COAL Chicago Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire

Victor P. Henderson — Candidate for President, Chicago Board of Education

COAL submission deadline: End of day September 21, 2026

Candidate Information

Name on Ballot	Victor P. Henderson
School Board District	President, Chicago Board of Education — Citywide
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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?

No. I have not previously held elected public office, and this is my first campaign for elected office. I have, however, served in appointed public-service and governance positions, including service on the Illinois Community College Board. I believe that combination of public-service experience and independence from the existing CPS political structure is an asset as Chicago transitions to a fully elected school board.

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?

My public and civic service has included serving as President of the Chicago Bar Association, President of the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation, Outside Ethics Officer for the Chicago Housing Authority, Counsel to the U.S. House Committee on Ethics, a member of the Illinois Community College Board, and service on the board of Urban Prep Academies. My professional and civic career has consistently involved governance, ethics, access to justice, education, and institutional accountability.

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
Victor P. Henderson	$500,000
Mark Christensen	$7,300
Catherine Chaskin	$5,000

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

I welcome support from parents, educators, labor, business, civic and faith leaders, and community organizations, but I will remain independent in office. I will work with stakeholders; I will not work for any special interest. Please see the endorsement list at www.victorforthefuture.org.

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 Chicago is entering a new era of school governance, and the Board needs a President capable of bringing 21 members, diverse communities, educators, parents, labor, administration, and other stakeholders together around one central obligation: providing every child in Chicago an excellent education.

I bring an unusual combination of financial, legal, executive, governance, ethics, and education experience. I began my career as a Certified Public Accountant, became an attorney, managed complex litigation and financial matters, led major professional organizations, managed a law firm, and served in significant public and educational governance roles. I am also the father of four CPS graduates. The next Board President must understand billions of dollars in public finances, build consensus among people who will disagree, demand accountability from management, and know the difference between governing CPS and attempting to run it day to day. That is the experience I bring.

f. Please describe your Educational agenda.

My educational agenda begins with a simple standard: a child's ZIP code should not determine the quality or breadth of his or her education.

My priorities are improving academic outcomes—particularly literacy, mathematics, graduation, and college-and-career readiness; providing safe and well-supported schools; expanding access to CTE, technology, arts and rigorous academic opportunities; strengthening support for students with disabilities and students requiring additional intervention; and ensuring that resources follow student need. Those educational priorities must be supported by transparent multiyear budgeting, strong school leadership, meaningful parent participation, and measurable accountability. Our goal should not simply be to spend more or spend less. It should be to spend smarter and produce better outcomes for children.

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. I would establish a regular Board President Community Update at least monthly, distributed electronically and publicly available online. It would identify upcoming major votes, explain significant policy and financial issues in plain language, report progress on Board priorities, and tell residents how to provide input before decisions are made. Communication cannot simply tell people what the Board already decided. Transparency must occur before important decisions are made.

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

I would strengthen the Board committee process so major financial, academic, contractual, operational, and policy matters receive meaningful public review before reaching the full Board. Materials should be released sufficiently in advance for Board members, parents, LSCs, educators, journalists, watchdog organizations, and residents to understand what is being proposed. I also support understandable public dashboards for finances and student outcomes, plain-language explanations of major Board actions, accessible contract and procurement information, and clear reporting on whether initiatives are producing their promised results.

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 use structured community engagement: regular school visits, meetings with LSCs, parent organizations, principals, educators and students; public listening sessions throughout Chicago; surveys and digital feedback; and direct engagement with community, civic, faith, labor and business organizations.

But constituent engagement does not mean outsourcing my judgment. A Board member has a responsibility to listen carefully, examine the evidence, understand citywide consequences, and then exercise independent judgment in the best interests of students. No contributor, union, corporation, political organization, elected official, or other stakeholder should receive a veto over that responsibility.

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

The Board should establish clear annual and multiyear goals for the CEO and administration, identify measurable outcomes, review progress publicly, and require corrective action when goals are not being achieved. Financial performance, academic outcomes, major contracts, capital projects, staffing and important initiatives should have understandable benchmarks.

Accountability also requires consequences. Programs that work should be strengthened. Programs that consistently fail should be improved, redesigned or ended. The Board's job is not merely to approve what administration places before it; it is to ask the difficult questions necessary to protect students and taxpayers.

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

YES. I support an independent financial and operational review of CPS. The purpose should not be to produce another report that sits on a shelf, nor unnecessarily duplicate existing statutory audits. It should identify structural costs, inefficiencies, financial risks, contracting issues and opportunities to redirect resources toward classrooms and student services. Independence is important because the public needs confidence that conclusions are based on facts rather than political preferences.

