2026-2027 SCHOOLHOUSE
MT. ZION SCHOOL DISTRICT #3
MMXXVI



Jeffrey Sams
Board President



Kyle Janvrin
Board Vice President



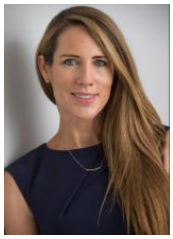
Eric Law
Board Secretary



Regan Deering
Board Member



Kent Newton
Board Member



Dr. Courtney Gaine Cuddy
Board Member

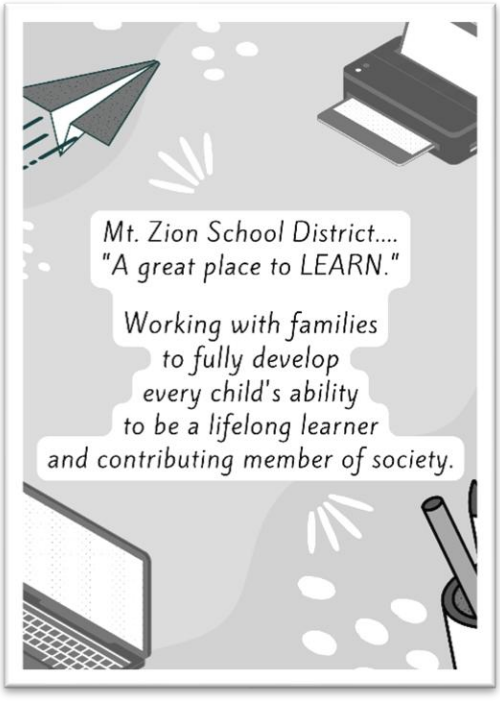


Wayne Tanner
Board Member

School Start Times:
Grades 7-12.....7:45 a.m.
Grades K-6.....8:30 a.m.

Early Dismissal Times:
Aug 17, Dec 18 & 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 2026–2027 SCHOOL YEAR!

We're excited to welcome all of our Mt. Zion families to another fantastic school year! The **2026–2027 School Calendar is linked here**, so you can plan ahead. The 27-28 school year calendar is also available on our website for those who need to plan even further.

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 Monday, August 17th**, 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.

Staff 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 our students' needs, and their efforts are deeply appreciated. We're incredibly proud to announce a **95% teacher retention rate**! This figure reflects our 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. Our principals will introduce the new faculty and staff to their schools.

New to our leadership team is board member Wayne Tanner. We appreciate the volunteer time and effort our school board devotes to the benefit of our students.

We also have a new McGaughey Principal joining our leadership team. Mrs. Rodgers comes to us as an experienced and energetic professional to lead McGaughey. More about Mrs. Rodgers, see the McGaughey article later in the publication.

A new position in the district this year is a Dean of Students at the Intermediate School. This position has been filled by Mrs. Yaeger, mentioned in the Intermediate School article. She will be a great addition and offer support to our administration, teachers, and directly to students and families.

Academic Excellence

We look forward to the release of the 2026 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]**.

The District Strategic Plan is also available on the website and through this link.

E-Learning Plan

Attached is the link to our E-Learning Plan, created by teachers in conjunction with the administration and approved by the school board on July 14th. This plan allows learning opportunities on traditional snow days, but doesn't require the first five days to be made up at the end of the school year. Email me at newsletter@mtzschools.org if you have any questions.

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.

No More Parking Fee (High School)

This spring, we determined that the district charges enough fees for classes and other extracurricular items, so **the required parking fee has been eliminated**. The school still allows senior students the option to purchase a reserved spot, but it's not required.

Facilities & Improvements

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



- The **Fieldhouse and Outdoor tracks** are being repainted/resurfaced this summer. The picture above shows the proposed outdoor track.
- **Gym floors** at Mt. Zion Grade, Intermediate, and High School are scheduled for refinishing this summer.
- The **Mt. Zion Grade upper parking lot** is undergoing a major upgrade to install new pavement.
- **New flooring is also being installed in the cafeteria at Mt. Zion Grade**, and carpeting is being updated in various places throughout the district.

Success in Sports

Special recognition to our **7th-grade girls' basketball team,** which placed **3rd at state**. In addition, the school district had numerous individual state qualifiers in various sports. We have had **27 sports teams place in the top 4 at state during the last 14 years**! Congratulations to our teams, athletes, and coaches!

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.

Legislative Update

You may have heard that the state of Illinois has approved a cell phone ban in schools. SB 2427 passed both houses and limits students' access to cell phones in schools. Schools have until 2031 to adopt the new rules, but our schools already have many of these restrictions in place.

Looking Ahead

If you have any questions about the upcoming school year, I would like to invite you to a free coffee-and-conversation at the Four Star Family Restaurant on Monday, August 10th, from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. I understand that schedules are busy, so just email me at newsletter@mtzschools.org if you have questions about anything from academics to finances but aren't able to attend. 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**!

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

MT. ZION FOUNDATION FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

We are incredibly fortunate to partner with the **Mt. Zion Foundation for Quality Education**, an independent, non-profit organization dedicated to bringing extra magic to our classrooms. The Foundation steps in to fund the vital enrichment programs and resources that fall outside the standard school budget. Operated by a passionate Board of Trustees—made up of local parents, business leaders, and professionals—the Foundation relies on community support to help our students truly thrive. To donate or to provide the Foundation an extra hand please email mzfqe@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 funded projects reflect a diverse array of enhancements across all grade levels, deeply impacting literacy, STEM, the arts, and student well-being.

Literacy & Classroom Modernization

The Foundation placed a strong emphasis on reading and classroom updates this year. Early literacy received a major boost with new decodable book sets, matching digital resources, and specialized storage. The Intermediate School's thriving **Battle of the Books** program was fully supported with new Bluestem Award book sets and student incentives for all 4th and 5th-grade classrooms. Classroom spaces were refreshed with new collaborative art tables, reading rugs, library graphic novels, and everyday organizational essentials. Furthermore, new iPad technology was integrated to allow teachers to model thinking and annotate lessons in real time.

