

THE BURLINGTON BARK

Burlington, Iowa | May 1, 2024



Katie Bonar reads a book along with students while student-teaching Friday, April 26, in Susan Vandenberg's classroom at Aldo Leopold Intermediate School. Bonar is among eight Burlington Community School District paraeducators on track to earn their bachelor's degree in K-6 education with a K-8 Strat 1 endorsement later this month through the Teacher and Paraeducator Registered Apprenticeship and University of Northern Iowa's Purple Pathway programs.

PARAS TAKE FAST TRACK TO TEACH

BCSD paraeducators near the end of UNI Purple Pathway program and the beginning of their teaching careers.

Katie Bonar was about to embark on her sixth year of working as a paraeducator for Burlington schools when she got a highly consequential phone call.

It was from Human Resources Director Laci Johnson. She wanted to know if Bonar would be interested in enrolling in the University of Northern Iowa's Purple Pathway for Paraeducators program following a last-minute withdrawal.

"She just kind of gave me the rundown and I knew if I hung up the phone, the next person down the list would be called," Bonar said. "Opportunities just don't happen like that."

UNI long has offered the accelerated elementary education licensure program for paraeducators, but the particular cohort Bonar would join had some added advantages thanks to Burlington Community School District's participation in the Teacher and Paraeducator Registered Apprenticeship Program.

QUICK SIX

- 1. May 6 & 20**
School board meets at 6 p.m.
- 2. May 10**
Two-hour early out
- 3. May 17**
Seniors' last day
- 4. May 25**
Graduation at 7 p.m.
- 5. May 27**
Memorial Day-No School
- 6. May 31**
Last day of school, two-hour early out

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DAYS TILL GRADUATION:

24

THIS IS BURLINGTON



Katie Bonar poses for a photo with Tracy Walding's third grade class at North Hill Elementary School. Bonar spent eight weeks student teaching in Walding's classroom while working toward her teaching degree via the Teacher and Paraeducator Registered Apprenticeship and University of Northern Iowa's Purple Pathway programs.

TPRA arose from a combination of American Rescue Plan Act dollars and a growing need for teachers. The two-year grant program pays tuition for paras working in participating districts who already hold either an associate's or bachelor's degree to enroll in programs like Purple Pathway, along with a portion of para salaries throughout the program's duration.

"It was a wonderful opportunity to give paraeducators who did want to become teachers an opportunity to earn a free bachelor's in K-6 education with a (K-8) special education endorsement," Outreach and Grants Supervisor Cassie Gerst said.

"So what's cool about that is to get those two degrees in two years, I have not heard of a lot of people who get that opportunity," said Cristina White, an instructional coach who has been the multi-classroom leader for those participating in BCSD's iteration of the TPRA program. "For them to go to class for two years and come out with both endorsements, it makes them extremely marketable because they're able to be placed in a variety of positions and high-need positions. A lot of them were very interested in special ed positions, which is typically an area that we have a shortage in and a hard time filling all those positions."

The idea of teaching wasn't new to Bonar. Her mother has taught for 40 years and a family friend had planted the seed that she follow in her mother's footsteps early on in her para career.



"What really always stuck in my brain was actually a former AEA employee, her name is Nancy Gutman, and I'd known her for a long time and went to school with her daughter, and my first year working as a para, I was at Ed Stone, and she stopped me in a doorway and said ... 'You need to be a teacher.'"

Gutman followed up with emails containing information about grants and other opportunities that could help her pursue higher education.

"I still have the emails," Bonar said.

Gutman followed up with emails containing information about grants and other opportunities that could help her pursue higher education.

"I still have the emails," Bonar said.

But having earned a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts and Communication Design, Bonar already had student loans to pay off. She was also a single mother to a 3-year-old, and the idea of juggling multiple jobs and a toddler and school was daunting.

She continued to work as a para. The job allowed her to observe and learn from veteran teachers while building meaningful relationships with students. The idea of becoming a teacher herself, like the emails from Gutman sitting long-dormant in her inbox, lay tucked away in the back of her mind.

But then came the phone call, and with it a chance to seize on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

With only two weeks before the start of the program, Bonar accepted Johnson's offer.

"As a single mom, you can't just take off and go to a class and you still have to work, and at the time I was working two to three jobs, so I'm trying to survive and do all this and then this opportunity happened, and I was like there's no reason not to take it anymore," Bonar said. "This is the next logical step for my daughter and I to have a better life."

Bonar jumped in with both feet. By day, she was a para, by night, a student.

