
BACKGROUND OF PROGRAMMING IN BHM SCHOOLS

The development of online programming in the Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose School District has been shaped by a growing recognition of the need for flexible learning options, particularly in response to the COVID - 19 pandemic. When schools were forced to transition to remote learning in 2020, districts quickly adapted to online instruction. This shift highlighted both challenges and opportunities associated with digital learning.

In the years following the pandemic, the demand for online learning remained steady, as families and students sought alternative pathways that better suited their learning styles, schedules, and personal circumstances. In response, BHM Schools turned to external options, including Elevate Online, to offer students a virtual learning option. While Elevate Online provided a temporary solution, the district recognized the drawbacks of outsourcing online education, including the loss of students and funding to an external entity, as well as a diminished connection between students and BHM teachers.

As online education continues to grow, many neighboring districts have launched their own programs, both comprehensive and supplemental, further reinforcing the need for BHM to develop an internal option. By creating Bison Online, BHM Schools can offer a high-quality, district-run online program that allows students to remain connected to their home district while benefiting from the flexibility of online learning. This ensures that students receive instruction from Buffalo High School teachers, maintains enrollment within the district, and provides a more personalized learning experience tailored to the needs of each student.

The launch of Bison Online represents a strategic response to evolving educational needs. It reflects BHM Schools' commitment to innovation, equity, and student-centered learning by offering structured, standards-aligned programming that keeps students engaged and connected to their school community.

REGISTRATION PROCEDURES

New Bison Online Student Registration:

Task	Action, next steps, and options
Task #1	<p>Students (or family) initiate interest in Bison Online by connecting with a BHS School Counselor or completing the Online Interest Form.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss online vs. in-person options and gauge student interest. • Counselor notifies Student Services secretary of interest
Task #2	<p>Student Services secretary receives interest notification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The required follow up email is sent to family and student • Family is asked to submit a confirmation form indicating interest • Student is given onboarding tasks to begin completing in preparation for online
Task #3	<p>Family completes Bison Online Confirmation Form</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Counselor reviews form and determines next steps prior to registration • Family/Student schedules a virtual or in-person registration meeting • Student completes initial Course Requests assuming they will be in Bison Online
Task #4	<p>Depending on student need, school counselor registers student for courses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For low concern students or returning to online, the registration meeting can be cancelled and the student can be enrolled. • Counselors will meet with students, review their course requests, and make schedule adjustments in IC. • If a student is a high concern, an administrator will be added to the meeting and approval will be needed before the student is enrolled in online courses.

STANDARD ALIGNMENT

The implementation of Edmentum as the primary online platform for Bison Online ensures that courses remain rigorously aligned with state and national academic standards. Edmentum is designed to integrate with state standards, providing students with high-quality instruction that meets the expectations set by the Minnesota Department of Education.

Edmentum's course offerings are built around state-specific learning objectives, ensuring that students enrolled in online courses at Buffalo High School receive instruction that directly aligns with the academic expectations of their in-person peers.

At this time, only courses that are directly aligned with Buffalo High School's course catalog will be offered through Edmentum's platform via Bison Online. This ensures that teachers can supplement curriculum from their current classrooms, students are having similar experiences online and in the brick/mortar classroom, and courses offered have been board approved previously. By maintaining this alignment, Bison Online upholds the integrity and consistency of the district's curriculum while providing a flexible learning experience.

PROGRAM MISSION STATEMENT



Bison Online, in partnership with Buffalo High School, is dedicated to providing engaging, relevant, and equitable online education. We aspire to pioneer innovative and inclusive solutions that eliminate barriers to high-quality learning, empowering students for their college and career success.

SUMMARY OF PROCESS FOR REVIEW OF PLATFORM and RESOURCES

In an effort to enhance online learning opportunities and ensure high-quality instructional resources for students, the district conducted a comprehensive review of potential online learning platforms. The goal was to select the most effective and rigorous platform to support the instructional needs of students enrolled in Bison Online.

The decision-making process centered around a thorough evaluation of two leading online platforms; Edgenuity and Edmentum. To ensure a well-rounded and data-informed decision, the district assembled an Online Task Force Team composed of key stakeholders, including district administrators, instructional staff, and technology specialists. This task force collaborated with district staff to conduct an in-depth review of both platforms, focusing on instructional quality, user experience, and alignment with district learning objectives.

