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709 Communicator

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

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2022

Our next steps toward 'as safely and normally as possible'

We have learned a lot over the last two years. So have our students, who largely closed the gaps from remote learning and, in some instances, actually surpassed pre-pandemic achievement levels.

We thought, as many did, that this school year would be more normal. Prior to its start, our Board of Education had approved a plan of tiered mitigations that would take into account the degrees of COVID spread within the district while moving toward our goal of "as safely and normally as possible."

DR. JEFFREY HILL

Unfortunately, we were prevented from implementing that plan. Meanwhile, much has transpired over the past several months regarding the physical and mental health of our students.

First, the school district and the community of Morton have never been as protected from the COVID-19 virus as they are today:

▶ Approximately 85 percent of Morton residents are vaccinated.

▶ Close to 80 percent of school personnel are vaccinated.

▶ About half of students ages 12 and up have been vaccinated.

Second, this data gives us confidence that we should work toward more support for the teaching and learning environment, with a greater focus on the social-emotional and psychological health of our students. The following indicators demonstrate

Jefferson Patriots dress in red for a school spirit day.

Please see HILL Page 2

HILL

Continued from page 1

the struggles our students are having:

▶ A substantial increase in counseling cases

▶ An increase in behavioral incidents in early childhood programs

▶ An increase in hospitalizations for mental health issues

▶ An increase in violent acts or threats of violence

We know that this is happening in Morton, despite the benefit of in-person instruction for all of 2020-21. We also know that this is a widespread problem in districts throughout the state. We are not alone in battling this issue.

While we strive to create an environment that supports our students' social/emotional health with the freedom to communicate, interact and learn, we know our staff needs greater autonomy to make instructional choices that support the whole child.

To that end, the Morton School Board and administration are exploring multiple potential remedies to what is becoming an untenable situation. We are always trying to balance the need for our students and staff to learn and teach normally with mitigations that keep all of them well physically, socially and emotionally.

On a personal note, we have entered my final semester as the superintendent of Morton schools, as I will be retiring at its conclusion. It probably goes without saying that due to COVID, these last two years have been among the most challenging of my career. Ironically, because of the way Morton Board, staff, families and students have risen to the challenges, these also have been among the most rewarding years. It has been a privilege, and I thank you.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey W. Hill, Ed.D
Superintendent
Morton Community Unit District 709

Struggling kids most need an adult who will listen

Since the onset of COVID nearly two years ago, Morton School District 709 has experienced an uptick in student mental health challenges, as measured by increases in counselor visits and classroom behavioral issues, diagnosed depression and hospitalizations.

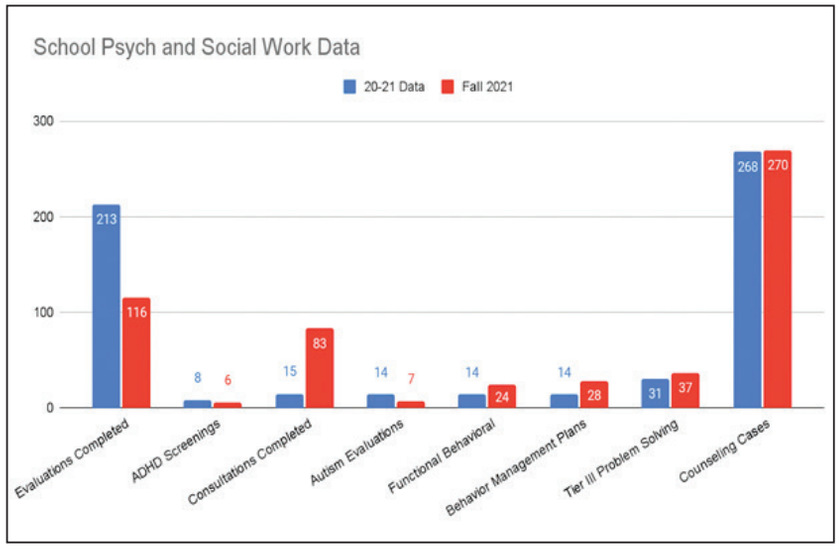
The numbers are not large relative to the entire student body, but the trend is unmistakable, with school districts across the nation reporting much the same.

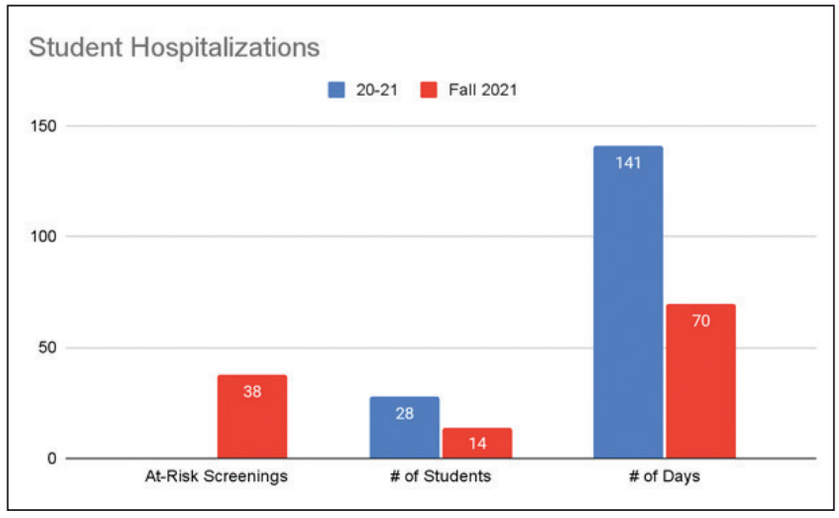
For example, District 709 meted out 19.5 days of disciplinary suspension in the pre-COVID first semester of 2019. This school year so far, the number is 54. Counselor visits so far this year already have surpassed all of 2020-21.

"COVID's definitely a part of the picture and social media is part of the picture," said Lindsay Franklin, the district's director of student support services. "Children are struggling with so many things now compared to what we had."

Among the contributing factors are pandemic-imposed isolation, mitigation-related social frustrations, online bullying, trauma, gender identity issues, etc. The negative effects can be compounded during adolescence, an often emotional, vulnerable, confusing time in a young person's life.

