

THE BURLINGTON BARK

Burlington, Iowa | Feb. 3, 2025



Burlington High School senior Sophie To and her mentee, third-grader Isaiah Rojas, play a “Star Wars”-themed game of Eye Found It Jan. 15, 2025, in the cafeteria at BHS. The duo are among 34 mentor/mentee pairs this year in Club M, which over its past 10 years has served 734 students.

CLUB M MENTORS MAKE AN IMPACT

Most days when Emily Johnson picks up her son from Sunnyside, the third-grader — a self-described “quiet kid” — is scant on details, but not on Wednesdays.

That’s because on Wednesdays, Isaiah Rojas gets to hang out with his high school mentor, Sophie To, at Club M.

“When I pick him up from Club M, he tells me every single thing that they did throughout the whole thing, from the minute he got on the bus,” Johnson said. “He goes into dinner talking about it.”

Johnson first signed her son up for Club M when he was in first grade. She had noticed that Rojas had a difficult time maintaining relationships with people outside his family, and she thought that him being paired with a high school mentor might help. She was right.

“When I saw that Club M was an opportunity for him to maybe develop a relationship with someone else, I signed him up immediately,” Johnson said. “We were so lucky to be paired up with Sophie.”

Rojas began coming home from Club M eager to tell his mom about what he and To did that day, and after each Club M day, a new countdown would begin.

QUICK SIX

- 1. Feb. 4**
FAFSA Night from 4-7 p.m. at BHS
- 2. Feb. 10 and 24**
School Board meets at 5:30 p.m.
- 3. Feb. 14**
Two-hour early out
- 4. Feb. 27**
Aldo Leopold Black History Museum from 4-7 p.m.
- 5. Feb. 27**
End of 2nd trimester
- 6. Feb. 28**
No School-Professional Development

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DAYS UNTIL GRADUATION

117

THIS IS BURLINGTON



Burlington High School freshman Xyian Parker and third-grader Josiah Carpenter play “Guess Who” Jan. 15, 2025, in the cafeteria at BHS. “One of the good things about being a mentor is that I get to give other people opportunities to do things that I didn’t have,” Parker said.

“Every Wednesday when I go to pick him up, he’s like, ‘OK, seven more days till we get to do it again,’ ” Johnson said. “To see the change in him to get so excited about something has been absolutely amazing for me, and to know that he has built that relationship with her over the last three years, it is very promising for me to know that he does have the ability to do that with people.”

To is among 34 mentors currently matched with elementary-aged mentees through the program. She’s been paired with Isaiah each of the past three years.

“I think I’m the luckiest (mentee) because I got the same mentor three years in a row,” Rojas said while playing a “Star Wars”-themed game of Eye Found It with To.

To takes seriously her commitment to the program and her mentee.

“If you’re given the title of a mentor, then you should be someone who’s going to be reliable,” To said. “You should be a good role model, and being present is an important part of that.”

To first got involved in Club M because she was looking for something to do after school. Having no younger siblings, she thought Club M would be a good new experience.

Since then, she and Isaiah have spent their Wednesday afternoons

CLUB M AT A GLANCE

Club M has served a total of 734 Burlington Community School District students in its 10 years of operation.

According to 2023-24 Club M surveys:

- More than 80% of mentors believe they make a positive difference by being in Club M. 70% of elementary students agree having a mentor has made a positive difference in their life.
- When asked about completing high school, 97% of our elementary students believe that they will graduate high school. 93% of high school mentors say they will graduate high school.
- 83% of matches met monthly throughout the school year. Almost 70% of high school mentors stayed in the program for the whole year.



Burlington High School sophomore Owen James and his mentee, first-grader Roman Boyce, play with blocks Jan. 15, 2025, in the cafeteria at BHS. “(The mentees) bring a bunch of energy and they just brighten your day,” James said.

playing board games and with Legos. They don’t often deviate from Rojas’s favorites, and that’s just fine with To, who has enjoyed seeing Isaiah gradually become less reserved and appear more energized during their time together.

