FALL 2026

Daystar Academy

NEWSLETTER

IN THIS ISSUE

Alumni Spotlight
SAM VANDERWEELE

Daystar High School is Growing Up
ENTERING A NEW CHAPTER

What Does Daystar Need From Us Now?
AN INVITATION

Your Generosity Changes Lives
SUPPORTER STORIES

Dear Friends of Daystar Academy,

Each school year gives us an opportunity to look carefully at what has been entrusted to us, to celebrate what is flourishing, to listen where there is room to grow, and to consider how we can continue strengthening Daystar for the students and families we serve today and those who will come after us.

Our theme verse this year, Micah 6:8, offers a beautiful framework for that work: **"To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."**

Those words remind us that a Daystar education is about more than what our students know. **It is also about who they are becoming** and how they will use what they learn, the gifts they have been given, and the opportunities before them in service to God and others.

Throughout this issue, you'll see glimpses of that mission taking shape.

You'll meet a Daystar alum and see how the seeds planted here continue well beyond graduation. You'll read about meaningful investments we are making in our programs, from smaller class sizes and stronger student support to an expanding music program and new academic opportunities. You'll also get a closer look at Daystar High School, a program that has grown tremendously since opening its doors in 2019 and one we are excited to continue strengthening in the years ahead.

You'll also read about **stewardship**, a word that has been part of many conversations at Daystar recently. Nearly 30 years into this school's story, we are increasingly aware that we have inherited something precious. Generations of families, teachers, donors, board members, and friends have prayed for, sacrificed for, invested in, and helped shape this school. Now it is our privilege and responsibility to care well for what they built while continuing to prepare Daystar for the generation that comes next.

There is much to celebrate, and there is still work to do. We approach both with gratitude and humility.

Thank you for the many ways you are part of Daystar's story. For entrusting us with your children. For praying for this community. For giving generously. For asking good questions. For showing up. And for believing alongside us in an education that prepares students not simply for their own futures, but to love and serve the world God loves.

Grace and Peace,

Tosha Jackson,
Head of Schools

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2 From the Head of Schools

2 Upcoming Events
MARK YOUR CALENDARS

3 Alumni Spotlight
SAM VANDERWEELE, '23

4 Daystar High School is Growing Up
ENTERING A NEW CHAPTER

6 What Does Daystar Need From Us Now?
AN INVITATION

8 Your Generosity Changes Lives
SUPPORTER STORIES

DAYSTAR
HIGH SCHOOL
Open House
THURSDAY,
NOV. 19, 2026
6:00PM
RSVP HERE

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

ALL EVENTS

NOV 5 State of the School

Join us for an evening of reflection and vision-casting as school leadership shares updates on Daystar's progress, priorities, and plans for the future.

NOV 19 PreK–8th & High School Open House

Come experience Daystar for yourself! Meet teachers and students, explore our Christ-centered IB program, and discover what learning looks like when Chicago and the world are your classroom.

DEC 10 Christmas Around the World

Join our PreK–High School community for an evening of music, Scripture, and celebration as we tell the Christmas story through cultures and traditions from around the world, all centered on the beautiful truth that **God so loved the world.**

JAN 25–29 XP Travel

Our students are heading out into the world for their XP travel experiences in Atlanta, Mexico City, and Ghana! Please join us in praying for safe travels, meaningful learning, and opportunities for our students to grow in faith, deepen their understanding of the world, and positively impact the communities they visit.

SAM VANDERWEELE
CLASS OF 2023

Alumni Spotlight

What are you studying at Kenyon College, and what drew you to your major or area of focus?

I'm a senior at Kenyon College, majoring in Economics, with a minor in Statistics and a concentration in Public Policy.

Kenyon College recognizes the rigor of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program; how have you seen that connection play out in your classes or campus culture?

I am 100% sure that having attended an IB high school helped with my admission to Kenyon. Some of my best friends at Kenyon also attended IB high schools, and I believe that **IB grads are often the most curious and talkative during class discussions.** The ability to think deeply and have intellectually stimulating conversations is something I've experienced at Kenyon, and I think that the DP program prepares you for those moments well.

How has the transition from high school to college felt for you, and what has surprised you most about college life?

