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MAY 2026

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CHASING BIG GOALS
— AND EARNING THEM

CELEBRATING
YOUR
GRADUATE

MORE GRAD
CONTENT INSIDE



INSIDE: SUMMER CAMPS & PROGRAMS GUIDE



Nataly Danilova
PHOTOGRAPHY



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May 16**

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prospective and current
LGBTQ+ parents!**

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4-12 year olds**

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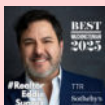


Jordyn White

Mom & Vice President of
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ON THE COVER

This month's cover photo is by
Donnie Biggs

3 THINGS TO KNOW THIS MONTH



DAVID ARKIN, EDITOR

Cultural events, graduation and festivals, oh my!



An editor's guide on what to do in the DMV this month

Spring is in full swing, with summer well on its way, and the DC area is buzzing with things to see, do and celebrate. Whether you're planning a family outing along Embassy Row, cheering on a new grad or counting down the days until summer break, here's a peak at what's going on in the DMV. Plus, everything else you need to make the most of the season is right here in this issue.

Passport DC cultural events

**10 a.m.-4 p.m. May 2 & May 9,
Embassy Row, Washington, DC**

This May, Washington, DC's Passport DC festival turns Embassy Row into a free, family-friendly tour of the world — no passport required. On May 2, the Around the World Embassy Tour invites families to explore the food, art, dance, fashion and music of countries across the globe, with past highlights including karate demonstrations, sari wrapping lessons and live dance performances. Then on May 9, the EU Open House opens the doors of European Union embassies for a second weekend of cultural discovery, from Ireland and Italy to Spain and Slovakia. Both events run 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. along Embassy Row and Massachusetts Avenue NW. Visit eventsdc.com/passportdc for confirmed hours and participating embassies.



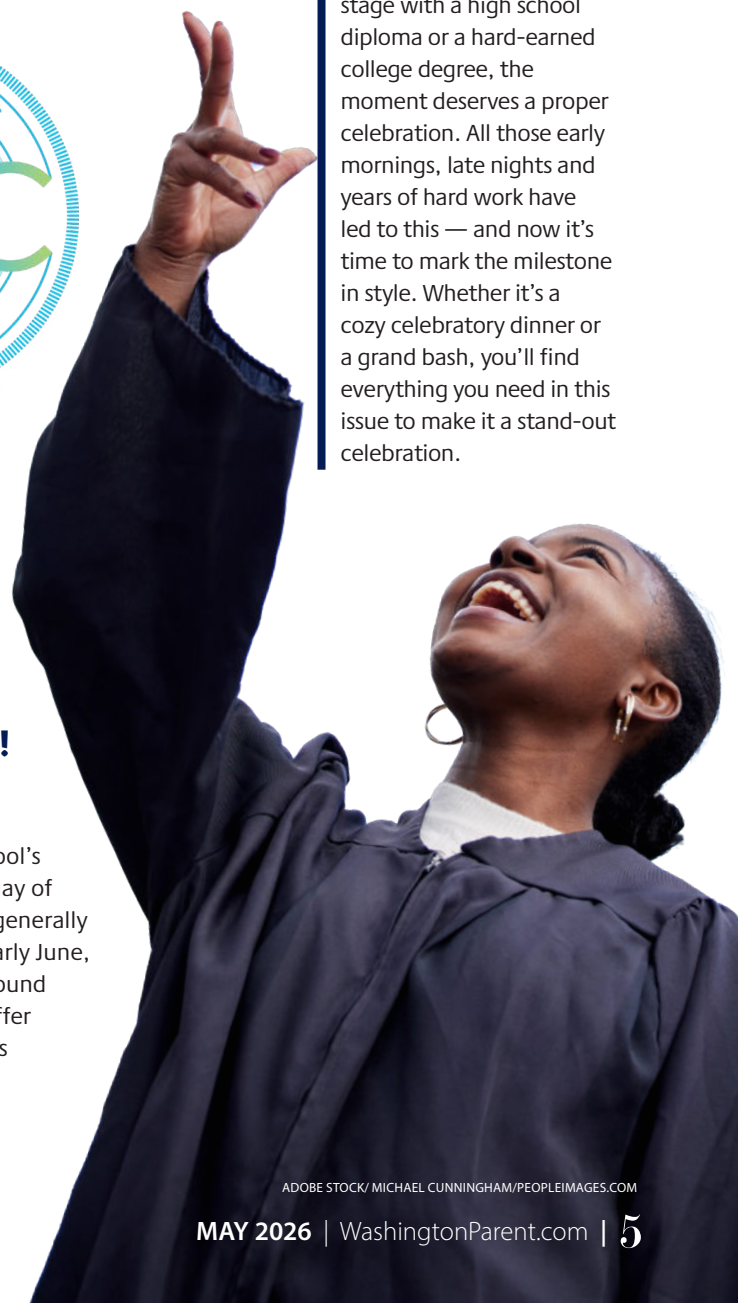
Celebrating your graduate

Graduation season is here, and whether your favorite new grad is crossing the stage with a high school diploma or a hard-earned college degree, the moment deserves a proper celebration. All those early mornings, late nights and years of hard work have led to this — and now it's time to mark the milestone in style. Whether it's a cozy celebratory dinner or a grand bash, you'll find everything you need in this issue to make it a stand-out celebration.

School's out for the summer!

Late May-early June

Well, almost. According to the DC Public School's calendar, Thursday, June 18, will be the last day of school for students. Virginia's public schools generally wrap up their academic year in late May or early June, with most major school divisions finishing around June 17-18, 2026 — though exact dates differ by district. In case you need some ideas on what to do this summer, we've got you covered.



ADOBE STOCK/ MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM/PEOPLEIMAGES.COM

EDUCATION

Top schools in and around the DC area:

**Private, Montessori and
specialized programs
to know**

From prestigious private institutions to hands-on Montessori classrooms and schools designed for diverse learners, here are some of the top schools across Washington, DC, Maryland and Northern Virginia.

BY JENNA DOLCH

IN THIS SECTION

- Father's Day fun with your little one** 12
- Top-rated early-learning options across the region** 14
- Camps & Summer Programs Guide** 21
- The Dr. Is In: When spring brings sneezes** 16
- Camp confidence for you and your camper** 25



Choosing the right school in the DC area can feel overwhelming but the region is home to some of the most respected and innovative programs in the country. Whether you're searching for a rigorous private education, a Montessori approach or a school designed to support different learning styles, these standout options across Washington, DC, Maryland and Northern Virginia are worth exploring.

Best private schools

Featured schools

In this section, Washington Parent's advertising partners share their top private school offerings.



PHOTO COURTESY IDEAVENTIONS ACADEMY

Ideaventions Academy

Designed for gifted students who genuinely love to learn, Ideaventions Academy for Mathematics and Science serves grades 1-12 with passionate teachers supporting intellectually curious students in everything from art to advanced robotics. With just 75 students and a 5:1 student-to-teacher ratio, according to Niche, the school offers an intimate, high-achieving community where kids can find their intellectual peers. Two-thirds of faculty hold at least a master's degree, and 25% have PhDs — bringing deep expertise into every classroom. Learning here is rooted in hands-on, experiential projects and lively discussion — rigorous, but always full of fun. Visit the website for tour dates and evaluation criteria.

- **Address:** 12340 Pinecrest Road, Reston, VA
- **Phone:** (703) 860-0211
- **Good to know:** Strong emphasis on STEM and innovation

Westminster School

Established in 1962, Westminster School in Annandale, Virginia has been delivering a superior preschool through eighth grade education built on a simple but enduring philosophy: that kids this age are naturally curious, and a great school should meet them there. Rooted in the Classical tradition, Westminster's rigorous academic curriculum is infused with the humanities and foundational subjects, while remaining well-rounded through strong arts, athletics and extracurricular programming. The school's guiding mission — presenting challenge, building character,



PHOTO COURTESY WESTMINSTER SCHOOL

instilling confidence — runs through everything from the classroom to the playing field. Rather than simply filling students with information, Westminster focuses on developing disciplined, well-informed minds alongside virtues like respect, integrity and kindness. A STEAM program, drama department and a tight-knit school community round out the experience, making Westminster a place where academic excellence and genuine joy in learning go hand in hand.

- **Address:** 3819 Gallows Road, Annandale, VA
- **Phone:** (703) 256-3620
- **Good to know:** Ideal for younger students and foundational learning

Merritt Academy

Merritt Academy's rich legacy of providing inspired learning for over 60 years continues to shape a dynamic educational experience grounded in excellence, curiosity and a deep commitment to each child's growth. From joyful early childhood play to leadership



PHOTO COURTESY MERRITT ACADEMY

CONTINUED...

EDUCATION

opportunities in our “varsity” middle school program, students thrive through experiential learning, Genius Hour, STEAM projects and meaningful intergenerational connections. Serving children from infants through middle school, Merritt Academy is guided by a philosophy built on academic excellence, character education, and strong family partnerships. Within a nurturing, relationship-driven environment, small class sizes allow for personalized attention, while robust programs in the arts, world languages and leadership help students discover their interests and build confidence. With a focus on both achievement and belonging, Merritt Academy prepares students for continued success while cultivating a lifelong appreciation for learning and the journey ahead.

■ **Address:** 9211 Arlington Blvd., Fairfax, VA

■ **Phone:** 703-672-4552

■ **Good to know:** They accept applications on a rolling basis for the current school year as well as future enrollment.

More private schools

This section features some of the best private schools in the DMV and are based on public data, academic performance, community reviews and survey feedback to help families find the right fit. Many of these schools have earned top marks, including A+, A and A- grades, according to Niche.com.

Sidwell Friends School

Sidwell Friends School is one of the most prestigious private schools in the nation, known for its rigorous academics and strong emphasis on Quaker values like integrity, community and reflection. Students benefit from small class sizes, exceptional faculty and a curriculum that balances academics with arts, athletics and service learning.

■ **Address:** 3825 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Washington, DC

■ **Phone:** (202) 537-8100

■ **Good to know:** Highly competitive admissions and strong college placement

Lowell School

Lowell School stands out for its progressive, student-centered approach that blends academic learning with social-emotional development. The curriculum encourages creativity, collaboration and critical thinking.

■ **Address:** 1640 Kalmia Road NW, Washington, DC

■ **Phone:** (202) 577-2000

■ **Good to know:** Strong emphasis on whole-child education; 2025 Washington Parent Pick finalist

Georgetown Day School

Georgetown Day School is nationally recognized for its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion alongside strong academics. Students are encouraged to think critically and engage with real-world issues.



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- **Address:** 4200 Davenport St. NW, Washington, DC
- **Phone:** (202) 295-6200
- **Good to know:** Known for its inclusive culture and social justice focus; 2025 Washington Parent Pick finalist

Best Montessori schools

Featured schools

In this section, Washington Parent's advertising partners share their top Montessori school offerings.

Montessori School of McLean

The Montessori School of McLean is recognized as a leading Montessori program, offering a thoughtfully designed continuum for toddler, primary and elementary students.



PHOTO COURTESY MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF MCLEAN

The toddler program (ages 24-36 months) nurtures early development through a low student-teacher ratio, emphasizing independence, language, motor skills and social growth in a carefully prepared environment. The primary program (ages 3-6) builds a strong academic and personal foundation through Montessori's core areas—practical life, sensorial, language and mathematics—enhanced by cultural studies and enrichment experiences. Children develop confidence, curiosity and a lifelong love of learning. In elementary (grades 1-6), students expand their academic skills while exploring big ideas across subjects such as science, history, and geography. The program encourages critical thinking, creativity and a deep understanding of the world. Together, these programs create a cohesive, engaging educational journey that supports each child's growth and success. Enrichment Programs, Summer Camp, After School programs are available.

■ **Address:** 1711 Kirby Road, McLean, VA

■ **Phone:** (703) 790-1049

■ **Good to know:** Emphasizes individualized learning and independence through traditional Montessori methods

The Nature School at Montessori Living

The Nature School at Montessori Living is a distinctive, nature-based Montessori school serving infants, toddlers and young children throughout Montgomery County, Maryland. Families from Kensington, Silver Spring, Bethesda, Chevy Chase and nearby communities are drawn to its nurturing, thoughtfully designed programs and strong sense of

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- Bus transportation and Summer Camp available



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PHOTO COURTESY THE NATURE SCHOOL

community. Set within the unique Montessori Living campus, the school blends education, housing and lifelong learning into one enriching environment. Children begin in carefully prepared NIDO classrooms for infants, where independence, movement and trust are gently fostered from the very start. As they grow, students engage daily with the natural world, exploring gardens, participating in outdoor

work, and developing a deep respect for the environment. A defining feature of the school is its intergenerational model, where children regularly connect with families, educators, and older adults. These shared experiences create meaningful relationships, enriching learning while fostering empathy, community and a lifelong love of connection. This summer, they'll have an Outdoor Experience for Young Explorers, Farmers and Scientists!

