



At a Glance

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Key Dates

- March**
- 2.....Spring sports meeting, 7 p.m.
 - 6.....Two-hour early release
 - 8.....Daylight Saving Time Begins
 - 9.....End of 2nd Trimester
(no school grades 9-12;
PreK-8 and PRIDE in session)
 - 9.....School board wksp., 4:30 p.m.
 - 12.....*A Little Night Music*, 7 p.m.
 - 19.....NES Gr. 4 musical, 6 p.m.
 - 19.....HES Gr. 2 musical, 6:30 p.m.
 - 19.....MESI Gr. 5 shows, 6:30 p.m.
 - 21.....*Night Out for Music*, 7 p.m.
 - 23.....School board mtg., 7 p.m.
 - 27.....End of 3rd Quarter
(no school for PreK-8 and PRIDE;
grades 9-12 in session)



See features on student award winners inside.



Making history

Quest students at Buffalo Community Middle School made their research projects come alive through performances, documentaries, exhibits, podcasts and websites on Tuesday, Feb. 17, during the History Day Showcase. Here, sixth-grader Lydia Kruse re-enacts the startup of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League in the 1940s. The theme this year was 'Revolution, Response and Reform in History.'



Tracy Hagstrom Durant

'HD' earns state honor

Longtime Buffalo High School Theatre Director Tracy Hagstrom Durant recently earned the National Federation of State High School Associations Outstanding Theatre Educator of the Year Award for Minnesota due to her commitment to excellence and her many contributions to theatre activities.

Thanks in part to Hagstrom Durant's leader-

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From the Superintendent

Challenges ahead in school funding

I recently attended a legislative session preview to hear from state legislators. At that meeting, school district administrators shared their concerns about decisions made during the previous session that are going to have tremendous impacts on school district budgets in a time of economic uncertainty.

These decisions include

reductions in funding for special education and compensatory education, and an increase in unfunded mandates.

Lack of special education funding has been a chronic issue nationally, and especially at a statewide level. BHM Schools remains firmly committed

See Thielman Page 5



Scott Thielman

Bermudez, Carlson take Triple 'A' honors

When notified that he and Jeanette Bermudez had been selected as Buffalo High School's Triple 'A' Award winners for 2025-26, Parker Carlson's mind went directly to his predecessors.

"I thought of the people who won it last year – Hope [Bjornson] and Mitchell [Friesz] – and I thought, 'Wow, there's no way I'm in the same class with those two,'" Carlson said. "I felt and still do feel a little undeserving, but it's really great that all of our work is getting recognized. I think it's just a really great honor to be memorialized with such a great group of people."

The Minnesota State High School League's Academics, Arts and Athletics Award is given to two seniors each year who have distinguished themselves in all three areas.

Jeanette Bermudez

A standout soccer captain who is the all-time leading scorer for full-time defenders in BHS girls soccer history, Bermudez also excels in the classroom, where she owns a 3.9 grade point average while having taken 13 college-level classes, and on stage, where she plays violin and sings in the choir.



BHS seniors Jeanette Bermudez and Parker Carlson have been named the school's Triple 'A' Award winners for 2026 in recognition of their academics, arts and athletics.

"When Jeanette walks into a classroom she does so with a mature attitude and friendly demeanor," said BHS social studies teacher Craig Lachowitzer in a letter of recommendation for Bermudez. "As a leader, her confidence, maturity, and ability to make others feel welcome are a couple of her best traits."

For her part, Bermudez named Lachowitzer and fellow BHS social studies teacher Tara Rosh as two of her most influential teachers, and the inspiration behind her decision to pursue teaching as a career herself.

She will attend Concordia University, St. Paul in the fall and continue playing soccer there, while deciding whether she wants to focus on elementary education or special education. Her favorite subjects at BHS include social studies and English.

"I love learning history, and I enjoy writing and reading," she said.

