

THE BURLINGTON BARK

Burlington, Iowa | Sept. 3, 2024



Summer school helpers Kingsley Miller and Kiara Winski operate the star lab July 7, 2024, in the gymnasium at North Hill Elementary School. The two are among 11 high schoolers who worked alongside teachers to make small group and other learning opportunities possible for students enrolled in the summer school program this year.

‘ABOVE & BEYOND’

High school students try hand at teaching at summer school.

A line of third-graders carefully stepped inside the inflatable dome occupied by two teenage girls who had spent the previous evening preparing for the journey ahead.

Their destination? The stars.

“Do you guys ever do connect the dots or do you look up at the clouds and see something totally different than just clouds?” Burlington High School senior Kingsley Miller asked the group seated around her and fellow senior Kiara Winski. “People for thousands of years have been looking up at the night sky and seeing different pictures in the stars. We’re going to be showing you guys some of those pictures.”

The younger students gasped in awe as their surroundings morphed from that of a sunny day in Fairfield (the

QUICK SIX

- 11. Sept. 3**
Auditorium Open House at 5 p.m. at Aldo
- 2. Sept. 3**
First Day of Preschool
- 3. Sept. 9 & 23**
School Board meets at 6 p.m.
- 4. Sept. 10**
Special Election
- 5. Sept. 13**
Two-hour Early Out
- 6. Sept. 27**
No School

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THIS IS BURLINGTON



Instructional coach Michael Carper poses for a photo alongside elementary students and high school helpers Aug. 1, 2024, at North Hill Elementary School.

launch base imagery of the Great Prairie Area Education Agency's Star Lab) to the diamond-studded blackness of outer space.

"What types of shapes do you guys see?" Miller asked.

A cacophony of voices filled the Star Lab as students called out various shapes and figures before Winski hit a button on the tablet controlling the 3-D projector that brought into view the constellations as the Greeks viewed them thousands of years ago.

The crescendo faded to a fresh round of oohs and aahs, and Miller began to point out the individual constellations like Hercules, Draco, Orion, Cancer and Leo, telling the Greek mythology behind each in a way that kept the young audience engaged.

"They're naturals," instructional coach Michael Carper said. "They went home and prepped heavily. I saw Kiera at soccer and was like, 'What are you doing after this?' She said, 'I gotta go home and prep for my lesson tomorrow.'"

Winski and Miller are among 11 high school applicants who were selected to help out at this year's elementary summer school program, which this year served about 90 students from Burlington and neighboring elementary schools.

Priority is given to applicants who have interest in pursuing careers in education after high school.

"I give priority to high schoolers who want to be teachers," Carper said. "They get opportunities to come here and lead small-group lessons and things like that with a teacher so they can continue to mold their own kind of pedagogy in a way."

Miller has been a high school helper each of the past four summers. The experience made her realize that there is nothing she would rather do than teach.

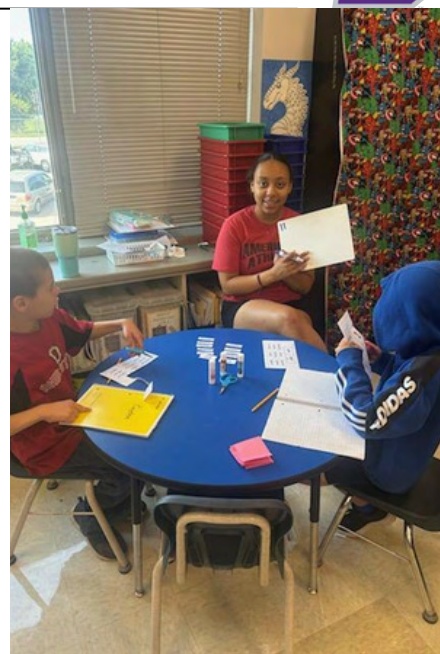


Third- (now fourth-) graders gather for a toast to fourth grade Aug. 1, 2024, as they finish their pizza party made possible by Deron Bray's mother, Darlene, who purchased the pizzas to help her son and his classmates celebrate their last day of summer school. "My favorite thing about summer school is the family-like atmosphere," interventionist and summer school teacher Judy White said.

"I found out last year that because of this that I want to be a teacher and I can't think of doing anything else now," Miller said while waiting for the next round of students to enter the Star Lab.

She was soon joined by Bentlee Bohnenkamp, who chose to sit beside her in the dome's center and asked when she would come to his classroom again.

"The high schoolers are so important to these little guys," Carper said. "Yes, the teachers connect with them, but they really bond with those high school kids. When you see them coming out of their cars, a kid runs up and gives them a hug."



High school helpers lead small group lessons during summer school at North Hill Elementary School.

The high schoolers went above and beyond to make morning drop-off fun and welcoming, dancing to music and holding up signs as students pulled up. BHS senior Ace Whalen bought an inflatable dinosaur costume specifically for morning drop-off, and the arriving elementary students' enthusiasm mirrored her own.