- **Address:** 3015 Upton Drive, Kensington, MD
- **Phone:** (301) 929-2505
- **Good to know:** Features a rare outdoor "forest school" model with daily learning in gardens, woodlands and natural spaces

Brooksfield School

Brooksfield School offers a unique Montessori experience cultivating a love for learning that fosters lifelong friendships between children, families, teachers and the community — with a focus on the arts and nature. Programs span toddler through kindergarten, with a curriculum built around confidence, concentration, independence and order, and mixed-age cohorts that give older students the chance to lead



PHOTO COURTESY BROOKSFIELD SCHOOL

and younger ones a more natural way to learn. What makes Brooksfield stand out is its deep commitment to the outdoors: organic gardening, outdoor adventures and nature-based learning are woven into the school day, with research showing outdoor education improves behavior, reduces stress and boosts academic performance. They're also members of the American Montessori Society and Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots program.

- **Address:** 1724 Chain Bridge Road, McLean, VA
- **Phone:** (703) 356-5437
- **Good to know:** Longstanding program with experienced staff; 2025 Washington Parent Pick finalist

Julia Brown Schools

Founded in 1967, what began in the founder's downtown Laurel apartment has grown to four family-owned and operated locations across Maryland — in Laurel, Columbia, Silver Spring and Olney. The school's roots run deep: founder Ms. Julia Brown was one of the first Montessorians in the state of Maryland, having earned her Montessori degree from the London St.



PHOTO COURTESY JULIA BROWN SCHOOLS

Nicholas Montessori Training Centre, trained by two women who studied directly under Dr. Maria Montessori herself. That lineage still shapes everything the school does today. Programs span toddler through elementary, using the traditional Montessori method to help children become lifelong learners who think independently, explore with curiosity and genuinely love school. Now in its second generation of family leadership, Julia Brown Schools remains one of Maryland's most trusted and enduring names in Montessori education.

- **Address:** 3400 Queen Mary Drive, Olney, MD; 9450 Madison Ave., Laurel, MD; 9760 Owen Brown Road, Columbia, MD; 1300 Milestone Drive, Silver Spring, MD
- **Phone:** 301-498-0604, Ext 1; 410-730-5056, Ext 2; 301-622-7808, Ext. 3; 301-774-5700, Ext. 4
- **Good to know:** They are not enrolling for fall 2026.

More Montessori schools

This section features some of the best Montessori schools in the DMV and are based on public data, academic performance, community reviews and survey feedback to help families find the right fit. Many of these schools have earned top marks, including A+, A and A- grades, according to Niche.com.

TOTH Montessori

TOTH Montessori offers a child-centered environment where students learn through hands-on exploration and independence. The program builds confidence, curiosity and early problem-solving skills.

- **Address:** 1000 5th St. SE, Washington, DC
- **Phone:** (202) 748-5930
- **Good to know:** Focuses heavily on independence and self-paced learning; 2025 Washington Parent Pick finalist

Little Flower Montessori

Little Flower Montessori nurtures the whole child through individualized instruction and a supportive classroom environment. Students are encouraged to grow academically and socially.

- **Address:** 3029 16th St. NW, Washington, DC
- **Phone:** (202) 667-6803
- **Good to know:** Strong community feel and smaller class sizes; 2025 Washington Parent Pick finalist

Waterfront Academy

Waterfront Academy blends Montessori principles with real-world experiences, helping students connect classroom learning to their environment.

- **Address:** 703 D St. SE, Washington, DC
- **Phone:** (202) 484-0044
- **Good to know:** Urban setting allows for experiential learning; 2025 Washington Parent Pick finalist

Best schools for specialized learning needs

The Siena School

The Siena School specializes in supporting students with language-based learning differences, offering structured, individualized instruction.

- **Address:** 1300 Forest Glen Road, Silver Spring, MD
- **Phone:** (301) 244-3600
- **Good to know:** Focus on reading, writing and executive functioning; 2025 Washington Parent Pick finalist

The Katherine Thomas School

This school provides individualized education plans along with therapeutic and social-emotional support.

- **Address:** 9975 Medical Center Drive, Rockville, MD
- **Phone:** (301) 738-9691
- **Good to know:** Offers integrated therapy services; 2025 Washington Parent Pick finalist

The Diener School

Diener School offers a nurturing environment with personalized instruction for students with learning differences.

- **Address:** 9312 Old Georgetown Road, Bethesda, MD
- **Phone:** (301) 299-4602
- **Good to know:** Strong emphasis on social-emotional growth; 2025 Washington Parent Pick finalist

Lab School of Washington

The Lab School of Washington uses an arts-based curriculum to support students with learning differences.

- **Address:** 4759 Reservoir Road NW, Washington, DC
- **Phone:** (202) 965-6600
- **Good to know:** Creative teaching methods set it apart

Ivymount School

Ivymount offers specialized programs for students with autism and other learning challenges, focusing on independence and life skills.

- **Address:** 11614 Seven Locks Road, Rockville, MD
- **Phone:** (301) 469-0223
- **Good to know:** Strong transition and life-skills programs

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Father's Day fun with your little one

Let dad spend some quality time with the littles at one of these Parent & Me classes.

BY ANNA GALAN

Whether you're planning a Father's Day outing or simply looking for ways to spend more quality time together, across the DMV there are a range of parent-and-me classes that go beyond the typical celebration. Here are a few programs to try.

Taste Buds & Kitchen Chester

Taste Buds & Kitchen Chester offers hands-on cooking classes where kids and caregivers create made-from-scratch recipes in a lively, supportive kitchen environment led by friendly chef instructors. From rainbow cupcakes to sprinkled donuts and holiday gingerbread house decorating classes, "Caregiver & Me" sessions offer a fun, hands-on introduction to cooking while helping children learn about ingredients. This structured, screen-free activity allows caregivers to actively join in as a "sous chef" in a guided, hands on experience.

- **Best ages:** 2-8 years
- **Typical visit length:** 1 and 2 hour sessions
- **Cost:** \$30 per child, a spot for the caregiver is included
- **Planning tip:** Book in advance, especially for weekend and themed "Caregiver & Me" classes, as spots can fill up quickly



PHOTO COURTESY TASTE BUDS & KITCHEN CHESTER



PHOTO COURTESY TASTE BUDS & KITCHEN CHESTER

Power Tots

Designed specifically for younger children, Power Tots offers movement-based sports classes (gymnastics, dance, yoga) that blend fitness, coordination and fun. They run in-person, including Parent & Me sessions, primarily in schools, child care centers and local parks throughout the DC, MD and VA area. With simple games and guided activities, kids build confidence and motor skills while dads or caregivers can join in and stay active alongside them.

- **Best ages:** 18 months-5 years
- **Typical visit length:** 30-60 minutes
- **Cost:** Varies
- **Planning tip:** Wear comfortable clothing since you'll likely be moving too

Babies & Books!

People's Book hosts a weekly baby storytime designed for children ages 3 and under, featuring a cozy mix of board books, songs and interactive rhymes. This welcoming, relaxed setting makes it easy for caregivers to settle in while little ones explore early literacy through sound, repetition and play.

- **Best ages:** 0-3 years
- **Typical visit length:** 30 minutes
- **Cost:** Free, caregivers get free coffee
- **Planning tip:** Arrive a little early to grab seating and enjoy the free coffee before storytime begins.



PHOTO COURTESY REFLECTIONS MUSIC THERAPY



PHOTO COURTESY REFLECTIONS MUSIC THERAPY

Reflections Music Therapy

Reflections Music Therapy offers early childhood music classes that invite children and caregivers to explore sound, rhythm and movement together in a calm, engaging environment. Led by Sarah Kind, licensed board-certified music therapist, sessions use songs,

instruments and interactive play to support early development while keeping the experience joyful and accessible for all families. The sessions offer a soothing, low-pressure bonding activity that supports early development and sensory development while giving dads or caregivers a shared, screen-free moment with their child.

- **Best ages:** Infants-5 years
- **Typical visit length:** 30-60 minutes
- **Cost:** Varies

Watch Me Bloom

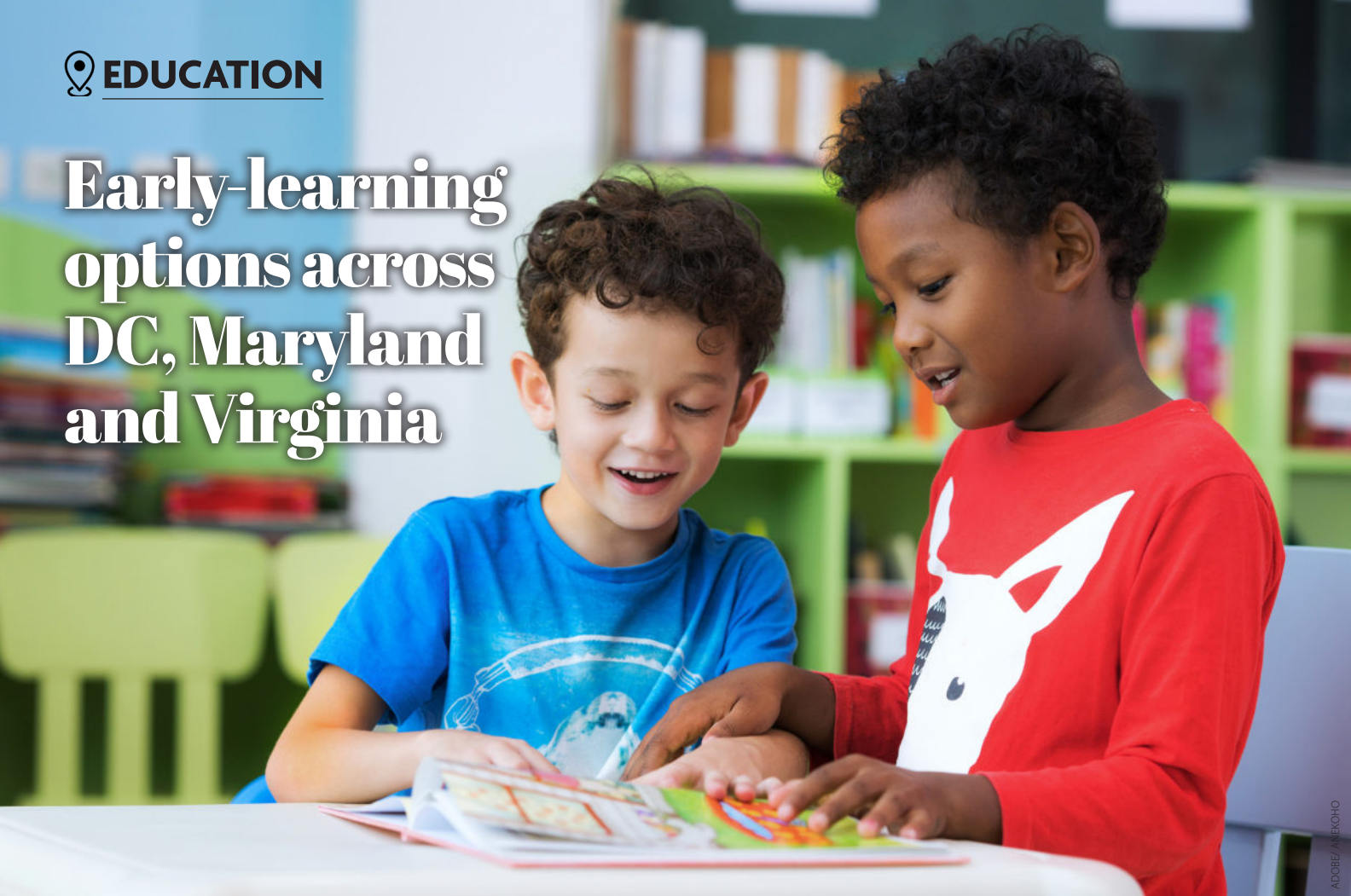
This family-centered early childhood wellness center supports children from infancy through age 10 through play-based learning, therapy-informed activities and guided caregiver involvement. The space is designed to help children build confidence, communication and social skills while parents or caregivers actively participate in the experience and learn strategies they can use at home. They offer a supportive, structured environment where caregivers gain tools to better understand and support their child's development while staying hands-on in the experience.

- **Best ages:** 0-10 years
- **Typical visit length:** Varies by class or program
- **Cost:** Varies by class or program
- **Planning tip:** Book a consultation or introductory class first to find the best-fit program for you child's needs



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Early-learning options across DC, Maryland and Virginia



From Montessori academies to play-based programs, here's your guide to selecting early childhood education and preschool programs across the DMV.

BY ZAKKARY PARKER

Finding preschools and early childhood education that fit your family can feel daunting.

With so many factors to consider, from education philosophies and campus features to daily activities and routines, it's hard to know where to begin. That's why we created this guide to round up a variety of early-learning options across Maryland, Virginia and DC, to help you narrow down your search.

Featured schools

In this section, Washington Parent's advertising partners share their top preschool offerings.

