

BHA Building Report 2/11/25

Heavy Music Symposium

We've created what we believe to be the first ever high school course in Montana which celebrates and explores extreme music genres such as metal, punk, hardcore, etc. This course falls within the social studies department, as there is a strong historical analysis of extreme music and its' impact on culture and society. A primary emphasis of this course will feature the healing power of these styles, as well as specific coping mechanisms and wellness elements these genres support.

In technical terms, the Heavy Music Symposium is a unique, interdisciplinary course designed to engage high school students through the lens of heavy music and its cultural, artistic, and emotional significance. In a collaborative effort between Buffalo Hide Academy, Browning High School, and the Blackfeet Native American Studies Department, the course invites students to explore heavy music as a tool for emotional expression, coping, community building, and career development.

The symposium incorporates music instruction, expressive arts, social studies, and Blackfeet cultural practices to create a well-rounded and deeply meaningful educational experience.



Key Components of the Course

Subgenres and Themes:

- The course explores a variety of subgenres, including Heavy Metal, Death Metal, Doom Metal, Hardcore, and more. Students will learn about the musical, historical, cultural, and social significance of these genres.

Wellness and Expressive Arts:

- Students will gain a deeper understanding of the role music and art play in emotional regulation and personal identity, with a focus on the heavy music scene as a protective and supportive community.

Final Project:

- Students will apply the skills they've learned to plan, organize, and host a DIY concert in Browning, handling all aspects from booking to logistics to promotion.

We've received tremendous support from unexpected places for this course. Metalheads of the Blackfeet Nation continue to come out of the woodwork to show their support. Additionally, we've also confirmed multiple guest speaker slots from professional musicians in the heavy music genres to visit our class to share insight about how heavy music promotes wellness in their lives. And Gibson Guitars (Bozeman, MT) has donated guitars, amps, and other gear to get instruments in the hands of our students. The main goal is to help our students explore productive ways to cope with their distress.

A year of change @ BHA – Grief and Loss Issues

While we remain steadfast in our mission to create safety and protection while providing an enriching academic experience for our students and families, the past year has not been an easy one at Buffalo Hide. In February of 2024, our principal lost his son to suicide. This devastating loss resulted in his retirement from the public school system, and he hasn't been back in our building since. While this seems to surprise some, it makes complete sense to us, as we understand the magnitude and seismic/earth shattering impact of the death of a loved one.

Throughout our clinical training and counseling education, we've come to understand certain truths about the grief and loss process that we think are extremely relevant for Browning Public Schools. Awareness of the grief and loss issues that our students are experiencing (as well as BPS staff members) and their implications is paramount to offering a safe and compassionate academic environment. Some of the evidence-based concepts that inform our approach are:

- 1) Each person is unique, and so too is their grieving process.
- 2) Stages of grief are a myth.
- 3) There is no roadmap for grieving. What works for some may not be helpful for others.
- 4) Time does not heal all wounds.
- 5) The pain of grief is insidious – grief is felt physically, spiritually, emotionally, socially, financially, etc.

- 6) It can be impossible to “just not think about it”. We can’t simply turn off our thought of loved ones.

Attendance Interventions

Attendance is always a primary focus at BHA, as we deal with an extremely at-risk population that oftentimes has had extremely poor attendance patterns throughout their school careers. A main goal of ours is to help our students recapitulate past issues in school to find better routines with consistent attendance. In addition to creating an empathic, welcoming school environment, we’ve integrated as many interventions as possible to get students in our building as often as we can.

Advisory Support – Each teacher has been assigned a homeroom roster of approximately 20-25 students. We’ve created a system where teachers will make two phone calls home each week to every household, regardless of academic status. The purpose of the calls is to provide updates on academic standing, attendance, and to simply just to connect to offer positive feedback.

Home Visits – Charlie coordinates with Chris Lewis (BHA counselor) to prioritize student contacts and weekly home visits each Thursday. As time permits, Charlie visits 5-10 student households each week. These visits are positive, informal, and usually result in increased attendance on behalf of the student.

Daily Calls – Lacey Salois makes daily contact with all families via phone, email, in-person chats, etc.

Incentives – We provide recognition-based incentives such as school based awards, public acknowledgements, and personalized shoutouts to celebrate student achievement and strong attendance. We also provide tangible awards in the forms of raffles, prizes, and whatever else we can cobble together.