

**BHS senior Lexi Zheng was named a National Merit Semifinalist. See Page 2.**

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## Key Dates

### October

30...BHS band concert, 7:30 p.m.

### November

2...BHS winter sports mtg., 7 p.m.

3.....Two-hour early release day

5.....Daylight Saving Time ends

7.....Election Day

10.....No school PreK-8, PRIDE (grades 9-12 in session)

10.....BHS Veterans Day Program

13...School board wksp., 4:30 p.m.

16-19.....BHS fall musical

## Bond Referendum 2023

# Decision time for voters

**By Melissa Brings**  
BHM School Board Chair

Whenever a public agency announces that one of its buildings needs to be replaced, a common objection is, "Why didn't you maintain it properly?"

Here, we are thankful that the Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose community has enabled us to retain and improve the same schools for many decades. The best example is the Discovery building, which was constructed in 1936 and is still fully functional.

This fall the BHM School Board is seeking permission from district voters to proceed with a variety of new projects that demonstrate our fiduciary responsibility to the community and good stewardship of our facilities in terms of safety, building maintenance and operating efficiency.

What's more, these im-



**If voters approve this fall's \$41.5-million bond request, the district will construct secure entrances at the high school and middle school, and address other maintenance needs.**

provements can be made in a tax-neutral manner. Because maintenance of the district's 1 million-plus square feet of facilities is an ongoing process that requires regular bond projects – and because existing debt from some of those bonds will soon be paid off – these new projects can be undertaken without

raising taxes beyond current rates.

This means, of course, that if the new bond projects are not approved, voters will see a decrease in their taxes (a home with a tax value of \$220,000 would save about \$6.67 per month,

**See Brings**  
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## Fast Facts

**Total request:**

**\$41.5** million

**Tax increase beyond current rates:**

**\$0**

**Election day:**

**Nov. 7**

### How is this possible?

Maintaining district facilities is an ongoing process that requires regular bond issues. Because existing debt will soon be paid off, new projects can be undertaken without raising taxes beyond current rates.

Polls are open from  
7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Early voting is available  
(see information inside)

### What Is It For?

- Secure entrances at BHS and BCMS
- HVAC system replacements
- Roof replacements

- Auditorium upgrades
- Unitary playground surfaces
- Technology, and classroom renovations

# BHS senior named National Merit Semifinalist

Fewer than 1% of high school seniors nationwide have become National Merit Scholarship semifinalists this year, but one of those standout students hails from Buffalo High School.

Yiqian "Lexi" Zheng is among roughly 16,000 semifinalists who qualified for the distinction through exceptional performance on the 2022 Preliminary SAT/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. More than 1.3 million students from 21,000 schools took the test.

"This is a huge deal when you think about the mathematics of it, the number of people who take the assessment vs. the number who receive that honor," said BHS Principal Mark Mischke. "It's a great accomplishment. ... In terms of the core values we have here, she checks all the boxes when you think about what it means to be



**Lexi Zheng is in rare company as a semifinalist. Fewer than 1% of seniors earn the honor nationwide.**

a kind, proud, driven leader. That's Lexi, so she is an outstanding representative of our school."

## **Rising to the top**

Zheng open enrolled to the Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose School District from St. Michael-Albertville in

fifth grade to join the Quest program for gifted students at Parkside Elementary. The camaraderie with other advanced students and accelerated material helped nurture her academic abilities through middle school and into high school, where she has flourished in music,

math, science, English and journalistic activities like newspaper and yearbook. She has also been an active Knowledge Bowl and Math Team member.

Asked what the National Merit honor means to her, Zheng explained in humorously self-deprecating fashion that it has been a confidence-booster.

"I've never considered myself incredibly intelligent or anything like that, because I do a large number of dumb things, OK?" she said with a laugh. "But in a way it feels like a certificate of competency."

*\* The full text of this abridged feature story is available online at <https://bit.ly/Zheng23>.*



## Upcoming Events

### **Halloween Dance**

The annual Opening Doors Halloween Dance takes place from 4 to 6 p.m. on Sunday, Oct. 29, in the Discovery Center gym. See <https://bhm-schools.ce.eleyo.com/for> more information and to register.

### **Veterans Day Event**

Buffalo High School is hosting a Veterans Day Program at 2:20 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 10.