"Best part of my summer," Whalen commented in a post about summer school on the district's Facebook page.

"Our teenage helpers go above and beyond," said interventionist Teresa Morris. "They have stepped up in a way that was beyond our expectations. We're so proud and honored to have them."

The high schoolers, along with associates, helped to make possible the cafe-style teaching method that Morris and fellow interventionist Judy White teamed up to try this summer. Small group interventions are key to cafe instruction, and the high schoolers got to lead some of those lessons.

Carper recalled one day when he walked around North Hill to find every single high schooler leading a lesson at the same time.

"It may have been listening to two kids read, it may have been doing little phonics things with them or cutting things out on paper," Carper said. "It was so cool."

HIGH SCHOOL HELPERS

Gwen Bilderback

Abby Cluney

Jacob Downey

Maggie McKee

Kingsley Miller

Azalea Quinones

Aeron Roth

Isha Salohke

Julianna Weger

Ace Whalen

Kiara Winski

Back in the Star Lab, Winski and Miller told the students the story behind the Leo constellation.

"Leo was a giant lion that tormented a town," Miller said. "Have you guys ever been to the zoo? ... Imagine that but 100 feet tall just roaming around Burlington, Iowa. Hercules was sent to slay him. If that ever happens to us, we'll send Bentley."

A MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dear Staff and Community,

I hope this message finds you well and that you had a wonderful summer! As we embark on another school year, I am thrilled to share some exciting updates with you.

But first, I would like to take a moment to reflect. This year will be my third year as superintendent of Burlington schools. During this time, I have had the privilege of witnessing the compassion, kindness, dedication, and enthusiasm that our teachers and support staff display in their day-to-day interactions with students, and I am humbled to lead this team of professionals.

I am both grateful for and inspired by the growth and progress we have made together in my time here thus far. I look forward to continuing on that path in our commitment to providing exceptional educational opportunities to each and every one of our students.

In our ongoing effort to enhance our academic offerings, we are delighted to announce that we are continuing to add dedicated STEM staff. Last year, we added a STEM rotation at each of our K-4 buildings. This year, we also have a new STEM teacher at Aldo, providing our fifth and sixth grade students with more opportunities to explore the critical fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

I am proud to report that our athletic and music programs are thriving. Student enrollment in both areas has increased each of the past two years, bringing us closer to achieving our goal of every middle and high school student being involved in at least one extracurricular activity. These programs not only enrich the lives of our students, but they also bring together our community in support and celebration of their achievements.

I look forward to continuing BCSD's community partnerships as we continue to work together to remove barriers and provide opportunities for students. One such partnership, initiated last year, was with the city of Burlington to provide free busing to our students beyond school bus routes. We also continue to provide free breakfast and lunch to all students regardless of income via our participation in the USDA's Community Eligibility Provision program.

Together, our administrators, teachers and support staff will continue to strive for excellence in everything we do.

Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to our school community. It is through our collective efforts that we can create an environment where every student can thrive.

Sincerely,

Robert Scott
Superintendent
Burlington Community School District





A rendering of the proposed performing arts center shows what the space could look like should voters approve a property tax increase for up to six years that would be the equivalent of up to roughly \$2.50 per month (or \$30 per year) for someone who owns a \$100,000 home.

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THE SEPT. 10 SPECIAL ELECTION

The Burlington Community School District will ask district residents to vote in a special election Sept. 10 on whether to allow an increase in the Voted Physical Plant and Equipment Levy that will go toward transforming an existing auditorium into a performing arts center.

We'll be hosting an open house at 5 p.m. Sept. 3 at Aldo Leopold Intermediate School so you can see the existing space and plans for the proposed project, as well as speak with district representatives.

Below are some Q & A's to help answer questions you may have about what's on the ballot. If you have a question that is not answered below, please email michaele.niehaus@bcsds.org.

What would this revenue be used for?

The additional PPEL funds would support the expansion of the auditorium at Aldo Leopold Intermediate School to better support our music and performing arts programs district-wide, while freeing up existing VPPEL funds to further bolster security and support facility maintenance throughout the district.

Why a performing arts center?

BCSD currently is without a performing arts center.



The existing auditorium at Aldo Leopold Intermediate School is shown. A plan to expand the space includes additional seating, a larger stage, better acoustics and accessibility, among other features.

The existing spaces at Edward Stone Middle School and Aldo where concerts, plays and musicals are held were built as junior high auditoriums for things like assemblies and therefore lack desired stage size, acoustics, set design room and adequate lighting/seating.



What will the expansion entail?

Planned work would transform Aldo's auditorium into a performing arts center, with improved stage presence and acoustics, as well as increased seating that will bring the capacity from 503 up to 700, and improved accessibility.

The expansion would be along the current auditorium's south wall. This would allow for seating to be installed up to about the end of the existing stage, which would be moved back further into the expanded space.

