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

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Candidate Information

Name on Ballot: Aaron Jitu Brown

School Board District: 5A

Home Address 1041 North Lorel, Chicago, IL 60651

Employer/Your Title National Director for Journey For Justice Alliance

Phone 773-317-6343 **Email** friendsofbrothajitu@gmail.com

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

11/21/2026	Aaron Jitu Brown	Aaron Jitu Brown
Date	**Print**	**Signature**

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

Campaign Information

Campaign Manager Jenean Truesdell

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Website https://www.aaronjitubrown4cps.org/

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

I ran for and served on the Jackie Robinson School ' s Local School Council from 2000 to 2002, and on the Dyett High School Local School Council from 2003 to 2013. I ran for Chicago Board of Education Rep District 5A in 2024 and won.

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?

As the father of a recent Chicago Public Schools graduate, a product of Chicago Public Schools myself, and a proud resident of the Austin community on Chicago ' s west side since 2006, I am more than excited to run for re-election to continue to represent Chicago District 5A on the city ' s first fully elected school board. For the past 30 years, I have been an organizer and leader apart of the movement for racial and educational justice. I spent many years as the education organizer at Chicago ' s Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO) where organized and won numerous campaigns for greater investment in public education and the improvement of schools serving Chicago ' s Black students and ran culturally relevant youth leadership development programs in CPS. For ten years, I taught African American history at St. Leonard ' s Adult High School on Chicago ' s west side, the only accredited high school in the nation that exclusively serves people who have been formerly incarcerated

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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
Our Schools	$2500
CTU	$8,000
Madeline Talbott	$1000

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

I have received endorsements from: Commissioner Tara Stamps, State Representative Camille Lilly, Alderman Jason Ervin, Alderman Byron Sigcho Lopez, Alderman Chris Taliaferro, Our Schools Coalition, 290 IPO, People United for Action, Chicago Teachers Union, Citizen Action of IL, Chicago Federation of Labor and Sunrise Chicago. With three decades of experience fighting for educational justice for Black and working class communities, I am accountable to community organizations rooted on Chicago ' s West and South sides at the forefront of fights for investment in school communities. I am also aligned with a Public School Champions Slate.

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 have spent the past 30 years dedicated to making Chicago schools and schools across the country better, more culturally relevant, more rooted in the communities they serve, and more equitable. In my capacity as a community organizer, I would estimate I have attended a hundred Chicago School Board meetings.
Now, with my experience fighting for education justice, I am running to retain my seat to continue to fight for the realization of a dream to make Chicago a Sustainable Community Schools district. I have seen decision-makers in Chicago choices that have sabotaged the education of thousands of children that look like me for too long.

f. Please describe your Educational agenda.

My vision is to work toward the creation of a world-class, pre-k through 12th grade system of education within safe walking distance of every District 5A home (and every home across the City of Chicago!). If re-elected as a School Board representative, my top priorities will continue to be investing in neighborhood schools and fighting for more equitable school funding. For too long, structural racism in Chicago Public Schools has meant separate and unequal education along the lines of race and class. Families have been shut out of decisions impacting students lives. Standardized testing has been weaponized against Black and Brown children. Neighborhood schools have been underfunded, neglected, and entirely shut down. Whole communities have suffered from this kind of sabotage. The solution must be to transform CPS into an equitable district where every child and community has access to a quality neighborhood school walking distance from home.

As a representative on Chicago ' s School Board, I will continue to be be committed to this process of transformation by supporting these reforms:

1. Responsible expansion of the Sustainable Community Schools model, which centers community input and investment in neighborhood schools.
2. Insure that every child has equitable access to world-class early childhood education, pre-k through 3rd grade

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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)**

Yes! In addition to regularly hosting in-person and virtual forums with community members and stakeholders, I will establish a monthly newsletter to communicate with constituents and school communities.

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

I will ensure that there is transparency regarding CPS contracts, and that the CPS Board seeks 5A district families ' input regarding CPS ' budget. I will adhere to Open Meetings Acts regulations. I would like to see the School Board make the budget process as open and engaging as possible and experiment with participatory budgeting. Further, I would like to have the Board members meet at least annually with the LSCs, Parent Advisory Councils, and principals in their district to find out what ' s working and what ' s not working.

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 create a new model of community engagement that regularly meets with families in each ward that comprises the 5A district, with Local School Councils, and engages high schools and feeder school communities in a sustainable community school village format to build from the ground a vision and strategy for a world class education system in neighborhoods throughout the 5A district. As an organizer and director of a network of grassroots organizations, I have a track record of being accountable to families, and grassroots constituencies, first and foremost.

As a member of the inaugural elected school board class and hopefully the new fully elected school board, I will maintain that focus on accountability to community. In many ways the school district historically betrayed the public trust by ignoring the recommendations, wisdom and insight of communities that were most affected by its decisions. Many of these decisions had dire consequences including spikes in violence throughout Chicago, the displacement of thousands of students, school staff and educators and the misuse of CPS funds.

