



BREAKING

VIDEO: Prince William School Board meeting cleared due to unruly crowd

By Jared Foretek Sep 16, 2021 Updated Oct 6, 2021 28



Police trying to clear the room at the Prince William County School Board meeting on Sept. 15, 2021.



Loudoun School Board restricts who can speak at meetings

In response to a rising national trend of disruptive, sometimes violent, local school board meetings, the school board in Loudoun County has c...



'Baby bonding' leave, quarantine topics at drama-free Prince William School Board meeting

Wednesday night's Prince William County School Board meeting went off without disruption in a return to relative normalcy after last month's m...

Trending on InsideNoVa

Karen Orsogo
SVP of U.S. Retail, H&R Block

Jared Foretek @JaredGM19

The PWCS School Board room meeting room. Security is now attempting to clear the room. @PWCSNews

8:07 PM · Sep 15, 2021

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For a time, it was unclear if the meeting's public session would be held. School security and Prince William County police were enforcing a strict 53-person capacity for the public inside the board meeting room, with dozens more people outside trying to get in. After more than an hour of tense standoffs with those outside and some heated exchanges among the public inside the meeting room, security and police told the assembled public that the room needed to be cleared of everyone, including members of the media, for security purposes.

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No fights broke out and no arrests were made, but security staff faced off with people trying to get into the meeting room and sporadic shouting matches took place inside the meeting room among the public.

A resident who attended the meeting said on InsideNoVa's Facebook page that a group sang the National Anthem and were then confronted by others prior to the room being cleared.

"There were no riots, just angry concerned parents that deserve to be heard yet the school board set us all up and never came out. Videos will be shared and pwc will see the truth! God bless all of you!" she wrote.

At 9:30 p.m., more than two hours after the public session was scheduled to start, board members brought the remaining 15 people back into the meeting room, gavelled in and sped through their agenda, suspending public comment.

Some at the Prince William School Board meeting Wednesday night held signs in opposition to "critical race theory," one of the topics that led to the demonstrations in Loudoun. Division leaders have said it isn't being taught in local schools. Lateef told InsideNoVa that the decision to clear the building was a "security call" suggested by the security personnel inside.



Members of the public hold signs and sit spaced apart before the Prince William County School Board meeting on Sept. 15, 2021.

"My understanding was the room was cleared because of security concerns," Lateef said. "... The school board chose to come out and continue the business we had this meeting because the next meeting is in October."

Among other things, the board had a deadline to approve the sale of a number of bonds for capital improvements. The board's next scheduled meeting will be held Oct. 6, and Lateef told InsideNoVa after Wednesday's meeting that they haven't decided on any additional security measures.

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For Wednesday night's meeting, the division was mandating bag checks and said it would be enforcing the socially-distanced capacity, as well as face masks, which are required in all school buildings. Many people came to attend the meeting without a face mask.

Standing outside the Kelly Center, Deputy Chief of Police Jarad Phelps said the police department had posted three officers at the meeting to supplement division security staff. He said it was unclear whether or not that was a higher number of police officers than usual.

"Our interest is that no one get hurt at our meetings. We have parents who are on our school board, moms and dads who are on our school board and nobody wanted to see anyone get hurt," Lateef said.

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An overflow crowd with security outside Wednesday night's Prince William School Board meeting.

Superintendent LaTanya McDade said that for staff members who declined to take the vaccine, their weekly tests would be available at division facilities free of charge, and said more details will be forthcoming.

Employees will have to disclose their vaccine status by Nov. 1 and new employees will have to do so within 30 days of hire.

"I believe that public health and public education are directly linked," McDade said during the meeting. "We need to listen to the science, examine the data and listen to the scientific experts. When it comes to the pandemic, scientists are unequivocal in their message: getting the vaccine is the best way to protect us and those around us."

The new citizen comment rules will limit public input at meetings to 20 speakers with three minutes each. The first proposed rule would have limited comment to two minutes per person and allowed 30 speakers, but that was changed in the lead-up to Wednesday's meeting. Only pre-approved comments will be allowed in the meeting room and the policy mandates that sign be "directly" related to school policy or operations.

Informally, public comment has not been limited before, but Lateef said that technically this change would increase the time for comment going by the board's rules. When the change was first proposed, he said it was related to what had happened at Loudoun County School Board meetings.

During the time the building was closed Wednesday night, dozens of those remaining milled about at the front entrance of the building. Rebecca Hermon, the grandmother of a Prince William student, was there with her daughter. She said she had concerns about what the students were being taught, and that the public should be able to voice their concerns directly to the school board.

"If they're still having the meeting, that's not right," she said of shutting down public comment and closing the meeting. "These people represent the community. And I'm sure everybody here is not going to be voting for them again. ... Even if you don't agree with somebody's views that comes to the meeting, you still listen to them."

