McBRIDE LAW LLC

CPS School Board Voter Guide 2026

Information for our clients and community, with a focus on special education issues

Election date: November 3

ABOUT THIS SUMMARY

Our focus: Special education issues

This voter guide summarizes candidates' positions on special education issues at stake in this election, as well as their relevant background and affiliations.

We are not endorsing any candidates, and we encourage you to seek additional information on other key issues in this election before making your final voting decisions.

Additional resources we recommend:

- **Candidate questionnaires on issues affecting students with disabilities (via Access Living and Legal Council for Health Justice)**
- **Evidence-based issue guides on key topics before the Chicago Board of Education (via UChicago Consortium on School Research)**
- **Chalkbeat Chicago's School Board elections coverage**

01 **Stated proposals**

Specific priorities attributed to candidates in questionnaires, public statements, and news coverage.

02 **Experience**

Professional or family experience, especially where the candidate argues that personal experience serves as a qualification.

03 **Affiliations & endorsements**

We have highlighted key affiliations with and endorsements from other major players, such as unions and policy organizations.

BOARD PRESIDENT

School Board President: candidate comparison

CANDIDATE

Victor P. Henderson

- Attorney/CPA; CPS parent of four
- Top issues: improving reading/math instruction, spending efficiently, student safety
- Opposes automatically maxing the property tax levy; wants spending review before new revenue asks
- Supports the current mix of neighborhood/magnet/selective/charter schools; would allow closures only as a last resort
- Represents families of children with disabilities through his law practice; no specific special-ed policy platform

CANDIDATE

Jessica Biggs

- Started her career as a special education teacher in California before becoming a CPS principal and then a district administrator
- Top issues: instructional quality, board governance capacity (wants independent budget/policy analysis staff), competitive pay and career pathways for teachers and paraprofessionals
- Opposes opening new charter schools; favors preserving arts/sports/specials amid budget cuts
- No special-ed-specific policy beyond her background

CANDIDATE

Hilario Dominguez

- Former CTU deputy political director
- Former CPS special education teacher and case manager (2015–17, 2019–22); holds an M.A. in special education
- Top issues: full state funding (says CPS is owed ~$2 billion), building a "sustainable community school district," universal full-day pre-K starting at age 3
- Names the tension between funding legally required special-ed services vs. English-learner services as a top concern
- Wants smaller class sizes and fully staffed special education services

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 1a — Far Northwest Side

CANDIDATE

Ed Bannon

- Incumbent (appointed 2024)
- Priority: community engagement (holds his own budget briefings; served a decade on Dever ES's Local School Council)
- Voted for a CPS budget plan other mayoral appointees tried to block
- Endorsed by CTU and SEIU
- No special-ed-specific platform reported

CANDIDATE

Margie Luczak

- Retired Chicago police officer (25+ years)
- Priorities: lowering property taxes, returning school resource officers to schools
- Has no children and limited direct education background; says her policing career gives her "common sense" for the role
- Backed by charter/school-choice groups (Illinois Network of Charter Schools, The Urban Center)
- No special-ed-specific platform reported

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 1b — Northwest Side

CANDIDATE

Michelle Pierre

- 25+ years as teacher, principal, district administrator, leadership coach
- Metrics-driven approach: wants district decisions weighed against return-on-investment for student outcomes
- Served on Ogden International's Local School Council as a parent
- Backed by Illinois Network of Charter Schools and The Urban Center
- No special-ed-specific platform reported

CANDIDATE

Claudia Peralta

- District director for U.S. Rep. Delia Ramirez
- Priorities: using cross-government relationships to secure funding, protecting immigrant students, opposing layoffs as a way to balance the budget
- Former chief of staff to state Rep. Lindsey LaPointe; former Von Linné Elementary LSC member
- Endorsed by CTU and SEIU
- No special-ed-specific platform reported

District 2a — Far North Side

CANDIDATE

Ebony DeBerry

- Incumbent; CPS teacher and parent
- Priorities: taxing corporations/the wealthy to address the budget deficit, multiyear budgeting to reduce last-minute cuts, tighter state oversight of charter schools after the Acero closures
- Wants a youth advisory council so the board hears directly from students
- Longtime advocate for Sustainable Community Schools ("every school needs something different")
- Endorsed by CTU; no special-ed-specific platform reported

