



Countryside Elementary School

**115 Schoolhouse Lane
Mt. Laurel, NJ 08054
856-234-2750**



**Student & Parent Handbook
2026-2027**

"Together Is Better!"

"The Year of New Beginnings"

Main Office Phone Number: 856-234-2750

FAX Number: 856-222-9755

School Directory...Press 1

Reporting an Absence...Press 2

Nurse's Office...Press 3

Guidance Office...Press 4

Main Office Secretary...Press 5

Board of Education: 856-235-3387

Community Education: 856-231-5891 or 5890 press... 3

Extended Daycare Office: 856-231-5891 or 5890 press... 4

Transportation: 856-778-6905

School Principal.....Mrs. Stacy Murphy

**PTO Co-Presidents.....Mrs. Ally Duleone &
Mrs. Monica Costello**

School Counselor.....Mrs. Rebecca Cataline

School Nurse.....Ms. Lauren Steen

Secretary.....Mrs. Nicole Sengdetka

Office Assistant.....Mrs. Lisa Hensinger

District Website: www.mtlaurelschools.org

School Website: https://www.mtlaurelschools.org/countrysideelementary_home.aspx

A Message From The Principal...
Mrs. Stacy Murphy

Welcome to a new school year! It is with great excitement and gratitude that I introduce myself as the new principal of Countryside Elementary School. I am truly honored to join the Countryside family and become a part of the Mt. Laurel community.

As we begin this school year together, I am excited to introduce our theme: *New Beginnings*. A new beginning represents more than the start of a new school year—it is an opportunity to grow, embrace new challenges, build meaningful relationships, and create lasting memories. It reminds us that every day is a chance to learn something new, support one another, and become the very best version of ourselves. Whether you are entering our school for the first time or returning as a familiar face, this year offers a fresh start filled with endless possibilities.

My mission is grounded in a simple but powerful belief: all students can learn and succeed when provided with the right support, encouragement, and opportunities. Every child has unique strengths and talents, and I am committed to ensuring that each student is challenged, supported, and celebrated as they reach their fullest potential at Countryside Elementary.

I also believe that one of the greatest predictors of student success is a strong partnership between home and school. When families and educators work together with trust, open communication, and shared goals, we create a community where children thrive. I look forward to getting to know our students and families and building relationships that strengthen our school community.

Countryside Elementary School is a neighborhood school serving a diverse community. We encourage the support and involvement of families, and community members as we work together to meet the unique needs of every student in an inclusive setting. Our enrollment to date is approximately 270 students. Countryside's grades span from Kindergarten through Fourth grades.

We have a very active and caring Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO). In addition to raising funds for technology, assemblies, field trips and playground equipment, the PTO generates ideas for school improvement. The group also coordinates the efforts of parent volunteers throughout the year. Our volunteers assist in our school on a consistent basis and are invaluable in helping us provide special events and undertake projects for our students. I encourage each of you to join the PTO and help us work collaboratively to continue with Countryside's success!

As we embrace this year of *New Beginnings*, I am excited about all that we will accomplish together. I know that by working as one Countryside family, we will create a school where every child feels safe, valued, inspired, and empowered to succeed.

Thank you for welcoming me into the Countryside family. I look forward to meeting each of you and making this a wonderful year of growth, learning, and new beginnings.

This student/parent handbook contains extremely helpful information for your use throughout the year. I hope it provides you with the answers to most of your questions. It includes the activities and procedures at our school and is based on Mt. Laurel School District's policies. Please review this information with your child, and use it as a reference throughout the school year. Remember that you must sign and acknowledge all forms in SwiftK12 under "Documents and Files".

We are excited to begin a new year together at Countryside Elementary School. It is the "Year of New Beginnings! It is our sincere hope that every day your child will experience the joy of learning and will create memories that will last a lifetime! The possibilities are endless. Feel free to contact me at any time. I am looking forward to creating a long-lasting partnership with you and leading Countryside into the next phase of our successful achievements!

Your partner in education,
Mrs. Stacy Murphy
Principal

Mt. Laurel Board of Education

**330 Mt. Laurel-Moorestown Road
Mt. Laurel, NJ 08054
(856) 235-3387**

Superintendent of Schools.....Dr. Neil Burti

**Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum,
Instruction & Assessment.....Mrs. Mridula Bajaj**

Assistant Superintendent of Business.....Mr. Robert Wachter, Jr.