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?

Parents must be treated as governing partners, not as an audience called after decisions have already been made. I would support regular parent listening sessions, school visits, stronger communication through LSCs and parent organizations, accessible digital engagement, language access, and opportunities for families to comment on major initiatives before Board action.

Families also need to know what happened after they spoke. CPS should develop mechanisms to report back: what we heard, what changed, what did not change, and why.

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?

Chicago must aggressively advocate for the state funding its students are entitled to receive and for a predictable, sustainable state-school funding structure. That requires a coordinated strategy involving the Board, CPS administration, Chicago's legislative delegation, parents, educators, labor, civic organizations and other stakeholders rather than approaching Springfield only when CPS is facing an annual crisis.

Externally, CPS should pursue federal and state grants, responsible philanthropic partnerships, workforce and apprenticeship partnerships, City Colleges, universities, organized labor and employers—particularly for CTE, technology, internships, career pathways, mental health and enrichment. External funding should supplement CPS's educational responsibility, not privatize it or allow temporary grants to create permanent unfunded obligations.

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

There is no credible single solution. I would begin with a transparent multiyear baseline and independent financial and operational review. Protect classrooms and direct student services first. Examine Central Office, contracts, vendors and programs for effectiveness. Aggressively pursue sustainable state, federal and other revenues. Address long-term obligations rather than repeatedly pushing costs into future years. And connect spending to measurable student outcomes.

I do not support treating teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, clinicians, principals and other school-based employees as the automatic balancing mechanism whenever a deficit appears. Nor do I support automatically taxing or borrowing our way out of every budget problem. CPS needs disciplined multiyear governance.

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 funding does not necessarily mean identical funding. Schools serving students with greater needs may require greater resources.

CPS should have a transparent school-funding methodology incorporating student enrollment and need, including students with disabilities, multilingual learners, students experiencing homelessness, concentrated economic disadvantage, academic intervention needs and other legitimate factors. The public should be able to see how resources are allocated and why. The objective is a strong educational foundation in every neighborhood, with additional resources directed where student need requires them.

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

Mental-health services should be treated as a core student-support function, not an optional program to be restored only when resources are plentiful. I would prioritize stable funding for counselors, social workers, psychologists and other appropriate school-based professionals; seek available state, federal and grant resources; and responsibly expand partnerships with qualified health and community providers.

Funding decisions should also be needs-based. Schools confronting greater levels of trauma, violence, homelessness, chronic absenteeism or other documented needs may require more intensive support.

EDUCATION / STUDENTS

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

We should begin by refusing to accept persistent racial achievement disparities as inevitable.

For Black students, I would focus on early literacy and numeracy, timely academic intervention, effective tutoring, attendance, access to experienced educators and school leaders, rigorous coursework, and transparent measurement of progress beginning in the earliest grades. CPS should disaggregate outcomes so the Board and public can see where Black students are succeeding, where disparities persist, and whether interventions are actually working.

The Black Student Achievement Committee should be an accountability body with the staff, data and authority necessary to turn those measurements into action. We should set measurable goals, report publicly on progress, and change strategies when the evidence tells us they are not working.

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?

The opportunity gap is larger than test scores. It concerns what students actually have access to.

Black students throughout Chicago should have meaningful access to advanced coursework, STEM and computer science, arts, foreign languages, high-quality CTE, dual-credit opportunities, apprenticeships, internships, extracurricular activities, college counseling, modern facilities and technology.

CPS should expand partnerships with City Colleges, organized labor, apprenticeship programs, employers and workforce-development organizations so students can graduate with industry-recognized credentials, college credit, work experience and genuine options after high school. College preparation and career preparation should complement one another rather than compete.

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

CPS needs a continuum of mental-health support, from prevention and early intervention to crisis response. That means appropriate staffing, clear referral pathways, behavioral supports, trauma-informed practices, partnerships with qualified providers, crisis protocols, and support for employees as well as students.

Mental health also cannot be separated from school climate, attendance, bullying, violence, housing instability and family circumstances. The system should identify needs early rather than waiting for a student or employee to reach a crisis point.

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?

Every child deserves a complete education, not simply the subjects that are easiest to fund.

I support establishing systemwide minimum educational-opportunity standards so students have access to physical education and appropriate equipment, healthy food, arts, technology, career and technical education, and language learning. Where facilities or staffing prevent a program from immediately being offered on-site, CPS should provide shared or network-level access while building long-term school capacity. A child's neighborhood should not dictate whether he or she gets a rich educational experience.

