

Ask Mr. Craft



Questions and Answers asked by Callaghan Parents about the upcoming school year.

August 2020

|

Disclaimers

The following slides include the questions that were asked by a parents during a series of Question and Answer sessions held during the week of August 10-14.

As I asserted to the parents who attended each of the sessions, I do not have the answers to all questions. Situations and guidance seem to constantly change, and some of the questions posed brought to light some situations that have not been thought about or considered yet, which was much appreciated.

The answers provided are accurate, to the best of my abilities and knowledge at the time of delivery and publication; however, with decisions being changed and reversed every day by state and local entities, my responses may not reflect the most updated guidance and could become entirely **WRONG** at any time.

Additionally, the responses to questions are answered as they apply to Callaghan School specifically. Although there are many overlapping and similar practices in place at the other schools in the division, each school has its own unique set of communities and circumstances.

What will students who live in an unserviceable area do on Wednesdays?

A great question, and one in which I do not know how to answer at this point. I've taken it to the higher levels, and we are in the process of discussing possible options for a solution.

UPDATE: 08.18.20

Wednesdays will be a full virtual day for all students. Buildings will be closed to students to allow for deep cleaning and disinfecting of the building in preparation for the B group of students on Thursday and Friday. Teachers will be extremely flexible with specific situations, and it may be possible for these students to download Wednesday's lessons prior to leaving on Tuesday and be able to work offline on Wednesday. An additional option would be to access the internet from the school parking lot on Wednesday just long enough to download the day's lessons, and work offline from home.

When will we know what teachers' preferred method of virtual instruction will be?

Your child's teacher will go over her personal plan for the virtual component at your scheduled parent training session (formerly "Open House") in September. Teachers are working to develop a plan that is both age appropriate and promotes student growth. Teachers understand that as instruction continues, these plans made need to be revisited and adjusted. Sessions will either be pre recorded and posted for students to watch at their convenience or teachers will hold live sessions (via Google Meets, Zoom, etc.) for students to tune into at a specific time. However, live sessions will also be recorded and posted later in the day for students to view if the scheduled time of the meeting is not possible for your student.

How will caregivers (grandparents, sitters, etc.) know how to help students access the technology on virtual days?

One session from each teacher will be recorded at the open house days in September. These videos will be posted on the school website. These sessions will include accessing virtual learning and how to utilize the technology. These videos can be shared with caregivers. We will also be working rigorously with students at school to teach them how to access the components they will need on virtual days.

What will the school day at Callaghan be like?

Our goal is to keep the school day as normal as possible while also meeting current health regulations. Due to these health regulations, some things will be changing. The biggest of these changes is that all breakfast will be consumed in classrooms along with grades 2-5 eating lunch in classrooms. JK-1st grades will eat in the cafeteria while practicing social distancing. Dismissal routines will also be altered so that we can limit exposure between bus and car riders. Recess and specials will still occur. Most importantly, the entire school day WILL NOT be live streamed. More details and expectations for parents and students can be found on the school [website](#).

What is the school bus situation?

If your child will ride the bus to school, his/her regular bus will pick up at the regular bus stop on the days he/she attends school on-site. All students and adults will be required to wear a face covering while on the bus. Current safety guidelines for school buses allow one student per seat. Siblings will sit together in the same seat. Students will not be allowed to choose their own seats. Instead, the driver will assign seats to students starting with the students at the first stop in the mornings and fill seats back to front. This will prevent students from having to pass other students as they board the bus. Students will be expected to stay in their bus seats. If you bring your child to school, regular drop off procedures will not change. Students may not enter the building prior to 8:15. Please do not drop your child off before this time.

How will library books work? Will students get to check out books and bring them home?

We are still working on figuring out the best, safest way for students to be able to check out and exchange library books since library books are touched, often by multiple students daily as they peruse the collection searching for the perfect book. While we work on this, students will have access to hundreds (or more) electronic books using one of the many educational software programs that we subscribe to such as American Reading Company, Epic and RazKids.

One thing I plan to invest in this year is beginning a collection of ebooks for the library. Students can check out Ebooks using their school Google account and read the books on their device. Then the books are automatically “returned” at the end of the check out period. No more lost library books!

