter Rutkowski fired instead--and jealous teacher Karen Soto can go too!"
Guy Nickson "Best thing about Waters School"
Jillian Baranggay "This is important to my son and the school"

Irene Flebbe "What Pete Leki has done at Waters and in the larger community, is an inspiration and for environmental educators everywhere. No one can fill his shoes. Pay the man for all he does!"
"My three grandchildren all graduated from Waters. I can name a hundred reasons why I was always pleased that they were privileged to go to this school. First on this list would certainly be the influence that Mr Lexi had on all three! Each one spoke of him over the years with great affection and admiration. They were all inspired by him to appreciate and care for our beautiful and fragile planet."

Carol Drehobl "The young will inherit the planet and, hopefully, they will be better stewards than previous generations."
Linda Burke "Waters' garden NEEDS Leiki!"
Katylyn Frew "I just read the Block Club Chicago article and I find it shocking and incredibly offensive that some Waters teachers would begrudge the 80k salary of Mr. Leki, a program director with 31 years of experience. I am incredibly grateful to Mr. Leki for everything he has done for Waters and our community. I am especially grateful that he has inspired so many students and their families to care about ecology. We NEED committed environmentalists and leaders in CPS such as Mr. Leki, and we need to pay them what they are worth."

Ritamari Bramble "For years I've been in awe of Pete Leki and what he has been able to accomplish at Waters and elsewhere, and how he has given absolutely unique opportunities to his students. I always wished my son could have attended Waters and had an experience no other school offers. It was deep knowledge and love that made this possible. It takes someone very special to dedicate themselves to this work - it will not be easy to find a worthy replacement. For the years and skills given, the (free to CPS) salary was a rare bargain."

Robyn Flakne "This garden and Mr. Leki's incredible stewardship make me proud to send my children to Waters. We must do what we can to keep our most dedicated community members and leaders. Mr. Leki has gone above and beyond to make learning about our earth come alive for so many children and community members."

Lindsay Read Feinberg "Was a student from waters. Loved the class, stories, and the songs Mr. Leki taught us!"

Roberto Hernandez "Mr. Leki is what made my elementary school experience one of a kind. More programs like this should exist for all future generations. Help keep this amazing program in Waters!"

Yasmín Hernandez andrea cohen-agrimont "He is a ecological mentor for the entire community!"

Marnie Ware "This is an absolute outrage. Clearly this principal and whoever contributed to this astonishingly bad, backward and hurtful decision is unaware that the things Pete has been teaching for 30 YEARS are not optional, but essential; To our very future. And HE started doing this when NOBODY was even thinking about it because they were too busy amassing their beanie babies collections and watching the X-files in the 90's. When I think about the countless children, adults, flora, fauna and bacteria that have benefited from Pete's loving and knowledgable lessons."

Holly Greenberg "Teaching ecology and our connection to the natural environment is paramount to our survival on the planet."

Dan Lucchesi "Why are there people who always do the worst things....."
"The Waters Elementary school and community garden is inevitably linked to the sustainability of this CPS public school. No steward, no garden, a lose/lose for the students. CPS is not sympathetic to parents' struggles to balance the pressures of organize competitive sports with science, art, and nature. The science supports the need for city dwellers to access nature for their mental health and well being.
<https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/07/22/how-nature-changes-the-brain/?referringSource=articleShare>"

Beth Genet "This program has enhanced the surrounding neighborhood. It is inspiring, especially in times like these. You are not only helping the future children that attend Waters, but also the surrounding neighborhood."

Colleen Blackburn "It is important to guard this important environmental exposure for children at Waters and perhaps all over the city."

Barbara Cooper "My children were Waters students my daughter just graduated this year my son graduated 3 years ago, the ecology program is part of waters, is part of the community. Mr Leki has done so much for the school and for the community, is hard to imagine the new generations without him and his program."

Martha Fragoso "The program Mr Leki developed is a national model, making him something of a national hero. He's worth more than he's asking for, I'm sure of it!"

drew thomas "I'm a 1973 graduate of Fenger High School (Chicago far SouthSide). We had an ecology program - one of Chicago's first. I learned more in ecology club than I did in any other classes and I graduated 17 out of 1000 students. I have known Pete for over 10 years and I'm happy to be part of the community garden at Waters school. I had been the steward of the Sheridan Road triangle Garden for over 20 years before I moved to Water's neighborhood. I find solace, peace and community in the Garden. Ya can't get this from textbooks Mr Principal and Board Members! We are facing a global food crisis. Community and individual gardens are a solution. BigAgra, like BigPharma, have agendas— we have solutions. I find the position of the principal and board reprehensible as well as scandalous. If you succeed in your actions, the students will eventually see the light. And be then it may be too late."

