General & Background Questions

1. Candidate Name: **Ellen Sherratt**
2. Running for School District: **District 4A**
3. Campaign Website: **www.ElectEllenSherratt.org**
4. Campaign Email: **electellensherratt@gmail.com**
5. Briefly describe your background, including personal, educational and professional information and how it prepares you for this position.

I'm a Chicago mom and an education researcher. I hold a PhD in Education and for 25 years my work has centered on the factor the research says matters most inside a school building: whether a child gets a teacher who is equipped to do the job well.

I've done that work with the Illinois State Board of Education, with legislators in Springfield where I've won education funding fights, and nationally, where I led the introduction of the American Teacher Act in Congress to raise minimum teacher pay to $60,000. I also tutored with both Literacy Chicago and Turning the Page, where reading proficiency stopped being a statistic for me and became a person sitting across a table.

Two parts of that background matter for this seat in particular. The first is that evaluating education policy is what I do for a living. I can look at a curriculum decision, a staffing model, or a new initiative and assess what it is actually doing to children, which is a different exercise than reading the press release announcing it. The second is that I am deeply versed in education budgets. CPS carries more than $9 billion in long-term debt and will spend $794 million on debt service this year. I want to work with district leadership, with my colleagues on the board, and with our partners in Springfield to understand the full shape of that problem and pursue responsible ways out of it.

6. Why are you running for this position?

Two reasons, one about children and one about representation.

The first: 24% of CPS students are proficient in math and 40% in reading. That is an emergency, and it should be the opening item on every board agenda. It rarely is. A child who doesn't learn to read carries that into adulthood, and the research on what closes those gaps is not mysterious. Strong curriculum taught well, early literacy done right, capable principals, and excellent teachers who get real training and support. I've spent my career on the last piece, and I want to bring it to bear on the schools my neighbors send their kids to.

The second reason speaks directly to what NEU works on. Chicagoans spent more than a decade organizing for an elected school board so that the people who live in a neighborhood would choose who represents it. This November is the first time that promise is fully kept. My concern is that this neighborhood has had a representative beholden to the mayor and to the CTU rather than to the families of Uptown and Edgewater.

I bring 25 years in education research and policy to this seat, and I bring no obligations along with it. Nobody appointed me. No organization holds a marker on my vote. The only people I will answer to are the families of District 4A, in Uptown, in Edgewater, and in every neighborhood this district covers.

That independence matters because of what it frees up. Far too much of this board's energy goes into political fights that have no bearing on whether a child in Uptown learns to read. I want to pull the focus off the politics and put it on the work, and I'll measure every decision I make against a single question: does this help a child in District 4A learn more this year than last?"

Housing

1. What role can the Chicago School Board play in encouraging housing development around public schools in a way that strengthens school funding and keeps families with school-age children stably housed within their communities?

Start with what usually gets left out of this conversation, which is that the causation runs in both directions. Housing follows schools. Families with children choose where to live largely on the strength of the neighborhood school, and developers build family-sized housing where they believe families will actually come. You will not get meaningful family housing development in a neighborhood whose public schools people are trying to avoid. Great schools anchor a community, and everything else in your questionnaire gets easier when they're working.

So the most consequential thing I can do for housing in Uptown and Edgewater is make these schools excellent. That's not a dodge. It's the precondition.

Beyond that, the board holds three more technical levers and underuses all of them.

The first is land. The board votes on what happens to district-owned property, and CPS holds vacant parcels and underused buildings across the city. Those decisions get made one at a time with no housing lens applied. I'd push for a standing policy that surplus CPS property gets evaluated for mixed-income housing with a preference for family-sized units.

The second is information. When a project like the one at Emanuel Congregation comes forward, nobody produces a clear analysis of what it means for nearby school enrollment. That vacuum gets filled with speculation about overcrowding that the data usually doesn't support. CPS holds the enrollment projections and the building capacity figures. The board should publish them as a matter of course so neighbors and aldermen are arguing over real numbers.

The third is voice. School board members get treated as authorities on whether a neighborhood can absorb growth. When 603 homes go up steps from

the Thorndale Red Line, roughly a fifth of them affordable and a quarter sized for families, that is good for the schools around it. Many of our North Side buildings have room, and state funding follows enrolled students. I'll say that publicly rather than staying quiet while the opposite claim goes unanswered. "

2. Approximately 45% of revenue collected by CPS comes from property taxes. This revenue source has had its levy consistently maximized, and has become a burden on homeowners and renters alike. As housing costs rise and displacement pressures grow due to Chicago's housing shortage, what policies would you advocate for to ease this burden?

I agree that it's a major burden, and I hear about it constantly at doors in this district. Homeowners feel it directly, renters feel it through their leases, and low-income Chicagoans feel it hardest because it takes the biggest bite out of the smallest budget.

An honest accounting has to start with why the levy keeps getting maxed. The state genuinely does shortchange Chicago; Illinois's own evidence-based funding formula puts CPS at 73% of adequacy. That is the largest single cause of the pressure. I've successfully advocated in Springfield before, and I would work to build a coalition that can move real dollars rather than pass resolutions demanding them.

The district's own decisions have made it worse. CPS carries more than $9 billion in long-term debt with a total annual burden the board president has put above $900 million, roughly $28,000 per student. Nearly $200 million a year still services bonds sold a decade ago to paper over a deficit. Every dollar of that is a dollar the levy covers before a teacher is paid.

The habit that keeps the cycle going is balancing budgets on money nobody has appropriated. In July, this board voted to add $150 million in hoped-for state revenue to close its gap. Most of the elected members voted no. Most of the appointed members, including the member from this district, voted yes. Budgets built that way end in mid-year cuts, emergency borrowing at bad rates, and more debt service that lands right back on the levy.

Concretely, here is what I'd pursue. I'll vote for budgets built on revenue that exists. I'll press for a hard look at central office headcount and vendor contracts before the levy gets touched. On TIF, I'd push for districts covering

areas that are already thoroughly developed, the South Loop and Printers Row among them, to expire on schedule rather than being renewed, so that revenue flows back to CPS and the taxing bodies it was diverted from. And I'd support growing the tax base, because the arithmetic is simple: more housing on the same land spreads the same levy across more property."

3. Nearly 1 in 7 CPS students will face housing insecurity during their enrollment, and at least 22,000 (or 6.8%) students reported experiencing homelessness during the 2024-2025 school year. What can CPS do better to support its students?