Are fourth and fifth grade students switching classes?

Yes. This year, the set up is as follows:

- Mrs. Liptrap: 4th and 5th grade math
- Mrs. Browning: 4th and 5th grade reading and 5th grade science
- Mrs. Bray: 4th grade reading and 4th grade Virginia Studies

The number of times that students have to change classes have been minimized with careful consideration. Student schedules will be explained during your child's parent training sessions (formerly "Open House"). Classrooms will be disinfected between classes with no shared materials.

How often will bathrooms be cleaned?

All restrooms and common areas will be disinfected multiple times on a schedule throughout the school day. The entire building will receive a thorough cleaning at the end of each instructional day.

How are teachers going to enforce that virtual work is completed.

Unlike the paper/pencil packets given to elementary students in the Spring and the inconsistent message about whether or not students would be held accountable at-home work, students are expected to complete the virtual assignments provided by their teacher(s). Using the available technology tools, teachers will upload assignments to the Learning Management System (Canvas). Students will be able to access, complete and submit their assignments electronically. Teachers will easily be able to keep track of assignment completion. Students will receive feedback and grades as they work to meet academic benchmarks and goals. Grades JK-2 will continue with standards based grading while grades 3-5 will utilize a 10 point scale.

What is going to happen when a student or employee tests positive for COVID-19?

When a student or employee receives a positive confirmation, we will be notified by the Allegheny Highlands Health Department. After conducting contact tracing, the department will direct the school division on how to proceed. Depending on the extent of personal contact, actions could range from simply notifying the parents of the class affected to quarantining a class or a temporary closure of the building. Again, the health department will direct the division on the course of action we will take in those circumstances. The School Division is currently developing a flowchart that will describe our response in certain COVID related situations.

When will we go back to a 5 day school week?

Alleghany County Public Schools is taking guidance from both the Virginia Department of Health and the Virginia Department of Education to follow all guidelines being set for public schools. When these entities determine that health conditions are such that a 5 day school week for students has returned to a safe level, the division's decision making team will use this information and guidance to develop a new plan for returning to school to full capacity. Parents will still have the option to continue virtual learning if and when we cross this bridge.

If a parent opts for full virtual learning for their child and then conditions allow schools to reopen on a regular schedule before the requested duration period is over, will those students be allowed to return at that time?

Yes! When schools fully reopen and revert back to a normal schedule, all virtual students will be able to return regardless of the duration period indicated on the flexibility request form. On the same token, if schools should fully reopen, and parents wish to continue a virtual learning schedule for their child, that is very much acceptable as well.

If I decide to opt for full virtual learning for my child, how long would that last and what happens when my time commitment is up?

When completing the flexibility form, parents must indicate a duration of time that they plan to have their child participate in full virtual learning. That time frame is completely up to the parent. Common time frames are the first month of school, the first nine week grading period or the first semester. As long as schools are operating on a hybrid A-B schedule, parents agree to maintain virtual learning for the time frame they requested. At the end of the requested duration, the situation is reevaluated. Parents may then opt to send their child back to school on the hybrid A-B schedule or to continue virtual learning from home.

If a class is quarantined or if the school closes or goes to a full virtual situation, what will students who have no internet at home do?

A good question, and one in which I don't have an answer for yet. We'll work on this and figure out a solution and inform the families who live at unserviceable addresses.

Will Canvas (the Learning Management System) be set up the same for all students both virtual and hybrid?

Yes, Canvas will be set up the same for both hybrid students and virtual students. All students will experience the same skills instruction and skills practice while utilizing Canvas.

What happens when hybrid students need to be absent from school? Will they be able to participate and attend school virtually?

Attendance is still a gray area in terms of how schools are going to determine whether a student is present or absent and there are still many unknowns in this category. There will likely be many avenues to consider in making an attendance determination for a student for any school day. When it is necessary for a student to be physically absent from school on a hybrid day, it will absolutely be possible for him/her to participate virtually. Again, setting attendance criteria for students in a hybrid learning situation is going to be a big challenge for the Virginia Department of Education.

Why is the first day of school on a Wednesday which is a virtual day for everybody?

