Countryside Trees

NEWSLETTER OF THE COUNTRYSIDE SCHOOL ALUMNI

Spring 2026

Letter from the Head



Krystal Young

Dearest Countryside Community,

What a whirlwind this year has been for me, both at Countryside and at home. As many of you know, the eldest Young girls have been finishing their senior year at Mahomet-Seymour, and it has been quite the emotional season for our family.

Having never gone through the college process before, navigating it with two daughters at the same time has brought all the emotions - heartbreak that they are leaving, immense pride in the young women they have become, and a fair amount of anxiety at the thought of them being so far away from Jeff and me.

True to form, the girls kept us in suspense until the very end, but they have finally made their decisions. This fall, one will be heading to Ithaca, New York, to attend Cornell, while the other will be off to Gainesville, Florida, for the University of Florida. We are incredibly proud of them both and excited to see what lies ahead, even as we prepare ourselves for these big transitions.

And the adventure is far from over - our youngest will begin the college application process this summer, which means we will move straight from one season of applications and decisions into the next. At this point, I would not be surprised if she chooses somewhere in the Pacific Northwest, as keeping us on our toes seems to be one of our girls' greatest gifts.

Big decisions for them, of course, bring big decisions for me and Jeff as we stare down

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Head of School Krystal Young with her daughters Mallory Young (2022) and Madison Young (2022)



Fall Day - 8th graders and Mrs. Young as the agents from *Men In Black*

Big News

- Mrs. Young announces her retirement
- We are renovating our front lobby
- Countryside takes 1st All-School field trip

Inside this issue:

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Welcome from Mrs. Young

Welcome Letter - continued from page 1

a rapidly emptying nest (and wonder if our house can stand without all the sound three teenage girls make). I've rehearsed how to say what comes next more times than I can count, and it is, without question, one of the hardest messages I've ever had to write. But as I often remind our students, the only way over something hard is straight through it, so here goes:

I have decided to retire as Head of School at Countryside at the end of June 2027.

Okay, everyone…let's take a deep breath - I'll take two. **;)**

First, please know this was my decision. The board, faculty, and staff have been aware, and in true Countryside fashion, they have been nothing but thoughtful, supportive, and honestly, very persuasive in trying to get me to reconsider. But here's the truth: I only know how to do Countryside one way – 150% all the time. It is a joy and privilege to give that kind of energy to a place I love this much, but it's also not something I can do halfway, especially when my own people are beginning to spread out across the country.

In many ways, this feels like choosing to walk off the field at the end of a championship season, grateful, proud, and knowing just how special the team is.

This school, these students, and this extraordinary group of educators and staff mean more to me than I can adequately put into words. Miss doesn't even begin to cover it. My heart will break when I don't get to see them every day. Countryside has not only been a defining part of my life, but of my family's lives. Sending our daughters here was one of the best decisions we ever made.

The good news (for all of us) is that we still have time. Time to keep doing the work I love, time to celebrate the community (next year marks our 35th anniversary!), and time for me to soak in as many everyday moments as possible.

Thank you for trusting me, supporting me, and sharing your children with me. It has been, and will continue to be, the honor of a lifetime.

Wishing you a summer full of memories and adventure!

Krystal

MARK YOUR CALENDARS:

MRS. YOUNG RETIREMENT PARTY

MAY 22, 2027

Logo Contest - 35 Years

Remember our 30th anniversary logo? Now we need a 35th anniversary logo, and we are holding a design contest! We would love to feature YOUR logo design on a t-shirt and other 35th anniversary print and digital materials.



Logo used for our 30th Anniversary
*Designed by alumna **Kayla Israel** (2016)*

What: 35th anniversary logo contest

Who: Open to anyone in our community

Entry deadline: June 30, 11:59 p.m. CT

Prizes: Grand prize includes a t-shirt with your logo featured, a $200 Amazon gift card, and other Countryside swag. Runner-up prize is a $50 Amazon gift card.

For rules and entry instructions:
www.countrysideschool.org/logo-contest

College Colors & Coffee Celebration

On Sunday April 26, we celebrated our Countryside Class of 2022 as they prepare to graduate from high school.

About a dozen of our Class of 2022 gathered to celebrate their launch into the real world. Those attending represented Cal Berkeley, Stanford, Princeton, Cornell, University of Florida, University of Pennsylvania, Carnegie Mellon, Case Western, Eastman School of Music, Emerson College, and Purdue.

We chatted about what the alumni were majoring in, going to see **Jordan Rinkenberger** (2022) as Shrek that afternoon, summer plans, and we even reminisced about their 8th grade trip to Washington DC.

Mrs. Young has twins heading off to different universities - so she wore a split shirt. She even wore one blue shoe and one red shoe! (See the photo on front page.)



Above: Andres Bross, Helen Fu and Sasha Goncalo

Below: Chris Antonsen (MS Literature & Writing) is thrilled that Adelaide Kota has decided to major in English





Above: Will Miller, Shinjian Song, Mallory Young, Madison Young

Below: Chris Antonsen (MS Literature & Writing) chats via video with Siddhant Baht in Princeton, NJ





Above: Muskaan Garg, Elliot Neault, Adelaide Kota

Below: Helen Fu's Case Western Reserve socks!



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WANT THIS NEWSLETTER VIA EMAIL?
SEND US YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

What is New This Year?



7th grade: Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago

Middle School Field Trips

We have revamped our middle school field trips. Now only the 6th grade class plans and goes on *Expedition!* - the local "day around town" where our students use public transportation, tour a business, and eat at a sit-down restaurant.

