

Board of Education Candidates Disability Questionnaire 2024**Candidate: Ebony DeBerry****Question: In no more than a paragraph, introduce yourself and why you are running to serve on the Board of Education.**

Answer: I have lived in Rogers Park my whole life. I am a graduate of CPS, a former Gale teacher, a former Gale LSC member, the current president of Gale Grows Kids, and an education organizer with ONE Northside. As an education organizer, I've grown parent mentor programs from one school to eight. In these schools I work with principals, teachers and parents, mostly women of color, to provide voluntary service in classrooms where additional support is needed. As an education organizer, I was also an integral part of Illinois' Grow Your Own, a teacher recruitment program that focused on placing teachers of color in front of students of color.

I believe decision making in relationship with others is the precedent that needs to be set after our first elections for this board, and I believe I am the candidate that can do just that. My work and life experience have revolved around the betterment of students and families in my community, and elevating their voices and setting priorities with them.

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

Answer: Yes, at the beginning of my teaching career; I had a student who had Sped practitioners come into the classroom as well as occupational and speech therapists. I was overjoyed that he was getting his needs met in real time and that I was able to coordinate with these professionals. I've also had situations where students weren't accessed early enough so they could receive services and you can feel the loss of learning happening in real time in front of you.

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 can see the potential of their child. Once they navigate a system and do not receive the services that meet their child's need, they see that potential being wasted and lost. It becomes very personal and as if no one cares about your child like you do.

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 need to recruit members of our communities to become bus drivers. These are good jobs with good benefits that can be filled by parents and community members. We also need to create the budget with the anticipation that more students will need buses for the foreseeable future, because there's been an increase of students that have different needs.

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: I think it's about creating a targeted outreach plan for parents and providing opportunities that parents trust will support their child. We can make them more accessible by ensuring the curriculum includes diverse learnings, ensuring that there are virtual offerings, local community offerings, and transportation to these trainings as well.

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: This has been a blind spot for a long time and advocates have been going hard on this issue only to be ignored. I think its time to listen and prioritize creating plans early on for what changes needed to be made so that we have 100% ADA Accessibility for all buildings.

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: We need to evaluate what meaningful progress means. Is it only academic elements that contribute to progress or should we be looking at how students are affected socially as well? How does restrictive placements affect students with and without disabilities? How can we analyze the supports being received and where needs are not being met?

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

Answer: All of our students with disabilities must have their needs met, and our first step should be partnering with our local universities and community organizations that can help close that gap. Finishing that work, however, will require investment in more staff and experts to detect and diagnose issues early, intervene, and support throughout a child's career in CPS. If there were a mandate that every child were assessed by five, we would have better outcomes.