



Superintendent and school board assistant Anita Underberg has retired in her 40th year. See the feature story on Page 2.

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Underberg feature

Key Dates

October

15-17.....Fall Break, no school
20.....BHS choir concert, 7 p.m.
23.....BHS orchestra concert, 7 p.m.
24.....MESI Fall Bingo Night
26.....Opening Doors Halloween
Dance, 4 p.m.
27.....School board mtg., 7 p.m.
27.....BHS band concert, 7 p.m.

November

2.....Daylight Saving Time ends
3.....No school PreK-8 or PRIDE
(grades 9-12 in session)
3..BHS winter sports mtg., 7 p.m.
7.....Two-hour early release day



Warm welcome back

Newly arrived students were greeted with open arms by school secretary Jaime Anderson at Montrose Elementary School of Innovation on Thursday, Sept. 4, the first day that all students were present after a staggered school year start.

Fisher is ABE Teacher of the Year

As an educator committed to helping students of various ages find personal meaning in their learning, Terrisa Fisher has helped shape countless lives.

Recognizing her skill in that endeavor, the statewide Literacy Action Network named Fisher its Teacher of the Year during its annual Summer Institute in Waite Park on Aug. 14.

Fisher has worked with adult students in Buffalo since 2009, when she joined WEST Adult Basic Education (ABE), facilitated locally

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From the Superintendent

Progress report on bond projects

Nearly two years after District 877 voters approved a \$41.5-million referendum to improve security, building integrity and operating efficiency, I'd like to provide an update on where we're at in that process.



Scott Thielman

The referendum passed by a 64-36% margin in November of 2023. Construction planning began immediately afterward, and a three-summer campaign was quickly outlined due to long lead

times to obtain materials. The sale of bonds occurred in February of 2024, with BHM Schools benefiting from one of the highest credit ratings in the state (only six school districts held a higher credit rating at the time) that yielded a lower-than-anticipated interest rate and approximately \$6 million in savings.

Construction began in the summer of 2024 with installation of the new unitary rubber playground surfaces, along with a limited amount of new equipment, at Hanover, Montrose and Tatanka elementary schools.

See Thielman
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New staff members join BHM Schools



New licensed staff members joining BHM Schools this year include, from left:

Row 1: Paul Nienaber (BHS special education), Loren Sohler (BHS social studies), Jayleigh Mateuszczuk (BCMS social studies), Cassandra Byrne (BHS school nurse), Haley Lorenz (DES grades 3-5), Julia Carlson (BCMS science), Ohnica Melenich (districtwide developmental adapted physical ed.), Miranda Weber (early childhood special education) and Stephanie Halverson (early childhood family education).

Row 2: Shannon Curtis (BHS band), Michelle Possin (TESS special education),



Mary Stettner (TESS grade 5), Haley Morse (TESS grade 3 long-term sub), Samantha Beneke (districtwide school psychologist), McKenna Buerck (districtwide occu-

pational therapist), LaChelle Sandon (PES special education), Anna Bartels (PES/MESI school psychologist), Chris Beard (TESS grade 5), Jessica Jenema (BCMS choir)

and Charlotte Eichenberg (BHS FACS).

Not pictured: Timarie Leahy (districtwide school nurse).

Underberg retires in 40th year with district

Not many school board meetings feature a standing ovation for a staff member, but that's exactly what occurred after the board recognized Anita Underberg for four decades of service to Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools on Monday, Sept. 22.

Underberg, the administrative assistant to the superintendent and board of education, retired after her final workday on Tuesday, Sept. 23. She was in her 40th year with the district, the last 35 of which were in the superintendent's office.

"You hear all the time, 'There will never be another...' said Board Chair Bob Sansevere after Underberg's last meeting. "But there will never be another Anita. Whatever the highest praise is, I'd like to go a step above that."

Last month Sansevere humorously suggested that the board deny approval of a list of personnel changes when he saw that it included



Anita Underberg was in her 35th year as the assistant to the superintendent and board of education, and started with the district's Community Education department.

Underberg's retirement date.

"Up to the final minute of this meeting I kept hoping she would say, 'You know, I changed my mind,'" Sansevere said after the Sept. 22 meeting. "It's a loss. The district will feel that void."

