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# 709



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# Communicator

VOLUME 44  
2021

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

## Our mission: A return to normalcy in the 2021-22 school year

As we prepare to begin the 2021-22 school year, we are excited to embark upon another new adventure, with all of the changes and life transitions that can bring.

First, a return to normalcy, following the pandemic year of 2020-21, would be a welcome change in and of itself. Though we await reopening guidance from the state of



DR. JEFFREY HILL

Illinois, we are hopeful that we can return to seeing uncovered faces in our classrooms, to the kinds of personal interactions that perhaps we once took for granted, to full schedules and packed bleachers for our sporting and other

extracurricular events.

We are encouraged by our experience of the last year, when our School Board made the call to return to in-person instruction for the vast majority of our students and staff, with safeguards. Our test scores have provided some reassurance regarding that decision, as they show our students across the board at pre-pandemic learning levels.

That is not the case across the state, according to a recent analysis, with reading and especially math scores showing significant "unfinished learning," or skill deficits. In short, where there was regression in many parts of Illinois, we in Morton made progress. While many factors go into that learning bottom line – including our previous emphasis on literacy programs — we believe our firm response to COVID-19

Please see **CHANGE** Page 2



**REGISTER  
YOUR  
STUDENTS:**

In-person

**Thursday,  
July 29**

**7 a.m. - 5 p.m.  
at all schools**

Online

**Now until  
July 27**

[www.morton709.org](http://www.morton709.org)

*Details on Page 7*

Look for more  
information about  
each school on the  
pages inside!





## District calendar

### August

11 No school: Teacher Institute Day  
12 First day of attendance for students, half day a.m.

### September

6 Labor Day, no school  
17 Early dismissal day

### October

6 Early dismissal day  
11 Columbus Day, no school  
15 In-service half day a.m., no school p.m.  
21 No school: Parent/Teacher Conferences  
22 No school: Parent/Teacher Conferences

### November

3 Early dismissal day  
11 Veterans Day, no school  
24-26 Thanksgiving vacation, no school

### December

1 Early dismissal day  
21 In-service half day a.m., no school p.m.  
22-31 Christmas vacation, no school

### January 2022

3-7 Christmas Vacation continues  
10 School resumes, early dismissal day  
17 Martin Luther King Jr. Day, no school

### February

2 Early dismissal day  
21 Presidents Day, no school

### March

2 Early dismissal day  
11 In-service half day a.m., no school p.m.  
28-31 Spring Break, no school

### April

1 Spring Break continues, no school  
6 Early dismissal day  
15-18 Easter Break, no school

### May

4 Early dismissal day  
15 High School Graduation, 2 p.m.  
30 Memorial Day, no school  
June  
3 Last day for students, no school p.m.  
6 Last day for teachers

*Note: In the event that no emergency days are used, May 26 would be the last student attendance day and May 27 a Teacher Institute Day.*

## THUMBS UP



Students at Jefferson give learning two thumbs up!

## CHANGE

Continued from page 1

and our insistence on providing an environment as conducive to learning as possible contributed to those welcome results.

Going into a new school year, it is heartening to know that we do not have any ground to make up, that our students are exactly where they should be.

Sometimes the returns on our investments can be hard to quantify, but here the dividends are clearly visible, and for that we are thankful.

What else will be different?

For one, we have implemented online registration as an option for most of our students. It's easier, it's quicker, and we trust our families are comfortable operating in that medium.

Second, as previously announced, this will be my final year as superintendent, as I have opted for retirement at the conclusion of classes in 10 months or so. The School Board has chosen Assistant Superintendent Craig Smock as my successor. Dr. Smock is a veteran of Morton schools, he knows the district inside and out, and we will be working together, as we have the previous four years, to ensure a seamless transition.

Finally, there are multiple pieces of legislation potentially coming out of Springfield that may directly impact



Principal Saunders reads to Grundy students.

the instruction our students get in the classroom, with which we do take issue in some instances. Let me simply say that we in Morton District 709 are fully committed to local control and to championing an educational experience that reflects the values of the community.

Inevitably, we will face our challenges this school year. That said, our experience gives us confidence that we are leaving the starting line stronger and better than ever, and that this is

going to be a memorable school year, in the most positive sense of the word.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jeffrey Hill, Ed.D.  
Superintendent,  
Morton School District 709

## Regular & Special Schedules

### FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL, AUG. 12

The first day of school for students is Tuesday, Aug. 12. A special schedule applies that day only:

#### Grundy, Jefferson and Lincoln

Grades K-6 8:20 - 11:55 a.m.

Lettie Brown 8:10 - 11:45 a.m.

Morton Junior High 8-11 a.m.

Morton High 8-11 a.m.

### REGULAR SCHEDULE

The daily District 709 school schedule is as follows:

#### Grundy

Grades K-6 8:20 a.m.-2:40 p.m.

A.M. Early Childhood 8:20 -10:55 a.m.

P.M. Early Childhood 12:05 -2:40 p.m.

Lettie Brown 8:10 a.m. -2:30 p.m.

Jefferson and Lincoln 8:20 a.m. -2:40 p.m.

Morton Academy 8:10 a.m. - 2:40 p.m.

Morton Junior High 8 a.m.-3p.m.

Morton High 8 a.m.-3 p.m.

### EARLY DISMISSAL WEDNESDAYS\*

Every 1st Wednesday of the month, the students will be released early to provide continuous and collaborative professional development for faculty. The dismissal times are the same as the half-day schedule.

\*Non-Wednesday early dismissal days: Friday, Sept. 17; Monday, Jan. 10, 2022.

Lettie Brown 11:45 a.m.

Other Elementary Schools 11:55 a.m.

MJHS and MHS 11:00 a.m.

# Morton School District 709 Directory

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



**JEFFREY HILL**

**Superintendent:**  
Jeffrey Hill, Ed.D.  
263-2581  
(ext. 8099)



**CRAIG SMOCK**

**Assistant  
Superintendent and  
Superintendent-elect:**  
Craig Smock, Ed.D.  
263-2581  
(ext. 8098)



**TROY TEATER**

**Director of Curriculum and  
Technology:**  
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 Academy



**AMANDA  
RICKENBERG**

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

## Morton High School



**DEIDRE RIPKA**

350 N. Illinois, Morton, IL 61550 — 266-7182  
**Principal:** Deidre Ripka  
**Administrative Team:** Jamie Adolphson, Scott Jones, Matt  
Oyer, Josh Prichard  
**Reporting absence:** 263-0611  
**Student Services:** 263-0611  
**Guidance:** 263-8585  
**Food Service:** 263-7451

## Morton Junior High



**LEE HOFFMAN**

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

## Lettie Brown



**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 ALBERS**

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



# Coming school year to herald leadership change in Morton schools

The 2021-22 school year will mark a transition at the top of District 709 as Superintendent Jeffrey Hill caps a 37-year educational career with his fifth and final year at the helm of Morton schools, with Assistant Superintendent Craig Smock waiting in the wings to succeed him.

"Morton is a wonderful place, and very supportive of its schools. Honestly, it has been an honor to serve the community in this capacity," Hill said, citing as accomplishments his Morton Moving Forward program that brought full-day kindergarten to the district, a new and improved reading curriculum, more counselors and increased professional development opportunities for teachers. Meanwhile, standards-driven learning is on the way, along with the academic progress expected to accompany it.

Hill's tenure also has been marked by significant investments in facilities, specifically at Morton Junior High with an impressive renovation and addition to the campus – enhanced by a milestone agreement/land swap with the Village of Morton – and Morton High School, which will see major improvements to its science/STEM labs and main

gymnasium.

Of course, nothing surpassed the achievements of the past year, when Morton became one of the few school districts in Illinois to return to in-person classroom instruction full-time in the midst of a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. Not only that, but the district did so successfully, without interruption, while providing as normal a school experience as possible given the unprecedented circumstances.

"I'm pretty proud of the fact that we were all rowing in the same direction" through the extensive planning that had to occur and the adjustments that had to be made along the way, said Hill.

Standing by his side through all of that, of course, was Smock, who earned the nickname "Captain COVID" for spearheading the district's pandemic preparation and oversight efforts.

"Quite simply, we could not have done it without him," said Hill.

Smock, 53, has been the district's number two for the last 14 years. His responsibilities have ranged from general educational oversight of six facilities to human resources, payroll, enrollment and residency, legal compliance, teacher



DR. CRAIG SMOCK

mentoring and professional development.

In short, he's been a go-to guy almost across the board, making him well prepared to assume the superintendency.

Prior to arriving in Morton in 2007, he was principal at Pekin Community High School, at Peoria Heights High School and at Bradford High School. He began his career as a math teacher at Ottawa Township High School. The Tremont native earned bachelor's and master's degrees at Illinois State University and his doctorate at Western Illinois University.

Smock actually chose Morton as a place to live and raise his family 21 years ago, well before taking a job in the district. He is married to Peggy and has three adult children, Cassie, Ryan and

*"He has great skills and knowledge to lead the district well. I think he'll do a fantastic job."*

Dr. Jeffrey Hill, Morton District 709 Superintendent, said of Superintendent-elect Dr. Craig Smock

Kayla, the latter three all graduates of District 709.

"This has always been kind of my dream job," he said. "I feel like I'm a good fit from the perspective the board has and the community has. I've never worked with a more cohesive board of education. We have a high-integrity, top-notch administrative team and a faculty and staff who are second to none. It will be an honor to lead what I feel is the best school district in the area."

Smock has a year to think about his agenda for the district, but "Morton schools have functioned and always will at a very high level," he said. "The big challenge is to not rest on your laurels and always look for opportunities to improve."

Regarding his management style, he is a big believer in teamwork, and is especially proud of the collaboration that was displayed over the past year in contending with the pandemic while keeping classrooms open with in-person instruction.

While he values directness,

he's learned over the years of working in every kind of district with very different kinds of challenges – from a small, rural one such as Bradford to the largest high school in the region in Pekin — that "you can also lead by listening, not just talking," Smock said.

"Dr. Hill's accomplishments over the past four years will impact students for years to come," said Morton School Board President Jeff Schmidgall. "Dr. Smock brings tremendous experience over the course of his career as a teacher and administrator. He is a proven leader within District 709 as assistant superintendent, which will enable him to hit the ground running in the superintendent role ... He is well-positioned to take District 709 to the next level."

"He has great skills and knowledge to lead the district well," added Hill. "I think he'll do a fantastic job."