The number that shapes the answer is that roughly 88% of homeless CPS students are doubled up, staying with other families because they lost housing or can't afford it. These are not mostly students in shelters. They are students in someone's living room, and they are in Uptown and Edgewater schools right now. McCutcheon in Uptown has long served one of the higher concentrations of students in temporary living situations on the North Side.

I'd work closely with the district's Students in Temporary Living Situations department, which does difficult work with thin resources and rarely gets board attention until something goes wrong.

There are three things CPS can do better.

Staff STLS reports adequately. Every school is supposed to have an STLS liaison, and at many schools that role sits on top of a full-time job someone is already doing. I was pleased that the board unanimously passed the revised policy in August guaranteeing same-day enrollment and allowing unaccompanied youth to enroll themselves. That policy is only as good as the person available to execute it at 8 a.m. on a Tuesday, and I'd push for the staffing behind it.

Deliver the transportation these students are legally entitled to. Federal law requires it, and CPS has struggled for three years to reliably provide it to the students with the strongest claim. That is a routing and management problem the board should track monthly.

Report transparently. CPS should publish STLS identification, services delivered, attendance, and outcomes at the school level, the way it reports other

metrics, so that the board and the public can see whether the policy is working rather than assuming it.

I agree with NEU's premise on the larger point. Building housing, and building affordable housing, is critical to reducing the number of students living without stable housing. The board's job is to support these 22,000 students directly and to work as one part of a larger ecosystem alongside the city, the county, and the organizations doing the housing work itself.

Transit

1. How would you work with the CTA and hold them accountable to increase ridership among students and CPS staff who rely on public transit as their main mode of transport?

This is a classic example of two large public bureaucracies that serve the same people and do not work closely enough together. CPS is one of the largest institutional generators of trips in the city and does not behave like one.

CPS holds the bell times, the enrollment addresses, and the school-choice travel patterns. CTA holds the service planning. Right now those datasets don't meet. Bell time decisions get made without asking whether buses run then, and route decisions get made without knowing where students actually travel from. Sharing that data costs nothing and would improve both agencies' work.

On accountability, the board has one direct instrument, which is the CEO. I'd hold the CEO responsible for building and maintaining this partnership and for reporting to the board on it, rather than treating coordination with CTA as something that happens or doesn't. I'd also work closely with whoever wins the 2027 mayoral race, since the mayor appoints the CTA board and that relationship determines whether any of this moves.

On students specifically, I'd push to widen fare access. Free Ventra cards currently reach a narrow slice of students, mostly general education students at magnet and selective schools who qualify for transportation. Plenty of students who ride daily get nothing.

I'd want an annual public report on student transit: on-time performance on the routes serving our schools, station conditions at the stops students actually use, and safety incidents. District 4A students move through Wilson, Lawrence, Argyle, Berwyn, Bryn Mawr, Sheridan, and Addison every day. If those stations are unpleasant at 3 p.m., families drive, and we get the congestion your next section is about.

2. CPS has limited capacity to provide transportation to families, including students with disabilities and students living in temporary living situations. What policies should CPS pursue to increase access to transit options for students?

The binding constraint is a genuine shortage of commercial drivers, which is a national problem and not one CPS invented. It is, however, a problem the district can work on rather than wait out.

On supply, I want CPS partnering with workforce development programs and City Colleges to move people into commercial driver's licenses, including high school students in career and technical pathways. A student who graduates with a CDL is a good outcome twice over.

On efficiency, I'd examine the district's routing software and how it's being used. Routing is where a fixed number of drivers becomes either adequate or inadequate, and it deserves real scrutiny. I'd also support a comprehensive strategy to align bell times across schools so that the same bus can serve multiple schools on staggered starts. That is how districts with fewer drivers than they'd like still get children to school, and it requires the board to make a coordinated decision rather than leaving start times to accumulate school by school.

Expand hub stops where the geography supports them. The hub model works best exactly where District 4A sits, in dense areas where a centralized pickup point is a reasonable walk. It's a poor substitute for a route in low-density parts of the city and a genuinely good option here.

Keep the legal obligations first. Students with disabilities and students in temporary living situations come first, and I'd want the count of unrouted students reported at every board meeting until it reaches zero.

And treat CTA as transportation policy rather than a fallback. For many District 4A students, a Ventra card and a safe walk to the station beats a bus that doesn't come.

Safe Streets

1. What specific infrastructure improvements would you advocate for to promote safe and accessible routes for students and staff walking or biking to school? How can the Chicago School Board work with CDOT to relieve vehicle congestion at schools during arrival and dismissal times?

The Board of Education does not control streets, and I want to be straightforward about that. But a good board member and a good elected official works cross-functionally, and the fact that a lever sits in another department is not a reason to stop pushing on it.

The treatments that work are well established and inexpensive relative to almost anything else CPS spends money on. I'd advocate for daylighting at intersections adjacent to schools, curb extensions and raised crosswalks at the crossings students actually use, hardened centerlines and speed feedback signage in school zones, and protected bike lanes on the corridors that feed schools rather than on whichever street was easiest to stripe.

I'd also look seriously into closing streets in front of schools during arrival and dismissal. Other cities have done this successfully, it is the most effective congestion and safety intervention available, and it costs very little. The obstacles here are permitting and the absence of anyone at CPS whose job it is to pursue them.

On working with CDOT, the structural problem is that principals are left to do this themselves. A principal who wants a crosswalk fixed has to find the right person at CDOT and lobby the ward office personally, on top of running a school. That should be the Office of Operations coordinating citywide policy with CDOT, not fifty separate principal-to-alderman relationships producing fifty different results. This is another instance of two large bureaucracies that could accomplish a great deal more by working together, and someone has to insist on it.

Development can carry some of the cost. The Emanuel Congregation project includes $50,000 toward bike and pedestrian improvements on Thorndale and eliminates a curb cut on Sheridan. Those commitments should be

routine near schools, and a board member willing to show up at a plan commission hearing and say so makes them more likely.

2. Divvy offers $5 annual memberships for Chicago residents receiving SNAP, WIC, LIHEAP, or public housing assistance. What steps should CPS take to increase access to Divvy and other biking options for students and staff?

Worth naming the limit first, because it shapes what CPS can usefully do. Divvy for Everyone (D4E) starts at age 16, and 16 and 17 year olds need a parent or guardian to authorize the account. The program as written reaches high school juniors and seniors and nobody younger, and even for eligible teenagers that consent step quietly stops a lot of sign-ups.

