COAL- Coalition of African American Leaders
Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
for the
General Election - Nov 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
Principal Gerald Morrow at 773.593.5428 / gjmorrow86@gmail.com

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Candidate Information

Name on Ballot: Jessica Biggs
School Board District: President
Home Address: 3410 S Calumet Ave Unit 1, Chicago, IL 60616
Employer/Your Title: Southwest System of Care at the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP)
Phone: 773-490-0149
Email: biggs4chicago@gmail.com

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

Date 09/20/2026 **Print** Jessica Biggs **Signature**

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

Campaign Information

Campaign Manager: Alaina Hampton

Phone: 217-891-5717
Email: vote@biggs4chicago.com
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a. Have you held or run for public office before, and if so, what office[s] with what results?

Yes. In November 2024, I was elected to represent District 6 on Chicago's first elected school board, winning a three-way race, and I was seated in January 2025. It was the only time I have run for office. I was one of three winners that cycle who ran without the backing of any of the major organizational players in the race, and I was significantly outspent.

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 direct the Southwest System of Care at the Southwest Organizing Project, where I work with families, schools, clinicians, and community institutions on the Southwest Side to build coordinated supports for young people. Before that I spent roughly two decades inside CPS: outreach coordinator at Senn High School, special education teacher at the high school and middle grades level, and then principal of Burke Elementary in Washington Park, a neighborhood PreK through 8 school that moved from years of probation to good standing during my tenure. I have also worked in health equity.

On the board I led the search process for a permanent superintendent, which produced a near-unanimous vote for Dr. Macquline King. I hold monthly office hours in District 6 and serve on board committees.

Chicago Board of Education
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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:
1.	SEIU	$150,000
2.	LiUNA	$50,000
3.	Grayson Holmbeck	$7,300

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

I am proud to have earned the endorsements Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, former Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot, Ald. Pat Dowell, Ald. Lamont Robinson, Ald. Desmon Yancy, Commissioner Bill Lowry, the SEIU Illinois State Council, the Chicago Federation of Labor, and former CPS CEO Dr. Janice Jackson, as well as many other local elected leaders.

My alliances do not predetermine my votes, and I pride myself on being an independent-minded candidate. I was not endorsed by any of the major special interest groups or any of the organized slates in 2024, and I am not carrying anyone's slate now. I am proud to have the support of a wide coalition of endorsers in this race.

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 am running because this district is at a crossroads and the board has been spending its time on the wrong things. In one recent quarter, the board devoted about 4% of its time to discussing student outcomes. That is a governing failure, and it is the thing I intend to fix.

I bring the only complete set of experiences in this race. I have been a special education teacher, a CPS principal, a community organizer, and I am a CPS parent, which means I have sat on every side of the table where these decisions land. As principal at Burke Elementary, I was accountable for results in a Washington Park school that had been on probation for years, and I watched six schools within a mile of us close in 2013 while Burke barely survived. I know what these decisions do to a community because I lived through them with one.

I also bring two years of a public record on the Board. Every other candidate can promise independence. I can point to votes. I opposed the high-interest borrowing that City Hall pushed, I voted against a budget built on $150 million the state has not appropriated, and I led a superintendent search that stayed insulated from political pressure and ended in a near-unanimous choice.

What makes me the best candidate is that I have done the work of building coalitions inside institutions that did not want to change, and I know the difference between governing and managing. The board's job is to set goals, pass aligned policy, adopt an honest budget, and hold the superintendent accountable.

f. Please describe your Educational agenda.

My agenda rests on four commitments.

1. **Put students and their learning first.** I will require the board to set explicit, public goals for early literacy and numeracy in kindergarten through second grade, reported

quarterly and disaggregated, with particular attention to Black students, students with disabilities, English learners, and students in poverty. Reading and math proficiency in the early grades remain the strongest predictors we have of everything that follows. I will hold the same standard on graduation and what comes after it, because graduating is not the finish line. The question is whether a young person leaves us ready for college, a trade, or a career, and whether they persist once they get there.

2. **Govern effectively and independently.** Real committees doing real work between meetings, a public legislative calendar, defined criteria for major decisions, and a transparent evaluation framework for the superintendent tied to student outcomes. A partnership with the superintendent, not a power struggle.
3. **Build a responsible path to financial stability.** A five-year recovery plan built with the city and the state, honest about tradeoffs, with public milestones. More of every dollar reaching schools. A Springfield strategy that earns investment rather than demanding it.
4. **Stand with every student, school, and community.** Community voice built into how the board operates as a standing expectation, not a public comment period after the decision is made. That includes defending our immigrant families, our bilingual programs, and our Title I dollars against the Trump administration's attack.

