



2025-2026 SCHOOLHOUSE

MT. ZION SCHOOL DISTRICT #3

MMXXV



Jeffrey Sams
Board President



Kyle Janvrin
Board Vice President



Michelle Shumaker
Board Secretary



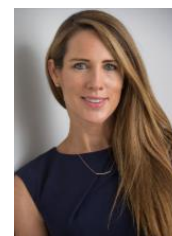
Regan Deering
Board Member



Kent Newton
Board Member



Eric Law
Board Member



Dr. Courtney
Gaine Cuddy
Board Member

School Start Times:

Grades 7-12.....7:45 a.m.

Grades K-6.....8:30 a.m.

Early Dismissal Times:

Aug 15, Dec 19 & the last day of school

Grades 7-12.....11:05 a.m.

Grades K-6.....11:35 a.m.

Regular Dismissal Times:

Aug 18 & each regular school day after that

Grades 7-12.....2:30 p.m.

Grades K-6.....3:00 p.m.

SUPERINTENDENT



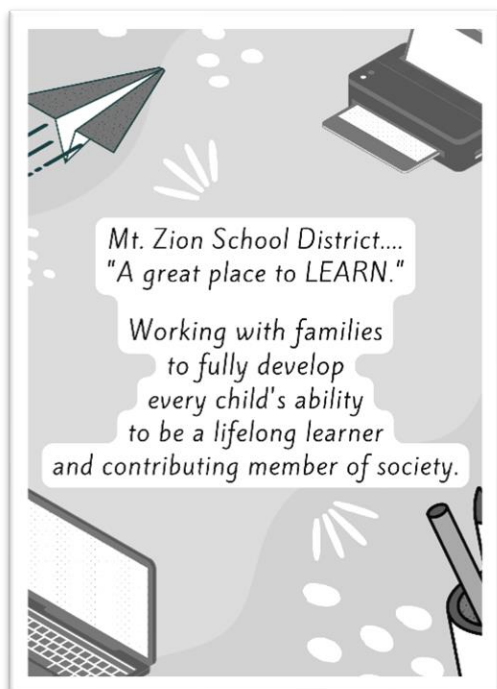
Dr. Travis R. Roundcount

WELCOME TO THE 2025–2026 SCHOOL YEAR!

We're excited to welcome all of our Mt. Zion families to another fantastic school year! Linked here is the [\[2025–2026 School Calendar\]](#), so you can plan ahead.

Our teachers, staff, and administrators will officially kick off the year with Institute Days on **August 13th and 14th**. These days are set aside for building-level and district-wide meetings, as well as important organizational sessions. **Students return to school on Friday, August 15th**, with a **half-day dismissal**. Regular bus transportation will begin that day. Please note, however, that pick-up and drop-off times may vary slightly in August as families and drivers adjust to the new routes.

If you have any questions about school programs or need to share special circumstances, please reach out to your child's school principal or the district office—we're here to help.



STAFFING & ENROLLMENT UPDATES

We're proud to have such a talented and dedicated team returning for this school year. Our teachers go above and beyond to meet the needs of our students, and their efforts are deeply appreciated. We're incredibly proud to announce a **94% teacher retention rate!** This figure reflects our unwavering commitment to creating a supportive and thriving environment for our educators. This high retention rate directly benefits our students, ensuring consistency, experienced instruction, and strong, lasting relationships that foster exceptional learning outcomes. In addition to internal movements, we posted a few teaching positions for the next school year, including:

- Show Choir Director at the Junior High and High School
- Pre-K Teacher at McGaughey
- Speech Teacher at McGaughey & Mt. Zion Grade
- Special Education Teacher at Mt. Zion Grade
- Junior High Science Teacher
- Junior High English Teacher
- High School Math Teacher
- High School English Teacher

Mt. Zion Schools now serve **16% of all students in Macon County**, a milestone we reached last year and expect to build on as new families register in August.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

We look forward to the release of the 2025 school report cards this fall. While test scores aren't the only measure of success, they do offer insight into how well we're preparing students for the future, and we're proud of the results they reflect. Across multiple grades, Mt. Zion is outperforming other students across the state in both English language arts (ELA) and mathematics on the Illinois standardized tests. To view last year's report card, [\[click here\]](#).

SCHOOL SUPPLIES (K-6)

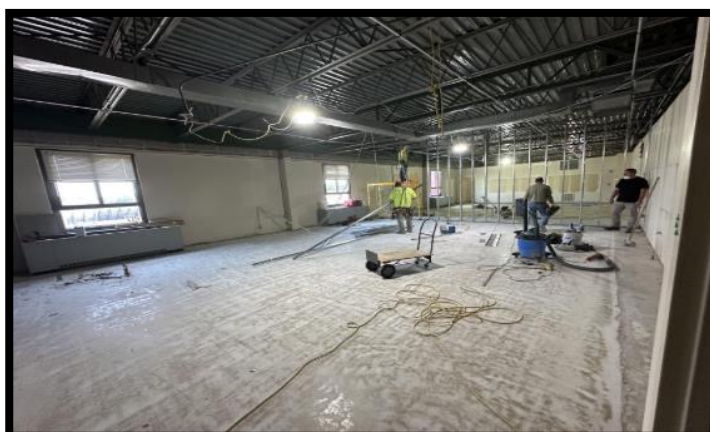
Great news for elementary families—**no more shopping for school supplies!** For grades K-6, just send your child with a backpack. Supplies will be at the school when students arrive on the first day! No more trying to find the right items, dealing with sold-out

supplies, paying tax on school supplies when the school doesn't pay tax, or schools dealing with not all the students having what they need.