Tom Kucinski "Waters School garden is a neighborhood refuge. Most of all, Mr. Leki is treasure who cannot be replaced."

Judith Raddue "I worked at the Chicago Academy of Sciences when the garden started with Pete Leki and am amazed at his continued efforts to bring nature to the young folks of the neighborhood. He is a fantastic educator and garden steward."

Rafael Rosa

Don Parker
Janis Bates
Kristen Althoff
Paul Roots
John Campbell
deb doetzer
Kathleen Belmares
Justine Woen
Michael Klonsky
christina ranvik
Robert Scheffler

"Pete Leki is a treasure. He has improved the community immeasurably through his ceaseless conservation and education efforts at Waters School and beyond. The Waters Garden that he has catalyzed and fostered is a truly special place and a special human community. No policy can create that — people with community support do that. It's insane to throw out something that's obviously still working magic and touching lives just to have more bureaucratic control. Also, the notion that Pete should get a cut in pay to stay in line with what other teachers are making is ridiculous — given that the community is apparently privately funding his salary, this time the "free market" is actually valuing ecological stewardship. What he does is above and beyond. Makes sense to me."

"I agree it is important"

"Pete's presence and positive impact extends far beyond this small plot of land at Waters. I have nothing but respect for the hard work and care he puts into ensuring our community has spaces that aren't stripped to their bare bones, that the birds and pollinators have food and refuge, and that future generations can learn about the importance of these things and carry them on. We should be adding MORE educators to positions like this, not removing them."

"Pete Leki has built an incredible garden and community at Waters, and I am in disbelief that he has been fired. My wife and I had considered getting our son to go to Waters once he is of age, desire the fact that it would be far out of our way. There is simply no other program in Chicago that comes close to what Pete has achieved, and the benefit to children is incalculable. Please reinstate Pete and the full ecology program!!"

"Pete is a staple of our neighborhood school. He made us welcome as new transplants to the neighborhood, got us involved in community supported agriculture, and shared his songs with me to teach my students. I still trwch then, even now that I'm in Michigan."

"Both my sons attended Waters and Pete Leki was also a cherished neighbor. His knowledge of ecology is a bright light at CPS. People are buying million dollar homes to attend Waters because of Pete and his teaching. I was pushed out of the neighborhood because of the brutality of capitalism disguised as "change". Please do not do this to Pete."

"It's beyond words what the garden and Mr. Leki do for the community and the kids. It would be a tragedy to see what they have built over the years end."

"Ecology program at Waters was one of the most important reasons why I sent my son to Waters. Mr. Leki is not only an educator but also a friend to the community and a protector of nature."

"Pete Leki is a brilliant educator and one of the reasons Waters School has had success in attracting parents and students to the school for the past 25 years. He needs to be rehired and given a raise."

"Deeply appreciate all Pete Leki has done for Waters, for the neighborhood, for the river and community. He is an amazing person and has made a positive difference in countless lives and showed so many of us how to live life more mindfully."

"Pete Leki understands the importance of community, education and environmentalism. He needs to be encouraged and supported because we all benefit from his knowledge and commitment."

Rachel Stempel
mio navarro

"Ask the children about Mr. Leki ?? They are the ones who will be missing his guidance most!"

"Mr. Leki is the heart and soul of Waters."

"Pete Leki had the vision for a community garden/ecology learning environment when that space was barren asphalt. He has lead the ecology program for years affecting the lives of students in the most positive way. The CPS is not being respectful for all Mr Leki's vision, commitment and hard work. Work it out!"

Robert Sutton

Grace Jeong

"His hard work and dedication needs to be recognized. We need more community members like him!!!"

"I worked with Mr. Leki while serving as an environmental educator. Mr. Leki and his students participated in my non-profit's education programming for years. He has a passion and knack for connecting students' experiences in nature to science, the arts, language arts and more. It is heartbreaking to think about him not being part of the Waters team and continuing his legacy at the school."