Underneath all of it is attendance, which is where academics and community trust meet. More than 40% of our students are chronically absent. I do not treat that as a discipline problem. A student who is challenged, supported, and in a classroom that connects to their life comes to school. Getting our children in school starts with the schools, and it takes all of us.

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
for the
General Election - Nov 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. I already work hard to do this. I hold monthly office hours in District 6 and I will keep that practice as president while expanding it citywide.

As president, I will publish a monthly communication before each board meeting that does three things: lists what the board is voting on and what each item actually means in plain language, reports progress against the district's student outcome goals, and names how people can weigh in before the vote rather than after. I will also ask the board to adopt this as a standing expectation for all 21 members, so that no family's access to their representative depends on which district they live in.

YES or NO? (Please provide an example)

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

A public legislative calendar, published far enough ahead that communities can see a major item coming and organize around it. No more consequential votes appearing on an agenda days before they are taken.

Board materials released with enough lead time to be read, including the financial assumptions behind budget items, not only the summary. When the district asks the board to approve a number, the board and the public should see what that number rests on.

A public superintendent evaluation framework, with the goals set in the open and the results reported in the open.

Standing committees that meet publicly and do real work between board meetings, so that deliberation happens where people can watch it rather than in private conversations before a meeting.

Plain-language reporting on student outcomes at the district, network, and school level, disaggregated by race, income, disability status, and language, so that community organizations can hold us to the numbers.

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)

The structure matters as much as the intention, so here is the structure I will build.

First, organized networks with direct lines to the board: LSC chairs, faith leaders, parent mentor groups, and local elected officials convened regularly by region, with a standing place on the board's calendar rather than an invitation when there is a crisis. I have spent my career building this kind of infrastructure at SWOP and at Burke, and I know the difference between a network that has real power and an advisory council that exists for the photograph.

Second, structured feedback before decisions. On any major item, the board should define in advance what community input it needs, gather it, and then state publicly how that input shaped the outcome, including where it did not and why.

Third, a practice I intend to model: explaining my votes. When I vote against something popular, I will say why, in public, in my own name. The public deserves that explanation from a sitting Board President.

On funders, the honest answer is that I have already been tested on this. I voted against the borrowing City Hall wanted and against a budget that assumed money we do not have. My record on independence is not a promise I am making to you now; it is a record that I have built over the last two years in serving on the Board.

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 holds three critical responsibilities here, and each one should be carried out in public.

The superintendent's evaluation, tied to specific student outcome goals with defined thresholds, reviewed in public on a set schedule.

The budget, which should arrive with its assumptions visible and with a clear accounting of how much of every dollar reaches schools rather than central office.

Quarterly public progress monitoring on the district's goals, at a meeting where that is the only agenda item, so it cannot be crowded out.

I would add one more: a standing expectation that when a school community raises a problem through its LSC or principal and does not get a response from the district, there is a defined path for that to reach the board.

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

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

YES, but I want to be precise about what I mean, because I sit close to this work.

CPS is not an unaudited institution. Every year, an outside firm audits the district's financial statements and issues an opinion, and that opinion is published in the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report along with federal compliance reporting. The district also has an Inspector General and a professional finance operation. I work closely with the CFO, the chief budget officer, the controller, and the CEO, and I have watched those mechanisms function. Anyone who tells you no one is examining the books is not describing the district I help oversee as a Board Member.

But a financial statement audit answers a narrow question: are the numbers fairly stated? It does not ask whether the money bought anything worth having, or where it landed. That is the question our communities are actually asking, and no existing mechanism answers it. Nor does the reporting reach people in a usable form. An audit opinion written for bond markets does not tell a parent in Englewood why her school lost a position while central office did not.

So what I support is a scoped independent review that answers the questions our existing audits do not: how a dollar travels from the district to a school, what share arrives there, and what the rest purchases. Paired with that, a standing practice of public accounting, meaning the board receives and publishes school-level resource data and the assumptions behind budget decisions on a regular schedule, not only when someone demands it.