So the first ask goes to CDOT and Lyft rather than to CPS: create a student tier that reaches younger riders, and build a school-sponsored authorization path so a parent can sign once at registration instead of navigating a website. CPS has real leverage in that conversation as the largest source of potential young riders in the city.

What CPS can do on its own: run D4E enrollment drives at high schools alongside the benefits and financial aid events schools already host, since the eligibility criteria overlap almost exactly with families the district has already identified. Push CDOT to site docks at or near high schools, since several of our buildings sit farther from a station than they should. And install secure bike parking, which is the unglamorous thing that actually determines whether a kid rides. A student with nowhere safe to leave a bike doesn't bring one, and covered racks cost a fraction of a bus route.

Add bike safety and traffic skills to PE where schools want it, and extend the same support to staff.

3. Parents in many communities have organized "bike buses" to safely get students to and from school together. Would you accommodate, support, and join these bike bus efforts in your district?

Yes, and I've already put it in writing. Safe bike bus routes appear in the published priorities on my campaign site, listed alongside transportation as one

of the ways we get kids into the building, because a student who can't get to school can't learn there.

The support that matters is removing friction. Parents organizing bike buses run into the same three obstacles: uncertainty about whether CPS considers the ride a school activity, difficulty using school communication channels to recruit families, and no clear path to ask CDOT for treatments along the route. The board can settle all three with policy. Clarify the status of parent-organized active travel, let schools promote it the way they promote any other family activity, and route bike bus corridors into the safe routes work described above so that streets improve where children are actually riding. This is low hanging fruit; and the investment in supporting students to safely bike to school pays off beyond measure.

Bike buses also do something a district program can't buy. They put neighbors on the same block on the same schedule, and families who ride together start showing up for each other in other ways.

Creating Community

1. McCutcheon Elementary School is one of the only public schools in the state of Illinois without its own dedicated gym space for students. Will you ensure that CPS follows through on its commitment to build the gym? For more information, please visit buildthegym.com.

Yes. This is the clearest test of whether a board member is any use to this district, and I'd make it an early priority.

The history matters. CPS committed $10 million to a gym at McCutcheon in 2018. The Castlewood Terrace homeowners association sued in 2019 and the project stalled. The city moved to acquire the surrounding property anyway, and then this spring the district told the school community that the budget picture had stalled it again. Meanwhile children walk down Sheridan to the Boys & Girls Club for PE, and when the weather is bad, gym is cancelled. Staff carry some students with disabilities up and down stairs so they can participate with their

classmates. Families rallied in April to say they are done waiting, and they're right.

McCutcheon serves a student body with a high share of students in temporary living situations, where over a third receive special education services, and where more than 34 languages are spoken. The proposed gym includes an elevator that would finally make the building ADA-accessible.

Here is the connection to the earlier questions. Capital projects like this one are what disappear when a district balances its budget on revenue it hasn't been appropriated. The money runs out mid-year, the capital plan gets deferred, and a school in Uptown waits another cycle. I'd push to get the gym written into the capital plan with a published timeline and a named owner, and I'd report back to the McCutcheon community on progress, whether the news is good or bad.

2. What is your ideal way to solicit input from parents, students, and educators to guide your decisions as a school board member?

Honestly, one of the real joys of running for this office has been the conversations. Meeting people at their doors and at community meetings, hearing what they're actually worried about rather than what a poll says they're worried about, has changed how I think about several things. I don't want that to stop the day the election ends, which is the trap this job sets.

Local School Councils are the structure Chicago already built for this, and board members underuse them badly. I'd meet with LSCs across District 4A on a rotating schedule rather than once during a campaign. Beyond that: monthly open office hours that move between school buildings, and showing up at block club meetings, community organization meetings, congregations, and the events neighbors are already holding. NEU's monthly meetings are on that list, and I'd like to be a regular.

Students belong in this directly, especially at the high school level. They know things about safety, scheduling, and transportation that adults consistently get wrong, and asking them costs nothing.

The part that makes it real is closing the loop. Input that vanishes teaches people not to bother. I'd commit to reporting back, in plain language, on what I heard and what I did with it, including the times I heard something and went a different way and why.

3. How can CPS schools serve as safe, accessible "third spaces" for the broader community outside of school hours, and as a school board member, how would you encourage schools to do so?

Public buildings that sit empty from 3 p.m. Friday to 8 a.m. Monday waste a public asset, particularly in dense neighborhoods where space is the scarce thing.

The barrier is almost never willingness. Principals want their buildings used. The obstacles are custodial and engineering costs after hours, insurance and liability questions, and the fact that every arrangement gets negotiated from scratch by a principal with no legal support. That is an administrative problem the board can solve with policy rather than encouragement.

What I'd push for: a standard joint-use agreement template so schools aren't reinventing one, a clear and funded process for covering after-hours building costs, and expansion of the Community Schools Initiative and Community Hub model that already works in this district. McCutcheon is a designated Community Hub, which is part of why the gym question is about more than gym class.

Partnership organizations already do a great deal of this well. After School Matters runs strong programming for Chicago teenagers and has for years, and there are others. The district should be making it easier for them to operate in our buildings rather than treating each partnership as a novel request.

Safety has to be part of the plan rather than an afterthought. I'd work with the Office of Safety and Security to make sure that a building open at 7 p.m. is a building where children are genuinely safe, with clear expectations about supervision, access, and who is responsible for what. Families will use these spaces if they trust them.

Playgrounds and green space should be open to the neighborhood by default outside school hours. Gyms, auditoriums, and libraries take more coordination and are worth it for the schools that want them.

4. How do you see public services like libraries and parks working alongside CPS schools to support students and families?

As one system that currently behaves like three.

CPS, the Chicago Public Library, and the Park District serve overlapping populations in overlapping footprints on separate calendars with separate budgets and no shared plan. In District 4A that means the Bezazian and Edgewater branches, the Broadway Armory, Clarendon and Margate Park, and the schools around them are all being utilized by the same children without much coordination. The Park District is planning substantial capital investment over the coming years, and school communities should have a say in where it lands.

