

Board of Education Candidates Disability Questionnaire 2024**Candidate: Carlos Rivas**

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

Answer: I began my career in education at Lowell Elementary School, the same neighborhood school where I graduated 8th grade before beginning my teaching and counseling career at UIC College Prep, a Noble School. I am running for Chicago School Board because I believe that every student deserves a quality education and should be able to count on their school as a pillar of their support system, just as I did when I was a student at Lowell Elementary. As a former teacher, I believe schools can be a transformative force in communities. First, I will fight to expand wrap-around services for the whole family, including educational and extracurricular opportunities. Second, I will fight to increase transparency at the Board and CPS ensuring greater community engagement and buy-in to board and CPS decisions. Third, I will champion access to high quality public school options for families.

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

Answer: As a former teacher and counselor I participated in many IEP meetings for the students I taught and worked with case managers and other clinicians to meet the educational needs of the students I taught. When I was a long-term substitute teacher I had students in my class with IEPs and worked with their pull-out teachers to ensure they received their allotted minutes regularly.

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: I believe families are frustrated with a system that is so large consistently not meeting their needs. Whether it is transportation, clinician services, or waiting for diagnosis from the district. We are an incredibly large district and need to provide our individual schools with the tools necessary to support students with disabilities. One of the largest issues facing families this school year is a lack of reliable transportation on day one of school for students who require transportation services based on their IEP, a legally binding document, which determines what educational supports students need and are legally entitled to.

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: I would want to work closely with stakeholders, including families, to discuss options. CPS released many plans to improve transportation services this year but did not engage stakeholders adequately. A group of families, CPS Parents for Buses, has a long list of recommendations that I would like to explore as a board member to alleviate these issues.

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: When I was a counselor at UIC College Prep I managed our Dual Credit programming and worked diligently to support all students have access to Dual Credit options. This meant working more closely with students who needed extra support and guidance throughout their dual enrollment class. As a Board Member, I would want us to make explicit policy about how we make CTE and dual enrollment accessible to all students with a particular focus on students with disabilities.

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: Historically the district's capital plan is severely underfunded by several billion dollars. ADA compliance is of the utmost importance to me and have seen strides across the district. For example, my own elementary school Lowell recently installed an elevator and ramp to increase ADA compliance. As a board member I would like for the district to provide a report on which buildings are not 100% ADA compliant and for a joint task force to be created to center ADA compliance. My hope is that we can gather outside dollars across levels of government, philanthropy and the private sector to increase ADA compliance quickly given the district's limited capital budget.

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: This is very alarming to me as a former teacher and now candidate. I would want to see school level data to determine where and why this is occurring and begin discussions with district, network and school leadership to determine why this trend has occurred and what can be done to bring students into the least restrictive environment with their peers.

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

Answer: Top of mind my first priority would be to ensure we are meeting state and federal guidelines when it comes to the ADA and IDEA, including adequate staffing of clinicians, special education teachers, and special education classroom assistants. Additionally, I would work with stakeholders to solve the busing issues that have caused many students with disabilities to miss school.