Advanced STEM & Hands-On Labs

In the science department, learning became highly interactive through major equipment upgrades and specialized tools:

- **Medical Training:** High school Anatomy and Physiology students gained real-world clinical experience using new class sets of blood pressure cuffs and synthetic skin with simulated wounds for suturing practice.
- **Lab Upgrades:** Classrooms were outfitted with updated safety hot plates, precision electronic digital balances, and mini portable microscopes for outdoor field studies, alongside new logic games to teach deductive reasoning.

Arts, Music, & Vocational Skills

Creative expression and life-skills programs flourished thanks to the Foundation's generosity:

- **The Arts:** Funding for students participating in the high school musical production.
- **Music:** The 5th and 6th-grade music programs received updated marching percussion and a full set of high-quality classroom ukuleles.
- **Vocational Training:** The **Blooming Braves Brew Crew** was launched, allowing intermediate special education students to operate an in-school coffee shop to build invaluable real-world vocational, social, and financial skills.

Experiential Learning & Student Support

Beyond traditional textbooks, grants helped bring lessons to life through vibrant community experiences and peer mentorship. Second graders enjoyed hands-on art classes at the Decatur Area Arts Council and interactive wildlife lessons from the Scovill Mobile Zoo. Sixth graders engaged in an immersive, interdisciplinary Winter Olympics and Ancient Greece unit that culminated in an ice skating field trip, while other classes took part in virtual field trips and Macon County Nature Program visits. Finally, the Foundation continued to provide funding for pivotal high school programs as high schoolers hosted the annual **Probability Fair** for younger peers, and **The Tribe** freshman mentoring program received vital funding to support incoming students and foster a positive school climate.

For over 33 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 2026-2027 school year: Zach Anderson, Jessica Allen, Amy Brammer, Trisha Erickson, Lisa Flora, Jamie Foster, Amanda Jones, Eric Law, Ross Munsterman, Kylee Roney, Billy Rockey, 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

As we embark on another school year, we are thrilled to welcome our students, families, and staff back to the classroom. The start of the year brings a renewed sense of excitement and opportunity. Our dedicated staff is eager to uphold our cherished traditions, establish new milestones, and continue ensuring that Mt. Zion remains a premier environment for academic excellence.

The mission of the Business Office is to support an exceptional educational experience for all students through the responsible stewardship of our community's financial resources. Every fiscal decision we make is guided by our commitment to student growth, ensuring our learners have the necessary tools to become productive and successful citizens.

The State of Illinois continues to support public education through the Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) formula, which pairs local property tax revenue with state aid to establish an optimal target funding level for each district based on its unique demographics. Currently, Mt. Zion is funded at approximately **71% of its adequacy target**, placing us in the state's lowest funding tier. Simultaneously, we are proud to maintain one of the lowest local property tax rates in Macon County, while maintaining our high standards across the board. While inflation pressures present ongoing challenges for all school districts, we remain optimistic. We anticipate that our rising Equalized Assessed Valuation (EAV) alongside continued improved state EBF support will move us closer to full adequacy in the coming years, allowing us to expand opportunities for our students.

We highly value your input. As always, your suggestions, questions, and feedback are welcome as we strive to build upon our past successes and actively pursue district-wide improvements. Thank you for your continued partnership as we work together to ensure Mt. Zion remains a "great place to learn." Go Braves!

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 or email me at bmr@mtzschools.org.

E-Funds and Electronic Payment Options

Mt. Zion CUSD #3 is pleased to continue offering convenient options for parents and guardians to manage school-related expenses and fees.

Option 1: E-Funds

For real-time processing, families can utilize our **E-Funds** platform to pay for various school expenses.

- **Getting Started:** Create an account using the E-Funds link located on the Family Access Food Service page or directly via the school district's website.
- **How it Works:** Once registered, select your child's name to make secure payments. Funds are deposited directly into the appropriate school account.
- **Payment Methods & Fees:** E-Funds accepts checking account transfers and credit cards. Please note the following standard convenience fees applied by the provider:
    - **Checking Account Transfer:** $1.25 per transaction.
    - **Credit Card Payments:** $2.85 per $100 increment per transaction.

Option 2: Electronic Bill Pay via Your Local Bank (Free)

The District also accepts electronic payments through your personal bank's online bill pay system for food service accounts, registration fees, and other applicable school expenses.

Important Processing Note: This free payment method can take **up to one week to process**. Because funds are not credited until the District receives bank confirmation, please do not use this method for lunch balances under $10.00 or any time-sensitive payments requiring immediate credit.

To utilize your bank's online bill pay, please follow these instructions:

1. **Set Up the Payee:** Log into your bank's online bill pay system. Enter the specific school building's name and address as the vendor/company you wish to pay.
    - *Note:* If you have children in different buildings, or if you are paying for both Registration and Food Service for the same building, **please create separate entries**. Your bank will issue distinct checks, which allows the District to accurately track and allocate your payments.
2. **Enter the Amount:** Specify the payment amount within your bank's system.
3. **Provide Details in the Memo Line:** In the memo or description field, please be as specific as possible. Include the **student's full name, student ID number, and the exact purpose of the payment** (e.g., Jane Doe, ID#12345, Food Service).

If you need assistance setting up these payment methods, please follow the detailed instructions on the district website or contact your school's main office.

START DATES:

Teacher Institute Days
(No Student Attendance)
August 13th and 14th

First Day for Students
Grades K-12, Early Dismissal,
August 17th
11:05 for Grades 7-12,
11:35 for Grades K-6

McGAUGHEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Kathryn Rodgers, Principal

Welcome to a new school year! My name is Kathryn Rodgers, and I am honored and excited to serve as your principal. As we begin this year together, I look forward to getting to know our students, families, and staff and building strong relationships throughout our school community. The faculty and I look forward to partnering in educational and social efforts to assist the McGaughey Busy Bees to "Be the Best You Can Be!" As your student begins their educational career at McGaughey, please feel free to ask questions, assist in activities, and become part of our extended family.