Libraries deserve a specific answer. The number of school libraries and librarians in CPS has dropped dramatically over the past two decades, largely because principals working inside constrained budgets chose to put those dollars elsewhere. That is a complex issue and it deserves real scrutiny that it has not gotten. What I hear from voters is more immediate: too many CPS students aren't using the Chicago Public Library resources that already exist a few blocks from their school and cost nothing. A student without a library at school and without a library card is a student we've failed twice.

So, concretely, I'd prioritize three things. Aligned calendars, so that summer and after-school programming across the three agencies is planned together and there are no weeks where a working parent has no option. A deepened CPS and CPL partnership, so that every student has a card, knows what it gets them, and has a librarian on one end or the other paying attention to them. And shared space where it makes sense, including school and park land serving both purposes rather than sitting behind separate fences.

The strategic argument is the one your organization already makes. A neighborhood works when its shared institutions work together. Families decide where to raise children based on whether the school, the park, the library, and the transit line add up to a place worth staying.

General & Background Questions

7. Candidate Name: **Karen Zaccor**
8. Running for School District: **District 4A**
9. Campaign Website: **https://neighborsforkarenzaccor.org/**
10. Campaign Email: **info@neighborsforkarenzaccor.org**
11. Briefly describe your background, including personal, educational and professional information and how it prepares you for this position.

I have been a CPS parent and an LSC member at multiple schools including being the first LSC chairperson at Stockton Elementary where I spearheaded the campaign to remove lead from the school. I was a teacher in CPS for 29 years, retiring just 2 years ago, so I am familiar with the current needs in classrooms. As a teacher, my team and I won a national award for our literacy program and I am a cofounder of Uplift Community High School. I am also a member of Northside Action for Justice and have worked on securing and maintaining affordable housing for our families as well as education issues like fighting privatization and school closings, working on getting the elected school board, initiating Sustainable Community Schools, and protecting our community from ICE. I know CPS from multiple perspectives, both within the system and outside. That plus my almost 2 years as a board member gives me unmatched insight into possibilities and pitfalls as we work to ensure that CPS is a district that provides an excellent education to all its students.

12. Why are you running for this position?

I have been involved in schools for over 40 years, and it has always been obvious that CPS is baked in inequity. More recently they have crafted a quite good Five Year Strategic Plan, but that is words and what we need is transformative action. CPS is an entrenched bureaucracy and it will take people with a deep commitment and some history of collective work on education justice to make that transformation happen so that every child is able to attend a high quality well-resourced school in their neighborhood. It is important that we elect a team that will continue the progress made–11 votes are needed to make anything happen. I have the experience, the deep community roots, and the practice of collective work in my community and around the city on education justice that is required in this moment.

Housing

4. What role can the Chicago School Board play in encouraging housing development around public schools in a way that strengthens school funding and keeps families with school-age children stably housed within their communities?

The best way we can encourage increased enrollment is to invest in areas that have been historically disinvested. That means building affordable housing and it means making our CPS school properties look like we value the community, whether that's improving a playground area, replacing concrete areas with garden space, improving the facade in some way, or ensuring the inside is clean and decorated with inspirational materials and student work. While CPS is not directly involved in city housing policy, they should be supporting CTU's call to house our 22,000 houseless students. If CPS works with community members on reimagining schools including making clear that their communities are valued and investments will be made, then property developers will be incentivized to build affordable housing in the area if the city offers its support as well. We know that good schools are a driver for housing. And more housing means more students which leads to an increase in funding.

5. Approximately 45% of revenue collected by CPS comes from property taxes. This revenue source has had its levy consistently maximized, and has become a burden on homeowners and renters alike. As housing costs rise and displacement pressures grow due to Chicago's housing shortage, what policies would you advocate for to ease this burden?

The real solution to our financial problems is for Springfield to pay its fair share. It's an obligation, based on the Evidence Based Funding formula. And it's an obligation based on the fact that the 5th wealthiest state should not be funding only 25% of education while the nationwide average is 45%. Also, there is money available. There is another $4B in progressive revenue in bills already written. The legislature passed $1B last spring that is not yet earmarked and could go to education. And in the first two months of the fiscal year, the state took in $500M more than expected. As things stand now, CPS really has no choice but to maximize the levy. It's the only tool available to us and if we forgo it, it compounds, and losses can be in the hundreds of millions.

6. Nearly 1 in 7 CPS students will face housing insecurity during their enrollment, and at least 22,000 (or 6.8%) students reported experiencing homelessness during the 2024-2025 school year. What can CPS do better to support its students?

Affordable housing is a tremendous problem. I am glad that CTU prioritized it in their contract demands and that Mayor Johnson is building a

significant amount of additional affordable housing. There isn't much CPS can do about the availability of housing, except maybe give the vacant buildings to developers on the condition that they build affordable housing. But there are other things CPS can do. Schools do have homeless liaisons and offer waivers and supplies. New legislation makes it easier to instantly enroll students who are homeless without all the paperwork. Some of the Sustainable Community Schools have a washer and dryer and that way homeless students can wash their clothes at school. Having packages of food for students to take home would be another way CPS can help. With one in three families in Chicago now facing food insecurity, that need has clearly increased.

Transit

3. How would you work with the CTA and hold them accountable to increase ridership among students and CPS staff who rely on public transit as their main mode of transport?

It's progress that now students can ride the CTA for half fare at any time of day all year. It would be great if CTA allowed students to ride for free, but that is not within the board's power. To encourage ridership, routes being frequent enough and on time is important. The extension of the Red Line is huge: it is really important that every part of our city is adequately served by public transportation. The school I taught at, Uplift, had students who came from far away and had to take multiple buses or trains, making for a very long ride, because their neighborhood didn't have the same level of service you might find in other parts of the city.

4. CPS has limited capacity to provide transportation to families, including students with disabilities and students living in temporary living situations. What policies should CPS pursue to increase access to transit options for students?

One issue for CPS is a shortage of bus drivers. Ways to address that include better pay and opportunities for drivers who don't speak English fluently to get a commercial license. There are different sizes and types of buses also and CPS could take advantage of different bus models to optimize routes. We have heard of situations where there are only one or two students with disabilities on a bus, as if for some reason, students with disabilities can't be on a bus with students without disabilities. There should be a system where siblings can ride and students in temporary living situations can ride with students with disabilities. There are parent groups that have put a lot of thought into ways busing could be made better and more efficient. CPS should be willing to sit down with those groups and come up with improvements through an exchange of ideas. CPS tends to be very stuck in a set way of doing things and working with people who are able to think outside the box could lead to better solutions.