As a result, Morton school officials are putting greater emphasis on teaching students the coping tools, and parents the recognition skills, to contend with problems as they arise. Social-emotional learning (SEL) has long been a priority in District 709 – it's reflected in the high number of classroom aides Morton employs – but it's an even bigger deal in an era when COVID has poured "gasoline on the fire," said Franklin.





Discussions are underway regarding the need for more manpower and space for SEL programs.

"It's the time we're living in right now," School Board member Tom Neeley noted at a recent meeting.

Children in crisis

In December, Morton Junior High School invited Mike Bushman, a board member with the Illinois Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, to speak with students and parents, educating the latter to the signs of depression and providing tips on how to address their children when they're "more than sad."

"We are in a youth mental health crisis," he said.

Please see HEALTH, Page 3

HEALTH

Continued from page 2

Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among 10- to 19-year-olds and "getting worse," said Bushman. For every death, there are up to 200 attempts, he said. Girls are more likely to try, and boys more likely to complete the act.

It's frequently an impulsive decision, said Bushman, noting that 40 percent of teens who tried to take their own lives "spent less than 10 minutes contemplating it."

If the situation is urgent, the suicide prevention hotline number is 800-273-8255. Texting "TALK" to 741741 also is an option for those who need immediate help sorting things out. Another resource is the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention website at afsp.org.

Meanwhile, "the single most important protection against suicide is having one open, trusting relationship with an adult … you know you can go to no matter what," said Bushman.

Warning signs

Families need to be alert to the signs of depression, which include irritability and anger, seeming laziness or lack of interest, grade deterioration, extreme sleep patterns (too little or too much), substance abuse, reckless behavior, self-isolation from family and friends, and the surrender of prized possessions.

Self-harm always rings an alarm bell,

Mike Bushman, a board member with the Illinois Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, addresses parents at Morton Junior High.

added Franklin, triggering an immediate risk assessment and intervention by the school district, including notifying parents.

While students will sometimes give voice to the pain they're feeling -- they'll talk about having no reason to live, about being a burden on others, about feeling trapped, said Bushman – Franklin has noticed that many kids now tend to internalize when before they'd act out as a cry for help. What educators do hear are statements like "I just can't take it anymore," or "the work is too hard," or "someone's bothering me."

Technology can aggravate matters.

"Kids don't hang out like they used to," said Franklin. "Now they're texting each other when they're sitting right next to each other. They're not communicating effectively." Masking also has had unintended consequences, concealing facial expressions that can signal how a young person is feeling.

Bushman acknowledged that it's not always easy to tell the difference between clinical depression and "just being a typical teenager." For parents and teachers, "if it strikes you in your gut that this is odd, you want to ask questions about it."

Other important safeguards are exercise, time outside, improved diets (less sugar), creative endeavors such as art and music, and pushing socialization including attendance at family meals. There certainly is a recognition of that in District 709. While many Morton children are engaged in extracurricular activities, more can be, and it's encouraged.

All the above can alter brain chemistry, short of professional therapy or medication, which also can be effective, said Bushman.

While the pressures of life may be inevitable, kids can learn to deal with them and recognize that it's not the end of the world, said Franklin.

Meanwhile, as adults we can all do a better job of listening to young people, of validating their feelings by letting them know that people care about them, that they're not alone, that help is available. Don't wait to act.

Free developmental screenings

WHO: For children ages birth through 5 years who are residents of Morton School District #709

SCREENING DATE: Feb. 9, 2022

LOCATION: Morton 709 District Office 1050 S. Fourth Ave, Morton

THE SCREENING WILL ADDRESS:

- ❑ Early Academic Concepts
- ❑ Motor Development
- ❑ Communication and Language
- ❑ Hearing and Vision

If you are concerned about your child's development and believe that there is a potential for significant delay in the areas listed above, **please call 309-263-0522 to make an appointment before Feb. 4, 2022**.

Sponsored by Morton School District #709 - Special Education Department

Request records before they are destroyed

Morton Community Unit School District 709 will be destroying special education records for students who were evaluated for or received services during their school career and have a **1994** birth date. If the student and/or parents want these records, they should call 309-263-0522 to arrange to pick them up. Any records not collected by **June 15, 2022**, will be destroyed.

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

Directior 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, Todd Herrmann, Scott Jones, 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 HORCHEM

100 S. Nebraska Ave., Morton, IL 61550

Principal: Julie Horchem
Assistant Principal: Michelle Peterson
Main Office: 266-6989
Reporting absence: 284-4000

District 709 Board of Education

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

Vice President: **Dr. David Cross**
Appointed: 2021; Term Expires: 2023
david.cross@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

Amanda Leman
Appointed: 2021; Term Expires: 2023
amanda.leman@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

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**.

More information

More information about the Board of Education is available on our website – **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: Standing, left to right: David Cross, Tim Braker, Bart Rinkenberger, Jerry Rudd. Seated, left to right: Diane Krall, Thomas Neeley, Amanda Leman.

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 of learning.

Communication: We will provide open and meaningful two-way communication with all members of the community.

Climate: We will maintain a cohesive organizational system which facilitates and fosters a productive and trusting climate with a highly qualified staff.

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

Finance: We will support student learning in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Upcoming meetings

Board of Education meetings are at the District Office, 1050 S. Fourth Ave. The School Board is scheduled to meet on the following dates:

2022
Feb. 8 – 7 p.m.
March 8 – 7 p.m.
April 12 – 7 p.m.
May 10 – 5:30 p.m.
May 24 – 5:30 p.m.
June 7 – 5:30 p.m.
July 12 – 5:30 p.m.

Meet new School Board member Amanda Leman

Amanda Leman is the newest School Board member in Morton District 709.

A Morton native, Leman, 41, is an administrative assistant to a local real estate agent and the mother of three. She and her husband have two sons at Morton High School and a daughter who attends Lettie Brown Elementary School.

She was appointed to the seven-member board last fall, filling the seat vacated by the departure of Jeff Schmidgall. Her term expires in 2023.

AMANDA LEMAN

Leman grew up as Amanda Zimmerman with her parents, an older sister and a younger brother, first on Minnesota Avenue and then on Akron Court, from which she walked to Lincoln Elementary School. At Morton High – Class of 1999 -- she was a cheerleader and an active member of the Student Council, where she got her first taste of community involvement.

Leman applied for the School Board seat because "I feel like I'm ready," she said. "With a lot of what's going on in the world now … I feel like it's good to bring a mom's perspective.

