



ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

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COMMISSIONERS OF ST. MARY'S COUNTY

James R. Guy, President
Eric Colvin, Commissioner
Michael L. Hewitt, Commissioner
Todd B. Morgan, Commissioner
John E. O'Connor, Commissioner

NEWS RELEASE *for Immediate Release*

No. 2020 – 137

July 28, 2020, 4:15 p.m.

Commissioners Continue to Support Board of Education Distance Learning as COVID-19 Pandemic Continues

LEONARDTOWN, MD – As pandemic conditions linger into the fall, the Commissioners of St. Mary's County continue to support funding for local schools. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commissioners proactively moved to support funding for students and teachers of St. Mary's County public schools when distance learning challenges arose. Since May, the Commissioners have approved more than \$4M toward ongoing support for county school students.

In May, St. Mary's County Commissioners invested \$3.5M for the expansion of existing commercial cable provider networks to allow extended service to areas that are not economically feasible for the vendors to perform alone. This expanded Middle Mile project extends service to several underserved regions of the county. By funding the construction of these plant expansions, the county offset the capital improvement costs of the vendor without assuming any additional maintenance or support costs.

In a collaborative effort, the Board of Education Information Technology Department and St. Mary's County Information Technology Department focused on data collection and analysis to identify students who live in areas where wired broadband service is unavailable or unreliable. It was noted that wireless (4G, 3G, LTE, etc.) data speeds have proven challenging when attempting data-intensive operations such as those utilized in a remote learning environment. The Commissioners approved a \$200,000 grant to improve rural broadband service and a multimillion-dollar Phase III Cable Plant Expansion project to provide and upgrade internet service in these underserved areas of St. Mary's County.

Along with allocating funds for internet service upgrades, the Commissioners authorized \$400,000 of emergency reserve funding in June to purchase 1,250 student laptops for the 2020-2021 school year.

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The Department of Emergency Services, Emergency Management Division, secured an agreement with the St. Mary's County Public Schools to submit for FEMA public assistance for a school feeding program. FEMA dollars could provide up to 75% of the additional staffing costs for the modified school feeding program not covered by the USDA grant to the local public schools.

On July 14, the Commissioners approved budget amendments to realign funding from the Local Management Board for a new project to purchase \$15,382 for books for St. Mary's County students. The Commissioners also allocated \$54,400 for feeding students to prevent a disruption in food service when the school system had to cease feeding operations.

Commissioner decisions and related public documents are available on the county government website in [BoardDocs](#). St. Mary's County Commissioner Meetings may be viewed live Tuesday mornings on SMCG Channel 95 or as a replay on Friday nights at 6:30 p.m. Meetings are also available for on-demand viewing on the St. Mary's County [Government YouTube Channel](#).

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