All veterans and their families are invited to attend. RSVP to Anita Underberg at 763.682.8706 or [aunderbe@bhmschools.org](mailto:aunderbe@bhmschools.org).

Due to space constraints, the event is not open to the general public.

## BHS preparing 'The Wind in the Willows'

Nearly 100 Buffalo High School students are hard at work preparing their fall musical, "The Wind in the Willows."

The production, based on the children's book by Julian Fellowes, follows the story of Mole, Ratty, Badger and Toad, who embark on a series of adventures and misadventures caused by Toad's insatiable need for speed. Imprisoned for theft and under threat from the inhabitants of the Wild Wood, Toad must attempt a daring escape to defend Toad Hall.

"The goal was to do a show that would really be attractive to families," said Director Tracy Hagstrom Durrant, adding that the theme



**A few of the show's 51 tech crew members paint a boat prop in preparation for the fall BHS musical.**

is true friendship. "It is high interest, high action, and the music is incredible. It's just a fabulous little gem."

Watch the district Facebook page and website for photos and a full preview story.

### **Show Details**

November 16-18, 7:30 p.m.  
November 19, 2 p.m.

BHS Performing Arts Center

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



# Four honored with annual distinction

Four teachers have been recognized as exemplary educators and leaders among their peers by the Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose School District.

Each will receive a Leadership in Educational Excellence Award at the annual LEEA Banquet and Award Ceremony in St. Cloud on Oct. 25.

Those honored include Northwinds Elementary kindergarten teacher Katie Deneen, Buffalo Community Middle School math teacher Natalie Johnson, Buffalo High School health/physical education teacher Josh Ortmann, and Discovery Elementary kindergarten teacher Kimarie Tacke.

### **Katie Deneen**

Deneen has taught for 30 years, including 17 at BHM Schools.

"I have always wanted to be a teacher for as long as I can remember," she said. "I wanted to create a classroom that is welcoming to every student who walks through the doors and to make lasting connections with each of them."

Northwinds Principal Carmen Tubbs said Deneen has been successful in that regard, building strong relationships with students and their families, and also serves as "a positive leader, mentor and support for fellow colleagues."

### **Natalie Johnson**

The seed of an idea that eventually sprouted into Johnson's 23-year local teaching career was planted early.

"As a student, I saw the difference the right teacher could make in a person's



**Katie Deneen**



**Josh Ortmann**

life," she said. "I wanted to become a math teacher because I find joy in helping others."

BCMS Principal Matt Lubben said Johnson is frequently mentioned when students talk about favorite teachers, and she is a standout in her ability to connect theoretical classroom exercises to real-life scenarios.

"I thrive on finding ways to best help my students learn math in a fun and meaningful way so they will see the important role its understanding will have in their future," Johnson said. "I find it so rewarding to watch my students grow and achieve success after learning hard work and perseverance when problem-solving."



**Natalie Johnson**



**Kimarie Tacke**

Johnson is also a leader among the eighth-grade math department members.

"Our staff absolutely loves Natalie, and the kids too," said Lubben. "She's always positive and smiling, and makes kids feel good about themselves. She's been a great fit for our school and just a real strong leader both academically and culturally."

### **Josh Ortmann**

Ortmann is in his 12th year of teaching, and also serves as the head coach of the BHS boys basketball team.

"Outside of my parents and family, the people who had the greatest impact on me with who I am as a person today were my teachers and coaches," Ortmann said.

"Having that same opportunity to try and give back and positively impact the students that walk our hallways at BHS makes this the greatest job there is."

Because of his classroom and coaching connections with all ages of students at BHS, Principal Mark Mischke said Ortmann is well-positioned to lead in exactly that way.

"So many people get to see him and interact with him, and they walk away in a better spot than they were before they spent time with him," Mischke said.

### **Kimarie Tacke**

For Tacke, the recognition is a fitting finale to 40 years in the classroom, including 27 years with BHM Schools.

"This is my last year teaching, which has caused me to reflect back over my career," Tacke said. "I have never shied away from leadership opportunities if it meant I could make things better for students, teachers and the school system at large."

Discovery Principal Mat Nelson said Tacke is "more than deserving" of the recognition.

"She cares deeply about her students as learners and people, and meticulously maintains a safe classroom learning environment to maximize academic, social, and emotional growth," Nelson said. "Ms. Tacke exemplifies what the highest quality teacher should be and demonstrates so much care and skill in everything she engages in."