Christ Episcopal School

About the school: At Christ Episcopal School, preschool is more than childcare; it's where a lifelong journey of curiosity, confidence and joyful learning truly begins. Nestled in the heart of Rockville, the preschool welcomes children ages 2-4 into a vibrant, nurturing space where wonder and a love of learning



are woven into everything they do. Their college-educated, early childhood professionals bring deep expertise and genuine warmth to every interaction, guiding little learners through play-based exploration in literacy, math, science, STEM, art, music and more. With a dedicated focus on kindergarten readiness, their pre-K program builds the academic foundations and social confidence children need for a smooth, successful transition, so they arrive in kindergarten not just prepared, but truly ready to thrive. What truly sets CES apart is their community.

What students and parents are saying: “We have been so happy with our experience as parents to a CES student, starting in the preschool 2’s. The school is small enough that everyone knows your child - and the support of the community is amazing,” said one parent in a five-star review.

■ **Address:** 109 S Washington St., Rockville, MD. Additional locations in DC and VA.

Noteworthy attributes:

- Values-based programs that emphasize play, discovery and fostering meaningful relationships
- Weekly special subject area classes like art, STEM, physical education, music and Spanish
- Variety of classes for each age group, including preschool 2s and 3s, as well as prekindergarten for students aged 4
- Before- and after-school care programs
- 2025 Washington Parent Pick winner



PHOTO COURTESY CHESTERBROOK ACADEMY

Chesterbrook Academy

About the school: For 40 years, Chesterbrook Academy preschools have been dedicated to providing exceptional early childhood education for children ages 6 weeks through pre-K. They turn everyday moments into meaningful learning experiences, fueling your child’s growth with activities that challenge, inspire and delight. Nurturing teachers take the time to truly know each child, tailoring learning experiences to their interests and learning styles. Through hands-on activities and purposeful play, the curriculum fosters a lifelong love of learning while helping children build the academic, social and emotional skills they need for success. Their strong safety practices bring peace of mind to families, while dedicated educators partner closely with parents every step of the way.

What students and parents are saying: “Our son has been at Chesterbrook for five months — he started when he

was around 7 months old. The teachers and admin have been wonderful and work very hard to accommodate any special requests when it comes to his care,” said one parent in a five-star review for the Alexandria, VA, location. “I can tell they really love and care for him. Anytime he’s been away, they still message us to check up on him...We are lucky to have found this place!”

■ **Address:** Multiple locations across Virginia and Maryland

Noteworthy attributes:

- Flexible curriculum designed to meet each child’s needs
- Programs for a variety of ages, ranging from infants to pre-kindergartners
- Outdoor learning opportunities through nature, sports, games and discovery
- Focus on hands-on play and learning in small groups



PHOTO COURTESY CHRIST EPISCOPAL SCHOOL

Rosemount Center

About the school: Rosemount Center has been preparing children and families for their future since 1972. They provide year-round early childhood education and family support services in a bilingual (English/Spanish) and multicultural setting at the historic Mount Pleasant campus. Enrollment options include full tuition, local government subsidized and federally funded opportunities for the Infant/Toddler Program (ages 6 weeks to 3 years) and Preschool Program (ages 3 to 5 years). With over 70 community partnerships, home visiting services and dedicated support for children with developmental disabilities, Rosemount Center goes far beyond the classroom — building a foundation of learning, language and community for the families it serves.

What students and parents are saying: “My children went to Rosemount from 2014-2018. The friendships we made there are still enduring — among the kids, parents, teachers and staff. It was truly the place we “started” as a family,” shared a family on the school’s website.

■ **Address:** 2000 Rosemount Ave., NW Washington, DC

Noteworthy attributes:

- Curriculum to foster physical, social, emotional and cognitive development through hands-on, play-based learning
- Small, private center with own parking lot and own playground — not accessible to the general public
- Certified and well-regarded food service provider
- Full time health professional onsite
- Accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children

CONTINUED...



First Steps Academy

About the school: First Steps Academy is a premier early childhood school located in the heart of Tysons, serving children from infants through kindergarten. Thoughtfully designed for busy, modern families, the school provides a nurturing and engaging environment during the most important years of development. First Steps academic program blends the natural desire of children to explore their environment with a structured, phonics based curriculum designed to lay a strong academic foundation. In addition, 2 year olds, preschoolers and kindergartners take part in specialty classes such as music, STEM, Spanish and physical education as well as monthly field trips to enhance their learning experience. With a focus on both academic readiness and social growth, First Steps creates a balanced experience where children build confidence, independence and a love of learning. Its convenient Tysons location and supportive community make it an ideal choice for families seeking high quality early education.

What students and parents are saying: “As a first-time mom, I was nervous leaving my daughter anywhere for too long. Not only has First Steps soothed that anxiety, but they have helped my daughter thrive. I am so appreciative of their warm support and care and for the socialization and enrichment my daughter has experienced. We LOVE First Steps Academy. 11/10 recommend,” shared a parent on the school’s website.

■ **Address:** 7900 Westpark Drive, Suite A040, McLean, VA

Noteworthy attributes:

- Curriculum is designed to inspire children and challenge critical thinking through purposeful play
- Highlighted monthly values taught and encouraged daily
- Work to support and strengthen the bond between parent and child
- Use activities to nurture child’s heart, both physically and emotionally

More preschools

This section features some of the best preschools in the DMV and are based on public data, academic performance, community reviews and survey feedback to help families find the right fit. Many of these schools have earned top marks, including A+, A and A– grades, according to Niche.com.

Lowell School

About the school: Originally founded in 1965, the Lowell School is a progressive, coed school serving students from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. According to their website, their pre-primary school “takes a child’s natural curiosity and multiplies it so that our youngest students discover the joy of learning, grow in their confidence and develop strong fundamental skills for kindergarten and for life.”

■ **Address:** 1640 Kalmia Road NW, Washington, DC

Noteworthy attributes:

- Personalized classroom placement based on age, developmental readiness and diversity, and balance in each classroom
- Eight acres of land featuring outdoor learning environments, playgrounds and an open-air classroom
- Designated classrooms for STEAM, art, physical education, dance and library activities
- Potty training transitioning
- 2025 Washington Parent Pick winner

National Child Research Center

About the school: The oldest continuously operating preschool in DC, the National Child Research Center “nurtures the whole child—socially, emotionally and intellectually—toward a lifelong love of learning. Informed by current research and continuing education, NCRC’s exceptional faculty guide each student’s unique development through a play-based, child-centered curriculum in a diverse, family-focused community, with a commitment to the inclusion of children who benefit from additional support and adaptations,” according to their website.

■ **Address:** 3209 Highland Place NW, Washington, DC

Noteworthy attributes:

- Variety of programs, including early learning (ages 2-3), preschool (ages 3-4) and prekindergarten (ages 4-5)
- Play-based, emergent curriculum that encourages children to engage in discovery with meaningful topics and ask questions
- Each classroom has a “research board” that records both student and teaching team inquiries
- Before and after-school care programs
- 2025 Washington Parent Pick finalist

St. Columba’s Nursery School

About the school: According to their website, St. Columba’s Nursery School’s mission is to “celebrate the joy and discovery of early childhood. In our inclusive community, children learn to make and be a friend, grow confident by taking ‘safe risks,’ and explore the world with a spirit of curiosity and love.”

■ **Address:** 4201 Albemarle St. NW, Washington, DC

Noteworthy attributes:

- Research-informed, play-based curriculum that guides intentional learning environments that support holistic child development
- Disability and learning differences-friendly programs
- Recently renovated expansive playgrounds and resident chickens
- Variety of programs with different time spans that can meet each family's individualized needs

2025 Washington Parent Pick finalist Parkside Community Montessori

About the school: A locally owned and operated school, Parkside Community Montessori works to make Montessori education more accessible, with a holistic and community-driven approach. According to their website, the school's mission is to ensure "every child's innate curiosity and independence are nurtured through authentic Montessori experiences that honor each learner as a unique individual."

■ **Address:** 624 W Church Road, Sterling, VA

Noteworthy attributes:

- Variety of classes for each age group, ranging from 16 months up to age 6
- Flexible scheduling and dedication to affordable tuition
- Spanish immersion Montessori environment
- Expansive outdoor play space
- 2025 Washington Parent Pick winner

Bright Horizons

About the school: Having served families for over 40 years, Bright Horizons values high-quality education and care to ensure your child becomes their most confident and happy self. The school emphasizes its dedication to "making a lasting difference, one child, one student, one teacher, one family and one employee at a time," according to their website.

■ **Address:** 11400 Commerce Park Drive, Suite R140, Reston, VA

Noteworthy attributes:

- Designed for working families with numerous locations across the state
- Science-informed, "Discovery Driven" learning framework that focuses on child's individual strengths
- Range of programs for all ages, including infants, toddlers/2s, preschoolers, pre-kindergarteners, kindergarteners and even summer programs
- Family resources like concierge personalized support services, college coaching, elder care, tutoring and more
- 2025 Washington Parent Pick finalist

Lee Montessori Public Charter School

About the school: Founded in 2014, the Lee Montessori Public Charter School serves a diverse student body, offering an individualized Montessori education. According to their website, their curriculum "redefines high-quality education by pairing Montessori with Anti-Bias/Anti-Racist practices. We create a joyful learning environment where children and families flourish, and can show up authentically as their true selves."

■ **Address:** 3025 4th St. NE, Washington, DC

Noteworthy attributes:

- Free, public charter school

- Participation in the My School DC common lottery
- Programs focus on whole-child development through self-directed, hands-on activities
- Before- and after-school care programs

Everbrook Academy of DuPont, DC

About the school: With a focus on individualized early-learning pathways for students, the Everbrook Academy of DuPont's mission is to "provide a foundation to ensure children are prepared to navigate a changing world and our approach to early education ensures that they thrive and develop the necessary skills to embark on their future," according to their website.

■ **Address:** 1307 19th St. NW, Washington, DC

Noteworthy attributes:

- Variety of programs including infants, toddlers, preschool, prekindergarten, kindergarten and full-day summer camp options.
- SproutAbout app, which provides families with live streaming of classrooms
- Personalized learning pathways
- Before- and after-school care programs

Bethesda Country Day School

About the school: Founded in 1995, Bethesda Country Day School is a daycare and preschool center that prepares children for elementary education by combining learning and play. According to their website, they emphasize that "preschool is more than just learning isolated lessons. Our Links to Learning curriculum 'links' multiple activities together, tailored to each child's interests."

CONTINUED...



A promotional graphic for the 2026 Washington Parent Picks nomination campaign. The background is dark blue with gold confetti. At the top, the text "NOMINATE YOUR FAVORITES!" is written in large, glowing yellow letters. Below this is a circular seal with a scalloped edge, containing three stars at the top, the year "2026" in the center, and the words "WASHINGTON Parent PICKS" in white. A banner across the seal reads "NOMINATE YOUR FAVORITES". Below the seal, the text "PARENTS—WE NEED YOUR PICKS KNOW A LOCAL FAVORITE? NOMINATE THEM" is written in white. To the right of this text is a QR code. At the bottom, a yellow banner contains the dates "MAY 1 - 31, 2026" and the website "WASHINGTONPARENT.COM" below it.

■ **Address:** 5615 Beech Ave., Bethesda, MD

Noteworthy attributes:

- Programs for a variety of ages, spanning from age 2 to kindergarten
- Outdoor learning experiences like nature activities, sports and games
- Before- and after-school care options
- Curriculum with a wide range of focus, including social and emotional learning, language and literacy, creative expression, scientific exploration and more

Key School

About the school: With a focus on inquiry and play-based introduction to education, the Key School has served families for nearly 70 years. According to their website, the school was founded “upon the conviction that children are innately curious about themselves and the world; they want to learn, they want to discover and they want to create.”

■ **Address:** 534 Hillsmere Drive, Annapolis, MD

Noteworthy attributes:

- 4:1 student-to-faculty ratio
- Variety of programs designed for children aged 2.5 to kindergarten, such as outdoor recreation, STEM, music, library and more
- Average class size of 15
- Facilities include laboratories, gymnasiums, outdoor classrooms and a Nature Play and Learning Space

Park School of Baltimore

About the school: With a focus on progressive education and active engagement, the Park School of Baltimore’s mission is to “cultivate children’s innate curiosity by nurturing their interests and engaging them as active participants in their own education. We support young people in becoming confident questioners and responsible citizens of the world,” according to their website.

■ **Address:** 2425 Old Court Road, Baltimore, MD

Noteworthy attributes:

- Multi-disciplinary programs like reading comprehension, math, art, science, library and more
- Individualized learning experience based on each student’s strengths and interests
- 100-acre campus featuring gardens, trails, streams and woodlands
- Before- and after-school programs

Westgate Child Center

About the school: Founded in 1973, the Westgate Child Center is a nonprofit organization that emphasizes its philosophy to “focus on each child’s social, emotional, physical and intellectual needs in a stimulating yet warm and caring environment” through play-based curriculum, according to its website.

■ **Address:** 1613 Great Falls St., Suite B101, McLean, VA

Noteworthy attributes:

- 6:1 child-to-teacher ratio
- Full-day and half-day programs
- Breakfast, lunch and afternoon snacks are provided
- Before- and after-school care options

Little Beginnings Child Development Center

About the school: Established in 1986, Little Beginnings Child Development Center is a parent-cooperative childcare center that allows parents more involvement in their children’s education. According to their website, their philosophy “recognizes that parents are the primary educators of their children. To that end, we invite parents to share their interests and talents in the classroom, to participate in field trips and learning opportunities, and to engage in close and regular communication with teachers about their child and their child’s classroom.”

