



**Board of Education Candidates Disability  
Questionnaire 2024  
Candidate: **La'Mont Raymond Williams****

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

Answer: I was born and raised on the South side of Chicago in the same district I am running to represent on the CPS Board. I currently live in the Ashburn neighborhood. I am a proud CPS alum of Clissold Elementary, Ogden Elementary, and Lincoln Park High School. I graduated from Upper Iowa University in 2010 with a bachelor's degree and graduated Loyola University Chicago's law school in 2014. I currently serve as Chief of Staff and General Counsel to Cook County Commissioner Bill Lowry serving Cook County's Third District. I continue to serve in this role since 2018. As Chief of Staff and General Counsel, I work with a wide range of community groups, elected officials, and stakeholders to tackle governmental issues throughout Cook County. I successfully help create and develop a small business program at Cook County. I analyze, consult on, and prepare Commissioner Lowry's budget preparation pertaining to Cook County's over \$9 billion dollar budget. I am running because our students deserve better. I am running to represent the working class and middle-class families of the 9th district, families like my own. I am running to uphold the fiduciary duty as a member of the CPS Board to be responsible with taxpayer money. I am running because current CPS students suffer the consequences of inadequate funding and inadequate resources, leading to cutting basic services like busing for elementary students, due to mismanagement. I am running to address the current, and growing, budget deficit plaguing CPS and to ensure financial stability at CPS. I am qualified for this unique position, and I am ready to serve on day one.

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

Answer: Yes. As the uncle of a special needs child who formerly attended CPS I interacted with CPS several times on my nephew's behalf when his mother, my sister, reached out to me for guidance and assistance. The interactions were not positive and ultimately led to my sister moving my nephew and his siblings out of CPS to a suburban school district.

**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 are frustrated because they do not receive the type of individual attention their students, children, and families deserve. Children with special needs require more attention, patience, and understanding as we navigate the best path to providing for their needs and giving these children a world class education. Many of the 9th District constituents tell me how frustrated they are with the lack of services. Unfortunately this is a funding issue and not a caring issue. CPS constantly borrows from its operating budget to address other needs, like building improvements, which cuts into already scarce resources for students. These cuts and lack of resources directly affect the staffing and ability of our CPS personnel, including special education teachers, counselor, etc., from providing the services our children need.

**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: My immediate first step would be to increase the transportation budget for CPS. Currently, CPS' budget reduced its school busing transportation budget. This is an outdated carryover practice from during the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to revert back to the transportation allocation and funding pre-COVID pandemic to adequately provide transportation for our students with disabilities. As a Board member I would make this my top priority to fact into responsibly spending resources on our students.

**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 will advocate and work to implement equal access for our students with disabilities in CTE and Dual Credit Courses. I am the only candidate endorsed by several trade unions in my race, including the Chicago Federation of Labor, because I advocate for the increase of CTE, Dual Credit courses, and vocational classes. My relationship with the trades will allow for effective partnership to ensure equal access to these opportunities for our students with special needs and 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: First, CPS must conduct a district-wide inventory and audit of all schools to determine the exact number of schools which are non-compliant with ADA. Once conducted, I propose creating a priority list of non-compliant neighborhood schools, based partly on the number of overall students and students with special needs, to begin addressing the ADA non-compliance. We will not be able to get every school compliant within a year or two but this proposal ensures we equally begin updating these schools throughout the entire city to begin addressing the problem. Lastly, I will advocate and work to implement quarterly reports from CPS' facilities management to determine the process of updating these non-compliant schools so we as a Board can relay this information and expectations to our districts' families and schools.

**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: First, I would ask what substantially changed from two years ago to now which exacerbated the 200% increase in cluster classrooms. I opine it is imperative we collect the data, look at the statistical and informational trends, which might provide the narrative, and hopefully the causation, of this drastic increase. Next, I would ask what measures over the last two years CPS implemented to address this issue and what is the current strategy. Lastly, I would ask the CEO and his team how CPS intends to address this issue as part of its recently released Strategic Plan, and if there is any flexibility to bering in subject matter experts to assist with implementing best practices across the district.

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



Answer: My priority would be to increase the revenue and resources CPS has to better allocate these resources to our students with special needs and all students across CPS. Unfortunately, the issues plaguing our students with special needs are the same issues plaguing our minority students, ESL students, and other groups. Our students suffer from an underfunded and under resourced school district. I aim to fervently lobby the state to pay its fair share, particularly through the Illinois Lottery funds for Public education, explore creative and new revenue sources, and eliminate waste in the CPS budgets. CPS is often the only choice for most Chicago families, especially in the 9th District, so let us work to make it the best choice. Our students deserve better!