In terms of importance, Bermudez said academics and sports take the primary place for her, but music also plays an essential role in supporting her success.

"Soccer and school are

most important to me," she said. "But I would also say that music helps me to relax, and I love it as well."

In addition to soccer, Bermudez has also had success in track and field. She is a member of the Chamber Orchestra, Concert Orchestra and Concert Choir, and is active in National Honor Society and the Tri-M Music Honor Society. Though Concordia does not have an orchestra program, she intends to bring her violin along and perhaps join a community orchestra if time allows.

"I know Jeanette is a dedicated individual because of the quality of work she produces through her music talents, in the arts, in the classroom, on the field, and as a leader for our school," said Lachowitzer. "You will be hard-pressed to find a better person than Jeanette, and she is very deserving of the Triple 'A' Award."

Bermudez is the daughter of Bismark Bermudez and Jennifer Hobbs.

Parker Carlson

An all-state singer the past two years who impressed as a key character in the

See Triple 'A'
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BCMS visits Sherwood

Buffalo Community Middle School students performed 'Robin Hood' as their annual play in January. The production involved more than 30 cast and crew members, who played a variety of familiar and new roles in a fun adaptation of the traditional story. The show took place in the Discovery Center auditorium.



Proud Of...

Those listed below were submitted by district staff and recognized by the BHM School Board for their special contributions and accomplishments.



The BHS One Act Play ensemble, which won the section championship and earned "Starred Performance" status at the State One Act Play Festival. Only three of the eight schools performing at state earn Starred Performance status.



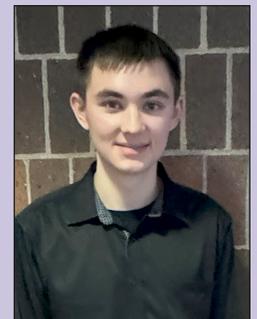
BCMS Band students Owen Rehnstrand, Tyler Spalinger, and Violet Schuette, listed here from left to right, who participated in the Central Minnesota Band Directors Association Honor Band on Saturday, Jan. 17, at Elk River High School.



BHS musicians Carli Delorenzo on clarinet and Lilah Dongoski on trumpet, who were selected for the prestigious University of Minnesota Honor Band and performed at Ted Mann Concert Hall on Jan. 25. This ensemble is even more select than the Minnesota All-State Band and includes the finest players from throughout the Midwest.



Students chosen for the Central Minnesota Band Director Association 9-10 Honor Band, which performed on Jan. 17. They are Arowyn Lee, alto sax; Jacob Kortisses, horn; Isak Keranen, horn; Joey Christensen, bass clarinet; Leah Guadagni, bassoon; and Braydyn Clark, tuba.



BHS musicians Erik Salhus on trumpet, left, and Carter Robertson on bassoon, who were chosen for the MMEA All-State Symphonic Band and All-State Orchestra, respectively. The groups performed on Feb. 14.

Proud Of....

Those listed below were submitted by district staff and recognized by the BHM School Board for their special contributions and accomplishments.



Courtney Kotish, who became the first Bison in school history to qualify for the girls state wrestling tournament.



BHS gymnast Macy DuBois, center, who qualified for the state gymnastics meet in three events: floor, beam, and uneven bars.

Gabe Kepke, Mitchell Nosbush and Cayden Kepke, who represented BHS in the state Music Listening Contest.



School board member Sheila Smude, who received MSBA's Leadership Development Certificate for completing the Learning to Lead Workshop Series, Phases I, II, III and IV.



Sebey, Teschendorf nominated for ExCEL

Brielle Sebey and Braxton Teschendorf are Buffalo High School's nominees for the Minnesota State High School League's ExCEL Award this year.

The award, which represents Excellence in Community, Education and Leadership, is for juniors who participate in an MSHSL fine arts and/or athletic activity, hold a leadership position in their school, and volunteer in their community, among other stipulations.