Club M Match Coordinator Natalie Hall said returning mentor/mentee pairs is not uncommon and that relationships strengthen year over year.

“It is amazing to see mentors and mentees come back and work with each other multiple years in a row,” Hall said. “I have a few matches who are in their third year together, and the first day when we come back, it is always so heartwarming to see them reconnect after a summer of not seeing each other and catching up on what they’ve done and everything. Really just the more that students work together, the closer bond they develop, and the more likely that it is to carry over to later in their life. We have had relationships where the mentor goes off to college and then they stay in touch with the younger student.”

Hall noted that research shows that having a stable older role model is an important factor in a child’s life and that such relationships help to instill in the mentees confidence that helps them plan their future.

Finding the right pairs is crucial to Club M’s success.

Mentees and mentors are matched based on interests and personalities. There are pairs who enjoy arts and crafts, pairs who like to play games,

and pairs who like to play with Barbies. And then there’s Dallas Moore and Neil Stevenson.

Moore, a third-grader, said what he enjoys most about Club M is messing with his mentor. Stevenson, a junior at BHS, takes it all in stride.

“He’s no goodie-two-shoes, that’s for sure,” Stevenson said with a laugh as he closed in on a Connect Four win — a rare occurrence, according to Dallas.

A few tables away, sophomore Ell Riddle and second-grader Gage Benhart played a game of Battleship.

“I like my mentee. He’s cool,” Riddle said.

Riddle initially joined Club M because she needed Silver Cord hours.

“But now that I’m here, I’m very happy I did and it gives me something to look forward to every Wednesday,” Riddle said. “Like if I’m really like, ‘Oh my gosh, I can’t go to school today,’ then I’ll leave Gage alone so I have to go to school on Wednesdays and it gets me out of bed.”

Other mentors said they decided to join Club M because of their interest in a career in education.



Burlington High School junior Gwendolyn Bilderback and third-grader Kinleigh Dameron draw and color Jan. 15, 2025, in the BHS cafeteria. “Since I want to work with kids as my career path, I really wanted to start with something small and learning from different kids who are different from what I would normally hang out with,” Bilderback said.

“It helps me stay active and in touch with the youth and what they like to do. It also gives me good bonding time, so bonding experience for my future career as well,” said senior Ace Whalen, who plans to study elementary music education after high school.

Others joined Club M to have a fun break in their week and provide a chance to form connections while meeting new people. Whatever the reason, the impact on their mentees is huge.

“There are kids out there who don’t have anybody, and (high school students) could be that somebody for a kid and make the day just that much better for them,” Johnson said. “It’s not only rewarding for the kid, but it ends up being rewarding for the high school student as well to know that they made such an impact with something that only takes an hour a week.”

Those interested in becoming mentors can apply by visiting [bcsds.org](https://www.bcsds.org) and filling out the Club M mentor application.

Once the application is received, mentors will complete an interview and an hour of training to review safety, procedures, policy, and how to be a good mentor. They then are free to start the program.

“We can always use more mentors and use more mentees,” Hall said. “The more mentors we have, the more mentees we can accept into the program.”



Burlington High School junior Rayleigh Peterson and fourth-grader Lauren Johnson pose for a photo Jan. 15, 2025, in the cafeteria at BHS. “I love being a mentor just to be able to see Lauren every week and I love connecting with her. She’s really fun,” Peterson said.

NHS PROJECTS BRING WARMTH AND COMFORT

On Jan. 18, a group of nearly two dozen volunteers braved the morning's frigid cold and ventured out of their homes to participate in an event whose goal was to bring warmth to sick children.

Once inside the cafeteria at North Hill Elementary School, they were greeted by brightly colored swaths of fleece fabric waiting to be cut and tied to create blankets to be donated to the University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital.

The blanket making was hosted by National Honor Society and was spearheaded by senior Sophie Brown, who had been planning for it since last spring, when she was searching for a service project that would meet the eligibility requirements for the NHS Executive Board.