Human Resources.....Ms. Aja Thomas

Board of Education Members

Danielle Stuffo, President

Melissa DeClementi, Vice President

Roger Gibson

Tara Hall

Jade Moustakas

Susan Lovato

Sapna Rustagi

Jonathan Paradise

Shamara Ijames

***For dates and times of Board meetings, please refer to the district website at:**

<https://www.mtlaurelschools.org/BoardMeetingSchedule.aspx>

Countryside School

Parent Teacher Organization

Co-Presidents, Mrs. Ally DuLeon & Monica Costello

Vice President of Events, Mrs. Rita Mevmedovski

Vice President of Fundraising, Ms. Danielle Bonomo

Treasurer, Mrs. Kelsey Abram

Financial Secretary, Mrs. Krista Kirwin

Recording Secretary, Mrs. Shannon Nayda

Co-Corresponding Secretaries, Mrs. Nicole Oorbeek & Jena Rae Torres

Parliamentarian, Mrs. Pam Miller

We would love to achieve 100% support for our Parent/Teacher Organization. Make sure to sign up to support our kids!

Here's a link to the Countryside PTO Website:

<https://www.mtlaurelschools.org/CSPTO.aspx>

ARRIVAL/DISMISSAL

Student arrival begins at **8:15 a.m.** **No students are permitted to arrive prior to 8:15, as supervision is not available.** All students are expected to be in their classrooms by 8:30 a.m. Students arriving at school after 8:30 a.m. are considered late and must report to the office for a late slip. Please see the updated [Arrival/Dismissal Procedures](#) for more detailed information this year.

Dismissal procedures begin at 2:55 p.m. Due to security reasons, you will need to line up in the parent pick-up car line and your child must be signed out with our school staff. Your child should have their books and materials ready and be prepared to exit the building. **Please notify your child's teacher or the main office before 11:30 a.m. if your child is not going home on the bus.** Anyone picking up a student must be designated on the emergency form provided by the parent or guardian. You will be asked to produce identification. Once proper identification is presented, the staff member will walkie into the building and your child will come out to your car.

Walkers are responsible for reporting to the designated area to line up for dismissal when called. **If you are taking your child home, please join the parent pick-up car line and sign them out as a parent pick-up. Please do not take them out of the walker line.** Walkers should live in the development. Students taking the bus should report to their buses when called. Students who miss their assigned bus should report to the main office to contact their emergency contact for transportation. **Please use the designated crosswalks at all times.** **For your safety, please do not cross between the buses in the bus lane.**

THE SCHOOL DAY

Grades K through 4:

School begins at 8:30 am and ends at 3:00 p.m.

Half Days Grades K through 4:

School begins at 8:30 am and ends at 12:30 pm

ASSEMBLIES

- Always use good manners
- Keep hands and feet to one's self
- Be quiet during the program
- Clap at appropriate times
- Remain seated at all times
- Show respect to performers
- Use whole body listening
- Pay attention so that everyone may enjoy the program

There are various assemblies throughout the school year. Many assemblies are very costly and are sponsored by the generosity of the Countryside School PTO and/or Federal/State Funding. We also benefit from some free assemblies. Students will gain the most value from these assemblies when they follow these expectations:

ATTENDANCE

Please note that new legislation has compounded the importance of attendance. In the past, if your child was absent due to a family trip, those missed days would be reported in our internal system as unexcused absences. Under the new process, the NJ Department of Education is now collecting its data directly from our reporting system. **Any days reported as unexcused in our system are considered "truant" by the state.** As you know, truancy can result in serious legal consequences for parents. **Therefore, please do not schedule family vacations during the school year.** When such absences are unavoidable, a letter explaining the reason for the trip must be submitted to the main office prior to your departure.

In the event that your child will not be attending school, please follow these instructions:

- If you know in advance that your child will miss school, send a note to the main office showing the child's name, dates of absence and reason for absence.
- **If the absence is unanticipated, please call (856) 234-2750 and press #2 no later than 8:45 am to report your child's absence. Please state your child's name, your child's teacher, and reason for the absence.** The answering machine is on 24/7, so you may call the night before to leave a message.
- When your child returns to school, he/she must have a note explaining the absence. The note should include your child's name, the date the note was written, the dates of the absence, the reason for the absence and a signature by the parent/guardian. If your child has visited the doctor, please present the doctor's note upon return.
- ***Please abide by the 24-HOUR RULE** - If your child has a temperature, diarrhea, vomiting, throat infection or strep throat, he/she should not return to school until 24 hours after the symptoms have subsided, or after antibiotics have been noted.

As a safety measure, the school will call you if your child is not in school and we have not received notification by phone or note.

- **If your child will be absent more than 10 school days, you will need to notify the principal in writing. They will be responsible for all work that was missed during their absence.**
- For cumulative unexcused absences of 10 or more, The district shall:
 - Make a determination regarding the need for a court referral for the truancy;
 - Make a reasonable attempt to notify the student's parents of the mandatory referral;
 - Continue to consult with the parent and the involved agencies to support the student's return to school and regular attendance;
 - Cooperate with law enforcement and other authorities and agencies, as appropriate;
 - Follow all procedures required by N.J.S.A. 18A:38-28 through 31, Article 3B, Compelling Attendance at School and other applicable state and federal statutes.

