

**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?

I was a bilingual high school history and ESL teacher for nearly two decades. I began my career at Benito Juarez High School when Pilsen was Chicago's major port of entry community for new arrivals. I also taught at Schurz High School and, after a stint as the newspaper editor for CTU, at Gage Park High School on the south side. During most of those years, I served as a school delegate, assisting members, leading the Professional Problems Committee, and keeping faculty and staff informed on important issues affecting schools.

I was also a CPS parent for 18 years. Both of my daughters attended Inter-American and then were at Whitney Young. I am a grandmother of a current Inter-American preschooler. At Inter-American, I played an active role in the parent group and helped with numerous events such as potlucks and forums.

I will be retiring from my part-time 'retirement' job at the Chicago Teachers Union in June. While there, I have served in a variety of roles, most recently coordinating our class size relief work for schools throughout the city with an emphasis on helping primary grades and under-resourced neighborhood schools. We have provided a significant number of positions to schools that have experienced a large influx of new arrivals.

I have been a representative to UCORE, a national network of progressive, social justice minded teacher unions and caucuses in the two major education unions. As such, I have learned a lot about the struggles in other regions and have been able to provide support to those who are organizing against major challenges in places like Texas and Florida.

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 of a thriving multi-cultural district with equitably and fully funded schools. I envision an anti-racist curriculum, educational and social/emotional support for all students including but not limited to those with special needs, English language learners, and LGBTQIA and trans students. I would like to see a district where restorative justice rather than punishment is the guiding force in the disciplinary process for young people.

I believe that an elected school board is one extremely important step towards improving CPS but, as with any election, it is a necessary step but, in itself not sufficient, for the transformation our schools need. Having members who are familiar with how schools work and who understand what our children are dealing with is an essential step aspect

of improving schools for all Chicago's children. Many previous school board appointees have been from the business community and, in most cases, did not even have children who had attended CPS. Their goals for the district were frequently based on economics, privatization and data points, not on supporting children and meeting their needs.

As an individual, I hope to bring my decades of experience both as a parent and as an educator to the Board. I think that my experience teaching in diverse school communities in different areas of the city and my work as a Spanish bilingual teacher would be a valuable contribution.

My driving force is to provide each child in CPS with the opportunities that have in the past only been available to some. My daughters were at Whitney Young while I was teaching at Gage Park High School. The contrast between the resources available to my students with those my daughters had access to at their school made crystal clear the painful inequities in our system. It made me redouble my previous efforts to fight for the systemic changes needed to provide well-resourced quality schools in every community.

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?

I do see District 2 as being somewhat unique in its diversity. I view this as a strength in that we can work to incorporate the diverse talents, cultures, lived experiences etc. of its many residents to strengthen our schools and make our curriculum and social emotional learning more relevant and supportive for our children and families. My experience in the CTU grievance department has afforded me the opportunity to visit dozens of schools throughout the city and listen to, and have organizing conversations with, educators working in diverse circumstances.

One of my goals will be to encourage neighbors throughout the district to find their voice and express their needs. Board members should facilitate and support these conversations and meetings in places where people congregate.

Many District 2 schools received large influxes of newcomers in the past two years. This has placed a strain on the local resources. As I have done in my role as class size coordinator at CTU, I would provide assistance to schools for smaller class size as well as additional bilingual personnel. This ties closely with my support for an expansion of Chicago's Sustainable Community Schools initiative.

Housing is a major challenge in our area. I was actively involved in the attempt to pass BCH (Bring Chicago Home) and will continue to fight for funding for affordable housing for both recent arrivals and historically marginalized communities.

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

I would encourage schools to involve parents, grandparents and others in the community as speakers, welcome volunteers and members of LSCs and parent/bilingual councils etc. I support the expansion of Sustainable Community Schools with partnerships with the

many excellent grassroots organizations in our area. I would hold ‘district nights’, would visit churches, mosques, synagogues and other neighborhood institutions to hear what concerns our neighbors want to share and would work diligently to bring these to the Board and implement programs and policies responding to their issues.

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?

We need to persist in the struggle for progressive taxation so that the wealthy and corporations pay a fair share of the socially necessary funding. I have written letters, made phone calls, done 54,000 text messages for BCH and more. I was also a Fair Tax trained proponent. I have lobbied in Springfield for additional funding for our schools and will, in fact, be down there on Wednesday, May 15th with a large contingent of educators. This goal will not be achieved in one easy step but, education, activism, and persistence are the key to getting what our children need and deserve.

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?

