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## Key Dates

### June

- 5.....Last day of school
- 6.....BHS/PLC graduation, 7 p.m.
- 9.....School board wksp., 4:30 p.m.
- 10.....ECFE Music in the Park,  
10:30 a.m.
- 10.....ABE Graduation, 7 p.m.
- 17.....ECFE Music in the Park,  
10:30 a.m.
- 19.....Juneteenth, no summer  
programs or KidKare
- 23.....School board mtg., 7 p.m.



**Retiring staff members provided 429 total years of service to the BHM community. See Page 2.**



**BHS senior Marcus Boeckers receives his cap and gown during Decision Day at Buffalo High School on Wednesday, May 21.**

## Grad rate rising

New approach has made historic gains in student success at Buffalo High School

As commencement season arrives, the Buffalo High School Class of 2025 will attempt to continue building on a trend toward higher graduation rates over the past five years.

The Minnesota Department of Education released its numbers for

2024 on May 7, and BHS had its best results since 2020 with a final graduation rate of 93.6%. The statewide rate was 84.2%, which represents the best year ever recorded for Minnesota as a whole.

While there are various measures that go into graduation calculations,

leading to slightly different numbers reported by different agencies, the overall trend in local graduation rates is clear: There has been steady recovery after the COVID time period of 2020-22.

**'Coming out of it, I think we can go beyond what the norm was prior to the pandemic.'**

**Mark Mischke**  
BHS Principal

That improvement may seem natural enough now that school days have returned to normal, but BHS Principal Mark Mischke is hopeful that new measures implemented to support students during those difficult times will bear increasing fruit in the years ahead.

"Coming out of it, I think we can go beyond what the norm was prior to the pandemic," he said.

There is already evidence to fuel that optimism for the Class of 2025 and the classes to come.

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## Montrose an AVID Showcase school

From Grand Forks to Faribault, and from Burnsville to other points around the suburbs, educators have found inspiration and instructional examples to implement after visits to Montrose Elementary School of Innovation (MESI).

MESI has hosted five AVID Showcase events in the past seven school years,

**See AVID**  
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**MESI students speak about how AVID has helped them during a recent showcase.**

# BHM retirees provided 429 years of service

A total of 18 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 2. Collectively, the group served the BHM community in various ways for 429 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: Nancy Tilus, Karen Schultz, Christine Hafften, Sandy Weldele, Dana Brainerd and Scott Rabehl. Standing, from left, are Lori Lipinski, Lori Rankila, Pam Melenich, Tammy Jacobs, Susanne Glawe, Patty Lammers, Char Torgerson and Sue Van Lith.

**Kenny Beise**.....17 Years  
Northwinds Elementary School  
Custodian

**Dana Brainerd**.....22 Years  
Hanover Elementary School  
School Secretary

**Susanne Glawe**.....16 Years  
Tatanka Elementary STEM School  
Special Education Support Professional

**Christine Hafften**.....34 Years  
Buffalo Community Middle School  
Education Support Professional

**Tamra Jacobs**.....36 Years  
Districtwide Special Education  
Teacher on Special Assignment

**Patty Lammers**.....16 Years  
Discovery and Montrose Early Ed. Center  
Early Childhood Special Education

**Lori Lipinski**.....11 Years  
Discovery Center  
Early Childhood Special Education

**Pam Melenich**.....38 Years  
Districtwide  
Developmental Adapted Physical Education

**Scott Rabehl**.....22 Years  
Buffalo High School  
Band Teacher

**Annette Rabusch**.....28 Years  
Hanover Elementary School  
Early Childhood Family Education

**Lori Rankila**.....12 Years  
Districtwide  
Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant

**Cathy Rose**.....36.5 Years  
District Office  
Accounts Payable

**Marlene Rudenick**.....22.5 Years  
Buffalo Community Middle School  
Special Education Support Professional

**Karen Schultz**.....11.5 Years  
Buffalo High School  
Nurse

**Nancy Tilus**.....12 Years  
Buffalo Community Middle School  
Special Education Support Professional

**Charlotte Torgerson**.....35 Years  
Early Childhood Special Education  
ECFE Classroom Assistant

**Sue Van Lith**.....27.5 Years  
Northwinds Elementary School  
Nutrition Services Manager

**Sandy Weldele**.....32 Years  
Buffalo Community Middle School  
Education Support Professional

## Pomp and Circumstance

# BHM programs planning June graduation ceremonies

**BHS and Phoenix Learning Center**  
Friday, June 6 | 7 p.m.  
Bison Field West

Buffalo High School will have more than 480 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 3 | 1 p.m.  
Discovery Center Auditorium

Nine 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 10 | 7 p.m.  
Discovery Center Auditorium

West Adult Basic Education (ABE) consortium will honor at least 49 adults who have earned their General Education Development (GED) diplomas from the Minnesota Department of Education during the past program year. Another 100 adult learners will be honored with awards for a variety of academic skills and achievements. The ceremony and reception at Discovery Center Auditorium is open to the public.