Thank you for entrusting us with your children each day. I am excited for the year ahead and look forward to teamwork that will make it a wonderful and memorable school year.

Registration

Online registration will be open beginning Monday, July 20th, 2026. On-site registration is scheduled for Wednesday, July 29th, 2026, from noon until 6:00 PM. Parents of returning or registered first-grade students, along with incoming kindergarten students who were screened and pre-registered in the spring, can complete registration online beginning July 20th. Online registration will allow parents to update contact and health information, update transportation information, deposit money into your child's food service account, and pay the registration fee if not already paid.

Kindergarten and first-grade families that do not have easy access to a computer to complete online registration may come to the building during registration times for online assistance. Anyone who has not already enrolled in the Mt. Zion School District must attend registration at the building instead of registering online.

Registration fees for kindergarten and first-grade students will be $85.00. Registration fees and most others may be paid online using e-Funds, by cash, or by check made payable to "Mt. Zion School District".

A friendly reminder that **all** incoming kindergarten students must provide a physical and up-to-date immunization record to enter school. Dental and eye exams are also required.

School Supplies

This school year, the district is providing the majority of students' school supplies. Families will only need to send their students with:

-One backpack
-A lunchbox (if desired)
-One full change of clothing (shirt, pants, underwear, and socks) in a labeled bag to be kept in each student's backpack

Optional Orientations

All incoming kindergarten and new first-grade families are invited to attend an optional orientation event. The purpose of this orientation is to introduce families to McGaughey Elementary School and provide them with important information that will be helpful in knowing and understanding the routines and procedures of McGaughey. There will be two different orientation dates and times available in August. Information presented at each session will be the same.

- Tuesday, August 4th, 2026 at 5:30PM
- Thursday, August 6th, 2026 at 5:30PM

Open House

Open house for all kindergarten, first-grade, and ASPIRE students will be held on Thursday, August 13th. To ensure ample parking and comfortable space within the building, there are assigned times based on students' last names.

- **Students with LAST NAMES beginning with letters A-L are invited to attend from 3:00 PM-3:40 PM**
- **Students with LAST NAMES beginning with letters M-Z are invited to attend from 3:50 PM-4:30 PM**

Kindergarten, First Grade & Aspire School Hours

McGaughey school hours are from 8:30 AM until 3:00 PM. Children who arrive before 8:00 AM should register for the Before and After School Activities Program (BASAP). Detailed information regarding drop-off and pick-up procedures will be available before the start of school.

Please note, the first day of school for all kindergarten, first grade, and ASPIRE students will be Friday, August 15th, with an 11:35 AM dismissal time.

Prekindergarten Home Visits & Orientation

Prekindergarten families are not required to attend registration. Prekindergarten parents will be contacted by PreK staff to schedule an introductory home visit, which will be done on August 17th or 18th. Preschool family orientation will be held on Wednesday, August 19th. Our AM families should plan to attend from 12:00 PM-12:45 PM. Our PM families should plan to attend from 1:15 PM-2:00 PM. The first day of student attendance will be on Thursday, August 20th.

Pre-Kindergarten School Hours

AM PreK hours are from 8:15 AM to 10:45 AM, and PM PreK hours are from 12:00 PM to 2:30 PM. There is no supervision available for PreK students before or after their school day. Detailed information regarding drop-off and pick-up procedures will be available before the start of school.

Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports

McGaughey Busy Bees follow the motto of "Be the Best You Can Be!" Our motto is incorporated into the school through the implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which is a proactive systems approach to establishing the behavioral supports and social culture needed for all students in a school to achieve social, emotional, and academic success. McGaughey will be entering the 13th year of PBIS.

All students are encouraged to follow the 3 R's: Be Ready! Be Responsible! Be Respectful!

All students practice the 3 R's throughout the building in various settings, such as during PE, on the playground, during lunch, and on the school bus. We begin the school year with PBIS by establishing clear expectations for behavior that are taught, modeled, and reinforced across all settings by all staff. Students participate in Beehive Boot Camp and travel throughout the building with staff to learn and practice the 3 R's.

Parental Involvement

Educating students is a team process involving students, parents, and the entire school staff. Communication between students, home, and school creates the atmosphere we need for successful learning. The use of Family Access to look up attendance, lunch accounts, and grades is a helpful communication tool. You can also find useful information by visiting McGaughey's website and clicking on Parent Resources. At any time throughout the school year, please contact teachers by note, voicemail, or e-mail. We also invite you to share your time and talent with us through volunteering at school or through the Community Club.

The Community Club welcomes the participation of all families in its activities throughout the school year. The Community Club is a volunteer organization that supports McGaughey, Mt. Zion Grade, and Mt. Zion Intermediate. The purpose of the Community Club is to promote family events and projects for the direct benefit of students. Membership is open to any parent/guardian with a child in PreK – 6th grade. Volunteers can participate in a range of activities, from helping during one of the many family activities to facilitating classroom celebrations.

Curriculum & Instruction

A nurturing, family-friendly environment with academic excellence for all students is the climate we strive for at McGaughey. We expect the students, teachers, office staff, and support staff to "Be the Best They Can Be!" Technology will continue to be an important part of learning this school year, as well as other advancements in educational practice. For math, Kindergarten will continue using a Guided Math approach incorporating research based strategies, and First Grade will utilize the district adopted Savvas Envision Math curriculum supplemented by the Guided Math structure. The McGraw-Hill-Wonders Reading Series will continue to be used in 1st grade this year. Our curriculum is supplemented with guided reading, Accelerated Reader, and other research-based educational programs. The Response to Intervention (RtI) model is utilized in order to help all students reach their fullest academic potential. Teachers and support staff provide students with research-based interventions in a small group setting based on the students' need for remediation and/or enrichment on a daily basis. In order to aid in effective and consistent data gathering, computer-aided assessment tools, as well as one-on-one reading and math diagnostic testing, are used with all students. It is our goal to keep parents well-informed of student progress.

Our Pre-K classrooms use Creative Curriculum, while our kindergarten and first-grade classrooms are guided by the Common Core Standards. Curriculum guides and home-based activity ideas for all grade levels are available via the McGaughey website.