# District 709 Board of Education

## President: Jeff Schmidgall

First Elected: 2015; Term Expires: 2023  
jeffrey.schmidgall@mcusd709.org

## Vice President: Tim Braker

First Elected: 2019; Term Expires: 2023  
timothy.braker@mcusd709.org

## Secretary: Bart Rinkenberger

First Elected: 2017; Term Expires: 2025  
bart.rinkenberger@mcusd709.org

## Dr. Diane Krall

First Elected: 2021; Term Expires: 2025  
diane.krall@mcusd709.org

## Thomas Neeley

First Elected: 1989; Term Expires: 2025  
thomas.neeley@mcusd709.org

## Jerry Rudd

First Elected: 2021; Term Expires: 2025  
jerry.rudd@mcusd709.org

## Dr. David Cross

Appointed: 2021; Term Expires: 2023  
david.cross@mcusd709.org

## Contact the board

Stakeholders in District 709 are encouraged to contact school board members at any time with questions, comments and concerns. Board members can be contacted by email through their individual email addresses listed above or as a group at [board@mcusd709.org](mailto:board@mcusd709.org).

## More information

More information about the Board of Education is available on our website – [www.morton709.org](http://www.morton709.org). Board meetings are streamed live on the Internet and posted on Comcast Channel 20 and iTV3 Channel 21. Click on the MPTV logo on our website for a broadcast schedule and to go to the online streaming feature.



Photo Credit: Jacque Austin

District 709 Board of Education: Front row, left to right; Jerry Rudd, Diane Krall, and Thomas Neeley. Back row, left to right; Jeff Schmidgall, Bart Rinkenberger, Tim Braker, and David Cross.

## Mission

The Mission of the Morton District 709 Board of Education is to be a provider of and an advocate for the education of all children.

## Goals

**Achievement:** In order to ensure all students have opportunities to achieve their potential, our academic programs will maintain the highest standards and expectations for learning.

**Communication:** Provide open and meaningful two-way communication with all members of our community.

**Climate:** Maintain a cohesive organizational system which facilitates and fosters a productive and trusting climate with a highly qualified staff.

**Facilities:** Provide facilities conducive to student learning and growth, based on evolving needs, with the support of the community.

**Finance:** Support student learning (which includes achievement, climate, facilities, and communication) in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

## Upcoming meetings

Board of Education meetings are at the Morton Education and Administration Center, 1050 S. Fourth Ave., unless otherwise noted. The School Board is scheduled to meet on the following dates:

### 2021

**Aug. 3** – 5:30 p.m., NTO Dinner; 7:30 p.m., regular meeting

**Aug. 17** – 5:30 p.m.

**Sept. 7** – 5:30 p.m.

**Sept. 21** – 5:30 p.m., Lettie Brown Elementary School (teachers meeting)

6:45 p.m., Morton Education and Administration Center (regular meeting)

**Oct. 5** – 5:30 p.m.

**Oct. 19** – 5:30 p.m., Ward Grundy Elementary

School (teachers meeting) 6:45 p.m., Morton Education and Administration Center (regular meeting)

**Nov. 2** – 5:30 p.m.

**Nov. 16** – 5:30 p.m., Jefferson Elementary School (teachers meeting)

6:45 p.m., Morton Education and Administration Center (regular meeting)

**Dec. 14** – 5:30 p.m.

### 2022

**Jan. 18** – 5:30 p.m.

**Jan. 25** – 5:30 p.m., Mor-

ton Academy (teachers meeting)

6:45 p.m., Morton Education and Administration Center (regular meeting)

**Feb. 8** – 5:30 p.m.,

**Feb. 22** – 5:30 p.m., Lincoln Elementary School (teachers meeting)

6:45 p.m., Morton Education and Administration Center (regular meeting)

**March 8** – 5:30 p.m.

**March 22** – 5:30 p.m., Morton Junior High

School (teachers meeting) 6:45 p.m., Morton Education and Administration Center (regular meeting)

**April 12** – 5:30 p.m.

**April 26** – 5:30 p.m., Morton High School (teachers meeting)

6:45 p.m., Morton Education and Administration Center (regular meeting)

**May 10** – 5:30 p.m.

**May 24** – 5:30 p.m.

**June 7** – 5:30 p.m.

**July 12** – 5:30 p.m.

# Morton School Board welcomes new members

Morton District 709 added two new School Board members to the horseshoe this past spring.

Diane Krall, 44, is a medical doctor affiliated with OSF in Tremont. She has three children attending Morton schools – at Grundy Elementary, Morton Junior High and Morton High School, respectively. Jerry Rudd, 54, spent 35 years with the Illinois Air National Guard, specializing in electronics and information technology. He is the father of five, with two children currently enrolled in Morton schools, one at MHS and one at Brown.

Krall's interest in board service grew out of her involvement in a moms' prayer group at Grundy. A native of Bradford with degrees from the University of Illinois, Krall said that being a mother has been the best preparation for the School Board. Her specific interests include the provision of high-

quality special education for those in need of it and career and technical training for those who may not be college bound.

She has a lot of empathy for students from challenging environments.

"I came from a very poor, rural background," Krall said of her upbringing as the oldest of four in a family headed by a single mom. That experience helps her relate to "the kid getting a free lunch," or the child who wonders "how I'm going to get shoes for the season." School became a safety net for her, a source of stability and confidence that did not always exist at home. While parents are the ultimate teachers of their children, it's a role that schools can and often do find themselves playing, said Krall.

Indeed, over the last year of COVID, Morton schools arguably "helped normalize" what could have been a scary situation for many students,



DIANE KRALL

Krall said.

On the whole, "Morton is very blessed," she said. Her experience thus far on the board, which has included familiarizing herself with the budget and facilities, has left her "very impressed," said Krall, who also noted the board's unity.

Her priorities moving forward include ensuring that the school district remain true to the community's values, particularly as it contends with directives from state government.

Likewise, Rudd indicated that he intends to draw upon his personal experience, specifically in the military and especially in the areas of teamwork and



JERRY RUDD

leadership.

Rudd grew up in Norwood and graduated from Limestone High School before joining the Guard. He currently is an employee of Intech Innovations. Rudd has been involved in his church and in youth sports, particularly baseball, which ties into his belief in pairing the mental and the spiritual with physical activity.

"I like what the School Board accomplished this past year" in committing to in-person instruction during the pandemic, and he wanted to be a part of that can-do culture, he said.

"I think our district is one of the best districts in the state. Our school district is the main reason I live in this area," he said. "My initial impressions of the board are positive. There are seven voices with seven opinions," but board members listen to one another and engage in "constructive conversation."

"Another strength is the communication from the district administration to the community," he said. If there is room for improvement, it is probably in the area of facilities, he said, adding that continuing "to keep up with technology" is a must.

"My main goal is to get back to normal, whatever normal may be, from the pandemic," said Rudd. "Other goals would be to standardize metrics to understand where our students compare" with others across the region, the state and nation, he said.

In another move, the School Board welcomed back David Cross, a local pediatrician who did not seek reelection this year after first coming to the board in 2017. He will complete the unexpired term of Shad Beaty, who recently resigned to pursue other opportunities out of state. The seat will be up for election again in 2023.

## MHS athlete, coach among "the best of the best"

Two Morton High School representatives did the community proud this past year, and for that they were recognized at the Central Illinois High School Sports Awards recently.

Lauren Doerr, who graduated in May, came away with Track and Field Athlete of the Year honors, and Marshall Tucker, a drivers ed instructor, assistant football coach and head track and field coach at MHS, received the Courage Award for his inspiring personal story of triumph over tragedy.

Doerr won state titles in the 100- and 200-meter sprints and took home a bronze medal for the long jump as she proved to be almost a one-woman team, leading the Lady Potters to a sixth place overall finish. She also made headlines



this past spring for finishing second in a heat of the 100 meters ... *in the boys' race*, in which she fell just a fraction of a second short of the all-time area girls' record before breaking the mark at the state meet.

She will continue her academic and

sports career at Butler University in Indianapolis, where she has earned a scholarship to play soccer.

Tucker was in Chicago for a Blackhawks hockey game with friends on Feb. 21, 2020, when

his life abruptly changed. He was hit by a vehicle while crossing the street, leaving him with critical injuries including broken bones from nearly head to toe.

The following year of rehabilitation and recovery made him realize that "every



MARSHALL TUCKER

day is a gift," which he shares with his students and athletes.

"Adversity is going to happen in life," he told the Journal Star, which sponsors the local awards ceremony in conjunction with USA Today. "It's how

you react to adversity (that) is the most important ... Don't let it define you. Use it as a motivational factor."

"I could not be prouder of these two," said Morton High Principal Deidre Ripka. "They represent the best of us. That they've been recognized for it is just awesome."



# Morton students can now register online



All returning students to Morton School District 709 can now register for the upcoming school year through the district's website, **[www.morton709.org](http://www.morton709.org)**.

Online registration will continue through **Tuesday, July 27**. Details can be found under the "Parent" tab at the top of the page on each school's website and on the district's main page. Click on "Registration" and follow the directions.

## In-person option

All families of new students and incoming kindergarteners must register in person at their individual schools between the hours of **7 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Thursday, July 29**. Returning students also have that option. The paperwork may be filled out in advance online by again going to the website, clicking on the "Parent" tab and selecting "Pre-Registration."

The individual schools, their addresses and phone numbers are as follows:

- **Lettie Brown Elementary School:**  
2550 N. Morton Ave., 309-266-5309
- **Ward Grundy Elementary School:**  
1100 S. Fourth Ave., 309-263-1421
- **Jefferson Elementary School:**  
220 E. Jefferson St., 309-263-2650
- **Lincoln Elementary School:**  
100 S. Nebraska Ave., 309-266-6989
- **Morton Junior High School:**  
225 E. Jackson St., 309-266-6522
- **Morton High School:**  
350 N. Illinois Ave., 309-266-7182

## Requirements for new students

All students who are new to Illinois must present physical, dental and eye exams, along with immunization records, no matter what grade they are entering. Those specific requirements can be found here: [Child School Requirements 2021-22.pdf](http://www.morton709.org/Child_School_Requirements_2021-22.pdf) (morton709.org). The doctor need not be located in Illinois.

In addition, this year's fee schedule is listed to the right.

## "The best of both worlds"

"We just really felt like it was time," Superintendent Jeff Hill said of the online registration. "It's now fairly common practice among school districts in Illinois, and most of our families are accustomed to performing so many of their basic tasks online, from banking to shopping.

"Families are busy, many parents work. Online registration can save them the trip to one of our buildings, and it will relieve some of the congestion and the waits at our schools. That said, if parents want to familiarize themselves with our facilities and some staff members, they will continue to have the in-person option. It's the best of both worlds."

