

1. What do you think the purpose of public education is?

The purpose of education is three fold. First, to educate students so they are employable. Secondly, to develop informed, responsible, and engaged citizens, so that our democracy is protected and improved through active and knowledgeable participation. Third, public education serves the purpose of creating strong communities and, when done intentionally, inclusive, tolerant, and diverse communities.

2. List your top three priorities for improving public education in Chicago.

First priority is to expedite an elected representative school board. Although the proposed change to the state law might prevent the ESRB from happening until 2023, we are committed to working with the State legislature to expedite the process, simultaneously ensuring the current appointed board is representative, responsive, and responsible to every Chicago community.

Our second priority is to invest in public neighborhood schools. The current system is stratified, causing widespread racial disparities between schools and neighborhoods. Our administration will work directly with groups like Raise Your Hand, Generation All, Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, to invest in neighborhood schools so that every child has equitable learning opportunities no matter their zip code.

Our third priority, is to expand the Office of Equity. We applaud CPS for finally creating the Equity officer position, but this office needs to be expanded. Equity is a lens we need to use to examine everything we do in CPS, including budgeting, staffing, how we allocate facility improvements and annexes, and curriculum and instructional decisions. Too often changes are made without considering how the most vulnerable will be affected, and without ensuring all voices are at the table.

3. Currently, the mayor appoints the CPS CEO. Would you replace Janice Jackson as CEO of CPS?

Dr. Jackson has stabilized a district that was in free fall after multiple scandals of prior CEOs. However, we require all executives to adopt and embrace our vision of transparency and equity. Too often it seems CPS has intentionally kept parents, communities, students, teachers, and administrators from having a voice in decision making. This has been demonstrated with the illegal changes to Special Education funding, and the attempted closing of National Teacher Academy. The lack of transparency and refusal to listen to the people we serve is demonstrated every month at the CPS Board Meeting, in a room too small to hold the people that want to attend, and a process that intentionally prevents people from speaking and sharing their perspective.

If Dr. Jackson can demonstrate she fully embraces our vision for CPS then she will be welcomed to stay. We need stability and less transition, so it is our hope she will support our vision for CPS.

4. Explain your plans to deal with school funding inequity and inadequacy in Chicago.

We plan to end student-based budgeting and move the district to a model that uses equity as the prime determining factor. First, we need to do a deep dive into the school-level and district budgets. The budgets have changed in format nearly every year, along with changes in funding streams, so we need to first uncover where the inequities exist. Along with this work we need our expanded equity office to develop criteria and working definitions of inequity and inadequacy. Without definitions, in our current funding model, every school could rightfully claim they have inadequate funding. We also need to examine the numerous programs, mandates, and requirements foisted onto schools. We will likely find savings that can be reallocated, if we find ineffective mandates that do not improve academics.

5. CPS recently released a report on facilities that uses their school ratings to label schools and regions as having “quality” seats. Illinois now also has a school rating system. Why should CPS have its own rating system? Is the current method of rating schools useful? Would you ask the Chicago Board of Education to modify or get rid of the CPS rating policy? What role should standardized test scores have in evaluating schools?

The new Illinois State Board of Education rating system is extremely limited and does not offer as much useful information as is possible. While the CPS system is better in that it offers more nuances, both are problematic in that they label schools as failing’, rely too heavily on measuring outputs, or lagging factors, rather than inputs or leading factors, and result in punishing schools with compliance paperwork that do not actually help the schools improve.

We do not anticipate the State to change their rating system, so CPS will continue to have its own. We intend, however, to make changes along the lines of what New York City has attempted with using detailed learning walks that include parents and community members. This will allow the rating system to help identify successes and concerns, while sharing practices and increasing transparency.

The current rating system enables a black box and does not tell us anything about best practices.

6. Under what circumstances and via what process should or could a public school be closed, if ever?

Chicago author Eve Ewing detailed the harm in closing schools in her recent books, “Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and Schools Closings on Chicago & South Side.” We need to first acknowledge it was a racist process that led to closing 49 schools in predominantly black and brown communities, while schools in more affluent areas with white families went untouched, and in many instances received new IB programs or other resources to attract and grow their schools.

Moving forward we need to look to what happened at Ogden and Jenner. Principals Beyer and Croston asked me to facilitate the first steering committee to consider closing Jenner and consolidating it with Ogden. Working with a dozen teachers, parents, and community members we developed and delivered a report to the LSCs at both Ogden and Jenner for them to decide.

The LSCs demonstrated interest in further exploration but CPS leadership interfered and ended the process when it became too heated. A new steering committee formed and pushed it forward.

If a community wants to close and consolidate their local schools, we will support them in that process. The community must always be a fully invested partner in such drastic decisions.

7. Should Chicago have a fully elected representative school board? If so, when should an elected representative board be put into place? What policies or structures are needed to ensure that an elected board is truly representative across geography, race, class, and stakeholder constituencies (parents, teachers, etc)?

Yes, we need and deserve an ERSB. The proposed state law suggests it will not happen until 2023, but as mayor we will push the legislature to expedite this process, ideally no later than 2021.