Brielle Sebey

Sebey has been involved in a variety of sports, is a violin section leader, and is an active volunteer at her church and in school, where she serves as an orchestra camp mentor.

"Leadership is less about being in charge and more about inspiring and serving others," Sebey wrote in her ExCEL essay.

English teacher Madison Miller has recognized that Sebey does so in a manner marked by authenticity.

"She models the type of integrity that inspires others to become leaders themselves," Miller said.

Sebey manages the cross country and boys basketball teams, and has also participated in golf and volleyball



BHS juniors Braxton Teschendorf and Brielle Sebey have been recognized for strong performance in academics, activities and community service.

during high school. She is a member of the Student Council, National Honor Society, prom committee, peer tutoring, and the honor roll thanks to her 3.99 grade point average. She is also active in Business Professionals of America, the Tri-M Music Society, and the B1 Leaders student group.

Sebey is the daughter of Derek Sebey and Kristi McLaughlin-Sebey.

Braxton Teschendorf

Teschendorf said his view of leadership changed when "I began finding myself in situations where others start-

ed to recognize me as a leader." Rather than focus on the benefits to himself, "I learned that being selfless is one of the most powerful forms of leadership," he wrote in his ExCEL essay.

Given his schedule, opportunities for leadership abound. Teschendorf has been a three-season athlete, playing football, wrestling and competing in track and field. He is the treasurer of Student Council, is active in Fellowship of Christian Athletes and the B1 Leaders group, is on staff for the school's newspaper and yearbook, and along with his 3.98 GPA is a member of the National Honor Society. He has also been active with the school's Unified programming.

"Braxton is a natural leader. His leadership is rooted in authenticity, compassion, and commitment to making things better," said Miller, who also wrote a letter of recommendation for Teschendorf. "He does not seek titles, but rather impact."

Teschendorf is the son of Jerold and Shereen Teschendorf.



Abridged article

Scan to read the full story

Musical mecca

When the statewide Minnesota Music Educators Association Convention scheduled for Feb. 12 in Minneapolis was canceled, Buffalo High School offered to host each of the choirs that had been chosen to sing at the Minneapolis Convention Center in order to give those students an opportunity to perform. In addition to the BHS Concert Choir, music teachers, students and community members were able to see high-caliber performances by ensembles from St. Peter, Richfield, Sauk Rapids-Rice, Bemidji and Austin. Here, members of the BHS Concert Choir sing during the two-day event.



Thielman

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to exceptional experiences for all learners, and we continue to fulfill our responsibility to provide the services necessary for students with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate education. (As a matter of fact, public school districts provide services for all of the private schools in their district boundaries too).

This responsibility has been in effect since 1975, when Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). At that time, the federal government authorized funding for 40% of the excess cost of special education.

However, that level of federal funding has never been fully realized. When federal and state funding do not cover the full cost of special education services, the remaining amount must be funded locally. In Minnesota, this unfunded portion is called the "cross-subsidy," meaning districts use general education revenue to cover the gap.

Minnesota has significantly increased the amount of cross-subsidy covered by the state. Previously, the state reimbursed districts for 6.43% of the calculated cross-subsidy. Beginning in the 2024-25 school year, the state increased this to 44% of that remaining gap.

While this represents meaningful progress, districts are still responsible for covering the remaining 56%. This is the equivalent of approximately \$4.3 million dollars for the BHM School District in 2023-24 (the state reimburses school districts for special education expenses in arrears by two years). In that same legislative session, an increase to the special education cross-

subsidy was established whereby the formula would cover 50% of the cross-subsidy in 2026-27.

Unfortunately, in the most recent legislative session, the legislature determined that it would reduce special education funding by \$250 million statewide. If the cuts are not identified by the Minnesota Department of Education, the cross-subsidy will be reduced by that same \$250-million amount. Depending on how those reductions are implemented, this could affect the level of cross-subsidy support available to districts.