"It's good to have a well-rounded board."

Beyond that, she just really wanted to be a part of a board "that has maintained community values."

In her short time sitting around the horseshoe, Leman said she has been impressed with "the sense of respect" that board members have for one another and for their differences of opinion, noting that "a 100 percent board is not always a good thing."

She is committed to the concept that "all of our children deserve an equal education," in a school district tasked with ensuring that they "be prepared" for life and "more than just ready for college."

Her priorities include preserving "local control to ensure our community values are represented in our schools" and to see to it that the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic are instilled and reinforced in children, along with the ability "to think critically and form sound reasoning for their opinions."

"It's funny how things come full circle," Leman said, adding that her children now have some of the same teachers she did.

"I have really great memories" of attending and graduating from Morton District 709 schools, she said. Her goal now is to help ensure that students enjoy the same positive and productive experience.

Sander to join District 709 administrative team

In accepting the offer to become assistant superintendent in Morton District 709, Joe Sander is coming full circle.

The 50-year-old Sander, an East Peoria native and currently the assistant superintendent at Washington Community High School, began his administrative career as assistant principal and dean at Morton High School in 2004-05. He, wife Jennifer and their four children have called Morton home since 1997.

Leaving District 709 after one year to take a principalship in East Peoria "was one of the hardest professional decisions I ever had to make," said Sander. "It's just a great community and a great school district with an amazing staff.

"I'm excited to come back."

Meanwhile, the District 709 administrative team is looking forward to having him on board.

"He has a great deal of administrative experience at many grade levels, including the district office level," said Assistant Superintendent Craig Smock, whose elevation to superintendent in the 2022-23 school year creates the vacancy that Sander will fill. "He has made a positive impact everywhere he has been due to his integrity and tireless work ethic … I know that he will be a great fit for our school community."

Sander has accumulated a wide array of experience in his 28 years in public education. In his current job at Washington High, he has served as chief financial officer with responsibility for a $20 million annual budget, has overseen curriculum and student achievement, has developed and managed evaluation programs for teachers and other staff, has been the point person on $25 million in capital improvements to the Washington High campus, and has secured some $935,000 in grants for various school projects.

Prior to the last decade in Washington, he was a principal at the elementary and junior high levels in East Peoria Grade School District 86. He began his career as a high school math teacher in Washington.

DR. JOE SANDER

Part of the appeal of returning to Morton was rounding out his résumé at a unit, or K-12 district, with all of the full-spectrum educational challenges that poses, said Sander.

If he were to describe himself, "I'm a commitment kind of guy" who takes a very hands-on approach to his duties, running the gamut from food service to the classroom to driving a bus, said Sander, who continues to serve as a squadron officer in the Illinois Air National Guard in Peoria. "If I can help out in any capacity, I'm going to do it."

As a leader, "I like to engage with everyone," he said. As an educator, "I've always subscribed to the continuous improvement model," he said, taking pause at the end of the day to consider what was accomplished and what could have been done differently, or better.

Adaptability is the key to being a successful educator in the 21st century, said Sander, noting that when he started in the profession, students didn't even have cell phones. "Technology," he said, "has changed the way we do business."

Sander received his bachelor's degree from Illinois State University, later did graduate work at Bradley and Western Illinois universities, and earned his doctorate from Aurora University in 2016. He has three sons and a daughter, ranging from an eighth grader at Blessed Sacrament Catholic School in Morton to a sophomore and senior at Notre Dame High School in Peoria — his alma mater — to a sophomore at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

He starts work in the district on July 1, 2022.

At Grundy, building 'the stamina to stay in a book'

At one point or another in our school careers, many of us may have committed this reading sin: Faking it, mindlessly flipping the pages to fool a teacher or parent into believing reading and comprehending were actually happening.

At Grundy Elementary School, teachers began to notice that such pretend "reading behavior" had become a bit too common, prompting school leaders there to adopt a new reading curriculum this school year, with the mission of building within students "the stamina to stay in a book."

So says teacher and literacy coach Mindy Wendling, who is part of a committee of teachers, their meetings facilitated by Principal Michael Saunders, in a program they call the Grundy Reading Adventure.

To get where they want to go with their reluctant readers, they knew that a change in attitude would have to occur first. How do you get a generation of young people with various electronic devices glued to their hands to pick up a book more often and "get excited about reading again"?

The first order of business was to have students sit down with their classroom teachers to determine reading goals, while revisiting those ambitions monthly to ensure that progress is being made. Students are asked to take personal accountability for their reading time and comprehension. The feedback from teachers is especially critical to reaching those literacy aspirations schoolwide, said Wendling.

At first, "the kids were really honest. 'Yeah, I fake read.' They never thought about why they did," said Wendling. The antidote to that was to be "very intentional about growing the love of reading … and lifelong learning."

That starts with giving students "all the right tools," which in part means helping them "choose the right books" by aligning their reading material with their personal interests, said Wendling. One student likes the escapism of an Indiana Jones tale. Another loves baseball. Still another thinks she might like to learn to fly someday.

While reading itself "is the real prize," Wendling said, a few extra incentives have been built into the program – a field trip to a local park, a glow party in the gym, all-school reading assemblies, etc. – to make it fun, she said, adding that communicating a message of "reading is important to all of us" is essential, whatever the endeavor or subject, from gym to math to music and beyond.

Meanwhile, involving families is of the utmost importance. Wendling points to research that shows parents who read at home with their children just 20 minutes per day expose their children to 1.8 million words over the course of a year – compared to a fraction of that when no books are cracked – which pays off big time in terms of learning and achievement, as evidenced by test scores and other measures.

As a result, at Grundy, parents are asked to send photos of family reading time to school with their children.

"Teachers already have started to see an improvement, anecdotally," said Wendling.

Certainly, attitudes have started to change. Ask the children and you can hear it in their answers.

"It got me to read books like 'The Hobbit' just because I love the movie."

"It made me start reading graphic novels. Now I'm reading a book that has 290 pages."

"It has given me a sense of accomplishment."

"Like, when you set a goal, you feel good about it."

In the end, whatever it takes to get kids interested in the written word, said Wendling. "We know that results don't happen overnight … We also know a lot about what students need to know in order to succeed," with literacy at or near the top of that list, she said.