During the meeting Superintendent Scott Thielman read a letter of recommendation he had written for Underberg last year when she won the statewide Administrative/Executive

Assistant of the Year Award from her professional organization. When he finished his remarks, board members, staff and the audience gave Underberg a standing ovation. Board members also left their places to file past Underberg's desk, thank her for her service, and wish her well.

"I love this district. I support this district. I'm proud of this district, and always will be," Underberg told

"You hear all the time, 'There will never be another...' but there will never be another Anita."

Bob Sansevere
Board Chair

the board. "I look forward to hearing about you in the Insider (the district newsletter)."

Underberg also thanked board members for choosing to serve, for voluntarily taking on the challenges associated with education, and for working through issues large and small on behalf of students and staff members.

"It's been an honor, and I'm glad to have served with you," she said. "Thank you so much."

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School forest gift

A ribbon-cutting event for a new observation deck was held in the Hanover Elementary School Forest on Sept. 16. Students, families, school board members, staff and Hanover city officials were present to celebrate and thank Julie Allinson and Paul Erickson of the Hej Field Foundation for their generous grant to replace the former structure, which had deteriorated and was no longer usable. The new feature enhances the school forest, which already features an outdoor classroom and other learning spaces, a walking trail, animal feeding stations, and more.

Upcoming Events

BHS to present 'Hedestown: Teen Edition'

The influences woven into Buffalo High School's fall musical, the teen edition of "Hedestown," are as wide-ranging as the show's themes.

A unique fusion of Greek mythology in a soulful Depression-era New Orleans-inspired setting, the sung-through production tells the story of young dreamers Orpheus and Eurydice, their journey to the underworld, and their interactions with King Hades and Persephone.

Throughout, the story explores the themes of doubt against faith, fear against love, industry against nature, and heroic action in the face of overwhelming odds.

Music is the primary storytelling medium, with blues, jazz and folk styles carrying a story that is "achingly beautiful, thought-provoking, powerful and prophetic," according to Newsday.

Show Details

November 14, 15, 21: 7 p.m.
November 22: 2 p.m.
BHS Performing Arts Center

Tickets: \$4 for students and seniors age 62 and up, and \$6 for adults

"[BHS Choir Director] Zack Carlson-Giving and I work hard to expose our students to a wide variety of musical theater experiences during their four years at BHS, and 'Hedestown' certainly will do the job," said Director Tracy Hagstrom Durant. "This show is also so new, so current, so timely. We want to stretch our students, asking them to learn and grow. ... I saw the show when it was first on Broadway and knew immediately that it was a show I longed to direct. The messages are vitally important at this particular time in history."

There will be four performances: Fridays and Saturdays, Nov. 14-15 and 21-22. The first three shows are at 7 p.m., and the Nov. 22 show is a 2 p.m. matinee.

Originally written in 2006 by Vermont-based singer-songwriter Anaïs Mitchell, the play opened on Broadway in 2019. It won eight Tony Awards that year, and a Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album in 2020. A Los Angeles Times critic called it "Unforgettable. Simply one of the most exquisite works of musical storytelling I've seen in my more than 25 years as a theater critic. In its supple convergence of story and song, Hedestown represents a step forward for the art form."

Watch the BHM Schools Facebook page, Instagram and website for photos and a full preview story.

Halloween Dance

The annual Opening Doors Halloween Dance takes place from 4 to 6 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 26, in the Discovery Center gym. The event is for those age 16-plus with cognitive and physical disabilities. See <https://bhmschools.ce.eleyo.com/> for more information and to register.

Split school day

The first split school day of the year occurs Monday, Nov. 3. There is no school for PreK-8 and PRIDE students. Grades 9-12 are in session. This is the end of the first quarter.

Winter sports meeting

The Buffalo High School Winter Sports meeting will be held at 7 p.m. in the BHS gym on Monday, Nov. 3.



Steps in the right direction

Thielman

from Page 1

While some work will continue in 2026, we are now wrapping up the biggest season of construction. What follows is an overview of what has been accomplished, and what remains.

Buffalo High School

• **Secure entrance**

The facade is mostly finished and the new secure entrance is functionally complete, allowing greater control over access to the building and a more straightforward visitor entry process.

• **Performing Arts Center**

Lights, sound, seating and carpet have been updated. Remaining improvements include replacement of the leg curtains and acoustical curtains later this school year.

• **Library Learning Center**

The media center has been completely remodeled to allow more effective small-group collaboration, larger testing rooms, and more effective supervision.

