COAL COALITION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERS

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
for the
General Election - November 3, 2026

The purpose of this candidate questionnaire is to ascertain each candidate's qualifications and preparedness for, and commitment to, participating as a member of the Chicago Board of Education and for President of the Board.

The Coalition of African American Leaders (COAL) encourages an informed community towards casting an informed vote. The goal is to seat a professional, qualified, independent and engaged school board, responsible to the community, that has a laser focus on providing the best K - 12 educational experience for all of the children of Chicago, regardless of family income or zip code; the high quality educational system our children deserve.

INSTRUCTIONS

Please complete and return this fillable pdf candidate questionnaire for the position of Chicago Board of Education member and president, responding to all questions. There are a few yes/no questions which include space to expound on your response. Once completed, please return via email to: publicpolicy@coalchicago.com. **This questionnaire should be returned no later than end of day on September 21, 2026.**

We welcome any query regarding this questionnaire or individual question(s) which will help you provide your best response. Please contact Education Committee co-chairs:

Dr. Kimberly Dulaney at 312.287.4571 / readme4000@aol.com
or
Principal Gerald Morrow at 773.593.5428 / gjmorrow86@gmail.com

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
General Election - November 3, 2026

Candidate Information

Name on Ballot: Jesus Ayala Jr.

School Board District: 7A

Home Address 2107 W 19th St., #2F
Chicago, IL 60608

Employer/Your Title Full-Time School Board Candidate & Part-Time MBA Candidate

Phone 773-556-6883 **Email** jesus@ayalajrforstudents.com

Candidate signature attesting to the truthfulness, accuracy, and authorship of this Questionnaire.

09/25/2026	Jesus Ayala Jr.	
Date	**Print**	**Signature**

[Please feel free to attach primary campaign literature, bio or vita]

Campaign Information

Campaign Manager N/A

Phone N/A **Email** N/A

Website https://www.ayalajrforstudents.com

a. Have you held or run for public office before, and if so, what office[s] with what results?

No. Although I did serve as a Local School Council Representative at Jones College Prep from 2016 to 2020

b. COMMUNITY. In what community roles do you currently serve? Or in what capacity have you served the community in the past? Have you been appointed to any public committees, commissions, task forces?

I've served in many communities across Chicago and with a focus on serving students. I have spent more than a decade serving Chicago students through roles with MetroSquash, One Million Degrees, and City Year Chicago at Gage Park High School, along with volunteer service with several education-focused organizations. Although I've served diverse communities, I call Pilsen home and the throughline is supporting students and families improve their socioeconomic status.

I have not been appointed to a public committees, commissions or task forces.

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
General Election - November 3, 2026

c. Please list your top three contributors who have donated $1,000 or more, and include the corresponding amounts as reported on your D-3 form (if applicable):

Contributor	Amount
SEIU IL Council PAC Fund	$15,000
Jesus Ayala Jr. (Self)	~$9,437.46
Common Ground Pac	$8,978

d. Who has endorsed you and what are your political/stakeholder alliances (if any)?

I have earned the endorsements of:
-SEIU Illinois State Council & SEIU Local 73
-Chicago Federation of Labor
-Common Ground Collective
-INCS Action PAC
-Urban Center

Candidate's Plans and Goals for the School Board

e. Why are you running for *this position*? What expertise do you bring to the board? What makes you the best candidate for *the School Board*?

I'm running to ensure every CPS student has access to the opportunities and support they need to succeed. As a CPS graduate and first-generation college student, I know firsthand the doors public education can open.

I bring over a decade of experience in education, from working directly with students to leading operations, and budgeting at organizations serving hundreds of students. My experience combines student-centered programming, executive leadership, and data-driven decision-making. I understand both what students need and what it takes to build sustainable organizations that deliver results.

f. Please describe your Educational agenda.

1. Improving Student Outcomes: Strengthen literacy, math, and college and career readiness through evidence-based investments and measurable accountability.

2. Democratizing Governance: Ensure students, families, educators, and communities have a meaningful voice in decisions affecting their schools.

3. Long-Term Financial Sustainability: Address structural budget challenges, advocate for equitable funding, and prioritize investments that directly benefit students.

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
General Election - November 3, 2026

ACCOUNTABILITY / TRANSPARENCY

1) We believe that it will be important for you to communicate with District constituents on a monthly basis. Communications should include, but not be limited to, updates to inform and receive feedback on upcoming CPS votes and initiatives, as well as progress monitoring. Will you commit to implementing some form of monthly communications for your constituents?