TARDY: Students reporting late to school must report to the main office upon arrival and be signed in by a parent or guardian. Excessive absences/tardiness will be reported to the school attendance officer, who will investigate the causes and take appropriate action.

“BACK TO SCHOOL NIGHT”

Back to School Night is held in the evening usually in September/October. This event is for parents and guardians. The evening includes a meeting with the PTO, a visit to your child's classroom and an opportunity to meet their teacher. The teacher will give a short outline on what he or she plans for the school year and what will be expected of your child. General questions will be answered. Specific concerns about your child should be addressed privately at another time. A second session is provided on the same evening for those of you who have more than one child in the school. If you have more than two children, you will have to attend classes separately.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS, SPECIAL OCCASIONS, ETC...

The cafeteria offers HEALTHY snack packages to help you celebrate those special occasions. Prices are \$2.25 for a snack and drink per student for the 2026-2027 school year. **(Subject to change.)** Snack options have included: Rice Krispie Treats, Smart Cheddar popcorn and juice cups. You simply fill out the form, pay at least one week in advance, and the students receive their treats during their lunch.

Homemade birthday treats will not be permitted in the classrooms at this time. If you are purchasing snacks for your child's class for a celebration please use our safe snack list [here](#). You may still choose the NutriServe option of having their snacks delivered during the lunch period in the cafeteria.

BREAKFAST PROGRAM

- Our cafeteria offers a Breakfast Menu to students at the cost of \$1.80 per serving.
Serving time is 8:00-8:30 am

BUSING

Transportation provided by the Mount Laurel Township Board of Education is a privilege. The following behavior is expected in return for this privilege:

- Arrive at the bus stop about ten minutes before scheduled time.
- Take the assigned seat.
- Wait on the sidewalk until the bus comes to a full stop.
- Sit at all times.
- Board and exit the bus without pushing.
- Speak softly.
- Keep books, lunch, book bags, and your hands on your lap.
- Keep the bus clean.
- Keep hands and head inside the bus.
- Cooperate with the driver at all times.
- Be courteous; use proper language at all times.
- Wait until the bus stops before standing.

Prior to the first day of school, children will receive a bus pass by e-mail. It will show the bus number, location and time of the bus stop. Children may only take their assigned bus to and from school at their assigned bus stop. **Please do not request a pass to ride a different bus.** Pupils transported to school must return home via the same route. **Parents wishing children**

BUSING (Continued)

to visit friends, relatives, etc., should make plans to do so after the child returns home. Also, a parent can sign out both students as long as each parent submits a note to the office prior to dismissal.

A Special Kindergarten message: One of the biggest worries for parents of Kindergartners is the concern that they will be lost or confused when they get off the bus. We assure you that we will take the utmost care of your little one. The Kindergartners will get off the bus and be directed into the school building led to their designated hallway. There will be staff located around and throughout the building at all times to watch over the children. When school begins, the teacher/aides will direct them into the classroom. **No Kindergarten student may walk to school or home from school. They must ride the bus or be picked up in the parent pick-up car line.**

Also, for a variety of reasons, buses are sometimes late. If you are ever concerned, you should call the Transportation Department at (856) 778-6905.

CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT

Any knowledge or suspicion of child abuse and/or child neglect by law must be reported immediately, to the New Jersey Division of Child Protection and Permanency. Failure to make a report is a violation of the law. All information is kept confidential. The building principal, school nurse, and school counselor have further information relating to this process. You may also reference Board Policy #5141.4 on the district webpage at www.mtlaurelschools.org.

COUNSELING SERVICES

Countryside School's Counseling Program is an integral part of the educational process for every child. Our counselor helps students to strengthen self-concepts, enhance their ability to solve life problems and explore positive attitudes. Counseling services include whole class instruction, as well as individual and group interaction. These services address the social, emotional, behavioral and academic aspects of a child's life. Counselors are available to consult with parents, teachers and others regarding issues related to a child. All School Counselors in the district of Mount Laurel are certified professionals. Parents are encouraged to call the counseling office with any questions concerning your child's social or emotional needs, in addition to questions regarding standardized testing.

DELAYED OPENING OR EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSING

In order to allow school to remain open on days when weather conditions are poor in the early morning hours, a two-hour delayed opening schedule has been developed.

