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Key Dates

January

15.....MLK Jr. Day, no school
18.....Quest info night, 6:30 p.m.
22.....DES info night, 6:30 p.m.
22.....School board mtg., 7 p.m.
23...NES PTO family event, 6 p.m.
25.....Quest requests due
26.....End of 2nd Quarter
(no school PreK-8, PRIDE;
grades 9-12 in session)
29.....DES lottery application due

February

1...TESS family engineering, 5 p.m.
2.....Two-hour early release day
5..BHS orchestra concert, 7:30 p.m.
6.....BHS One Act Play, 7:30 p.m.
8.....BHS Registration and Gr. 8
parent night, 4:30 p.m.
12....BHS band concert, 7:30 p.m.
15.....Districtwide kindergarten
registration night, 6 p.m.



A pair of BHS juniors are the school's ExCEL Award nominees. See Page 2.



BHS Tatanka yearbook editors discuss new page spreads for the 2023-24 edition.

'Best of Show'

Yearbook students build marketable skills

When Buffalo High School's "Tatanka" yearbook won "Best of Show" honors in the Minnesota High School Press Association's annual contest in the fall, it wasn't exactly a surprise.

Judges reviewing entries for the annual statewide convention have chosen the BHS yearbook for that honor in six of the last seven years that records have been kept. In all, the 2023 yearbook

won 18 awards at the convention in October, including numerous individual awards for

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From the Superintendent

Planning underway for three years of projects

Two months after a majority of voters in each of our communities approved the district's \$41.5-million bond proposal, preparations are underway to schedule three summers of construction that will improve security, building integrity and operational efficiency across the Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose School District.

We are deeply grateful for the trust and support of Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose residents, and will strive to make the best use of the resources you have provided for the benefit of our students.

District staff are currently meeting regularly with architects, construction

See Thielman
Page 2



Scott Thielman

Akram, Hallman named ExCEL Award nominees

Jayde Hallman and Kumail Akram were recently named Buffalo High School's nominees for the Minnesota State High School League's ExCEL Award.

The award, which stands for Excellence in Community, Education and Leadership, is for juniors who participate in at least one MSHSL fine arts and/or athletic activity, hold a leadership position in their school, and volunteer in their community, among other stipulations. Both students said they were surprised by the honor.

"There are a lot of great students who are super talented and do tons of extra curriculars," said Akram.

"I just assume everyone else is doing just as much as I am, so it doesn't feel like a lot," said Hallman. "But I do try to have high standards for what I should be doing."

Jayde Hallman

Hallman is an exceptional member of the band and marching band, where she was captain of the clarinet section and an award winner for Outstanding Visual Performance.

"Jayde is a standout performer," wrote BHS band director Scott Ra-behl in a letter of recommendation.



BHS juniors Kumail Akram, left, and Jayde Hallman have been recognized for strong performance in the classroom, in school sports and activities, and in community service.

"Her performance skills are legendary throughout the band."

In addition to her musical abilities, Hallman was named Most Improved on the swimming and diving team this fall, and is also a member of the track and field team.

Academically, she is also a strong student, a member of the National Honor Society, and a physics tutor who helps peers in what she intends to be her future college major. She has volunteered with Feed My Starving Children.

Kumail Akram

Akram runs on the state-caliber cross country team, where he was previously named Rookie of the Year. He also competes in track and field.

In school, he spends countless hours in band, jazz band and orchestra as a percussionist, sings in choir and BHS Singers, and was a captain on the winter drumline. Akram carries a 4.0 unweighted grade point average, has competed at the varsity Knowledge Bowl level since ninth grade, and is a member of the yearbook staff.

Outside of his regular activities, Akram volunteers at the Buffalo Food Shelf, and as a middle school choir mentor.

"Both his athletic and academic skills are exceptional, and he is one of the most friendly and helpful students in his calculus class," wrote BHS math teacher David Kilgore in a letter of recommendation for the award. "Truly, he is an ideal role-model for his peers. ... It is clear that, to him, learning isn't just a job, it is a passion."

Abridged article
Scan to read
the full story



Quest info session set for Jan. 18

Does your student need more of an academic challenge? Do you wonder if the Quest Program might be the right fit?

Please join Gifted Services Coordinator Rob Nosbush at **6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 18, at Parkside Elementary for a "What is Quest?" informational session.**

This evening will focus on information about the Quest program for families who are considering assessment.

