

Board of Education Candidates Disability Questionnaire 2026**Candidate: Ed Bannon****District: 1a****Question 1:**

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

Answer:

My name is Ed Bannon, and I'm running for reelection to the CPS Board(District 1A) because I've spent my life showing up for this community as a parent, an organizer, and a public servant. I served ten years on the Dever Local School Council, where my own children came up through the system, and as a commissioner for the Northwest Home Equity Assurance Program. Before that, I was a reporter who helped organize my newsroom's first union. Since 2019, I've been a full-time parent while staying deeply engaged in the Northwest Side — coaching youth basketball, leading Cub Scouts, and organizing with 38th Ward Democrats and United Northwest Side. I'm running because our schools deserve a board member who has actually done the unglamorous, everyday work of building community here, not just talked about it, and who will bring that same hands on accountability to CPS.

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:

I think families are frustrated because there is so much uncertainty surrounding special education funding, resources, and services. Parents want to know that their children will have access to the support they need, but when funding, staffing, or available services are unclear or inconsistent, it creates anxiety and makes an already complicated system even more difficult to navigate. Lack of information is also a frustration. I have been speaking recently with a mother who had to navigate waitlists at various schools. There was not automated way for her to find out where she was on the waitlist, so she had to call every school whenever she wanted an update, which they didn't always have. The school she ended up selecting has had a long transportation time to her child's after-school therapy, forcing her to miss therapy. If the month had known about the transportation issue earlier, she could have planned for it.

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 should be directing more capital funds to accessibility. More than 35 years after ADA, and still not all our schools are fully wheelchair accessible. I have been fighting for more education funding so we'll have more funding available for capital projects that improve accessibility. And the district should bring disabled students, parents, and educators directly into that planning process, since they're the ones who know exactly where the barriers are and what fixing them actually requires.

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:

In my oversight role, I would ask for the data to be broken data and to find trends.

Is the percentage of students in cluster classrooms increasing?

Is there a process to assess when students in cluster classrooms should be placed in a general education classroom?

Are there any groups of students that tend to get placed in cluster classrooms when grouped, for example, by grade level, geography, race or disability?

Has Access Living or the OSD Family Advisory Board been involved in this discussion?

Where does CPS currently stand in meeting the inclusion objectives established through the Corey H. settlement?

How many students in cluster classrooms are meeting their IEP goals?

Question 5:

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

Answer:

Increasing cluster programming is a step in the right direction but cannot be the end goal for all students. CPS added cluster classrooms this year in response to the increased population of students with disabilities. In the immediate term, this step will provide an education for students that CPS could not previously serve. The downside is that CPS could stop at this step and consider the work complete. But the work isn't done until we are confident that all students are educated in the least restrictive environment.

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:

We need to ensure as a board that the needs of students with disabilities are addressed in every department. OSD should collaborate with the CPS Office of College and Career Success to build an employment pipeline for students with disabilities. The office of Family And Community Engagement (FACE) should be engaging with parents of disabled students to provide resources for teaching independent living skills. CPS should be working on building partnerships with employers and adult support agencies.

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:

My top priority is closing the unacceptable achievement gap for students with disabilities. That's an easy answer. The real challenge is finding a path to achieve this goal within our resources. . A no-cost measure the representative school board can implement is better accountability. As the new board writes the superintendent's goals, I will be pushing for public-facing dashboards that hold the district accountable for fulfilling IEPs and producing measurable success in improving student outcomes.

We also need to examine the dramatic growth in separate cluster classrooms. Students should not be separated because CPS lacks the resources to educate them effectively alongside their peers. From a school board perspective, my top priority is strengthening the Special Education Committee. The committee has been slow to form, but now that it is in place, I will support this committee in pursuing better oversight for students with disabilities.

Every child deserves the opportunity to learn, grow and succeed—and a disability should never be an excuse for CPS to lower expectations.