FACILITIES & IMPROVEMENTS

We've been busy improving our schools over the summer:

- **Science Lab Renovations** at the Junior High and High School are underway and expected to be completed by the first week of August. This will provide an enhanced learning environment for our students. I'll share the "after" photos on Twitter at the start of the year.



- The **Fieldhouse track** will be repainted this winter—it's hard to believe that the facility is already over 10 years old!
- **New accessible playground equipment** is being installed at the Intermediate School, including a wheelchair-friendly swing.
- **Gym floors** at Mt. Zion Grade, Intermediate, and High School are all scheduled to be refinished this summer.
- The **McGaughey bus circle** is undergoing major upgrades, including new pavement, improved drainage (eliminating "Lake McGaughey" after it rains), and additional visitor parking near the front entrance.
- **Turf baseball and softball fields** are currently being planned for the summer of 2026.

CELEBRATING STUDENT SUCCESS

Congratulations to our **7th-grade girls track team**, who placed **3rd at state**, and the **8th-grade boys**, who placed **4th**! In total, Mt. Zion has had **25 sports teams place in the top 4 at state over the past 13 years**—an incredible accomplishment.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

A balanced budget today ensures a stronger, more secure tomorrow for our school community. We again concluded the fiscal year with a balanced budget, and we remain committed to fiscal responsibility, ensuring that tax dollars are spent wisely and effectively.

HOMESCHOOL PARTICIPATION

Homeschool students are welcome to participate in many of our extracurricular activities if they are enrolled in at least one class. Please visit our district website to learn more about eligibility and policies.

MASCOT LEGISLATION UPDATE

Many of you may have heard about proposed state legislation regarding school mascots. We can confirm that the bill **did not pass** this spring. If it had, the impact on our district would have been minimal. Any required changes would have occurred only during scheduled renovations of facilities displaying the name “Braves” or the spear symbol. Additionally, our current uniforms and many displays already align with what would have been permitted. We will continue monitoring this issue in future legislative sessions—but for now, **Mt. Zion remains the home of the Braves**.

LOOKING AHEAD

We hope everyone is enjoying a restful and fun summer. We have so much to look forward to in the coming year, and we remain committed to making Mt. Zion Schools a **great place to learn!**

Let's make it a
great year
together!

RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS

Per the Illinois School Code, permanent records must indicate that the parent/legal guardian resides within the boundaries of this school district. Families who are new to the District or families enrolling new students in the District must observe the residency requirements [found here](#). The residency documents must be provided to school personnel in the building where the student will attend.



MT. ZION FOUNDATION FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

We are fortunate to have the Mt. Zion Foundation assist our schools with items that fall outside of the school budget. The Mt. Zion Foundation for Quality Education is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization governed by a Board of Trustees whose members are parent volunteers, business leaders, and professionals from the community with a commitment to education. The Foundation operates as an independent entity, established to enrich programs throughout the Mt. Zion Schools. To donate please follow this link. If you would like to provide the Foundation an extra hand please email mzfge@mtzschools.org.

Once again, the Mt. Zion Foundation for Quality Education has made a remarkable impact on our schools by providing generous grants that enrich classrooms and create exciting new opportunities for our students. This year's projects reflect a wide variety

of enhancements across the district, including flexible seating areas, new desks and tables, wheelchair-accessible furniture, updated science classroom seating, and expanded resources for our agricultural programs. The Foundation also supported literacy by funding the Bluestem Award book sets for every 4th and 5th grade classroom at the Intermediate School, strengthening their thriving Battle of the Books program. Additional grants provided social-emotional learning tools for younger students, upgraded classroom reading areas, and new foreign language books to better support our growing English language learner population.

Beyond the classroom, the Foundation's support is helping bring learning to life through engaging field trips, guest speakers, interactive zoo visits, and hands-on programs like the Probability Fair where high school students teach math concepts to younger learners through fun games. Arts and music programs also benefited from the purchase of new instruments and technology like iPads for creating digital portfolios. Classroom upgrades continued with new interactive flat panels, glockenspiels, and even materials to expand the monarch butterfly garden. The Foundation also continued to support programs like The Tribe, which helps freshman students build positive connections and adjust to high school life.

For over 32 years, the Mt. Zion Foundation for Quality Education has provided more than **two million dollars** to help bring innovative projects and meaningful experiences to Mt. Zion Schools, and we are incredibly grateful for their ongoing partnership and generosity.

