

# Richard Blake – Candidate for House District 6A

## Education Minnesota candidate questionnaire

### Education funding

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1. Education Minnesota believes the solution to closing the state's racial opportunity gaps must include fully and equitably funding public education, from preschool to postsecondary institutions. There's widespread agreement the full-funding agenda will require several billion dollars in new education investments. Please indicate your support or opposition to the following components of our full-funding agenda.

*Inflation: Reverse Minnesota's perpetual underfunding of education by significantly increasing the per-pupil funding formula and tying it to inflation.*

Yes    No

*SPED cross subsidy: Fully fund its portion of special education costs instead of relying on school districts to pay for them.*

Yes    No

*EL cross subsidy: Fully fund the costs districts pay to provide quality English learner programs and instruction.*

Yes    No

*Lower class sizes: Lower class sizes so teachers can give students more of the individual attention they need and deserve.*

Yes    No

*Full-service community schools: Expand access to full-service community schools across the state.*

Yes    No

*Universal pre-K: Provide universal pre-K taught by licensed teachers, so all children are ready for kindergarten.*

Yes    No



*Teachers of color: Fund programs to increase the number of teachers of color significantly so teachers providing instruction better reflect the students in our classrooms.*

Yes  No

*Student support: Provide additional resources for school districts to hire more student support staff, including counselors, social workers, psychologists, licensed school nurses and other job classifications.*

Yes  No

*TDE/Q Comp: Fully fund the 2011 Teacher Development and Evaluation law, an unfunded state mandate, to ensure teacher quality and lift the cap on the Q Comp program.*

Yes  No

*Professional development: Provide professional development to all staff around cultural competency and trauma-responsive classrooms with aims of closing the discipline disparity gap.*

Yes  No

*ESP living wage: Ensure all education support professionals earn a living wage of at least \$25 an hour.*

Yes  No

*Teacher compensation and benefits: Increase teacher compensation to provide competitive salaries and benefits to recruit and retain teachers.*

Yes  No

*Health care for all school employees: Make health insurance more affordable, fair and predictable for educators and school employees so they stay in the profession.*

Yes  No

*Education debt relief: Provide debt relief to retain teachers so they can afford to stay in the classroom.*

Yes  No

*Higher education: Renew Minnesota's commitment to invest in the state's future by fully funding public higher education in Minnesota.*

Yes  No

## **Education Support Professionals**

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2. Do you support ESPs being able to access unemployment insurance in the summers, when they are not guaranteed work?

Yes  No

3. Will you support dedicated, paid training each year for education support professionals to get the training they need that is specific to their work and students' needs?

Yes  No

## Taxes/revenue

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4. Would you commit to raising revenue to ensure the wealthiest corporations and richest households pay what they truly owe in taxes so every student, no matter what they look like or where they live, can attend a fully funded public school that prepares them to pursue their dreams?

Yes  No

5. Education Minnesota believes in restoring fairness to the state tax code by raising revenue from the very wealthiest corporations and richest households and reducing the reliance on local levies to fund schools. Considering your own experience and expertise, are there other progressive, equitable ways to raise state revenue that you would recommend the union consider supporting?

**I am in favor of raising the income tax to supply needed revenue but it should be combined with some sort of low income tax credit to prevent the burden from falling on low income tax payers. Raising the rate on higher income levels would also provide additional revenue without burdening those citizens with lower incomes. Perhaps a luxury tax on play things of rich is worth considering, at least until we can get out of the hole we are in. We have underfunded education for so long it will take some hard work to get back on track.**

## Higher education

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6. Do you support increasing the state's direct investment in public higher education to significantly reduce institutions' reliance on tuition?

Yes  No

7. Will you support investments in capital bonding projects that preserve buildings, remodel classrooms and keep our technology assets current?

Yes  No

8. What would you do, as a state legislator, to help with education debt?

**I would support legislation that increases the State's share of higher education cost in order to reduce the need for student debt. Keeping the interest rates low and indexing payments to income levels would also help. Programs that offered debt relief for teachers who remain in the profession as well as those who teach in underserved areas should also be continued. The ultimate goal should be to move to a system where higher education is funded by the State, since all of society benefits from a well-educated citizenry.**

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9. Some college campuses have no counselors, while others have a ratio of 1:11,000 students. Will you support each Minnesota State campus having at least one counselor so students have access to mental health and academic support services?

Yes    No

## High-quality professional educators

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10. What will you do to help recruit and retain high-quality educators in our classrooms?

**Competitive pay scales, decent benefits including a good retirement plan, freedom to teach, quality facilities and an environment that values education are keys to keeping high-quality educators in the classroom.**

11. Do you support changes to current law to include our fully licensed Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) and Adult Basic Education (ABE) teachers in the continuing contract law?

Yes  No

## Teacher licensure

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12. Do you support changes to state law to allow Tier 1 teachers to join the teacher bargaining unit?

Yes  No

13. Do you support deleting the option in Tier 3 that allows a person to receive a full professional license without completing a teacher preparation program?

Yes  No

## Standardized testing

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14. What individual or system-level decisions in education do you believe are appropriate to make based on standardized test scores?