## School Fees

for 2021-2022

### MORTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

#### EC-6 textbook

Rental and supply fee..... \$73

#### Technology

K-4 Technology fee..... \$15

5-6 Technology fee..... \$45

### MORTON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

#### Textbook rental & supply fee

All ..... \$115

#### Technology

All ..... \$45

#### General

Padlock lost..... \$6

I.D. card lost ..... \$6

Library fines per day..... 10c

#### Band

Instrument Maintenance Fee (yearly for District owned Inst.) ..... \$50

Percussion Use Fee (per semester) \$50

#### User supply fee

Co-curricular activities ..... \$65

### MORTON HIGH SCHOOL

#### Textbook rental & supply fee

All ..... \$180

#### Technology

All ..... \$45

#### General

I.D. replacement fee ..... \$6

Library fines per day..... 10c

Marching Band Fee\* ..... \$650

Instrument Maintenance Fee (yearly for District Owned Inst.) ..... \$50

Percussion Use Fee (per semester) \$50

#### User supply fee

Co-curricular activities ..... \$95

#### Athletic gate receipts

Adults ..... \$4

Students/Seniors..... \$2

Season ticket, adult..... \$30

Season ticket, student..... \$15

#### Parking

Student parking ..... \$75

#### Driver education

1st & 2nd semester ..... \$75

Summer school ..... \$75

### LUNCH PRICES FOR 2021-2022

Adults, staff and visitors..... \$3.30

Grades K-6..... \$2.70

Grades 7-8..... \$2.80

Grades 9-12..... \$2.90

Milk..... 50 cents

\*Marching Band students will also be assessed the User Supply Fee, Co-curricular Activities Fee of \$95.

# Summer = construction on Morton campuses

Morton students will return to schools in August that have seen significant upgrades over the summer, costing some \$1.6 million in total.

The biggest projects were at Morton High School, which is getting new science labs to serve its STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) programs, a renovation of the West Gym including new bleachers, and some roof work.

Jefferson and Lincoln schools also are getting roof improvements, and Morton Junior High is wrapping up its three-year, \$8 million renovation and expansion. The latter included new classrooms, gym, locker rooms, parking lot, green space and front entrance.

Morton High Principal Deidre Ripka is confident the investments at her building will produce a return, particularly on the science front, which hasn't seen significant modernization since the high school was constructed more than 65 years ago.

"We don't teach the way we did in 1954," she said. "It demands some change."

Previously, the instructional space had been separated from the lab space, but it will all be integrated now.

"It improves the flow of the classroom, the teacher's ability to connect with students on the technology," which can be complex, said Ripka. "It's just a more collaborative environment."

Morton has a proud tradition of promoting the sciences. It was one of the first school districts to adopt the Project Lead the Way program, which provides students with hands-on activities in the computer and biomedical sciences and engineering, motivates them to tackle real-world problems, and perhaps prompts some to reexamine their own career choices and potential.

The main gym also is getting a facelift – floors sanded and redesigned, new lighting and bleachers, etc.

"We're losing some seating, but it's more accessible to everybody, so it's a



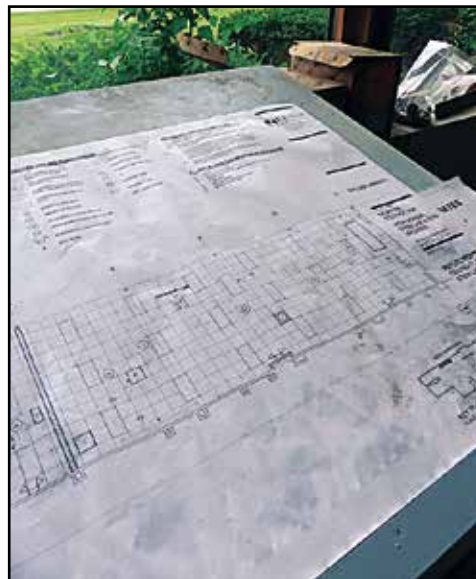
**ABOVE: Science lab work continues at MHS.**

**RIGHT: It all starts with a blueprint.**

fair trade," Ripka said.

Morton has always taken pride in its facilities, and has remained disciplined, year in and year out, in holding to a 15-year maintenance schedule.

"Ongoing capital improvements pay off in the long run, enhancing learning and making us more competitive for families seeking the right fit for their children," said Superintendent Jeff Hill. "These are good, needed investments that will benefit generations of Morton children."



**Pictured from left to right are award winners Caitlin Gschwend, Don Sturm and Gena Jones.**

## Recognizing those educators who just 'rock'

Morton teachers and staff stepped up big time to the added demands of the 2020-21 school year, but three really went above and beyond to distinguish themselves.

Each year, District 709 takes nominations and distributes awards in three categories — the **Dana Ashby Award** for outstanding work with special needs children, the **Potter's Hand Award** for exceptional service by a non-certified employee, and the **Master Potter Award** for excellence in education.

This year's winners were Morton Junior High teacher **Gena Jones** (Dana Ashby Award), Morton High special education aide **Caitlin Gschwend** (Potter's Hand), and District 709 instructional coach **Don Sturm**

(Master Potter).

The comments in their letters of recommendation spoke for themselves.

If Ms. Jones is "the most awesome teacher in the history of the universe," known for her encouragement to students to "never give up," Ms. Gschwend "builds relationships like no other" and is both "a sounding board" and "a shoulder to cry on." As for Mr. Sturm, he has few peers as a coach, mentor, master of technology and "catalyst for positive change." In short, he just "rocks."

The awards were presented at the post-school year banquet in May. Congratulations to all for answering the call in 2020-21.



# On fifth anniversary, celebrating a good match

Morton Academy has reached an important milestone: the fifth anniversary of its partnership with District 709.

Call it a match made in ... well, made in Morton.

"What Morton has to offer is a family environment for students. It's a safe environment. ... There's a lot of community support. Morton residents donate to Guardian Angel Home. They donate to the school," said Principal Amanda Rickenberg.



AMANDA  
RICKENBERG

"Here in Morton, our students have a lot of opportunities."

That kind of stability and support is critical for students who face significant social, emotional and sometimes academic challenges. Most of the students who attend Morton Academy reside at Guardian Angel Home next door to the Queenwood Avenue school. The home has a 140 year-plus history in central Illinois, starting in Metamora before moving to West Peoria and ultimately to Morton. The all-male residential facility is operated by the Center for Youth and Family Solutions and serves students who are in the care of the state in a richly therapeutic and structured environment. The latter



handles the shelter component, District 709 the educational aspect.

The home can serve boys ages 7 to 18, with the school's enrollment capped at 18 (it's currently 16). The students require a lot of individual attention, and so three teachers and two aides keep the student-to-staff ratio low. The most notable change in the last few years has been the declining age of students, said Rickenberg.

An acknowledgment of the partnership between the district and Guardian Angel is the fact that the latter's staff attend school with the children. They can then provide immediate support, if needed, so the school can fulfill its academic mission.

"One of the hardest things as an administrator is knowing that we only have our students a short time," typically 12 to 18 months, she said. Morton Academy has helped educate and improve the lives of 55 different students since 2016.

"Our goal is to provide intensive, school-based intervention to help students reenter our local schools when they're ready," said Rickenberg. "We provide the kids an opportunity to gain



The Cookery owner and head chef Amanda Pyle enjoys working with the students.

the skills needed to transition back home or to a less restrictive environment."

Morton Academy is arguably one of the best kept secrets in town, acknowledged Rickenberg, adding that "it's kind of a tricky balance" between recognizing the important work being done there and purposely keeping a low profile due to the sensitivity of the nature of both Guardian Angel Home and Morton Academy.

Still, the school has marched forward, working to increase programming, access to community resources and especially vocational opportunities for their students. Local employers such as The Cookery have long been involved with the school and its students, to the benefit of both.

"We've just really seen them grow over

the last couple of years," The Cookery owner and head chef Amanda Pyle said of the program that brings the entire Morton Academy student body to her kitchen once a month for some hands-on learning and fun.

The Cookery was already known for its kids' classes, so it was a natural pairing. One Academy student is now an employee.

"We honestly have grown quite attached to the boys," Pyle said. "It's instantly rewarding to see them happy. When they walk in, they're super-excited to get into the kitchen," where they get down to business in no time.

"It's important to have a school like this," Rickenberg said. "We know that students need different types of education ... We make this model work with a wide range of ages and development levels."

"I think it's a special place because not every district has a program like this. We're able to diversify what we're doing to the meet the students right where they are. Every school does this, but when you're talking about a school of 500 vs. a school of 16, our changes can be pretty immediate."

"I want to give them the most that we have," concluded Rickenberg. "We weren't there before. We won't be there after. But we want our students to look back and say, 'I had a great educational experience here in Morton.'"

## Student Support Services

Student Support Services covers any accommodated need students may have through Individual Education Plans (IEP), 504, ELL plan, and medical needs in all school buildings throughout the district.

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

### District Office Staff

**Director, Student Support Services:** Lindsay Franklin

**Assistant director, Morton Academy principal, Early Childhood:** Amanda Rickenberg

**Secondary coordinator, Student Support Services:** Denise Fountain

**RtI Coordinator:** Kristen D'Alfonso

**Administrative assistant, Student Support Services:** Marcia Wallace

**Administrative assistant, Morton Academy and ECE:** Julie Miller

### Related Services

**Speech and language therapists:**  
**ECE:** Brooke Behm

**Grundy, pre-school age:** Chelsie Chaney

**MJHS, MHS, parochial schools:** Chelsea Heitz

**Lettie Brown, Lincoln:** Rachel Meier

**Lincoln:** Sherry Robinson

**Jefferson, pre-school age:** Kelly Webb

### Social Workers

**Grundy:** Elizabeth Antonacci

**Jefferson:** Kelly Hobson

**MHS:** Peter Klinkner

**Lettie Brown:** Laura Steiner

**MJHS, Morton Academy:** Paul Thompson

**Lincoln:** Molly Winkler

### School Psychologists

**Lettie Brown, Jefferson:** Alyson Baker

**MJHS, MHS:** Madison Fisher

**Lincoln, ECE:** Melissa Kerber-Long

**MHS, Morton Academy:** Katharine Zwolinski

### Occupational Therapist

**TMCSEA:** Mary Zumwalt

### Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants (COTA)

**Lincoln, MJHS, Morton Academy:** Amanda Bunting

**Lettie Brown, Jefferson, MHS:** Keri Gillette

**ECE, Grundy:** Molly Suellentrop

### Physical Therapist

**TMCSEA:** Erica Gleason

### Physical Therapist Assistant

**TMCSEA:** Stefanie Sraw

### English Language Learner Teachers

**Elementary, coordinator of ESL services:** Dayrim Sheehan

**MJHS, MHS:** Mary Beth Stewart

### Nursing Care

**Lincoln:** Jen Cook

**MHS:** Kelly James

**Jefferson:** Abby Novak

**MJHS:** Maria Miranda

**Grundy:** Lindsay Phillips

**Lettie Brown:** Monica Pitzer



## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

# For the Baum brothers, CORE values were learned in Morton

“The best thing I can say is, ‘I graduated,’” joked Wayne Baum, who one might say took his 1956 diploma from Morton High School and made something of it.