She scoured the internet for ideas, but it was ultimately a desire to teach something coupled with her affinity for crafts and an old photograph that led her to choose the blanket project.

The photograph was of her friend while in the children's hospital, snuggled up under a tie blanket.

"I remembered that she was always cold," Brown said.

And so she decided the mission of her project would be to provide tie blankets to as many patients at the children's hospital as possible.

She began seeking out donations via phone calls and keeping a watchful eye out for fabric sales and ultimately secured enough materials to craft 35 blankets. Additional donations of ready-made blankets brought the total number of blankets to be donated to more than 60.

Brown plans to transport the blankets to Iowa City later this month. But the blankets won't be the only thing she and her fellow NHS members will have in tow.

They also hope to have a vehicle packed full of stuffed animals donated during the Teddy Bear Toss, which will be held during halftime of the boys varsity basketball game on Feb. 7.

"Come out and watch the girls' Senior Night and donate a teddy bear at the boys game," Brown said. "It's for a good cause."

The stuffed animals will be donated to the Ronald McDonald House.

There's also still time to donate blankets. Donated items must be new and may be dropped off in the office at Burlington High School.



Volunteers from the community and Burlington High School's National Honor Society make tie blankets Jan. 18, 2024, in the cafeteria of North Hill Elementary School. The blankets will be donated to the University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital.

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT FAFSA, SCHOLARSHIPS

It's FAFSA season.

That's right, it's time for seniors planning to attend college to start taking steps toward securing financial aid and scholarships for their future.

Burlington High School will host a FAFSA Night from 4-7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 4, at the school. Financial aid experts from Southeastern Community College will be on hand to guide students and their parents through the FAFSA process.

Students should register for the event by contacting their school counselor. They should also plan to bring a parent or guardian, along with driver's license, social security number, and 2023 tax returns.

WHAT IS FAFSA AND WHO SHOULD FILL IT OUT?

FAFSA stands for Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Applications recently opened, and timing is of the essence.

"Seniors need to do it now," Burlington High School guidance counselor Tamara Levinson said. "There's a limited amount of funds that are available, so the sooner that you've completed your FAFSA, you've secured your spot for loans and grants."

"If they don't complete the FAFSA, it's going to be hard for them to be accepted into colleges and get back their acceptance letter with their grant financial aid and everything so they know what the bottom line is, what it's going to cost to go to that college."

Guidance counselor Sarah Mumm noted that the FAFSA also opens doors to additional opportunities.

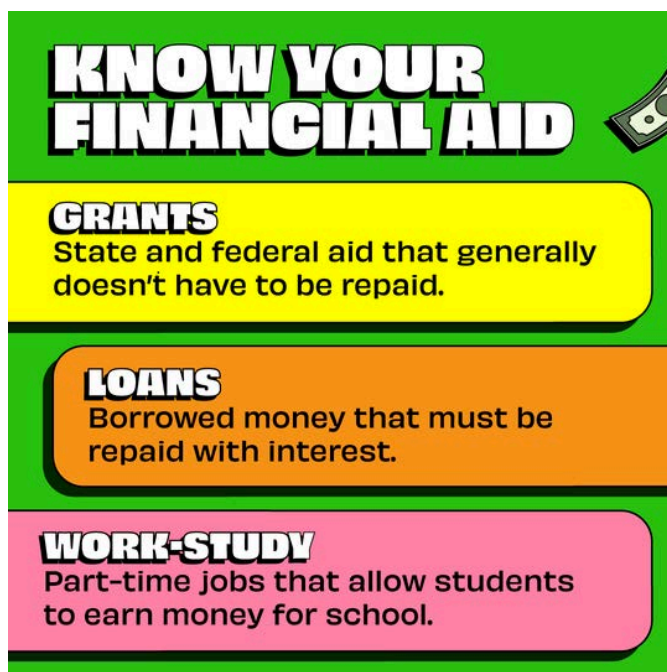
"It also gives access to loans from the government, which have better rates than a bank, at this point anyway, and access to work-study options," Mumm said. "If you don't do your FAFSA, you can't do work study at your college."