# Successful school year drawing to a close

As we approach the end of another successful school year, I want to take a moment to thank you for your continued partnership and support. It has been a tremendous year filled with student achievement, community engagement, and countless moments of pride. From the classroom to the concert stage or the athletic field, our students have shown resilience, creativity, and excellence. I am incredibly proud of what we've accomplished together.



**Scott Thielman**

### Family survey

Our families received an email invitation to participate in an end-of-year parent survey on May 28. Your feedback will play a critical role in guiding improvements across the district. The survey includes questions about your experience this school year, communication effectiveness, school climate, and more. Please take a few minutes to share your thoughts before the survey closes on June 11. Your voice matters and helps us better serve every student.

### Construction update

We're pleased to share updates on recent and ongoing construction projects across the district on our district website. At the middle school and high school, secure

entrance upgrades are underway to enhance building safety while maintaining a welcoming environment for students, families, and visitors. In addition, two of our elementary schools are receiving brand-new playground equipment along with unitary safety surfacing designed for improved accessibility and safety. These improvements reflect our commitment to both student well-being and inclusive play spaces. Thank you for your support as we continue investing in our facilities.

### Minnesota Legislative Update

This year's Minnesota legislative session brought both opportunity and concern for public education. While there are positive developments, such as some proposed increases in funding for education, the proposed reductions to general education funding in future biennium budgets raise significant concerns. These potential cuts could impact staffing, programming, and the overall quality of education statewide. Our district remains committed to strong fiscal stewardship, and we will continue to advocate for stable, adequate funding that meets the needs of all students. We will keep you informed as more details become available.

Thank you again for your support and involvement. Whether you're attending an end-of-year concert, cheering at a spring sporting event, or helping your child finish strong, know that your participation makes a meaningful difference as our students make BHM Schools the place to **dream, believe and achieve** their goals. Have a safe and joyful start to your summer, and we look forward to welcoming you back this fall.

## AVID

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most recently on April 28, making it a destination for those who are looking to observe AVID practices in action. AVID stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination, and is an instructional framework geared ultimately toward helping students succeed in college and careers. On showcase days, visiting educators visit various classrooms to see how AVID strategies are used. The most recent event even featured a student panel.

Since MESI staff began initial AVID training in 2017, the school has become a leader both locally and statewide.

Karin Swainey, an AVID Implementation Strategist for the Upper Midwest, said that MESI is a standout school due to its "culture of high expectations for both staff and students, very engaged leadership that



### MESI students collaborate to solve a problem during a recent showcase.

sets that vision and tone for how MESI functions, student ownership of their learning, shifted mindset from teachers for what students *can* do, and monthly college and career awareness."

"I have a number of districts that refer to their experiences at a MESI AVID Showcase as they refine their implementation," agreed Shannon

Bailey, who holds the same position with the AVID organization.

That reputation is a point of pride for MESI Principal Tony Steffes and his staff.

"Hosting these events allows us to showcase our belief in all students and the steps we have taken to prepare them for their futures," Steffes said. "Our staff has worked hard to implement consistent practices scaffolded across all grade levels to support student organization, high levels of thinking, and opportunities to collaborate and problem-solve. When educators from other school districts come to learn from you, it reinforces all of the efforts that our staff have made over the years to refine their instructional practices. It is incredibly rewarding, and our staff deserves the recognition they receive for the outstanding experiences they provide for our students."

## Proud Of....

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



Mitchell Friesz and Kate Schmidt, who are the 2025 Hall of Fame inductees for BHS. The award recognizes seniors for high academic performance, integrity, leadership, and making a positive impact on their school.



The Buffalo High School FFA Market Plan Team, which took first place at the 96th State FFA Convention. Team members are, from left, Brendan Park, Isaac Erhard and Colton Peterson.



Jayde Hallman and Julien Kariniemi, seniors at Buffalo High School, who have been chosen from a group of nationwide finalists to receive scholarships and the title of National Merit Scholar, an honor earned by less than half of 1% of seniors in the United States.



Students from Buffalo Community Middle School, who participated in honor bands on Saturday, May 10, at Zimmerman High School. The honor bands were hosted by the Minnesota Band Directors Association and were specifically designed for students who were in their first or second year of playing. Students in the Beginning Honor Band (above left) were, from left: Eden Palmer, Isabelle Forsman, Khloe Wetzels, India Keranen, Matthew Rinderknecht, Samantha Schauer, Violet Schuette and Macen Moe. Second Year Honor Band members (above right) were, front row from left: Gavin Schlosser, Tyler Spalinger, Wyatt Broecker; in the second row, from left, were Elsie Poser, Aubrey Karvonen, Aubrey Reinking, Gigi Butler and Owen Waskey.