Mt. Zion is fortunate to have the following individuals as Foundation for Quality Education Trustees for the 2025-2026 school year: Zach Anderson, Jessica Allen, Amy Brammer, Katy Doolin, Trisha Erickson, Lisa Flora, Jamie Foster, Amanda Jones, Ross Munsterman, Kylee Roney, Billy Rockey, Michelle Shumaker, Mary Swartz, and Betsy Tanner. To continue our success, our schools are staffed with dedicated men and women who are committed to providing our children with an excellent education in a safe and secure environment. Parental involvement also contributes immeasurably to the success of our schools. We encourage our parents to join us and be involved in the many active parent organizations in the District. This combined effort makes Mt. Zion Schools "a great place to learn."

ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT



Brian Rhoades

To our new families, welcome to the Mt. Zion School District! We are excited to have you join our community and look forward to supporting your child's success in our schools. To our returning families, welcome back—we're glad to have you with us again for the 2025-26 school year!

In the Business Office, our mission is to continue providing an exceptional educational experience for all students, while responsibly managing the financial resources entrusted to us. Every decision we make is centered on what is best and most necessary to help our students grow into productive and successful citizens.

The State of Illinois continues to support schools through the Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) formula, which combines local property tax revenue with state aid. This model determines a target funding level for each district based on its demographics and provides additional resources to districts that fall below that goal. Mt. Zion currently receives increased funding through this formula, as we are still funded at around 70% of the adequacy target—placing us in one of the lowest funding tiers statewide. On the local level, we continue to have one of the lowest two property tax rates in all of Macon County. We remain hopeful that our increasing EAV and the EBF funding will help us to move closer to the full adequacy level in the years ahead and help us to continue to offer more and more opportunities to our students.

As always, I welcome your suggestions, questions, and feedback. We will continue building on past successes and actively seek opportunities for improvement throughout the district. I look forward to partnering with all of you as we work together to ensure Mt. Zion remains a "great place to learn."

STUDENT ACCIDENT INSURANCE COVERAGE

All students enrolled in Mt. Zion CUSD #3 are covered under the District's Supplemental Student Accident Insurance policy. This coverage provides benefits for eligible medical expenses resulting from accidents that occur during the school day or while participating in school-sponsored co-curricular activities.

Please note that this policy serves as secondary insurance. It is designed to help cover medical expenses when no other health insurance is available, or to supplement existing coverage by filling in gaps.

In the event of an accident, the student will be provided with a claim form for a parent or guardian to complete and submit to the insurance carrier. For any questions or additional information regarding this coverage, please contact the Mt. Zion CUSD #3 Central Office at (217) 864-2366.

E-FUNDS AND ELECTRONIC PAYMENT OPTIONS

Mt. Zion CUSD #3 is pleased to continue offering **E-Funds** as a convenient way for parents and guardians to make real-time payments for various school-related expenses.

To get started, you must create an E-Funds account using the link provided on the Family Access Food Service page or through the school district's website. Once your account is set up, you can select your child's name and make payments via checking account transfer or credit card. Funds are deposited directly into the appropriate school account.

Please note that E-Funds applies the following convenience fees:

- \$1.25 per transaction for payments made via checking account.
- \$2.85 per \$100 transaction for credit card payments.

In addition to E-Funds, the District accepts electronic payments for student food service accounts, registration fees, and other applicable school payments. However, please be aware that this payment method may take up to one week to process. As a result, it should not be used for lunch balances under \$10.00 or for any payments that require immediate credit. Funds will not be applied to your child's account until the District receives confirmation of the transaction from the bank.

To access the free electronic payment system, please follow the instructions provided on the district website or contact the school office for assistance.

1. Go to your local bank's online bill pay system. Enter a school building's name and address from the list below, as the company you wish to pay. For children in different buildings, please make separate entries and the bank will send separate checks. If you are making a payment for Registration and Food Service to the same building we would again ask that you make separate entries and the bank will send separate checks. This will allow the District to better track the payments being made by the bank.
2. On your bank's online bill pay system, enter the amount of the payment you wish to make.
3. On your bank's online bill pay system, enter in the memo line/description line the reason for the payment. Please be specific and provide as much information as possible (student's name, student's ID#, reason for payment - food service, registration fee, etc.).

START DATES:

***Teacher Institute Days
(No Student Attendance)***

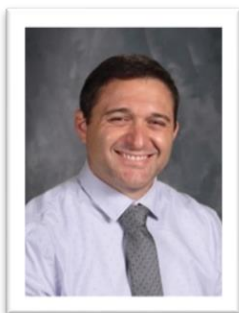
August 13th and 14th

***First Day for Students
Grades K-12, Early Dismissal,***

August 15th

11:05 for Grades 7-12,

11:35 for Grades K-6

MT. ZION HIGH SCHOOL

Justin Johnson,
Principal



Rob Prange,
Assistant
Principal



Diann Durbin,
Athletic
Director

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Welcome to the 2025-2026 school year!

Online registration will open on July 21st at www.mtzschoools.org. Online registration will allow parents to update information, pay fees, and provide you with access to the 25-26 District Handbook. Families that do not have access to a computer are welcome to come to the school office for assistance in completing online registration. Our on-site registration day is July 30th from 12 PM-6 PM. Returning families are not required to attend, but are welcome to come tour the building, check lockers, and seek any assistance needed from office staff. Anyone enrolling in Mt. Zion School District for the first time must attend on-site registration at the building instead of registering online. New families should bring proof of residency, birth certificate, and a current transcript. We look forward to seeing returning students & meeting new students on July 30th.