The ASPIRE Program at McGaughey Elementary School serves students in Kindergarten and 1st grade. The ASPIRE classroom at McGaughey meets the special educational needs of students within a modified self-contained setting. The ASPIRE program uses the Unique Learning Systems, a standards-based curriculum.



McGaughey Elementary School:
"Be the Best You Can Be!"



MCGAUGHEY FACULTY & STAFF

Principal:	Mrs. Kathryn Rodgers
Lead Secretary:	Mrs. Wendy Albrecht
Attendance Secretary:	Mrs. Alicia Berg
Pre-K:	Ms. Chloe Cable
	Mrs. Jennifer Taylor
	Mrs. Tonya Freeland
	Mrs. Melissa Hilton
	Mrs. Natalie Hubner
	Mrs. Amanda Richardson
Kindergarten:	Ms. Gracey Reynolds
	Mrs. Mandi Ditty
	Mrs. Angie Hamrick
	Mrs. Amber Larkins
	Mrs. Taylor Larrison
	Ms. Dana Perry
	Mrs. Alysa Peters
	Mrs. Brittany Reatherford
1st Grade	Ms. Angelina Adams
	Mrs. Meredith Beard
	Ms. Lori Hanson
	Mrs. Kathryn Holtfreter
	Mrs. Christine Koehn
	Mrs. Sarah Nichols
	Mrs. Katie Patrick
	Mrs. Leigh Van Thyne
Nurse:	Mrs. Annaliese Britton
Social Worker:	Mrs. Marie Baker
Remedial Reading:	Mrs. Rachel Orris
Music:	Mrs. Jamie Sill
Art:	Mrs. Jenny Cowgill
Speech:	Mrs. Allison Hammer
	Mrs. TBA
Special Education:	Mrs. Jill Driscoll
	Mrs. Allison Behrends
	Mrs. Andrea Gensler
	Ms. Addison Orris
Physical Education:	Mr. Mike Patrick
	Mrs. Jenny Moore
Library Resource:	Mrs. Stephanie Croft
BASAP Director:	Mrs. Shirley Johnson
Custodian:	Mrs. Kristina McKean
	Mr. Rick Coventry
	Ms. Angelynn Freuind
Playground Supervisors:	Ms. Carey Flesch
	Mr. Chance Mendenall
	Ms. Samantha Niana
	Ms. Phyllis Radley
	Mrs. Brianna Stoneburg

MT. ZION GRADE SCHOOL



Gary Gruen, Principal

Helping Students to Create the Future

Welcome to the 2026-2027 School Year

"A new school year means new beginnings, new adventures, new friendships, and new challenges. The slate is clean and anything can happen." This quote by Denise Whitmer succinctly states the positive realities and anticipations that arrive every August at Mt. Zion Grade School.

As the new school year approaches, our anticipation grows for meeting new students and re-engaging with those returning. This year, we will have seven Third Grade classrooms and seven Second Grade.

We will continue to do the school supply shopping for all K-6 families this year. Each student will still bring his or her own backpack, lunchbox, and leak-proof water bottle. We will not distribute student supply lists. If you have questions, please feel free to reach out to the office.

Staffing Updates

We recognize those who have served our school so well but who have moved on. Mr. Greg Blakey, who served our district as a dedicated elementary PE teacher and highly recognized girls' softball coach, has retired from teaching and coaching. Mrs. Sarah Pierce has taken a Third Grade position in Arkansas as part of her husband's promotion. Mrs. Sarah Bone moves with her ASPIRE classroom to Mt. Zion Intermediate School. Mrs. Colleen Scherer joins the Junior High special education teaching staff after many years as a teaching assistant. Last but not least, Don Hudson, who in his retirement served our district as a substitute and ASPIRE teaching assistant, has fully retired. We wish each of these valued professionals success in their new endeavors.

This year, we happily welcome Mr. Garrett Knock as our new full-time PE teacher. Garrett resides in Mt. Zion and many may recognize him from his past coaching roles for our district. He comes to us from Warrensburg Latham High School as their PE teacher and head wrestling coach. Additionally, we will welcome new special education teaching assistants to fill open positions; these new staff members are to be determined at the time of this writing.

Registration Information

On July 17, we will email registration information to families; we will announce teacher assignments on August 4. Online registration opens July 20 for all current students. New student onsite registration occurs on July 29, from Noon-6:00 p.m. If current families experience difficulty registering online, please come this day to use one of our computers, or give us a call at 217-864-3631. Registration fees cost $100 per student. You may pay this fee online using e-Funds anytime, or with cash or check made payable to "Mt. Zion School District" in our office during business hours.

New student registration may also occur during office hours on any day prior to the on-site registration day. Parents/guardians have thirty (30) from registration to provide a government-issued certified birth certificate and three proofs of residency to have their child assigned a classroom. *School attendance is allowed only after all documents have been received and verified by the district completing the registration process*. For more information on meeting the residency requirements of the District, see the section on Residency Requirements located elsewhere in this publication.

Key Dates: Teacher Assignment Announcement, First Week of School, & Orientation

- August 4: Teacher Assignments Available in Skyward
- August 4: Open Halls for students to find their homeroom and see their class roster (time to be determined).
- August 13: Teacher Institute Day – No School
- August 13: 5:30-6:15 PM – Second Grade Come-and-Go Open House
- August 14: Teacher Institute Day – No School
- August 17: First Day for Students – 11:35 a.m. Early Dismissal and Teacher In-service. Due to early dismissal only breakfast will be served.
- August 17: 5:30-6:15 PM – Third Grade Come-and-Go Open House
- August 18: First Full Day of School for students.

We will share details via email closer to the dates.

Our Commitment to Your Child

Mt. Zion Grade School provides a nurturing and rewarding educational environment for your Second or Third Grader. Our families will find we have staff dedicated to our students' education and growth. Our families chose Mt. Zion School District, and we recognize that they have made some sacrifice to have their child at Mt. Zion Grade School. We recognize your commitment to your child's education, and we support your desire to raise a well-rounded adult. On behalf of the staff and faculty of Mt. Zion Grade School, welcome to the 2026-2027 school year.