"I've had good support, but it's not for the faint of heart," Bonar said. "You can't just wing it."

The program was equal parts condensed and intense, with five or six courses being completed each semester. Every eight weeks, Bonar would complete either two or three courses, meeting virtually with up to three professors over the course of three hours on Wednesday nights. The cohort also met for day-long sessions at least two Saturdays of every course period.

The Saturday sessions, Bonar said, bore the most semblance to a normal class. She and her fellow BCSD Purple Pathway navigators — Troy Boelens, Katy Conger, Steve Davis-Quick, Hadley Holtkamp, Kristin Kauffman, Amethyst Lehman and Angela Pella — would meet up to attend these classes together.

"It was a great shared experience with those people," Bonar said. "You know you're part of a larger group (statewide), but the fact that there's eight of us, there's a small group and we get to cheer each other on."

Over the summer, they completed 16 credit hours.

Between work and assignments and classes, Bonar and her classmates also had to complete a four-page list of tasks

**“ I'M REALLY PROUD OF THE
WORK THEY'VE DONE. ”**
— CRISTINA WHITE —
MULTI CLASSROOM LEADER

demonstrating their mastery of a wide range of skills such as referring to learning targets, working with a grade-level team to create assessments, and choosing the best materials for the standards they taught and the students they worked with.

"I'm really proud of the work they've done," White said. "I've been able to have a front-row seat to all of this through their eyes, and they have all worked really hard. They have been working full time in their jobs and they also have been basically full-time students all of these semesters and they also have all of these things in their personal life, their children and their outside obligations. There's a lot on their plates."

They've also been student-teaching. Bonar first student-taught Tracy Walding's third grade at North Hill before moving over to Susan Vandenberg's classroom at Aldo. Bonar said her experience as a para has gone a long way toward helping her build the skills she will utilize as a teacher.

"Having that background of being a para and being actually in the schools and seeing how it operates and knowing the back end of it, because people think because they went to school once, they know all about school, that's not true," Bonar said. "There's so much on the other side of things that you don't even realize, and after being in that environment and getting that confidence to be able to manage anything with regard to responsibilities whether you're a para or a teacher, it gives you that background."

Vandenberg has been impressed by what she's seen from Bonar's student teaching in her classroom.

"Our district is very lucky to have Kate Bonar as a teacher," Vandenberg said. "She's very thorough, she's consistent. She's a seasoned teacher, but she'll be a first-year teacher."

Bonar looks forward to accepting her diploma in Cedar Falls on May 11 in front of her now 10-year-old daughter, as well as to the future before them.

We at BCSD, meanwhile, look forward to seeing the long-lasting impact each of these eight Purple Pathway graduates will have on our students as they embark on their careers as teachers.

"This grant has afforded these individuals a very unique and wonderful opportunity to make their dreams of becoming a classroom teacher a reality," Johnson said. "They have all worked extremely hard and juggled what was already a busy schedule before they began the program. We are very proud of all of them and are happy to have them begin their new role in the district as teachers with the 2024-2025 school year. I would also like to give a huge thank you to Cassie Gerst, who managed this huge grant and Cristina White who helped these grant recipients every step of the way. We want to congratulate each of them, they should be extremely proud."



Congratulations, PURPLE PATHWAY GRADS!



TROY BOELENS

Years as a para:
8

Reason for wanting to teach:
I wanted to become a teacher because it offers a lot of variety and it's a way to serve my community. Teaching also gives me the creativity and independence I would want in a career. I have worked with children most of my life, whether it is coaching or in a school setting. I love to help build skills and knowledge for young children. I want to make a difference in people's lives in any way I can.

Future plans:
I was hired to be the 5th/6th Strat 1 teacher at Aldo Leopold Intermediate School. My long-term goal is to become a Physical Education teacher for the district in the future.

Biggest takeaway from Purple Pathway/TPRA program:
The biggest lesson I learned while participating in the Purple Pathways Program was Time Management. I learned how to juggle being a father, coach, student, and full-time employee all at the same time.



STEVE DAVIS-QUICK

Years as a para:
3 as a para, 2 as a long-term sub

Reason for wanting to teach:
One of the big reasons I wanted to go back to school for a teaching position is because a number of people over at Aldo wondered where I would be teaching the next year, and they were surprised that I wasn't actually a licensed teacher, only a substitute. They encouraged me to school online and get my license.

Future plans:
I am going to be staying in the Burlington district for the near future; next school year I will be at Edward Stone as a Strat I Special Education teacher.