**I do not think individual or system-level decisions based on standardized test scores should be used until and unless we can eliminate the racial, economic and cultural biases that are built into these tests. Basing decisions on these tests hampers our efforts to overcome these biases.**

## Honesty in Education

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15. What can you do to protect teachers in the classroom and ensure that they have the freedom to teach?

**Oppose forcing teachers to post lesson plans months in advance and current efforts to burden teachers with having teaching lessons prescribed in ways that limit their ability to teach accurate history. Teachers should be free to teach in ways that give students the ability to make informed choices in their lives.**

16. Do you agree that Minnesotan students deserve an honest and accurate education about race that enables them to learn from the mistakes of our past so they can create a better future for all Minnesotans? Why or why not?

**Students need an accurate portrayal of our history to ensure we don't make the same mistakes. An accurate portrayal is also needed to move forward. An example would be how the GI loans discriminated against people of color and prevented building the wealth that home ownership was a vehicle for. In this case an accurate history gives our future leaders the knowledge needed to make informed decisions on how to deal with current disparities that result from that past.**

## Time to Teach

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17. The planning and differentiating that teachers do daily needs more time. Most after school "prep" is filled with meetings. The current statute falls short of the time needed for preparing lessons. Will you support adjusting this statute to increase prep time?

Yes    No

18. Will you support legislation that protects an educator's prep time so it can't be used for meetings or having to sub for colleagues?

Yes    No

19. Do you support paid, dedicated time outside of student contact time for special education teachers to complete their paperwork and required meetings?

Yes    No

## Union Rights

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20. Do you support collective bargaining rights?

Yes    No

21. Will you oppose any legislation or constitutional amendments that would weaken collective bargaining rights, the right to organize, the right to strike, automatic payment of union dues, union access and activities at worksites or other anti-union policies backed by anti-worker groups?

Yes    No

22. Do you support teacher tenure and due process rights so the experts who work the most with students have the support to stand up for them?

Yes    No

23. How will you support unions as a state legislator?

**I will oppose any efforts to make Minnesota a right to work state. I have been a strong union supporter my entire life and will continue to fight for workers' right to organize. We need that to ensure fair wages, decent benefits, and a healthy middle class.**

## Working families

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24. Do you support the current language that allows educator locals to unilaterally seek a bid and join the Public Employee Insurance Program (PEIP) as the insurance provider for local bargaining units?

Yes  No

25. Will you support continuing defined-benefits retirement systems for public employees?

Yes  No

26. Will you support providing the necessary state funding to ensure financial sustainability of public pension funds?

Yes  No

27. Will you support exploring new systems for providing educators with a secure retirement, including exploring early retirement options that might help recruit and retain educators?

Yes  No

28. What legislation could you introduce or support that would reduce the cost of health insurance to school districts? Where do you stand on health care for all?

**I favor a single payer system for health care. Our nation pays at least 30% more for lower quality health care than other industrialized nations. One method would be to systematically lower the age for Medicare until all citizens are covered. I am fortunate in that I lived and worked for over a year in a country that had a National health care system that worked very well, the United Kingdom. In the meantime, fully funding education means providing the assistance required so local districts are not bankrupted by the cost of providing medical insurance.**

## Privatization

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29. Do you oppose state tax credits for private K-12 education tuition and expenses?

Yes  No

30. Will you support policy changes that will ensure a stronger accountability system with necessary oversight and reporting to ensure quality management and instructional practices in charter schools?

Yes  No

31. Will you support a moratorium on new charter schools until such changes are made?

Yes  No

32. Minnesota students, from different places and of different races, deserve well-resourced, welcoming schools. These needs are urgent and can't wait decades for lawyers and courts to force it to happen.

*Do you oppose efforts that would delete constitutional mandates for using taxation to fund public education funding and for providing equal access to public schools to all students?*

Yes  No

*Do you also oppose these same efforts that would enshrine standardized testing – with all its racial, cultural and economic biases – into the Minnesota Constitution?*

Yes  No

## Your role as a legislator

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33. Have you visited a public school in your district in the past year? If so, which one? What were your observations from your visit? How will that experience inform your work as a legislator? If not, when did you last visit a school? Would you like us to help arrange a visit?

**Yes. Of course COVID interfered with visits, but prior to that I served on a task force that evaluated our existing facilities, promoted a school bond issue that passed, and helped with the design of the new facilities. We now have two new elementary schools and a third that was extensively remodeled. I have witnessed how our overcrowded and outdated facilities hampered the education of our children and how up-to-date facilities improved the education of our children.**

34. What have you done to become informed on issues relating to public education? What organizations and individuals do you go to for your information?

**As mentioned above, I served on the school bond task force. I follow education issues in the media and have used Education Minnesota's web site to learn more about education issues. I have also studied Education Minnesota's 2022 Legislative Agenda and attended zoom presentations put on by Education Minnesota.**

35. How do you envision working with Education Minnesota if you are elected/re-elected? If you disagree with us on an issue, how will you communicate that?

**I will continue to do what I mentioned in my answer to question 34. I will reach out to Education Minnesota. If I do not agree I will explain why and will reach out to Education Minnesota in case information I am unaware of is available.**

36. If elected/re-elected, how will you balance competing priorities that might exist between Education Minnesota and other education groups?

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**I will balance competing priorities but will favor the group that has the most expertise in what happens in Minnesota's classrooms, the educators themselves.**

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