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# 709 Communicator



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MORTON COMMUNITY UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 709 SERVING THE GROVELAND-MORTON AREA

## THRIVING TODAY, READY FOR TOMORROW

### Superintendent's State of the District

We have already had so many fantastic successes in our schools in just the first semester of 2022-23. I am beyond impressed with the way our faculty, staff, and administrative team have embraced, promoted, and implemented this year's initiatives. We



DR. CRAIG SMOCK

have been focusing on two overarching strategies:

- 1) Addressing social-emotional concerns of students and staff so that we are all thriving today.
- 2) Intentionally promoting a future perspective in preparing our students for what comes next. Our goal is to have them all ready for tomorrow.

#### Academics

So, you may ask yourself, "What about the academic goals? What about reading, writing, and arithmetic?" Well, our initiatives actually do address academic learning. By identifying the root obstacles to learning and helping students to address and overcome them, they can intelligently navigate their future.

What are some of those social-emotional obstacles our students are bringing to school? They include a lack of confidence and resilience, disconnectedness, negativity, anxiety, apathy, and not having a goal-oriented perspective. Studies have shown that, once you remove these barriers, students are more apt to focus and to learn what teachers are trying to teach them.

Please see SMOCK Page 2

Several Morton High School students participated in "Drive Your Tractor to School Day" as part of National FFA Week in February. Our revived FFA program has over 80 students involved this year.

## SMOCK

Continued from page 1

It does not matter what specific reading curriculum, math initiatives, or goals are in place, if students come to school worried, anxious, disengaged, uninvolved, apathetic, and not ready to learn. There is no point to tuning the engine of the speedboat if there is a hole in the hull. First, we must fix the hole.

## Future Focus

And part of that “fix” is getting students to have a future perspective so that they see how today’s learning will mean a brighter future with more opportunities tomorrow. When students get out of the rut of a “perpetual present tense,” they start to see connections between what they are learning **today** and what they will get to do **tomorrow**. This is very motivational to working hard and learning each day. When students can focus and recognize the importance and relevance of their learning, it will pay significant dividends toward their academic successes. Our teachers are having these types of conversations with students of all ages to get them into a future-oriented, growth mindset.

## Soft Skills

Alongside purely academic goals, there are skills that may be regarded as more important keys to unlocking future success. These keys include working as part of a team, public speaking, making friends, listening, problem-solving, being resilient, and resolving conflicts. We have emerged from a pandemic that isolated all of us, keeping many of these skills from being developed. However, our teachers are intentionally finding ways to address these every day.

► **Getting students working collaboratively and in groups again in the classroom.** Wearing masks and social distancing over the past two years severely limited and impacted student engagement and conversation in the classroom. But, this year, teachers

are being intentional about breaking habits of disengagement and finding opportunities for students to work together and collaborate with one another. They are finding activities that allow students to get out of their comfort zones. Presenting information to their classmates exercises communication skills. This pursuit leads to better student engagement and reduced anxiety as students learn how to deal with stress and learn to respectfully converse with one another.

► **Getting students involved and engaged in school activities.** In addition to establishing several clubs at the elementary and junior high levels, we have started several groups and teams at MHS as well. We now have both a boys and girls bowling team with 24 participants. Our new 12-member competitive dance team placed 12th in state in its first ever year of competition. And, our revived FFA program has over

80 students involved. These are just a few ways we are getting students plugged into school activities, and more importantly, spending time, in person, with one another. Student participation leads to learning leadership skills, learning how to be a teammate, and learning how to navigate conflict.

► **Getting students into the workplace and into college coursework.** We have expanded our work co-op course at MHS to include just about every student who has interest. Thirty-four students are in the program, and they are getting real-life experiences with employers such as automotive dealers, banks, accounting firms, insurance companies, pharmacies, and childcare centers. We even have 11 students working as aides in our own elementary schools. In addition to our work co-op program, we have eight students in our registered apprenticeship programs in places like Caterpillar, Morton Industries,



**LEFT: Drew Bankert, MHS senior in the Morton HS Technology & Engineering program, recently presented to Caterpillar staff about his experiences and what he learned in CAT's E4L (Essentials for Life) Program. According to Caterpillar coordinators, "This project provided us real solutions to help make us more effective and efficient. We appreciate these relationships and the time we're given to mentor and educate these students. We look forward to working with these bright students and others in the future." We are very fortunate to partner with great companies like Caterpillar and offer our students invaluable workplace opportunities! Well done, Drew!**



**ABOVE: Student collaboration is complemented by technology. RIGHT: High academic student achievement is nurtured. Excellence grows in a healthy learning environment.**



and Otto Baum. These experiences help our students get a taste of the real world and working with adults while gaining a great picture of what their futures may hold.

## Parent Resources

Another one of our initiatives this year is to partner with our parents and to come alongside them with some ideas and strategies on how to be intentional in the very difficult job of parenting. Early in the fall, we surveyed parents about their specific concerns about their students. On the top of the list of concerns were: Friendships, Working Hard, Technology Use, and Conflict Resolution. Soon after the survey, Care-U was born. Care-U is a multi-faceted approach initiated and led by Stephanie Brown and Don Sturm. Care-U involves a bi-weekly podcast for our caregiver parents with tips and discussion about pertinent topics, such as screen time. In addition, they have started a book study with over 30 parents signing up. A third opportunity was a return visit from Andrew McPeak who spoke about how we can lead our students so that they are ready for real life. Check out the Care-U website for podcasts and parent resources. <https://anchor.fm/careu709>

This community is a special place to raise and educate our families. Our students leave with excellent educational opportunities and real-world experiences. If you are reading this, you are a part of our story, and we are grateful for your support. Together, we can help prepare our children for tomorrow.

## District Calendar 2023-24

On behalf of the Calendar Committee of Morton 709 and the Board of Education, I am pleased to share with you the 2023-24 school calendar. The committee consists of teachers and administrators from the elementary, junior high and high school grade spans served by District 709. Every year, committee representatives work collaboratively to develop a calendar that is formally presented to and approved by the Board of Education.



DR. JOE SANDER

The official 2023-24 Public Calendar can be viewed on our website at [morton709.org](http://morton709.org). Through valuable feedback from the teaching staff, administration and community, the 2023-24 calendar has a few changes from the current calendar. Listed below are the highlights of the new calendar:

► The official start date will be a week later than the current year. The first day for students will be on **Wednesday, Aug. 16, 2023**.

► The committee also recommended piloting a new concept to hold Parent-Teacher conferences on different dates. Traditionally, conferences districtwide have been scheduled on the last two days of the 1st quarter to correspond with grade reporting at the junior high and high school grade levels.

► Parent-Teacher conferences for junior high and high school grades will be held on Oct. 19-20. There will be **no school** for students in grades 7-12, but it will be an attendance day for students in Early Childhood Education (ECE) through sixth grade.

► Conferences for ECE/Elementary students will be held on Nov. 9-10. On these days, there will be **no school** for students in grades ECE-6th, but it will be an attendance day for students in grades 7-12.

► We understand this is a significant deviation from past practice. The later conference dates at the ECE/Elementary grades allow additional time for elementary teachers to gather more information on their students which will be beneficial to share with parents.

► Breaks at Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter will correspond according to the holidays consistent with the current calendar.

► Saturday, May 18, 2024, is the **tentative** date for Morton High School Graduation.

► The last day for student attendance would be on Thursday, May 30, 2024. However, in the event that no emergency days are used, May 22, 2024, would be the last student attendance day.

The committee recognizes it is difficult to propose one calendar that meets the “wants” of everyone within our learning community. However, the members of the Calendar Committee and our Board of Education greatly appreciate community input, thoughts and considerations in the development of the 2023-24 calendar. It is our goal to provide Morton 709 parents and families with this important information to better serve the students of our community in the coming school year.

### MORTON UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 709 2023-24 School Year Calendar

Month	Date	Day	Activity	Notes	Days of Pupil Attendance
August 2023	15	Tuesday	Teacher Institute Day	No School	12
	16	Wednesday	First day of attendance for students: <b>Elementary</b> – 8:20 a.m. to 11:55 a.m. <b>Brown</b> – 8:10 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. <b>Jr.Hi/Hi/S.</b> – 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	A.M. Only	
September	4	Monday	Labor Day	No School	20
	15	Friday	<b>Early Dismissal</b> - Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	
October	4	Wednesday	<b>Early Dismissal</b> - Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	21
	9	Monday	Columbus Day	No School	
	13	Friday	Inservice, Half-day (p.m.)***	A.M. Only	
	19	Thursday	<b>P-T Conf. for MJHS &amp; MHS ONLY - No School</b>	<b>ECE-6 Full Day</b>	
	20	Friday	<b>P-T Conf. for MJHS &amp; MHS ONLY - No School</b>	<b>ECE-6 Full Day</b>	
November	1	Wednesday	<b>Early Dismissal</b> - Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	19
	9	Thursday	<b>P/T Conf. for ECE/Elem-6<sup>th</sup> ONLY - No School</b>	<b>7th-12th Full Day</b>	
	10	Friday	<b>P/T Conf. for ECE/Elem-6<sup>th</sup> ONLY - No School</b>	<b>7th-12th Full Day</b>	
	22-24	Weds. – Fri.	Thanksgiving Vacation		
December	6	Wednesday	<b>Early Dismissal</b> - Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	16
	22	Friday	Inservice Half-day (p.m.)*** <b>Grundy, Lincoln, Jefferson</b> – 8:20 – 11:55 a.m. <b>Brown</b> – 8:10 – 11:45 a.m. <b>Junior High</b> – 8:00 – 11:00 a.m. <b>High School</b> – 8:00 – 12:05 p.m. (Final Exams)	A.M. Only	
	25-29	Mon. – Fri.	Christmas Vacation	No School	
January 2024	1-5	Mon. – Fri.	Christmas Vacation, cont.	No School	17
	8	Monday	School Resumes		
	8	Monday	<b>Early Dismissal</b> -Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	
	15	Monday	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	No School	
February	7	Wednesday	<b>Early Dismissal</b> -Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	20
	19	Monday	Presidents' Day	No School	
March	6	Wednesday	<b>Early Dismissal</b> - Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	16
	8	Friday	Inservice, Half-day (p.m.)***	A.M. Only	
	25-29	Mon. – Fri.	Spring Break		
April	1	Monday	Easter Break	No School	21
	3	Wednesday	<b>Early Dismissal</b> - Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	
May	1	Wednesday	<b>Early Dismissal</b> - Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	16
	18	Saturday	High School Graduation-10:00 a.m.- Tentative Date		
	27	Monday	Memorial Day		
	30	Thursday	Last Day for Students* Inservice Half-day (p.m.) Grundy, Lincoln, Jefferson – 8:20 – 11:55 a.m. Brown – 8:10 – 11:45 a.m. Junior High – 8:00 – 11:00 a.m. High School – 8:00 – 12:05 p.m. (Final Exams)		
			Last Day of the School Term*		
	31	*Friday	Teacher Institute Day		

\*\*\* - End of quarters. 1<sup>st</sup> 10/13/23 \* 2<sup>nd</sup> 12/22/23 \* 3<sup>rd</sup> 3/8/24 \* 4<sup>th</sup> 5/22/24

Note: \*Any unused emergency days can be declared as special holidays. In the event that no emergency days are used, May 22 would be the last student attendance day and May 23 a Teacher Institute day.

