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: Michelle N. Pierre

School Board District: 1B

Home Address 2915 N. Sayre
Chicago IL 60634

Employer/Your Title New Leaders/ /Senior Executive Director

Phone 773-887-8311 **Email** michelleforchange2@gmail.com

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

21 September 2026	Michelle Pierre	Michelle Pierre
Date	**Print**	**Signature**

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

Campaign Information

Campaign Manager NA

Phone **Email**

Website

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

Chicago School Board (2024) lost by 3000 votes

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?

None

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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
Jim Perry	$5000
Robert Best	$5000
Linda Erlinger	$2500

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

INCS
Urban Center
Common Ground Collective
Ald. GIlbert Villegas
Ald Felix Cardona
Ald Sam Nugent

Candidate's Plans and Goals for the School Board

e. Why are you running for *this position*? What expertise do you bring to the board? What makes you the best candidate for *the School Board*?

I am running because I believe Chicago Public Schools can become one of the best urban school districts in America, but getting there will require experienced leadership, accountability, and a relentless focus on children.

I bring nearly 30 years of experience in education to the Board. I have served as a teacher, principal, district executive, Chief Academic Officer, Chief Schools Officer, and national education leader. In Cleveland, I helped lead a district of approximately 40,000 students and nearly 100 schools, where graduation rates increased by more than 20 percentage points during my tenure. I have led school turnarounds, coached principals, managed large teams and budgets, and worked with families, educators, unions, community organizations, and business partners.

I was also a CPS parent. I understand this work both professionally and personally.

f. Please describe your Educational agenda.

My educational agenda begins with a simple belief: every child, in every neighborhood, deserves an excellent public school.

My priorities are Academic Excellence, Family and Community Voice, and Budget Transparency and Fairness. Academically, I want CPS to strengthen early literacy and mathematics, use evidence-based interventions, support students with disabilities and English learners, invest in excellent teachers and principals, and create clear measures of student and school progress.

We must also expand pathways beyond the traditional college-preparation model. Students should have access to CTE, dual enrollment, apprenticeships, advanced coursework, the arts, technology, and career-connected learning.

Finally, families deserve voice and choice. Whether a child attends a neighborhood, magnet, selective enrollment, charter, CTE, or other public school, our responsibility is the same: provide an excellent education and prepare that child for a successful future.

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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)**

I will provide a monthly District 1B update explaining important upcoming Board votes, CPS initiatives, district and school progress, and opportunities for community input. I will use email, social media, community meetings, and regular office hours to make information accessible.

Communication must also go both ways. Before significant votes, I want families and community members to know what is being considered and have an opportunity to tell me what they think. Afterward, I will explain how I voted and why.

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

Transparency starts by making information understandable and accessible before decisions are made. Board materials, budgets, contracts, academic performance data, and major proposals should be available to the public in plain language and with enough time for meaningful review.

I also support public dashboards that allow families to understand school spending and progress on important academic and operational measures. Major Board decisions should include clear explanations of the expected cost, anticipated student benefit,

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 maintain regular office hours, attend LSC and parent meetings throughout District 1B, hold community conversations before significant Board votes, conduct constituent surveys, and maintain regular communication with families, educators, principals, students, and community organizations.

I will listen carefully to my constituents, but my responsibility is also to exercise independent judgment. I will not promise that every vote will satisfy every group. I will explain my decisions and the evidence behind them.

Campaign contributions or political relationships will never determine my vote. Children come first.

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 a small number of clear, public measures for academic achievement, student well-being, finances, operations, and service delivery and review progress against them regularly. When CPS makes a major investment, the Board should ask three basic questions: What outcome are we trying to achieve? How will we measure whether it worked? What will we change if it does not?

The same standard should apply to transportation, special education, academic programs, contracts, and central office initiatives. Accountability should not simply mean producing reports; it should mean using results to improve decisions.

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

CPS manages more than $10 billion in public resources. An independent review can help identify inefficiencies, duplication, opportunities for savings, and areas where resources should be redirected toward classrooms and students.

An audit should not be used simply to justify predetermined cuts. It should provide an objective picture of where money is going, whether programs are producing results, and where CPS can operate more effectively.

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 should be partners, not an audience CPS speaks to after decisions have already been made.
I will hold regular office hours, attend LSC and parent organization meetings, visit schools, provide monthly communications, and create multiple ways for parents to reach me. I will also intentionally seek input from parents who may not regularly attend formal meetings.

As a former CPS parent myself, I understand how important it is to know that someone is listening and will respond. I want parents

BUDGET / FINANCE

7) In what ways should the school district engage Springfield for funding? In what ways will you engage external partners to assist with funding CPS initiatives?

