

# THE BURLINGTON BARK

Burlington, Iowa | April 3, 2023



Elizabeth Dickinson and Sophia Kerr greet Elsa Monday, March 20, 2023, at Edward Stone Middle School. Elsa is among six either certified or in training therapy dogs in the Burlington Community School District. Others are Monte (bottom left) at Burlington High School, Grady (bottom middle) at North Hill Elementary School, and Lolli (bottom right) at Aldo Leopold Intermediate School.

## DOGS ON THE JOB

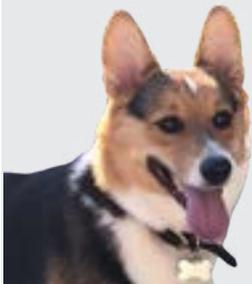
As students filled the hallways of Edward Stone Middle School between classes, Elsa rose from her chair and began to pace, eager to greet her two-legged friends.

“When she hears kids in the hallways, she gets restless,” school counselor Tamara Levinson said the morning of the first day back from spring break.

The 3-year-old Silver Labrador Retriever was more than ready to get back to work.

Smiling students pet and greeted Elsa as she made her way down the hallway, her tail wagging as she walked.

This good girl is nearing the end of her second year as a therapy dog at Ed Stone, and she knows her way around the building well.



### QUICK SIX

- 1. April 3 & 17**  
The Burlington School Board will meet at 6 p.m.
- 2. April 7, 10 & 21**  
No School
- 3. April 12**  
Groundbreaking ceremony for BHS fitness center at 4:30 p.m.
- 4. April 21**  
BCSD YouthNet Conference from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Catfish Bend Conference Center
- 5. April 28**  
Peek at Preschool from 9 to 11 a.m. and 2 to 4 p.m. at Corse
- 6. April 28**  
Walk to Fight Suicide at 3:30 p.m. at Bracewell Stadium

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- YouthNet Conference aims to address homelessness
- National Honor Society celebrates 100th year
- March's Instagram poll results
- BHS teacher takes on new approach to math with Thinking Classroom

THIS IS BURLINGTON

“She’s really grown up here with middle school kids, which has been awesome for her because I feel like she has the same personality they do,” Levinson said.

Elsa visits classrooms with students so long as she has the teacher’s permission. She knows how to find her way back to the office she shares with Levinson.

A sign taped to the wall in Levinson’s office designates ownership of the chair below it to Elsa, who naps there in between the many visits she gets from students and staff.

“Kids just love to come in and take a break,” Levinson said. “I have so many pictures of them snuggling on the floor with them.”

## FROM GREY HOUND TO GRAYHOUND

Levinson, who formerly was a counselor for the West Burlington School District, long had considered getting a therapy dog to benefit students, but it wasn’t until her second year at Burlington High School that she went forward with it following the passing of one of her dogs at home.

She researched which breeds make for good therapy dogs and decided that a Lab was the way to go.

“Labs are just very family-prone dogs,” Levinson said. “So I started looking at Labs online and came across Silver Labs. I didn’t even know they existed. I had no clue, and I saw the Silver Lab and thought, ‘Oh my gosh, we’re Grayhounds! Why not a Silver Lab?’ ”

She found Elsa in the southern Iowa town of Albia and began to go through the steps needed to bring her into Burlington schools.

Upon completion of obedience training through Barb’s Dog Obedience in Burlington, Levinson got permission from then-superintendent Pat Coen to begin bringing Elsa to BHS. She was officially a therapy dog in training.

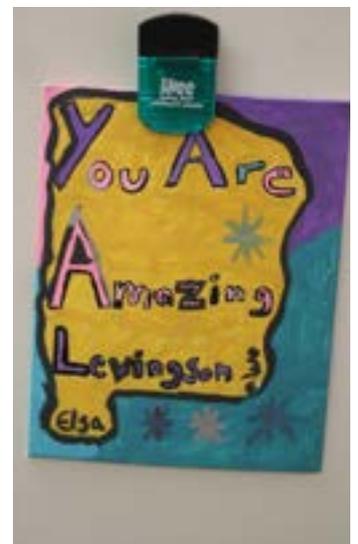
Elsa and Levinson spent the following summer going back and forth between Burlington and the Muscatine Humane Society, where Elsa received the training needed to prepare for the AKC Canine Good Citizenship Test.

“That’s where it got more difficult for her because they train in groups, not singles,” Levinson said. “She had to learn to focus with other dogs around. She was still very young, still very much a puppy.”

Despite her young age, Elsa passed the Good Citizenship Test and advanced to therapy dog training, ultimately earning her her therapy dog certification, as well as the certification tag that hangs on her harness alongside her staff ID, which displays her photo along with the words, “ELSA THE DOG.”

The two transferred to Ed Stone that fall, and Elsa has grown up playing with the middle schoolers at recess and cleaning up after them at lunch.

There’s also been ongoing training to teach Elsa more about the emotional support side of her job, such as recognizing and



**Top: Chazlyn Boyd and Elsa run down the hallway Monday, March 20, 2023, at Edward Stone Middle School.**

**Right: Elsa wears her school ID badge and therapy certification tag on her vest.**

**Left: A sign made by a student hangs in Tamara Levinson's office. It is among several works of art students have made for Elsa.**



**School counselor Deborah Brueck poses for a photo with Lolli, a Goldendoodle and therapy dog, Monday, March 20, 2023, in the break room at Aldo Leopold Intermediate School.**

responding to signs of emotional distress. Levinson plans for Elsa to go through another round of training this summer to get certified as a psychiatric service dog specializing in post traumatic stress disorder and depression.

For Elsa and other therapy dogs to be in schools, their handlers must provide proof of vaccination, documentation of training, and personal liability insurance.

It's all part of a policy whose creation was spurred by a presentation put on by a group of Ed Stone students that helped pave the way for an official path to getting therapy dogs in Burlington schools.

## WORTH THE WORK

Before Deborah Brueck was a school counselor at Aldo Leopold Intermediate School, she was at Ed Stone and Grimes.

