



2026 Board of County Commissioners
Candidate Questionnaire

CANDIDATE: Ryan Daniels

OFFICE SOUGHT: St. Mary's County Commissioner, District 4

CAMPAIGN ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

PHONE NUMBER(S): (C) [REDACTED]

CAMPAIGN EMAIL: [REDACTED]

CAMPAIGN WEBSITE: ryandanielscountycommissioner.org

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: Ryan Daniels DATE SUBMITTED: 20260312

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?

Absolutely. Of all the issues and concerns I have learned about in St. Mary's County during my time running, education has become one of my highest priorities for good reason.

First, we must focus on retaining our teachers. From what I understand, there have been solid efforts made recently to improve retention, which is encouraging. However, I want to ensure that supporting and keeping our teachers remains a consistent priority and is not overlooked again in the future.

Second, I want to ensure we continue providing mental health services and broader student support services. After the recent concerns surrounding mental health support for students, it is clear this is an area that requires continued attention. I plan to work with the appropriate partners to ensure these services remain available and sustainable. With mental health challenges among students continuing to rise, providing the proper support systems is more important than ever.

Finally, we need to address the ongoing issue of falling behind on school infrastructure needs. Our schools require consistent investment to maintain safe and effective learning environments. I believe these needs should be a higher priority than they have been under the current County Commissioners, and I have been disappointed that some have not taken this issue as seriously as it deserves.

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?

Funding public school priorities in St. Mary's County requires a responsible and balanced approach. Education must remain one of the county's top priorities, and that means ensuring our budget reflects that commitment. County government has many responsibilities, but investing in our school system is one of the most important investments we can make for the future of our community.

I believe we need to carefully evaluate how existing county revenues are allocated before turning to new taxes. Taxpayers deserve confidence that the funds they are already contributing are being used efficiently and directed toward core priorities. With that in mind, there are no direct changes to the county's tax structure that I currently plan to pursue.

However, I do plan to work closely with the Town of Leonardtown regarding the ongoing issue surrounding the Excise Tax. If this issue has not been properly resolved by the time I take office, I fully intend to work with Leonardtown's leadership, who have publicly stated they are willing to negotiate with the county in good faith, to establish a structure that would allow the county to once again collect an appropriate level of Excise Tax from the town with those funds helping support education.

Beyond that, any discussion about updating the county's tax code should focus on ensuring that the burden on residents remains reasonable while still allowing the county to meet its obligations. This includes reviewing how various revenue sources, such as property, income, and excise taxes, are structured to ensure they remain fair, equitable, and aligned with the county's long-term needs.

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

If the state or federal government were to reduce their commitments to our schools, it would require careful budgeting and strong prioritization at the county level.

I would evaluate existing county spending and identify areas where resources can be reallocated to protect core educational services. Our school systems should not be the first place we look to make cuts when outside funding changes.

I would also work closely with the St. Mary's County Public Schools (SMCPS) leadership to understand where the greatest needs are and where county support could be most effective in minimizing disruption to students. Maintaining my above priorities would remain key.

Additionally, I would advocate strongly at the state level, something that running as a Democrat will certainly allow me to do more effectively and something I will take advantage of, to ensure that St. Mary's County receives fair and consistent support from Maryland General Assembly education funding programs. County leaders should always be working collaboratively with our state delegation to protect resources for our schools.

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?

Addressing large class sizes and educator caseloads starts with ensuring our schools are adequately funded. Unfortunately, much of this challenge is tied directly to budget limitations. My first priority would be working to ensure that the funding requested by SMCPS is met as closely as possible so the system can remain fully operational and keep pace with inflation.

From there, I would focus heavily on teacher retention. Recruiting educators is important, but retaining the experienced teachers we already have is just as critical.

I would also explore additional revenue opportunities that could support education funding, including continuing discussions with the Town of Leonardtown regarding the Excise Tax structure and how it might contribute to school funding if the opportunity arises for me to do so.

As resources allow, I would support efforts to hire additional teachers to reduce student-to-teacher ratios and address growing caseloads. At the same time, we need to plan ahead for long-term enrollment growth in St. Mary's County. That includes considering future school construction so we are proactively preparing for student growth rather than reacting once overcrowding has already occurred.

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?

X _____ YES

_____ NO

How can you help with the shortfall?

Along with what I stated above, I hope that running and winning the County Commissioner seat as a Democrat can assist me in creating real relationships with those in Annapolis and, maybe, in some way, allow me to work with them to justify assisting us with more State dollars.