The 7th grade class now plans a day in Chicago. This year they took a school bus to the city and explored the Museum of Science and Industry and enjoyed lunch and shopping - with the requisite stop at Jellycat!

At their leadership retreat, the 8th graders propose and vote on locations for their 8th grade trip - then they help to plan the activities for the four day trip. This year they explored Orlando, FL.

Competitive Archery Team

We had an archery team for the first time in Countryside history! 8th grader Devyn represented Countryside in 10 National Archery in Schools Program (NASP) tournaments and shot a personal best of 260/300. She even placed 52nd out of 194 middle school girls! Go Devyn!



Our Newest Alumni

Our graduating 8th graders plan to attend these high schools this fall:

Corbin Barker	Blue Ridge
Lucas Cao	Centennial
David Chen	Academy
Olivia Chew	Mahomet-Seymour
Katherine Edwards	Academy
Cindy Fu	Centennial
Adam Green	Kenwood Academy – Chicago
Liam Guest	Academy
Jacob Hartman	Academy
Mira Ivanova	Central
Skye Johnson	Central
Dilan Martin-Ersoz	Central
Luciano Molina-Sprandel	Academy
Ashley Patten	Academy
Drew Perry	Centennial
Devyn Pugh	Centennial
Liam Sears	Academy
Shinroong Song	Central
Elijah Thrapp	Academy

Our students matriculating as sub-freshmen at University Laboratory High School:

Kavya Haran	Isabella Shodunke
Henry Lin	Ian Wisdom
Max Mirica	

Camp Countryside

We host morning and afternoon camps during the month of June which are open to ANY student from ANY school.

Young Alumni: Looking for your first summer job? Although we have hired for this summer already, we often hire our young alumni to assist with camps.

Check back with us early next spring!

Good News & Renovation

Our Gym and Performing Arts addition transformed our school when it opened almost 14 years ago – changing the events we host, improving the sports we play, and elevating the performance opportunities for our students. That addition even allowed us to repurpose our Multi-Purpose Room to allow space for art, shop, and middle school study hall.

One unforeseen benefit happened during Covid. The "theater quadrant" curtains were drawn across the gym and temporary carpet tiles laid, so it could become three classroom spaces - allowing the school to remain open and have the appropriate spacing between student desks. We could safely operate when other schools could not.

This project was made possible with a large lead gift, donations through a capital campaign, and a low-interest loan. **We are happy to announce that this loan is now completely paid off!**

We worked hard to set Countryside on stable footing for a successful future, and we are thankful to our board and school leadership for their excellent fiscal responsibility.

On the heels of this great news, we look forward to an impactful improvement to the



school this summer – renovating our front lobby!

Our front desk and lobby have remained unchanged for almost 30 years. This mini upgrade will enhance the visitor experience of all who enter our doors and improve both the image and functionality of the space. **To help fund this mini renovation, we are accepting donations for the project.**

If you would like to support Countryside in this **lobby renovation** or our **Excellence Fund** which supports our teacher wish lists, please visit:

www.countrysideschool.org/give

INTERESTED IN **GIVING & GETTING INVOLVED?**

GIVE NOW

Mark Your Calendars: 35th Anniversary events

35th Logo Contest deadline	Tuesday, June 30
35th Anniversary Launch Party	Saturday, August 29 4:00-6:00 pm, rain date August 30
35th Birthday Party	Saturday, April 3
35th Celebration Closing Event	Friday, May 7

Athletics Raffle

Win Illini football, basketball & volleyball tickets - or a Chicago sports package!

Winner drawn on May 30.

Purchase raffle tickets:
www.countrysideschool.org/raffle

Golf Outing

Join us on May 30 for an afternoon of food, golf and prizes - all to benefit Countryside Athletics.

Register for golf outing:
www.countrysideschool.org/golf

8th Grade Trip: Orlando, Florida

This year's 8th grade trip was an adventure in Orlando, Florida! Over the fast-paced four days, they explored Universal Studios, Universal's Island of Adventure, Volcano Bay water park, the Kennedy Space Center, and then made a surprise trip to the beach.

Each fall our 8th grader class takes part in a leadership retreat where they present proposals on locations for their trip. The past few years we have explored Washington DC, Boston, New York City, and San Antonio TX.



Meeting Canadian astronaut Julie Payette - who spent eleven days on the space shuttle Discovery - at the Kennedy Space Center

JOIN US!
ALUMNI & FORMER FACULTY:
GRADUATION
MAY 21
6:30 PM



David, Eli and Lucas have differing opinions on the Revenge of the Mummy ride



Above: Mrs. Young's "punishment" for students who lose things on a trip is that they have to hold her hand. We had **five** students and **one** teacher lose items in Orlando - along with a dozen hotel key cards!



Kate, Ashley, Devyn, Drew, Olivia and Cindy meet Beetlejuice at Universal Studios

Below: Cindy, Drew and Kate meet Gru from *Despicable Me* at the Cabana Bay resort





Left: We surprised our 8th graders with a trip to the beach - the first time seeing an ocean for some

Alumni Shout Outs

The CTRL-Z Robotics team - including alumni **Will Miller** (2022), **Muskaan Garg** (2022), **Oren Akresh** (2023), **Shreya Haran** (2023) and 8th grader **Lucas** - advanced to the National Competition in Houston, TX where they were finalists in the Archimedes Division!

Breaststroker **Emily Dossey** (2024) and her 200 medley relay team took 14th place at YMCA Nationals in Greensboro, NC!

