



Great Vision Great Coverage

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BCPS Announces Hybrid Reopening Plan

By Logan Dubel



Does this place look familiar? Students might return to FHS soon.

Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS) has officially published a comprehensive [hybrid learning plan](#), detailing what the return to schools might look like in the next few months. While parents, students, and staff members recognize the school system for its efforts to bring back in-person learning, many of them wonder whether the plan will ever make it off paper and into reality.

In a whopping 137-page document, the BCPS team outlines the rough details of how they plan to institute hybrid instruction. Students will be divided into three groups. Cohorts A and B will include students attending in-person instruction two days per week, while cohort C will remain entirely virtual. Cohort A will meet on Mondays and Tuesdays, with cohort B on Thursdays and Fridays. Wednesdays will remain an asynchronous virtual day for all three groups.

Whether a student participates in live or virtual instruction is largely dependent on the information they provide to school principals through the survey released via email in early January. Students can switch from one group to the other,

though there may be a waiting period of up to 14 days.

Under this plan, teachers would report to school four days per week. Mr. Sommer, an English teacher, sports coach, and leader of the National Honor Society (NHS), is anxious to return. "I try to be adaptable in all situations, so I think I am in favor of hybrid learning. I will try my best to be effective to teach that way. It will be a big adjustment to go back to the physical school building and classroom, though. I think what is needed--besides structural things at the school--is grace," Sommer explained. "Students, families, teachers, administrators, and politicians need to remember that this adjustment to going back is tricky, and the more grace given to everyone, the more effective we will all be at building back better."

Junior Alaina Hetrick is also excited to get back to school and start fresh. "I am excited to see all my classmates that I don't usually see outside of school," she said. "I'm also ready to learn again in the school atmosphere. It's been hard to find motivation sometimes, and social isolation can really take a toll."

Junior Noveen Awan shares many of Hetrick's concerns about virtual learning. "When you're in a classroom, the environment is completely different. You're surrounded by people who motivate you and want to help you succeed," said Awan. "That isn't always portrayed through a computer screen."

Once students finally go back to school, many of the same practices that have become the new normal in public establishments will also apply. Frequent handwashing, wearing masks, and social distancing are all precautions BCPS intends to take.

The question of what a hybrid class could look like has yet to be answered. Some students may

participate in-person while others stand by on Google meet. On the other hand, students working from home might participate in asynchronous instruction. The official outline does not include any explicit answers to this question but does make clear that virtual meetings and Schoology will continue to play an integral role in daily activities.

While these plans are necessary to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of learning, they are quite ambitious, considering the slow pace at which BCPS has moved towards reopening in any form. However, a new announcement from Governor Larry Hogan might speed up the process.

Governor Hogan: Schools Should Reopen March 1

In a press conference on January 21, Hogan insisted that state officials want hybrid learning enacted in all counties by March 1. He believes that there is "no public health reason" barring students from returning in some capacity and criticized local school boards. Hogan added that he plans to explore other avenues if school systems do not act. He noted that other states and cities have withheld pay from teachers who have refused to return. It remains unclear whether Hogan has this kind of authority.

Following the press conference, people across Maryland reacted with both excitement and frustration. While some were thrilled at the chance to return to normalcy, others were frustrated by Hogan's strong remarks directed at educators. The most prominent dissenter, Maryland State Education Association (MSEA) President Cheryl Bost, called out Hogan for threatening teachers.

"No one wants to open school buildings safely and sustainably sooner than educators. So, let's focus on what we need to do to get there rather

In-School Instruction by Cohort on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday

Monday	Tuesday	Thursday	Friday
Student Cohort A	Student Cohort A	Student Cohort B	Student Cohort B

Virtual Instruction by Cohort on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday

Monday	Tuesday	Thursday	Friday
Student Cohort B	Student Cohort B	Student Cohort A	Student Cohort A
Student Cohort C	Student Cohort C	Student Cohort C	Student Cohort C

BCPS hybrid learning schedule. Image courtesy of BCPS.