SCHEDULE FOR TWO-HOUR DELAYED OPENING:

Here are some important facts you need to know for any two-hour delay we may have:

- Grades K-4 students may begin arriving at 10:15 a.m. School will begin at 10:30 a.m.
- Lunches **WILL BE** served
- Recess will be canceled.

SCHEDULE FOR TWO-HOUR DELAYED OPENING (Continued):

- Students will report to homeroom and will begin whatever class they normally attend at 10:30.
- Students will continue with the remaining day's schedule when there is a two-hour delay.
- Extended Day Care remains open before the school day begins. Day Care opens at 9:00 on two-hour delays.
- In the event of a two-hour delayed opening, regularly scheduled transportation will be delayed accordingly. For example, a child regularly scheduled for pick up at 7:45 a.m. would be picked up at 9:45 a.m. Although they may be inconvenient, two-hour delays enable the district to avoid extending the school year.

CLASS PLACEMENT/TEACHER REQUESTS

The Countryside staff makes every effort to meet the emotional, social and academic needs of each child while balancing our classes in terms of ability, gender, number of students in a class, and other criteria. This makes it difficult to honor requests; therefore requests for specific teachers cannot be honored. If you have medical and/or legal documented information about the placement of your child that will assist us in making an appropriate placement, please email that information to your child's principal no later than **May 15th**.

Any information that you wish to submit must be received by the building principal no later than May 15th. If you have a student entering kindergarten who is registered after May 15th, please email any information to the principal within 5 days after completing registration.

Any information received after May 15th will not be considered and placements will not be changed once finalized.

DISCIPLINE

SAFETY AND RESPECT

Countryside School's entire staff works diligently to create an environment in which our children feel safe, comfortable and happy providing the greatest opportunities for learning. Behavior is everyone's responsibility. Your child's teacher and bus driver will provide some very important guidelines on the proper behavior on the school bus, in the classroom, hallways, lunch room, and playground. In order to grow educationally, socially and emotionally, children need to be in an environment in which there are concerned individuals who will set firm, consistent, positive limits while providing warmth and support for the appropriate behavior. Please help to reinforce these guidelines. The Mount Laurel Board of Education has adopted a district wide discipline code. Parent(s)/Guardian(s) receive a copy of the Discipline Code in their registration packet on Infosnap. It requires a parent/guardian signature acknowledging that you are aware of the code.

DRESS CODE

Research shows that the way students dress for school affects their attitude and behavior. All students are expected to wear clean, sensible attire at all times. Sneakers must be worn on Gym days or your child will not be permitted to participate in gym activities for that day. The Board of Education recognizes that each pupil's mode of dress and grooming is a manifestation of the pupil's personal style and individual preferences. The board will impose its judgment on pupils and parents only when a pupil's dress and grooming affect the educational program of the schools. Per Board Policy #5132, pupils may not wear clothing or engage in grooming practices that present a health or safety hazard to the individual pupil or to others, materially interfere with school work, create disorder, or disrupt the educational program, cause excessive wear or damage to school property, or prevent the pupil from achieving his or her own educational objectives because of blocked vision or restricted movement. The principal/school supervisor shall determine whether the dress or grooming of pupils comes within these prohibitions.

EARLY PICK-UP - WHAT DO I DO IF I NEED TO PICK MY CHILD UP FROM SCHOOL EARLY?

To pick up your child, you must fill out the online [Parent Pick Up Form Link](#) and include the time you are leaving with your child. The office staff will notify your child's teacher that you are here. **You will not be permitted to go directly to the classroom.** Kindly try not to pick your child up early unless it is an emergency. It is very disruptive to the learning process when children are leaving at odd times. **Please make sure to notify the office before 11:30 a.m. if your child will not be riding a bus or walking home due to parental pick up change.**

Parents should report to the Main Office to pick up their child to officially sign them out of school. The student will then meet his/her parent/guardian in the Main Office at the designated time. If for some reason the parent/guardian picking up his/her child is running late, kindly call the office so your child is not losing valuable class time. For security purposes, the parent or guardian should be prepared to present ID if requested by the office staff.

EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSINGS

If weather conditions cause a delayed opening, interruption or cancellation of school, word of the closing will be announced via text message and email. Announcements start as early as 6:00 a.m. Please sign up for emergency notifications. **Our Alert System pulls its information from our PowerSchool Student Information System. For this reason, it is critical that you keep your phone numbers and e-mail addresses up-to-date. If you change one of your phone numbers or e-mail addresses, that information will update 24 hours after it is entered.** You will receive a text message to the phone number(s) you have on file along with communication to the e-mail(s) you have listed in your account. On occasion, you may receive a phone call. *Please be aware that primary notification will be sent via text and e-mail.*