It's a great start toward a fulfilling, fruitful future.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Beyond his years, ahead of his time

"Morton was always supportive of pretty much everything... If I had not been in a city that had those kinds of things and that kind of nurturing about music, I wouldn't have kept it up or even started."

Adam Kujawa, Morton High School Class of 2015

It's safe to say that Adam Kujawa, Morton High School Class of 2015, is the youngest person to be featured in the Communicator's Alumni Spotlight.

Curious, then, that this 24-year-old professional musician has earned that distinction because of his mastery of a very old instrument. Indeed, the violin dates back to 16th century Italy, and it has opened some big-time doors for Kujawa.

Recently, he and that fiddle of his – a 95-year-old Voit & Geiger -- landed in the touring production of the Broadway musical "Anastasia," which is taking him all over North America. Kujawa also is the youngest member of the orchestra, surrounded by musicians who are sometimes decades his senior.

"It's tough living out of a suitcase," traveling with a 55-member cast and crew, acknowledges the Morton native who now calls Tennessee home – when he's home – but a Broadway musical written by Tony Award winners (Stephen Flaherty and Lynn Ahrens) is a plum assignment, and he's not complaining.

Indeed, he's glad to be making a living doing the thing he loves most. Last year, he saw a job posting online for a live theater violinist, and thought he was applying for the international tour of "The Sound of Music." He submitted an audition video, and heard … nothing. COVID was raging. Plays were being postponed. Then came the call from "Anastasia."

At this stage of his life and career, he much prefers touring to a stationary gig on Broadway. "The same theater and the same music every night would get boring," he says, and this gives him a chance to see the world. Still, he wouldn't mind stealing away for studio work every now and again, where "you're getting new music all the time."

The tour will run through August 2022 – there's a stop in Springfield in July – with a potential extension after that, but once you're in the Broadway pipeline, "as long as you want to do it, you have a job," said Kujawa.

He figures he'll do this "until I feel like settling down," but in terms of career ambitions, well, "anything to keep playing, that's how I feel about it."

You could say those violin strings tug at Kujawa's heartstrings.

'Never felt like work'

"The violin is one of the closest instruments to the human voice, which I think makes it touch people more than other instruments," Kujawa said of his relationship with the tool of his trade. "It is able to be both very melodic and sweet, and also to be less formal for some genres of music. I like being able to switch between those."

The instrument, and his proficiency with it, is what took him to Tennessee, first to Belmont University in Nashville, where he graduated with degrees in classical performance and commercial music, then to Middle Tennessee State University for his master's. Along the way, he delved deeply into alternative jazz, bluegrass, American fiddle and other genres, enhancing his marketability.

At Belmont, the emphasis was on getting out and performing, and that he did. Kujawa occupied many an orchestra pit within an hour's drive of Nashville, did studio work, worked on movie scores – including one of the "Star Wars" sequels – played in a folk band (Blackwood Row), created video game soundtracks, performed with symphonies, and did concerts with the likes of Sheryl Crow and Kathy Mattea. Somehow, he found time to attend class and to teach private lessons.

"I love playing, so it never felt like work," he said.

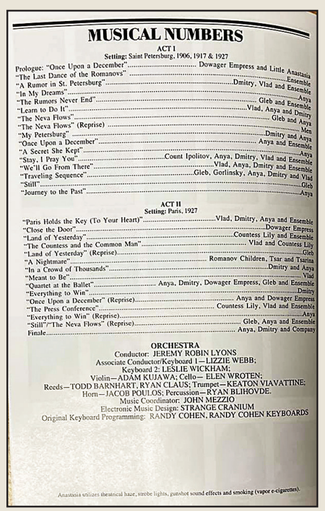
Alas, there's "nothing like live audience interaction," says Kujawa, who gets a taste of it through "Anastasia" as the lone violinist with several solos in the show.

Community support

It all started back home, where Kujawa grew up with parents Roger and Kathy on Polk Street. The music of the Morton High marching band would waft over his neighborhood, and he has "vivid memories" of music always being a part of his life, listening to and singing along with the radio. But otherwise, his family was not musically inclined, for the most part.

Then one day, while at Jefferson Elementary School, "I just picked up the violin." A bond began to form.

He credits a number of mentors — Heidi White and Shane Rocke at Jefferson with giving him the foundation, Kristin Witzig (now Schmidt) with cultivating his skills through countless private lessons, Pete Martin at Morton Junior High and then Dave Getz at Morton High School. He remembers "great teachers" in District 709 who "loved what they did and wanted to be there. I really liked school."



MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT I

Setting: Saint Petersburg, 1906, 1917 & 1927

Prologue: "Once Upon a December" ..... Dowager Empress and Little Anastasia
"The Last Dance of the Romanovs" ..... Ensemble
"A Rumor in St. Petersburg" ..... Dmitry, Vlad and Ensemble
"In My Dreams" ..... Anya
"The Rumors Never End" ..... Gleb and Ensemble
"Learn to Do It" ..... Vlad, Anya and Dmitry
"The Neva Flows" ..... Gleb and Anya
"The Neva Flows" (Reprise) ..... Men
"My Petersburg" ..... Dmitry and Anya
"Once Upon a December" ..... Anya and Ensemble
"A Secret She Kept" ..... Anya
"Stay, I Pray You" ..... Count Ipolitov, Anya, Dmitry, Vlad and Ensemble
"We'll Go From There" ..... Vlad, Anya, Dmitry and Ensemble
"Traveling Sequence" ..... Gleb, Gorlinsky, Anya, Dmitry and Vlad
"Still" ..... Gleb
"Journey to the Past" ..... Anya

ACT II

Setting: Paris, 1927

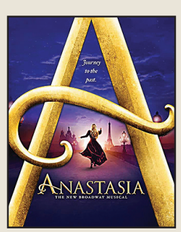
"Paris Holds the Key (To Your Heart)" ..... Vlad, Dmitry, Anya and Ensemble
"Close the Door" ..... Dowager Empress
"Land of Yesterday" ..... Countess Lily and Ensemble
"The Countess and the Common Man" ..... Vlad and Countess Lily
"Land of Yesterday" (Reprise) ..... Gleb
"A Nightmare" ..... Romanov Children, Tsar and Tsarina
"In a Crowd of Thousands" ..... Dmitry and Anya
"Meant to Be" ..... Vlad
"Quartet at the Ballet" ..... Anya, Dmitry, Dowager Empress, Gleb and Ensemble
"Everything to Win" ..... Dmitry
"Once Upon a December" (Reprise) ..... Anya and Dowager Empress
"The Press Conference" ..... Countess Lily, Vlad and Ensemble
"Everything to Win" (Reprise) ..... Anya
"Still"/"The Neva Flows" (Reprise) ..... Gleb, Anya and Ensemble
Finale ..... Anya, Dmitry and Company