GO BRAVES!

HOW TO FIND YOUR SCHEDULE

Schedules will be viewable on Family & Student Access on July 22nd. It is recommended that you print a copy of your schedule prior to the first day of school. Your locker assignment and combination are also accessible on your schedule.

CLASS SCHEDULE TERM CODES

YR - means that you will have this class all year

S1 - means that you will have this class 1st semester only

S2 - means that you will have this class 2nd semester only

T1 - means that you will have this class 1st nine weeks only

T2 - means that you will have this class 2nd nine weeks only

T3 - means that you will have this class 3rd nine weeks only

T4 - means that you will have this class 4th nine weeks only

CLASS/SCHEDULE CHANGES

The only changes that can be made prior to the start of school are listed below:

- If a class you previously requested did not fit into your schedule
- If you are a work program student -- see Mrs. Stephenson
- If you are a new student to our district
- If your schedule does not account for work taken or not taken during summer school
- If you have not signed up for enough classes or have too many classes scheduled for this upcoming year
- If you failed a course last semester and you need to pick up another course

LUNCH ASSIGNMENT

Your lunch is determined by your 6th hour class and will display either A (11:48-12:21) or B (12:35-1:07) next to your 6th period class on your schedule. Lunches will be designated on your schedule by early August.

GUIDANCE DEPARTMENT

Students have been assigned the following counselors:

Freshmen & Juniors.....Mrs. Kasey

Sophomores & Seniors..... Mrs. McCarty

To be able to effectively assist all families, July 30th will primarily be reserved for new students to the district to meet with guidance counselors about scheduling. Returning students are asked to email the assigned counselor (Mrs. McCarty—mccartyn@mtzschoools.org; Mrs. Kasey—kaseya@mtzschoools.org) to make an appointment to meet the first week of school to address questions regarding schedules.

FEES

Instructional Fee

The price for all high school students is \$100.00. You may also purchase an optional Chromebook protection plan for \$25.

Driver Education Fee

There will be a \$40.00 surcharge for all students enrolled in Driver Education classes for the 2025-2026 school year.

Parking Permits

Parking permits (\$40 1st semester, \$20 if purchased on/after January 5th [with a \$60 per family cap]) must be purchased in the office along with filling out a registration card.

Athletic Participation Fee

All athletes must pay a participation fee. The cost of the participation fee is \$60.00 for high school students per sport (\$260.00 family cap). The fee must be paid before the first athletic contest. If the student decides to quit the sport, a refund of the participation fee will be given

up until the first game. No refunds will be given after the first game.

Heartland Tech Academy & Richland Transfer Academy

Technical Academy fee is \$200 for the year and Transfer Academy fee is \$400 for the year.

Free/Reduced Breakfast/Lunch Applications

Applications will be available during registration and on the District webpage. Once the application is completed and submitted to the office, you will be sent a letter to notify you if you were approved or denied according to the guidelines.

PROGRAMS & POLICIES AT MTZ HIGH

- **Welcome Class of 2029!** Mt. Zion High School provides a program to assist freshmen in transitioning into high school that we call The Tribe. The Tribe is designed to welcome & support freshmen by pairing them with a junior or senior leader as a mentor. A special Tribe Orientation & Welcome is planned for incoming freshmen on August 11th from 8 AM to 12 PM.
- **New Staff:** We are proud to welcome our new staff members for this school year: Diann Durbin (Athletic Director) Josie Maul (English) Camryn Skundberg (Math) Haley Baker (Library Aid).

DRESS & APPEARANCE

Please help us set a positive tone in getting the school year off to good start by making appropriate choices when purchasing school clothes. We ask that clothing be safe and respectful.

FRESHMEN & ATHLETIC PHYSICALS

The School Code of Illinois requires that students entering 9th grade, or students who have moved into the district from out of state must have a physical exam completed prior to October 15th.

All students going out for athletics & show choir must

have a current physical to tryout, practice, & compete. A physical is good for 13 months from the date of the exam and a copy of the physical must be on file in the high school office. A 9th grade physical can be used as an athletic physical.

9th grade physical forms & athletic physical forms can be found on the website.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION GYM SUIT POLICY

Every student is required to have regulation gym clothes to participate in Physical Education. This shall consist of a solid red, t-shirt or sweatshirt, solid black shorts or sweatpants, socks, and gym shoes with laces. You may purchase MTZ PE clothing items directly from us.

HEARTLAND TECHNICAL ACADEMY STUDENTS

The first day of attendance for students attending the Technical Academy is Monday, August 18th. The Mt. Zion School District will provide transportation to the Technical Academy on all days including those when Mt. Zion High School is not in session. The bus will depart from the front of the high school at 11:15 a.m. Students attending HTA will be able to purchase school lunches following 4th hour. Morning students must supply their own transportation. All students enrolled in the Heartland Technical Academy will follow the calendar established for the Technical Academy at www.tech-academy.org

FIRST DAY & WEEK of ATTENDANCE

The first day of attendance will be a half day on Friday, August 15th. Classes will begin at 7:45 AM and dismiss at 11:05 AM. Students enrolled in Early Bird classes should report as normal at 6:50 AM.

