



February 2, 2025

Dear Families and Staff,

We are writing to update you on the ongoing situation that has affected Covington Middle School over the past several days. As we communicated earlier, an odor was detected in the building on Friday, January 31. The Covington Department of Public Works advised that the school be evacuated as a safety precaution. Following the evacuation, local and state emergency management began to conduct a variety of building system checks.

The Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) and the Roanoke Valley Regional Hazardous Materials Team have investigated the air quality concern and have identified the source of difficulty. The team determined that a natural gas-fueled oven in the kitchen was the source of difficulty. The oven was not burning the natural gas efficiently causing carbon monoxide to be released. The ventilation hood system that would normally exhaust any fumes to the outside was not operating properly causing the carbon monoxide to be released and detected in the kitchen and cafeteria of the school. This was not detected sooner despite extensive investigation by local responders, state responders, and a vendor because no food was being cooked over the weekend. We have no indication this was a long-standing defect.

The January 31 incident clarified for us the unfortunate fact that, despite prior internal communications, carbon monoxide detectors had not been installed. Before any school is reopened tomorrow morning, we will have corrected this oversight which should permit us to diagnose these sorts of concerns far sooner in the future.

AHPS is working to get crews onsite to address the issue starting Monday. **As a result, classes at CMS have been canceled for Monday, February 3. All other schools will be open.** We anticipate providing additional updates through official AHPS communication channels as soon as information is available. We are considering a variety of solutions, which may include delivering food to the school.

We do not yet know when the school will reopen. We will update our families and staff by 3:00p.m. on Monday regarding our plans for the following day. We hope that crews can resolve the issue and we can resume classes as soon as possible. In the meantime, AHPS administrators are developing a continuity of learning plan and services with staff. Staff are encouraged to monitor their work email for ongoing updates and directions for reporting to work. Other schools are not affected.

We will continue to provide updates on this situation on the AHPS website, at <https://ahps.k12.va.us>. We encourage you to keep checking the site, as we are continually updating the information and answers to frequently asked questions posted there. We are working as hard as possible to communicate quickly and accurately as we manage this situation.

We know we are a family in our community and help each other in many challenging times. AHPS and the community benefit from your help in sharing any pertinent information directly and promptly with AHPS and we thank you.

As always, the safety and well-being of our students and staff is our top priority. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me by emailing AHPSinfo@ahps.k12.va.us. This is to assist in prioritizing related emails. Thank you for your attention to this important update.

Sincerely,

Kimberly K. Halterman
Superintendent