ORCHESTRA
Conductor: JEREMY ROBIN LYONS
Associate Conductor/Keyboard 1—LIZZIE WEBB;
Keyboard 2: LESLIE WICKHAM;
Violin—ADAM KUJAWA; Cello— ELLEN WROTEN;
Reeds—TODD BARNHART, RYAN CLAUS; Trumpet—KEATON VIAVATTINE;
Horn—JACOB POULOS; Percussion—RYAN BLIHOVDE;
Music Coordinator: JOHN MEZZIO
Electronic Music Design: STRANGE CRANIUM
Original Keyboard Programming: RANDY COHEN, RANDY COHEN KEYBOARDS

Anastasia utilizes theatrical haze, strobe lights, gunshot sound effects and smoking (vapor e-cigarettes).

And he liked branching out, developing his talents even further with the Central Illinois Youth Symphony and Peoria Pops.

"Adam stands out as one of the most driven performers that I've had the pleasure of having in class. He took advantage of literally every performing opportunity possible during his years as an MHS orchestra student," said Getz.



"He was one of the early adopters of electric instruments in the orchestra, and he often soloed.

"He always loved playing arrangements of pop music, and his style was perfectly suited for Nashville … We are super proud of Adam and the way he has been able to continue to grow as a musician since his days at MHS."

The feeling is mutual, as Kujawa does not believe he would be where he is if not for the emphasis placed on music programs by the district and the following they have in the community.

"Morton was always supportive of pretty much everything," he said. "If I had not been in a city that had those kinds of things and that kind of nurturing about music, I wouldn't have kept it up or even started."

'Don't give up'

His advice may not have been forged over decades of rough-and-tumble experience, but he's been around enough to know a few things.

"The obvious is don't give up," he said. "It can be very difficult, especially when you get the no's. It's going to happen.

"Be persistent. Keep going for it. You won't always get through to people on the first try. If you do get people who are not supportive, there's somebody else out there who is."

Meanwhile, don't dwell too long on what you can no longer change. If he flubs something in a live performance, which can happen over eight shows a week, sometimes three in a single day, "you have to keep going. I can't fix it. I can do it better the next time."

Morton High's published authors earn readers, real-life lessons, new relationships

"If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it."

The students in Mackenzie Love's advanced French class recently took celebrated author Toni Morrison's advice to heart as they spent the first semester writing and publishing the bilingual books that had nearly 60 third-graders at Lincoln Elementary School enthusiastically wanting to read them.

Those Morton High modern language students actually took it a few steps further, involving classmates from art, creative writing, journalism, desktop publishing, computer engineering design and food preparation to give these 8- and 9-year-olds not only something to read but piqued their interest by making them the stars of their own story.

In addition, the kids were gifted a book-related action figure manufactured just for them, a foreign language lesson, an event to remember and new friendships to cherish. This being a thoroughly modern crowd, these young Lincoln Lions also could scan a QR code in order to read their stories on computers.

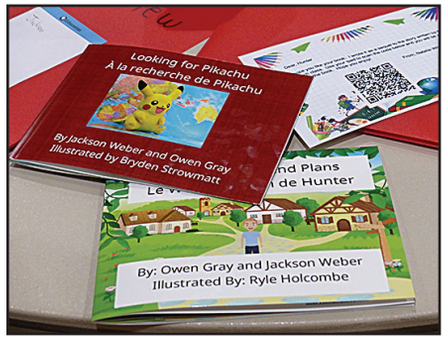
Along the way, the high schoolers received real-world lessons in interviewing, writing, illustrating, publishing, computer engineering, 3D printer manufacturing, product development, marketing, cooking and entertaining their clients.

All in all, more than 300 students took part.

It's the kind of interdisciplinary, intergenerational project that has students simultaneously learning and teaching, and that arguably represents the best of the 21st century classroom. Meanwhile, it allowed them to achieve a rare distinction: Teenagers who are now published authors.

"I'm amazed by what they've created.

MHS senior Caroline Potts poses with fans of her newly formed book club.



They exceeded any expectations," said Love, who came up with the idea after "reading to my 3-year-old" and "always looking for ways to use French outside the classroom."

She found eager partners not only in her students but in fellow teachers Amy Woods (art), Karen Gardner (family and consumer science, foods), Eric Myers (business education, desktop publishing), Lauralee Moss (language arts, creative writing), Tiffany Beard (technology education) and Jodi Gordon (language arts, creative writing). Joined by Lincoln Elementary instructors Janelle Guetschow, Kayla Knoblock and Jacey Wharram, they made a formidable team.

Their involvement was an easy call.

"We have so many creative kids," said Moss. "We should show it off."

For Beard, it was a chance for her students to learn and master the 3D modeling software, to take the illustrations created by other classes and "bring those to life as figurines."

"My kids finally had a real client and had to meet an actual deadline," she said. "They came out with a lot more confidence in their abilities."

"It definitely was fun to see them run with it," said Woods. "It's good to see the student engagement."

In the end, the assignment "took on a life of its own."

Meanwhile, the third graders were full participants, as they were asked to help plot their own stories with themselves as the protagonists in them. The results were reflected in English/French titles such as "Lewis' Flying Adventure" (L'Aventure Voler de Lewis), "Scarlet's Search for a Sidekick" (Scarlet Cherche un Acolyte) and

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AUTHORS

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"Looking for Pikachu" (A la Recherche de Pikachu).

The semester's worth of work culminated in a December get-together at Morton High, where students were presented their books and action figures … and where they devoured sugar cookies, of course.

Ultimately, it was hard to tell who got more out of the experience, the little kids or the big kids.

"I loved this assignment because it involved other classes," said senior Caroline Potts, who will attend the University of Iowa to study business next fall. "It's cool to give to other people."

What was her takeaway?