“The best thing I can say is, ‘Don’t ask me about my grades,’” deadpanned Kenny Baum, who likewise took his 1963 certificate of graduation from Morton High School and used it as a launching pad.

Fast forward some six decades and these two may not exactly have made a career as comedians, but they certainly have proven themselves darn savvy businessmen.

Their CORE Construction company and its various enterprises now brag 28 offices in 10 states with

approximately 1,200 employees, nearly 400 of them here in the Peoria area. CORE is the fourth largest builder of schools in the nation, the second largest for municipal structures, and occupies a top 100 spot in terms of annual revenues. In central Illinois,

CORE has a major presence in offices on Peoria’s Downtown riverfront and on Morton’s North Main Street.

The seeds of their future success were sown in Morton – around their parents’ supper table on the family farm, where the chores were mandatory and where their father held court with Bible in hand, read in his broken English/German, and in the classrooms that fed them a steady diet of reading, writing, arithmetic and discipline.

Their father, Otto, had immigrated to the United States from Germany at the age of 21. He and wife Mary would have seven children – Melvin, Glen, Eileen, Wayne, Robert (“Ducky”), Kenneth and Barb – and all would work first on the family’s 80-acre farm just southeast of the village, then in their parents’ fledgling masonry business.

The family was self-sufficient, raising and growing all of their food with all of the physical labor that required. Even at play, the siblings would gather in the barnyard to toss a ball around, as the other kids just lived too far away.

The cows had to be milked, the chickens and pigs fed, and the fields harvested, all of which left precious



Kenny and Wayne Baum stand in front of the Peoria office of CORE Construction.

spare time for anything else – with the exception of school, of course. Wayne attended a one-room country schoolhouse, Maple Grove, across the road from what is now the Field Shopping Center. The only trips to what seemed like the metropolis next door – then still under 4,000 residents – were to go to church on Sundays and to take corn to the local mill.

The community was changing and growing rapidly then with the consolidation and construction of new schools to accommodate the rising population. First it would be off to an “intimidating” Jefferson Elementary for the younger Baum children, where a single class might have 20 students in it, more than the entirety of their previous school. Wayne attended the original Morton High School, then standing where Morton Junior High now does, before finishing up his last two

years at what was then the “new high school,” in the building you see today.

Given the demands of the farm, they took advantage of what activities they could, indulging their passion for baseball, slipping on a football jersey, strapping on the spikes for track. Wayne learned to play the trumpet.

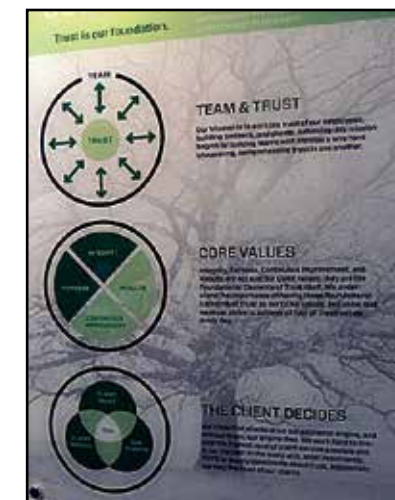
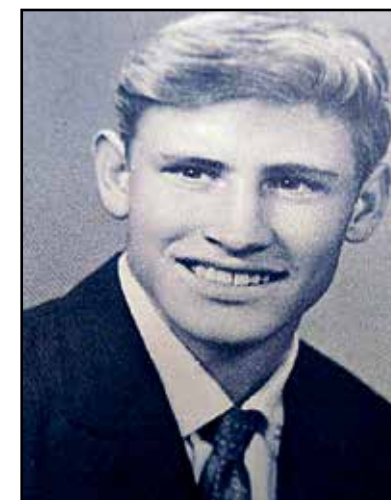
But then it was still home for farm work and to lay bricks in the evening.

There were influential teachers, certainly – the brothers remember junior high English teacher Betty White and baseball coach Terry Whitsitt – and there was always a healthy respect for the imposing figure of principal and coach Ward Grundy.

“To me, school was a place I met people that became lifelong friends,” said Wayne. “I learned that most of what it takes to be successful is hard work.”



Clockwise from ABOVE: The Baum brothers pose in front of a mural of the Morton family farm. A sign showing CORE Construction’s core values. Kenny Baum, MHS Class of ‘63. Wayne Baum, Morton High Class of ‘56. MHS football team featuring Wayne Baum, #86, front row.



“We were blessed by being brought up in the Morton school system,” added Kenny, who preferred the hands-on experiences that were nurtured between the family business and school.

Ultimately, however, they never had to leave home to absorb the most enduring lessons.

“The work ethic they had was incredible,” Wayne recalled of his parents. “In his old German accent, Dad would say, ‘I don’t care what you kids do, but each one of you is going to learn a trade. It’s something you can

always fall back upon.”

And fall back upon it, they certainly did.

Once the decision was made to leave farming for construction once and for all, the Otto Baum Company grew rapidly, going from six to eight workers to 100 in the span of 10 years. What started with masonry evolved into cement and excavation and then general contracting. In the early days, it was their father handling the manual labor and their mom doing the calculations at the dining room table.

“Dad came over from Germany really with nothing ... as a seedling, and this thing has just grown,” said Kenny, past president of Otto Baum Company, Inc.

“Personally, it’s hard to look back and see how it all happened, all the in-betweens. There were a lot of hills and valleys,” said Wayne, who serves as CORE’s chairman of the board.

The one thing that never changed was the family’s and the business’s commitment to the values reflected in the name of the company itself, those core virtues of honesty, integrity, fairness, humility, continual improvement and results, which in the end add up to the most important element of all: trust.

They understood from the get-go that before you can build a business, you have to build a culture first. Those values were a priority in the home, and they were reinforced in the classroom.

“We give a lot of credit to something you can’t put on a financial statement. That’s our people. That’s the strength of our organization,” said Wayne. “And that’s because of the way Dad treated people,” said Kenny.

Those employees have included four generations of the Baum family itself.

Ultimately, “we appreciate every single thing that we have today because of that background,” said Wayne.

“Three words: We are blessed.”



# Need a welder? Make Morton schools your first stop

In part because of an emphasis on workforce training in District 709, in part because the community is “just a hotbed of good, quality trade jobs,” vocational education enrollments have nearly quadrupled in Morton schools over the last couple of years.

Indeed, if some 70 students were in that course track when Morton High Industrial Technology teacher Chad McFarland arrived two years ago, this coming fall that number will push 250, he said.

“The community has spoken,” said McFarland. “I’ve got employers coming to me directly to employ kids. It’s exciting, but we can’t fill all those jobs. I just don’t have enough kids.”

That may be changing, as some programs, such as welding and automotive technology, among others, have grown in popularity.

That’s because of the presence of local businesses such as Parker Fabrication and Morton Industries, but whether it’s Caterpillar or Taco Bell, there is a huge demand for workers by employers who are willing to offer better incentives to get them. Within a 30-mile radius of Morton, for example, there is a significant need for welders, said McFarland.

Attitudes, from educators, parents and their teens, also have changed over the years. Morton schools may be recognized for the number of students they send on to college and the curriculum that helps them excel there, but the recognition is rising that a good living can be had in the skilled trades, and there are entrepreneurial opportunities, as well.

If once upon a time, so-called “shop programs” with their expensive equipment requirements were among the first to go in many school districts when budgets had to be cut, now there is a renewed sense that those programs are very much worth the investment. A healthy economy needs builders and fixers.

“I think we need to meet every kid where they’re at,” said MHS Principal Deidre Ripka. “There’s also workforce



**ABOVE: Chad McFarland teaches MHS welders**

demand. Not every job requires a four-year degree.”

Career and technical education and apprenticeship and internship programs also are a priority for Assistant Superintendent Craig Smock, who will take the leadership reins of the district starting in the 2022-23 school year.

With soaring tuition costs and student debt weighing heavily on young people, many families are “seeking other avenues,” he said, and it’s the district’s responsibility to “make sure we’ve really pulled out all the stops in terms of opportunities for kids.”

As with athletics, vocational education is a motivator for many students, keeping them engaged in their studies and providing a sense of purpose, said McFarland. Young people learn in all kinds of ways, and some just need more of a hands-on experience, he said.

The challenges, he said, are to keep the curriculum up to date and relevant in a fast-changing, increasingly technological world. Meanwhile, it can be difficult to find and hire qualified staff, he said. Last year, there were 28 vocational ed classroom openings in Illinois. Only eight could be filled, said McFarland.



Morton remains undaunted. Dual credit programs continue to be pursued with the likes of Illinois Central College. There are Mid-Illini Conference competitions. McFarland wants to host a “signing night” for his students, a twist on those public events where athletes announce their college intentions. He would have his charges “sign” with an employer.

The fact is that many students aren’t sure what they want to do, and unlike previous generations, they will change careers far more often.

“Just getting the kids to commit to something, that’s the big thing,” said McFarland.

“I know at Morton, I’ve got a lot of support,” he said. The rising enrollments are evidence that “we’re doing something right.”





# MORTON HIGH SCHOOL

350 N. Illinois Ave. | Phone: 266-7182

Facebook: Morton High School:  
@MortonHighSchoolPotters

Facebook: Morton Athletics:  
@PotterPride

Twitter: Morton Athletics:  
@Potter\_Pride709

Facebook: Morton School Counseling Office:  
@MortonHighSchoolCounseling

Twitter: Morton High School Counseling/Student  
Services: @MHSStudentServe

## Our vision

Morton High School students are independent, critical thinkers of strong character who are prepared to succeed in society through rigorous curriculum and extracurricular opportunities.

## Our mission

The mission of Morton High School is to prepare all students for life as productive citizens. This necessitates that the MHS community be dedicated to maintaining high standards, offering relevant courses, providing a rigorous and responsive curriculum, being technologically progressive, providing opportunities for extracurricular activities, and meeting the needs of students.

