



Great Vision Great coverage

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Widespread Wi-Fi Issues Cast Shadow Over BCPS Reopening

By Logan Dubel



For the past year, students across Baltimore County have looked forward to finally returning to the classroom after facing arguably the worst disruption to education in modern history. Between the uncertain pandemic and a jolting ransomware attack, BCPS teachers and students have dealt with their fair share of challenges. However, when certain groups of students returned to their buildings for in-person instruction after spring break, mass internet outages handed yet another blow to the already strapped and struggling school system.

Internet outages at all 175 BCPS schools began early in the morning on Thursday, April 8, when many cohort B students had just arrived back in the building for the first time in over a year. Schoology and Google Meet services suddenly went down, stranding teachers and students. Without access to these services, not only did teachers lose the ability to provide their lessons, but they also lost all communication with students learning from home.

At Franklin High School, the number of students continuing to remain entirely virtual greatly outnumbered those in the classroom. Cohort C, consisting of all virtual students, makes up 68.68% of the Franklin student population. When combined with students in cohort A, who were also at home during the colossal internet outages, a total of 84.64% of students were not present in the building, illustrating the disastrous and overwhelming reality of the temporary loss of instruction.

Many teachers raced to send messages to their students at home, who likely wondered what happened when they abruptly lost connection to their classes. Other teachers attempted to publish lessons from their phones, used their own data for internet hotspots, and even resorted to going home to meet with their classes if they had no in-person students.

Franklin Sophomore Priyanka Saini says that she has had enough. "Honestly, I'm so done with all the tech issues that the county has brought us. When there's a tech issue at home, you literally feel helpless because oftentimes, the tech hotline is busy and

you're waiting for hours," Saini explained. "It seems like the students and teachers have to go through 50 times more effort to try and have an OK learning experience. It feels like the tech issues keep piling up on top of each other and are left unresolved all the time."

After a few hours of troubleshooting to no avail, BCPS officials released the following statement. "At 8:15 a.m., BCPS exceeded the capacity of its firewall which created an Internet outage. This systemwide outage is impacting the ability for teachers to engage virtual students. The primary cause of this outage is face-to-face student utilization of Google Meet," the announcement reads. "Students within the classroom environment are encouraged to turn off their cameras to relieve the strain on the firewall. Additional information will be forthcoming."

While internet outages surely are not unheard of, many have questioned why county leaders did not foresee such a major problem. One of the district's most vocal critics, The Baltimore County Parent and Student Coalition, which has amassed nearly 4,000 supporters, is beyond frustrated by the county's lack of readiness.

"BCPS should have been prepared to open their schools fully on February 1, 2021, after the second quarter ended. They clearly were not prepared to welcome all the in-person students back ten weeks later," said Amy Adams, an administrator of the coalition. "This lack of preparation deprived BCPS students of synchronous instruction time in a year with already reduced synchronous instruction. BCPS's lack of planning has failed students and teachers since March 16, 2020, and the leadership seems to lack the sense of urgency needed to address these issues and provide an adequate education to its 111,000 students."

However, it seems as though BCPS leaders did have some foresight into the state of their cyberspace. On April 6, just two days prior to the start of the outages, the Board of Education voted against numerous variations of motions aimed at extending reopening plans, notably motions to increase in-person learning to four days per week. Of course, expanding hybrid learning would bring more students back into the building at once, heightening the strain on the BCPS firewall. A source close to the Board of Education has confirmed that concerns surrounding the capabilities of the system's technological infrastructure played a significant role in the decision to hold off further reopening. Weeks later, BCPS reversed course and put forth more extensive plans set to take effect in May.

Following the widespread outages on April 8, intermittent disruptions continued on April 9. At the time, county leaders attributed the issues to the use of Google Meet by in-person students and even took

action by disabling functions of the site, including the use of cameras. Later, Superintendent Darryl Williams thanked educators for their continued dedication and recognized that the county's low bandwidth capacity was also at fault. Spotty disruptions continued across the county through the week of April 19th. Making matters worse, the Schoology learning management system, which is uncontrolled by BCPS, has recently suffered several national outages.