## Proud Of....

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



The Buffalo High School Knowledge Bowl team, which took sixth place in the Tier AAA big school division at the State Knowledge Bowl Meet on April 11, and also claimed the Heritage Spirit Award for outstanding sportsmanship, enthusiasm and team spirit. Team members were, from left: Lucas Lawrence, Kumail Akram, Daniel Jungwirth and Dexter Huss.



Luke Gramstad and Kylie Kelm, who qualified for the Business Professionals of America National Leadership Conference May 7-11 in Orlando, Florida. Both students competed at a very high level, and Kelm advanced to the finals. She earned a place on stage, finishing seventh in the nation in Fundamental Word Processing.



Buffalo High School seniors Julien Kariniemi, Ryan Giddings, Marcus Boeckers and Jayde Hallman, who were selected by staff to attend the Students of Excellence award banquet in St. Cloud on Wednesday, April 23. Students were selected based on exemplary academic achievement, leadership skills and/or school/community involvement.



Lucas Lawrence, BHS senior who served as the Student Council Representative for the ISD 877 Board of Education for 2024-25.



Students who represented Buffalo Community Middle School in the Allegro Honor Band at St. Michael-Albertville in April. Those pictured here are, front from left: Connor Peterson, Karina Wuollet, Zander Robertson and Iona Whitney. In the back row, from left, are Natalie Lawrence, Carleigh Phillips, Connor Smude, Oliver Maenner, Matias Roiko and Savannah Mahn.





BCMS students who qualified for the State History Day Competition: Davis Kelm, Keon Mech, Claire Neumann, Elsie Johanson, Dorothy Karson, Henry Winger, Bella Young, Dallin Jerman, Karston Perkins, Rebecca Koch and Annika Niemela.



Nineteen current and former Quest students, who participated in the St. Cloud State Mathematics Contest in April. Above left, students who earned an award for finishing in the top 10% of their grade level included, from left, Nicolas Kuerten (sixth place out of 98 students in his division), Nolan Rabon (seventh out of 75), Karston Perkins (20th out of 290), Jackson Holler (20th out of 290) and Will Crain (32nd out of 290). Nearly all BHM participants, shown above right, scored in the top half of their grade level. In all, the contest included nearly 1,000 students from grades 7-12, representing 33 schools from Minnesota and Wisconsin.



BHS sophomore Will Schmidt, who was awarded the Congress-Bundestag Exchange Scholarship to study in Germany for the 2025-26 school year.



Members of the BHS Repertory Orchestra, which was one of only three ninth-grade ensembles to qualify for the state showcase at Orchestra Hall in April. See the story at [www.bhmschools.org](http://www.bhmschools.org).



# Grads

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## New safety net

While this year's official graduation rate will not be released until next spring, Mischke said there are good reasons to believe the upward trend will continue, including a new approach to student support that has drastically reduced the number of failed classes.

Traditionally, a student who failed a required class needed to re-take the class the following semester or during summer school. Those who didn't participate, didn't graduate. Following the challenges of the COVID time period, staff have taken a more proactive approach to preventing class failures in the first place.

This year BHS has rolled out a new Extended Day program. During the last three or four weeks of each trimester, students at risk of failing a class can attend a two-hour after-school session twice per week to catch up and finish assignments. Teachers are on hand to provide guidance, and fellow students serving as tutors are also available. While at-risk students are not required to attend, the chance to complete a handful of assignments with a short push of extra effort has been attractive compared to the prospect of retaking an entire class.

"It's an eleventh-hour intervention. We're trying to get to kids earlier, before they fail," said Mischke.

The effect has been remarkable. According to school records, the number of students receiving a first-trimester F dropped from 201 last year to just 65. As far back as 2014-15, well before the pandemic, the total tally of failed classes per quarter often exceeded 200, and never fell below 114, so that improvement is historic. Second trimester numbers this year were also encouraging, with 90 Fs recorded – the second-best quarter or trimester performance in the last 10 years.

"The reason I believe our graduation rate will probably continue to go up in the years ahead is that we have fewer kids failing classes, which means they're in line to graduate," said Mischke.

Performance at the top end of the academic perspective has also improved, with the number of students earning an A jumping to about 55% in the first two trimesters of this school year, compared to a historic average of 48-49%.

Additional factors in improved performance and reduced fail rates have been a Learning Recovery program implemented in the wake of COVID and fine-tuned in the years since, as well as the startup of "Connections Classes" that help students keep pace in new classes while remedying past issues.

"So we have three major things that we weren't doing three years ago," said Mischke. "We've added this trifecta of interventions that are really making a difference."