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 5A district comprises diverse communities with rich cultural and civic histories and backgrounds. Many of the Black and Brown communities in the 5A district have been disparately impacted by school closures and privatization schemes. In many cases, communities felt acted upon by CPS instead respectfully engaged. As communities most impacted by CPS school closures and actions, it is imperative that we develop a new culture and responsive practices that promote meaningful engagement.

I will hold regular meetings throughout the 5A district to discuss recommendations to improve the quality of education in neighborhood schools, and to hear concerns from students, parents and community members on an ongoing basis.

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

Yes, as long there is a vetted and credible auditor. The goal of the audit would have to be to maximize resources with a vision that supports students and the goal of a sustainable community school district.

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 will co-host community forums with reputable community leaders to begin to 1) learn about parent and community concerns and 2) build a vision and strategy for a world class pre-k thru 12th grade system of education in their neighborhood so eventually want to institutionalize a grassroots education alliance on the west side of Chicago

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?

Illinois ' education system remains separate and unequal due to its reliance on property taxes as the primary revenue source. While the Illinois Legislature passed legislation to address the school funding formula, schools in Illinois are still funded by property taxes which proliferates a system that is inherently unequal. The school district should meet regularly with state legislators to discuss and develop strategies for equitable funding, as well engage ISBE regarding curricula, assessments and resources to enhance teaching and learning.

I will engage with Senators and State Representatives from the 5A district regularly to advance a policy agenda that addresses inequities and work to end dysfunctional practices. Just as I engaged with legislators as an organizer to advocate for fair funding, resources to support teacher retention and mentorship, and the ability for district 299 to elect its school board members, I will continue to meet with legislators to fight for equity in Chicago Public Schools.

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

Equity must be at the heart of any plan to address the budget gap. That means identifying new streams of progressive revenue - that don ' t burden the working class - to fully fund our education system.

We also need to take a look at reallocating existing resources and streamlining expenses that don ' t serve student and community needs. As a " portfolio " or " choice " district, CPS spends hundreds of millions of dollars annually in support of that infrastructure (support for charter expansion, testing companies, etc) that could be funding important staffing like nurses, librarians, counselors, and other need investments in neighborhood schools.

Another way to bring resources into Chicago Public Schools is for the State of Illinois to fully pay its portion into the pension fund. Chicago is the only city that is required to pay twice. Our current system fundamentally creates a situation where hundreds of

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?

Equitable school funding is an essential part of any vision for improving our school system. There is no reason why students at some CPS schools have the ability to learn multiple languages, take art classes, and play any sport they want while other schools are stripped of all kinds of programming and struggle to even be properly staffed with counselors, librarians, and janitors. I will be a fierce advocate of equitable revenue strategies that properly fund schools that have been impacted by generational disinvestment throughout the state. We must develop an equitable school funding system and build on the good work that is transforming how resources are allocated (student need vs. population).

I ' m in favor of a district-wide annual equity assessment that looks at different metrics like course offerings, wrap-around supports, how discipline is administered, and which would hold the superintendent/CEO accountable for the results of that

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

The Sustainable Community Schools Model provides additional resources to address the mental health needs of students and families. As a champion for the Sustainable Community Schools model, I would work to ensure its full implementation particularly in communities with limited mental resources. The closure of public mental health clinics, and the pending loss of COVID funding exacerbates the need for additional mental health resources.

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?

Standardized testing has been weaponized against Black and Brown children for the past 25 years. And while institutions that many Chicago decision makers send their children to (like the U of C Lab School) minimize testing, CPS has as many as 6 standardized tests annually with punitive consequences. Instead, we need balanced, evidence-based, culturally relevant assessment (portfolio assessment, oral assessment, project based assessment) which I learned in my 10 years teaching at St. Leonard ' s Adult High School. I say what ' s good for the goose is good for the gander.

Emphasizing project based learning and culturally relevant curricula are the best ways to invest in our young people instead of simply teaching to a test.

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?

Equitable school funding is really at the root of almost all problems in our school system. Investing fully in neighborhood schools so that every kid in Chicago has access to a high quality education environment with advanced classes, diverse programming, a librarian, a nurses, a counselor, and a supportive context within walking distance of home.

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

In addition to what has been stated in question ten I would say that partnering with more of the mental health clinics that have been opened or reopened to help connect people who live in those communites would be another avenue and resource to support themental health needs of students, faculty and staff.

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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?

Yes! Art and music should be viewed as core curricular subjects, not expendable, removable or erasable parts of a student ' s experience and education. In my decades of leading youth leadership development and mentorship programs in CPS, I have seen first-hand how important access to a well-rounded set of progr

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 have been honored to served as a member of the current the Black Student Success Committee and want to see the School Board listen to committees like this one. Black student achievement - which goes hand in hand with Black student opportunity - must be an agenda item for the Board in every meeting. The assessments of the Black Student Achievement Committee should inform board-level decisions and I will remain committed to ensuring that the committee is representative of long-standing and community rooted voices from Black communities, which have been most negatively impacted by school inequities. Now that the black sudent achievement Committe is here and I am the cochair I plan to further intiative and look forward to the meetings and forward movement we have planned for this coming school year.