To ensure the board is truly representative across geography, race, class, and stakeholder constituencies, we need to have the district divided into regions from which board members can be represented. We will also push for public funding of elections to prevent special interests from unduly influencing elections. One of the first actions we will take will be to form a steering committee of parents, community members, students, and teachers, to look at possible models for school boards from across the state, to help form our decisions and ensure an equitable and fully representative school board.

8. Until an elected school board is put in place, the next mayor will be responsible for appointing the Board of Education and the CEO of Chicago Public Schools. What criteria will you use to evaluate potential board members?

The first criteria is a commitment to transparency, to the extent allowed under the laws to maintain the safety and privacy of students and employees. The manner in which the unelected school board has been conducting business, behind closed doors and without publicly releasing minutes, is an astounding affront to the public trust. If board members cannot or will not weather the storm when they make decisions, then they should not be the ones making those decisions.

The second criteria is a dedication to equity for all students, schools, and communities. What we don't want is a balkanization of our city with board members fighting only for the schools or communities they care about. Board members need to see the big picture and fight for every part of the city.

Equity does not mean we take resources from one community and put them in another. Equity, when done thoughtfully, allows everyone to win.

Under the current system, far too many resources are placed into certain areas of the city, but this only leads to drastically increased costs for real estate and rents, and prevents other areas of the city from being developed. If we create a strategy to ensure there are desirable schools in every neighborhood, and draw boundaries that lead to desegregation, families will have far more options of where they can live, work, play, and learn.

The third criteria is that board members need to have skin in the game. Too many board members only connection to Chicago Public Schools is they pay taxes; they don't send their children to the public schools, and they have never worked in a public school. There is value in having outsiders or community members on the board, but for far too long the majority of the board have had little to no direct connections or interactions with public schools in Chicago.

A fourth criteria is board members cannot have any connection to companies that profit from CPS. It was alarming that Deborah Quazzo was appointed to the board, despite having sizable investments in companies that had contracts with CPS.

9. Recently, the Illinois State Board of Education conducted an investigation of CPS special ed programs and found CPS wrongly cut and denied services to special education students in several areas. ISBE has placed a monitor in charge of CPS special ed department for three years and formed a Special Education Parent Advisory Council. What more, if anything, should CPS be required to do to ensure that special education students are getting all of the services they need?

CPS needs to routinely audit and inspect the instructional practices, curriculum, learning environment, and implementation of the IEPs. Currently, the Central Office performs compliance checks of IEPs mostly through examining paperwork and comparing teacher and paraprofessional schedules to the minutes required in IEPs. Whenever an organization relies too heavily on paperwork compliance, bad actors can find ways to make it seem like services are being rendered, when they are not.

The majority of teachers, staff, and administrators want to do good by the student and ensure they are following the IEPs, but again, there is too much emphasis on paperwork. We need to invest in professional development of teachers and staff. Through regular audits and inspections, likely in tandem with the improved school rating system mentioned above, school teams can receive feedback to improve their practices.

CPS can also do a better job educating parents on what to look for, what questions to ask, and how to advocate for their child. Many parents of students with IEPs seek help and support. This might include workshops but also more access to observing their child in the learning environment, followed by a debriefing so the special education team and the parent agree on what is going well, and what might need to change.

10. Does the system of selective enrollment schools where student admissions are based on standardized test scores help or harm CPS students? Why?

Selective enrollment schools were created to desegregate CPS, and were somewhat successful in doing so, although too many of the schools were built on the north side, causing a significant inconvenience to students of color. So even in the original purposing and plan for selective enrollment schools, they both helped and harmed CPS students.

Today, selective enrollment schools do more harm than help. Selective enrollment schools have trained an entire generation of students and their families to believe their neighborhood school is not desirable, or worse, a failed school. This is far more true on the West and South sides,

where there has been significant disinvestment in the local schools. As a result, the majority of students want to go to a school in another neighborhood, even if it is not academically better or statistically different than the school down the block from their home. This isn't an efficient or effective system of schooling, with thousands of students travelling in some cases over an hour to and from school on public transportation, when they could be walking five minutes to their local school.

The focus on selective enrollment schools have also trained a generation of students, families, teachers, and guidance counselors to believe that failing to get accepted into a selective enrollment school is an indicator of less talent, and/or aptitude. Intelligence can be measured in a dozen different ways, and the reliance on standardized test scores and GPA overwhelmingly favors one type of intelligence. This can be damaging to students' psyche, especially when schools are using standardized test scores to predict a student's academic future in 3rd grade or earlier. Students need a wide variety of options, such as arts, STEM, IB, and trade schools, and we need far more of each than we currently have.

CPS has been attempting to move away from the over emphasis on selective enrollment schools, but there is a lot more work to be done. The work to expand AP and IB in non-selective enrollment high schools is helpful, but there needs to be more investment than simply adding a program to a school. CPS has brought in IB and Montessori but forced them to adjust to fit the model of teaching and learning that CPS expects.