Nicole Machuca

"I believe the Waters ecology program started with Mr. Leki's vision of bringing community together for all to benefit. It only makes sense to me that he be allowed to continue to to lead this program."

Bob Thom

Principal Rutkowski,

July 22, 2022

Although I have contacted the Ward office and the local Green Council, I have delayed in writing to you concerning the matter of the community garden which sits on the Chicago Public School system's property at Waters Elementary School, and its related staffing and programming. I had hoped you would respond positively to input from the school and surrounding community. However, your recent community communication of July 20, 2022, has influenced me to weigh in. As a National Board Certified teacher with an MA in Curriculum and Instruction, University of Illinois certified Master Naturalist, and longtime community member, I write to you today to express my utter dismay at the news of the firing of Pete Leki. I realize that you may choose not to read further, but I urge you to at least consider the opinions of a community member, parent, volunteer, and property owner who has lived in this neighborhood for 30+ years. In addition, as a master naturalist and formal educator of 30+ years, I would like to offer for your consideration information which you may not have yet taken.

Community Development

Waters Elementary has not always been a destination school for upper middle class parents. The neighborhood in which Waters sits was once home to drug dealers and active violence. As a woman, I avoided walking through the area after dark going to and from locations on Lawrence Avenue. It was not a safe area. At one point, after several CAPS meetings, neighbors held a peace march starting at Waters in the early aughts. Thus, when I was looking for a neighborhood school in which to enroll my children a few decades ago, while the small garden on the property amidst the sea of asphalt was a positive, the neighborhood, poor condition of the school as well as the lack of vision by the administration outweighed the green space. Instead, I enrolled both my children, when of age, at Ravenswood Elementary School where I was a founding member of Friends of Ravenswood. Although I chose to enroll my children in a neighborhood school, I want you to understand that at that time, parents of means in the community chose private or magnet schools for their children, not neighborhood schools like Waters or Ravenswood.

Simultaneously, Pete Leki was engaged in working with community members and parents to remove the vast sea of asphalt and to convert part of the area surrounding the school into a teaching garden. The task was a labor of love and perseverance that changed the perception and destiny of Waters. It was Mr. Leki's extended efforts that drew the attention of forward-thinking parents in the neighborhood and who began enrolling their children in order to take advantage of the ecology program then in its infancy. Parents of Waters founded a parent's group to raise money for the school and to lobby for infrastructure improvements from the Chicago Board of Education. Parents were wildly successful

obtaining not only additions to the school, but installation of a swale to help control flood waters. These improvements also benefitted the surrounding neighborhood. I am sure I don't need to explain to you the mechanics of gentrification. But I will emphasize that improvements in the Waters Elementary campus, largely spurred and maintained by Mr. Leki's tireless efforts, led to an increase in parent interest, improved quality of life for residents within the school's boundaries, and a consequent rise in property values around the school.

I do not place much stock, as it were, in property values, but I will say that the involvement of the community grew along with the garden. Regular garden workdays and nights brought people out which in turn led to less crime and violence in the neighborhood. Community cohesion is one of the legacies of

Mr. Leki's work in the garden. I argue that the transformation would not have occurred without Pete Leki at the center.

Education

Mr. Leki's program is an exemplary environmental education program. Environmental education is extremely beneficial to students' academic, mental and physical development. In case you are not aware of the vast amount of research that has been conducted in the last two decades, here is a short summary of research I have compiled:

Environmental Education Benefits Students by...

- Improving Academic Achievement. EE improves test scores by providing students with engaging lessons about the natural world that can be applied to all subject areas and grades.
- Breaking the Indoor Habit. EE offers an antidote to the plugged-in lives of today's generation, which is the first to grow up indoors. Children who experience school grounds or play areas with diverse natural settings are more physically active, more aware of good nutrition, more creative, and more civil to one another.
- Improving Student Health. EE gets students outdoors and active, and helps to address common health issues in children today, such as obesity, attention deficit disorder, and depression.
- Improving Focus and Cognition. EE increases the ability of students to focus and improves their cognitive abilities. Children with attention-deficit disorder also benefit from more exposure to nature—the greener a child's everyday environment, the more manageable are their symptoms.
- Supporting STEM. EE offers an engaging platform for gaining and applying knowledge and skills in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).
- Meeting 21st Century Needs. EE emphasizes skills essential for succeeding in tomorrow's world,

such as questioning, investigating, defining problems, analyzing, interpreting, reasoning, developing conclusions, and solving problems.