Olivia Dempsey (2021) once again competed at IHSA State in swimming. She swam for Champaign Central in the 200 medley relay.

Congratulations to our local alumni who won medals at State in Science Olympiad! **Daehyun Lee** (2025) earned 1st in Hovercraft and 3rd in Engineering CAS. **JJ Lee** (2022) earned 4th in Robot Tour. **Piper Fields** (2025) took 5th in Water Quality.

Mattox Pugh (2024) earned 3rd place at the Midwest Open archery tournament with a 540/700 as well as an Illinois State Indoor National Championship title! He also competes with the Uni High archery team.

JJ Lee (2022) was selected to sing at the Midwestern American Choral Directors Association festival.

Alumni on Stage

Janaki Raj-Underhill (2022) and **Sameena Raj-Underhill** (2026), and several of our current students performed in CU Ballet's *The Nutcracker* at Krannert Center in December and again in *The Little Mermaid* at the Virginia Theatre with **Taylor Feddersen** (2012) in May.

Jordan Rinkenberger (2022) was fantastic as Shrek at Central High School in April with **Shinjian Song** (2022) playing in the pit orchestra.

We loved seeing **Lin Gilbertz** (2020) on stage in *Anastasia* at Parkland College in April.

Student Shout Outs

8th grader **Devyn** placed 2nd at the Midwest Open archery tournament with a score of 616/700 and earned a state championship title for the Illinois Indoor State Championships. She competes in compound with the Team USA North Regional Elite Team and is preparing for JOAD Nationals in Lincoln, NE this summer.

8th grader **David** took 2nd in forms at a national Tae Kwon Do competition.

8th grader **Liam** competed in speedskating at Age Group Nationals in Boston in March.

Inspired by our 5th grade teacher Phil Weber, 5th grader **Maya** publishes The Crimson Chronicle, a neighborhood newspaper.

7th grader **Amy** was named an All-District musician and selected as a violinist for the junior orchestra by the Illinois Music Education Association.

Involved in a show?

Let us know when you are cast in a show! We LOVE to see our alumni perform!

Drop an email to Kristin Feddersen at feddersen@countrysideschool.org and she will let our faculty and staff know about your upcoming performances!

Countryside Takes Japan

Tune into our social media starting June 1 to follow along on our trip to Japan.

We have over 70 participants going on two overlapping trips!



SEND US YOUR "SHOUTOUTS" FOR SPORTS, THEATRE & ACADEMICS

Alumni Updates

Please note: *Students are listed by "affiliated class year" - the year the students graduated 8th grade or would have graduated had they remained at Countryside.*

ALUMNI:
PLEASE SEND US YOUR UPDATES!

WE'D LOVE TO FEATURE YOU

Rachel Walsh (1997) is a curriculum developer at Lawrence Hall of Science in Berkeley, CA.

Alyssa Walsh Green (1999) is in management at Morgan Stanley.

Michael Belmont (2003) is an attending physician at the Northwestern Hospital in Lake Forest, IL.

Erin Gelke(2005) LCSW, co-founded a private practice located in Champaign, IL with Deidra Dame, LCSW. Moonlight Trauma and Counseling Center provides trauma informed individual and family therapy services that support meaningful recovery for children, teens & adults - focusing on treating concerns surrounding childhood abuse of all kinds, high conflict divorces, domestic violence, post-separation abuse and coercive control. **www.moonlightcounselingcenter.com**

Erika Belmont (2006) is in the second year of a 3-year Oncology fellowship at St Louis' Barnes Jewish Hospital/Washington University, St. Louis.

Alex Gruebele (2008) lives in San Francisco and heads his own AI start-up that assists manufacturers with their production and workflows.

Hanna Gottlieb-Graham (2009) is president and founder of ALMA, a public relations and marketing firm, which was recently selected by *The Observer* as one of the 50 most-powerful PR firms of 2026: **tinyurl.com/ALMAtop50**

Madelyn Gunn Sapp (2009) is the mother of Katherine Emilia, who is 10 months old. Madelyn works in contracts at Saint Louis University.

Anna Kanfer Slepian (2010) has been producing reality TV shows both on location and from her home base in Los Angeles, recently including Big Brother for CBS. She lives with her husband Eric and their dog Webster.

Juliana Trach (2010) recently received her Ph.D. in Cognitive Neuroscience from Yale University and has accepted a post-doctoral fellowship at Kennedy-Kreiger Institute, Johns Hopkins University.

Robert Welch (2010) got married in September 2025 and will begin a doctorate in psychiatric nursing this coming fall. And he got a cat, Penny.

Jordan Gunn Dettelback (2011) is a fellow in the New World Symphony in Miami Beach, playing the cello in the nation's preeminent orchestra for young musicians.

Valerie Makri (2011) married Bryce Mazurowski in 2025, and they are buying their first house in Downers Grove, IL. She continues to work as a design engineer for Burns & McDonnell.

Ashley McFarquhar (2011) will move back to Houston this summer with her husband to begin a Hematology & Oncology fellowship at Baylor College of Medicine, with plans to practice in the field of oncology.

Ryan Mondak (2011) continues to play guitar - touring, recording, and producing with jazz-pop vocalist Emmaline. Over Thanksgiving, the band flew to Oman to perform two shows at the Royal Opera House. They followed with 22 sold-out performances in northeastern cities such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, and then two shows in Colorado, including one in which they opened for Kenny G.

Maddie Brown Carlson (2012) and Brady live in Chicago and joyfully welcomed their daughter, Halle, to the world in November!

