

Frequently Asked Questions About Noble, Unions, and ChiACTS

Did Noble start with a union?

No. While many unions do excellent work, the founders of Noble, Michael and Tonya Milkie, both worked in schools subject to the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) contract. They believed the restrictions in this contract hindered their school's ability to serve students well. Michael and Tonya believed that Noble would be most successful without the regulations of a union contract. They wanted to make sure they could always flexibly serve students and make sure that the best teachers would be teaching Noble students.

Does Noble have a union now?

No, it does not. However, about 10% of Noble's 1200+ employees recently signed an open letter with a goal of joining ChiACTS. ChiACTS is a teachers' union closely linked to the Chicago Teachers Union. Other Noble teachers and staff members feel strongly that Noble is better without a union.

Who is ChiACTS?

If ChiACTS were to represent Noble teachers, they would be the exclusive, third-party representative bargaining on behalf of Noble teachers and staff. ChiACTS has been actively working to unionize charter schools throughout Chicago for nearly a decade. ChiACTS works closely with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU). For example, CTU representatives negotiate contracts and handle grievances for ChiACTS members.

In the past several years, CTU and ChiACTS have opposed fair funding for charter school students and co-sponsored a cap on new charter schools in Chicago. The CTU opposed the opening of Noble's Mansueto, Speer, and Noble Academy campuses. Staff at two of the charter schools in Chicago represented by ChiACTS have authorized a strike in the past year.

Why does ChiACTS want to represent Noble?

ChiACTS is a part of a national effort by teachers unions to unionize charter schools to make them operate more like the local district schools.

Do all Noble teachers want to join ChiACTS?

No. We believe all Noble teachers and staff want to make things better for their students. We respect the right of all our teachers to make their own decision about whether joining ChiACTS would be good for Noble. Some teachers and staff believe joining ChiACTS would be good for Noble. However, many other teachers and staff disagree, and they believe Noble is better without the ChiACTS union. Noble leadership is committed to always working directly with Noble teachers and staff to address any concerns they have and improve our school communities together.

What is the process from here?

When a union wants to represent a group of employees, it must first gather enough employee signatures. These signatures can be on paper petitions, “union authorization cards,” or by electronic means. If ChiACTS gathers enough signatures (at least 30% of non-supervisory employees), they can file a “*petition for representation*” with the National Labor Relations Board. The NLRB may then order a secret ballot election. An election could take place within 20-30 days of such an order.

What does this mean for my student?

We believe that a restrictive union contract like the one in CPS or other ChiACTS charter schools could unfortunately change many aspects of how teachers and staff may work and interact at our schools. We are concerned that this could make Noble less able to effectively serve students in the classroom. Noble has so far operated without these restrictions, and we believe that’s why the most effective teachers, resources, and support systems are always available for our students, even after they graduate from Noble and head to college. Additionally, staff at two of the charter schools in Chicago represented by ChiACTS have authorized a strike in the past year; even the possibility of a strike concerns us.

While we believe teachers must always continue to have a big voice in decision-making, we’re concerned about this culture of “us vs. them” at Noble. While Noble would always bargain in good faith, we believe that working directly with our teachers and staff to solve problems is the best way to improve Noble.

What can we do?

As a Noble parent, you have a right to respectfully express your opinion – either for or against Noble having the ChiACTS union– to other parents, or Noble staff. Remember that some teachers and staff support this, and some are against it. You have the same right to make a decision on your own. This is something that could impact your student's education, and you have a right to be heard. Whatever your belief is, we appreciate your support of Noble and of our teachers and staff.