Having taught in some of Chicago’s most under-funded high schools, I am very determined to make CPS’s funding more equitable. I think that there should be more money spent directly in classrooms and schools and less on expensive testing initiatives and layers of bureaucracy. This would provide more money that could be directed to those schools with the greatest needs... in the form of smaller classes, additional support personnel and social workers, nurses, and librarians. My work on the Board-Union class size council has prioritized smaller classes in primary grades at historically under-resourced schools. A number of schools in the northeast part of District 2 and in Albany Park have benefited from the council’s support.

Most importantly though, we need to work collaboratively with parent groups, neighborhood organizations and other stakeholders to gain more funds to meet our students’ needs. We should not complacently accept a budget of scarcity and inequity.

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?

I lost three students to gang-related shootings during my career and hundreds of others were impacted, either physically or psychologically. This is not a problem that is solved by having police in our schools. One important step is adequate social workers and other support personnel in the buildings. Another is to start early in elementary school to develop students’ capacities to participate in and respect conflict resolution processes based on the concept of restorative justice. This will need to involve training for our educators and for our families.

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

I fully support the Green Schools Initiative to bring our schools into the 21st Century. We need to plan proactively for schools that can provide a safe learning environment as global warming continues. CPS needs to garner funds, especially from the federal government, to update and modernize our aging school buildings. Citywide our schools average approximately 80 years old, and, like older housing stock, they need updating and costly repairs.

I also support making custodial and janitorial jobs good jobs with decent pay and benefits for the workers. This will encourage these people to become stakeholders in their local schools and take pride in the important work that they do. As far as food service is concerned, I want to see CPS move to healthier meals with less sugar, ultra-processed foods and, along with healthier food, more nutrition education for our students and communities.

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?

As a bilingual teacher, this is an area I feel very strongly about. My children went to Interamerican, Chicago's first dual immersion school and my granddaughter is in pre-school there now.

With the ongoing influx of newcomers, OLCE (Office of Language and Cultural Education) needs more funding so they can assist in training more bilingual teachers, increase the number of dual language programs, not just in Spanish but in other world languages that are a vital part of diverse areas such as District 2. In addition to being a bilingual history teacher, I also taught ESL to parents and helped organize parents and students from the Gage Park community to participate in 2006 immigrant rights marches and other actions.

CPS must continue to support and expand programs such as Grow Your Own, the Seal of Biliteracy and other initiative to encourage new multi-lingual teachers. We also need to support our current teachers as they work to become certified in ESL and bilingual education.

As an individual, I was involved in Nicaragua and El Salvador solidarity work. I am strongly committed to a curriculum that provides all of our students with more knowledge and understanding of freedom struggles throughout the world. In District 2, we have many community members who can contribute their lived experiences to this task.

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?

We need to increase the number of special education teachers by providing programs that help current teachers become special ed certified. We also need to work with local colleges to expand opportunities for a diverse student body to gain this licensure. Additionally, special educators need more time to work individually with students and to provide all the services mandated by the student's IEPs. Funding for SPED should be based on anticipated enrollment

and not merely on past enrollment minus the graduating year. As we move towards support for all students, including our neuro-diverse children, in inclusive settings, we need to fully support them to ensure that they can be successful.

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

Sustainable Community Schools are a model that would serve all of our neighborhood schools well. The partnerships, additional resources, and opportunities for collaboration between schools as well as with grassroots organizations is an opportunity for schools to grow, thrive and provide the wide-ranging services that can help our students flourish. District 2 is a particularly rich area for such collaboration, given the many wonderful organizations that work in our region.

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?

I've talked earlier about the funding changes and priorities I would work to institute to focus support on our neighborhood schools. I also think that CPS needs to actively recruit teachers from a more diverse community base to bring additional languages to our schools and to provide a richer cultural context for our students. I have fought and will continue to fight for the restoration of school libraries and librarians, and for added enrichment classes in the arts, technology, and other areas to engage our students in their areas of interest and help them develop new interests and skills. Expanding partnerships with the Chicago City Colleges and local universities will increase students' access to advanced courses and dual credit opportunities. We should also expand opportunities for children to participate in a wide variety of both competitive and non-competitive sports and physical activities.

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 a wonderful network of friends, fellow-activists, and educators who have come out to help me with this task. Approximately 30 volunteers from five of the wards in the district joined me for our launch at Winnemac Park. I feel confident that I will be able to garner the needed signatures because I will pursue my dream with diligence and because I have a committed base of supporters who are active and engaged in their communities. I've worked alongside many of these people for years and they respect my work and appreciate the scope and breadth of my experience in the movements.