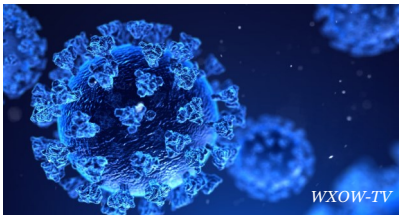
INSIDE THIS ISSUE

BCPS Reopening, cont.	2
SAT/PSAT News	2-3
Student Interest	3
Sports	5

than point fingers and threaten educators who are working harder than ever,” the MSEA posted online.

Another concern is the slow pace of vaccine rollout. Maryland educators, regardless of their age, are now eligible to get vaccinated. Hundreds of thousands of doses have poured into the state and are being used daily, though there is still a long way to go. Several local health departments are low on supplies and waiting for many more doses to arrive. So, even though teachers are all *eligible* to get a vaccine, there are not necessarily enough vaccines *available*.

It was previously assumed that all teachers would be inoculated ahead of their return, but that might not hold true. Dr. Jinlene Chan, Acting Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services, told reporters that schools should reopen regardless of the progress made on vaccine distribution.



BCPS recently announced its own vaccination plan, which prioritizes staff members who have the greatest contact with children. This includes Pre-K and Kindergarten teachers, along with bus drivers and cafeteria workers. It is nearly

guaranteed that *students* without any pre-existing conditions would not receive the vaccine prior to a possible March 1 reopening.



BCPS Data Clarifications

Aside from Governor Hogan, many other factors are at play when deciding whether BCPS can open its doors to students. In compliance with [Maryland Department of Health](#) guidelines, schools previously said they would not reopen in any capacity until the county positivity rate is 5% or lower and the cases per 100k are below 15. Recent numbers show Baltimore County trending in the right direction, but still shy of these marks. While BCPS does hope numbers fall, a spokesperson revealed that students may actually return to schools before key metrics fall in line.

“The metrics need to be much lower than they are now, but not necessarily below the positivity and case rates as designated,” said Charles Herndon of the BCPS Office of Communications. “They are headed in the right direction and much lower currently than they have been.”

The positive trends are having an impact on another key county metric. The BCPS website displays a Covid-19 dashboard and updates it weekly with a reopening score reflective of county data. A score of 12 indicates that it is not time to reopen, while a score of 1 means to continue reopening. The score now sits at 7, down from 9 last week and 12 the week before. Once the number reaches six, BCPS may consider moving forward.

As many might imagine, there is immense pressure on the school system to reopen, especially as other districts move ahead. Carroll County Public Schools reopened in the fall, and their positivity rate currently stands around 7%. On the eastern shore, where the positivity rate is even higher at 11%, Worcester County Public Schools are also open with a hybrid learning plan. Will BCPS follow suit?

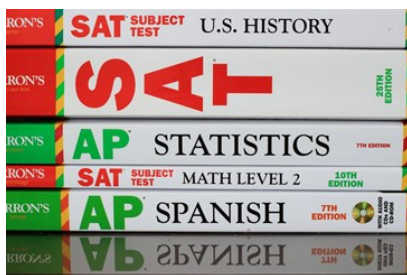
Covid-19 information and data changes daily, but hybrid learning has always been the game plan for schools. At the end of last summer, school officials marked January 29th as a key date and potential turning point. They promised students that no matter the situation, online learning would continue through the first semester, though there could be a possibility of enacting a hybrid learning plan in February. With Governor Hogan’s latest plea to school leaders, the February target might be spot on.

Nonetheless, after nearly a year away from school, it is quite possible that BCPS could kick off hybrid learning very soon. When that happens, Mr. Sommer will be ready to go. “I’m looking forward to coaching sports, laughing with students in person, definitely not wearing a belt or dress pants,” he said. “I don’t think I can fit into them anymore.”

At the end of the day, there is no way of telling when leaders will make the call to reopen, but it seems as though we are can finally see the light at the end of this very dark tunnel.

College Board Discontinues SAT Essay and Subject Tests

By Logan Dubel



Review books for SAT subject tests will soon be a thing of the past. Image courtesy of the Philadelphia Inquirer.

After a year of upheaval in the standardized testing sphere, the College Board made headlines yet again last week, announcing that it will no longer offer the SAT essay and subject tests.

Administrations of the SAT essay, an optional component of the test, will continue through June 2021. Students currently registered for the essay can cancel online without any change fees.

