

Chicago Board of Education Candidates Disability Questionnaire 2026

District: 6B

Candidates:

Brittany B. Kimble

Michael L. Neal

Candidate: Brittany B. Kimble

Question 1: In no more than a paragraph, introduce yourself and why you are running to serve on the Board of Education.

Brittany B. Kimble: I am a mother of a CPS student, attorney, small-business owner, and Chair of the Illinois Employment Security Board of Review. For more than 16 years, I have represented people navigating systems that can be confusing, intimidating, and life-changing. That experience, combined with my experience advocating for my own child, is why I am running for the Chicago Board of Education. I believe every child deserves a high-quality education and the support necessary to reach their full potential.

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?

Brittany B. Kimble: Families are frustrated because too often they feel they have to fight for services their children are legally entitled to receive. The special education process can be complicated, full of unfamiliar terminology, delays, meetings, evaluations, and paperwork. A parent should not have to be an attorney to understand an IEP or 504 plan to make sure it is implemented. Staffing shortages and inconsistent services only make that frustration worse. CPS has to move from making families audition and prove they are worth of help to creating a system where they make services readily available and information is easy to obtain.

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?

Brittany B. Kimble: CPS needs a transparent, long-term accessibility plan instead of addressing accessibility building by building only when a problem arises. I would support a districtwide accessibility audit, a publicly available list of needed improvements, clear priorities and timelines, and dedicated capital funding. The district should prioritize schools where accessibility barriers are currently preventing students from attending their neighborhood school. While major renovations are being planned, CPS must also provide reasonable interim accommodations so people with disabilities are not simply told to wait years for access.

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?

Brittany B. Kimble: My first question is are these placements being made because they are truly the least restrictive and most appropriate environment for the individual student, or because the district does not have enough resources and staff to support that student in a general education classroom? I would also ask CPS to provide data showing which students are being placed in cluster programs, their disabilities, race, school, placement history, academic outcomes, and whether their IEP teams considered less restrictive options first. I would want to know how parents are being included in those decisions, whether schools have sufficient special education teachers and support staff, and whether students placed in clusters are receiving the same access to rigorous academics, electives, extracurricular activities, and their non-disabled peers.

Question 5: In your opinion, what are the pros and cons of expanding cluster programming for students?

Brittany B. Kimble: Pros of Specialized Cluster Classrooms

- Targeted Individual Support: They provide a smaller, highly specialized environment with intensive resources tailored exactly to a student's unique needs.

- **Meaningful Academic Progress:** When properly staffed and resourced, these classrooms allow students to learn safely and make real, measurable educational gains.
- **Appropriate Placement:** They serve as a highly valuable and necessary option when an IEP team genuinely determines it is the best fit for the student.

Cons & Concerns of Specialized Cluster Classrooms

- **Risk of Default Placement:** Districts may use specialized classrooms as a "default answer" simply because general education classrooms lack the staffing or resources to support the student.
- **Reduced Peer Socialization:** Separating students limits their valuable daily access to non-disabled peers and the broader school community.
- **Limited Academic & Extracurricular Opportunities:** Placement in these classrooms can restrict a student's access to grade-level instruction, electives, and extracurricular activities.
- **Lowered Expectations:** Isolation can inadvertently create lower academic and behavioral expectations for capable students.

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?

Brittany B. Kimble: Transition planning cannot begin when a student is 21 years old and about to leave CPS. It should be a meaningful part of a student's education well before graduation. CPS should expand partnerships with employers, unions, apprenticeship programs, community colleges, vocational programs, and disability organizations so students have access to paid work experience, career training, mentoring, and real employment opportunities. Students should also receive support with independent living, transportation, financial literacy, self-advocacy, and understanding the adult services available to them. Most importantly, there should be a real handoff from CPS to adult services. Families should not reach age 22 and suddenly discover that the supports they relied on have disappeared.

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?

Brittany B. Kimble: My top priority is making sure students with disabilities receive both the services in their IEPs and high-quality academic instruction that leads to measurable progress. We cannot treat compliance as success. Providing a service on paper is not enough if a student is not making meaningful academic progress toward grade-level standards and their individualized IEP goals. CPS should closely track IEP implementation, staffing vacancies, service minutes, academic growth, and outcomes, and intervene quickly when a student is not progressing. Special education must be treated as both a civil-rights responsibility and an academic achievement responsibility.

Candidate: Michael Neal

Question 1: In no more than a paragraph, introduce yourself and why you are running to serve on the Board of Education.

Michael Neal: Before there was a campaign there was a commitment to serve the community and the city I was born and raised in. I have spent nearly all of my adult life serving in schools. Running for this seat is an extension of my service.

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?

Michael Neal: The lack of system wide coordination, the turnover of leadership and the overall lack of knowledge and understanding of the importance and impact on families.

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?

Michael Neal: Educating and advocating and collaborating with families and experts in the field to heighten the need.

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?

Michael Neal: I would inquire about best practices across the nation and the district. Also by reaching out to the teachers and support staff I would listen to the experiences and challenges that are being faced on a regular basis.

Question 5: In your opinion, what are the pros and cons of expanding cluster programming for students?

Michael Neal: Students with learning disabilities deserve an opportunity to be exposed to a variety of instruction. This exposure would be beneficial to students. The con would be if a school isn't quite prepared or resourced to handle expanding cluster instruction.

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?

Michael Neal: By actively pursuing opportunities for charitable and philanthropic partnerships we could create strong support and a plethora of resources designed to help and support students with career options as they graduate / age out of school.

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?

Michael Neal: It would be similar and even more robust for the vision I have for all schools. To offer opportunities of learning and understanding that the education of our students needs to encompass the community as well as the in school educators. That combined with gathering highly resourced organizations would help to insure that families and students would receive quality information and a quality education.