I will name the tradeoff, because it is real and it gets skipped in this conversation. An audit costs money, and in a district with a structural deficit that money comes from somewhere. A broad audit that re-performs work already done would be expensive and would tell us things we already know. A narrow one, aimed at the questions our communities keep asking and released publicly in full, is worth paying for.

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?

I am a CPS parent, and I was a principal who learned that a school improves at exactly the speed its parents are brought into the work. At Burke, moving off probation was not something the staff

did to the community. It happened because parents were in the building, in the decisions, and in the accountability.

As president, I will keep monthly office hours and push every board member to do the same. I will build the parent-facing side of the community networks described above, working through parent mentor programs, LSCs, and the organizations families already trust, rather than expecting families to come to a board meeting downtown on a Thursday afternoon.

I will also insist that the district communicate with parents in a way that respects them: in their language, in plain terms, with real information about how their child and their school are doing. Too much of what CPS sends home is unreadable, and that is a choice we can reverse.

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?

The pattern we have fallen into does not work. CPS shows up in Springfield near the end of a legislative session with a list of demands, most of them specific to Chicago, after months in which other districts and their legislators have been building the coalitions that actually move a bill. By then the budget is largely written and the relationships that decide it were formed without us. We have done this repeatedly and it has not produced the money our children need.

The numbers give us a real case if we make it well. According to ISBE's calculations released in August 2026, CPS now sits at roughly 70% of what the state's own Evidence-Based Funding formula says we need, down from 73% the year before and 79% the year before that. Closing that gap takes about $1.9 billion. We are moving backwards while the state adds money, because costs are rising faster than the $350 million a year the formula gets.

Here is the part that gets left out of this conversation in Chicago. Springfield is unlikely to lift a finger for us until we can demonstrate that we are managing the resources we already have. Legislators representing districts that are themselves below adequacy will not vote to send more money to a district they believe cannot account for what it spends. Whether that is fair is a separate question from whether it is true, and it is true. Our credibility is the precondition for the ask, not a nice addition to it.

So my approach has three parts, in this order. Earn the credibility first, by bringing a five-year financial plan to Springfield that shows exactly what CPS will do with its own dollars, with public milestones we can be held to. The independent review of how money reaches schools belongs here too. Build a coalition rather than a delegation, because more than 700 Illinois

districts moved further from adequacy this year, which means suburban and downstate districts share our problem and a statewide bill is the only kind that passes. Then press the obligations the state already owes, starting with full reimbursement of mandated categoricals for transportation, early childhood, and special education, and the inequity in teacher pension coverage that no other district in Illinois carries.

On external partners, philanthropy and higher education institutions can seed and evaluate things the district cannot pilot on its own, particularly in early literacy, postsecondary pathways, and mental health. I would set one condition. Partnerships must be aligned to the district's stated goals and must have a plan for what happens when the grant ends, because our schools have absorbed a great deal of damage from initiatives that arrived with money and left without it.

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

There is no single move that closes it, and I will not pretend otherwise. My first commitment is that I will stop making the deficit worse. I voted against this summer's budget because it assumed $150 million from the state that has not been appropriated. If that money does not arrive, the cuts come mid-year, and mid-year cuts land on schools rather than on central office. We cannot budget with money we do not have.

The path out has four pieces working together. A five-year recovery plan negotiated with the city and the state, with public milestones, so that each year's decisions serve a strategy instead of a deadline. Real revenue from Springfield through the coalition described above. Honest treatment of the structural costs that were shifted onto this district, including the pension payment and the borrowing that was pressed on us to cover it. And a disciplined look at central office, where every administrative line should justify itself by what it produces for students.

I would also want the board to confront utilization and facilities costs with the community rather than around it, because we are spending significant money maintaining buildings rather than educating children, and pretending that is not true has not served anyone.

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?

The board should receive and publish a school-level accounting of resources that includes what schools actually receive, not what the formula nominally allocates, broken out by student need. Inequity in this district usually hides in the difference between the two.

On how to prioritize, I support the district using its Opportunity Index to drive staffing and resource decisions. It is an objective tool that scores a school's level of need across a wide range of factors the school does not control: student poverty, students with disabilities, English learners, housing insecurity, teacher retention, community health and life expectancy in the surrounding neighborhood, and how that school has been funded historically. Moving away from enrollment-driven student-based budgeting toward this approach was the right direction, because funding a school by headcount punished exactly the communities that had already lost the most.