Safe Streets

4. What specific infrastructure improvements would you advocate for to promote safe and accessible routes for students and staff walking or biking to school? How can the Chicago School Board work with CDOT to relieve vehicle congestion at schools during arrival and dismissal times?

I am a person who walks or takes public transit everywhere and honestly, I have been a bit afraid to ride a bike on Chicago streets. Recently, riding with someone who is familiar with the bike lanes has opened up that possibility for me. I think dedicated bike lanes are the best, especially those that have some kind of barrier or even just a line painted on the road. I would love to see a network of connected bike lanes bigger than what exists. I think physical ways to slow down traffic like speed humps and bump outs near schools are essential. I don't know how effective having streets go one way in areas adjacent to schools would be, but it might be worth considering. Many schools create their own infrastructure. They put cones out to prevent cars from parking or sometimes even driving in certain areas, for example. What seems potentially the most challenging is the situation of schools that face onto a busy street. A number of my schools have pretty calm side streets but one major street as part of their perimeter. Here is where the human factor is probably most important–where a crossing guard is needed and stop signs or stop lights so that traffic does not just go whizzing through with no way for children to cross.

5. Divvy offers $5 annual memberships for Chicago residents receiving SNAP, WIC, LIHEAP, or public housing assistance. What steps should CPS take to increase access to Divvy and other biking options for students and staff?

True confession: I have never ridden a Divvy bike and am not that familiar with the system. In reading up a little, it sounds like the annual membership will allow you 45 minute rides as long as you use the classic bike. So CPS would need to encourage Divvy stations near schools to make that practical. Divvy bikes do not currently come in different sizes, so if children were going to be able to take advantage of it, they would need to implement more sizes. CPS would also need some kind of helmet program. This past summer, my alder was giving away bike helmets at her back to school event which I thought was really phenomenal. A number of my schools have bike buses. I have participated a few times and it's a great collective way to encourage biking and bike safety. I really think we should emphasize the safety aspect in doing this. I see a lot of people riding scooters on the sidewalks or in ways that make things challenging for both pedestrians and cars and would not advocate for the scooters, especially for children.

6. Parents in many communities have organized "bike buses" to safely get students to and from school together. Would you accommodate, support, and join these bike bus efforts in your district?

Partly addressed in the last question. I think the bike buses are great. At least 3 of my schools have weekly bike buses. But for some schools in my district, I doubt if many of the students have bikes. I have schools where 20% of the students are homeless and most of the rest are low income and not necessarily living in a place where it's easy to practice riding a bike for young students. So I would like to see some kind of program through which students could get bikes and be able to learn how to ride if need be right there on school property. I have previously talked to Broadway Bikes about some kind of partnership with a school, possibly including lessons on bike safety and bike repair, as well as facilitating acquisition of bikes for schoolchildren.

Creating Community

5. McCutcheon Elementary School is one of the only public schools in the state of Illinois without its own dedicated gym space for students. Will you ensure that CPS follows through on its commitment to build the gym? For more information, please visit buildthegym.com.

Yes, I am already doing this. I have talked a few times with the Chief Operating Officer in an effort to clear the way for the project to move forward. I have talked to elected officials about their support. When the figure from TIF money quoted in CPS materials was off, I alerted aldermanic staff immediately so they could sort out whether it was an error or what led to the incorrect amount. I will stay alert to any reports about the project and because I am in regular touch with the McCutcheon principal, McCutcheon's most active LSC members, and the alders whose TIF money is supporting the gym project, I will know right away if anything is going wrong and be able to step in.

6. What is your ideal way to solicit input from parents, students, and educators to guide your decisions as a school board member?

What I have been doing is meeting with students at schools and talking with parents in various locations like parent events, block parties, back to school events, and the like. I have gotten a lot of input that way and it has enabled me to identify common interests among students and among parents. I like the idea of town halls, but really need community groups to organize them, since they have access to community lists that I don't have. Joining ward nights might be a possibility, or my alder has regular community conversations that I could be present at. I have also gone to school events and had a table with a big "talk to your school board representative" sign, but often people are in a hurry and the conversations are fleeting, so the idea of a space and time dedicated to discussion of board business is appealing. For educators, I do talk with teachers but it has been more as I can catch them. I would like to be able to perhaps attend union meetings where many teachers would be present to hear teacher concerns. I hope that because I was a teacher myself teachers would feel free to reach out to me with any issues.

7. How can CPS schools serve as safe, accessible "third spaces" for the broader community outside of school hours, and as a school board member, how would you encourage schools to do so?

Keeping school buildings open after hours incurs a cost. An engineer and security have to be on the premises. A great benefit of Sustainable Community Schools is that they have both the resources and the programmatic design to

keep the building open extended hours and potentially weekends as well. Our goal is for Chicago to be a Sustainable Community School district, with every school being a hub for families and community regardless of whether they attend the school. We envision evening classes, open gyms, youth activities, activities of all sorts in these hubs. I do want to also offer some cautions as we think about opening the schools up to the community. One caution would be to think through who gets free access and who has to pay for access. Right now, some schools make much needed funds through renting out their parking lot or renting out space for a church to hold services or a group to hold a meeting. Unless and until we are adequately resourcing our schools through the state funding they are owed, it would create problems for a school to give up those funds. Another caution is around schools as in some sense neutral spaces. So there would have to be guidelines around groups that were partisan in some manner. We wouldn't want our schools to be forced to allow groups that fomented hateful ideology to use their space nor would we want them to be seen as pushing certain candidates or positions.

8. How do you see public services like libraries and parks working alongside CPS schools to support students and families?

I think to some extent they already do. My former school Uplift has a pool and a gym. Of course, the first priority is the school and the facility has to be off-limits during school hours. But the park district can send lifeguards to keep the pool open for the community at other hours and can send people to supervise the gym. And that has happened, although to a lesser extent than we would like. In this day and age where school libraries have become scarce, partnering with the public library is important and useful. CPL is promoting its 81 Club, where student IDs can serve as library cards. Regular school based programming to ensure all students know about the services the library offers and how to access them, as well as field trips, ideally walking field trips, to the local library can help get students to see the value of libraries for pursuing information and interests. Parks, libraries, and schools are all family oriented institutions that are positively viewed in our communities and the more we can establish connections that increase positive use and nurture children and families the better.