CANDIDATE

Bruce Leon

- Entrepreneur (sold his HR outsourcing firm in 2024), 50th Ward Democratic committeeperson
- Priorities: cutting "excess staff," converting low-attendance schools into charter or vocational schools
- Argues the board needs more business/financial expertise, not just educators
- Ran for school board in 2024 and lost; also briefly ran for Congress
- Did not respond to the candidate questionnaire; no special-ed-specific platform reported

CANDIDATE

Hector Morales

- Attorney (Illinois DCFS); musician
- Priorities: making arts/music part of the core curriculum, more university partnerships to expand college access, efficient use of existing budget rather than new revenue
- Taught electronic music to kids at Gale Elementary as a volunteer, which inspired his run
- Backed by the Common Ground Collective and The Urban Center
- No special-ed-specific platform reported

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 2b — North Lakefront

CANDIDATE

Debby Pope

- Incumbent; retired bilingual social studies teacher
- Priorities: taxing the wealthy and closing corporate loopholes to fund schools equitably, continued advocacy for bilingual/dual-language education
- Worked for the CTU for over a decade after retiring from teaching
- Endorsed by CTU (top donor: CTU's political arm)
- No special-ed-specific platform reported

CANDIDATE

Kyna Lenhof

- Former special education teacher at Easterseals Academy (a therapeutic day school for autistic students) and at Scammon Elementary
- Priorities if elected: more funding for special education, ensuring IEPs are actually followed by all educators, better support for special-ed teachers
- Also wants to reduce the district's reliance on high-interest loans
- Backed by the Common Ground Collective and INCS Action PAC (charter-focused)

CANDIDATE

Daniel Basco

- Data scientist/policy research (Ph.D., RAND School of Public Policy)
- Priorities: more consistent state funding, multiyear CPS budgets for family/program stability
- Wants stronger AI guardrails and data-privacy protections in classrooms
- Self-funded ($7,000 of his own money); positions himself as independent of political groups
- No special-ed-specific platform reported

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 3a — Logan Square, Albany Park

CANDIDATE

Norma Rios Sierra

- Incumbent; Logan Square community organizer
- Priorities: more mental health resources for students, restoring arts/extracurricular funding at neighborhood schools, continued protections for immigrant families
- CPS graduate and single mother of a CPS teen; former Logan Square Elementary LSC member
- One of only four candidates endorsed by both CTU and SEIU
- No special-ed-specific platform reported

CANDIDATE

Peter Gonzales

- Lawyer (Illinois Secretary of State's office); volunteer tutor
- Priorities: equitable teacher wages, expanding trades pipelines, protecting immigrant students from federal immigration enforcement
- Wants greater budget transparency and fiscal accountability at CPS
- First in his family to attend college; board member of the Institute of Latino Studies at Notre Dame
- Backed by charter groups and the Common Ground Collective; no special-ed-specific platform reported

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 3b — Humboldt Park, Hermosa

CANDIDATE

Carlos Rivas Jr.

- Incumbent; works for the Civilian Office of Police Accountability
- Priorities: more investment in neighborhood schools, support for immigrant families, moving away from high-interest borrowing
- A transitional foster parent for unaccompanied migrant children, which he says shaped his views on dual-language programs
- Wants less mayoral interference on the board; favors partnerships with outside social-service organizations
- Backed by SEIU, charter groups, and the Common Ground Collective; no special-ed-specific platform reported

CANDIDATE

Jason Dónes

- CPS parent; worked on CPS' Instructional Equity Working Group
- Priorities: budget transparency, protecting CPS jobs/services for immigrant students, more resources for district schools
- Serves on his children's school's LSC since 2020; co-chairs a progressive neighborhood housing group
- Says he won't accept donations from corporations or billionaire-funded PACs
- Endorsed by CTU; no special-ed-specific platform reported

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 4a — North Side

CANDIDATE

Karen Zaccor

- Incumbent; longtime Uptown teacher (helped found Uplift Community HS)
- Priorities: equity for high-poverty neighborhood schools, growing the Sustainable Community Schools program, more progressive state revenue
- Opposes school closures, arguing the district should invest in low-enrollment schools instead
- Pushed for stricter charter-school renewal/monitoring standards
- Endorsed by CTU; no special-ed-specific platform reported