## School Day

8 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Main office: 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

## Daily Schedule

1st hour - 8 to 8:46 a.m.  
2nd hour - 8:51 to 9:37 a.m.  
3rd hour - 9:42 to 10:28 a.m.  
4th hour - 10:33 to 11:19 a.m.  
5th hour\* - 11:24 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.  
6th hour - 12:50 to 1:36 p.m.  
7th hour - 1:41 to 2:27 p.m.  
Potter Hour\*\* - 2:32 to 3 p.m.  
Teacher Assistance - 3 to 3:40 p.m.

\*Juniors and seniors have open campus for lunch.

\*\*Potter Hour is a time for students and teachers to connect, build trust and rapport, create community within our school, provide academic and social/emotional interventions, and improve culture.

**Counseling office:** 263-8585. Counselors will be in the office

## Mark your calendar

**July 29** – Registration, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Aug. 5** – Freshmen/new student orientation and iPad distribution

**Aug 6** – iPad distribution for sophomores through seniors, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**Aug. 12** – First day of school, 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

**Aug. 20** – Cherry and Gray Night, 5:30 p.m.

**Aug. 26** – Meet the Teacher Night, 6:30 p.m.

**Aug. 26** – Potter Post-Secondary Planning Sessions, 8:15 to 9 p.m.

starting July 28. Please schedule in advance.

**Textbooks:** Textbooks will be distributed during the first week of school.

**iPad Checkout:** Incoming freshmen and students new to the district will receive their iPads during orientation on Aug. 5. Sophomores through seniors will receive their iPads on Aug. 6.

## Policies

**Absence:** Call 263-0611. All absences should be called into the attendance secretary, Courtney Hess. Notes from parents will not be accepted. If students leave MHS during the school day for any reason, they must sign out in Student Services. They must also sign in any time after 8:05 a.m.

**Parking, drop-off, pick-up:** Students that do not drive can be dropped off at the canopy doors off Jackson Street in the student parking lot or the Main Office doors on Illinois Avenue.

**Parking passes:** Parking spaces are assigned and passes are available at registration or during iPad distribution. Stu-

▶ Opportunity for 10th through 12th grade families to learn more about post-secondary options and planning toward admissions to these institutions.

▶ Session topics include Financial Aid FAFSA filing, 2-year college pathway, 4-year college pathway, military planning, and trade school preparation.

▶ Registration to attend and select a session will begin Aug. 1 via email. Contact Counseling with questions.

**Oct. 1** – Homecoming Game vs. Metamora

**Oct. 2** – Homecoming Dance, 7:30 to 10:30 p.m., East Gym

dents apply for a parking pass in the spring and pay by July 28. New students may apply at registration or through the Student Services office starting July 27.

**Lunch:** There are three lunch periods at MHS that take place during 5th hour. Some courtyard seating is available. Juniors and seniors may leave campus for lunch but must scan their student ID at the canopy doors as they leave and return.

## Athletic Passes

Athletic passes are available for purchase with Ms. Frey in the Athletic Office or at the Fall/Winter Cherry & Gray nights. Admission prices are adults \$5, students \$3, senior citizens free. Season tickets are \$35 per adult and \$20 per student. For more information, please contact Ms. Frey at 266-7182.

## Registration information

If you have questions, please call the MHS office at 266-7182. Fee waiver/free and reduced lunch applications are available upon request.

## Meet the 2021-2022 Staff

**Principal** – Deidre Ripka

**Assistant principal/Athletic director** – Scott Jones

**Associate principal/Activities director** – Jamie Adolphson

**Assistant principals** – Matt Oyer and Josh Prichard

**Principal's secretary** – Katie Bolkema

**Athletic secretary** – Samantha Frey

**Attendance secretary** – Courtney Hess

**Student Services secretary** – Nicole Friend

**Receptionist** – Cathay Parungao

**Counseling** – Chase Bushman, Travis Grant, Christina Kienitz, Taylor King

**Counseling secretary/registrar** – Sara Hornsby

**Social worker** – Peter Klinkner

**Speech therapist** – Chelsea Heitz

**Psychologist** – Katharine Zwolinski

**Resource officer** – Mark Ehlke

**Instructional coach** – Court-



DEIDRE RIPKA

Plevka, Courtney Sheets, Sydney Young

**Mathematics** – Tim Bradford, Kelly Ciocca, Rose Durand, Sarah Knapp, Kristin Lucas, Joi Monferdini, Josh Smith, Joel Zehr, Joe Zeller

**Science** – Kate Fritts, Ben Ginzel, Mary Holmgren, Clark Ingwersen, Shannon McClure, Jacob Rutan, Emily Wegner, Nathan Young

**Social Studies** – Ashley Beyer, Tory Delong, Brian Deters, Matt Franks, Robert Hornsby, Jaclyn Hoskins

**Modern Language** – Kim Johnson, Mackenzie Love, Jay Mahannah, Rafael Rodriguez, Vonda Zehr, Ben Zoss

**Business** – Eric Myers, Dakota Neisen, Corban Williams

**Library media specialist** –

ney Eddleman  
**Language Arts** – Carol Bally, Tony Feleccia, Jodi Gordon, Krista Kolls, Ryan Lindley, Lauralee Moss, Helen

Stacy Osborne

**Technology Education and Engineering** – Tiffany Beard, Christopher Garner, Chad McFarland

**Family and Consumer Science** – Karen Gardner, Amy Kelly, Kait Lienhop

**Art** – Amy Woods

**Band** – Tim Gray, Craig Hatter  
**Orchestra** – Dave Getz, Pete Martin

**Vocal Music** – Heather Berger

**Physical Education/Health** – Tim Brille, Justin Dehm, Darren Hurst, Jessica Kerby, Josh Prichard

**Driver's Education** – Edward Henderson, Marshall Tucker

**Special Education** – Dawn Block, Denise Fountain, Jamie King, Alison Eckart, Kara Powers, Cody Pullium, Christopher Roberts, Michelle Towner, Lisa Schock, Jennifer Wheat

**MPTV** – Brooke Janes

**Technology specialist** – Becky Christianson

**Custodians** – Bobby Barker, Mary Blair, Rodney Duneheew, Daniel Epkins, Brandon Jacob, Deb Lane, Millicent Sanders

## Parent Organization

PTO sponsors Teacher Appreciation Week, provides breakfast to students taking college and career testing, and provides funds to teachers for additional classroom items. PTO has one fundraiser, Potter Card sales. Morton Potter Cards offer discounts at local businesses and are sold for \$10 each at the MHS office. PTO usually meets on the second Tuesday of the month at 1 p.m. at the high school.

**Morton High School PTO officers are (pictured from left to right):** Vice President Amy Retherford, President Melinda Radloff, Secretary Dana Weber, Treasurer Becky Davis.







# MORTON JUNIOR HIGH

225 E. Jackson St. | Phone: 266-6522

## School day

8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

### MJHS Daily Schedule

1st Period: 8-8:49 a.m.  
2nd Period: 8:53-9:37 a.m.  
3rd Period: 9:41-10:25 a.m.  
4th Period: 10:29-11:13 a.m.  
5th Period: 11:17 a.m.-12:01 p.m.  
6th Period: 12:05-1:23 p.m.  
7th Period: 1:27-2:11 p.m.  
8th Period: 2:15-3 p.m.  
*Lunches will last 30 minutes during 4th, 5th and 6th periods.*

## Info & Policies

**Absence reporting:** Call 284-5000 and use the automated system, available 24 hours a day.

**Morning arrival:** Students may arrive starting at 7:15 a.m. All students are to enter the main entrance and sit in the bleachers in the practice gym until 7:50 a.m. Parents should drop off students in the lanes at the main entrance.

**Orientation:** Orientation for new students and incoming seventh-grade students will be from 2:30 to 3:45 p.m., Aug. 10. Students can stay until 4 p.m. to practice their locker combinations.

**Lunch:** Students can purchase a lunch for \$2.80 and/or buy a la carte items. Money can be added to your child's lunch account through E-Funds. Your child's charging habits can be tracked on My Lunch Account. Both of these websites can be accessed under the Parent tab on the school website ([www.morton709.org](http://www.morton709.org)).

**Cell phones:** Students are allowed to bring cell phones

to school but must leave them turned off and in their locker during the day.

**Identification:** MJHS students are issued ID cards, which are needed to check out books and use the computer in the Library and Media Center (LMC) and at lunch.

**Team concept:** MJHS has a team-teaching concept. Seventh grade students are divided into Green and White teams. Eighth grade students are divided into Red and Gray teams. A group of teachers is assigned to each team and the curriculum is the same. Teachers meet to plan and discuss upcoming tests, interdisciplinary units, and the progress of all students.

**Dress code:** In short, students are to be covered from shoulder to mid-thigh. More details can be found in the student handbook.

## Traditions

MJHS hosts Grandparents' Day each spring. More than 350 grandparents attended in 2019.

## Supply List

Pens (blue/black and red), pencils and pouch, colored pencils, highlighters, loose-leaf paper, protractor, box of tissues, 5 pocket folders, 3 spiral notebooks, index cards (3x5), 3-ring zippered binder, earbuds for iPad, TI-NSpire CX graphing calculator for 8th grade students, Morton Public Library Card (not required but available at no cost)

Physical Education: uniform t-shirt (\$10), shorts, and athletic shoes



## Red and White PTO

Activities the PTO coordinates or assists with are:

- ▶ **Help-a-thon fundraiser** – Students complete a service project in the community.
- ▶ **Teacher Appreciation** – Food is provided for staff on the first Monday of the month.
- ▶ **Potter Pride Night and Spaghetti Supper** – Music groups perform, as well as all four basketball teams and the spirit squad (cheer and dance).

If you are interested in helping out, please sign up at registration or contact the office. Monthly meetings are typically held on the third Thursday evening of the month.

MJHS PTO officers: Angel Fisher, president; Allison Vershaw, vice president; Tracy Heer, secretary; Julie Fauber, treasurer; Amy Ahlers, activities chair.

## Athletics

**Athletic passes:** Passes are valid for all home, indoor events, including boys and girls basketball, volleyball and wrestling, regular season only. Passes are \$8 for students, \$10 for adults and \$30 for a family, available at the main office. Admission fees to MJHS athletic events are \$1 for students, \$2 for adults, free for seniors 60 and older.

**Sports participation:** Visit Morton Junior High's athletic website, [il.8to18.com/mortonjhs](http://il.8to18.com/mortonjhs), to complete the online registration process. A sports physical is required. For questions regarding athletics, contact Mr. Carter at 284-5060 or at [chris.carter@mcusd709.org](mailto:chris.carter@mcusd709.org).