□ Cultivating Leadership Qualities. EE emphasizes cooperative learning with others, critical thinking and discussion, and a focus on action strategies with real-world applications.

For additional information and research links, please see:

<https://www.neefusa.org/resource/environmental-literacy-report-2015>

But the education and involvement of students, parents and community members was not the only result of Pete Leki's work. He hosted Chicago Public Schools compost cohorts, helping dozens of schools and hundreds of educators implement robust composting programs at their schools. Not only is implementation of a compost program an authentic STEM activity allowing students to make positive change in their community, but composting also keeps food waste out of landfills and thus assists in reducing greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. In addition to the compost cohorts, Pete Leki served as a mentor to teachers across the city hoping to start their own native and edible gardens.

Education about the natural world and stewardship that impacted students, parents, community members and fellow educators is another legacy of Mr. Leki's work at Waters.

Environment

A final legacy of Mr. Leki's achievement that I want to emphasize is the installation of the garden has reduced the effect of an urban heat island around the school and neighboring community. In addition, the deep-rooted plants that grow in the native areas contribute to carbon sequestration which helps to ameliorate the effects of climate change. Those same deep roots coupled with the deep roots of the stately oaks on the property mitigate flooding in the community. One can physically feel the difference in temperature and air quality as one walks west on Sunnyside Avenue past the campus. That transformation, too, is a legacy of Pete Leki's work at Waters.

I read your recent note with dismay. I do not agree with the harmful decision-making process in which you have engaged regarding Mr. Leki, the school ecology program and community. Waters Elementary, the building and campus, do not belong to you nor to the current parents, some of whom obviously lack understanding of the benefits the garden bestows and has bestowed on the community. The building and the campus belong to the larger community, and, yes, to the taxpayers who fund the education system.

Additionally, the land in its current state must be stewarded to continue to provide the ecological

benefits I outlined above. Your current plan will in no way maintain the established ecosystem that has been rebuilt there from scratch. That ecosystem also belongs to the surrounding community, many of whom help steward it. The garden, properly stewarded and maintained, will play a big role in making their urban neighborhood livable in the face of the oncoming impacts of climate change. As you are new to the community and to Chicago, I could attempt to interpret your decisions as those of one who does not understand the full picture. I hope that lack of understanding is the case rather than that your decision is based on a punitive mindset.

Appreciatively,
Colleen M. McVeigh, M.A., NBCT
Urban Conservation Educator
she/hers

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**CPS Board Meeting Presentation
August 2022**

UCHICAGO Charter School

**DONOGHUE CAMPUS
NORTH KENWOOD/OAKLAND CAMPUS
WOODLAWN CAMPUS**

**The UChicago Charter School's 10+ Year History
with "Greening" the Woodlawn Community**

ABOUT THE

UChicago Charter School

The UChicago Charter School has served students on the mid-South Side since 1998. With 3 campuses in Woodlawn, North Kenwood/Oakland, and Bronzeville, the UChicago Charter School serves 1,500 students in grades Pre-K to 12. We are a neighborhood boundary school and the majority of students reside in the 6 neighborhoods closest to our campuses. **The UChicago Charter School is seeking a 5-year renewal**, for a contract from 2023 to 2028. We filed our application on July 29, 2022 with the CPS Office of Innovation & Incubation.





We are presenting at the August 2022 CPS Board of Directors Meeting to share how the UChicago Charter School has partnered with the Woodlawn community and contributed to the “greening” of the Woodlawn community over the past 10 years.

The UChicago Charter School has involved over 650 students, 30 community members, and countless neighbors and passersby in beautifying neighborhood spaces around our former and new Woodlawn Campus buildings. We have worked with community members, students, families, and staff to learn how to grow the food we eat, offer free produce, and improve our environment – from pollinator projects to a green roof – to create cleaner air for everyone.

The UChicago Charter School's "Green Work"

Our "green work" in Woodlawn has evolved through three specific projects:



Gerber's Garden (2010-2020)

Land located on 64th Street between our "old" and "new" Woodlawn Campus buildings, supported by the South East Chicago Commission's Neighborhood Enhancement Grant



Pollinator Project (2019-present)

Funded by the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, which awarded the Woodlawn Campus a grant to install pollinator habitats on campus grounds



Green Roof of Woodlawn Campus (2018-present)

Rooftop space for outdoor learning and community use

Early 2010s

Mr. Gerber worked with students and local gardeners to develop a city lot on 64th Street into a garden.