Biggest takeaway from Purple Pathway/TPRA program:
One of the biggest lessons I have learned in the Purple Pathway program would be that there are many highly talented people in education, and I have been fortunate to work with many of them in Burlington and throughout the state.



KRISTIN KAUFFMAN

Years as a para:
9

Reason for wanting to teach:
I have been encouraged to go back to school by multiple coworkers and staff in Burlington for many years. I enjoyed my time as a paraprofessional and thought it was time to take the steps to become certified.

Future plans:
I will be teaching the Level 2 ID/Autism at Blackhawk next year

Biggest takeaway from Purple Pathway/TPRA program:
The importance of time management to accomplish everything I had going on and how to meet students where they are at in their learning journey when they join our schools.



KATY CONGER

Years as a para:
6 as both a para and long-term sub

Reason for wanting to teach:
My 4th grade teacher was a huge influence for me. She was an amazing teacher. I want to make a difference in my students' lives. I want them to think of me years later as helping them.

Future plans:
Next year I am going to be the STRAT 2 (LD/BD) teacher at North Hill next year and I am so excited.

Biggest takeaway from Purple Pathway/TPRA program:
Never give up!! Keep going! With the help of the Burlington School District I was able to make my dream come true.





KATE BONAR

Years as a para:
8

Reason for wanting to teach:
I felt it was a natural progression for me to teach.

Future plans:
I am excited to start working in BCSD next year and see where the path takes me.

Biggest takeaway from Purple Pathway/TPRA program:
One of the biggest lessons I have learned in the PP program is that being in a community is really important to me especially throughout this program and the support I received as well as in my career, my continued learning/teaching and personal life.



AMETHYST LEHMAN

Years as a para:
3

Reason for wanting to teach:
I love working with students and getting to help them learn and grow.

Future plans:
I am happy to announce that I'll be teaching at North Hill Elementary next school year!

Biggest takeaway from Purple Pathway/TPRA program:
Education is a team profession! You cannot do it alone. I am so grateful for the team I've had behind me that's helped me grow and prepare for my teaching career. I've learned so much from my fellow Grayhounds, and I'm excited for what's to come next.



HADLEY HOLTkamp

Years as a para:
2

Reason for wanting to teach:
I have had teachers during my time in school that have positively impacted my life and helped shape me into the person I am today. I have always had a passion for helping people and serving those in my community. Teaching gives me the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others in the classroom and beyond.

Future plans:
In August, I will be teaching at BHS in a Special Education ID/Autism classroom.

Biggest takeaway from Purple Pathway/TPRA program:
I have learned that education can be a challenging field but it is also a very rewarding one. Teachers are required to wear many hats throughout the day. The Purple Pathway program has been able to privilege me with the perspective of being a student while also being inside the classroom the entire time. This perspective has made the program an unforgettable experience.



ANGELA PELLA

Years as a para:
5

Reason for wanting to teach:
In my role as a paraprofessional, I often helped students practice their skills. Sharing their pride as they overcame challenges or mastered new concepts inspired me to teach.

Future plans:
Start teaching for BCSD!

Biggest takeaway from Purple Pathway/TPRA program:
Managing the overwhelming challenges of taking a full course load while still working full-time and being available to my family has taught me I'm a lot tougher than I thought!



Class of 
2024





Christian Teeter, a 14-year-old eighth grade student at Edward Stone Middle School, sits on the back of Engine 727 April 26 at the Burlington Fire Department just before leaving on a call.

FIRE FAMILY

Christian Teeter was a toddler living in California when he first caught a glimpse of what his future would look like.

He was 4-and-a-half years old, and he was hungry. A party pizza beckoned from the freezer and the buttons on the microwave were within his reach. He'd seen his mother make party pizzas before. How hard could it be?

It turned out to be harder than he thought.

The microwave caught fire and smoke billowed throughout the kitchen. He ran to wake his mother from a nap and the two escaped the home. Christian watched helplessly as the smoke continued to expand, seemingly filling the whole house, and as flames threatened his most treasured toys.

Then the firefighters arrived, heroes who rode in on big red trucks with flashing lights.

"It kind of sparked an interest," Christian, now 14, recalled on a recent morning while sitting in the nurse's office at Edward Stone

Middle School. "If they wouldn't have shown up when they did, my house would have been gone, all my stuff."

Over the following years, Christian would continue to have positive interactions with public safety workers and would watch with curiosity and fascination when emergency vehicles drove past.