Taylor Feddersen (2012) is a software engineer at Microsoft (Minecraft Education) in Seattle, WA. She continues to dance and will perform with the professional dance company, Suitcase Dance Theatre, at Fringe Festival in Edinburg, Scotland in August.

Alumni Updates

Abby Poteshman (2012) is graduating with a PhD in Computational and Applied Math from the University of Chicago, and she will be a post-doc in Berkeley.

Ailín Valdivia-McCarthy (2012) was promoted to Senior Associate, Renewables Asset Management at Invernergy and just returned from a trip to Paris and Marseille, France

Isaac Freund (2013) remains in Germany, working remotely for the FreeBSD foundation, playing bass guitar in a band, and beginning the steps to become a German citizen.

James Vaughen (2013) will be joining the Philadelphia Orchestra as principal trumpet this fall.

Emma Berry (2014) will receive an MFA in Visual Arts from Rutgers University, culminating in an exhibition at Westbeth Gallery in May 2026.

Dylan Gunn (2014) will receive his master's degree in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations from Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

Dante Freund (2015) is completing an Artist Diploma degree in Violin at the University of Illinois and fills his time with practicing, teaching and performing.

Lauren Feddersen (2015) is graduating with her master's degree in biology from Tufts University in Boston. She plans to work in cancer research.

Lu Poteshman (2015) is a literacy specialist living in Brooklyn, NY.

Olivia Gunn (2016) is a behavior specialist at the Alliance Academy of Cincinnati and working towards her Master of Science in Mental Health Counseling at Butler University.

Nicholas Gunn (2016) is getting married to Elise Bossenbroek in September and is a private asset manager.

David Kanfer (2016) is in the Nuclear Engineering PhD program at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. His research focuses on enhancing plasmas in vacuum chambers to improve semiconductor manufacturing. (This research would have helped him in Mr. Chapp's project to design a spacesuit.)

Angela Xu (2016) is currently finishing her first year of dental school at the University of Illinois Chicago.

Andrew Chen (2017) is working as a project manager at Capital One in Richmond, VA.

Holden Siena (2017) is finishing his first year as a Doctor of Physical Therapy student at Washington University in St Louis. He will spend part of the summer doing a clinical in Pittsburgh.

Charlie Smith (2017) is in their first year of teaching at Urban Dove Team Charter School in the Bronx, NY, while also pursuing their Masters of Arts in Teaching.

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RECENTLY GRADUATED COLLEGE?
LET US KNOW YOUR FUTURE PLANS

Your Director of Advancement

Kristin Feddersen, is our Director of Advancement - handling development, alumni relations, and communications.

Kristin has been involved in the Countryside community since 2003 when her eldest started in kindergarten. She is the parent of two alumnae - Taylor (2012) and Lauren (2015).

Contact Kristin for giving & donations, alumni support, marketing and communications: feddersen@countrysideschool.org



Alumni Updates

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Andy Brown (2018) is graduating from the University of Illinois with a bachelor's in industrial engineering. After graduation, he heads to Madison, WI to start as a Client Systems Administrator for Epic.

Yoon Freund (2018) will graduate this spring from Beloit University and will be attending mortuary school in Milwaukee.

Ekam Ghotra (2018) is graduating with his BS in Computer Science from University of Wisconsin, Madison. He wants to be in the quant and investments space.

Jared Hastings (2018) is graduating from North Carolina State University summa cum laude with his BS in Electrical Engineering. He plans to attend NCSU in the fall to complete his Master of Science in Electrical Engineering.

Madeleine Keenan (2018) is graduating from Yale with a degree in history.

Jake Regenwetter (2018) is graduating from Brown University at the end of May with a Bachelor of Science in Applied Mathematics-Computer Science and a Bachelor of Arts in Human Spatial Interaction and Design.

Lily Weaver (2018) is graduating from Princeton University in software engineering. She has an offer for a software development position in the Big Apple.

Sierra Freund (2019), now at Illinois State University, has switched her major from violin performance to marketing - though she still plays with local symphonies.

Teoman Sehitoglu (2019) is finishing his junior year studying Finance at the University of Illinois. He is looking forward to spending this summer in Des Moines, IA as a Strategic Initiatives Intern at Brookfield Wealth Solutions. He will also return to campus this fall to serve as the new President of the AXIS Risk Management Academy.

Ian Weible (2019) is finishing his junior year at Augustana College and beginning work on a senior research project involving interpreted paleoclimate from fossil biodiversity data. In addition, he will be continuing to work as a lab and field assistant for the Illinois State Geological Survey this summer.

Suhani Garg (2020) After finishing her sophomore year in the Gies College of Business at the University of Illinois, Suhani will spend the summer on Capitol Hill as an intern in the office of Illinois Congresswoman Nikki Budzinski. This fall she will go back to the U of I for her second year as a resident advisor to other students and continue to prepare for the LSAT with plans to take it in late winter. In spring 2027, she will head to South Korea for a semester-long study abroad experience.

Lin Gilbertz (2020) performed in Parkland Theater's production of *Anastasia* in April - featured in the ensemble and as the understudy for the lead role of Anastasia. Lin is completing her sophomore year as a lyric theater major at the University of Illinois.

Gavin Sheppard (2020) is currently working at the Walmart in Savoy and will be cohosting the Dungeons & Dragons summer camp with Mr. A!

Hadley Siena (2020) is finishing her sophomore year at the University of Illinois. She has an internship with a venture capital group on campus and was recently selected for a summer 2027 investment banking internship at the Bank of Montreal.