Students in the middle school planted and harvested in their science classes, and a perennial favorite has been the strawberry patch and raspberry briars



High school members of the Urban Gardening Internship have established, designed, and maintained pollinator plantings and other perennial ornamental gardens around UCW's main entrance.



2017

With the support of Big Green, the 64th Street Community Garden incorporated more raised beds to provide safe edible gardening for students.



2019

The 64th Street Garden expanded to include U-Pick vegetable beds to welcome neighbors to the space, as well as pollinator perennials to support local insects and birds.

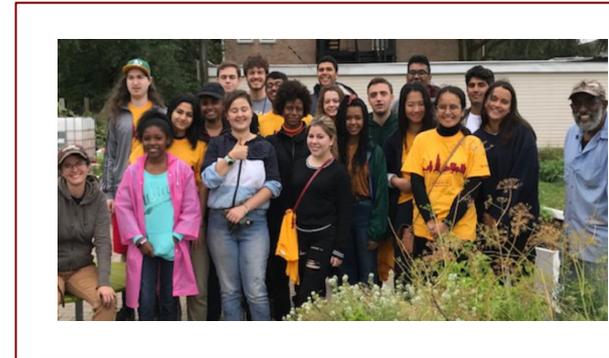
History of the UChicago Charter School's Gerber's Garden and the Pollinator Project

GERBER'S GARDEN

Staff Help Create Sustainability Garden for Community Use

In 2019, a group of UChicago Charter School teachers and local community members created a community garden called the 64th Street Sustainability Garden, which is a project of Gerber's Garden supported by the South East Chicago Commission's Neighborhood Enhancement Grant. This community garden provided residents near the campus with access to community garden plots and free produce.

Located across the street from the UChicago Charter Woodlawn (UCW) Campus, the 64th Street Sustainability Garden has connected about **20** UChicago Charter families, **30** local community members, and over **500** UChicago Charter students.





“The most I appreciated being in the garden was to see a seed grown to food for people to enjoy and all of the beautiful flowers – and, I love the fact that the garden was available to the community so they was able to plant and enjoy the garden as well.”

–Nicole Edwards, parent and member of the UChicago Charter Woodlawn Garden Team

POLLINATOR PROJECT

Woodlawn Community Convenes for Pollinator Planting Days

In 2019, a group of UChicago Charter School teachers and local community members created a community garden called the 64th Street Sustainability Garden, which is a project of Gerber's Garden supported by the South East Chicago Commission's Neighborhood Enhancement Grant. This community garden provided residents near the campus with access to community garden plots and free produce.

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POLLINATOR PROJECT

The Pollinator Gardens Foster Partnerships



South Side YMCA campers explore plants with the PAL Program.

SUPPORT ILLINOIS POLLINATORS!



- Plant native pollinator plants like those labeled in this garden
- Set your lawn mower to a higher level to leave flowers for pollinators that are active early in the season
- Use chemicals sparingly and look for less toxic options
- Provide bare patches of soil for ground-nesting bees
- Leave dead plant materials out over winter

 budburst.org
beespotter.org



UChicago students support educational media.



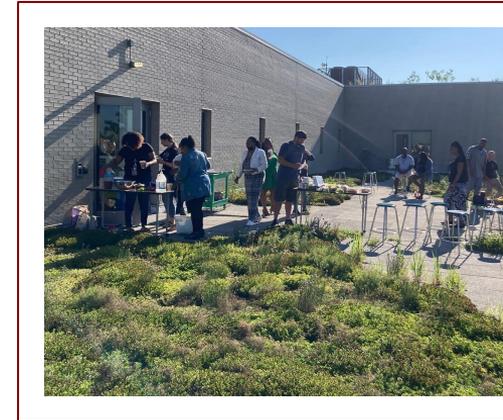
High schoolers volunteer at the Hyde Park Farmer's Market.

GREEN ROOF OF WOODLAWN CAMPUS

UChicago Charter to Open Green Roof for Community Use

The UChicago Charter Woodlawn (UCW) Green Roof is the campus' new work in progress to support student learning and the local community. The new Woodlawn Campus building was designed to have a green roof that could function as an outdoor classroom and as a local community space. In 2022, UCW received funding to outfit the space accordingly. A community member also plans to paint a mural in the space.

