



Dramatic play space at Tatanka provides fun learning opportunities

Fred Rogers once said, "Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood."

Today's parents may not recognize the host of the once famous children's television show "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" as readily as in the past, but his words are as true today as when he spoke them.

Teachers and administrators at Tatanka Elementary STEM School are observing that reality on a daily basis in the school's new Dramatic Play Space, an innovative room where imaginative games flourish and students build new social skills without even realizing it.

While the unstructured play time may seem like recess to the students, there is definite intention behind the colorful props, unique costumes and creative avenues provided by school staff.

"This started as an opportunity to embed social-emotional learning



into the day in a much more meaningful way and to be able to do that through different literacy and science-related learning," said Tatanka Principal Andrée Iden, explaining that the fun space was originally intended to complement lessons in the kindergarten classrooms.

For example, students have studied classroom units on dinosaurs or community helpers like emergency

responders and doctors. The current theme is "Things That Go." Students then have the opportunity to enter into the world of that theme.

"When they come into this space we think of it as a place to apply what they're learning in a different way," said Iden. "So what we're seeing is students being able to use vocabulary differently. Some of their imaginative play shows a higher use of academic language than what we see in the classroom."

An 'immersive experience'

What is it about the Dramatic Play Space that facilitates this development?

"It's an immersive experience," said Iden. "The teachers have reported that even though they have a play location in their classroom, the way



A Look at Legislative Impacts for BHM Schools

Every two years, when the state sets its biennial budget process in motion, school districts wait and wonder what decisions legislators will make to support students, staff and communities. We have to wait until after the third Saturday in May to know what policy and funding decisions have been made to support or detract from our daily operations.



Scott Thielman

The Minnesota Department of Education has provided information regarding inflation rates and how inflation has impacted school districts in the state. According to that information, school districts have been underfunded by \$1,263 per student (18.4%) over the last 20 years. The Minnesota special education funding deficit has grown to over \$780 million annually (\$824 per student), and is still growing. The BHM special education deficit is approximately \$6.582 million annually (approximately \$1,111 per student).

To fully understand the impact that school districts face each year, we can look at our district as an example. The additional general education per pupil funding proposed by the governor would reduce the inflationary impact by approximately \$275 per pupil, so the inflation rate impact would now be a deficit of \$988 per pupil. Additionally, the increase of \$555 per pupil for the special education cross subsidy would reduce the current deficit to approximately \$556 per pupil. The additional funding would still leave a deficit of \$1,544 per pupil for the BHM School District.

I share this information with

the community to show that all of the rhetoric touting the full funding of schools is a fallacy. The aforementioned information shows what it would take to fully fund BHM Schools. Our district is very fortunate to have the support of parents and community members through its current operating levy, which provides \$750 per pupil. The funding from this local effort reduces the general education and special education funding deficit to approximately \$794 per pupil. Needless to say, losing the \$750 per pupil funding from our community would have a seriously detrimental effect on the daily operations and staffing of our classrooms.

The per-pupil funding is also used to maintain our facilities and ensure that our buildings can operate efficiently. The last building bond that was approved by the community allowed the district to make improvements such as replacing roofs, replacing A/C and heating units, repairing the exterior and interior of buildings, repairing parking lots, changing the entries to some elementary schools to improve student and staff safety, and creating an efficient and effective use of outdoor facilities at the high school. The district also invested in its technology infrastructure.

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Matthew Scherber



Victoria Viteri

BHS seniors Matthew Scherber and Victoria Viteri, who were selected to receive the MSHSL AAA (Academics, Arts and Athletics) Award.



Jenny Boldt



Danielle Kelm

Jenny Boldt and Danielle Kelm, who have been nominated to become the next Minnesota Teacher of the Year!

There are 131 nominees statewide from the PreK-12 teaching ranks in both public and private schools. An independent panel will review each candidate's portfolio, and the Teacher of the Year will be announced in May.



BCMS students who donated 633 pairs of socks for the Rotary Adopt-a-Family program.



TESS students who collected food items for 171 holiday baskets for local families. Mrs. Job's 2nd grade class collected the most food items.

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The investment approved in 2014 made significant improvements in our buildings, grounds and infrastructure, but mother nature and time do not stop wreaking havoc on structures. Our school buildings range in age from 17 to 115 years and continue to serve our students and communities well, but regular infrastructure investments are needed to extend the life of these buildings. At present we are determining the upcoming needs of

our facilities, and we will share more information in the near future.