Community Club

The Community Club provides our students and staff with those "extras" that we find indispensable. It also provides a great way for parents to become involved in the school community. The staff and I look forward to working with them, and we appreciate their hard work and dedication to the cause.

You're Always Welcome

We appreciate you entrusting us with your child's education and encourage the participation of parents and guardians both at home and school. Open and honest communication serves each child best. Therefore, we'll contact you if any concerns arise, and we ask that you feel free to reach out to us via email or at 217-**864-3631**. We'd love for you to join us at our family events, and please remember to **check in at the office** when you visit. The staff at Mt. Zion Grade School looks forward to partnering with you and your child to ensure a productive and rewarding learning experience.



Mt. Zion Grade School
"Mt. Zion Grade Rocks!"

MT. ZION GRADE FACULTY AND STAFF

Principal:	Mr. Gary Gruen
Office Secretaries:	Mrs. Sheila Drum
	Mrs. Amber Shobe
2nd Grade:	Mrs. Denise Hatayama
	Mrs. Michelle Koslofski
	Mrs. Allison Perry
	Mrs. Jessica Peters
	Mrs. Sadie Stambaugh
	Mrs. Dianna Wierman
	Mrs. Kelly Wilson
3rd Grade:	Mrs. Angie Causey
	Mr. Michael DeMeio
	Mr. Derek Grove
	Mrs. Elizabeth Kyburz
	Mrs. Sheri Schorfheide
	Mrs. Jessica Talty
	Mrs. Renee Wendell
Art:	Mrs. Jenny Cowgill
Library:	Mrs. Stephanie Croft
Music:	Mrs. Jamie Sill
Physical Education:	Mr. Garrett Knock
	Ms. Jenny Moore
Special Education:	Mrs. Nicole Paulson
	Mrs. Wendy Ragsdale
Special Education Aides:	Mrs. Denise Toothman
	TBD
Special Education ASPIRE:	Mrs. Stephene Beller
Special Education ASPIRE Aides:	Ms. Autumn Runyen
	TBD
Special Reading:	Mrs. Julie Courson
Speech:	TBD
Nurse:	Mrs. Alexandria Smith
Social Worker:	Ms. Brynn Becker
Custodial Staff:	Ms. Diana Wickline
	Mrs. Melody Tilton
Cafeteria Staff:	Mrs. Shawna Lynch
	Mrs. Kathy Anderson
	Ms. Monica Stuart
	Mrs. Vickie Wehr
Playground Supervisors:	Mrs. Danielle Fair
	Mrs. Adena McCoy
	Mrs. Danette Robinson
	Mrs. Karen Tharp

MT. ZION INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL



Randy Thacker, Principal

On behalf of the entire faculty and staff of the Intermediate School, I am very excited to welcome all new and returning students and families to the 2026 - 2027 school year. We are looking forward to a great school year!

At Mt. Zion Intermediate School, we take immense pride in our exceptional team of educators. They skillfully blend a rigorous academic challenge with genuine compassion for each student.

Our primary focus is to ensure students are well-prepared: ready for daily learning, accountable for their assignments and social interactions, and capable of demonstrating positive respect toward their classmates and teachers. We are also incredibly fortunate to benefit from a robust tradition of parent and family support, which significantly enhances our educational offerings and directly contributes to student achievement. As the world continues its rapid evolution, we are actively guiding our students to cultivate a global perspective, effectively integrate technology into their learning, and meet the academic demands of their grade levels.

For the upcoming school year, we're excited to continue co-curricular learning opportunities, including programs such as 6th-grade Honor Choirs, Jazz Band, Pre-Algebra, and social-emotional learning lessons. These enriching programs, combined with an enhanced classroom curriculum, are designed to deliver a comprehensive educational experience for all Intermediate School students.

Finally, during the upcoming school year, we encourage parents to continue a positive partnership with our faculty by maintaining frequent communication. Please phone, email, utilize assigned teacher apps, or schedule meetings to monitor your student's progress. We know your child's educational experiences will be the best when you are involved in their growth and learning. We are looking forward to our unified efforts to see every student succeed!

Welcoming Our New Intermediate School Dean of Students



We are excited to announce a new administrative addition to the Mt. Zion School team! Please join us in welcoming Mrs. Bridget Yaeger as our new Dean of Students.

Mrs. Yaeger brings more than 10 years of educational experience and holds a Master's Degree from EIU. Regarding her new role, Mrs. Yaeger shares, "I am excited to be a Brave, and I look forward to supporting our students and building relationships within the community."

Registration & Instructional Fee

Online registration is available for all current Mt. Zion students beginning July 20. Parents/guardians can access the online registration materials via the Skyward Family Access system. Start by going to the Mt. Zion School District website: www.mtzschools.org and click on the Skyward Family Access tab.

Onsite registration for new students will be held at the Intermediate School on Wednesday, July 29th, Noon – 6:00 p.m. **The Instructional Fee for 4th through 6th grade students is $100.** All district fees may be paid on-line through e-Funds, or onsite by cash/check made out to "Mt. Zion School District."

Health & Physical Examinations

The School Code requires all students entering 6th grade to submit a physical exam, updated Immunizations and a Dental exam. Any student entering an Illinois school for the first time, regardless of grade level, is required to submit a State of Illinois Physical, Eye, and Dental exam and proof of Immunizations. Exams must be submitted on the required State of Illinois forms, available on the district website. Sports exams, required for participation in athletics, are not acceptable as a school physical. Health requirements

are due on or before the first day of school, but no later than October 15th, with Dental exams due May 15th.

State-mandated hearing and vision screenings are conducted for all Special Education students, any student new to the district, and at the request of a parent/teacher. Students who fail the first screening will be re-screened in 10-14 days.

Medication of any kind during the school day must be ordered/authorized by an MD, PAC, or Nurse Practitioner, as well as a parent/guardian. The district approved medication authorization form can be found on the district website. Please contact the School Nurse with any questions or concerns regarding your child's health. If the student fails the second screen, a referral is sent home to the student's parent or guardian.