Approved: December 13, 2022-a

Mark your  
calendar

First day of school is Aug. 16, 2023



# Meet Andrew Roth

## Newest 709 Board Member

Andrew "Andy" Roth grew up west of Morton on a farm. It was growing up on the farm and in the Morton schools where he learned to appreciate hard work. He spent many fall evenings helping his family after school. He was active in Morton's FFA chapter where he learned more about character and developed leadership skills. After graduating from Morton High School, he attended Illinois Central College (ICC) with every intention of farming.

Andy met his wife, Katie, at the end of his last year at ICC. They married and believed God was leading them to Southern Brazil to work at a children's home. They moved to Brazil, five months pregnant with their first child, desiring to make a difference in the lives of the children in their care. In reality, they were the ones who learned through the rigorous demands and trials of cross-cultural ministry. Living as a language learner abroad and experiencing cultural barriers, he brings something unique to the



ANDREW ROTH

board table. Andy had first-hand experience working with children who had been orphaned or abandoned. Many would struggle with what is now identified as Social Emotional Learning challenges. The experiences were rich. They learned as much as they taught. The challenges were many, but so were the rewards.

After two years on the mission field, they returned to Morton. It was good to be back in Central Illinois. They knew they were where they wanted to be, raising children with family nearby. They were impressed by the quality of the Morton 709 School District and chose to live in Morton.

Their family has grown. Their children are Joseph (12), Cora (10), Eva (7), Veronika (2), and Nicolaus arrived in January 2023. Joseph is at Morton Jr. High and

Cora and Eva are proud Grundy Gators.

Andy noted he has watched and appreciated the Morton CUSD 709 schools for some time. He wanted to participate on the school board for several reasons. He states: "I was curious to learn more about the administrative processes of the board. More importantly, I believe I have experiences that are relative and beneficial to the board. Living cross-culturally has allowed me to better understand people who have different opinions. It has given me a better understanding of different points of view. I find it interesting there are many similarities between the challenges of a school system and the challenges of working at a non-profit."

Volunteering has been a regular part of Andy's life since childhood. The school board was, in some ways, the logical next step, and a place to make a positive difference in the community he calls home. He hopes his active participation on the board will serve to further educational excellence in all our schools and for all of our students.

## 2023 Summer Facilities Projects:

# Big Jobs On A Short Clock

The Morton 709 campus is spread out all over town. Rodney Schuck, Director of Operations, is the man who keeps track of it all. He knows the buildings like the back of his hand and works hard to keep them clean, safe, and well-maintained. He leads an exceptional team of custodians, maintenance men, and groundskeepers across the Morton 709 School District. They have some long days as they meet the needs of each of our buildings. The facilities, inside and outside, need care 12 months a year. For them, summer is not a break. It is a race.

Summer months are the only time big facilities projects can be completed. There are substantial costs associated with building upkeep. Every project must be identified, prioritized, designed, Board of Education approved, sent out to bid and vendors selected. Then, the work has to be scheduled, coordinated, and completed over approximately eight weeks of summer break. Big jobs; short time frame.

With the start of each project, the clock begins to tick. Throw in any unexpected supply chain issues or a rainy summer and some projects become more challenging. Once the job is completed, the custodial staff needs time to finish the job by cleaning and getting rooms ready for students to return.

This year, Mr. Schuck, with the help of Superintendent Dr. Smock, CFO Lisa Kowalski, and Keach Architecture, presented a plan to start a two-part project at Jefferson School, on the southeast and southwest wings. The floors will be replaced over the next two summers. Three levels of the southeast wing classrooms and corridors will receive new flooring and paint. Classroom 203's floorcovering on the upper level of the west side will be replaced, too. The southwest wing improvements will happen in the summer weeks of 2024.

The Jr. High will have some window and door replacements and some additional adjustments to windowsills to allow for better roofing flashing and drainage below. Some roofing and masonry issues will also be addressed at the same time.

Morton High School is next in the cycle for some roof replacement as part of normal maintenance. There will be some significant upgrades in the MHS Science Department with remodels of Biology (41) and Earth Science (42) that will create updated STEM classrooms.

These projects along with numerous O and M maintenance projects are what's on tap, barring anything unforeseen, for next summer.

There is nothing like walking into a building at the completion of a big job. Not every project draws the eye, but each one is necessary to keep our buildings in ship shape. We are grateful to have some great facilities and for the hands that take care of them.

## 709 School Board Elections: 5 Running for 4 Seats

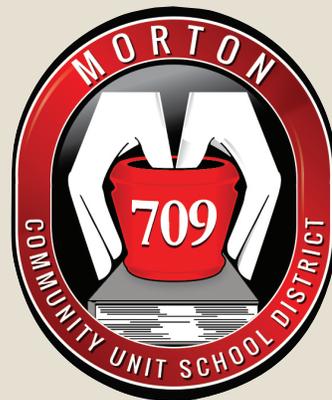
Five candidates are running for four positions on the Morton School District board in the April 4 election.

Tim Braker is running for a two-year term.

Four candidates are competing for three seats that have four-year terms. They are David Cross, Amanda Leman, Andrew Roth, and Cathryn Stump.

Braker is the current board president. Cross, Leman, and Roth are board appointees. Their terms all expire this year.

At least one winning candidate must come from the unincorporated area of the school district. Cross is the only candidate from the unincorporated area.



# Morton School District 709 Directory

Morton 709 Education and Administration Center: 1050 S. Fourth Ave., Morton, IL 61550 — 263-2581



CRAIG SMOCK

**Superintendent:**  
Craig Smock, Ed.D.  
263-2581  
(ext. 8099)



JOE SANDER

**Assistant  
Superintendent:**  
Joe Sander, Ed.D.  
263-2581  
(ext. 8098)



TROY TEATER

**Assistant  
Superintendent:**  
Troy Teater, Ed.D.  
263-2581  
(ext. 8045)



LINDSAY FRANKLIN

**Director of Student  
Support Services:**  
Lindsay Franklin  
284-8097



LISA KOWALSKI

**Chief Financial Officer:**  
Lisa Kowalski  
284-8025



RODNEY SCHUCK

**Director of  
Operations:**  
Rodney Schuck  
263-2581  
(ext. 8005)



JULIE THARP

**Director of  
Transportation:**  
Julie Tharp  
263-1086

## Morton High School



DEIDRE RIPKA

350 N. Illinois, Morton, IL 61550  
**Principal:** Deidre Ripka  
**Administrative Team:** Jamie Adolphson, Todd Herrmann,  
Scott Jones, Josh Prichard  
**Reporting absence:** 263-0611  
**Student Services:** 263-0611  
**Guidance:** 263-8585  
**Food Service:** 263-7451

## Morton Junior High School



CHRIS CARTER

225 E. Jackson, Morton, IL 61550  
**Principal:** Chris Carter  
**Assistant Principal:** Scott Hammond  
**Main Office:** 266-6522  
**Reporting absence:** 284-5000

## Morton Academy



AMANDA  
RICKENBERG

260 E. Queenwood  
Road, Morton, IL  
61550  
**Principal:** Amanda  
Rickenberg  
**Main Office:** 284-8033

## Lettie Brown School



FAITH WATERFIELD

2550 N. Morton Ave.,  
Morton, IL 61550  
**Principal:** Faith  
Waterfield  
**Main Office:** 266-5309  
**Reporting absence:**  
284-1000

## Grundy School



MICHAEL SAUNDERS

1100 S. Fourth Ave.  
Morton, IL 61550  
**Principal:** Michael  
Saunders  
**Main Office:** 263-1421  
**Reporting absence:**  
284-2000

## Jefferson School



KATE WYMAN

220 E. Jefferson St.,  
Morton, IL 61550  
**Principal:** Kate Wyman  
**Main Office:** 263-2650  
**Reporting absence:**  
284-3025

## Lincoln School



JULIE HORCHEM

100 S. Nebraska Ave.,  
Morton, IL 61550  
**Principal:** Julie  
Horchem  
**Assistant Principal:**  
Michelle Peterson  
**Main Office:** 266-6989  
**Reporting absence:**  
284-4000

# Getting Down to Business

This past September, the business office finalized the 2021-22 fiscal year financial audit with the help of CliftonLarsonAllen, or CLA. Morton CUSD709 received the best type of auditor report possible as a result of the audit, an unqualified opinion. An unqualified opinion means that CLA can say with reasonable assurance that Morton 709's annual financial report is presented fairly and without any material misstatements. This opinion is a direct reflection of all of the work performed in the business office throughout the year.

The district receives local, state, and federal grants that help fund various programs. For the 2021-22 fiscal year, the district received approximately \$6,671,000 through grants and related funding programs. The business office team is continuously researching and exploring additional ways to bring additional funding to the district. Using funds received from a state grant, Morton High School was able to kick start an agricultural education program beginning in August 2022. The district is fortunate to have grant opportunities to maximize student learning, safety, and involvement throughout all of our schools.

Each grant and funding program has specific restrictions on the use of disbursed funds. It requires the district to track each purchase that uses these funds and submit periodic expenditure reports. Due to the complexity of grant spending and reporting, in-depth single audits are performed to ensure the district is complying

with state, federal, and grant-specific requirements. A single audit was performed on the ESSER grant and the Food Nutrition Program in the fiscal year 2021-22. The district was commended for how well it complied with the requirements associated with the grant and funding program. Many districts had trouble with this portion of their audit due to the newness of the free and reduced lunch program, however, our business office handled it well.

It is expensive to keep a school district operating while striving to improve the learning environment for our students. The business office attempts to maximize every dollar that the district receives. This process ranges from setting a budget that is fiscally responsible to investing our cash reserves to reconciling all revenues and expenditures. The district's financial profile and position is graded annually during the financial audit. Morton CUSD received a recognition designation (the highest) with a profile score of 4/4.

Lisa Kowalski, CFO, and her team of Adam Jacob, Zach Glisan, and Amy Zimmerman work together like a finely tuned instrument. Most businesses get anxious at the thought of an upcoming audit. The Morton 709 business office welcomes the annual audit. In fact, they use it as a part of their performance reviews. They view the audit as an opportunity to improve our business practices.

The business office is proud to be a team as they continue to strive for excellence.



LISA KOWALSKI



ADAM JACOB



ZACH GLISAN



AMY ZIMMERMAN

# Meet Stephanie Brown: Wellness Coordinator

Hello, 709! My name is Stephanie Brown. I am excited to serve as the new staff and student wellness coordinator for the Morton CUSD 709. My favorite roles are being a mom to three beautiful, crazy children, a wife, and an educator. I love people and I love to learn! This innovative new position focuses on helping people learn and grow both professionally and personally.

My bachelor's degrees are in psychology and Spanish. I earned a master's degree in counseling, a master's degree in educational leadership, a certificate in mental health, and a certificate in life coaching. Most recently, I served as an elementary school principal after a decade as a high school counselor. I had the opportunity to teach English in Mexico and learn some great lessons about culture and diversity. I have been an adjunct faculty member at Bradley University. I am a Neurosequential Model of Education (NME) Advanced Trainer through the ChildTrauma Academy. Learning, leading, and teaching is my passion.

