

HISTORY OF MORTON HIGH SCHOOL

Morton, which was settled in the early 1820s by pioneers of mostly English and German descent, has always held a good education in the highest regard. The first school in Morton was the cabin of a Methodist minister who was also the first teacher. The first “real” school was built in the early 1830s, and that started the educational process in Morton. Since that time, many schools have been built, and today the city of Morton has four elementary schools, one junior high, and one high school.

In the early years, there was no need for a separate high school. Hence an advanced department located in the elementary school served as high school. The curriculum included the three R’s – reading, writing and arithmetic – and also history, geography, and science. The first formal graduation was held in 1892 with four young ladies receiving high school diplomas. By 1902 school enrollment showed a need for a separate high school building. Four acres of land were donated to the school board by William Moschel, and with a \$24,000 completion sum in mind, work on the building began. This school, located on Jackson Street in the building that is now Morton junior High School, had approximately 20 students and three teachers and opened in 1894. By 1925 there were approximately 80 students in the high school, and it was in this year that the school was first accredited by North Central. By 1939 the enrollment of Morton Township High School had increased so much that it was necessary to build an addition to the school. Four classrooms, a library, a laboratory for science classes, and a gymnasium were first used in 1939.

Construction for the present high school, which is located at 350 N. Illinois Avenue, was begun in 1952. By that year, the village of Morton had increased in size and there were well over 200 students in the high school. Classes began in the new one-story brick building in 1954. By 1963 this building was no longer adequate for the increasing enrollment, and an addition was built which provided enough room for almost a thousand students. In 1971 a unit school district was formed consolidating five elementary schools, the junior high school, and the high school. Also, the name changed from Morton Township High School to Morton High School. In 1976 there was additional construction at the high school, adding two floors of classrooms. In 1997, the Bertha Frank Performing Arts Center was opened which provided a facility for both the school district and community to hold many events. The Berth Frank Performing Arts Center seats approximately 450 people and is equipped with equipment and facilities to produce high-quality programs. In 1998, remodeling of Carper field was completed with the addition of ticket booths, locker rooms, and a concession area.

At its highest enrollment during the 1970s, Morton High School grew to almost 1,400 students, but by the 1980s enrollment had decreased to around one thousand, the average enrollment for the past several years.

The athletic department at Morton High School was initiated in the early 1900s and has grown steadily over the years. The first basketball games were held in a small frame building called Morton Hall because there were no facilities at the high school. In 1926 work was begun on the school auditorium to convert it into a gymnasium that could also be used as a study hall when athletic events were not scheduled. Football had its debut in 1944, and since there were no facilities for games, the school district had to rent land. Later this land was purchased, and in 1976 it was named Carper field in honor of Mr. Bob Carper who served as principal of Morton High School for many years.

An estimated 11,000 students have graduated from Morton schools through the years, and the educations they received have served them well. As the number of classrooms and buildings grew to keep up with the population of Morton, so also did the curriculum expand to keep abreast of the changing times. From its inception until today, the philosophy of Morton Unit School District 709 has been to “encourage...the attainment of life-long learning skills for ... constructive participation in our ever-changing society.”

2004
50 years