■ **Address:** 606 N Irving St., Arlington, VA

Noteworthy attributes:

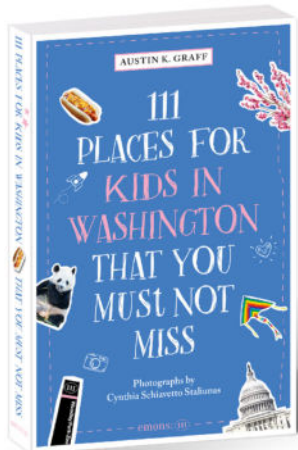
- Nutritious lunch as well as morning and mid-afternoon snacks are provided five days a week
- “Conscious Discipline” approach designed to empower both teachers and students
- Play-based curriculum
- Variety of classes for students ranging from 3 months to 5 years

WASHINGTON, DC FOR KIDS — BEYOND THE OBVIOUS

111 FUN, SURPRISING PLACES

FOR FAMILIES

EXPLORE TOGETHER



Austin K. Graff

Photographs by Cynthia Schiavone Stalham

What does one million dollars look like? Where can you see a real moon rock? How can you go undercover as a spy? And which president had a famous Scottish terrier? From hidden parks and quirky museums to hands-on adventures, this guide turns DC into a playground for curious kids and grown-ups alike.



emons:



art camp at The Art League (ages 5—Teen)

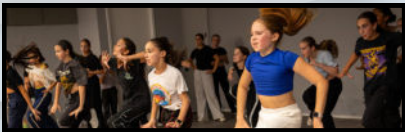


Register online at www.theartleague.org/classes



The Art League | 105 N. Union St. | 800 Slaters Ln. | 1201 N. Royal St. 2. | Alexandria, VA 22314 | 703.683.2323 | school@theartleague.org



SUMMER PROGRAMS

INTENSIVE
JUNE 15-18

MINI MOVERS (PRESCHOOL)
JUNE 22-26

DAY CAMP SESSION I
JULY 27-31

DAY CAMP SESSION II
AUG 3-7



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www.afyp.org

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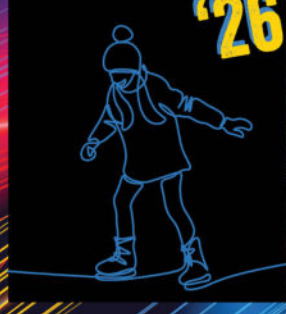

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- > Sleepaway Camps
- > STEM Camps
- > Friendly Farms
- > STEM Programs



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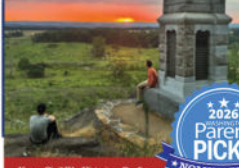



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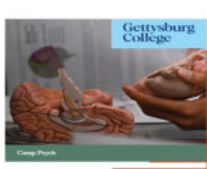

Gettysburg College Academic Camps

Young Civil War Historians:
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Psychology Camp:
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Highlights:

- \$1,395 (includes all activities, room & board)
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SUMMER CAMPS



Camps & Summer Programs Guide

From creative arts and outdoor adventures to STEM, sports, and performing arts, this year's Camp & Summer Guide highlights a wide range of enriching experiences for children of all ages and interests. Whether families are seeking flexible day programs, immersive specialty camps, or overnight adventures, these listings showcase opportunities designed to inspire confidence, curiosity and lifelong memories. Explore the possibilities and find the perfect summer fit for your child.

CAMPS & SUMMER PR

VIRGINIA

Acting for Young People Summer Acting Camps

AFYP has provided programs in the Northern Virginia area since 1997. Our summer programs, for ages 5-18 include production showcases and fun, fast-paced camps taught by professional teaching artists. Acting, on-camera, musical theater, improvisation and more! Weekly sessions with final performances. Presented in conjunction with Mason Community Arts Academy. Fairfax, Va. 703-554-4931.

Art League Art Camp

Spark your child's creativity this summer! Our art camps offer hands-on projects in drawing, painting, printmaking, and sculpture, with fresh curricula each week. Choose regular or specialty (single-medium) camps, available in

half-day or full-day sessions. All materials provided. Register for multiple weeks for a truly immersive artistic experience! Alexandria, Va. 703-683-2323.

Beginner Fencing Camp

Beginner Fencing Camp introduces students to the Olympic sport of fencing in a supportive, skill-building environment. Instruction emphasizes caring, inclusion and competence while helping campers build confidence, discipline and athletic ability. Sterling, Va. 240-424-0749.

Dominique Dawes Academy Summer Camp

At Dominique Dawes Academy Summer Camp, kids can experience up to nine weeks of exciting gymnastics and ninja instruction that strengthen their physical and mental development - creating a long-lasting love for exercise,

learning, and movement. In addition to gymnastics & ninja instruction, camps also include fun games, arts & crafts, open gym, team-building activities, and more. Ashburn, Va.

Fairfax County Park Authority Camps

Form friendships, learn new skills, embark on adventures and create lifelong memories! Choose from locations near your home, work or anywhere in between! Aquatics, Boating and Fishing; Arts and Crafts; Equestrian and Farm; Nature; Outdoor Adventures; Performing Arts; Specialty; Sports; STEM; Variety; and Virtual — there's something for everyone (even adults). Fairfax County, Va.

MedStar Capitals Iceplex Summer Ice Skating Camps

We have on ice full and half day summer camps for ages 4-12. MedStar Capitals Iceplex - Arlington, Va.

Fairfax County Park Authority

Summer Survival 101

- ☒ Book a family vacation
- ☒ Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate
- ☒ Buy sunscreen in bulk
- ☒ Visit Grandma and Grandpa
- ☐ Register for DAY CAMP

2026 Parent PICKS
NOMINATE US!

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Camp Accomplish is a summer experience by Melwood and Children's National Hospital. We serve campers ages 5 - 18 with and without disabilities and chronic health conditions while promoting fun, safety, challenge, and friendship for everyone.

Day Camp and Overnight Camp schedules for 2026 are available now!

[Learn More](#)

2026 Parent PICKS
NOMINATE US!

PROGRAMS GUIDE



Natural Leaders Ultimate Explorer Day Program

Each day brings a new outdoor adventure as campers explore local woods and creeks through games, fishing, whittling and wilderness survival skills. Immersed in nature, children build confidence, resilience and a strong connection to the outdoors. Northern Virginia. 571-244-3793.

The Little Theatre of Alexandria Performing Arts Camp

Now in its 18th year, LTA's summer program at our beautiful Old Town Alexandria theater, offers over 40 week-long camps, for preschoolers through 10th grade. Full-day, half-day and extended day options, include Acting, Improv, Musical Theatre, Puppetry and a variety of specialty themed camps. Something for everyone! Alexandria, Va. 703-683-5778 ext. 4.

MARYLAND

AFF Summer Adventure Camp

Give your child a screen-free summer where nature becomes the classroom. Summer Adventure Camps blend hands-on environmental learning with outdoor exploration, helping kids build confidence, curiosity and friendships through discovery, play and fun on a historic riverside campus. Accokeek, Md. 301-292-5665.

Camp Woodend

Located on a 40-acre nature sanctuary, Camp Woodend offers day, travel and overnight camps that combine outdoor adventure with nature and science education for students in kindergarten through high school. Camps are led by experienced environmental educators and maintain an 8:1 child-to-teacher ratio. Chevy Chase, Md. 301-652-9188.

C-Unit Studio

The perfect summer dance experience for kids who love to move! Dancers explore jazz, hip-hop, ballet, and contemporary dance to fun, high-energy music, and wrap up each session with a special performance. 5521 Landy Lane, Bethesda, Md. 301-664-7900.

WASHINGTON, DC

Capitol Debate Public Speaking & Debate Summer Camp

Students strengthen public speaking, debate, and leadership skills in an engaging, supportive environment. With personalized coaching and dynamic workshops, campers gain confidence, think critically, and form lasting friendships — preparing them for success in school and beyond. American University, Washington, DC. 800-450-5012.

CONTINUED...

Amazing Summer Camp Experiences Await!*

GRADES K-9

camp woodend

BY NATURE FORWARD

***...but they fill up fast!**

Currently, a few camps in each grade still have space.

Check availability and register for these camps and more at natureforward.org/campwoodend

2026 WASHINGTON Parent PICKS

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- ★ Fun games, arts & crafts, open gym, team-building activities, and more
- ★ Kids gain confidence, stay active, and have a blast

Expires 5/31/26. Must create an account to purchase. Only applicable at locations in Maryland and Virginia.



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Rockville, MD • Silver Spring, MD



CAMPS & SUMMER PROGRAMS GUIDE

Sleepaway Camp

Camp Accomplish

Camp Accomplish is an inclusive summer camp for children ages 5–18 with or without disabilities and chronic health conditions, along with siblings, friends and peers from the local community. Campers can choose from day and overnight options and enjoy activities such as horseback riding, swimming, arts and outdoor adventures in a safe, supportive environment. Melwood Recreation Center, 9035 Ironsides Road, Nanjemoy, Md. 20662.

Camp Hidden Meadows

Nestled in the mountains of West Virginia, an all-gender sleepaway camp with a child-centered and caring staff. Offering 1- and 2-week sessions packed with adventure and connection. Campers do activities like hiking, climbing, swimming, archery, pottery, and explore the beautiful outdoors, building confidence, friendships, and independence in a welcoming, unplugged community. Bartow, West Va. 304-456-5191.

Gettysburg College Academic Camps

At Gettysburg College, we're here, all of us, to do great work. Summer camp participants will join our community of passionate achievers, on a campus where history and innovation meet to shape the future and enjoy a glimpse into life as a Gettysburgian. From enriching academic programming to meaningful social connections, the week-long experience is unforgettable! Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pa. 717-337-6924.

South Mountain YMCA Camps

A transformative overnight experience that builds confidence, independence, and character through meaningful friendships and supportive mentorship. Set on 450 acres, campers enjoy climbing, horseback riding, arts, and water activities while developing resilience, teamwork, and lifelong skills through outdoor adventure. Reinholds, Pa. 610-670-2267.

PERFORMING ARTS CAMPS
Full-day, half-day, extended day.
June 1 – August 28



Give your kid a memorable summer in Old Town Alexandria!

Now in its 18th year, the Little Theatre of Alexandria's summer program offers over 40 weeklong performing arts camps, for preschoolers through 10th grade.

703-683-5778 x4

For online registration go to:
thelittletheatre.com/education

Camp confidence

Tips and tricks to prepare your child and family for summer programs.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

As summer approaches, many parents are looking to fill their kids' days with camps and programs. While these programs can present many questions and challenges, there are strategies that can help parents and kids enter camp with confidence.

Go over camp schedules and policies with everyone

Before the first day, make sure you are familiar with the camp schedule and policies. Many camps provide parents with a list of guidelines for what to expect, but you may benefit from reaching out to administrators with any lingering questions or concerns. It may help to leave early on the first day to circumvent issues like long drop-off lines.

Researching the program will also help you know what to pack your camper based on the unique program. For example, some sports camps may provide equipment while others prefer children bring their own. Check in with the camp website and registration documents to determine what to pack.

Many camps offer some information about their staff and their training online to help you gain an understanding of who will be working with your children. Many camps, like Washington Parent's 2025 Parent Picks Best Sleepaway Camp winner Brainy Ridge, employ medical teams or first aid trained counselors to deal with unique medical needs and any unexpected issues.

Understand your camper

Understanding your camper can also help you prepare for summer programs. If you're planning on sending them to sleepaway camp, discuss ahead of time what being away from home will entail, what they are excited and nervous about, and how they can deal with negative emotions and homesickness. It could even help to practice certain scenarios with them, like drop-off, or what to expect when going to sleep in a new bed. Forming these strategies ahead of time could help your child feel more comfortable starting camp.

Considering your child's personality and habits can also help with packing for day or sleepaway camp. Kids with low-blood sugar may benefit from extra snacks to avoid meltdowns, while messy eaters could use an extra shirt in their backpacks. A

homesick camper might feel safer bringing a cherished stuffed animal to sleepaway camp, but be careful sending valuable or sentimental items with more absent-minded kids.

Have a plan for yourself, too

Sending a child to a new place with new people can be just as nerve-racking for their parents as it is for them. But having a plan in advance can benefit both of you. Forming a clear drop-off and pickup routine can remove scheduling stressors and meltdowns. You can also make a personal schedule to fill time you would normally be spending with your child with fun relaxing activities like reading or exercising.

While you may be nervous for yourself or your child, consider the benefits of camp for both of you. Summer programs provide young people with many academic, athletic and social skills that will help them grow in the long-term. While they may make new friends during their program, you can use pick-up and drop-off as an opportunity to meet other parents whose families have similar interests to your own.