• **Roof replacement**

Replacement of the Bison Activity Center roof will take place in the summer of 2026. We are opening bids for this project in October.

• **Mechanical improvements**

Construction of a new chiller plant with three packaged air-cooled condensing units is currently in progress. This will provide dehumidification to the north side of the building, including the



Bison Activity Center, gyms, locker rooms, cafeteria and Performing Arts Center. Work on this aspect of the project is scheduled for completion in December.

• **Resource spaces**

The common areas in our classroom wings have been refreshed with new paint and carpet, and in some cases have been re-furnished with re-purposed furniture from the Library Learning Center.

• **Locker rooms**

The home locker room shower spaces were converted to single-user stalls this summer to improve privacy.

Buffalo Community Middle School

• **Secure entrance**

Aside from the installation of facade panels, lettering

and logos, the new secure entrance is functionally complete, allowing greater control over access to the building and a more straightforward visitor entry process.

• **Office remodel**

While some finishing work remains, the office space has been completely remodeled to meet current building

From left to right, this series of photos shows the Buffalo High School entrance on March 28, before work began; on Aug. 7, after waterproofing had been done and the framework for facade panels was being installed; and on Oct. 7, after completion of the facade.



codes and improve student access to services.

• **Mechanical upgrades**

Considering the 50-plus-year age of the BCMS mechanical systems, a two-summer timeline was needed to replace steam systems with more efficient hot water systems, upgrade equipment and dehumidify the lower level activity spaces. The first phase in 2025 included the entire main level of the building with its academic spaces, and the lower level will be completed in the summer of 2026.

Discovery building

• **Door 6**

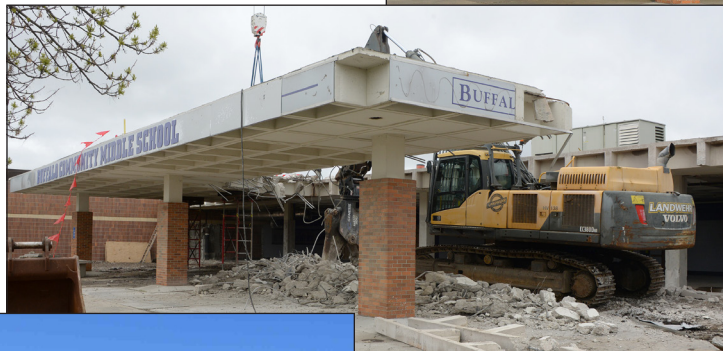
We are addressing a long-standing water infiltration problem at Door 6 of the Discovery building (the gym entrance) by adding a canopy and small vestibule. Originally scheduled



The BHS Performing Arts Center received new lights, sound seating and carpet this summer, the first renovations to the well-used 1997 facility.

Security, building integrity and operating efficiency are improving thanks to voter approval of the 2023 bond.

From right to left, this set of photos shows Buffalo Community Middle School on March 28, before construction; on May 2, during demolition of the canopy over the main entrance; and on Oct. 7. Installation of signage and facade pieces remains, but the entrance is fully functional.



for completion in August, this project was delayed by complications with utilities positioned under the new entrance location. The door can currently be used for emergency egress, but completion is now anticipated in November.

• Auditorium

Beginning in November, the Discovery auditorium will receive some theatrical lighting upgrades, an LED house lighting upgrade, and some minor sound updates.

• Mechanical upgrades

The existing steam heat distribution throughout the building will be converted to more efficient low-pressure hot water distribution, and conventional dehumidification will also be added to the cafeteria and gymnasium. This work is planned for the summer of 2026.

District-wide projects

• Playground surfaces

The Northwinds playground surface and select new equipment was completed in mid-July. The Lions Park playground used by Discovery and Parkside students opened Sept. 24 with all new equipment and



Improvements to all five elementary school playgrounds were completed in September, with the Lions Park playground shown here serving Discovery and Parkside students.

a new surface, in partnership with the City of Buffalo. This completes the updates to all five elementary playgrounds.

• Electrified retraction (automated locking)

This is in progress at all locations and will be complete in the summer of 2026. This new system will also include door position sensors to ensure that all exterior doors are closed properly.

Hanover Elementary

• Mechanical upgrades

Later this month we will seek bids for mechanical and remodeling bids at Hanover Elementary School. The building heat will be converted from steam to a more efficient hot water system,

and dehumidification will be added to the cafeteria and gymnasium.