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

My philosophy on charter schools is that they can have a place within the public education system, provided they remain accountable to local oversight and do not undermine funding for traditional public schools.

Local school boards should maintain a strong role in guiding the overall direction and standards of education within their county.

At the same time, it is important that the expansion of charter schools does not result in a loss of critical funding for the broader school system. Per-pupil funding should remain structured in a way that ensures the overall public school system in St. Mary's County is not financially harmed when students choose to attend a charter school.

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?

As I mentioned earlier, I believe it is critical that we continue providing mental health services and broader student support services. After the recent concerns surrounding mental health support for students, it is clear that this is an area that requires continued attention. I plan to work with the appropriate partners to ensure these services remain available and sustainable.

From a budget perspective, my focus would be on maintaining and protecting the mental health services that are already in place so they are not reduced or lost. With mental health challenges continuing to rise among both students and educators, ensuring access to these resources is more important than ever.

Addressing mental health concerns benefits not only the individuals directly affected, but also contributes to a safer and healthier school system and community overall in St. Mary's County.

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

Community schools are an interesting as I've only recently learned about them. I think the idea has could have potential. Connecting schools with community services be beneficial for students, but my main concern is how these programs are funded. Implementing community schools often requires additional resources, and I would want to ensure that expanding these services does not take funding away from core classroom needs. My priority first and foremost would be the existing school system.

If efforts to create community schools move forward in St. Mary's County, I would carefully review the financial structure to ensure they strengthen the overall school system without negatively impacting classroom funding. When implemented responsibly, these partnerships can improve attendance, behavior, and academic outcomes by addressing barriers to learning. Most critics of community schools are not opposed to helping students. They are primarily concerned about cost, scope, or execution rather than the idea of providing support services itself.

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

I believe we have found ourselves in a difficult but necessary situation in which redistricting appears to be the only viable option for managing capacity. Leonardtown High School, as a great example, is currently at maximum capacity. Without another high school available to transfer

students to, redistricting some students to other schools is a responsible, though understandably unwelcome, choice.

This approach helps prevent Leonardtown from becoming even more overcrowded, which has already created real challenges for the school. At the same time, Chopticon and Great Mills High Schools have available space that can accommodate these students without compromising educational quality. I also understand that safety and location are concerns for parents, and I take these concerns seriously; however, the current implementation plan appears reasonable and considers these factors while addressing the capacity issue.

Public Funding for Private Schools:

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

X SUPPORT _____ OPPOSE

Additional comments:

It depends on how the voucher program is structured. If the cost per student follows the student, without hurting the public school system, and administration fees aren't wholly burdensome, I would be in favor.

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

X SUPPPORT _____ OPPOSE

Additional comments:

There is hardly any situation where I would not support non-public school students to participate in extracurricular activities, again, as long as it doesn't create a burden on the school system that is unfair or unwarranted.

Collective Bargaining:

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

X SUPPORT _____ OPPOSE

Additional comments:

No comment needed.

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?

In St. Mary's County, the Board of Education sets policy, oversees the school system, hires the Superintendent, and negotiates with employee unions. The Superintendent manages daily operations and prepares the budget request, which the BOE approves before submitting to the County Commissioners for funding. EASMC negotiates contracts that impact salaries, benefits,

and staffing, which in turn influence budget priorities. Effective coordination among the BOE, Superintendent, county government, and unions is essential to ensure schools are properly funded, staffed, and run efficiently.

My power is to make determinations on what is to be funded within that request, and I plan to utilize that power to make sure that budget decisions are smart and responsible and properly fund education in a way that keeps up with inflation.

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:

Absolutely.

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:

Absolutely. There is no question as long as there are no incidents or complaints to consider. I will let the education system determine what merits an incident to where this autonomy is no longer a consideration. But until then, I think professional autonomy is something deserved and respected as an educator.

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:

Without question I support. Political pressure would not be a consideration.

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 support?

I will fight for diversity, equity, and inclusion in our schools, ensuring all students have fair access to a quality education. This includes support for providing equitable access, opportunities,

resources, and support. I am committed to working with the community and county agencies to remove barriers and give every student the tools they need to succeed.

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?

I have a background in homeland security, the same federal department that oversees Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). I recognize that ICE, like other federal agencies such as the FBI and CIA, has a defined role and legal purpose. At the same time, I am concerned about current operational practices that appear to go beyond established legal authority.