This could have initially been an oversight when planning for school reopening was in its early phases; however, with the first day being virtual with no kids in the building, it will give us the opportunity to troubleshoot and fix any technical issues that will likely arise on the virtual side on a day when no students are in the building. Fixing issues on the first day will be much easier and faster to accomplish in a building without students.

When do students get Chromebooks?

Chromebooks will be distributed on the parent training sessions (formerly “Open-House”) on September 2, 3, or 4. Fees or waivers may be submitted at that time. Parents will be receiving a letter in the next week with a specific date and time to attend for their child. Families with multiple children will have a date and time for each child as teachers will have specific information to deliver during training sessions.

When do I have to decide if I want my student to participate in full virtual?

There is still plenty of time to make a decision. Conditions may change within a single day. A decision should be made by September 4. Participating virtually requires parents to complete a flexibility request form. The form can be accessed at the Callaghan website; it is fillable and submittable electronically.

How will students who receive special education services receive those services if they are participating virtually?

There is not a specific answer to this question as all student needs are different and individualized. Students, regardless of attending school in person or virtually, will receive all of their required services whether fully or modified. The student's case manager will consult with parents and other members of the IEP team, and the team will make specific decisions on the delivery of services.

Can parents still send in snacks for their child's class?

Just like scissors, pencils and crayons will not be shared by students, the same will go for food as well. Parents may still pack individual snacks for their child to enjoy during his/her class's snack time.

When will live instruction that is recorded be uploaded to Canvas for students to view at a later time?

The current plan is for teachers to have recorded sessions available for viewing by the end of school hours on the day it occurs. This is subject to change based on teacher feedback. Any and all changes will be communicated to parents.

How do you plan to close the academic gap caused by school closure and students not finishing the school year?

Teachers are aware and understand that students did not finish the previous school year and that the instruction that was provided in the spring was not conducive to students meeting their maximum growth for that school year. Teachers are planning to spend extensive time assessing students at the beginning of the year so that they can meet each student where they are. An overall goal is to see a year's growth from where the student begins academically this school year. It will take several school years for some students to get back to grade level performance. Teachers are dedicated to achieving this and will take advantage of having the A/B schedule to work in small groups and to provide individualized instruction.

What is virtual learning going to look like? Will it be recorded or live?

Watch the video from the last Q/A session and pay particular attention to the presentation by Mrs. Thompson. She gives a general overview of what virtual learning will look like along with expectations for parents, students and teachers. Each teacher's or grade level team's presentation of virtual instruction will be unique to them and will likely include a combination of both live and prerecorded lessons. Teachers will provide specific details during the parent training sessions on September 2, 3 and 4.

How will general illness symptoms displayed by students (such as allergies, cough, headache, upset stomach) be handled at school?

Kids are going to be kids and every insignificant symptom can be a big deal that warrants a visit to the clinic for a cough drop, a bandaid, an ice pack or a sip of ginger ale. Going forward, there will be fewer student visits to the school nurse for general childhood symptoms that teachers will be able to address in their classrooms. Children who display symptoms associated with COVID-19 will be seen and triaged by the school nurse. Based on the child's symptoms, the nurse will determine the course of action, which may include transfer to the isolation room and calling parents for an immediate pick up with the recommendation to visit the child's medical care provider. Parents must screen their children for symptoms before sending them to school, and if symptoms are present, especially fever, DO NOT send them to school.

What restrictions will students have for traveling, parents work, etc.?

Alleghany County Public Schools has not solely placed restrictions of student or employee travel. Such restrictions will come in the form of advice by the Virginia Department of Health or CDC. If COVID hotspots are identified and a recommended period of self quarantine are issued (as was the case for travelers to Myrtle Beach back in July) for any visitors to that location, ACPS will also issue that recommendation. At this time, to my knowledge, there are no travel restrictions or hotspots that recommend a period of self quarantine.

If a student, class or teacher is quarantined, will teaching and learning continue virtually?

Yes indeed.

What if my child goes to another location in the afternoons and needs to ride a different bus than the bus they ride in the mornings?

In these situations, please notify Mrs. Hartman as soon as possible so that we can make any necessary changes to our transportation lists well in advance. Because of the restricted capacity on buses, we need to prepare for all students who will or even may be riding buses. This is an issue that we haven't had to account for in the past. Last minute changes to transportation may take some time to accomplish and may not be possible if enough time is not afforded to us.

