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: Michilla "Kyla" Blaise

School Board District: 5B

Home Address 3427 W, Adams, Chicago, IL 60624

Employer/Your Title Cook County Government/ 16th District Chief of Staff

Phone 773-418-8502 **Email** blaiseforschoolboard@gmail.com

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

9/21/26	Michilla Blaise	
Date	**Print**	**Signature**

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

Campaign Information

Campaign Manager Paule Bernadel

Phone 323-919-1365 **Email** paulebernadel@gmail.com

Website www.blaiseforschoolboard.com

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

I am the sitting CPS Board of Education Member for District 5B.

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?

Board Secretary of Westside Justice Center (6 years)
Appointed by Mayor Lightfoot to the board of Northwest Home Equity Assurance Program (2.5 years).
Executive Director of the Judicial Accountability PAC and lead a coalition to unseat a corrupt judge which was the first time a judge did not get retained in 30 years. (3 years)
Constituent Services Director (2 years) Deputy Chief of Staff (2 years) for 46th Ward Alderman Helen Shiller
Appointed by CPS to the Public Buildings Commissioner (3months)
Executive Director of the Grassroots Curriculum Task Force (1 year)
CEO of Blaise and Associates, helping progressive candidates and moving progressive issues forward (10 years)

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
Leslie Fox	1000
Bill Griffin	1000
Perry Mandera	2500

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

US Congressman Danny Davis
Dr. Phalese Binion, West Side Ministers Association
Chicago Teachers Union (Local 1)
Teamsters Local 777
Cook County Chicago Teachers Union-CCCTU, Local 1600
Tara Stamps, Cook County Board Commissioner, 1st District
Jason C. Ervin, Alderman, 28th Ward
Jawaharial "Omar" Williams, Illinois State Representative

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 I am running to retain my seat on the CPS Board of Education because I have more work to do including:
Returning shuttered school buildings back to the community and the tax rolls
Charting a path to repopulate Marshall High School
Leading the charge for fully funded schools in Illinois
Standing up the Black Student Achievement Cmte (I am co-chair)
I want to change the Do Not Hire List policies in CPS. (There is currently a proposal on the table)

I just earned an MA in Public Policy from the University of Chicago in2026. I bring expertise regarding healthy Board operations from other boards I was on and from the Cook County Board. I have a deep contact list from many years in government.

I am the best candidate in my race because having been the seated Board Member for the last 2 years, I have experience, I am an independent voice on the Board, and I am a leader on the Board right now.

f. Please describe your Educational agenda.

Funding and Preventing Layoffs: Blaise opposes cuts that impact classrooms and teacher staffing. She notably led a board push to reverse proposed budget reductions and teacher layoffs by leveraging anticipated state funding.

Mental Health and Wellness: A major focus of her platform is addressing trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) caused by community violence, particularly for students living in distressed urban neighborhoods.

Community and Student-Centric Equity: Rooted in her background with the Grassroots Curriculum Task Force, she advocates for systemic support systems that match classroom learning needs with wrap-around community resources.

Local Accountability: Emphasizes direct engagement with local schools, families, and student voices rather than top-down or financially driven mandates.

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 currently send out a bi-monthly newsletter and host at least one FB Live per month. I also conduct school visits to speak with educators and attend community events to ensure I am enmeshed in Community.

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

I have requested more transparency around the procurement process in CPS.

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 plan to make the budgeting process start earlier with more Townhalls to discuss the budget with stakeholders, and i hold public town halls or regular neighborhood-level meetings. (I am hosting a townhall on Tuesday, September 22nd)

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?

Institutionalize community input: Utilize ongoing feedback mechanisms, modeled after the CPS Accountability Redesign framework, to co-create district policies.
Work with schools to ensure that the LSC has members and they are well trained.
Hold public town halls or regular neighborhood-level meetings in advance of major operational and budgetary votes. (I am hosting a townhall on Tuesday, September 22nd)

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?)

Chicago Public Schools is required by statute and board policy to undergo annual third-party financial audits conducted by independent certified public accountants, and I support that requirement.

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 attend LSC and CAC meetings. I encourage parents to join townhall meetings and join our FB Live conversations. I am available for and I attend community meetings throughout the district as well, and I offer everyone my personal cell phone number.

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?

CPS recently appointed an IGA Chief after nearly 2 years having that position vacant. I have advised the new head of IGA to develop a plan that includes stakeholders, labor partners and parents that outlines a concerted full-court press to increase the funding for CPS /EBF formula. I offered assistance with connecting the IGA chief with all contacts I have in Springfield, and to organize stakeholders in my district to support CPS' efforts. I will also ensure that labor partners who I am associated with will join the chorus of voices demanding appropriate funding for Illinois schools.

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

The only way to develop structural changes to CPS' consistent underfunding is for the State of Illinois to fund the EBF. CPS has slipped from being funded 87% of the EBF down to 70% of the EBF over the last two years. In order to create stable structural budget relief, the State of Illinois needs to commit to funding CPS and other Illinois school districts to 100% of the EBF.

During this year's budget, CPS released over 125 central office staff and attempted to release over 2500 SECAs, teachers, Vice Principals and admin staff from our neighborhood schools. SEIU stepped in and suggested an additional $85M in TIF funds be assumed to save their members from termination, and I submitted an amendment that assumed an additional $150M in state funds to reverse some of the layoffs and cuts to the classroom. Before I submitted that amendment, I saw a video of Speaker Welch suggesting we seek additional funds during veto session which encouraged me to stop the cuts to classrooms before the start of school.