Other features of the expansion project include the addition of a stage craft area, spotlights, a sound booth, and a concession stand.

Why has Aldo been selected as the proposed location for this expansion?

Aldo's location and layout make it ideal for the expansion as there are no homes immediately behind the school and the basketball hoops in the expansion zone could be easily moved.

Why wasn't an auditorium included in the high school renovation project?

The addition of an auditorium at the high school had been considered during the planning phase of the BHS SAVE — Secure an Advanced Vision for Education, which allows districts to bond against revenue generated via the penny sales tax — project.

Estimates made in 2022 for such a project were as follows:

- \$22-23 million for an 800-seat auditorium
- \$30 million for a 1,100-seat auditorium

This is more than three times the planned cost at Aldo.

What impact will this have on my property tax?

The question on the ballot seeks permission for the district to levy up to an additional 67 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property valuation for a period of six years.

Currently, BCSD's VPPEL is 67 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property valuation. Voter approval would allow the district to increase that levy to no more than \$1.34 per \$1,000 of assessed property valuation.

To help put this in perspective, this increase would be the equivalent of \$30 per year for a \$100,000 home. That's \$2.50 per month.

It is important to note that the actual amount levied could be revisited each of those six years and could be lower, but it would not be able to exceed the approved amount.

Also worth noting is that since 2015, BCSD's total property tax rate has decreased \$3.18 per \$1,000 valuation — from \$15.43 to \$12.25.

How does BCSD's PPEL compare to that of other districts across the state?

85% of Iowa school districts have a Voter-approved Physical Plant

HOW THE QUESTION WILL APPEAR ON THE BALLOT

Shall the Board of Directors of the Burlington Community School District, in the County of Des Moines, State of Iowa, for the purpose of purchasing and improving grounds; constructing schoolhouses or buildings and opening roads to schoolhouses or buildings; purchasing of buildings; purchase, lease or lease-purchase of technology and equipment; paying debts contracted for the erection or construction of schoolhouses or buildings, not including interest on bonds; procuring or acquisition of libraries; repairing, remodeling, reconstructing, improving, or expanding the schoolhouses or buildings and additions to existing schoolhouses; expenditures for energy conservation; renting facilities under Iowa Code Chapter 28E; purchasing transportation equipment for transporting students; lease purchase option agreements for school buildings or equipment; purchasing equipment authorized by law; or for any purpose or purposes now or hereafter authorized by law, be authorized for a period of five (5) years, to levy annually, a voter-approved physical plant and equipment property tax not to exceed an additional Sixty-Seven Cents (\$0.67) per One Thousand Dollars (\$1,000) of the assessed valuation of the taxable property within the school district commencing with the levy for collection in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, or each year thereafter; it being understood that if this proposition should fail to be approved by the voters, such failure shall not be construed to terminate or restrict authority previously granted by the voters to levy and impose a special tax for any one or more of the foregoing purposes?

and Equipment Levy, and more than one-third of those districts have rates of \$1.34 per \$1,000 valuation.

If approved, how much revenue is expected to be generated by the PPEL?

The estimated increase in PPEL funds would generate an estimated \$5 million. The expansion is estimated to cost between \$7.5 and \$8.5 million. The remaining funds could come from the district's reserves.

If approved, what is the timeline for the project?

Work would likely start in two years after plans have been finalized and funding has been secured.

How can I vote?

You can vote absentee at the Des Moines County Courthouse right up until Sept. 9.

Those voting on Sept. 10 must vote at their polling place. Polling places will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Locations are as follows:

- Oak Street Baptist Church, 1303 Oak St (use south door): Pct 1, 2, & Tama Twp.
- Optimae Life Services, 910 Cottonwood, Ste 1001: Pct. 3
- First Church of the Nazarene, 1015 S. Roosevelt Ave.: Pct 4, & Union
- Harmony Bible Church, 550 Division St.: Pct 5 & 6
- James Madison Educational Center, 2132 Madison Ave.: Pct 7
- Bethany Lutheran Church, 2515 Madison Ave., Pct 8 & Concordia Twp.
- Middletown City Hall, 120 Mechanic St., Middletown: Pct FM
- Divine Mercy Parish Center, 502 W Mount Pleasant St., West Burlington: Pct WB



Above: A group of graduating seniors pose for a photo ahead of Burlington High School's 2024 Commencement Ceremony May 25, 2024, at Bracewell Stadium. Below: Students exit the stage area against a backdrop of fireworks following the commencement ceremony.

A CLASS OF GROWTH AND PERSEVERANCE

On the evening of May 25, 143 young men and women donning purple caps and gowns walked out of Clark Field House and onto the field at Bracewell Stadium en route to the chairs that had been set up for them around the 50-yard line.

The commencement ceremony was the last school event members of the Burlington High School Class of 2024 would experience as a collective group, and they had learned years earlier not to take such opportunities for granted.

"Our freshman year was really wonky," Salutatorian Hannah Wentzel acknowledged in her address to her classmates and their families, friends, and teachers seated behind them.

