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Key Dates

June

- 2.....PRIDE Diploma Ceremony, 1 p.m.
- 4.....Last day of school
- 5.....Teacher workshop day
- 5.....BHS/PLC graduation, 7 p.m.
- 8.....School board wksp., 4:30 p.m.
- 9.....ECFE Music in the Park, 10:30 a.m.
- 9.....ABE Graduation, 7 p.m.
- 16.....ECFE Music in the Park, 10:30 a.m.
- 19.....Juneteenth, no summer programs or KidKare
- 22.....School board mtg., 7 p.m.



Retiring staff members provided 713 total years of service to the BHM community. See Page 2.



Evelyn Lubben and Niklas Raisanen enjoy a Unified Music lesson during the unique Unified Symposium in April.

'Life changing'

Buffalo High School organizes and hosts first Unified Symposium in Minnesota

When it comes to paving the way for students with and without disabilities to learn together in a mutually beneficial manner, Buffalo High School staff members have stood out as leaders in their individual fields over the past few years.

This spring, they combined

their efforts to host the first Unified Symposium in Minnesota, and perhaps the nation.

The Friday, April 10, event drew 38 educators from around the state. Several

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Anderson to retire after 50 years

For the past half century, Nancy Anderson has nurtured some of the youngest learners in the Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose area.

This summer, she will retire after 43 years at Hanover Elementary, 50 years with BHM Schools overall, and 51 total years of teaching.

"I think the only remarkable thing about my career is the longevity," she said. "I don't think there's

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Leaders in student voice

BHM is one of just three school districts nationwide chosen for a special film project about encouraging student voice in the learning process.

Over two days on April 13-14, a film crew and members of the National Association of Secondary School

Principals visited Northwinds Elementary School, Buffalo Community Middle School and Buffalo High School to interview staff members and students about how the district helps students

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Braxton Teschendorf shares his perspective during the film project.

BHM retirees provided 713 years of service

A total of 27 retirees were recognized by Superintendent Scott Thielman and school board members for their dedication to BHM students and their years of service at a retirement luncheon on May 1.

Collectively, the group served the BHM community in various ways for 713 years. Each one of these employees has played a valuable role in shaping the lives of students, both directly and indirectly, and has allowed students to **dream, believe and achieve.**

BHM thanks these individuals for the impact they have made on students, staff and the broader community.



Retiring BHM staff members at a recognition luncheon included, front row from left: Jodi Guckenberger, Teresa Borgstrom, Patti Fisher, Laura Sandhoefner, Jasmine Hopkins, Pam Miller and Tammy Otten. Standing, from left, are David Schrupp, Dan Manz, Shannon Bye, Michelle Lunacek, Jill Mills, Katie Deneen Kiefer, Cindy Johnson, Cheri Knop, Anita Underberg, Nancy Anderson, Michelle Wurm and Natalie Johnson. Not pictured are CiAnn Jackson, Marie Jacobs, Cheryl Kienholz, Jen Nichols, Rebecca Prom, Kim Sonju-Zrust and Vicki White.

Nancy Anderson.....50 Years
Hanover Elementary School
1st and 2nd Grade Looping Teacher

Teresa Borgstrom.....22 Years
Buffalo Community Middle School
Special Education Teacher

Shannon Bye.....32.5 Years
Buffalo Community Middle School
Special Education Teacher

Katie Deneen Kiefer.....22 Years
Northwinds Elementary School
Kindergarten Teacher

Patti Fisher.....31 Years
Buffalo High School
Social Worker

Jodi Guckenberger.....31 Years
Discovery Elementary School
Early Childhood Special Education Teacher

Jasmine Hopkins.....19.5 Years
Northwinds Elementary School
KidKare Supervisor

CiAnn Jackson29 Years
Buffalo High School
Art Teacher

Marie Jacobs.....34 Years
Buffalo Community Middle School
Senior Technician

Natalie Johnson.....24 Years
Buffalo Community Middle School
Math Teacher

Cindy Johnson.....12.5 Years
Hanover Elementary School
Education Support Professional

