

Student Voice Bill of Rights

Prince William County Public Schools' (PWCS) purpose is to serve as trusted partners in education with the community of Prince William County, preparing our students to be critical thinkers, visionaries, and collaborators while implementing inclusive and equitable practices to establish expectations of excellence for our school communities. Promoting and protecting student rights are essential to accomplishing our purpose of creating safe and supportive school communities where students can and are encouraged to flourish.

All students have rights. A right is freedom or protection extended to a person, defining what is owed to them by the systems and people around them.

These rights belong to all students, regardless of their race, color, religion, national origin (including shared ancestry and ethnic characteristics), sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions including lactation, age, marital status, veteran status, disability, genetic information, or any other basis prohibited by law. People's rights belong to them and cannot be threatened, violated, or taken away without due process.

PWCS Student Bill of Rights aims to protect students and inform them of their rights. Informing students of their rights will protect them from possible abuse and violation of their person. Student rights are human rights. To acknowledge the PWCS Student Bill of Rights is to clarify and understand the value of students.

Numerous stakeholder perspectives were represented in the creation of this document, which is intended to grow and evolve alongside changes in policy and the sentiments of both students and society.

The Student Voice Bill of Rights is a document created by PWCS students communicating to the School Board, PWCS administration, and parents, the student body's collective views of their needs and expectations that being met would allow them to achieve academically, to feel safe, and to participate as stakeholders in the school community. The Student Voice Bill of Rights is aspirational and is not intended to create any legally enforceable rights beyond those set forth by federal and state law, PWCS policies and regulations, or other provisions of the Code of Behavior.

Article I Access to High-Quality Education:

All students have the right to a high-quality education that is tailored to their individual needs and prepares them for life beyond high school.

- 1.1 All students have the right to be taught by high-quality, certified educators who respect different learning styles and learn within environments that support their individual learning needs.
 - 1.1.a Students have the right to supplemental academic resources that support their learning beyond the traditional classroom environment.
 - 1.1.a.1 Students have the right to access safe and adequate school transportation, which may include after-school transportation.
 - 1.1.a.2 Students have the right to access supplemental academic supportⁱ during the school day.
 - 1.1.b Students have the right to be informed of and have access to available virtual education opportunitiesⁱⁱ.
- 1.2 All students have the right to high-qualityⁱⁱⁱ in-school counseling resources.
 - 1.2.a Students have the right to be informed of the available counseling resources.
 - 1.2.b Students have the right to college and career support during their entire K-12 career^{iv}.
 - 1.2.c Resources^v should be individualized based on the needs, interests, and readiness level of each student. Students need to be informed about the specific pathways^{vi} they should take to be able to achieve success post-secondary.
- 1.3 All schools will have access to the same high-quality resources regardless of external or internal factors.
 - 1.3.a Students have the right to equal access to academic and specialty programs.
 - 1.3.b Students and families will be informed of all academic and specialty programs with regular communication beginning in elementary school.
 - 1.3.c Students have the right to attend schools with established career pathways, to include extracurriculars.
 - 1.3.d Students, regardless of background, affiliation, or other identifying factors, have the right to pursue advanced classes and specialty programs that will help them in their post-secondary life.
 - 1.3.e If schools are unable to provide specific courses, there should be a centralized program^{vii} that provides additional courses.
 - 1.3.f Students have the right to comprehensive support in language development.

Article II Modern Technology:

All students deserve access to a curriculum that prepares students for a technologically advancing world.

- 2.1 All students have the right to access updated technology to facilitate learning in both school and at home, including WIFI and PWCS issued devices.
- 2.2 All students have the right to access a balanced approach^{viii} to technology in the classroom.
- 2.3 All students have the right to access online material required by their curricula.
- 2.4 Online access will be scaled by age so students can access the materials required by their curricula.

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2.4.a Students can request access to sites to support their learning^{ix}.

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Article III Civic Participation and Decision-Making:

All students have the right to be active in their school environment to develop the skills and understandings necessary to become active citizens.

- 3.1 All students have the right to access, be informed of, and properly understand countywide and school-based initiatives that impact student learning and experiences within the school.
 - 3.1.a Students have the right to transparent information regarding policies that impact student learning.
- 3.2 All students have the right to have their perspective considered on major policy decisions impacting their lives as students^x.
- 3.3 All students have the right to be informed of and have access to civic participation opportunities and volunteer opportunities within their schools.
- 3.4 All students have the right to protest and participate in peaceful activism^{xi}.
- 3.5 All students have the right to information to support and encourage voter registration.
- 3.6 All students have the right to advocate for themselves regarding their education and to make suggestions to their administration to enhance their individual education.
 - 3.6.a Students have communication channels both within and outside of their school buildings to share their perspectives.
 - 3.6.b Students should not fear the consequences for expressing their ideas unless their propositions are or have the potential to be harmful, disruptive, and/or illegal.

Article IV Diversity & Inclusion:

All students deserve a high-quality and equitable learning environment regardless of their race, color, religion, national origin (including shared ancestry and ethnic characteristics), sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions (including lactation), age, marital status, veteran status, disability, genetic information or any other basis prohibited by law.