Joshua Muhumuza, Student Member of the Baltimore County Board of Education, understands the problems quite well, both as a student and county insider. "Much of the technology issues have affected teachers' ability to deliver instruction to both hybrid and in-person students simultaneously," Muhumuza said. "I feel for the teachers who are frustrated with the continued issues concerning technology, which might have been exacerbated by the increased use of networks due to the current learning system. It's a major nuisance, but I'm optimistic all issues will soon be remedied."

While it is natural and justifiable to feel outraged over the issues, some teachers are choosing to both recognize the problems and be optimistic. Ms. Amos, a social studies teacher at Franklin, is simply glad to be back in the classroom. "When I have experienced internet outages, my ninth graders are always there waiting for me when I am finally able to log back on. I am very thankful for their patience throughout all of this! As frustrating as it is on our end as teachers, I bet it is even more frustrating for students," Amos said. "This situation has been complicated by online learning, but I am still enjoying the time I get to spend with my students who are in-person. We usually do some more old-fashioned teaching and learning when these internet problems occur."

Permanent solutions are indeed necessary – now. With \$2.05 billion recently allocated to education in the Baltimore County budget by County Executive Johnny Olszewski, funding surely should not be an issue. Nonetheless, the BCPS community is counting on leaders to *permanently* solve these problems, before even more learning is lost.

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From Drumline to Teacher, Mr. Kessell Has Done It All

By Trey Green



Music Teacher Mr. Allen Kessell playing the drums at a local game (first person to the right of the middle)

To many people, Mr. Allen Kessell is another music teacher at Franklin High School. Those who are around him know that he is more than that. He won music teacher of the year and has played in the Ravens football team band for a total of 9 years. Even during Covid he has strived to make sure that he makes classes fun and interesting to keep students sticking to their instruments.

Mr. Kessell initially wanted to be a math teacher when he was in high school. He had switched to a music-focused career after excelling in music. “I had great teachers that motivated me, and I wanted to give back to the world.”

“When I have students come up and tell me that this is their favorite part of their day,” Mr. Kessell said, “or students that opt out of a shortened day just for my class are moments that I live for.” Mr. Kessell also added that he enjoyed seeing the Franklin High Orchestra and Band succeed at their assessments in the early part of 2020. Moments like those are what continues to motivate Mr. Kessell to teach music.

Mr. Kessell’s father had an influence on the career path that he chose as well. His father played in many bands and was a drummer. He had almost gotten a performance degree from Iowa, Mr. Kessell said. He remembers, as a kid, listening to his father practice with his band and listening to records on Sundays.

Mr. Kessell fell in love with percussion and had joined the Ravens’ drum line in his junior year of high school when it was open to all ages. He played for 2 years in high school, 1 in college. He had taken a break and joined back in 2015 and has continued to play with the drum line to this day. What motivated him to come back was the drive to do something for himself. He felt he was missing out on playing opportunities because he was teaching for most of his time.

Mr. Kessell said he always wanted to be a part of the drumline since the Ravens had come to town. When he found out they had a band, he called the head of the group, auditioned, and was quickly placed into the drum line for the next football game. Mr. Kessell just finished his sixth consecutive season with them in 2020.

2020 had also brought with it a bunch of unique challenges that teachers and musicians in large groups had to face. Teaching became virtual, and large bands like the Raven’s drum line could not meet up and practice like they once did. Mr. Kessell, like many others had to change his teaching style to keep things interesting for the students he taught.

“This is a very difficult discipline to teach online,” Mr. Kessell said, “Especially since we are used to working as a team. This pandemic has really taught us all to think outside the box.” Mr. Kessell talked about his trials and errors with trying different activities to keep his virtual classes engaged. By the time the second semester rolled around, he had found his stride and believes that the classes this semester are being taught better than the first semester. Hybrid learning brought with it new challenges as some instruments that required wind could not be played in school because of the COVID guidelines set by the school.

The same could be said about the Raven’s drum line where wind instruments were prohibited by the NFL, so that meant that the percussion group was the only one to participate in the 2020 football season. “Home games looked a lot different. It’s a lot different when you’re used to playing with a full 150-person band,” Mr. Kessell said. “It was fun! I think we got to let loose a little more, and it was unique being in there with no fans.” Mr. Kessell had a more positive experience with the drumline than teaching when the pandemic affected both.