Cheryl Kienholz.....21 Years
Parkside Elementary School
KidKare Supervisor

Cheri Knop.....21 Years
Discovery Elementary School
Education Support Professional

Michelle Lunacek.....12 Years
Hanover Elementary School
Speech Language Pathologist

Dan Manz.....32 Years
Parkside Elementary School
Head Engineer

Pam Miller.....37 Years
Districtwide
Director of Teaching and Learning

Jill Mills.....38 Years
Northwinds Elementary School
Second-Grade Teacher

Jen Nichols.....23.5 Years
Buffalo Community Middle School
PE Teacher

Tammy Otten.....10 Years
Buffalo High School
Education Support Professional

Rebecca Prom.....28 Years
Tatanka Elementary STEM School
Fourth-Grade Teacher

Mary Radtke.....27.5 Years
Early Childhood Special Education
Education Support Professional

Laura Sandhoefner.....25 Years
Buffalo Community Middle School
Education Support Professional

David Schrupp.....10 Years
Northwinds Elementary School
Custodian

Kim Sonju-Zrust.....28 Years
Northwinds Elementary School
21st Century Learners Teacher

Anita Underberg.....39 Years
Districtwide
Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent

Vicki White.....21.5 Years
Buffalo High School
Education Support Professional

Michelle Wurm.....32 Years
Parkside Elementary School
Second-Grade Teacher

Thank you to our dedicated staff members!

Mueller is new Director of Teaching and Learning

BHM Schools is pleased to announce that Dr. Cynthia Mueller will become the district's new Director of Teaching and Learning on July 1.

Dr. Mueller, who has a history with BHM Schools and a background in administrative and curricular leadership, will step in for Pam Miller, who is retiring after 22 years in the role.

At present, Dr. Mueller serves as a Principal on Special Assignment and District Literacy Specialist for White Bear Lake Area Schools. She was also an elementary school principal for White Bear Lake Area Schools from 2017-23.

She began her career as a kindergarten teacher in Pocatello, Idaho, in 2003, then came to Buffalo as an elementary teacher in 2005. From 2011-15 she served as a STEM Curriculum Integration Specialist for BHM Schools, and she became a Program for Professional Development Coach for BHM Schools in 2015 before taking the principal position in White Bear Lake two years later.

While evaluating candidates, the hiring committee noted that Dr. Mueller had a strong desire to return to BHM



Dr. Cynthia Mueller

Schools and build on the leadership experience she gained both locally and in White Bear Lake. Particularly valuable attributes include her prior work in literacy and in coaching others to improve their instructional practice. The committee also appreciated the importance Dr. Mueller places on relationships and collaboration, the way she creates conditions for others to succeed, and her commitment to the growth and development of students and staff alike.

Dr. Mueller earned her undergraduate degree in elementary education from the College of St. Benedict in 2003. She added a master's in literacy education in 2012, her administrator's license in 2016, and her Doctor of Education in Leadership in 2025, all from St. Mary's University.

Members of the hiring committee noted that she is "authentic, approachable and collaborative," and are excited to welcome Dr. Mueller back to BHM Schools this summer.

"Returning to Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools feels like coming home," said Mueller. "BHM truly was 'the place to dream, believe, and achieve' in my own career journey, and the support, opportunities, and relationships I experienced here helped shape me as both an educator and leader. I have always admired the district's strong commitment to students, collaboration, and continuous improvement, and I am excited to return in a role where I can partner with staff, students, and families to continue strengthening teaching and learning so all students can dream, believe, and achieve."

Graduation rate continues upward trend

Last year's May-June "Insider" featured a cover article titled "Grad Rate Rising." It explained how a trifecta of new interventions at Buffalo High School had improved academic performance and graduation rates over the past few years.

In April, the Minnesota Department of Education released official graduation rates for last year's Class of 2025, and that trend continued in a big way.