CANDIDATE

Ellen Sherratt

- Teacher-recruitment/retention consultant
- Priorities: setting ambitious "moonshot" achievement goals for the district, boosting teacher pay/quality, more state funding without "phantom money" budget tactics
- Wants special after-school office hours to hear directly from students
- Her own daughter attends private school, which she frames as a "personal decision" separate from her public-school advocacy
- Backed by SEIU, the Common Ground Collective, and school-choice groups; no special-ed-specific platform reported

CANDIDATE

Angel Alvarez

- Leads the family advisory board for CPS' Office for Students with Disabilities
- Personal experience: his visually impaired daughter missed a full semester of school over a transportation/bus dispute; he has since helped other families navigate special-ed staffing and transportation issues
- Priority if elected: universal screening for learning and other disabilities before kids start school, connecting families to existing resources
- Also prioritizes limiting property tax increases and giving Local School Councils more control over budgets
- Scientist/professor at Northwestern; no major PAC/union endorsement reported

District 4b — North Side (unopposed)

CANDIDATE

Ellen Rosenfeld

- Incumbent; former CPS teacher and family-engagement specialist
- Priorities: rallying the board around shared goals (raising reading proficiency, cutting chronic absenteeism), fiscal caution (opposed this year's budget over reliance on uncommitted state money)
- Opposed CPS's 2025 vote to absorb five failing Acero charter schools, arguing the district shouldn't bail out troubled private operators
- Wants genuine community engagement (e.g., a cross-city task force) before any future school closures
- Former LSC chair, mother of four CPS graduates; no special-ed-specific platform reported

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 5a — West Side

CANDIDATE

LaPamela Williams

- Customer-service background (including as nursing-home aide); Austin native
- Priorities: financial accountability, cutting spending that doesn't directly benefit students
- Supports opening new charter schools where there's community demand and sustainable funding
- Backed by the Illinois Network of Charter Schools, The Urban Center, and the Common Ground Collective
- No special-ed-specific platform reported

CANDIDATE

Aaron "Jitu" Brown

- Incumbent; veteran anti-school-closure organizer
- Leads the board's Black Student Achievement Committee, focused on closing racial disparities
- Priorities: more state funding via taxing the wealthy/closing corporate loopholes, trimming administrative overhead
- Opposes new charter school expansion; helped lead the fight that reopened Dyett High School
- Endorsed by CTU; no special-ed-specific platform reported

WRITE-IN CANDIDATE

Kernetha Jones

- Per her resume, taught students with learning and behavioral disabilities in CPS during the 1980s–90s
- Stated priorities: school choice and school vouchers, limiting AI use in classrooms, hiring more Black teachers
- Her 2026 questionnaire included claims about CPS sex-ed curriculum that Chalkbeat found no evidence for, and used anti-transgender language about how schools should handle students' gender identity — worth weighing alongside her stated priorities
- Did not respond to interview requests; no campaign funding reported
- Was removed from the printed ballot

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 5b — West Side

CANDIDATE

Michilla "Kyla" Blaise

- Incumbent; political aide; multi-generation West Side resident
- Priorities: increasing CPS funding, addressing declining enrollment (wants to revitalize underused buildings like Marshall Metro HS), student mental health
- Spearheaded the 2026 budget amendment that reversed planned layoffs by assuming $150 million in additional (uncommitted) state funding
- Wants families to have real choices among magnet, charter, and neighborhood schools
- Endorsed by CTU; no special-ed-specific platform reported

CANDIDATE

Anthony Hargrove

- Runs programs reconnecting disengaged youth with school
- Priorities: improving reading/math proficiency, refining special education services, expanding vocational and career education
- CPS graduate and parent; has worked multiple roles inside CPS schools (security officer, social worker assistant, parent worker)
- Wants more community partnerships to make use of underutilized school buildings
- Backed by the Common Ground Collective and The Urban Center

District 6a — Downtown

CANDIDATE

Anusha Thotakura

- Incumbent; former lobbyist, leads a statewide advocacy organization
- Priorities: boosting reading/math scores against the district's 5-year strategic plan, expanding pre-K access, more public data-sharing on student progress
- Sponsored the Healthy Green Schools resolution (clean-energy investment, mold remediation funding)
- Broke with CTU last year to vote for a budget without high-cost borrowing, then voted with the union-aligned bloc this year
- Endorsed by CTU and SEIU