My educational philosophy embraces the idea humans work as a system. Looking at the whole child through a developmentally informed and biologically respectful lens provides a healthy, safe, respectful, relational, engaged, supportive, brain-friendly, and challenging working environment. We must meet each child and adult where they are and challenge them to grow academically, socially, and



STEPHANIE BROWN

emotionally. I consider myself a wellness and personal growth junkie and a brain-friendly advocate. It

is my honor to walk alongside other educators as we all strive to show up as our best selves to serve all who enter our school doors!

In this role as the staff and student wellness coordinator in Morton CUSD 709, it is my intention to use my experiences and learning journey to collaborate alongside those who serve and work with children. It is my passion to share the science of behavior, the brain, and wellness.

In order to have an accessible forum to share resources and conversations with those doing the most rewarding, exhausting, and joy-filled hard work of raising and caring for children, Don Sturm and I created a podcast, "Care-U." We hope those that are able to listen find it to be a helpful resource. You can find it at <https://anchor.fm/careu709>.

I am thrilled to return to Morton 709. It is a privilege working with the students, staff, and families in our district.

Care  U

# Who Are These Mysterious Instructional Coaches?

What do teachers do all day? Most people would answer with teaching lessons, grading papers, and managing the classroom. Yes, they do all of these things every day, but the complexity of teaching goes far beyond the daily tasks. In short, teachers have their hands full.

A teacher's schedule does not have much time to look for answers when a student is struggling or needs a different approach. Teachers want to help when a student isn't grasping a concept. Teachers are constantly considering and looking for new avenues to increase student engagement while maintaining high expectations. This is where instructional coaches become key players in the teaching process.

An instructional coach works closely with teachers to advance classroom instruction. This might happen through professional development, coaching cycles, or one-on-one conversations. An instructional coach's goal is to help teachers level-up classroom learning.

In Morton, our instructional



**Pictured ABOVE: Instructional Coaches (left to right), Courtney Eddleman, Don Sturm, Jennifer Auxier, Melissa Kruse and El Higus with Wellness Coordinator, Stephanie Brown taking the selfie.**

coaches wear many hats. Our 709 instructional coaches are all professional development facilitators. In the fall semester alone, our teachers were offered over 40 hours of professional development. Some of the professional development hours happen on our Early Release



Wednesdays during "Staff Academy." Yes, the students get a half-day, and their teachers go to class.

Teachers also may elect to give up their planning time

during or after school to attend a professional development session led by our instructional coaches. During this time, teachers dig deeper into their individual instructional practices to improve the quality of their instruction. Attending professional development sessions can make a teacher feel rejuvenated and recharged, so the time is well spent.

Another hat they wear is coaching teachers one-on-one. When Morton hires a new teacher, that person has the opportunity to participate in a coaching cycle. This means the teacher works with a coach to set a goal. The coach provides feedback and observes the teacher in action. The coach and teacher work together to impact instruction over a concentrated period of time. Instructional coaches help our district grow excellent teachers, and excellent teachers tend to enjoy their work more. Again, time with the coaching team is time well spent.

New teachers have mentioned appreciation for the effort put

forth by the district to give them the tools they need to succeed. Seasoned teachers appreciate new ideas, too. Another benefit is that if a strategy works for a teacher, they get excited. When they are excited, they tend to share it with their colleagues in their building or those who teach at the same grade level. Everyone benefits.

At the end of the day, the instructional coaches and teachers all have the same goal. They are passionate about teaching and impacting the students in Morton 709 schools. Excellence is a constant pursuit. You cannot tread water.

Our enthusiastic team of instructional coaches is always ready for the next challenge. They love learning and want everyone around them to love learning, too. It is kind of contagious. They are never idle. Courtney Eddleman, Don Sturm, Melissa Kruse, Jennifer Auxier, and El Higus are not afraid of a challenge. They don't have secret identities, but they might have superpowers.

## Staff Academy: Seeding Success

The Morton District 709 employees have been participating in Staff Academies where district professionals are given the opportunity to choose sessions that focus on instructional strategies, technology tools, or social-emotional learning. There is something for everyone and at times it is hard to choose when offerings conflict.

Courtney Eddleman, instructional coach at Morton High School, said, "All sessions are designed to address topics that coaches have heard directly



from faculty would be helpful to their work in the classroom. The element of choice is an appealing part of this process and taps into the needs that adult learners have." Teachers

love to learn and make the sessions valuable and often fun, too.

There is also an ongoing book study during this time run by Lindsay Franklin,

**At Staff Academy, teachers enjoy learning, too.**

director of student support services, in order to provide a meaningful experience for those who don't have a traditional classroom within the district, such as school psychologists, social workers, etc. While instructional coaches are the primary presenters for Staff Academy, administrators and teachers have been a part of delivery of sessions for elementary teachers.

The sessions offer an opportunity for teachers to talk to each other about engaging topics and the work they are

doing in the district. Some of the sessions include executive functioning skills, using Canva, student reflection strategies, gamification, assessments in Schoology, and maintaining healthy boundaries.

We are fortunate to have our own resident experts within our district who can deliver this high-quality instruction. Our teaching team make exceptional learners and contribute much to discussions with their years of experience or fresh learning from college. Together, they are seeding success.

# PAES Lab: Building Skills and Workforce Bound

The MHS Life Academy and RISE students have a new addition to their curriculum, The Practical Assessment Exploration System (PAES) Lab!

The PAES Lab is a workforce development lab where students become employees. This research-based program assesses students' ability to secure competitive employment while exploring different jobs using real workplace tools and developing proper workplace behaviors and habits in various workplace environments.

The PAES Lab develops job skills in five different career areas: Computer Technology, Construction, Processing/Production, Consumer Service, and Business Marketing. Each day a student is assigned a workbox that contains instructions and materials to learn a new job skill and complete a task. Students complete a timesheet and receive workplace "money" for the completion of these jobs.

Mrs. Amanda Fell, the PAES lab teacher, says this about her students' experiences in the PAES lab: "I personally enjoy seeing the students learn that they are able to do jobs that they didn't think they could do. I have seen my students gain independence that they will be able to take with them when they go out to the community to work."

Michael Lowrance



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Arek Smith; Michael Lowrance; Benaiah Schoenbein.**

appreciates the variety of tasks that students get to do. His favorite activities are data entry and working with kitchen appliances. In the future, he would like to continue his job at Peoria Production or gain employment at a local bakery or restaurant.

Arek Smith enjoys hands-on tasks, especially housekeeping and custodial tasks. He has

learned to pay attention to detail and take pride in his work. He enjoys his jobs at Peoria Production and Morton School District on the custodial crew.

The PAES Lab is a great complement to the work experience and skills that our students are also developing while taking courses at Illinois Central College and through Peoria Production.

## STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

- ▶ MTSS
- ▶ Special Education
- ▶ 504
- ▶ Medical
- ▶ Multilingual
- ▶ Speech Therapy
- ▶ Social Work
- ▶ Occupational Therapy
- ▶ Physical Therapy
- ▶ School Psychology
- ▶ ACES
- ▶ RISE
- ▶ LIFE Academy
- ▶ Morton Academy

## Programs

### ▶ RISE - Reaching Independence through Support and Education

The RISE program is our functional/life skills program that supports students Kindergarten through 12th grade. These programs are housed at Lincoln Elementary, MJHS, and MHS.

### ▶ LIFE Academy - Living Independently for Everyone

The LIFE Academy serves our 18-22 year old students as they are developing vocational and independent living skills. This program is at MHS.

### ▶ ACES - Academic Connections Emotional Support

The ACES program serves the social-emotional needs of our students at the jr high and high school level. This program is at MJHS and MHS.

### ▶ Early Childhood Education (ECE)

The ECE program services our 3- to 5-year-old students with developmental delays. This program is at Grundy Elementary.

### ▶ Multilingual Program

The Multilingual program serves our students with two or more languages throughout our district. This program is at Jefferson Elementary, MJHS, and MHS.

## Questions

Any questions about support services for your student can be directed to the Student Support Services Office at 309-263-0522.

## PUBLIC NOTICE

### Destruction of Records Notification

Morton Community Unit School District 709 will be destroying special education records for students with a **1995** birthdate. These individuals were evaluated for or received special education services during their school career.

If the student or parent wants these records, please call 309-263-0522 to arrange pick up.

Any records not collected by **June 15, 2023**, will be destroyed.

## MORTON CUSD 709 | STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

1050 S 4th Ave | Morton IL 61550 | 309.263.0522

THURSDAY | MAY 11th | 1:00PM



Lindsay Franklin  
Director of  
Student Support  
Services



Amanda Rickenberg  
Asst. Director of  
Student Support  
Services

**What:** Annual Timely Meaningful Consultation

**Who:** Parents of home-schooled or private school students living within the Morton 709 district boundaries.

**Why:** Discuss the district's 2023-2024 school year plan to provide special education services/supports to students with disabilities who attend private school or home-school.

**When:** Thursday, May 11, 2023, at 1:00 p.m.

**Where:** Morton District Office, 1050 S 4th Ave, Morton IL 61550

**Address:**

1050 S 4th Ave | Morton IL 61550

**Contact:**

309.263.0522

**Email:**

lindsay.franklin@mcusd709.org

## MHS Students Earn National Merit Scholar Recognition

When you take an optional test in your junior year of High School, you tend to take it and forget about it. Life goes on and there are more tests to take.

For two Morton High School Students, Aiden Belsly and Luke Dennison, it would mean national recognition. About 100 Morton High School students take the test annually along with 1.5 million students across the United States. Based on test scores, the top 50,000 students (about the 96th percentile) are awarded a designation. Mr. Dennison and Mr. Belsly finished



AIDEN BELSLY



LUKE DENNISON

in that 96th percentile.

Mr. Belsly, designated as a National Merit Commended Scholar, has demonstrated outstanding potential for academic success at the post-secondary

level. He can be considered for scholarships sponsored by corporations and businesses based on this designation.

Mr. Dennison, designated as a National Merit Scholar Finalist, finished in approximately the top 15,000 students based on their qualifying scores, abilities, skills, and high school accomplishments. National Merit Finalists go on to compete for scholarships. The National Merit awards over \$35 million to the finalists. Congratulations, Aiden and Luke.

## Morton Academy: Small School, Big Impact

Over the past seven years, Morton Academy has worn many hats. It opened as a school to serve middle and high-school-aged youth residing at the Guardian Angel Home, based on a previous model. The school has made quite the metamorphosis in a short amount of time. Mrs. Amanda Rickenberg is the school's principal.

With its current day program model, Morton Academy now has a wider impact, serving students throughout the school district. Its current primary focus is grades K-6 and while serving as a homebound tutoring location for the district. ***Simply stated, more Morton students are staying in-district for school programming.***

In alignment with the district's focus on social-emotional learning for all students, Morton Academy's primary focus continues to be on social-emotional learning, which is accomplished through small class sizes, intentional hands-on learning, targeted and frequent social-emotional instruction, and an integrated community experience. This keeps students and staff engaged and very busy.

The program attributes help to differentiate services provided within and outside of the neighborhood school

model, by changing environmental factors of the structure of the learning environments. It works for many students who go from dreading school to eagerly anticipating each new day.