Thanks to the UCW Urban Garden Internship developed by a UCW staff member, several students have already planted fruits and vegetables, fruits in the garden on the UCW Green Roof – and gained a new passion for gardening! This new garden project is sure to once again engage community members as the garden grows.



Thank you!

Learn more about our garden program here!

SunSparkler
Sedum



Jaden's Speaker Notes

- Hi, my name is Jaden Bonds, and I am a seventh grader at UChicago Charter School. I'm here today to voice my support of the UChicago Charter School. We are asking you to renew the UChicago Charter School for another 5 years.
- I joined Garden Club last year because I wanted to plant plants. My favorite memory from the year was planting in the Tower Garden. It's an indoor garden that holds plants. We planted radishes, zucchini, and other food plants. It was hard work taking care of the Tower Garden! I moved a lot of water to keep the plants alive, but it was worth it because you're supposed to care for your plants.
- I also spent some time in our old community garden, Gerber's garden. We went to that garden last year to pick the last herbs of the season for Thanksgiving cooking, and we made herb kits for our teachers. I took some herbs like thyme to my dad, because he likes to cook. We also transplanted strawberries up to the green roof so we could start our food garden up there.
- I enjoyed spending time on the Green Roof last year too. I liked seeing the plants up there and making smoothies. I am excited for the Green Roof to be used more for classes and events this year. In the future, I want to learn how to take care of the plants that are living up there. I would like to go to the roof with classes, like my reading class. I like spending time outside so I can breathe fresh air.
- Thank you very much for listening to our team. We are asking the board to renew the UChicago Charter School's charter for another five years, and we appreciate your time and consideration!

Richard's Speaker Notes

- Hello, my name is Richard Dobbins, and I am a horticulturalist and the founder of the business South Side Roots. I'm here today to voice my support of the UChicago Charter School. We are asking you to renew the UChicago Charter School for another 5 years.
- I am a Navy veteran, I have worked with the Chicago Botanic Garden for several years, I am a resident of Bronzeville, and my interest is in how horticulture can support our communities of color. I have been working with UChicago Charter School for the past three years, and in that time, I have designed and maintained pollinator projects and facilitated our urban gardening internship as a mentor and guiding expert.
- As I think about what's going on in our nation, with shortages of water and the impact on farming, I know that even in Chicago, we need to be thinking about this and preparing our students for the environmental sustainability issues and improving the outcome of our urban inner cities by way of horticulture.
- I have worked directly with five high school interns and close to 50 students and community members during planting days, and I have interacted with countless students and neighbors during my ongoing stewardship of our gardens. I have worked with other CPS schools in the past, like Jackie Robinson Elementary, but I have recently focused my work around UChicago Charter School because the youngsters seem so enthusiastic and have a lot of thinking and ideas that we have been able to implement. A lot of students were very engaged and seemed to be very interested, because we were allowing them to think, share their thoughts, and envision the possibilities for the garden in and around the school and on the rooftop. A lot of those ideas were implemented in the designs and selections by the team.
- I particularly loved the time that students were presenting their design ideas and one intern envisioned seating that would make the space more welcoming. She dreamed it, and we were able to get a grant to make her vision possible. Now that spot is a place to rest and appreciate the green spaces around the school!
- I look forward to continued partnership with the UChicago Charter School, which is why I'm here today to ask the board to renew their charter for another five years. Thank you for your consideration.

