

## **THE STORY OF MORRIS HILLS**

Morris Hills High School, with its modern comprehensive curriculum, stands today as evidence of the foresight, planning, cooperation, hard work, and courage of many citizens and educators in the area who as far back as the late thirties saw the need for growth in terms of school system. The increase in birth rate, the construction of new homes, the expansion of old industry and the addition of new, the demand for a wider variety of high school courses and subjects and the rise in educational costs in both receiving and sending districts were among the reasons why the Boards of Education were interested in studying the proposal for a regional high school that would best serve the needs of their high school youth.

From the March 7, 1949 public discussion meeting on the organization of the regional district until October 29, 1949, when it was submitted to the voters, much work was done by educators and community leaders resulting in an affirmative vote of 2675 to 318 for the formation of the districts.

Since the first Board of Education was appointed by Mr. William H. Mason, Morris County Superintendent of Schools, to begin the solution of the problems of the district, many Board members have given their valuable time towards the welfare of Morris Hills. Some of the problems that had to be solved by the Board of Education were selections of a site, kind and size of building, curriculum, financing, transportation, equipment, staff, textbooks, and policy regulations.

The first site was approved on June 16, 1950. Mr. Nathan Gifford, Superintendent of Morris Hills Regional High School, was selected July 1, 1950 to act as supervisor consultant and administrator for the Board of Education to assist with solving the many problems of the district.

Groundbreaking ceremonies were held on April 26, 1952 and the cornerstone ceremony was held on May 23, 1953. During the summer of 1953, Miss Dora A. Ames (Mrs. Dora A. Sharp), Director of Guidance, began working to assist the class and student counseling. On September 9, 1953, the Morris Hills Regional High School was opened for the entrance of its first classes. On October 23, 1953, dedication ceremonies were attended by a crowd of over fifteen hundred people.

The six curricula offered during the first year included: College Preparatory, Art, Business, Vocational Homemaking, Vocational Building Trades, and Auto Mechanics.

Since the opening day registration was sufficient to fill the new school to capacity, plans were started immediately for an addition. On July 20, 1955, the voters approved a bond issue of \$1,839,000.00 for an addition to the school, which would house an additional thousand pupils. This addition provided further facilities for the college preparatory and vocational rooms. Added to the school's curriculum were Distributive Education, Practical Nursing, Beauty Culture, and Electronics. Courses of enrichment were also added to the College Entrance, Business and Homemaking fields.

Mr. Patrick Caruso was appointed Superintendent of Schools to succeed Mr. Nathan Gifford. Upon Mr. Caruso's retirement on February 1, 1981, Mr. David A. MacNicoll assumed the position of Chief School Administrator. Mr. MacNicoll ended his career on July 1, 1988 with Dr. James J. McNasby following him to the position of Chief School Administrator. In July of 2001, Dr. McNasby retired and was replaced by

Dr. Ernest Palestis. In August of 2009, Dr. Ernest Palestis retired from the Morris Hills Regional District, and Mr. James Jencarelli was appointed the new Superintendent of Schools.

On December 1, 2, and 3, 1959, the first Evaluation Committee from the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, evaluated Morris Hills Regional High School and accredited the school with an excellent rating. Many favorable comments were made on its breadth of curriculum and the comprehensive nature of its offerings for both the college and non-college students. On February 16, 17, and 18, 1970, we underwent our second evaluation of the school with very favorable results. November 14, 15, and 16, 1980 marked the third Middle States Evaluation of Morris Hills with extremely favorable results. The fourth review by the Middle States Association was conducted November 29, 30, and December 1, 1989 with our school receiving superb commendations. On November 29, 30, and December 1, 2000 a fifth review by the Middle States Association again yielded superior commendations.

In 1998, the Morris County School of Technology announced a plan to establish a series of Academies throughout the county which would be subject specific. Our Superintendent, Dr. McNasby, realized this was the future course of education. His vision brought the Academy for Mathematics, Science and Engineering, to the Morris Hills Campus.

The academy is a highly focused, four year, full time program that begins in ninth grade at Morris Hills High School. The program is for students attending a high school in Morris County, who are highly qualified and are looking to enter careers in the areas of engineering, mathematics and science.

After two years of intensive planning the refurbishing of our former vocational building, and the development of various curricula, the Academy opened its doors to twenty-four students on September 5, 2000.

Morris Hills High School offers a Magnet Program in Mathematics and Science, as well as being an AVID School, promoting college-readiness skills for our students.

Morris Hills High School has been named a 2017 U.S. News and World Report Best High School. More than 6,000 schools, barely one-fourth of the schools that U.S. News and World Report evaluated, were awarded gold, silver, or bronze medals in this year's ranking. Morris Hills High School has received a silver ranking. Furthermore, Morris Hills High School is ranked 59th in the state of New Jersey and is ranked 1,477 in the entire country. This national ranking puts Morris Hills High School in the top 7% of high schools in the entire nation.

The present administration of Morris Hills High School includes, Mr. Todd Toriello as Principal, Mr. Robert Merle, Jr. and Mr. Gene Melvin (discipline) as Assistant Principals, Mrs. Emily Barkocy (attendance) as Assistant Principal, Ms. Yesenia Rivera as Supervisor of Guidance, and Mr. Robert Haraka as Supervisor of Student Services/Athletics.

Morris Hills now sponsors twenty-nine varsity sports. In 1958, the Jersey Hills Conference was formed and Morris Hills became a charter member of that conference. In 1977, the Jersey Hills Conference merged with the Iron Area Conference, to form the Iron Hills Conference. Due to a realignment of all of the conferences in the state of New Jersey, the Iron Hills Conference was eliminated in 2009, and Morris Hills High School became part of the Northwest Jersey Athletic Conference.

The school has become nationally recognized in various activities including Forensics, Athletics, Music and Academics. Graduates from Morris Hills have attended various schools and colleges and they have distinguished themselves in the service of our country.