The tuition-free Quest program is a school-within-a-school for highly gifted



students (top 2-3% percent in class) in grades 2-9 in the BHM School District. **Requests to assess are due by Thursday, Jan. 25.** See bhmschools.org/quest-program for more information.

Feature Video
Find out more
about Quest



Thielman

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managers and others to work out details and schedules. Because that process is ongoing, there are few specifics to share at this point. However, here are a few things we know:

- Due to extended lead times for materials, the construction of secure entrances at Buffalo High School and Buffalo Community Middle School will not occur until the summer of 2025.

- The coming summer may be relatively light in terms of work completed, with the bulk of the improvements taking place in 2025 and finishing work occurring in the summer of 2026.

- Depending on project schedules, our typical school calendar may be adjusted to allow for longer summer construction periods in the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years. The school board is scheduled to approve next year's calendar by the end of January, and more information will be included in our next edition of the *Insider*.

We will keep you updated about this construction process in the coming months as we seek to maximize the safety, efficiency and effectiveness of our learning spaces. The ongoing support of our community will ensure that BHM Schools remain **"the place to dream, believe and achieve!"**

Enrollment Opportunities



Kindergarten Registration

If your child will be 5 years old by September 1, 2024, you can enroll them for the 2024-25 school year in BHM Schools. All incoming kindergarten students will need to complete Early Childhood Screening.

The districtwide **Kindergarten Registration Night** takes place **Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024 at 6 p.m.** See more info at bit.ly/BHMkindergarten.

Residents of the BHM School District have a variety of outstanding elementary options alongside their neighborhood schools.

- **Discovery Elementary School** provides multi-age instruction with instructional looping to create meaningful long-term relationships between students and teachers.

- **Montrose Elementary School of Innovation** offers a STEAM curriculum, including Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics.

- **Tatanka Elementary STEM School** offers Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), with a primary focus on engineering.



Magnet schools

BHM students who do not live in the attendance boundary of Montrose or Tatanka must enroll through the Northwest Suburban Integration School District. Enrollment includes free transportation to and from school. The magnet lottery application period re-opened on Jan. 8. See www.nws.k12.mn.us/ for more information and to apply.

Discovery information meeting

The application window to enter the kindergarten lottery for enrollment at Discovery

Elementary School is now open. Discovery Elementary does not have an attendance area and therefore uses a lottery process for student enrollment. **On Monday, Jan. 22, at 6:30 p.m., Principal Dr. Mathew Nelson will host an informational presentation** in Commons B at Discovery. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions.

In early January, letters and application forms for Discovery enrollment were mailed out to all families who are registered with the district as having a child eligible for kindergarten next fall. The application can be returned to the Discovery office or emailed to Discovery-Lottery@bhmschools.org.

If you did not receive this information, you may contact the Discovery office at 763-682-8400. **All applications are due by 3 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 29,** and the kindergarten lottery will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 1. All families who apply will receive a notification of the lottery results via postal mail, whether they were selected in the lottery or not.

BHS registration and parent night

Buffalo High School is hosting a registration night for students in grades 8-11, and an eighth-grade parent information night from **4:30 to 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 8.** Prospective families are also invited. BHS offers regionally unmatched opportunities in academics, athletics and the arts.

Community support adds to Hanover playground

Hanover Elementary School students are enjoying a new playground structure this year thanks to the generous support of the Hanover Athletic Association.

Principal Brad Koltes said that an inspection of one section of the former playground equipment, which dated back to 1991, revealed that replacement was necessary.

"Those are really expensive structures. I wondered how long it would take to budget to replace it," Koltes said. "But all I did was make a phone call and they said, 'How much do you need?' Then they came back and said, 'You've got it.' It's just unbelievable, the support we



Students are enjoying a new playground structure this year thanks to a Hanover Athletic Association donation.

get from them. We're able to make purchases or add things that we would otherwise have to budget long-term for."

The addition of the playground, which cost about \$62,000, is just the latest in a history of support from the

Hanover Athletic Association. The group has previously provided a rock-climbing wall, other equipment for physical education, and flexible seating.

Hanover students also regularly benefit from the support of the Hanover

Elementary PTO and the Hanover Lions, and Koltes is grateful for the broad community support.

"They're all so willing to help," Koltes said. "Any time I ask the response is always just, 'What do you need?'"

The new playground feature is the same size as the old, but adds different types of climbing activities from those found elsewhere on the playground. Koltes met with various groups of staff members to gather input on what would best serve students, and the new design was selected with that input.

