

Benton Community Schools

School Counseling Department

600 1st Street ♦ PO Box 70 ♦ Van Horne, Iowa 52346

Phone 319-228-8701 ♦ Fax 319-228-8747

September, 2023

Seniors and Parents,

Graduation from high school is one of the more significant events in a young person's life. We look forward to working with each of you during this time of transition and know that this will be an outstanding senior year. We are providing this letter to keep each of you abreast of important dates and ask for your cooperation in helping us all meet deadlines. If you have any questions please call us at 228-8701.

There will be a mandatory Senior Meeting on Wednesday, September 20, in the Auditorium during the advisory period. Attendance will be taken and Mr. Cretin will discuss important information related to scholarships, college applications, transcripts, and other postsecondary items. We know some students have unavoidable conflicts (college classes) and those students will be able to meet with Mr. Cretin at an alternative time, if necessary.

Each student needs to provide a vertical head/shoulder shot without props. These are used for the class composite photo, the yearbook, and newspaper requests. These can be professionally taken photos, or the picture can be taken by Ms. Knaack. Pictures need to be turned in by December 1st to Ms. Knaack in room 214. Photographers can submit electronic pictures by email to: jknaack@benton.k12.ia.us.

All senior students need to meet with Mr. Cretin in October/November to discuss transition plans. These meetings can occur whenever it's convenient for the student. Meetings can be scheduled with Mr. Cretin via his calendly link at <https://calendly.com/acretin> or on a drop-in basis if Mr. Cretin is available. Post-secondary plans will be discussed as well as reviewing information related to graduation. This meeting is best completed one-on-one with Mr. Cretin; however, parents are certainly welcome. As we discussed in our Junior English presentations with students, all college applications should be completed by Thanksgiving. Each senior will also need to verify his or her official name for the diploma with Mr. Cretin. We strongly recommend that students use their full legal name.

Our representative with Herff Jones will be at Benton Community on Wednesday, November 1st, to share information related to Senior Orders. All seniors must turn in an order form for cap, gown, and tassel (or a tassel only). All seniors will wear the same robe colors for graduation. Robe colors will be royal blue with royal and gold tassels, reflecting our school colors. You may use robes from previous alumni, but you do need to order a tassel. Our representative will return on November 15th to pick up completed order forms.

All Seniors should complete a FAFSA form for financial aid. The application is free and can be accessed here: <https://fafsa.ed.gov/>. The Iowa College Access Network also offers free

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counseling related to FAFSA's and will help you complete yours. The office can be reached at 1-877-272-4692. College Planning Night and Financial Aid Night will be Wednesday, November 15th, at 5:30 PM in the auditorium. We will have a representative from the Iowa College Access Network here on that evening to provide information related to college search and financial aid.

Senior year is a busy time. Please pay attention to school announcements and the school counseling website throughout the year for updates, changes, and reminders. In addition:

- Announcements arrive in March and will be handed out during lunch.
- Caps and gowns arrive in late April and will be handed out in early May along with information about graduation and graduation practice.
- Senior scholarship and awards assembly is May 8th at 1:30 PM.
- Commencement practice is Friday, May 17th beginning at 8:30 AM sharp. All seniors are expected to be in attendance. **We will not begin until all seniors are present.**
- Commencement is Sunday, May 19th at 2:00 PM. Please keep in mind that all academics must be completed and all fees and accounts must be up to date in order for you to be able to participate in the ceremony.

Every year, we receive notice of companies who offer presentations to increase the amount of financial aid families can receive. These presentations often include an invitation and offer to share with you secrets of the financial aid world for a set price. Our recommendation is that you do not purchase scholarship or financial aid services. You can receive all of the same information for free from the School Counseling Office, www.fastweb.com, or www.icansucceed.org. We also recommend the College Planning Center in Cedar Rapids as a resource for free help with the college planning process and financial aid assistance. **If you have any questions about something you receive in the mail, please contact the School Counseling Office.** Scholarship information will be shared with students electronically via student email as it becomes available. All seniors should regularly check their school issued email account, the announcements and scholarships tab of the school counseling website at <https://bentonschoolcounseling.wordpress.com/>. There is a lot of different information on the school counseling page, but pay especially close attention to the Calendar of Events, Scholarships, Announcements, and Senior Resources links on the left hand side.

Congratulations on your outstanding accomplishments and we look forward to working with each of you during the upcoming year.

Aaron Cretin
School Counselor
Senior Class Advisor

Rob Arnold
High School Principal

Candi Benesh
School Counseling Secretary

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Senior Year Important Dates:

ACT Test Dates-Register at www.act.org

October 28, 2023

December 9, 2023 (12th graders should be done testing after 12-9-23)

September 20-Senior Meeting During Advisory Period

November 1st-Information on ordering Senior Items during Advisory Period.

November 15th-Turn in completed order forms for Senior Items.

November 15- Financial Aid and College Planning Presentation.

November 30- Diploma name verification completed.

Transition meeting with Mr. Cretin completed.

December 1- Senior pictures are due to Ms. Knaack, Room 214.