"We had a bunch of students — this was when I worked at Edward Stone — who had a fundraiser," Brueck recalled on a recent afternoon while Lolli, her 5-year-old Goldendoodle, eyed a coworker's lunch in the breakroom at Aldo. "It was a bully prevention group, and they came up with the idea. They said what we need here is a therapy dog."

Brueck was on board with their idea but told the students they would need to research hypoallergenic dogs and present their proposal to the principal, who at the time was Angie Butler.



**Brian Johnson, director of Career and Technical Education and director of Food Services, gives a treat to Rufus, therapy dog in training, Thursday, March 23, 2023, in Johnson's office at Burlington High School.**

"Angie was like, 'OK, kids, you did an amazing job, let me think about this,'" Brueck said. "And then the kids walked out and Mrs. Butler's like, 'Debbie, get back in here.'"

Butler pulled out her phone and showed Brueck a picture of Goldendoodle puppies up for grabs that her pastor had posted earlier that day.



**Rufus, therapy dog in training, is shown Thursday, March 23, 2023, in the hallway of the Industrial Arts building at Burlington High School.**

That night, Brueck and Butler went to see the puppies, one of whom was sporting a purple collar.

“(Mrs. Butler) just started laughing and said it’s meant to be,” Brueck said with a smile.

Brueck worked with administrators and the school board to craft the district’s therapy dog policy, which puts the cost and responsibility of the dogs on their handlers, though PTOs can sponsor therapy dogs for their building if they so choose.

“The work that goes into having a therapy dog is long, and there are many hoops to jump through,” Brueck said. “However, it is so worth it.”

Brueck convinced her husband that they needed a dog and brought home Lolli the same day their daughter was deployed to Jordan.

“We picked up Lolli and poured all our love into her,” Brueck said. “She’s a good dog and she is very intuitive. The kids love her, the staff really like her, so it’s been a wonderful addition.”

Lolli’s arrival was followed by Monte, Betsy Wolf’s Welsh Pembroke Corgi, who began coming to BHS in 2019.

“When we went to STAR puppy training the trainer said that he had the right personality to be a therapy dog and suggested I find out what was necessary for the school district and we went through additional training and certification,” Wolf said.

## REMEMBERING SPARTY

While Lolli was the first dog to come to the district under the policy, she was preceded by Sparty, whose time with the district goes back to when James Madison was used as a middle school.

“Probably one of the best-known therapy dogs in the district was Sparty,” Brian Johnson, director of career and technical education and food services, said while his therapy dog in training, Rufus, greeted a visitor.

Sparty came to James Madison on his own freewill — frequently.



**Grady, a 2-year-old Dachshund mix, waits for belly rubs from his dad, Brent Krieger, Thursday, March 30, 2023, at North Hill Elementary School.**



**Sparty was the first therapy dog in the Burlington School District.**

He would go there to visit students and staff after escaping his owner’s home. Now retired, Kent Strabala was a counselor there at the time and ended up adopting the dog from his then-owner. This was before all BCSD students were Grayhounds, and Strabala named him after the James Madison Spartans.

“He’d roam the building for the most part,” said Johnson, who was the principal of James Madison at the time. “Kent could get on the intercom before it was time to leave and go, ‘Sparty, it’s time to go home,’ and Sparty would just come running down the hallway to the office.”

Strabala and Sparty ultimately transferred to Sunnyside, where he is still remembered fondly by staff. Sparty passed away unexpectedly a few years later.

## GOOD DOGS HAVE GOOD RESULTS

Sparty left a strong impression on Johnson, who couldn't help but notice all of the benefits of having a dog in the school. He's seeing similar outcomes with Rufus.

"One class in particular has a nonverbal student in it. When they first met Rufus, they were kind of scared of him, but now it's like the highlight for them. They get all excited and get to moving their arms and get a big grin on their face and look forward to it," Johnson said.

Therapy dogs have been shown to help children learn social skills, reduce stress, and even aid in cognitive development by stimulating memory and problem-solving skills. According to a 2019 study published by the National Institute of Health, the presence of a dog in the classroom promotes positive mood and provides significant anti-stress effects on the body. Another study conducted by the University of California found that students who participated in canine reading programs increased their reading fluency by between 12% and 30%.

Levinson and Dayton Leazer, a school counselor intern at Ed Stone, have also seen the benefits of having Elsa around firsthand.

"She gets kids to open up a lot faster," Leazer said. "It gives them some common ground to get them to start talking."

"They just pet and focus on her, but then they can talk because they don't have to make eye contact with me if they're telling me something that's really upsetting to them," Levinson added.

Brueck said Lolli's presence has spurred more students to seek her out.

"I primarily had a lot of girls who would come and stop in the office if they were having some mental health concern or were needing some mediation," Brueck said. "As soon as I got Lolli, then the boys started coming in, and they'd be like 'I'm just here to see the dog.' I'd sit down beside them and say, 'How are things going?' All of a sudden, the guys would start opening up, so it was like they had an in."

Even for students who aren't seeking counseling services, the presence of a dog has a positive impact.

"Seeing some of the kids in the morning, their eyes just light up when they see (Elsa)," Levinson said. "For some of them, I think it just sets the mood for the day, and it's not just the students. I have staff throughout the day who come in here just to hug on Elsa."

Levinson and Leazer said Elsa also seems to make students feel safer in school, even though she's not trained in safety.

"They truly feel she is a safety wall," Levinson said. "They feel like for somebody to get to them, they have to pass through Elsa, because she is very protective of them."

Elsa doesn't show aggression, but she does greet visitors in the office to make her presence known.

Next year, Elsa and Levinson will join Rufus and Monte at BHS, where Levinson plans for Elsa to be a regular presence in the TLC and special education classrooms. She also will walk the halls at passing time.



**Roxy, a Lab mix, poses for a photo with school counselor Dayton Leazer. Roxy is training to become a therapy dog at Edward Stone Middle School.**

Ed Stone won't be without a dog, however. Leazer will be bringing her 3-year-old Lab mix, Roxy.

"Even for me, just having Elsa around makes my day go a lot better," Leazer said. "You can't go from having a pup in the building to not having a pup in the building."

