Coalition of African American Leaders

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

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Candidate Information

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Campaign Information

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

I served on the Whitney Young Local School Council as Community Representative from 2018 to 2021. I ran for alderman of the 25th Ward in 2019 and was not elected.

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 served on the Whitney Young Local School Council from 2018 to 2021. That body hires and evaluates the principal, approves the budget, and approves the school improvement plan. While I served, we organized to remove School Resource Officers from the building and move that money toward counselors and restorative practices.

I taught special education in CPS for six years, beginning at Pablo Casals Elementary in Humboldt Park.

As an organizer I have worked with parents across the city to keep neighborhood schools open. I helped build sanctuary teams in CPS schools so families knew their rights when immigration enforcement came into their neighborhoods. I worked on the campaign that won an elected representative school board.

I have not been appointed to a public commission or task force.

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

CTU Local 1 PAC — $44,415.00, reported July 18, 2026

CTU PAC (Illinois Federation of Teachers) — $41,386.83, reported July 31, 2026

We do not have a third contributor at that level. Beyond these two, our money comes from small donors, roughly $10,000 of which is not yet reflected in a filing because of reporting timing.

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

Labor: Chicago Teachers Union; Cook County College Teachers Union, Local 1600; Communications Workers of America, District 4; Workers United, Chicago and Midwest Regional Joint Board; Painters District Council 14.

Organizations: Our Schools Chicago; United Northwest Side; 25th Ward Independent Political Organization; 39th Ward Neighbors United; 33rd Ward Working Families; Students for a Democratic Society, UIC.

Elected officials: Congresswoman Delia Ramirez; State Senator Graciela Guzmán; State Representative Lilian Jiménez; Cook County Commissioners Tara Stamps, Jessica Vásquez, and Frank Aguilar; Aldermen William Hall, Byron Sigcho-Lopez, Jessie Fuentes, Anthony Quezada, Chris Taliaferro, and Rossana Rodríguez Sánchez.

Education leaders: Dr. Kenner, former Principal of Whitney Young Magnet High School; Chicago Board of Education member Jitu Brown.

I refuse contributions from charter and privatization interests, the real estate lobby, developers, and corporate PACs.

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?

This district rarely starts with what our students need, it starts with what we cannot afford. That is a choice, and I am running so we can finally make a new choice.

I taught special education in CPS for six years, and every time the budget got tight my students were the first to lose something. I know firsthand how decisions made far from the classroom land hardest on students who already have the least margin for cuts, and how often their families are the last to find out.

My qualifications come from several places:

- I am the only candidate who actually went to CPS. These schools raised me.
- I taught in these schools.
- I served on my old school's Local School Council from 2018 to 2021, where we handled the budget, the principal's contract, and the school improvement plan, which is governance at the building level.
- I have spent the last three years in Springfield making the funding case, with years before that organizing parents through closure fights.

That means I know what a policy looks like when it is written, when it is implemented, and when it finally lands on a family.

f. Please describe your Educational agenda.

- Universal full-day pre-K starting at age three. Every child gets an extra year. Working parents get childcare they can afford.

- Better school food. We spend roughly $100 million a year on a contract for meals students throw away. We need to rebid the contract, cook in regional kitchens, and buy from Illinois farms and local and minority-owned suppliers.
- Sustainable Community Schools with wraparound services in every neighborhood that wants one. We are at roughly fifty schools in a district of more than six hundred, and we have proven that this model can scale.
- Youth jobs and career pathways. Every high school student should have paid work experience before graduation.

For Chicago students to get the education they deserve, the state must pay what it owes. Illinois wrote its own funding formula and has never funded it. A school board president's job is not to assume the state will not find the money, but to make sure that it does.

Accountability / Transparency

1) Will you commit to implementing some form of monthly communications for your constituents?

YES.

My district is the whole city, so this cannot be one newsletter. I will publish a monthly report on what the Board voted on, what I voted for, and why. Plain language, translated, and distributed through schools and community organizations rather than posted and forgotten.

I will also hold regular public sessions across the city on a set schedule rather than only during a crisis.