At this time, the school programming is nearly at capacity, with two of the three classrooms full and all of the homebound tutoring space

filled. Within this model, staff and students are able to form relationships that are critical to the learning process. The staff is dedicated to helping them be successful every day. Some days are harder than others, but encouragement and support are never in short supply.

Morton CUSD 709 is proud of the program being offered at Morton Academy. It is unique to the area. It is unusual for a district to have a stand-alone program. Many districts are forced to look outside of their home districts for student programming. Morton Academy allows students to be educated in their home communities. They remain connected and immersed as part of the local school community by offering this continuum of services. It is a win-win.

The Morton Academy students are flourishing and learning with a staff that loves to meet them at school every day.



# Coach Brilley Leaves a Legacy at Morton

A few years after resuscitating the Morton High School football program, Tim Brilley took it to unprecedented heights. That will be his legacy at Morton. Brilley, who began coaching Morton's football team in 2016, has resigned to be closer to the family, saying he can't give a 100% commitment to the team anymore.

Adam O'Neill, the defensive coordinator at Manhattan (Kan.) High School for five seasons and at Peoria High when it won the 2016 Class 5A state championship, was named the new coach. The Peoria native also will be a PE teacher at Morton, taking over Brilley's responsibility for the school's strength and conditioning classes. O'Neil helped Manhattan win the 2022 Class 6A state championship in Kansas.

A Week 4 win over Limestone in 2016 ended a 12-game Morton losing streak and gave Brilley his first win as Morton's coach. The Potters went 3-6 that season and missed the playoffs but from 2017-21 they were 33-17 with four Class 5A playoff appearances and a 2021 Mid-Illini Conference championship.

"Everybody got a fresh start. The first thing we had to do was get our numbers up," Brilley said about his first season. "We went from 74 athletes in the program the first year to 102 this year, and I think it will stay up because we have 80 sophomores and juniors. The style of offense we ran attracted the better athletes. Then we had a run of talent. Nolan Donald. Jarrett Crider. Grant Gudeman. Riley Richards. And, of course, Seth Glatz."

Brilley went 40-28 at Morton including a program-best 10-3 record in 2021. Led by Glatz, the All-State running back, the Potters made it to the state semifinals that year, one game away from the state championship, the furthest advance in team history.

They went 4-5 last season, missing the playoffs for only the second time during Brilley's time with Morton.

"But we were 15 points away from being 7-2, the same record the 2021 team had during the regular season,"



**TOP: The Morton Potters take the field in a game against Canton. Coach Brilley taught his team to give it their all in every game. BOT-TOM: Coach Brilley's biggest fans will now get a little more of his time.**

he said.

Two players from the 2022 Morton team have signed to play at the Division I Football Championship Subdivision level. They are Jack Stump (Lindenwood University) and Ian Mutchler (South Dakota State).

Stump is grateful Brilley was his coach. "I want to thank Coach Brilley for reviving the team and turning it into the greatest team in the history of our program," he said. "I especially want to thank him for his support on my college recruiting journey."

Brilley worked at Morton while living with his family in Forsythe. It was a 150-mile round trip, an hour each way. He stayed in a Morton hotel on Friday



and Monday nights, game nights. The travel and nights in the hotel eventually took their toll.

While he is considering his options for a teaching job, Brilley has been hired as the offensive line/running backs coach and run game coordinator at Maroa-Forsythe High School, where his son Peyton, 13, now a seventh-grader at the Maroa-Forsythe Middle School, will be a student and play football.

"My son will be five years away from college next year. That's not a long



time," Brilley said.

"I wanted a meaningful coaching job. I haven't been a position coach for 12 years (he spent five years as coach at Decatur St. Theresa before coming to Morton). I'll enjoy working with the kids again and not having so much of a management role."

Brilley also has a daughter Olivia, 8, who is in third grade. His wife is Julie.

# A Magical Season for the Morton Marching Potters

Band director, Tim Gray, made a comment at the Morton Marching Potters community show that said it well. “This year’s seniors were in diapers when Morton earned their first (of their now seventeen consecutive) first-place wins.”

Morton has a reputation as a marching band powerhouse that has been building for nearly two decades. This year’s show, “What’s the Matter?” had a chemistry theme and the show exploded with success. One judge gave a shout-out to the props team and those who designed and put them together, and such a comment is rare. The props can make or break a show if they don’t work properly. They appeared to glide over the field, never missing a beat. The band is quick to express their gratitude for the level of support they receive, not just from parents and fans, but from the community.

They earned a special place in history when they, as a 2A division band, won the 2022 Overall Grand Champion for the first time in school history. It was a winning season from the beginning to the end. The band collectively felt the big win was not just for them. It was for all of the smaller school bands who continue to compete, knowing that the Grand Championship always goes to the bigger bands.

Hannah Strubhar said, “The 2022 marching



**PICTURED CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Everyone moves with clockwork precision. Standing still, alert, and ready. Soloists rock out for the crowd. The Color Guard adds color and life to the field.**

band has given me some experiences I never thought I would, and I’m very happy I got to be a part of it. Watching my friends and I do so well as we competed and traveled is an experience I’ll never forget.” The sense of family runs deep

with little families within each section of the band, color guard, and those who move the props.

Mr. Gray credits the seniors and section leaders for starting the season off right. They were onboard from the beginning to support,

encourage and lead. The leadership team runs at full throttle for the entire season. Craig Hatter, Katrina Fitzpatrick, Jeff Arbisi, Bob Hornsby, Craig Fitzpatrick, Brian Spicklemire, and Sara Gray move fast to keep up.

“This season has been such a memorable experience, being in such an amazing band with my friends is more than I could ever ask for. Everyone has grown and accomplished so much this season, it’s just been incredible!” reflected

Gwen Eckart.

The community outpouring of support continues to be incredible. The bleachers were full for the community show last fall. It matters! It makes a difference.

# Preparing For The Future Today

Morton High School students expand their experiences with FFA, SkillsUSA and Speech Team

Benjamin Franklin said, “Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I learn.” Education is about more than just academics. While at Morton High School, students are encouraged to get involved with any of the over 40 different clubs and activities offered.

If they feel the school is missing something, students can petition to start a club and be involved in the development. Being involved is a critical component in student success. When a student is involved, it helps foster a commitment to their education.

MHS has kickstarted several new activities in the last few years. Mr. Chad McFarland initiated a partnership with the SkillsUSA organization. SkillsUSA empowers its members to become world-class workers, leaders, and responsible American citizens. We recognize that college may not be every student’s path after they graduate. SkillsUSA is one way we can guide, support and help students gain valuable skills as they prepare to enter the workforce.

The vision is to produce the most highly skilled workforce in the world, providing every member with the opportunity for career success. Through SkillsUSA, students also attend competitions where they get to showcase what they have learned in the Career and Technical Education department.

The Speech Team has been reinvigorated after a few-year hiatus with our English teacher, Ms. Liliانا Zamora, taking the helm. In their first competition, two of our students made it to the final round of competition. This season the Speech Team is scheduled to compete in at least eight events. They continue to recruit individuals to join and are excited about the chance to compete in the state series!

MHS re-launched FFA after over a decade without any agricultural clubs or classes. We recognized not only the need for more programming but also the ability to tap into community partnerships and resources to support our students. FFA goes beyond farming and preparing students for leadership and careers in the science, business, and technology of agriculture.

Mr. Johnathon Hendricks has already taken groups of students to competitions in land surveying, dairy,



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: FFA members sport their signature blue jackets. FFA members exploring a ditch. Impromptu Speech competitors pose with their awards.**



etc. They also made their way out to the organization’s national convention in Indianapolis. We cannot wait to see where they go in the future.

If you are interested in learning more about any of these or the other clubs and activities offered, please contact Jamie Adolphson at [jamie.adolphson@mcusd709.org](mailto:jamie.adolphson@mcusd709.org).

“Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I learn.”

Benjamin Franklin

RAP: Registered Apprenticeship Program & Community Partnerships



SkillsUSA Illinois, a certified U.S. Department of Labor Apprenticeship Intermediary, facilitates the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) process by connecting employers and schools to validate training, create apprenticeship opportunities, and then support apprentices from program start to finish.

Through collaboration with SkillsUSA, this opportunity will allow us to provide apprenticeships in local high-growth industries. In this program, students become career-ready individuals with real practical hands-on training. It is an opportunity for senior students to be connected directly to the workforce and a potential career after graduation.

Students attend a partial class schedule at the high school and work the other portion of the day for their apprenticeship. Apprentices are compensated for their work time on the job. Successful program graduates will earn the nationally recognized U.S. Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeship Credential, the SkillsUSA Career Essentials (career-ready) Credential, an industry-recognized employability skill development credential, and industry-specific credentials and certifications.

Currently, we have five business partners that will, are,

## Thank You

Thank you to our Community Partners!

**CAT** — 2 current students

**Grimm Chevrolet** — 1 graduate and 1 new in 2023

**Lighthouse** — 4 students placed currently; 2 graduates

**Morton Industries** — 2 graduates

**Otto Baum** — 2 current students in pre-apprenticeship

or have employed our students. This is a huge opportunity for local companies to develop these apprentices and train them specifically for their environment.

Students interested in the program qualifications should speak to Mr. McFarland or their counselor.

# Building Endurance and Enduring Friendships

## Morton Junior High Cross Country, other teams find success

If you ever find yourself out at Kennel Lake on a cool September afternoon, you may be surprised to discover nearly one hundred junior high kids running around the scenic area. The residents of the houses along the lake are no strangers to this occurrence. They are likely quite accustomed to seeing the Morton Junior High Cross Country team practice at its home course.

Morton Junior High has a long history of success in athletics dating back to its days when its teams wore the old green and white school colors, but it wasn't until more recently that the cross country team became one of the front runners (pun intended) of this success.

In 2018, 66 students competed for the cross country team at the junior high school. Before this, it was not uncommon for the team to have between 20-30 students. This year is particularly notable for the fact that it would be the first time in school history a team had qualified for state in cross country, and it marks the beginning of a very special run of success.

In 2019, the team had grown to 78 runners, led by Josh Weeks and Yonas Wuthrich. In the state meet, Weeks and Wuthrich ran times of 10:05 and 10:11 respectively and finished 1st and 2nd overall. Both of those times beat the previous state record. Weeks' time still stands as the fastest time in the 3A state meet in IESA history. This year also marks the first time the cross country team received a trophy at the state meet, taking 2nd place overall. The girls also found success with Arlie Akers and Emma Belsly finishing in the top 20 in the girls race.

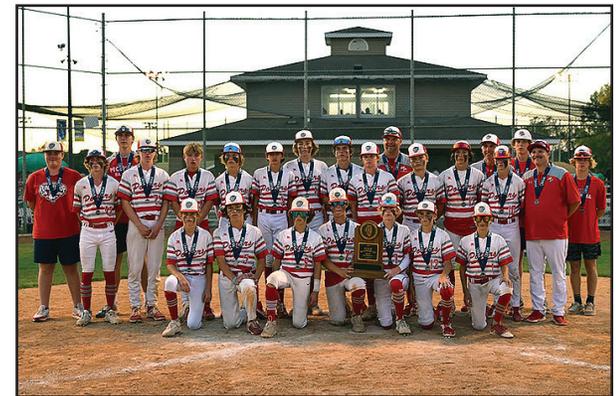
Following the success of the previous season, the cross country team experienced the biggest turnout of students in its history. Despite the challenges and restrictions of Covid, 107 students participated in cross country in 2020. This accounted for 20 percent of the entire student body. During this season, both the boys and girls teams finished with undefeated seasons which led to two 1st place trophies at the sectional meet. Unfortunately, there was not a state meet held that season due to Covid.