## Mark your calendar

**July 26** – MJHS office opens

**July 29** – Registration, 7 a.m. - 5 p.m.

**Aug. 10** – 7th-grade and new student orientation, 2:30 to 3:45 p.m.

**Aug. 12** – First day of school, 8 to 11 a.m.

**Aug. 12** – Meet the Teacher Night, 6 to 8 p.m.

## Facebook &

**Twitter:** Follow what is going on at MJHS at — [www.twitter.com/MJHSJrPtrs](http://www.twitter.com/MJHSJrPtrs) and at [www.facebook.com/MortonJuniorHighSchool](http://www.facebook.com/MortonJuniorHighSchool)

## Meet the MJHS 2021-22 Staff:

**Principal** – Lee Hoffman  
**Assistant principal/ Athletic director** – Chris Carter

**Counselors** – Beth Spaniol, Danielle VanMeenen

**Secretaries** – Holli Pfeifer, Valerie Smith, Erika Happach

**English/Language Arts** – Rachel Shore, Cady Nosbisch, Megan Hasler, Sarah Gorshe, Moriah Millburg, Laura Wurtz

**Math** – Kirk Schick, Ashley Geil, Katie Burkman, Brandon Heider

**Physical Education** – Caryn Goss, Dan Gashaw, Jesse Crawford



LEE HOFFMAN

**Science** – Brandon Parrott, Jordan Williams, Melissa Tortorella, Kelsey Ewing

**Social Studies** – Don Swearingen, Adam Sheley, Alex Bishop, Jennifer Rabe

**Project Lead the Way** – Kathryn Vollhaber

**CareerMaker** – Josh Ames

**Foreign Language** – Mindy Hartzler

**Music** – Tim Beutel, Pete Martin, Katrina Fitzpatrick

**Art** – Brittany DuPont

**Resource/Collaboration** – Gena Jones, Leslie Gray, Patti Massaglia, Greg McAndrew, Jaclyn Herr, Dylan Stork

**Speech therapist** – Chelsea Heitz

**Health** – Toni Trilikis

**Library** – Jacqueline Akers

**Social work** – Paul Thompson

**Psychologist** – Madison Fisher

**Interventionist** – Katie Miller

**Instructional coach** – Melissa Kruse

**Study hall** – Clara Jo Odgen, Daniel Williams, Andy Zuck

**Custodians** – Steve Culbertson, Val Hoehn, Mary Blair, Dana Garcia

**Crossing guard** – Michael Rusch

**Aides** – Kim Serrurier, Ashley Turner, Tami Schaff, Wendy Wright, Martha Schwend, Rick Giovanetto, Phil Harris, Jeff Arbisi, Richard Cox



# LETTIE BROWN ELEMENTARY

2550 N. Morton Ave. | Phone: 266-5309 | Fax: 284-1015

## School day

### Grades K-6

8:10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

### Policies

#### Absence reporting:

284-1000. The absence line is open 24 hours a day. Please call prior to 9 a.m. on the day of the absence.

**School supplies:** Lists of needed supplies are available at local retailers and on the district website, [www.morton709.org](http://www.morton709.org). Click on the Lettie Brown Virtual Backpack for information about supply lists and other information about the school.

**Parking/Drop-off Information:** In the morning, parents should drop off

students in the north parking lot, entering by the pool. There also is a drop-off area near the building.

After school, parents are asked to park in the north parking lot and come to the front doors to meet their children at 2:30 p.m. Please do not park in front of the school on Morton Avenue, as it blocks the view of motorists who are exiting the parking lot. This is a Village of Morton "no parking" area during the school day. If your child will be riding the bus home with another student or walking home with another student, the school must have a note from both families.



Lettie Brown students participate in Put Me in the Zoo day.

## Lunch Schedule:

**Kindergarten** - 10:50 to 11:35 a.m.

**5th and 6th grades** - 11:15 a.m. to noon

**3rd and 4th grades** - 11:37 a.m. to 12:22 p.m.

**1st and 2nd grades** - Noon to 12:45 p.m.

## PTO



**Parent-Teacher Organization Officers:** (Left to right); Lee Speichinger, Treasurer; Holly Bones, President; Amy Kominkiewicz, Vice President; Ciara Day, Secretary.

## Mark your calendar

**July 29** – Registration, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Aug. 9** – PowerSchool open to K-6 Parents after 4 p.m.

**Aug. 12** – First day for students, 8:10 to 11:45 a.m.

**Aug. 16** – Meet the Teacher, 6 to 7:30 p.m.

**Aug. 30** – PTO meeting, 7 p.m.

## Traditions:

Prior to starting the school day, Lettie Brown students and staff have announcements in the multipurpose room at 8:05 a.m. Lettie Brown has a student council for fourth, fifth and sixth grades, and we enjoy our monthly spirit days. On Fridays, students and staff show their school spirit by wearing Lettie Brown (blue and orange) spirit wear. Lettie Brown has a strong tradition of a supportive PTO. We encourage all parents to become active in our school and to be involved in the PTO.

## Community Service:

Lettie Brown staff and students participate in community service projects throughout the year. Our service projects have included making cards for Apostolic Christian Restmor, hosting a Red Cross Blood Drive, collecting toys for Toys for Tots, and raising funds for Children's Hospital of Illinois.

## Meet the 2021-2022 staff

**Principal** – Faith Waterfield

**Secretary** – Abbey Carpenter

**Kindergarten** – Kelley Bradford, Jenny Bushman

**First grade** – Brenna Stork, Kate Wettstein

**Second grade** – Kristy Boecker, Sara Thomas

**Third grade** – Kim Knox, Kelsey Kirk

**Fourth grade** – Taylor George, Laura Zehr

**Fifth grade** – Katy Gingerich, Michael Finck

**Sixth grade** – Lexy Ginzel,



FAITH WATERFIELD

Shane Weyland

**Resource** –

Tabytha Buskirk, Ashley King, Edie Russell

**Instructional Coach** – Stephanie Bishop

**P.E.** – Chelsea Tennell, Clint Baldwin

**Music** – Melissa Risner

**Technology Aide** – Sondra Dole

**Library Aide** – Laura Hoots

**RtI Aides** – Heidi Robbins, Heidi Hartter, Teri Pheasant

**Instructional Aides** – Tracey Vickerman, Brandi Edwards, Jenny Johnson, Julie Schmidgall,

Lisa Tillison, Tammy LaMirand, Michelle Mullen, Cori Wong

**Challenge teachers** – Shane Weyland, Laura Zehr

**Social Work** – Laura Steiner

**Psychologist** – Alyson Baker

**Speech** – Rachel Meier

**Clerical Aides** – Sue Schrock, Carol Main, Liz Cigelnik

**CMA** – Monica Pitzer

**COTA** – Keri Gillette

**Custodians** – Allen Fort, Dominique Mackey

**Food Service** – Heather Brooks, Linda Fanning, Olivia Carr



# WARD GRUNDY ELEMENTARY

1100 S. Fourth Ave. | Phone: 263-1421 | Fax: 284-2015



## School day

### ECE

A.M. 8:20 to 10:55 a.m.  
P.M. 12:05 to 2:40 p.m.

### Grades K-6

8:20 a.m. to 2:40 p.m.

## Policies

**Absence reporting:** The absence line (309-284-2000) is open 24 hours a day. Please call prior to 9 a.m. on the day of the absence.

**The school supply list** is posted on the Grundy website: <https://grundy.morton709.org/virtual-backpack>

**Morning drop-off:** Please use the driveway on the west side of the building. Students must exit from the passenger side of the vehicle. Please remain in your vehicle to keep the line moving. If you need to walk your child inside, please park in the District Office parking lot.

**Afternoon pick-up:** Please park in the right lane of the driveway on the west side of the building or in the District Office parking lot. If you park in the driveway, please remain in your vehicle to keep the line moving.

## Meet the 2021-2022 staff:

**Principal** – Michael Saunders

**Secretary** – Kathy Shaw

**Clerical aides** – Jennifer Sadler, Marjorie Henderson, TBD

**Kindergarten** – Olivia Gabbert, Janine Weyland

**First grade** – Emily Anderson, Baylie Craig

**Second grade** – Jeanette Grant, Ashlie Reinert

**Third grade** – Jessica Gunn, Jami Kaisershot

**Fourth grade** – Jacob Stone, Jon Wheat

**Fifth grade** – Holly Manthey, Julie Matlock



MICHAEL SAUNDERS

**Sixth grade** – Becky Bazzetta, Kelley Friedrich

**Building technologist** – Beth Shook

**Challenge teachers** – Holly Manthey, Mindy Wendling

**Crossing guard** – Craig Carroll

**Custodians** – Pam Addams, Dwight Schuck

**Daily substitute** – Tara Meester

**ECE teachers** – Ryan Gillhouse, Cassidy Johnson

**ECE aides** – Rachel Herrmann, Lorrie Kaiser

**Food service** – Theresa Hermacinski, Jan Huette, Sue Bailey

**Grade level aides** – Ashley Feilner, Leslie Householter, Leanne Sommer, TBD

**Librarian** – Angel Fisher

**Literacy coach** – Mindy Wendling

**Music teacher** – Tim Beutel

**Nurse** – Lindsay Phillips

**Occupational therapy assistant** – Molly Sullentrop

**Physical education teachers** – Clint Baldwin, Jayne Eisenmann

**Psychologist** – Madison Fisher

**Resource teachers** – Tammy Block, Holly Toraason, Sarah Williams

**Resource aides** – Olgajean Atteberry, Jeanie Dennis, Jessica Moeller, Michelle Paulson, Pam Riddle, Danielle Tolly, Jen Wilson

**RTI aides** – Amanda Derrick, Lisa Kaufman, Anita Stidman

**Social worker** – Elizabeth Antonacci

**Speech and language pathologists** – Brooke Behm, Kelly Webb

## Athletics/ Extracurricular activities:

- ▶ Fifth- and sixth-grade choir
- ▶ Sixth-grade band
- ▶ Sixth-grade orchestra
- ▶ Board Games Club
- ▶ Book Club
- ▶ Cheerleading Club
- ▶ Chess Club
- ▶ Dance Club
- ▶ Running Club
- ▶ Sports Club
- ▶ Theatre/Drama Club

## Daily schedule:

7:45 a.m. — Office opens  
8:10 a.m. — First bell (students go to class)  
8:20 a.m. — Second bell (classes begin)  
10:45-11:30 a.m. — Kindergarten lunch/recess  
11:15 a.m.-12 noon — First, second grade lunch/recess  
11:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m. — Third, fourth grade lunch/recess  
12:15 -1 p.m. — Fifth, sixth grade lunch/recess  
2:40 p.m. — Dismissal  
3:45 p.m. — Office closes

## Registration information:

In-person registration is on July 29 from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

## PTO Officers

**Parent-Teacher Organization Officers:**  
President Denise Martin; Vice President Besa Basha;  
Secretary Toni Martiens; Co-Treasurer Tara Meester;  
Co-Treasurer Elise Pate

## Mark your calendar

**July 29** – Registration, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Aug. 5** – Kindergarten Round-up

**Aug. 9** – Powerschool opens to K-6 parents

**Aug. 11** – Unpack Your Backpack (K-1), 6 p.m.

**Aug. 12** – First day of school, 8:20 a.m. to 11:55 a.m.

**Aug. 19** – Meet the Teacher, 6:30 to 8 p.m.

**Aug. 23** – PTO meeting, 6:30 p.m., Grundy library

## Traditions:

▶ **Educational excellence:** Grundy is ranked among the top 10 percent of all schools in the state of Illinois. Grundy has earned the Academic Excellence Award from the Illinois State Board of Education and the School Search Bright A+ Award. Grundy is also among the few public elementary schools in Illinois to have received a distinguished Greatschools.org rating of 10 out of 10. In 2021, 9 percent of our sixth-graders earned the President's Award for Educational Excellence and 44 percent of our third- through sixth-graders earned the Principal's Honor Roll Award.