What if my child is both a bus rider and a car rider?

To the best of our ability, we will maintain our traditional practices of handling student transportation needs and working with parents. As soon as possible, call the office and inform Mrs. Hartman of your student's transportation arrangements to and from school if it is a special situation. Transportation is being closely monitored and modified to ensure the safety of all students, and last minute changes may not be easily accommodated which can lead to frustrations that neither of us want.

While we recognize that changes in afternoon transportation are sometimes unavoidable, such changes will require extra planning and precautions. It is important that Mrs. Hartman receive notification of any changes by note at the beginning of the day.

Are masks or face coverings required?

Updated: 08.18.20: The Health Mitigation Plan approved by the School Board on 08.17.20 includes the following requirements for masks and face coverings at school: *Face Masks are required when six feet of social distancing cannot be maintained except when not medically or developmentally feasible.*

Here is what this means:

- A mask or face covering is required to be worn by everyone at all times including:
 - While on the bus
 - When in school hallways transitioning from place to place within the building
 - When in the clinic
 - While out of an assigned seat inside the classroom
 - when six feet of distance between student/student or student/teacher cannot be maintained during school activities
- All visitors to the building are required to wear a face covering at all times.
- Students may remove their mask when seated at their assigned desk or learning area at least six feet away from others.
- Students may remove their masks while eating or participating in outside activities.
- Students who have documented medical or developmental needs in which wearing a mask is not feasible do not have to wear a mask.

Will there be SOL testing this year? What about accreditation?

This is a question that cannot be answered at this time as the the Virginia Department of Education has not determined this yet. Even if SOL testing is not partially or fully implemented this spring, official assessments of some kind will definitely be part of the plan to determine where kids are academically, what concepts need to be taught and remediated, and how much growth students make as a result of instruction. The state will be keeping track in some way whether it is through SOL testing or by other means.

Last week, the State Superintendent determined that Virginia school accreditation status will not be revisited or recalculated until at least after the 2021-2022 school year. This will allow time for academic lines to be redrawn and for students and teachers to close the gaps of lost instruction due to the impact of COVID-19 setbacks.

Update-08.18.20: SOL Testing will resume this spring as usual, so that's what we will plan on, but don't be surprised if this does not change, at least somewhat, as we progress through the year.

What drives the decisions for reopening full time or 100% virtual?

Virginia school divisions have the flexibility to make their own operating decisions in the times of COVID-19. In the case of Alleghany County's decisions, a committee consisting of 30+ school administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, health care providers, school board and community members and leaders (referred to as the Future of Learning and Education Committee..or FLEC) are called together to take a look at a multitude of factors including but not limited to available resources, local health data, community attitudes, governmental requirements, parent and teacher survey results, and guidance from the CDC and the Virginia Department of Health. Based on this information and in-depth discussion, the FLEC team will make recommendations to the school board to consider. Changing course from the current approved plan to either fully reopen schools or moving to fully virtual operations are driven by these factors and require school board approval.

Why are other schools' reopening plans different from ours?

The Governor and the Virginia Department of Education have provided school divisions and boards with flexibility to develop and implement reopening plans that are best suited for the diverse circumstances within each public school division and community. The best plan for Fairfax or Martinsville Schools may not be the best plan for Botetourt or Halifax Counties due to differing circumstances unique to those communities. The same goes for communities as geographically close as Alleghany County and the City of Covington.

Are the parent sessions in September (formerly “Open House”) limited to parents only?

This is a touchy question. Traditionally, parents bring their children to open house to meet their teachers, and I realize this is an important rite of passage for all students every year. I am not going to restrict these sessions to parents only or advise you not to bring your child for this reason. The training sessions, however, are mostly geared for parents though, and I have scheduled the events for small groups in order to limit the number of people in the building at any given time. I will request that you limit your attendance to one parent; whether or not your child attends will be your decision; your child’s attendance is not required. Thank you for your understanding the circumstances that drive these decisions.

JK and Kindergarten students are requested to have a mat or blanket. Is there a better choice? How will these be cleaned?

