



(Right) Sully Riebling is a senior at Phoenix Learning Center (PLC) taking in the lesson from his SI Lab taught by PLC Teacher Michelle Ryder. The class focuses on social/emotional learning that provides skills for other classes. He's glad to be back to In-Person Learning. (Left) Paula Meister, Senior Technician at Buffalo High School, prepares Chrome Books for students to use during 4th Term after Spring Break.

High School Students Learn a Lesson

How many of you have listened to the older generation say, "In my day, I had to walk to school 10 miles, uphill, in eight feet of snow. And we liked it!" Years from now, when this generation of students become the "older generation," they can honestly say, "In my day, we had to go to school during a pandemic! Sometimes we went to school for two days a week, sometimes we were alone in front of our computers for weeks at home, and when we were allowed to go back to school, we had to wear masks, keep our distance from each other and follow arrows down hallways so we wouldn't bunch up. And we liked it...well not really, but we had to do what we had to do to be in school."

Like the elementary schools and the middle school, students in grades 9-12 had many challenges over this past year. Once students are in high school, everything matters—attendance, grades, participation. It all counts towards "the BIG day," GRADUATION.

Over 1,750 students attend Buffalo High School (BHS). The COVID-19 pandemic caught everyone off guard at the end of last school year and left everyone searching for better teaching and learning alternatives for the 2020-21 school year.

Mark Mischke, BHS Principal, shares that the perspective of success is very different this year. "Success this year is measured by feeling

safe in school. Success this year is measured by kids attending school in person. March 1 (2021) was monumental! That's when we welcomed all students back into the school. Success moving forward will be keeping kids in school and our school doors open."

BHS started the school year in a Hybrid Learning Model. Students were split by the alphabet, A-K and L-Z, and attended school on alternating days, two days a week. Students stayed home on Fridays for At-Home Learning. COVID-19 numbers were on the rise, and on November 30, students transitioned into Distance Learning 2.0, which lasted through February for most students. On February 17, ALL 9th-grade students returned to school for In-Person Learning for two weeks until all of the students returned. It was almost like it was the first day of school all over again. By March 1, students across the district, including those in grades 9-12 were back in school together for the first time since almost one year ago.

Just Beginning

BHS Freshman Grace Therrien recalls right off the top of her head the last time she saw her class and the last day she was at Buffalo Community Middle School; it was Friday, March 13, 2020. "We all went home not knowing what was going to happen. I was so excited to come back to school (September 2020 at BHS) to see my friends. The teachers were all so nice and flexible to work with. This is not a

regular freshman year, but we've embraced it. We are thankful for what we have and that we are still in school."

Therrien was not only happy to be in school but also to play on the varsity volleyball team. Originally, the Minnesota State High School League was going to shift their season to spring 2021. She was thankful that they got to play during their regular season; she felt like the girls were like her second family. Therrien shares, "In the fall, I realized how much I like school. It gives you a connection, community and friendship. I wouldn't have realized that if it wasn't for COVID."

From a Distance

Distance Learning 2.0 (DL 2.0) was an option for all students who were not comfortable with attending school in person. In the fall, BHS had just over 450 students in DL 2.0. Currently 365 students are in DL 2.0. English Teacher Anna Reedy is in her sixth year at BHS and is experiencing her first year teaching Distance Learning classes from home and school. Reedy was one of two teachers who had DL 2.0-only classes. Reedy worked from home teaching English 9, English 10 and Journalism until March 1.

"Normally, we can see changes coming, and we can prepare for things such as new curriculum or new testing standards," explains Reedy.

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Twelve Months and Counting

I don't know if any of us believed we would be dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic for an entire year, let alone to the end of this school year. The move to close schools last March was sudden, and we quickly learned that we would have to be able to plan, re-evaluate and pivot quickly. We continue to adapt to daily changes in requirements that affect the day-to-day operations of our schools. All of these changes have moved many of us to work outside of our comfort levels. The changes are sometimes subtle and many times disruptive to the daily routines we are used to in our classrooms.