The DP program is really good experience for writing college level papers, and taking huge tests, so I felt very well prepared for my high school experience coming into Kenyon. However, the transition to college socially was really huge; my group of friends is double my graduating high school class! I've really enjoyed getting to know so many more people, and think that **coming from such a small high school has taught me to treasure every relationship that I build**, not just the ones I spend the most time with.

How did your experience at Daystar help prepare you for college? Academically, socially, or spiritually?

The DP program is great preparation for college; in freshman year many of my peers were writing papers for the first time, and I felt very well prepared in comparison. I also learned how to think, so while I wasn't able to take Economics in high school, **I knew how to figure out what I didn't already know, which I believe is a much more valuable skill.** I get along well with a huge variety of people here on campus, and I attribute that to getting along with an extremely small class in high school. Going to a non-religiously affiliated school has meant much more exposure to those of different faiths, so it has been really interesting to have discussions about faith with people at Kenyon.

Are there any specific teachers, classes, or experiences at Daystar that made a lasting impact on you?

Yes! The History of the Americas class at Daystar fundamentally shifted how I view politics, and that has only been reinforced in my experiences at college. Obviously all of my teachers during high school made a long lasting impact on me; **the care and attention shown to me was unlike pretty much every high school experience that I know of**, and instilled in me a belief that I can do difficult things. I also knew that I had the support and care of a team behind me. One of the reasons I wanted to go to a small school was because I wanted my relationships with my future professors to mirror the ones that I had with my high school teachers, which I think is pretty special.

What did you love most about being part of the Daystar community?

I loved that everyone knew everyone. It can definitely feel that way here on the hill, but it was actually the case in high school and **that support system was special.** That connection has remained, and I love saying hi to everyone when I'm back for plays or games, etc.

What advice would you give to current Daystar students who hope to follow a similar path?

My advice to current students is to **lean on those around you for support**. Everyone wants you to succeed, but it's your responsibility to ask for help if you need it. Not everyone has the opportunity to receive as much focus and attention as students at Daystar do, and students should maximize it while they can! ✳

Chicago is our campus

10–15 ANNUAL LEARNING EXCURSIONS

History where it happened. Art where it hangs. Science where it's practiced. Questions explored alongside the people and places most connected to them.

Recent excursions:

- Art Institute of Chicago
- National Hellenic Museum
- Hull House Museum
- Museum of Science and Industry
- Illinois Holocaust Museum
- Chicago Architecture Center
- Field Museum
- Local community orgs + service partners

The world is our classroom

12 countries visited

1,092,528 miles traveled

Students Gain:

- Cultural Understanding
- Independence & Confidence
- Global Perspective
- Adaptability & Resilience
- Empathy Across Differences

"MY EXPERIENCE IS ONE EXPERIENCE. MY WAY IS ONE WAY–NOT THE ONLY WAY."

Our High School is Growing Up

Daystar High School opened its doors in 2019 and, just months later, faced the unexpected challenge of building a brand-new program through a global pandemic. Seven years later, the High School has graduated its first classes, established a strong International Baccalaureate academic program, taken students across Chicago and around the world, and continued expanding opportunities in athletics, the arts, leadership, service, and more.

Now, the program is entering a new chapter—with a new identity that captures something Daystar has learned along the way: small doesn't mean less. In fact, a smaller High School can make some pretty big things possible.

CLASS OF 2026

15 STUDENTS
1 GLOBALLY RECOGNIZED PROGRAM

14.6 average college credit hours earned per graduate through IB coursework	**100%** completed IB Diploma Programme coursework
83% earned college credit	**8** students earned at least 12 college credit hours
$200,000 merit-based scholarships per student	**↑** above national average PSAT/SAT performance in math and reading
92% took IB Diploma Programme exams	**4** students earned a full year of college credit

SMALL SCHOOL. SERIOUS RESULTS.

ROOM TO EXPLORE

Interdisciplinary Studios

High School students have opportunities to explore interests beyond their core IB coursework through interdisciplinary studios spanning arts, media, technology, global affairs, health, culture, leadership, and more.

