

**ERSB Candidate Questionnaire
Network 49 Education Committee**

Thank you for your candidacy! Please complete this questionnaire and return it by Saturday, May 11th to christinejohnson1000@gmail.com.

1. Describe your background and qualifications to be a member of the Chicago Board of Education. What has been your connection with Chicago public schools? What special skills and experiences do you bring to the position?

My name is Maggie Cullerton Hooper and I'm running to represent District 2 on the newly created Chicago School Board. I am a single mom to two wonderful kids who attend our global majority, neighborhood school, Hibbard Elementary.

I was very intentional in choosing a community and school for my kids. I was raised in a rigid and competitive social and educational environment with and struggled through the majority of my education with undiagnosed disabilities. I chose Hibbard Elementary and Albany Park because of the rich tapestry of religious, cultural and racial diversity it affords us.

I am the parent of a child with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). I have witnessed first hand the dysfunction of our Special Education system - through this experience and through my years of work with Raise Your Hand Illinois where I trained as a parent leader and organizer - and that is why I serve as a parent advocate for students with disabilities. I believe that it is essential we have SPED parents and parents with disabilities serving on the Board of Education.

Fighting for equitable educational access for my child and every student with an IEP was not my first experience of activism. I am a survivor of gender-based violence and have acted as a peer activist for survivors for years. I am on the board of Planned Parenthood and a proud advocate for reproductive justice and gender affirming care at all ages. I am deeply engaged in racial justice and equity organizing, fought for an equitable Elected Representative School Board map, stood in solidarity with teachers and families when we were pushed to re-enter unsafe classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic, and have served on our school's Local School Council for over 7 years - first as a community representative, then parent representative, and now as Chair.

I was an inaugural member of Solidarity Futures; co-lead numerous initiatives under the leadership of the city's first Chief Equity Officer, Candace Moore; am a member of 33WF; partnered with the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless on numerous efforts, including advocating for "Bring Chicago Home"; and have supported the campaigns of local progressives, including Rossana Rodriguez, Brandon Johnson and Graciela Guzman.

Professionally, I have dedicated my career to Chicago's nonprofit and government sectors. I have ample experience managing multi-million dollar city budgets, maximizing the impact of limited funds, and building sustainable partnerships across government, philanthropic and non-profit sectors. I am a unique candidate in that I possess a keen understanding of how government functions, how to navigate the legal system and how to most effectively lobby state and federal funding sources. My extensive experience means I understand how the systems work and where to cut through bureaucracy to create lasting change.

Finally, I am a Cullerton (making me a beneficiary of incredible privilege) and a progressive activist. I spend my time straddling two groups who I believe have enormous potential to come together to build community and collective power without compromising progressive ideals. I want to leverage my privilege and bridge gaps that are fueled by divisive rhetoric. I believe that I have done the internal work to recognize the limits of my lens and am able to move with the humility and self-awareness required to build together.

2. What is your vision for Chicago public schools? How do you believe an elected school board can achieve that vision? What do you personally hope to achieve as a board member? Is there any driving force behind your desire to be a school board member?

Public education is the lynchpin of our society. My vision for a thriving Chicago Public School system is one where every child in our city can walk to an excellent neighborhood school. In addition to securing increased funding, this can be achieved through reforming SPED funding allocations; providing high quality, culturally relevant curriculum through an equitable, needs-based funding model; and partnering with community based organizations, city services, elected officials, LSCs, and school staff to ensure a consistent, proactive approach to mental health and wellness for our children.

An elected school board means that the population most impacted by decisions - parents and students - finally have the opportunity to affect our public schools. We are often the most informed people in the room, and yet, we are dismissed, ignored, or placated at best.

I am running to represent District 2 because I am the only candidate with children currently enrolled in Chicago Public Schools. I am the only candidate who chose a global majority, neighborhood school. I am the only candidate who is both a SPED parent and a parent with disabilities.