I do not share this financial information to cause alarm, but rather to help our community members understand the reality that school boards and administrators face. We celebrate the support of our communities and hope you see the benefits of your investment in the BHM School District. Your support has afforded our district the ability to continue to offer opportunities to our students that

other districts cannot. Part of this is due to economy of scale: the more students served, the more efficient it is to provide certain services. Smaller school districts cannot offer the same options to their students due to lack of efficiencies and funding from the state. We are proud of our community's support and what we are able to offer our students. BHM Schools will continue to be the place where students can **dream, believe** and **achieve!**

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students play in the dramatic space is totally different. There's a different depth. Their level of imaginative play has completely changed because now they're telling stories in a much more intricate way."

While originally intended for kindergarten classes, the benefits of the Dramatic Play Space quickly attracted the attention of other teachers up to the third-grade level. Cheree Johnson has seen some of her own third-graders, including a few with special needs, develop in unprecedented ways through time in the Dramatic Play Space.

"Young children benefit so greatly from unstructured play," Johnson said. "When kids have to learn to share and get along and solve their own problems, real-life social skills are developing. Children have to learn to do this on their own - mom, dad, caretakers and teachers must let children practice these skills vs. always solving problems for them."

One success story involves a student on the autism spectrum who has rapidly improved in social awareness.

"We had a student who, prior to using this space, only did parallel play, and is now initiating play with other students," said Iden.

"It's been really cool to see his growth this year. We're seeing that development that we would have expected him to go through, but in a very short amount of time."

Kindergarten teachers Kristi Fobbe and Jamie Abell added that regular time in the space has helped children play with imagination rather than relying on technology for entertainment. In terms of problem solving and teachable moments, they said students have relied on teacher intervention less as the year has progressed because they are applying what they have learned.

"Some people think it is just a place to play, but the kids are building their vocabulary and working on social skills, which they are then bringing back to the classroom," Abell and Fobbe said in a joint statement. "And we are noticing that these skills are being applied throughout the day. We are also noticing that our students' academics are improving as well."

Parent support

While Iden has spent a great deal of her own time building props, she hastened to add that the partnership of parents has been key to the ongoing success of the space.



Tatanka parent Ashley Lindeman, an artist, has donated her time and talent to create a seven-foot dinosaur, cardboard vehicles that students can wear with a handy pair of suspenders, and more.

When the theme changes, generally about once a month, parents have helped change out the props and families have donated items of all kinds to create the new world. The current setup for "Things That Go" includes vehicles of various kinds, a space corner complete with rocket ship and telescope, an airliner and airport area complete with cockpit setup and baggage scanner, a crane bearing a wrecking ball with plenty of cardboard bricks to knock down, and much more.

"I've had many families donate toys that fit the theme because I put out a wish list of things we're looking for," said Iden. "That's been really cool because parents who may not even have a K-3 student are also contributing."

At every level, that support has been deeply appreciated.

"While I don't know the behind-the-scenes work that it takes to coordinate the themes, my students and I benefit weekly from them," said Johnson. "I can't even tell you how impressive our Dramatic Play room is at Tatanka."



Buffalo Community Middle School Presents "Sherlock Holmes"

Our talented students at BCMS did an incredible job during the recent performances of "Sherlock Holmes." Students worked hard in all aspects of putting together the show both on stage and off. Congratulations to everyone involved!



Meet the New BHM Schools Communications Coordinator

At the turn of the year BHM Schools welcomed new Communications Coordinator Paul Downer. He replaces Laura (Barta) Lindquist, who served the district for 22 years and established a strong foundation for the district's communications efforts.

Over the last five years Downer served as the Communications Coordinator and Assistant to the Superintendent/School Board for Delano Public Schools. Before that, he was the Managing Editor for the Annandale Advocate and the Community Editor for the Norwood Young America Times. Downer attended Luther College in Iowa, where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree with majors in English and History.

Superintendent Scott Thielman is excited to have Downer join BHM schools. "Paul was an outstanding candidate," he said. "He believes in

pro-active communication, and will emphasize engagement with our school and community members."

Downer said he saw the job opening as a chance to give back to the schools he attended as a student.

"I graduated from Buffalo High School in 2003, and feel that the wealth of opportunities, outstanding teachers and challenging courses truly paved the way for success in college and my career," he said. "I had an ideal student experience at BHM Schools, and I am grateful for this chance to support the district as it continues serving students in even greater ways today."



Paul Downer



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Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Vol. 49 No. 3



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Mark your calendars!

KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION NIGHT

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2023 | 6 PM

The time is almost here! If your child will be 5 years old by Sept. 1, 2023, you can enroll them for the 2023-24 school year in BHM Schools. All incoming kindergarten students will need to complete Early Childhood Screening.

If you have not received kindergarten registration information, please contact your school of attendance.

