

Chris Kennedy's Submitted Responses to Raise Your Hand Action's Candidate Questions

1. What do you see as the purpose of public education?

Public education is the first step up the ladder of economic mobility that is the American Dream. It is a promise that every child, regardless of socioeconomic class, race, religion, or sexual orientation, will receive an education whose purpose is both to prepare students to succeed in a modern-day economy and to inspire them to grasp hold of what interests them and make it a meaningful part of their lives. Public education should be the door to the future, and it should be accessible in every community across our state. Chris Kennedy and Ra Joy believe that public education should provide every student in the state a world-class, career-ready education and that a degree from every high school in Illinois should be a license to work, to command a job at a living wage, and to enjoy the American Dream.

2. List three priorities you'd have as Governor in terms of improving public education in the state of Illinois.

- Funding education through a graduated progressive income tax instead of through the broken and inequitable property tax system.
- Investing in neighborhood schools and opposing school closings
- Investing in teachers through expanded professional development programs, sensible standardized testing, and diversifying the teacher pipeline.

Read more about my education platform for Illinois [here](#).

3. Explain your plans to deal with funding inequity in Illinois?

We need to move to a progressive income tax to fund our local schools.

In most states, around half of the state and local funding for education comes from the state. In Illinois, the state pays closer to 25% of the cumulative funding for education that all districts receive. Critics will say that Illinois spends over \$1,000 above the national average on per-pupil spending, but this doesn't tell the entire story. Illinois school districts with the greatest number of low-income students receive 20% less funding than wealthier districts. Not only are under-resourced communities being systematically denied their fair share, they are also asked to fill the gap with local taxes despite having a lower tax base. Our reliance on the property tax system to fund schools penalizes every school district and unfairly burdens homeowners with high property taxes.

Currently, the more money that a district can raise through property taxes, the more money it can spend on education per student. This allows us to spend the greatest amount of money on the students in the wealthiest communities who need the least amount of additional services. This violates the fundamental concept of equity. School funding on the state level should be wealth-neutral so that all of Illinois' children receive the same basic level of high-quality education, independent of how much their homes are worth or the amount of wealth in their communities. Local districts should be free to generate more revenue to supplement state funds, but no district should suffer for the inability to fund schools locally. The new state school funding formula requires an additional \$5 billion to adequately fund education in Illinois. We cannot rely on an inequitable property tax system to continue funding our schools.

4. Should all students have to take standardized tests annually? What is your philosophy about how students should be evaluated academically?

Time taken away from teaching limits the creative capacity of teachers and creates a difficult learning environment for students. While standardized tests serve as a key component for identifying achievement gaps and benchmarks for learning and growth, an over-reliance on testing data means we fail to recognize other markers of academic success. Tests, evaluations, and other assessments should be designed to facilitate quality education and ensure that every student can earn a living wage after high school, whether they go to college, attend a trade school, get an associate's degree, or join the workforce.

A Kennedy/Joy administration will de-emphasize standardized testing in favor of more time for intentional classroom instruction while also committing to evaluate and distribute state standardized test results in a timely and efficient manner so that educators can use this measure as one among many real-time benchmarks of student performance.

5. What other ways would you suggest teachers be evaluated? What do you see as the problem of evaluating teachers by standardized tests?

Evaluating teachers solely based on standardized tests does a disservice to teachers. Instructional value cannot be boiled down to how a student does on one test on a single day of the year. Our teachers need to be supported through better funding to expand resources so that they have the tools they need to teach our kids.

Teachers should be evaluated using a constellation of factors that take into account student growth, student demographics and home life, and classroom observations by an administrator.

6. Should Illinois continue using the PARCC test? Why or why not?

It is important for school districts to have a say in these decisions. Our administration supports local control for school districts, and each district is best equipped to decide whether or not to use PARCC or administer another test, like the SAT.

7. The difference in test scores between students of color and white students was the smallest when US public schools were the most integrated. Schools are now more segregated than they were at the time of Brown v. Board of Education. The Chicago metro area is one of the country's most segregated in both housing and schools. What is the state government's responsibility to repair a century of government-sponsored residential and school segregation in our state? How will you promote integration in housing and schools in Illinois?

Gentrification, violence, lack of economic opportunity, and an inequitable property tax system all drive segregation in Chicago.

We have to address violence in our city, this is why I've released an [Eight Point Plan to Combat Gun Violence](#), which includes getting guns off our streets, closing the gun show loophole, investing in mental health clinics, and cracking down on illegal gun trains.

Not only do we have to make neighborhoods safer, we have to grow the economy and prepare a skilled workforce so that everyone can have a high quality job. I've released a [Plan to Build and an Equitable Economy in Illinois](#) that includes workforce development training, investing in our universities and community college system, and boosting business incubators so that first-time entrepreneurs have access to the resources they need.

Finally, we have to [fix the broken property tax system](#) in Cook County and in our state, which underfunds our schools and contributes to the segregation we see in our city. Under this system, homes are unequally assessed, and a handful of elected officials benefit from being property tax appeals lawyers, which is a conflict of interest that prevents them from supporting a progressive income tax to equitably fund our schools.

Integrating Chicago will be a long-term effort, but by taking a multi-pronged approach we can address the systemic challenges that have kept Chicago one of the most segregated cities in America. It is only when we integrate our communities that our public school system, too, will be integrated.

8. Would you support legislation mandating an elected representative school board for Chicago? If so, when should an elected representative board be put into place?

Yes, I support legislation mandating an elected representative school board right away. Elected school boards continue to be examples of the importance of local control in a democratic system. They provide transparency, accountability, and allow members of their communities to have a say in their children's future. Elected members of a school board want to solve problems, not protect the legacy of politicians that appoint them. Chicago is the only district in Illinois that has an appointed school board, created in 1995 through special legislation.

