



MORTON

UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 709

After Day 1, some perspective: Statement from Morton Community Unit School District 709

We trust that many Morton families saw the report on WEEK-TV regarding the return of most of our students to District 709 classrooms on Tuesday, Aug. 11. The story showed photos of hallway traffic at Morton Community High School, which had been sent to the station.

District officials acknowledged the photos' authenticity while also releasing a statement which emphasized that Tuesday was the first day of school for everyone after nearly five unprecedented months off, and that all of us are adjusting to the new demands being placed upon us in this pandemic and to the new rules that come with it, including physical distancing.

District leaders also stressed that procedures are being reviewed daily at all schools and that some will be revised as we go along in order to accommodate this new reality and to keep our students and staff as safe and as healthy as possible.

We believe it is also fair to put these photos in context. In fact, we were heartened to see that all of those pictured were wearing masks, as far as we could tell. While a photo freezes an instant in time, our students were moving through the corridor, not standing still and socializing with one another. We are proud of our students' efforts in that regard. It is and has always been our intention to enforce the wearing of face coverings and physical distancing to the degree possible, while also relying on the responsible behavior of all involved.

Hallway passing periods are among the changes and challenges being faced by all school districts that have returned to in-person instruction. We are limiting the number of students in our hallways at any given time. For the purposes of trying to prevent the transmission of coronavirus, our guidance from public health experts is to reduce “close contact,” defined as 15 minutes or more of exposure at a distance of less than six feet. Our typical hallway passing period is five minutes long.

The same protocols apply to the other common areas inside our schools – cafeterias, gymnasiums, auditoriums, etc. – where people may gather in greater numbers. First, to the extent possible, we try to limit such groups to fewer than 50 at a time, per Centers for Disease Control and Illinois Department of Public Health guidelines. Temporary walls or partitions have been installed in several of those areas, and more will go up as they arrive. For lunch at Morton High, for example, students are dispersed between the cafeteria, the Bertha Frank lobby and the north courtyard. We have an open campus, and juniors and seniors are allowed to leave for lunch.

To give everyone some idea of how our schools and classrooms look, to the right is a photo from Day 2 in Morton District 709, which depicts the seating arrangement in a band class at Morton Junior High School. As you can see from the projection screen, remote instruction is taking place.



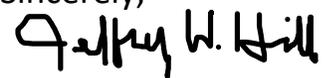
Our Return to School plan is [here](#). Morton School District 709 families were given the option of sending their children back to school for in-person instruction full-time, five days a week, or staying with remote learning. In a school district of

approximately 3,150 students, under 200 families have chosen to keep their children at home, as of this writing. That number is just above 50 at Morton High, which has an enrollment of about 960 students.

We did not expect perfection on our first day back at school. However, what we can promise is that our process will be under continuous review and that we will improve our protocols for our students and staff, while doing our best to prepare our young charges intellectually and emotionally for the challenges of later life.

Again, thank you for your cooperation and patience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey W. Hill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "J".

Jeffrey W. Hill, Ed.D.

Superintendent

Morton Community Unit School District 709