# A class of its own

## BHS takes a unique approach to offering advanced courses

Unlike Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, which merely offer the potential to test for college credit, BHS has chosen to emphasize College in the Schools (CIS) classes. These are actual college courses offered tuition-free in partnership with seven area colleges and universities. See more info at <https://www.bhmschools.org>.

*How many advanced classes are available at the following schools?*

*(CIS=College in the Schools, AP=Advanced Placement)*

### Buffalo High School

**40 total**

(36 CIS, 4 AP)



801 BHS students earned nearly 5,600 college-level credits, amounting to savings of more than \$1.9 million in 2024-25.



Advanced courses at BHS cover a broader array of subjects than most schools.



40% of sophomores took a CIS class this year, and 86.5% of the Class of 2025 took a CIS class.

### Lake Conference

**44 total** (7 CIS, 37 AP) - Wayzata

**36 total** (6 CIS, 30 AP) - Eden Prairie

**34 total** (5 CIS, 29 AP) - Minnetonka

**29 total** (7 CIS, 22 AP) - Hopkins

**27 total** (27 AP) - Edina

**25 total** (5 CIS, 20 AP) - STMA

### Wright County

**27 total** (21 CIS, 6 AP) - Monticello

**20 total** (15 CIS, 5 AP) - Delano

**14 total** (13 CIS, 1 AP) - Dassel-Co

**10 total** (10 CIS) - Maple Lake

**9 total** (6 CIS, 3 AP) - HLWW

**8 total** (8 CIS) - Annandale

**8 total** (8 CIS) - Rockford

Some of the Lake Conference and Wright County districts listed above offer a number of additional college credit opportunities through International Baccalaureate curriculums, articulation agreements, or other programs.

### BHS graduation rates

2020: 92.5%

2021: 90.9%

2022: 91.2%

2023: 93.2%

2024: 93.6%

Source: MN Department of Education

## The student factor

While some young people experienced a lost sense of purpose and connection during COVID, the ability of staff to re-engage personally with students has been crucial to their development.

"The overall mindset and work ethic of our kids is continuing to improve," Mischke said. "We can put things in place as adults, but none of it works unless the kids put in the effort themselves. We set the stage, and they deliver. That's the student agency we talk about, straight out of our Portrait of

a Graduate. Our academic performance and graduation rate directly reflects kids' willingness to work hard."

With a reinforced support system and an engaged student body, final results for the Class of 2025 and beyond look promising.

"We're uncovering more things to make us even more effective," said Mischke. "The optimist in me says we're just getting started."

## Statewide honor brings Stein's journey full circle

The reception of a statewide honor recently brought lifelong connections to early childhood programs full circle for one Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose parent educator.

Danielle Stein remembers attending BHM Early Childhood Family Education classes as a child. Later, she did so as a parent. Three years ago, with the encouragement of her mentor, Stein became a BHM parent educator herself. And on April 10, Stein received the 2025 Emerging Leader Award from the Minnesota Association of Family and Early Education (MNAFEE).

"I didn't think of myself as a leader, but that they look at me as somebody who is emerging in that role feels really, really amazing," said Stein.

The Emerging Leader Award honors early-career educators who demonstrate significant promise and influence. According to MNAFEE, Stein goes "above and beyond" in supporting families, sometimes joining them at workshops or helping non-English-speaking parents navigate online learning.

"Her leadership is not just

about personal achievement. It is about uplifting those around her," said Jennifer Greenhagen, Early Childhood Coordinator for BHM Schools.

Stein also serves on the statewide Parent Education Practice Committee (PEPC), where she helps connect educators and shape policy. "It feels like parent education is its own little island," Stein said. "Through PEPC, we can share ideas, influence legislation and make a difference."

A 2003 Buffalo High School graduate, Stein initially earned degrees in fine arts and German, planning to teach



**Danielle Stein, center, an ECFE parent educator, has been named an emerging leader in her field.**



### 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
Lucas Lawrence .....	Student Representative

abroad. As it turned out, she stayed in Minnesota, worked in a variety of public and private roles, and raised a family. Searching for connection, she joined ECFE classes as a new parent.

"We know there's an epidemic of isolation," said Stein. "When I came to ECFE I found community, and that's what I want to create for other families."

As her involvement deepened, she volunteered

to facilitate parent discussions. When longtime educator Diane Mastel retired, she encouraged Stein to step into the role.

"I never thought of this as a potential career, but it was very natural, over time, that I ended up here," said Stein.

Now licensed, Stein leads classes where parents and young children learn together before parents split off for deeper conversations.

Her favorite part?

"Everything," she laughed. "I get to see families grow, build community, and support one another. It's powerful to see the long-term impact of one conversation."

Greenhagen called Stein an "invaluable asset" who exemplifies passion, knowledge, and commitment, while MNAFEE praised Stein for creating secure family foundations.

"We are so pleased that she is part of our future," the association said.