YES **NO** **(Please provide an example)**

I commit to monthly communications that provide updates on upcoming board decisions, solicit community feedback, and report on progress and accountability. There's no excuse for our board member to not communicate monthly.

I am assessing what is the best way to do this, but I am hoping to try community meetings scheduled after board meetings where we debrief the board meeting, and we can process information and results together.

2) What measures do you want to put in place to promote transparency in the school board system?

I'm committing to being present and transparent. I support publishing board materials well in advance of votes, making budget and performance data accessible, and creating meaningful opportunities for public input before decisions are made. I also support regular reporting on student outcomes and holding board members accountable for their attendance, engagement, and decisions.

Also, the level of transparency in my campaign's financing when compared to the other candidate is much higher.

3) What methods will you put in place to understand the interests / positions of your constituents, to ensure your Board votes align with your constituents, and not political funders or special interests? **(Please be specific)**

I will regularly attend LSC and community meetings, visit schools, and maintain open communication through monthly updates, surveys, and opportunities for public feedback before major votes. I am also figuring out how to best document this work and make it available to ensure the community understands where I'm spending my time.

I will also publicly explain my votes and how community input informed my decisions. My accountability will be to students and families, not political funders or special interests.

4) What measures do you suggest the school board implement to ensure that CPS is held accountable and is responsive and transparent to school stakeholders?

The board should require regular, publicly accessible reporting on student outcomes, budgets, and progress toward district goals. CPS should also establish clear timelines for responding to stakeholder concerns, strengthen LSC engagement, and ensure meaningful public input before major decisions are made.

Accountability requires both transparency and measurable follow-through. Where there is not enough being progress made, support and acountability need to be exercised.

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
General Election - November 3, 2026

5) Will you support a third-party independent audit of Chicago Public Schools? **YES** **NO**
(and why?)

I support an independent, third-party audit of CPS to strengthen financial transparency, identify operational inefficiencies, and ensure resources are being used effectively to support students. This audit is one piece of the puzzle as we have many professionals in the system that have great ideas. This also needs to be a truly independent audit.

6) Recognizing that parents of CPS students are a critical portion of your constituency, what will you do to build and nurture a relationship with parents in the District?

Aside from regularly attending LSC meetings, visiting schools, and creating accessible opportunities for parents to share feedback, I hope to meet parents that are less plugged into their schools. This means being flexible with office hours and office hour locations and having communication channels across platforms.

I'm committed to consistent, bilingual communication, listening to families before major decisions, and following up so parents know their voices are being heard.

BUDGET / FINANCE

7) In what ways should the school district engage Springfield for funding? In what ways will you engage external partners to assist with funding CPS initiatives?

I support working with Springfield to fully fund the Evidence-Based Funding formula, address pension funding inequities, and secure sustainable, long-term revenue for CPS. Chicago is a driving force for the state's economy, and our students cannot afford to continue being shortchanged.

I would also leverage relationships with nonprofits, foundations, universities, and businesses to expand student opportunities, particularly in academic support, enrichment, and college and career readiness. These partnerships should supplement, not replace, adequate public funding.

8) What are your ideas to address the School District's consistent $500-$700 million budget gap?

Addressing this structural deficit requires both responsible spending and sustainable revenue. I support an independent audit to identify operational efficiencies, greater budget transparency, and prioritizing resources that directly impact students. I would be supportive of progressive revenue streams that ask our wealthier residents to do more for our students.

We must also work with Springfield to fully fund the Evidence-Based Funding formula and address pension funding inequities. But, we cannot continue to cut services for students or continue asking homeowners to bear the full cost. CPS needs a transparent, multiyear financial strategy that protects classrooms while putting the district on a sustainable path.

9) How will you hold CPS accountable for ensuring equitable funding for all schools? And how should the Board / CPS prioritize to ensure funds are allocated where needed?

I support transparent, needs-based funding that prioritizes schools serving students with the greatest needs. The Board should regularly review school-level budgets, staffing, and student outcomes to identify inequities and ensure resources are reaching the students who need them most. As a Board, we need to reach a shared understanding about where the greatest opportunities are, build trust with each other, and prioritize equity in our decisions together.

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
General Election - November 3, 2026

10) What are your ideas for **funding** the mental health needs of students, faculty, and staff?

I support prioritizing funding for school-based mental health professionals, expanding partnerships with community mental health providers, and pursuing additional state and federal resources.

I've worked with students furthest from opportunity, and I know it can be an insurmountable task for them to learn under the wrong conditions. We should also invest in staff wellness as they are the ones driving theh impact, this includes trauma-informed practices, prioritizing schools with the greatest needs, and ensuring students and staff can access consistent, high-quality support.