Scott Thielman

The district has moved into and out of different learning models throughout this school year. At the beginning of this school year, a COVID-19 case rate formula helped determine the district's learning model. We began the year with elementary students In-Person and grades 6-12 in a Hybrid Learning Model. Then we moved into more restrictive learning models during the year. Finally, by March 1, 2021, we brought back all students In-Person, five days a week. The constant change in learning models has been taxing on everyone involved. We are very proud of the efforts of our teachers and staff as we transitioned between learning models. We are incredibly appreciative of our BHM parents for allowing us the grace to implement the models as required by the circumstances.

During this pandemic, we have learned the importance of wearing a mask to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Although this requirement has been difficult for some, we know that masks have helped reduce possible

transmissions within our schools. There have been a few cases of transmission among students due to athletic activities. As new variants of COVID-19 continue to evolve, it will be crucial to continue to adhere to the health protocols to keep our students in school and protect our citizens.

We are now looking towards the end of the 2020-21 school year. As more people are vaccinated and there is a more positive outlook, the Minnesota Department of Health is allowing school districts to plan for high school graduation. While there are many restrictions, we are grateful that our seniors will have the opportunity to experience this milestone in person. The plan for this year's graduation is to be an outdoor ceremony. Our plans will follow limited capacity guidelines at the facility and they will include a plan for inclement weather, which will be no easy task for our high school administration and our buildings and grounds staff. But again, we know the importance of providing this event which marks the culmination of our senior students' time at BHM schools.

Not everything has been easy or without challenge, and I would be remiss if I didn't call attention to those shortcomings. Understanding that the district had to offer every parent the choice of Distance Learning while at the same time offering In-Person Learning was not what was advertised when districts began preparing for the 2020-21 school year. Anticipating the constant need for substitutes to keep our students in class was difficult. We did not expect that over 200 students would choose a homeschool option. We also did not expect about 14% of kindergarten students would delay the start of their educational experience. It has all been difficult, to say the least. School districts estimate how many students will be enrolled every year and then hire or reduce staff based on those es-

timations. This year, the staffing process was challenging as there was no predictable way to estimate how many students would attend our schools.

As we prepare for the next school year, we are working with our state and federal elected officials to address funding for school district staffing needs. We hope this will buy some time for the economy to recover and fully reopen businesses and organizations. As we plan for the coming year, we know that there will need to be staff reductions due to student enrollment decline. While we are reaching out to parents who chose to homeschool their children during the pandemic, we anticipate that we will have another unpredictable enrollment projection for the next school year due to the pandemic requirements. That is the reason for the extra attention school districts are giving our elected officials. The state of Minnesota will receive \$2.6 billion from the federal government to offset the pandemic's economic impact. School districts are hopeful of receiving support to offset the need to make reductions in the future. The legislature is not scheduled to end the biennial session until the first Monday after the third Saturday in May, which is May 17, 2021.

We will continue to strive for excellence in everything we do and ensure that our students have the best possible educational opportunities. We understand this has been a challenging year for our students and our staff. We appreciate your support of our schools and know that we have an outstanding community, which is evident by the actions given in recent weeks to the Allina staff and patients. We appreciate our communities' partnership to help ensure our students and staff health during this time of COVID-19 and for making *BHM Schools the place to dream, believe and achieve!*



Proud Of....

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



BHM staff, students and families for their actions and support in response to the Allina Clinic incident on February 9, 2021.



Jenny Boldt, Hanover Elementary 4th Grade Teacher, whose work with the Hanover Elementary Forest has been highlighted in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Newsletter. Jenny has secured feeding stations, benches and tree identification tags. Students have recently tapped sugar maple trees for sap and are learning about making syrup.

