



Just before middle school students changed learning models from Hybrid to Distance Learning 2.0, BCMS Science Teacher Paul Lundberg quickly moved around the room helping students and answering questions about their class work and how things would work in Distance Learning 2.0.

Buffalo Community Middle School: A Tale of Two Learning Models

Do you remember middle school? It's where young elementary school children go to transform into young adults; to meet new friends and find a place to "fit in." It's where children seemingly begin to grow up overnight and become more independent. It's where some begin to discover the person they will grow up to be. It's definitely a time of great change.

Being a middle school student in 2020 and now in 2021, during the height of a global pandemic, has made things more challenging than ever before for our students. Our Buffalo Community Middle School (BCMS) students started out the school year in the Hybrid Learning Model. Students would attend in-person at school on either an A Day (Mondays and Wednesdays for students with last names beginning with A-K) or B Day (Tuesdays and Thursdays for students with last names beginning with L-Z). During their off days and on Fridays, students were expected to do At-Home Learning where they would turn to their computers or devices to complete school work online. The school made sure everyone had a device and Internet capabilities to do their work.

BCMS is doing whatever it takes to meet the needs of all of their students in a safe manner. Principal Matt Lubben shares, "Hybrid is a challenge for us on the instructional end of

things, but it's a way to get the kids in the building. It's a temporary way to personally connect with them until we can safely bring them all back to school."

Even before the pandemic, the need for substitutes in all areas of the district was strained. From teachers to custodians to educational support professionals to nutrition services, every area has been short on subs and the pandemic made things worse. On November 30, 2020, the district had to shift learning models in order to help alleviate the strain on the need for substitute staff. Elementary students moved into Hybrid and students in grades 6-12 moved into Distance Learning (DL) 2.0. This change allowed the district to better meet the needs of students and staff while continuing to provide students the highest quality education possible.

The change meant that students' primary social contact would now be limited to Google Meets (video meeting with their classes). Teachers were going to have to get even more creative to stay connected to their students and keep them engaged in the class work.

In only his fifth-year teaching at BCMS, 6th grade science teacher and 7th grade Quest science teacher Paul Lundberg, like other BCMS teachers, is tackling the challenges of

the school year head-on. "The initial shift to Distance Learning last spring was almost like 'survival,'" explains Lundberg. "Everything was just day-by-day. Coming back to school in Hybrid has been good and not so good. I really realized the value of those 'small conversations' with students to connect and clarify things to keep moving forward. That is challenging when they are not here. When we shifted into DL 2.0, at first it was like a 'honeymoon phase.' Students were engaged and excited. I had close to perfect attendance. We had shorter Google Meets, they would go to work on assignments and pop back into the meeting if they had questions."

When Lundberg is in Hybrid, he has two 6th grade classes in school, two in DL 2.0 (families who have chosen DL 2.0 for the year) and a 7th grade Quest (district's gifted program) class that has a combination of Hybrid and DL 2.0 students. When the school shifted from Hybrid into everyone being in DL 2.0, Lundberg's first class began at 9 a.m. He is on screen for about 20 minutes, depending on the instruction, because attention can begin to fade. But he stays in the Google Meet so students can pop back in for help. He often pre-records instruction for students in case someone's Internet is down or slow. He continues this for all of his classes until the end of the day.

2020 Carries Over Into 2021

When we flipped the calendar to January 1, 2021, I believe we all had high hopes for the new year. After all, it couldn't get much worse than the 2020 pandemic, could it?



Scott Thielman

Fast forward to Tuesday, February 9, 2021. It is a day none of us will ever forget. The events that unfolded at the Allina Health Clinic–Crossroads affected our entire BHM community. While they were dealing with the tragic events on site, we had schools in soft lockdowns (no one entering or leaving the school) and two of the neighboring schools to the clinic, PRIDE Transitions and Tatanka Elementary STEM School, were evacuated, as a precaution, to the Buffalo High School.

As a district, the emergency plan that we had in place worked. We were in close contact with the Buffalo Police and Wright County Sheriff Departments the whole time. We are grateful for their efforts and the job they did that day along with the first responders and emergency personnel. We are also grateful for the work of our BHM staff in making sure our students were safe and that our buildings were secure. Our parents remained calm and followed the guidance we provided which contributed to a successful reunification process with their children.

Our hearts go out to the victims and their families and to everyone at the clinic that day. We will continue to provide support to ensure that our schools and our community remain Buffalo Strong!