EDUCATION / STUDENTS

11) Achievement Gap: The data show persistent disparities in measures of educational performance among subgroups of students, especially groups defined by socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity and gender. How do you plan to address/close the intransigent achievement gap for African American students?

I would prioritize equitable access to high-quality instruction, early literacy interventions, and targeted academic supports. We must also ensure accountability for implementing the Black Student Success Plan, with measurable goals and transparent reporting on student outcomes. Where progress isn't happening, we need to be curios, ready to respond, and provide the support, and/or accountability, to ensure we reach progress. Closing achievement gaps requires addressing disparities in resources and opportunities while engaging families, educators, and students in developing solutions. I would want to lend my experience to help but also want to elevate the voices of leaders and those with lived experiences.

12) Opportunity Gap: The disparities in providing access points and multiple pathways to position students for post-secondary success. How do you plan to address/close the opportunity gap for African American students?

As someone who has worked in expanding equitable access to our students, I would focus on expanding equitable access to college and career advising, dual-credit programs, internships, and career and technical education.

Having spent years helping students navigate post-secondary pathways, I recognize the importance of early exposure, individualized support, and removing financial barriers. I would also prioritize partnerships with colleges, employers, and community organizations to ensure African American students have access to meaningful opportunities for success beyond graduation. I want to work with community leaders, like my former MetroSquash CEO Janae Meyer, to ensure we have lived experience and expertise guiding our efforts.

13) What are your thoughts and/or ideas on **policies** to address the mental health needs of students, faculty, and staff?

I would prioritize expanding access to school-based mental health professionals, strengthening partnerships with community providers, and investing in preventative services. I also think we need to assess and ensure our reporting structures are properly flagging challenges and creating solutions when students and staff express concerns.

As mentioned, we also need to recognize the mental health needs of educators and staff by promoting manageable workloads, supportive working environments, and access to resources. Mental health is essential to creating safe, welcoming schools where everyone can thrive.

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
General Election - November 3, 2026

14) How will you work towards all schools providing recess and physical education equipment, healthy food offerings, and classes in the arts, shop, and technologies, as well as foreign languages?

I believe every CPS student deserves a well-rounded education, regardless of their school or neighborhood. I would work to identify gaps in access; we need an honest assessment for where our students have gaps in access. I would prioritize equitable funding, and expand community partnerships. Having spent over a decade in youth development, I know firsthand that athletics, the arts, and enrichment opportunities are essential to student success, not extras. I would also ask more of our nonprofit partners and include them in our assessment.

15) The elected representative school board legislation includes the establishment of a board-level *Black Student Achievement Committee*, to develop actionable strategies to close the achievement gap for Black students. What actions will you take to ensure that this committee is staffed appropriately to give it its best chance of achieving measurable improvements in the education of Black students, system-wide? And, importantly, will you commit to the African American community having a strong voice / autonomy in the selection of Black Student Achievement committee members? **YES** **NO** **(and why?)**

I would make sure the committee has the staff, data access, and resources necessary to move beyond recommendations and track measurable results. Illinois law specifically charges it with developing strategies, setting measurable goals, tracking key performance indicators, and publicly reporting progress. Where there are opportunities to collaborate, I would love the opportunity to elevate the voices of the African American residents in my district as well as my former students.

I also believe the African American community should have a strong voice in shaping the committee's membership. The law gives appointment authority to the Board President and requires diverse membership, but meaningful community participation should be built into that selection process. Having worked alongside students and families, I know how diverse the needs are, and we need to do better to ensure we are including different voices.

GOVERNANCE

16) What are your thoughts on the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Career and Technical Education (CTE), Computer Science (CS), and other emerging technologies in education for students, faculty, and staff?

New techonlogies always present great opportunities and potential harms. AI can enhance teaching, learning, and career readiness. I support expanding access to computer science and CTE programs while providing educators with the training and resources to use these tools effectively.

Rather than restricting innovation, CPS should establish clear safeguards around student privacy, academic integrity, and responsible AI use. Our goal should be to prepare students for a rapidly changing workforce while ensuring equitable access to these opportunities.

There are schools in my district that want to be national leaders in this space, we should find ways to encourage them, financing these efforts through corporate partnerships, and to ensure our students benefit from those efforts

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
General Election - November 3, 2026

17) Do you think the school board should have autonomy to override LSC decisions that are made at the local level? **YES** **NO** Please explain your answer with an example.