North Hill Elementary School is on track to have a therapy dog as well as Patricia Krieger plans to get her 2-year-old Daschund mix, Grady, certified.

The training should be a breeze for Grady, who's been known to fall asleep at Texas Roadhouse.



**Lolli poses for a photo with a student on her birthday at Aldo Leopold Intermediate School. Students and staff celebrated the occasion by dressing up like Lolli by wearing black and pigtails to resemble ears, while Lolli dressed as a princess.**

# BHS BC2M CLUB 1ST OF ITS KIND IN IOWA



Burlington High School sophomore Elaine Guyton mans a table in the school cafeteria. Guyton and other Bring Change to Mind Club members spent three days in the cafeteria to give students a chance to send a kind note to students and teachers with the goal of promoting connectedness.

A Burlington High School club has become the first of its kind in Iowa.

Formerly known as Mind Blowing Connections, the club that formed in the fall of 2021 out of a desire to further normalize discussions about mental health, has joined the Bring Change to Mind network.

Mind Blowing Connections was the brainchild of Zakiyah Timmons-Crear, who graduated this past May.

Timmons-Crear formed the club after being inspired by the Therapeutic Learning Classroom — an idea conceived of and brought to life in 2020 by a group of BHS students seeking to create a safe haven for those struggling with anxiety, depression and other mental health issues to go when they need a break from their regular classrooms — as well as an assignment for science teacher Jill Smith's class in which students were tasked with coming up with an idea to add something to the school.

Timmons-Crear wanted to create a mental health class, which morphed into a club. With the principal's blessing, she spent the summer of 2021 coming up with materials for the club. She decided the club would be a perfect fit for Bring Change to Mind after learning about it from TLC teacher Amy Kristensen, who came across the BC2M website while searching for ideas to implement in TLC.

"I was playing around on the internet and I found this group called Bring Change to Mind, and it's all across the country, but there were none in Iowa," Kristensen said.

Bring Change to Mind got its start in 2009 with the goal of ending the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental illness through creating multimedia campaigns, curating storytelling movements, and developing youth programs.

It makes available information and other resources, including funding, to its clubs.



After reviewing Bring Change to Mind's website, Timmons-Crear was quick to apply. Part of the application process involved writing a letter.

"I brought it up and Zakiyah wrote the letter," Kristensen said. "What was so cool about it was she wrote the initial letter, and I followed up with it the next day and I wasn't sure if they really had read the letter, and the woman goes, 'Oh yeah, we read the letter. We know it.' So it just shows you how on top of things they are."

Due to a decrease in funds brought on by the pandemic, BC2M had a waitlist, and BHS was on it.

Kristensen was taken by Timmons-Crear's persistence, which paid off this year after winter break when Timmons-Crear, who graduated last May, received an email stating that Mind Blowing Connections no longer was on the waitlist. From then on, the BHS club became known as Bring Change to Mind.

"Mrs. Smith said roll with it and she did," Kristensen said. "Our students have awesome ideas. There are times they feel they don't have the power, but the power's in their hands to run with anything and make the changes. Our kids are going to change the world. That's non-negotiable. They're incredible."

The BC2M membership gives the BHS chapter access to public service announcements made with celebrities such as Glenn Close and everyday people, promotional items for resources such as the National Suicide Hotline, which can be reached via phone or text at 988, and ideas for things they can do locally to spark conversations about mental health.

"It's amazing all the things they have available, and we've just started to scratch the surface," Kristensen said. "They sent a box of things for us right away that had a huge banner, and they had flyers and stickers, plus there's all these other advisors you can talk to and share ideas with."

Recently, BC2M members spent three days manning a table in the high school's cafeteria taking down names and messages for notes of kindness. The notes were passed out to their intended recipients the following week by club members. The goal was to foster connections, which can be life-saving to those struggling with mental health.

The club seeks to have a positive impact both outside of its membership and for those who are in it.

# BRING CHANGE TO MIND TO HOST 2ND ANNUAL WALK TO FIGHT SUICIDE

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

The event will take place from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. April 28.

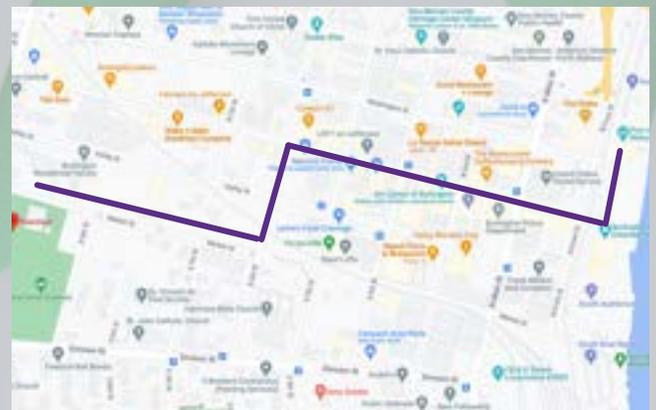
The route will begin at Bracewell Stadium and end at the Port of Burlington, where attendees will be able to visit with vendors and service providers, as well as hear from speakers, including Stephen Kastantin, president of BC2M; Selena Janssens, vice president of BC2M; Gigi and Shawn Johnson, the parents of Zephaniah "Zephy" Johnson, who died in February 2022; and Jen and Joe Skelley, the parents of Owen Skelley, who died in March 2022.

BHS junior Selena Janssens, vice president of BC2M, joined the club last year after being inspired by the first suicide awareness walk, which drew more than 200 community members.

"Last year's suicide awareness walk made me want to join because I saw how it impacted people around and I wanted to be a part of that," Janssens said. "It showed everyone that there was a place in this world for their individual self. That's the vibe that I got from it, and it genuinely just made me happy to see everyone coming together and being there for one another regardless of their differences or anything else. It was just a big deal."

The group hopes to see a similar turnout — and impact — this year.

"I want people to take away from the suicide walk that you're not alone and that no matter what, you're able to fight through that you're going to through," sophomore and club member Elaine Guyton said.