These graduating seniors entered high school in the fall of 2020 as schools throughout the nation were grappling with how best to operate while mitigating the spread of the novel virus. For Burlington, that effort took the form of hybrid schedules, with students attending school in-person on alternating days. The pandemic also put a damper on school events.





A graduating Burlington High School senior looks toward the crowd May 25, 2024 ahead of the 2024 Commencement Ceremony at Bracewell Stadium.

“COVID took a lot of experiences our freshman year, such as dragon boats, only being able to go to football games if we had special tickets, the Homecoming dance and festivities, the Vice Versa dance, and I’m sure we can all remember the struggle with the masks,” Wenzel said.

With the eventual return to normalcy that followed came the return of opportunities for growth and self-discovery.

“Our sophomore year was our first real high school year,” Wenzel said. “We got to participate in clubs and sports normally, attend dragon boats and dress up for our first high school dance. The activities we participated in during high school really helped shape us into the people we are today.”

Through swimming and diving, Wenzel learned the value and importance of working as a team. From Leo Club, she learned to serve others, and her service on Student Council helped her to understand the importance of being involved. From her participation in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, she learned the importance of community and vulnerability, as well as the ability to allow herself grace in the face of shortcomings and to place her identity in more than just academics.

“My point in all this is to urge you to think about how fast time goes and to take every opportunity,” Wenzel said. “It is also to show our great amount of knowledge and growth and character our years in school have given us. It seems like just yesterday, we were hanging out at the monkey bars at recess, only worrying about our playdates after school, and now, here we are, graduating.”

Valedictorian Adam Johnson similarly expressed appreciation for the opportunities presented to him and the friendships forged during his time in high school while acknowledging the significant changes ahead.

“There’s a point that all seniors go through, a time of realization,” Johnson said. “We realize it’s all over. Gone are the days of talking to your friends as you walk the halls on your way to your next class. Gone are the days of being in the Kennel at a football game, or playing your favorite sport or instrument.

“For me, this happened several days ago when our final soccer game occurred. I never realized until that moment that we are truly done with our high school experience. No more will I be staying up until 3 in the morning trying to finish a TSA project I should’ve started four months ago.

“What I’m really going to miss most is being able to see my closest friends everyday, joking around with them at lunch, in class and on the field.”

Johnson went on to speak of challenges, accomplishments, and growth, as well as the struggles and discomfort that often accompany it. He also shared some words of wisdom.

“One of the most important lessons I learned through high school was to get at least one thing done a day, whether that was a school assignment or this speech,” Johnson said. “No matter how I was feeling, no matter how tired I felt, I always made sure to better myself



Burlington High School Valedictorian Adam Johnson and Salutatorian Hannah Wenzel accept their diplomas May 25, 2024, during the BHS 2024 Commencement Ceremony at Bracewell Stadium.

by doing something. And I want you to apply this to your life. No matter what you do or what you want to pursue, regardless of how you feel, it doesn't matter how small it is, it's that you show up and do it.

"Because two things will happen: You will realize that the hardest part was just getting started, and the second is that you'll have momentum, making it easier to accomplish tomorrow, but if you don't show up, if you give into your thoughts, you will compromise the relationship you have with yourself, you will have tricked yourself into believing that even though you need to get something done and that you're capable, it does not matter. So just show up, because when you do, you will have already won."

Principal Monical Myers, in her final commencement address before retiring, likened the growth of the students before her to the renovation of BHS.

"As you sit together with your classmates for the last time, I want you to think back to the person you were when you first entered the doors of BHS as a freshman," Myers said. "Just as our building is under construction, so were you."

"For the last four years, you have matured and grown into young men and women, and you will continue to revise your values, your ideals, and your goals. You are not the same person today that you will be in 10, 15 or 30 years from now. Each day, you will have the opportunity to improve yourself as we refurbish Burlington High School and find things that need to be changed, you also have that opportunity each day to make improvements within yourself."

"There will be times when life comes at you hard. Being an adult isn't easy. You will experience situations when you wish you were wearing a hard hat, steel-toed boots and a safety vest for protection. During those moments, remember that it is how you respond to those difficult situations that indicate your character."

"I have confidence in you. I have seen you mature and make good decisions and I know that you will continue to make us proud."

Superintendent Robert Scott also has confidence in the Class of '24.

"Today's students who are graduating seniors are competent, prepared, excited, and ready for the next phase of your life," he said. "Those opportunities may be in the workforce, in the military, on a college campus, with your families, or maybe even as a teacher or staff member here at Burlington. ... I congratulate all of you, and please remember, you will always be a Grayhound."

Board President Darven Kendall encouraged the students seated before him to continue to take advantage of the opportunities that come their way, rise to meet life's challenges and to serve others with compassion.