Beginning August 18th, classes will begin at 7:45 AM and dismiss at 2:30 PM.

ATHLETICS

***Check out all athletic schedules on our website**

1st Day of practice/tryouts are as follows:

- Football—Monday, August 11th, 4-7pm, Football Field. Contact Coach Patrick Etherton @ ethertonp@mtzschoools.org for more info.
- Girls' Golf—Monday, August 11th, 2 pm @ South Side Country Club. Contact Coach Jay Driscoll @ driscollj@mtzschoools.org for more info.
- Boys' Golf—Monday, August 11th, 1 pm @ South Side Country Club. Contact Coach Colby Burdick @ burdickc@mtzschoools.org for more info.
- Cross Country—Monday, August 11th, 7 am @ HS Track. Contact Coach Kelly Fox @ foxks@mtzschoools.org for more info.
- Boys' Soccer—Monday, August 11th, 5 pm @ Intermediate Field. Contact Coach Bryce Shumaker @ 23bshumaker@gmail.com for more info.
- Girls' Tennis—Monday, August 11th, 8 am @ Fletcher Park. Contact Coach Mike Roberts @ robertsm@mtzschoools.org for more info.
- Volleyball—Contact Coach Kristin Sams @ JKSams@hotmail.com for more information.

Athletes must complete the online registration process for school before the first practice listed above.

SCHOOL PICTURES & HEADSHOTS

School pictures for all students will be taken the morning of Wednesday, August 20th. All students should have their picture taken (Grades 9-12), even if you are not purchasing a package, for I.D. cards and Family Access/Skyward use. Picture information is included in the registration email or may be picked up in the high school office. Retakes are scheduled for October 22nd.

Seniors will have yearbook senior headshot pictures taken at school on August 20th as well. They are encouraged to dress in their best for this photo.



Mt. Zion High School

SCHOOL DAY & BELL SCHEDULE AT MTZHS

Classes begin at 7:45 am daily and end at 2:30 pm. The bell schedule is as follows:

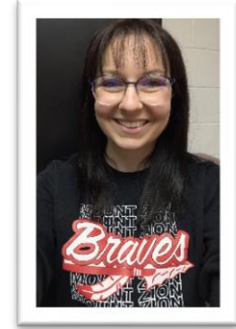
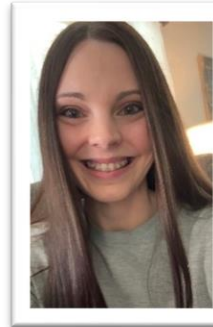
Early Bird	6:50-7:35
Warning Bell	7:35
1 st Hour	7:45-8:30
2 nd Hour	8:34-9:19
3 rd Hour	9:23-10:08
4 th Hour	10:12-10:57
5 th Hour	11:01-11:44
6 th Hour	
A Lunch	11:48-12:19
A Class	11:48-12:31
B Lunch	12:35-1:06
B Class	12:23-1:06
7 th Hour	1:10-1:54
Focus Period	1:58-2:30

SCHOOL OPENING & CLOSING

School doors open at 7:15 AM for all students except those enrolled in Early Bird classes which begin at 6:50 AM. At 7:35 AM, a ten minute warning bell will ring and students will be permitted to go to their lockers and pick up the necessary materials for their first hour class. Students arriving before that time must report directly to the large gymnasium.

Students may see a teacher before that time by providing a hall pass from their teacher and when finished, report directly back to the gymnasium.

The regular school day ends at 2:30 p.m. **Students must be out of the building by 3:00 PM unless they are participating in an extracurricular activity.**

SCHOOL HEALTH

*Carley Morey, McGaughey, Alex Smith, Grade,
Jeanne Luckenbill, Intermediate,
Cassie Mullins, JH/HS
School Nurses*

Welcome back to the new school year! We hope that your summer was a healthy one!

Physical Examination requirements are due on or before the first day of the school year, but no later than October 15th, 2025 for all students entering the following grades for the first time:

- Pre-Kindergarten
- Kindergarten
- 6th grade
- 9th grade
- Any student who is entering an Illinois school for the first time, regardless of grade level, within 6 weeks of enrollment

Dental Examinations or Waiver are required by May 15th, 2026, for all students entering:

- Kindergarten
- 2nd grade
- 6th grade
- 9th grade
- Any student new to the District or entering an Illinois school for the first time regardless of grade level, within 6 weeks of enrollment

Eye/Vision Examinations or Waiver are required by October 15th, 2025 for students entering:

- Kindergarten
- Any student entering an Illinois school for the first time, within six weeks of enrollment

Immunizations must be up to date and on file by October 15th, 2025.

We welcome the opportunity to assist parents and students during the upcoming school year and look forward to seeing all of you soon!

SPECIAL EDUCATION



Renea Smith, Administrator

As we begin the 2025-2026 school year, we are excited to expand opportunities for parent engagement. Last year, we hosted our second Transition Night, featuring several exhibitors who shared resources and opportunities available to students with special needs as they prepare for life after graduation. We are pleased to announce that our third Transition Night is scheduled for October of this year. Please note, this is not an event just for high school students. This is an event for all students with an IEP. This event is designed to provide students with disabilities and their families with comprehensive information about the steps and agencies involved in planning for employment, post-secondary education, and independent living.

