

# Dane Dems Endorsement Questionnaire

Thank you for seeking an endorsement from the Dane County Democratic Party. You do not need to answer all of the questions below, but please answer all of the ones you feel are pertinent to your campaign. We will ask more detailed questions and followups during our interview, if we choose to have one, so feel free to answer these questions as briefly or thoroughly as you desire. These answers will be shared in full with our membership before they vote on your endorsement.

Email \*

blair.feltham@gmail.com

Candidate name \*

Blair Mosner Feltham

Position you are running for (include municipality) \*

MMSD Board of Education - Seat 6

Campaign website

### Professional Experience \*

I am a former MMSD teacher, and I currently work in a high school in a neighboring district. I've taught members of the graduating classes of 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 in required academic classes and subbed for members of the classes of 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2026. I've worked in public schools in 4 districts and always in a school. 8 of those years were in MMSD, in and out of the classroom, briefly as a Special Education Assistant sub at Elvehjem Elementary and then for 7 years as a teacher, coordinator, and instructional coach at West High. I worked a short stint at the Department of Public Instruction while waiting for my teaching license to transfer from California, where I was trained and where I started my career.

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### Political/Service Experience \*

N/A

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### Why are you running for this seat? \*

I have been working for the schools Madison youth deserve since 2014: in the classroom, at the building level, as a union member, and now I am hoping to do it at the governance level. Schools are complex, and it takes specialized knowledge to make good choices about them. I think, if I'm not mistaken, that the last time someone with experience working in schools in an everyday way was on the BOE was about 2015. I'm running to bring a needed perspective to MMSD Board governance.

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### What are the three most important issues in your race? \*

The most important issues facing MMSD right now are 1) ensuring steady district leadership; 2) creating quality experiences for children in schools; 3) a truly student-centered budget.

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What are the largest environmental concerns you aim to deal with in office?

This is a topic about which I look forward to learning more. I know that Madison youth are rightfully worried about climate catastrophe, and many young people are already actively pushing MMSD to take ecological responsibility more seriously. Just one example is students at West High fundraising for and organizing solar installations and rain gardens. I am curious what it would look like for MMSD to think about what being “future ready” could mean if we had our eyes on environmental concerns as an extension of our concern for our students’ futures.

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How will you use your position to create more equitable opportunities and help those living in poverty?

I want to use this question to discuss two things. One is the dogged ways school-based staff work to support poor students and their families. People with access to wealth don’t always see this when they look at schools, but I think it’s important to understand that school-staff in every employment group are feeding children, buying clothes, and helping with the rent on a regular basis, and we are doing this because we care about our students as whole people. The second thing is that MMSD can’t be expected to be taken seriously as an organization that cares about poverty when cost of living increases and wage growth for all employees are left out in the budget process every year.

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What will you do to address racial inequality?

When people talk about racial inequality in schools, they often talk about it only in terms of measurable achievement outcomes. I recognize and appreciate the need for large organizations to use quantitative, standardized measures to identify trends, but I also know that having real knowledge about how schools work is needed for making good choices based on that data. There are a lot of people and companies out there who can’t wait to sell school districts pre-packaged “solutions,” but the way those solutions actually play out in schools hurts students, sometimes irreparably. If your student comes home and complains of boredom after hours on a Chromebook, you might know what I mean. It takes insight and experience in schools to know the difference between something that looks good and something that can actually BE good. I have the years of experience to know the difference. A narrow focus on achievement outcomes has not worked, and we should instead be focusing on creating the conditions for high-quality educational experiences in classrooms. Students crave educational experiences that challenge white supremacy. I’ve talked to probably a thousand young people over the past 12 years about how they feel at school. They are very clear and very consistent about what they want – they want to be treated as individuals, they want affirming, creative curriculum that is connected to their lives, and they want to be the drivers of their own experiences. I think we should listen to what young people, specifically racialized young people, tell us they want and need, and orient ourselves toward their vision.

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## How will you promote restorative justice and address racially biased policing?

There are amazing efforts towards restorative justice happening in MMSD schools right now, and MMSD students are benefiting from those projects every day. It was within the past several years that some members of the current Board pushed for Restorative Justice coordinators in the schools, which was really needed. But the exciting headlines are not the whole story. This work takes time and needs sustained support to take root. It also can't be done mechanically. It takes deep, applied knowledge of how schools work to understand how the details will work, and those details matter—for budgeting, for implementation planning, and for sustaining change. I will bring that applied knowledge of how schools work to the Board of Education.

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## How will you improve the public health of our community in your position?

Because I have 12 years of experience in public schools, there's a lot I could say about how public health issues show up in schools in terms of mitigating communicable disease, nutrition, PhyEd and health curriculum, mental health, suicide prevention, and so much more. I understand how these issues work together in school, and I will be able to bring a needed perspective to the Board of Education. But rather than get into some of those things, I want to use this space to talk about how much potential there is for MMSD to work less in isolation, and more in collaboration with other city agencies. Less than 10 years ago, MMSD was building bridges and relationships that had Public Health Madison-Dane County experts working right alongside English, Science, Social Studies, Math, and Career/Tech Ed teachers to develop curriculum and student experiences. Right now, there are still students at LaFollette, East, and Memorial who are talking with public health officials as part of their core coursework. That's a major opportunity, but if we continue to churn through flashy add-on initiatives, we lose the momentum and the partnerships that our students crave.

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## What are the largest transportation issues you wish to work on and how will you address them?

While this might not seem like a schools issue at first, I can tell you from experience that citywide transportation issues have a huge impact on student success. I had students who, because of where they live in Madison, were late every single day. They had to pick being 20 minutes late, or an hour early, so these students were truant and did not get the education they were entitled to. Transportation issues impacting a student's education happens way more than some might think. Schools are part of the community, and I would love to see MMSD more engaged in citywide issues like this.

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How have you elevated diverse voices in government and public discourse? How would you continue to do so if elected to this office?

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Any other issues/topics you wish to discuss?

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