- 4.1 All students have the right to have a respectful school environment.
 - 4.1.a Students have the right to be informed of the non-discrimination policy.^{xii}
 - 4.1.b Students have the right to a process^{xiii} to challenge and rectify discrepancies in inclusion such as discriminatory practices.
 - 4.1.c Students have the right to accommodations for religious practices as determined by their parents, school administrators, and PWCS policy.
 - 4.1.d Students have the right to access a safe restroom^{xiv} and locker room.
 - 4.1.e Students have the right to request accommodations that satisfies their needs.
 - 4.1.f Students have the right to access athletic uniforms that reasonably align with their personal beliefs and practices if they do not interfere with safety guidelines.
- 4.2 All students have the right to be informed of their ability to participate in student organizations, advanced classes, and extracurricular activities regardless of accommodations, language, etc.
- 4.3 All students have the right to access confidential communication with teachers, counselors, and administrators in a safe environment in compliance with PWCS policy and federal and state laws.

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Article V. Positive School Climate:

All students deserve to feel mentally, physically, socially, and emotionally safe in school.

- 5.1 All students have the right to be informed of available mental health support and resources^{xv}.
 - 5.1a Students will have access to mental health excused absences^{xvi} that are not related to an official mental health diagnosis.
 - 5.1b Students, parents, and families will be made aware of student support services through visible advertising.
 - 5.1c Students will have a clear understanding of what is available, where they can access support, who they can speak to about support, the various methods through which support will be provided, and be informed about why mental health resources are important to their lives as students.
- 5.2 All students have the right to a safe and supportive learning environment, free from discrimination, harassment, and bullying, and to file a complaint^{xvii} if they feel that they are subject to this behavior.

Article VI Free Expression:

All students have the right to express themselves within an educational context if it adheres to their First Amendment rights.

- 6.1 All students in all schools have the right to wear clothing they choose as long as it conforms to the PWCS dress code as outlined in the Code of Behavior and does not pose a safety or health concern.
- 6.2 All students will be able to respectfully talk, celebrate, and learn about any culture without repercussions.

Article VII Due Process:

All schools have systems and structures in place to both model and monitor student behavior. All students have the right to understand existing rules in their school and the opportunity to address unfair treatment.^{xviii}

- 7.1 All students deserve to be physically, emotionally, and mentally safe within their schools.
 - 7.1a Students have the right to report unfair treatment to a trusted adult in the building.
- 7.2 All students have the right to have their perspective considered on school and division codes of behavior^{xix}.
- 7.3 All students have the right to be informed in a meaningful way of school and countywide rules and the disciplinary consequences that will occur if the Code of Behavior is violated.
 - 7.3a Students will have the right to advocate for themselves or be advocated for during any disciplinary decision.
 - 7.3b Students will experience standardized processes with search and seizure^{xx} according to PWCS policy and regulations.

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- ⁱ This could include, but is not limited to, in-person and online tutoring resources, etc.
- ⁱⁱ Virtual education refers to programs such as Virtual Prince William and Virtual Virginia.
- ⁱⁱⁱ High-quality is defined as well-trained and accessible.
- ^{iv} This support should be age appropriate. For example, this could include enhanced career exploration at the elementary level.
- ^v This includes resources provided by professional school counselors, as well as other supplemental resources each school might provide to best support students.
- ^{vi} This might include helping inform students about career options in middle school so they know what specialty programs could support post-secondary choices, pre-requisites for colleges, etc.
- ^{vii} This could include, but is not limited to, a virtual program that ensures access to advanced and/or specialty courses
- ^{viii} Balanced approach determined by teacher based on best practices in the course, however students acknowledge that they would like a balance of both virtual and paper-based learning experiences.
- ^{ix} Students requests will be considered within an official approval process. If sites or resources are deemed inappropriate or unsafe, students will be provided with an explanation as to why their request is denied.
- ^x Some ways for students to share their perspective include sharing their perspective at Student Voice Committee sessions, Principal Advisory Council, speaking with Student Representatives to the School Board and/or Student Senate members, attending school faculty meetings to share their perspective, and/or attending PWCS School Board meetings to share their perspective during Citizen Comment Time.
- ^{xi} Students must comply with any PWCS policy and regulation, including Policy 724, 730, and Regulation 724-1.
- ^{xii} More information regarding PWCS policy and procedures related to discrimination and harassment can be found here: [Discrimination and Harassment](#)
- ^{xiii} Students can report complaints directly to an administrator, use the [online reporting system](#). More information about this process can be viewed here: [Discrimination and Harassment](#)
- ^{xiv} Safe restrooms include, but are not limited to, gender-neutral restrooms.
- ^{xv} Resources related to current mental health support and services can be found here: [PWCS Mental Health Supports](#).
- ^{xvi} Virginia Code §22.1-254 allows for any student who is absent from school due to their mental or behavioral health to be granted an excused absence. PWCS follows these provisions in its guidance for excused absences.
- ^{xvii} Students can report complaints directly to an administrator using the [online reporting system](#). More information about this process can be viewed here: [Discrimination and Harassment](#).
- ^{xviii} Unfair treatment refers to discrimination, bullying, harassment, etc. occurring within the system of due process.
- ^{xix} Students might have the opportunity to share their perspective within school-based Student Voice Committees, within the PWCS Student Senate, or sharing their perspective during Citizen Comment Time.
- ^{xx} Search and seizure is a legal procedure where security searches a person and/or their property for evidence of their potential violation.

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