CPS must maintain a sustained, bipartisan advocacy strategy in Springfield focused on fully funding the state's Evidence-Based Funding formula and ensuring appropriate reimbursement for special education, transportation, pensions, and other mandated costs. The Board should work collaboratively with Chicago's legislative delegation, the Governor, ISBE, other school districts, families, labor, and education advocates rather than engaging Springfield only when CPS faces a budget crisis.

We should also build stronger partnerships with philanthropy, universities, businesses, workforce organizations, and community organizations for initiatives such as CTE, internships, teacher pipelines, mental health, and college and career pathways. External partnerships should supplement, not replace, the public responsibility to adequately fund education.

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

CPS cannot solve a structural deficit with one-time fixes year after year. We need a combination of stronger revenue advocacy, disciplined spending, enrollment growth, and better long-term planning.

First, CPS should aggressively pursue the state funding it is entitled to under Illinois' Evidence-Based Funding system.
Second, we should conduct a rigorous review of central-office spending, contracts, programs, and initiatives to determine what is producing measurable value for students. I support reducing or eliminating spending that cannot demonstrate results before asking taxpayers for more. Third, we must address enrollment. Stronger schools attract and retain families. Increasing enrollment strengthens both our communities and CPS's financial position. Finally, the Board needs multi-year financial forecasting rather than

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 does not mean giving every school exactly the same resources. It means ensuring every child has what they need to succeed.

I support a transparent funding formula that considers enrollment as well as student needs—including poverty, disability, English-language status, academic needs, school size, and other factors affecting the cost of providing a high-quality education. I would prioritize dollars closest to students: strong teachers and principals, rigorous instruction, special education and bilingual services, early literacy and mathematics, student safety and mental health, and interventions for students who are behind.

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

Mental health support is not separate from academic achievement. Students cannot learn at their highest level when they are experiencing trauma, anxiety, instability, or other unmet needs, and educators cannot sustain excellent work without appropriate support. CPS should prioritize counselors, social workers, psychologists, and behavioral-health partnerships based on student need, while aggressively pursuing Medicaid reimbursements and available state and federal funding. We should also partner with universities, hospitals, community mental-health providers, and philanthropic organizations to expand capacity.

At the school level, I support early identification, trauma-informed practices, trusted-adult programs, peer mediation, and

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 have discussed the achievement gap for decades. I want us to become much more disciplined about closing it.
That starts with excellent instruction every day: strong early literacy grounded in evidence, rigorous mathematics, effective teachers and principals, high-quality curriculum, early intervention, tutoring when students fall behind, and meaningful progress monitoring.

CPS's Black Student Success Plan provides an important framework, but plans only matter if implementation produces results. I would expect the Board to regularly review measurable outcomes for Black students, specially, literacy, mathematics, attendance, discipline, access to advanced coursework, graduation, and postsecondary readiness, and intervene when progress is insufficient.

Throughout my career, I have seen that demographics do not determine destiny. Adults, systems, resources, and expectations matter. We must maintain high expectations for Black students while ensuring schools have the support necessary to help them

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?

Closing the opportunity gap means ensuring Black students have access not only to strong academics, but also to the experiences and pathways that prepare young people for life after graduation. I support expanding access to AP and honors courses, dual credit, CTE, internships, apprenticeships, college exposure, technology, the arts, and career-connected learning. Access to these resources should occur before high school.

In Cleveland, I helped build the Academies of Cleveland, bringing together schools, labor, employers, and community partners to create stronger career pathways for students. That experience reinforced my belief that we must connect education to real opportunities.

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

Mental health must be treated as part of student achievement and a healthy school culture, not as a separate initiative. CPS should strengthen early identification and intervention, ensure appropriate access to counselors, social workers, psychologists, and behavioral health providers, and develop strong partnerships with community mental-health organizations.

I also believe every student should have a trusted adult in their school. Staff need support as well. We should provide employees with meaningful access to mental-health resources and create working conditions that recognize the demands placed on educators. Most importantly, we should measure access and outcomes. Having a program on paper is not enough if students and staff cannot actually receive services when they need them.

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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?

A high-quality education must educate the whole child. Students need strong academics, but they also deserve physical education, recess, nutritious food, the arts, technology, world languages, and hands-on learning.