"I wanted to make sure it had activities that could accommodate all students," Koltes said.

Standout staff members receive honors

It takes a wide variety of skills and services to keep a school system running smoothly, and four Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose support staff members were recently honored as standout contributors to the school district's mission.

Bethany Bienias (special education support professional at Hanover Elementary), Ryan Lindenfelser (district technology coordinator), Katie Lohse (nutrition services manager at Montrose Elementary School of Innovation) and Dean Milner (educational support professional at Buffalo Community Middle School) each received Educational Support Staff Awards during a ceremony at Resource Training & Solutions in St. Cloud on Wednesday, Nov. 15.

More information about each is included below.

Bethany Bienias

Bienias has worked at Hanover Elementary for the past five years, and spent one year at Parkside Elementary prior to that.

In a nomination letter, multiple Hanover teachers noted Bienias' skill in re-teaching core concepts to students needing additional support, and turning challenging behavior into teachable moments.

"She is calm and extraordinarily patient with students while at the same time maintaining high expectations for their performance," the nomination said, adding that her willingness to learn and grow makes her a sought-after mentor for other ESPs at the school.

Most importantly, the nomination noted Bienias' active advocacy on behalf of



BHM personnel who received Educational Support Staff Awards last fall were, from left: Dean Milner (BCMS educational support professional), Katie Lohse (nutrition services manager at Montrose), Bethany Bienias (special educational support professional at Hanover), and Ryan Lindenfelser (district technology coordinator).

the students she serves, saying that her "most impressive and valuable attribute as an educational support professional is her core belief in the students she is working with."

Ryan Lindenfelser

Without reliable technology and timely troubleshooting, classroom activities can quickly grind to a halt. This means that the behind-the-scenes work done by the district's technology personnel is essential to student learning.

"Ryan is a very hard worker and will go the extra mile to see jobs and projects through," said Discovery Elementary Principal and district Technology Director Mat Nelson. "He cares about his work, our department, and providing high-quality service to the users, and especially the students."

Lindenfelser has worked in the tech field for nearly 30 years, including 20 years in education. He has spent the past eight years at BHM.

"The thing I enjoy the most about my job is knowing every day that I will have a new challenge to keep me on my toes, and that what I do is helping someone else with what they need to do," said Lindenfelser.

Katie Lohse

With a consistently positive approach and "can do" attitude, Katie Lohse has deftly managed the large increase in students enjoying free school meals this year.

"Katie is a shining example of a team player who is willing to do whatever it takes to ensure that our students have a positive meal experience," said MESI Principal Tony Steffes.

As part of ensuring a "warm and welcoming" atmosphere, Lohse makes a point to address all 360 students by name, and is always "patient, kind, supportive and selfless," according to Steffes.

Lohse has been a part of the BHM nutrition services department for 26 years, and

is highly regarded by her colleagues in Montrose.

"She is well-liked and adored by everyone in our school," said Steffes.

Dean Milner

After a 31-year law enforcement career, including 27 years as a Minneapolis police officer, Milner is now in his second year with BHM Schools.

"Being a career street cop helped me stay connected with the community and the people I served," said Milner. "Compassion is huge for me. That transitions nicely into the education field."

In a nomination letter, school counselor Kaitlin Kolbinger said Milner has had an incredible impact on the school and its students.

"His work ethic and dedication to his job is incredibly evident, his attention to detail unparalleled, and above all, the care he shows students and staff is near unmatched," Kolbinger wrote.

She added that Milner has a talent for both giving students positive encouragement, and for perceiving when students are struggling and providing assistance before their struggles become more pronounced. In one case, she said that Milner took some math lessons himself so that he could help a struggling student comprehend an assignment.

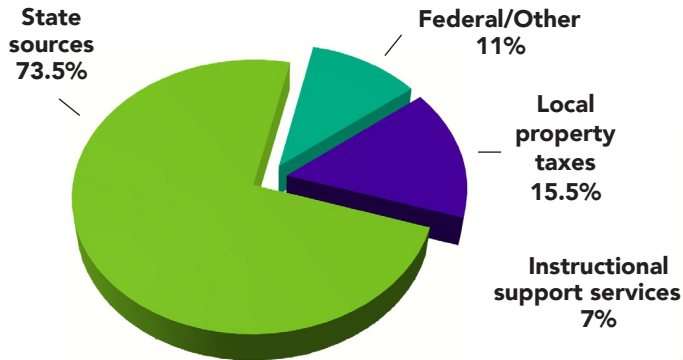
"Frequently, he finds students who need a positive role model and works with them to develop a close bond," Kolbinger said.