All of the ravens drumline in a picture together (Mr. Kessell pictured in the back) Photo via drumeo.com

A Day in the Life of Sophomore Laila Roodbari

By Taleya Younger

Hard work and motivation are the base of success in our modern society. This does not exclude the valiant and successful efforts of sophomore Laila Roodbari. Daily, she works in high heaven to pass classes and help her family, despite being only 16 and the youngest in her family. She works thoroughly and diligently through the troubles of life, school, and Covid-19 with straight A's.

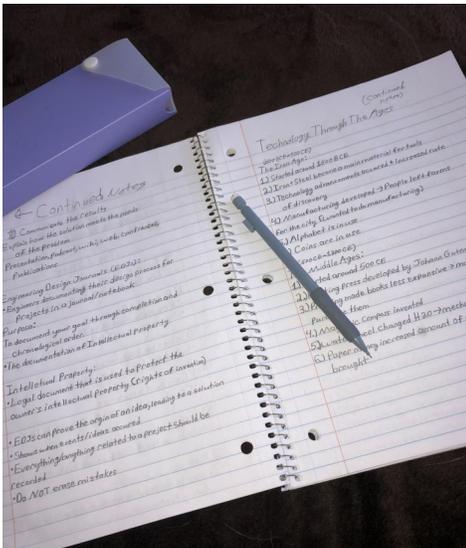


Photo of part of Laila's usual work, just a small peek.

In the current time in this sickness-ravaged world, we still see many working hard to continue their life as normally as possible. Laila also follows this routine with her day, thoughts, and family.

School & Daily Life

Waking up is the slowest part of any day, especially since some don't always get breakfast. This is relatable for Laila as she's already off to maintaining her straight A's

in school. That's the truth a student's teachers consider hardworking. "Definitely" said Laila after explaining her usual work load and even offering up some of the topics she's learning about in classes like Earth Systems and Engineering.

Stress is just a natural part of school and life for any student with or without straight A's. "Sometimes it's a fair amount of stress, or sometimes it's a lot of stress," Laila said. She elaborates how the flow of assignments she gets determines the stress, as the work load is the source of it rather than the classes. She does feel like some classes move rather fast.

Home Living

After school, this star teen like to relax, like most students. Laila is usually stuck with a lot of homework, and she wants to keep her A's. "I do it to keep my grades up," Laila said.

She plays video games to relieve stress and hangs out with her friends. "Oh, and chores," Laila said as she comments on how old her parents are and the need for the extra help around the house.

Sometimes parents give a lot of work of their own. Most kids age 16 like Laila have many chores that are due to be done.

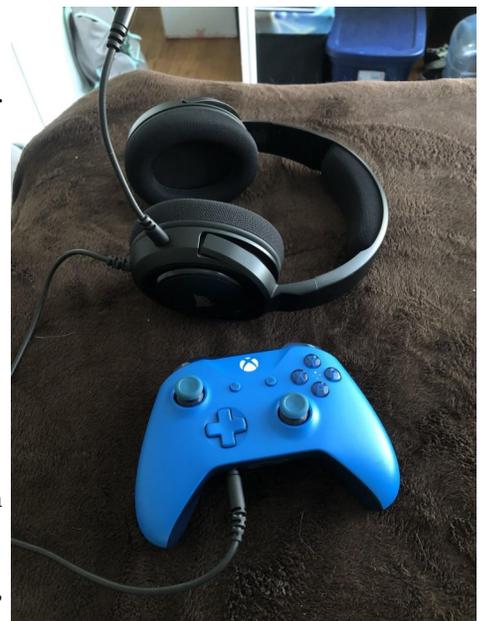
"Well, I mean I wouldn't say it's a lot like it's overwhelming." She proceeds to explain some of her daily duties like washing dishes, mopping the floors, and cleaning the bathroom. She agrees that it's fair. "I mean, if I had a kid, I'd want them to help as well."

Future Arc

In addition to school, home, Covid-19, and everything else, she still thinks about her-

self and her future. She is currently thinking about having to learn how to drive. "In a way, I am excited. I'll feel more free, but I am also scared to drive." She goes on to explain how it might be hard for her to learn everything, taking into consideration the amount of driving rules every teen needs to learn.

Even in her daily life, she preps for future knowledge and experiences. "Yeah I do find myself thinking about different careers I want to do and researching what would suit me the best." She goes on to elaborate on her future job choice and how she wants something in a medical field.



Laila's Xbox Controller and Headset she uses to play Video Games like, Left 4 Dead.