"I was really big on like, every time I'd hear a siren, I'd start recording them just go by, and now I'm actually in the truck watching somebody record us as we go by," Christian said.

Christian joined the Burlington Fire Department's Explorer Program after learning about it as a seventh-grader during the Build My Future event at Southeastern Community College's fairgrounds. He is now certified in CPR and AED and spends his Friday nights and Saturdays at the fire station, accompanying firefighters when they have calls to respond to. He looks forward to learning about extraction over the summer.

"He is a very eager kid and he wants to constantly learn," BFD Battalion Chief Luke Sneller said of Christian.



Christian likes going on calls and helping those in need, but he also likes the camaraderie that comes with being in the program.

“As an explorer, you’re treated like you’re family at the fire department,” Christian said.

That feeling of family is especially important to Christian.

“I’m in foster care. It’s just kind of an unfortunate situation, but I’d rather still help other people than use it as a reason to do bad, I guess,” Christian said. “Law enforcement and EMS were there for me at moments when I was having a really bad time in life, so now I get to see that from that perspective and I get to be able to be there for people who need it.”

School nurse Kathryn Menke has witnessed Christian’s ability to do just that first-hand. Earlier this school year, a student had a grand mal seizure while at school.

“Christian was in their room and he knew immediately what to do,” Menke said. “He had kids move the chairs away from them. He said to roll them on their side and he flew like the wind down here to me to say we need you up there.”

She was so impressed by Christian’s fast thinking and ability to remain calm under pressure that afterward, she called him to her office and called his foster parents to tell them what he had done.

The two began talking about his experiences in the program, and Christian asked if he could be on the school’s emergency response team. He can’t because he’s a student, but Menke was all the more impressed by his willingness to step up.

“I’m also impressed with his standard to confidentiality,” Menke said, explaining that other students, knowing Christian is in the program, will often ask him about things that happened over the weekend. Christian doesn’t budge. “He’s a stickler,” Menke added.

And for good reason. In addition to HIPAA laws and integrity, Christian is very serious about his long-term goal of becoming a Burlington firefighter, and one wrong move or slip of the tongue would put that future in jeopardy.

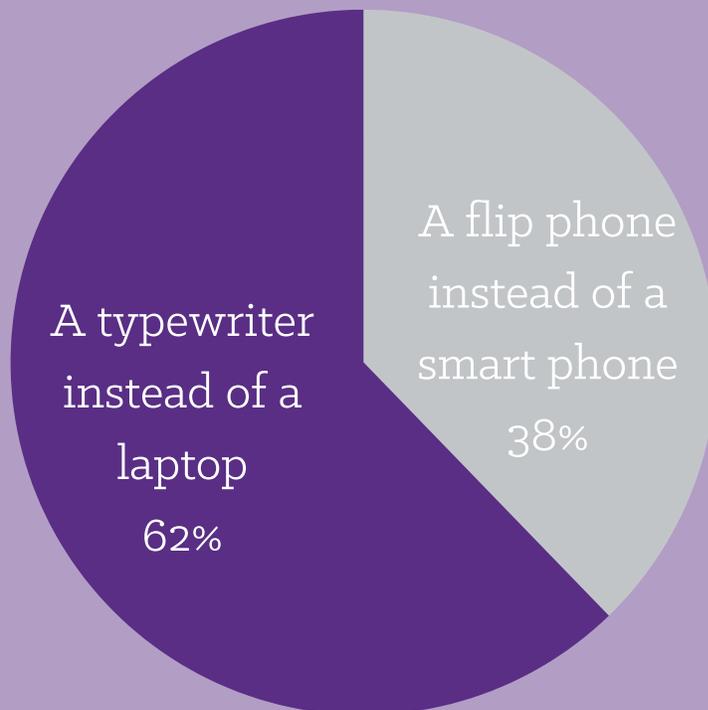
He plans to pursue the Public Safety Career and Technical Education pathway in high school and earn all of the credits he needs to graduate by his junior year.

“That way I can graduate early and then I’m going to try to go over to SCC and get my EMT and apply for Burlington Fire and go through their probationary and go to IFLS, which is the fire academy that Burlington has their firefighters go to,” Christian said.

