

School Board Workshop:

May 11, 2026

Subject:

BHS Winter Activities Report

Presenter:

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BHS Activities Director**

SUGGESTED SCHOOL BOARD ACTION:

Report only.

DESCRIPTION: Season Summaries

Buffalo High School has officially wrapped up its winter activities for the 2025-26 school year. Our dedicated coaches and advisors have put together brief narratives reflecting on their respective seasons, which are now available for your review. These insights highlight the hard work, growth, and accomplishments of our students throughout the fall.

We'd like to take a moment to express our sincere appreciation for your continued support of activities at BHS. Your encouragement plays a vital role in the success of our students, and we're excited to share these season recaps with you. Thank you for being an integral part of our school community!

Program: Mock Trial

Head Coach: Jason Swanson (16th season)

Asst. Coach: Heather Eld (10th season)

Atty. Coach: Karen Wolff (20th season)

Atty. Coach: Jay Mason (1st season)

Case Overview

This is a civil case in which the Plaintiff, Harper Lightfoot, alleges that the Defendant, Jesse Gates, included defamatory statements about Lightfoot in a video that Gates posted online. The case is in Cook County, Minnesota, where Gates lives.

Lightfoot and Gates first met in a shipwreck museum, bonding over their shared fascination with the wreck of the famous Great Lakes freight ship Edmund Fitzgerald. After some shared treasure hunts, Gates moved to Minnesota's North Shore and joined Lightfoot's business, Icy Dives. After obtaining a Canadian permit to dive on the Edmund Fitzgerald, they used a remote-controlled submersible to take underwater pictures of the wreck. In 2019, they purchased a submarine that could transport passengers down to the wreck. A highlight of each dive was a spectacular view of two orange life preserver rings fastened to the ship, which Gates referred to as the "Big Reveal."

Unfortunately, Icy Dives struggled to make a profit, given the business' high prices, expensive insurance, and limited customer base. The partners had a falling out over business plans, and Gates left to start a rival business, Superior Depths, that used a virtual reality headset and remote-control drone to "dive" on the wreck without actually taking passengers underwater. Icy Dives and Superior Depths shared the rights under the Canadian dive permit, with each business alternating weekends for their respective dives. As an additional revenue source, Gates also posted videos of Superior Depths' dives online, using an artificial intelligence tool, ChatSeaPT, to analyze the raw video footage of each dive, generate narrative based on its interpretation of the raw footage, and then post a finished product online.

On a remote dive with one passenger in November 2024, Gates realized that one of the two life preserver rings was no longer attached to the ship. It was gone. Believing that Lightfoot had removed

the life preserver, an upset Gates shouted, cursed, and blamed Lightfoot for removing it to make up for Icy Dives' financial problems. Gates' reaction was captured on the dive video's raw footage. As they did with every dive, Gates used the ChatSeaPT artificial intelligence to edit, summarize, and prepare the November 2024 dive video summary to be automatically posted online, using prompts that Gates defined.

The video's closed caption specifically identified Lightfoot as the only person who could have stolen the life preserver and put it up for sale. That statement is the basis of this case. Lightfoot claims that the statement is defamatory and has harmed their business and brings this action against Gates to recover damages.

Is the statement defamatory? Was Gates reckless or malicious in posting the video? Did Gates follow proper procedures in their use of the ChatSeaPT artificial intelligence tool to edit, summarize, and post the video? Each side summons the testimony of experts in artificial intelligence. Billie Warns, a well-known commenter on ethical standards around the use of artificial intelligence, has strong opinions on the responsibilities of the users of tools like ChatSeaPT. Alex Ignasi, a content creator and professor, recalls their former student Jesse Gates having an understanding of how to use the tool.

Competition Overview

The competition this year was in a hybrid format. Half of our trial competitions during region play were in person, and the other half in an online format. This was due to a continued backlog of court cases, and little availability of courtroom space. It has also allowed larger regions to compete with each other due to no worry for geographic distance between competing teams. For the sixth season BHS was placed in the Greater MN Super Region, comprising 20 teams, BHS making up two (2) of those 20. Mock Trial is unique in that during competition, there is no difference between V and JV. All teams are competing together in the region, regardless of varsity or junior varsity status. Both Buffalo teams performed well.