In addition, we hosted a Parent Informational Meeting during the first semester. The meeting featured a presenter informing parents about ABLE, which is a savings account that can be started for individuals with disabilities. We received positive feedback and are planning additional informational meetings throughout the school year to continue supporting and connecting with our families. This fall, Mindy Donahue, behavior

specialist, will provide a parent training on September 24th, 2025.

Save the Date: The Illinois Statewide Transition Conference will take place October 30-31st in Springfield at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. This annual event is designed for transition-aged youth and young adults with disabilities, their families, educators, vocational professionals, caregivers, health care providers, and community advocates. The conference will focus on best practices for person-centered transition planning that supports all areas of adult life. Visit their website for registration details.

As always, I am committed to strengthening the services and programs that Mt. Zion offers to support students with diverse needs. Currently, Mt. Zion provides special education services for students from PreK through age 22. These services range from speech-language therapy to self-contained classrooms, and include related services such as occupational therapy, as well as hearing and vision support.

I remain dedicated to creating a supportive and effective learning environment where every student can thrive. I believe that every child can be challenged to reach their full potential, and that success is best achieved through strong partnerships between home and school. My goal is to foster trust, collaboration, and confidence within our school community. I look forward to working with parents and community members as we continue to grow and improve our programs—because relationships come first.

Please feel free to reach out to me at smithr@mtzschools.org.



CURRICULUM AND TECHNOLOGY



Billy Rockey, Director

Hello, my name is Billy Rockey, and I am entering my twelfth year in this position. I have been with Mount Zion Schools for the last eighteen years as a teacher and more recently as the Director of Curriculum and Technology. I am excited to continue serving the teachers, staff, and students of Mount Zion Schools. As the parent of two current Mount Zion students and one recent graduate, working with our teachers and staff on increasing student achievement through more effective use of educational technology and curricular best practices is my number one priority.

Mt. Zion Schools continues to focus on preparing our students to be 21st-century learners equipped to thrive in a rapidly evolving technological world. All students in grades 7-12 will be issued **Brand New** Lenovo 100e Chromebooks for both in-class and at-home use, while students in younger grades have dedicated devices for classroom learning. It's hard to imagine a time when Chromebooks weren't a staple in our educational environment. Today, we are embracing the next wave of technology by actively integrating artificial intelligence (AI) in a safe, ethical, and responsible manner. Through structured professional development, digital citizenship curriculum, and AI literacy initiatives, we are empowering both educators and students to harness AI as a tool for learning, creativity, and problem-solving. Our focus is on helping students critically evaluate AI-generated content, understand its ethical implications, and use it to enhance—rather than replace—their own thinking. Supported platforms like Google Workspace, Gemini, MagicSchool, and Khanmigo provide students at all grade levels with dynamic learning experiences. Many of our teachers have completed Google Level 1 and Level 2 certifications and are now leading the charge as "early adopters" in exploring and sharing best practices for AI in the classroom. We are proud of the strides our staff continues to make in developing their

technology skills to cultivate the next generation of lifelong learners and responsible digital citizens.

We are proud to continue expanding opportunities for students at every grade level. Thanks to generous funding from the **Mt. Zion Foundation for Quality Education**, we've been able to upgrade classroom technology across the district. The Foundation has supported improvements in audio systems, STEM resources, and interactive classroom displays, all designed to create more dynamic and engaging learning environments for our students. Another highlight this year was the continued success of **Braves TV**, which gives high school students hands-on experience in media production while allowing families and community members—both near and far—to tune in to Mt. Zion events and celebrations.

Student safety online remains a top priority for Mt. Zion Schools. We are committed to providing a secure digital learning environment and have implemented multiple layers of protection to safeguard student activity in compliance with the **Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)**. All student Chromebooks are protected through Google's built-in content filter, along with **GoGuardian**, which provides additional filtering, monitoring, and reporting features whether students are at school or working from home. Teachers also use **Hapara**, a powerful classroom management tool that allows them to view student Chromebook screens in real-time during class, helping to keep students focused and on task in a safe, supported environment.

We are proud of our achievements in improving our network infrastructure over the last several years. We have wifi in every classroom and continue to expand access in high traffic areas. This additional connectivity will allow us to meet the increasing demand of our district's expanding technological needs. This year our district is moving to the state supported Illinois Century Network as our broadband provider. With this move, we will receive 4 times more bandwidth. Our district Internet bandwidth will be a robust 4,000 mbps to support the continued growth of online educational learning across the district.

Mt. Zion Schools continues to look for ways to improve communication with parents. We are excited to move from Skylert to ParentSquare as our primary means of communication with stakeholders. This service will allow us to utilize text/SMS messaging with parents, staff, and students. It will also provide a more efficient means of

communication between teachers, coaches, staff and parents. We are planning for this to become the “one stop shop” for school/home communication.

Big changes are coming to Skyward this year as we upgrade from SMS 2.0 to **Qmlativ**, offering a more modern experience with better functionality and smoother integration with tools like **ParentSquare**. Skyward Family Access is a valuable resource for all parents, providing real-time updates on student grades, food service balances, discipline records, report cards, and more—all in one convenient place. If you haven’t set up your account yet, you can easily request access by filling out the **Family Access Request Form** available in the “Links” section of our district website.

