

# Candidate Responses – Orange County School Board

**Ryan Markey**

Question 1: Position Seeking:

RM: School Board District 3

Question 2: Have You Previously Held this Position?

RM: No

Question 3: Will you be attending the August 23, 2023, Orange County Candidate Showcase?

RM: Yes

Question 4: How will you foster relationships between businesses and the school community?

RM: With issues deriving from the government (local, state and federal) we find funding harder and harder to obtain. Issues such as the calc tool error from the Virginia Department of Education, resulting in approximately \$400,000 less state funding per public schools in 2024. With this being the case, it's more important than ever to rely on help from the community to fill in the ever growing gaps that government is unable to provide for.

I believe that if we increase our communication with local business leaders in an authentic and meaningful way, reaching out to them and meeting them in their own businesses and on their own turf, and show them just how large these gaps are and how detrimental they may be towards the education of Orange County children, they would be more than happy to join alongside our schools in giving their professional experience, time and frankly, themselves, to the greater cause of helping our kids. We have already seen many businesses step up to help our schools over the years. I have seen great things come from the people of my county over the course of my lifetime living here, and I see more great things to come.

Another way to help better foster these relationships is to not only focus on educators for facilitating and contributing to this communication. I believe that some of the most powerful voices come from the students themselves and their parents. We should harness their unique perspectives on how to better spread awareness of the needs and challenges they face. If we allow the kids and their parents to contribute to fostering these relationships, I believe we will be able to form a powerful community of future changers and makers that will last lifetimes.

Having operated in teams of Search and Rescue workers throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia, I know first-hand the importance of teamwork and what working together to achieve a common goal which is greater than ourselves can accomplish. That same sense of working collaboratively can most certainly be found within our community, in helping OCPS students achieve success in whatever it is that they choose to pursue.

Question 5: Over the years, minority representation has decreased relative to administration and teaching staff. There is a growing concern among the African American community relative to the issue. What would be your proposal to help bridge the gap?

RM: A plethora of literature shows that minority students often perform better academically, have decreased absenteeism and are suspended much less frequently when they have

representation in school faculty (see "Teachers, Race and Student Achievement in a Randomized Experiment, 2001-Aug <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED464172> , "Representation in the classroom: The effect of own-race teachers on student achievement" (bu.edu) <https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/27019> , "The Impact of Teacher Demographic Representation on Student Attendance and Suspensions" - Institute of Labor Economics <https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/9554/the-impact-of-teacher-demographic-representation-on-student-attendance-and-suspensions> , to name a few). Another paper has shown that when an African American Student has at least one African American teacher in the third, fourth or fifth grade, they are much more likely to graduate high school and aspire to attend a four year college (The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers [http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jmhyman/Race\\_match\\_AEJ\\_final.pdf](http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jmhyman/Race_match_AEJ_final.pdf) ). Though we do not need papers and studies to prove the importance of representation in schools, they do reiterate the fact that it's incredibly important.

I would partner with organizations such as the Orange County Chapter of the NAACP to find ways to better facilitate teacher recruitment and retention among minorities. Any concern of discrimination of any sort would be taken extremely seriously. I also believe that a sense of connection in our schools through programs such as extracurricular activities, music programs, sports and clubs are vital to improving acceptance and attitudes among both students and faculty. As former Orange County educator Murcelle Coleman said, "A lot of it just has to do with attitude, and you can't legislate people's attitudes." My goal as a School Board member would be to create an environment where attitudes can be improved, acceptance can flourish and connections that transcend all divisions can be achieved. This will create a more welcoming environment for faculty and students alike, and be a major step in making Orange County Public Schools a place of inclusion.

Another option that we have is simply treating our teachers better overall. We need to be offering them better compensation in accordance to their performance, experience and skills. By doing that, we can improve both teacher recruitment and retention. When our revenue will increase from \$181.1 million in 2023 to an estimated \$194.1 million in 2024 (a raise in revenue that is greater than the raises in revenue in 2021, 2022 and 2023 combined), to say that we may only offer teachers a 5% raise in salary across the board (not in accordance with individual performance and experience) is a broad claim to make. That will ultimately harm hiring and retention, which in turn will lead to more difficulty in present teacher representation in our schools.