What I would push on is the discipline around it. The index has to be applied consistently rather than selectively, it has to be updated as conditions change, and school communities should be able to see their own score and understand how it shaped what they received. Right now, most LSC members and most principals could not tell you how the index affected their building, and a tool nobody can see is not an accountability mechanism.

A formula distributes what exists. In a year of cuts, an equitable formula distributes cuts equitably, which is better than the alternative and is not the same as adequacy. The index is how we allocate. It is not a substitute for having enough.

I would also make the classroom share of the budget a public metric that the board tracks over time and that the superintendent is evaluated on, so that the pressure to protect school-level spending is permanent rather than dependent on who is in the room.

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

The honest starting point is that this cannot be funded out of the existing gap, which is why my answer is mostly about revenue and partnership rather than reallocation.

There must be three tracks. First, Medicaid. CPS leaves reimbursement on the table for school-based health services that are already being delivered, and improving that claiming process brings in federal dollars without new local money. Second, braided funding with the City and County, which have their own behavioral health infrastructure and their own dollars. My work directing a system of care on the Southwest Side is exactly this: aligning clinical providers, schools, and community organizations so that a young person's support does not depend on which door they walked through. That model is replicable and it does not require CPS to build a clinical workforce from scratch. Third, state advocacy specifically for school-based mental health, which has bipartisan support in Springfield in a way that general operating aid does not.

I also want to say plainly that the district already has people doing this work, and my instinct is to fund and strengthen them rather than announce something new. The Office of Student Health and Wellness has built real infrastructure around school-based health services, behavioral health partnerships, and the clinical side of student support. The Talent Office runs the employee wellness side for the adults. Both are chronically under-resourced relative to what we ask of them, and both get overlooked when the budget conversation turns to cuts because neither shows up as a classroom position.

On staff specifically, we are asking teachers, clinicians, social workers, nurses, counselors, principals, and school staff to absorb an enormous amount of trauma with very little support. The turnover that produces is itself a budget problem, and an expensive one. Whatever we build for students has to include the adults, and I would protect that funding rather than treat it as the first thing to cut.

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?

On the most recent state assessment results, roughly 1 in 4 Black students in grades 3 through 8 met the state reading standard and fewer than 1 in 10 met the math standard. Our graduation rate has climbed for a decade, and Black eleventh graders remain the furthest from proficiency of any group we serve. Those two facts sitting next to each other should stop a board in its tracks.

We have not made enough progress on the Black Student Success Plan. It launched in February 2025, it is mandated by state law, and more than a year and a half later there is still no public implementation timeline, no dedicated budget, and no metrics anyone outside the building can track. The district's own Black Student Success director has acknowledged that CPS has earned the distrust the Black community holds for this work. I agree with him. A plan that exists as a document is not an intervention.

As president I will require a public implementation plan with a budget line, named owners, annual targets, and quarterly reporting to the board in open session. The Black Student Achievement Committee exists in state law for exactly this purpose and it should be the body holding that schedule.

My second commitment is to defend the plan. The federal Department of Education has moved to withhold grant dollars from CPS over this work, and the district is in litigation. I will not let that pressure become a reason to slow down, water down, or quietly shelve a plan that Illinois law requires us to carry out. Retreating under federal threat would tell Black families exactly what many of them already suspect about how durable this commitment is. I intend to say that publicly and vote that way.

On substance, I would concentrate the work in three places. Rigor and curriculum, because access to grade-level material is the single most controllable driver of achievement and too many Black students spend their day on work far below where they are enrolled. High-quality instruction, meaning a coherent curriculum actually implemented, with coaching and time for teachers to get good at it, rather than another program layered on top. And the Black educator pipeline, where the Talent Office has strategies underway to increase hiring and retention of Black teachers, with particular attention to Black men. That work is in the plan's own goals, it is measurable, and I would fund and protect it.

I was the principal of an all-Black neighborhood school in Washington Park, a school that had been on probation for years and came off it. I have a deep understanding of what it takes to move Black student achievement, and I will hold the CEO and her leadership team accountable for ambitious goals around black student outcomes.

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?

I would audit access directly: which schools have advanced coursework, CTE programs, dual credit, arts, athletics, world languages, and counselors with manageable caseloads, and which do not, mapped against the racial composition of those schools. That map will not surprise anyone who has worked in this district, and putting it in front of the board in public changes the conversation.