HEALTH + HUMAN PERFORMANCE

Strength Training • Weight Training • Running Club • Volleyball • Outdoor Team Sports • Life Skills + CPR Certification

GLOBAL AFFAIRS + LEADERSHIP

Model UN • Student Council • National Honor Society

DESIGN + TECHNOLOGY

Robotics • ESports

ARTS + CREATIVE PRACTICE

Photography • Fiber Arts • Poetry Club • Art Therapy • Jazz Band • Choir • Exploring + Making Music

MEDIA + STORYTELLING

Student Podcast • Newspaper • Yearbook • Film Clubs • Book Club

CULTURE + LIFE

Baking • Hispanic Culture + Cooking • Life Skills • Personal Finance

26 ELECTIVES

BRAND NEW & GROWING:

Jazz band, Choir, Model UN, National Honors Society

ATHLETICS. THEATRE. CLUBS. DANCES. PROM. SPIRIT WEEK. STUDENT LEADERSHIP. TRADITIONS.

The moments that make high school, high school.

Someone In Your Corner.

100% OF STUDENTS HAVE A FACULTY MENTOR

Students don't disappear into the crowd. They're known by teachers, challenged when they're ready, supported when they need it, and encouraged to try things they might never have imagined for themselves.

Help Build What's Next

DAYSTAR HIGH SCHOOL IS STILL YOUNG— AND THERE IS MORE WE WANT TO BUILD.

More opportunities in the arts and athletics. More electives and interdisciplinary experiences. More ways for students to lead, create, explore, and discover what they're capable of.

If you have a heart for Christ-centered High School education in Chicago, this is a unique moment to invest. Your generosity can help us build the programs, experiences, and opportunities that will serve students today—and become part of Daystar High School for years to come.

DAYSTARACADEMY.ORG/DONATE

What Does Daystar Need From Us Now?

Last spring, Daystar began a series of conversations with families, donors, and longtime friends of the school around two pretty simple questions: What's going well? What needs to be strengthened?

We heard plenty of affirmation. We also heard areas that deserved our attention.

During one of those conversations, a longtime friend of Daystar talked about what it means to steward his nearly 100-year-old business.

That word stayed with us.

To steward something is to recognize that something valuable has been entrusted to you for a season. Other people built it before you. Other people sacrificed for it. And, if you care for it well, other people will inherit it after you.

You protect what is good. You strengthen what needs strengthening. And you prepare it for the people who come next.

It prompted an important question: **What does it mean to steward Daystar well?**

Daystar Is Turning 30!

Next year marks 30 years of Daystar Academy, and we're starting to dream about how we celebrate. We want to honor the people and stories that have shaped Daystar, celebrate this community, and have some fun along the way. And we'd love some help.

Interested in joining our 30th Anniversary planning team? Whether you've been part of Daystar for decades or joined us more recently, we'd love to have you at the table.

EMAIL: g.vryhof-bultema@daystaracademy.org

We Have Been Entrusted With Much

There is an institution to steward: a mission, teachers, programs, resources, buildings, finances, and a nearly 30-year story that began long before many of us arrived.

But most importantly, every family that chooses Daystar entrusts us with a child. Their education. Their growth. Their safety. Their sense of belonging. Their gifts. An important season of their life.

That is an extraordinary privilege.

So as we listened last spring and summer, we asked what caring well for Daystar requires now. What do students and teachers need? What is strong and worth protecting? What needs to become better?

Some of the answers required meaningful investment.

This school year, those investments are becoming visible: **smaller class sizes, stronger student support, expanded High School coursework, greater investment in music and the arts, and more opportunities for students to research, create, perform, explore, and grow.**

Different investments. One purpose: **to strengthen the experience of the students and teachers entrusted to us today while building a stronger Daystar for those who come next.**

More Capacity To Know Students

Daystar has continued its commitment to a **12:1 student-teacher ratio in Kindergarten through second grade** while moving third through fifth grade toward smaller class sizes as well.

The goal is smaller numbers and greater capacity.

Smaller classes create more room for inquiry, individualized feedback, small-group instruction, differentiation, and meaningful relationships. Stronger student support provides additional resources for students who need them while giving teachers greater capacity to focus on instruction and relational care.

A Music Program Designed To Grow

Some investments you can hear.

This year, Daystar added a **full-time Music and Orchestra Director**, allowing us to build a more connected music program from our youngest learners through High School.

Music asks students to listen closely, recognize patterns, practice patiently, take creative risks, and contribute their individual part to something larger than themselves. It develops creativity, discipline, confidence, collaboration, expression, and joy.