Question 6: Our youth are our future. Agricultural education and organizations such as FFA plug students into the pathways available to grow, supply, and create within the agricultural sector. How would you like to see agricultural education be best supported in Orange County Public Schools? Are you in favoring of continuing these programs; what changes, if any, would you like to see? What experience do you have working with said programs?

RM: It is a proven fact that experiential learning (that is, students participating in the learning process with hands-on, actual experience) results in greater academic achievement than traditional lectures (see "Study shows that students learn more when taking part in classrooms that employ active-learning strategies – Harvard Gazette" <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2019/09/study-shows-that-students-learn-more-when-taking-part-in-classrooms-that-employ-active-learning-strategies/> ). The FFA provides just that and more. In addition to hands-on learning through actual experience, the FFA also provides

students with discipline, hard work, dedication and commitment. The FFA has shown incredible results in teaching leadership, business modeling, personal growth and development, and career success. By partnering with local farms and agricultural businesses to help provide this experiential learning, we can further our FFA programs while also fostering stronger relationships between our schools, the businesses of our county and our community.

I'm absolutely in favor of continuing the FFA program in Orange County, and I would encourage more partnerships with local farms and agricultural businesses to provide the hands-on learning students need to be successful in their education and their futures.

I have worked alongside EMS personnel whose educational experience has included the FFA. I have seen the courage, dedication, leadership skills and great character that an FFA participant has from their experience with the program. It is very obvious to me that this program teaches both success in the profession of agricultural (a vital part of any infrastructure), but also in any discipline a student chooses. I would be proud to support and continue the FFA here in Orange County.

Question 7: Please further explain your interest in a position with our local School Board. What is your connection to Orange County Public Schools?

RM: I'm a lifelong resident of Orange, having lived here for 41 years. I was raised in Orange County Public Schools, and graduated Class of 1999 from Orange County High School. My wife of 23 years, Marie, graduated Class of 1995 from Orange County High School. We raised our son, William, in Orange County Public Schools and he is currently enrolled as a Senior at Orange County High School. As a parent of an OCPS student I have seen the operations of our public schools from an extremely unique and personal perspective. I'm also a professional Emergency Medical Technician and Search and Rescue volunteer for the Virginia Department of Emergency Management. I have extensive experience responding to extremely important and personally sensitive situations related to both individuals and families. I have been responsible for making vitally important decisions which have been matters of life and death under enormous pressure. I'm a concerned parent who sees concerning things that I would like to help resolve.

Question 8: What is your stance on CTE education and internship opportunities in the community and how will you support these efforts?

RM: As I stated earlier, studies have shown that experiential learning, that is having students participate in the learning process with hands-on, actual experience, results in greater academic achievement than traditional lectures. Not only does CTE provide this hands-on, experience-based education, it applies that experience kids get to their future careers, whatever they chose those to be. It's not only a great idea, it's an imperative one. Much of what we learn happens outside of the classroom in the actual setting, with help from peers and mentors. CTE can provide opportunities for on-the-job learning, as well as credit, credentials, and real-world application.

As mentioned before, I believe communicating with business leaders within our county is extremely important in this regard. By leaning on-the-job alongside these community leaders and mentors, we can not only advocate for better and more fulfilling education for our kids, but we can also accomplish this with possibly very cost effective (or even no-cost) ways.

I would also greatly encourage building a CTE center on the property adjacent to the high school, but this would require funds to be approved by the Board of Supervisors. For the 2024 fiscal year, the Board is providing OCPS with \$1.6 million less than what OCPS had hoped for. I hope to be able to foster better communication with our Board of Supervisors and county's budget and financial advisors to see if there may be a way to afford more funding towards our county's education.