Cafeteria Program

School lunch prices for the 2026 -27 school year are included in this publication. Hot lunch menus are posted on-line at the District web site during the school year. Additionally, breakfast is served every morning with milk and juice available.

Intermediate School Hours

School hours for the Intermediate School are from 8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. The first bell rings at 8:10 at which time students go to their lockers and then to their classrooms. A second bell rings at 8:25 at which time teachers review announcements and our student's broadcast is played. Classes begin at 8:30 a.m. Supervision of children begins at 8:00 a.m. Students should not arrive before 8:00 a.m. unless they are attending a special band or chorus practice.

Safe Student Pick-Up

To ensure a safe environment for our students, we need your cooperation during drop-off and pick-up in our south parking lot.

Morning Drop-Off:

- Please pull your vehicle all the way up to the bus shelter. This helps keep traffic flowing and out of the streets.
- Do not leave your vehicle unattended.
- If you need to visit the office, please park in the main parking lot.
- If you arrive before 8:00 AM, please park in the main lot instead of waiting in the drop-off area.

Afternoon Pick-Up:

- Do not double-park in the traffic lane.
- Feel free to use the parking spaces for pick-up.
- **Important Safety Note:** Students are directed to wait on the sidewalk until their vehicle pulls up or a parent comes to the sidewalk to receive them. With the high volume of traffic before and after school, your teamwork in creating a safe flow is essential. Our goal is a safe dismissal and pick-up process for everyone!



Mt. Zion Intermediate School:
"Preparing students to be
ready, responsible and respectful"

MT. ZION JR. HIGH SCHOOL



Julie Marquardt,
Principal



Kelly Fox,
Dean of Students

HOME OF PRIDE, TRADITION, AND SPIRIT

Welcome from the Mt. Zion Junior High faculty and staff! We're enthusiastically preparing for the new school year and can't wait to greet all our students. We're here to support them every step of the way as they begin and complete their time at the Junior High.

It is always apparent to me through observation and discussions with students and parents that Mt. Zion residents desire a quality education for their children and they encourage them to behave in an acceptable manner both academically and socially.

The District is large enough to offer challenging programs to all students, yet small enough to maintain a feeling of "togetherness".

Registration

Online registration is available to parents/guardians using Skyward Family Access beginning Monday, July 20th. For those that cannot register online, on-site registration for students is Wednesday, July 29th from 12:00pm – 6:00pm. The instructional fee is $100.00 per student and can be paid online by efunds or on registration day.

Academic Requirements

Mt. Zion Junior High students are required to take science, math, literature/composition, social studies, physical education, and an elective. The students may choose art, band, orchestra, French, Spanish, home economics, computer concepts, yearbook/ journalism, or study hall as an elective.

School Hours

School will start at 7:45 a.m. daily and be dismissed at 2:30 p.m. The schedule is as follows:

1st Period	7:45-8:30
2nd Period	8:34-9:19
3rd Period	9:23-10:08
4th Period	10:12-10:57
5th Period (Lunch)	11:01-11:32
6th Period	11:36-12:19
7th Period	12:23-1:06
8th Period	1:10-1:54
Focus Period	1:58-2:30

Physical Education

Physical Education uniforms may be purchased using eFunds or they will be on sale during registration. Cost is $30.00 per set or $20 per item, T-Shirt (White/Red) and Shorts or Sweatpants (Red/Black/Grey). Uniforms are required for participation in physical education classes. The fee can be paid online by efunds or on registration day.

Sports

Softball, baseball, and cross country will begin in late July or early August. For exact times and dates, please call the Junior High Office, at 217-864-2369. Please remember that all athletes must have a physical on file to try out and participate. The athletic physical form is available on the school web site. There is a $40.00 athletic fee per sport, per student for all who participate in Junior High sports. Note: There is $260.00 cap per family.

Handbook/Calendar & Co-Curricular Guide

As part of the registration process parents will be required to go online and sign off indicating that they have read and agreed to the terms of the documents.

Picking Up Students After School

Parents are asked to leave the circle drive on the east side of the school open for bus pick up before and after school. The suggested place to pick up your children would be in the back parking lot on the west side of the school. The circle drive may be used when buses are not loading and unloading.

Student Support Services

Students and parents are reminded that we have a social worker and student dean on staff at the Junior High School. If you have any questions regarding your child's schedule, please call the office at 864-2369.

Health Information

All students who attend Mt. Zion Junior High School must have a parent complete and sign a Health Information form. This form is provided at registration or may be obtained on Family Access. The health information form equips the school nurse, teachers, and coaches to deal with any health problems or emergencies students may experience while at school or participating in a sport. This form should be on file by the first day of school.

All students who will use medication of any kind while at school must have the medication authorization form filled out by their doctor and parent. This includes any over the counter medication as well as inhalers. Illinois state laws provides for students who wish to carry their inhaler while at school. However, any student with an inhaler must have the authorization form on file with both doctor and parent signatures. Any form submitted without both signatures cannot be accepted. Forms are provided at registration. If there are any questions pertaining to your student's health, please feel free to call your child's school and speak with the nurse.

Picture Information

Inter-State Studio will take pictures of junior high school students during the morning of Thursday, August 19th. Picture forms will also be sent home with your student on Tuesday, August 18th. Students may bring money (payable to Inter-State Studio) that day if they wish to purchase pictures or pictures may be purchased online by following the directions on their picture packet.

Dress Code

As your building administrator in the Mt. Zion School District, I am anticipating a great year! In an effort to provide a wholesome atmosphere at the Junior High School, it is requested that parents again cooperate in monitoring the apparel your children wear to school. Specifically, the following will not be allowed; apparel that doesn't meet the dress code, shirts that have profanity on them or advertise alcohol or tobacco product, and/or shirts having scenes which imply the physical or sexual abuse of people or animals. Your understanding and cooperation with this concern will be appreciated. For additional information, please refer to the District Dress Code.

I trust the information in this publication will be helpful. If you have any additional questions, please call me at 864-2369.