*\* The full text of this abridged story is available online at [www.bhmschools.org](http://www.bhmschools.org).*

# Bond Referendum Overview



Approval of the bond referendum would allow the construction of new secure entrances at the high school and middle school. An architect's rendering of the middle school is shown here. The new entrance would require visitors to pass through an office before entering the hallways, and would include the school resource officer's workspace.

## Security Highlights

- ▶ The middle school and high school lack secure entrances.

**Solution:** Secure entrances would allow the ability to engage visitors before they enter the schools, not only to contain threats, but also to greet and orient visitors. The elementary schools all have secure entrances.

- ▶ Exterior doors at five schools, including BCMS and BHS, are locked manually, creating potential security gaps.

**Solution:** Installation of automated systems at all schools would allow consistent, simultaneous locking.

## Facilities Highlights

- ▶ Mechanical systems at five of the eight schools are original to the facilities, and many are over 50 years old. Equipment is obsolete and the systems are inefficient, leading to increased maintenance and operating costs.

**Solution:** Replacing steam systems with hot water systems, upgrading equipment and adding dehumidification capabilities to various areas - including the BCMS and BHS activity spaces - will improve air quality, allow district facilities to operate more efficiently, and improve user comfort.

- ▶ Many classrooms in the elementary and middle schools were constructed with temporary, removable interior walls, which do not effectively block noise from outside the classroom and create less-than-ideal learning environments.

**Solution:** Where necessary, classrooms in all buildings will be updated with appropriate acoustic walls and re-configured to allow for contemporary teaching methods emphasizing collaboration rather than lectures.

- ▶ After extensive use for the past 25 years, BHS Performing Arts Center equipment is in need of replacement, including lighting, sound, curtains, seating and more. In addition, portions of the BHS roof have reached the end of their 20-year lifespan and are due for replacement.

**Solution:** PAC equipment and various roof sections will be replaced to prevent future maintenance problems.

## Project Budget

Secure entrances	\$5,842,303
Air quality/HVAC	\$6,454,445
Roof replacement	\$2,341,456
Auditorium upgrades	\$2,127,380
School renovations	\$6,472,745
Playground surfaces	\$1,019,200
Steam to hot water heating systems	\$12,242,471
Technology	\$5,000,000
<b>Total Bond Amount</b>	<b>\$41,500,000</b>

# Ballot Information

## Sample Ballot Question

This is a preview of the district's bond referendum ballot, with some added explanations. For most district residents, this will be the only question on the ballot this fall.

**This would not increase school taxes beyond current rates.**

**If the referendum fails, a home valued at \$220,000 (tax value, not sales value), would see a tax decrease of \$6.67 per month, and a home valued at \$330,000 would see a decrease of \$10.67 per month.**

**Installation of unitary surfaces would improve ADA accessibility for all visitors.**

**See the 'Voting Information' section on Page 6 for more on poll locations and options. Early voting begins Sept. 22.**

**These are the last two schools in the district that need security updates to entrances. Elementary entrances were addressed in the 2014 school bond.**


**Several BHS roof sections have reached the end of their expected lifespan.**

**By law, the ballot must include this language because failure of the referendum would lead to a small decrease in taxes when other debt carried by the district is paid off. However, approval of this referendum would not increase the debt portion of school taxes beyond current rates.**

**Sample**

**Special Election Ballot**  
**School District Election**  
**Independent School District No. 877**  
**(Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools)**

**November 7, 2023**

**Instructions to Voters:**  
To vote, completely fill in the oval(s) next to your choice(s) like this: 

To vote for a question, fill in the oval next to the word "Yes" on that question.  
To vote against a question, fill in the oval next to the word "No" on that question.

**School District Question 1**  
**Approval of School District Bond Issue**

☐ **Yes**

☐ **No**

Shall the school board of Independent School District No. 877 (Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools) be authorized to issue its general obligation school building bonds in an amount not to exceed \$41,500,000 to provide funds for the acquisition and betterment of school sites and facilities, including the construction of secure entrances to the high school and middle school; the construction and installation of HVAC improvements at school sites and facilities; the acquisition of furniture, fixtures, technology and equipment; renovations and remodeling of classrooms at school sites and facilities; remodeling and enhancements to the auditorium; improvements and upgrades to playgrounds; and roof replacements at school sites and facilities?