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

- Publish Board items far enough in advance that communities can read them before a vote.
- Require an operational impact review on items affecting budget, staffing, safety, and school operations, so the Board sees in writing what a policy asks of a school before voting.
- Publish what the district already knows: building conditions, staffing and vacancies by school, whether students with IEPs are receiving the services their plans require, and post-graduation outcomes by school.
- Disaggregate every metric by race, income, disability, and language. No more hiding behind citywide averages.

3) What methods will you put in place to understand the interests and positions of your constituents, and to ensure your Board votes align with your constituents rather than political funders or special interests?

I will be in school buildings on a regular basis, sitting with principals, teachers, parents, and students in their own schools rather than waiting for them to come downtown. A board that only meets its constituents at a monthly public comment period is not hearing from them, it is processing them.

That means regular community sessions across the city on a set schedule, not only during a crisis, and it means bringing questions to people before I have made up my mind rather than after a policy is drafted.

It also means closing the loop. I will state my reasoning in public before a vote, not after, so people can hold me to an argument and not just a tally. And when a community raises an objection and I go the other way, they deserve to hear why directly from me.

As for the funders, I refuse money from charter and privatization interests, the real estate lobby, developers, and corporate PACs. That removes the most common conflict before it starts.

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 hires and evaluates the CEO. That is the main tool and it has rarely been used seriously.

I will evaluate the CEO on a published schedule against criteria set in advance and in public. The central question is whether schools are better off, measured by asking principals and educators directly.

The Board should also set its own meeting agenda rather than receiving one from central office, and it should ask for information that is not being volunteered by staff.

Central office is the one part of this district that is never evaluated on whether it made schools better- that needs to change.

5) Will you support a third-party independent audit of Chicago Public Schools?

YES.

We are carrying close to $10 billion in debt and a structural deficit, and the public is entitled to know exactly where the money goes. An independent audit is how you establish facts that can inform how we use our values to govern.

I want an audit to cover outside contracts specifically. Our food contract alone runs roughly $100 million a year for meals students throw away. If there are more like it, the public should know.

The findings should be public and the Board should have to respond to them on the record.

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?

Local School Councils are the strongest parent power structure this city has, and we have let them wither. Many cannot fill their seats and many members have never been trained. I will invest in real training on budgets, principal evaluation, and legal responsibilities, and in sustained recruitment.

Parents should be brought in while decisions are still open. Most engagement in this district happens at the end, when a policy is already drafted and the only choices are to accept it or object publicly.

Information has to reach parents in a form they can use. Plain language, delivered through schools and community organizations.

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 wrote its own funding formula, set the adequacy number, and has never paid it. That gap lands on Chicago families twice, once through property taxes and again through what their students go without.

I have spent the last three years working Springfield during session weeks. I know the delegation, I know the committees, and I know that legislators respond to their own constituents far more than to anyone testifying from Chicago. That is why I will bring parents and educators with me to Springfield.

The asks are full funding under the Evidence-Based Funding formula with a real timeline attached; progressive revenue at the state level, including taxing the wealthiest people and corporations in Illinois; full funding of the special education and multilingual mandates the state requires of us and then underpays; and TIF surplus returned to schools predictably instead of through an annual political fight.

On external partners, I welcome employers, unions, City Colleges, hospitals, and philanthropy for programs and pathways. I am also clear about the limit: private money can seed something, but it cannot fund the basics. That lets the state off the hook and hands private actors influence over public decisions.

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

We are not going to cut our way out of it. The gap is structural and it was created by a state that does not pay what it owes.

So the first move is revenue: full state funding, progressive revenue, funded mandates, and TIF surplus.

The second is an honest look at what we already spend. The food contract is one example. We also own hundreds of roofs that could be generating power instead of running up utility bills every month.

What I will not do is balance a budget by asking students to do with less. Closing 50 schools in 2013 did not produce the savings we were promised. It did produce immense harm, which is still with us today.

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?

Equity means investing more where the need is greatest. Allocations should account for poverty, disability, and school complexity, not headcount alone.

Accountability means we need to prove it - the district should publish, by school, what it spent and what students actually received: staffing levels, vacancies, program access, and building condition.

Investment must go first to the schools and communities that have endured the deepest historic disinvestment.

