



2026 Board of County Commissioners
Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE: Brandon Russell
OFFICE SOUGHT: St. Mary's County Commissioner, District 2
CAMPAIGN ADDRESS: [REDACTED]
PHONE NUMBER(S): [REDACTED]
CAMPAIGN EMAIL: [REDACTED]
CAMPAIGN WEBSITE: votebrandonrussell.com

I confirm that the responses provided here are my official positions in seeking local office and I understand that EASMC reserves the right to share my responses with members and interested parties.

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE: *Brandon Russell* DATE SUBMITTED: 3/12/26

Candidates: To be considered for a recommendation, you must indicate your response to each of the questions. You may use more space than is provided to elaborate on your answers and provide clarification, explanation, and other context, but please be certain to clearly indicate the questions(s) to which you refer. Please return your completed and signed questionnaire to EASMC.

Education Funding and Local Budgets:

1. Do you commit to prioritizing public education funding in future county budgets? What are your top three budget priorities for the public school system?

Education is one of my top campaign priorities, and I take funding needs seriously. The SMCPSS budget is built around investing in students, staff, and schools. I agree with the Board of Education's priorities in making sure student instructional needs are met, staff are well compensated, and school buildings are maintained. I have advocated alongside educators as a citizen, and will continue as a Commissioner.

2. How do you plan to fund public school priorities? What are your thoughts on the current county tax and revenue structure and any actions you would take to update the tax code to promote fairness and equity?

The county consistently underestimates growth year over year which results in a multi-million dollar fund balance that could be put to better use. I'm in favor of examining the tax structure to identify ways to maximize county revenue at the current tax rates, if possible.

3. How would you utilize your budget authority to address shortfalls facing our schools if the state or federal government reduces their commitment(s)?

The county is currently facing cost push downs from the State, and a reduction of funding from the Federal Government, which are resulting in difficult choices for the school system's budget. The reality is that the county cannot afford to cover all these funding gaps without raising revenue. In the past, we have seen the community come together to advocate for modest tax increases to provide needed funding. If the community prioritizes a need and is willing to support it, I'm willing to listen.

4. In many schools, educators are dealing with high class sizes and caseloads. How will you help address critical concerns with educator recruitment and retention in order to ensure we can increase staffing to reduce class sizes and caseloads?

Current and past Commissioners have said that they just provide the funding, but the Board of Education decides how to spend it. Commissioners have little ability to directly impact staffing decisions made by the school system. However, the Commissioners do control or influence the quality of life and environment of the county through things like zoning, taxes, and economic development. I would lean into the areas within the purview of my role to improve the affordability and attractiveness of living in St. Mary's County.

5. Do you commit to honoring the role of your elected body in upholding the policy and funding mandates associated with the Blueprint for Maryland's Future?

YES

NO

How can you help with the shortfall?

St. Mary's County has, so far, met Blueprint mandates for funding. The Blueprint was well-intentioned, but its application—particularly with funding formulas and required allocation—has been spotty. As Commissioner, I'll work with the Board of Education, as well as EASMC and SMASA, to advocate for better funding policy at the state level.

6. Please discuss your philosophy related to charter schools. Do you believe they should be expanded in our county public school structure?

I think charter schools serve a purpose within the overall school system, especially for different types of learners who may excel in that particular setting. However, I have reservations about the lottery system by which students are admitted and would need to learn more about the charter school prior to deciding whether they should be expanded or not.

7. How will your budget address increased needs for mental health supports for students and educators in our community, where mental health access is so limited?

Finding a way to fund the school social worker positions that help fill a gap in our community is a start. St. Mary's County is a mental health priority area, meaning we do not have the right amount of providers to meet the need. We cannot afford to lose the positions we have because of misguided federal funding decisions. I'm also in favor of expanding services at the school based health centers, a model that has proven results and is accessible to the entire community.

8. What is your opinion on local efforts to create and support community schools?

Community schools are a valuable part of the school system and provide needed services related to health, nutrition, and more. Truthfully, we expect so much from our school system that every school is a community school in some ways. I support efforts for a robust community schools program.

9. SMCPS is in a period of enrollment decline. Our newest building is 10 years old. What should influence any decisions to redistrict?

Community input, full stop. This affects people's lives in major ways. Data is useful for context, but lived experiences provide a fuller picture. This also goes back to funding flexibility, something that is lacking with Blueprint funding requirements.

Public Funding for Private Schools:

10. Do you support or oppose allocating public funding to non-public school students through voucher programs?

_____ SUPPORT ___X___ OPPOSE

Additional comments:

I believe our public education system is strong, and well worth supporting. Segmenting public funding to non-public schools through vouchers is problematic if the non-public schools are not required to follow the same laws and regulations, or meet the same standards, as public schools.

11. Do you support or oppose allowing non-public school students to participate in public school extracurricular activities (sports, clubs, etc.)?

___X___ SUPPORT _____ OPPOSE

Additional comments:

Though Maryland law prohibits this, I generally support the idea of non-public students participating in public school sports. Any policy would need conditions to ensure fairness. For example, a non-public student should have to be a resident of the district of the school for which they want to participate, and would need to pay any fees associated with a program.

