

Board of Education Candidates Disability Questionnaire 2026**Candidate: Ebony DeBerry****District: 2a****Question 1:**

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

Answer:

I am a graduate of CPS, a former Gale teacher, a former Gale LSC member, an education organizer with ONE Northside, and I have served on the board of education since January 2025. As an education organizer, I've grown parent mentor programs from one school to eight. In these schools I work with principals, teachers and parents, mostly women of color, to provide voluntary service in classrooms where additional support is needed. In 2012, I fought alongside many others against the mass school closures. To this day, Gale School, where I was developed and taught, is still here because of education organizing and power building I helped lead. It is critical that our board remains focused on supporting our students and ensuring that everyone in this city has access to a high quality neighborhood education, and this is why I'm running for reelection to the board.

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:

Every parent is challenged with making choices that best secure their child's future. As a parent, I know that it is a very personal, values-based, and hopeful decision-making process. We all want our children to have the best access to future success, and whether that means our children are diverse learners, gifted, poor, or first-generation, we are trying to make the choices that will secure success for their futures. We as a society, and as a board of education, have to accept the trends that are approaching us, and that means creating space for children that are challenged in all matters. Neurodivergent learners are increasing in our society and need special supports that will best equip them for a successful future. When IEPs and 504s describe these supports and they are not met, parents feel that they are not doing the best for their children. We need to accommodate these plans and forecast financially how best to accommodate these students.

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:

We are not meeting our students' needs. Many of our buildings, on average, are more than eighty years old. It is our responsibility to find ways to make access to education accessible for all. I am hopeful that organizations like yourselves will stay engaged and help us figure out how to make progress in this area. We need to look at how many of our schools are inaccessible and create a plan based on community need to begin addressing this deficit.

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:

It’s important to know how much time students are spending away from their peers and in which subject areas. It’s also important to know where students are more comfortable: with their peers or apart from them. That is not a decision to be unilaterally made by schools. That is a decision that needs to be made by students and their parents. Our goal is to best support student need and success. The real

problem is that we are not identifying that individual students need special supports in order to join their peers in inclusive settings.

Question 5:

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

Answer:

Cluster programs are more cost-effective, but are not necessarily meeting the agreed upon need. I've visited the schools in my district, and I've seen instances where cluster programs are seemingly successful for individual students. Small classes, several sports, and environmental adjustments are meaningful progress, but they are not a prescription for all. That must be a continued conversation between experts, parents, administrators, students, and case workers in order to meet the goals of IEPs and 504 plans.

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:

I would like to highlight one of the schools in my district, which is Northside Learning Center. I am so impressed with the way they have treated the wholeness of adult learning: caring for yourself, your space, and your career options. Their curriculum is expansive and nurtures creativity, self-care, and individuality. That school teaches confidence, communal living, an ethic for work and skillbuilding, as well as independence. It's a model that should be amplified all over the city.

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:

We must do better for all of our students in these areas. That means more individual attention, more creative teaching methods that use all the ways of learning that we don't always investigate. This endeavor will take extra time, manpower, and resources. We can't ignore how expensive meeting the needs of all of our students is, regardless of their particular needs.