Check out these camps named in our Washington Parent Picks

Check out these camps and summer programs voted best in the DMV by Washington Parent Readers:

- **Tiny Dancers:** A specialized dance program for children 2-12 focusing on ballet, tap, jazz, hip hop, and musical theatre with locations in Alexandria, Mosaic, and Fairfax City, Virginia.
- **String Time:** An introductory violin, viola, and cello program for 7-12-year-olds. Classes are offered in Alexandria, McLean, and Burke, Virginia, and taught by professional musicians. Instruments are provided.
- **OneKick:** A martial arts program located in Germantown, Maryland, focusing on physical activity, life skills, community, and convenience for families.
- **Ideaventions Academy:** For families wanting to expand their child's education during the summer months, Ideaventions offers a variety of academic courses to keep young minds active. The academy is in Reston, Virginia.
- **Calleva:** With locations in McLean and Great Falls, Virginia, and Poolesville, Maryland, Calleva offers a variety of unique outdoor programs for kids and teenagers including kayaking, fishing and rock climbing.

BIGSTOCK/ SERGEY NOVIKOV

PARENTING

Chasing goals, earning every one

After attending eight schools around the world, this Mount Vernon senior turned resilience into leadership, earning top military academy nominations along the way.

BY JENNA DOLCH

IN THIS SECTION

- What subsidies, tax credits, or programs are there for DC childcare? **28**
- Celebrating differences: Raising children who respect and relate **30**
- The Dr. Is In: Summer safety starts early **32**
- The Dr. Is In: When spring brings sneezes **26**
- What to Read: Honor your favorite teacher with these meaningful books for every age **34**



8 schools. 3 varsity captain roles. Multiple academy nominations. Meet the Mount Vernon senior making it all happen

For most students, starting at a new school is intimidating. For Audrey Ortiz-Peterson, it's been a way of life.

As a military-connected student who has attended eight schools across the country and around the world, Audrey has learned how to adapt quickly, build connections and find opportunity in the unknown. That mindset helped her hit the ground running when she arrived at Mount Vernon High School, and it's carried her to some remarkable achievements.

Turning change into opportunity

Moving frequently isn't easy, but Audrey has learned to embrace it. Instead of focusing on what she leaves behind, she chooses to see each new place as an opportunity to grow.

That positive mindset helped her transition into a new school community, where she quickly got involved in activities, joined clubs and built a support system. For Audrey, the key has always been staying open to new experiences and trusting that each move brings something valuable.

Leading the military-connected community

One of the most meaningful parts of Audrey's high school experience has been her involvement in the Purple Team, a student organization that supports military-connected students.

Starting as a member and eventually becoming president, she helped create a welcoming environment for students facing similar challenges. Through events, outreach and leadership, Audrey worked to strengthen the sense of community and make sure others felt seen and supported.

Finding strength through athletics

Audrey didn't begin running until her sophomore year but it quickly became a defining part of her high school experience.

As a three-sport varsity captain in cross country, indoor track and outdoor track, she found both challenge and connection. Running taught her resilience, discipline and how to push through difficult moments, which are lessons that extend far beyond the track.



From moving across the world to leading at school — Audrey Ortiz-Peterson's story is one to watch.

PHOTO © DONNIE BIGGS-FCPS

A clear path to service

While many seniors are still deciding what comes next, Audrey has long known her goal: to serve her country.

Inspired by her experience as a military child and her stepfather's service, she set her sights on attending a service academy early on. That decision led to months of hard work, completing applications, securing recommendations, improving test scores and preparing for interviews all while balancing school and extracurriculars.

Her perseverance paid off. Audrey earned congressional nominations to multiple service academies, received an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and secured a Naval ROTC scholarship.

What "service" really means

For Audrey, service goes far beyond a career path. It's about making sacrifices, leading with integrity, and choosing the often harder right over the easier wrong.

As she weighs her options between academies and ROTC, her decision comes down to one core question: how she can best lead and serve others.

Growing up in a military family has shaped Audrey into a resilient, adaptable and driven leader. She credits her experiences with teaching her to stay positive, be open-minded and lean on her support system, no matter where she is.

It's a perspective she hopes to pass on to other military kids who may be facing yet another new beginning. For students preparing to walk into a new school, Audrey's advice is simple: stay positive, be yourself and embrace the experience.

While change can be intimidating, it also creates opportunities to discover new passions, build new friendships and grow in ways you never expected.

Looking ahead

When Audrey looks back on her high school years, she hopes her story reflects the power of hard work, determination and belief in yourself.

Through every move, challenge and late night, she's proven that even the most ambitious goals are within reach as long as you're willing to put in the effort.

PHOTO © DONNIE BIGGS-FCPS



Financial help for child care

From the DC Child Care Subsidy Program to local tax credits, here's how families in the District can access financial support for child care.

BY ZAKKARY PARKER

Parents in Washington, DC, face some of the [highest child care costs](#) in the country. According to a study done by Axios in 2024, child care costs for two children took up 42% of the area's median household annual income. To combat rising costs, the district has implemented various resources designed to help families afford reliable, high-quality child care. Here's a short guide to understanding the support that's available to you and your family.

What is DC's Child Care subsidy program?

The [Office of the State Superintendent of Education](#) offers a Child Care Subsidy Program that provides financial assistance

to families who are working or attending school in DC for child care. The initiative helps low- to moderate-income families, as well as those facing special circumstances that may create a need for assistance, to cover the cost of child care.

How does it work?

The program either pays all or part of the child care costs directly to the provider. Depending on income, the family may also pay a portion of the cost. Families can use subsidies to pay for care at a [licensed child development facility](#) or for in-home care. The goal of the program is to connect families within DC to more accessible, high-quality care and education.

Who qualifies?

For families to qualify, the program has specific requirements. You may qualify if:

- You are a Washington, DC, resident
- You are a United States citizen or have legal immigration status
- You have children ages 6 weeks to 13 years (or under 19 if the child has special needs)
- You are currently working, attending job training or education programs, seeking employment or have a child who is considered vulnerable or is receiving protective services
- You meet income requirements and have a gross income that is below 300% of the federal poverty level

How to apply

To apply for the Child Care Subsidy Program, you can submit an online application through the [DC Family Child Care Subsidy Portal](#), or in person at the [DC Department of Human Services](#) or at a [Level II child care provider](#).

Families at risk of homelessness or currently experiencing homelessness can apply at the Virginia [Williams Family Resource Center](#).

When applying, families will need to provide important documents:

- Identity verification: Government-issued ID, birth certificates or passports
- Child eligibility
- Proof of residence
- Proof of income

Once submitted, it typically takes around 10 business days for the Office of the State Superintendent of Education to confirm eligibility.

Starting May 12, 2026, a [waitlist](#) will be implemented for new program applicants in response to continued enrollment growth. Families that submit an application before the date may enroll if approved and can then receive services from their chosen provider. Those who submit an application after May 12 will be placed on a waitlist if approved.

Additional resources

In addition to the subsidy program, DC also offers tax credits designed to assist families with child care. The [Child Tax Credit](#) provides support in covering essential expenses like food, housing and child care. According to the DC Fiscal Policy Institute, “Effective tax year 2026, the new credit provides up to \$1,000 per dependent child under age 18 and is fully refundable, meaning families can receive the full amount even if they have little or no income tax. Unlike the previous CTC, the credit has no family cap, offering more generous support for families across the District

The [DC Earned Income Tax Credit](#) helps provide financial relief to low and moderate-income workers by offering a cash boost and reducing income tax liability. The credit works by matching a portion of the federal credit. Emergency legislation passed in 2025 increased the match rate to 100%, allowing families additional tax relief and income.

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Celebrating differences: Raising children who respect and relate

From cultural backgrounds to sibling personalities, teaching children to celebrate differences starts at home.

BY PASCALE BRADY

Every family has its own rhythm. Some homes are loud and expressive. Others are quiet and reflective. Some value independence early. Others emphasize interdependence and closeness.

In the Washington area, many families carry more than one culture under one roof. Even when parents grew up in the same town, they often bring different expectations about discipline, communication and achievement.

Children notice these differences long before they are named. Research shows that children begin recognizing social differences as early as preschool age. The question is not whether they see difference, but what we teach them to do with it.

Celebrating differences begins at home—not through lecturing, but in how we live together every day.

Different Backgrounds, Shared Parenting Challenges

The culture we were raised in shapes how we parent. It influences how we view authority, how much independence

we expect, and how we respond to strong emotions. In some families, children are expected to speak up. In others, respect is shown through quiet listening.

Yet across cultures, parents face similar challenges:

- Children everywhere test limits.
- They seek attention.
- They resist bedtime.
- They argue with siblings.

Developmental research confirms these behaviors are part of normal growth.

Children's unconscious goals are universal. They all want to feel:

- Connected
- Capable
- Significant
- Courageous

How families help children reach those goals may look different, but the needs do not. Recognizing this can reduce judgment of ourselves and others.

There Is No Single “Right” Way

In a diverse community, it is easy to compare. One family allows more freedom. Another holds tighter structure. One prioritizes academic performance. Another emphasizes emotional expression. Healthy parenting is less about copying a style than finding our own values-based answers:

- Does this approach build mutual respect?
- Does it prepare my child to handle life responsibly?
- Does it support our long-term parenting goals?

Parenting styles that include warmth, structure, and consistency have been shown to be key predictors of positive outcomes. These qualities can exist in many cultural expressions. What matters is whether a family's approach fosters dignity and responsibility over time.

When parents feel secure in their values, they are less threatened by difference. They can stay curious instead of defensive.

Teaching Children to Respect Difference

Children are keen observers: they learn more by watching and experiencing than from lectures. If we want them to respect differences, we must model that respect daily.

Here are practical ways to do that:

1. Name Differences Calmly

If a child points out a difference, avoid shushing them. Respond simply and matter-of-factly. The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages open, age-appropriate conversations rather than “color evasion”.

2. Expand Their World

Read books with diverse characters. Share music, food, and traditions from various cultures. Common Sense Media offers curates lists for families.

3. Practice Perspective-Taking

Ask questions like, “How do you think that felt?” Perspective-taking builds empathy and social awareness.

4. Model Inclusive Behavior

Children notice who we invite into our lives. A diverse social circle communicates more than any speech.

5. Teach Courage, Not Bystanding

Help children practice speaking up kindly when someone is excluded. Organizations such as Responsive Classroom offer guidance for parents navigating these conversations.

These small, repeated actions build habits of respect.

Holding Differences Within the Family

Celebrating difference also applies inside the home. Siblings may have opposite temperaments. One child is cautious; another is bold. One thrives on routine; another resists it. Treating children fairly does not mean treating them identically: it means responding to who they are.

When children experience respect at home—when their individualities are honored, feelings are heard and strengths recognized—they are more likely to extend that respect outward. They learn that equality does not mean sameness. It means equal dignity.

What really matters

In times of public tension, parents may feel unsure how to address social differences. It can feel safer to avoid the topic. But silence often leaves children to draw their own conclusions.

Celebrating differences does not require political statements. It requires daily practice: respect in tone, curiosity in conversation, and steadiness in conflict.

Across cultures, parents want similar things. We want children who can cooperate, think critically, contribute, and treat others well. Those outcomes grow in homes where differences are acknowledged without fear.

The goal is not to erase what makes families distinct. It is to create homes strong enough to hold differences with confidence.

When children learn that differences can coexist with connection, they carry that lesson far beyond our front doors.

Pascale Brady, CPCC, PCC, MBA, is a Certified Parenting Educator who has been teaching parenting programs at PEP since 2005 and is currently vice president of PEP's Board. She is also The Challenge Coach: a certified life and business coach in private practice. For more information about PEP's parenting programs and resources, including PEP's free Family Resiliency Program, please visit PEP's website. See more from PEP on Instagram, Facebook and X



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A pediatrician's summer safety checklist every parent needs

From pool supervision to tick checks, here's how to protect your kids all season long — straight from a board-certified doctor.

DIPANWITA SAHA, MD

Summer is a season families look forward to all year: long days, warm weather and endless opportunities to be outdoors. But with that freedom comes responsibility, especially when around water safety. As a board-certified pediatrician at Kaiser Permanente, I see firsthand how quickly preventable accidents can happen. My goal is to help families enjoy summer with the right safety habits.

1. Start swim lessons early

Drowning is the leading cause of death of children ages 1-4. Research shows that teaching kids to swim early can help prevent drowning.

One of the most important messages I share with parents is that children can begin swimming lessons as early as 6 months old. Early exposure builds comfort, familiarity and foundational safety skills. Summer swim classes fill up quickly; fall and winter lessons are excellent options, and the wait lists are usually shorter.

Swim lessons at private companies can be pricey; check out swim classes offered by cities and counties for rates that often are lower.

For parents who have never learned to swim themselves, I emphasize that it's never too late. Many of the parents I work with immigrated from countries where swimming wasn't a priority or accessible. I tell them what I tell everyone: It's never too late to learn how to swim. I learned in my 30s! Learning together as a family can be empowering and fun.

2. Why a “designated watcher” saves lives

Whether you're at a community pool, a friend's backyard or a lake, the most important layer of protection is active supervision. Drowning is fast and silent and often occurs when adults assume someone else is watching the kids.