Meher Ghotra (2021) is finishing her freshman year in biomedical engineering at Santa Clara University in California.

Davis Mo (2021) started his undergrad degree in computer science in Texas.

Bonnie Weaver (2021) is now a freshman at Cornell University and is considering studying public health. She also has big plans - hoping to go to Kenya and work over the summer on the shores of Lake Victoria.

Alaia Ahmad (2022) will attend Butler University as a healthcare and business major and is incredibly grateful to have received 3 scholarships. She also completed an intensive philosophy program, culminating in a capstone project that included both a

CHECK US OUT ON INSTAGRAM
@COUNTRYSIDEK8

Alumni Updates

dissertation and a formal presentation to a large audience. Her research was called "Grins, Gaps, and Justice: The Ethics of Cosmetic Dentistry", and it explored why society places such a strong value on straight, white teeth, and how those standards intersect with mental health and socioeconomic inequality.

Siddhant Bhat (2022) is excited to be heading to Princeton University to study molecular biology and computer science. He had research on protein function prediction submitted to the STEM Fellowship for review and it will hopefully be published in the coming weeks. In addition, he recently ran his first marathon in Jersey City, NJ and ran just shy of three hours with a time of 3:02:25.

Andres Bross (2022) will be attending the University of Pennsylvania this fall. Go Quakers! "I want to give a huge thank you to all my Countryside teachers and friends who helped me get this far."

Cali Cooper (2022) will be attending University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff to play D1 soccer and study international business.

Muskaan Garg (2022) After leading her soccer team at St Thomas More high school as one of the captains and going with her robotics team to Houston for the world-wide FIRST Championship Robotics competition, Muskaan will spend the first part of her summer visiting family and then start college in July at Purdue University as part of Purdue's Early Start Program. Muskaan will major in mechanical engineering and is a proud recipient of Purdue's Presidential Scholarship of $10,000 per year for all four years of her undergraduate degree.

Sasha Goncalo (2022) will be attending UC Berkeley this fall to study bioengineering.

Vidya Sinha (2022) will attend Stanford University where she plans to study computer science, mathematics, and philosophy. Beyond academics, Vidya is excited to get involved in campus jazz performance groups and continue developing her cooking skills.

Lucas Tosi (2023) is finishing his junior year in high school preparing to apply to colleges with strong animal sciences programs. His career goal is to become a veterinarian. He will be spending his summer shadowing veterinarians, taking horseback riding lessons, and preparing his college application components.

Leave Your Thumbprint

If you were **not** here for 8th grade and attend an alumni event at the school, you may put your thumbprint and name on our Alumni Wall!



Send Us a Sentence Winner

Thanks to the 60+ of you who sent us a sentence about themselves for *Trees*.

The winner of the *Send Us a Sentence* drawing is **James Vaughen** (2013). James is currently principal trumpet of the Minnesota Orchestra and will be joining the Philadelphia Orchestra as principal trumpet this fall.

Thanks, James! We will get yours delivered to you.



35TH ANNIVERSARY LAUNCH PARTY & HOMECOMING

AUGUST 29

4 PM - 6 PM

ALUMNI: WANT TO GIVE BACK?
WE WOULD LOVE TO HAVE YOU SPEAK TO OUR STUDENTS

Q & A with Tara Santiago



Tara Santiago

After ten years as our middle school math teacher, middle school advisor, and coach for MATHCOUNTS and Scholastic Bowl, Tara Santiago is moving away. Before she leaves, we asked Tara a bit about her experience at Countryside:

What are some of your favorite Countryside moments?
Those moments of "middle school whimsy"…

• Remote learning 2020, everyone was obsessed with Animal Crossing. One day **Mallory Young** (2022) had amazing turnip prices on her island, so we paused math class to visit, sell some turnips, and become in-game millionaires (Bell-ionaires?).

• After a review game in 2022, **Breanna Patten** (2022) asked me if she could bat a squishy ball at the whiteboard using a meter stick. Of course, I said yes. The meter stick broke in half and it made everyone's day.

• In 2022, it's the middle of class and I've just explained something about linear systems. **Cameron Hamilton** (2022) raised his hand and said, with a straight face, "One day when I'm really old, I want to make an escape room… using all of the pointless knowledge I've collected over the years… like this stuff… and make my grandkids solve it to earn their inheritance." I told him to please send me an invite so I can keep the inheritance for myself.

• A fly in the room always disrupts class (this is middle school, remember?). In 2023 **Jo Bross** (2023) caught the fly in mid-air between her index finger and thumb. To this day, I'm still impressed.

• Field Day 2024, racing across the soccer field in a golf cart with Mrs. Young and Mrs. Barker, pelting students with water balloons. At some point we hit a bump and Mrs. Barker went flying off the cart.

• In 2025 my Core 5 geometry class gleefully pranked Mrs. Young by pretending they were being so unruly and out of control that I had to call her in for assistance. In order to *really* sell it, **Zachary Akresh** (2025) and **Gio Bellina** (2025) went to her office and pretended to be in trouble for 5 minutes. I think they almost had their parents called.

• Year after year, the pure joy and glee with which students like to watch Barbie bungee jump off the LWW loft with too many rubber bands and crash into the floor.

• All the off-topic and wacky conversations that take place during math class when absolutely no one is "locked in".

What profession other than teaching would you like to attempt?
I'd like to run my own small business. Maybe someday…

What will you miss most about the school?
It's hard to say. Countryside is the only school I've ever worked at, so I'll always compare other places to it. It will always be in my heart!

