



**MORNING  
STAR SCHOOL**  
*Where Futures Begin*

**LOOKING AHEAD**

August 9th

First Day of School

October 29th

Trunk or Treat

Jan. 30th – Feb. 5th

Catholic Schools Week

May 24th

High School Graduation

May 26th

8th Grade Graduation

May 27th

Last Day of School

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# Morning Star School

## Pinellas Park

Summer 2021

### Principal's Perspective

I think we can all agree that the 2020-2021 school year was a wild ride that tested our collective powers of creativity and flexibility. We began the school year with 50% of our students on campus and 50% learning from home. While no one had ever experienced this kind of school start before, our faculty and staff, students and parents embraced the “new normal” with enthusiasm and excitement. We practiced social distancing, wore masks, followed all CDC guidelines, and learned about COVID protocols. Each morning, classes participated in an online “Morning Meeting” that allowed all students, both virtual and in-person, the opportunity to learn together. Everyone was so excited to see each other, even if it was on the Smart Board. One of the most valuable lessons we learned was the importance of being together. Although everyone was wearing a mask, you saw the joy in the students’ eyes as they saw their teachers and friends. Students returned from distance learning throughout the school year and, by the end of the year, only 15% were still learning from home.

As spring approached, we took a leap of faith and planned our Annual Auction Fundraiser. We knew it would have to look different, but we needed it. Thanks to a small, energetic group of parents, we held our auction on the front lawn of Morning Star Catholic School on May 1, 2021. The auction raised almost \$85,000 with \$35,000 going to the Capital Campaign to build the Morning Star Achievement Center that will house our new Transition Program. It was a wonderful evening of fellowship, laughter, and fun. Thank you to our sponsors, families, and community supporters for making this evening a success.

This year, Mrs. Castaneda retired after more than 30 years of teaching at Morning Star School. Mrs. “C” was an amazing teacher who had a lasting impact on the lives of so many students and families throughout her career. I know she is looking forward to spending time with all her grandchildren and traveling. Mr. Laux also retired this year after teaching at Morning Star for 7 years. Prior to coming to Morning Star, Mr. Laux was a classroom teacher and Principal at several Catholic schools in the Diocese. He was instrumental in developing our high school program. We will miss his enthusiasm and love of all things St. Louis. In addition, we said good-bye to teachers, Ms. McGee and Mrs. Mittermayr. We will miss them and wish them the best of luck in their new ventures. Mrs. Walley also embarked on a new adventure in Texas. She is returning to her original career and has secured a job teaching high school French while her husband begins his medical practice. Onyx, the office rabbit, joined Mrs. Walley and her family in the move to Amarillo, Texas. Teachers’ assistants, Ms. Micah and Mrs. Jess have also left as they continue their college education.

As luck would have it, in the summer of 2020, during a global pandemic, Morning Star kicked off a Capital Campaign. Our dream is to build a dedicated space for a Transition Program called the Morning Star Achievement Center. The goal of the center is to educate students after high school graduation to 22 years of age. This is a monumental task, and we have currently raised over \$700,000 with an additional \$165,000 pledged. We are so grateful for everyone’s support and are thrilled to announce that on July 8th, 2021, the Pinellas Park City Council approved our building plan which was the final hurdle. The build will begin soon.

2020-2021 was a lesson in resiliency and a reminder of the value of community. We will take all of our learning and growth and apply it to the opportunities and challenges that await us in the 2021-2022 school year.

*Many Blessings,*

*Susan M. Conza, Principal*

# Morning Star Achievement Center

We are excited to embark on our first school year with Morning Star's Transition Program! We are anxiously awaiting the new building, but that does not put pause on our programming. Our transition program will focus on job and life skills training to meet student's individual needs, as well as partnering with businesses that will help our students employability and raise the visibility of our mission and vision. Students will continue educational goals that are consistent with improving their ability to become confident and active participants in the world! We look forward to sharing more updates as our school year progresses.



Creating Our Future  
Morning Star Achievement Center

## Support Morning Star school while you shop!

You can support Morning Star everyday by keeping us in mind while you shop!

### Amazon Smile

Visit [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and choose Morning Star Catholic School Pinellas Park Inc. as your charity. Then 5% of your purchases will be donated to Morning Star School!



### Box Tops for Education

Box Tops are now Digital! Download the free Box Tops for Education app, shop for eligible products, scan your receipt and earn money for Morning Star!



### Coca-Cola Gives

Download the Coca-Cola app and you can give back to Morning Star with every beverage you purchase. Just scan the code on the inside of the bottle cap or box of cans and you'll help us continue to do what we do best!