Question 9: What do you consider to be the greatest needs of the Orange County Public Schools that the School Board can resolve? If elected, what would be your top priority?

RM: I see many areas of concern, none of which can be labeled as 'top priority' as they are all of high importance.

One of my top priorities that is a deeply personal concern for me is mental health for students. All too often we see stories of how students are being weighed down and are becoming overwhelmed with a variety of stressors. Studies have shown that youth suicides have been increasing. This has to stop. I will do all that I can to prevent this from happening. My goal is to partner with local resources to provide the help that our kids need to overcome whatever challenges they may be facing. I will work to partner with local resources to provide any child who needs or wants it help and counseling from a licensed mental health professional.

In an effort to reduce stress and pressure to our parents and kids, as well as to free up vital time for our families I will propose to have structured, supervised study halls where teachers are assigned students that are already in their class. According to a study conducted by Saint Xavier University in Chicago, homework completion increased with structured study halls, allowing kids to have less stress from assignments and spend more time with their families. It also showed that comprehension of the materials being learned increased.

I also plan to provide teachers and parents (who volunteer to receive the training) Mental Health First Aid and Psychological First Aid training to better help identify, communicate and respond to mental health issues and crises. This training can be provided at a very low cost (or possible even for free through organizations such as the Virginia Medical Reserve Corps). This training may also help reduce bullying in our schools. A study conducted by researchers at UVA and the Cincinnati Children's Medical Center found that emotionally supportive teachers in early education helped to decrease aggressive behaviors and increase behavioral self-control in children (see [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281477299\\_The\\_Contribution\\_of\\_Teachers'\\_Emotional\\_Support\\_to\\_Children's\\_Social\\_Behaviors\\_and\\_Self-Regulatory\\_Skills\\_in\\_First\\_Grade](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281477299_The_Contribution_of_Teachers'_Emotional_Support_to_Children's_Social_Behaviors_and_Self-Regulatory_Skills_in_First_Grade) ).

I plan to eliminate standardized uniform guidelines and procedures for teaching from the county and school-specific levels which will allow teachers more time to be there for the kids in their class instead of worrying about uniform bureaucratic procedures that don't help kids individually. Just as not all kids learn the same, not all teachers teach the same. Much like our students with standardized testing that has doubled since schools let back in from being out due to COVID-19, our teachers are also overburdened with standardized education. They have forms that must be filled out with boxes to check stating that they successfully completed the standardized requirements for teaching in a large variety of subjects. These requirements are specific to state, county, curriculum, and even to the school where they're teaching. Teachers are required to write out lesson plans word-for-word and have them approved according to these uniform procedures weeks ahead of time and cannot deviate from those written plans. Our teachers are no longer allowed to teach but are expected to meet standardized requirements. Their expertise, knowledge and experience are not respected, and

the education that they offer suffers because of it. If a kid is struggling, a teacher can't stop to help that kid specifically because the standardized requirements for the class as a whole, instead of the children independently, won't be met. Often a teacher isn't given enough time to conform their study plans in accordance with these procedures and have to work on their plans during their own time when they're not getting paid. As a member of our School Board, my plan is to eliminate this standardization from the county and school-specific levels. By doing so, we can return to actual teaching again, retain great teachers and improve recruitment.

By eliminating this county and school-specific standardization of education, we will also lift the burden of data requirements and computer programming objectives to maintain this standardization from our schools' technical support staff, allowing them more time to work on programs like Power School and Canvas. By improving the streamlining of these programs, we can give more accurate and timely information to the parents and guardians of our county. This will give them the ability to see their child's lessons, assignments, grades and completion of assignments in real-time. It will give our parents the ability to see exactly what their children are learning in class, and thereby increase transparency. These issues are only a few of the concerns that I see and that I hope to help resolve as a member of our School Board. Please see my website, [www.MarkeyForSchoolBoard.com](http://www.MarkeyForSchoolBoard.com) for more.

---