Upcoming Events



27th Annual Scholarship Pork Chop Dinner

The 877 Endowment Foundation is sponsoring the 27th Annual Scholarship Pork Chop Dinner on **Thursday, April 15 from 4:30-7 p.m. at Buffalo Community Middle School (BCMS) DRIVE THROUGH ONLY.** All proceeds support Buffalo High School (BHS) student scholarships. Last year, the 877 Foundation was able to award over \$83,170 in scholarships to 84 high school seniors.

A pork chop meal is \$10, a meal with two pork chops is \$15 and a kids' hot dog meal

is \$5. All meals include baked beans, apple-sauce, chips and dessert. Curb-side order/pick up will be available at the main entrance. Purchase tickets ahead of time by scanning the QR Code with the camera on your smartphone to go directly to the 877 Foundation website (www.877foundation.org/events) or purchase tickets curb-side.



Week of the Young Child-ECFE Family Fair

Celebrate the Week of the Young Child April 12-16. The district's Facebook page will highlight a different activity you can do with your little learners each day.

The Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) catalog will mail during the Week



of the Young Child. You will find it full of fun summer activities, events and classes.

Last year, the **ECFE Family Fair** was canceled because of COVID-19 restrictions. This year, the event is postponed to **Saturday, September 18.** More information such as time and location will be shared as the date gets closer.

Can We Come Out and Play...Compete...Win...

Before the start of the school year, one of the biggest questions on many high schoolers' minds was, "Will we get to participate in sports and activities this year while a global pandemic is still raging?"

Literally, the fall sports seasons were bounced around. The Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) first announced that volleyball and football would have to play their seasons in the spring. After further consideration and evaluation, the MSHSL reversed their decision and allowed football and volleyball to play in the fall with few to no spectators

and a shortened season (since the decision was made late in September).

"I feel fortunate and lucky that our coaches, directors and advisors are stepping up and addressing all of the challenges," Tom Bauman, BHS Activities Director shares. They have done all that I have asked. We meet regularly to review guidelines and make 'good faith' attempts to follow, what feels like moving targets, the best we can."

BHS students and staff returned from Winter Break on January 4, after a month of Distance Learning 2.0 (DL 2.0) and no athletics or activities, DL 2.0 continued, but now students could return to practice and rehearsals.

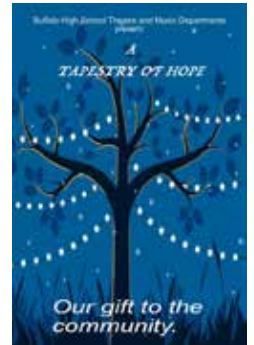
One change was that all students and participants had to wear masks during their practices and games or events at all times (with a few exceptions). At first, most everyone struggled with the masks. No one could understand that more than Josh Ortmann, Head Boys Basketball Coach. "It's not ideal, but the kids have a great attitude," comments Ortmann. "They understand the benefits and know if they do it, they get to play. I have some good kids who work hard, and I appreciate that. It's been difficult to keep the masks up when the boys are running down the court and bouncing the ball (and some of those photos make



Antonio Bluiett, BHS junior, is focused and ready to play ball. (Photo by Rob LaPlante-Wright County Journal Press)

BHS Presents an Original Theatrical Production

Buffalo High School (BHS) Theatre and Music Department staff and students are working extra hard this year. They are producing their own musical performance this year titled, *A Tapestry of Hope*. "It is a production of show tunes, poems, readings, and more, all built around the need for hope in our world and community today. You can see the musical production on **April 22-25**. Details, such as if the performance will be in front of an audience or virtual and how people may purchase tickets, have yet to be determined. More information will be posted on the BHM Facebook page when it becomes available.



Mark Your Calendars

April 18-24

Volunteer Recognition Week

April 21

Administrative Professionals Day

April 22

Earth Day

May 3-7

Teacher Appreciation Week

May 4

Teacher Appreciation Day

May 6

School Nurse Appreciation Day

May 7

School Lunch Hero Day

it into the local papers). The masks keep falling down, but they do their best to keep them up to cover their nose, mouth and chin."