What are you most looking forward to doing in the next year?
Exploring and discovering new places, meeting new people, and having new experiences.

We wish Ms. Santiago all the best on her new adventures. We will miss you!

Feel free to reach out to her:
mathy.tns@gmail.com

Mark Your Calendars:
35th Birthday Bash
Sat. April 3
Time: TBD

Homecoming/Fall Picnic 2025

Our Homecoming/Fall Picnic attendees enjoyed inflatables and face painting. In addition, our returning alumni were treated to free Kona Ice! We loved having so many of you return! **Mark your calendars:**

Saturday, August 29 4:00 - 6:00 p.m.
35th Anniversary Launch Party & Homecoming 2026



Kaitlyn Young, Mallory Young, Shinjian Song





Above left: Zoe McMillan, Sophie Shaffer, Sylvie DeJarnette
Above right: Mattox Pugh, Elliot White, Layla Zong, Chris Antonsen (MS Literature & Writing)
Below: Nate Sharpe, Ian Yao, Nyal Adoni, Issac Sulkin, Crew Messer, Christopher Kota



IF YOU DID **NOT** RECEIVE *TREES* BY EMAIL, WE DO **NOT** HAVE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

Multicultural All-School Lunch Celebrations

Thank so much to our generous families who hosted All School pizza lunches in honor of several cultural and ethnic occasions this year. We love that you explain to all our students the significance of these wonderful celebrations:

October	Diwali, Hindu Festival of Lights
February	Chinese Lunar New Year
March	Eid al-Fitr, end of Ramadan



Thanks to our parents who hosted art & educational activities in our elementary classrooms for Diwali

35 YEARS BIRTHDAY BASH
APRIL 3, 2026

Great News at School

Fifth grader **Zara** broke the girls' school record for the mile at 7:03 - previously set by **Caroline Hartmann** (2019) in 2018. Eighth grader **David** broke the boys' school record with a 6:06 set in 2014 by **Adam Youssef** (2016) *We started recording school records in 2013.*

Felicidades to our middle schoolers who took the **National Spanish Exam.** Despite being in middle school, our students often do well beyond "8th grade level" Spanish. In Level 1 (1st year high school), we received 1 gold, 1 silver, 4 bronze and 4 honors. In Level 2 (2nd year high school), we received 1 gold, 4 silver, 3 bronze and 1 honors.

And our 4th and 5th graders rocked the **National Spanish Challenge** (taking the exam one level above their grade) with ALL our students honored for outstanding or excellent achievement – and 5th grader **Felix** received a perfect score!

Congratulations to our Mathletes - **Lucas, Liam G, Max** and **Atharva** - who placed 3rd in the team round of the **MATHCOUNTS** chapter competition. **Liam G** made it to State in individual competition!

Our **Battle of the Books** team took 2nd in Battle of the Books competition at the Champaign Public Library.

Congratulations to our **Scholastic Bowl** team who won 2nd at Regionals. In addition, Countryside hosted the Regional competition for the first time.

Congratulations to our **FIRST LEGO League Challenge** team who competed in the Qualifiers at the University of Illinois and advanced to Sectionals. The team also won the Core Values Award, which celebrates a team that displays extraordinary enthusiasm and spirit, knows they can accomplish more together than they could as individuals, and demonstrates respect at all times. Special shout out to our alumna mentor **Shreya Haran** (2023)!

CSA Happenings



Our Countryside School Association (CSA) is active in bringing our community together. They sponsor:

- Box lunches at staff inservice
- Welcome Back Coffee
- Fall Picnic/Homecoming with inflatables, face painting, Kona Ice & food trucks
- Lunch Fundraisers - Jersey Mikes and Monical's Pizza
- Dine-in fundraisers at Panera and Jupiter
- Outdoor Family Movie Night
- Barnes & Noble Book Fair
- Concessions for soccer, basketball & volleyball
- Bimonthly teacher treats
- Beverages at Trivia Night
- Color-throwing station at the Color Run
- The Literary Bookfair
- Green Out games for athletics complete with pompoms and tattoos
- Lunches for teachers during conferences
- Family Ice Skating Party
- I-Power Parents' Night Out
- Teacher Appreciation Week events with an air travel theme - complete with passports, boarding passes, airline snacks & meals, in flight entertainment (books or puzzles to take home) & baggage claim (bags of appreciation notes from students).

Our school would not be the special place it is without our CSA. Thank you volunteers!

Former Faculty Updates

Jeff Butler (5th grade) Since departing Countryside, I have been breaking things for a living - smashing tiles, ripping porches apart, knocking down fences, and smearing mud on walls. I also get to rebuild them - installing floors, restoring structures, and sanding walls down to a smooth finish. As a child I dreamed of being a carpenter or architect; now I get to do both.

Natalya St Clair (MS math) After 10 years in ed-tech research, I was DOGE'd and made the leap into a new corner of ed-tech. I'm now a QA Lead at the first national nonprofit data trust for nondegree credentials, bringing my love of math visualizations to a whole new domain. Family is thriving, and we're going to Hawaii this spring and Yellowstone this summer.

Sharon Henson (4th grade) Another winter stay in Florida is coming to an end. Due to a months long burn ban and a watering ban, some of our favorite activities have been suspended: grilling tasty meats on our Weber grill and gazing at the flames in the Solo Stove on our back patio while relaxing at sunset. We will once again spend the summer at our condo in Iowa. In early July we will spend a week in Yellowstone with our son Seth, his wife Christy, and his kids Owen and Leah.