**Burlington High School senior Stephen Kastantin, president of the school's Bring Change to Mind Club, sophomore and club member Elaine Guyton, and junior Selena Janssens, vice president of BC2M, pose for a photo Monday, March 20, 2023, in the TLC classroom at BHS.**

"We have like a good group of kids who want to make a change, and we're actively doing things to show our support and stuff," said sophomore Elaine Guyton, who joined the club after reading about it in a newsletter. "I wanted to come because I believed it was going to be like a safe space to talk about your problems and stuff."

BHS senior Stephen Kastantin, president of BC2M, joined the club last year when its members began planning the school's first ever suicide awareness walk, an event inspired by the deaths of two BHS students.

His membership also came as he was struggling with his own mental health.

"Last year, I was diagnosed with depression and anxiety, and I started having a realization that people really shouldn't be going through this," Kastantin said. "It's not normal, so I went to Mrs. Myers and said I want to get involved with a group of people who are trying to spread awareness about mental health, and she said, 'Do I got the people for you' and pointed me in the direction of this lovely group of people, and they were all so kind to me and brought me along for the wonderful journey that I've gone through."

Kastantin is far from alone. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Data Summary and Trends Report, in 2021, 42% of students nationwide reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless and 29% experienced poor mental health.

**“ OUR KIDS ARE GOING TO CHANGE THE WORLD. — AMY KRISTENSEN — ONE OF THREE BC2M ADVISORS ”**

That same year, 22% of students reported having seriously considered attempting suicide.

Kastantin said joining BC2M has helped him to open up about his own experience, and he believes it will do the same for others.

"Most people are very shy when it comes to their mental health, so they don't really want to talk about it, but when they see a group of people who are willing to talk about not only their experiences but are willing to help out and reach out to random people that they don't know, then they start to recognize that they can talk about this and that they really should talk about this, especially coming from a guy who's grown up thinking you're not supposed to show your feelings," Kastantin said.

Bring Change to Mind meets for an hour after school each Monday in the TLC room across from the main office. Those wanting to join are welcome to attend.



Attendees of the Burlington High School National Honor Society chapter line up to claim prizes Thursday, March 23, 2023, during a round of NHS Bingo, which was part of the chapter's 100th birthday celebration at the BHS library. Below: NHS photos are displayed on a table ahead of the celebration.

## 100 YEARS OF BURLINGTON

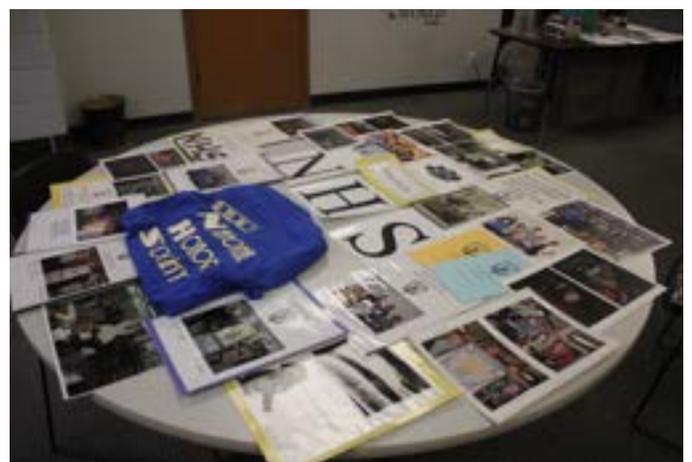
Current and prospective members of Burlington High School's National Honor Society gathered March 23 alongside teachers, administrators and community members in the high school library to celebrate 100 years of service, leadership, character, and scholarship.

The BHS chapter of NHS was formed in 1922, making it the first chapter west of the Mississippi River.

"It's really special to know that this chapter is the oldest chapter west of the Mississippi," BHS Principal Monica Myers said before introducing Christina Hess-Haughey, faculty advisor for NHS.

Hess-Haughey informed the about 30 people attending the chapter's centennial celebration that in its history, chapter members have organized or participated in no less than 900 service projects.

"National Honor Society students serve their community," Hess-Haughey said. "A typical school year at BHS has approximately nine community service projects for National Honor Society alone. This means that this chapter has organized or participated in more than 900 service projects in its history. That equates to 900 times that this chapter has impacted the community."



Among those service projects have been senior proms at assisted living facilities, making blankets for the homeless, clothing and homeless shelter drives, animal shelter drives, Toys for Tots, Trunk or Treat, and many more. Sam Morehead, president of BHS's NHS chapter, informed those in attendance about such activities through a game of NHS Bingo before introducing keynote speaker Anikka



**Attendees of Burlington High School's chapter of National Honor Society laugh Thursday, March 23, 2023, while playing a game of NHS Bingo during the chapter's 100th birthday celebration in the high school library.**

Cook, a 2018 graduate of BHS who went on to double major in History and Strategic Communication at Miami University in Ohio, from which she graduated magna cum laude and with Honors with Distinction.

She now is a long-term substitute at BHS, where she teaches American Studies. She plans to go on to pursue a masters and a career as a history professor.

But before all of that, Cook was a high school sophomore applying to join NHS. Students must have a minimum GPA of 3.6 to be invited to apply to NHS, and membership is contingent upon applicants' ability to show how they exemplify in their lives the organization's four pillars: service, leadership, character, and scholarship.

"I would love to tell you that I joined NHS because my 16-year-old self fully understood the legacy of National Honor Society and was committed to upholding its pillars in every aspect of my life, but that would be a dramatic exaggeration," Cook recalled.

Instead, she was spurred to join by her competitive nature, a desire to outperform her peers, and a personal need to be a part of every student organization possible. But what she would learn through her NHS membership continues to serve her today.

"When I thought of my own NHS experience, I realized entry into National Honor Society is not so much the acknowledgment of

mastery of any of the four pillars, but rather the recognition of the seeds of true character, service, leadership and scholarship in a student with the intention of nurturing these seeds as they grow, and that is what National Honor Society did for me," she said.

Cook, who served as NHS president in her senior year of high school, and current NHS executive board members went on to explain to those in attendance the role that each of the four pillars has played in their lives.

#### **SERVICE**

When Cook first joined National Honor Society, she had a considerable amount of experience in service, but her understanding of the motivation behind service was greatly enriched by her NHS membership.