Education / Students

11) Achievement Gap: How do you plan to address and close the intransigent achievement gap for African American students?

We need to be honest about where the gap comes from. This district closed 50 schools in 2013 and the overwhelming majority of displaced students were Black. Research found most transferred from one under-resourced school to another, that the closures did not save money, and that violence increased in the affected neighborhoods. That decision also pushed Black educators out of CPS.

So the first thing is to stop making it worse: I will not close schools.

The second is to fully implement the Black Student Success Plan. It is mandated by state law. It was adopted in February 2025 and still has no dedicated budget line and no public metrics. I will fund it with a visible line the Board votes on, publish progress by school, and hold the district to the goals already written down, including cutting out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for Black students by 40 percent and doubling the number of Black male educators.

The third is staffing. Black students are disproportionately in schools with the highest vacancy rates. You cannot teach reading without reading specialists.

The fourth is rebuilding the Black educator and school leader pipeline through Grow Your Own, so the adults in these buildings come from these communities.

12) Opportunity Gap: How do you plan to address and close the opportunity gap for African American students?

Access is something this district controls directly, which means it can be fixed directly.

Career and technical programs, dual credit that transfers, apprenticeship connections through the trades and unions, and functioning college counseling all exist in CPS, but they exist unevenly. Which opportunities a student gets depends mostly on which building they walked into as a freshman.

I will bring those programs to the most disinvested high schools at the scale they already exist elsewhere, and publish access measures by school so the unevenness is visible.

And the measure of whether any of it worked is what happens after graduation. CPS needs to publish where its graduates land at one year and five years out, by school and disaggregated. Right now the district cannot tell a family what happened to their high school's last five graduating classes.

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

Schools are where most young people in this city will first be seen by an adult trained to recognize what they are carrying. But that only works if the adult is there.

Every school should have counselors, social workers, and psychologists at ratios that allow actual relationships, not crisis triage. Right now those positions go unfilled for months, and are some of the first on the chopping block.

Sustainable Community Schools are the model that works, because they bring health and mental health services into the building. Drake Elementary has a full-time clinic because that community decided that is what it needed.

We also know that care has to be culturally competent, which means recruiting and retaining Black clinicians, and it means trauma-informed practice.

And we can't forget that staff need support too. Educators and school staff carry secondary trauma and the district doesn't address this as seriously as it needs to.

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

- Bill Medicaid for eligible services. CPS leaves money on the table here, and other large districts recover far more than we do.

- Partner with the city and county so school-based clinics draw on public health funding rather than the education budget alone.
- Build it into the Sustainable Community Schools line so clinicians are funded positions rather than grant-funded pilots that disappear in the first lean year.
- Fight for state and federal behavioral health dollars. Springfield funds mental health separately from education, and this district has not pursued it aggressively.

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?

The district knows which schools lack a gym, a library, an art teacher, or a world language program, and that information should be published and public by school.

Some of this is facilities: our buildings average 86 years old with more than $3 billion in deferred maintenance. A handful of CPS elementary schools do not have a gym at all.

Anyone who has followed by campaign knows that food is one of my main priorities. We need to rebid the contract, cook in regional kitchens, buy from Illinois farms and local and minority-owned suppliers. Making better food this way can actually help CPS get more funding from the federal government.

Arts, shop, technology, and world languages come down to staffing and scheduling. When budgets tighten these are the first positions cut and we need to prioritize them in our schools. My standard is that a family should find these offerings at the school on their block without an application or a lottery.

15) What actions will you take to ensure the Black Student Achievement Committee is staffed appropriately? And will you commit to the African American community having a strong voice and autonomy in the selection of Black Student Achievement Committee members?

YES.

This committee was required by state law and was seated only this July, more than two years after the mandate and more than a year after the Board voted to create it. That delay is an example of a recurring issue at CPS.

We need dedicated staff support rather than borrowed time from an existing department, a real budget, a published meeting schedule, public minutes, and an annual report to the Board that the Board must formally answer.

Black parents, students, educators and community organizations should have meaningful authority in shaping who represents them on this committee, through a transparent selection process established before names are chosen.

