



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

BHM Music Vision Statement

- Encourages lifelong musical learning by connecting students to music in their lives and the world around them,
- Develops musical skills and independence through singing and playing instruments,
- Builds confidence, perseverance, and self-discipline,
- Teaches goal setting, preparation, and how to contribute through solo, small and large group performance,
- Nurtures social and emotional growth in a supportive environment with opportunity for creative expression,
- Purposefully integrates life skills and makes cross-curricular connections,
- Deepens musical understanding by including contextual cultural and historical aspects to expand a student's global lens,
- Uses state and national standards as a foundation for music education.

The BHM K-12 Music program continues to be very strong and well-supported by the community. Music performances in BHM have continued to maintain a high level of performance and student engagement. The teachers in the music program have continued their professional growth by attending state level conferences, classes, and by reading professional articles. All schools provide instruction in the Minnesota State music standards. BHM K-5 music has worked to stay up-to-date with trends without losing its strong foundation of learning music skills. The elementary music staff chose QuaverEd and has worked to implement that program, along with continuing to provide a variety of performances (QuaverEd is an online music curriculum that has lessons, songs, and interactive musical opportunities for students).

Through collaboration with Central Lakes College (Brainerd), BHS has been able to begin offering concurrent enrollment credits for some of its higher level music courses.

All K-5 students have instruction in music that aligns with the Minnesota State Standards.

Students at Buffalo Community Middle School are required to take a music course in sixth grade. They are able to take music classes as fine arts credit beyond sixth grade.

At Buffalo High School, students are required to take one credit in the arts to meet graduation requirements. Music can meet that requirement and students are able to take music throughout their time at BHS for additional elective credits.

BHS Courses Currently Offered

- Repertory, Varsity, and Concert Bands
- Repertory, Varsity, and Concert Orchestras
- Repertory (Tenor/Bass, Soprano/Alto, and Mixed), Varsity, and Concert Choirs
- Unified Music (offered since 2021-22)
- CIS Intro to Music Theory and History (offered in 2023-24 and 2024-25)

Buffalo Community Middle School and Buffalo High School offer a variety of honor ensemble opportunities that enrich and extend music education for students who seek additional challenge and growth. These ensembles allow students to refine their musical skills, collaborate with other highly motivated peers, and perform at an advanced level.

At BCMS, students have the opportunity to audition for specialized groups such as the *Chamber Choir* and the *Allegro Honor Band*. These ensembles are designed for students who demonstrate strong musical ability, dedication, and leadership. Participation in these groups provides students with additional performance experiences beyond the regular classroom setting and helps prepare them for high school-level ensemble work.

At Buffalo High School, the tradition of musical excellence continues with a variety of honor ensemble offerings. *Chamber Strings* provides advanced string players the opportunity to perform challenging repertoire in a small group setting, allowing for greater musical independence and collaboration. Students also participate in prestigious external groups such as the *Minnesota American Choral Directors Association (MN ACDA) Honor Choirs* and the *University of Minnesota Honor Band*. These statewide and university-level ensembles give students the opportunity to work with renowned conductors, perform in prestigious venues, and connect with talented musicians from across Minnesota.

Both BCMS and BHS students also participate in district-wide events like *BHM Jazzin' It Up*, a festival that highlights jazz musicians across the district. This event celebrates student achievement and fosters a sense of community within the music programs.

Through participation in these honor ensembles, students not only develop advanced musical skills but also grow in confidence, teamwork, and artistry. These opportunities represent a vital part of the vibrant and thriving music culture within Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools.

STATE STANDARDS AND REQUIREMENTS

The Minnesota Arts Standards were revised in 2018. The revised standards were required to be implemented in the 2023-2024 school year.

In elementary and middle school, students must meet state arts standards and benchmarks at each grade level in two arts areas. The five arts areas are Dance, Media Arts, Music, Theater, and Visual Arts. In high school, students must earn 1 arts credit sufficient to satisfy all the state arts standards. Students must be offered at least 3 and required to meet the standards in at least one arts area. The five arts areas are Dance, Media Arts, Music, Theater, and Visual Arts.

Minnesota State Music Standards:

- The Minnesota State Music Standards consists of 5 strands; Foundations, Create, Perform, Respond, and Connect. These 5 strands are the basis of all K-12 benchmarks.
- K-5 benchmarks include the following
 - Create/Improvise melodic and rhythmic phrases
 - Develop vocal and instrumental skills to perform a variety of music.
 - Identity elements of music: patterns, sounds, contrasts, similarities
 - Describe your connection to a piece of music; emotional, cultural, experiential
- 6-12 Across One anchor standard: 5. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for performance.
 - 3.6.3.5.1. Collaborate as an ensemble to refine and prepare music for presentation or performance.
 - 3.7.3.5.1. Demonstrate an understanding of various genres and styles of music by applying musical elements to prepare for a performance.
 - 3.8.3.5.1. Demonstrate persistence and cooperation in refining musical selections for performance.
 - 3.9.3.5.1. Utilize multiple rehearsal strategies to refine performance, using technology where appropriate.

BHM EVIDENCE OF ACHIEVEMENT

Elementary Assessments include a 4th-grade recorder and a 5th-grade rhythm assessment. Students at all 6 schools show improvement and most students meet expectations based on our common assessment

rubrics. Based on the assessments over time, the elementary team works together to differentiate learning and provide more support or enrichment as needed.

Students connect with music especially through singing, movement and game songs, drums and other instruments, perennial favorites, seasonal and familiar songs, movie and real life connections to music.