CANDIDATE

Isaiah White

- Has worked as a special education classroom assistant; currently CPS substitute teacher and school support worker
- Priorities: improving reading/math scores, raising pay for teaching assistants, hiring more effective school leaders
- Was homeless for a period in high school; says a supportive guidance counselor shaped his interest in education
- Backed by The Urban Center, Illinois Network of Charter Schools, and the Common Ground Collective; faced scrutiny for overstating past volunteer/campaign roles on his website

CANDIDATE

Brenda Lee Anderson

- Education and social-policy researcher, Northwestern lecturer
- Top priority: fixing the CPS budget crisis by pursuing untapped federal funds and more state funding
- Grew up in and out of foster care, which she says shaped her view of schools as "safe spaces"
- Wants to build coalitions across the political spectrum and prioritize evidence-based policy over special-interest pressure
- Not backed by any major union or PAC; no special-ed-specific platform reported

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 6b — South Loop, Greater Grand Crossing

CANDIDATE

Michael Neal

- Pastor; founded a South Side literacy/reading nonprofit
- Top priority: improving early childhood education, including more read-aloud programs districtwide
- Longtime volunteer recruiting Black men to read to CPS students; serves on the Greater Bronzeville Community Action Council
- Self-described "campaign novice" running largely on volunteer support
- Endorsed by the Common Ground Collective; no special-ed-specific platform reported

CANDIDATE

Brittany Kimble

- Lawyer; CPS mom
- Personal experience: says she repeatedly and unsuccessfully sought extra school support for her daughter, including for speech-related needs and bullying, and homeschooled her at one point as a result — "not every parent should have to do that"
- Top priorities: tackling the district's structural budget deficit (cuts outside the classroom, reducing debt), improving reading/math proficiency
- Filed personal bankruptcy in 2026 after her law firm struggled post-pandemic; remains a licensed attorney
- Backed by The Urban Center, which she says has "not asked anything" of her

District 7a — Southwest Side

CANDIDATE

Emma Lozano

- Incumbent; Pastor at a Pilsen church with a history of immigrant sanctuary work
- Priorities: protecting immigrant students (pushed CPS to consider remote learning during ICE enforcement surges), more progressive state revenue
- Backed policies limiting CPS cooperation with federal immigration authorities
- CPS parent/graduate; family has deep ties to Pilsen's Latino community
- Endorsed by CTU; no special-ed-specific platform reported

CANDIDATE

Jesus Ayala Jr.

- Worked for MetroSquash, a South Side academic/athletics nonprofit
- Priorities: evaluating whether curriculum materials (like the district's Skyline curriculum) are actually improving outcomes, reducing absenteeism and bullying
- Believes the board spends too much time on single-school issues instead of districtwide policy
- CPS graduate; credits a CPS school with helping his immigrant father acclimate to the U.S.
- Backed by an SEIU-affiliated PAC and the Common Ground Collective; no special-ed-specific platform reported

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 7b — Southwest Side

CANDIDATE

Yesenia Lopez

- Incumbent
- Says she wants more special education resources for students, in response to parents' concerns their children aren't getting legally required services
- Other priorities: protecting immigrant families, increasing student mental-health services
- Supports the Sustainable Community Schools program and called for the state-required noncitizen-student advisory panel to finally be created
- Endorsed by SEIU (lost CTU's backing this cycle); did not respond to the 2026 questionnaire

CANDIDATE

Erika Diaz-Chavez

- Chicago Park District project manager (20+ years)
- Also says she wants more special education resources for students, echoing the same parent concerns Lopez cites
- Wants to evaluate whether Sustainable Community Schools is delivering results before expanding it further
- Says the board needs more independent, non-slate-aligned voices, especially on the looming school-closure moratorium expiration
- Backed by the Illinois Network of Charter Schools and The Urban Center; did not respond to the 2026 questionnaire

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 8a — Southwest Side (unopposed)