General & Background Questions

13. Candidate Name: **Kyna Lenhof**
14. Running for School District: **District 2B**
15. Campaign Website: **kynaforthekids.org**
16. Campaign Email: **kynaforthekids@gmail.com**
17. Briefly describe your background, including personal, educational and professional information and how it prepares you for this position.

I was raised in a household where social justice was ingrained from a young age which led me to becoming a special education teacher. I have experience in education, leadership, community engagement, and organizational management. As a former CPS special education teacher, I understand the challenges students, families, and educators face and the importance of making sure every student has the support they need to succeed. Post teaching, I have led teams, balanced budgets, managed operations, and built partnerships. These experiences have given me the skills on how to bring people together collaboratively as we stay focused on a common goal.

18. Why are you running for this position?

I am a former special educator, disability advocate, and community leader. I have been the 40th Ward Democrats' Treasurer since 2020. I want to ensure CPS resources are reaching and benefiting the students and schools that need them most and that every CPS student has access to a high-quality education, regardless of their ZIP code, ability, school, or background.

Housing

7. What role can the Chicago School Board play in encouraging housing development around public schools in a way that strengthens school funding and keeps families with school-age children stably housed within their communities?

   I believe that neighborhood schools are essential to the health of Chicago. The Board can help by working with the City and community partners to support affordable, family-friendly housing near schools. When families can stay in their communities, schools are stronger and students benefit from greater stability and connection to their neighborhood.

8. Approximately 45% of revenue collected by CPS comes from property taxes. This revenue source has had its levy consistently maximized, and has become a burden on homeowners and renters alike. As housing costs rise and displacement pressures grow due to Chicago's housing shortage, what policies would you advocate for to ease this burden?

   As a Board member, I would look for ways CPS can build stronger partnerships with businesses and community organizations to bring additional resources into our schools without increasing the burden on homeowners and renters. I would also push for greater budget transparency and work with the City and state to find new revenue sources.

9. Nearly 1 in 7 CPS students will face housing insecurity during their enrollment, and at least 22,000 (or 6.8%) students reported experiencing homelessness during the 2024-2025 school year. What can CPS do better to support its students?

   Every student deserves to feel safe and supported at school, regardless of their housing situation. As a Board member, I would hold CPS accountable for making sure students and families can easily find and access the resources available to them.

Transit

5. How would you work with the CTA and hold them accountable to increase ridership among students and CPS staff who rely on public transit as their main mode of transport?

   As a Board member and someone who uses the CTA, I would encourage a stronger partnership between CTA, so we can increase ridership by improving reliability, safety, and access.

6. CPS has limited capacity to provide transportation to families, including students with disabilities and students living in temporary living situations. What policies should CPS pursue to increase access to transit options for students?

   As a Board member, I would work with CPS, families, and transportation partners to address the bus driver shortage, improve routes, and find creative solutions that make better use of the resources we have.

Safe Streets

7. What specific infrastructure improvements would you advocate for to promote safe and accessible routes for students and staff walking or biking to school? How can the Chicago School Board work with CDOT to relieve vehicle congestion at schools during arrival and dismissal times?

   As a Board member, I would advocate for safer crosswalks, protected bike lanes, better sidewalks and other solutions around schools so students and staff can walk or bike safely. Partnering with CDOT, we can identify problem areas, listen to families and school communities, and work on safer arrival and dismissal plans that improve safety.

8. Divvy offers $5 annual memberships for Chicago residents receiving SNAP, WIC, LIHEAP, or public housing assistance. What steps should CPS take to increase access to Divvy and other biking options for students and staff?

   As someone who uses Divvy, I will advocate for more Divvy stations, protected bike lanes, and safer routes to and from CPS schools. CPS could also make students and staff aware of reduced-cost Divvy memberships and other biking resources so cost and access are not barriers to getting to school.

9. Parents in many communities have organized "bike buses" to safely get students to and from school together. Would you accommodate, support, and join these bike bus efforts in your district?

   I love the bike buses that are happening! They are a fun, healthy way to build community while helping students get to school safely, and I would be excited to support and join these efforts throughout the district.

Creating Community

9. McCutcheon Elementary School is one of the only public schools in the state of Illinois without its own dedicated gym space for students. Will you ensure that CPS follows through on its commitment to build the gym? For more information, please visit buildthegym.com.

   Yes. McCutcheon students deserve a dedicated gym, and I will hold CPS accountable for following through on its commitment to build one.

10. What is your ideal way to solicit input from parents, students, and educators to guide your decisions as a school board member?

    I don't think email by itself is the best way to hear from families, students, and educators. I want to listen directly and meet people where they are. This includes going to schools, Local School Council meetings, community events, and having small group conversations. Hearing firsthand what is working and what needs to change will help me make informed decisions and stay connected to the community I am serving.

11. How can CPS schools serve as safe, accessible "third spaces" for the broader community outside of school hours, and as a school board member, how would you encourage schools to do so?

    As a Board member, I would encourage CPS to make it easier for schools to collaborate with trusted neighborhood organizations and help connect schools with resources that meet the needs of their communities.

12. How do you see public services like libraries and parks working alongside CPS schools to support students and families?

    Our public libraries and parks are part of what makes Chicago an amazing city. CPS can work with these public services to give students and families greater access to learning, recreation, enrichment, and support. As a Board member, I want to find ways to strengthen these partnerships, so we can connect schools with the resources already available in their neighborhoods.

General & Background Questions

19. Candidate Name: **Daniel Basco**

20. Running for School District: **District 2B**

21. Campaign Website: **https://www.votedanielbasco.com/**

22. Campaign Email: **dan.basco.official@gmail.com**

23. Briefly describe your background, including personal, educational and professional information and how it prepares you for this position.

I am a researcher and data scientist with more than 15 years of experience helping public institutions, nonprofits, and foundations work better for the people they serve. I hold a BS in Education and Social Policy from Northwestern and a PhD in Policy Analysis from the RAND School of Public Policy. My career began supporting the Obama White House on science and education issues. Since then, I have advised on the allocation of billions of dollars in public funding and led analytics teams that help institutions maximize their impacts. I have worked at the Federal, state, and local levels to help underserved students get the education they deserve. I live in Andersonville with my husband Jon and our dog Major. I am committed to supporting our neighbors and applying all my policy and research experience to help CPS improve.