Typically, Boys Basketball would have started playing in late November. January 15 was their first game, and they beat Minnetonka in overtime (OT). Buildings could only be at 70% capacity, and they played 18 games instead of the regular 26. The season ended on March 13.

Many competitions are recorded and played later or are Livestreamed (where an event happens in real-time over the Internet). Families have paid for streaming services to watch their child's events. Ticket sales have primarily moved to online sales, which helps tremendously with contact tracing if an event is in-person.

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Ryan Tangen Named the Next BHM Director of Finance and Operations

Beginning July 1, 2021 BHM Schools will have a new Director of Finance and Operations, Ryan Tangen. Gary Kawlewski, BHM Director of Finance and Operations, announced several weeks ago that he will retire on June 30 after working 11 years in BHM Schools. Kawlewski has worked a total of 35-years in school finances.



Ryan Tangen

Tangen is currently serving as the Detroit Lakes Public Schools Business Manager and has been for the last seven years. Like his new role in BHM Schools, he serves as the Chief Financial Officer and oversees the food service and transportation operations. In 1997, he began as an Auditor for

the Minnesota Office of the State Auditor in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. In 2002, he was the Becker County Treasurer and in 2006, he served as the Becker County Auditor-Treasurer. Not only does Tangen have an impressive work history, but he also has a solid educational background. He earned his BA in Business Administration Accounting in 1997 and earned certificates as a CPA (Certified Public Accountant) and a Certified School Business Financial Officer.

Superintendent Scott Thielman is excited to have Tangen stepping in where Kawlewski will leave off. "Ryan was an outstanding candidate," states Thielman. "His stewardship of school finances is impressive and I am looking forward to him continuing the excellence already established in BHM Schools."

When Tangen heard about the opening in BHM Schools, he knew of the district's great reputation both academically and financially.

He shares, "Academically BHM Schools has many innovative opportunities for students in all grade levels and offers students multiple pathways for learning. Financially, the district has a strong financial position indicative of sound leadership and community support. Also, it's been said multiple times that BHM Schools make student-centered decisions. I am excited for the opportunity to be part of a district that exemplifies their mission by making a difference by preparing students for a successful future in a changing world."

"I'm really looking forward to getting started and being able to work with team members in person and getting to know everyone," continues Tangen. Being appointed to the team is very exciting and a great honor. The first few weeks will be focused on meeting with stakeholders to build relationships and foster collaboration to support the BHM learning community."

Come Out and Play..., p. 3

Nine months ago, Tracy Hagstrom-Durant and Nick Lostetter, BHS One-Act Co-Directors, picked a One-Act piece that would work in a "worst-case scenario." They found a play featuring short stories and monologues, *Under the Stars and Stripes: Stories of WWII*.

They began in early December with auditions and rehearsals, all of which were done virtually over the computer. There are many rules included with a One-Act performance; it's a competition—who can perform and articulate the meaning of their piece the best. Up to 20 students can be involved in the show. There were 13 cast members and seven crew members. Students researched the piece and posted it in Google Classroom (an online classroom to share assignments and work).

Their first rehearsal with everyone was on January 4, 2021. Because the students lost out on last spring's show and summer community theatre, the actors were out of shape. They had to deal with students quarantining and having understudies more than ever if someone had to go out at the last minute. One student was in quarantine and came back right before they recorded the show.

Typically, performances and competitions are in front of a live audience. This time, teams could choose to perform a "Zoom Show" in "real-time" over the Internet or record the performance and send it in for review. Even in the recordings and virtual shows, they had many different mask rules to follow established by MSHSL. If an actor is alone, no mask is necessary. If an actor is in a scene with others, they wear a clear plastic mask.

Hagstrom-Durant remembers that last year's One-Act Play was the last time the group was together. "It was emotional," shares Hagstrom-Durant. "They did what we asked them to do, and the students were more cooperative this year. It's been nice to do the creative process with the kids, and we are doing a beautiful piece."

The group took first in Sub-sections and advanced to Sections. Unfortunately, they did not place high enough at Sections to advance to the State competition.