Thanks to the implementation of programs

Wright County	
Delano	98.93%
STMA	97.34%
BHM	96.70%
Maple Lake	96.67%
HLWW	95.05%
Annandale	92.57%
Rockford	90.91%
Monticello	90.82%
Dassel-Cokato	89.73%
State of MN	84.94%

like Extended Day, Learning Recovery and Connections Classes, the four-year

Lake Conference	
STMA	97.34%
Minnetonka	97.24%
Wayzata	97.2%
BHM	96.70%
Edina	95.70%
Maple Grove	94.18%
Eden Prairie	90.92%
Hopkins	88.05%
State of MN	84.94%

graduation rate at Buffalo High School jumped to 96.7%, more than three full points higher than

the previous year's rate of 93.6%, which in itself was the school's best year since the pandemic.

That grad rate ranks Buffalo High School third out of nine high schools in Wright County, and fourth in the eight-school Lake Conference.

Buffalo's traditional four-year graduation rate is 11.7% higher than the Minnesota average.

The Class of 2026's graduation rate will be released next spring.

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grow by encouraging their participation in and ownership of their learning. Opportunities at the

elementary, middle and high school were highlighted, including features like choice in elementary classrooms, the WEB program in the middle school, AVID at the middle school and high school, B1 Leaders at BHS, Unified Week, and much

more.

The interviews and visuals will be combined with content from two other school districts in Maryland and Illinois, and used for teacher training around the United States.

"Buffalo-Hanover-

Montrose has been identified as a strong example of this work," said a statement from NASSP. "These stories will serve as real-world models that other districts can learn from and adapt within their own communities."



Parker Carlson and Audyn Molesky, who are the 2026 Hall of Fame inductees for BHS. The award recognizes seniors for high academic performance, integrity, leadership, and making a positive impact on their school.



BHS seniors Lauren Berg and Hans Pederson, who received the American Legion Citizenship Award at the BHS Academic Excellence Awards Program on May 11.



Buffalo High School Assistant Principal Stephanie Ward (second from right), who was named High School Assistant Principal of the Year for the Central Division of the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals on April 24. The Central Division consists of 18 counties, and there are seven total divisions in Minnesota. Each division winner is now a candidate to receive state-wide Principal of the Year honors.



Students from Buffalo Community Middle School, who participated in honor bands on Saturday, May 9, at Zimmerman Middle School. The honor bands were hosted by the Central Minnesota Band Directors Association and were specifically designed for students in their first or second year of playing. Students in the First Year Honor Band (above left) were, front from left: Ryan Chen, Jameson Otto and Philip Rusch-Wichtendahl. In the second row, from left, are Jaxson Carroll, Lauren Smith, Remy Bebbler and Skyler Theis. Second Year Honor Band members (above right) were, from left, Macen Moe, Sawyer Schlak, Paige Hiestand and Dorothy Karson.



BCMS Special Education teacher Joey Hartfiel, far left, who has been chosen by FOX 9 as one of only 10 Top Teachers out of hundreds of nominations submitted from the station's viewing area.



Tatanka Elementary STEM school teacher Kristine Johnson, who has been named a KS95 Teacher of the Week.



Buffalo High School seniors Amelia Pence, Samantha Greig, Lynne Franzen and Mitchell Nosbush, who were selected by staff to attend the Students of Excellence Award Banquet in St. Cloud on Wednesday, April 22. Students were selected based on exemplary academic achievement, leadership skills and/or school/community involvement.



Eighth-grader Stella Schlak, who has been chosen as a student emcee for the national AVID Summer Institute General Session in Kansas City, Missouri, this July. Watch for a feature story on Schlak at bhmschools.org.



Members of the BHS Repertory Orchestra, who qualified for and performed at the Middle Level Festival Honors Concert, a state showcase at Orchestra Hall, in on March 31. To become one of nine ensembles featured at the showcase, the group earned two 'Superior with Distinction' ratings in a competition round that included 25 orchestras from around the state. This is the third straight year the Repertory Orchestra has made it to Orchestra Hall.



BCMS students who qualified for the State History Day competition: Remy Bebbber, Audrey Schaaf, Violet Schuette, Bella Young, Gigi Butler, India Keranen, Annika Niemela, Oscar North, Matthew Rinderknecht, Elsie Johanson, Dorothy Karson, Henry Winger, Preston Young, Dallin Jerman and Karston Perkins.