For students hoping to take any of the twenty different subject tests, it is indeed too late. There are no future administrations planned, and those currently registered will receive automatic refunds from the College Board.

“We’re reducing demands on students. The expanded reach of AP and its widespread availability means the subject tests are no longer necessary for students to show what they know,” the College Board said in a [press release](#).

These major announcements come after an admissions season unlike any other, with countless colleges and universities going test-optional due to the pandemic. Many institutions are expected to bring back standardized testing to their application processes next year, though some schools could continue to waive all testing requirements.

The College Board has offered the SAT since 1926 and added the essay more recently in 2005. Only certain schools re-

quired the essay, though undoubtedly, this latest change will force them to alter how they assess applicants’ writing abilities.

“We’re adapting to respond to the changing needs of students and colleges,” the College Board wrote in a statement. “This change simply streamlines the process for students who have other, more relevant opportunities to show they can write an essay as part of the work they’re already doing on their path to college.”

Following a year of college admissions officers across the country learning to evaluate applicants without testing metrics, many students wonder, is this the beginning of the end for the SAT? While some students may hope that answer is yes, the College Board insists that the test is not going away anytime soon.



Class of 2022 Takes Socially Distant PSAT In-Person

By Olivia Turner

As the first semester is coming to a close, many juniors must worry about more than just finals: the PSAT. Now, if that just sounds like a bunch of random letters, do not worry. The PSAT is a standardized test that over 3 million Americans take. It is used to measure their reading and mathematics skills. It comes as a practice test to its big brother, the SAT, a very important test for the college acceptance process, so it is not something to take lightly. For those wondering, the closest date for the SAT is March 13th 2021, something to keep on the horizon.

However, back to the PSAT: the class of 2022 got to take the PSAT free of charge in person at Franklin High School on January 26th, 2021. Students were required to report to the north building between 7 and 7:30 and to remember to bring their own number 2 pencil and a calculator. Just because the test was taken in person does not

mean safety precautions would not take place. Social distancing had to be maintained, all students and staff were required to wear a mask. Here is an important part: if a student refused to wear a mask, they were not allowed to enter the school building. So no one pull a Karen and keep covered. Remember the test is not mandatory so if someone still doesn't feel safe, they could opt out, but Franklin High is doing everything they can.

This can be a nerve-wracking experience especially for parents. Considering it is for most their first time sending their children back into the school building since March of 2020. To get a deeper look into the parent's perspective I interviewed junior Simone Tillman's stepmom. When asked, "Do you trust the school to make sure everyone will follow the proper Covid-19 precautions," she replied, "Yes, in fact that was a hard decision for me to make as a parent.

If anything happened to her, I wouldn't know what to do." When asked, "As a parent do you think online PSAT would be just as effective," she replied, "no, I do not, kids have the ability of cheating on their side at home. I believe in person creates an even playing field for everyone."

To prepare for the big day, junior Noveen Awan said she's studying using Khan Academy's practice tests. That's a great resource with so many practice tests. What's even better is logging in with your College Board account to take practice tests that focus on your individualized strengths and weaknesses. A truly amazing resource. If you are still not sold on the test, those with top scores on the test can receive a \$2500 National Merit scholarship. Results are expected to come out early December of 2021. So hopefully the class of 2022 did well. Don't forget to check College Board in December.

New Year, Same Me

By Christina Okoli

Have you ever made a New Year's Resolution? How long do they stick before you give up? New Year's Resolutions are like creating a fresh start, a clean slate. But then responsibilities, fears, and pressures creep in to stomp out your "New Year, New You" phase.

Some brief history: New Year resolutions date back as far as Babylonia in ancient Rome with the creation of the calendar. Julius Caesar named the first month January, after the god Janus. The two-faced figure was very symbolic to Romans, with one face facing the past year, and the other looking forward to the future coming. Romans would make sacrifices to Janus and make promises for a better year. Thus, the creation of New Year's Resolutions was formed.

To those who did complete their resolution goals for last year: Congratulations, you are one of the less than 8% that actually fulfill them. According to 2018 statistics from Statista.com with 1,024 respondents, 4% said that they actually stuck to the goal, while 16% did 'some' of their resolutions, and 54% didn't make any at all. Why didn't they make resolutions?