▶ **Community service:** Grundy staff members and students participate in several community service projects including a Thanksgiving Food Drive, a Christmas Clothing Drive, Gameball Run and various other fundraisers for charitable organizations throughout the year.

▶ **Patriotism:** We teach students to understand the importance of patriotism through the study of American history including important people, places, events, holidays, documents, music and literature. We hold a Patriot Day ceremony and a Veterans Day ceremony to honor those who have served our country.



# JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY

220 E. Jefferson St. | Phone: 263-2650 | Fax: 284-3031

## School day

8:20 a.m. to 2:40 p.m.

## Policies

**Absence reporting:** 284-3025.

The absence line is open 24 hours a day. Please call prior to 8:30 a.m. on the day of the absence.

**Supply Lists:** Lists are available at local retailers and on the district website, [www.morton709.org](http://www.morton709.org). To access the lists online, click on Schools, Jefferson, Virtual Backpack.

## Parking/Drop-off & Dismissal:

Jefferson School is located in downtown Morton. We ask you to adhere to these guidelines to ensure the safety of all children. Morning drop-off is behind the school, past the sign, on Adams Street. Students should exit on the sidewalk/passenger side of the vehicle. Please use Clifton and turn left onto Adams to avoid the bus traffic lane. Students enter the building by the cafeteria door. Dismissal for K-1 students is by the primary wing doors on Third Street, while second- through sixth-grade students exit the front of the building on Jefferson Street. Parents may park in the lot across from school to wait for their students. Students must cross Jefferson Street with the crossing guard.

## PTO Officers



**Jefferson School PTO officers 2021-2022:** (left to right): Katherine Bauman, president; Sarah Fore, vice president; Ashley Stephens, treasurer; Lauren Johnson, secretary.



6th-grade Jefferson students making cookies.

## Mark your calendar

**Thursday, July 29** — Registration

**Thursday, Aug. 5** — Kindergarten round-up

**Monday, Aug. 9** — Class assignments available in Power-School

**Wednesday, Aug. 11** — Kindergarten Unpack the Backpack

Night - 4 to 5 p.m.

**Thursday, Aug. 12** — First half day of school 8:20 to 11:55 a.m.

**Tuesday, Aug. 17** — Meet the Teacher - 6 to 7:30 p.m.

## Meet the 2021-2022 staff

**Principal** – Kate Wyman

**Secretary** – Grace Nessler

**Kindergarten** – Allison Bohnhoff, Emily Cline

**First grade** – Ashley Parker, Melissa Ralson

**Second grade** – Heather Hochstettler, Teresa Oaks

**Third grade** – Ashley Sarver, Esther Hofstetter

**Fourth grade** – Steve Brenkman, Lindsey Pierz

**Fifth grade** – Laura Carr, Kira Schoen

**Sixth grade** – Summer Geist, Faith Kruzick

**Resource teachers** – Bridget Quinn, Christine Seneca, Kristin Muzzarelli

**Literacy coach** – Randi Deverman



KATE WYMAN

**Rtl coordinator** – Kristen DAlfonso

**Rtl reading aides** – Emily Hinch, Christy Powers, Lisa Sanders

**Title 1 math** – Sara Dirks

**Rtl math aides** – Elaine Campbell, TBD

**ELL coordinator** – Dayrim Sheehan

**ELL teacher** – MaryBeth Stewart

**Speech/Language pathologist** – Chelsie Chaney

**Psychologist** – Alyson Baker

**Social worker** – Kelly Hobson

**Occupational therapy assistant** – Keri Gillette

**Physical education teachers** – Dan Gashaw, Justin Tilford

**Music teacher** – Heather Berger

**Building technologist** – LaVette Brown

**Librarian** – Amy Jones

## Registration information:

**Online Registration** — July 1 to July 27

**In-person registration** — Thursday, July 29, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

## Vision/Mission

Educating Patriots today, to be leaders tomorrow. Our students will be respectful, responsible, and ready to excel in learning and serving.

## Traditions

Jefferson School, established in 1928, is the proud home of the Patriots. On Fridays, our students and staff show their school spirit by wearing red, white and blue.

Jefferson has a strong, supportive and generous Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). Our PTO organizes our annual Read-a-thon, coordinates Christmas Basket distribution, and hosts a carnival and fun day. With the help of PTO and our community partnerships, many projects have been completed in recent years including the primary wing playground, outdoor benches, basketball hoops, and more.

Jefferson participates in several community service projects including a Food Drive, Children's Hospital of Illinois/Gameball Run and St Jude. Our school is proud to be the home of the annual Morton Pumpkin Festival.

**Challenge teachers** – Sara Dirks, Ashley Sarver

**Resource aides** – Brittini Austin, Eric Brown, Carrie Claassen, Amy Glass, Jeany Righi, Sarah Webb, Kathleen Wunder

**Classroom support aides** – Mandy Collins, Lindsey O'Donnell, Monica Taylor, Zoe Troxell, Keshia Wenninger

**ELL aides** – Allison Nix, Robin Sizemore

**Clerical aides** – Sarah Fore, Tammy Presley, Lisa Raisor

**Daily sub aide** – TBD

**Custodians** – Dave Keen, Doug Hutchison, Dante Williams

**Crossing guard** – Stacy Krantz

**Food service** – Teri Goodspeed, Val Messer, Cynthia Courtney

**Nurse** – Abby Novak





# LINCOLN ELEMENTARY

100 S. Nebraska Ave. | Phone: 266-6989 | Fax: 284-4015

## School day

8:15 a.m. to 2:40 p.m.

**First bell:** 8:10 a.m.

**Morning assembly/announcements in gym:** 8:15 a.m.

**Daily schedule:** All students will report to the gym upon arrival. Our daily assembly/announcements will begin at 8:15 a.m. Students and teachers will be dismissed from the gym to classrooms at the end of the announcements at approximately 8:25 a.m.

## Policies

**Absence reporting:** 284-4000. The absence line is open 24 hours a day. Please call prior to 9 a.m. on the day of the absence.

**Proof of residency:** Families enrolling in the district for the first time (including all kindergarten students) need to provide proof of residency. In addition, families who may have moved during the previous school year or during the summer need to provide proof of residency for their new address. Proof of residency includes a copy of one document from the following group: property tax bill, mortgage paperwork, rental agreement and previous month's payment, or letter from landlord in lieu of lease. In addition, copies of two documents must be provided from this group: driver's license, voter registration card, public aid card, homeowner/renter insurance policy, gas/electric/water bill, library card, cable bill.

**Supply lists:** School supply lists will be distributed at registration. Lists were also included with student report cards when distributed in May 2021. The lists also are available at local retailers and can be found on the district website, [www.morton709.org](http://www.morton709.org). Click on the Lincoln icon, then go to the Virtual Backpack on the Lincoln page.

## Parking/drop-off information:

Please help follow these guidelines in the morning and after school to ensure the safety of all children.

► Students who arrive at school by car should be dropped off in the circle drive on the west side of the school. Please do not drop off your child on Nebraska Avenue, as Nebraska is very busy and it is not safe for students to cross traffic on Nebraska or in the circle drive.

► The north parking lot is for bus drop-off and pick-up. Please do not drop off or pick up children in this parking lot.

► Cars should pull up in the drive as far as possible to allow for multiple cars to drop off their children. After your child exits the passenger side, proceed out of the drive to allow for more cars to pull through. It is important for children to exit the vehicle on the passenger side so they do not cross in front of other vehicles. Please help keep the traffic flow moving smoothly by having your child ready to exit the car once it is stopped.

► Walkers and bicycle riders should walk on the sidewalk that goes up to the building. Do not cross the driveway to park a bicycle or to walk to the building.

## Traditions:

► On Fridays, students and staff are encouraged to show their school spirit by wearing Lincoln Lions green and white or Morton cherry and gray/red and white colors. Families will have an opportunity during the school year to purchase Lincoln spirit wear.

► At the end of the year, one sixth-grade girl and one sixth-grade boy are recognized with the Ruth Myers Citizenship Award. This award has been given annually to outstanding students at Lincoln School since 1989. The names of the winners from 1989 until present are located on a plaque inside the front door of Lincoln School.

► Lincoln has a strong tradition of a supportive and active Parent Teacher Organization and families who are regularly involved in our school activities. Each year, the Lincoln Elementary PTO coordinates fundraising activities in order to provide supplies, materials and experiences throughout the school year for teachers and students, including last year's Step It Up fundraiser. Funds from this fundraising activity support activities at Lincoln such as Artistic Adventures, student birthday books, the sixth-grade field trip to Chicago, technology needs, new library books, hands-on science supplies and our fifth-grade Etiquette Luncheon. The PTO also

organizes our quarterly Family Fun Nights and coordinates our annual school carnival. We encourage all parents and guardians to become involved with our PTO and to be active in our classrooms and school activities.

## PTO Officers:



The 2021-22 Lincoln Elementary PTO officers (left to right): Treasurer Jennifer Weaver, Vice President Mary Miller, President Natalie Friend and Secretary Lyndsey Parnham.