Compensatory funding

Compensatory education funding is a categorical fund that school districts receive based on the number of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. That probably seems like a strange way to determine funding now that Minnesota provides universal free meals to students. This funding reduces class sizes, and helps provide staffing and resources to students in need of additional support. Our district receives less funding per student than most districts in the state, but does rely upon those categorical funds annually.

The state just released the funding allocations for the 2026-27 school year and has indicated that BHM Schools will receive approximately \$128,000 less next school year. This means we will need to make adjustments before the budget is finalized and approved at the June school board meeting.

Unfunded mandates

Some of the mandates we are now implementing will have an impact on school district budgets. For example, additional leaves of absence are causing substitute teacher shortages, and state-paid unemployment for

hourly school workers is expected to be depleted by the summer of 2026. These concerns, along with the already published funding reduction to public schools for the next budgetary biennium, will cause great harm to school districts.

The last legislative session provided a net zero increase in public school funding, which has happened in a few funding cycles. Unfortunately, legislators have already published financial estimates that indicate a reduction of \$420 million dollars for 2027-28 and 2028-29. On a personal note, I have been a school superintendent since 2002, and in that time Minnesota has never reduced public education funding. There have been shifts and no increases, but never a reduction.

All school districts in Minnesota will face huge challenges unless the legislature changes course or the economy improves. I know this is not good news, but our school board members know about this, as well as our legislators, and I feel compelled to inform our community about the challenges school districts will face in the coming years.

Staying student-focused

In the last edition of the Insider I shared examples of our district's efficiency, and how we have decreased our property tax levy for 2026. Unfortunately, decisions made at the state and federal level will soon create financial difficulties for even the most efficient school districts. Regardless of the funding situation, our primary focus remains fixed on serving our students. As always, we will carefully manage our resources in order to provide the best possible place for them to **dream, believe and achieve**.

Triple 'A'

from Page 2

fall musical "Hadestown," Carlson has also shown strong aptitude in the classroom and character on and off the basketball court.

"Parker is a quiet, steady role model whose leadership is rooted in service rather than recognition," wrote BHS Choir Director Zack Carlson-Giving in a letter of recommendation for Carlson's candidacy. "He uplifts peers, mentors younger students, and contributes positively to the culture of both our school and broader community."

Carlson said his favorite subjects at BHS include math, local history and public speaking. He has earned academic excellence awards at the school in both music and social studies, and carries a GPA of 3.6.

In athletics, Carlson has stood out in an unconventional way. One of the better basketball players in his age group during freshman year, he has since been supplanted by a talented younger group that has made Buffalo one of the best teams in the state this year. After he was cut from the team his junior year, he was faced with a choice – step away completely or stay involved however he could.

"I chose to keep working," Carlson wrote in his Triple 'A' paperwork. "Even after being cut, I continued to train in the weight room and participate in our open gym basketball league. I also stayed supportive of my teammates by going to as many games as I could. Through this, I learned that being

part of a team is about showing up, putting in effort, and helping the group any way you can. This experience changed the way I approach challenges in sports and in life. It taught me resilience, perseverance, and the value of staying committed even when things do not go my way."

While his basketball career may have ended sooner than he wished, Carlson took on a new challenge by participating in theatre, where his singing has stood out.

"Music is the most important of the three to me," he said of the three As. "Based on the amount of work I've put in and how much I really enjoy doing it, it's one of the most important pieces of my life."

As a regular participant in the school's Unified programming, Carlson said he is looking forward to a career in occupational therapy. He will attend the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities in the fall to major in psychology and minor in music.

"I want to be an occupational therapist for people with special needs and hopefully own my own occupational therapy clinic someday," he said. "I've always had kind of a soft spot in my heart for programs like Unified, so I always knew I wanted to do something like that."

That heart has been evident to Carlson-Giving, who heads up the Unified Music program.

"His ability to lead with empathy, consistency, and purpose makes him an exemplary representative of the Triple 'A' Award," Carlson-Giving said.