That's why every gathering near water needs a designated watcher: one adult whose only job is to keep eyes on the children in the water. Ideally, the designated watcher would not be drinking alcohol or looking at a phone. Closed-loop communication — explicitly stating who is responsible for which children — prevents dangerous assumptions.

And remember: Lifeguards are a backup, not a substitute, for parental supervision.

3. Flotation devices add a layer of safety

Life jackets and flotation devices add a layer of safety, especially for young or inexperienced swimmers. But they do not replace supervision. They should be used in addition to a designated watcher, not instead of one.

I also encourage parents to understand what real swim competence looks like. I don't ask children: "Do you know how to swim?" Instead, I ask: "If you accidentally ended up in deep water, could you tread water or float on your back for 10 minutes?" That's the true safety benchmark.

4. Teens need water safety reminders, too

We often think of toddlers when we talk about drowning, but teens are also at risk, especially when substances are involved. Teens need clear expectations: no alcohol, no drugs, and always swim with supervision or a buddy.

5. Beyond the pool: Other summer safety essentials

Tick and mosquito protection

Our region is endemic for Lyme disease, and summer hikes and backyard play increase exposure. The best protection includes:

- Light-colored, long-sleeved clothing
- Tick-specific repellents (not all insect repellents protect against ticks)
- Spraying clothing, hats and exposed skin
- Head-to-toe tick checks after outdoor activities
- Look in and behind the ears, in the groin area, behind the knees and under the arms. If you find a tick, remove it right away. Also remember to inspect pets, clothing and camping gear.

Ticks that transmit Lyme must be attached for 36 hours or more to pose a significant risk. The deer tick is the one we worry about most in the DMV. If you find a tick embedded, seek help removing it properly so the head doesn't remain in the skin.

Mosquitoes bring their own risks, including West Nile virus. Avoid areas with stagnant water, where mosquitoes breed, and use repellents consistently. Natural citronella-based products may help with mosquitoes but don't work well against ticks, so choose products based on what you're protecting against.



BIGSTOCK/MACSIM

Sun safety: Every day, even when overcast

Dermatologists recommend SPF 30 or higher, and pediatric dermatologists often prefer mineral sunscreens containing zinc oxide or titanium dioxide for children. Apply sunscreen about 30 minutes before going

outdoors – even on cloudy days – and reapply every 60-90 minutes, especially during water play or heavy sweating.

Sun-protective clothing helps but isn't enough on its own. And infants need extra caution: they should stay in the shade, wear hats and avoid direct sun exposure.

Try to limit sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Hydration: Water is good, electrolytes are better

Kids are active in the summer, and hydration needs vary based on heat, activity and environment. Water is fine, but electrolyte solutions without added sugar are even better. Many pre-made sports drinks contain unnecessary sugar, so check labels carefully.

The best indicator of hydration? Urine color. It should be clear or light yellow.

Helmets for bikes, scooters and more

Helmets are essential for bikes, scooters, hoverboards and skateboards, even for kids who feel confident. A helmet must fit well and be worn every time. Head injuries in kids can be devastating.

Neighborhood safety: Watch the roads

Summer means kids playing outside, often near driveways and streets. Just as with water, supervision matters. Designate an adult to keep an eye on children playing near roads.

Layered safety makes summer fun

Every strategy I've shared — swim lessons, designated watchers, flotation devices, sunscreen, hydration, helmets, insect protection — is part of what I call layers of safety. No single measure is perfect but combined, children will be protected from preventable summer-related injuries and health problems.

Dipanwita Saha, MD, is a board-certified pediatrician with the Mid-Atlantic Permanente Medical Group. She sees patients at the Kaiser Permanente Columbia Gateway Medical Center.



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Honor your favorite teacher with these meaningful books



BY MARY QUATTLEBAUM

From board books to YA, these reads remind us why great teachers matter.

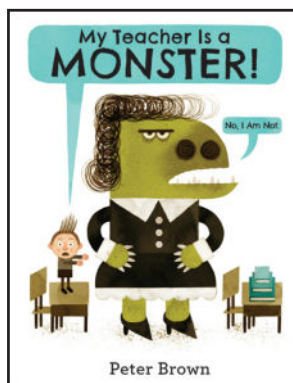
Teacher Appreciation Week is May 4-8 this year. But how can a mere one week be adequate time to recognize and express gratitude for teachers? As we know, time in the classroom is only the visible tip of all that teachers do. There's also preparing lesson plans, overseeing extracurriculars and trying to recognize the distinct needs and learning style of each student. Many adults can look back on a teacher whose influence was transformative. You might email or write that special teacher from your past—and do this with your children, encouraging them to do the same with a noteworthy teacher in their lives. From funny to inspirational, these books feature teachers who play a big part in a child's learning and growth.

Tots – Age 7

"My Teacher Is a Monster! (No, I Am Not.)"

Peter Brown
Little Brown, 2014, \$18.99

Through a playful mix of narrative and dialogue balloons, Caldecott Honoree Peter Brown explores the dynamics between student and teacher. Kids can experience teachers' limit setting as extremely unfair, failing to realize that learning cannot occur in a chaotic classroom. Mischievous Bobby perceives Ms. Kirby as a monster when she denies him recess after he breaks a rule. But an unexpected encounter at his favorite park reveals common interests and her appreciation of him. At the end of the outing, Ms. Kirby has been fully humanized, in Bobby's

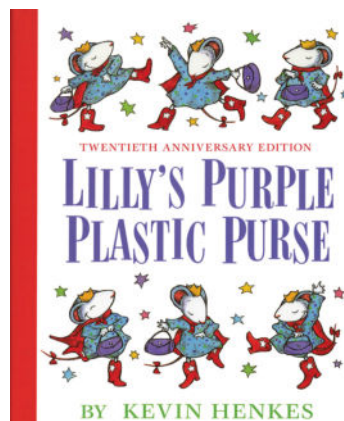


eyes. Young readers will enjoy charting her transformation in the illustrations from a hulking green creature to an ordinary woman.

"Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse"

By Kevin Henkes
HarperCollins, 1996, \$19.99

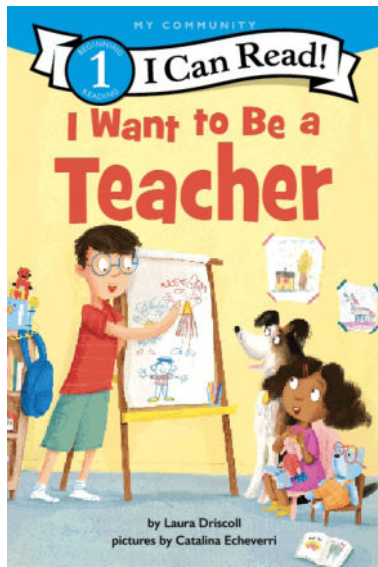
Published 30 years ago, this gently humorous, wise picture book is a classic for good reason. Without being preachy, it models kindness, understanding and boundaries on the part of the teacher, which then allows the young protagonist to experience remorse and learn self-control. Lilly is a big fan of school and of her teacher, Mr. Slinger. Her kicky red boots fairly vibrate with enthusiasm the day she brings her new purple plastic purse to class. So eager is she to show off her new possession, though, that she constantly interrupts, prompting Mr. Slinger to confiscate her purse until the end of the day. Feeling angry, Lilly draws a mean picture of Mr. Slinger. She soon regrets her action, though, when her purse is returned, with a thoughtful note from Mr. Slinger. Lilly feels "simply awful." Author/illustrator Kevin Henkes shows how Lilly makes amends by owning what she did and apologizing to her teacher.



"I Want to Be a Teacher"

By Laura Driscoll
Illustrated by Catalina Echeverri
HarperCollins, 2021, \$5.99

Youngsters will be amazed at all the different types of people and activities that revolve around teaching. And you don't even have to wait to be a grown-up to begin! In fact, this early reader opens with the child narrator, Noah, teaching new words to his baby sister. Readers also meet Noah's classroom teacher, gym teacher, art teacher and swim instructor. Mom's music teacher helps her to become a better tuba player. Even the family dog, Rocket, works with a trainer, who also teaches the kids how to teach their pup. This book reveals that teaching, in its many varieties, may be a fulfilling career path or volunteer opportunity.



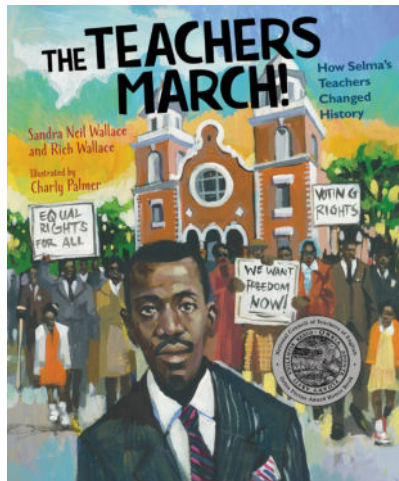
Preteens

"The Teachers March!"

By Sandra Neil Wallace and Rich Wallace
Illustrated by Charly Palmer
Calkins Creek, 2020, \$18.99

As well as imparting knowledge and skills, teachers can be important role models and change agents. This is certainly true of those involved with the January 1965

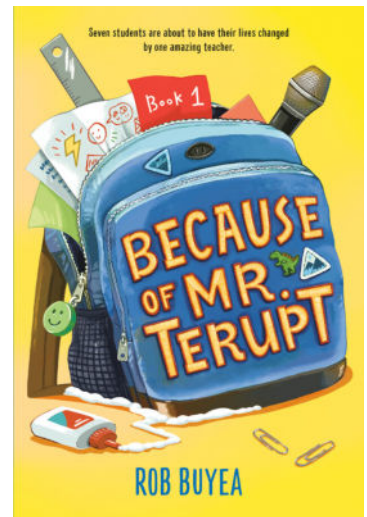
Selma Teachers' March, a major turning point in the civil rights movement. How and why was it organized and by whom? This compelling historical picture book answers those questions. Black Americans in the segregated South were often threatened with violence and arrest or subjected to unfair tests whenever they tried to register to vote. To protest this injustice, Reverend F.D. Reese, a minister and high school teacher in Selma, Alabama, decided to organize a teachers' march to the courthouse. Even though the teachers knew they could be jailed and/or fired, more than 100 showed up. They were turned away at the courthouse, forcibly, repeatedly. But their activism inspired their students to march, and other professional groups as well—barbers, beauticians, undertakers. Some were beaten and killed, others, like Reverend Reese, were the target of threats and bombs. But they persevered, and in August 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965.



"Because of Mr. Terupt"

By Rob Buyea
Delacorte, 2010, \$8.99

This instant classic, now available in paperback, is the first in a popular five-book series. It follows seven students over the course of their fifth grade year. They take turns narrating, and this shifting perspective and the short chapters propel the story and widen perspective. Each student is challenged and changed in a different, positive way by their teacher, Mr. Terupt. When a terrible accident threatens to derail their progress, how each responds reveals the depth of that change. Books two, three and four attend to these same students in sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Book five, "Because of Our Student Teacher," will be published in September. This time, one of the students, now grown, is in the role of teacher.

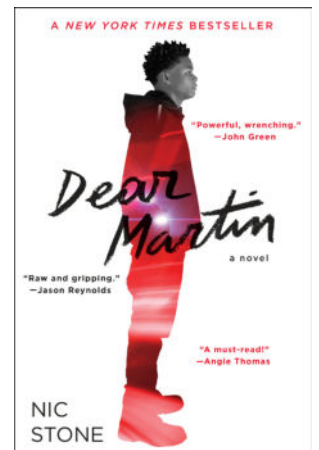


Teens

"Dear Martin"

By Nic Stone
Crown, 2018, \$12.99

A life-changing teacher might be a book or historic figure that deeply engages and challenges a young person. This is the case in Nic Stone's powerful debut novel, available in paperback. Interspersed throughout a fraught contemporary story about 17-year-old Justyce McAllister are letters he writes to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In them, he reflects on the words and example of the slain Civil Rights leader. They help him to clarify his own thinking as he questions the systemic racism, injustice and violence he experiences as a Black kid at his mostly white prep school and in the world. The book's thoughtful protagonist and unflinching exploration of the issues of young Black men earned it much acclaim. It has since become the first in a best-selling series, with the most recent title, "Dear Manny," published last year.



Mary Quattlebaum lives in Washington, DC, and is the author of 30 award-winning children's books, most recently "Queen Elizabeth II," an early reader biography. She teaches in the graduate program in writing for children at the Vermont College of Fine Arts, writes frequently for the *Washington Post* and is a popular school and conference speaker. For more information, visit maryquattlebaum.com.

THINGS TO DO

DMV festival fun all summer long

Plan your season around these festivals, all happening this summer in the DMV. No FOMO, just fireworks and fun.

BY SANYA BATHIA

IN THIS SECTION

- **Top Strawberry festivals near DC in 2026** 40
- **Step inside the Holodeck Experience at MCAAD** 42
- **Where to Take Your Grad to Celebrate** 44
- **Picture Perfect Memories** 46
- **DC Kids Events** 48



As DC starts to sizzle up, the area's festival scene comes to life. From foodie night markets to rave festivals, we are here to help you find the best events for this upcoming summer season.