The varsity team finished 4-0 during the regular season, and faced off against Battle Lake High School. Battle Lake defeated Buffalo to move to the state competition. There are five (5) seniors on the team this year. They are: Haley Gentry, Graciela Gonzalez Estrada (JV), Julia Millard, Erika Torres Gutierrez (JV), and Hannah Williamson. The junior varsity team finished 2-2. We are also very proud of this team ranking, considering that all but one of the team members on the junior varsity were made up of brand new participants. The top six teams advance to the final round for the state competition.

I would especially like to thank our attorney coach Karen Wolff, who spent a lot of time with the teams this season to help them through the challenges this season. Karen is an invaluable member of this organization each year, and has been since the 2007 season. She volunteers her time, energy, expertise, as well as a great sense of leadership and humor that allows this group to grow to their full potential each year.

Program: One-Act Play

Director: Tracy Hagstrom Durant (32 years at BHS, 46 total)

Assisted by: Drew Elo

Student Technical Director: Mitchell Nosbush

20 students participated in the One-Act Play program during the 2025-2026 season.

The MSHSL only allows a competition ensemble of no more than 20 students.

Play selection is key to success in the competitive One-Act play arena.

The Women of Lockerbie by Deborah Brevoort

Synopsis:

"The Women of Lockerbie" is a poignant play by Deborah Brevoort that explores themes of grief, love, and redemption in the aftermath of the Pan Am 103 bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland.

The play is set seven years after the tragic bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, which resulted in the deaths of 270 people, including 11 residents of Lockerbie. The story follows Madeleine Livingston, a mother from New Jersey, who roams the hills of Lockerbie searching for her son's remains, which were lost in the crash. During her search, she encounters the women of Lockerbie, a group of local women who are fighting against the U.S. government to reclaim the clothing of the victims found in the wreckage.

2025-2026 Season Performance Record

Lakes Conference – The Lakes Conference does not have a One-Act Play Festival.

Sub-Section 5AA – 1st place

Section 5AA Finals – 1st place

State One-Act Play Festival - Starred Performance

From HD:

I am always looking for that special educational piece of challenging theater that tells a story and moves people. It is a constant in the life of every theatre director. However, this year seemed more difficult because of the challenging times we were living through right here in MN. Our fall musical had been a heavy one so should I find something lighter to let the kids forget the agony around them and just laugh? I tried that approach but a show title just kept resurfacing in my head and heart...and it would not leave. *The Women of Lockerbie* by Deborah Brevoort.

For most of my career, if someone had asked me, "*Why did you choose high school teaching and directing theater as a career?*" I probably would have answered, "*I want my students to learn to be a good person.*" Looking back now, that answer feels a bit trite—well intentioned, but incomplete. The true and complete answer is simple, powerful, and—especially today—essential:

I wanted my students to be better humans.

And how does that happen?

By learning to recognize, understand, and regulate our emotions.

By learning how to communicate those emotions in effective, healthy, and compassionate ways.

So where do we teach those skills?

In the theatre.

In theatre, students learn to:

- Step into the light
- Find their people
- Learn what it means to belong
- Collaborate and communicate with empathy and purpose

Our world feels like a bit of a mess right now—and this time, that mess has come directly into Minnesota, Buffalo, our homes, impacting our children in profound ways. How do we begin to make sense of it? How do we begin to heal it?

We start by looking again at those four simple ideas above.

Is theatre a magic pill? A miracle cure? An instant fix? No. But it *is* a powerful place to begin.

As the women remind us in *The Women of Lockerbie*:

"The dark valley rises to a mountain where the sun shines bright.

Spring follows winter. Morning follows night.

You have to trust in this.

Trust in the rising sun and in the stars that shine at night.

Trust in the strength of love to overcome the awesome power of hatred.