## Creating Our Future Capital Campaign Commitment Form

Yes, I/we want to help ensure Morning Star School's ability to prepare and empower young people for years to come. I/we hereby commit and agree to contribute a total of \$\_\_\_\_\_ in support of the Morning Star Achievement Center Creating Our Future Capital Campaign.

This commitment will be funded as follows:

- Enclosed is my/our one-time gift of \$\_\_\_\_\_
  - Check payable to Morning Star School Campaign
  - Credit/Debit
 Card # \_\_\_\_\_ Exp \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ Sec Code# \_\_\_\_\_
- Gift payable over \_\_\_\_ years (5-year maximum) beginning \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ to be paid in installments
  - Quarterly  Semi-annually  Annually
 Initial payment of \$\_\_\_\_\_ enclosed.
- Please contact me/us about a gift of stock/securities.
- My company will match my donation and I will submit the matching gift form with my payment(s).

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Name for Business/Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address, City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please also credit this gift to the following additional individuals \_\_\_\_\_

I/We would like our gift to be recognized with the following Naming Opportunity:  
*(minimum gift of \$25,000. Refer to Naming Opportunities chart for availability.)*

You may publish my/our names in your donor lists as a motivation for others to give.

Please do not publish my/our names in your donor lists.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Morning Star School of Pinellas Park**  
4661 80<sup>th</sup> Ave N, Pinellas Park, FL 33781

**Sue Conza, Principal**  
(727) 544-6036 • sue.conza@morningstarschool.org

*Your contribution may be tax-deductible.  
Morning Star School is a 501(c)3 charitable organization, #59-1274421*

# COVID- 19 and School Life



Latrale eats lunch safely away from others



Aiden enjoys learning with friends at home and in the classroom



Emily swings while social distancing at recess

Learning looked very different at Morning Star School this year. With some students returning to campus and some remaining at home, staff worked tirelessly throughout the summer to prepare for a school year unlike any other. Classrooms were rearranged to provide for maximum social distancing. Signs were posted all over campus to remind students to wear their masks and to promote safe ways to greet and interact with each other.

Technology workshops were offered to all teachers to learn how to best teach students who remained at home. Mrs. Mittermayr served as our Distance Learning Coordinator and worked directly with distance learning students and parents to provide the best possible education through this difficult time.

Social and emotional health was at the top of our priority list. Our counselor taught weekly classes to practice social skills and provided our students with many different options to express their feelings and emotions.

Through it all, students and staff at Morning Star School--those at home and those on campus--all worked together to make sure that our commitment to quality education was upheld no matter what!



(Pictured above) Ruby and Orlando enjoy a socially distanced Art Class

## We are excited to announce the retirements of Mrs. Mary Beth Castaneda and Mr. Thom Laux!



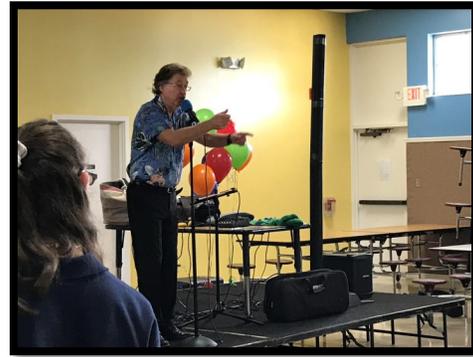
Mr. Laux has served as a high school teacher and assistant principal at Morning Star School for the last seven years. While teaching in one of our high school classrooms full time, Mr. Laux also managed to regularly conduct safety drills and teacher observations as well as run the Before Care Program. His contributions to the school, particularly to our High School Program, have been invaluable, and we will miss him very much. We wish him well as he relaxes and spends more time with his family.



Mrs. Castaneda is retiring after serving as a classroom teacher at Morning Star for over 30 years! Through the decades, she has impacted hundreds of lives of students with special needs and their families, and has served faithfully and completely in whatever role she has been asked to undertake, from chairperson of the book fair, to head of the admissions team. There hasn't been a student, parent or even faculty member whose life she hasn't touched in some way, and for that we thank her dearly. We will definitely miss Mrs. Castaneda, but we are so excited for what her next adventure has in store for her!

We know you will all join us in thanking Mrs. Castaneda and Mr. Laux for their service to Morning Star School and in wishing them well in their retirements.