During the “Evaluate” phase, [all nine BHS performance ensembles increased one grade level or more](#), from the beginning to the end of the school year. This type of growth is something that happens consistently throughout each year with each performance group.

Over the course of approximately two months, students in grades 10–12 prepare individual or small group performances. Each student presents their work to a judge or their director, with the goal of receiving positive feedback and constructive criticism in a supportive, encouraging environment. Most students earn Superior ratings for their performances.

BHS performance ensembles participate in Lake Conference Festivals (non-competitive) rather than competitions offered through the MSHSL. This puts the focus on collaboration with others. Students receive workshops and clinics from area professionals as part of this experience.

A Concert Orchestra student published a piece for string orchestra (2025).

For the second year in a row, the Repertory Orchestra received two Superior with Distinction ratings at the MNSOTA (Minnesota String and Orchestra Teacher Association) State Orchestra Festival. As a result, they were invited to participate in the State Orchestra Festival Honors Concert at Orchestra Hall in early April.

STATE AND NATIONAL TRENDS

The number of enrolled percentage of music students is continually decreasing nationwide.

There is an increase in including music composed by people from historically marginalized communities in our curriculum.

In the aftermath of COVID-19, MN school districts are impacted negatively regarding budgeting and staffing. In addition, the level of music performance achievement is still down since 2020 and MN educators are still adjusting their rigor and objectives to meet the student needs.

AI platforms for music teachers are in the early stages and have yet to be common practice.

Social media is a regularly used resource for music teachers to connect and share their expertise.

BHM continues to lead the way for inclusion within a music program with our Unified Music class.

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

A survey was sent to K-12 parents in January. There were 513 responses. One question was, “How does your child feel about participating in music class?”

- 70% selected enthusiastic or very enthusiastic.
- Majority of the parents also selected that they see skills that their child learned in music class be used or talk about at home.

Parents comments

- “Music has a lot of positive impacts on students across all academics.”
- “Kids are exposed to music and different instruments. We live in a time where music lessons are for the wealthy. Music in school provides all students with exposure to something new. My kids are coming away with a positive experience and are interested in pursuing music outside of school.”
- “It helps him to have confidence so that he can do public speaking or stand up in front of groups. He’s painfully shy in front of the groups.”
- “Freedom to build confidence and try something new.”
- “Last night's orchestra performance brought tears to my eyes and was a clear example of the love being put into the program. We were blown away with the progress and teamwork displayed by the kids.”

Overall many comments related to teachers. They described teachers as knowledgeable, passionate, caring, and inspiring. Parents also noted the diverse options that are available at the high school level.

PROGRAM LIMITATIONS OR CHALLENGES

At the elementary level parents noted that they would like more opportunities to see performances. A few commented that evening performances for parents would be nice. There were concerns about inconsistencies between schools.

The BCMS music program has undergone significant changes in recent years due to staffing reductions, including a .5 FTE reduction each in choir, orchestra, and band. As a result, eighth-grade band and band lessons are no longer offered, and most music classes now have larger section sizes. One positive development is that eighth-grade choir sections have been aligned, allowing for common scheduling and opportunities to combine students into voice-alike sectionals, which has strengthened choral instruction.

Previously, both seventh- and eighth-grade music classes met daily, providing consistent, high-quality instruction and more opportunities for skill development. The move away from daily classes has made it

more challenging to maintain the same level of progress and student engagement. Additionally, recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers for .5 FTE positions continues to be difficult, which further impacts the stability and growth of the music program.

Over the past three years, the music department has experienced staffing reductions each year, including significant reductions within Buffalo High School over the past six years. These reductions have directly impacted program offerings, making it impossible to continue courses such as the guitar class — a highly anticipated addition designed to bring new students into the music department. Despite strong student interest and high initial enrollment, the course could not be sustained.

Additionally, co-teaching within performance ensembles has dramatically decreased over time, resulting in fewer opportunities for students to receive specialized instruction and support. Educational Support Professional (ESP) hours have also been reduced, further limiting available assistance for students.

The trimester schedule presents both opportunities and challenges for the music program. On the positive side, the structure has allowed the department to introduce non-performance classes such as Music Production. It also enables ninth-grade students to participate in music every day and provides the ability to group ninth-grade students into voice-alike ensembles during the first two trimesters. However, there is concern that the trimester format has made it more difficult for ensemble musicians to commit to participation consistently throughout the year, potentially impacting overall program continuity and student retention.

NEXT STEPS

At the elementary level, staff are focused on creating more equitable musical experiences by working toward having a greater number of common instruments available across all sites. A key goal is to ensure all students have access to school-provided recorders, given that learning the recorder is a required part of the curriculum. At the same time, families will continue to have the opportunity to purchase their own recorders if they choose. In addition to these efforts, elementary music staff have expressed a strong interest in attending more professional development opportunities to further enhance their instructional practices.

At BCMS, the music department is exploring the possibility of adjusting the middle school schedule to allow for music classes to meet every day, even if for shorter periods of time. Increasing the frequency of student contact time is expected to significantly improve students' confidence, skill development, and familiarity with musical concepts. Staff have noted that a similar "every-day" model at BHS has proven highly successful and could serve as a strong example.

At BHS, the music program continues to innovate and expand opportunities for students, including offering a Bison Online music course. In addition, staff are exploring the possibility of reintroducing a guitar class. This course has historically been a popular offering that attracts many students to the music department. One important consideration for offering the guitar class again is ensuring the instructor has proficiency in guitar performance and instruction.