



in Iowa

Best Buddies seeks \$35,000 in level funding to maintain and expand school-based programs that foster one-to-one friendships between students with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout Iowa.



About Best Buddies

Best Buddies is an international non-profit organization dedicated to providing meaningful opportunities to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) through one-to-one friendships, supported employment, leadership development, inclusive living, and family support.



Iowa Key Program Statistics

In Iowa, Best Buddies has chapters at 53 schools. Our chapters serve 1,700 participants, positively impacting the lives of over 17,000.



Who We Serve

The IDD community that Best Buddies serves includes, but is not limited to, people with Down syndrome, Autism, Fragile X, Williams syndrome, cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury and other undiagnosed disabilities.



The Need

13% of people in Iowa have a disability, and among that percentage 5% are cognitive disabilities.

Despite nationwide gains in physically inclusive classrooms, a 2013 study by Carter, Gotham, Harvey, and Taylor concluded that “there is a qualitative difference between being present in a community and having a presence in a community. [The authors] suggest this difference may depend in part on the development of valued relationships and a sense of belonging.”



Even when students with and without IDD do share a classroom, they rarely interact with each other, since students with IDD frequently work alone or separated from typical peers.

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Best Buddies has been identified as a Peer-Mediated Instruction & Intervention evidence-based practice that supports inclusion (Steinbrenner et al, 2020).



Expanding Best Buddies programs to new schools is a time-tested and cost-effective way to connect students with and without IDD in meaningful, positive social relationships. This project will create opportunities for community-based inclusion, subsequently providing the environment in which students with and without IDD develop vital social skills needed for successful post-secondary outcomes like college and careers. (Steinbrenner et al, 2020).



Friendship Program Participants
Cedar Rapids Kennedy High School

BESTBUDDIES provides opportunities for students with IDD to have meaningful interactions with their typical peers. These increased opportunities for social engagement and the development of positive relationships with peers are associated with positive employment outcomes. (Holwerda et al. 2013 as cited in Scheef et al. 2017)

BESTBUDDIES Middle Schools & High Schools Foster one-to-one friendships between middle and high school students with and without IDD. In this time of heightened social and emotional development that can be difficult even for teenagers without IDD, the Best Buddies Middle School and High Schools programs helps break through social barriers at an important time in a young person's life..

BESTBUDDIES Colleges Fosters one-to-one friendships between college students without IDD and their peers on campus or in the community with IDD. Young adults with IDD historically have been isolated at home or in work environments. The Best Buddies Colleges program is changing this by providing the opportunity for people with IDD to be involved in their local campus and community life.

2025 - 2026 Participating Schools

Black Hawk County

University of Northern Iowa

Bremer County

Wartburg College

Cerro Gordo County

Mason City High School

Dallas County

Adel-Desoto-Minburn High School
Dallas Center - Grimes High School
Waukee High School
Waukee Northwest High School

Humboldt County

Humboldt Middle School
Humboldt High School

Johnson County

Solon High School
University of Iowa

Linn County

Taft Middle School
Cedar Rapids Kennedy High School
Prairie High School

Madison County

Winterset Middle School
Interstate 35 High School
Winterset High School

Marion County

Pella High School

Polk County

Ashland Ridge Elementary
Centennial Elementary
Crocker Elementary
Hanawalt Elementary
Heritage Elementary
Hubbell Elementary
Mitchellville Elementary
Morris Elementary
Perkins Elementary
Valerius Elementary
Webster Elementary
Johnston Middle School
Merrill Middle School
Parkview Middle School
Urbandale Middle School
Weeks Middle School

Des Moines Christian School

Dowling Catholic High/ Ruby Van Meter
Johnston High School
Lincoln High School
North High School
Roosevelt High School
Southeast Polk High School
Urbandale High School
Valley High School
Des Moines Area Community College
Drake University
Grand View University

Shelby County

Harlan High School

Story County

Ballard High School
Iowa State University

Warren County

Carlisle Elementary
Carlisle Middle School
Carlisle High School
Martendale-St. Mary's High School