I believe Local School Councils should have meaningful authority and autonomy over decisions affecting their schools. These are caring adults volunteering their time with intimate insights about their schools. The Board should respect local decision-making and only intervene when necessary to address legal requirements, student safety, or significant equity concerns. Any intervention should be transparent, justified, and involve meaningful engagement with the school community.

18) LSCs are responsible for principal selection; should CPS be required to obtain LSC review to remove a principal? **YES** **NO** **(and why?)**

I believe LSCs should have a meaningful role in reviewing decisions to remove a principal, consistent with their authority in principal selection and evaluation. CPS should engage LSCs before making such decisions, except in urgent circumstances involving student safety or serious misconduct.

Transparency, due process, and community input should guide the process. There needs to be objective and thorough policies in place regardless to ensure good principals can continue doing good work.

19) What are your thoughts on establishing an independent review board for terminations within CPS?

An independent review board could strengthen transparency, fairness, and accountability in CPS personnel decisions.

I would support exploring a process that provides employees with meaningful opportunities to appeal terminations while respecting collective bargaining agreements, due process, and existing legal protections. I do, however, worry about additional costs and am not the most informed on how much of an issue this currently presents. I am also excited to learn more about this and what potential opportunities exist.

OPERATIONS / POLICY / PERFORMANCE

20) What is one challenge or area of growth you see within CPS? What are your solutions for addressing this challenge?

One significant challenge is the lack of trust and meaningful engagement between CPS leadership and school communities. We are coming out of decades of appointed leadership and decisions made without geunione community input. Too often, families, educators, and students feel excluded from decisions that directly affect them.

I believe we can address this through greater transparency, earlier community engagement, and stronger partnerships with Local School Councils. We must create a culture where community input meaningfully shapes decisions and leadership is accountable for results, and the Board should be making this work visible.

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
General Election - November 3, 2026

21) What are your thoughts on the financial and academic oversight of school choice, and do you believe guardrails should be put in place? If so, why?

I believe all publicly funded schools should be held to consistent standards of financial transparency, academic accountability, and student outcomes. School choice should not come at the expense of equitable access or the stability of neighborhood schools. I support guardrails that ensure responsible use of public funds, protect students and families, and provide meaningful oversight without limiting access to quality educational opportunities.

22) What are your thoughts on school closings and consolidation?

I oppose school closures as we've seen the harm and cost to this approach. We should work to strenghten schools. That said, CPS must develop a transparent, long-term strategy that prioritizes students and neighborhood stability. We should explore shared facilities, repurposing underutilized space, and additional community partnerships. We also have to get serious about funding equity for CPS. Any changes to our schools must involve meaningful community engagement and a clear plan to protect student outcomes.

23) What criteria should be used to identify which schools should be considered for closure/consolidation?

This question itself requires years of building trust and community engagement to answer. We've learned a great deal from past mistakes, and we should ensure that decisions are not made behind closed doors with spreadsheets and not community input. We have to consider community needs, resources, tradeoffs and have an equity framework to ensure the work is spread across all districts. These conversations have the real potential of harming our black and brown students the most, and it's important for Board members to recognize that if these conversations take place.

24) What existing CPS policies would you like to change, or what new policies would you like implement?

I would prioritize policies that strengthen transparency, community engagement, and accountability. This includes requiring meaningful public input before major Board decisions, strengthening the role of Local School Councils, and improving public reporting on student outcomes, school funding, and special education services.

There is no shortage of ideas from everyone I've spoken to, including school leaders who want to continue doing great things but the existing policies create challenges. I'm excited to figure out how we can create shared wins through policy changes on behalf of our students.

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
General Election - November 3, 2026

CHARTER SCHOOLS

25) Funding Equity: Chicago Public Schools provides funding to both district-operated and charter public schools. Do you support funding parity between charter public schools and district-operated schools? **YES** **NO** **(and why?)**

I support equitable funding for all students, regardless of the type of public school they attend, and this includes all the different types of schools we have in our district. Funding decisions should reflect student needs, including special education, English learner services, and other supports. Parity should mean comparable resources for comparable needs, while accounting for differences in school responsibilities, facilities, and services. Our priority must be ensuring every student has access to a quality education regardless of their school label.

26) Equitable Access to Resources: Do you believe funding for student support services should be allocated equitably to all students, regardless of whether they attend a district operated or charter school? Yes or No If a school accepts public funding for a student should it also be responsible for continuing to serve that student the entirety of the year? **YES** **NO**
(Please explain in detail.)