Christine L. Carter Ph.D. says that in theory people want to make changes, but deep-down people aren't ready to commit to them. Sometimes outside pressures influence certain changes. Like a person slyly suggesting you lose weight or a person who doesn't like your clothing. "You can see their point, and you aren't entirely opposed to the idea... but you aren't ready to make a New Year's Resolution."

There are also benefits for those who still want to make them. For instance, with 2020 behind, you may ponder or reflect on what you may have gained or lost. Maybe you made a promise to yourself to learn how to skateboard. 365 days have passed, and not once did you attempt a kickflip? Maybe this is the perfect year to do so. It also encourages you to be better. Maybe

you have realized you might have slight anxiety if your phone isn't with you at all times. So maybe you could put your phone down and go hiking or go on trails. A New Year's Resolution is effective if done right. To stay on top of your resolutions, try to make mini-goals to reach the big goal.

The overall message is "Sometimes, on New Year's Eve — or in life — we feel pressured to commit to changes we just aren't ready to make. If you aren't ready to spring into action, there's no harm in that. Please realize that you have more options than either making or doing nothing at all. All you need to do to grow is to move from one stage of change to the next!" - Christine L. Carter Ph.D.

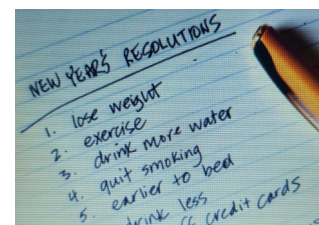


Image from mentalfloss.com

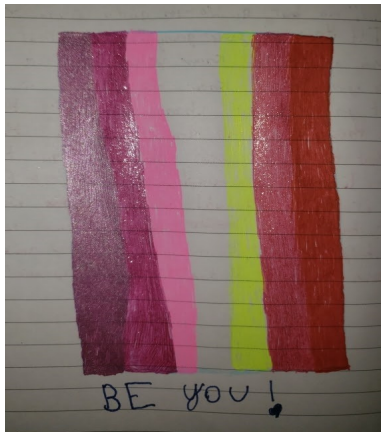


January was named after the ancient Roman god Janus. Image from Britannica.com

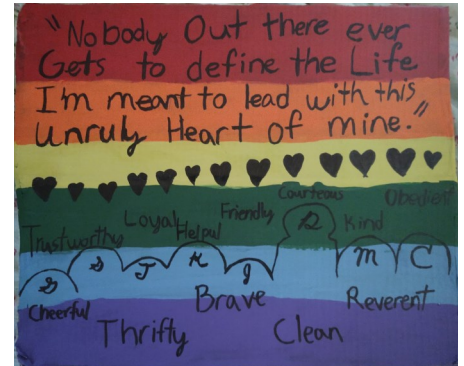
Clubs Find a Way to Meet Virtually during Covid-19

By Shenandoah Wolf

Despite the worldwide pandemic, clubs at Franklin are still meeting. Several different clubs meet on a daily basis and new ones are being formed. Some of the clubs that continue meeting are the Gay Straight



Alliance (GSA), the School Government Association (SGA), and the Gazette. One new club that has been formed is the Choir club. Though being virtual has caused some difficulties, it has provided many new opportunities. The high school GSA has had the wonderful chance to join with the middle school GSA. Several members have expressed pleasure in the chance to make friends of different ages and have such a wide support system. Other clubs are still trying to keep things as normal as possible. The SGA has continued to meet and even hold their seasonal Coffee House events virtually. So far, both went very well. Clearly, the Gazette has also been meeting weekly to create the monthly newspaper. Chorus teacher Ms. Larrimore recently started the choir club in order to let the students who have her classes first



Members of the GSA made the two Identity symbols pictured.

semester keep up with their singing over the second semester. It is refreshing to see the school come together and continue to engage in extracurricular activities even when they can not be in person.

What did you do over winter break?

By Bari Weinstein

BCPS's winter break was December 23rd to January 3rd, but the question among many students, faculty and parents minds were, what went on over break?

