

# Dane Dems Endorsement Questionnaire

Thank you for seeking an endorsement from the Dane County Democratic Party. **This questionnaire is due by no later than Friday, January 24, at 11:59 PM.**

**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 and mark the questions you do not feel are pertinent N/A.** 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 \*

bret@bretwagner.com

Candidate name \*

Bret Wagner

Position you are running for (include municipality) \*

MMSD School Board, Seat 3

Campaign website

bretwagner.com

## Professional Experience \*

I bring a unique blend of experience as an engineer, educator, and community leader. Currently, I serve as Director of Digital & Financial Transformation at Huron Consulting Group, leading complex projects that require data-driven decision-making and stakeholder collaboration. As a former high school science teacher with Teach For America, I achieved a 117% increase in students passing state science tests. I've served as Cherokee Heights Middle School PFO President, Board Chair for Junior Achievement of Wisconsin-South Central, and founded Science For America to support teachers.

## Political/Service Experience \*

While this is my first time running for elected office, I've dedicated my career to public service and education. As Cherokee Heights Middle School PFO President, I've worked closely with school leadership to improve student outcomes and family engagement. During my tenure, we've achieved over 90% attendance rates and significantly reduced behavioral incidents through data-driven approaches and strong community engagement.

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

Our schools work best when every student has the support they need, when we let teachers do what they do best, and when we use real data to make smart choices. That's why I'm running - because getting these basics right matters for every kid in Madison. My experience as both an engineer and former teacher has shown me that the most effective solutions come from combining data-driven decision-making with a deep understanding of what happens in the classroom.

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

- 1. Building a Culture of Belonging:** School safety and student success start with belonging. When students feel known and valued, attendance improves, behavior incidents decrease, and learning flourishes. School leaders and teachers at Cherokee Heights with 90%+ attendance and dramatically reduced behavioral incidents. This requires investing in mental health support, building strong student-adult connections, and creating welcoming school environments.
- 2. Responsible Budget Management:** As an engineer and project leader who has managed multi-million dollar initiatives, I understand the importance of strategic resource allocation. We must ensure every dollar supports student success by prioritizing classroom resources, reducing administrative burden on teachers, and maintaining transparent financial reporting to our community.
- 3. Building for the Future:** We need forward-thinking solutions that prepare our students for tomorrow's challenges. This means investing in early intervention programs, expanding advanced learning opportunities, and ensuring our facilities and technology support 21st-century learning while remaining accessible to all students. All of this, and responsible use of tax dollars in rebuilding / renovating the next phase of 10 schools in our district.

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

Schools play a vital role in environmental stewardship. I'll focus on:

- Sustainable facility management and energy efficiency.
- Environmental education integration across curricula.
- Supporting student-led environmental initiatives.
- Ensuring healthy learning environments in all schools.
- Promoting walking and biking to school where possible.

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

Equity must be at the heart of every decision we make. My specific commitments include:

- Ensuring every child starts with a no-cost healthy breakfast.
- Expanding early intervention and support programs.
- Making advanced learning opportunities more accessible to students.
- Supporting wraparound services for families.
- Using data to identify and address opportunity gaps.
- Working to eliminate barriers to participation in school activities.

What will you do to address racial inequality, promote restorative justice, and/or address racially biased policing?

At Cherokee Heights, we've seen the power of restorative practices in action. Under Principal Moreno's leadership, we've reduced behavioral incidents dramatically by focusing on reflection and restoration rather than punishment. I support:

- Expanding successful restorative justice programs district-wide.
- Using data to identify and address disparities in discipline.
- Ensuring culturally responsive teaching practices.
- Supporting recruitment and retention of diverse educators.
- Prioritizing mental health support over punitive measures.
- Creating clear, equitable discipline policies.

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

Student health and academic success are inseparable. My priorities include:

- Universal access to healthy breakfast.
- Comprehensive mental health support for students, families, and staff.
- Strong partnerships with community health providers.
- Supporting school nurses and health services.
- Data-driven approach to identifying and addressing health disparities.
- Creating healthy learning environments in all facilities.

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

- Work with city partners to ensure safe routes to schools.
- Support efficient bus routing to maximize instructional time.
- Address transportation barriers to program participation.
- Promote walking and biking where feasible.
- Ensure transportation decisions support our equity goals.

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

As Cherokee Heights PFO President, I've worked to make parent engagement more inclusive and accessible through:

- Multilingual communication
- Flexible meeting times and virtual options

If elected, I'll continue this work by:

- Ensuring diverse representation on advisory committees
- Making board meetings more accessible
- Regular community listening sessions
- Data-driven accountability for equity initiatives

Any other issues/topics you wish to discuss?

One critical focus I'd like to emphasize is teacher empowerment. When we trust teachers as professionals and give them the support they need, students thrive. This means reducing administrative burdens, providing meaningful professional development, and ensuring teachers have real input in decisions affecting their classrooms.