Then, I would attach goals and resources to closing it. Every high school serving predominantly Black students should have real postsecondary pathways, meaning dual credit that transfers, CTE aligned to actual regional employment, and apprenticeship connections. Counseling capacity matters here more than almost anything, because a pathway nobody tells you about is not a pathway.

And I would extend the board's accountability past graduation. Postsecondary persistence, not just enrollment, should be a metric this board tracks by race. We currently celebrate graduation rates and lose track of young people six months later. If the board is serious about opportunity, it has to know what happened to them.

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

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
for the
General Election - Nov 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?

This is a concrete example of an opportunity gap in CPS, and the answer is the same: make the disparity visible, then attach it to goals, budget, and the superintendent's evaluation.

I want a public inventory of what every school actually offers, by school and by neighborhood. Families deserve to see it, and so does the board. The district knows this information and does not present it in a form that invites accountability.

From there, I would set a floor. A defined set of offerings that every CPS school provides, phased in with a funded timeline rather than declared as an unfunded expectation, which is how previous versions of this promise have died.

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 or NO? (and why?)**

YES, and here is how I would make that real.

It is unacceptable that this committee still has no members. The General Assembly wrote it into law, the naming of members has been delayed for many months and the result is that the one body specifically charged with accountability for Black student outcomes has not been able to serve.

This is what happens when the adults are focused on politics instead of the district's priorities. Nobody set out to stall it. It simply was not anybody's urgent problem, which tells you where Black student achievement has actually ranked against everything else consuming this board's attention. Seating that committee is where I would start on day one.

On staffing, a committee without dedicated capacity is a committee that produces minutes. I will ensure the Black Student Achievement Committee has dedicated district staff support, direct access to the district's data and analytics capacity, a defined budget line, and a standing place on the board's calendar with reporting obligations to the full board. I will also ensure it has authority that matters: the ability to require the superintendent to respond to its recommendations in public, and a formal role in reviewing the district's goals and budget as they affect Black students.

The people who fought for this committee should decide who sits on it. I would have Black community organizations, COAL among them, do the nominating, and I would not seat anyone over their objection. I want that written into how the committee operates so it holds regardless of

who is president, because a practice that depends on goodwill lasts exactly as long as the person with the goodwill.

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?

These are three different questions and I want to separate them:

On artificial intelligence, I signed a pledge supporting a three-year pause on generative AI in CPS classrooms, and I want to be clear about what that pause is for. AI is like any other technology that has come through our schools. It is a tool, and the work is figuring out how to use it well. The pause buys us the time to do that figuring before the tools are already everywhere, rather than after. Three years gives the district room to settle academic integrity, bias, and real training for educators.

The piece I care most about is protecting student privacy. These systems run on data, our children generate an enormous amount of it every day, and once a vendor holds it the district has very little leverage over where it goes or how long it lives. Our students are minors. Many of their families have good reason to be wary of institutions collecting information about them, and immigrant families in this city have the best reason of all right now. Before CPS deploys anything, board policy has to answer four questions: what can be collected, who owns it, how long it is kept, and what happens to it when the contract ends. I would not vote for a deployment that cannot answer all four.

What I will not accept is AI used to replace educators. That is where the pressure will come from in a district with a deficit, and I want my position on the record now rather than when a vendor is in the room with a proposal that looks like savings. A teacher who knows a child is doing something no tool does. Used well, AI can take work off that teacher's plate and give her more time with students, and that is the version worth building toward.

CTE and computer science are a different matter, and my concern there is access rather than caution. These are among the clearest pathways to a good living for our students, and they are unevenly distributed across this district in a pattern that follows race and income. I would expand CTE with attention to whether programs connect to actual regional employment and to credentials that carry weight, rather than to whatever equipment a grant purchased. Computer science should be available at every high school, and the barrier is usually teacher capacity rather than curriculum.

On technology generally, the equity issue is the one I would keep in front of the board: devices, connectivity at home, and technical support are not evenly available, and every initiative that assumes they are widens the gap it claims to close.

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

No.

If an LSC has the authority to select and contract with a principal, it should not be able to be bypassed when that principal is removed. Otherwise the selection power is conditional, and a principal's real accountability runs to the central office rather than to the community that hired them. That undermines the entire design.