Angela Leinbach, another guidance counselor at BHS, said students who may not qualify for financial aid but plan to get scholarships through the college they attend should still fill out the FAFSA.

"The school still needs to have their FAFSA filled out if they're going to get any scholarships through that school," Leinbach said. "There's going to be kids who won't get financial aid, but that doesn't mean they won't get scholarships."

SCHOLARSHIPS

Seniors also should start looking into scholarships if they haven't already.



The Gold Form is a single application available only to BHS students. A committee will apply each application to any of more than 40 local scholarships for which a student may be eligible.

The deadline to submit the Gold Form is Feb. 28.

Additional scholarship opportunities can be found via the Counselor's Web as well as via a presentation that was shared with seniors earlier this year.



Lunch is served at Burlington Community High School. Beginning Feb. 3, a la carte items will be available for purchase at BHS. Students with money on their lunch accounts will be able to enjoy a hot or iced coffee with their warm breakfast and a multitude of food and beverage items with lunch. To see the a la carte menu and prices, visit bclds.org/food-services/lunch-menu/

WARM BREAKFAST, A LA CARTE RETURN

Beginning Feb. 3, a la carte items will return to the Burlington High School cafeteria.

Flavored hot and iced coffees will be available during breakfast and lunch. Over the lunch hour, students will be able to select from a number of other items, including beverages, chips, snacks, ice cream, jerky sticks, yogurt and more.

A la carte items, however, are not covered by the Community Eligibility Program, and therefore may only be purchased if a student has money in their lunch account.

Students may add money to their accounts in the morning at the breakfast line. Parents also may add money to lunch accounts via RevTrack or Infinite Campus. Those who have negative balances on their accounts will not be able to purchase a la carte items.

Warm breakfasts are also back!

We're talking menu items like confetti and blueberry pancakes and breakfast sandwiches.

Warm breakfasts are being served on the following schedule:

- Elementary schools: Tuesday and Thursday mornings
- Aldo and Ed Stone: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings
- BHS: Monday, Tuesday and Friday mornings.

Cold breakfast will continue to be served on non-warm breakfast days.

Breakfasts are covered by the district's participation in the Community Eligibility Program and therefore are available to all students at no cost.



Freshmen Kassidy Korte and Maddie Moore hold up the chest plate they designed Jan. 16, 2025, in Brian Blake's Physical Science class before testing its ability to reduce force. In addition to protective layers of tape, plastic bags, cups, cardboard, and cotton balls, they added an uplifting message to their design.

UNDER PRESSURE

For two weeks in January, students in Physical Science classes at Burlington High School researched, designed, built and tested chest protectors.

The chest protector project is part of the [Open SciEd curriculum](#), which is designed based on the way that students learn and begins with anchoring phenomena before students are tasked with using that information in critical thinking and hands-on projects.

"They are trying to design something to reduce force," science teacher Brian Blake said. "We've studied momentum, gravity, weight, and mass times acceleration equals force, so we're trying to find a way to limit force."

Students first were tasked with researching bullet-proof vests and car bumpers to see how they work to dissipate force. They were then told to apply what they learned through that research to a design for a chest plate they would build using the following materials:

- Cotton balls
- Newspaper
- Plastic sacks
- Masking tape
- Duct tape
- Dixie cups

- Popsicle sticks
- Cardboard
- Rubber bands
- Index cards
- Glue

Working either alone or in groups of up to three, the students plotted and budgeted their designs (each material was assigned a cost, and each group could "spend" up to \$300).

After getting approval of their design from their teacher, they set about building their chest plates.

The designs and material use varied greatly from group to group.

"This group over here, these guys have a whole pile of cardboard," Blake said, pointing to a group working in the northwest corner of the lab. "No one in any class has ever used that many. And these guys over here are going to do something with 60 bags. No one's ever done that before. There's all these variations of people and ideas."

One group planned to rely heavily on cotton balls.