The next two seasons had turnouts of 80 or more students in the program and 2022 produced another 2nd place trophy for the boys team, led by Abe Martin who finished 4th overall in the state meet. The girls team also qualified for the state meet and saw Madi Greiner finish in the top 15 individually.

Since 2003, which is the beginning of the all-time records being recorded at MJHS for cross country, boys from the 2018-2022 seasons hold nine of the top 10 times and 17 of the top 20 times. Girls from



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:**  
The 2022 Boys Cross Country team won another 2nd place trophy at the state meet. The 8th Grade boys' baseball team finished 2nd in the state tournament. The 8th Grade girls' basketball team finished 3rd at state.



the 2018-2022 seasons hold seven of the top 10 times and 12 of the top 20 times. The program has nearly tripled in size and has some of the strongest runners in school history. To what do we attribute all of this recent success? The cross country program has become a family. The coaches and runners work hard every day to not only improve times, but to have fun and build strong relationships. A culture of success has been built on a foundation of respect and care for the sport and for

each other.

After Cross Country, five more IESA State titles were earned by MJHS student-athletes: 8th Grade Boys Baseball- 2nd Place, 8th Grade Girls' Basketball- 3rd Place, MJHS Wrestler, Colt McKee- 2nd Place, 7th Grade Volleyball-1st Place, and 8th Grade Volleyball- 4th Place. It's been a great year to be a Junior Potter!

# MJHS March Madness: They Just Keep Winning and Making History!

MJHS has experienced its **M**own March Madness this year. Three IESA State finishes in just a matter of days.

It all began with the 7th Grade Volleyball team taking 1st Place at the State Tournament. 7th Grade is that year when everything is new. This team figured out fast how to work together and the outcome led to a great season. The fans went wild. Potter Pride was in no short supply.

On the very same day, at the IESA State Wrestling Tournament, four MJHS Wrestlers would find themselves on the mat giving their all. Trygg Herron, Brock Mannino, and Brody Watson made it to the consolation semi-finals. Colt McKee made it all the way to the State Championship match earning 2nd Place. Head Wrestling Coach, Dan Gashaw, expects a lot. The team gave a lot.

The madness did not end there. It fueled it and history was made!

Volleyball continued a week later with the 8th graders finishing in 4th place with the grace, athleticism, and character this team is known for, but there is a bigger story to be told.

It was the first time in MJHS history both teams qualified for state in the same year. It was the first time both teams captured state trophies the same year. The 8th grade team was the first to advance to state as both 7th and 8th graders, and the only 4A school to advance both grade levels to state this year.

They also tied for the school record in wins (28) as they both finished 28-2 as 8th grade went into post season undefeated. Both teams were also undefeated in the regular season on our home court. The 8th grade did not lose a single set in the month of February!

Both teams, coached by Jordan Williams and Emma Owdom, stayed hungry to improve



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The 7th grade volleyball team are the 7-4A State CHAMPS!!! Colton McKee (left) earns a 2nd Place medal at the 145-Pound Class 2A finals. The 8th Grade Volleyball placed 4th in the state.**

throughout the season and in the postseason. Coach Williams shared, "They were humble and worked hard to improve in every practice, which isn't always easy to do when teams have the kind of success these girls did. They were so coachable and bought into what we asked. That trait mixed

with their skills and athleticism made for an outstanding season."

For some on the 8th grade team, it was their second trip to state this year, as some were on the Basketball team that took 3rd Place at State earlier this school year. When asked what made the season so special, Williams

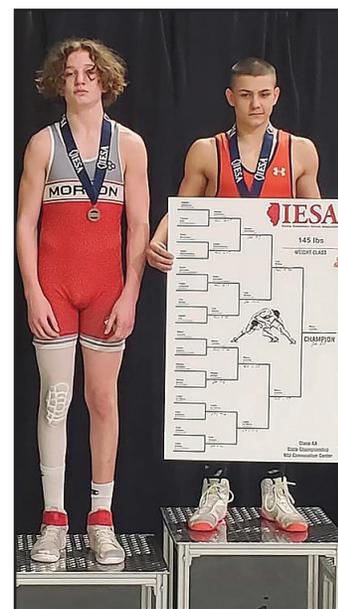
each other's biggest fans."

Williams expressed that parent involvement was instrumental in their success. They made sure every girl felt supported, even if it wasn't their own daughters. They supported the coaching staff and pitched in to help with anything that was needed. "I've always preached how important team culture is. Now I've gotten to see the power it has when the entire program (parents, players, and coaches) is working together towards the same goal."

Williams spoke volumes about the depth of their work ethic and their character, even under pressure, "So many opponents complimented the team on their sportsmanship and how well rounded the team was. Coaches and officials often noted they could never break us mentally and that we never had a weak spot no matter who was on the court." That is powerful praise.

Both teams faced adversity. "Anchoring players on both teams had post-season injuries. Both had matches that nearly eliminated them from the tournament before making the final four. With a few reminders, they remembered to trust in their team and their coaches, and they were able to find ways to make it work," said Williams. His final thoughts were these, "The team always found ways to amaze us and somehow up the level of play when we needed it the most. Those high intensity matches are such great life lessons in handling stress, and I could not be more proud of how each team handled it."

He and Coach Owdom were grateful for MHS Volleyball players Tyla Mattson and Hannah Nieukrik who showed up daily to help coach and run drills with the team. The season embodied what it means to be #OneMorton.



replied, "These two teams were so much more than their wins and trophies. One thing that made them special was the way the two teams bonded and became one large team." He continued, "The 8th graders were great mentors to the 7th graders. They were both

# Help-a-Thon: A decade of service to the community

Morton Junior High School's Help-a-Thon hit a milestone last fall.

For 10 years, students at the school have been gathering pledges to do community service work instead of having a candy sale or other fundraisers. About 500 students and staff members went out into the community this year.

The money goes to the MJHS PTO (Red & White Club) and is used to offset field trip costs for families and support school programs.

Money has been used for graphic novels, PE and athletic equipment, guest speakers, outdoor park benches, the choir program, Kiln furnishings, musical props, uniforms and more.

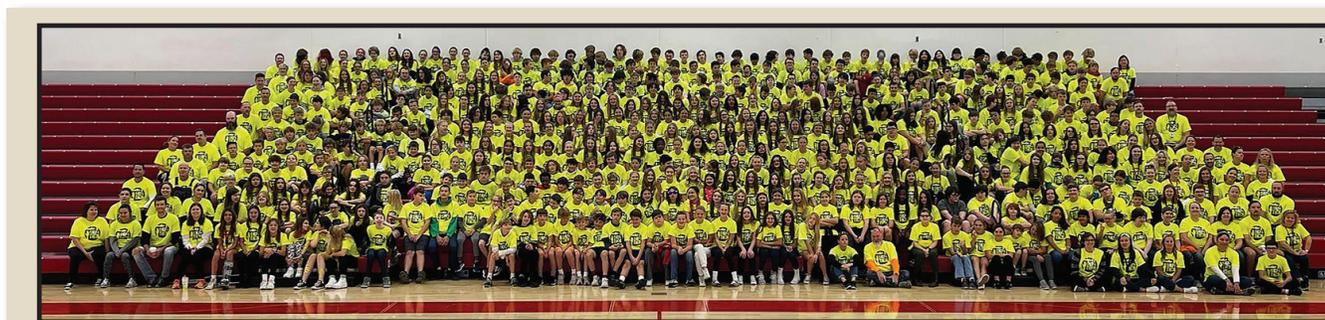
The Help-a-Thon also raises money for charitable organizations -- reducing the number of times families are asked to donate to worthwhile causes -- and 10 percent is donated to the Morton Community Foundation.

Each student gets a Help-a-Thon T-shirt with business sponsors printed on the back.

The totals through 10 years are impressive. Through 2022, students have raised \$343,375.42. Add in the sponsor total of \$42,041.15, and it's \$385,416.57.

In 2022, students raised \$38,585. Add in the \$3,200 from sponsors, and the total was \$41,785.

"The students get a lot out of it," said MJHS principal Chris Carter, who ran the Help-a-Thon for the first time last fall after Help-a-Thon founder and principal



## Service projects

The list of service projects is impressive. **Here are some of the 2022 projects:**

**Birchwood Park** — clean up and prepare softball fields for the winter  
**Downtown Morton** — winterize downtown  
**Goodwill** — sort clothes

**Morton Fire Department** — wash fire trucks

**Morton Estates** — indoor cleaning and interacting with residents

**TCRC** — wash vehicles and garden cleanup

**Villas of Holly Brook** — technology assistance for residents

**Westwood Park** — cleanup around baseball facility and

work on the disc golf course

## Bonus projects

The bonus service projects generally take students out of town and often include tours.

**Here are some of the 2022 bonus projects:**

**OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois** — tour and make blankets for patients

**Peoria Rescue Ministries** — tour, food prep, sort clothes

**EPIC** — tour, garden cleanup, interior work

**Peoria Dream Center** — assist in the Hope Store

**Almost Home Kids** — planting, painting rocks, interact with kids

**Midwest Food Bank** — packaging meals

Lee Hoffman left the school to take another job.

"I think we'd still do the Help-a-Thon even if we didn't need the money," Carter said. "What the students get out of it the most is the feeling of giving back to the community."

A few students get to give back twice. Those who raise a minimum of \$250 don't win gifts, they get to go back out into the community a second time and do more work.

"We focus on the altruistic value of the

Help-a-Thon," Carter said.

Every student has an opportunity to get out into the community. Those who don't go come to school that day and work at the school. About a dozen of the nearly 500 students at the junior high did last fall.

"There's no school work that day," Carter said.

Of course it takes a lot of work behind the scenes to coordinate the Help-a-Thon.

Holli Pfeifer, the principal's

administrative assistant, has the massive assignment of determining which students go to each site. She does it well.

"After the kids learn what opportunities are available, they give us their choices," Carter said. "Most get their first or second choice."

Carter is in charge of assigning teachers and staff members to the sites.

"The Help-a-Thon practically runs itself," Carter said. "The teachers and staff are great, and we really appreciate the places welcoming our students there."

## MJHS Leadership Academy: Building Core Abilities

Each month during the district's early release days, MJHS students spend their half day participating in our Leadership Academy program. During that time, there is an intentional schoolwide focus on developing skills needed for one to have success in a variety of settings.

Leadership Academy allows us to dedicate time to develop the core abilities of resourcefulness (September), curiosity (November), sociability (December), self-awareness (January), resilience (February), empathy (March), and integrity (May).