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. I will support sufficient professional staff, data capacity, policy expertise, budgetary support and direct access to CPS leadership so the Black Student Achievement Committee can do more than hold meetings—it must be able to measure disparities, recommend interventions and track whether CPS is delivering results.

I also support a strong and meaningful African American community voice in selecting committee members. Community-based educators, parents, students, researchers and organizations with demonstrated experience serving Black children should have a significant role in identifying candidates.

I support genuine community input and representation consistent with the governing law and the Board's legal appointment responsibilities.

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 areas should be central to preparing students for the economy they will enter.

CPS should expand high-quality CTE, computer science, cybersecurity, advanced manufacturing and other emerging career pathways, while strengthening partnerships with City Colleges, apprenticeship programs, organized labor and employers.

AI should be used responsibly to enhance—not replace—learning or educators. CPS needs clear standards protecting student data and privacy, academic integrity, professional judgment and critical thinking. Students should learn both how to use emerging technologies and how to understand their limitations.

OPERATIONS / POLICY / PERFORMANCE

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.

NO. I do not believe the School Board should have general authority to override decisions that the law entrusts to Local School Councils. LSCs exist to provide meaningful school-level governance and ensure that parents, educators and community members have a genuine voice in decisions affecting their schools.

For example, Illinois law gives an LSC the authority to select its school's principal. If an LSC follows the law and properly exercises that authority, the Board should not be able to substitute its preferred candidate simply because it would have made a different choice. That would undermine the purpose of giving the decision to the local council in the first place.

There are circumstances in which CPS must act pursuant to its own statutory responsibilities, including specific intervention procedures established by law. But those circumstances should be treated as defined exceptions, not as a general power to second-guess lawful LSC decisions. Effective governance requires clear roles, appropriate training, transparency, and collaboration among LSCs, principals, and CPS; while respecting the authority assigned to each.

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

YES. Because LSCs are responsible for selecting, evaluating, and determining whether to renew their principals, I believe they should have a meaningful role when CPS is considering removing a principal before the end of the principal's contract.

That review should include notice and an opportunity for the LSC to provide relevant information and perspective before a final decision is made, where circumstances permit. The people charged with

evaluating a principal's performance and governing alongside that principal may have important context that should inform the decision.

However, LSC review should not amount to a veto or interfere with CPS's lawful authority to discipline or remove a principal. CPS must retain the ability to comply with statutory removal procedures, contractual and due-process requirements, and to act immediately when circumstances require it.

The goal should be meaningful local participation without preventing CPS from exercising the authority and responsibilities assigned to it by law.

I support **independent and meaningful review of contested terminations**, but I would first determine whether establishing a new review board is necessary.

CPS employees are not all subject to the same termination process. Depending on the employee and the circumstances, existing protections may include independent hearing officers, collective bargaining and grievance procedures, arbitration, or judicial review. Before creating another review body, I would examine whether there is an actual gap in the current system.

I would also consider the cost. An independent review board would require funding for administration, staffing, legal support, hearings, and potentially compensation for board members or hearing officers. Those costs should be justified by a demonstrated need, particularly if existing processes already provide meaningful review.

Ultimately, CPS should have a termination process that is **lawful, provides required due process, honors applicable collective bargaining and contractual rights, and produces fair, consistent, and timely decisions**. If the existing process meets those standards, I would not create another layer of bureaucracy simply for the sake of additional review. If there is a demonstrated gap, then I would support a targeted solution that addresses that gap while remaining fiscally responsible.

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

One of CPS's greatest challenges is the inconsistency in educational opportunity from one neighborhood to another.

The solution is not a single program. CPS needs strong academic fundamentals, early intervention, effective school leadership, equitable resources, safe learning environments, mental-health and student supports, meaningful college and career pathways, and transparent measurements that allow families to know whether schools and programs are improving.

My goal is straightforward: Every Neighborhood. Every Child. Students should not have to win an admissions lottery, travel across the city, or depend on family income to obtain a high-quality educational opportunity.

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 necessary wherever public dollars and children's education are involved.

Every publicly funded school should meet meaningful standards for academic performance, financial integrity, governance, student safety, special-education obligations, transparency and responsible use of public funds. School choice should expand opportunity for families—not create a system in which one school model receives accountability while another receives exemption.

At the same time, guardrails should not eliminate legitimate innovation or school-level autonomy simply because a school operates differently.

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

I begin with a strong presumption against closing schools. A neighborhood school is more than a line item in a budget; it can be an anchor for families and communities.

I would not support closures simply to produce short-term financial savings. Closure or consolidation should be considered only in extraordinary circumstances and only after compelling evidence, meaningful community participation, examination of alternatives, an equity analysis, and a credible transition plan showing that affected students will actually be better served. A spreadsheet alone should never determine the future of a neighborhood school.