Trust...

And believe..."

And that, ultimately, is why I chose this show and my life's work:

to help young people trust, believe, connect—and become better humans.

Tracy Hagstrom Durant

Program: Boys Basketball

Coach: Josh Ortmann (10 years as head coach, 14 overall)

Assistant Coaches: Joel Squadroni, Ryan Petersen, Ross Mjelde, Tom Bauman, Andy Atkinson, Bo Bauman, James Lindquist

The Buffalo Bison put together an outstanding season, finishing with a 22–6 overall record and a strong 9–5 mark in Lake Conference play. From the opening tip, this group established itself as one of the top-tier teams in the state, earning six wins over top-10 opponents. Their consistency and competitiveness kept them ranked in the top five for two months and inside the top ten for three months—a testament to the daily commitment and toughness this team brought to the floor.

Offensively, the Bison were led by a trio of standout players. Sophomore Eli Hegle averaged 18.7 points per game, showcasing confidence and growth well beyond his years. He was closely supported by sophomore Thomas Jordan, who averaged 18.1 points per game, and junior Matthew Jordan, who added 17 points per game. Together, they formed one of the most potent scoring groups in the area, consistently stepping up in big moments and setting the tone for the team's success.

While the numbers and accolades tell part of the story, the true strength of this team lies in the foundation built by its seniors. Hendrix Gatz, Grant Benson, and Henry Bloomquist played an invaluable role in shaping the culture of this program. Their leadership, work ethic, and commitment to something bigger than themselves have left a lasting impact that will carry forward. As they graduate, we are incredibly appreciative of all they have poured into Buffalo basketball, and their legacy will continue to influence future Bison teams.

Program: Boys Hockey

Coach: Aaron Johnson (13 years as head coach, 19 overall)

Assistant Coaches: Bruce Johnson, Chris Pullar, Jon Varner, Dallas Weston, Jerod Petty

The Bison finished the season with a 10–16 record, though that mark doesn't fully reflect how competitive the team was throughout the year. The group battled through six one-goal losses, including three overtime losses in Lake Conference play against top-10 teams Wayzata, Maple Grove, and Eden Prairie. It marked one of the most competitive seasons Buffalo has had in the Lake Conference, even if the results didn't always fall in their favor.

Strong leadership guided the team all season, led by captains Brandon Rodenwald, Charlie Rosso, and Evan Hinnenkamp. The program will graduate a large and impactful senior class, including Russell Ylitalo, Nolan Rumsch, Aubrey Baker, Graydin Limke, Braylen Dahl, Latham Johnson, and Drew Lindquist. Their contributions helped shape a season defined by effort, resilience, and a strong team culture.

Program: Knowledge Bowl

Coach: Brandon Aldrich (5 years as head coach)

Assistant Coach: Ryan McCallum

Knowledge Bowl had another outstanding season, highlighted by strong postseason performances. Both top varsity teams advanced from sub-regionals to the regional competition. Varsity 1 narrowly missed a state berth, finishing 6th overall and 3rd in the AAA tier after a close final round.

Assistant coach Ryan McCallum was recognized by his peers as the AAA Coach of the Tier, a well-deserved honor reflecting his passion, creativity, and dedication to the program.

Across the season, all teams competed successfully in regional invitationals from January through February. The JV D team stood out with multiple first-place finishes and shows great promise as a future top competitor at both the regional and state levels.

The program continued to build a positive and engaging culture, with practices marked by teamwork, energy, and enthusiasm. Congratulations to the graduating seniors: Austin Elletson, Drake Hermann,

Koben McCallum, Jacob Muellerleile, Mitchell Nosbush, Gabriel Plaisted, and Nolan Rabon for their contributions to a fantastic season.

Program: Dance Team

Coach: Mackenzie Ackerman (3 years as head coach)

Assistant Coaches: Jennifer Thaler, Ashley Buermann, Nicole Olesen, Emma Macki

The 2025–26 season was one of growth and achievement for the Buffalo Dance Team. Both the JV and B Squad teams earned the highest scores and placements in program history. At the varsity level, the Jazz team reached a program-best score of 306, while both Varsity Jazz and Varsity Kick posted the highest section competition scores in program history.

