

Board of Education Candidates Disability Questionnaire 2026**Candidate: LaPamela Williams****District: 5a****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 LaPamela Williams, and I was born and raised on Chicago's West Side in the Austin community. I'm a proud CPS and Lane Tech graduate, and I come from a family of educators. I'm running for the Chicago Board of Education to help put the trust back in our neighborhood schools, make a positive impact on students academically, and ensure the schools in our communities are truly thriving. I believe every student deserves a quality education, the right support, and the opportunity to succeed.

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 a lot of the frustration comes from families trying to navigate a system that can already be difficult to understand, while schools are also dealing with limited resources, staffing shortages, and funding challenges. Parents want to know that when their child needs additional support, those services will be available. I believe we must make sure special education is properly funded, resources are getting where they are needed most, and families have clear communication throughout the process. At the end of the day, every student should have the support they need to be successful.

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:

CPS has already taken steps to improve accessibility, and I believe we need to build on that work with a clear, long-term plan. We should prioritize schools with the greatest needs, establish realistic timelines, and dedicate funding to continue making progress. This cannot happen overnight, but we should be accountable for moving the work forward. If neighborhood schools are truly going to serve their communities, every student, parent, educator, and community member should be able to access them.

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 first want to understand what is driving such a significant increase. Are these placements based on the individual needs of students, staffing or resource limitations, or a broader change in district practice? I would also ask whether families are being fully included in placement decisions, whether schools have the resources and trained staff needed to support students in general education classrooms, and what outcomes we are seeing for students in cluster classrooms. The focus should always be on what setting gives each student the best opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed.

Question 5:

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

Answer:

There can be benefits to cluster programming when it provides students with more individualized support, specialized staff, and an environment that meets their specific needs. The concern is when students are placed in separate classrooms because a school lacks the staffing or resources to support them in a general education setting. We must be careful that expanding cluster programs does not unnecessarily separate students from their peers. Placement decisions should be based on the individual needs of each student and where they have the best opportunity to learn and succeed.

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 must start preparing students for life after CPS well before they reach age 22. That means connecting students and families to career training, employment opportunities, independent living skills, and community resources while they are still in school. CPS should also strengthen partnerships with employers and organizations that can continue supporting students after graduation. The goal should be a real transition plan so students and families know what comes next and are prepared for it.

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 would be making sure students with disabilities are receiving the academic support and services they need to make real progress in the classroom. An IEP should not just be a document; it should translate into effective support for that student. That means having qualified staff, providing the right resources, tracking student progress, and adjusting support when something is not working. We must focus on outcomes and make sure every student has a real opportunity to succeed academically.