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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Feb. 1, 2025

AHPS Diligently Assessing CMS after Precautionary Evacuation

COVINGTON — Allegheny Highlands Public Schools is continuing to investigate possible concerns at Covington Middle School that led to a precautionary evacuation of students and staff on Friday, Jan. 31.

AHPS administrators, maintenance staff, local law enforcement, local emergency management, and state emergency management worked throughout the night to thoroughly inspect the building.

CMS was evacuated at approximately 2:20 pm after an odor was detected in a portion of the building. Students and staff were evacuated to the nearby Covington Recreation Center.

At the time of the evacuation, the Covington Fire Department, Covington Rescue Squad, Smurfit WestRock Rescue Squad, the Covington Division of Police, the Covington Emergency Manager, and the Allegheny County Emergency Manager provided immediate expert assistance. Covington Parks and Recreation assisted with necessary facilities at the Covington Recreation Center where AHPS staff supervised students.

Following the evacuation, a variety of checks of building systems were promptly conducted, including the HVAC systems, by both AHPS personnel and staff from a regional provider of HVAC services. The Virginia Department of Health was also contacted for assistance.

“It was amazing to see the efforts of our team at CMS even well late at night. Everyone was so committed, and we are appreciative,” said Kim Halterman and Melinda Snead-Johnson, leaders of AHPS.

As of late Friday night, the source of the odor had not been identified. There were no indications of a natural gas leak. Several checks were completed with the assistance of the Virginia Department of Emergency Management and the Roanoke Valley Regional Hazardous Materials

Team. There were no concerns with the boiler system, and no concerns with sewer backup. Appropriate follow-up investigations will continue through the weekend. AHPS staff will continue to check the building with the assistance of appropriate authorities.

Similarly, it was widely speculated that there was a gas leak at CMS on Thursday, Jan. 16. There was no gas leak. An odor was noticed in a broad area of the Highlands and it originated from an industrial source.

There was a gas leak near but not inside of CMS on Jan. 14 caused by utility work. This information was shared widely through AHPS communications.

Throughout the Jan. 31 event, all available AHPS staff provided assistance at various locations.

“There was a tremendous and effective response from our bus drivers and maintenance staff to support CMS,” shared Halterman and Snead-Johnson. The full central office staff, including all administrative assistants, assisted in answering calls, supporting each AHPS school with dismissal changes, and directing overall operations and communications.”

“We continue to appreciate the cooperation of all AHPS families, staff, and students with a special thanks to CMS.”

Any pertinent updates on the current situation at CMS will be shared via AHPS communications including on the AHPS website.

AHPS serves approximately 2,700 students. The school division was created in July 2022 through the merger of Alleghany County Public Schools, Covington City Public Schools, and Jackson River Technical Center. The school division is jointly funded by Alleghany County and the City of Covington.

AHPS news and events are regularly updated on Facebook at [AHPublicSchools](#) and Instagram at [ahpublicschools](#). Information is also available at www.ahps.k12.va.us.

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