All students deserve equitable access to support services, regardless of whether they attend a district-operated or charter school or any other type of school.

Schools receiving public funding should be responsible for serving their students throughout the academic year, including providing appropriate supports. If students choose to transfer, we should better understand that decision and support the transition to ensure students don't lose progress. Funding and accountability must follow students, and no student should be left without necessary services.

27) Parent Choice and Educational Options: Well-to-do families have the resources to afford the type of education they want for their children. Many Black and Brown families who may be unable to afford private or parochial schools, choose charter schools because they believe those schools best meet the educational, social, emotional, or cultural needs of their children. What role do you believe charter schools should play within the Chicago Public Schools system, and how would you ensure families continue to have meaningful educational choices?

I believe families should have access to meaningful educational choices, regardless of income or neighborhood. I'm proud to have worked at nonprofit organizations that try to close this gap. Charter schools can play a role in meeting diverse student needs, and we should respect families who choose them. My priority is ensuring all publicly funded schools are held to consistent, clear standards of accountability, transparency, and student outcomes, while strengthening neighborhood schools so every family has access to quality educational opportunities.

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
General Election - November 3, 2026

28) Charter Renewal Stability: School board meetings can involve lengthy discussions on charter renewals. What are your thoughts on charter school renewals, including multi-year renewals?

I support a transparent, consistent, and evidence-based charter renewal process. Where charter schools are upholding their promises to our families, the renewal process should follow its guidelines and legal advice to renew. Where that is not happening, the Board should hold schools accountable.

Multi-year renewals can provide stability for students, families, and staff, provided schools demonstrate strong academic, financial, and operational accountability. Renewal decisions should prioritize student outcomes, incorporate community input, and include clear expectations for continued improvement. The Board should be building trust with charter schools to ensure there is a shared understanding of expectations and a follow-through on those expectations.

29) Accountability and Student Outcomes: Should charter schools and district-operated schools be evaluated using the same academic, financial, operational, and student-outcome standards?

YES **NO** Where might they differ?

Yes. Context matters, but at this time all publicly funded schools should be held to consistent standards. These standards should include academic performance, financial transparency, operational accountability, and student outcomes.

While recognizing differences in school models and student populations, oversight should be equitable, transparent, and focused on ensuring every student receives a quality education. Charter school students are public school students, and no student should be given unfair treatment in any direction.

30) Long-Term Vision: What is your vision for the relationship between Chicago Public Schools and public charter schools over the next five years, and how would your policies support improved outcomes for all Chicago public school students?

My vision is a CPS system where district-operated and charter schools are held to consistent standards of transparency, accountability, and student outcomes. A district where there is trust, understanding, collaboration, and a true effort to serve all our students void of the politics and adult problems. Over the next five years, I would prioritize stronger collaboration, equitable access to resources, and sharing effective practices across school models. I would work to be transparent, present, and do the work to build trust with all our schools, so that everyone understands what promises we're making and whether we're making good on that promse. Our focus should be on improving educational opportunities for every student while ensuring the long-term sustainability of our all our schools.

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
General Election - November 3, 2026

Thank You

for your response

COAL COALITION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LEADERS

About COAL
COAL is an umbrella organization founded by 13 of Chicago's historic African American mens clubs. COAL's overarching mission is to identify, examine, illuminate and find resolution to issues impacting the greater community. We strive to use our collective experience, expertise and resources to improve the quality of opportunity, quality of preparedness and the quality of outcomes (expressed as 'quality of life') for our community.

What We Believe
The Coalition of African American Leaders believes that it is important to examine the critical issues confronting the African American community where injustice, inequality and the absence of access and opportunity continue to prevail, thereby negatively impacting us as a people. COAL is an assemblage that advocates and organizes for appropriate and responsible public policy change, system behavior change and equality of opportunity. We aim to achieve for all of our people the fullness of the life experience without any form of racism or exclusion as a deterrent. We believe we must prepare ourselves for the opportunity of this full participation, thereby achieving the necessary education and training to participate.

Founding Member Organizations
100 Black Men Of Chicago ■ Chicago Assembly ■ Chicago Connection ■ Druids Club ■ Frogs Club ■ Lunch Bunch ■ New Committee ■ Original 40 Club Of Chicago ■ Rat Pack ■ Royal Coterie Of Snakes ■ Saints ■ Sigma Pi Phi Beta-Boule ■ UIC Male Forum / Chicago Good Health Group

WWW.COALCHICAGO.COM publicpolicy@coalchicago.com
COAL is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization incorporated in Illinois, USA.
Donations are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by U.S. law.