The comprehensive review process included:

- A platform analysis
 - A detailed examination of the curriculum, instructional materials, and course offerings from both Edgenuity and Edmentum to assess alignment with state standards and district priorities.
- Instructional Material Evaluation
 - A focused review of lesson design, engagement strategies, assessment tools, and differentiation options to support diverse learners.
- Stakeholder Feedback
 - Input was gathered from the district administrative team, which included principals, teaching and learning staff, special education staff, and technology leaders to ensure that the selected platform would meet the needs of both students and educators.
- User experience consideration
 - Students who attended Elevate Online utilized the Edmentum platform, which was taken into consideration – including the ease of access in navigation, accessibility, and the overall experience for both students and teachers.

Based on this evaluation, the task force and district leadership carefully weighed the strengths and limitations of each platform. The final decision reflects a commitment to selecting an online learning platform that best supports student engagement, instructional rigor, and accessibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Bison Online is a locally developed online learning program that is designed to keep students within the BHM School District. This transition reflects the district's commitment to providing high-quality, personalized educational opportunities that are responsive to the evolving needs of BHM students and aligned with Buffalo High School's mission and values.

Bison Online will function as an internal program, designed and supported by Buffalo High School educators. It will offer a flexible and responsive learning environment for students who elect to participate in online learning either supplementally or comprehensively. Unlike external managed platforms such as Elevate, Bison Online allows for greater local oversight, consistency in instructional quality, and alignment with district curriculum standards and expectations.

Students will have the opportunity to engage in coursework while maintaining a strong connection to the Buffalo High School community. By keeping instruction and student support within the BHS system, students will be better positioned to be provided with timely academic and social-emotional support, alignment with graduation requirements and core instructional standards, build more consistent and meaningful relationships, and increase flexibility for students whose personal, health, or family circumstances necessitate an alternative learning model.

The district recommends the adoption of Edmentum as the primary online learning platform for Bison Online. Edmentum was selected based on its strength in curriculum quality, instructional design, and flexibility to support a wide range of student needs.

Benefits of adopting Edmentum include:

- Standard Alignment: Offers robust course content that aligns with state academic standards
- Personalized Learning: Provides adaptive learning pathways and individualized instruction to support all students
- Supports a variety of instructional models: including fully online, blended, and credit recovery options

Challenges that may be associated with Edmentum are:

- Balancing in person and online teaching for teachers
- Supplemental and comprehensive options

The recommendation to the board carefully considers how teachers will effectively plan for and deliver instruction in an online learning model. Each online teacher will have a designated hour built into their daily schedule, reserved specifically for planning, posting course content, and meeting with students enrolled in their online classes. This structure ensures dedicated time for meaningful engagement and instructional support.

Additionally, to accommodate enrollment needs, content area teachers may be responsible for multiple subjects within their discipline. For example, a math teacher may oversee Intermediate Algebra, Geometry, and Algebra 2 during their online period. This model provides flexibility while maintaining instructional quality.

Student expectations and experiences are central to this recommendation, with a focus on maintaining strong connections to BHS and ensuring alignment with in-person course offerings. Students enrolled in online courses will be expected to engage regularly with posted content and take an active role in their learning. By offering an internal online option, the district aims to provide a more seamless and supportive experience for students, allowing them to stay connected to BHS staff and benefit from consistent expectations across learning environments.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

<u>Program</u>	<u>Budget Request</u>
BHS Bison Online	\$20,374.00

Teaching and learning will provide curriculum writing hours to support course development for the first time each course is offered.

EVALUATION

Evaluation of the program will be monitored in several ways. Some of the anticipated desired outcomes include:

- Level of student success (classes passed vs. classes taken)
- Increase in capture rate from online students from outside providers
- Increase in student enrollment
- Teacher and student feedback
- Cost benefit analysis
- Evolution of curriculum and in house created pieces (growth in curricular planning and delivery)

NEXT STEPS

- Purchase date will be after July 1, 2025
- Professional development will begin as soon as online teachers are identified
- Curriculum Writing Hours will be shared with teachers as soon as registration numbers are finalized