

Board of Education Candidates Disability Questionnaire 2026**Candidate: Tameka Walton****District: 10a****Question 1:**

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

Answer:

I'm Tameka Walton, a CPS graduate, mother of four, social worker, somatic therapist, community organizer, and founder of Restored Hope. As a CPS parent, former Local School Council member, and state-appointed commissioner, I have spent years advocating for children, families, and communities. I'm running for the Chicago Board of Education because every student deserves a safe, well-resourced neighborhood school, every family deserves a meaningful voice, and every community deserves accountable leadership that puts children first.

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 are frustrated because accessing special education services in CPS can feel like a constant battle rather than a supportive partnership. My sister has an intellectual disability, and I helped my mother advocate for her throughout high school, so I intimately understand how overwhelming and exhausting the system can be. Parents often face delayed evaluations, inconsistent services, staffing shortages, confusing processes, and difficulty ensuring IEPs are fully implemented. No family should have to fight continuously for the education and support their child is legally entitled to receive.

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:

This is unacceptable. A neighborhood school cannot truly serve its neighborhood if students, educators, parents, voters, and community members with disabilities cannot safely enter or fully access it. I support a transparent, districtwide ADA accessibility plan with clear timelines, dedicated funding, public progress reports, and meaningful input from people with disabilities and their families. CPS should prioritize the buildings with the greatest barriers while ensuring all renovations and capital projects move us toward full accessibility, not as an optional improvement, but as a civil right.

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 CPS to provide data showing which students are being placed in cluster classrooms, who makes those decisions, what criteria are used, and whether families meaningfully participate in the process. I would also examine whether the increase is driven by staffing shortages, inadequate supports in general education classrooms, building accessibility, budget decisions, or failures to implement students' IEPs. Most importantly, I would ask how CPS evaluates each student's ability to make meaningful progress in a less restrictive setting, what inclusive options were attempted first, and whether placement patterns reveal racial, geographic, language, or disability-based inequities. Separate classrooms should never become the default because the district failed to provide the staffing, training, and resources necessary for genuine inclusion.

Question 5:

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

Answer:

Some pros: Smaller classes and more individualized instruction. Staff may have specialized training and experience. Easier access to therapies, assistive technology, sensory supports, and consistent routines. Can benefit students whose needs cannot currently be met safely and effectively in a general education classroom. Cons: Students may have fewer opportunities to learn and build relationships with nondisabled peers.

Expansion can make separate placement the default instead of strengthening inclusive classrooms. Programs may concentrate students in schools outside their neighborhoods, creating transportation and family-access barriers. Expectations may be lowered, and access to grade-level curriculum or extracurricular activities may become limited. Placement disparities can deepen by race, disability, language, or neighborhood.

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:

Students with disabilities need individualized transition planning that begins well before graduation and includes their goals, strengths, interests, and support needs. Schools should provide things such as paid internships, job training, career exploration, and partnerships with employers. Instruction in independent living, transportation, financial literacy, self-advocacy, and decision-making. Meaningful access to college, vocational programs, apprenticeships, and industry credentials. Strong coordination among families, schools, healthcare providers, vocational rehabilitation, and adult-service agencies. Benefits counseling so employment decisions do not unintentionally disrupt essential services.

A documented handoff to adult programs before the student exits school, not simply a list of phone numbers. Families also need a dedicated transition coordinator who helps them navigate eligibility requirements, waiting lists, guardianship or supported decision-making, transportation, housing, and employment resources. Success should be measured by whether students leave school with real

relationships, opportunities, skills, and services already in place, not by whether they merely completed a program.

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 ensuring that every student with a disability receives the services and supports promised in their IEP, consistently, promptly, and in the least restrictive environment. That requires fully staffing special education teams, strengthening accountability for IEP implementation, investing in inclusive classrooms, and treating families as true partners. CPS should measure success not only by compliance, but by whether students are learning, included, supported, and prepared for meaningful lives after graduation.