I say this as someone who was a CPS principal and understands what is on the other side of the argument. There are situations, involving misconduct or immediate risk to students, where the district must be able to act quickly. Review does not mean delay. The district should be able to remove or reassign a principal immediately when student safety requires it, and then the LSC review happens, with the district obligated to state its reasons to an LSC on the record.

What I want to end is removal by attrition and pressure, where a principal a community chose is pushed out quietly and the LSC is informed afterward. Requiring review puts that decision in the light.

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

YES.

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

I know this one firsthand, because it happened to me. I was pushed out of a position in this district through a process that had little to do with my work and no meaningful review attached to it. I raise it because you should know that when I say people in CPS have been removed unfairly, I am not repeating something I read. I understand what it costs, and I understand how little recourse there is once it starts.

So yes, I am open to an independent review board, and I want to understand the pattern before designing the remedy. The belief that outcomes depend on who you know corrodes a workforce we are already struggling to keep. Black employees in particular have raised this for years, and the district has never answered it with data.

So my first step would be to review: termination patterns by race, by role, by network, by reason, presented to the board publicly. If those patterns show what many people believe they will show, the case for an independent review mechanism makes itself, and I would support building one.

My caution is about design rather than principle. Any such body has to be genuinely independent of both the administration and the board, has to respect existing collective bargaining protections rather than duplicate or undercut them, and has to work fast enough to matter. A review process that takes a year is not a protection. I would want to build it with the unions rather than around them.

OPERATIONS / POLICY / PERFORMANCE

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

In one recent quarter, this board spent about 4% of its time discussing student outcomes. The rest went to political conflict, to managing the district rather than governing it, and to fights that had little to do with children. Meanwhile, the district's academic results, its finances, and its enrollment all needed attention that they did not get.

Here is what we need: Standing committees with defined charges that do substantive work between meetings, including the Black Student Achievement Committee. A published legislative calendar so that work is planned rather than reactive. Quarterly progress monitoring on student outcomes as a protected agenda item that cannot be crowded out. A written evaluation framework for the superintendent tied to those same outcomes. And clear norms about the line between governing and managing, which is the line this board has crossed most often and most damagingly.

I have built this kind of structure before, at a school on probation and in community coalitions where nobody had authority over anybody. It is unglamorous work and it is the thing that actually changes what an institution produces.

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
for the
General Election - Nov 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?

Oversight should be real and it should be even. My view is that any school receiving public dollars, whatever its governance model, owes the public a full accounting of its academics and its finances, and the board owes families the ability to compare schools honestly.

Guardrails, yes. I would want three. Financial transparency that reaches the actual operating entity, including related-party transactions and management fees, because dollars that leave the classroom through a contract are just as gone as dollars that leave any other way. Academic reporting on the same measures and the same timeline as district schools. And enrollment practice guardrails covering recruitment, admissions, and mid-year exits, since a school's results mean something different depending on which students it keeps.

I would add one that applies to the district side too. Choice as a system has costs that the district has never accounted for honestly, including what happens to a neighborhood school when a share

of its students leave and its funding follows them. Any serious oversight framework has to look at the effects on the schools children leave, not only the schools they enter.

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

No one should want to close a school. I know what it does to a community because I lived it. I watched six schools within a mile of Burke close in 2013 while my school barely survived, and I saw what that did to families, to staff, and to the streets those children crossed afterward. I opposed that closure process then, and I would oppose anything like it now. A top-down, mass closure carried out on the district's timeline is not a plan, and it is not something I will repeat.

I also know what it looks like when a school has 30 students in it and cannot offer those children an art teacher, a counselor, a librarian, or a classmate their own age. That is not a school. That is a building. Pretending otherwise serves the adults in the conversation, not the children inside it.

Closing schools is not part of my agenda, and it is the last thing I would ever do. I will not make a promise that is convenient for me in a campaign at the expense of children I would then have to face. What I will commit to is this: no such decision made quickly, lightly, or without deep partnership with the community from the beginning rather than at the end. And a principle I hold firmly. When a community is asked to give something up, it must get something real in return. Not a promise. Something they can see.

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

I want to answer this carefully, because criteria published by a district have historically functioned as a list of schools to close, and communities read them that way for good reason.

If this board ever takes up utilization, the criteria should be developed with communities rather than delivered to them, and they should include more than a utilization percentage. Utilization formulas have been used to justify predetermined outcomes, and the formula itself has been contested for as long as it has existed.