March- Announcements will be delivered and picked up by students.

Early May- Pick up Caps and Gowns and additional graduation information.

May 8- Senior Awards Assembly at 1:30 PM, High School Auditorium.

May 17- Graduation Practice at 8:30 AM.

May 19- Commencement Exercises at 2:00 PM.

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College Search and Application Process

The college search process can be intimidating. Please do not hesitate to reach out to myself, Mrs. Nesbitt, or Ms. Benesh. If you are still early in the search process, then we encourage you to use the following website: <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>. The “Big Future” website is comprehensive in it’s ability to search for a school based on potential major as well as location. It is important to go to a college that offers the degree field that you are considering as a possible career. Don’t go to a college that doesn’t have your potential major. I have seen students indicate to me that they want to be a “Lab Tech” which requires a 2-year degree, but then they are planning to attend a 4-year college. Another college search site that students have said is helpful is <https://www.collegeraptor.com/>.

If you are undecided on a career possibility, then we encourage you to use the following websites: Iowa Specific- Google Iowa Career Coach and National Search go to <https://www.mynextmove.org/>. Students can search by keyword, browse careers by interest area, and complete an inventory that offers job possibilities.

As you are searching for potential college options, pay attention to the tuition costs but don’t allow the price of attendance to be your final deciding factor until you have gone thru the Financial Aid process. It is important to make connections with the financial aid offices at the college that you might attend to see what options they provide to make college more affordable. We do know that some colleges will have a higher advertised cost of attendance, but sometimes the actual cost of attendance is much less once scholarships and financial aid are accounted for. Once you have made your final selections of schools of interest, then see what options they provide for financial help. Pay attention to the amount of student loans and make smart decisions in regards to loans. Unfortunately, Iowa students have traditionally had a high amount of student loans and we need to reduce that number.

Once you do know what colleges you are interested in attending, you then need to complete an application to that institution. Most of the time, applications are completed online. It is important to remember that all questions are for the student to answer. A common mistake is to put down a parent birthday or address in place of the students. You will need to know your cumulative GPA, class rank, and class size. You will also need to submit a transcript to the college that you apply to. Anytime you need a transcript, email Ms. Benesh at cbenesh@benton.k12.ia.us. Finally, it is important for you to work with the Admissions Counselors at the college that you plan to attend in order to get additional questions answered. We can provide general information, but will often refer you to Admissions.

Please let us know when you need our help as we are happy to serve!

Mr. Cretin

Mrs. Nesbitt

Ms. Benesh

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Top 10 Tips for Students

1. **Create a Game Plan.** Where do you see yourself after high school? What steps do you have to take to get there?
2. **Organize yourself.** Create a master calendar and share it with your parents. Write out answers to common questions and then save to google docs so you can cut and paste into scholarship apps and college apps.
3. **Be Honest-** be honest and realistic with yourself-are you cut out for college? Do you have the necessary study habits and self-discipline to be successful at college? What makes the most sense for you-work force, enlisting in the armed services, trade school, technical school, apprenticeship, 2-year college, 4-year college. If you attend college, how will you use the degree to make money and support yourself in the future? What kind of jobs can you get with the degree that you are choosing? If you are not attending college, then what further information do you need so that you can be successful in your transition?
4. **Pay attention-** Iowa is in the top of the nation for taking on too much student debt. Pay attention to expected debt. We have a lot of great schools in Iowa, and at the end of the day the school that you attend does not matter nearly as much as the experiences that you have. Your debt by the time you graduate should not be more than the expected 1st year of your starting salary in your chosen career field.
5. **Communicate-**Make time to keep your parents in the loop with your thought processes and decision making steps. Discuss how you will pay for school. Let them help you by listening to their viewpoints on your decision making process.
6. **Seek advice-** Gather information from lots of sources, and then make your own decision and own that decision. Don't rely on your best friend, your boyfriend/girlfriend, or your parents when making your decision. You are making the best decision for yourself and the type of life that you want to live.
7. **Get Along-** the world is much bigger then Southern Benton County. Not everyone will see things the same way that you do. That doesn't mean that you are right and they are wrong. Try to understand where someone is coming from, and if you can't agree with their viewpoint then find a way to get along with them as needed. You don't have to be friends with everyone in your life, but you do have to work with a lot of different people.
8. **You don't know everything-** Ask how to do your laundry, clean your bathroom, keep your kitchen clean, pay the bills, budget your money, cook a healthy meal, and organize your life. Study successful people that are in your life right now, and ask them!
9. **School doesn't end-** Your education doesn't end on the day you graduate. It's ok to know that you want to go to college, and still be undecided on exactly what you want your career to be. It's ok to work different jobs until you find out what exactly you want to do for a career. Be open to that process, and put yourself in a position that helps get you to the life that you would like to live.
10. **Be present-**be where your feet are. Enjoy these last few months in this environment. Don't rush "to get it over with" and enjoy being with your friends, classmates, parents, and family during this process. ***It will never be like this again-so enjoy this stage of life!***

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