# Jack Hartmann



COVID caused us to cancel or alter many events we typically enjoy on campus, but when it came to hosting a Jack Hartmann concert on campus, we just couldn't cancel! This was something we started planning a year ago, and we didn't want to disappoint our students with yet another cancelled event. So the staff got creative, and in cooperation with Jack Hartmann, were able to provide our students with a once-in-a-lifetime experience!

Jack Hartmann is a critically acclaimed children's music artist, with thousands of songs and music videos specifically geared to promote academic and social standards for early learners. With a BA in Child Psychology and a Master's Degree in Clinical Psychology, Mr. Hartmann uses research-based, teacher-approved methods and standards to create engaging, meaningful content for use at home or in the classroom.

Students who would benefit most from seeing Mr. Hartmann in person were invited to attend his concert in OTHERS Hall at socially distanced tables. Parents had to provide permission and all students and staff remained masked at all times.

For our students at home and those who remained in the classroom, the concert was broadcast live via Zoom. All students, no matter where they were located, danced and sang as they enjoyed a live performance of one of their favorite songwriters!

Thank you to Mr. Hartmann for being willing to provide this experience to our students!



# Halloween

Halloween at Morning Star was a day full of fun and festivities! Students and staff donned their favorite costumes, enjoyed Halloween-themed activities, and left school with treats galore!

In PE class, students turned each other into mummies, and Father Kevin and Father Veejay of Sacred Heart Catholic Church delivered bags of treats to each of the students. While we couldn't host our Annual Trunk-or-Treat this year, we still enjoyed a wonderful Halloween!



# Christmas

The Christmas Spirit was alive and well at Morning Star this year! While we could not host our Annual Christmas Program, staff and students found a way to make the season special nonetheless!

Staff and students enjoyed Christmas-theme dress-up days, such as "Dress Like a Christmas Tree" and "Christmas PJ Day". Hot cocoa was enjoyed by all, and many Christmas carols were sung in the halls. We even collected over 800 non-perishable food items to donate to His Heart Society, a homeless mission of Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

Through masking and social distancing, Morning Star students and staff had a great time sharing the joy of the birth of Christ with each other and with our community!

# Catholic Schools Week



Every year, students in Catholic schools throughout the country participate in a week of spirited activities and dress-up days to celebrate all that Catholic education provides to students, families and communities.

This year, as with most events, Catholic Schools Week looked a little different at Morning Star School, but that doesn't mean we didn't have a week full of fun and meaningful activities! Students and staff wore their best tacky gear, tropical attire (on the coldest day of the winter), patriotic pride and school spirit! Students enjoyed an icy treat from Kona Ice and participated in a discussion about vocations with Father Kevin via Zoom. They even had

their own Mass at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, which was particularly special because they were otherwise only able to attend Mass virtually.

Thank you to Father Kevin Yarnell at Sacred Heart Catholic Church for inviting our students and staff to their own Mass and for taking the time to speak with them about your path to the priesthood!



Another successful Catholic Schools Weeks in the books! Take that, COVID!



In an effort to promote sportsmanship, social interaction, and physical wellbeing during the pandemic, the Diocese of St. Petersburg started a kickball program in the fall. It allowed for students to be outdoors and to compete in a more socially distanced environment.

All Morning Star students were invited to participate in two games of kickball after school against our friends at Sacred Heart Catholic School. The team practiced regularly together after school and learned the basics of the game. Staff, parents and even Father

## Kickball

Kevin were there to cheer on our students as they kicked, ran, rolled, threw and caught! Everyone had an amazing time, and all students from both schools were extremely courteous and friendly through the entire process!

Thank you to Sacred Heart for inviting us to play with you! This experience was invaluable for our students!



# Congrats, 8th Grade Grads!

Fourteen students graduated from the eighth grade at Morning Star School on Thursday, June 3rd in a wonderful ceremony held on the MSS campus. Students performed a song for their families and the MSS staff and told us their favorite memories of their time at our school, and their teachers thanked them for all they learned from their students. Those in attendance also enjoyed a slideshow of images of each of the students throughout their time at Morning Star, some of whom have been with us since they were very little! It was a joyous, touching way to commemorate their time with us and to mark the beginning of their next chapter. Some of these students will transfer to other high schools to start a new adventure while others will stay and participate in the MSS High School Program. Whatever their plans for next year, we are so proud of each of them and cannot wait to see what the future holds for them!