Mark Your Calendars:

35th Anniversary Launch Party
Sat. August 29 4pm - 6pm
Rain date: Sun. August 30

ALUMNI:
BE SURE WE HAVE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS TO RECEIVE INVITATIONS

Alumni: How can you help? How can we help you?

Young Alumni: When you are applying to colleges, please contact us so we may connect you with our older alumni who can answer your questions about universities they attended!

Older Alumni: Let us know if you will be in town and come speak with our students! We will schedule a lunchtime/afternoon time slot for you to share what you do in your job.

Also reach out if you are willing to be a resource for our young alumni to ask questions of you via email about colleges or careers.

Email Kristin Feddersen to make this connection: feddersen@countrysideschool.org

Medallion Club Newest Members

Over 20 years ago, Countryside established the Medallion Club to recognize our graduates who attend Countryside from Kindergarten through 8th grade. The honorees receive a medallion at graduation. Out of over 1,000 students to attend Countryside, **only 87 have earned this honor.**

We welcome our newest Medallion Club members:

Olivia Chew
Jacob Hartman
Luciano Molina-Sprandel
Drew Perry
Devyn Pugh

Stop by the school to see your name hanging in our lobby!



Giving Back to the Community

ALUMNI:
PLEASE SEND US YOUR UPDATES!

WE'D LOVE TO FEATURE YOU

To give back to the community, our students spend time on service projects. Our middle schoolers also have a small service hour requirement and together average over 600 hours of service each year! Where they volunteer is their choice.

This year they transcribed documents for the Library of Congress, built beds at Sleep in Heavenly Peace, volunteered with the Sangamon River Conservatory, helped at 3 different food banks, to name just a few. They also volunteer at Countryside by working concessions for athletic events, assisting with after school clubs, and handling door duty each morning opening car doors and greeting our arriving students.

Our Sociedad Hispánica de Amistad (Spanish Honor Society) operated La Tiendita (little store) on Tuesdays over lunch from September to April. They collected over $600 in revenue to purchase items for a program for residential youth at Cunningham Children's Home and Immigrant Services of Champaign Urbana.

Our Kindness Club held a used/donated book sale with their proceeds going to buy new books for our Mary E Breault Memorial Library.



Mrs. Young gets "pumpkin gutted" and then her staff surprises her with whipped cream pies!. Watch Mrs. Young's reaction:

tinyurl.com/MrsYoungPied

Our 1st/2nd grade class collected donations as an entrance fee to their Invisible Zoo presentations highlighting extinct animals. They then visited the Miller Park Zoo in Bloomington to adopt 3 endangered animals.

Our Chinese Honor Society held a bubble tea sale which collected almost $600. In honor of the Year of the Horse, they will use the funds to donate to Hooves for Hope and to support the K-8 Chinese programs at Countryside.

Thank you for all your community support!

In Memoriam - Julia Hartman



Julia Hartman – our music teacher from 2014-2018 – passed away on November 4, 2025. Julia not only taught music for all grades but also directed our JV and varsity choruses, beginning band, and our chamber groups.

She took many of our students to the IESA's Solo and Ensemble Contest. And under her direction, our students had big performance opportunities including singing the National Anthem at both Illini men's and women's basketball games and at a Bloomington Thunder hockey game.

Julia was always up for bringing music into our lives. Here is how we remember Julia – performing "Here Comes the Sun" with her colleagues in our front lobby for Music in our Schools week:

tinyurl.com/LobbyConcert

Her obituary may be found here:

tinyurl.com/JuliaHartman

High School Alumni Lunch

We hosted an alumni lunch in October - on a day when most of our local high schools were not in session, but Countryside was. This year the returning alumni enjoyed pizza and conversation with Mrs. Young.

Save the date: **Monday, October 12** from 12 noon - 1 p.m. for our High School Alumni Lunch!



Back rows: Amber Barker (MS Science), Sylvie DeJarnette, Blayke Johnson, Gio Bellina, Isaac Sulkin, Crew Messer, Soma Sarathy, Daehyun Lee, Lawrence Booth, Mattox Pugh

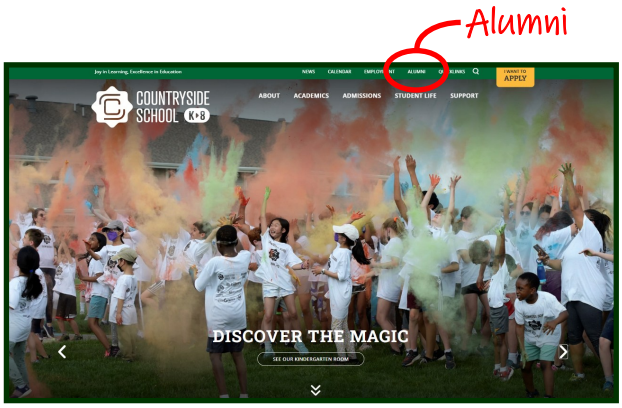
Front row: Layla Zong, Mallory Young, Krystal Young (Head of School), Zachary Akresh, Joshua Koo, Nyal Adoni, Chris Antonsen (MS Literature & Writing)

HIGH SCHOOL ALUMNI LUNCH
MONDAY
OCTOBER 12
NOON - 1 PM

Alumni: Will you be visiting the area?