**BY VOTING "YES" ON THIS BALLOT QUESTION, YOU ARE VOTING FOR A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE.**

## Quick Scans

Voting information is located on the following page. Scan these codes for quick access to the following:

**Find my  
polling place**



**Absentee ballot  
application**



**Other ways  
to vote**





## Voting Information

In-Person on Election Day	Tuesday, Nov. 7, from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the locations below
Buffalo Covenant Church - Precinct 1	This combined polling place serves all district territory located in the City of Buffalo (Precincts 1, 2 and 3) and the townships of Buffalo, Chatham, Maple Lake, Monticello and Rockford in Wright County.
Montrose Community Center - Precinct 2	This combined polling place serves all district territory located in the City of Montrose and the townships of Franklin, Marysville and Woodland in Wright County.
Hanover City Hall - Precinct 3	This combined polling place serves all district territory located in the cities of Corcoran, Hanover, Greenfield, St. Michael and the City of Rogers (Precinct 2) in Wright and Hennepin counties.
Early Voting	Early voting began Friday, Sept. 22
In person or by mail	All district residents can vote early in person at the Wright County Government Center (3650 Braddock Ave NE, Suite 1400, Buffalo), or by mail (see directions at <a href="https://www.sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/other-ways-to-vote/vote-early-by-mail/">https://www.sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/other-ways-to-vote/vote-early-by-mail/</a> )

## Referendum Q&A

### What is the district asking?

The district is seeking approval of a \$41.5-million bond referendum to improve security and maintain district facilities. Approval would allow the district to add secure entrances and automated locking systems; to replace obsolete mechanical systems with newer, more efficient systems; and to improve a variety of other spaces, including classrooms, gymnasiums, the high school auditorium, and elementary school playground surfaces.

### Why now?

Making investments now in security and maintenance meets current needs and improves safety without increasing costs for taxpayers (see next question). Delaying this request may result in higher costs for the same projects later.

### What will it cost me?

District residents would not see any increase from their current taxes if this bond request is approved. This is because maintenance of district facilities is an ongoing process and existing debt will soon be paid off, allowing new projects to begin without raising taxes beyond current rates.

### Does that mean my taxes go down if the referendum doesn't pass?

Yes. A home valued at \$220,000 in the district would see a decrease of about \$6.67 per month, and a home valued at \$330,000 would see a decrease of about \$10.67 per month.

### What happens if it doesn't pass?

Projects of this magnitude rarely fit into annual maintenance budgets, so these improvements would occur at a much slower pace, or not at all, until a new bond request is approved.

### Why are the mechanical upgrades needed?

At BCMS, Hanover, Tatanka, Montrose and Discovery, the existing mechanical systems are original to the facilities and are 50 or more years old. The steam heating systems are obsolete, are failing, and have required extensive maintenance. These systems are also inefficient. In addition, the activity spaces (gyms, auditoriums, etc.) at BHS, BCMS and Discovery lack the capability to dehumidify the air during non-heating seasons.

### Why are the BHS PAC upgrades needed?

The existing lighting, sound, curtains, seating and orchestra shell are original to the building and, after extensive use for the past 25 years, are in need of replacement.

### Didn't schools just receive significant new funding from the state legislature?

Yes, school districts received a historic funding increase for the 2024-25 biennium, but it does not make up for the previous 20 years of underfunding public schools. In addition, there are historic new expectations and requirements for school districts, some of which were not funded and will increase costs. Finally, school districts must comply with far more spending regulations than other local units of government like cities and counties. Most funding is categorical rather than general, meaning it can only be put toward specific purposes. Approval of a bond referendum provides funding specifically for facilities.

### Where can I find more complete information?

Scan the QR Code at right to visit [www.bhmschools.org/elections](http://www.bhmschools.org/elections).



# Students, PTO bring in ZipKrooz

Thanks to the initiative of one student, and the input of many others, Tatanka Elementary STEM School has a fun new playground feature this school year.

It all started in 2021 when a student wrote a letter to the Tatanka Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) requesting that the school's tire swing be repaired, or a second tire swing added.

"The existing tire swing was already set to be repaired, so we used this opportunity to ask the students at Tatanka what they would like to see if a playground addition could be funded," said PTO member Emily Starry, who led the effort. "The PTO obtained information on a few different options, and photos of each were displayed for each student to vote for their top choice. The ZipKrooz was the overwhelming winner, so the brainstorming began to fund this project!"