Inspiration from a High School English Teacher

By Jaden Dutton

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.” English teacher Ms. Campbell loves that powerful quote from Nelson Mandela, who spent 27 years in prison for fighting for the rights of his people, including education. According to Ms. Campbell, “your knowledge is something that no one can take from you, so you should value it and get as much of it as possible. The University of Maryland graduate has been teaching for twenty-six years. She has taught fifteen years in middle school and eleven years in high school. She currently teaches English to ninth and eleventh graders.

During virtual learning, Ms. Campbell’s schedule was no different than it was while

she was in school. The freedom to have bathroom breaks was a plus for her. When school opened again, Ms. Campbell had to readjust to getting up earlier, getting gas for the car, and packing her lunch.

Many may be surprised that Ms. Campbell prepares for her day by driving to work listening to rap music. When she arrives to school, she has a planning period. If she does not have to use her planning period to cover for another teacher, Ms. Campbell returns calls to parents and talks with other teachers about the pace of student’s learning. Ms. Campbell checks the lesson folder that she puts on Schoology. She always tries to make sure there are no errors in the lesson plan and that each lesson is ar-

ranged so students can understand and complete each task she assigns.

“There never seems to be enough time,” Ms. Campbell said is her biggest challenge during the day. Between lesson planning, grading papers, and teaching, there is not enough time in the day to get all of it done. She handles this challenge by making a list of what she wants to do everyday and checking it off as she does them. Having her students complete all their assignments would make her day successful. Twenty years from now, she would like for her students to say that they learned a lot and that she was a teacher that held them accountable. Ms. Campbell is changing lives one student at a time.

Shalini Patel: Lessons from Leadership

By Bari Weinstein

Senior Shalini Patel, Environmental Club president and environmental activist, starts club meetings off with a great attitude and enthusiasm, which then sets the tone for the rest of the meeting. Shalini brings a lot of encouragement and can help others with the activities if they do not understand. Everyone loves working with her, and she brings so much positive energy to the club. Shalini is always polite and professional in meetings. “Whenever anyone suggests an idea, she never knocks it down. I think her positive vibes also come from how far relaxed she seems in the meetings,” senior Trey Green said.

Shalini believes in helping others to understand the beauty of nature. She uses her voice to help others get involved in cleaning up the Earth. Shalini’s initial goal to join the club was to help warn others about climate change and take care of animals. She is passionate about the environment because she understands that what humans do causes harm to the Earth. She has

learned different types of leadership skills through her time in the club, like collaborating and communicating. She believes she has a sense of urgency that she brings to the club.

When Shalini gets stressed, she gets on top of her work to stay organized before getting overwhelmed. Her favorite quote is from Steve Jobs: “If you are working on nothing that you care about, you don’t have to be pushed. The vision pulls you.” “This quote inspires me to put in my best effort.” Shalini loves collaborating and working with the other members of the club. She says “it’s fun to get to do all the activities and events together.” In the future, she wants to continue her education and career with the environment by getting more information to the public.

Shalini has great hopes for the future. She believes she can put her mind to it and accomplish anything. The club appreciates her hard work and is excited to see what she will do.



Shalini leads environmental club meetings from home.

A Day in the Life of a Hybrid Learner

By Howard Yates

Senior Jason Epps is a student that has recently returned to our school for hybrid learning. Starting school at 7:40 a.m., Jason's first class is piano. "I like my first class. It gave me a better understanding of how to play." Jason gets to leave early after this class. "I only had two classes. My second class was African American history,

but I don't have it anymore because it was an elective. I did like my second class. I learned about our history as black people."

Jason then goes back to his house. "After school, I take a nap. Well, I eat lunch first." I ask him about what he thinks about our

school. "I think going to school is better than sitting at a computer. I decided to come back for hybrid learning because I missed being in school, and it's senior year. I love FHS because they have amazing teachers that will help you when you need it."

A Day in the Life with Ms. Amos

By Lea Glaser

As virtual learning kicked off, many wonder what has changed or what is the same about a teacher's typical day. U. S. History and U.S. Government & Politics teacher Ms. Amos shares a typical day in her life.



Social Studies teacher Ms. Amos visiting a witness tree in Gettysburg.
Image from Ms. Amos

Her day kicks off at 6 AM. Once up and out of bed, she gets some breakfast. "I always make oatmeal with banana for breakfast," Ms. Amos said. "And either a cup of coffee or a stop at Dunkin', if I have time." Before going to school, she sometimes picks out her clothes, but those are usually chosen the night before.