Collective Bargaining:

12. Do you support or oppose school employees gaining the right to strike?

SUPPORT OPPOSE

Additional comments:

The right to strike is a cornerstone of a worker's right to organize.

13. What is your understanding of the nature of the relationship between the Board of Education, Superintendent, county government, and union as it relates to negotiations, budget development, and administration of schools? How do you see yourself utilizing the power of your office in working within this structure?

Current and past Commissioners have kept themselves at a distance. I don't think it's appropriate for Commissioners to be involved in negotiations between employees and their employer. It is, however, appropriate for the Commissioners to be part of an overarching conversation for budget planning purposes. More broadly, the adversarial nature between the Commissioners and the Superintendent/Board of Education is not productive and I will work to change that when elected.

14. Do you commit to meeting with union leadership to talk about the needs facing our schools (including salary and staffing levels) and the revenue or other budget actions necessary to meet those needs?

YES NO

Additional comments:

Racial and Social Justice:

15. EASMC supports honesty in education. To encourage critical thinking within our classrooms, we believe educators should have professional autonomy on how to implement curriculum to meet the needs of our students. Do you support or oppose this position? How would you respond to political pressure threatening that professional autonomy?

SUPPORT OPPOSE

Additional comments:

Educators are responsible for meeting certification standards. Additionally, the Maryland State Department of Education sets policy and curriculum standards for local education agencies to follow.

16. Do you support or oppose a curriculum that reflects the perspective and background of diverse learners? How would you respond to political pressure requesting changes to content and curriculum?

SUPPORT OPPOSE

Additional comments:

Academic standards are decided by the Maryland State Department of Education, but local school systems choose the specific curriculum and materials. Residents have direct access to any curriculum changes through a public process, during which they can submit comments. We should trust the accredited professionals hired by the Board of Education to perform these duties.

17. What specific policy goals and objectives will you pursue aimed at addressing racial and social justice, including support of diversity, equity, and inclusion for all students and providing equitable access, opportunities, resources, and supports?

Commissioners cannot implement policy that specifically addresses these issues within the school system because that power lies with the Board of Education. Under the county commission form of government, Commissioners have little authority to legislate. However, as Commissioner I would strengthen engagement with the county's Human Relations Commission to determine specific needs in our community that would create a more inclusive county for everyone.

18. Immigration enforcement is a matter of federal jurisdiction. What is your position on how local law enforcement should interact with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement? And how will you work to ensure school grounds, bus stops, and other school spaces are safe havens against immigration enforcement actions?

Local law enforcement should follow all applicable state and federal laws to keep our communities safe. I do not believe it is appropriate for immigration enforcement to occur in school spaces.

19. Stable, safe, and affordable housing is necessary for all students to be able to succeed in school and in the recruitment of educators, including education support professionals, to live in the communities they serve. How do you plan to address the housing crisis in the county?

We need to implement proper zoning that encourages construction of “missing middle” housing stock like duplexes, townhouses, and courtyard developments within the development districts. The Commissioners have not implemented the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, so I will focus on the implementation of the revised plan which is likely to be approved this year.

Privatization and Support for Education Support Professionals (ESP's):

20. Are you in favor of contracting out custodial, cafeteria, and maintenance services rather than have those services provided by the Board of Education employees?

SUPPORT X OPPOSE

Additional comments:

21. Too many ESPs work second jobs and struggle to provide for their families, buy homes, save for their futures, and afford community or four-year college tuition for their children to learn a trade and plan a career. The looming threats of privatization by school districts, which would import even lower-paid workers from outside areas, risk the stability of schools and communities and further undermine the value of ESPs and their jobs.

ESPs across the state are organizing to build presence, strength, and power in a campaign focused on a bill of rights that defines the issues long nagging these dedicated employees and now threatening not only the recruitment of new employees but the retention of dedicated veteran employees. You can read about the [ESP Bill of Rights here](#).

Do you support the ESP Bill of Rights?

X SUPPORT OPPOSE

Additional Comments:

22. Please share how you would use your office to help make the ESP Bill of Rights a reality in the county.

As Commissioner, I would voice my support for the ESP Bill of Rights and encourage the Board of Education to act.

Essay Questions:

A. Why are you running for this position? What personal attributes, characteristics, and experiences make you the right candidate for this position?

I'm running for Commissioner because it's time for change in St. Mary's County. We have had the same type of Commissioners making the same kind of decisions for over a decade. I intend to be a proactive Commissioner that addresses the needs of the community. I am not afraid to ask questions or to learn what I don't know. I am committed to fact-based decisionmaking that puts community first. I'm passionate about making sure the community is informed about local government, and finding ways to get people more involved.

B. What are the top three things you would like to accomplish in the next four years if you are elected to [county commission/BOE]?

I'll prioritize implementation of the Comprehensive Plan so zoning works for residents more than developers. I'll work to move SMCPS from being 23 out of 24 Maryland counties for per-pupil funding. I'm committed to building coalitions between the Commissioners and overlooked community organizations, and improving relationships between governmental bodies.

Additional Information:

Along with this completed questionnaire, please provide an up-to-date bio or resume as well as a current list of endorsements for this election cycle.