Vaccinations

Daily headlines in newspapers and on TV are about the release of COVID-19 vaccines across the state and the prioritization of who will receive it. First doses were for emergency, healthcare and nursing home staff along with those 75 and older. Then the state added

those who are 65 and older and people who work in education. While education staff have reached the prioritization level, the BHM School District has received very limited allotments. The first week (the week of January 18) we were only able to invite 12 staff to receive a vaccination and a week later we were able to invite 36 more. BHM Schools has over 900 employees when you account for substitutes and contracted employees (bus drivers and other service providers). When providing only those few vaccines each week, it will take a very long time to vaccinate our entire school staff. We are hopeful that there will be more invitations allotted to BHM staff in the very near future.

Learning Model

As you know, to begin the 2020-21 school year, school districts met requirements set forth by the Minnesota Department of Health and the Minnesota Department of Education in order to have students return to school. In meeting all of the mitigation requirements, the BHM District was able to have elementary students in school every day and grades 6-12 students attend in a Hybrid (every other day) learning model. During the first week of November, the community spread of COVID-19 in Wright County contributed to us changing our learning models. The community spread was exposing students and staff to the virus, outside of school, which caused classrooms and staff to quarantine due to their exposure. This, in turn, led to a need for more substitutes for our staff. The lack of available substitutes forced the district to change learning models. Students in grades 6-12 transitioned to Distance Learning and our elementary students transitioned to the Hybrid Learning Model. On February 1, we were very excited to finally transition back to a full In-Person Learning Model for elementary students and back to Hybrid Learning for students in grades 6-8. Our goal is that by March 1, all students K-12 will be attending school In-Person.

Budget Process

While we are addressing the effects of the pandemic first and foremost from a health and safety and educational focus, the district is simultaneously addressing the financial impact of the pandemic. One of the first budgetary priorities of the BHM School Board is to establish budget assumptions for the 2021-22 school year. The first priority for the board has been safety and security of students and staff. The largest component of the annual budget is personnel and keeping class sizes as low as possible has been the focus for the school board for the last decade and a half. This year is extraordinary due to the pandemic and the decline of student enroll-

ment. It will be difficult to attain the goal of lower class sizes unless the state and federal government addresses the loss of funding due to decreased student enrollment across the nation. Due to the pandemic, many families chose to homeschool their children. This placed an enormous burden on the school systems as there was no way to plan for the decline in enrollment. That is important to know because schools project enrollment in the spring of the year in order to create an annual budget. According to state law, the district must adopt its budget in June, before knowing what the enrollment will be and how many students will actually attend on the first day of school. Also, parents have the ability to decide to homeschool their children at any time. This year, school districts across the state were surprised by the number of parents choosing the homeschool option for their children. The BHM School District experienced approximately 225 fewer students due to homeschooling and was not able to make a corresponding reduction in staff. Additionally, approximately 50 fewer kindergarten students registered for school for the 2020-21 school year. As you can tell from this quick snapshot, the decline in enrollment will have a devastating effect on the budget projections for the 2021-22 school year.

Limited Federal Support

Fortunately, the federal government is allocating additional funding but there is a concern since the funds can only be used for equipment, supplies and additional time to mitigate the pandemic effects. At this time, the funds cannot be used for the devastating effects of the decreased enrollment and will not help address the funding of school districts. We will continue to alert our legislators about the limitations of the state and federal funding in hope of a resolution to help school districts. Unless the exceptions are made, there are very few options available other than making reductions to the budget.

It is our sincere hope that we will be able to keep our students and staff in our schools through the end of this school year, and to that end, we will continue to rely on our community's diligence with mask wearing, physical distancing and limiting gatherings. The biggest contributing factor for changing our learning model was the community spread of the virus and having to quarantine students and staff due to exposure. We do not want to have to change back to a more restrictive learning model and the only way that has a chance to succeed is by your adherence to the CDC recommendations. Our community's commitment to our students, parents and staff helps us make **BHM Schools the place to dream, believe and achieve.**

Athletics and Activities— Making it Work in the Middle

Like everything else, it has been a rough year for athletics and activities. Seasons and events abruptly ended last spring. Coming into the school year, while high schools were following the direction from the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL), middle schools were able to set some of their own guidelines.

Fall Season

Since many of the fall sports were outside, such as girls tennis, boys/girls soccer and cross country, Buffalo Community Middle School (BCMS) was able to continue with a shortened seasons (five weeks instead of eight weeks). Football shifted from a regular season to a 5-week camp and at the end they were able to play a few flag football games. Volleyball was shifted to spring (March-April 2021) and middle schools stuck with that decision despite the MSHSL's decision to let high schools offer a shortened fall volleyball and football season. Since BCMS was in Hybrid (see the story on p. 1) to begin the school year, students only attended practices on the days they were in school.