The driving force behind my desire to serve on the school board is my conviction that my child cannot succeed unless every child can succeed. I want to uplift the voices of parents who have a demonstrated record of fighting just as hard for other children as they do for their own.

3. District 2 is quite large and diverse; it encompasses approximately 10% of the city and includes neighborhoods from Rogers Park to Uptown, Edgewater to Lincoln Square. It is also extremely diverse economically, racially, and ethnically. Do you see issues that are unique to District 2? What issues are common across the district? How will you represent the entire district?

A quick snapshot of the 37 schools in District 2 (10 high schools and 27 elementary schools):

- *The Opportunity Index scores vary*
 - *8 schools have Oi scores between 17 - 21*
 - *11 schools have Oi scores between 24 - 30*
 - *17 schools have Oi scores between 31 - 39*
- *19 schools have an ESL population of 41% or more*
- *21 schools have student bodies with 15%+ diverse learners*
- ***31 of 37 schools*** *have a 45%+ FRM population*
- *6 schools have a white plurality students body*
- *3 schools have a Black plurality students body*

- 17 schools have a Latine plurality students body
- 1 school has a Asian plurality student body

The robust religious, cultural, and language diversity in our schools and the community at large are unique to District 2 and afford our eventual elected school board member the ability to uplift a wide range of voices and experiences. It would be a privilege to continue the work of actively listening to and witnessing the experiences of my neighbors and fighting with them for the communities we deserve..

To me, gentrification and housing access is the most prevalent issue impacting the schools of District 2 (and beyond). At Hibbard Elementary, we have seen consistent declines in enrollment due to housing shifts - oftentimes, the purchase of a building by developers can be directly tied to the loss of 15 - 50 of our students at any given point in the year; and it is often children from the least economically privileged households. In the past two years, our enrollment has risen as we have been privileged to welcome families from Afghanistan, Venezuela, and other countries, but the underlying concern around enrollment drops remains. Ensuring that the new board members support and continue to do the work of implementing the needs-based funding model will be critical to ensuring every child has access to excellent schools.

Furthermore, because our non-citizen families will not be afforded a say in who represents their interests on the new School Board, it is a priority of mine throughout my campaign to listen to these vital voices in our communities and uplift their experience and concerns with the same weight and respect as the rest of our neighbors. After winning a seat on the School Board, continued engagement with the Non-Citizen Advisory Council will be a top priority of mine.

4. How do you propose to help schools in your district tap into local people, places, and institutions and strengthen community connections?

Communication and engagement are key to building community, and public schools are spaces that bring communities together and lay the groundwork for a neighborhood's future. The North River Commission brings parent mentor programs into schools, local businesses support fundraising events and donate to in-school events that bring us together, health partners offer clinics, community organizations provide english-language programs for parents and families. The scaffolding to build spaces we deserve exists and as an Elected School Board member, a priority of mine will be to strengthen these connections across our neighborhoods in ways that can be transformational.

5. CPS faces a budget deficit of \$391 million next year as Covid funding ends next September. How would you work across stakeholder groups to ensure CPS secures adequate funding? What solutions do you see for obtaining what we need for fully funded schools?

Right now, the state of Illinois funds the normal pension costs for every school in the state. The state also funds the legacy pension costs for every school in the state, EXCEPT for those located in the city of Chicago. As a result of the state's ongoing inability to equitably fund CPS, the city of Chicago has implemented a property tax that is earmarked to fund the legacy pension costs of our teachers.

This is an offensive, fundamentally unfair, and little known/reported element of how the state underfunds our public school districts.

The Board must demand this issue be immediately addressed, either by elevating the fact that the state legislature slowly stopped funding the legacy pension costs and insisting they take up the legislation again (in the past, the state passed the legacy pension funding as a package) or by supporting a merging of the two teachers pension funds (which would also build power with teachers across the state and help ensure that the city and state do not return to past practices of underfunding pensions).