"We are counting on you to continue your education or enter our workforce," Kendall said. "Life is one big cycle. You realize that, don't you? We need you. We have invested in each and every one of you. It's your turn and your privilege to take your turn in this cycle. ... On behalf of the entire board of education, I congratulate you, Burlington High School Class of 2024."



Human Resources Director Laci Johnson is shown Aug 14, 2024, in the Wineyard Room at the Greater Burlington Partnership during orientation for new teachers.

THE MANY HATS OF LACI JOHNSON

Laci Johnson has a whole lot of mugs and a whole lot of shoes, which is fitting for someone who wears so many hats.

The human resources director for Burlington Community School District might be found in the boardroom consulting with Superintendent Robert Scott and her fellow cabinet members. She might be in her office tending to matters of employee relations or meeting with her HR team. She also might be found in a school building to meet with staff and admin.

No matter where the day's duties take her, she strives to create a supportive and comfortable work environment.

"If you're going to work with me or be around me for any length of time, you know that I like to joke around and I like to laugh and I really like to make sure that people are comfortable. That's important to me," Johnson said on a recent Friday inside her office on the third floor of the Administration Building. "I love everybody here. I just

want them to do a good job for our students and just do what we're all here to do, which is to support that."

FROM TRANSPORTATION TO EDUCATION

Johnson has been in her current position since January 2019, but she first came into education in 2008 as a substitute teacher after earning her degree in K-6 elementary education from Iowa Weleyan College.

"During that year of subbing, I found it incredibly beneficial to sub in every area in every grade level," Johnson said. "I found out that I did not want to teach elementary; I actually preferred high schoolers."

So when she was offered a job as a special education teacher at Burlington High School, she was happy to accept.

She remained a special education teacher for six years, during which time she helped to put in place a transition class called Career and



Human Resources Director Laci Johnson poses for a photo alongside VIBE Principal Laura Mickey, left, and Aldo Leopold Intermediate School Principal Sara Watkins, right, July 25, 2024, outside the Administration Building during the district's annual job fair.

Self Exploration for students with Individualized Education Plans. She was also nominated by her students for The Hawk Eye's Teacher of the Year award.

"You're nominated by students, and that is everything, because that just shows that you're building relationships with them," Johnson said. "The Hawk Eye would send you the nomination forms and you got to see who it was and what they said about you, and that is worth a million dollars. ... That just meant the world to me. It didn't matter if I won the award. Just to be nominated was super exciting."

Johnson stressed that she is but one of many BCSD teachers to have been nominated for the award.

Four years into her teaching career, Johnson enrolled in Drake University's educational leadership program, from which she graduated in 2015.

She then accepted a position as an assistant principal at BHS. In that capacity, she was in charge of the special education program.

Drawing from her own experience teaching special ed, Johnson set about creating a comprehensive resource binder for special education teachers to assist them with things unique to their profession. That binder was adopted district-wide.

After about 4 ½ years as an assistant principal, another opportunity came knocking on Johnson's door, and it was one that she was

uniquely well suited to take on.

Before Johnson worked in schools, she worked for Nelson Trucking, a family trucking business in Mediapolis that had been started by her grandfather and his brother.

"I learned a lot about the trucking industry," Johnson said, ticking off a long list of responsibilities that included payroll, dispatch and keeping up on qualification files for drivers. "So having a little bit of that background in HR and having that lens of teacher, principal and HR, it seemed like a really good fit to jump at the opportunity."

Still, her decision to leave the high school was a tough one.

"(Special education) is a love of mine and I knew immediately that I was going to miss working with those teachers and working with those students, and the AEA team was fabulous and I knew it was going to be a hard transition," Johnson said. "But something was pulling me over to HR."

LIFE IN THE HR LANE

The world of human resources is a diverse one.

"I feel like sometimes when you tell people you're in HR, there's a lot of people I talk to, not just in the district but in general in life, they immediately think hire and fire, and that is not really everything that it is," Johnson said. "There's many different hats you wear in HR."

BCSD has more than 600 employees. That involves a whole lot of hiring, certification oversight, contract issuances, employment letters, training, negotiations, unemployment claims, benefits, worker's compensation, evaluations, background checks, and policies to keep track of.

"Wanda (Hind) and Julia (Dichraff) are incredible," Johnson said of the HR secretary and assistant. "I definitely could not get through this without them. Through the tasks, through the conversations, they are just there for me and I appreciate them so much." The COVID-19 pandemic brought additional responsibilities.

"COVID and HR was unbelievable and stressful and there were so many things that we did and had to attend to, whether it was health and hygiene plans that we had to create for all of the buildings, all of the different forms, accommodations needed to be made," Johnson said. "That was a really weird and scary time, but I'll tell you what, in this district, it doesn't matter what is in front of you, we will get it done, and we did.

"And we can look back and kind of chuckle about it now, but you put your head down and you do your work, and that's how everybody operates in this district, and that's why I'm so proud to be a part of it."

Recruitment and retention are another area of focus for Johnson, whose recruitment efforts include an annual job fair event held at the Administration Building and casting a wide net for potential candidates by traveling further and further to represent BCSD in job fairs for educators.