Winter Season

By December, the state had shut down all sports and activities (middle and high school) with the promise that they could return on January 4, 2021. More restrictions were put into place. First, everyone, would have to wear a mask at all times. This included athletes and physical education classes (previously masks didn't have to be worn). There are also limits on the number of people who can watch an event. Even before the extra restrictions, many of the other activities, such as speech and knowledge bowl, shifted to virtual meets.

BCMS Activities Director/Assistant Principal John Hayden says the new guidance has not been a problem. "Anything we can do to get kids back doing something, we are going to do it," shares Hayden. "Masks really haven't been an issue. Our kids are just happy to be back playing and participating."



Photo by Jen Nichols

For high school games, a facility can only have 250 people total in attendance, including the players (with some exceptions). Hayden mentioned that the other middle school athletic directors that BCMS competes against met and were open to only allowing parents for the home team into the games; visiting team parents could not attend. This allows more parents to be able to come and watch their kid's game. "Parents love watching their kids play and we didn't want to take that opportunity away from them," says Hayden.

Spring Season—Expected to be in Full Swing April 19-May 27

Because of varying factors, numbers have been down for participation. Hayden hopes that when the weather gets nicer and the kids are able to compete outside for spring athletics and activities that numbers will go up again. He shares, "Everything is going on this spring—co-ed track and golf, boys tennis, baseball and softball. We've been looking at the new and updated fields across the road from the school since last year, and now we finally get to use them."

Athletics and Activities, p.4



Melissa Brings

New School Board Leadership

At the annual BHM School Board organizational meeting in January, a new board chair was elected for the first time since 2015. Melissa Brings will serve as the BHM Board Chair for 2021. She is joined by Vice Chair Sue Lee, Clerk Bob Sansevere, Treasurer Ken Ogden, and Acting Clerk/Treasurer Amanda Reineck as well as newly elected board members Adam Bjorklund and Amanda Lawrence. The district looks forward to their leadership during these uncertain times. Congratulations BHM School Board members!



Proud Of...

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



Hayley Radcliff and Kelton Gray (pictured left to right), Buffalo High School Seniors who received the Minnesota State High School League Triple A Award for their achievements in the classroom and in arts/activities and athletics.



Elise Lubben and Andrew Shaffer (pictured left to right), Buffalo High School Juniors who received the Minnesota State High School League ExCel Award for Excellence in Community, Education and Leadership.



Amanda Reineck, BHM Board of Education, who earned a Leadership Development Certificate from the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) for completing Phases 1-4. Amanda also received a

Director's Award for attaining 100 or more points of attendance at MSBA training programs within the past four years.



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

The place to dream,
believe and achieve.

Athletics and Activities, p. 3

"I'm super proud of how the coaches and advisors have embraced the belief that activities are important for kids and they are willing to do anything to make it happen," expresses Hayden. "There has been no reluctance from parents for their kids to participate. Parents are grateful that their kids are able to get out and play."

Sign-up for spring BCMS athletics on MARCH 1! Register on their website or in the Campus Parent Portal-School Store.



BCMS: A Tale of Two Learning Models, p. 1

As you can imagine, science labs have been a challenge to complete whether in Hybrid, where students have to keep their distance from each other, or modifying things for home while students were in DL 2.0. Lundberg has been amazed by the amount of work that has been going on behind the scenes to make everything work. He is amazed by the ingenuity and resilience of his coworkers and his students.

"Education and society are going to be forever changed," states Lundberg. "There have been so many unsung heroes in a student's day. The generosity of people is such a valuable lesson. This will certainly be a year to reflect on."

Kumail Akram, an 8th grade Quest student at BCMS, has shared the roller-coaster of emotions about being in and out of school and having to learn from home. Last April, two weeks before the regional History Day competition, Akram said how the competition shifted into a virtual event. His team and other students made it on to state and even nationals.

"My mom is a doctor and we needed to be careful about not contracting the virus," explains Akram, "but she was glad to see my 6th grade sister and I get back to school. I was excited to be back, but it's not the same. It's hard to socialize with friends at lunch. The masks take away from a person's personality when you are meeting. I feel bad for the teachers who have to work with Hybrid students in class and, at the same time, work with students in DL 2.0."

Not only is science hard to do outside of school, but music classes can also be a challenge. Akram plays percussion and said it was going surprisingly well. "We are all on mute," he shares. "We use break-out rooms to work in small groups on parts and even high school students have come into the break-out rooms to help students learn their parts." He's been so dedicated to practicing that he even loaded up the school's vibraphone and timpani to practice at home.