The factors I would insist on: whether the school can actually deliver a full educational program to the children enrolled, meaning staffing, coursework, services, and peers; what the receiving school would offer and whether it is genuinely better, demonstrated rather than asserted; the distance children would travel and what they would cross to get there, which was handled shamefully in 2013; the building's condition and the cost of maintaining it against what that

money could otherwise buy those students; and the community's own assessment of what the school means and what would be lost.

I would also require the inverse analysis, which has never been done seriously in this district: what would it take to make this school one families want to choose, and has the district actually tried? In many cases the answer is that it has not.

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

The governance changes described throughout this questionnaire are the core: a public legislative calendar, committee structure with real charges, a transparent superintendent evaluation framework, and protected quarterly progress monitoring on student outcomes with disaggregated data.

Beyond those, four policy priorities. A board policy setting explicit early literacy and numeracy goals for kindergarten through second grade, with public quarterly reporting by subgroup. A minimum standards policy for school-based mental health staffing, with public reporting on which schools fall short. A community engagement policy that defines what input is required before major decisions and obligates the board to state how that input shaped the outcome. And a standing structure for the Black Student Achievement Committee with staff support, budget, and authority to require public response from the administration.

I would also revisit the district's approach to attendance, moving it out of the discipline frame entirely. More than 40% of our students are chronically absent. We have been treating that as a compliance problem for years and it has not moved, because it is a school quality and trust problem.

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
for the
General Election - Nov 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 or NO? (and why?)**

YES, with the understanding that parity has to run in both directions.

A child who attends a charter public school is a Chicago public school student, and the public dollars that follow that child should reflect what it costs to educate them, weighted for their needs the same way any other student's would be. I do not think we serve children by funding them differently based on which public school their family chose.

Parity also means the same obligations. The same reporting, the same transparency about where dollars go, the same responsibility to serve students with disabilities and English learners in the same proportion as the neighborhood, and the same accountability for outcomes. Charter operators have at times asked for parity in funding while resisting parity in obligation, and district advocates have at times asked for accountability from charters that they resist applying to district schools. I do not find either position defensible.

Parity on the money also requires a strong authorization and reauthorization process on both ends. Who gets to open a public school in this city, on what evidence, serving which community, and what has to remain true for that school to keep operating. That gate is where a public system exercises quality control, and ours has been inconsistent enough that both supporters and critics of charters can point to decisions they consider indefensible. If we are going to fund schools on equal terms, the bar to become one and the bar to stay one have to be rigorous, published in advance, and applied the same way every time.

Where I want to be careful is the word itself. Parity in per-pupil dollars is not the same as parity in cost structure. The district carries obligations that charters do not, including pensions, facilities across the whole city, transportation, and the legal duty to educate every child who arrives in August or in February. A formula that ignores those differences is not parity either. I would want the board to work through that honestly rather than treat the word as self-explanatory.

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 or NO? (Please explain in detail.)**

YES to both.

On support services, a student with a disability, a student learning English, or a student in crisis has the same needs and the same rights in either kind of school. The dollars attached to those

needs should follow the student. I would want the board to verify that this is happening in practice, because the aggregate numbers and the school-level reality do not always match.

On serving the student the entire year, YES, and I hold this one firmly. This is where the current arrangement breaks down and where it harms Black and Brown children most directly. When a school enrolls a student, receives public funding for that student, and then that student leaves mid-year through exit, counseling out, or a disciplinary process, the child lands back in a neighborhood school that receives them without the money and often after the point at which it could have staffed for them. The neighborhood school absorbs the cost and the child absorbs the disruption.

This applies to district schools too, including selective enrollment and magnet programs. Any publicly funded school should be accountable for the students it enrolled, and the funding should follow the student when they move rather than staying where they left. I would want a mid-year reconciliation policy that does exactly that, with public reporting on mid-year mobility by school. Schools with systematically high mid-year exit should have to explain it.

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 want to answer the premise of your question directly, because I think it is the right premise. Families with money have always had a choice. They exercise it by buying a house in a particular attendance boundary or by paying tuition. The question this city has never answered honestly is what choice means for families who cannot do either.

My own view is that the goal is a system where choosing is not necessary to get a good education, and we are a long way from that. In the meantime, charter public schools serve tens of thousands of Chicago children, many of them Black and Brown children whose families made a considered decision, and I am not going to treat those families as though their judgment about their own children needs correcting. That is true, whether or not I would make the same choice.

