The weekend just got longer for student and families of Iowa School for the Deaf.

Beginning this fall, Friday classes end at 1 p.m. Students start home on weekend routes sooner, and staff use the afternoon for professional development.

This shortened instructional day addresses additional learning students need, such as transition plans and developing skills in the Expanded Core Curriculum.

The Expanded Core Curriculum was developed to help deaf and hard of hearing students close the information gap in a number of areas, such as career education, self-advocacy and social-emotional learning. Fridays are used to incorporate special learning activities to address these areas.

Elementary students stay with their classroom teachers and focus on social-emotional learning and self-determination activities. Middle and high school students benefit from outside presenters, teacher-led seminars and experiential learning activities focusing on transition planning, career exploration, daily living skills and more.

Find information about the Expanded Core Curriculum for students who are deaf or hard of hearing here.

Extended Learning Opportunities for Expanded Core Curriculum

Blooming at Backyard Berries

Late September provided a perfect day for IESBVI students in Prairie Lakes Area Education Agency to meet, socialize and learn at Backyard Berries in Eagle Grove, a pick-your-own farm.

Six students navigated around the patch and gardens (orientation and mobility), picked their own berries and chose lunch items (self-determination), made peanut butter and strawberry jelly sandwiches (independent living) and interacted with familiar staff, new adults and peers (social).

Click this link for details about expanded core curriculum.

Backyard Berries activity goals

- experience the berry patch
- learn how strawberries grow on the plants
- experience the taste and feel of a ripe strawberry
- enjoy picking strawberries

Third grader Makinely Meier, who attends Taft Elementary School in Humboldt, experienced at least four of the nine expanded core curriculum principals at a fall extended learning activity.
Samuel Bacon, founder of Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School, was inducted into the American Printing House (APH) Hall of Fame of Leaders and Legends of the Blindness Field. Bacon’s achievements were noted at APH’s annual meeting held in Louisville, Ky. this fall.

He became blind at age 11 from Scarlet Fever, attended Ohio’s school for the blind and then majored in mathematics at Kenyon College. He headed west and established Illinois School for the Blind in Jacksonville.

In 1852 he agreed to begin teaching three students who were blind. He rented a house in Keokuk, Iowa for this purpose. By the end of that year, he had backing of the Iowa legislature, and the Asylum for the Blind opened in Iowa City in January, 1853.

Increasing enrollment caused the school to move four times by 1854. The legislature agreed to fund buildings if a community would provide 40 acres and help with construction costs.

“...our endeavors shall be to avoid all the errors of the past; and if we should fail in our efforts, it will be a lack of judgment and not of interest on our part.”

- Statement from Bacon’s first biennial report to the Iowa legislature

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Vinton was selected as the location, although Bacon was adamant the community could not provide the professionals, recreational and cultural experiences he wanted for his students.

Bacon resigned before the Iowa Institution for the Education of the Blind opened in fall, 1862.

The Man, The Ovine, The Legend.

A legend lives on- Sam the Ram, the IESBVI mascot, keeps Sam Bacon living on as a legend. IBSSS became known as Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired in 2010.

ISD staff recognized with Regent Excellence Awards

Dolly Murray and Kristi Zimmerman, staff at Iowa School for the Deaf, were recognized by the Board of Regents, State of Iowa, with Excellence Awards at the September meeting in Ames.

Murray received the Staff Excellence Award. She was recently promoted to director of student life and has assumed supervision of the health center as well as transportation, dorms and food services. “Along with responsibility for the social, emotional, and behavioral health of all students, she supervises the programs with incredible grace, patience and kindness,” wrote her supervisor, John Cool, assistant to the superintendent, before his retirement. Murray implemented a virtual tutoring program during COVID-19, helping students stay active in studies.

Kristi Zimmerman received the Faculty Excellence Award. She began at ISD in 1996 as a teacher in the LIFE Program (Living Independently with a Fundamental Education.) She then moved to the Transition Alliance Program for three years and later helped start 4PLUS, which she stayed with 13 years.

After completing additional education, she took on the role of secondary counselor at ISD three years ago. “Kristi is an outstanding teacher and counselor and very deserving of this year’s Faculty Excellence Award,” said Rebecca Gaw, ISD principal.
Teens participate in university research

How can a person with a vision impairment use a 3D printer?

Some techie teens who use IESBVI services are helping to solve accessibility challenges as part of an experiment with the University of Iowa’s (UI) engineering department.

Dr. Xuan Song, an industrial engineering professor at UI, has submitted a research proposal to create a prototype 3D printer which includes a talking feature. In December, select IESBVI secondary students will meet Dr. Song and his research team so the UI staff can observe how students conceptualize 2D and 3D information and what might be needed in an accessible interface for 3D printing.

With guidance from IESBVI math and STEM consultants, students will create designs out of clay, which will be scanned with 3D technology. The 3D scans will allow 3D printers to create a plastic model of the designs. During the collaboration, students will use engineering processes to conceptualize, model, sketch, technically draw, digitize and create the 3D designs.