While we make every attempt to notify parents in the event of a closing, it is sometimes impossible to reach everyone. Therefore, it is imperative that your child is aware of your family's contingency plan if schools must close early. Please place a written plan in your child's folder or homework book. If in the opinion of a parent, weather conditions are adverse and

there has been no emergency closing announcement, parents should use their own judgment as to the advisability of sending their child to school. Mt Laurel's School Closing Number is "659". You may also check the district website at <https://www.mtlaurelschools.org/AlertsEmergencyNotifications.aspx>

SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS

Parent Square- School-to-Home Communication:

All district, school and grade level information will now be sent to your computer or phone via email and/or text. For even more convenience, download the Parent Square app (available for free for iOS and Android devices). [Getting Started Video](#)

Have questions? Click the question mark in the top right corner of the desktop version or the Help tab on the app (tap the triple bar icon at the top left) to find answers to most of your questions.

To update/add phone numbers and/or e-mails:

[Log into PowerSchool Parent Portal here.](#)

- Navigate to the top left of the page and click on the **SwiftReach SwiftK12** icon.
- Move to the top right of the page and click on the gray **Contact Information** tab.
- Here, you may change/add phone numbers and/or e-mails to receive district alerts.
- Scroll to the bottom of the page and click the green **SAVE CHANGES** button.

EXTENDED DAY CARE

The district does provide a self-supported program for extended day care, at your own cost, for before and after school hours at each of the elementary schools. An application will be sent home if you wish to apply. You may also apply online at the following link

<https://www.mtlaurelschools.org/ExtendedDayCareProgram.aspx>. For information call: (856) 231-5890.

FIELD TRIPS

Field trips will be considered as instruction and planned as such, with definite objectives determined in advance. Appropriate instruction will precede and follow each trip. Students are expected to dress appropriately and conduct themselves courteously at all times during field trips. All school rules are in effect during field trips. Denial of student participation for field trips shall not be used as a disciplinary measure. However, students may be barred from field trips when there is a serious concern for their own safety, or the safety of others.

AM I PERMITTED TO BRING A YOUNGER SIBLING TO A FIELD TRIP?

Siblings are not permitted on field trips. However, siblings are invited to activities involving the entire school, such as: Field Day, the School Picnic, etc. When in doubt, check with your child's teacher.

FIRE DRILLS AND SECURITY DRILLS

There will be state mandated fire drills and safety drills conducted each month. During a fire drill, a visual & auditory alarm will signal the need to evacuate the building. Students should follow the directions given by staff members. A map indicating the nearest exit, as well as an

alternate route is posted in each classroom. Fire drills are concluded when the principal or his/her designee indicates the drill is completed. To facilitate the evacuation of the building during fire drills and other emergencies, the following rules should guide students' actions:

- Leave the building through the nearest exit. If it is blocked, use the next nearest exit.
- Walk rapidly, but do not run. No talking is permitted. Listen for directions.
- Move into the hallway in an orderly fashion.
- All doors and windows must be closed, and lights turned off.
- Once the class is outside the building; students are to stay together away from the building.
- Activities taking place outside the building should be immediately terminated.
- Unless otherwise directed, the ringing of the fire bell implies that all persons must evacuate the building.

Lock Down and Evacuation Drills will be conducted throughout the year. The purpose of these drills is to account for all the students and faculty and move them to a safe place in case of an emergency. Teachers review the process prior to the drills. You will be notified when a security drill has taken place.

HARRASSMENT, INTIMIDATION & BULLYING

Harassment, intimidation, or bullying, like other disruptive or violent behaviors, is conduct that disrupts both a pupil's ability to learn and a school's ability to educate its pupils in a safe and disciplined environment. Since pupils learn by example, school administrators, faculty, staff and volunteers should be commended for demonstrating appropriate behavior, treating others with civility and respect, and refusing to tolerate harassment, intimidation, or bullying.

For further information please review the Mt. Laurel BOE policy #5131.1 or visit www.mtlaurelschools.org.

HEALTH/NURSE SERVICE

The school nurse is on duty every school day. Children who have been absent three days or longer should bring a doctor's note upon return to school. Any child suspected of having an infectious, or contagious disease will be referred to the nurse. When the school nurse is not available, all referrals are to be made to the principal's office.

What happens if my child gets hurt or sick during the school day?

Your child will be escorted to the nurse if he/she is sick or hurt. Minor injuries will be handled in the nurse's office. You will be called immediately in the event of any serious injury or illness. The nurse keeps your emergency phone number on file. ***It is important that this information be up to date at all times. Please call the school if any phone number changes during the course of the school year.*** If the nurse is unable to contact you, she will contact the alternate number or name you have provided.

What do I do if my child must take medication during the school day?

