

Board of Education Candidates Disability Questionnaire 2026**Candidate: Brenda Lee Anderson****District: 6a****Question 1:**

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

Answer:

Schools have served as safe haven and sites of possibility for me to explore, learn, and grow—I wouldn't have gotten a whole PhD otherwise! I believe in the potential of public schools to transform lives, just as education has transformed mine. So, I'll bring that vision as Chicago Public Schools Board Member representing District 6A.

Question 2:

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 of students with disabilities are tasked with navigating the special education system without the kinds of resources, supports, and structures that ensure equity in access. This differentially burdens these families, and reifies existing racial and economic hierarchies in resources (Cowhy, 2025). Because of policy choices, from Federal to State to Local levels, families are made to figure out and become experts in the allowances, affordances, and limitations to the education that they are morally (and legally!) expecting to be able to access.

Background

Currently, over 60% 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.

Question 3:

What steps should the district take to address a lack of accessibility in its buildings?

Answer:

*No Answer Provided

Background:

A core tenet of The Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is “the right to a free and appropriate public education in the [least restrictive environment](#).”

Despite this, CPS has a history of separating students with disabilities from their peers instead of including them in general education classrooms. A [1998 court settlement](#) (Corey H.) required CPS to move toward *inclusion*, meaning students with disabilities should be taught alongside their non-disabled peers whenever they can make meaningful progress that way, rather than being placed in separate, more restrictive settings.

Since 2023, the number of "cluster classrooms" (separate, self-contained classrooms specifically for students with disabilities, apart from general education) has increased by over 250%.

Question 4:

As a board member, what questions would you ask to understand why the district is placing so many more students in these separate classrooms instead of general education settings?

Answer:

I would ask for data and evidence to chart the trajectory of cluster classroom placements. Which students are in these settings, when were they assigned to these settings, and are there demographic and/or geographic patterns in this? What are the infrastructural and administrative realities across these schools (and does this differ)? What are parents and caregivers sharing about their experiences with their students who were or were not placed in these classrooms? Put another way, I will ask the questions that will help address root causes and not just the symptoms of this increase in cluster classroom placement.

Question 5:

In your opinion, what are the pros and cons of expanding cluster programming for students?

Answer:

*No Answer Provided

Background

Federal law allows certain students with intellectual disabilities to stay in school until they are 22. Ages 18-22 are known as the *transition years* where students focus on employment and independent living skills. Many students and families fear the “[disability cliff](#),” or lack of resources and career support that comes when students age out of the school system at the age of 22.

Question 6:

What can be done to ensure students with disabilities are well equipped for success in their career and lives after graduation?

Answer:

This combines two of my core campaign tenets: to champion holistic student supports, and foster meaningful community partnerships. I see holistic student supports to mean meeting resources to students' wide-ranging needs, and pairing this with coordinating with community partners across the region to provide meaningful pathways after students age out of CPS.

Background

According to the 2024-25 [Illinois State Report Card](#), 42% of CPS students overall were proficient in English language arts and 27% in math on the state test. Among students with IEPs (formal plans for students with disabilities), only 10.5% were proficient in ELA and 7.1% in math.

Question 7:

What is your top priority for improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities in CPS?

Answer:

CPS has the potential to serve as a model district for the care and attention we pay to our students with disabilities, and I commit to advocating for the resources that I believe are a necessary, though not sufficient, condition to build towards educational systems that meet their transformative potential. So, my first campaign priority is to reimagine the CPS budget to fully fund our school and to provide the resources needed to support our students' diverse needs, very much including students with disabilities. This means advocating for the actual resources needed to meet the unfunded mandate that IDEA represents--securing additional Federal, State, and Local resources to be able to support and improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities in CPS.