"(BHS AD) Tom Bauman is a beacon of what's possible," adds Hagstrom-Durant. "This has been a tough year before he retires (in August 2021). He's been great to work with, and because of Tom—you believe you can do it because he believes you can do it!"

Bauman shares one final thought that makes it all worthwhile, "The payoff for all of the extra work is that the kids get to play/participate!"



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him in grades 7-9 if he would graduate, his answer might have been, "No." In 10th grade, he enrolled in PLC, where he instantly felt a sense of community; it felt like a family. He benefited from the smaller class sizes, and he could be more like himself. "It's been a weird year," Riebling says. "It's been a HUGE privilege coming in to work with my teachers. I've learned a lot at PLC (during COVID), like how to handle unexpected situations and how to roll with it."

Like most seniors, he is excited about graduation, but he is unsure what will come next. "I might take a 'gap' year and be done for now. I have some hobbies and passions that I want to pursue. "I currently work at a Delano medical equipment manufacturer as a janitor, making 'clean rooms' clean."

Ryder continues by saying, "I'm PROUD of our students—surviving the pandemic—engaged in learning and still doing school. That makes it all worthwhile."

BHS seniors
Jillian Elton and
Owen Klaphake
perform a scene
in this year's
One-Act Play
*Under the Stars
and Stripes:
Stories of WWII*.
(Photo by
Claudia Staut)

Learn a Lesson, p. 1

"Last spring, we were mid-course and we had to establish class norms in a new (Distance Learning) setting. It was almost like starting all over. We stripped down the content to primarily focus on course standards. It took almost a week to teach students how to use Google Classroom, Google Meets and how everything would work in a DL environment. This school year, we've amped up the course work from last spring (in DL 2.0), but I also realize teaching to multi-modal students still puts constraints on our ability to be back to 100% rigor in classes."

When Reedy was teaching only DL 2.0 students, she offered the same class all day for each block (BHS students have four blocks of classes each day—each class is about 85 minutes). Students would attend the block they had available. On average, 10-15 students would attend each class. The class would begin with a Google Meet (virtual meeting); they would discuss the lesson and work on the assignment. Students could stay online to check in with Reedy if they needed help.

Reedy shares, "It's a sigh of relief to be in front of kids teaching again (In-Person Learning). However, masks have stripped away part of their identity. A teacher has to put in more effort to get a reaction from the class. COVID has changed how we do things now and will change how we do things in the future. It has really shed light on how social we are as humans."

Since the shift back to In-Person, many teachers are teaching students in the classroom and also in DL 2.0. Some were also teaching this way in the Hybrid Learning Model. It can get to be a real juggling act.

Technology Help

For teachers and students to make DL 2.0 work, everyone needed access to technology and Internet services; the BHM Technology Department and BHS Senior Technician Paula Meister were there to help. Out of her 15 years working in the department, 11 years have been at BHS. Meister checked out 850 Chromebooks to students. Each student must have a dedicated device (either their own or from the school) to take back and forth to school to use for assignments. Most students use a Chromebook which is a Google-based device and other software cannot be installed on it like a laptop. Some students needed laptops for specific classes with specific software requirements. About 190 laptops were checked out to those students.

Meister only has about three days to turn around laptops and Chromebooks that students turn in at the end of the term. She shares, "It takes about two days to get a



BHS Freshman Grace Therrien (pictured in center) practices for an upcoming concert with the 9th Grade Sopranos and Altos Choir. She is glad to be back to In-Person Learning. On-line practices were difficult, but they made it work with interesting song selections.

device for everyone." Computers have to be cleaned, updated, and make sure it has the appropriate software for the class offered.

Not only is she prepping student computers, but she also made sure teachers have the proper technology to teach students in In-Person and DL 2.0 Learning Models. Meister also says that approximately 50 hot spots (a device that provides a connection to the Internet) were handed out to BHM families district-wide to ensure students have the ability to complete assignments from home. Teachers have the option to wear a wireless microphone, that amplifies their voice, in order for their voices to be loud enough through a mask.