These "core abilities" are broad titles that encompass several essential microskills

including:

► **Resourcefulness:** conscientiousness, decision-making, goal-orientation, problem solving

► **Curiosity:** critical thinking, inquisitiveness, love of learning, open-mindedness, reasoning

► **Sociability:** active listening, assertiveness, camaraderie, collaboration, cooperation, humility, forgiving

► **Self-Awareness:** self-belief, gratitude, hope, mindfulness, purposeful, self-reflection, spirituality, vulnerability, wisdom

► **Resilience:** bravery, determination, flexibility, grit, initiative, optimism, perseverance, self-confidence

► **Empathy:** altruism, caring, civic-mindedness, compassion, generosity, kindness, patience, stewardship, tolerance

► **Integrity:** authenticity, courage, honesty, honor, respect, responsibility, restraint

The schedule of the day starts off with an all-school assembly intended to bring students together for an introduction to the core ability that will be focused on that month. The assembly is followed by "tribe time" in which students are broken into

small groups for activities and discussions that focus on team building. The heart of the morning are two engaging lessons developed by our teachers to help students see the importance of the core ability in real life practice.

Within the 3-hour day, students also have 30 minutes of dedicated "C.L.A.Y. Time" which provides space for socializing, leisure activities, and exercise. After participating in the day's activities, students return to their tribe to debrief and reflect on takeaways from the day. During this time, they also set goals and add to a reflective journal that is revisited each month.

# Engagement at the Speed of Life

A group of students races to build the tallest tower they can out of Jenga blocks. The catch? They have to earn their building materials by answering questions related to a recent unit of study on sentence structure. Another group of students quickly tries to open as many plastic Easter eggs as they can in 45 minutes. The twist? The eggs do not contain candy and prizes. They contain math problems from our recently completed unit on multiplication. Yet another group is carefully examining a nonfiction article from the latest amazing issue of Storyworks looking for as many “microchips” as they can. However, they are not looking for electronic devices. They are searching for key pieces of text evidence. Their reward? Plastic poker chips.

The scenes described above are learning scenarios regularly taking place in fourth-grade classrooms at Grundy School--as well as many other classrooms throughout District 709--and taking student engagement to the next level. A few years ago, two middle-school educators, Michael Matera and John Meehan, wanted to increase the amount of student engagement in their classrooms. The result? The creation of a company called EMC2 Learning that brands itself as “Engagement at the Speed of Life.”

Grundy fourth grade teacher Jon Wheat had the great fortune of attending a three-day training presented by Michael and John this past summer, along with fellow 709 educators Don Sturm and Lindsey Pierz. Wheat stated, “Having been in education for 28 years now, I thought I had seen just about everything. However, I could not have been more wrong. What I learned during those three days brought a renewed excitement to me as a teacher, and the increased level of student engagement and participation has been nothing short of remarkable.”

The excitement started for Mr. Wheat on the very first day of school when he challenged his students to work in groups to create the tallest structure they could using only 20 pieces of dry spaghetti, one meter of string, and one meter of



masking tape. The completed tower had to support one jumbo marshmallow to be placed at the top. This activity is known as “The Marshmallow Challenge,” and it provided a wonderful opportunity to get students working together cooperatively from the very first day. Observing them was a great way to learn about his new students. The competitive element kept students engaged for the entire 30 minutes, and as a bonus, he witnessed which students exhibited leadership skills.

After the activity, he asked students to reflect upon the experience. According to Abigail, “I like the Marshmallow Challenge because you had to figure out how you could get your tower to stay up and have the marshmallow on the

top so you could not use it to help build.” Sophia added, “I like the Marshmallow Challenge because we have to be creative to keep the marshmallow on top of the tower.” My students are looking forward to “Marshmallow Madness” coming later this year!

The true genius behind EMC2

Learning and its plethora of online resources is that it is not grade-level or course specific. The resources are applicable to many grade levels and subject areas. All the teacher has to do is supply the content that is part of his or her course and a willing audience of excited learners. EMC2 does the rest.

Mr. Wheat noted, “During my teaching career, I have used many types of games to help my students review content in preparation for assessments. Jeopardy!-style review games have been around for years, and Kahoot! has become popular in many classrooms today. However, both suffer from what Michael and John call “The Jeopardy! Effect,” the idea that when students fall behind during the game and realize they have no hope of catching

up or winning, they disengage from the activity very quickly. This is why my students love the “Mystery Box.”

Simply put, the students do not know how many points a question is worth until after they answer the question and they reveal the question’s value on the Smartboard. Fourth grader Abram shared, “The Mystery Box is my favorite one of all because you can use it a lot, and if your team is losing you have a chance to come back while working with your teammates.” This simple change increased the level of engagement in the classroom dramatically.

However, the resource that has provided the highest level of excitement thus far in his classroom is undoubtedly the Egg Dash Challenge. Teams of students race to complete math problems which are hidden inside plastic eggs in a basket in the center of the classroom. Hidden inside the eggs are a few “traps” and “treasures” which guarantee that the engagement level stays high the entire time. And, just like in the Mystery Box, the point values are not revealed until after the questions have been answered, so the game always has a dramatic climax. The reviews were impressive. Blake said, “The Egg Dash Challenge was by far my favorite game because you got to pick eggs then solve math problems.” Markos added, “I liked this challenge because it required teamwork, and I think working in teams will make you more successful. My team actually worked really well together, and we got a really good score!”

Mr. Wheat shared, “It has been a joy to see students engaged with course content in new and exciting ways this year. Furthermore, as a veteran teacher, it’s reinvigorated me and encouraged me to get out of my comfort zone. And, admittedly, as a retired tennis coach and current football and basketball announcer, the competitive element certainly appeals to me! It’s further proof that when you combine some tremendous resources, an eager group of learners, and a teacher willing to try new things, some magic can happen in the classroom.”



# LETTIE BROWN ELEMENTARY

## Phonetic Meets Kenetic!

This past summer, Mrs. Brenna Stork, Lettie Brown first grade teacher, attended the IMSE Comprehensive Orton-Gillingham Training in Washington, Ill. She returned to Lettie Brown with an excitement to add even more phonological and phonics instruction to her daily reading lessons.

Mrs. Kate Wettstein, Lettie Brown first grade teacher, embraced the Orton-Gillingham methodology as well. Mrs. Stork and Mrs. Wettstein have worked collaboratively to strengthen their reading and writing instruction by using the Orton Gillingham philosophy of multisensory, sequential, direct instruction.

If you happen to stop by Lettie Brown first grade classrooms during phonics instruction, you will see students reviewing all the sounds that phonemes (sounds) can make; blending sounds to make words; and using multisensory strategies to spell words, such as pounding out syllables and tapping out each sound. Students are even using sand trays to connect letters (graphemes) and sounds (phonemes), as tactile support ignites multiple learning pathways.

There is nothing boring about this kind of learning. Student engagement is high, and students gain a solid foundation for reading and writing.

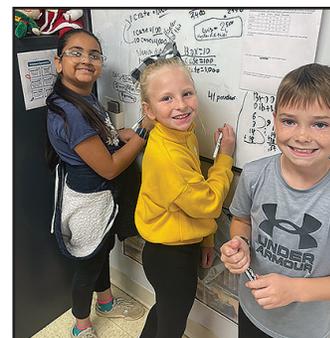


Students in Mrs. Stork's first grade class are using sand trays to review sounds.

## Teaching Students How To Think

During the 2021-2022 school year, Mrs. Stephanie Bishop served as our Lettie Brown instructional coach, primarily focusing on math instruction. After reading the book, *Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics, Grades K-12: 14 Teaching Practices for Enhancing Learning*, by Peter Liljedahl, Mrs. Bishop presented key components of building a thinking classroom during districtwide professional development last year.

If you take a peak into Mrs. Bishop's fourth grade classroom during math instruction, you will see students engaged in highly thinking tasks, using random groupings, standing at whiteboards, and working collaboratively to solve problems! Interestingly, Peter Liljedahl states



**Problem Solving in Mrs. Bishop's math class.**

that standing to work necessitates better posture, which is linked to better moods and more energy; provides an opportunity for increased nonverbal communication; increases knowledge mobility, as work is visible to everyone in the room and heightens the possibility that ideas will move between groups;

and increases the reliance on other students.

There is also less off-task behavior when students are working at vertical white boards, and teachers can assess student thinking immediately through this process. It is an added benefit of the learning strategy. We are excited that other teachers at Lettie Brown are embracing components of the thinking classroom as well!

Mrs. Bishop stated, "Building a thinking classroom has changed my perspective on teaching in all subject areas, especially math. I have really seen students grow in their ability to explain their thinking to peers through this process. I am especially excited that students are learning from one another and challenging their thinking."

## Living And Learning In The Zone

In accordance with the district social-emotional learning initiative, Lettie Brown has implemented a number of strategies to teach and encourage social/emotional skills during the 2022-23 school year. Specifically, the Lettie Brown staff and students review Essential Skills during our morning announcements.

In addition, teachers are encouraged to use a "Wish You Well" board to aid students in wishing each other well when they are absent from school. Teachers are also encouraged to hold weekly circles with their students, in which each student shares a response to a posed question. This provides the opportunity for everyone's voice to be heard, and it builds community by learning more about one another.

At the beginning of the school



**Mrs. Steiner, Lettie Brown School social worker, reviews specific tools and strategies for each zone with students in Mrs. Bishop's fourth grade classroom.**

year, Lettie Brown social worker, Mrs. Steiner, and our school psychologist, Mrs. Baker, presented classroom lessons on the Zones of Regulation. The Zones of Regulation is a systematic, cognitive behavioral approach to teach self-regulation by making students

aware of their states of alertness and feelings, which are divided into four color zones.

The Zones of Regulation helps students to effectively identify and communicate their feelings in a healthy way, provides specific tools/strategies to help students regulate, creates a consistent way to communicate between students and staff, and makes learning to regulate more concrete for students. All classrooms created a poster of strategies to use in each zone, and each classroom was provided a container with supports that can be used to help students regulate and return to the optimal zone for learning.

Lettie Brown will be continuing to build our staff and students' social-emotional toolboxes during the rest of the 2022-23 school year.



# WARD GRUNDY ELEMENTARY

## Play is Work and Work is Play

Kindergarten is a special place where children learn through play! The benefits are endless. Children are engaged in authentic learning scenarios with their peers. They learn to apply kindergarten skills to real-life situations. They use reading, writing, drawing, and math to interact through play while engaging with their peers.

During developmental play, teachers create intentional spaces for imaginative play. For example, the veterinary station allows children to assess stuffed animal wellness, take x-rays, and use bandages to help with sick or injured animals. Students write down symptoms and “check-in” with the vet to see if their dog needs to be kenneled overnight.

Grundy students had a visit from Dr. Mike, a local veterinarian, to reinforce their learning. He brought in his dog and students were able to use a stethoscope to listen to the dog’s heartbeat while wearing a white vet coat. Play translated into real-world understanding and experiences.

Popular “restaurant stations” create another interactive learning opportunity. Everyone eats. Kindergarteners take orders from customers, prepare food, write menus, and serve food to fellow friends who are acting as restaurant patrons. Students delight in wearing aprons or chef hats to add ambiance. Cooking, eating out, and preparing meals are all life skills learned through intentional Kindergarten play.

Waitstaff uses notebooks to take orders. It plants the seeds of organizational skills. Students learn teamwork as they pass orders on to the chefs in the kitchen. They count money and divide out food portions. They are developing math skills and learning math’s importance beyond the classroom.