Speaking of the website, we gave it a fresh new look last year when we transitioned to **Finalsite** as our web provider. You can always find the latest district news and resources at www.mtzschools.org. All of our teachers are just an email away, with contact information listed right on the district site. Don’t forget to stay connected by following **Mt. Zion Schools on Facebook and Twitter** for updates, celebrations, and important announcements.

Julie McNamara, Technology Specialist, continues to play a vital role in keeping our growing resources working efficiently. The assistance she provides to our staff, along with the behind-the-scenes infrastructure maintenance she performs enables our teachers to provide a high quality, technology-rich environment for students.

I am happy to discuss the district’s curriculum and technology matters with parents and community members. I can be reached at 217-864-2369 or by email at rockeyw@mtzschools.org.

Visit your child’s school and see how technology is being used to enhance your child’s education!



TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT



Paul Reeve, Director

Hello from transportation. The 25 – 26 school year is about to start and there are a few things I would like to share with you. In case you didn’t know, the district obtained all new buses in December of last year. All of the buses are now equipped with air conditioning and a new camera system designed to be able to look down into seats instead of across the tops.

Since Covid, our ridership has increased each year and we expect another increase this year. With more and more stops being added, it is making our scheduling even more challenging. Our biggest challenge is getting our afternoon HS/JH students home and then buses back to the elementary schools as close to dismissal time as possible. We have the same issue in the morning with our elementary routes after we drop the JH/HS and picking up elementary. So this year we are looking for ways to better stay on or save time.

1. We will be looking for stops that are close together and combining them. This will mainly be for JH/HS students but may affect some elementary. For the JH/HS stops we will choose the stops based on the most central location for all the students at that stop. For elementary, we will look at the age of the students with the stops closer to or at the house of the youngest students.

2. Please have your students ready and outside a few minutes before the scheduled pick up time. This is important for many reasons. It keeps our schedule on time, it avoids drivers from missing students if they don’t see them, but mostly, it makes it safer. Students who are running to make the bus are more likely to not pay

attention to traffic and run out in front of a car or even the bus driver not see them.

I'd like to take some time to discuss how we can work together to help maintain order on the bus. Being aware of the rules on the bus are important and the support of the adults in the student's life will go a long way to help us keep students safe while on the bus. A few things I would like to highlight that cause the most issues are as follows:

1. No cell phones are allowed out on the bus for grades K-6. They must be kept in their bookbags at all times. Cell phones are allowed for ages 7-12 but absolutely no pictures or video is allowed.
2. No music or blue tooth speakers are allowed. If the students want to listen to music, they must have ear pods or headphones.
3. No toys, Pokémon cards or other items are allowed to be out on the bus. Please keep them in bookbags.
4. Please keep pencils, pens or other sharp objects in your book bags. If a student causes damage to a seat cover, the parent is responsible for the cost of replacing the seat.
5. Please affirm with your student that staying seated while on the bus is extremely important. The school bus is by far the safest mode of transporting a student to and from school. If your student is standing up or out in the aisle and the bus has to stop quickly or is involved in a collision, their likelihood of being injured or worse is greatly increased.
6. Eating and drinking are not allowed on the bus for a couple of reason. If the bus hits a bump at just the right time, it could cause a student to choke. If a student shares food with other students, there could be a case of food allergies.
7. Please let your student know that hand sanitizer, deodorants, colognes or perfumes should never be used or sprayed while on the bus. This could trigger and asthma attack for other students or the driver.

8. Please instruct your student to use inside voices while on the bus. Loud talking or yelling can easily distract the driver and cause them to have an accident or miss a stop.

I would like to take a moment to give a shout out to our drivers. They have an almost impossible job. They have to not only safely maneuver a large vehicle in traffic, in all kinds of weather and conditions but they have to try to control behaviors on their buses. It is impossible to watch the road and to see everything that happens behind them on the bus. The more we can help them by explaining how students are expected and should conduct themselves while on the bus will only make our goal, the safe transportation of your child to and from school, an easier goal to achieve.

Lastly, I want to remind all parents/guardians that their student must ride their assigned bus to and from school at all times unless you get prior permission from the transportation office and the school. If a student tries to board a different bus other than their assigned bus, they will be sent back into the office and will have to be picked up. To contact the transportation office, call 217-864-5233.

Let's make the 25-26 school year, the best ever. We look forward to transporting your students.



FOOD SERVICE



*Nancy Jesse and Pam Mitchell
Co-Food Service Directors*

NUTRITION STANDARDS IN NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH

The 2025-26 school year continues following the National School Lunch Program requirements for hot lunch. Our school nutrition services will be participating in the DOD program this 2025-26 school year. The USDA annually allocates money for Illinois to spend with the Department of Defense Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program. Mt. Zion Food & Nutrition Services will be maintaining a healthy balanced nutritious quality meal. Students may purchase a hot nutritious meal and healthy ala carte items.