"I was used to volunteering and loved serving my community, but NHS made my experience serving others so much more," Cook said. "It gave me a community of like-minded people who are committed to serving the greater good. The hardest part of service for me was not taking the time to get involved, but instead setting aside my own ego and learning that true service is intrinsically motivated. It doesn't wait for direction or demand recognition or praise. It's a way of devoting a portion of yourself to the well-being of others."

Like Cook, Hannah Wegmann, a BHS senior and an at-large member

on the NHS executive board, was no stranger to service when she joined NHS in her sophomore year.

Wegmann thought back to 2020, when the pandemic resulted in widespread closures and restrictions. The pandemic was especially hard on residents of assisted living facilities as they stopped allowing visitors.

Wegmann took it upon herself to send cards and decorations to those living in local nursing homes.

"They really enjoyed it," she said. "It brightened their rooms up and just gave them a little burst of joy in a sad time."

But that was about the extent of her service prior to joining NHS. Since becoming a member, Wegmann said, she has developed a larger appreciation for and enjoyment of giving back to her community, particularly when it comes to raking leaves, something NHS members do each fall for area residents unable to rake their own yards.

"It really makes you feel good about the fact that you went out and did something selfless," Wegmann said. "It grew my character, and it's opened my eyes that you should help others."

Wegmann will be organizing a service project this month that will also involve giving cards to assisted living, nursing and hospice facilities this month.

## LEADERSHIP

Cook said she has always liked to lead, but the leadership pillar has been her most challenging.

"I knew I liked to lead, and I was excited to take on bigger leadership roles in organizations I was a part of," she said. "Though my high school self was trying her best, I have to admit that at the time, I was less passionate about leadership and more excited about being in charge. I thought that the reason I earned my leadership roles was because of all of the knowledge and skills I possessed. I could not have been more wrong."

Through her leadership roles in high school as the president of NHS and Student Council, Cook began to realize leadership has more to do with empathy and recognition of others than with being in charge.

"Leadership is relational," Cook said. "It's not the recognition of the greatness of yourself, but of the greatness of others. Being a good manager does not make you a good leader. Leadership requires constant ego-checking, reflection, and prioritizing the needs of others. I only began to grasp this concept of leadership in high school and didn't attempt to practice it until college and beyond. This kind of leadership is inherently humbling, and is a skill I strive to improve everyday."

For Melanie Reid, another at-large member of the NHS executive board, leadership is about how you use your morals and relationships to build up others.

"Everyone kind of has their own definition of what they think it



**Melanie Reid, an at-large member on Burlington High School's National Honor Society chapter's executive board, speaks Thursday, March 23, 2023, about leadership during the chapter's 100th birthday celebration in the high school library.**

means to be a leader, but for me personally, I think using your morals and your relations to help other people build themselves up and become bigger parts of the community is a great way to help become a leader and help other people become leaders as well," Reid said.

She believes it's also one of the most important pillars of NHS and that everyone in NHS has leadership qualities.

Even still, she admitted that for her, leadership is the most difficult pillar to exemplify, especially when it came to applying for NHS, though since then, she has found numerous opportunities to practice leadership through activities and clubs.

"I feel like once you get to high school, it opens up so many more opportunities to become a leader, because there's so many different clubs and activities where you can use your values, your strong suits and the things you know and do best to help other people better themselves and better others to build a stronger community," she said.

She recently put her leadership skills to the test by organizing the chapter's first ever Teddy Bear Toss, but she said leadership is important in all aspects of life.

"We're not a huge group of people," she said. "We really do bond with each other over trying to make our school and community a better

place, and that is why leadership is so important for NHS.”

## CHARACTER

Cook said character is perhaps the most important pillar of NHS, but it can be elusive.

“As I attempted to research the definition of character, I realized that most NHS chapters define character very differently depending on what school they’re from,” she said. “The definition that most stuck out to me was this: Character is the force within an individual that distinguishes that person from others, not their ability to be nice, kind and cheerful and to always say please and thank you. While we can argue that these things are important, they’re not the end-all, be-all of valuable traits in a person.”

Cook recalled being hyper-aware of how she was perceived by others during her high school years. She wanted to be seen as nice and polite, but since then, her understanding of character has shifted.

“I thought character was whether or not others thought I was good, but character is inherently unique,” Cook said. “It is what distinguishes a person from others. It’s who you are. It’s your most authentic self. NHS doesn’t need more nice members. It needs individuals grounded in their personal values who use them to make the world around them a better place. We need people who not only respect each other’s differences but celebrate them and encourage them to live out their fullest potential. When we encourage uniqueness and diversity of character, we build a chapter in the legacy that’s ready to withstand challenges and expand.”

Hunter Ford, treasurer of NHS, said character not only defines who a person is but also influences those around them.

He said among the most important character traits are honesty, responsibility, and respect, both for others and yourself.

“As National Honor Society members, it is our responsibility to be role models for not only students within BHS, but for everyone in our community and everyone we come in contact with. Character is what helps set examples for those around us, whether it comes through in the setting of a classroom, during a sporting event, or even out in the community,” he said.

He further indicated that character can be fluid, ever-changing throughout our lives through choices made.

## SCHOLARSHIP

Cook said her concept of scholarship changed significantly after joining NHS.

“The drive to do my best in my school work increased,” she said. “Slowly, I learned to stop taking shortcuts in my studies and truly strive to improve my skills, especially in writing and analysis.”

Her sense of scholarship paid off in college as it gave her the tools needed to distinguish herself among a pool of competitive students. It also helped her to see criticism as a tool for growth.



**Sam Morehead, president of Burlington High School's National Honor Society chapter, reflects on scholarship Thursday, March 23, 2023, in the BHS library.**

“By my junior year of college, my hard work had paid off and I was selected by my university’s history department to write and publish my own undergraduate thesis,” she said. “That 18-month-long project was the culmination of years of pushing myself and prioritizing scholarship and a commitment to learning in my own personal academic quest.”

Morehead equated scholarship with civic duty and as a responsibility to the human race.