After some thought on this, I would recommend a small blanket instead of a mat for a couple reasons. One reason is that it is easier to store a blanket away from other students' blankets (in a gallon size baggie or a book bag) than it is a mat. Secondly, blankets can easily be sent home for cleaning at the end of the student's two in-school days and returned the following week.

What are the expectations for completing work and achieving grades?

When students do not complete assignments and activities, it puts a hardship on both the student and the teacher. The student is not given credit for the work required, and the teacher is left with a missing gap of information for her to determine the student's mastery of the skill and the effectiveness of her instruction. Whether participating in the hybrid or full virtual learning environment, attending and participating in an educational program is Virginia law for all school aged students. We all have goals to achieve. Students will be required to participate in lessons and complete and submit all required assignments and activities assigned by teachers. Student work will be assessed, and grades will be determined according to the teacher's discretion and will include accuracy or mastery credit and not just completion. Teachers will work with parents to allow for flexibility in this new teaching/learning environment.

On Canvas, do I need to log on when students come home from A or B days?

Not unless the teacher has assigned homework or extra practice to do in the evenings, after the in-person day.

Will students still receive Title 1 services (remedial instruction in reading and math) ?

Absolutely. As long as we continue to receive Title 1 funding from the federal government, Title 1 services will continue. Actually, I anticipate more flexibility with the amount and quality of services provided with the incorporation of virtual learning.

On Wednesdays, how much time will students be expected to spend on virtual learning?

This will vary based on teacher and grade level. Teachers will keep the expectations reasonable and age appropriate. Live sessions will be recorded and posted if they need to be watched at a later time. Please communicate with teachers and they will be flexible.

On in-person school days, will there be a focus on traditional learning like using hands-on items and handwriting?

Although each teacher's instructional practices will be different from others and the virtual component will definitely be an obvious addition to instructional practices each day, which will be a change to what we consider "traditional", I feel comfortable in saying that in-person instruction will still maintain very traditional styles and strategies. I don't think it will seem that much different from a student's point of view.

Will students keep their Chromebook chargers at home all the time or will they transport them back and forth to school during in-person days?

This is a question that I'm not sure what the answer will be at this time; a good question nonetheless. We will discuss this as a faculty and have a definitive answer for parents during the parent training sessions in September.

How will the virtual component of instruction affect 504 services?

Similar to students who have IEPs, students with 504 plans will receive their required services whether fully or modified for virtual learning. The student's 504 case manager will consult with parents and other members of the 504 team, and the team will make specific decisions on the best ways to provide the student's accommodations.

Will the procedures for students who get picked up by parents in the afternoon change?

Our procedures for car rider dismissal has to change due to COVID-related safety reasons. Parents will no longer enter the building to collect their child, but instead pull into an available parking space and wait for direction from the SRO. After all buses have departed, the SRO will coordinate vehicles to assemble in a parade-style line along the sidewalk where the buses load. Students will be escorted to parents' vehicles by a staff member. Parents will not exit their vehicles. The SRO will then coordinate everyone's departure from the parking lot. It is going to take some time and patience on everybody's part before this procedure runs like clockwork. I know frustrations will be high due to the amount of time this is going to take in the beginning, but I ask for patience and understanding until we get it down. We will go back to the old way as soon as restrictions are eased and it is safe to do so.

One more note on this topic: Please, please please do not arrive early and check your child out from school in order to simply avoid this dismissal process. Getting students checked out at the end of the day while we are managing the many tasks associated with dismissal takes up more time and is distracting. All I want to do is get kids delivered to the right people and places without mistakes.

Will students be given PALs testing?

Yes, we will continue to administer PALs testing to students in grades JK-3. Students in JK-2 will be tested on Phonemic Awareness and Literacy skills at the beginning of the year, mid year and at the end of the year. Third graders will be assessed once at the end of the school year. The PALs center at the University of Virginia will issue an annual testing calendar and provide divisions with testing windows for conducting the assessments. The majority of these assessments are conducted on a one-on-one basis and teachers may engage students in these assessments virtually.

What if I cannot attend my scheduled parent training session (formerly “Open House”) in September?

One of the parent training sessions provided by each teacher will be recorded and uploaded to the school website so that parents who cannot attend their scheduled session can watch the rerun to get the training and information they need to prepare for the upcoming school year.