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

No school should be considered for closure based upon one metric alone.

The Board should examine long-term enrollment trends; academic and program quality; student safety; facility condition and utilization; financial sustainability; availability and quality of nearby alternatives; transportation and travel impacts; effects on students with disabilities and other high-need populations; neighborhood and community impact; equity considerations; and whether realistic alternatives to closure have been exhausted.

Most importantly, CPS should have to demonstrate that students affected by the decision will receive a better, not merely different, educational opportunity.

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

I would prioritize a more rigorous Board governance structure built around multiyear budgeting, transparent public performance measures, meaningful committee review before major decisions, and clear measures of academic and operational accountability.

I would also establish a systemwide educational-opportunity framework identifying the core academic, student-support and enrichment opportunities Chicago students should reasonably expect regardless of neighborhood, while using weighted resources to address greater student needs.

And I would institutionalize meaningful parent, LSC, principal and community engagement before, rather than after, major Board decisions.

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, properly defined. Public-school students should receive equitable public support based on their educational needs regardless of the governance model of the public school they attend.

But 'parity' should mean comparable support for comparable students and responsibilities—not necessarily an identical dollar transfer when CPS directly provides services or assumes costs for one type of school that another must provide independently. Funding formulas should be transparent, equitable and based upon actual responsibilities and student needs.

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 / 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. A child should not receive fewer appropriate student-support resources simply because his or her family selected one form of public school rather than another.

YES. A publicly funded school accepts responsibility for educating the students it enrolls. Schools should not be permitted to improve their numbers by pushing out students who become more expensive or difficult to serve. That principle must, of course, recognize lawful transfers, appropriate special-education placements, legitimate disciplinary processes, family decisions and student-safety considerations.

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 schools can be a meaningful part of Chicago's public-education system when they meet a genuine community need and deliver strong educational outcomes.

I reject the idea that Chicago must choose between being 'pro-charter' and 'anti-charter.' Families—particularly families without the financial means to purchase private alternatives—deserve meaningful high-quality public options. My responsibility is to make sure those options are good.

I will support strong district-operated schools and strong charter schools while requiring rigorous accountability from both. I do not support charter expansion merely for expansion's sake, nor do I support eliminating successful schools simply because of their governance model.

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?

Renewal periods should reflect performance and risk.

A charter with a sustained record of strong academic outcomes, sound finances, lawful operations and responsible treatment of students should be eligible for a reasonable multi-year renewal that provides stability for students, employees and families.

Schools with significant but potentially correctable concerns may warrant shorter renewals with specific improvement benchmarks. Persistent serious academic, financial, governance or legal failure should result in nonrenewal after fair review and a responsible student-transition process.

The purpose of renewal should be accountability—not repeatedly relitigating the existence of high-performing schools or granting automatic extensions to poorly performing ones.

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 the fundamentals. Academic performance, student outcomes, financial integrity, student safety, special-education compliance, operational integrity and public transparency should be measured seriously regardless of governance model.

Where standards may differ is in matters legitimately connected to governance structure and autonomy. A charter may make certain staffing, curriculum or operational decisions differently from a district-operated school. Autonomy can permit innovation, but it should never mean exemption from accountability for students or public dollars.

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?

Five years from now, I want Chicago to spend far less energy fighting ideological battles over school labels and far more energy determining whether children are receiving excellent educations.

District-operated and charter schools should function within one coherent public-education ecosystem: transparent funding, meaningful accountability, equitable access, protection of student rights, strong special-education services, comparable public reporting, and opportunities to learn from practices that work.

I will not expand charters simply for expansion's sake. I also will not close or undermine a successful public school simply because it is a charter. The governing question should be the same throughout CPS: Is this school serving children well, using public resources responsibly, and expanding educational opportunity?

Internal Review Checklist — Before Final Submission

- Treasurer: insert the current top three contributors and D-3 amounts.
- Campaign: insert only formally confirmed and publicly releasable endorsements.
- Candidate information: verify Victor's exact current title and confirm use of the office/campaign address in the field labeled 'Home Address.'
- Legal/policy: review Q15 concerning the Black Student Achievement Committee appointment structure and the word 'autonomy.'
- Legal/policy: review Q17 and Q18 concerning the precise relationship between Board authority, LSC authority, and principal removal.
- Legal/labor: review Q19 against existing grievance, arbitration, collective-bargaining, administrative and statutory termination-review mechanisms.
- Final consistency check: confirm charter answers remain aligned with previously submitted/approved campaign positions.
- Candidate: final voice and signature review before submission.