“It helps us be better community members,” Morehead said. “In this day and age, there is so much false and misinformation that can create a lot of distrust and even sometimes chaos out in the world. If you continue to have this scholarship and you continue learning and continue being informed, then you can better your community by knowing what’s going on and being able to honestly tell others the way you feel.”

He further stated that scholarship can help create new discoveries to help those around you and that it helps in most real-world situations.

“It helps you improve critical thinking, it helps you understand what’s going on in a real moment in time,” he said. “That way, you can react accordingly and with a well thought out plan and honest, open thinking.”

He challenged those in attendance to continue practicing scholarship to better both themselves and others.

## #THISISBURLINGTON

Hess-Haughey stressed that NHS isn't an organization that focuses solely on academics.

"National Honor Society students aren't just smart kids," she said. "They are so much more than a GPA or a class rank. They are today's leaders, they are our bright future. They deeply impact our school and community."

She then referenced a phrase often used on the district's social media accounts and on the pages of this newsletter.

"Our district uses the hashtag ThisIsBurlington when promoting school events and accomplishments," Hess-Haughey said. "This is 100 years of Burlington. This is approximately 900 service projects in Burlington. This is Burlington's countless members serving countless hours of community service. This is Burlington students leading. This is Burlington students being impactful. This is Burlington."

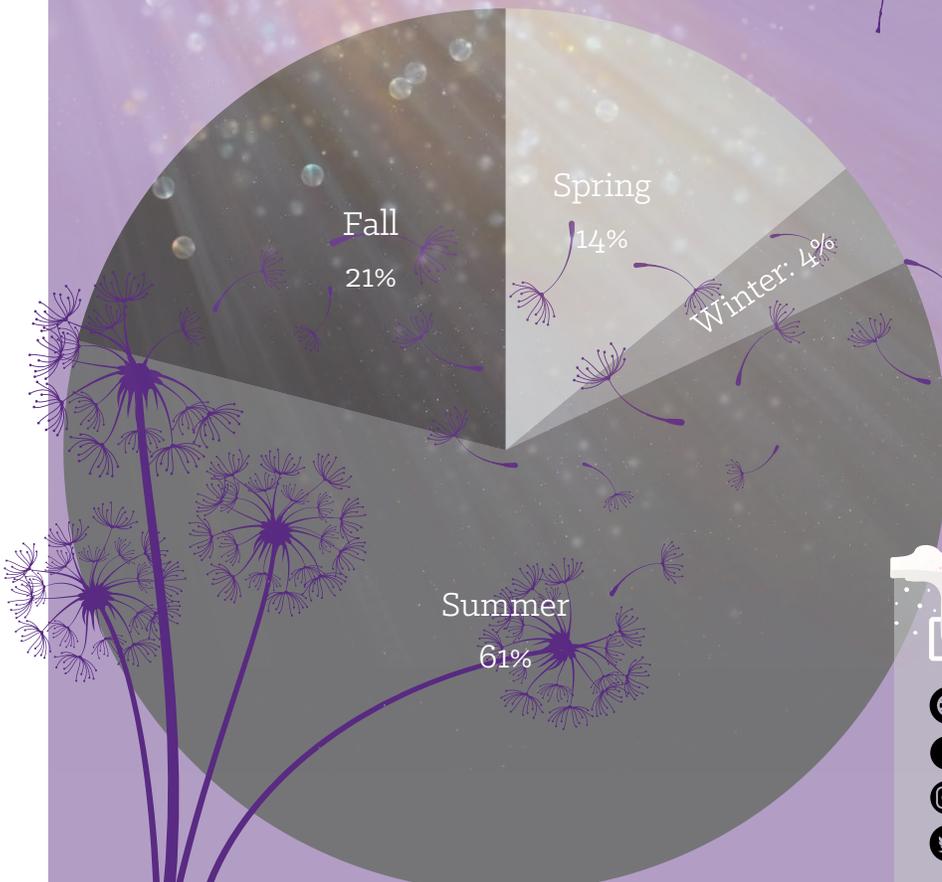


**Christina Hess-Haughey, faculty advisor to Burlington High School's National Honor Society chapter, speaks Thursday, March 23, 2023, during the chapter's 100th birthday celebration in the BHS library.**

## INSTAGRAM POLL RESULTS

### WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SEASON?

TOTAL VOTES: 138



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Room 228 is shown Monday, March 6, 2023, at Burlington High School. Mark Vasicek transformed the once traditional classroom into a Thinking Classroom toward the end of the first trimester after attending a conference featuring speaker Peter Liljedahl, the author of "Building a Thinking Classroom in Mathematics."

# THINKING CLASSROOM IS A 'GAME-CHANGER'

## Mark Vasicek's Thinking Classroom encourages engagement and critical thinking in math.

Burlington High School's Room No. 228 is sparsely furnished, occupied by only a podium and a single desk atop which sits a box of carefully crafted geometry problems waiting to be solved.

Using a deck of playing cards, Mark Vasicek randomly assigns his students into groups of three as they file in from the neighboring classroom, where the class spends only the first and last five minutes of each period for a crash course and review of the steps needed to solve a problem.

It is inside Room 228 that the real thinking begins.

The student groups select a small laminated piece of paper before

heading to one of the many whiteboards lining the classroom's walls. There, they work together to determine and solve the proper equation for the problem on the paper.

Standing beneath geometric shapes hanging from the ceiling, the students talk quietly within their groups to figure out how to tackle the problem, taking turns using the dry erase marker to write their work.

"They're all engaged," Vasicek said. "It's not that standing up is so great, but sitting down is so bad on so many levels. It causes anonymity and people can hide. They can be on their phones, they can be on their computer, they can do something that they're not supposed to be doing. When you're standing, I don't always see everything, but I can see everybody."

Several students said standing also helps them focus on the task at hand.



**Mark Vasicek reviews work done by a group of students Monday, March 6, 2023, inside his Thinking Classroom at Burlington High School.**

“This classroom, it helps you think when you stand up and move around, and you can have connections with people you don’t really know,” junior Lakyla Kuyro said as she and her peers waited on Vasicek to check their work.

