

Headline:

Igniting CS Enthusiasm by Building on Students' Interests

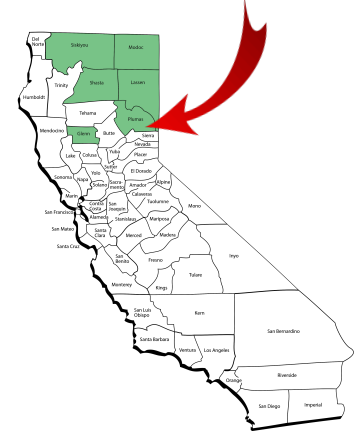
Article:

Plumas County is located near the northeast corner of California, up where the Sierra and the Cascade mountains meet. The county boasts more than 100 lakes and 1,000 miles of rivers and streams with over a million acres of national forest. With only nine people per square mile, this county is rural, beautiful and serene.

Shalyn Dunnington is a junior-high school teacher at the Indian Valley



Academy (IVA) in Greenville, Ca. in Plumas County. Indian Valley Academy is one of three learning centers that form Plumas Charter School, which opened in 1998 and serves students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Each center offers a personalized learning approach that includes: independent study, concurrent college enrollment, enrichment activities, online curricula, electives, and center-based courses. The other two Plumas Charter School sites are Quincy Learning Center and Chester Learning Center.



Ms. Shalyn, to her students, works with 7th and 8th graders who take two computer science classes: *CS Discoveries* is a mandatory elective class as well as the follow up course called *CS Principles*. This year, Shalyn is teaching *CS Discoveries* to a small group of high school students (who need elective credits); through the course, students have explored web page and app designs, and are currently learning to animate and create simple video games. Last year, the CS program also added robotics – where students learn about programming, mechanics and electronics. Shalyn said in the future... perhaps they can take their robotic challenges from the classroom to the competition arena!



Shalyn has worked for Plumas Charter School since 2016, after homeschooling her two children for two years. For the past nine years, Shalyn has predominantly taught 7th and 8th graders at IVA in math, social studies, science, ELA, and computer science; while offering art and computer science to high schoolers more recently.

After attending a CS4NorCal training in 2021, Shalyn has been running with the CS program ever since! All of her students have one-to-one access on their own personal Chromebooks to use for learning throughout the school day. She works with her students using programs from code.org and YaizY – providing immersive computer science course pathways for schools and districts.



"The benefit of working at a small, rural school is that because we are a charter, we have more flexibility in some of the things we can do; however, similarly, the small size of our school can be a challenge because of our limited resources," Shalyn said. "That's where CS4NorCal has been so invaluable... with all the professional learning, free curriculum and 'brush-up' lessons, we've been able to overcome our slim budgets and staffing constraints."

In her CS endeavors, Shalyn has support from other Academy teachers and especially the IVA site director, Ryan Schramel. *"Mr. Schramel realized early on that computer science is part of our future and something that our students need to be experiencing,"* Shalyn said. *"He has been instrumental in integrating computer science into our curriculum and finding ways that it works for all of us – students and teachers alike."*



Shalyn has found that tapping into her students' interests has fueled their excitement about computer science... especially when paired with their favorite technologies – like building new apps, creating their own webpages and developing video games. Shalyn's students are so amazed to learn that they can have a job – and *even a career* – creating computer video games: opening new career pathways they might have never dreamed about!

With her Plumas Charter's high school students, Shalyn has been leading some *'Digital Sleuthing'* lessons where students explore their *Digital Footprint*, and how much access people have to their personal data through social media. *"I've realized tying your CS lessons to the topics students' are already interested in (their likes, their hobbies and their world) elevates their openness and engagement with all this new tech,"* Shalyn shared.

Shalyn is all about jumping into uncharted territory in the classroom and in her life. A local to the area, Shalyn just started a new exciting chapter in her life. Recently remarried, to her husband Josh, Shalyn inherited two adult "bonus children" she loves, just welcomed a new grandbaby, and is cheerleading her daughter's journey to becoming a new educator herself.

Shalyn received her degree in Liberal Arts and holds a K-8 multiple subject credential from California State University (at Chico) where her daughter is applying for the teaching credential program as well. That passion for education is a family affair: Shalyn's mom worked in a local school, her aunt ran a private school, and her daughter (Madeline) is following in the footsteps of her teaching ancestors.

Shalyn is igniting a new generation of computer science learners as a lifetime learner herself -- taking the advice she gives to her students:

"I am trying not to be afraid to fail; and I am trying to not get frustrated... we're all on the 'struggle bus' together and the greatest feeling of all is when it all finally clicks!"

Ms. Shalyn is a huge asset to the Indian Valley Academy and the Plumas Charter School system. Her enthusiasm, positive attitude and genuine interest in her students' hobbies has fueled the success of this emerging computer science program.