"Part of my job is to attend a lot of the job fairs. We've really ramped that up in the last couple of years," Johnson said.

It is through those efforts, word-of-mouth by those in the district, and the district's participation in the Teacher Paraprofessional Registered Apprenticeship program that BCSD largely has been able to get out from under the teacher shortage that was exacerbated by the pandemic.

"Two years ago, we had 18 long-term subs, and that is a very high number," Johnson said, noting that nearly all of them were either in a teacher prep program or were associates with experience in the education system already.

Last year was slightly better but still difficult, with 14 long-term subs. This year, there are only four, with seven teaching positions having been filled by TPRA graduates.

But Johnson said the spirit of the district is what really helps attract and retain employees.

"This is a credit to everybody who works in the district," Johnson said. "Everyone is trying to help attract people to become Grayhounds, and I really love that."

As for Johnson, she can't see herself being anywhere else.

"I remember when I first got my job here and someone said to me, 'You work at Burlington High School? Isn't that scary?' And I

MEET THE HR TEAM

LACI JOHNSON, DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES



Please contact me for questions about:

- Certified staff master contract/handbook
- All other contracts/handbooks
- Complaints by and about staff
- HR processes and procedures
- Disciplinary actions
- Job qualifications
- Reasonable accommodations
- Board policy

WANDA HIND, HUMAN RESOURCES SECRETARY



Please contact me for questions about:

- Licensure
- Employee evaluation
- AEA Online
- Frontline Central
- Applitrack
- Staff email/account
- Employment contracts
- Employment letters

JULIA DICHRAFF, HUMAN RESOURCES ASSISTANT



Please contact me for questions about:

- Employment inquiries
- Frontline Central
- Applitrack
- Substitutes
- New employee onboarding
- Background check/fingerprinting
- ID badge/fob
- Board policy
- Employment verification

remember laughing and thinking, 'if you would just walk in these doors with me for one day you would find and see what I see, which is students who are so fun, teachers who are so fun and work so hard, administrators who will support you however you need, and I hope that's what others experience in their buildings. ...

"Why not Burlington? If anybody came here, they would see and know how great it is."



BCSD AWARDED \$1M GRANT TO SUPPORT PIECES PROGRAM

The Burlington Community School District has been awarded another 21st Century Community Learning Center grant to support free K-6 afterschool programming.

The federal grant will provide BCSD \$1,096,538 over five years beginning July 1 for the PiECES Afterschool Program at three buildings: North Hill and Black Hawk elementaries and Aldo Leopold Intermediate School.

Currently, Black Hawk students enrolled in PiECES are bused to Grimes. This grant will bring the program back to Black Hawk, which hosted PiECES up until the end of the 2021-2022 school year. The program no longer will be available at Edward Stone Middle School due to other after-school activities there.

PiECES will continue to be offered at Sunnyside and Grimes elementary schools as well under a previously awarded 21st Century grant.

"We are fortunate to have such a wonderful afterschool program for our students and families," Superintendent Robert Scott said. "I'm really excited to be able to continue that programming."

This installment of the grant is the fifth BCSD has been awarded under the federal program over the past 10 years to support the PiECES program. Over that time, PiECES has served 5,584 students.

The program has been shown to have numerous positive outcomes for PiECES students and their families. According to 2023 Parent and

Student Surveys, attendance reports and ISASP scores:

- 70% of students reported they attend PiECES because they want to be there, not because their parents make them attend;
- The majority of PiECES students say the program helps them feel good about themselves, get along better with friends and stay out of trouble after school;
- Parents of PiECES students say one of the best parts about the program is that it provides a free, safe learning environment;
- Most parents say that PiECES offers them an opportunity to have a greater role in their child's education;
- PiECES students say the best part of PiECES is learning new things and the fun activities they do;
- The majority of students attending PiECES say being in the program allowed them to try new things and volunteer in class more;
- Most PiECES staff believe PiECES makes a positive difference in the lives of students they serve;
- Most students who regularly attend PiECES will improve their state assessment scores in reading and math;
- Most students who attend PiECES regularly improve their school day attendance;
- The majority of students attending PiECES improve their self-regulation skills.

Registration for PiECES for the 2024-25 school is open! To register, [click here](#).

To learn more about PiECES and other grant programs, [click here](#).



Representatives of the Burlington School District, Burlington High School, Molina Healthcare of Iowa, the Iowa Jobs for America's Graduates Program, and Rep. Taylor Collins pose for a photo during a check presentation June 2, 2024, at BHS.

BHS PROGRAM 1 OF 4 IN IOWA TO BENEFIT FROM DONATION

Burlington Community School District will be among four districts in the state to implement a student support pantry made possible by a new partnership between Molina Healthcare of Iowa and the Iowa Jobs for America's Graduates program.

