

**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 background qualifies me to be a member of the Chicago Board of Education. When I was growing up, I was diagnosed with a mental health disability. I struggled to the point where I was ready to drop out, but the school intervened and placed me in a classroom off to the side of the building on the top floor. The classroom had a dedicated teacher. The classroom had two Special Education Teaching Assistants. And there were, at most, 10 of us students in by that room. There, I was able to receive the individualized education plan that allowed me to graduate high school. After college, I dove into social justice work, being lucky enough to find a job after graduating. I was a housing and education organizer in the North Lawndale Neighborhood on the West Side and in the Englewood Neighborhood on the South Side. I became convinced that public schools act as pillars and anchors of community within their neighborhood. To me, public schools are fundamental. This theory was sadly tested. Mayor Rahm Emanuel took office and shuttered nearly 50 schools in one pen stroke. Those pillars were lost. It was then that I first ran for and was elected to the Nicholas Senn High School LSC. In protest, I became among the first LSC members in Chicago to vote against their school's budget and was interviewed by DNAinfo (which became Block Club Chicago). Then, when elected to the LSC of Disney Magnet Elementary, I had the honor of advocating for using a position to hire a social worker, I made the motion, it passed, and one was hired. It continued to be obvious. CPS operates on a policy of separate and unequal. It became my reaffirmed belief that a rising tide can lift all ships, and good schools in every neighborhood are good for every school in every neighborhood. I am the leader who has the history of listening to parents, teachers, and community members, and making educated votes for the best of the students.

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?

My vision for CPS is to, on day 1, begin the formation of a district-wide task force led by Local School Councils to reimagine a strategic plan for CPS. By the time the kindergarteners of my first term are ready to graduate into high school, there will be a public high school available to them that will meet their needs. A dynamic evolution of needs-based funding, data of student needs should be collected from kindergarten through 8th grade so that by the time they get to high school, the school is ready to meet their needs. Serving on local school councils, I know that schools often must play catch up to needed policy. For example, a school should know ahead of time that they will be

receiving a student who requires an all gender, single use bathroom. Local School Councils need to be given the tools to make their school the best school possible. And I know for certain that the support a student receives outside the classroom can be just as important as the time in the classroom. That is why my vision for a concerted, district-wide effort to rebuild CPS, includes wrap around services, including access to social workers. We should know where social workers will be needed in advance, so they can address student needs proactively rather than retroactively. My vision is an achievable one, and through partnering with LSCs, very attainable.

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?

District 2 is home to some of the most diverse student populations in the city. Even though I grew up in Oak Park, my life has truly been about diversity. I have been on the LSC's of Senn and Disney. I am a member of St. Paul COGIC, a leading institution in the African American Community. I have been blessed enough to have lived in much of the district, including Albany Park, Rogers Park, and currently Edgewater. I love these neighborhoods because of their diversity. I think the diversity of our district can be an asset that we can further grow. It is my sincere belief that students learn best when learning with students who are different from them. Across these neighborhoods, wealth disparities, community investment disparities, and institutional racism have created unequal tiers of CPS. Ever since first being elected to an LSC in 2012, I have advocated for a city-wide agenda. I voted against my own school's budget in protest of 50 school closings. When I served on the LSC for a magnet school, I intentionally used my position to stand with neighborhood schools.

Because of my high school education, and where it is, I can relate to many of the voters who grew up in a similar education setting as I did, and can assure them of the stands that I take would provide similar quality of education for the city we now reside in, such as neighborhoods similar to Lincoln Square. I have also talked about how diversity flows through my life, and holds me accountable in my attitude and advocacy.

The Office of Local School Council Relations is completely broken. The truth is, no one in any neighborhood knows more about their schools than the parents and teachers of them. LSCs are the direct representative body of their school. They have the answers. They need to be heard and empowered. All council chairs will have my cell phone number. All council members will be invited to my listening sessions, where I can hear directly from constituents. We all know we need wrap-around services. The LSCs know which services are needed for each school. They and their families have been my constituents, my neighbors, and my fellow Chicagoans. I believe a rising tide lifts all ships. A great education should be a guarantee, regardless of zip code.

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

I have a history of community building. When I was elected to the LSC, I networked with a local coffee shop to grow relations for students to have a safe space after school. I was then commissioned by an Alderperson to write a block club manual in an effort to foster community growth with all stakeholders. The block club manual I wrote is now the official block club resource of Illinois and is downloaded across the country.

I would host a local school council caucus, inviting all the LSC chairs to join me once a month. They will all have my cell phone number.

Together, we will network with local businesses. I believe that businesses, local non-profits, and engaged residents can come together and help neighborhood schools. Some already have fundraising groups. The Board of Education should provide resources to every local school council to focus on community outreach and enrichment. A healthy community helps the local school, and an excelling school helps the neighborhood.

I will have my staff (while, the Board position is volunteer, we are provided paid staff, who i will ensure will work for the benefit of families) create as well as maintain databases which can connect organizations and interested individuals

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?

When approaching this massive budget deficit, I think everything needs to be on the table for a multilateral discussion except for school closures. We as CPS leaders will need to work with the state, county, and city, to ensure the district remains able perform at its best while long term funding is secured. We own buildings and building spaces. How can we use them to generate revenue for our schools? And Cell tower leases? Let's meet with our partner taxing bodies to find collaborative ways to generate revenue. I know how to negotiate with leaders. I helped lobbying efforts in Springfield to secure state funding for a teacher scholarship program that still excels in producing great teachers. The Board needs someone who knows how to roll up their sleeves and be ready to work with partner municipalities. While many will debate what can be cut, I want to lead the discussion of what revenue we can add .