Carlson is the son of Jeremy Carlson.

HD

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ship and guidance, her One Act Play Contest students have a record of:

- Winning the subsection contest in 45 years.
- Winning the section contest and participating at state in 24 years.
- Earning State Festival Honored Performance status in 9 years.

That legacy has continued up to the present day, with this year's One Act Play ensemble becoming one of just three performances out of eight total to earn a starred rating at state.

"Even though Tracy 'HD' may be retired from her classroom, her influence as an educator continues far beyond those walls," said BHS Activities Director Nick Guida. "The theatre productions she leads are exceptional, but what truly stands out is the way she inspires students to grow, explore and believe in themselves. Her dedication and excellence make her truly deserve this recognition."



Visiting Olympian

The Minnesota Wild's youth outreach team visited Discovery and Parkside on Feb. 10, introducing students to three-time Olympian Natalie Darwitz (two silver medals and one bronze), at left, and longtime Wild forward Stephane Veilleux, below. Local resident Rusty Kath, who does announcing work for the Wild, emceed the visit. Darwitz and Veilleux shared about exercise and health, then joined a pair of students for a shootout against Wild mascot Nordy.



Four support staff members earn recognition

Whether providing extra help to students, managing a busy office, or maintaining the cleanliness and comfort of a complex school building, this year's Educational Support Staff Award winners help provide the essential services that keep Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools running.

Earlier this school year four BHM staff members were recognized, along with other support staff standouts from across Central Minnesota, at an annual banquet in St. Cloud. They are Kimberly Laumann (educational support professional at Tatanka Elementary STEM School; Candice Rozeske, principal's secretary at Discovery Elementary School; Richard Thompson, head engineer at Hanover Elementary School; and Sophia Warolin, educational support professional at Parkside Elementary School.

More information about each is included below.

Kimberly Laumann

Laumann has worked in education for more than 20 years, including 13 with BHM Schools. She has been at Tatanka for eight years.

"I feel blessed to say that I wholeheartedly love my job. Every day I am able to walk into school with a purpose," Laumann said.

Able to draw on her background as a head start teacher, as well as a youth horse riding instructor and daycare provider, Laumann is familiar with the tactics that help young people succeed.

"What sets Kim apart is her proactive nature," said TESS third-grade teacher Kristine Johnson, who wrote a nomination on her behalf. "She doesn't wait to be asked for help – she sees a need and steps in without hesitation ... to ensure the best possible outcome."

"Kim's ability to build strong, lasting connections with students is truly remarkable," wrote fellow third-grade TESS teacher Patti McMullen. "She approaches every child with patience, understanding, and respect – no matter their challenges or behaviors. Students trust her because they know she believes in them unconditionally. Her impact reaches far beyond a single



BHM personnel who received Educational Support Staff Awards earlier this school year were, from left: Sophia Warolin (educational support professional at Parkside), Richard Thompson (head engineer at Hanover), Kimberly Laumann (educational support professional at Tatanka), and Candice Rozeske (principal's secretary at Discovery).

school year – former students often return to visit her, seeking out her encouragement and support long after they've moved on."

In addition to her work with students, Laumann said relationships among the close-knit staff at Tatanka are one of the things she enjoys most about her job.

"The saying 'work for a cause, not for applause' is very close to my heart," she said. "When [TESS Principal Ms. Andrée] Iden told me that I was chosen for this award, I was stunned. Our school and our district have so many deserving ESPs that have the same dedication as I do. To be recognized for this very special award was truly an honor."

Candice Rozeske

For the past five years, students and families at Discovery Elementary have been cheerfully served by Rozeske, who enjoys the wide variety of responsibilities inherent in her role.

"I enjoy being at the center of the school community," she said. "I'm able to support students and staff, help families feel welcome, and play a key role in keeping the school running smoothly."

A collaborative nomination written by several DES teachers noted her "care, efficiency, and good humor."