Students begin with musical foundations in our youngest grades. Third graders learn recorder, fourth graders pick up ukuleles, and fifth graders move into guitar. From there, opportunities expand into instrumental ensembles and orchestra, along with jazz band and choir in High School.

Our continued partnership with the **Chicago Jazz Philharmonic** connects students with professional musicians and the extraordinary artistic resources of our city. Chicago has always been one of our classrooms, and music is another way students can learn from the people and institutions around them.

Daystar families and friends have embraced the expansion as well, generously contributing toward classroom sets of ukuleles and guitars and percussion instruments that will serve students for years to come. Their enthusiasm has been an encouraging reminder of how many people share this vision for our students.

Strengthening High School Academics

A new Language & Literature and Research Librarian role expands High School support for research, writing, media literacy, and analytical thinking.

Students are growing up with more information at their fingertips than any generation before them. They need more than access to knowledge. They need to know how to ask good questions, evaluate sources, discern what is trustworthy, communicate clearly, and think critically.

High School students also have expanded opportunities in science, including **Physics, Chemistry and DP Biology**, creating greater depth and choice within the IB framework.

Together, these investments create more opportunities for students to pursue challenging coursework, develop skills they will need beyond Daystar, and explore where their interests and abilities might lead them.

Stewardship Looks Forward

Nearly 30 years ago, a group of people believed Chicago needed a school like Daystar. They sacrificed, invested, prayed, taught, gave, led, and built.

We inherited what they started.

Stewarding that legacy means honoring what has always mattered while continuing to strengthen Daystar for a new generation. It means caring for our people, giving teachers the capacity to do their best work, strengthening programs, creating opportunities for students to discover their gifts, and listening when our community shows us where we can do better.

Through it all, we remain rooted in the faith, relationships, curiosity, and sense of purpose that have defined Daystar from the beginning.

Someday, another generation will inherit this school from us.

Our hope is that they will find we cared well for what God entrusted to us and left Daystar stronger for the people who came next.

That is stewardship.

Daystar Academy

An IB World School

1550 South State St. Chicago, IL 60605
www.daystaracademy.org

Your Generosity Changes Lives

Every day, students from across Chicago walk through Daystar's doors to experience a Christ-centered, International Baccalaureate education in a community where they are known, challenged, and given opportunities to explore their city and their world.

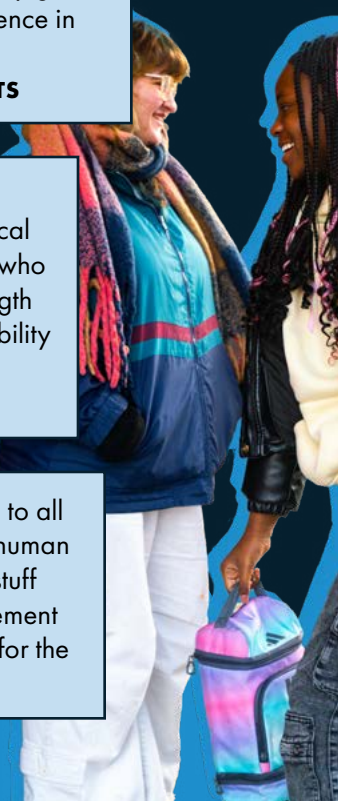
Generosity helps make that possible.

Approximately **60% of Daystar students receive financial aid**, representing roughly **$1.7 million in assistance each year**. Gifts also help strengthen the programs, experiences, and opportunities that make a Daystar education distinctive, from music and the arts to Learning Excursions, international travel, student support, and more.

When you give to Daystar, you're investing in more than a school. **You're investing in students, in the people they are becoming, and in everything their lives will touch.**

DONATE TODAY

We're grateful for the opportunity to be part of a school that helps our children grow not only as students, but as genuinely good people who strive to make a difference in the lives of others."
—MINDY & JUSTIN THIEL, PARENTS

We believe Daystar sends students out into the world who are curious and critical thinkers, open-minded world changers who will continue to seek diversity as a strength for a more just society. It is our responsibility and privilege to support this vision."
—JOE & CATE HUIZENGA, PARENTS

We're here to explore and contribute to all aspects of human life, all features of human culture, even, maybe especially, the stuff that's gone wrong. A cultural-engagement stance like Daystar's equips students for the world as it is." **—GRANDPARENTS**