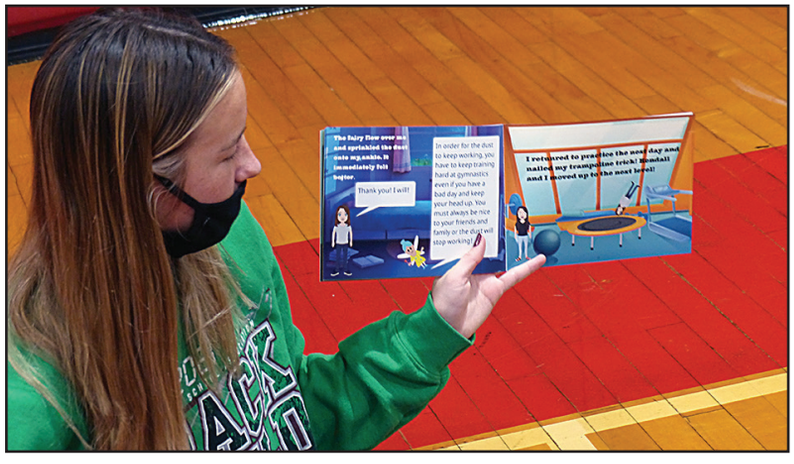
"When something might seem tough to pull off, you can do it with the help of other people."

For football player and self-described "math and science guy" Jackson Weber, it was about the teamwork, too, as well as allowing him to stretch in a different direction outside his initial comfort zone.

"Definitely speaking skills. Definitely writing skills. It's hard to think in a different language," senior Olivia Pippin said of what the exercise coaxed out of her. Beyond that, it was the importance of process -- of taking a vision and, step by step, turning it into reality.

"It's definitely something different … definitely a community effort," said senior Aubrey Mattson, who is considering minoring in French in college as a result of the experience. The children were "very excited getting a book custom-made to their likes and interests, plus the action figure.

"It was the best of both worlds."



Lincoln third-graders enjoy the fruits of MHS students' labors.

Morton High School administrator honored

Morton High School Associate Principal Jamie Adolphson has been selected by the Illinois Principals Association as the Assistant Principal of the Year for the Central Illinois region.

Her name now goes into nomination for the statewide Assistant Principal of the Year.

JAMIE ADOLPHSON

"I cannot imagine a more deserving candidate," Superintendent Jeff Hill said.

Both he and MHS Principal Deidre Ripka lauded Adolphson's growth as a leader, first as assistant principal/dean when she arrived four years ago to her promotion this past year as associate principal.

"She has really stepped up on our intervention efforts with students struggling with academic and social/emotional issues, which are more pronounced than ever now, in the era of COVID," said Hill.

Meanwhile, she has been described as "second to none in her advocacy for our kids."

Nothing if not data-driven, Adolphson also has applied what she's learned to the social/emotional needs of staff members, whose well-being also is critical to the health of the students in their charge, said Hill.

"Our school climate is a very positive and collaborative one in no small part due to her efforts," he said.

As activities director at the high school, Adolphson has done the nuts-and-bolts work of coordinating countless student programs, from finding sponsors to providing the support necessary to ensure that important rite-of-passage events go off as planned. Meanwhile, she has involved the community in the life of the schools, putting together fundraisers that link the organizations outside Morton classrooms with the students inside them, which has proven a mutually beneficial arrangement.

Finally, Adolphson has somehow found the time and energy to take a very active role among her peers statewide. Specifically, she was a hands-on participant in the authorship of the Assistant Principal Playbook on behalf of the Illinois Principals Association, that organization's attempt to provide guidance on a role that can be very difficult to define.

Congratulations, Ms. Adolphson!

District Calendar 2022-23

Month	Date	Day			Days of Pupil Attendance
August, 2022	10	Wednesday	**Teacher Institute Day**	No School	
	11	Thursday	**First day of attendance for students:** **Elementary – 8:20 a.m. to 11:55 a.m.** **Brown – 8:10 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.** **Jr.Hi/H.S. – 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.**	A.M. Only	15
September	5	Monday	Labor Day	No School	
	16	Friday	**Early Dismissal-** Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	21
October	5	Wednesday	**Early Dismissal-** Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	
	10	Monday	Columbus Day	No School	
	14	Friday	Inservice, Half-day (p.m.)***	A.M. Only	
	20	Thursday	P-T Conference	No School	
	21	Friday	P-T Conference	No School	18
November	2	Wednesday	**Early Dismissal-** Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	
	8	Tuesday	Election Day Holiday – State Mandated	No School	
	11	Friday	Veterans Day	No School	
	23-25	Wed. – Fri.	Thanksgiving Vacation	No School	17
December	7	Wednesday	**Early Dismissal-** Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	
	21	Wednesday	Inservice Half-day (p.m.)*** **Grundy, Lincoln, Jefferson – 8:20 – 11:55 a.m.** **Brown – 8:10 – 11:45 a.m.** **Junior High – 8:00 - 11:00 a.m.** **High School – 8:00 - 12:05 p.m. (Final Exams)**	A.M. Only	
	22-30	Thurs. – Fri.	Christmas Vacation	No School	15
January, 2023	2-6	Mon. – Fri.	Christmas Vacation, cont.	No School	
	9	Monday	School Resumes		
	9	Monday	**Early Dismissal**-Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	
	16	Monday	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	No School	16
February	1	Wednesday	**Early Dismissal**-Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	
	20	Monday	Presidents' Day	No School	19
March	1	Wednesday	**Early Dismissal**- Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	
	10	Friday	Inservice, Half-day (p.m.)***	A.M. Only	23
April	3-7	Mon. – Fri.	Spring Break	No School	
	10	Monday	Easter Break	No School	
	12	Wednesday	**Early Dismissal**- Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	14
May	3	Wednesday	**Early Dismissal**- Elem.-11:55 (BR-11:45) JH/HS-11:00	A.M. Only	
	20	*Saturday*	*High School Graduation–10:00 a.m.- Tentative Date*		
	29	Monday	Memorial Day	No School	18
June	2	Friday	**Last Day for Students*** **Inservice Half-day (p.m.)** **Grundy, Lincoln, Jefferson – 8:20 – 11:55 a.m.** **Brown – 8:10 – 11:45 a.m.** **Junior High – 8:00 - 11:00 a.m.** **High School – 8:00 - 12:05 p.m. (Final Exams)**	A.M. Only	
	5	Monday	**Last Day of the School Term*** **Teacher Institute Day**		

*** - End of quarter.

Note: *Any unused emergency days can be declared as special holidays. In the event that no emergency days are used, May 24 would be the last student attendance day and May 25 a Teacher Institute day.