24. Why are you running for this position?

I am running to ensure our schools and our students get the support they need to thrive. Too many CPS students are failed by systems nobody has fixed: kids with special education needs, kids hit by school closures and funding deficits, English language learners, and LGBTQ+ kids. I have spent my entire career helping public systems work better. I want to bring that expertise to CPS to partner with our phenomenal teachers, parents, and students to get the results our students deserve. My grandparents picked cotton and fruit in the fields; two generations later, their family holds doctoral degrees. Education has been the engine of my family's story, and I feel a deep responsibility to make sure that engine runs for every family in Chicago.

Housing

10. What role can the Chicago School Board play in encouraging housing development around public schools in a way that strengthens school funding and keeps families with school-age children stably housed within their communities?

Housing is such a critical component of healthy schools and even more important now as the Board needs to step up to address declining enrollment across the district. While the Board doesn't control zoning policy, it can and should support housing development by pushing each school to develop a 5-year community plan. That plan should consider housing growth as a key driver of enrollment changes. Those plans can then be used to advocate for more transit-oriented and mixed-income development. We see such a strong demand in District 2B for new housing and I would be proud to support further development that keeps families in our district and brings in new families.

11. Approximately 45% of revenue collected by CPS comes from property taxes. This revenue source has had its levy consistently maximized, and has become a burden on homeowners and renters alike. As housing costs rise and displacement pressures grow due to Chicago's housing shortage, what policies would you advocate for to ease this burden?

Illinois' own funding law says CPS is owed roughly $1 billion more every year. Winning that money is the Board's most important job, and this Board has barely tried. The current Board failed to pass a legislative agenda until after Springfield's session ended. Students pay for that kind of failure. I will push the Board to run a year round Springfield strategy and to build a coalition of parents, educators, community groups, and business leaders that comes to the capitol with one voice and one mission. I support new progressive revenue at the state level, including a millionaires' tax, because property taxes cannot carry this district alone.

12. Nearly 1 in 7 CPS students will face housing insecurity during their enrollment, and at least 22,000 (or 6.8%) students reported experiencing homelessness during the 2024-2025 school year. What can CPS do better to support its students?

We have to support the whole child. Students learn best when they feel safe, have enough to eat, and have secure housing. CPS has made real progress on this through its Sustainable Community Schools model, and I want to build on it. I will push to expand that model and add housing support as a standing part of its wraparound services pillar. Other districts have shown what a real whole child approach can deliver and CPS should be doing the same.

Transit

7. How would you work with the CTA and hold them accountable to increase ridership among students and CPS staff who rely on public transit as their main mode of transport?

As I've talked with students and teachers who use CTA, it is clear that ghost buses, breakdowns, and delays make it difficult to get to school reliably. I will push CTA to publish better data on reliability, particularly along routes to schools, so the Board can hold CTA accountable. While we've seen some transit corridors improve recently, we need more data to understand where they are still critical gaps.

8. CPS has limited capacity to provide transportation to families, including students with disabilities and students living in temporary living situations. What policies should CPS pursue to increase access to transit options for students?

Transportation is one of the clearest places where CPS has fallen short, particularly for students with disabilities and students in temporary living situations who depend on it most. This is an area where I need to partner with parents, transportation experts, and other districts to explore how CPS can do better. We have seen this issue persist for years, and while CTA bus routes have improved, I do not think that alone will close the gap.

Safe Streets

10. What specific infrastructure improvements would you advocate for to promote safe and accessible routes for students and staff walking or biking to school? How can the Chicago School Board work with CDOT to relieve vehicle congestion at schools during arrival and dismissal times?

    I have been encouraged by the recent changes to Clark Street, including protected bike lanes. I will push for further development like this in partnership with alderpersons, to give students biking to and from school better protection. I will also bring together community members and CDOT to consider every possible strategy for relieving congestion at arrival and dismissal. I live two blocks from Peirce, the largest elementary school in 2B, and have talked with parents and residents about their traffic concerns. Some have suggested eliminating parking on one side of the street. Others have suggested temporary one way streets to better control the flow of traffic. I do not have an immediate answer on the best strategy, but I am committed to being a convener, bringing parents, residents, CDOT, and traffic experts together to find the right solution.

11. Divvy offers $5 annual memberships for Chicago residents receiving SNAP, WIC, LIHEAP, or public housing assistance. What steps should CPS take to increase access to Divvy and other biking options for students and staff?

    CPS should further promote this program with students, families, and staff to ensure everyone understands how to enroll and the benefits. CPS should also partner with organizations like the Active Transportation Alliance to further promote biking safely.

12. Parents in many communities have organized "bike buses" to safely get students to and from school together. Would you accommodate, support, and join these bike bus efforts in your district?

    Yes. Bike buses are exactly the kind of community-organized solution I want the Board actively supporting instead of ignoring, and I'd show up to ride with one in District 2B.

Creating Community

13. McCutcheon Elementary School is one of the only public schools in the state of Illinois without its own dedicated gym space for students. Will you ensure that CPS follows through on its commitment to build the gym? For more information, please visit buildthegym.com.

Yes. I will make sure the Board provides oversight to ensure all the relevant city departments follow through on their commitments to McCutcheon.

14. What is your ideal way to solicit input from parents, students, and educators to guide your decisions as a school board member?

Good governance means gathering evidence from every angle before a decision. I will build a standing practice of collecting input broadly, through surveys, school visits, and direct conversations with parents, students, and educators. As a researcher, I will always want to collect data from multiple stakeholders and in multiple different ways to ensure I'm understanding the impacts of decisions from all perspectives.

15. How can CPS schools serve as safe, accessible "third spaces" for the broader community outside of school hours, and as a school board member, how would you encourage schools to do so?

Using CPS schools as "third spaces" is both a way to drive greater community engagement and a potential avenue for revenue to help schools thrive. We already have a model for this in Sustainable Community Schools, which turn buildings into hubs with extended hours and wraparound services during the school week. I want to build on that model on weekends too. Shared use agreements, facility rentals, and partnerships with community organizations can bring in revenue that stays local to that school, while turning unused space into a real community hub. I have seen this work firsthand, playing in social sports leagues that rent school gyms on weekends. As a Board member, I will push CPS to help every school build these kinds of local partnerships and put its "third spaces" to full use.

16. How do you see public services like libraries and parks working alongside CPS schools to support students and families?

Libraries are vital assets to further students' learning and provide after school and weekend safe spaces for students. The same is true of our parks, which give kids a place to be active and engaged when school is out. Collectively,

we all aim to support students through public assets to help them succeed in safe and supportive spaces.