Since everything went online, Meister and the other technicians have been fielding student, parent and staff phone calls and emails to troubleshoot technical difficulties. Meister says, "Everyone is so dependent on the Internet and technology for teaching and learning. It has changed technology in the classroom from a research device to a daily learning device."

Phoenix Rises to the Challenge

If any group has gone through a lot of change this year, it's been Phoenix Learning Center (PLC) students and staff. PLC is an alternative high school for students who need extra support. PLC was located across from Tatanka Elementary STEM School in Buffalo for over 20 years. Plans were already in the works for moving PLC into BHS for the 2020-21 school year when the pandemic hit.

Michelle Ryder, PLC Special/General Education Teacher, says that she didn't see this coming. She recalled a student last January 2020 mentioning COVID-19, but no one ever thought any of this would ever happen. "Before we left school on Friday, March 13, 2020, we made sure to get the students into Google Classroom to get them familiar with the platform," explains Ryder.

"Last fall, it was hard to leave our school to move to BHS. PLC is our 'family,' and we were losing our 'home.' But we adapted," Ryder proudly states. "We had to figure out how everything would work, including the masks, arrows on the floor, mics around our necks, seating arrangements, and more. The BHS administration, teachers and staff did a good job trying to ease our anxiety to make us comfortable. They welcomed us with open arms. Most PLC students are in person. Our students (and staff) learned all of these new skills so quickly. I think they ROCKED IT!"

Another positive outcome for COVID-19 was Sully Riebling's new ability to advocate for himself during the pandemic. He was excited to return in the fall to Hybrid Learning. "I discovered it's important for me to have a place to work," shares Riebling. "I succeed when I have a place to go."

Riebling is a senior in PLC and will graduate this spring with about 14 other PLC classmates and over 425 BHS seniors. If you had asked

Learn a Lesson, p. 4



Anna Reedy, BHS English Teacher, helps a student with a proof reading assignment during an In-Person class in March 2021.



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Announcing the Class of 2034



If your **child will be 5 by September 1, 2021** you can **enroll** your child for the **2021-22 school year** in Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools.



All incoming kindergarten students need to complete **ECFE Screening**—call **763-682-8408** to make an appointment.



Due to COVID-19 restrictions, **Kindergarten Registration Nights** were postponed.

All elementary schools **mailed information and registration materials** to incoming kindergarten families.

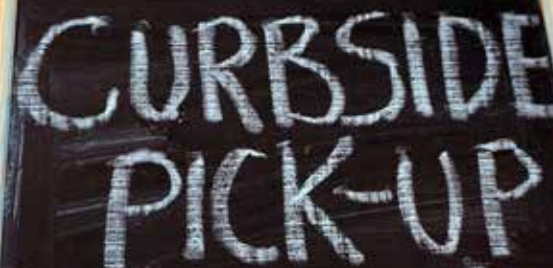
Principals plan to **welcome kindergarten students** and their families to a kindergarten "open house" sometime **prior to the start of school**.

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Make dinner plans for Thursday, April 15 to **pick-up** a pork chop meal for the 27th Annual Scholarship Pork Chop Dinner. More on p. 3.

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Reader comments or questions welcome!



Early Childhood Screening

Calling all parents of a future kindergartner! Screening is a requirement for entry into all Minnesota public schools. Children ages three to five years old will have their overall development checked in a one-hour appointment. The district provides this FREE service to all district residents. To make an appointment, please call 763.682.8408.

BHM Census Information

Ever wonder how people find out about our BHM Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) opportunities throughout the year, or when to register for Kindergarten? It's because they registered their children, ages 5 and under, with the BHM School Census. You can use the QR Code below with your phone's camera to quickly get to the BHM Census Form on the BHM website at www.bhmschools.org. You will also find information about ECFE preschool opportunities and screening dates and information. If you would like more information about the census form and registering with the district, call 763.682.8737.