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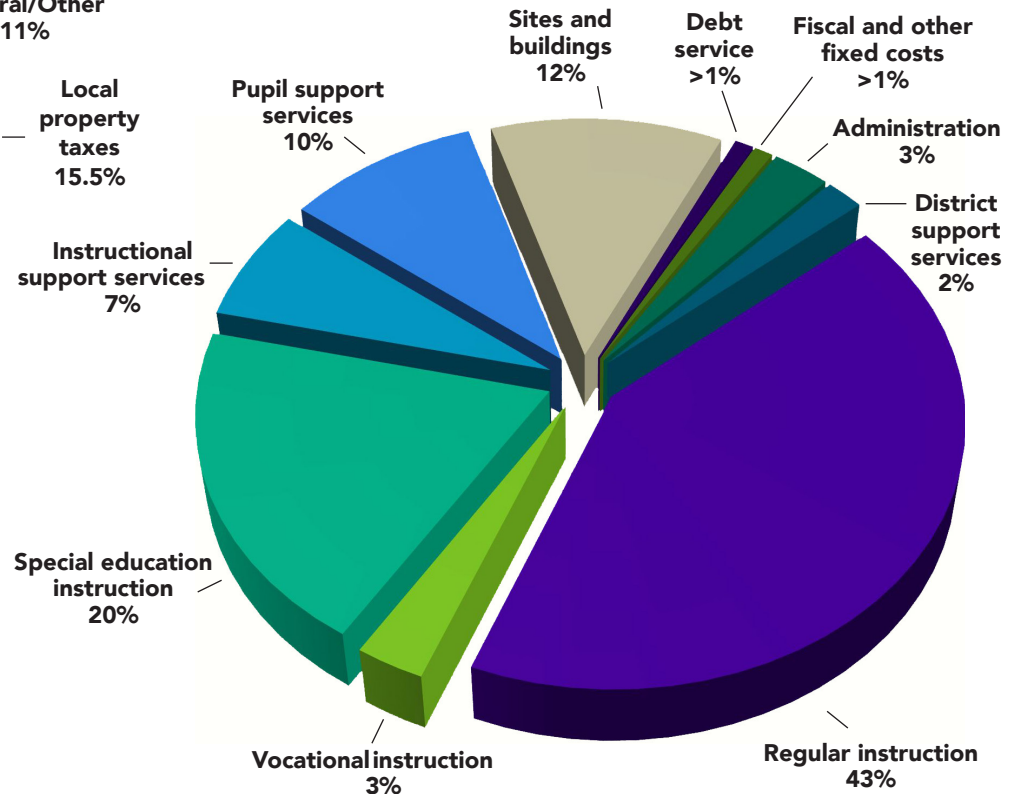
Sources of funding and how it is spent