## Meet the 2021-2022 staff:

**Principal** – Julie Albers

**Assistant principal** – Michelle Peterson

**Secretaries** – Jennifer Bakirdan, Sueann Spinder

**Office clerical aide** – Christy Getz

**Nurse** – Jennifer Cook

**Kindergarten** – Tammy Anderson, Jodi Hoelscher, Haley Veldhuizen

**First grade** – Kara Brooks, Madison Kumpf, Wendy Vastine

**Second grade** – Abbey Denney, Abby Schwarting, Erika Turbett

**Third grade** – Janelle Guetschow, Kayla Knoblauch, Jacey Wharram



JULIE ALBERS

**Fourth grade** – Kaiti Brown, El Higus, Emily Turner

**Fifth grade** – Meghan Dalberg, Samantha

McKee, Stuart Smith

**Sixth grade** – Danielle Estes, Jaime Farrell, Andrea Knepp, Ruth Westbrook

**Physical education** – Bob Becker, Clint Baldwin, Claire Schmitt

**Music** – Shane Rocke  
**Special education** – Erin Chan, Joy Gronewold, Megan Levitt, Bethany Scroggs, Molly Stephens, Pam Woods

**Literacy coach** – Jenny Auxier

**Speech** – Rachel Meier, Sherry Robinson

**Social worker** – Molly Winkler

**Psychologist** – Melissa Kerber-Long

**Occupational Therapy Assistant** – Amanda Bunting

**District technologists** – Keri Dodson, Diana Schauer, Rhonda Stalter

**Building technology aide** – Jennnifer Wright

**Library aide** – Denise Poshard

**Custodians** – Dwight Hamilton, Bob Harkless, Dante Williams

**Crossing guards** – Rhonda Konieczny, Laura Hardman  
**Arbor Food Service staff** – Lisa Horn, Ronae Fender, Mary Dralle

## Mark your calendar

*(Dates and times are tentative and subject to change.)*

**July 1-27** – 2021-2022 school year registration online for returning families

**July 29** – 2021-2022 school year registration in person for new families and incoming kindergarten students, 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**July 29** – Back-to-school pool party, grades K-2, at Morton Pool, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

**Aug. 2** – Back-to-school pool party, grades 3-6, at Morton Pool, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

**Aug. 5** – Kindergarten round-up for all incoming kindergarten students

**Aug. 9** – Class assignments announced in Power-School 4 p.m.

**Aug. 11** – "Unpack Your Backpack" for all K-6 students, 4 to 5 p.m.

**Aug. 12** – First day of school, 11:55 a.m. dismissal

**Aug. 16** – Step It Up PTO fundraiser kickoff assembly

**Aug. 16** – PTO meeting in gym vestibule, 7 p.m.

**Aug. 23** – Meet the Teacher Night, 6 to 7:30 p.m.

**Sept. 20** – PTO New Family Dinner in cafeteria, 6 p.m.

**Sept. 24** – Day of Awesomeness fundraiser celebration

**Feb. 17** – Lincoln School Open House, 6 to 7:30 p.m.

**Mar. 11** – PTO Carnival

**May 20** – School Picnic Day

**May 25** – Laugh Olympics



# MORTON ACADEMY

260 E. Queenwood St. | Phone: 284-8033

## School day

8:15 a.m. to 2:40 p.m.

Half-day/early release dismissal: 11:10 a.m.

## Traditions

In addition to our in-building instruction, Morton Academy has established traditions throughout the school-year. These social-centered events provide students, teachers and staff from Guardian Angel Home an opportunity to connect. Some annual events are:

- Back-to-School Movie night on the outdoor screen
- Special Kids Day at the Morton Pumpkin Festival
- Fall Harvest Bonfire at a local farm
- Thanksgiving Feast
- Holiday Hot Cocoa Bar
- Potter's Alley Spring Bowling PE Unit
- Spring Picnic
- End of the year field day

## Mission

The mission of Morton Academy is to provide an authentic and diversified school climate intentionally designed to meet the social, emotional and academic needs of students.

Morton Academy serves many residents of Guardian Angel Home, an all-male residential facility operated by the Center for Youth and Family Solutions, through a contract with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. Guardian Angel Home currently serves boys ages 7-16 and can serve young men up to the age of 18.

Morton Academy is part of the Morton School District. The facility

## Meet the 2021-22 staff

**Principal** - Amanda Rickenberg

**Secretary** - Julie Miller

**Teachers** - Rhonda Howard, Deborah Moore and Shay Nelson

**Paraprofessionals** - Laura Donley and Krista Naab

**Physical Education** - Bob Becker

**Music** - Melissa Risner

**Social worker** - Paul Thompson

**School psychologist** - Katie Zwolinski

**Speech/Language pathologist** - Sherry Robinson

**Certified occupational therapy assistant** - Amanda Bunting



AMANDA  
RICKENBERG

has two classrooms, a multipurpose office space and a flexible learning space/classroom within the gymnasium. The full-time staff consists of three certified special education teachers and two instructional aides as well as many other staff members who share their time between district buildings.

At the elementary level, students stay with their same-age peers for the duration of the school day in a self-contained classroom model. A structured schedule allows the students in the middle school and high school grades to switch teachers for different subject areas, providing students with an opportunity to practice routines, transitions and foster independence. Additionally, there is a school-wide focus on daily social emotional learning, lessons and interventions.

The success of the programming at Morton Academy can be attributed to the hard work of students and the dedication and commitment of teaching staff, related service staff and support staff in Morton 709, as well as the collaborative and supportive partnership with Guardian Angel Home. This unique opportunity for

two organizations to work closely together is a testament to the power of collaboration and positive school outcomes for children.

Staff at Morton Academy approach teaching and learning through a trauma-informed lens and recognize the power of positive relationships in supporting students in the school environment. The Morton Academy school climate is sensitive to the diverse needs and backgrounds of students and places value in the great abilities of children while supporting them to gain skills in areas of need. This is accomplished through a strong emphasis on social emotional learning.

Morton Academy strives to provide its students with the same access to opportunities that all students of Morton District 709 receive. Support from district administration, the Board of Education, community businesses and organizations and Guardian Angel Home have been instrumental in achieving this goal.

## Community Partnerships

Morton Academy continues to be involved in the Morton community with partnerships for educational

experiences for students and was able to continue these partnerships through the 2020-2021 school year: Those partnerships include:

► The Cookery, where with Chef Amanda Pyle and her culinary team, students engage in monthly hands-on, in-the-kitchen, vocational educational experiences differentiated to meet the needs of a wide range of learners.

► Morton Public Library, which our students visit weekly, as there is no on-site library at the school. Many Morton Academy students are avid readers and look forward to this opportunity each week.

► Yoga Learning Adventures. For the past two years, Morton Academy has partnered with Angie Swearingian, founder and owner of Yoga Learning Adventures. Angie brings 17 years of experience teaching in the Peoria Public Schools. By providing the students access to yoga, students learn strategies for resilience, focus and self-regulation that they can apply in the classroom and beyond.

► Art with Ericka Ziegenbein. Former owner of Soulshine Studio in Pekin and a certified art teacher, Ms. Ericka provides weekly art lessons to the students of Morton Academy. In her instruction, she utilizes many different art styles to present engaging lessons for students. Students have used models of old-time print stamping with instruction about the use and origins of printmaking, the creation of individualized African masks and the history behind the masks, cartooning, string art, clay and other models of art instruction.



# Attendance perfection ... and so much more

Chloe Schonert had 2,238 Opportunities over the last 13 years to take a day off.

Yet the busy young woman who very much likes it that way always showed up to be counted, continuing her remarkable run even during a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, said Morton High Principal Deidre Ripka, who singled Choe out for special mention at the school's graduation exercise on May 16.

In fact, between her kindergarten year in 2007-08 and her senior year in 2020-21, Chloe never missed a day of attendance, nor did she ever arrive to class late, not that there weren't temptations along the way.

Credit that achievement to one part determination, one part luck of the draw (think resilient genes).

Indeed, after Chloe won a perfect attendance award at the end of grade school, "I thought it would be cool to continue it through junior high and high school. It became kind of an unofficial goal I set for myself. The rest is luck. I never went to school sick."

Perhaps that's because Chloe's schedule is so full, not even the occasional illness can catch up with her.

Once the school year ended in May, she was off to work at Girl Scout camp, an activity to which she has long been devoted. Between that and being a top-notch student, she also found time for activities such as dance. She plays the violin. She has volunteered as a tutor, at a food pantry and animal shelter.

The attendance record ranks a close second on her proudest moments list to the Gold Award



she earned from the Girl Scouts, the equivalent of the Eagle Scout distinction for Boy Scouts.

For that she took on the project the summer before her senior year of refurbishing the Morton High girls' locker room, which consisted of painting the walls and lockers, putting up new mirrors and bulletin boards, and sprinkling inspirational messages around the space, which hadn't otherwise been touched in more than 65 years. It became a family project, with three generations putting in close to 300 hours of sweat equity in a decidedly unairconditioned

space, and the whole thing came in under budget, which drew raves from the Morton School Board.

To qualify for the Girl Scouts' highest honor, the work must be sustainable and leave a lasting impact. "It's something I know people will use for generations," Chloe said.

"Chloe's initiative, attention to detail, and work ethic have created a space that our students will enjoy for years to come," said Ripka. "I love the uplifting quotes she chose, but my favorite is the flower garden," which also was part of the locker room project.

As for her family, "they are beyond amazing," said Chloe, and she credits them with instilling in her the uncommon drive to do things that make a difference. Like putting up Morton's first Little Free Library when she was in seventh grade. Like the new ceiling tile tradition Chloe helped start at Morton High, where all the seniors affix their signature and the class motto to a tile, which will then be installed in the high school foyer. The tiles will soon be among the first things students and visitors see when they enter the building.

The Girl Scouts have been a

major influence, as well, and she appreciates the organization's "pushing of teen leadership." Indeed, she hopes to pursue a career in educational leadership herself. Chloe will be attending the University of Tampa in the fall, where she is just one of 30 incoming students to receive a presidential leadership fellowship, and where she will pursue a degree in teaching, specifically of mathematics. Her career goals are to become a school principal and superintendent someday.

Chloe is proud of the contributions she's made, but she took something away, too.

"I learned a whole lot about what it takes to actually make things happen," she said. The locker room project in particular provided real-world lessons in budgeting and time management. Regarding the latter, it is very helpful "to focus on one thing at a time," she said.

If she has any advice for others, it's the same her family gave her: "They encouraged us to be open and to change the things we want to change." Beyond that, "use your first year of high school or college to branch out to do everything," determine your passion, and then whittle that list down to concentrate on the activities that really matter to you. Surround yourself with other ambitious people. Then go for it.

She has high praise for Morton and its school system.

"There are so many opportunities for growth. For being a small school, there's a lot to participate in – the arts, sports," she said. "A big thing Morton has taught me ... is that there are always opportunities to make things better."