Kate's Speaker Notes

- Hello, my name is Kate Carter, and I am a garden coordinator at the University of Chicago Charter School. I'm here with a team of three people who will share about the positive impact of the garden program in our school community. Jaden Bonds and Richard Dobbins will also be speaking.
- UChicago Charter School has been serving students on Chicago's south side for nearly 25 years, since July 1, 1998. UChicago Charter operates 3 campuses in Woodlawn, North Kenwood Oakland and Bronzeville and serves 1,500 students in grades Pre-K to 12. We are a neighborhood boundary school and the majority our students live in these neighborhoods. The UChicago Charter School is seeking a 5-year renewal this year, for a contract from 2023 to 2028. We filed our application on July 29, 2022 with the CPS Office of Innovation & Incubation.
- We are here today to share how UChicago Charter School has partnered with the Woodlawn community and contributed to the "greening" of the area over the past decade-plus. UChicago Charter School has involved over 650 students, 100 community members and countless neighbors and passersby in beautifying neighborhood spaces around both our old and new Woodlawn campuses. We have partnered with community members, students, families and staff to learn how to grow the food we eat, offered free u-pick produce, and shown how to improve our environment, from pollinator projects to a sustainable green roof.
- Staff members and community gardeners collaborated to create a school and neighborhood garden in 2010 near our old Woodlawn campus. This garden supported science projects, nutrition and botany curricula, food packages to families, and garden plots for our neighbors.
- In 2019, we began developing pollinator-friendly gardens. Since then, with the support of six grants, five paid high school internships, and dozens of volunteers, we have planted around 4,000 square feet of pollinator habitats outside our old community garden, around our new Woodlawn campus, and on our building's green roof. We are excited about the possibilities that the garden provides for conversation and collaboration within and outside UChicago Charter School's walls. We hope you will help us continue to grow! Thank you.



Taking care of the Tower Garden in our middle school.



Watching high school interns present about their Green Roof work.



Maintaining our new pollinator gardens.



Preparing U-Pick vegetable and herb beds for neighbors in 2019.



Posing after planting 3,000 square feet of pollinator habitat on June 19, 2021.



Garden intern Sabirah describes her seating design to partners and supporters.



Main entrance at Woodlawn Campus in August, 2020 and in August, 2022



Students harvesting in the community garden in 2019.



Outdoor garden events helped us bring our school community together during the 2020-2021 school year.

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Ben Helphand. I am the Executive Director of NeighborSpace, Chicago's nonprofit land trust for community managed open spaces. My organization protects more than 130 gardens, farms and natural areas encompassing 32 acres across the City of Chicago on behalf of dedicated neighbors and community groups. I am moved to write to you today to express my surprise and concern about the recent removal of Pete Leki from his role at the Waters Elementary School garden.

I have known Pete for 15 years through his work at the Waters garden as well as the NeighborSpace protected Riverbank Neighbors project, a community riparian habitat restoration project along the river between Montrose and Berteau. While I can't speak to the leadership dynamics at the school or speculate on politics I can speak to the impact the garden and Pete's work has had on the neighborhood and the City.

The Waters Garden as well as the Riverbank Neighbors project are beautiful spaces enjoyed by thousands of residents for community events, lifecycle celebrations, recreation and quiet contemplation. I have personally taken my family there every year during the Jewish New Year for a garden walk and riverside ritual. I have also seen the gardens in action as an educational spaces. Several years ago NeighborSpace partnered with the garden for a compost education series, which brought dozens to the Waters Garden for a hands on compost demonstration. We couldn't have asked for a more perfect site. Weaving together the children's vegetable beds, native plantings, berry patches, and oaks of various sizes, the Waters Garden is one of those unique places that, while small, looms large in one's imagination. It is a place that grows many vegetables, fruits and flowers, but even more so it grows memories, and these memories stitch together the community and make it stronger and more resilient.

Waters Garden, Riverbank Neighbors and other similar spaces across the city, increase social cohesion and help build community. They are able to achieve this outcome because they are community-managed. These spaces are not tended by a landscape crew, rather, they are stewarded by the members of the community itself. This governance structure allows residents to get deeply involved in their environment, take on leadership roles and connect with neighbors in ways that build bonds that last a lifetime. For young people in particular community managed open spaces provide accessible venues where they can create and grow together.

Behind every community managed garden there are local leaders that put their time, resources and vision into these spaces. They work with neighbors to keep the spaces tended and vibrant. For the Waters Garden Pete Leki has been one of those leaders. For several decades he has poured himself into that garden, helping it slowly become what it is today; a beacon for the neighborhood, the place you go to celebrate, the place you go to be alone, the place you go to connect with friends, the place you go to learn, the place you go to grow, the place you go to forage. My fear is that the abrupt removal of Pete from the Waters Garden will be like the abrupt removal of one of its century-old oak trees. It will disrupt the fragile garden and

community ecosystem and upend what makes the Waters Garden so inviting. This seems to me an unnecessary self-inflicted wound on the community. I hope CPS finds a way to bring Pete back to the garden.

Sincerely,

Ben Helphand
Executive Director
NeighborSpace