Many of you will be happy to hear that not many BCPS families traveled out of state or country this past break.

But what else really went on besides boardgames and reading?

Winter break seemed like the must needed time away from school. It was a time for the stressed students and worried parents to relax, be calm, and have fun, and just enjoy the holidays with friends and family.

From person to person, answers were similar. From "I went to see family," to "me and some friends hung out."

Plenty of BCPS parents said they did believe that winter break was a much needed relaxation period that students and par-

ents needed more than ever due to the circumstances of the 2020 - 2021 school year.

Sophomore Priyanka Saini said, "I saw a few family members and hung out, and really just had fun."

Mrs. Mathis said she gets work done before winter break so she can really take a break from work. "My kids are on break the same time as me. I get all my grades in before break. My kids are fairly good at occupying themselves."

Mrs. Cascio said, "I unplugged my computers. I did not work at all over break. Because I usually make the break as relaxing as I can. I do all grades before the break starts, so than I do not have work over break. But if I can not get all my grading and work for school done, I will do it when we get back to school."

But we are having to consider the factors that this past year brought. Covid-19 made our lives a living nightmare, from not being about to see friends and family as much to just keeping a healthy routine of your everyday life. We all know the pains Covid-19 brought and is still bringing. There definitely seems to be an overriding ruling of we were stuck inside, and it was relaxing yet scary after a while.

BCPS Cancels Winter Sports Season, Fall Sports Set for February

By Lea Glaser

After careful consideration, Baltimore County Public Schools has decided to cancel its winter sports season. Although this doesn't come as much surprise due to the rise in COVID-19 cases in Maryland, many eager high school athletes were desperate to play. A silver lining at the beginning of November was the bit of hope that guided these students when BCPS announced in-person winter sports. For now, that hope is gone as athletes continue to watch out for a new sports update.

A whopping 7.8% COVID-19 positivity rate in Maryland guides the decision carried out by BCPS. Because very few counties in Maryland are allowing public school students to play sports, it is hard for Baltimore County to comprehend and apply possible statistics and news that could help when determining the best decision for BCPS students.

It was heartbreaking to many when BCPS announced on Twitter, "Due to COVID-19 infections, we are cancelling the 2020-2021 winter athletic season." This statement was followed by another quote that stated a supposed re-evaluation and examination for possible alternatives for winter athletics. Cheerleading, basketball, indoor track and field, and wrestling are among the sports included in the winter season.

Yet, Baltimore County is not alone in the cancellation of a sports season. Howard County, on January 13, announced their cancellation of the winter season. Carroll County, our neighbors to the west, began their respective winter season on January 12, set to run through mid-February. Officials of Carroll County Public Schools made their decision while in the midst of surpassing 6,400 confirmed cases. Other counties still waiting for a recent update include Harford, Anne Arundel, and others.

This winter sports cancellation joins the previous fall and spring seasons, as we are approaching almost a year of no sports. But how can this be on the students who have been looking forward to this opportunity to play the sports they love? Gabby Goins, a junior who runs relays and the 300-meter dash on the Indoor Track and Field Team, was looking forward to showing off her skills to potential college coaches this winter season. "I haven't been able to practice as much, so I feel my potential has gone down, and I haven't been able to have any coaches watch me," Goins said. Many athletes across the county, like Gabby, were hopeful to catch the eyes of college coaches in the recruiting process. But now that play has been paused, coaches have less to look at and more to dwell on.

Since COVID-19 and the cancellation of many programs is affecting students' lives in many ways, it can be difficult to move away from all the negatives and find the positives. Many students feel that a silver lining of the situation is more time focused on academics and raising grades. Others are thankful that they can spend more time with loved ones or recover from injuries. For now, these positive aspects are what's guiding many through these tough times.

Fall Sports Set to Begin on February 13

On January 21, the school board officially declared in a 9-1 vote to begin fall sports on February 13. Not much information has been announced yet, although personal transportation is required. This announcement is promising, but these teams can only hope for the most normal season possible.

As we continue in the school year, we can only hope for the best and safest decisions for sports in Baltimore County. We look forward to the first moments back on the field and winning games for FHS. Be sure to look for future updates regarding COVID-19's impact on BCPS Sports.

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