"The goal of this grant is to allow students to focus on their goals and the things that they need to achieve, so we're really excited about the opportunity to be able to do that," Jennifer Vermeer, plan president for Molina, said Monday before presenting iJAG with a check for \$25,000.

"Burlington High School is very excited to be selected by iJAG as one of only four school districts in the state to partner with Molina, and we know this partnership is going to allow our students opportunities that otherwise wouldn't be made available," BHS Principal Monica Myers said. "Whether it be through food insecurities, their basic personal needs, or related influences, this partnership will make a really positive impact on our students."

The grant will allow iJAG specialists like Burlington's Jeff Woodside to stock what will be called the Molina Corner with snack and hygiene products that their students need.

Woodside said the partnership not only will help to meet student needs, but it also has the potential to provide further career exposure opportunities for iJAG students.

"I have a number of students this year interested in careers in healthcare or going into the healthcare field, so that's another opportunity that we can make happen," Woodside said, adding that he hopes to be able to arrange for healthcare professionals from Molina to come speak to students.

This past school year was the first that iJAG was made available to Burlington juniors and seniors. This fall, that implementation will expand to include sophomores and freshmen, as well as seventh- and eighth-graders.

iJAG is a non-profit organization that partners with school districts and private businesses to deliver grades 7-12 career development programming such as leadership training, career education, individualized guidance and employer engagement. There currently are about 165 iJAG programs serving more than 8,200 students across the state of Iowa.

"We partner with employers to make sure we have meaningful opportunities for students and now we're excited to have Molina on board for our partner to help us make sure that our students have those basic needs so that they can thrive and achieve all those great things they have in front of them," said iJAG Director of Employer Strategy and Performance Jill Padgett.

The idea to launch a network of student supply pantries was spurred by the results of a survey sent to iJAG specialists who largely reported a desire to meet basic needs of students so they're able to come to school ready to learn.

State Rep. Taylor Collins, who was present for the check presentation, commended BCSD's implementation of and expansion of iJAG, as well as the partnership between iJAG and Molina. "It really takes those private partners like Molina Healthcare and like the school district to get iJAG to work, so I just want to thank Superintendent (Robert) Scott and board members for continuing to expand iJAG programs here in Burlington," Collins said.



Vida Long, Burlington Community School District's new supervisor of technology and food services, poses for a photo alongside members of her technology team Brandon Broeg, Keith Smith, Brandon Carter and Richard Fernandez Aug. 20, 2024, outside James Madison Education Center.

LONG DIGS INTO NEW ROLE

After 11 years of working in Burlington schools, Vida Long has moved on to a district-level position.

Long is the new supervisor of technology and food services for Burlington Community School District. Brian Johnson, formerly the director of district services, now is the director of Career and Technical Education.

"I'm excited to be trying something different and continuing to learn about all the departments that comprise a school district," Long said.

Long first joined BCSD as a high school English teacher before becoming an associate principal at Burlington High School, then the principal of Edward Stone Middle School and Aldo Leopold Intermediate School.

"I'm excited to have a former building leader and educator in this role and believe Vida's experience will help to identify and bridge gaps to meet the needs of teachers and staff," Superintendent Robert Scott said.

Long officially took on her new position July 1 following her return from the International Society for Technology in Education Conference in Denver, where she and other district leaders spent several days learning about how to safely and responsibly integrate

technology in education, including with artificial intelligence.

As the supervisor of technology, Long plans to find ways to improve communication.

"I'm hoping that we can create a smooth ticketing system and communication between the tech department and those who submit tickets," Long said. "I think the communication can improve insofar as, if it's going to take longer than the person who submitted the ticket expects it to, that we can be communicating and letting them know why."

Long has ambitions for food service as well, such as possibly bringing back warm breakfasts and expanding other meal options.

"It's about allowing students to have options to meet their nutritional needs, so I'm hoping to be able to find some different meals that maybe haven't been provided since the pandemic and maybe get back to some of those," Long said.

Long said she will miss her daily interactions with students, but she looks forward to supporting their education and development from a different perspective.

"I'm just ready to dig in and see what I can do," she said.



Curriculum Director Cory Johnson addresses new certified staff Aug. 14, 2024, in the Winegard Room at the Greater Burlington Partnership. Johnson was among several education leaders throughout the state to be nominated for the School Administrators of Iowa's 2024 Iowa Central Office Administrator of the Year Award.

JOHNSON NOMINATED FOR SAI ADMIN OF THE YEAR AWARD

Burlington Community School District Curriculum Director Cory Johnson has been named as a nominee for the School Administrators of Iowa's 2024 Iowa Central Office Administrator of the Year award.

"We are pleased to recognize district and organizational leaders who are committed to excellence in education," said Lisa Remy, SAI executive director.

Johnson first joined BCSD in July 2018.

Since then, he has made significant contributions to a number of district initiatives, including the realignment of schools in 2019; the implementation of VIBE Virtual Learning Program and the opening of Corse Early Childhood Center, both in 2021; the expansion of Career and Technical Education; and the renovation of Burlington High School.