Students will also be introduced to engineering careers through interactions with professors and students in UI’s engineering program. If Dr. Song’s project is approved, the students will may have the opportunity to test the printer’s accessible talking interface in future collaborations.

New event helps parents understand, “Why ASL?”

“Explore ASL provides parents with information, inspiration and motivation to learn more about ASL and how this visual language can help their children overcome isolation and educational barriers in their lives,” said Tina Caloud, the outreach director at Iowa School for the Deaf.

National presenters at Explore ASL were Justin Perez, a visual vernacular specialist, and Nadmionor Casiano-Berrios, who earned a degree in aerospace engineering.

Perez uses physical theater techniques and elements of poetry, making ASL and storytelling more accessible to both deaf and hearing audiences.

Casiano-Berrios shared her experiences growing up deaf in Puerto Rico, learning Spanish and Puerto Rican sign languages. To have a successful university education in the United States, she learned two more languages—American Sign Language and English. Through ASL, she had access to the spoken English lectures and discussions.

Explore ASL presentations were in American Sign Language to create an immersive experience. Translation was in spoken English.
Families who have a child on the Iowa Deafblind Registry are now able to access information for their children’s unique needs. The Family First Hour started in August. Through the school year, six learning sessions will provide information and tips families can put to use right away.

Topics for the year include:
• Deafblind Project and technical assistance information • family resources • ask an expert: Disability Rights Iowa • building social skills and sibling support

Levi Kruse likes to read about history. Coincidentally, this year the Iowa School for the Deaf eighth grader from Ogden is also making history.

Kruse and three classmates are the first ISD students to compete in Battle of the Books, a national reading incentive competition requiring teams to read the same list of books and compete against each other by answering questions about what they have read.

Throughout the country, Gallaudet University Youth Programs offers the competition Battle-Ready Bobcats

Left to right: ISD Battle of the Books team members are L. Kruse, K. Johns, S. Perales and L. Vaca. The team’s first competition is set for mid-November.

“I joined the team because I love to read- not books with pictures, but novels.”

– Kaitlyn Johns
ISD Battle of the Books team

For more information, contact Heather Dirks: heather.dirks@iaeddb.org.

Six families at zoo event

Among those attending the September Deafblind Project’s zoo event was the Teed Family from Muscatine (left). Families and staff gathered at Blank Park Zoo in Des Moines.

According to Heather Dirks, the family engagement coordinator, families mingled and connected with one another. A taco bar, paid zoo admission and train tickets for families were provided.

Links to the live battle will be posted on ISD’s Facebook page: @ISDOFFICIALPAGE.
School staff wondering how to best provide for a student who is blind or visually impaired gain reassurance, confidence and practical skills during the annual IESBVI Summer Institute.

This summer, 125 general and special education teachers and paraeducators benefitted from Summer Institute, held in early August in Johnston. IESBVI staff and outside presenters provided 35 sessions ranging from 90 minutes to three hours covering topics such as literacy, STEM, assistive technology, transition, additional disability and general sessions about working with students who have visual impairments.

“Wow! Who knew there was such a thing as a talking tape measure!”

– Becki Brookshire
Summer Institute participant

School staff working with students who are blind or visually impaired can email cindy.bryan@iaedb.org to be notified of next year’s Summer Institute.

ISD staff publishes in national interpreter journal

Deb Cates, Ph.D., is the sign language program coordinator at Iowa School for the Deaf. This research is part of Dr. Cates’ ongoing efforts to improve the quality of interpreting services for students who are deaf or hard of hearing in Iowa.

Deb Cates, Ph.D., sign language program coordinator for Iowa School for the Deaf was published in Journal of Interpretation, 29 (1). Her research is titled, Patterns in EIPA Test Scores and Implications for Interpreter Education.

Iowa is a part of Training and Assessment Systems for K-12 Educational Interpreters (TASK-12), a collaboration of states working together to increase the qualifications and skills of interpreters in educational settings.

Dr. Cates, Iowa’s representative on the TASK-12 board, conducted research on interpreters using the TASK-12 data from the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA), one of the interpreter skill assessments recognized in Iowa for interpreter licensing.

This research will help interpreters currently working in Iowa identify critical areas of growth. It will benefit interpreter training programs which have graduates coming to work in Iowa schools.

The link to Dr. Cates’ study is HERE.

ISD 4PLUS at work!

These students landed jobs through Iowa’s only transition program exclusively for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Back row: Jacob Taylor (Glenwood), Blake Loudenslager (Omaha), Ashley Schroeder (Kingsley) Brylee Johnsen (LaVista, Neb.) and Sterlyn Aragon, Sergeant Bluff. They are employed at McDonalds, Old Navy, Warren Distribution and Goodwill.

Is this no-cost program right for your student? Click this link for more information.
Who made this mess? More importantly, who is going to clean it?

IESBVI 4PLUS transition students get surprised several times a week when staff intentionally set messes in the program’s mock living room, bedroom and kitchen spaces. “Some days nothing is out of place; some days it looks like someone hosted an Animal House party,” said Stacey Telgren, IESBVI teacher of the blind and visually Impaired.