Vasicek flits from group to group, asking the scholars to explain their methodology. Once a problem is solved, the group selects a new one from another pile. Each is designed to be slightly more difficult than the last.

“The hard part for me is to come up with the questions in the right order that’s sliced thin,” said Vasicek, who has written a geometry book and whose Desmos problems are used by teachers in schools throughout the state. “If I give you a problem, the next one’s going to be just a little bit harder.”

When students get stuck on a problem, Vasicek will assist, but only so much, forcing them to engage in what he calls productive struggle, something that ultimately builds both their problem-solving skills and confidence.

“If the kid asks me a ‘stop-thinking’ question — is this on our test, is this right — if I answer that for them, then they don’t have to think anymore,” Vasicek explained. “What I’ll do is I’ll look at them, I’ll smile and then I’ll walk away, and that’s unnerving to some of them at first, but then they realize he’s not going to answer that.

“If they ask me a ‘keep-thinking’ question — how to do a square or cubed root on the calculator — usually I’ll stop and ask them a question like show me what you’re thinking here or how did you come up with this. Then they get to explain their reasoning ... It’s to



**Boxes of geometry problems are shown Monday, March 6, 2023, inside Mark Vasicek's Thinking Classroom at Burlington High School. The problems are designed to increase in difficulty.**

jump-start their engines, not tow them to the finish line.”

Sometimes, he will allow for collaboration between groups as it gives the students the ability to teach, thus reinforcing what they’ve learned. It also offers a fresh perspective on the problem at hand.

Students in Vasicek’s first period geometry class indicated they prefer the Thinking Classroom to traditional math classes.

“I feel like it’s better because we can just communicate better as a classroom,” sophomore Grace Eden said.

Fellow sophomores Hudson Jones and Blaze Dochterman agreed.

“It’s better than sitting down because we’re collaborating,” Jones said.

“We can learn from other people,” Dochterman said. “If we don’t know what you’re doing, somebody else shows you how to do it.”

### BUILDING A THINKING CLASSROOM

Vasicek, who has taught math for nearly 20 years, is in his third trimester of utilizing a Thinking Classroom.

Everything about it – from the size of the paper upon which the problems are displayed to the use of whiteboards and lack of seating – is by design.

“They’re whiteboards. These are non-permanent vertical spaces,” Vasicek said. “We tried this with white paper before I got the whiteboards that I had Mrs. Knickerbocker’s husband make for me, and it takes them about 10 minutes longer for them to write something down, because it’s permanent. Even though you’re going to throw it away, it’s permanent.”

Similarly, delivering the math problems on such small pieces of paper prevents the students from writing on them.

Vasicek decided to implement the Thinking Classroom after attending a conference this past October featuring keynote speaker Peter Liljedahl, author of “Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics.”

“This guy went to 20 schools over 15 years, spoke to 10,000 students, 400 teachers and they tried different things in the classroom,” Vasicek said.

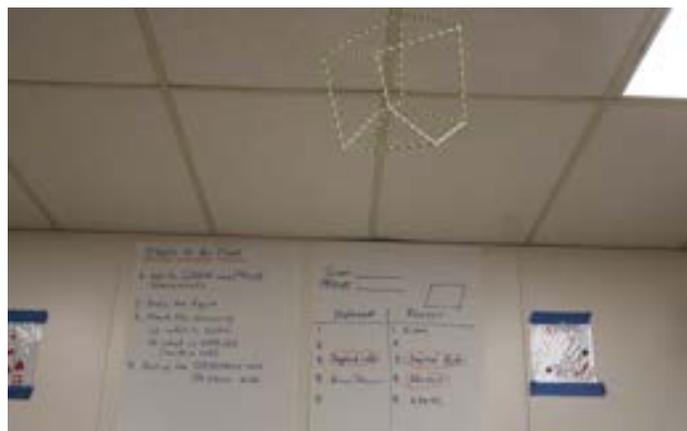
Using that research, Liljedahl developed a 14-point plan for encouraging students to deeply engage with math content rather than rely on mimicry to pass a math class.

“What the kids do is they mimic, and mimicking delivers the product you want up to the point that ... the curriculum becomes more demanding than what mimicking can do, but (mimicking) has been institutionalized, it’s been non-negotiated,” Vasicek said.

Formerly having worked as both a petroleum and machine engineer, Vasicek long had been searching for a way to teach math in a manner that engages critical thinking and therefore could be applied to real-world problems.



**Above: Mark Vasicek reviews work done by a group of students Monday, March 6, 2023, inside his Thinking Classroom at Burlington High School. Below: A geometric shape hangs from the ceiling near instructions on how to do a proof.**



“You walk into a plant and they don’t say two plus two equals four. They say make us money,” Vasicek said. “Thinking like an engineer is not intuitive, but you have to do the thinking. You come to the classroom and you want them to be thinking.”

Vasicek left the conference feeling inspired. He approached instructional coach Michael Carper about putting Liljedahl’s plan into action at BHS, perhaps the next trimester. Carper, however, told him to start it immediately.

Vasicek ran with it, learning as he went. The most difficult parts, he said, were finding the right progression of problem difficulty and effectively delivering lessons in a five-minute window.

Thus far, he has been pleased with the results. He’s seen students who in the past showed little interest in class engage and learn to the point where they were able to teach their peers. He’s also see students who formerly earned average grades work their way up to an A in his class.

“This is a game-changer,” Vasicek said. “We’re busting norms.”



## BCSD CONFERENCE TAKES PROACTIVE APPROACH TO COMBAT HOMELESSNESS

The Burlington Community School District will host a daylong conference April 21 aimed at reducing homelessness.

The YouthNet Conference: Collaborating for Change, will be from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Catfish Bend Casino Event Center.

The conference aims to take on a more proactive approach to combating homelessness, as well as increase awareness and outreach regarding the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which authorizes the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program and is the primary piece of federal legislation related to the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

"We tend to be, as a country, really very reactive where someone will call you and they're being evicted, they were evicted or they're living in their car, they're in a hotel," said Cassie Gerst, supervisor of grants and community outreach for BCSD. "We wanted to turn that around, and that's why we specifically structured this Resilient Communities project so we can be more proactive."