The first step is understanding where these opportunities currently exist and where the gaps are. I would ask CPS to provide the Board with a school-by-school opportunity analysis so we can see which students lack access and develop a plan to address those inequities. We should also use partnerships strategically. Chicago has extraordinary museums, universities, arts organizations

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?)**

The Black Student Achievement Committee should include people with expertise in instruction, school leadership, research and data, special education, mental health, family engagement, and college and career readiness. Just as importantly, Black parents, students, educators, principals, and community leaders must have a strong voice in its work and membership.

I would advocate for an open and transparent process for identifying committee members, including meaningful recommendations from Chicago's African American community. The committee must also have access to high-quality data and staff support. Illinois law requires it to establish baselines, develop strategies, track measurable indicators, and report progress publicly. I would hold the committee and the full Board accountable for turning those requirements into measurable improvements for Black students.

GOVERNANCE

16) What are your thoughts on the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Career and Technical Education (CTE), Computer Science (CS), and other emerging technologies in education for students, faculty, and staff?

These are no longer optional areas of education. Our responsibility is to prepare students for the world they are entering, not the world we grew up in. I strongly support expanding CTE, computer science, AI literacy, apprenticeships, and career-connected learning. My experience helping develop the Academies of Cleveland showed me what is possible when schools, employers, unions, and higher education work together to create meaningful pathways for students.

AI also has tremendous potential to support teachers and personalize learning, but it must be used responsibly. CPS should teach students how to use AI critically and ethically while protecting privacy, academic integrity, and independent thinking. Educators also need professional development so technology strengthens teaching rather than replacing the essential relationship between teacher and student.

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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.

Generally, NO. One of Chicago's strengths is local school governance. LSCs bring parents, educators, students, and community members directly into important school decisions, and the Board should respect the authority given to them.

There may be extraordinary circumstances involving law, student safety, civil rights, financial misconduct, or another matter where the Board has a legal obligation to intervene. Those situations should be narrowly defined and supported by clear evidence and due process.

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

YES, except where immediate action is legally required to protect students or staff.

If an LSC has responsibility for selecting and evaluating its contract principal, it should have a meaningful role when CPS is considering removal. The LSC knows the school's context, leadership, families, and community.

That does not mean an LSC should be able to prevent CPS from acting in circumstances involving serious misconduct, safety, legal violations, or other situations where the district has a responsibility to intervene. But under ordinary circumstances, there should be transparency, due process, documented evidence, and meaningful LSC review before such a consequential decision is made.

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

I am open to an independent review process if it improves fairness, consistency, and due process without creating another unnecessary layer of bureaucracy.

Before establishing a new board, however, I would want to understand what problem we are solving: Are similarly situated employees being treated differently? Are current appeal processes inadequate? Are investigations taking too long?

Any new review process should have clear standards, appropriate professional expertise, defined timelines, and safeguards against political influence. Employees deserve fair treatment, and CPS also needs the ability to act when performance, misconduct, or safety concerns warrant action.

OPERATIONS / POLICY / PERFORMANCE

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 opportunities for growth is creating greater coherence between what the district says it wants to accomplish and what actually happens in schools.

CPS has talented educators and many strong programs, but initiatives do not improve student outcomes simply because they are announced. We need clear district and school goals, a small number of meaningful KPIs, evidence-based interventions, strong principal support, and regular progress monitoring.

This is work I have done throughout my career. As a Board member, I would consistently ask: What outcome are we trying to achieve? How will we know whether we are making progress? What support do schools need? And what will we change when something is not working?

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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?

Yes. School choice and accountability should go together.

Families deserve meaningful educational options, including neighborhood, magnet, selective enrollment, CTE, charter, and other public-school models. At the same time, every school receiving public dollars should be accountable for academic outcomes, financial integrity, student safety, and appropriate services for students. Guardrails should be transparent, consistent, and focused on quality—not designed to favor or disadvantage a particular school model.

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

School closings should never be the first strategy for improving schools or balancing a budget. They are disruptive to students, families, educators, and communities and must be approached carefully. At the same time, I do not believe responsible governance means promising that every school building will remain unchanged forever regardless of enrollment, academic quality, finances, or opportunities available to students.

When enrollment is extremely low and maintaining separate schools limits our ability to provide students with robust academic programs, consolidation may deserve consideration. Any such process must begin with community engagement, transparent criteria, careful analysis of student impact, and a credible plan demonstrating that students will receive better educational opportunities…not simply a different building.

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

No school should be considered based on a single measure. The Board should examine enrollment and long-term demographic trends; academic performance and growth; building utilization and condition; program availability; per-pupil operating costs; proximity and quality of receiving schools; transportation; special education and bilingual services; safety; and the impact on the surrounding community.