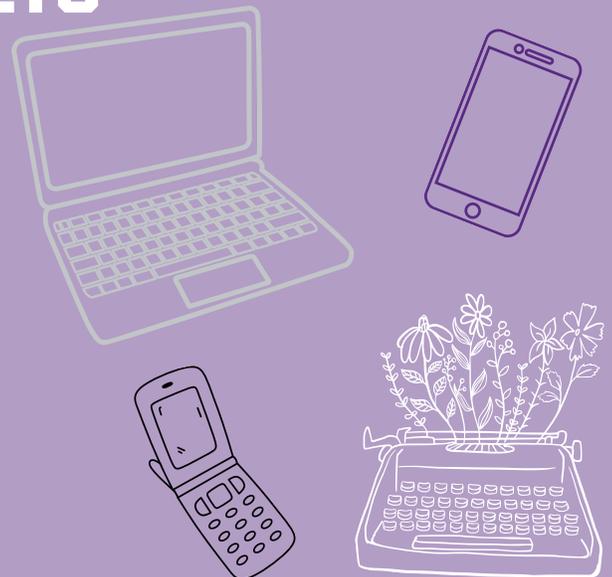
In the meantime, Christian plans to continue in the Explorer program, surrounded by his second family and doing all he can to give back to his community.

INSTAGRAM POLL RESULTS

WOULD YOU RATHER USE...



TOTAL VOTES: 143



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Students in Brian Carper's Advanced Public Safety class investigate a mock crime scene April 16 at Burlington High School.

PUBLIC SAFETY CTE PATHWAY TO EXPAND

Working in groups of four and five, students in Brian Carper's Advanced Public Safety class at Burlington High School surveyed the scene laid out before them in a small storage area connected to their classroom.

On the table was a single plate, atop which sat an uneaten dinner, next to a glass with a bloody fingerprint. On the floor was the victim — a bloodied mannequin with an ID in her pocket.

The crime scene investigation required students to use all of the skills they had reviewed in the class thus far, things like lifting fingerprints, filing for warrants, witness interviews and following the chain of custody.

"They're going to come in here, they've got to take pictures, take measurements, do a sketch," Carper said before the first round of students for the day made entry into the make-shift apartment. "There's a lot of different evidence here that will eventually show who the suspect is."

If students failed to secure a warrant prior to entry, the evidence they

collected would be thrown out.

"So if they don't figure out they need that search warrant right away, I'm not going to say anything and their case is shot," Carper said.

Carper is nearing the end of his first year of teaching following a 28-year career with the Burlington Police Department. His experience has served students well as he works to build up the Public Safety Career and Technical Education pathway, which was added this year in response to local workforce needs and student interest.

Carper has brought in a number of speakers — ranging from K-9 officers to detectives to correctional officers — to present to students. He's also using those connections to get his students access to places they might not otherwise have, such as the Des Moines County jail, where he will take students later this trimester.

"With the corrections part, they're going to learn some self defense and do three class periods of mental health," said Carper, who was



Above: Students in Brian Carper’s Advanced Public Safety class investigate a mock crime scene April 16 at Burlington High School. Below: A student dusts a glass recovered from a mock crime scene for prints April 6 at Burlington High School.

a crisis intervention officer and instructor.

Students have been enjoying the hands-on nature of Carper’s classes.

“We always have something to do, which is good,” said freshman Isaac Griesman. “The murder scene has taken everything we’ve learned and is putting it to use instead of just listening to lectures all day.”

Griesman and his teammates each were assigned a task while investigating the crime scene. Only one from each group would collect the evidence. Another conducted an interview with Carper, who acted as both the landlord and the first officer on scene. Another took pictures, another took measurements, and another lifted fingerprints.

Carper then evaluated the students based on their performance in each of five categories: Interview, Sketch, Search Warrant, Photos, Fingerprints, Legal Paperwork, and Phone App (related to a phone recovered from the scene).

The evidence gathered would lead students to a suspect, but it wouldn’t be until a couple weeks later that they would make an arrest.

“This has a whole theme,” Carper said on the day of the crime scene investigation. “So after this, there will be an OWI involving the suspect in this murder. They’ll have to learn how to do a field



sobriety test, and he’s got evidence on him that links him to the scene.”

This, of course, came after students practiced doing field sobriety tests on each other with the help of drunk goggles.

Carper has more in store for the rest of the year, including a trip to the police and fire departments, where students will be able to get certified in CPR.

“It’s definitely been a more challenging class than the Introduction to Public Safety,” Griesman said. “You go deeper and more hands-on. It’s a fun class ... I definitely want to take more crime or medical

classes. I hope Carper will open up more classes and I'll take those."