Mt. Zion Junior High School:
"Home of pride, tradition, and spirit"

MT. ZION HIGH SCHOOL



Justin Johnson, Principal



Rob Prange, Assistant Principal



Diann Durbin, Athletic Director

Registration Information

Welcome to the 2026-2027 school year!

Online registration will open on July 20th at www.mtzschools.org. Online registration will allow parents to update information, pay fees, and provide you with access to the 26-27 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 29th 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 29th.

GO BRAVES!

How to Find Your Schedule

Schedules are viewable on Family & Student Access. 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

Parking Permits

Students need to have parking permits in order to park on campus. There is no fee for the permit, all students need to do is complete a registration form and display the permit in the car.

Guidance Department

Students have been assigned the following counselors:

Freshmen & Juniors.....Mrs. McCarty

Sophomores & Seniors..... Mrs. Kasey

To be able to effectively assist all families, July 29th 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@mtzschools.org; Mrs. Kasey—kaseya@mtzschools.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 $90.00 surcharge for all students enrolled in Driver Education classes for the 2026-2027 school year.

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 2030! 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 10th from 8 AM to 12 PM.
- New Staff: We are proud to welcome our new staff members for this school year: Geoff Cowgill, English, Rebecca Harman ESL, and Mandy Sowa (ASPIRE TA)

Freshmen 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 17th. 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 Monday, August 17th. 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: Wednesday, August 5th @ 4:00-7:00 p.m. @Football Field, Contact Coach Patrick Etherton - ethertonp@mtzschools.org*
- *Girls' Golf: Monday, August 10th @ 2:00 p.m. @South Side Country Club putting green, Contact Coach Jay Driscoll - driscollj@mtzschools.org*
- *Boys' Golf: Monday, August 10th @ 1:00 p.m. @South Side Country Club, Contact Coach Colby Burdick -burdickc@mtzschools.org*
- *Cross Country: Monday, August 10th @ 7:00 a.m. HS Track, Contact Coach Kelly Fox - foxk@mtzschools.org*
- *Boys' Soccer: Monday, August 10th-7:00-8:30 p.m. @ Football Field, Contact Coach Bryce Shumaker -23bshumaker@gmail.com*
- *Girls' Tennis: Monday, August 10th @ 8:00 a.m. @ Fletcher Park, Contact Coach Mike Roberts - robertsm@mtzschools.org*
- *Volleyball: Monday, August 10th, 7-10 a.m. in the Big Gym, Contact Coach Kristin Sams - samsk@mtzschools.org*

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

Athletes must also have a current physical on file with the school before the first practice listed above. Check out all athletic schedules on the school website. mtzschools.org

School Pictures & Headshots

School pictures for all students will be taken the morning of Wednesday, August 19th. 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 21st. **Seniors will have a yearbook senior headshot pictures taken at school on August 19th 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
1st Hour	7:45-8:30
2nd Hour	8:34-9:19
3rd Hour	9:23-10:08
4th Hour	10:12-10:57
5th Hour	11:01-11:44
6th Hour ***Lunch***	***11:48-12:19***
6th Hour ***Class***	***11:48-12:31***
7th Hour ***Lunch***	***12:35-1:06***
7th Hour ***Class***	***12:23-1:06***
8th 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.

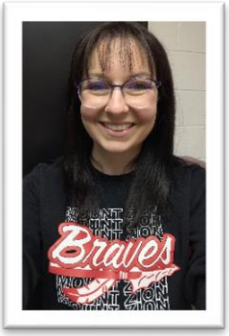
Students may see a teacher before that time by providing a hall pass from their teacher and when finished, report directly back to the gymnasium.

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







Annaliese Britton, McGaughey (not pictured),
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, 2026 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, 2027, 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, 2026 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, 2026.

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

Welcome back to a brand-new school year! As your District Special Education Administrator, I am thrilled to welcome our returning families and extend a warm greeting to those who are new to our community.

Our theme for this year remains centered on partnership. Navigating special education is a collaborative journey, and our teams are deeply looking forward to another year of working hand-in-hand with you to support your child's unique path.

Below, you'll find important updates regarding upcoming events, early childhood milestones, new state legislation, and reminders to help kick off a successful year.

Early Childhood & Elementary: Supporting Our Youngest Learners

Transitioning into preschool or kindergarten is a massive milestone for any child, but it can feel uniquely overwhelming for families navigating special education for the first time. Whether your child is transitioning from early intervention (0–3 services) into an early childhood IEP, or moving up to elementary school, we are here to ensure a gentle landing.

Tracking Milestones & Early Identification

Early identification is the most powerful tool we have. In the early childhood and elementary years, our teams focus heavily on foundational milestones across four core areas:

- **Communication**: Following 2- to 3-step directions, using sentences to express needs, and being understood by most adults.
- **Social-Emotional:** Sharing pieces of a play set, showing empathy for a crying peer, and managing transitions with visual support.
- **Motor Skills:** Hopping, catching a large ball, and practicing pencil grip or scissor safety.
- **Cognitive:** Naming colors and shapes, counting small groups of objects, and engaging in imaginative play.

Our Promise to You: If your child is struggling with a specific milestone, it is not something you have to figure out alone. If you have concerns about your child's speech, behavior, or motor skills, please reach out to your school's principal or case manager to discuss how we can support them.

Spotlight Event: 2026 Illinois Statewide Transition Conference

For our families with older youth and young adults, planning for life after high school is one of the most critical journeys we take together. We are excited to share that registration is opening for the **21st Annual Illinois Statewide Transition Conference**, titled "*Stepping Stones of Transition.*"

This conference is an incredible resource for youth with disabilities, their families, and professionals to learn about navigating adulthood, employment, community living, and independent health care.

- **When:** November 5–6, 2026 *(Registration deadline is October 16, 2026)*
- **Where:** Sheraton Lisle Naperville Hotel in Lisle, IL
- **What to Expect:** Sessions covering Education, Employment, Healthcare tracks, and Community living, including dedicated sessions presented in Spanish.
- **More Info:** You can explore details and register directly at illinoistransitionconference.org.