Audyn Molesky, a BHS senior who served as the Student Council Representative for the ISD 877 Board of Education for 2025-26.



Eighteen current and former Quest students who participated in the St. Cloud State Mathematics Contest in April. Above left, eighth-grade students who earned an award for finishing in the top 5-10% of their grade level included, from left, Finn Ryden, Will Umhoefer, Dallin Jerman and Karston Perkins. As a team, BHM eighth-graders took fifth place out of 26 schools. All BHM participants (above right) included Malachi Smude, Henry Evans, LilyAnn Fix, Katherine Gustafson, Jackson Holler, Dallin Jerman, Elsie Johanson, Davis Kelm, Karston Perkins, Finn Ryden, Lake Thiel, William Umhoefer, Izabella Young, Oliver Maenner, Connor Smude, Levi Summers, Nicolas Kuerten and Nolan Rabon. In all, the contest involved 1,001 students from 98 schools.

Symposium

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came from Anoka-Hennepin, the state's largest district, while others hailed from Cloquet, Morris, Mankato and other communities near and far.

Visitors spent the day observing partners (students without disabilities) and teammates (students with disabilities) engage in three Unified classes:

Home Living, Music and Physical Education. Visiting educators also interacted with a student panel, asked how-to questions of a staff panel, and quizzed BHS staff members on logistics.

Karley Sykora, from the Paul Bunyan Education Cooperative in Brainerd, said the day was "completely life changing."

"It was a complete perspective shift for me to learn of the benefits for not only the Unified teammates,

but for the Unified partners as well," Sykora explained. "The student panel was so profound for me."

During that panel discussion, teammates Emma Oja and Kevin Rayner shared that Unified classes help them feel included and meet new friends.

Partner Evelyn Lubben explained that the experience transcends academic benefits.

"At first I was a little worried about missing

college credit classes, because now I'm taking two Unified classes," said Lubben. "But sometimes I think I learn more in the Unified classes."

Senior Maci Provo agreed. "You learn so many different social skills, which is really important for life," she said.

**Abridged article
Scan to read
the full story**



Anderson

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anything else that's really noteworthy other than I couldn't figure out how to stop. I've always enjoyed it."

The Mankato native was destined for a career in education.

"I knew from age 8 that I wanted to be a teacher and never wavered from that," she said. "I had a lot of trusted adults as teachers who maybe saw past the reserved, shy child in me and saw promise – something that they knew they could nurture. And that's my 'why': to give to youngsters what I received in a school setting."

Hanover Elementary Principal Brad Koltes said Anderson exemplified that commitment to a higher purpose, and that she brought far more value than simple endurance.

"She doesn't see teaching as a profession; she sees it as a calling," he said. "For her, retiring was not an easy decision because she loves it so much. Her dedication is incredible. The amount of time she puts in on weekends, after school, over the summer – the number of families, students and staff she has worked with and touched over the years, it's pretty remarkable."

Answering the call

Anderson completed her own schooling and college training in Mankato, then struck off to begin her career in a self-contained special education classroom in Milnor, North Dakota.

The following year, in 1976, she moved back closer to home when she



Anderson answers student questions after class story time.

was hired for a similar special education position in Buffalo. She spent four years at what was then Buffalo Elementary (now Parkside Elementary), before shifting to the primary school (now Tatanka Elementary STEM School) in 1980.

"It was the time in the history of education marking the end of self-contained special education rooms and the beginning of mainstreaming," said Anderson. "So, in my first job in 877, along with my teammate, I was breaking some barriers. Classroom teachers were not accustomed to having youngsters with special needs in their room."

In 1983 she was offered a job teaching students with learning disabilities at Hanover Elementary. Four years later she moved into a general education classroom, where she has been ever since. During that time she has taught a combination classroom of second- and third-graders, many years of second grade, multi-age K-2 classrooms, and first- and second-grade looping classrooms.

What does she enjoy most about that age range of student?

"It is an era in a child's development of tremendous growth," Anderson said. "They go from being very literal beings to being able to handle abstractions and humor as well as changes in schedule. They are ready for more independence and responsibility. They're still excited about learning. It's the time when most of them learn to read, and that is a big feather in their caps."