"Candice goes above and beyond every single day to make Discovery Elementary a warm, welcoming, and well-run place," the statement said. "She is the bright smile that greets visitors, the friendly voice that answers calls, and the heart that keeps our school family connected. ... She's the Energizer Bunny of DES – balancing countless responsibilities, problem-solving with ease, and lifting spirits with her positivity."

Rozeske said the part of her job she enjoys most is interacting with students and building relationships with their families and fellow staff members.

"I like being someone people can rely on for help, information, or simply a friendly face during the school day," she said. "My prior experience has helped me develop strong organizational, communication, and multitasking skills. Working closely with a diverse group of students, families, and staff has taught me how important it is to be approachable, efficient, and flexible in a fast-paced school environment."

As for the award itself, Rozeske said the recognition is humbling.

"This means a great deal to me because it reflects the collective effort of



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Scott Thielman.....	Superintendent
Audyn Molesky	Student Representative

*****ECRWSS**
RESIDENT DISTRICT 877

ESSA

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our entire school community," she said. "It's rewarding to know that the behind-the-scenes work I do contributes to a positive, successful learning environment for our students."

Richard Thompson

For nearly three decades, Thompson has quietly helped maintain the district's facilities, from its largest buildings to the Hanover School Forest.

His first six years were at the middle school, and he worked at Buffalo High School for 16 years. The last few years have been in Hanover, where fellow staff members have taken note of his technical ingenuity, his kind disposition toward adults and students alike, and his willingness to take on projects well beyond a typical job description in order to benefit others.

"He doesn't bat an eye if you ask him to move a whiteboard, find some desks, drill a hole, fix a clock, find a bookshelf, clean a spill, remove something that crawls, and the list goes on," said fourth-grade teacher Carla Turner. "He's known to check in with each staff member individually more than once to

see if we have any needs."

Fellow fourth-grade teacher Jenny Boldt has enlisted Thompson's help to equip the school forest with everything from outdoor desks and signage to squirrel-proof bird feeders.

"When a new observation deck was installed in our School Forest this year, Ric was the first to notice that some of our younger and shorter students would not be able to use the tower viewer to see far-away objects, so he went to work to build some steps complete with non-stick skids so that students would be safe while learning about our natural world," Boldt said.

"I enjoy the teachers and the staff," said Thompson. "I also like helping the students. When I was at BHS I liked working in the same school that my children were attending. It is an honor to be nominated by my colleagues in recognition of the work that I do at the school."

Sophia Warolin

Though she is relatively new to education, Warolin is "the heart" of Parkside's specially designed classroom for students on the autism spectrum, according to a nomination submitted by special education teacher Evalina Baber.

"Ms. Sophie brings pa-

tience, compassion, and a deep understanding of our students' individual needs," Baber wrote. "She is the kind of person every teacher dreams of having by their side: dependable, creative, and completely student-centered."

Warolin decided to find work as an ESP in order to explore an interest she has in becoming a special education teacher.

"Since working at Parkside Elementary in our ASD SDC program, I've definitely found my passion for special education and am excited to eventually become a teacher," she said.

Baber said that passion shows. As an example, she shared how Warolin memorized the book "Pete the Cat" to connect with a certain student, and how she often stays late to brainstorm ideas on how to help different students succeed. When students who Warolin has worked with were asked to

identify three adults in the building they trust by visual cues, each indicated Warolin without hesitation.

"That moment speaks volumes about who she is and the impact she has," Baber wrote.

"What I love most about my job is the relationships I build with my students," Warolin said. "Being someone they trust, someone who believes in them, and someone who shows up for them every day is incredibly meaningful to me. I love watching them grow academically, socially, and emotionally, and seeing their confidence build over time. The small victories are just as important as the big ones, and getting to celebrate those moments with them is the most rewarding part of what I do.

"I'm incredibly honored that I was recognized for the work I do, and I take it as a sign that I'm on the right path."