Without an elected school board, the residents of Chicago have very little influence on the decisions made by the board. Consequences include a widening achievement gap between black and white students, school closings, an expansion of charter schools, illegal, multi-million dollar contracts, and two recent CEO's removed from their jobs due to corruption and ethics violations.

9. Do you support legislation to weaken the IL state charter commission? Why or why not?

The Illinois State Charter School Commission (SCSC) is a loophole for charter school organizations that want Springfield to pre-empt local control of education. If any local school districts want to reject a charter applicant or retire a charter school, the charter can appeal to the State Charter Commission, whose decision takes precedence over the local school district's decision. This takes educational decisions out of the hands of local school boards and puts them in the hands of bureaucrats in Springfield.

Currently, there is a proposal before Governor Rauner that would limit the SCSC's ability to overturn decisions made by local school districts. A Kennedy/Joy administration would support these efforts to return local charter control to the hands of local districts.

10. What role do public charter schools play in the education landscape in Illinois?

Right now, in Chicago only 25% of students are going to their designated neighborhood schools. This is a good measure of school quality as interpreted by families themselves. Instead, kids attend neighborhood schools in other parts of the city, private or magnet schools, or charter schools. When parents don't feel comfortable sending their children to their designated neighborhood school, they should be free to send them elsewhere, but they should not have to face this choice. A Kennedy/Joy administration will stand with communities to make sure neighborhood schools are viable options for families.

It is the responsibility of our state government to provide every child in Illinois the opportunity to earn a world-class, career-ready education. Our goal should be to have a great grade school, middle school, and high school in every community. Expanding the number of charter schools we have in Illinois threatens our commitment to an equitable education for all students because for too long, charter schools have been allowed to operate under a different set of standards than our traditional schools. Charter schools were initially intended to serve as experimental labs for innovative education practices. Unfortunately, they have become a mechanism that pulls students and funding away from traditional neighborhood schools. In this way, charter schools divert more of our already under-resourced funding away from traditional public schools.

A Kennedy/Joy administration will put a moratorium on opening new charter schools in order to prioritize funding and fully supporting the schools we already have. Illinois needs to fundamentally rethink the way it funds public education so it doesn't matter whether you live in Northbrook or on the Southside of Chicago, you can get a quality education that prepares you for the workforce.

11. A voucher program was recently passed into law here. What are your thoughts about this program?

A Kennedy/Joy Administration opposes voucher programs that privatize public education because we believe that government should fund public schools—not rob them to fund private schools. Article X of our state Constitution makes it clear that we're not allowed to use tax dollars to fund private education. Unfortunately, Governor Rauner held school funding reform hostage by requiring a \$100 million school voucher program as a part of the bill. Now, wealthy donors to private schools can get tax credits for their donations. Under this program, public dollars are being funneled to private schools. Our administration will roll back this unconstitutional provision and restore the funding to public schools.

12. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) says that each child who has a disability and needs special education and related services will receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). How will you ensure that special education students are receiving FAPE?

Students with disabilities deserve the same access to high quality education as any other student in our state. In order to fulfill the promise of high quality education for all, the state must provide and fund crucial services for students with disabilities and diverse learners like transportation. Additionally, we must fund ADA compliant schools, social workers, paraprofessionals, certified aids, and teaching instruction that is adapted to a student's needs through Individualized Education Plans.

A Kennedy/Joy administration would encourage schools to hire special education classroom assistants for classrooms of special needs students as well as invest in the counseling services these children and their families need to navigate the educational process. Parents of children with special needs often need an individualized, one-on-one approach to make sure that their child is getting the highest possible education. A Kennedy/Joy administration will work with disability rights advocates and local school districts to make sure that schools are adequately funded, meeting state standards, and working to give every child a quality education.

In far too many districts across the state, budget cuts force schools to choose between the needs of general education students and special education students. Protecting the legal rights of children with disabilities will be a top priority for a Kennedy/Joy administration.

One of the biggest challenges for students with disabilities is the transition from school to the workforce. The majority of adults with disabilities are unemployed or underemployed. This is unacceptable. Illinois is the birthplace of the Special Olympics, which was founded by Eunice Kennedy, and under a Kennedy/Joy administration, Illinois will be a leader in workforce development training for people with disabilities. Our administration will work with the largest employers in the state, as well as the state's supply chain, to create on-the-job training programs and internships that prepare students with disabilities for the workforce and ease the transition out of school.

13. Illinois is one of 37 states without class size laws. Would you sign a law putting a cap on class size in Illinois?

A Kennedy/Joy administration will work towards adequately funding the new education funding formula through a progressive graduated income tax so that every school gets the resources it needs to hire enough staff to provide quality learning experiences for students.

We know that students learn better when they have more individualized attention, and they perform better in the classroom and are more likely to be college or career ready when they attend schools with smaller class sizes. While the average class size across the state is 20 students per class, there are many classrooms with far too many children and too few teachers, teacher's assistants, and social workers.

Overcrowding is also a problem facing schools across Illinois. Peoria, Champaign, Naperville, and Chicago all have schools that are suffering from overcrowding. Brookdale Elementary in Naperville is projected to have 70 more students than they can support over the next five years. One in five CPS students started the 2016-2017 school year in overcrowded classrooms, some of which exceeded 30, even 40 students per

class, and many of which were concentrated in black and brown communities on the South and West sides of the city.

14. Educational software collects large amounts of sensitive data about students. Should students in public schools be required to use programs that collect personally-identifiable data? What rights do public school families have if they do not wish to hand over sensitive student data in order to participate in school curriculum and programs?

Families should be informed of any personally-identifiable data that will be collected and have the right to opt out and still participate in school curriculum and programs.