High-quality charter schools are part of the public system and should be treated as such, with the same accountability, the same transparency, and the same obligation to every child. Charter schools that are not serving students should not continue, and the standard should not be softer or harsher than the one applied to a district school with the same results.

The part I would push hardest on is the one that rarely gets attention in this debate. Meaningful choice requires that the neighborhood school also be a real option. When a community's only viable choice is to leave, that is not choice. Most of my career has been spent trying to make neighborhood schools places families choose, and that remains where I would put the district's energy.

Chicago Board of Education
Candidate Questionnaire
for the
General Election - Nov 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?

Longer-term renewal terms only work if the monitoring in between is real. The district should never be caught off guard by a school's financial condition, and it has been. Trouble at an operator tends to reach the board late, once the options have narrowed to bad ones and families are the ones absorbing it. So I want annual financial and academic reporting on every authorized school no matter where it sits in its renewal cycle, with defined triggers that bring a school back to the board early rather than at the end of a term. A longer renewal should mean less churn for a school that is performing. It should never mean less oversight.

This is the other half of a strong authorization process. The front end decides who opens. The monitoring decides whether we find out in time.

EPIC Academy is what being caught off guard looks like. That school announced it was closing a matter of months after this board renewed its contract. Acero moved to close seven campuses the year before. In both cases, the district's read on the finances was behind the reality, and children and families paid for the lag. ASPIRA closed schools in the middle of the school year - something that is absolutely unacceptable - and the authorization process that missed this risk failed tremendously.

I was also dismayed by how this board handled renewals last spring. Six operators, sixteen campuses, roughly 8,300 students, held up and pushed into June while members sought more information. Wanting stronger oversight was legitimate. Making families and staff carry that uncertainty toward summer break was not, and the board president and the superintendent both said so at the time. You can ask hard questions about accountability and still run the process on a calendar that respects the people it affects.

What I would not do is grant long renewals as a default or use short renewals as a way to avoid a decision the board does not want to make. Both are failures of governance.

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 on academic and student-outcome standards, without qualification. A child's growth in reading is measured the same way in every building. Enrollment, retention, and service to students with disabilities and English learners should be measured identically as well, since those are the areas where differences in practice have the largest effect on which children are served.

On financial and operational standards, the substance should be the same and the mechanics will necessarily differ, because the entities are structured differently. A charter's audit reaches a nonprofit board and often a management organization; a district school's budget sits inside the district's own accounting. The standard I would apply is that the public should be able to see, for either kind of school, how much reached students and what the rest purchased. Where charters operate through management contracts or related-party leases, that has to be visible, because it is the place where public dollars most often become difficult to trace.

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 over five years is a single public system with one set of expectations. Every publicly funded school in this city, however governed, serves every child who enrolls, reports the same information, is held to the same outcomes, and is funded according to what its students need. Schools that serve students well continue and are learned from. Schools that do not, in either sector, do not continue indefinitely while the district looks away.

The policies that get us there are the ones in this questionnaire. Clear, publicly set student outcome goals that apply system-wide. Consistent renewal and accountability criteria set in advance. Transparency about dollars that reaches the operating entity. Mid-year enrollment reconciliation so that no school is rewarded for shedding students. And real investment in neighborhood schools, so that families are choosing between good options rather than away from bad ones.

I want to be clear about how I see these students. Most of my career has been spent in traditional public schools, where the majority of Chicago's children are and where the disinvestment has run deepest. The young people in our charter schools are still our students. I am responsible for them the same way I am responsible for a child at a neighborhood school two blocks away, and their

families are owed the same thing every family is owed: a school that works. In practice that means a strong reauthorization process, a consistent and honest look at whether those schools are academically strong, and real support where a school is struggling and worth strengthening. Indifference in either direction would be a failure of the job.

None of that works at arm's length. It takes a strong working partnership between the board, the school operators themselves, and the district's portfolio office. Operators should know exactly what the standard is and hear early when something looks off, rather than learning at renewal that the district has concerns it has been holding for two years. The portfolio office needs the staffing and the standing to catch problems while they are still fixable, and the board needs to hear from it regularly rather than once a cycle. A board that only encounters these schools at renewal will keep being surprised by any challenges, and that ends up adversely impacting students and families.

Chicago Board of Education

Candidate Questionnaire
for the
General Election - Nov 3, 2026

Thank You
for your response

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.