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?

On CTE and computer science, I want to expand both, connected to real employers, unions, and City Colleges, with paid placements. These are among the clearest paths from a CPS diploma to a career, and access to them is currently uneven across the city.

On AI, I support a pause on expanding or purchasing student-facing AI tools until the district establishes clear protections for student data, age-appropriate use, and educational quality

As a special education teacher I know assistive technology can be transformative for some students, and I do not want to lose that. But right now vendors are selling into this district faster than we are deciding anything, and our students should not be the experiment.

Any policy should be built with teachers, students, and families at the table. It has to protect student data, and it has to not widen the gap between schools that can afford support and schools that cannot.

Operations / Policy / Performance

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

We announce things and do not fund them or meaningfully commit to them. A program launches with grant money, the grant ends, the position gets cut in the first lean budget year, and what was a real program becomes a line in a brochure. Families notice and they stop believing us. The Black Student Success Plan is the current example. Adopted, mandated by law, and still without a budget line.

The fix is discipline and integrity about commitments. If the Board adopts something, it funds it as a permanent line, assigns someone accountable, and reports publicly on progress.

18) LSCs are responsible for principal selection. Should CPS be required to obtain LSC review to remove a principal?

YES.

The Local School Council hires the principal and evaluates them on a performance contract. Removing a principal without that council's involvement takes away the authority the law gave parents and community members.

I served on an LSC. That body knows things about a building that central office does not.

There are genuine emergencies involving safety or misconduct, and those need a defined process. Outside of that, a principal should not be removed over the heads of the people who selected them.

17) Do you think the school board should have autonomy to override LSC decisions that are made at the local level?

NO.

LSCs came out of the 1988 reform act because decisions were being made about neighborhoods rather than with them. That authority was placed with parents and community members deliberately, and Black and Brown parent organizing is the reason it exists.

The Board sets districtwide standards on equity, safety, civil rights, special education, and fiscal transparency, and it should enforce those. Enforcing a legal obligation is different from overriding a council's judgment because central office disagrees with it.

An example of the difference: if a council approved a budget that failed to fund legally required special education services, the district must correct that, because it is a violation of law. If a council selects a principal central office would not have chosen, that is the council exercising exactly the authority it was given.

Where councils struggle, the answer is training and support, not taking their power away.

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

I am open to it and I think the case is strong.

Termination decisions in this district have not always been consistent, and the consequences have fallen unevenly. Employees are entitled to a process they can trust, and the public is entitled to know the process is the same regardless of who you are or which network you work in.

An independent body would need real authority, published standards, and public reporting on outcomes disaggregated by race and job category. Without those it becomes another layer that changes nothing.

I would want to hear from the unions representing these employees before designing it, because they see the pattern in a way the district does not.

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

I reject the notion that this conversation should begin with what we can take away from a community.

Chicago ran this experiment in 2013 with 50 schools. The savings we were promised never materialized. Research has since found that most displaced students moved from one under-resourced school to another, that the closures did not save money, and that violence increased in the affected neighborhoods. Black educators left the district.

Falling enrollment is a symptom of disinvestment, not an argument for more of it. When families leave a school, the question is why, and the answer is usually the programs, the staffing, and the building.

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

Again, I reject the premise that when a school is struggling or enrollment is declining, our first task is to decide what criteria justify taking that school away from the community. The first question should be: what has this school been denied, why are families leaving, and what would it take to make it thrive?

What I will say is what criteria this district used before and what was wrong with it. Utilization formulas treated a building as too empty without asking why families left. Test scores were used to describe schools that had been starved of resources. The process then landed almost entirely on Black and Brown neighborhoods.

If enrollment is declining at a school, the district should be identifying the cause and investing, and reporting publicly on what it tried and whether it worked. We all remember Dyett High School, which community members and families had to fight tooth and nail to keep open. Today, Dyett is fully enrolled and their basketball team are state champions - imagine if we had given other schools that same opportunity.

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

- Make the Black Student Success Plan fully funded and publicly reported, with a budget line and metrics by school.
- Require an operational impact review on Board items affecting budget, staffing, safety, and school operations.
- Require public reporting, by school, on special education service delivery, staffing vacancies, building condition, and post-graduation outcomes.