Over the next two years, the PTO raised funds through a read-a-thon, a silent auction at Family Engineering Night, the STEM-pede 5K, t-shirt sales, coin drives, book fairs, personal and business donations, and more. The equipment itself carried a cost of \$13,000, but extensive sitework needed to expand and level the playground area pushed the overall project cost closer to \$40,000.



"Our Tatanka community (students, caregivers, grandparents, friends) worked so hard to get the funding necessary to make this happen!" said Tatanka Principal Andrée Iden.

"We are extremely grateful that the TESS community so generously contributed to all our fundraising efforts to make this dream a reality for the students at TESS," added Starry.

The equipment, similar to a two-way zip line, was installed this summer and has been an instant hit with students.

"The ZipKrooz is a really fun addition to our playground, allowing students to gain self-confidence, coordination and another outlet for imaginative play," said Iden. "Beyond the physical and mental benefits this addition to the playground will have for our school community, I



am especially proud of how students were able to advocate with their own voice and choices to bring this addition to our school. The ZipKrooz is a representation of how students can work collectively to bring positive change to their school!"

- If you would like to join a PTO group, or help start one at your school, contact your school principal for information.



**Melissa Brings**

## Brings

from Page 1

and a home with a value of \$330,000 would save about \$10.67 per month). But the district is simply asking voters to re-invest the same money they are currently paying for school facilities, which will help prevent larger expenses for more extensive repairs later.

As board members, we feel that the \$41.5-million bond request on this year's ballot is both reasonable and measured, in that it meets valid needs without asking more of taxpayers than they have already approved in the past. As always, we strive to handle the resources that are entrusted to us with the utmost efficiency, and we appreciate the support of our communities.

Extensive details about the bond request were shared in the September issue of the *Insider*, and some additional summary information is included in this edition as well.

More complete information is also available on the school website at [www.bhmschools.org/elections](http://www.bhmschools.org/elections).

Please review this information in order to make an informed decision, and remember to vote on or before Nov. 7.

## Career Day at BCMS

**About 20 area business owners spoke to BCMS eighth-graders on Oct. 5, the school's Career Awareness Day. Students attended the session they were most interested in to hear about the work and ask questions.**







## SCHOOL BOARD

Melissa Brings.....Chairperson  
Bob Sansevere.....Vice Chairperson  
Adam Bjorklund.....Clerk  
Amanda Lawrence .....Treasurer  
Sue Lee.....Acting Clerk/Treasurer  
Sheila Smude.....Director  
Matt Hoffman .....Director  
Scott Thielman.....Superintendent  
Cambelle Feldman .....Student Representative



**Singers rehearse for BHS musical 'The Wind in the Willows.'**

## Farm to School grant bolsters BHM kitchens

When students around the Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose School District sat down for a meal this fall, odds are that something on their tray was produced only a short drive away.

That's because the district was awarded a Farm to School Full Tray Grant in the amount of \$28,500 from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture in February of 2023, and opted to put those funds to use to augment menus this fall.

"For the month of September, we have spent \$17,421 on the local produce," said BHM Nutrition Services Director Kim Hinrichs, adding that over 100,000 meals were served in September alone between breakfast and lunches. "Our employees took the extra time to process the fruit and vegetables (washing, chopping, serving) so the stu-



**Steve Garvin from Gilchrist Orchard in Buffalo brought boxes of apples this fall.**

dents and staff could enjoy them."

Hinrichs estimated that the remaining funds would last through October, "which will be perfect as the Minnesota growing season will be winding down for most items," she said.



**Paul Ruter delivered a bin of melons from Ruter Farms in Hanover.**

Grant funds can be used to purchase Minnesota-grown produce, grains and even meat. A few items already scheduled for use at the secondary schools in November include wild rice and maple sugar. In addition, there may still be some local

apples, winter squash, garlic and cabbage available.

While the district received two Farm to School "mini grants" of \$5,000 each in the past two years to purchase apples from local orchards, this year's larger grant involved a much more extensive application process. Even so, Hinrichs said she is planning to apply for the same Full Tray Grant again next year.

There is always some level of engagement with local producers, but Hinrichs said the grant funds allow a far greater volume and variety of fresh products.

"This grant has helped bring more locally grown food to our students, and also benefits our local farming community," said Hinrichs. "We want to work with local farms and support the agriculture of Minnesota."