Carson



Joshua



Latrale



Alisa



Edward "EJ"



Nicholas



Jake



Orlando



Ruby



Isabella



Donald "Liam"



Maci



Darrell "DJ"



Makayla

# Congrats, High School Grads!

The 2021 Graduating Class from Morning Star School included six students who worked incredibly hard during their tenure here: Dyllan, Kendra, Madison, Jonah, Alex and Lewis --as well as 2020 Graduate Brianna Bosworth-- were celebrated in a special service at Sacred Heart Catholic Church on Tuesday, June 1st. In addition to family and staff, Associate Superintendent Dr. Ann Davis was also in attendance and took a moment to express to the graduates how proud she was of them. Each student received a Certificate of Completion for their time at Morning Star School. Five of the graduates will be returning to Morning Star next school year as the inaugurating class of our new Transition Program, and we couldn't be more excited to see their faces on campus again! Wherever God leads our graduates in the coming years, we pray for their continued growth and success in all of their endeavors!



Mikal "Dyllan"



Kendra



Madison



Jonah



Alexander



Lewis

# Annual Auction Fundraiser 2021

Despite a global pandemic, Morning Star School found a way to still hold our Annual Auction Fundraiser. On May 1st, under a tent outdoors on the Morning Star campus, guests enjoyed a more relaxed atmosphere that included dinner from Sonny's and a time to catch up with friends we hadn't seen in over a year. All staff, parents and friends laughed, talked and bid their way through a very enjoyable evening, and raised over \$85,000 in the process! Thank you so much to all of our sponsors, community supporters and volunteers for another successful fundraiser and another wonderful evening!



Our Annual Auction Fundraiser is a time when all supporters of Morning Star School come together to enjoy an evening of fun and giving! The funds raised at this event go directly into the school's operating budget to help us continue to provide a quality, individualized education for each of our students. Save the date and plan to join us for this amazing evening of giving!

Save  
the Date

FOR THE ANNUAL  
AUCTION FUNDRAISER  
MARCH 5, 2022

# With Gratitude

This school year, Morning Star felt more blessed than ever! Between donations for our Transition Program and donations toward our operating budget, we have been overwhelmed with love and support from our family, friends and community supporters. We wholeheartedly thank God for the grace and faithfulness He has shown us through you:

- Morning Star Families
- OTHERS members and all individual donors
- All sponsors of and donors to our *Annual Auction Fundraiser*
- Bishop Gregory Parkes
- Mr. Chris Pastura, Superintendent, and Dr. Ann Davis, Associate Superintendent
- Krauss/Baschab Family Foundation, Seminole Lanes and Sunrise Lanes
- The Knights of Columbus Council 10157, Council 14456, Council 3580, Council 5737
- Advantage Mental Health
- Catholic Daughters of the Americas Court of St. John Vianney #1944
- Canon and Lisa Coleman
- Dairy-Mix, Inc.
- Insoft & Hurst Orthodontics
- Guardian Trust
- Jack Hartmann's Hop 2 It Music and Press, Inc.
- The Jack Moore Group, LLC
- Clearwater Central Catholic High School
- Father Kevin Yarnell and Sacred Heart Catholic Church
- Pinellas Park Rotary Club
- Rahdert & Mortimer, PLLC
- Social Club of St. Petersburg
- St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church
- St. John Vianney Catholic Church and School
- St. Paul Catholic Church Columbiette Auxiliary 13657
- St. Raphael Catholic Church
- Traffic Control Products of Florida, Inc.
- United Way Suncoast
- Verizon Foundation
- Morning Star Advisory Board Members: Lily Abadal, Linda Champion, Beth Lani, Jack and Kerry Moore, Marianne Pasha, Denise Reilly, Julie Reyes, Richard Ryder, Mary Ann Smith and Karen Vogel

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# In Memoriam

We remember the following friends and family of Morning Star who passed away this year:

Yolanda Conza  
Patricia "Pat" Kennedy  
Richard Layton  
Richard Mohr  
Richard Panella  
Janet Schweiger  
Rodney Wilson

## Morning Star School

4661 80th Avenue North  
Pinellas Park, FL 33781

Phone: 727-544-6036

Email: [info@morningstarschool.org](mailto:info@morningstarschool.org)

[www.morningstarschool.org](http://www.morningstarschool.org)

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@MSSPP

## O.T.H.E.R.S. Membership

The annual membership dues of  
O.T.H.E.R.S. is \$25 per year.  
Annual membership is from  
January 1 to December 31.

Please use enclosed envelope for  
new memberships and renewals.

Thank you!

*Morning Star Catholic School, a mission of the Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg, recognizes the unique educational needs of students. The administration, faculty, staff, and parents work together to provide an ungraded academic curriculum in which students can achieve their potential academically, socially, and spiritually.*