New Legislative & Policy Updates

Several important legislative updates went into effect recently that help expand resources and protections for our students:

- **ABLE Savings Account Awareness (Public Act 104-0314):** School districts are now required to share information regarding **ABLE (Achieving a Better Life Experience)** accounts with families of students who have 504 Plans (in addition to existing IEP frameworks). These tax-advantaged savings accounts allow individuals with disabilities to save for disability-related expenses without losing eligibility for state and federal benefits.

Quick Tips for a Smooth Transition Back to School

- **Review the IEP/504 Early:** Take a few moments to review your student's current accommodations and goals. It can be incredibly helpful to share a quick "About Me" cheat sheet with your child's new teachers highlighting what motivates them and what triggers anxiety.

- **Establish Routines:** Transitioning from summer schedules to school mornings takes time. Gradually adjusting bedtime and morning routines a week before school starts can prevent morning fatigue during those first critical weeks.

We are so grateful for your continued trust, advocacy, and collaboration. Let's make it a wonderful and growth-filled school year!

CURRICULUM AND TECHNOLOGY



Billy Rockey, Director

Hello, my name is Billy Rockey, and I am entering my thirteenth year in this position. I have been with Mount Zion Schools for the last nineteen 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 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, and MagicSchool 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 2.5 times more bandwidth. Our district Internet bandwidth will be a robust 10,000 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 very pleased with our rollout of ParentSquare as the exclusive avenue for mass communication with families, teams, and groups. This service allows us to utilize text/SMS messaging with parents, staff, and students. It also provides a more efficient means of communication between teachers, coaches, staff and parents. This is our "one stop shop" for school/home communication.

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, Webmaster Andrew Brown continues to do an excellent job in keeping our district and school websites up to date and user friendly. 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 the transportation department. Another year is quickly approaching and it's time to share some things with all you parents.

For the last several years, our ridership has increased by several hundred students and we are expecting another increase in the 26 – 27 school year. We still have the same number of buses and routes so this means we are adding stops and time it takes for each route. It's important that we work together to make sure we keep buses on time as best we can. This means making sure your students are outside and ready by the pick-up time. We have a limited time in the mornings after we drop off the JH/HS students to pick up our elementary students and get them to school by 8:00 to 8:10. If students are not out at their stops or we have to wait it causes buses to run late. I know many people think "it's only a minute or two" but some routes have 20 or more stops. If we wait on even half of those, it could add 10 to 20 minutes to a route and make them extremely late getting to the schools. In cases of bad or cold weather, it makes the students after a stop that is late have to endure the extreme weather that much longer. So please, have your students ready and outside before the bus gets to the stop. If you keep your student inside the house until the bus arrives, it increases the chances of missing the bus.

We post times at the beginning of the year on the web page plus send out emails. These times, especially at the beginning year, can fluctuate for a few weeks as everyone settles into the routing. Routes general will cut as much as 5 minutes off the times as the driver and students get accustom to the routes. Please be understanding during this time. We will do our best to make sure you are notified of any route changes.

Throughout the year, we may find it necessary to change routes in order to deal with things like overloading, safety concerns among other things. We cannot guarantee your route won't change and pick up and drop off times can change. Please understand that we need to look out for the entire route and not just one individual. If you expect changes, then you are prepared for them.

With added ridership comes more students on the buses and it's even more important that students behave themselves just as if they were in the classroom. The education experience doesn't end when the last bell rings, it ends when they are dropped off at the end of the day. It is important to convey to your students that they are expected to treat the bus as an extension of the classroom. They to act the same on the bus as they would in class. This includes how they talk and treat their driver.

I want to take this time to give a yearly reminder of a few important rules on the bus.

1. K – 6 students are absolutely not allowed to have cell phones out on the bus. They must be kept in back packs or pockets at all times while on the bus. 7 – 12 are allowed cell phones but taking pictures or video is not allowed.

2. No music or blue tooth speakers are allowed on the bus. If you wish to listen to music, you must use ear pods or headphones.

3. No toys, Pokémon cards or other items are allowed out on the bus. They need to be kept in bookbags.

4. Keep pencils and pens and other sharp objects in book bags. If a student causes damage to a seat cover, the parent is responsible for the cost of replacing the seat cover.

5. Please reinforce with your student that staying seated on the bus is the most important thing they can do. The school bus is 70 times safer than riding in the family car but only if the student is sitting properly in their seat. That's back to the back of the seat. Seat on the seat, and feet on or as close to the floor as possible.

6. Eating and drinking are not allowed on the bus. This is a choking hazard should the bus hit a bump plus, it's easier to share with others who may have a food allergy.

7. Absolutely no aerosol sprays or perfumes of any kind. This includes hand sanitizer. The odor could trigger an asthma attack for a student or the driver causing an accident.

8. Students are not allowed to ride a different bus than what they are assigned without permission from the transportation office. And should be for emergencies only. Some buses are extremely full and there is not always room for extra students. Please call the transportation office at 217-864-5233 for approval. Once it is approved, please call your students school as well to inform them.

We look forward to serving our community again this year making sure your students get to school and home every day. Let's have a great year.

FOOD SERVICE





Nancy Jesse and Pam Mitchell
Co-Food Service Directors

Nutrition Standards in National School Lunch

The 2026-27 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 2026-27 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. We have to raise our prices 10 cents every year as required by the state.

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 2026-27 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 2026-27 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	**$2.45**	**$3.15**	**$3.35**
Reduced	**$0.30**	**$0.40**	**$0.40**
Adult	**$2.65**	**$3.85**	**$3.85**

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

Second meal - $7.20 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 = $15.75
4-12 one week of lunch = $16.75
K-3 one week of breakfast = $12.25
4-12 one week of breakfast = $12.25

BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL ACTIVITIES PROGRAM (BASAP)



Marie Johnson, Director

The before and after school activities program for the 2026-2027 school year will officially begin on August 17, 2026.

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 **Thursday, August 13, 2026** at McGaughey Elementary School at 5 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@mtzschools.org.