

Board of Education Candidates Disability Questionnaire 2024**Candidate:** Adam Parrott-Sheffer

Question: In no more than a paragraph, introduce yourself and why you are running to serve on the Board of Education.

Answer: It matters to me that our board consists of Chicago Public School parents who have experience creating the conditions for powerful learning and have improved large bureaucracies. That is my story. I am a 5th generation Chicagoan and proud public school parent who has spent 20 years making our schools work better for all kids as a principal and former special education teacher. I am frustrated with the experiences our students with disabilities and multilingual learners have in our schools and I know we can do better. That starts with a board committed to transparency, accountability, and increased communication. I want to deliver on that promise for each and every child who walks through our school doors.

Question: Have you interacted with the special education system in CPS in any capacity? If so, what was your experience?

Answer: I have interacted with the special education system as a parent of a child with a disability and as a former principal. My experience was that it was a constant battle to get the resources my students and my child required. I regularly had to ensure legal documents were followed and each year the resource gains we made were reduced and we had to start over. At the same time, I met and worked with many teachers who were willing to do what it took for our children's (and my personal child's) needs to be met. The system is designed for kids to be behind and failing before they get support. This needs to change. We can be much more proactive in supporting kids with places where they need additional help and we need to spend much more time helping kids invest in their strengths and individual brilliance.

Question: Many families of students with disabilities talk about the challenges they face trying to navigate the special education system in CPS. Why do you think families are so frustrated?

Answer: There is very poor communication regarding special education services. It is infrequent and overly complicated and legalistic. Everything takes too long to accomplish and there are too few related service professionals to meet needs effectively. There is also little accountability at the central office level. You can call phone numbers from the website and wait for thirty minutes with no one picking up and no message machine.

Question: At the beginning of this school year, over 1,500 students with disabilities legally entitled to transportation had not received a bus route. These routing delays, common since 2020, result in students missing valuable school hours and parents missing work opportunities.

What steps will you take as a board member to ensure that students are provided bus routes in a timely manner?

Answer: We know most of the students with bussing needs before the year even begins. We can maintain routes and run practice schedules to ensure that all kids receive services and they receive them at reasonable times of day. We should look at having greater management oversight of our buses and bus drivers by not privatizing those jobs. When scheduling buses, students with disabilities should be the first students scheduled.

Question: Preparation for life after high school is important for all students, especially those with disabilities. Research shows that students with access to transition programs such as Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Dual Credit courses have greater graduation and employment outcomes than their peers. However, in CPS, disabled student enrollment in these programs lag well behind their nondisabled peers.

As a board member, what would you do to ensure equal access for students with disabilities to career training offerings?

Answer: With my wife, I am the guardian to an adult family member with disabilities who lives within a CILA placement. The transition from school to community life and work is critical and oftentimes not well done in Chicago.

Improving access and quality of experiences will require training for counselors and IEP teams to improve knowledge of options that are available. We then need to make sure that students have access to appropriate accommodations and modifications to programming and additional teacher support as needed.

To help accomplish this we need to partner with the community organizations that have already built in-roads into the CTE and college partnerships.

Question: Over 65% of CPS schools are not fully ADA accessible. In practice, this means that “neighborhood schools” are not an option for many students with physical disabilities, let alone disabled teachers, disabled parents, disabled voters, or other disabled community members visiting our schools. The 2023 CPS Facilities Master Plan identifies building accessibility as an important priority, but the district has not adopted a roadmap or plan to achieve better building accessibility.

What steps should the district take to address a lack of accessibility in its buildings?

Answer: We have schools that do not meet the needs of 22nd century learners. We need to accelerate a capital plan that begins to replace our deteriorating infrastructure in a way that is aligned with what we know about learning and creates schools as community hubs in ways that are sustainable for the next 150 years. We need to prioritize the buildings that are least accessible and go beyond ADA accessibility requirements.

Question: CPS has a history of segregating students with disabilities. The Corey H. settlement in 1998 required the district to move toward meaningful inclusion of students with disabilities for students who could make meaningful progress in a less restrictive environment. In the last two years, the number of cluster classrooms in the district has increased by 200%, presumably because these students cannot be supported to make meaningful progress in the general education setting, even with supports. As a board member, what kinds of questions would you ask to understand this sharp increase in restrictive placements?

Answer: As a former special education teacher who developed one of the first inclusive education programs at my middle school through a state grant and as a former board member of the virtual special education co-op in Indiana, I have increased access to and success in inclusive education environments for two decades.

My questions would focus on the type of professional learning provided to the teachers and principal at the school to ensure there were strong co-teaching practices. I would request analysis of IEP minutes and services to find outliers. This should also include comparisons across schools as that is how we are most likely to identify places where services are not provided in a least restrictive environment.

Question: What would be your top priority for improving access to education for students with disabilities in CPS?

Answer: My top priority would be expanding methods for gathering and acting upon student and parent voice. We need to ensure that we know how our students with



disabilities- particularly those with most significant needs- experience school. This information should be collected through both survey and interview and should help understand student experiences of rigor, relationships, and joy-filled learning. This needs to go beyond the 5 fundamentals survey results. It also needs to include greater policy influence for advocacy and taskforce groups that represent our students with disabilities.