Resilient Communities is a program aimed at increasing community awareness of adverse childhood experiences and the long-term health impacts that can follow, as well as the positive childhood experiences that can counteract ACES. BCSD is among four program participants in the state.

The conference will feature keynote speaker Emily Teeter, education program consultant with the Iowa Department of Education, followed by eight breakout workshops.

"(Teeter) specializes in consulting on the McKinney-Vento Act for all homeless liaisons in the state, so she will be discussing the state of homelessness in our public schools in Iowa and then doing a brief McKinney-Vento Act 101, so what is it, so there's some definition and eligibility behind it," Gerst said.

Those leading the workshops will be Kara Vojcsik, a licensed clinical social worker, and Sonia Pitzi, director of the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness, who will discuss social-emotional

learning, help educators and service providers to confront their own biases, and bring awareness to the work being done with students and families experiencing homelessness through interactive activities.

Vojcsik will lead another workshop focused on mental health in the classroom, and Pitzi will deliver a session entitled "I Will Be Your Voice," which will include reading of stories written by homeless Pennsylvania youths, as well as discussion of the needs of students experiencing homelessness.

Four Oaks Children's and Family Services will be there to discuss collaboration in community-based services, housing, and how intentional integration of services can help communities, families and students; and Mona Ash, executive director of Building Bridges, will explore the impact the program is having on the community through helping build sustainability through community support.

Also present will be Dana Van Renterghem, parent and family coordinator for Iowa Safe Schools.

"They are going to talk about discussing barriers facing LGBTQ youth and the juxtaposition between student success in environments that provide inclusive curriculum and those that don't," Gerst said. "Often, LGBTQ are at high risk for homelessness and unaccompanied youth."

The conference also will include a workshop led by Iowa Balance of State Continuing of Care Executive Director Courtney Guntly and Institute of Community Alliances Coordinated Entry Specialist Jason Smith, who will present on the Continuum of Care and the Coordinated Entry system, which connects homeless families to housing programs and other resources.

Gerst said the conference will benefit anyone who works with family and youths.

Lunch will be provided, and the event is free to attend. Register by Friday, April 7, at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/bcsds-youthnet-conference-tickets-477557526417>.

## BCSD SELECTS ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM

Stephanie Vittoe has been selected as the Assistant Director of Curriculum for the Burlington Community School District. She will officially begin her new role on July 1, 2023.

Vittoe currently serves as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the Keokuk Community School District.

She has 10 years of school leadership experience, including serving as Curriculum Director, Assistant Principal, Principal, and as a regional Mentoring and Induction Coach. Prior to that, she taught high school business courses and Talented and Gifted programs.

Vittoe holds a Masters Degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Buena Vista University and completed the School Administration Licensure program through Viterbo University's Iowa Center.

"I am excited to welcome Ms. Vittoe to our team," BCSD Curriculum Director Cory Johnson said. "Her dedication, enthusiasm, and past experiences will be valuable assets for our District."

In her role as Assistant Director of Curriculum, Vittoe will work with Johnson to provide leadership and support in implementing, maintaining, monitoring, and aligning district educational programs.

# BURLINGTON ACTIVITIES DEPT.

To view the Activities schedule [click here!](#)

## THE RECAP



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## BURLINGTON COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

April 3 - Burlington School Board meets at 6 p.m.  
 April 7 & 10 - No school  
 April 17 - Burlington School Board meets at 6 p.m.  
 April 21 - No School  
 April 21 - BCSD YouthNet Conference from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Catfish Bend Conference Center  
 April 26-29 - Drake Relays  
 April 28 - Walk to Fight Suicide at 3:30 p.m. at Bracewell Stadium

## BURLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

April 6 - Parent-teacher conferences from 4 to 7 p.m.  
 April 22 - Prom from 8 to 11 p.m. at Barn on the Ridge  
 April 12 - Groundbreaking ceremony at 4:30 p.m.  
 April 14-15 - BHS Drama students will present "All I Really Wanted to Know I Learned by Being in a Bad Play" and "All I Really Need to Know I Learned from Being in a Bad Murder Mystery" at 7 p.m. at Aldo Leopold Intermediate School.

## EDWARD STONE MIDDLE SCHOOL

April 4 - Parent-teacher conferences from 4 to 7 p.m.  
 April 11 - Band solo contest at 6 p.m.  
 April 20 - BHS Spring Band and Jazz Band concert from 7 to 8 p.m. at Edward Stone Middle School  
 April 27 - BHS Spring Choir Concert at 7 p.m. at Edward Stone Middle School

## ALDO LEOPOLD INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL

April 3 - Penny War to raise money for Through Joshua's Eyes begins

## ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS & CORSE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER

April 3 - Corse PTO meets at 5:30 p.m.  
 April 3 - Grimes PTO meets at 6 p.m.  
 April 4 - Black Hawk PTO meets at 5 p.m.  
 April 28 - Peek at Preschool from 9 to 11 a.m. and 2 to 4 p.m. at Corse Early Childhood Center



## AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS

[Click here to view the PiECES Calendar](#)

**and activities!**

### Saturday Movie!

April 8 at 1 p.m. at the Capitol Theatre

### Saturdays with PiECES

April 1, 8 & 15

### NO PiECES

April 7, 10 & 21

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# AT BCSD, WE ARE RAISING GRAYHOUNDS!



## BURLINGTON COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT NONDISCRIMINATION NOTICE

It is the policy of the Burlington Community School District not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, creed, age (for employment), marital status (for programs), sexual orientation, gender identity and socioeconomic status (for programs) in its educational programs and its employment practices. There is a grievance procedure for processing complaints of discrimination. If you have questions or a grievance related to this policy please contact the district's Equity Coordinators at the District Administrative Office, 1429 West Avenue, Burlington, IA 52601; (319) 753-6791.

For Educational Programs: Cory Johnson, Director of Curriculum, [cory.johnson@bcstds.org](mailto:cory.johnson@bcstds.org)

For Employment: Laci Johnson, Director of Human Resources, [laci.johnson@bcstds.org](mailto:laci.johnson@bcstds.org)