



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!



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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."

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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

Bob Thom

"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."