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?

I believe that each of these has a place in education and students and staff should be equipped to adapt as the world changes. I do believe that each of thes tools and emerging technologies must be used in a manner that is responsible and equitable for our students faculty and staff.

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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 deeply in local community level decision-making and direction around the schools that serve them and I believe that local site management means local site management.
Only in the event that a Local School Council has made a decision that will harm students should the School Board step in to overturn that decision. I believe that there should be a clearly defined grievance process so that, if someone in the school community has a problem with a decision made by the LSC, someone can file a grievance. There would then be a process to follow look into how and why the decision was made before it escalates to the Board. In the event that process is followed, the School Board would then assess whether it is necessary to intervene while holding the principle that school communities know their own needs and context best.

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

Understanding that local school control has enormous importance and value, Local School Councils should hold the role of hiring and removing principals. Only in the event that the LSC is non-functioning should CPS be able to move forward with removing a principal without LSC approval and involveme

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

There are a lot of things at play when you begin to establish and independent review board for terminations within CPS. Who will these people be? Who do they serve? Who are they accountable too? Are these people education minded and education centered. Before I can consider this there would need to be an established framework that centers the equity and structure of who is is meant to serve, I think that LSC's, school administrators, and the school board collectively should be enough oversight for this.

OPERATIONS / POLICY / PERFORMANCE

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

Chicago Public School ' s fundamental growth area is the need to fully prioritize and invest in neighborhood public schools to make them successful schools our communities can be proud of and excited to send their children to.

We have schools on the west side (which I am running to represent) with a lot of history: Marshal, Collins, Westinghouse. These are historic Black institutions that have produced generations of amazing people. The legacy of that needs to be lifted up, celebrated, included in curriculum. There ' s a lot of pride in that we can tap into. Instead, we have seen some of these schools that used to have excellent programs be entirely sabotaged. The destabilizing of neighborhood schools connected to unwanted charter expansion, school closures, school restructuring has left several schools in the 5th district as shells of their former selves.

What ' s needed is for the people directly impacted to lead the visioning process for rebuilding our public education system in the 5th district. The School Board needs to then respond positively to that vision and fight for the funding and prioritization it deserves.

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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?

School choice was a disaster as school policy. It took attention off the real issue, which is equity in public education.

Instead, there is no such thing as school choice in Black and Brown communities. You can ' t have choice if you don ' t have equity. If neighborhood schools are starved, there is no choice of a great school your kid can walk to. We know that only 1 out of 5 charters outperform public schools. Yet, the for-profit charter industry continues to suck resources away from a system of public education that should be able to provide every Chicago kid with the high quality education they deserve. Guardrails need to be put in place and the program should seek to make it so that all schools are of the quality that the need for this would be obsolete.

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

In my capacity as an education organizer, I am particularly proud of the work our movement has done to keep open schools in Black communities that were at risk of being closed down. Stopping school closures meant saving neighborhood institutions that working families rely on. I am deeply proud of the role we played in keeping Mollison, Jackie Robinson, Woodsen, Fuller, Reavis, Dyett, Doolittle schools open and in winning the moratorium on school closures.

I have been so committed to stopping school closures – going so far as to have participated in the 2015 hunger strike that saved Dyett high school – because I know that any type of school closure is traumatic for the community it serves.

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

I believe that efforts should be made to revitalize schools before steps are taken toward closing or consolidating them. If we collaboratively build a vision of high quality public education with the communities schools are in, people come. A vision that includes the needs and perspectives of the community is how the model of sustainable communities schools, which I have organized and advocated for, comes alive.

If a community comes together and says the best thing for us is that we consolidate rather than revitalize a school, then the Board can support that and support the community in envisioning what that space is used for and what comes next.

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

Changes I would like to see within CPS include:
An end privatization of school staff and instead fund good union jobs in schools
A social worker, a nurse, and a librarian in every school
Equitable school funding that relies on an expanded set of revenue streams, and is not inequitably based on property taxes

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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?)**

Yes. We do a disservice to our children by taking funding away from their schools.

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.)**

Yes. Students should be served to the best of our abilities at all times and that doesn't shift from one model to the next.

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?

Charter school should serve the same role as CPS schools in that they should seek to provide the most equitable educational experience students can have.

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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 am not in favor of closing schools so I believe charters should be renewd when the schools are perfoming well and if they are not rather than close them we should seek to fold them back into CPS as we did with the Acero schools.

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?

I think that there should be an equal commitment to give our students the most equitable education. This requires a consistent standard and ethic in the learning regardless of if the school is public, private or charter.

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?

I would hope that eventually Charter Schools in Chicago can be folded back into the Chicago Public School system and that there can be a mutual standard established in the school system for transparency and accountability. I want to help strengthen the existing charter schools wihout further expanding the charter school model.

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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

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