The focus continues on offering healthier options for students in the Mt. Zion Community Unit School District #3. The District monitors the Local Wellness Policy and makes appropriate changes to improve nutrition and health education in the classroom, PE classes, and class parties. We encourage healthy choices in the breakfast and lunch program in the District. The Wellness committee includes administrators, teachers, PE staff, school nurse, food service, parents and students. Mt. Zion School District will continue to monitor the policy's implementation in the 2025-26 school year. Parents are encouraged to look at their student's food service information on Family Access. Any school organization that requires the kitchen in any of the schools for the 2025-26 should contact Pam Mitchell or Nancy Jesse four **weeks** prior to the event at 217- 864-9450. This allows for plenty of preparation in order to make the fund-raising event successful.

FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM DISTRICT #3 OVERVIEW

The food service program for grades K-12 offers a daily meal consisting of a meat/meat alternative, vegetable, fruit, and milk. A breakfast meal is offered to students in grades K-12 each day before school. A Grab N Go lunch that consists of nutritious items that are approved for the Child and Nutrition Program. The National School lunch program continues to offer nutritious ingredients in all items for the lunch program.

DEBIT ACCOUNT OVERVIEW

Nutrition and Technology team-up in the Mt. Zion School District with an automated meal purchasing system. This program provides a positive identification process used to access a student debit account and record purchases of food service items. A debit account will be established for each user and sharing of accounts will not be allowed. Students, parents, and staff may deposit advance sums of money to cover food service purchases. Advance deposits allow the user to draw from an individual debit account rather than having to handle cash during the lunch serving time. Payments and purchases are recorded daily. Parents will receive an email when the student's account reaches \$10.00. This is a reminder that will be delivered via email until a deposit is made into the student's account. If the student has a negative balance, an automatic call, email, and texted message through School Messenger will be made to the parents as a reminder. Payments may be made using e-funds through Family Access. Once online payments are made the money is automatically credited to the student account. Online payments can be made anytime. **Parents may also call the Food Service Office at 217-864-9450, by 10:00 a.m. and request a student transfer from one sibling to another.**

GRADES K-6

Payments will be accepted each morning school is in session. Payments should be sent in an envelope with the student's name, student's ID number, and teacher's name. Payments should include break-milk money for students in Kindergarten only. Payments will be posted to the student's debit account on the same day. The food service office maintains a record of student payments. Payments may also be made using e-funds through Family Access. Once online payments are made, the money automatically is credited to the student account. Online payments can be made anytime.

GRADES 7-12

Payments will be accepted **before 10:00 a.m.** each morning that school is in session. Locked drop boxes are available in five locations in the Jr. & Sr. High School buildings. This method of payment collection will ensure posting of deposits and that funds will be available in the student's debit account before lunch serving time (10:53 a.m.). and that funds will be available in the student's debit account before lunch serving time (10:53 a.m.). **Payments made after 10:00 a.m. will be posted the following school day. Students will not be allowed to purchase a la carte items Phase 5 until payments are posted.**

Payments by check, money order, cash and online e-fund payments are accepted and must contain student name and ID number to ensure proper posting. Payments of cash will be accepted in a sealed envelope, available at drop box locations.

The envelope must be labeled with student name, ID number, and amount of cash deposit. No change will be given to students. The school Food Service Administrative Assistant will maintain records of all cash deposits and parents can view these deposits in Family Access.

FREE/REDUCED MEAL APPLICATIONS

Free and reduced lunch and breakfast applications, along with letters containing guidelines, are available online throughout the school year and in each school's office. A parent/guardian wishing to apply must complete and return the application to their student's school office. Verification of income, and a letter of approval or denial will be sent by mail to the parent/guardian. **Students with Free/Reduced Status may only purchase A la Carte items if his/her debit account has funds available to cover such items. Kindergarten students with free/reduced status wishing to purchase milk for break time should make payment to cover such (\$.50 per carton) on a weekly or monthly basis.**

Meal Pricing

Breakfast K-12		Lunch K-3	Lunch 4-12
Full	\$2.35	\$3.05	\$3.25
Reduced	\$0.30	\$0.40	\$0.40
Adult	\$2.55	\$3.75	\$3.75

Students with free/reduced status may only receive one (1) free/reduced lunch and one (1) free/reduced breakfast per day.

Second meal - \$7.00 Second meals are charged at full price; there is no federal support for second meals. Menu items may be purchased separately only in addition to a paid lunch.

K-3 one week of lunch = \$15.25

4-12 one week of lunch = \$16.25

K-3 one week of breakfast = \$11.75

4-12 one week of breakfast = \$11.75

***BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL
ACTIVITIES PROGRAM
(BASAP)***



Marie Johnson, Director

The before and after school activities program for the 2025-2026 school year will officially begin on August 15, 2025.

All children registered in the program should bring a sack lunch on this day since it is an early dismissal day

Prior to the start of school, the BASAP staff will be hosting an orientation on Tuesday, August 5, 2025 at McGaughey Elementary School at 6:30 PM. A complete overview of the program will be discussed.

We look forward to another exciting school year. If you have any questions regarding BASAP or the upcoming orientation, contact, Marie Johnson, BASAP Director, 217-864-2814, or by email at johnsonsh@mtzschoools.org.