



February 5, 2025

Dear Families and Staff,

We are writing to provide you with the latest update regarding the situation at Covington Middle School. We are providing you with regular updates to make sure everyone has accurate information.

We have worked tirelessly to address the situation at CMS since it was first brought to our attention on Friday, January 31. The Alleghany Highlands Public Schools Division now plans to implement virtual learning for CMS students so that a thorough assessment of potential safety concerns at the school can continue. No other school is affected.

As you know, the school has been closed since a concern was reported to administrators on January 31. It was later discovered that an oven in the cafeteria kitchen and an exhaust system were not functioning properly, causing carbon monoxide to be released.

While the school has been closed, AHPS administrators have been in discussions about the safety of students and staff while also meeting their instructional needs. As a result, virtual learning will be implemented for a short period, beginning Monday, February 10.

Chromebooks will be distributed to students for online learning, and AHPS instructional leaders are planning for the continuation of learning. More information on Chromebooks will be released soon. AHPS is also making arrangements for CMS students to pick up meals. Information on meals can be found here: [AHPS CMS Meal Pick-Up Schedule](#)

In the meantime, AHPS is bringing in contractors to assess the CMS building. A primary focus will be an environmental study, along with inspections of the mechanical and engineering systems.

The natural gas oven has been removed from the building and a gas line has been capped. Our investigation found that the ventilation hood system that would normally exhaust fumes to the outside was not operating properly, causing carbon monoxide to be released and detected in the kitchen and cafeteria. Even though an extensive investigation occurred at CMS on January 31, this was not detected until the afternoon of Sunday, February 2.

Those responding to the situation included the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), the Covington and Alleghany County emergency managers and their teams, an independent vendor, the gas utility company, and numerous AHPS staff members.

Crews have remained at the school this week to continue with the assessment. VDEM and local first responders have declared CMS free of carbon monoxide and natural gas. However, AHPS wants to take every step possible to ensure the safety of students and staff before they are welcomed back to the building. We will not resume in-person learning until we are 100 percent sure the building is safe.

As a reminder, several resources are available on the AHPS website, at <https://ahps.k12.va.us>. These include the [AHPSinfo@ahps.k12.va.us](mailto:AHPSinfo@ahps.k12.va.us) email account that is being used to assist with related questions and to collect information individuals may wish to share with the division. It is the function of the Virginia Department of Health to assess public health situations, and the agency is in contact with LewisGale Hospital-Alleghany Alleghany and AHPS leaders. Division leadership initiated contact with VDH and is very grateful for the agency's support.

We will continue to provide updates on this situation at <https://ahps.k12.va.us>. Please note that the frequently asked questions (FAQ) page is updated routinely, and we have added information from Johns Hopkins University to support you in locating health information.

Thank you for your continued attention and support. As always, we want our students to receive a quality educational experience in a safe and welcoming learning environment.

Sincerely,

Kimberly K. Halterman  
Superintendent