2023 General Fund Revenue

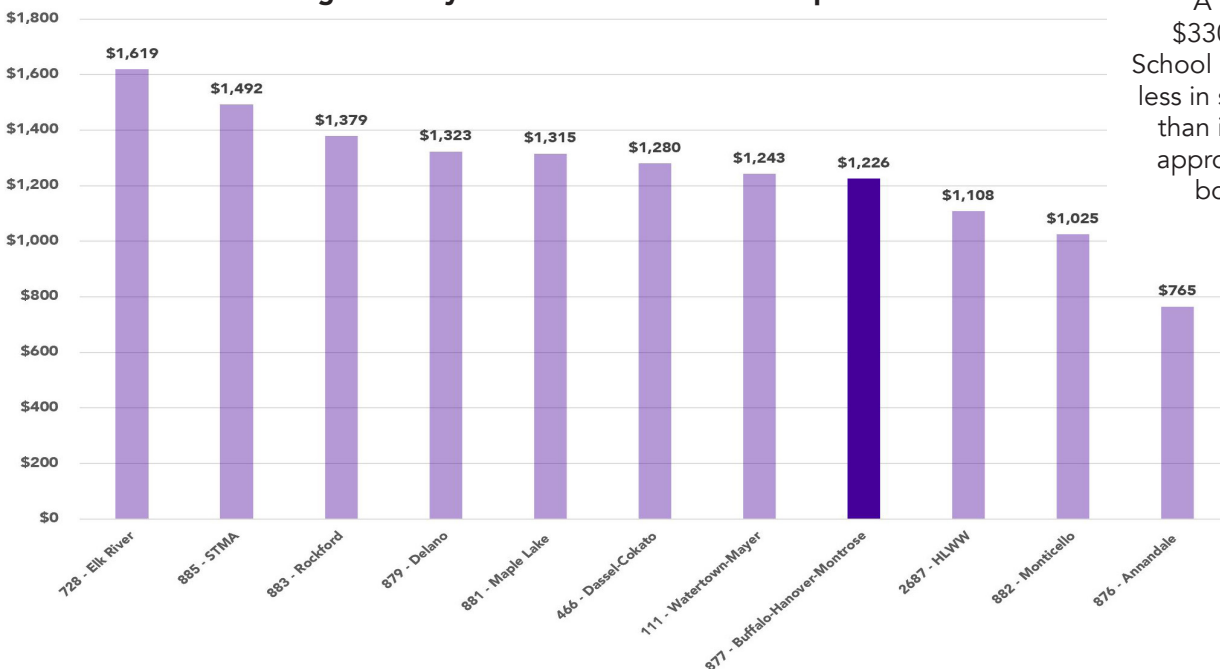


This information is from the district's most recent annual independent audit presented by BerganKDV. In 2023 the district collected \$73,984,831 in general fund revenue and expended \$75,369,363 from the general fund. In 2022, the most recent year that statewide numbers were available for comparison, general fund revenue and expenditures were \$13,603 per average daily membership served, compared to \$15,166 statewide.

2023 General Fund Expenditures



2023 pay 2024 \$330,000 Residential Homestead Property Tax Comparison Wright County Public School Districts - Proposed Final*



A home valued at \$330,000 in the BHM School District will pay \$107 less in school taxes in 2024 than in 2023, even after approval of the district's bond request last November.

*Graph info source: Wright County, Minnesota Auditor/Treasurer's Office Property Taxes, Values, Levies and Rates (<https://www.co.wright.mn.us/780/Property-Taxes-Values-Levies-and-Rates>)

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RESIDENT DISTRICT 877

Tatanka

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photography, design, writing and features. Tatanka also took the top prize for its theme: "flourish."

Those results were simply the fruit of an extended process in which students built technical skills, envisioned a cohesive theme, applied what they had learned, revised extensively, and fine-tuned a product almost beyond compare.

'You learn so much in one year.'

Halle Nichols
Tatanka editor

"It was super exciting to see the work we put in for last year's book and the awards that were given," said Anna Kugler, now the senior editor-in-chief for this year's staff. "When I was younger I never thought about how much went into making these books."

Most of this year's senior editors, almost 20 in all, served as writers and photographers for last year's book as juniors, and have now taken on design- and theme-focused roles. They have last year's success to help build confidence, but

still feel a bit intimidated by their own publication's success.

"I don't want to let people down (this year)," said senior editor Andrea Harkess.

Life skills

Because of the widely diverse soft and technical skills needed to create and manage a project of such magnitude, students develop tools they need to pursue successful careers.

"In terms of technical skills, every yearbook staff member is able to put Adobe Creative Suite on their resume right away," said yearbook advisor Erika Clifton. "Starting with 288 blank white pages, the students build every box, color, font, photo, spacing, and word on each page."

Senior editor Halle Nichols agreed that the opportunity for hands-on development leads to rapid gains in proficiency.



Yearbook staff members review their event photos.

INSIDER

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SCHOOL BOARD

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"I personally had zero InDesign skills. That's the majority of my job now," she said. "You learn as you go, and you learn so much in one year."

But student growth goes far beyond proficiency with design programs.

"They also learn how to tell accurate, authentic stories of their school community," said Clifton. "They learn the basics of design and how information should be presented. Editors learn leadership skills and how to problem solve with adults and peers, as they are responsible for organizing rosters, keeping records, managing a team of writers, developing marketing campaigns, and leading fundraising efforts. This team gets to see each others' work all the time and make critiques and revisions. Editing, redoing and trying again is completely ingrained in the classroom culture. We never

do something once and call it our final."

Not surprisingly, a number of students have used their yearbook experience to launch professional careers after graduation.

"Many students have walked out of this classroom and into graphic design internships, newspaper and magazine careers, understanding how to be a project manager, starting their own photography businesses, or having a photo hang in the halls of the U.S. Congress," said Clifton.

"While the awards are an amazing source of accomplishment, what is more important is that we put a great yearbook in the hands of our own community, something that they enjoy looking at and reading for years to come."

**Abridged article
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the full story**