Schools with strong alumni, such as Whitney Young and other longtime selective schools have enough resources to raise funds for those schools. We need focus on the underresourced. I will also use my "bully pulpit to advocate those in related positions (i.e. leadership roles in different agencies and organizations) to build those neighborhoods

economically but especially with active residents who can make a difference, as well as bringing in outside resources to fill the gap.

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?

First, the “student based funding” formula that had been used was created by special interest groups whose aim was motivated by racism.

Second, I firmly believe, and my organizing experience confirms, that a rising tide lifts all ships. I will continue to make the case that an excellent school in district 2 is made stronger by an equally excellent school in district 5, or 8, or 10. No student should have to leave their zip code to get a world class education. I will continue to advocate for a CPS-wide strategic plan, one that should seek Local School Councils input, as their bodies are the most representative of our school communities. I would be their advocate on the board.

Lastly, I would also refer to my answers in question 5, which includes solutions to address inequities.

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?

Senn is down the street from me. The shooting was at the corner where I stop for breakfast. When I was on the Local School Council at Disney Elementary we had a young student bring to school a handgun he found in his parents’ room. He was able to sneak it into class. Luckily, other students reported this and, even though the gun went off, no one was seriously hurt. But a gun should never find its way into a school. Schools must be safe havens for students. For some students, their school is the safest place they can be all day. I am for a very proactive effort that respects children and families but also ensures schools are safe. Local School Councils should be empowered and emboldened to create school safety plans, such as if the school needs additional security cameras, or screening devices, or staff monitoring all doors are locked. Indeed, classrooms should be able to be locked from the inside in the case of an active shooter scenario.

As far as SROs: I agree with Ald. Hadden that we need more mental health workers and less police officers. We need personnel who can establish ongoing relationships with students rather than fear. I will always vote against armed guards in schools but I am open to consider it being an LSC choice. As we both agree, our district is a very diverse one,

which includes communities that differ from my views. Allowing the Local School Council, which should represent that specific community, should continue to have the power to decide. But I will strongly stand with any school which rejects the use of an SRO.

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

Local school councils should be empowered to submit sustainability plans to the board so that the board can meet the nuanced needs of all schools. Some schools need pipes replaced. Some schools need grounds to be redone with permeable surfaces. All students deserve a school that is utmost sanitary. Also, school properties need to be made more sustainable; ideas like green roofs. I want to explore solar panels on the roofs, for example. The district should aim to be carbon neutral.

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?

I grew up in the Oak Park system, which itself has a diverse program. I will advocate strongly on the board on behalf of our students to ensure that they receive the same education I did.

Senn High School is one of the most diverse schools in the city. I was proud of the school's strong culture of multiculturalism. Serving on the local school council, I was vocal in defending multiculturalism as a strength of the school. Disney, being a city-wide school, also had students of so many different backgrounds. Every school should have the ability to support multilingual needs. In fact, I believe multilingual education should be the standard for all students of all language backgrounds, not only to help students relate to their fellow peers, but to be better prepared to enter a global work world post-graduation.

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?

As someone who would have qualified as a Diverse Learner, I know one thing for certain: I would not be here today if it wasn't for the services I received, like a school social worker, like two special education teaching assistants, and like family outreach and involvement" - these services saved my life. Because they saved my education. I know it works. I've seen it. I am it.

It must be part of a master strategy to ensure that all diverse learners receive these resources so that they can perform at their best and be fulfilled as students. We will need more communication from CPS to parents, as well as stronger ties with community organizations that support diverse learners.

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

Uplift in Uptown is one such school, as is Dyett in Bronzeville, where community activists, including our current mayor, went on a hunger strike to create such a school. I know families who have benefitted from Dyett's model such that they have been able to achieve almost a year's worth of college credit, just like they could in suburban schools that myself and friends have attended.

The Sustainable Community School Model should be a template for public schools everywhere. I have always fought for community partnerships rooted in efforts for justice. Community stakeholders aiding student achievement and students encouraged and aided with robust wrap around services. I would not have graduated high school - I would have been another mental health statistic dropping out of high school - except for the services beyond my great teachers that I also received. The Sustainable Community School Model is a manner to make every school just as capable.

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?

One of the saddest student stories I remember during my tenure was of a high school girls sports team playoff game and they had to forfeit because the district couldn't get them a school bus to get them to their game. That is a shame. And it's not just sports. Why do some schools have all the language opportunities and other students will never see it? My vision is to create a district wide strategic plan to address this. All schools have areas of excellence and all have areas to grow. With fresh elected eyes, we will be able to examine allocating resources on a needs based metric, and with leadership, we can do it proactively, make sure the grade or school your student will attend next is already expecting them and are prepared.

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?

My plan is to continue to do what I have been doing. I have been waking up at 4 AM to be at the Metra stops by 6 to gather signatures. I've had weekend petition parties. I have been overjoyed by support from volunteers and professional organizers. I am overjoyed. I am nobody nobody sent. All I have to do is keep my current pace and I am confident I will survive a challenge. My advantage is that I started campaigning last summer. I texted 3,000 registered voters in surrounding precincts. Now I'm showing up at their doors asking for their signature.

In addition, I will continue to utilize my social networks to have individuals leverage their own networks and work to get their friends to sign needed petitions. With a diverse support group, we can connect with the various groups needed to advocate for those who might otherwise be ignored.