Children are not permitted to transport medications. Any medications (prescription or over the counter) that need to be taken during school hours must be in the original containers along with written authorization from your physician. If it is prescribed for 3 doses daily, all should be done at home. The first dose should be taken upon waking up, the second dose should be taken after school, and the third dose at bedtime. These rules are extremely important for your child's safety. Before the close of the school year all unexpired, unused medicine must be retrieved by a parent/guardian.

Emergencies

In case of medical emergencies, the district will call the nearest ambulance service and will make every effort to immediately contact the parent/guardian in order to facilitate necessary care.

Health Screenings

Your child will be screened, yearly, in height/weight, scoliosis, hearing, and vision. Deviations from the norm will be screened a second time, followed by parental notification should a deviation again be noted.

Injuries or Illness Requiring Inability to Participate in Gym

If your child sustained an injury/illness and cannot participate in physical education, a written note is required. If an injury/illness will cause a child to miss more than one gym period, a physician's note is required.

HOMEWORK

Parental support and cooperation are necessary for homework to have a positive impact upon a child's learning. Providing an appropriate and consistent time, quiet work place and regular consistent support serves to create a responsibility for learning. Communication between the teacher and parent is essential in order to effectively coordinate this important component of the educational program. At all grade levels, homework will be given on a regular basis Monday through Thursday. On occasion, it may be inappropriate to assign homework, so there will be exceptions to this general guideline. While homework should not be assigned prior to holidays and weekends on any consistent basis, it is an excellent time for students to work on long-term assignments, projects and make-up work. The specific amount of homework assigned will depend upon the age of the student, and the needs of the instructional program.

In each grade level, the time presented is considered as a maximum:

* Grades Kindergarten through 2nd - 20 minutes/night

* Grades 3 and 4th - 45 minutes/night

To request homework for a student who is absent after 2 days, please call: 234-2750, by 8:15 a.m. You may leave a message on the office machine indicating when you will be picking up the homework assignments. Homework will not be available for pick up until 2:30 p.m., as the teachers need time to get the assignments organized. You may also request to have assignments sent home with a sibling in another class.

INCLEMENT & COLD WEATHER DRESS ATTIRE

Please make sure that you send your child to school dressed appropriately for inclement and cold weather. As the weather becomes colder, you should send your child to school in a warm jacket, gloves and a hat. The students will be going outside for recess and will be outside before school unless it is extremely cold. The students will also be walking to their buses after school. They may need a raincoat on rainy days. Please send your child dressed warmly before he/she leaves for school every morning. Thanks for your help!

INTERVENTION AND REFERRAL SERVICES (I&RS)

Countryside School operates a multi-disciplinary team called I & RS in order to assist students who appear to be experiencing academic, behavioral, social, or emotional difficulty. It offers teachers a way of drawing on the many resources of the individual school staff, as well as, the resources of the total district in order to determine the service(s) which will most benefit the student. Any staff member may request that a child's needs be considered by the team. These meetings take place once a month. Further information may be obtained from the principal, school counselor or classroom teacher.

KINDERGARTEN SNACK TIME

Kindergartners receive a light snack during the session. Parents provide these snacks at the teacher's request.

LUNCH INFORMATION

Lunch is provided every day; however students may choose to bring lunch from home. Money may be put on a student's lunch account at any time. Each child is provided with a pin number when ordering lunch. This works much better than bringing loose money to school each day, and it also helps the lunch line move faster as the student simply punches in their number and no change needs to be given. You may view your child's lunch account online and deposit funds into your child's/children's' [LunchTime](#) payment system by using a credit card or sending payments to school. You can add whatever amount you desire to the account. Checks should be made out to Mt. Laurel Lunch Program. Please do not make checks payable to the school. When you send a check in with your child, please put your child's name on the check so that the cafeteria workers will know which student turned in money. Children at Countryside will not go without lunch. In case of an emergency, students may charge their lunch. Lunch charges cannot be given for the purchase of snacks. It is important that lunch charges are to be paid back by the next school day. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated! Spending restrictions may be made on your child's lunch account by downloading a "Student Lunch Restriction Form" from the Cafeteria Service page on the district webpage. The cost for lunch for the 2026-2027 school year is \$3.05. Hot lunch is only provided on full school days. There is no lunch period on half days. Milk may be purchased separately for \$.90. 1st through 4 have lunch in the lunchroom. There are two sessions. Grades 1 and 2 have lunch from 11:35 to 12:05, and then play on the playground from 12:05 until 12:35. Grades 3 and 4 play on the playground from 11:35 to 12:05, and then go into the cafeteria for lunch from 12:05 until 12:35 p.m. Kindergarten students will eat lunch in their classrooms and have recess from 12:35-1:05 p.m.

PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCES

The best educational environment includes the complete understanding and cooperation between home and school. Parents are encouraged to maintain ongoing communication with their child's teachers throughout the year. There are formal parent/teacher conferences held in the fall and spring of each year. Fall conferences are held for every student. Spring conferences are held at the teacher's request on a needs basis; however, parents may request a spring conference. When parents have a specific concern, they should first contact the appropriate staff member (teacher, school counselor, nurse, etc.) to remedy the situation. If the concern continues, they should contact the principal.

PARKING (Visitors/Volunteers must have prior permission from the school principal to enter the building)

Parking can be difficult at Countryside since our parking is limited. The lot immediately on your right when you turn in to the school entrance is reserved for **"STAFF ONLY"**. It is important that spaces are available for staff during school hours, so that they can promptly enter school and provide supervision to the children. Parents may use this lot when they are participating in school wide events outside of the school day.

The spots directly out front of the school are reserved for parents and visitors. Please remember that township authorities enforce the parking regulations on and around school grounds. Police and fire officials require unimpeded access to school buildings in case of emergency. This applies to both evening and daytime activities. Therefore, no one should park anywhere where there are yellow painted lines suggesting a fire zone.

PERSONAL PROPERTY

On many occasions, it is necessary for you to send money to school with your child.

Generally, checks should be made out to Countryside PTO for PTO fundraisers. Book orders should be made out to the book company. Be sure all money is put in an envelope with its purpose and child's name clearly printed. **The school district can assume no responsibility in the event of loss, theft, or damage to personal property.** Therefore, students are not to bring to school large sums of money, valuable jewelry, or any other items of value such as any type of electronic devices.

PTO

THE PARENT TEACHER ORGANIZATION

Countryside has a very active, caring and involved PTO. Meetings are held virtually bi-monthly at 7:00 p.m. The meeting dates can be found on the district calendar. All are invited and encouraged to attend. The main business for the PTO is to work together with the principal and teachers to improve our school, receive reports on the district and school board issues, organize extracurricular activities for the children, raise funds and to get better acquainted with each other.

You will receive a form at the beginning of the year to sign up for membership. You do not have to attend meetings to be a member. Membership fees help cover the cost of many school activities, and assemblies. You will also be given a form to volunteer for the many school activities. Please try to volunteer for at least one activity described. If you would like to volunteer, you must read the [Hib Manual 2026-2027](#) and sign the acknowledgement form at the end. The form must be returned to the main office along with the [HIB Manual Signature Page](#) for board approval.

WHAT IS A ROOM PARENT?

Countryside has three types of room parents: Head Room Parent, Assistant Room Parent and Contributing Room Parent. The Head Room Parent organizes classroom parties and activities under the direction of the teacher. The Assistant Room Parents aid the Head Room Parent by being present at the activity and contributing needed items. The Contributing Room Parent supplies items for parties but does not attend. You will receive a form to sign up to be a room parent. We ask that you be Head Room Parent in not more than one class. Each class will also need a class photographer.

SPECIALS & RELATED SERVICES

WHAT ARE "SPECIALISTS"?

Naturally, we think all of the teachers at Countryside are special and the best in the district! At Countryside, we refer to subjects that your child goes to outside his/her classroom as "Specials". The teachers who teach these "specials" are referred to as "Special Teachers". This year our "specialists" will be traveling to Springville School to assist with scheduling. We will be working on an A, B, C, D day rotation schedule. The specials will not be the same each week. Your child's teacher will provide the rotation schedule each month for you to follow. These "Specials" are Art, Gym, Library and Music. Here are some related activities run by our specialists:

FIELD DAY

Each year Countryside has an all-day sports event known as Field Day. Students rotate around the school at different activities, such as relay races, obstacle course, ball toss, etc. Parents are encouraged to help out at the different stations or they can attend just to observe. Siblings are invited to watch.

ARTS/STEAM NIGHT

The Art Show/STEAM NIGHT is held in the evening. Our art teacher transforms Countryside School into an art gallery, displaying the children's accomplishments during the school year. Our STEAM teacher organizes hands-on experiments and activities in the all purpose room for family fun!

MUSIC NIGHT

The Countryside Music Concert is held in the evening. Under the direction of our music teachers, Countryside students perform in a musical event each Winter/Spring.

SUPPORT SERVICES

MATH SUPPORT

The Math Support teacher is a certified professional who provides services for any student needing additional academic assistance in the area of math. Students receive Basic Skills Math services one to five times a week depending on their academic needs. Students are eligible for basic skills services by:

- Teacher recommendation
- Test Scores

SUPPORT SERVICES (Continued)

LITERACY SUPPORT

A certified professional who uses strategies to help develop a strong basic reading foundation for students who are in need provides Reading Support & Supplemental Services. Students are eligible for Literacy Support services based on teacher recommendation and a variety of assessments. Services are provided 3-4 times a week.