• Media center remodel

The media center is currently built with temporary demountable walls, which will be replaced with permanent acoustic walls to improve the learning environment.

Montrose Elementary School of Innovation

• Mechanical upgrades and interior remodeling

Dehumidification to the cafeteria and potential remodeling will take place next summer. The extent of the work will depend on available funds.

Tatanka Elementary STEM School

• Mechanical upgrades and interior remodeling

A new rooftop unit will be installed next summer with hot water heating and direct expansion dehumidification to serve the cafeteria. Some interior remodeling may also take place, depending on available funds.

By improving security, building integrity and operational efficiency through the projects listed above, we intend to continue the responsible stewardship that has allowed these same facilities to serve our communities well for many decades. Thank you to all in the Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose community for supporting our schools!

Fisher

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by Buffalo-Hanover-Mon-trose Schools Community Education. WEST is a regional consortium of 17 school districts and local community organizations.

"Some of my WEST colleagues nominated me for the honor, and I am grateful for their kind words about me. I believe that for each 'teacher of the year' there are countless unrecognized teachers who are tenaciously doing whatever it takes to move their students forward and upward," said Fisher. "I am a humble representative to a host of commendable ABE teachers. I reciprocate respect for my WEST and MN ABE colleagues and their work."

Dr. Eric Erlandson, Director of Community Education for BHM Schools, noted that while the spotlight is on Fisher for the moment, she has always focused on highlighting the accomplishments of ABE students. Fisher is the "driving force" behind the awards ceremony held each year in Buffalo, which allows students and their families to celebrate everything from learning English to earning their General Education Development (GED) certificates.

"Terrisa's commitment to her students goes far beyond teaching content – she helps them discover purpose and confidence in their learning," said Erlandson. "This Teacher of the Year recognition is a testament to the countless hours she has invested in helping adults achieve their goals and transform their futures. We are so proud to have her as part of our team."

Adult student guide

Fisher began her career as a high school language arts teacher, speech coach and



Terrisa Fisher, left, received her Teacher of the Year Award from the Literacy Action Network in August.

yearbook advisor. From 1997 to 2006, she enjoyed helping students at Sartell High School and St. Cloud Cathedral recognize why their lessons mattered. But the strain of countless evenings working to critique student essays, combined with a busy daily class schedule, began to wear on her.

"At the peak of questioning my career choice, a fellow teacher asked me to substitute for her 'side gig' of teaching English as a foreign language to adults," said Fisher. "I loved the experience! Working with adult learners who chose to be there and who were so very driven to reach their learning

goals really expanded my awareness of what and how I could teach in an area that fits with my personality and skill set."

Intrigued, Fisher searched out more information about Minnesota Adult Basic Education programming, which provides free preparation classes to help adults pass their GED tests – granting them the equivalent of a high school diploma.

In 2008 she started teaching adults through WEST Adult Basic Education, and she took her current role in Buffalo the following year.

Joy in the job

While the age of her pupils

has changed, Fisher said she still enjoys that same challenge of helping students understand the significance behind the content.

"My core inner driver remains: making learning personally meaningful," she said.

One difference in the ABE setting, however, is that students have voluntarily sought out those learning opportunities and are often highly motivated to reach their goals.

"What I enjoy tremendously about my job in an ABE setting is that my external driver can cease to be a syllabus," said Fisher. "Certainly academic standards still guide me in my GED study labs; however, now equally important factors for me have become the students' self-identified goals and using each individual's assessment data to inform his/her/their education plans."

The teaching profession is all about pouring into others, and Fisher said that while it is gratifying to be recognized by those who best understand what it takes to be an effective teacher of other adults – her WEST ABE colleagues – the timing of the honor has coincided with an important shift in mindset.

"Ironically, this award comes just as I am learning to let go of desiring honors and recognition and accepting servanthood," she said. "This award means another opportunity to practice gratitude, humility, and peace during transitions."

- For more information about WEST ABE, see www.bhmschools.org/west-adult-basic-education.

- The Literacy Action Network is a statewide professional membership organization supporting Minnesota Adult Basic Education. For more information, see <https://literacyactionnetwork.org/>.



Fisher, shown here congratulating a GED graduate in June, is the 'driving force' behind the regional ABE graduation and awards ceremony held each year in Buffalo.