Another group of teachers also gathered outside the building. Oveta Scott, a 6th grade teacher at Fred Lynn Middle School, said the attacks on the school board and critical race theory were unfounded.

"We teach the SOLs, that's what we teach. The standards of learning. We don't deviate from that. We get the curriculum guide, pacing maps, all that stuff," Scott said.

"We're not teaching CRT," Rileys O'Casey, an 8th grade social studies teacher said. "We teach the kids the truth, critical thinking, problem solving, looking at multiple sources."

After the meeting, Lateef said he hoped some of the aggression that the board's faced the last two meetings would subside.

"I would ask the public to understand that we have serious business in restarting the school year with in-person learning. We have truly serious business about making sure we get it right and doing everything the best we can. We have really serious business about making sure our people stay safe and don't get sick in the schools," he said.

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Chaos erupts at School Board meeting

Comment changes, vaccination policy eventually adopted

» BY JARED FORETEK
jforetek@insidenova.com

A chaotic Prince William County School Board meeting last week ended with the board unanimously approving a vaccine or testing mandate for all division staff as well as significant changes to its citizen comment procedures.

For a time during the Sept. 15 meeting, it was unclear whether the scheduled public session would be held. School security and Prince William County police were enforcing a strict 53-person capacity inside the board meeting room, but dozens more people were outside trying to get in.

After more than an hour of tense stand-offs with those outside and some heated exchanges among the public inside the room, security and police told the assembled public that the room needed to be cleared of everyone, including members of the media, for security purposes.

No fights broke out and no arrests were made, but security staff faced off with people trying to get into the meeting room, and sporadic shouting matches took place inside the meeting room among members of the public.

At 9:30 p.m., more than two hours after the open session was scheduled to start, School Board members brought the remaining 15 people back into the meeting room, gaveled in and sped through their agenda, suspending public comment.

Some at the meeting held signs in opposition to critical race theory, one of the topics that led to demonstrations at board meetings in Loudoun County. Division leaders have said critical race theory isn't being taught in local schools.

ROOM CLEARED FOR SECURITY REASONS

School Board Chair Babur Lateef told InsideNoVa that the decision to clear the building was suggested by the security personnel inside.

"My understanding was the room was cleared because of security concerns," Lateef said. "The school board chose to come out and continue the business we had this meeting because the next meeting is in October."

Among other things, the board had a deadline to approve the sale of a number of bonds for capital improvement projects. The board's next scheduled meeting will be held Oct. 6, and Lateef said after Wednesday's meeting that it hasn't decided on any additional security measures.

At the meeting Sept. 15, the division mandated bag checks and said it would be enforcing the socially-distanced capacity in the meeting room, as well as requiring attendees to wear face masks, which are required in all county school buildings.



Heated discussions erupted in the School Board meeting room on Sept. 15, forcing police and security personnel to clear the room. JARED FORETEK | INSIDENOVA

However, many people came to attend the meeting without a face mask. Standing outside the school system's headquarters, the Kelly Leadership Center, Deputy Police Chief Jarad Phelps said the police department had posted three officers at the meeting to supplement division security staff. He said it was unclear whether that was more police officers than usual.

"Our interest is that no one get hurt at our meetings," Lateef said. "We have parents who are on our School Board, moms and dads who are on our School Board and nobody wanted to see anyone get hurt."

STAFF MUST DISCLOSE VACCINE STATUS

Superintendent LaTanya McDade said that the vaccine mandate means that staff members who decline to be vaccinated would have to take weekly COVID-19 tests at division facilities, free of charge. She said more details would be forthcoming.

Employees will have to disclose their vaccine status by Nov. 1, and new employees will have to do so within 30 days of hire.

"Public health and public education are directly linked," McDade said during the meeting. "We need to follow the science, examine the data and listen to the scientific experts. When it comes to the pandemic, scientists are unequivocal in their message: Getting the vaccine is the best way to protect us and those around us."

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After the building was cleared before



VIDEO ONLINE

Read this story on INSIDENOVA.COM to watch some video of the confrontations before the meeting.

» Adults behaving badly forced the School Board's hand. Kristina Nohe column in Opinion, Page 22.

the meeting, dozens of those remaining milled about at the front entrance of the building. Rebecca Hermon, the grandmother of a Prince William student, was there with her daughter. She said she had concerns about what the students were being taught, and that the public should be able to voice their concerns directly to the School Board.

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Riley O'Casey, an eighth-grade social studies teacher, agreed. "We teach the kids the truth, critical thinking, problem solving, looking at multiple sources."

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"I would ask the public to understand that we have serious business in restarting the school year with in-person learning," he said. "We have truly serious business about making sure we get it right and doing everything the best we can. We have really serious business about making sure our people stay safe and don't get sick in the schools."