Whether you're planning day trips with kids, scouting budget-friendly date nights or trying to hit as many America's 250th anniversary events as possible, this guide breaks down key summer festivals across the DMV: what they are, when they happen and how to make the most of them.

DMV Asian Night Market - Eileen Garnett Civic Space

This one is brand new and already buzzing. Neon District DMV is hosting monthly night markets in Annandale, Virginia, and the summer editions are the ones to hit. Stuffed to the brim with 30-plus food vendors serving Thai, Indonesian and Filipino street food under the starry night, plus live cultural performances and Thai kickboxing demos just a Metro ride from D.C.

- **Date:** May 23, June 27, July 25, Aug. 29
- **Location:** Eileen Garnett Civic Space, 7200 Columbia Pike
- **Good to know:** The market runs 3-9 p.m. and is great for bringing the family dog along with pet friendly stalls at the market, serving your dog pup cups all night long!

ViVa! Vienna! - Church Street

If you have not done ViVa! Vienna!, are you even from the DMV? This three-day Memorial Day weekend blowout takes over historic Vienna, VA, with two live music stages, 24 carnival rides, local vendors and enough fried food to fuel your entire summer. Mornings are for the little ones, think the Great Zucchini and the Vienna Singing Princesses, but once the sun dips, the tribute bands come out and the energy shifts. Disco fans, 80s lovers, Saturday night dancers: this one's for you.

- **Date:** May 23-25
- **Location:** 131 Church St. NE, Vienna, VA
- **Good to know:** Rides run until 10 p.m. Saturday and Sunday but shut down at 6 p.m. on Monday. There is also a Brewfest Beer Garden for the 21-and-older crowd. Admission and all entertainment is free.

Project GLOW – RFK Festival Grounds

If you tend to lean more on glow sticks than picnic blankets, DC's big electronic dance music weekend at RFK is your jam. The two-day festival brings major DJs and



PHOTO © TANIA HALUYON FOR PROJECT GLOW

producers to multiple outdoor stages, plus light installations, art and immersive visuals that run into the night. It's less stroller-friendly than some other picks, but a solid option for older teens and college-age kids.

- **Date:** May 30-31, 2026
- **Location:** 2500 Independence Ave. SE, Washington, DC
- **Good to know:** Expect to pay for tickets, food and drinks; build in transportation time and a meeting spot if you're chaperoning teens.



PHOTO © NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

National Gallery of Art Block Party

For one early-summer weekend, the National Gallery of Art turns its campus into an outdoor block party with a distinctly artsy twist. Visitors can picnic among sculptures, join drop-in dance workshops and try kid-friendly art projects inspired by 250 years of American creativity. Pop-up performances from D.C. area musicians keep the energy up while educators lead short, accessible tours inside the galleries.

- **Date:** June 6-7, 2026
- **Location:** 700 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC
- **Good to know:** The event is free and open to all ages; bring a blanket and snacks, and expect crowds around the most popular art stations.

CONTINUED...



PHOTO © NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART



PHOTO © TANIA HALUYON FOR PROJECT GLOW

Smithsonian Folklife Summer Festival

The Smithsonian 250th Summer Festival is taking over the country this year, creating a hands-on history playground, celebrating with a melting pot of culture, science and art. Families can rotate between live music, kid-friendly art making stations and interactive exhibits around the DMV tied to the Smithsonian's 21 museums.

- **Date:** June 18-July 12
- **Location:** Multiple locations across the DMV
- **Good to know:** The festival is free to attend; multiple events planned across multiple locations.

Great American State Fair

As part of DC250, the Mall will host a Great American State Fair, bringing tastes and traditions from around the country to one long green lawn. Families can wander from state-themed tents to cooking demos and sample regional specialties. Younger kids can collect stamps or prizes as they "travel" from state to state, turning the fair into a fun geography lesson.

- **Date:** June 25-July 10
- **Location:** National Mall, between Constitution and Independence avenues SW, Washington, DC
- **Good to know:** Entry is free; food and souvenirs cost extra, so consider setting a spending budget with kids ahead of time.

PHOTO COURTESY GIANT NATIONAL BARBECUE BATTLE



Giant National Capital Barbecue Battle - Pennsylvania Avenue

Show off your skills around the kids by grilling up a storm at DC's annual Giant National Capital Barbecue Battle. Learn from expert pitmasters, taste free samples and learn from local restaurants all while listening to stunning live music for a fun and satiating experience.

- **Date:** June 27-28
- **Location:** Historic Pennsylvania Ave. NW, 3rd to 7th streets, Washington, DC
- **Good to know:** Lines can run quite long; make sure to stay hydrated and wear lots of sunscreen.

Otakon – Walter E. Washington Convention Center

Otakon turns the convention center into a celebration of Asian pop culture, from anime to gaming. Fans can pack the halls in cosplay, line up for panels and workshops, and browse artist alleys full of prints, pins and one-of-a-kind merch. For teens and tweens, it's an all-weekend immersion in fandom with plenty of chances to meet content creators and fellow fans.

- **Date:** July 31-Aug. 2
- **Location:** 801 Allen Y. Lew Place NW, Washington, DC
- **Good to know:** You'll need badges for each day you attend;

crowds can be intense, so plan breaks outside and set clear meetup points if you're splitting up.

Great American Farmers Market

Also part of DC250, during National Farmers Market Week, the Great American Farmers Market will host more than 80 vendors nationwide, showcasing fresh produce, artisan goods and agricultural innovation. Daily themes span America's 250th anniversary, health and wellness, community, wildfire prevention, natural beauty and a final tribute to farmers.

- **Date:** Aug. 3-8
- **Location:** 1400 Independence Ave. SW., Washington, DC
- **Good to know:** Opening day features a ribbon cutting and live entertainment.

DCBX Latin Dance Festival

This jam packed festival celebrates its 18th anniversary in DC this Summer by going all out. Let your hair down and whip out your best dancing shoes for a plethora of Latin dance workshops, amazing live music, wellness workshops and flavorful food stands. Perfect for a mom's weekend filled with dancing or young adults ready to work on their yoga.

- **Date:** Aug. 20-24
- **Location:** TBD
- **Good to know:** Dance workshops can be back-to-back, be prepared to be on your feet all day long.

DC JazzFest at The Wharf

Labor Day weekend belongs to DC JazzFest, which is filled with waterfront stages, club shows and educational events. Families can spread out along Wharf Street for free outdoor sets, then wander to food stalls or ice cream between performances.

- **Date:** Sept. 5-6
- **Location:** 101 District Square SW, Washington, DC
- **Good to know:** Many outdoor performances along the promenade are free, but premium seating and some indoor shows require tickets.

H Street

DC's biggest block party is back for its 21st year and this time, it's better than ever. Twelve blocks of H Street NE shut down from noon to 7 p.m. with live music, food trucks, local art vendors, dance battles and nonstop energy. Families, this one's for you, the kids fun zone brings a rock climbing wall, moon bounces, slides and a kids' performance stage. Strollers welcome, vibes mandatory.

- **Date:** Sept. 19
- **Location:** H Street NE (near northeast neighborhood), Washington, DC
- **Good to know:** The festival pulls 100,000-plus people, so showing up at noon beats the mid-afternoon crush. Bring cash and sunscreen.



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Top Strawberry festivals near DC in 2026

Strawberry season approaches once again, and as those red berries bloom, the festivals that celebrate them blossom, too. Here's a brimming basket of strawberry celebrations for anyone in the DMV to enjoy.

In DC

Moon Valley Strawberry Festival

- **Where to Be:** Moon Valley Farm, 9700 Gravel Hill Road, Woodsboro, MD
- **When to Go:** May 9, 16 and 23
- **What to Know:** If you want to pick your own strawberries, Moon Valley is a place to do it, while also having a chance to tour its farm and grab a bite to eat at one of the visiting food trucks there to fuel your farmland adventure.

Weber's Cider Mill Strawberry Festival

- **Where to Be:** Weber's Cider Mill Farm, 2526 Proctor Lane, Parkville, MD
- **When to Go:** May 30-31
- **What to Know:** Hosted at the oldest operating cider mill in Maryland, this farm has been worked by four generations of Webers, though the Strawberry Festival is a new addition within the last decade to their traditions. Keep an eye out on their social media and website for more details.

Sandy Spring Museum Strawberry Festival

- **Where to Be:** Sandy Spring Museum, 17901 Bentley Road, Sandy Spring, MD

- **When to Go:** June 6
- **What to Know:** Admission is ticketed and limited to 5,000 visitors due to overcrowding in previous years – this is a big favorite in Montgomery County, not least for the yummy strawberry shortcake! Admission price includes access to the petting zoo, the reptile show, all hands-on activities hosted by the museum and its visiting folk artists and more.

35rd Annual Old-Fashioned Strawberry Festival

- **Where to Be:** Gamber & Community Fire Company Fairgrounds, 3838 Niner Road, Finksburg, MD
- **When to Go:** June 6
- **What to Know:** Beyond the traditional festival activities and strawberry delights, this festival also hosts a crafts market where vendors will offer handmade items for perusal and purchase.

Cape St. Claire Strawberry Festival

- **Where to Be:** 223 River Bay Road, Annapolis, MD
- **When to Go:** June 6-7
- **What to Know:** A free festival with over 60 years of history. Some activities do require tickets, which go for \$1 apiece. The day begins with a parade, followed by all the festival classics – a petting zoo, face painting, moon bounces, an obstacle course and more.

Virginia Strawberry Festivals

PHOTO COURTESY MESSICK'S FARM MARKET



Messick's 2026 Strawberry Festival

- **Where to Be:** Messick's Farm Market, 6025 Catlett Road, Bealeton, VA
- **When to Go:** Saturdays-Sundays from May 2-17; and Saturday-Monday, May 23-25
- **What to Know:** Admission will include all favorite festival activities, such as hayrides, the barrel train, a candy launch and much more. Strawberry pickin' will also be open.

Lincoln Strawberry Festival

- **Where to Be:** Wegmeyer Farms, 18451 Taylor Road, Hamilton, VA
- **When to Go:** May 15-17
- **What to Know:** From sticky pie-eating contests to joyful tractor rides through the fields, there's something for everyone. Chesapeake Charters has once again donated buses for community transportation. Buses will run continuously all day, stopping at the 18+ designated Berry Bus Stops.

Strawberry Jubilee Fest

- **Where to Be:** Great Country Farms, 34345 Snickersville Turnpike, Bluemont, VA
- **When to Go:** May 23-24 and May 30-31
- **What to Know:** This two-weekend festival includes a children's parade, an infant crawling race for a prize, an egg toss, a pie-eating contest and more.

Ashland Strawberry Faire

- **Where to Be:** Randolph-Macon College, 500 Henry St., Ashland, VA
- **When to Go:** June 6
- **What to Know:** Over 300 arts vendors will be in attendance at this massive community festival, which can be navigated via trolley. Two stages of performances, a kids zone full of activities, a pet pageant and more are sure to make it a worthwhile visit.



Strawberry Festival

May 2 – 25 🍓 **10am–5pm**
Saturday & Sunday, + Monday, May 25

🍓 Strawberry Pickin'

🍓 Hayrides

🍓 Barrel Train

🍓 Petting Zoo

🍓 Zipline

🍓 Candy Cannon

🍓 Strawberry Treats

🍓 Kid's Tattoos

Admission:

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Free: Ages 3 and Under
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MAY 1 - 31, 2026

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Step inside the Holodeck Experience

This immersive 360-degree attraction in downtown DC lets families step into inspiring American Dream stories through cutting-edge technology.

BY JENNA DOLCH

Looking for a DC attraction that feels completely different from the typical museum visit? The Holodeck Experience at the Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream (MCAAD) invites families to step inside powerful stories, not just watch them.



PHOTO BY IC IMAGEWORKS

Located just blocks from the White House, this immersive experience surrounds visitors with floor-to-ceiling digital visuals, cinematic sound and dynamic storytelling. Instead of sitting in rows facing a screen, you stand within a 360-degree environment where the story unfolds around you.

For families with older kids, especially ages 8 and up, it's a memorable way to combine technology, inspiration and conversation in one compact, high-impact outing.

What is the Holodeck Experience?

The Holodeck Experience takes place inside the Kenneth C. Griffin Holodeck, a specially designed immersive theater that uses massive LED walls and spatial audio to fully surround visitors.

Over approximately 35 minutes, families journey through three distinct American Dream stories. Each segment blends animation, real-world footage and artistic visuals to highlight themes like perseverance, innovation, mentorship and ambition.

PHOTO BY IC IMAGEWORKS



What makes it unique:

- 360-degree visuals that move and shift around you
- Immersive sound design that enhances emotional moments
- A standing, walk-in environment rather than traditional seating
- A narrative format that encourages reflection and discussion

The result feels part cinematic experience, part interactive art installation and part inspirational storytelling.

Why it's great for families

The Holodeck Experience isn't just visually impressive; it's conversation-starting.