"We're putting cotton balls on the bottom and then we're going to flip



Science teacher Brian Blake shows his Physical Science class a chest protector that was designed and built by a student in another class that wound up becoming more effective in reducing force after it broke in a way that created a springboard effect.

it over and crumple up newspaper into bigger balls, put a layer of them and then cardboard on top and then another layer of cotton balls," freshman Bradie Chenoweth said. "We want it to absorb the impact instead of transferring it down to the metal plate."

The impact Chenoweth was referring to was to be a metal rod dropped from three feet high onto the chest protector, which would be placed upon a metal plate that would measure the amount of force dropped upon it.

Each chest plate would be tested three times, Blake said, explaining that some plates become less effective as the tests go on, while others become more effective. In one class, a chest plate broke in a way that unintentionally created a spring effect, thus further reducing the amount of force that fell on the plate by diverting it away from the target.

Freshman Aurora Critser was curious about the bend that bullet proof vests and bumpers have, and she applied that same bend to her chest plate using cardboard, newspaper, bags and cotton balls.

Josie Newell, Florrah Mehaffy, and Saoirse Hermann made up the group using stacks of cardboard. Their goal, Hermann explained, was to build a table with bars on the side topped by a piece of cardboard.

"That way, the bar will catch on that and it won't even touch the first layer," Hermann said.

Their design turned out to be the most effective in their class,



Freshman Florrah Mehaffy gives her chest plate one final test while co-builders Josie Newell and Saoirse Hermann look on Jan. 16, 2025, in Brian Blake's classroom at Burlington High School. Despite having tested the most effective of the chest plates in their class, the structure could not hold up to the power of a teen-sized human.

redirecting the force of the bar completely from the metal plate.

After the projects were tested, each group returned to their desks to determine what they possibly could have done differently to make their design more effective. They were also permitted to further test the strength of their chest plates by stepping on them. None of the plates appeared to be freshman-proof.

BURLINGTON ACTIVITIES DEPT.

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

THE RECAP



UPCOMING EVENTS

BURLINGTON COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

- Feb. 10 - Burlington School Board meets at 5:30 p.m.
- Feb. 14 - Two-hour early out - Professional Development
- Feb. 17 - School Improvement Advisory Committee meets at 5:30 p.m.
- Feb. 24 - Burlington School Board meets at 5:30 p.m.
- Feb. 27 - End of 2nd Trimester
- Feb. 28 - No School - Professional Development

BURLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

- Feb. 4 - FAFSA Night from 4-7 p.m. at BHS
- Feb. 25 - Spring Orchestra Concert at Edward Stone Middle School

ALDO LEOPOLD INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL

- Feb. 27 - Black History Museum from 1-6 p.m.

EARLY CHILDHOOD & ELEMENTARY

- Feb. 18 - Sunnyside Spring Pictures

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

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

Saturdays with PiECES

Brick Masters: Feb. 8 and 22 from 10 to 11 a.m. at the Burlington Public Library

NO PiECES

Feb. 14 and 28

Aldo Leopold Intermediate School Presents

BLACK HISTORY MUSEUM

An exhibition of African-Americans who helped shape history.

Featuring over 25 exhibits researched and designed by our 5th and 6th grade scholars.

Open to the public
February 27, 2025 1:00-6:00 pm
3075 Sunnyside Ave

4:00-6:00 pm
 Scholastic Book Fair

BHS Music Boosters

ENCHANTMENT UNDER THE SEA Adult Prom

February 8
 7-10 PM

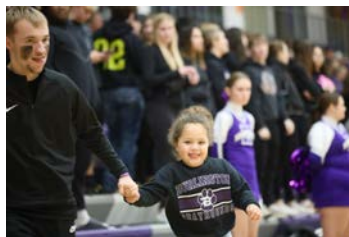
Heritage Garden Center
 620 Washington St

Tickets \$20 and can be purchased at Burlington by the Book 301 Jefferson St. cash or check

Cash bar, raffle, silent auction, appetizers and a live DJ. (Charging Rhino Production)



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