The team celebrated individual recognition as well, with All-Conference honors going to Amelia Pence and Amelia Hirman, and Honorable Mention recognition awarded to Emma Zelinski, Sadie Bienias, and Rylee Tetrault.

Team awards included:

- Rookie of the Season: Avery Lindberg
- Rising Star: Raelie Renko
- Showstopper: Nora Linden
- Heart of the Team: Emma Zelinski
- JV MVP: Hannah Soukup
- Varsity MVP: Rylee Tetrault

The team continues to represent BHS with pride, demonstrating a strong commitment to both the physical and mental demands of the sport while maintaining a positive, supportive culture.

Program: Wrestling

Coach: Blake Trullinger (3rd year as head coach, 10th overall)

Assistant Coaches: Kyle Ballard, Josh Lanners, BJ Trende, Chris Kotish, Jeff Granrud, Eli Riemer, Jason Maurer

The Bison Wrestling team capped off an impressive season with multiple state-level achievements. Junior Gabe Roehl competed in the AAA 127-pound state championship match, while senior Aiden Herbst placed 4th at the state tournament with a 4–2 performance. Sophomore Dylan Keeler made his first state appearance, and junior Courtney Kotish made program history as Buffalo’s first-ever girls state qualifier, finishing 3rd in her debut.

The team produced four state qualifiers and three state medalists—both program highs during Coach Trullinger’s tenure. The Bison finished 11–11 in duals, including a 3–4 mark in Lake Conference competition, with wins over Eden Prairie, Edina, and Hopkins.

Individually, Aiden Herbst concluded his career with 145 wins (5th all-time), while Gabe Roehl surpassed 150 career wins (tied for 3rd all-time). Dylan Keeler and Courtney Kotish each reached 50 career wins this season.

Conference honors included First Team selections for Gabe Roehl, Courtney Kotish, and Aiden Herbst, along with Honorable Mention recognition for Dylan Keeler, Max Carter, and Luke Potter.

Academically, the team earned a gold-level award from the Minnesota Wrestling Coaches Association with a 3.801 cumulative GPA, ranking 5th among AAA programs. The program continues to build strong momentum and a culture of excellence across all levels.

Program: Girls Hockey

Coach: Ryan Huddy (5 years as head coach)

Assistant Coaches: Billy Lincoln, Jennifer Wallace, Al Rakos

The Bison girls hockey team showed strong competitive growth throughout the season. The team improved significantly on both ends of the ice, increasing scoring output while allowing fewer shots and goals than in the previous six seasons.

With a solid core of younger players, the team gained valuable experience in both conference and section play. A strong emphasis on development included expanded use of video analysis, allowing players to review shifts and continue learning outside of games. The program also continued to build its strength training efforts, with high participation and growth supported by school resources. The program is on an upward trajectory, expecting over 45 eligible high school players for next season—an impressive jump from just a few years ago when a JV team could not be fielded. Highlights included a 6–1 win over Delano, a 4–1 victory over rival NWC (their first since 2011), and a tightly contested section game that went to double overtime against Alexandria.

Program: Girls Basketball

Coach: Jordan Zrust (2 years as head coach)

Assistant Coaches: Stacy Eggers, Barry Johnson, Bjorna Jayson

The Bison girls basketball team experienced a challenging yet rewarding season, competing hard throughout and building a strong team culture. While the record may not fully reflect their effort, the team consistently demonstrated resilience and unity.

A major highlight was Brianna Eggers reaching the 1,000-point milestone, along with setting records for most points in a season and most free throws made in a game (11-for-11).

The team competed closely with several Lake Conference opponents, including STMA and Maple Grove, and earned a notable win over Edina. With a young and talented roster, the program is well-positioned for continued growth and success in the seasons ahead.

ATTACHMENT:

- BHS Winter Activities Participation 25-26