There will indeed be more Public Safety classes available to students next year with the addition of two new offerings:

- Criminal Justice Essentials: an in-depth study of crime in America, United States' courts in action, and law enforcement efforts to deal with crime. The course will look into victimization, due process, and Constitutional laws affecting law enforcement as well as a review of sentencing offenders, parole, and prison rehabilitation. There is a rigorous block of Constitutional Law during this course.
- Forensic Science and Criminal Investigations: a course that uses

a structured and scientific approach to the investigation of crimes and the psychology of criminal behavior. Students will learn terminology and investigative methods related to crime scene investigation, questioning, criminal behavior characteristics, and scientific procedures used to solve crimes. Using scientific methods, students will collect and analyze evidence through case studies and simulated crime scenes such as fingerprint analysis, trace evidence collection, ballistics, body fluid collection, and blood spatter analysis. Students will learn the history, legal aspects, and career options available in forensic science.

To view a complete list of next year's course offerings, check out the [2024-25 BHS Course Catalog](#).

SESA DONATES SOCCER GOALS TO PRE-K-4 BUILDINGS

A Burlington High School student recently built soccer goals donated by a local soccer organization for each of the Burlington Community School District's four elementary buildings, along with Corse Early Childhood Center.

Gavin Bartelt, a freshman at BHS and a member of the Southeast Soccer Academy, which donated the materials, built four of the goals for each building, earning Silver Cord hours and sharing his love of soccer with younger students.

"We are very happy with the SESA donation and the work they did building the soccer goals," Sunnyside Principal Tim Bolander said. "Our PTO was going to purchase goals and because of the donation the PTO was able to purchase a volleyball set up to be used at recess."

Bolander initially reached out to SESA at the suggestion of Activities

Director Jay Huff when he inquired about the PTO's desire to purchase goals for the school. SESA agreed to donate them and went on to extend the same offer to the other building principals.

"We are very thankful for the donation and appreciate the impact SESA has on the community of Burlington," North Hill Principal Alec Clark said.

The elementary and pre-K principals said the goals have been popular among students since they were delivered over spring break. PE teachers have also been using them to teach soccer skills, which the students further practice during recess.

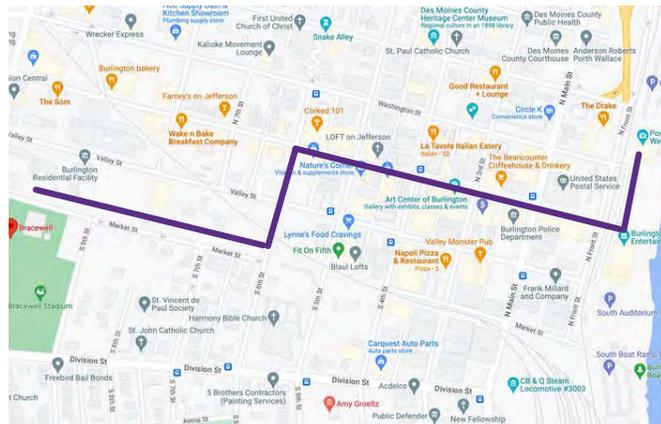
"As a current SESA parent myself, I think that was a fantastic idea for a donation!" Corse Principal Bryan Baker said. "I love that they donated this."

BC2M TO HOST 3RD ANNUAL WALK TO FIGHT SUICIDE

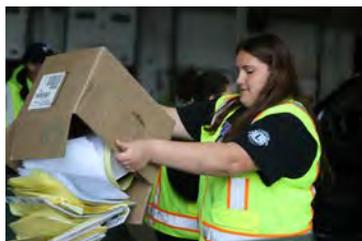
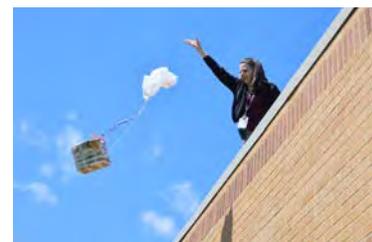
Burlington High School's Bring Change to Mind club is gearing up to put on the third annual Burlington Community Walk to Fight Suicide.

The event will begin at 1:30 p.m. Friday, May 10, at Bracewell Stadium. From there, walkers will depart for the Port of Burlington, where they will gather to listen to speakers and engage in activities centered around making meaningful connections and positivity.

The club, whose mission is to raise awareness of mental health issues and resources while normalizing conversations about mental health, encourages members of the public along with members of the school community, to attend.



AT BCSD, WE ARE RAISING GRAYHOUNDS!



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For Educational Programs: Cory Johnson, Director of Curriculum, cory.johnson@bcstds.org

For Employment: Laci Johnson, Director of Human Resources, laci.johnson@bcstds.org