BCMS students returned to a Hybrid schedule on February 1, 2021. The district plans to



Kumail Akram plays percussion in the middle school band. Here he is playing a marimba, similar to one of the instruments he was able to take home to practice the music selections for class.

have everyone back to In-Person Learning by March. Akram continues, "I'm happy to go back into Hybrid after DL. I'm also happy the district is looking ahead to have everyone back in school by March 1."

Parents have also struggled to balance work, school and home life over the past year. Parent of 7th grader Julian (and a 5th grader and a 5-year-old), Natalie Lee has found the silver lining in this complicated situation. "Julian thrives on the interactions with his friends and face-to-face instruction each week with teachers, says Lee. "It has been neat getting this extra time with the kids. It's been fun to all be home together, but we are very excited that they will be going back to school."

There is no doubt that there have been many unexpected lessons learned by both students and teachers during this pandemic. Lubben concludes, "As we've changed models throughout this year, I couldn't be prouder of BCMS staff and their input to make things work for students. Their flexibility and open mindedness of what we are trying to do for kids has been top-notch. Our staff has proved that no matter what learning model we are in, we will always work to do what's best for kids."



Students eat lunch in a space called the "Mall." It's hard to socialize at lunch because they are all spread out to comply with physical distancing rules. Lunch periods have been a little longer and the grade levels are split—half of the students eat while half get a "recess." Students can choose to go outside for fresh air, go to the small gym, media center, a classroom for quiet reading or the mezzanine for color therapy.

Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose School District Calendar 2021-22

*Please note that this calendar is for **NEXT** school year.*

S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
August/September							October							November						
29	(30)	(31)	(1)	(2)	3	4						1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	7	8	9	10	11	(12)	13
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	17	18	19	(20)	21	22	23	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
26	27	28	29	30			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	28	29	30				
							31													
December							January							February						
				1	2	3	4						1			1	2	3	4	5
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
26	27	28	29	30	31		23	24	25	26	27	(28)	29	27	28					
							30	31												
March							April							May						
			1	2	3	4	5					(1)	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
27	28	29	30	31			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	29	30	31				
June							() = Teacher Workshop/No School = No School/Holiday							174 Student Days Terms 45-43-43-43 Semesters 88-86						
			1	2	3	4														
5	6	7	8	9	(10)	11														
12	13	14	15	16	17	18														
19	20	21	22	23	24	25														
26	27	28	29	30																

Important Dates

Aug. 30-Sept.2	Teacher Workshop Days	February 21	President's Day - No School K-12
September 6	Labor Day - No School K-12	April 1	Teacher Workshop
September 7	1 st Day of School		No School K-12
October 20	Teacher Workshop - No School K-12		End of 3 rd Term
October 21-22	Fall Break - No School K-12	April 4-8	Spring Break - No School K-12
November 12	Teacher Workshop	May 30	Memorial Day - No School K-12
	No School K-12	June 9	Last Day of School
	End of 1 st Term	June 10	Commencement
November 24-26	Thanksgiving Break - No School K-12		Teacher Workshop
Dec. 23-31	Winter Break - No School K-12		End of 4 th Term
January 17	Martin L. King Jr. Day - No School K-12		
January 28	Teacher Workshop		
	No School K-12		
	End of 2 nd Term		



Last spring, BCMS students competed in a Virtual State History Day Competition. Kumail Akram and Daniel Jungwirth placed first at state earning them a spot in the national competition.

School Board

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Bob Sansevere..... Clerk
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Amanda Lawrence..... Director
Sydney Rhodes..... BHS Student Representative
Scott Thielman..... Superintendent

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Reader comments or questions welcome!

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 **763-682-8780** to make an appointment.

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

All elementary schools will **mail 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.**

More Info At: www.bhmschools.org

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 763.682.8780.



2021-22 Preschool Registration

Register NOW for Early Childhood Family Education’s (ECFE) Ready Set Grow preschool program for children ages 3 to 5 years old. This 9-month, 30-week preschool experience is offered two to five days per week. The teachers will help nurture your child’s social emotional development and use research-based curriculum to focus on language, literacy, math, scientific thinking, and building academic skills to prepare your child for kindergarten.

Ready Set Grow Preschool Features:

- Licensed preschool teachers
- Maximum class size of 17 to 20
- Academic learning that prepares children for kindergarten
- 4-Star Parent Aware Quality Rating
- Integrated classes serving children of all abilities
- Financial assistance and scholarships available for those who qualify

Questions? Call ECFE at 763-682-8780 or go to www.bhmschools.org and click on the Community Ed tab to find the ECFE page.