Let us know in advance. We would love to have you come speak to a class or to a group over lunch! Let Kristin Feddersen know: feddersen@countrysideschool.org

Alumni Center on our Website



Check out our Alumni tab: **www.countrysideschool.org**

- Access our archive of *Trees* newsletters
- See photos of alumni events
- Update your contact information

@CountrysideK8

@CountrysideK8

@CountrysideK8

www.linkedin.com/company/countryside-school

Highlights of the Past Year

Princeton Tigertones Perform

We welcomed alumnus **Henry Laufenberg** (2018) back to Countryside with the Princeton Tigertones! Henry is the president of the Princeton University all-male acapella group who stopped in Champaign on their fall break tour. Following their set, they ran a Q&A session.

Our students LOVED the performance and asked questions including how old were they when they started singing, how often and how long do they rehearse, and what is their favorite song to perform. (Many of the men said "Bridge Over Troubled Water")

Catch a glimpse of their Countryside performance here:
tinyurl.com/TigertonesAtCountryside



Above: Henry Laufenberg (far left) leading the Princeton Tigertones acapella group

Below: The Illini crew recording our students & our kindergarteners on their first field trip





All-School Field Trip

We took our first All-School field trip! In November, the entire school headed to State Farm Center to watch the Illini women's basketball team play Murray State at their Field Trip Day game.

It was definitely a logistical challenge bringing over 150 lunches (and earplugs for everyone). It is also amazing how much noise over 14,000 school children can make.

With 6-7 being a "thing", the crowd of students went wild when the score hit 6-7 and again at 67. There was also much excitement when our group was featured on the Jumbotron!

35TH BIRTHDAY BASH
APRIL 3
TIME TBD

Haley Driver Releases EP



Haley Driver (2016) released her debut EP, *Reverie In Blue,* this past July which was followed by a sold-out performance at Jazz St. Louis featuring Cyrus Chestnut, Bernard Terry, James Jackson, and Luke Sailor. Haley graduated from The New School, where she studied jazz and contemporary music, and is now an emerging talent in the New York City music scene.

Check out her amazing video for *Cry Me a River:*
tinyurl.com/HaleyDriverVideo

College Bound and Future Plans

Congratulations to our alumni headed to the following schools with their potential major:

Thanks to those who submitted where they are going - and to those who publicly published on social media where they are headed. *If you are not listed here, we do not have your contact information. Please let us know your post high school plans.*

Alaia Ahmad	Butler University - healthcare & business
Mona Allen	Oberlin College
Siddhant Bhat	Princeton University - molecular biology and computer science
Andres Bross	University of Pennsylvania
Cali Cooper	University of Arkansas Pine Bluff - international business
Helen Fu	Case Western Reserve University - biology
Muskaan Garg	Purdue University - mechanical engineering
Sasha Goncalo	University of California Berkeley - bioengineering
Simon Hamilton	Parkland Pathways to Illinois - molecular & cellular biology
Adelaide Kota	Emerson College - English
JJ Lee	Yale University - mathematics
James Lee	University of California Berkeley - sociology & legal studies
Will Miller	Carnegie Mellon University - mechanical engineering
Chloe Noronja-Hostler	University of Illinois
Janaki Raj-Underhill	Georgia Tech University - biomedical engineering
Jordan Rinkenberger	Temple University - musical theater
Vidya Sinha	Stanford University - computer science, mathematics, & philosophy
Shinjian Song	Eastman School of Music - jazz performance & political science
Renee Wang	Johns Hopkins University
Roy Wang	Stanford University - engineering & sustainability
Madison Young	Cornell University
Mallory Young	University of Florida

NOT LISTED HERE?
TELL US YOUR POST-HIGH SCHOOL PLANS

World Language Shout Outs

7th grader **Arman** was one of 6 students nationwide to receive the **Kevin-Buscemi Global Citizen Scholarship** 2026, awarded by the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese. Arman qualified for the scholarship after getting a perfect score in his National Spanish Exam Level 1, in 2025. In his application to this scholarship, Arman submitted a thoughtful Spanish-language message and completed a video interview - conducted entirely in Spanish.

Several of our Mandarin students participated in the **UAAT Mandarin Speech Contest** at the University of Illinois. Congrats to 7th grader **Kavya**, and 5th grader **Anzia** who each earned 1st place in their divisions! In addition, 4th graders **Elden** and **Paul** placed 2nd, and 5th grader **Maya** took 3rd.

Alumna **Shivani Anand** (2025) also won 1st place in the high school division.

Congratulations to our students on their world language success!

Countryside School

Joy in Learning, Excellence in Education

NEWSLETTER OF THE COUNTRYSIDE SCHOOL ALUMNI

Countryside School
4301 W. Kirby Avenue
Champaign, IL 61822

217.355.1253
E-mail: alumni@countrysideschool.org

We don't want to lose contact!

Please send us your email address: alumni@countrysideschool.org

We Need Your Pennant

We LOVE displaying pennants from all our alumni's colleges and universities, and we have almost **150 pennants on display!** Drop us an e-mail if you can provide us with a pennant (12" x 30") or to ask if we already have it! alumni@countrysideschool.org



Mark your calendars:

Graduation	May 21 at 6:30pm in the gym
6th Annual Golf Outing & Raffle	May 30 at Legends Golf Course
35th Anniversary Logo Contest deadline	June 30
35th Anniversary Launch Party/Fall Picnic	August 29 from 4:00 - 6:00 p.m. on our back lawn
High School Drop-In Lunch	October 12 from 12 noon - 1 p.m.
35th Birthday Bash	April 3, 2027
35th Celebration Closing Ceremonies	May 7, 2027
Mrs. Young's Retirement Party	May 22, 2027