This single change would generate between \$550M - \$640M in funding, 100% of which could be redirected to our schools.

6. Many neighborhood schools, particularly those that serve students of color, have suffered long-term underfunding and disinvestment. What policies would you support to fund all CPS schools regardless of neighborhood or zip code? How do you plan to support under-enrolled schools fully and equitably?

I strongly support the shift towards a needs-based funding model. I believe everyone can agree that the long-term goal is for every child in Chicago to be able to walk to an excellent neighborhood school.

For the first time in the history of Chicago Public Schools, the district is allocating funds using a methodology that is evidence-based, student centered, and that finally attempts to address the legacy of extraction, segregation, and oppression of marginalized students. This funding model takes those steps while establishing district-wide baseline standards, class sizes, and per-pupil funding rates.

While this model has been temporarily disruptive for a handful of schools who have not faced budget reductions in many, many years, it does take the necessary steps to ensure that every CPS student has the opportunity to succeed. My hope is that, once the district addresses the massive issues with the SPED funding allocations, we will see a truly equitable budget.

Going forward, however, it will be absolutely essential that the board and the district prioritize transparency. I understood the choice to hold off on publicly releasing the budgets initially, but CPS does not have the trust of our communities; and the continued refusal to release this information has been detrimental to the public perception of our CPS central office. Even for schools like Hibbard, where the new funding model has proved beneficial, the choice is creating resentment and perpetuating the adversarial relationship our community already has with CPS and the board of education. The community does not trust that this budget model is serving the purpose the Board claims, and with good reason.

As a member of the Board of Education, I would demand CPS publish their budget AND that each individual school do the same. The truth is, there are any number of revenue streams that schools access - student fees, earned revenue from communications devices or parking rentals, contributed revenue from donors and friends-of organizations, boosters, etc. If we cannot look at the true cost of producing the highest educational outcomes, how can we effectively make the case for increased funding?

Full and meaningful transparency at both the district and the school level is something I will not compromise on.

7. Violence is a critical issue for our students. In the last 3 months, Senn High School, for example, has experienced two shooting incidents resulting in the death of one student and the wounding of four others. As a board member what policies will you advocate to achieve safe schools? What is your position on the presence of SROs in schools?

Police have no place in our schools. Children, families, and communities who experience the trauma of violence need support, resources, and restorative practices inside and outside of our schools. Investments in counselors, restorative justice coordinators, parent mentors, out of school programming, and the arts are the pathways to building the school environments our children need and deserve.

8. What policies will you support to assure that our schools are healthy, clean, adequate to students' needs, and environmentally sustainable? Describe in detail.

The practice of out-sourcing school needs through vendor contracts with for-profit companies, in the name of financial efficiency, has been an unmitigated disaster. The process of submitting "change orders" through Aramark's opaque system lacks any transparency or accountability and has left many of our schools in utter disrepair. The employees are subject to the anti-worker, profit-driven practices of a massive corporation.

We must rebuild an internal infrastructure for facilities maintenance and management. The staff in our school buildings should be unionized city employees supervised by our school principals.

Furthermore, the arbitrary and discretionary allocation of capital budget investments at the district level must be reformed. A full database of capital investments should be publicly available on the CPS website and all future decisions should be accompanied by a methodology for those decisions. Lastly, program-related new investments should not be directed from the facilities budgets.

9. With up to 50 languages spoken in District 2, how can CPS effectively support both newcomers and those in existing ESL and bilingual or dual language programs? Do you have a vision for how to provide all students with needed language skills, respect and nurture students' home cultures, and expand all students' linguistic and cultural knowledge?

The district must completely reimagine community engagement at CPS. A meaningful investment in language services for LSCs, PAC/BAC, and parents and caregivers is critical to ensure every family can be a full participant in their child's education and in their broader school community. Leveraging the existing resources available at our libraries, community based organizations, etc. can move our schools towards more robust and holistic engagement within and across our local schools.