Federal law does not authorize ICE to randomly approach and detain individuals without cause, and enforcement actions should be conducted within the bounds of the Constitution; including respect for warrants and due process. When enforcement activities stray into indiscriminate stops or create an environment of fear in our communities, that is troubling.

As a local official, I will comply with state law and work to stay informed about federal enforcement activities in our area. I will do what I can, consistent with the law, to help ensure that students and families are not subject to unwarranted harassment, detention, or deportation. Protecting the safety, rights, and well-being of all residents, especially children, is a responsibility I take seriously.

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?

Workforce housing is a critical issue that our community and nation are facing. According to census data, St. Mary's County is currently short approximately 3,600 housing units for people who already reside here, which aligns with assessments from the Maryland Comptroller and the local Housing Authority.

One of my top priorities is to begin building these units without delay, while also exploring strategies such as adaptive reuse of existing structures and vertical construction to maximize available space. I am also investigating several specific initiatives with Three Oaks, particularly in connection with the \$850,000 recently allocated by Congress to the Housing Authority, which Three Oaks will help manage. These efforts aim to expand affordable housing options efficiently and responsibly for our workforce.

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 OPPOSE

Additional comments:

I support contracting out custodial, cafeteria, and maintenance services as long as it makes fiscal sense, ensuring that any decision saves taxpayer dollars without compromising the quality, safety, and well-being of our students and school staff.

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?

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 the son of a teacher who worked these kinds of jobs before her work with children, I wholeheartedly support this Bill of Rights. That said, I recognize that implementing it at the county level will be challenging given current funding constraints. I would be eager to work with my fellow Commissioners to explore opportunities, but I believe the most effective way to advance this initiative is at the state level.

In Annapolis, I would advocate for incorporating this Bill of Rights alongside the Maryland Blueprint for Education and work to secure the necessary funding to support its implementation.

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 was born and raised in St. Mary's County and have watched our community grow and change over the years. I served our country in the Marine Corps as a decorated, combat-wounded veteran, an experience that gave me a deep understanding of what truly matters: taking care of each other. As a young, educated, and well-traveled resident, who also worked both contracting and government positions on the Naval Base at one time, I bring a broad perspective and a strong desire to help build a stronger, more resilient community at home. I am running for this position because I see a gap between the promises made and the results delivered, and I want to ensure that families and residents in our county have the resources and opportunities they need to thrive. My personal commitment, experience in service, and dedication to this community equip me to serve effectively and responsibly in this role.

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

Technically, I have four.

1. Strengthening mental health services. Coordinated crisis response that quickly connects people to help is essential. My work with veterans has shown how early professional intervention

can prevent crises from escalating. Pairing mental health professionals with first responders improves public safety, reduces repeat emergencies, and saves taxpayer dollars. Equally important is placing mental health resources where people need them; embedded in communities rather than centralized or hard to access. Ignoring mental health strains law enforcement, hospitals, and families. I will work with community partners to expand accessible, community-based mental health services in St. Mary's County.

2. Addressing workforce housing. Affordable housing for teachers, nurses, deputies, and other essential workers is critical to a stable local economy. Workforce housing reduces turnover, shortens commutes, and helps retain experienced staff. Solutions should reflect local wages, cost of living, and workforce needs rather than one-size-fits-all labels. I will work with community partners to implement practical, locally grounded strategies that make it possible for essential workers to live where they serve.

3. Supporting public education. Education is one of the most effective tools to reduce poverty, strengthen the workforce, and support families. Funding has not kept pace with inflation, unfunded mandates, or the true cost of educating today's students, including transportation, pre-K, special education, multilingual learners, and students living in poverty. Schools also provide safety, stability, and meals for many children. I will advocate for honest, responsible investment in public education to ensure our schools meet the needs of all students.

4. Responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars. Fiscal responsibility means identifying waste, setting clear priorities, and ensuring every dollar works for our community. Before considering tax increases, we must focus on efficiency, align spending with residents' most pressing needs, and maintain affordability for families. Smart budgeting is not only good policy; it is respect for the people who earn and pay these dollars. I am committed to disciplined, transparent budgeting that keeps St. Mary's County a place where people can live, work, and thrive.

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.

As it is early on in the election cycle, I have not yet received any endorsements. However, I am early on in the process with multiple entities for endorsements.