CPS executive leadership needs to understand programs like IB, just as they need to learn more about Montessori in the earlier years. With IB (and Montessori), CPS leadership need to fully embrace the philosophy and methods of IB, and stop forcing schools to adopt CPS-specific methods of education. Students and families need to be educated about IB long before they enter high school, as do guidance counselors who have significant impact on students' high school choices.

11. Chicago's school facility decisions over the last eight years have in many cases exacerbated segregation by race in CPS rather than lessened it. What policies and programs would you carry out to increase integration in CPS?

One of our top priorities is to expand the office of equity so that decisions about facilities and annexes are made using a lens that ensures we desegregate our city.

Far too much money has been spent on new facilities, when it is far more economical to preserve and rehab existing buildings. Policymakers believe that putting a new school building will attract families. We saw this with hundreds of millions spent under Renaissance 2010, but this isn't the case. The one thing that attracts families to schools is the strength of the academic program in the school. Therefore, funds used for facilities improvement should go where needed, and not to communities who happen to have political pull with their alderman or city hall.

There is ample evidence of favoritism, and along racial lines, with schools like Peck and Pasteur Elementary Schools, which for many years were overcrowded by more than 130%. They were given mobile units, much like the Willis Wagons of the 1970s, until finally receiving a new middle school. In contrast, schools in other neighborhoods have been given annexes when they were not technically overcrowded.

For years CPS has created detailed lists of the conditions of facilities. By following the advice of our facilities department, with the supervision of the equity office to ensure there is no favoritism, we can improve more schools across the city, leading to desegregation as families have more choices for quality schools.

12. Research shows that charter schools: have no better education outcomes than regular public schools; drain resources from neighborhood public schools and do not support the professionalization of teachers. In what way would these research findings inform your decisions about the existence of charter schools in Chicago?

We do not support the addition of any new charter schools. The existing charter schools need to be held accountable in the same manner as all other schools that receive CPS funding. In many cases the continued existence of charter schools is problematic as they were intentionally created next to neighborhood schools, without any authentic community input, leading to the neighborhood school losing enrollment and funding, without any evidence of improved academic outcomes. In these cases, we need to engage the communities to determine what they want and need.

13. Illinois' recently created a neo-voucher program, the Invest In Kids Scholarship Tax Credit Program. It is set to sunset in 2023. Do you support tax credit scholarships or vouchers? If not, as mayor, how would you use your power and influence in Springfield to mitigate the harm that this program that drains funds from public schools to private schools causes to the public school system?

We do not support school vouchers as it can lead to further segregation.

Private schools, even when they receive public funds, do not have to adhere to the same requirements as public schools, allowing them to act on bias and preference. CPS has been successful decreasing rates of expulsion, whereas private schools do not have to share this data, and vouchers could undo this work. Public funds should not be given to private interests.

As mayor of Chicago, I will lobby Springfield to end this program and ensure public funds are used for public schools.

14. Educational software collects ever larger amounts of personally-identifiable data about students and families. What rights do families have if they do not wish to hand over sensitive personal data in order to participate in school curriculum, programs and services?

Parents should have the ultimate right to not share their child's data with an educational software platform. There is still not enough research supporting the current over-reliance on educational software; it has not been the panacea the tech and ed reform sectors have hoped., as evidenced by schools in Silicon Valley that do not use computers. Too often schools use software as a replacement for a teacher or a curriculum. Allowing parents to opt-out might help schools rethink their reliance on educational software.

15. In the aftermath of CPS sexual abuse violations, a CPS Office of Student Protection and Title IX was created to respond to allegations of sex abuse and bullying in schools. Are you satisfied with this solution? Are you satisfied with CPS communication to the public about changes they have implemented to improve sexual abuse and bullying response? Should the Mayor's Office or City Council hold further investigations into this scandal?

There has only been one report released from this new office, so we need to learn more.

Additionally, it is not for the mayor to decide if their communication has been satisfactory. We need to listen to the families and students who attend CPS. Unfortunately, the CPS Board of Education meetings intentionally limit the opportunity for dialogue.

We do not believe the mayor or the city council should hold further investigations, but we would consider asking the State's Attorney General to open an investigation, at the very least to do a full audit to ensure the system that has been created is effective, and to determine if any employee failed to report or protect students.

16. Give three examples of the policies, resources or best practices you would implement as mayor to retain excellent teachers and attract new ones to CPS.

We need to offer more residency waivers for hard-to-staff positions. Suburbs do not require residency in their towns, and poach some of our best educators.

CPS needs to do a better job partnering with the local universities to identify and train future educators. Local universities should offer scholarships for hard-to-fill positions, and to develop more African-American, Hispanic, and Asian teachers. We need a workforce that is representative of our student body.

Lastly, similar to what CPS has done with administrators to create an Independent School Principal designation, relieving high-performing administrators of red-tape and mandates, we need to offer a similar incentive to teachers. We need to develop teacher leaders, and pay them accordingly. Schools are starved of leadership and rely far too much on the principal and assistant principal, when you have capable teachers willing to help lead, but deserve the recognition and compensation.