

Board of Education Candidates Disability Questionnaire 2024**Candidate:** Carmen Gioiosa

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

Answer: My 23 year background in education is extensive and varied. My experience as a mom and educator will have a direct impact on effectively leading conversations, building consensus, and analyzing policy.

I have a Doctorate in Education Organization Leadership from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, with a Type 75 administrative certificate. I am an adjunct professor educating future CPS teachers through a culturally responsive framework through National Louis University's Teacher Residency Program. I started my CPS career at Schurz High School as a teacher for 8 years, and led a team to earn a \$1.25M grant to reorganize our high school into Small Learning Communities (a Freshmen Academy and 4 career-focused academies for upperclassmen). I then worked at CPS Central Office, bringing an MTSS resolution before the Board of Education, with the accompanying academic and social-emotional interventions for students identified in need. After serving on the board of my local neighborhood association, I served as a community member to our neighborhood Local School Council prior to having children in CPS. I have subsequently been elected to our LSC 4 times as a parent representative, and have been nominated 3 years in a row as LSC Chair.

I am running to serve because the potential in our young people is infinite, and education is the key to that potential! At this time in Chicago, leadership must be transformative. Three common elements that are central to transformative leadership are social betterment, equity, and a vision that reshapes belief and knowledge structures (Shields, 2010). Chicago's Elected School Board has an opportunity to be transformative and inject CPS with fresh ideas from independent voices. I am the only true independent in District 4 that will use data and my research experience to make decisions.

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

Answer: I worked directly with the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) and actively and currently work with Diverse Learner teachers and families. I worked with an extraordinary Chief when I was leading CPS in conversations about academic and social emotional interventions for students in all of our schools while working in the Office of Teaching and Learning. Creating the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework for CPS was one of my proudest accomplishments as it supports all Tier 1 learners while also collecting and progress monitoring student data consistently and in real-time in Tiers 2 and 3 to directly flow to all educators and school leaders and make determinations for additional assessments or learning supports.

At a local level, I have worked with case managers and diverse learning teachers that excel in providing students with inclusive learning opportunities while co-teaching with classroom teachers. I have worked collaboratively with a Network Office and a local school principal to find budget dollars to offer Diverse Learner teachers and an MTSS teacher training in Wilson Reading System. Linking highly effective, standards-based teaching with intensive structured literacy instruction is the only route to ensuring as many students as possible are reading proficiently by 3rd grade.

At a district level, we must staff our schools with Diverse Learner teachers and paraprofessionals that our students require! Delays in specialized support and services in the learning environment are beyond detrimental; it is a violation of federal law under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In addition, general education teachers should be proactive in identifying students that show a need for growth at all age levels, but especially in the primary grades.

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: Families of diverse learner students are frustrated for four reasons.

Reason 1: NEEDS of adults comes before children.

Reason 2: LACK of program accountability and follow through.

Reason 3: INCLUSION and providing the least restrictive learning environment is not funded adequately and reactively.

Reason 4: INADEQUATE co-teaching professional development and support for Diverse Learner and Classroom teachers. This also extends to intentional teacher prep time for Diverse Learner teachers and Classroom teachers together, in addition to collaborating with clinicians.

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 have a fiduciary responsibility to the community, children and taxpayers that money is not wasted or ill spent. I welcome all external audits of our bussing plans and policies as I believe it will highlight efficiencies not previously considered.

This question has multiple layers and needs to be approached systematically.

Step 1: FUND CPS schools with Diverse Learner teachers and Case Managers based on end of school year student and staffing data and SWAP graduating student numbers for incoming students. CPS CANNOT wait until after the 20th day of a new school year to staff positions and forecasting models have not worked.

Step 2: USE end of school year bus routes and procedures for the incoming school year. STOP the cycle of re-inventing the wheel and acting like information is new. CPS knows bus routes and student needs at each CPS school...STOP the excuses.

Step 3: LISTEN to proposed solutions from community organizations, members, students, and families in the summer. On March 20, 2024 CPS Parents for Buses wrote a letter to the new BOE with signatures from 26 alderpeople; how has the BOE and CPS responded?

Step 4: MAKE decisions that work for students and families and NOT for bus companies.

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?

This question also has multiple layers and needs to be approached systematically.

Step 1: **ADVOCATE** for inclusive practices. Inclusion is the norm, not the outlier.

Step 2: **REQUIRE** all CPS schools (PK-12) to have Career and Technical Education (CTE) Pathways.

Step 3: **TEACH** all classes through a CTE mindset. Education leads to careers and opportunities for independence, civic engagement, and social betterment.

Step 3: **ENROLL** all students in at least one dual credit or advanced coursework. **OFFER** additional opportunities.

Step 4: **RECRUIT ALL** students to join.

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: **IT IS THE LAW**, not an option. All students belong with their peers in neighborhood or choice schools. All students deserve to see themselves in teachers and adults in their schools. Inclusion is the gold standard; it is unconscionable that our schools lack ADA accessibility.

FOLLOW the advice in the 2023 CPS Facilities Master Plan and **ASK** local school councils, communities, teachers, families and students for their opinions and needs.

Schools and the education they provide is a great, universal equalizer (Mann, 1848). CPS along with the Board of Education must work towards that goal.

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: I am appalled and upset by the increase in cluster classrooms in CPS. Corey H. settlement is the gold standard we must strive for, for all our children and students. I am past the point of asking questions because I know the answer...we do not have Diverse Learner teachers applying to our open positions.

I have one demand for CPS: INCENTIVIZE teachers to apply for Diverse Learner positions (propose ideas to the Board and let the Board with CPS make the best decision).

Once we have all positions staffed, providing the least restrictive environment (LRE is federal law under IDEA) will follow. Children belong with their peers, in community together, learning, playing, and engaging with the world.

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

Answer: As a CPS Board of Education Member, my top priority will be staffing all Diverse Learner open positions.

If we staff all open Diverse Learner teacher positions, then we will:

ELEVATE learning for ALL students;

REDUCE student, family, and teacher placement anxiety;

SHIFT to an asset based mindset; and

INCREASE education access and career opportunities for Diverse Learner students.