



**Board of Education Candidates Disability
Questionnaire 2024
Candidate: **Kate Doyle****

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

Answer: I am a mom to a soon-to-be CPS kid (who I look forward to sending to our neighborhood school), a former special education teacher, and the leader of a nonprofit that offers career training for young people. I believe there is no more important institution in our society than our public school system, and I say this as a very proud public school kid myself from kindergarten through university. I got my start as a public school teacher working in a high-needs high school in New York City while earning my graduate degree in Special Education. After my time in the classroom, I went on to work in the tech sector, leading community engagement programs. I took those learnings from the corporate world and my educator's training and co-founded an award-winning workforce development nonprofit that serves low-income young adults who are out of work and out of school. We help our young people regain their confidence, access career training, and connect with full-time employment. It's through these experiences, working with hundreds of young adults, that I have become increasingly concerned about the many shortfalls in our K-12 system that create barriers to real post-secondary success. I am committed to using all of my diverse experience to advocate for CPS students as a school board member.

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

Answer: I have not directly interacted with the special education in CPS. However, having worked in special education in New York Public Schools, I am very familiar with the challenges special education systems face in large school districts. There is so much work that needs to be done to ensure adequate, equitable special education services within CPS.

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: Students with disabilities do not receive the equitable treatment they have the right to. These inequities and inequalities are greater among students of color and those who do not speak English, and all inequities with CPS are greater for students with disabilities.

CPS must also do more to enhance the cohesion between special education, general education teachers and counselors, and other school staff. For example, I have heard from numerous parents who attended IEP meetings with no general education teachers present. And, we need to remove the burden on parents who do not speak English to have accessible language services; CPS should be providing interpreters at all meetings, and it is abhorrent that they do not.

Finally, the pandemic further exacerbated underlying issues in our special education services across the district, from incomplete evaluations to more students with disabilities being separated from their general education peers for the majority of the day. This furthers the inequities between general education students and students with disabilities.

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: The Board needs a task force to ensure that these needs are being met and that the voices of students with disabilities and their families are heard in policy discussions. We must restore busing to all schools, including special education schools and others that are not in the immediate vicinity of students' residences. This transportation must be accessible for students with all types of disabilities, whether that is wheelchair accessibility, sensory adjustments for neurodivergent students, or other accommodations and adjustments.

Reiterating from above some proposals for enhancing busing services including for our special education students:

I would call for a thorough audit of CPS transportation spending including the impact of vendor caps on our ability to provide reliable transportation services.

Prioritize our families with the greatest need by renewing the \$500 per month stipend for low-income families without access to transportation services.

Call for a routing software analysis and potentially a RFP for enhanced routing software that would allow us to identify the most seats for students in the most cost-effective manner. This could also enhance the "hub" model that has been proposed (though with few details) by CPS.

Raise bus drivers' pay beyond just keeping pace with inflation, and increase sign-on bonuses for new bus drivers. I would also insist that the board review a monthly progress report on hiring goals and hiring activities including attendance at recruitment fairs.

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 support expanding access to CTE and Dual Credit programs and the distribution of programming must be equitable across the district. I would bring my experience as a non-profit leader who has focused on workforce development and use this experience to find creative solutions for amplifying CTE programs in our schools, particularly for

students with disabilities. We need to ensure that CTE and Dual Credit offerings contain all necessary accommodations, and that educators brought in externally to teach these courses have the same training regarding disability as all other CPS educators. This includes both academic accommodations, as well as accommodations and adaptations to equipment for students with physical disabilities in CTE courses that involve physical labor. As a Board Member, I would ask for accessibility audits of CTE and Dual Credit offerings, and call for immediate corrective action in areas that lack accessibility. As part of this process, I would personally visit schools to see the gaps in accessibility.

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: First and foremost, the Board of Education needs to immediately put together a task force to address these issues. The majority of the membership must be people with disabilities, including CPS students and alumni with disabilities and parents of CPS students with disabilities. It also must include people from all corners of the city. This task force needs to focus on ensuring timely accessibility audits of all CPS schools, with opportunities for students and families to provide input on each school. Then, the task force can make recommendations to the board on enhancing accessibility in the schools, with target dates and deadlines for various benchmarks to be met. Within the next few years, 100% of CPS schools should be fully ADA accessible. Furthermore, I would firmly call on all board members to visit CPS schools that are not ADA accessible, to see the issues for themselves and motivate them toward action.

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 gain a clear understanding of why these students are in restrictive placements. Has there been staff attrition in general? Has there been staff attrition in people with specific expertise? Have there been issues with facilities?

Furthermore, we must understand whether or not there have been changes in placements for the same students. Have a lot of students been moved into more restrictive placements than they once were, or is this transition happening with new students? What reasons have been cited for any changes made?

And, perhaps most importantly, we need to look at this through an equity lens. Are students of color or students in certain regions of the city more likely to be placed in more restrictive settings?

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

Answer: My top priority will be to ensure the rightful presence of every student with disabilities in high-quality instruction with their grade level whenever possible and appropriate. The LRE provision is one of IDEA's strongest principles, and CPS must renew its efforts to uphold this commitment by limiting pullout services and enhancing inclusion with adequate support whenever possible.

This also means making sure that IEP meetings are fully staffed and accessible to family members. General education teachers must always be present in IEP meetings; I have heard from numerous parents who attended IEP meetings with no general education teachers present. CPS must also never hold an IEP meeting with a parent or caregiver present who is not an English speaker without access to translation services for vital IEP documents regardless of whether the parent has made the direct request to a case manager or not. We need to remove the burden from the family and act proactively to involve them. Without translation services, these parents are effectively cut out from the IEP planning process.