Approved: January 18, 2022

This year 'one for the record books'

Ask many a longtime observer of Morton schools and follower of its teams, and you hear the word "unprecedented" regarding the success of so many athletic and other extra-curricular programs this school year.

The Morton High Band won its 16th consecutive state title and finished 30th in national competition. Boys' cross-country took home a third-place state trophy. The football program made the Final 4 on its way to the best season in school history. Boys' soccer reached the super-sectional game, falling just short of state.

Some of the wealth spilled over to the junior high, where the seventh-grade girls' basketball squad and boys' baseball team both reached state title games.

Now the high school boys' and girls' basketball teams are picking up where the fall sports left off, and the wrestling program has made strides, too.

"The fall sports season was definitely one for the record books," said Scott Jones, athletic director and assistant principal at Morton High School. He attributes the success to multiple factors, starting with student and parent commitment, an emphasis on off-season preparation, the district's overall dedication not only to physical but mental health at a very challenging time, and inspired coaching.

So, what does it take to put together not just a single breakout season but a program of sustained excellence?

Cross-country Coach Joe Zeller and football Coach Tim Brilley oversee very different sports, but to hear them talk, the keys to success are very similar.

2021-22 school year highlights

▶ Morton High boys' cross-country team (shown here with their trophy) finishes third statewide in Class 2A, the program's highest placement ever. Girls finish 19th

▶ COVID diagnoses among staff and students hit zero on Oct. 29, 2021, a first since the pandemic arrived, and never exceed 2 percent of the overall student population

▶ Morton High School Band wins 16th consecutive Class 2A state title, finishes third across all Illinois classes and 30th in a nationwide band competition

▶ Morton High football team enjoys its most successful season, making the Final 4 in Class 5A

▶ Morton High boys' soccer program reaches super-sectional game, falls just short of state appearance

▶ Morton High Yearbook staff gets national recognition with "Gallery of Excellence Award"

▶ Morton High Homecoming Dance has highest participation in memory, with nearly two-thirds of students attending

▶ Morton Junior High School 7th grade girls' basketball squad reaches state title game, takes home second place trophy

▶ Morton Junior High baseball team takes second in state

▶ MJHS girls' golf program sends an unprecedented five players to state

▶ U.S. News & World Report ranks MJHS 60th among more than 1,800 Illinois middle and junior high schools, and MHS 91st among 700 Illinois high schools. Test score results overall remain superior among peers and approach or surpass pre-pandemic levels

It's about not just building athletes but a culture and community where healthy relationships are cultivated and success becomes the expectation. Champions are made in the off-season. You play the way you practice. Develop the whole person and watch the athlete in that person blossom.

Cross-country is often viewed by outsiders as an individual endeavor but in fact it is very much a team sport, said Zeller.

"We ask ourselves, 'How are we going to get this done?' The answer is, 'Together,'" he said. "It's not just on race day. The community-building is year-round."

Indeed, the foundation is poured when his athletes are putting in the time and effort and miles out on a country road at sunup on a summer's day when no coaches are around.

"You learn a lot about a guy when you're running with him for an hour and a half on a Saturday morning," said Zeller, who teaches math when he's not peering at a stopwatch.

"Running can be a lonely thing sometimes," he acknowledges, but when it comes right down to it, near the end of a race when the breathing becomes labored and mere seconds make the difference between a medal or not and the finish line seems very, very far away, "you're not running for your town or high school or parents, you're running for the six other guys on the line with you.

"Doing it together is what's going to make them great."

In the end, "what I'd like the guys and girls to do is commit themselves, to go all in … The trophies are a byproduct of what I really want. What I really want is for them to build that community as a team and work toward the best of their abilities."

Brilley, in his sixth year as Morton's football coach, echoes many of those sentiments.

Please see SUCCESS, Page 14

ABOVE: The award-winning Morton High School Band performs during Community Night.
BELOW: Morton High Football Coach Tim Brilley coaches the team from the field.

SUCCESS

Continued from page 13

While the goal coming in to this school year was "to do something we hadn't done," he said, "if you told me we'd go from a 3-3 team in the spring (of 2021) to the semifinal, I wouldn't have believed you."

When he first arrived in Morton, his goals were to build the program's numbers, create a new culture and be competitive year in and year out in the Mid-Illini Conference.

"We're really happy with where we're at," said Brilley, and not just on the gridiron. While he bragged two football all-staters, he's every bit as proud of the five academic all-staters on the squad, as well as those who emerged as leaders in his locker room.

"We expect football to be on the priority list. It doesn't have to be number one … They're high school kids. It's not a job for these guys," Brilley said.

That attitude, along with the commitment to keeping it simple, is what makes it fun, what keeps the kids coming back year after year, and why he's optimistic about the future.

"You can't have a season like this without having a lot of good kids who buy into what you're trying to do. We showed up to work every day. We never had a bad practice from August on," said Brilley.

"We really just talk about reaching our potential as a team. We probably exceeded our potential this year."

Three difference makers, in sports and beyond

On any winning team, there are likely to be at least a few gifted athletes who help make everyone else around them better.

While there were many outstanding performances, three Morton High student/athletes — seniors Seth Glatz, Katie Krupa and Cade Zobrist — have stood out this year and in their careers and, in many ways, serve as models of consistency and excellence for others.

Seth Glatz

Glatz had a football season for the ages, as the MHS running back led the state, and for a time the nation, in rushing yardage – an astonishing 3,250 yards total, a career for many, along with 46 touchdowns. He was at his best when it counted most, piling up more than 1,200 yards and 18 TDs in four playoff games, the program's deepest run ever. Meanwhile, he also played in the defensive secondary, rarely leaving a game.

Glatz isn't one to talk much about himself, unless you get him going on his business, Mo-Town Sneakers – he's an entrepreneur, too – so Coach Tim Brilley is happy to do it for him.

The three-sport athlete – he's playing basketball now, he's run track – who also happens to be an academic all-stater is the very definition of a "complete" player, said Brilley.

Glatz is strong and fast, but vision is his number one physical attribute, said Brilley. It certainly helps to have an effective offensive line – the "Hogs" – clearing the way, but "he's going to make something out of nothing," the coach said. "He can make you miss. He can run you over. I've never seen him caught from behind."