He's worked closely with Grants and Outreach Supervisor Cassie Gerst to seize on grant opportunities to support a wide range of community outreach, student support and professional development programs, including the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant to provide after-school programming, the Club M Youth Mentoring Program, Teacher Apprenticeship, the DON'T QUIT Fitness Center and STEM Best.

He also carries out numerous other duties as assigned.

"Cory could lead any curriculum department in the state of Iowa with his knowledge base and work ethic," Superintendent Robert Scott said. "We are so fortunate to have him as a leader in Burlington schools. He is an invaluable asset to our students, staff and administration."

Johnson also serves on the Education Advisory Committee for Southeastern Community College and Buena University, the Greater Burlington Partnership Government Relations Committee, Workforce Advisory Council, the Greater Burlington Leadership Class Committee, and is affiliated with the National Associations of School Psychology and the Mississippi Valley Council, Boy Scouts of America.

Prior to joining BCSD, Johnson was principal of Ottumwa High School, a comprehensive school improvement specialist and a school psychologist for the Great Prairie Area Education Agency, and has taught at the high school and college levels.

Since 2017, he has been a member of the School Administrators of Iowa.

SAI, a statewide organization founded in 1987, represents more than 2,000 Iowa educational administrators. SAI's mission is to enhance PreK-12 education through effective leadership by school administrators.



Above: Ray Raker poses with his family after winning Season Championship Night at 34 Raceway. Below: Ryker Raker, Ray Raker's son and a student at Sunnyside Elementary School, competes in the Big Wheels race at 34 Raceway. (Photo credit: Ashley Zimmerman)

RACING RAY RAKER

Matt Levins
The Hawk Eye

MIDDLETOWN — Ray Raker is the custodial supervisor for the Burlington Community School District.

He's also a dad and a race car driver, and he's been through a lot in the past six years.

Since moving up to the IMCA late model class, Raker has learned the ropes, paid his dues and struggled through health issues that left him sidelined more than a few times on race night.

All of which contributed to making Aug. 24 at 34 Raceway an emotional night for Raker.

Raker passed Jay Johnson with six laps remaining in the 20-lap IMCA late model feature race and went on to win on Season Championship Night at the 3/8-mile oval dirt track.

And with the win, Raker secured the track championship, his first in any class at the track.

An emotional Raker pondered everything he has been through to get to the top as he celebrated with his son, Ryker.

"I have to thank God because my health the past couple years hasn't been the greatest. This past year and a half I've gotten a lot better. There are nights I couldn't race because I physically couldn't do it. I



have to thank God for that," Raker said. "This one feels very good. We've been in late models now for six years. We've been struggling and struggling and struggling. I just kept doing my homework and talking, asking questions and trying to learn everything that I could. At the end of the day you have to put it all together in your mind and make it work."

Raker didn't have to look far to find inspiration this season in the IMCA late model class. His son has been right by his side every step of the way, inspiring his father to greater heights.

"He's with me in the shop. He's with me in the motor home every weekend. We love it," Ray Raker said of Ryker. "Honestly, he really pushes me to be better. We were at the awards banquet last year and he said, 'Dad, why don't we get the big trophy?' He doesn't know it, but he pushes me to do better. He really does."

BURLINGTON ACTIVITIES DEPT.

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

THE RECAP



UPCOMING EVENTS

BURLINGTON COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

- Sept. 3 - Auditorium Open House at 5 p.m. at Aldo Leopold Intermediate School
- Sept. 9 - Burlington School Board meets at 6 p.m.
- Sept. 9 - Orchestra Recruitment Night at 6 p.m. at Aldo Leopold Intermediate School
- Sept. 10 - Special Election regarding VPPEL
- Sept. 13 - Two-hour early out
- Sept. 23 - Burlington School Board meets at 6 p.m.
- Sept. 27 - No school

BURLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

- Sept. 16: Homecoming Week
- Sept. 19: Homecoming Parade & Pep Assembly
- Sept. 20: Homecoming Football Game
- Sept. 21: Homecoming Dance

EDWARD STONE MIDDLE SCHOOL

- Sept. 24 - Fall Picture Day

ALDO LEOPOLD INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL

- Sept. 20 - Fall Picture Day

VIBE VIRTUAL LEARNING PROGRAM

- Sept. 20 - Optional in-person activities from 1-3 p.m.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS & CORSE EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER

- Sept. 3 - First day of preschool
- Oct. 1 - Fall Picture Day at Corse and North Hill



AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

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

Saturdays with PiECES

Brick Masters: Sept. 14 & 28 from 10 to 11 a.m. at the Burlington Public Library

Starr's Cave with PiECES: Sept. 27 from noon to 2 p.m.

NO PiECES

Sept. 13 & Sept. 27

CONNECT WITH US!



@BurlingtonCommunitySchoolDistrict

@bcsdgrayhounds

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