At 6:45, she hits the road, trying to get to school early. Once she arrives, she doesn't usually have much to prepare in the classroom due to hybrid learning. Then at 7:40, her first period of U.S. Government & Politics begins. Last semester, she taught all junior U.S. History classes. This semester, she is teaching freshman U.S. Government & Politics classes.

At 11:30, she has lunch. "I eat on B lunch, which at first I was dreading, because I thought it would be really difficult to teach third period in two pieces, but it's actually great," Amos said. "It makes the day go by so fast!" A typical lunch for Ms. Amos consists of a tuna salad and hard-boiled eggs.

At 12:00, she begins teaching her third period. In between her third and fourth periods, she likes to have some snacks which usually consist of Greek yogurt or rice cakes. Then at 12:45, she begins her last period of the school day.

At 2:10, her school day is complete. "I clean my whole classroom and get re-set for the next day. I don't like leaving my classroom being messy," she said. Once she is done cleaning, she gets changed into more athletic attire for sports practice. Ms. Amos coached the Varsity Field Hockey team this spring, leading them to a winning record.

At 5, practice is over, and she heads home. "I leave at 5 if I have field hockey practice or Mock Trial, or 3 if I don't have anything, but that is rare," Ms. Amos said. Aside from teaching, she also led Franklin's stellar Mock Trial team this season.

Once she gets home, she cleans up and prepares some food. At 7, she watches Jeopardy, testing her trivia knowledge. She works for about an hour, grading assignments, preparing lessons, and more. Some other activities she enjoys are watching Netflix, going for walks, and spending time with her newly-named cats, Little Joe and Hoss.

At 10, after a long day, she heads to bed. "I usually go to bed at 10, getting at least eight hours of sleep is really important to me," she said.



Ms. Amos recently named her tuxedo cat Hoss and her tabby, Little Joe.
Images from Ms. Amos

A Day in the Life of a Student- Athlete

By Jess Holzman

Junior Loryn Jordon, who plays varsity field hockey and lacrosse, has committed to Ohio State University to further her academic and athletic career to play D1 field hockey. She plans to major in sports psychology. Loryn is also a student and in the Franklin biomedical program.

One could imagine how busy the life of a student-athlete is, especially one committed to play a D1 sport: all the training, practices, games, schoolwork, homework, and being able to make time for themselves, friends, and family.



Loryn taking the ball up the court in her club field hockey game with a defender trying to catch up behind her.

Loryn describes a normal day in her life. “I usually wake up, brush my teeth, think about what I have to do for the day. Some-days I start right out and go to my workout which is usually lift and conditioning, then I go to school, finish up my classes, and get a little bit of free time to eat and maybe

chill for a little bit. Then I go to practice. After practice, I come home and eat something, and then I might have another workout or another practice.” This very busy day would be a challenge for anyone to stay motivated. A teenager finds it is an even bigger challenge to manage time between sports and school.

“I make sure I take time to care for myself and just keep up with myself. I like to pray, talk to my friends, spend time with my family, and just make sure I’m my best self to be able to perform well at the things that I love,” Loryn said. This busy schedule takes motivation and hard work.

Loryn trains 2-3 times a day for field hockey, whether it's lift and conditioning, running, or practice. This is normal for any student-athlete preparing to play a D1 sport in college. Her least favorite part of the day is “having to do nothing or school,” a comment with which many teens can relate.

The pressure to succeed may influence some athletes to stick to a specific diet to stay in shape. Loryn said, “I don't have



Loryn making a strong pass with two defenders on her in a game against Towson this past field hockey season.

specific diet, but before I play, I make sure I don't have anything too sugary. The night before I try to eat carbs so that I have energy throughout the day.” While some people may be struggling with trying to follow a restrictive diet, it is not always necessary.

Loryn said her motivation and inspiration is her favorite athlete, the legend Kobe Bryant. She likes to watch him and all the other great athletes play and “see where I can end up if I continue.”

Lastly, Loryn shared advice for other student-athletes trying to go D1 for college. “Follow your dreams and don't think that there's anything you can't do. Reach out to the people you have connections with and just use everything around you to your advantage to get where you want to be.”

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