

**Board of Education Candidates Disability Questionnaire 2024****Candidate: Thomas Day**

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

Answer: I'm a CPS dad, a lecturer at the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago,

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

Answer: I have. In the past academic year and on a couple of occasions in the current academic year, I have substitute taught at Tubman Elementary, including several times supporting special ed kids. I have always enjoyed my experiences at Tubman, yet through my time at Tubman, I have come to know the extraordinary challenges we are facing. As you know, CPS has confronted a dramatic increase in the need for special ed support, and CPS has historically been challenged to provide the support we are morally and legally required to provide. I've seen these challenges first hand.

**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: What I can say in response to this question with certainty is that the current CPS Board was not elected to be there, and for that reason, is less likely to be responsive to parent concerns. If elected in three and a half weeks, I will be accountable to voters and parents. I will set a policy of responding to all requests for support, including support in navigating the special education system, within seven days of receiving it.

As I'm sure we are all aware, CPS has a massive budget deficit. Since I announced by candidacy for the CPS Board, I have been asked a number of questions that are clearly downstream from the budget challenges we face. This would appear to be one of them. The reality is that until we fix and balance our budget, CPS parents will continue to be denied the support they have a right to receive, including special ed support. I am prepared to make the tough choices necessary to fix our budget and deploy resources efficiently.

**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: Of course our challenges with busing are not limited to students with disabilities. I recognize the obligation CPS has to provide busing for our students with disabilities, and if elected, would exercise strong oversight on CPS Transportation Services to understand why parents and students aren't receiving the support they require. My sense is that one explanation is the lack of available bus drivers, a problem I'm certain CPS recognizes.

I return to the subject of the budget. In this moment of extraordinary fiscal challenges, we must not continue to deploy resources to empty schools. Instead, we must make tough choices to make certain our schools are modern, integrated, and fully enrolled, and that our CPS budget is balanced. I firmly believe once we establish financial sustainability, we will be better able to provide the busing support our CPS kids require.

**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: Absolutely. One area I agree with Stacy Davis Gates on is the need to expand CTE programs. We had several hundred thousand Chicago residents employed in manufacturing forty years ago. Then the ground shifted, and our regional economy quickly pivoted toward professional services. The ground is shifting once again. The jobs of today, in services and manufacturing, are rapidly being automated. Our public schools need to proactively respond.

To prepare our kids for the job market they will enter, we need an all-hands-on-deck approach to understanding the skills needed and best approaches for teaching those skills. I believe the CPS Board should convene discussions between major employers, business communities like P33 and World Business Chicago, organized labor, and scholars at our top universities to chart out a comprehensive approach to updating curricula to meet rapidly evolving demands.

**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: The average age of a CPS main building is 84 years old. I strongly suspect that many neighborhood schools are too old to easily provide ADA accessibility. We cannot simply patch up old buildings. We must build modern ones.

Under my plan, CPS deals with the long-term drivers of our deficit, including consolidating empty schools and asking state lawmakers to revisit the "Grand Bargain," allowing voters to weigh in on constitutional amendments to allow for pension reform and a graduated income tax. As we reduce our structural deficits, we will be able to go into the bond markets to raise money with lower interest rates, and I argue we should do so to build 20 new school buildings that consolidate 60 old ones. This will require about a \$1 billion bond.

**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 have a legal obligation to integrate students with disabilities, with proper support, in general education classrooms. I recognize that requirement and will fight to ensure that CPS is abiding by federal laws protecting students with disabilities.

The Corey H. settlement required that CPS provide sufficient support staff, access to schools that best fit their educational needs, and critically, collect data on student performance. Federal court oversight ended in 2013. The CPS Board needs to ensure that data continues to be collected and understand what the data is telling us, then craft a strategy for correcting the injustice raised by this question. We should, as the Corey H. settlement required, maintain firm class size limits for students with disabilities.



I will make certain to take up this topic on the CPS Board, if elected.

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

Answer: My top priority is to advance student achievement with a balanced CPS budget and a CPS that provides modern, integrated, and fully enrolled schools. I believe that if CPS achieves this vision, CPS will be better able to support students with disabilities. We will be able to provide the personnel to meet the 52,000 CPS kids with IEPs. We will be able to busing and provide facilities that our students with disabilities can easily access. But that will first require that the CPS Board embraces tough choices ahead.