



MORTON

UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 709

Dec. 17, 2021

Morton District 709 Weekly Update

As we prepare to enter the Christmas and New Year’s holiday break, we saw real progress on the COVID front this past week, with student positives nearly halved.

As of Friday, 13 students had tested positive for COVID, down from 24 on Dec. 10, for an overall infection rate of .41 percent in a student body of more than 3,200. Meanwhile, seven staff members were out due to the virus, up from five the week before. Please see the chart below:

Covid Positive Now		12/13/21	12/14/21	12/15/21	12/16/21	12/17/21	%
	Staff	5	4	5	7	7	
Students	Brown	1	1	0	0	0	0.00%
	Grundy	2	2	2	2	0	0.00%
	Jefferson	2	2	2	3	2	0.60%
	Lincoln	6	5	4	1	1	0.20%
	JH	2	3	4	3	5	1.00%
	HS	6	6	4	3	5	0.46%
	MA	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%
	Total	19	19	16	12	13	0.41%

We continue to ask that our families keep ill children, COVID or no COVID, at home. We recommend that parents review our [Back to School Plan](#) and our [Frequently Asked Questions document](#). Please consult our [COVID reporting form](#), as well. As we enter the winter season and the holidays have us gathering with

our extended families and friends, we should continue to do our common-sense best to protect ourselves and others.

Meanwhile, the district is pursuing a less invasive COVID test – SHIELD, a saliva-based test developed by the University of Illinois – for those staff members who have not been vaccinated and therefore must be regularly monitored, per state order. As in the community, more than 80 percent of staff members have been vaccinated.



Santa Clay greets Jefferson students

Among the more concerning side effects of COVID and the strategies implemented to curb its spread, including mask mandates and enforced isolation, has been the rise of mental health issues in young people, which also can be exacerbated by social media use and other pressures. Morton has not been immune, with notable increases in student counselor contacts and even hospitalizations.

As a result, Morton Junior High School invited Mike Bushman, an Illinois-based board member with the Illinois Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, to speak with students and parents this past week to alert them to the signs of depression and provide tips about how to address it. We encourage families that could not make it to watch the recorded presentation, which will soon be made available online.



Suicide prevention expert speaks to parents

Among the more important pieces of information shared by Mr. Bushman was to “trust your gut” if something seems off about a child and to not hesitate to seek help. Beyond that, among the most important and effective protections against a suicide attempt “is having an open, trusting relationship with an adult,” someone a young person feels comfortable going to “no matter what.”

It's a reminder that as adults – as parents and relatives and teachers and coaches -- we can make a life-saving difference.



Ms. Adolphson

One of those people who makes a major impact, we're proud to say, is Morton High School's Jamie Adolphson, who was recently chosen the Central Illinois Region Assistant Principal of the Year by the Illinois Principals Association. Jamie is a true leader and caretaker, from her intervention efforts with struggling students to her role as the MHS activities director. She very much deserves this recognition.

Jamie is one of many in District 709 who go the extra mile on behalf of our students. For example, Morton High recently became the first in Illinois to offer an apprenticeship program through SkillsUSA, along with community partners Morton Industries, Grimm Chevrolet and Lighthouse Buick. The aim is to connect employers and schools to give students the real-world skills they need to succeed in life and career. Industrial technology teacher Chad McFarland has done a great job getting this program off the ground for us.



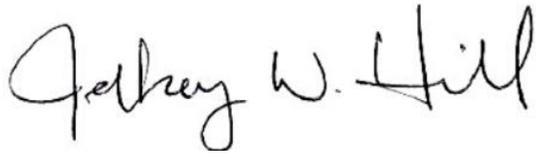
Mrs. Claus delivers the goods at Grundy

Finally, we're happy to report that Niche, the Pennsylvania-based organization dedicated to connecting schools and colleges with students and families, has selected District 709 as the 10th safest school district in Illinois, and 41st among the best Illinois has to offer overall.

All in all, it has been a fantastic first semester, and we in District 709 remain committed to doing whatever it takes to make the second half of the year just as magical.

This is our last communication of the year, and we look forward to being back in touch in 2022. In the meantime, have a wonderful Christmas and a happy New Year's holiday.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey W. Hill". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned on a light yellow rectangular background.

Jeffrey W. Hill, Ed.D

Superintendent

Morton Community Unit District 709