What will be the protocol the school will follow when kids are sent home sick?

A student who is not feeling well is first screened by the teacher to determine if a visit to the nurse is warranted. If so, the student is triaged by the school nurse. She will determine if a child's symptoms are COVID-like or not. If the student is sent home for general childhood infirmities, no further action will be taken. If the child is sent home due to COVID like symptoms, a form letter will be sent home with the students in the child's class to notify the parents and encouraging them to monitor their child's health.

Will there be meals available for students on the days that they do not attend school in-person?

Yes! Meals will be prepared for students when they do not attend school in-person. A form for this purpose will be provided to parents to complete in the annual stack of beginning of year paperwork. If you intend to collect a meal for your child on his/her virtual days, it is important that this form is completed and returned prior to the first day of school on September 9 so that we can know your intentions and prepare enough meals to distribute on those days. Parents (or a designee) can pick up meals in a grab and go fashion between 9:00 AM and 10:00 AM each morning from the kitchen entrance at the east side of the building. Meals will not be distributed through the office or from the main entrance.

Can my child wear a face shield or other alternative face covering instead of a mask?

Yes! Parents may provide their child with their choice of face covering to be worn at school and on the bus. Keep in mind that creative design choices must be school appropriate.

What if my student falls behind academically? How will this issue be handled?

Don't worry too much about this. It's going to be a given and well understood that all students are going to be academically behind when they come back to school in terms of the current state standards, which I believe will eventually change. We are all going to figure out exactly where we need to pick up from last year and meet all students where they are academically. This will mean that third grade teachers will be second grade teachers for a while...and so forth. We finally have the flexibility to take it slow and really focus on getting it right instead of having to hit the ground running at a full sprint in order to cover the required content in a year's time.

Given the current situation, I believe that the often unrealistic academic bars for students and teachers are going to be reset by the Virginia Department of Education and we'll move to a "kid over content" philosophy of teaching and learning. This will have to be a wait-and-see-what-happens kind of thing. (Disclaimer: This is just my opinion.)

What times will the parent training sessions (formerly “Open House”) be held on September 2-4?

Parents will be receiving a letter in the mail in the next week to 10 days with a specific date and time to attend a training session provided by their child’s teacher. A video of each teacher’s session will be posted on the school website afterward for parents who cannot attend.

For pre-planning purposes:

- Wednesday, September 2: Grades JK, 2 and 4.
- Thursday, September 3: Grades 1, 3 and 5
- Friday, September 4: Kindergarten

What will the general classroom set up look like?

Classrooms will be arranged by individual teachers who will ensure that student individual learning areas are distanced at least six feet apart. Don't be misled by the images you see on the news of the generic classroom with only six desks spaced out over a wide open empty floor. This is not realistic. Each student in a class will have his/her own learning space that is not shared by other students so there will be a desk or space for every student, but since only around 50 percent of the student population will attend school on A or B days, only half of the seats in a classroom will be occupied allowing for adequate distancing.

Will students have to tote their belongings to and from school every day?

More than likely, yes, especially Chromebooks. Each teacher will have her own preferences and expectations for students that she will communicate to you during the parent training sessions. I would expect that items transported back and forth would be minimal, mainly consisting of the Chromebook, as the text books that students have traditionally had to bring home can now be accessed on their device.

Can parents and community members come in and volunteer?

The health safety of the students and staff, the building will remain closed to outside organizations, visitors beyond the main office, and volunteers. We want to keep the germs outside as much as we can. Please understand that this is not my desire, but I understand the need for such safeguards. When things return to normal, this temporary restriction will be lifted.

Please check out the school division's health mitigation plan on the ACPS website for a more in depth description of the safeguards in place during this time. <https://allegghany.k12.va.us>

You have reached the end of this slideshow presentation.

If you have any additional questions between now and the first day of school, please feel free to call and ask or send me an email:

jcraft1@alleghany.k12.va.us

Be on the lookout for a letter in the mail from me with lots of information including your scheduled date and time to attend a parent training session (formerly “Open House”) with your child’s teacher.

You may also access the video link on the Callaghan website to watch a rerun of the parent session held on Thursday, August 14. A link to view the slideshow that was presented by teachers is also posted on the website.