CANDIDATE

Angel Gutierrez

- Incumbent; nonprofit fundraising/communications leader (Enlace Chicago)
- Wants to improve special education services districtwide
- Also prioritizes expanding skilled-trades pathways and ensuring reliable transportation, including school buses
- Wants CPS to "rightsize" — reviewing underutilized schools and pandemic-era staffing — before raising taxes further
- The only board member pushing Illinois to opt into a federal tax-credit scholarship program for private-school tuition; sends his own kids to Catholic school

District 8b — the Loop, Brighton Park (unopposed)

CANDIDATE

Juan Ignacio Gonzalez

- Chicago Police detective (27 years); coffee shop owner
- Priorities: high academic standards, expanding career and technical education (especially construction trades)
- Wants a closer look at how CPS spends its budget and whether resources are used well
- U.S. Marine Corps veteran and first-generation American; motivated to run partly by concerns over civic actions on school days

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 9a — Auburn Gresham, Englewood (unopposed)

CANDIDATE

Brittany Bailey Preston

- Wife of State Sen. Willie Preston; former construction-company co-owner
- Stated priorities (via social media, since she didn't complete a questionnaire or interview): improving literacy, expanding trade/career pathways, making CPS "the most family-friendly school district in America"
- Describes herself as running to be a "Momma Bear" for CPS families as a mother of six
- Previously removed from the 2024 ballot; effectively guaranteed the seat this cycle as the sole candidate

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 9b — Far South Side

CANDIDATE

Therese Boyle

- Incumbent
- Spent 35 years as a CPS school psychologist and teacher before joining the board
- Priorities: long-term financial stability (opposed a high-interest loan proposal), school safety and security
- Favors charter schools and school consolidation "when equitable and cost-effective"
- Backed by SEIU and school-choice/charter groups

CANDIDATE

Katherine Dunneback

- Currently an adjunct clinical professor and practicing speech-language pathologist (Saint Xavier University)
- Priorities: smaller class sizes, less classroom technology, expanding early-childhood education
- Supports expanding Sustainable Community Schools as an alternative to closures; opposes charter schools
- Endorsed and financially backed by CTU

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 10a — Bronzeville to South Shore

CANDIDATE

Che "Rhymefest" Smith

- Incumbent; Grammy-winning musician turned activist
- Wrote a resolution requiring the CPS superintendent to hold superintendent credentials
- Priorities: transparency and accountability from district leadership, tracking whether Sustainable Community Schools is actually working
- Visits every school in his district and holds monthly community events on issues like absenteeism
- Backed by SEIU, the Common Ground Collective, and charter groups; running essentially unopposed (only write-in opposition)

WRITE-IN CANDIDATE

Tameka Walton

- Founded and directs a nonprofit that works with children who've experienced trauma
- Personal experience: homeschooled her son for a time after a private school "didn't work out" and he faced unspecified challenges, before he later graduated from a public school
- Wants better connections between CPS and homeschooling families
- Endorsed by CTU (no funding reported as of mid-September); former LSC member and CPS parent
- Removed from the printed ballot

DISTRICT CANDIDATES

District 10b — Far Southeast Side

CANDIDATE

Connie Anderson

- Incumbent (appointed in July 2026); paralegal
- Top priority: fully funding special education so students with disabilities get the support they need
- Personal experience: mother of twins, one of whom needed special-ed services; fought to keep her daughter included in general-education classes alongside peers rather than separated out, eventually securing an aide after an outside evaluation
- Also fundraised to bring equitable resources (like a robotics program) to lower-income students after Ogden and Jenner schools merged
- Endorsed by CTU

CANDIDATE

Patrick Watson

- Legislative aide to Ald. Anthony Beale; former accountant (25 years)
- Priorities: balancing the budget through internal efficiency before seeking new revenue, more equitable resource allocation across schools
- Open to school closures if they help address underuse of resources — "not dead set against them"
- Attended CPS neighborhood schools himself; sent his own son to a selective-enrollment school
- Endorsed by the Common Ground Collective; no special-ed-specific platform reported

WRITE-IN CANDIDATE

Rosita Chatonda

- Former CPS teacher and literacy specialist
- Wrote a book, "The Literacy Gap," on teaching reading/writing to students below grade level
- Was fired from CPS after disputed misconduct allegations and placed on the district's "do not hire" list; her lawsuit over the firing was dismissed
- Priorities: literacy instruction strategies, fairer hiring/firing practices for Black teachers
- Not endorsed by CTU; no special-ed-specific platform reported