The staff’s creativity might lead to trash cans that are upset, wet towels and laundry strewn about, shampoo spills on dressers and more. “Just as if they had their own apartments and lived independently, they have to clean like everyone does after a long day at work,” said Telgren.

Is IESBVI 4PLUS right for your student?

Link to program details

Getting our exercise on at ISD

4PLUS student Jade Fastnacht of Council Bluffs learned how to work her biceps in exercise club.

Exercise habits can turn into a healthy life-long habit. ISD and IESBVI 4PLUS students, who share dorm space, have 100% participation in an exercise club, which started last spring.

Led by residential counselor Rachel Smith, the club meets once a week for an hour. Smith encourages students to work out on their own at least once more during the week.

Every student can love learning! ISD third grader Addy Warrior of Greenfield (right) completed her first mission of Zearn Math, a research-based K-8 math program designed to be engaging and accessible for math learning.

“Addy is a very enthusiastic learner and catches on to new topics in Zearn quickly.”

- Megan Jones
ISD elementary teacher

Not only does he juggle working at Fareway and cleaning the mock apartment, 4PLUS student Jack May of Urbandale can use a SmartLux magnifier and other assistive technology.

Smith offers different exercise options each month. “Hopefully they will be introduced to something they enjoy and can continue doing once they leave 4PLUS,” said Smith.

On the same path, this fall, two ISD faculty opened up their personal Thursday morning runs to high school students, and three students have been joining them.

“The first goal was for students to get up early in the morning and participate,” said Megan Shama. Shama and co-worker Ashley Villaverde inspired the activity. “We started with half a mile and depending on the student, we got up to three miles,” said Shama.

“We would love to help our students complete a 5K without stopping.”

- Ashley Villaverde
Running club co-sponsor

Check out Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired’s new website!
ASL class enrollment: a good sign!

During school year 20-21, Iowa School for the Deaf began its first Zoom offerings of American Sign Language (ASL) classes. The offering quickly became popular, and more than 160 individuals enrolled.

ASL classes are again offered this school year. To best respond to family and educator needs, ISD structured five different courses scheduled into 8-week blocks. For scheduling flexibility, some classes are offered more than once a week.

After participants move through courses ASL I01 - 104, advanced classes are available in fingerspelling, numbers, classifiers, storytelling and cultural mediation. Seven Deaf, native American Sign Language teachers provide the weekly instruction.

“We have a very engaging instructor who is patient with answering all of my many questions! She is positive with us and encourages us as we learn our new signs and increase our skills.”
- Janine Kane, Ed.D.
Grant Wood AEA
School psychologist, ASL student

White Cane Day events get corny this year

A chance to celebrate, a chance to learn. IESBVI students from across the state recognized annual National White Cane Safety Day with a host of events in October. The day (observed Oct. 15) recognizes individuals within the blind and visually impaired community for their declaration and pursuit of independence.

Meeting mostly at area pumpkin patches, students practiced components of the expanded core curriculum. Hay rides, petting zoos, bouncy pillows, barrel train rides, wacky slides and other traditional fall farm attractions provide numerous opportunities for students to practice independent mobility, choice making, spatial awareness, tactile exploration, socialization and how to support others.

When the Extended Learning team resurrected White Cane Day Celebrations in 2017, there were 51 participants registered and six events offered. Activities have ranged from exploring tourist sites in nearby towns of students’ homes, to touring their county courthouses and meeting elected officials. In 2021, 122 parents and siblings of students also registered.

For more information on the IESBVI Extended Learning Program: email susan.rolinger@iaeddb.org.

“She can’t see, either?”
- Taylor Jack Strause, White Cane Day second grader from Burlington. Taylor was surprised and happy to meet another student at the event with a white cane.
Every Friday after ISD students leave on homegoing routes, teachers break into professional learning communities to collaborate on curriculum planning and development. This year, social emotional learning and the school-wide climate program, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is the focus area.

PBIS is an organized, data-driven system of interventions, strategies and supports that positively impact school-wide and individualized behavior planning. ISD staff teach and reinforce desired behaviors of its students while at school. Staff share clear and consistent expectations about how students should behave in different settings (classroom, hallway, cafeteria, etc). Positive rewards, feedback and recognition are used to encourage positive behaviors.

PBIS is rooted in the belief that behavior is learned, just as math and reading.

What happens when a child has a normal eye exam but doesn’t appear to be using their vision?

This etiology, known as cortical, cerebral or neurological visual impairment (CVI), is now the leading cause of visual impairments in the United States and IESBVI’s ‘hot topic’ for professional development.

Staff meet regularly to learn how to provide assessment and instruction for students with cortical/cerebral visual impairment. Teachers of the visually impaired (TVI) and orientation and mobility specialists (O&MS) learn about CVI and adopt consistent standards of practice to support this growing population. IESBVI’s staff Cindy White-Botello, Katy Ring and Susan Brennan deliver professional development to teachers. National CVI expert Alisha Waugh delivers professional development to O&Ms.