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 have requested for midyear budget check-in reports to the Board. Fortunately we are standing up a finance committee on the Board that will be able to do a deep dive in ensure funds are going where they were allocated.

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?

In response to IL SB 1560, CPS students are required to have annual mental health screenings in 2027-2028. I am considering a resolution to establish a working group to begin thinking through how we comply. There are a number of vendors trying to level up to prepare to provide mental health services, but Illinois will be the first state in the country to roll out this level of screenings. If the state is handing down mandates, I would hope they would allocate the funds to implement their directives.

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 am the co-chair of the Black Student Achievement Committee which will work on this very issue. The Black Student Success Plan (BSSP) sets a clear path forward for the next five years, with a focus on immediate action and long-term sustainability for driving student success. The plan is built on and will be driven by the powerful voices and collaboration of the community and has 5 pillars:
- Identity, Culture, and Voice - Empower and elevate Black students' voices while celebrating their cultural diversity to create inclusive environments that honor their unique contributions and perspectives.
-Whole School, Whole Child Supports - Provide comprehensive, culturally responsive supports that address Black students' academic, social, emotional, and cultural needs, enabling them to thrive.
-Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Curriculum and Instruction - Implement culturally relevant teaching practices and expand access to high-quality, rigorous coursework and experiential opportunities that affirm Black students ' identities and enhance academic success.
-Culturally Responsive Family and Community Engagement and Empowerment - Strengthen engagement with Black families and communities through culturally competent workshops and partnerships that empower families to be active participants in their

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 Co-Chair for the Black Student Achievement Committee, I am excited to move forward with our impressive gathering of committee members. We will be data-driven, history-informed, and equity focused in our efforts to improve outcomes for CPS' black student population.

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

With the passing of SB 1560, CPS must prepare for district-wide student mental health screenings. i have already reached out to stakeholders and been in contact with possible vendors who can address the new mandate. In our first Board committee meetings, implementation of SB 1560 will be at the top of the list for me.

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 question is very complicated and each component has a different path to fruition, but in every cases, CPS is underfunded, and these items get put on the backburner in favor of "saving money." All evidence demonstrates that additional languages make children better learners, arts expand their thinking and phys ed helps on all fronts, but these classes are always the first to go when money gets tight.

I am fighting for the State of Illinois to fully fund Illinois schools. Currently CPS is $2.3B short of the goal the the state assembly set for itself. Even 1/10th of that shortfall could make a world of difference.

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?)**

YES, of course!
As Co-Chair, I understand the assignment. I am already requesting another dedicated paid staff member that will move this committee forward. Obviously we had setbacks when the Trump administration removed funding, but a year later we have won the court battle and we can get to work.
The committee members we have pulled together are tried and true beacons for racial justice and Black liberation. I am confident that we will move expeditiously once we get to the work.

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?

AI needs to have guardrails and oversight on the national level, so it surely has no place in our elementary schools. AI covers so much ground this a difficult question to answer, but my gut reaction is no.

CTE is a broader question. Currently we only have building trades i our schools if the union will pay for it. Based on some trade unions' history of not welcoming Black members, this is problematic. We need to invest in CPS schools that feed the trades. We cannot wait for the trades to help us. Funding is needed.

CS needs to really be examined. CS is a rapidly changing field and CPS needs to ride the waves to have maximum impact. Again, funding is needed.

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.

This is tough, but every level of authority should have a balance.
I will say yes. Some LSCs are completely recruited by the principal and may not be responsive to the families in the school.

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

Unless there is an egregious violation, the LSC should lead the conversation for principal selection, evaluation and if necessary - termination.

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

I would be open to discussing it. I was more focused on the Do Not Hire list and how it is an arbitrary hit list that mostly effects Black educators. There are proposed changes to that policy and I am awaiting implementation results.

OPERATIONS / POLICY / PERFORMANCE

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

Many leaders in my community are asking for a middle school. In my own experience as a parent, I have seen my tweens get lost in elementary planning and then be ill prepared for freshman year. I am hoping that we can shift an under-utilized school to a middle school that really specializes on early teen years. I would like to examine the impact that could have on those students high school outcomes.

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?

The question is a bit confusing for me.

I have the most charter schools in my district. I also have the most schools in my district. I would not support any additional schools in 5B.

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

I have grave concerns about school closings because our schools never got the funding they needed in the first place. All data shows that the communities with vacant school buildings see a rise in violent crime and a drop in property values. The data also shows that the students suffer considerably. I am asking for investment in our schools at this point.

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

the criteria should be set by discussions with CPS, neighbors and stakeholders.

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

The DNH List is a problem for me, but I have seen a proposal that I am open to. I am reserving judgement until I can evaluate implementation.

We need to examine how parents who have been justice involved are allowed to participate in their child's school experience.

Transportation is not available for children without special needs and this is problematic for students who get into academic centers and selective enrollment schools that may be outside of their neighborhoods. Some end up traveling for hours on CTA.

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 am open to the conversation.

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.)**

Historically charter schools cherry-picked their students and cast aside students who did not fit their goals. There are accountability measures in place currently that will call out a school that does that at this point.

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?

District 5B has 64 schools and the largest number of charter schools of any district. I do not wish to eliminate any options for my constituents.

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 check in with the schools up for renewal. I am the only Board Member to extend a renewal beyond CPS recommendation because the school made a great argument. North Lawndale College Prep was awarded a longer contract due to my efforts.

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?

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?

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
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