ESL (ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE)

The primary goal of the English as a Second Language (E.S.L.) program is the development of essential skills that will enable the student to function successfully in the mainstream of American schools and society. E.S.L. instruction in Mount Laurel is an integrated process of developing useful and necessary communication skills. Speaking, reading, writing and listening skills are developed and improved through the use of literature-based thematic units.

GAP

The Gifted and Talented Program seeks to meet the needs of students whose depth of understanding, higher level thinking skills, speed of learning, and related affective needs fall into the range of gifted potential. The nomination process begins in the spring of each year. Parents and teachers may make referrals to the program, but students must meet a range of criteria.

SPEECH/LANGUAGE

Mount Laurel's Speech and Language department's mission is to ensure that all students with speech, language, and hearing disorders, which are negatively impacting academic progress, have access to quality services to help them effectively communicate. A student's IEP determines how often a student receives services.

STANDARDIZED TESTING

Students in grades 3 & 4 are required to take the NJSLA (The New Jersey Student Learning Assessment) usually test in the months of April and May. They will also begin the year with a diagnostic NJSLA Start Strong Assessment. More information regarding these assessments will be provided as the test dates near.

STUDENT PROPERTY

Found items will be placed in the Lost and Found. Small and/or valuable items (watches, rings, electronics, money, etc.) will be secured in a separate location in the Main Office. Students are encouraged to check the Lost and Found as soon as they realize an item is missing. Parents and students should label important personal items such as coats, jackets, and book bags, etc. Items not claimed will be on display in the lobby during Fall and Spring conferences, as well as the close of the school year. All items unclaimed at the close of the school year will be donated. If your child leaves something on the bus, call the transportation department and they will attempt to locate it and return it to the school.

TECHNOLOGY

The technology curriculum helps integrate individual classroom learning with current forms of technology usage. Students develop needed technological skills as well as supplement in class learning by completing units that are integrated with classroom instruction. The students use a variety of educational resources, including mobile laptop computers, Chromebooks, interactive projectors, and document cameras to facilitate these skills. All 1-4 grade students will receive an individual Chromebook to take back and forth to school each day. A cart will be available for Kindergarten students in the event that they need them for diagnostic testing.

TRANSFERS

If you need to transfer your child to another school, we'll miss you and hope your experience at Countryside was second to none! A copy of a transfer card must be obtained from the Main Office when a child is moving out of the district. Student records are forwarded when requested from the school to which the student is transferring. A transfer card is also required when a child moves into the district during the school year.

TUESDAY FOLDERS

The Countryside Elementary School and the Countryside PTO will communicate with parents/guardians regularly by sending notices home with your child. We have provided each family with a special "Tuesday" folder for this purpose. If you have more than one child at Countryside, the folder will come home with your youngest child. Although some notices are emergencies and may be sent home at other times, the majority of school-to-home communications will arrive in your child's "Tuesday" folder. Please ask your child to see his/her folder every Tuesday. **Please do not send communications back in your child's Tuesday folders. All communications should be sent directly to the classroom teacher.**

VISITORS

When you approach the building during the school day, you will be directed to push a buzzer near the entrance. A member of the office staff will respond via speaker to ask your identity and/or purpose for your visit. The staff member will allow you entry to the new school vestibule. Your identification and reason for your visit will be presented at that time. Once the school personnel grants access to the building, **all visitors must report directly to the Main Office to sign in.** This includes visitors to the playground. On each visit, the visitor will obtain an official Visitor's Pass, which must be visibly worn. Upon leaving the building, the visitor should return to the office, return the pass and sign out. **Signing in and signing out will be extremely important in the event of an emergency.**

WALKERS

The students who walk to Countryside School will be crossed by a crossing guard in the morning and after school. However, students will no longer be permitted to walk home during the lunch hour. **There will be no crossing guards available during lunch from 11:35-1:05 each day.** This is a change from previous years. If you would like your child to come home for lunch, please make arrangements to pick him/her up at the office. **Kindergarten** students are not permitted to be walkers. Their safety is our number one priority! Thank you for your cooperation.

YEARBOOK

Parents can help with this project by submitting digital copies of photos of any school activity into the Treering App. This helps to ensure that all children are represented. You will hear more about this during the course of the school year.

We hope you have found this booklet helpful. It is our ongoing attempt to assist parents and children in any way possible to make their experience at Countryside the best it can be. Please feel free to offer suggestions to our Principal or PTO for additional material you feel needs to be included in future editions. Parents and Staff working together at Countryside School is the key to our children's success! Together is Better at Countryside!