



Prince William County

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Providing A World-Class Education

May 11, 2021

The Honorable Ralph Northam
Governor of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475 Richmond, Virginia 23218

Dear Governor Northam:

On behalf of the Prince William County School Board, we are writing to request a waiver of the social distancing requirements for all outside graduation commencement events as those requirements are outlined in Section 10 of Executive Order 72 (seventh amended) (EO72). Alternately, at a minimum, we request that the distancing be reduced to three feet.

We understand the challenges you face as you work to keep all Virginians safe during the pandemic. We join with your desire to place the safety of Virginia families as a highest priority. Despite the obstacles the pandemic has created, PWCS has sought to provide every opportunity for students to learn and to be recognized for their achievements.

PWCS is actively planning 15 graduation ceremonies, most of which will occur between June 4 and June 8, one week before the potential lifting of social distancing requirements. In light of recent CDC guidance and scientific data regarding the safety of outdoor events and rising vaccination rates in our community, our request for a waiver falls well within acceptable safety guidelines.

PWCS produces high achieving, outstanding graduates and large graduating classes. Our largest schools will graduate upwards of 750 students. Twelve of our graduations will occur at Jiffy Lube Live—an outdoor amphitheater with 10,444 reserved seats. Half capacity is 5,222 seats. However, EO72's six feet rule has the practical effect of reducing our capacity to approximately 3,000. With 750 graduates, that leaves at best 2,250 tickets to distribute among graduates and staff. The real-world logistics of six feet guidance limits each family's participation to approximately two tickets. Invariably, grandparents, siblings, friends--or even parents--will be kept from celebrating this rite of passage. **At the very least, a three feet standard would allow for the possibility of 4-5 tickets per family.**

PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

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We understand the importance of mitigation, including masks and reduced capacity. We appreciate the effect that EO72 has had in driving down infection rates in Virginia. We also understand the importance of being present at meaningful commencement events. **We ask for a waiver of the six feet distance requirement, for outdoor venues, or in the alternative, we ask that the social distance requirements be reduced to three feet.**

As always, we appreciate your continued support of Prince William County Schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Lateef', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Babur B. Lateef, M.D.
Chairman At-Large
Prince William County School Board