A fun new addition to the play stations is the “Playdough Museum.” Students create sculptures from



playdough. Some are individual works of art and others are cooperative group efforts. Art patrons tour the museum, chatting with artists about their work. Normally shy early learners break out of their shells and become confident speakers and creators. The play experience helps develop fine motor

**Playdough is a little bit magical, as it is useful for learning, playing, and calming children at the same time.**

skills and grows language skills. A bonus is the sense of calm that seems to manifest at the playdough creation station. Playdough is a little bit magical.

The Kindergarten post office is a spot where early learners write letters/draw pictures, label envelopes, and “mail” them to their friends. Having your own mailbox is big when you are little. They enjoy sending and receiving mail. Reading their letters and writing their classmates’ names helps with letter formation, letter identification, fine motor skills, and name recognition.

When Kindergarten students go home and say they “played all day”, there is much more to the story. Kindergarten teachers get to see them learn and master new skills. Work can be play. Play can be work. They might even get a glimpse of what kindergarteners might look like in their future professions!

## Debating in the Sixth Grade Classroom

A healthy and evidence-based debate about civics...in an elementary classroom? No sweat!

These sixth graders are working on mastering the skills needed all throughout life to engage in a discussion with differing views. Our class has had a good laugh about the fact that many adults could use some extra practice with this skill. In preparation for Election Day, our sixth graders were practicing inquiry and civics standards such as studying sources representing multiple points of view, roles played by citizens, and the protection of rights.

Students evaluated documents that argued for and against compulsory voting in America. Madison Cruz stated, “Debating in a classroom is always helpful. It teaches us how to make a civilized argument. Having facts always helps to back you up.” Hudson Berlien shared, “I learned so much about American rights, freedom, and the formal way of talking during a debate. You need to know how to argue formally about disagreements at a young age so you can use it in the future. It will help me in jobs and older grades.”

In junior high, students will be continuing to practice debate skills in ELA and Social Studies.

While studying ancient civilizations, our most recent debate questioned if Hammurabi’s Code was just or not. This activity connects more to our History Standards which include the cause and effect of a decision, perspective, and change in society. When we reach the conclusion of one debate, the students are always asking about the next one.

The engagement has blown us away and we are eager to see how they use these skills to master argumentative writing later in the year along with future debates. It is our hope that our young students learn how to navigate conversations among different topics with peers. We want them to understand the tolerance of differing points of view while supporting their own opinions with evidence.

Families, be prepared for more evidence-based arguing from your sixth graders at home!



# JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY

## ABCs of CONNECTION = COMMUNITY

**J**efferson School is practicing the ABC's of Connection in an effort to build and maintain a strong school community. We've learned when students are connected, they are able to thrive!



### B — Buddies

At Jefferson, we have a special buddy program to connect almost every student with another student during the school day. Buddy classes are arranged among two grade level teachers. Currently, 12 out of our 14 classes have a buddy class. Buddies meet regularly, often weekly, to build relationships across the building and with a goal of supporting learning and social development in our Patriots. During buddies, students read together, practice their facts, author books, create art, conduct science experiments, play games, practice writing, and complete schoolwide projects, such as bullying prevention ghost grams and what makes us #1 unique.



In addition to the regular buddy classroom gatherings, we have asked our older buddies to assist their younger buddies with facilitating breaks or helping with work completion. The possibilities are truly endless as not only students, but staff, are building connections across the building.

### A — Afterschool clubs

Jefferson held its first round of afterschool clubs during the months of October-November. There were 11 afterschool clubs offered to students which were led by Patriot staff members. There were club offerings for all ages and included offerings such as soccer, running, art, GoNoodle, sign language, board game, Lego, and puzzle club. Some students participated in more than one club based upon student preferences, space availability, and schedules. We had 223 participants in the fall afterschool clubs and are excited to offer another round of clubs this spring.

In addition to the weekly clubs, Jefferson held a couple of new and unique afterschool opportunities for our students. We had 38 Patriots sign up to participate in a special Christmas Caroling Club. The club participants performed several songs they learned in the club at the Morton Hometown Holidays Celebration on the Saturday after Thanksgiving. We also held a Christmas Craft Club to benefit the Children's Hospital of Illinois Gameball Run. We had 97 crafters that created beautiful Christmas/holiday artwork to



share with their loved ones or submit for participation in our PTO Holiday Showcase Art Show. These two special clubs attracted some Patriots that had not previously participated in an

afterschool club. We are excited to offer more special opportunities in the future.

While Jefferson offers a wide range of afterschool club activities, the district offers additional activities for elementary students to participate in during the school year. These activities include third-sixth grade challenge, sixth grade band, sixth grade orchestra, fifth-sixth grade choir, and sixth grade wrestling. We have 90 participants in these district programs and some of our students participate in more than one of these activities.

Afterschool clubs and activities are just one way we help our students get connected at Jefferson.

### C — Community Partnerships

Jefferson School currently has several partnerships with local churches and organizations that help our students and their families. The resource closet is new to Jefferson this year, with the idea stemming from conversations with members of the Morton Ministerial Alliance. Our resource closet is currently stocked and supported by Elevate Church in Morton.

Items available for our students and families include personal hygiene items, snacks and food items, cleaning supplies, and household items. The congregation has been extremely generous to purchase the initial inventory and continues to restock our shelves as needed.



Library (MPL), we are excited to share a new partnership that began this year. Our Patriots, and students across the district, have the opportunity to be authors and share their books with the community.

Though Jefferson School has promoted the summer reading program and taken numerous fieldtrips to the Morton Public

There is a new "Student Storytellers" section at the MPL that contains books from individual students or classes of students that are available for checkout by patrons at the library. Students write and submit their book for publication. While the collection is currently small as this new opportunity launches, we hope to grow the collection and help all students believe in their ability to be an author.

During the summer reading kickoff programs in the spring, the books will be returned to the author to make room for new books each year. We can't wait to grow this collection and to have others in the community read the students' writing. Next time you are at MPL, check out one of these books!



# LINCOLN ELEMENTARY

## Afterschool Clubs Return to Lincoln

On most afternoons, students are excited to hear the end-of-day bell, indicating the end of the school day. However, during the first semester of the 2022-23 school year, many Lincoln Elementary School students anxiously awaited hearing that final bell, only to stay longer at school! Lincoln students had the opportunity to participate in a wider variety of afterschool clubs for the first time in many years, thanks to the volunteer efforts of several parents and teachers.

Historically, Lincoln had a strong afterschool program called After School Adventures, organized by the Lincoln PTO. As families have moved on to MJHS and parent volunteers changed, there were several years in which there were little to no afterschool activities and opportunities for the Lions. Turn the page to 2022-23, when afterschool activities have flourished under the leadership of our parents and new teachers.

"The afterschool clubs at Lincoln are a great opportunity for our students to further explore their interests," explained PTO President Natalie Friend. "This year has been especially exciting as we started up several clubs that have been inactive in recent years. Our student response to these offerings has been overwhelmingly positive, with most clubs receiving far more interest than we anticipated."

After several years of inactivity, our Running Club kicked off the school year in August 2022. More than 60 fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-graders took to the streets around Lincoln twice a week in August and September to prepare for the Pumpkin Festival 2-mile run. Student runners far exceeded



**TOP: Students in the Chess Club play against volunteer Mr. Bob. LEFT: A Student Ambassador assists a younger student.**

fourth-grade teacher and club leader Catie Elward's expectations. "The biggest thing I learned about the students is that they are capable of much more than we initially expect out of children. These runners exceeded my expectations of the goals they would set for themselves and the distance they were able to run by the end of the club."

"Leading a club at Lincoln is such a special opportunity. There are so many parent volunteers and teachers that are there to help and you are able to get to know the students of Lincoln so well!" Ms. Elward added.

Fall 2022 also saw the addition of a new club in collaboration with the Morton Public Library. The afterschool Read Aloud Club gave students the opportunity to listen

to cherished books and stories after school while enjoying a snack. Led by Ashley Valerio, Youth Services Outreach Coordinator (and a Lincoln parent), nearly 50 Lincoln Lions participated in these two four-week sessions.

Another new club was so popular this fall that three different sessions were offered for more than 80 K through third-grade students. Our new Lego Club allowed for students to explore and create using Legos. Led by a Lincoln parent and kindergarten aide Jessica Harding the three different Lego Clubs met after school for four weeks. This club was made possible by the leadership of Mrs. Harding and the tremendous amount of parent volunteers who helped each week after school.

A lack of volunteers led parent Chelby Sauder to jump in feet first with leading our Chess Club many years ago, even though she had no idea how to play chess! "Fun Fact: the only reason I coordinate this

club is that four or five years ago, no one wanted to take over the club and my son, who loves chess, would have been so disappointed to not have this opportunity," explained Mrs. Sauder. "I stepped up and took over, not even knowing how to play chess. I had an older gentleman who taught the students, but he didn't want to deal with the organizational side of the club. We worked well together. He taught and I organized. I have since learned the game and can teach the basics." Mrs. Sauder's son has moved on to junior high, but she continues to lead our club as her youngest child enjoys playing the game.

"I have LOVED getting to know the students over the years, especially when I get students who come back a second or third year," Mrs. Sauder added. "And I love coming into the school, recognizing faces, and feeling connected." This year, our Chess Club has been so popular that a second club has been added and will begin in January. In all, 40 students will participate in Chess Club this year.

Fifth and sixth graders with a desire to serve and help within our school and local community had the opportunity to join a new club this fall, led by sixth-grade teacher Ruth Westbrook. Nearly 65 students joined our Student Ambassadors this year and have been actively serving our school community in a variety of ways.

"It has been a joy to watch our students step into leadership roles," explained Mrs. Westbrook. "Our students are anxious to both help and lead when given the opportunity. For every one spot I have to fill, I have 10 students clamoring to fill it! I have also

learned that leaders come in many shapes and sizes."

Some of the ways in which our students have volunteered and served this year include:

- ▶ Working alongside first-, second- and third-graders in math and reading.
- ▶ Assisting our PTO on multiple projects that help our school.
- ▶ Assisting teachers and district staff on tasks that lightened their load.
- ▶ Collecting and organizing cans for our canned food drive which helps our community.
- ▶ Writing and presenting announcements in school-wide assemblies
- ▶ Helping within our school library.
- ▶ Helping younger students in other afterschool clubs.

"It has been a joy to watch students who don't naturally lead in a large setting, step forward to help and serve through Student Ambassadors," beamed Mrs. Westbrook.

Second semester, we offer a Lego Club for students in fourth-sixth grades and bring back our Read Aloud Clubs for another session in the spring. We are always looking to create more opportunities for our students by offering new clubs and experiences.

"I love that After School Clubs can reach out to such a variety of students and interests and I hope we can continue to offer new clubs in the future," shared Mrs. Friend. "Volunteers are crucial to these clubs' success, and we have some of the best at Lincoln!"

Have an idea for a new club at Lincoln? Reach out to Mrs. Friend or Mrs. Horchem to share your ideas!