General & Background Questions

25. Candidate Name: **Deborah 'Debby' Pope**

26. Running for School District: **District 2B**

27. Campaign Website: **https://www.debbyfordistrict2b.com/**

28. Campaign Email: **debbyfordistrict2b@gmail.com**

29. Briefly describe your background, including personal, educational and professional information and how it prepares you for this position.

I grew up in New York City and attended what was then the largest public high school in NYC. I went to the University of Wisconsin, Madison during the anti-war movement but was an activist and didn't graduate. I moved to Chicago at age 19 and got my BA in history and secondary ed from Roosevelt University. I became a bilingual high school social studies teacher in 1990 and taught at three underfunded neighborhood high schools, retiring from Gage Park HS on the southwest side. My two masters degrees are in bilingual/bicultural curriculum and instruction (National Louis) and couple and family therapy (Adler University).

My daughters both attended CPS from pre-k through 12th grade and my granddaughter is a current 2nd grader.

After I 'retired', I worked part-time for over a decade for the Chicago Teachers Union grievance department and coordinated our Joint Class Size Committee with the Board.

30. Why are you running for this position?

I am serving now and believe that my experience, my knowledge of schools and of the city as well as my teaching experience contribute greatly to my ability to evaluate issues and do the best to improve equity and insure that all students in CPS get a quality education. This will necessitate a major battle to gain stable funding sources from the State of Illinois. I support a millionaires tax and a graduated income tax as well as the closing of corporate loopholes.

Housing

13. What role can the Chicago School Board play in encouraging housing development around public schools in a way that strengthens school funding and keeps families with school-age children stably housed within their communities?

One of the most important things is to make our neighborhood schools well-resourced excellent schools that parents are happy to send their children too. We need to fight for other funding sources so we are not as dependent on property taxes which, for residential housing, have increased astronomically, particularly in some parts of the city, making it very hard for families to afford to buy and stay in their communities.

On another level, there are parts of the city, particularly in historically under-resourced areas of the west and south sides where schools that were shuttered in 2013 could potentially be converted into some sort of housing.

14. Approximately 45% of revenue collected by CPS comes from property taxes. This revenue source has had its levy consistently maximized, and has become a burden on homeowners and renters alike. As housing costs rise and displacement pressures grow due to Chicago's housing shortage, what policies would you advocate for to ease this burden?

See above. The fight for sustainable state funding is the key to diminishing reliance on property taxes which particularly harm lower income home owners. Until we get that, we unfortunately need to keep raising the levy so are children are not shortchanged.

15. Nearly 1 in 7 CPS students will face housing insecurity during their enrollment, and at least 22,000 (or 6.8%) students reported experiencing homelessness during the 2024-2025 school year. What can CPS do better to support its students?

The CTU, community groups and organizations such as the Chicago Coalition to End Homelessness fought for STLS Coordinators (Students in Temporary Living Conditions). We can and should expand these. We should also provide seamless access to free public transit for all and should insure that students whose families move (e.g. shelter to apartment) are informed of their right to continue in their same school and welcomed to do so.

Transit

9. How would you work with the CTA and hold them accountable to increase ridership among students and CPS staff who rely on public transit as their main mode of transport?

As much as possible work with CPS transportation staff to encourage studies that might lead to improved routes and schedules to better serve students and staff at our high schools. Encourage the prompt distribution of passes for students. Regarding holding the CTA accountable, that would have to involve public pressure campaigns we could support as the Board has no actual authority to hold CTA accountable.

10. CPS has limited capacity to provide transportation to families, including students with disabilities and students living in temporary living situations. What policies should CPS pursue to increase access to transit options for students?

CPS should work to get additional categorical funding from the state for transportation. This is especially important due to cuts by the Trump administration. We should also work to make school bus driving a viable occupation for current and potential drivers. This would help eliminate the driver shortages that make service more limited and lass reliable.

Safe Streets

13. What specific infrastructure improvements would you advocate for to promote safe and accessible routes for students and staff walking or biking to school? How can the Chicago School Board work with CDOT to relieve vehicle congestion at schools during arrival and dismissal times?

    Making sure that crossing guards are not cut and that safe passage workers continue to protect our vulnerable students in difficult situations. Support for increased separate designated bike lanes. Expansion of safety features at crossings. Improved and safter CTA service and more school bus routes so that fewer parents/guardians would feel they needed to pick their children up.

14. Divvy offers $5 annual memberships for Chicago residents receiving SNAP, WIC, LIHEAP, or public housing assistance. What steps should CPS take to increase access to Divvy and other biking options for students and staff?

    They should make sure that students and their families are aware of this opportunity, work to help subsidize and provide helmets for students, and offer bike safety classes.

15. Parents in many communities have organized "bike buses" to safely get students to and from school together. Would you accommodate, support, and join these bike bus efforts in your district?

    Yes I would support these efforts by parents and community members. I am not physically able to participate but would be supportive in whatever ways I could.

Creating Community

17. McCutcheon Elementary School is one of the only public schools in the state of Illinois without its own dedicated gym space for students. Will you ensure that CPS follows through on its commitment to build the gym? For more information, please visit buildthegym.com.

Yes. I have committed to assist with this in any way possible.

18. What is your ideal way to solicit input from parents, students, and educators to guide your decisions as a school board member?

There is no one ideal way. Different parents have different levels of access to and comfort with technology for example. I offer virtual and in-person office hours. I also would be happy to work with community groups to hold listening sessions, answer questions and work together on projects. I am also happy to speak at local churches, mosques, synagogues or other places in the community. I give my number and email freely and try to assist people as much as possible.

19. How can CPS schools serve as safe, accessible "third spaces" for the broader community outside of school hours, and as a school board member, how would you encourage schools to do so?

I am a supporter of Sustainable Community Schools (SCS) and other forms of wrap around services. Making schools centers for after school activities is especially helpful for working parents. Schools should also offer services such as English language classes for parents and community members. I taught ESL classes for parents at Gage Park HS.

20. How do you see public services like libraries and parks working alongside CPS schools to support students and families?

Libraries and the park district can be great adjuncts to schools in providing activities for students after school and helping to keep them engaged and safe. I would support working with these institutions on things like walking school buses to bring groups of students to the library or park facilities after school. I also support the expansion of 'day off' camps and a longer calendar for summer day camp.