- Adopt a real accessibility roadmap with a target date. More than half of CPS buildings are not fully ADA accessible and the Facilities Master Plan names accessibility as a priority without a plan.
- Keep the SRO removal in place and do not return discretion to individual schools.

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?

Yes, guardrails are appropriate. Public money carries public obligations.

Any school receiving public funds should meet the same standards on financial transparency, special education obligations, discipline reporting, civil rights compliance, and the right of its employees to organize.

The specific thing I would fix is mid-year removal: when a school pushes a student out partway through the year, the student loses and the district absorbs the cost. That should not be our practice.

Oversight is also about information - families choosing a school deserve accurate, comparable data on outcomes, discipline, and special education service delivery across every school type.

Charter Schools

25) Funding Equity: Do you support funding parity between charter public schools and district-operated schools?

My answer is that funding should follow obligation.

Where a charter serves the same students with the same legal responsibilities, including special education services, English learner services, transportation, and serving every student who enrolls for the full year, it should be resourced for that work.

Parity as a flat per-pupil claim does not hold up, because district schools carry obligations charters do not. A neighborhood school takes every student who walks in, at any point in the year, and cannot decline anyone.

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? 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 to both.

A student with an IEP is entitled to those services regardless of which publicly funded school they attend. That is federal law and it should be enforced the same way everywhere.

On the second question, yes, without qualification. If a school takes public money for a student, it is responsible for that student through the year. Mid-year pushout is one of the most damaging things that happens to children in this system, and it happens most often to students with disabilities, students with behavior challenges, and students who are expensive to serve. The neighborhood school absorbs them and then gets judged on outcomes it did not create.

27) Parent Choice and Educational Options: 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 this respectfully, because the premise in the question is real. Black families have made rational decisions with the options they have, and these parents know what is best for their students.

But I *will* ask why those were the only options. The same district that told families their neighborhood school was failing had spent years underfunding it, and then closed 50 of them. “Choice” arrived after the alternative was taken away.

So my commitment is to make the neighborhood school worth choosing. Sustainable Community Schools, pre-K at three, career pathways, and real programs inside the building, open to the students who live there without an application or a lottery. Families should not have to travel across the city or win anything to get their child a good education.

On charters specifically, I do not support expansion, and I would hold every charter to the same standards as any other publicly funded school. Where a charter operator moves to close a school, CPS should step in to protect that school community. I was part of the effort that brought five Acero campuses under district management rather than letting a network walk away from those neighborhoods.

28) Charter Renewal Stability: What are your thoughts on charter school renewals, including multi-year renewals?

Renewal decisions should be made on clear, published standards, on a predictable timeline, with the record available to the public in advance.

Families and educators deserve to know well before a decision whether their school is at risk. Right now renewal season is a source of instability for the people with the least power in it.

On multi-year renewals, I am open to longer terms where performance and compliance are strong, because instability harms students. Longer terms should come with real interim reporting rather than a pause in oversight.

Where an operator has failed on finances, special education, discipline, or civil rights, renewal should not be automatic regardless of term length.

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

YES.

Same academic standards, same financial transparency, same operational reporting, same student outcome measures, all disaggregated by race, income, disability, and language.

Where evaluation should account for a difference is enrollment obligation. A school that takes every student who enrolls at any point in the year is doing something different from a school that does not. Any honest comparison has to account for who a school serves and who it does not, including mid-year entries and exits.

That is not an argument for a lower standard, it is an argument for a comparison that means something.

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

My vision is a district where the neighborhood school is the obvious choice rather than the fallback, and where a family's ZIP code stops predicting the quality of the school down the block.

In that district, charters are held to the same public standards as everyone else, their educators have the same right to organize, their students receive the same services, and no operator can close a school and leave families with a press release and no recourse.

I do not support expansion but I also do not support destabilizing schools that families currently rely on. Students in charters are Chicago public school students and they should not be treated as somebody else's responsibility.

The investments that improve outcomes are the same across school types: staffing, early childhood, career pathways, mental health services, buildings that work, and a state that finally pays what it owes.