Most importantly, CPS should have to demonstrate how consolidation would improve educational opportunities for affected students. Communities should know the criteria before individual schools are identified, and families should be involved throughout the process. Decisions this consequential should be based on transparent evidence rather than politics or short-term budget pressures.

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

I would focus on policies that strengthen academic accountability, transparency, and family voice.

First, I want CPS to establish clear academic and operational KPIs for the district and schools, with regular public reporting on progress. Second, major investments should include measurable goals and a process for evaluating whether they are producing results. Third, families should receive clearer, more accessible information about school budgets, academic performance, transportation, and major Board decisions.

I also want policies that strengthen early literacy and mathematics intervention, improve services and responsiveness for students with disabilities, expand high-quality college and career pathways, and preserve meaningful educational choices for families.

My approach to policy is straightforward: children come first, decisions should be driven by evidence rather than politics, and every

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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?)**

Public school students should be funded equitably regardless of whether they attend a district-operated or charter public school. Funding should follow student needs, including special education, bilingual education, poverty, and other factors that affect the resources necessary for students to succeed.

Illinois law establishes parameters for charter funding, and CPS should follow those requirements fairly and transparently. I do not believe a child's access to resources should be diminished simply because their family selected a

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.)**

Students with disabilities, English learners, students experiencing homelessness, and students needing mental-health or academic interventions deserve appropriate support regardless of the type of public school they attend. I also believe accepting public funding creates a responsibility to educate the students a school enrolls. Schools should not counsel out or push out students because they become academically, behaviorally, or financially challenging to serve.

There will always be legitimate circumstances in which a family chooses to transfer a child or a student's needs require a different placement. But those decisions should be based on the student's best interests—not an effort to improve a school's academic statistics or reduce costs.

27) Parent Choice and Educational Options: Well-to-do families have the resources to afford the type of education they want for their children. Many Black and Brown families who may be unable to afford private or parochial schools, choose charter schools because they believe those schools best meet the educational, social, emotional, or cultural needs of their children. What role do you believe charter schools should play within the Chicago Public Schools system, and how would you ensure families continue to have meaningful educational choices?

I believe strongly in family voice and choice. Families should have access to excellent neighborhood schools as well as magnet, selective enrollment, CTE, charter, and other high-quality public-school options.

For many families, particularly families who cannot afford private-school tuition, public school choice provides access to educational opportunities they otherwise might not have. I respect parents' ability to determine which school environment best meets their child's academic, social, and emotional needs.

Charter schools should therefore remain part of Chicago's public education landscape when they demonstrate quality and community demand. At the same time, CPS must continue investing in strong neighborhood schools so that choice is truly about selecting among excellent options rather than escaping a school that families believe is not meeting their children's needs.

My goal is not to protect one school model over another. My goal is to protect children's access to excellent schools.

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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?

Charter renewal decisions should be predictable, evidence-based, and proportional to performance.

Schools demonstrating sustained academic results, sound financial management, legal compliance, and responsible operations should be eligible for meaningful multi-year renewals. Strong schools need stability to recruit educators, plan programs, build community partnerships, and serve families.

When significant concerns exist, shorter renewal periods with clear improvement requirements may be appropriate. And when a school consistently fails students or demonstrates serious financial or operational problems, the Board must be willing to act.

The standards should be established in advance and applied consistently. Renewal should not become a political

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, with appropriate differences based on governance and law.

The fundamental expectations should be consistent: Are students learning? Are students safe and supported? Are public dollars managed responsibly? Are students with disabilities and English learners receiving appropriate services? Are families being treated fairly?

Charter and district-operated schools have different governance structures and legal requirements, so every operational measure cannot be identical. Charter schools, for example, operate under performance agreements and renewal requirements that do not apply to district-operated schools in precisely the same way.

But accountability should never depend on the label over the school's door. I support transparent academic, financial, operational, and student-outcome expectations for all publicly funded schools.

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?

Over the next five years, I want to move Chicago beyond the "district versus charter" debate and toward a much more important question: Are we providing every child with an excellent education?

CPS and charter schools serve Chicago children, often from the same neighborhoods and families. They should share successful practices, collaborate on challenges, and be held to high expectations for student outcomes. I want CPS to strengthen neighborhood schools while preserving high-quality educational choices for families. I support strong charter schools that demonstrate results and demand, just as I support strong district-operated schools. When any publicly funded school consistently fails students, we should intervene and improve it. Our policies should encourage quality, transparency, equitable funding, responsible stewardship, and accountability across the entire system.

Ultimately, I envision one Chicago public education community with different school models but one shared responsibility: preparing every child for a successful future.

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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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