# Morton 709 Transportation Team: They Deliver

The wheels on the bus go round and round. And in the Morton Transportation Department, it seems like they never stop. Check out the numbers:

- ☛ 1522 — Students who are eligible for service on the big yellow buses.
- ☛ 14 — Daily morning and afternoon routes. Eleven routes deliver students to Morton schools. Three take students to out-of-town schools.
- ☛ 2 — Mid-day routes for early childhood.
- ☛ 4 — Speech runs for pre-school students.
- ☛ 15 — Large yellow buses.
- ☛ 7 — Little yellow buses.
- ☛ 2 — Mid-size wheelchair buses.
- ☛ 6 — White activity buses.
- ☛ 4 — Vans.
- ☛ 32 — Employees including drivers, substitute drivers, aides and the director.

Drivers also transport sports teams, take the Morton High School marching band to its competitions, and take students on field trips. They also take high school students to the bowling alley for PE. There are yearly bus evacuation drills at each school, and every few years, drivers assist schools in a full lockdown drill by transporting students to a remote location.

Oh, and there's summer school. Don't forget that.

Julie Tharp guides the fleet. She's the director of transportation and it's her job to make sure everything goes smoothly with a ton of moving parts. She even drives some days.

She's had the job since 2019, taking over for Nancy Wiegel. After being a substitute driver for two years and a regular driver for 25 years, she was ready for the task. In 1995, the district started doing their routing online. She did both jobs in her first year as director until handing off the duties.

"I work with a good team. They step up every day. They go above and beyond the call of duty," Tharp said. "Even on days when there are challenges, they come in the next morning with the same joy and same commitment."

Tharp said she had a pre-conceived notion of the job of school bus driver before she became one. Now, she calls it an amazing job. She said her drivers would agree.

"I love it when I see that passion in our drivers," she said. "The kids become your own. I had one student from early childhood through age 22. We made a connection. And I drove the son of a former student who was on my bus."

Pam Glascock has been driving for 16 years. She has morning and afternoon routes and has done plenty of



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: #17 Bus Driver Nancy Stephens captured this perfect image. Students step it up on bus evacuation drill day. Bus Drivers pause for a picture.**

field trips and taken the wrestling team to meets.

"I love the kids. You never know what they're going to say," Glascock said. "It could be something that's going on at home to a new piece of clothing they're wearing. They always make me smile." Driving in bad weather and "kids being kids all at once" are the only challenges. The latter happens infrequently. As for the former, "When there's fog or freezing rain or wind, you just grab onto the wheel and hang on," she said

with a laugh.

"I'd recommend this job to anyone who is interested," she said. "The hours are good and if you like kids, you're around plenty of them. They know my life and I know theirs. We talk about it every day."

Interested in being a bus driver? Call Tharp at 309-284-5092.

# Two Podcasts / Two Audiences

A podcast for caregivers & a podcast for teachers

Caregivers and teachers are benefiting from bi-weekly podcasts being done by Morton School District staff members. “Care-U,” launched in September 2022, offers advice for adults who take care of kids. It’s done in a non-shaming and non-blaming manner, said Stephanie Brown, the district’s staff and student wellness coordinator.

“We want caregivers to be reflective and intentional about their practices,” she said. She’s doing the podcast, which lasts about 20-30 minutes, with Don Sturm, the district’s technology integration specialist.

“Through the Educational Looking Glass,” which launched in January 2022, is a 10- to 15-minute podcast for teachers. Sturm is teaming up with Courtney Eddleman, Morton High School’s instructional coach, on this one. They co-taught an American Studies course at the high school for 13 years, so working together isn’t new for them.

The name of the podcast reflects the “strange” world we live in today (like Alice experienced in the novel by Lewis Carroll) and its impact on teachers, and provides teachers with an opportunity for self-reflection. “If it helps half the teachers in our district or even a quarter of them, I’d consider it a success,” Sturm said. “Through the Educational Looking Glass” is different from many podcasts in the fact that it’s interactive. Questions and comments can be left on a Google form or in a voice message.

Brown and Sturm have a combined 46 years of teaching and 43 years of parenting, Brown said, and they love to share their experiences and the experiences of others. “Care-U” is a perfect platform for that. “The podcast

## Care U

Here are the podcasts titles:

- \* What to Expect from Care-U.
- \* Parenting Styles.
- \* Parenting Styles: Interview with Morton School District Superintendent Craig Smock.
- \* The Value of Gratitude.
- \* Teaching Responsibility (with Dina Emser.)
- \* Bonus Episode: Holiday Hustle.
- \* Exploring Hard Work (with Morton High School Principal Deidre Ripka.)
- \* Screen Hygiene 101.
- \* Sneak Peak (with Andrew McPeck.)
- \* All Things Common Sense Media.
- \* What Caregivers Need to Know About the Brain.
- \* Making Praise Count.



To access the podcasts, go to [anchor.fm/careu709](https://anchor.fm/careu709) or [anchor.fm/lookingglass709](https://anchor.fm/lookingglass709). The podcasts also on are the school district’s [website](#).

## Through the Educational Looking Glass:

Here are the podcast topics:

- \* Looking at What We Do Well.
- \* Looking at What Our Spaces Say About Us.
- \* Looking at the Complexity of Vulnerability.
- \* Looking at the Importance of Resetting.
- \* Looking at Widening Your Circle of Connections.
- \* Looking at the Current State of Motivation in the Classroom.
- \* Looking at Ourselves as Continual Learners.
- \* Looking at How We Use Our Summer.
- \* Looking at How Our District Redefined Coaching.
- \* Looking at Our Role as Leaders in the Classroom.
- \* Looking at the Complexity of Student Motivation and Engagement.
- \* Looking at the Intersection of Reflection, Emotion and Power.
- \* Looking at the Responsibility of Teaching the Students in Front of Us.
- \* Looking at How Others Experience the World.
- \* Looking at Responsibility in the Classroom (with Dina Emser).
- \* Looking at the Power of a Single Word.
- \* Looking at Preventing Polarization.
- \* Looking at How Digital Citizenship is Not Sufficient.



provides a plethora of resources for people who are busy with the day-day business of raising kids,” Sturm said.

“Or if they do have time, a springboard for conversation,” Brown said.

The topics, Sturm said, range everywhere from using technology to friendships to boundaries.

Technology, navigating the digital world, is the hottest topic. “Technology isn’t evil,” Sturm said. “But in a world where ‘likes’ on a post can define your worth, what’s more important is being genuine.”

As part of the “Care-U,” a book study on “The Gift of Imperfection” by Brene Brown is being held. Thirty-three parents participated in the first session.



MPTV Coaches Show interviewing new Morton Head Football Coach Adam O’Neill.

## MPTV’s Expanded Broadcasting

After the departure of longtime MPTV director Brooke Janes to Fox in Nashville, Morton Potter TV needed new leadership. Under the direction of Superintendent Craig Smock and Assistant Superintendent Troy Teater, a new lead technician was named. Welcome, Dawn Rademaker!

A Military Veteran with a creative eye, Ms. Rademaker has a calm demeanor but expects excellence. Her team includes: Andrea White, Eric Myers (who also teaches at MHS), Jordan Neville, Blake Barnes, and student worker Austin Lyons.

Many have noticed MPTV is still producing second-to-none coverage of Potters sporting events and productions. The team at MPTV creates snippets of video that allow Morton CUSD 709 to highlight the many diverse and amazing things happening in our classrooms, in the community, and on the sports fields. The MPTV Coaches Show airs almost weekly with co-hosts Ryan Lindley and Eric Myers. It opens a window for far-away family, friends, and fans to be connected and present.

As part of Dr. Smock’s mission to provide more communication with not only students and their families, but the community as well, the MPTV crew has been seeking out classroom events, field trips, and more to showcase the extraordinary learning opportunities happening at Morton 709 in all seasons.

In addition to the classrooms, we have also built out our video publishing capabilities with unmanned cameras that allow us to broadcast more events, both live and recorded, in our high school and junior high facilities. These additions enable those with scheduling conflicts to not miss out on important life events.

On an exciting note, Morton High School brought back the Broadcast Journalism class this year. Over 30 MHS students gained hands-on experience in their first semester. The students, while learning about the facets of modern journalism and video production, are responsible for a weekly news broadcast called “ClayNation.”

MPTV has some excellent volunteers that make a difference. Bill Schock and Jeff Stevens volunteer and help with sporting events. They had a part in helping design the studio and continue to support us as volunteers. Kyle Tellor volunteers, as well. We have a host of great volunteer announcers for football and basketball events. These volunteers become the voices sports fans recognize.

To find out more about MPTV and stay in the loop with the latest Potter news, be sure to subscribe to the Morton Potter TV YouTube channel and follow the Morton Community Unit School District 709 Facebook page.

Like, Share, and Subscribe!

## GAMEBALL RUN 2023

# Gameball Run: A Community with a Cause

It was cold and rainy. Not a fun day to be outside. But it was the day of the annual Gameball Run. And that's all that mattered.

Hundreds took part in the run on Feb. 9 on the track at Morton High School, helping raise \$181,861 for the OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois Heller Center for Kids with Cancer.

This was the 11th year for the multifaceted fundraiser that involves every school in the Morton School District, Bethel Lutheran School, Blessed Sacrament School, the Morton boys' basketball team, and a large group of sponsors. Each year, the fundraising total has been higher than the previous year.

"It's incredible what our community can do," said Stacy Littersky, who helped launch the Gameball Run and is still a co-chair. "Besides raising all that money, the Gameball Run also teaches the kids in our schools the importance of philanthropy," she said.

In addition to the run, each school does its own fundraising and has its own Miracle Family that has needed the services of Children's Hospital. The total is announced in front of a full house at a Morton boys' basketball game attended by all the Miracle Families. This year, that game was on Feb. 10.

In the first year of the Gameball Run, only the high school and Lincoln Elementary School were involved and only the high school had a Miracle Family.

At the direction of then-Superintendent Lindsay Hall,



the Gameball Run expanded to every school in the district the next year. It expanded again, in the past couple years when Bethel Lutheran and Blessed Sacrament joined the party.

Littersky and Dana Hobson have been co-chairs of the Gameball Run since it began. The first year, the Morton boys' basketball team actually ran relay style to the Children's Hospital to raise money. "It was a cold and rainy day,"

OSF HealthCare  
Children's Hospital of Illinois

## GAMEBALL RUN

MORTON POTTERS BASKETBALL

Howard & Howard  
RENEWAL  
W. ANDERSEN

Littersky said. "The weather was bad again the next year. It would have been a logistical nightmare to do it, so we decided against it. Instead, we ran on the track at the

high school and got everyone involved. It's been that way since then." The first run raised \$20,000. "We were blown away," Littersky said.

Tracy Heer has joined Littersky and Hobson as co-chairs. They work with an executive committee and a school committee with representatives of all the schools, plus parents and teachers. Each person is a volunteer.

## Money Raised

Here are the totals through the years:

2013	— \$20,000
2014	— \$32,800
2015	— \$51,038
2016	— \$62,180
2017	— \$92,841
2018	— \$100,341
2019	— \$113,715
2020	— \$133,051
2021	— \$135,614
2022	— \$284,253
2023	— \$181,861

For 2022, \$115,000 of the total were one-time gifts to help the fundraiser get to the \$1 million mark in 10 years. The total for the normal fundraising efforts that year was \$169,253.

## We are Grateful for our 2023 Sponsors