Beyond that, what separates Glatz is that "he puts the time in to get better," said Brilley. "He believes in himself. What you saw in the post-season was a very focused player. He needed to put the team on his back."

Remarkably, recruiting interest in Glatz didn't pick up until after the season, and the future finance major is still mulling his higher-ed options.

Please see ATHLETES, Page 15

ATHLETES

Continued from page 14

Katie Krupa

Krupa also is an all-stater, on the basketball court and in the classroom, which has earned her entrance to prestigious Harvard University.

At the press conference announcing her college choice, she talked about her journey and how she "got up every single morning before grade school to shoot hoops in the driveway," about the sacrifices her parents made to get her where she is, and about how Coach Bob Becker brought out her best.

It helps to be 6'2", of course, but more important, "Katie is a confident, driven, high-achiever. She takes pride in all she does," Becker said. "She sets lofty goals and holds high standards … Katie excels on the court, in the classroom and in our community, but not by chance or accident. She invests time and effort and is a conscientious leader on and off the court."

And she's not done. "The sisterhood is very real here," said Krupa. "I'm so excited to play with my girls one more time."

At Harvard, she'll study neuroscience, with designs on running her own medical practice someday. "They really focused on balancing academics and athletics," she said. "That's exactly what lines up with my values.

"It's the opportunity of a lifetime for me."

Cade Zobrist

Zobrist was a steady frontrunner all season, culminating in a medal and all-state status for his ninth-place finish at the IHSA state cross-country meet in November.

"I'm definitely proud," he said. "But the thing I'm proudest of is all the hard work the guys put in … It's just great to be around those guys."

His career was a testament to consistent effort and constant improvement, moving up the team ladder each season, concluding in a personal best in his final high school race.

"Cade came in as a talented runner, but it took him a little while to fully realize what he is capable of," said his coach, Joe Zeller. "During his junior year, he decided he wanted to go for it. His senior season was the product of that decision and the work that followed. Cade has always been a great friend to his teammates and extremely well-liked. His presence will definitely be missed."

Indeed, Zobrist graduated in December, and he'll be working this spring before matriculating at Indiana's Taylor University in the fall.

He is saddened not to be running with his track teammates, particularly on the 4x800 relay, but he's looking forward to attending his "dream school" and getting the chance to continue his running career.

And he'll take at least one thing from Morton with him: "Cross-country, we're like family."

GAMEBALL RUN 2022

Gameball Run celebrates 10th anniversary

Gameball Run is District 709's annual fundraiser for Children's Hospital of Illinois, having generated nearly $750,000 over the last nine years for that life-saving facility, with the goal of reaching $1 million in the near future. A record $135,114 was raised in 2021.

This year's 10th anniversary Run will be held **Feb. 10-11**, with educational and fundraising activities at all of Morton's schools and throughout the community.

What is Gameball Run?

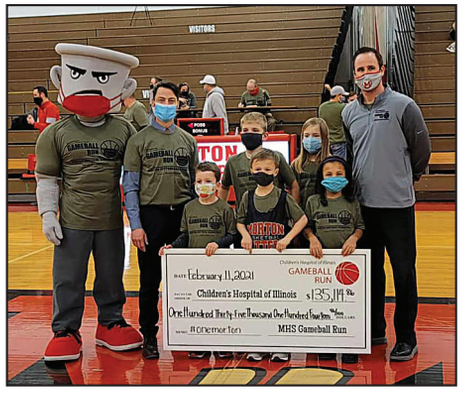
This community-wide fundraising effort is centered around the Morton High School varsity boys' basketball team.
Fundraising occurs through three major avenues:
▸ School efforts, with participation from every District 709 school, as well as Bethel Lutheran and Blessed Sacrament schools
▸ Business and personal sponsorships
▸ Outright gifts

T-shirts

T-shirt sales are a key feature, with more than 1,800 purchases each year. Those are worn to the Gameball Run basketball game and seen throughout the year. This year, the shirts are tie-dyed. White hoodies and crewneck sweatshirts also are being sold.

What does Gameball Run support?

The money generated through Gameball Run goes to a great cause: the most needed initiatives at OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois.
Over the past nine years, more than $742,000 from Morton has supported the hospital's neonatal and pediatric intensive care units. A patient room at the facility's intermediate intensive care unit is named in Morton's honor. In addition, Morton's Gameball Run was part of the initial fundraising for Peoria's Almost Home Kids facility, where a garden carries our community's name.
The dollars generated in our community this year are intended for the Heller Center for Kids with Cancer.
Meanwhile, each school has selected a



Pictured above is the check presentation at the 2021 Gameball Run

miracle family that will represent its fundraising efforts. Read about the families and their stories at www.MortonGameballRun.org.

Save the dates

Again, Gameball's culminating events are the Run on **Thursday, Feb. 10,** at the stadium track, and the Gameball Celebration and Game on **Friday, Feb. 11,** at the MHS Potterdome.
The Celebration event will occur just prior to the start of the varsity boys' basketball game. All sponsors and miracle families from the past 10 years will be honored, and the fundraising check will be presented at this time.

Mission Statement

Gameball Run is a community event that aims to raise money and awareness for Children's Hospital of Illinois by:
▸ Involving all schools, all students and our community
▸ Providing an opportunity for the boys' basketball team to serve in a philanthropic role
▸ Offering the chance to give back to an organization that has served multiple families and students in the Morton schools

What can you personally do?

▸ Buy your Gameball Run t-shirt or sweatshirt as your "ticket" to the game on Friday, Feb. 11, and wear it in support then and throughout the year!

▸ Sign up to be a part of the Run starting at 4 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 10, at Morton High's Carper Field track. All participants will receive a runner's bib for entrance onto the track. For those who don't want to lace up their running/walking shoes, come on out and cheer the other participants and enjoy the entertainment, concessions and a short program.

▸ Support your individual school's fundraising efforts.

▸ Become a sponsor! Sponsorship levels begin at $250

▸ Please scan the QR code to the right, which will direct you to the Heller Center for Kids with Cancer and provide the opportunity to make a donation, either on your own behalf or that of a school.

Our valued sponsors

Presenting Sponsor – Championship Level
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Friends of the Heller Center for Kids with Cancer
Gameball Run Sponsor – Super Sectional
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Family of Jesse Crawford
Brooke & Co. Salon