Delayed retirement

Anderson was mulling retirement in 2020, but couldn't walk away after COVID interrupted the school year.

"I'm the kind of individual who needs more closure rather than less," she said. "When we left on that Friday, we had no knowledge that we wouldn't be back until the next fall. For me, there were too many dangling pieces to be able to bow out comfortably then."

In the wake of the pandemic, she kept returning because of the long-term relationships with students and their families, her colleagues, and the unique fit of her aptitudes to the task.

Finding new purpose

In retirement, Anderson aims to find a new sense of purpose.

"I need a purpose, and for 51 years, education has been my purpose," she said. "It has been a career, yes, but it's never been a job. It's always been a calling."

Abridged article
Scan to read
the full story



Pomp and Circumstance

BHM programs planning June graduation ceremonies

BHS and Phoenix Learning Center

Friday, June 5 | 7 p.m.
Bison Field West

Buffalo High School will have about 415 graduates, with 19 graduates from Phoenix Learning Center. Each student has received six tickets for family and friends to watch the ceremony. In the event of inclement weather, the ceremony will move to the BHS main gym. A recorded telecast of the ceremony will be available. Others are invited to watch a live video broadcast in the air-conditioned BHS Performing Arts Center.

PRIDE Transitions

Tuesday, June 2 | 1 p.m.
Discovery Center Auditorium

Six PRIDE Transition students will be honored in a Diploma Ceremony signifying that they have met and completed the program requirements. PRIDE supports students age 18-22 who are in need of additional services to make the transition from school to work and independent living. The ceremony is by invitation only.

Adult Basic Education

Tuesday, June 9 | 7 p.m.
Discovery Center Auditorium

West Adult Basic Education (ABE) consortium will honor at least 40 adults who have earned their General Education Development (GED) diplomas from the Minnesota Department of Education during the past program year. Another 87 adult learners will be honored with awards for a variety of academic skills and achievements. The ceremony and reception at the Discovery Center Auditorium is open to the public.



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Audyn Molesky	Student Representative

History Day students heading to nationals

For the first time since 2020, and only the second time in the last 12 years, a trio of local students have earned the rare distinction of qualifying for nationals in the annual History Day competition.

Seventh-grader Dorothy Karson and eighth-graders Elsie Johanson and Henry Winger researched the impact of the Columbine school shooting in 1999, and changes to school security as a result. They presented their findings as a theatrical performance and advanced through school and regional competitions to finish in third place out of 28 teams at state.

That meant they were positioned as the first alternate if one of the top two teams was unable to compete at nationals, and they received word that they are going to Maryland this summer in a surprise announcement on April 23. Called down to the conference room by Principal Matt Lubben, they walked in to find their families and a History Day representative waiting to break the news. To say they were excited is an understatement.

"I think all of us were shaking," said Winger.

"Reaching the National History Day competition is a significant achievement," said their teacher, Danielle Kelm. "This trio earned that opportunity through years of effort from sixth grade until now. They took ownership of their learning and pushed beyond what was required. Their success also marks an exciting moment for our school as we return to the national stage. I am proud of their work and the compassionate performance they've crafted about a heavy moment in American history."



From left, Henry Winger, Dorothy Karson and Elsie Johanson will take their History Day performance to nationals.

A difficult topic

The idea for their topic came during a lockdown drill last fall, a practice that resulted from the Columbine event.

While all three students had participated in previous History Day competitions in varying formats, all agreed that a dramatic performance was the right way to approach this topic.

"There are documentaries and exhibits and websites,

but there's not as much emotion with that," said Karson. "It's not as heartfelt."

"Oral performance can be so much more powerful than a written paragraph because there's a difference between reading something on a page and delivering it – feeling all the emotion and power behind it," agreed Johanson.

While all have previously made it to state, nationals wasn't exactly a goal.

"It just felt so out of reach," said Winger.

The group will meet other students from around the country at the University of Maryland, and will also tour Washington, D.C.

"It's really a thrilling thing to watch these kids from Buffalo get to go compete on a national stage," said Kelm.

Abridged article
Scan to read
the full story