Honoring the rich linguistic and cultural diversity in our schools should go beyond the classroom as well. Every year at Hibbard, we host a "Cultural Celebration" event where students, their families, and teachers gather to elevate an array of cultural traditions from our students' homes. Students from all backgrounds learn traditional and popular cultural music, dances, watch live performances and enjoy a potluck. During this celebration, every child has the opportunity to be seen and celebrated. I would love to see this parent-led model introduced at schools across District 2.

10. What policy changes are needed to ensure that diverse learners receive all the services and resources they need for a full and joyful education?

The problem posed by our current approach to SPED funding is twofold - it is about the amount of funding available and about the methodology by which it is allocated to each school. The board can and should become a strong lobbying body at the state and federal levels to fight for full funding, but the fundamental flaws in the CPS allocations are something that can be corrected immediately.

Every year, the district determines SPED funding by looking at the number of students with IEPs + the number of minutes and subtracts the total number of outgoing students with IEPs. For example, at Hibbard, the district will subtract the number of IEPs in the graduating class of 6th graders.

The district does not, however, use any projection to determine the estimated number of incoming students with IEPs and/or the number of students that will be identified as needing IEPs (generally in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades).

The result of this approach means our school loses at least 3 three SPED staff positions and between .5 - 1.5 FTE case managers in our new budget. Of course, eventually, we regain that funding loss at the mid-year re-allocation and scramble to hire new staff, after being understaffed for the first half of the year.

This process repeats itself, year over year, without fail. The result is that SPED teachers and staff face little to no job security or stability and our students are unable to benefit from forming long term relationships with a team that knows them. It also means that during the first semester of each year, at the time when our school would need more staff in order to better identify, assess, and provide IEPs for students with disabilities, we are chronically understaffed.

In addition to supporting the needs-based funding approach that the current Board implemented this year, I would fight to amend the existing allocation methodology because the issue will persist whether funding at the city, state, and federal level increases or not.

11. What is your position on the Sustainable Community School model? How do you see this model applied in District 2?

The SCS model has proven to be an exceptionally successful framework for public education. I would love to see more SCS's across the city of Chicago and in District 2. Many of the schools in District 2 have partnerships with community organizations that bring resources, programs, and vitality to their students, families, and community members. ONE Northside and North River Commission have done exceptional work to bring parent mentor programs into schools in District 2 and I would champion efforts towards expanding and scaling that movement.

12. Equal access to a standard curriculum, with enrichment classes, should be available to all CPS students. However, many schools lack libraries with a school librarian, music and art, and well-funded sports teams. Many schools limit choices in foreign languages and advanced math and science classes. How would you address these inequalities and end this two-tiered system of education?

There must be standardization of a baseline across the city. Every school should have a robust library and a full time librarian. Every school should have at least two arts specials available for their students. Every school should offer students robust and advanced curriculum options. By significantly increasing the funding to CPS through the equitable state pension funding and by leading the charge for increased overall investment in public education, those resources could be available to every school.

I believe that schools should have some level of discretion, through their elected LSCs, to determine what additional educational and extracurricular programming best meets the needs of their student body and community. However, those decisions should not be limited by district investment, the ability of a school to generate funding through high student fees from a more affluent parent-base, or other inequitable mechanisms that have evolved over time.

13. To qualify for the ballot, ERSB candidates must submit a minimum of 1000 petition signatures by June 24. Typically, candidates in Chicago need to gather two to three times as many signatures to meet the required number of valid signatures. What is your plan to gather sufficient signatures by the June 24 deadline?

I have enlisted parents and other active members of their school communities to collect signatures at school drop offs and pick ups across the district. I recently hired a field director to coordinate volunteer petition efforts at local events and high-traffic locations. She will also be doing signature verification as we petition so we can submit our signatures with the highest level of confidence. I am leaning heavily on my network, but I am also collecting signatures and talking to residents every chance I get. My team and I are confident about securing ballot access.