



**Board of Education Candidates Disability  
Questionnaire 2024  
Candidate: **Yesenia Lopez****

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

Answer: I'm running for the Board of Education because I believe in breaking down barriers for students and families. As someone who navigated CPS services for my nephew with autism, I know the hurdles and gaps firsthand, especially in communication and special education support. Every child deserves equitable access to quality education and services. I'm committed to bringing my lived experiences and community focus to the Board to fight for these changes.

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

Answer: Navigating CPS's special education system has been eye-opening and challenging. My nephew's autism diagnosis brought to light the language barriers my family faced, making it difficult to access essential services and communicate effectively. My mother's experience, as a non-English speaker trying to advocate for her grandson, showed me how much work needs to be done to simplify these processes. I am determined to ensure that families in similar situations have clear support and resources.

**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 feel let down because CPS's special education system lacks transparency, consistency, and timely action. Parents struggle with long wait times and insufficient information, especially when language barriers are in play. This causes a loss of trust and confidence in the system meant to support them. I will advocate for streamlined processes, proactive communication, and accountability to restore faith in CPS for all families.

**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: It is unacceptable that students with disabilities are left without proper transportation, causing disruptions to their education and hardships for their families. As a board member, I will push for stricter guidelines and transparent tracking to ensure students are placed on bus routes promptly. We need to hold transportation providers accountable for meeting service standards. Every student should have a reliable and safe way to get to school, without delays.

**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: Students with disabilities must have the same opportunities for career and technical education as their peers. I will advocate for targeted outreach and dedicated resources to increase participation in CTE and Dual Credit programs. We must remove barriers and build inclusive pathways to graduation and employment for all students. This includes working closely with schools and organizations to bridge gaps in training and support.

**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: To address the lack of accessibility in CPS buildings, we must create a comprehensive ADA compliance plan with clear timelines and goals. Our schools should be welcoming spaces for all students, staff, and visitors, regardless of their physical abilities. I will advocate for prioritizing renovations and investments to make every school fully accessible. No child, educator, or community member should be excluded from participating in their neighborhood school.

**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: The sharp increase in restrictive placements demands a thorough examination of why students are not receiving appropriate support in general education settings. I will ask for detailed data and evaluations to identify gaps in services that may be leading to this shift. Our goal should be meaningful inclusion, supported by adequate resources and training. Students should have every opportunity to succeed in the least restrictive environment possible.

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

Answer: My top priority is to create an inclusive and supportive CPS environment by focusing on services, training, and transparency. Every student deserves a tailored education that meets their needs, and every family deserves clear and accessible communication. By investing in resources and accountability, we can build a system that works for all students. I am committed to making these improvements a reality as a member of the Board.