Kylie Kelm and Nolan Rabon, who were named National Merit Commended Students for finishing in approximately the top 3% out of 1.3 million students from 20,000 high schools who typically take the PSAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test each year. "Those being named Commended Students have demonstrated outstanding potential for academic success," said a spokesperson for the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. "These students represent a valuable national resource; recognizing their accomplishments, as well as the key role their schools play in their academic development, is vital to the advancement of educational excellence in our nation."



The achievements below took place after the end of the last school year and were recognized by the BHM School Board in June of 2024.



The following athletes who qualified for the Class AAA State Track and Field Meet: Rose Lamberts, Hannah Braun, Kennedy Herrboldt, Miley Farniok, Cady Macheel and Avery Larson. Lamberts placed fifth in the 300 hurdles. On the boys' side, state qualifiers included Jacob Macheel, Wesley Wistrom, Dexter Huss, Saul Rhodes, Jerome Thomas, Ryan Babatz and Joel Benson.



Babatz won the state championship in the shot put, and Benson took third place in the discus. In addition, Scott Palmer was named the Section 8AAA Boys Track and Field Coach of the Year, and Dave Knutsen was named the Section 8AAA Boys Track and Field Assistant Coach of the Year.



Andrew Schmidt, who qualified for the state trap shoot tournament.



Harvey Ylitalo, who qualified for the state golf meet.

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RESIDENT DISTRICT 877

Underberg

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Career highlights

After graduating from Buffalo High School in 1974, Underberg worked as a secretary at IDS Life Insurance in the IDS Tower in Minneapolis for four years before returning to Buffalo and raising two daughters with her husband, Kevin. She joined the district in 1986 through a summer job share position, then became the secretary to the director of community education.

In 1991 she shifted offices and became the administrative assistant to the superintendent and board of education. Since then she has served four superintendents, including three whom she helped bring aboard as a member of the hiring committee.

"All of those who were selected have been remarkable," she said. "The position I have is so fulfilling. I loved the variety of tasks that are included in this job – from issuing contracts to hearing about curriculum changes to compiling the school board meeting agenda and background information, to running the school district elections, and so much more."

That sense of fulfillment

kept Underberg coming back year after year, and the late-summer preparation for each new academic season was one of her favorite parts of the educational cycle. Another highlight was the retirement luncheon that Underberg organized for departing staff members each spring.

"I loved working with all the various staff in our district," Underberg said. "Everyone has such an important role."

While Underberg leaves behind strong relationships



Underberg gets settled on her first day in the superintendent's office in 1991.

at the individual level, her legacy also takes a physical form.

"When the school district would decide to hold a special election to construct a new school, it was all-consuming," she said. "I enjoy walking into Northwinds Elementary and Buffalo High School and remembering the work that took place to pass those elections."



SCHOOL BOARD

Bob Sansevere.....Chairperson
Sheila Smude.....Vice Chairperson
Amanda Lawrence.....Clerk
Adam Bjorklund.....Treasurer
Matt Hoffman.....Acting Clerk/Treasurer
Angela Greig.....Director
Mike Honsey.....Director
Scott Thielman.....Superintendent
Audyn Molesky.....Student Representative

More than logistics

Beyond the myriad logistical demands of the role, which Underberg handled with aplomb, Thielman said he came to value her judgment and insight in various scenarios.

"Anita provides critical assistance in decision-making, communication and administrative tasks," he said shortly before her retirement. "Over the years the district has dealt with numerous urgent matters, including reacting to crisis situations, weather-related issues, and decisions regarding safety protocols. Anita's ability to skillfully navigate and provide support during those situations, as well as her reliability and competence, has earned her my trust and respect, along with the high regard of our staff, leadership team and school board."

Retirement plans

Though she wouldn't have minded working a few more

years, Underberg said she hopes to travel around the United States and to Europe – specifically to Germany, Norway and Italy. She also intends to stay involved with the Miss Buffalo ambassador program, is considering helping at a hospice site, and will have many opportunities to enjoy her grandchildren's sports and activities.

One thing is certain: "She will be missed. There's no other way to put it," said Sansevere.

"I am so grateful to have worked for this school district," said Underberg. "I know that what we do here every single day matters to every single student. I am fortunate to have worked with amazing, talented and dedicated staff who are here because what we do is important. These students are our future!"

Abridged article
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