Parents often find that the stories spark meaningful discussions about goals, overcoming challenges and what the "American Dream" means to their own family. Because the experience highlights real people and relatable journeys, kids can connect to the themes in personal ways.

It's especially appealing for:

- Tech-curious kids who love immersive environments
- Tweens and teens who prefer dynamic visuals over traditional exhibits
- Families looking for an indoor attraction near major DC landmarks
- Parents who want enrichment without overwhelming younger children

At just 35 minutes, it's short enough to hold attention spans but powerful enough to leave an impression.

What you can do beyond the Holodeck

One of the biggest perks for families? The Holodeck is part of the broader American Dream Experience at MCAAD.

After your timed session, you can explore:

- Interactive exhibits focused on health, finance, education and innovation
- Hands-on displays that encourage goal-setting and future thinking
- Engaging multimedia installations throughout the center

This makes it easy to turn your visit into a half-day outing. Pair it with lunch nearby and you've got a well-rounded downtown adventure.

Tips for planning your visit

- **Book ahead.** Timed tickets are required, and late arrivals may not be admitted. Arrive at least 10-15 minutes early.
- **Consider sensory needs.** The experience includes shifting lights, immersive audio and dramatic visuals. Families with sensory-sensitive children may want to preview details or contact the center in advance.
- **Best for ages 8 and up.** While younger children may enjoy the visuals, the storytelling and themes resonate most with older elementary students, tweens and teens.
- **Make it part of a DC day.** Its central location near the White House makes it easy to combine with sightseeing.

Visit the Holodeck Experience

- **Address:** 1503 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC
- **Dates/Hours:** Timed sessions daily; experience runs approximately 35 minutes per showtime
- **Cost:** \$15 per person
- **Contact:** info@mcaad.org

Why families should add it to their DC list

Washington, DC is full of incredible museums, but not many attractions let you feel like you're inside the story.

The Holodeck Experience stands out because it blends cutting-edge technology with heart. It's not overwhelming or overly long. It's not just educational; it's immersive, emotional and engaging in a way that today's digital-native kids instantly understand.

For families looking to inspire curiosity, spark meaningful conversations and experience something new together, this attraction delivers.

Where to take your grad to celebrate

Plan the perfect graduation celebration in Washington, DC, with this curated list of venues—from budget-friendly rental spaces and scenic outdoor parks to upscale locations for a more elevated send-off.

BY JACQUELINE KIM

As graduation season approaches, it's prime time to begin looking into top venue spots to host your senior's graduation party. From rentable studios and public outdoor areas to higher end venues, here is our top list of locations in DC to coordinate your perfect graduation party to send your graduate off with a bang!

Rentable venues

Brazilian American Cultural Center

The Brazilian American Cultural Center is a versatile rental space that can accommodate a wide range of events and parties, including birthdays, networking events, pop-up events



PHOTO © BRAZILIAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER

and graduation parties. Located in the heart of DC, it offers ample indoor and outdoor space. It's open and bright with lots of windows, mirrored walls and hard wood floors. The approximately 800 square feet of enclosed space includes appliances such as an on-site cooler, a sink area, a toaster oven, a microwave and a bathroom.

- **Location:** 3001 Sherman Ave. NW, Washington, DC
- **Pricing:** ~\$48-55/hour (1.5 hour minimum)
- **Guest accommodations:** 40 people

Divino Ristorante — Enoteca

Divino Ristorante is an Italian restaurant with private event bookings located in The Glover Park Hotel in Georgetown. Its

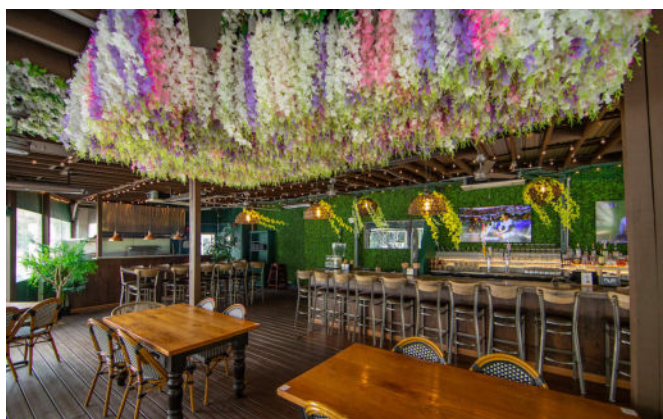


PHOTO © DIVINO RISTORANTE(1)

high ceilings, dark turquoise chairs and moody atmosphere offer an intimate and sophisticated event space that accommodates around 100 guests with approximately 3,000 square feet of space. It features an open kitchen for guests to witness preparation of handmade pasta by expert chefs as well as an outdoor space for event versatility.

- **Location:** 2505 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Washington, DC
- **Pricing:** ~\$50/hour (three hour minimum)
- **Guest accommodations:** 120 people

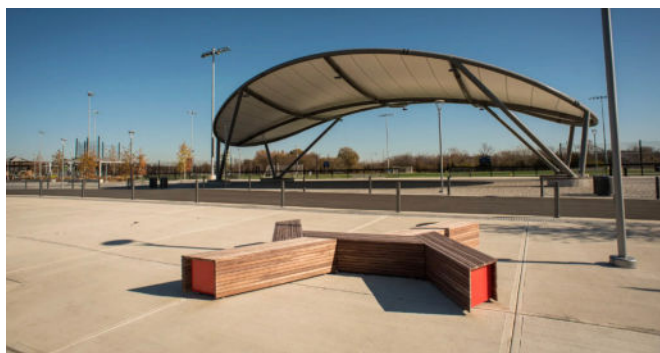


PHOTO © EVENTS DC

Outdoor spaces

Celebration Pavilion — The Fields at RFK Campus

The Celebration Pavilion is an open space available for event rentals of all kinds, including graduation parties. The 3,000 square foot pavilion is adjacent to Field 2a that is also available for an additional booking price. Hosts are permitted to bring furniture or may rent equipment from Go Play for additional prices. Food vendors and trucks are also permitted for an additional \$150 fee per vendor. The open turf fields offer ample space for large events and parties and stand as a great option for an outdoor graduation party. You must submit an event form application at least two weeks in advance of your event.

- **Location:** The Fields at RFK Campus, 401 50th St. NE, Washington, DC
- **Pricing:** \$75/hour (with a valid DC photo ID) or \$150/hour (Non-DC rate)
- **Guest accommodation:** up to 99 guests

Rock Creek Park — Group Picnic Areas

From April 1-Nov. 30, the eight Rock Creek Park group picnic areas will be available for advanced booking for events. Enjoy the historical and cultural aspects of the site while being immersed in nature. The site does not permit decorations or balloons to be hung from any natural or manmade structures. Rock Creek Park also only operates during daylight hours and will close promptly at 7 p.m. All picnic sites will be equipped with picnic tables while some also have fireplaces. Restroom facilities are not available at all sites.

- **Location:** Rock Creek Park Nature Center and Planetarium, 5200 Glover Road NW, Washington, DC
- **Pricing:** \$65/half day and \$130/full day
- **Guest accommodation:** 75 people per site

Higher end

Station 4

Station 4 is a modern American restaurant and lounge available for booking for events and parties. They have four booking options: Entire Venue (270 seats/350 standing, around \$68 per person), Semi Private Section (180 seats/250 standing, around \$68 per person), Wine Rack Station (50 seats/55 standing, around \$80 per person) and Patio (90 seats/100 standing, around \$68 per person).

- **Location:** 1101 4th St. SW, Washington, DC
- **Pricing:** ~\$68 per person
- **Guest accommodations:** Up to 300 guests, depending on booking



PHOTO © EMILYALYSSAPHOTOGRAPHY44

North Hall (Eastern Market)

North Hall is a historical venue space located on Capitol Hill with several event spaces available for booking: North Hall (4,000 square feet of indoor space), North Hall Plaza (3,500 square feet of outdoor space), Catering Plaza (800 square feet of outdoor space) and Bays (200 square feet of covered outdoor space). North Hall's vaulted ceilings and classic DC architecture make it a perfect photo spot and a visually striking venue for graduation celebrations.

- **Location:** 225 7th St. SE, Washington, DC
- **Pricing:** \$1,800-\$5,400 flat rate (price varies by day and type of event)
- **Guest accommodations:** Around 400 people (standing), 230 people (seated banquet style)



PHOTO © EMILYALYSSAPHOTOGRAPHY44

Picture perfect memories

From editorial-style senior sessions to classic cap-and-gown portraits, these DC-area photographers help grads celebrate this milestone in style.

BY JACQUELINE KIM

Graduation is more than just a ceremony; it's a milestone worth capturing. Whether you're looking for iconic DC backdrops or something more natural and candid, the right photographer can make these moments feel timeless.

Washington Parent Picks

Alexia Ballantine Photography

Alexia Ballantine Photography is known for bright, polished portraits that feel both natural and elevated. Her sessions often blend classic graduation shots with more candid, personality-driven moments, making them perfect for seniors who want a mix of timeless and modern styles.

- **Location:** Washington, DC, Northern Virginia and Maryland
- **Contact:** alexia@alexiaBallantinephotography.com

Tips for families

- Bring cap, gown, cords and any honor stoles to capture the full graduation look.
- Pack a second outfit (like a dress or casual look) for more variety beyond cap-and-gown shots.
- Schedule around golden hour for soft, flattering light on campus or outdoor locations.

Danielle Sara Photography

Danielle Sara Photography offers a soft, light-filled style that works beautifully for graduation portraits. Her work leans into natural posing and authentic expressions, creating photos that feel relaxed but still polished.

- **Location:** Washington, DC, Northern Virginia and Maryland
- **Contact:** (917) 689-3117

Tips for families

- Keep outfits simple and true to your grad's style for natural, authentic photos.
- Bring props like a diploma cover, college merch or future school gear.
- Arrive early to fix hair, adjust the cap/gown and ease into the session comfortably.

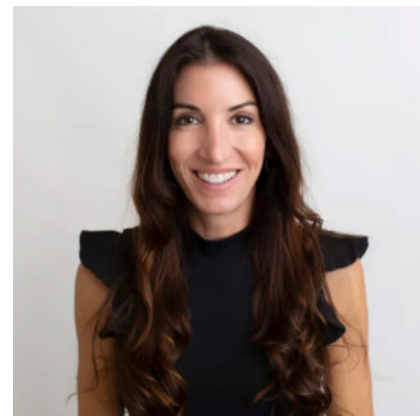
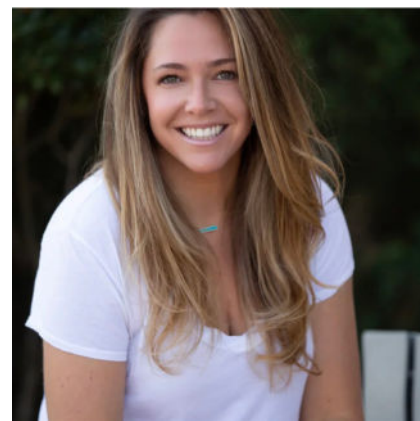


PHOTO © IMAGERY BY ERIN

PHOTOS © DIVINO RISTORANTE(1)

More top graduation photographers in the DC area

Imagery by Erin

Imagery by Erin specializes in light-filled, natural graduation portraits across Washington, DC, Northern Virginia and Maryland. Sessions are typically around 45 minutes and include a style guide, a gallery of images to choose from and the option to shoot at iconic DC locations like the Jefferson Memorial or on your grad's school campus.

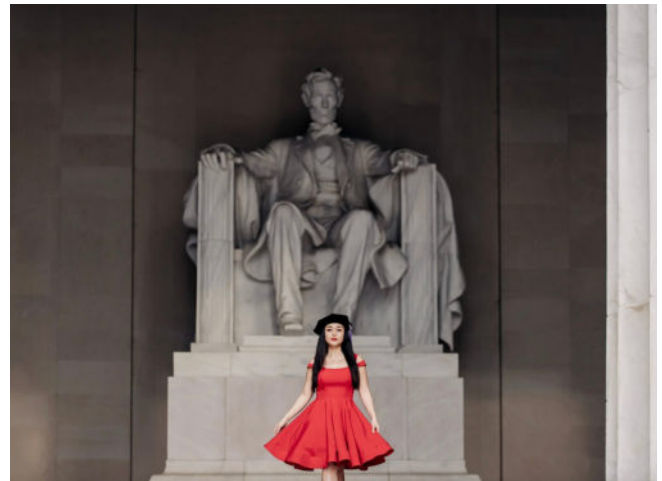
- Location: Washington, DC, Northern Virginia and Maryland
- Contact: erin@imagerybyerin.com

Tips for families

- Sessions include prep guidance, which helps students feel confident going in.
- Great option if you want classic DC landmark photos (monuments, their school's campus, etc.)
- Sessions can be extended to include multiple locations or group shots.



PHOTO © D'CORZO PHOTOGRAPHY



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D'Corzo Photography

D'Corzo Photography offers fine art-inspired graduation portraits with a polished, elevated feel, often shot at iconic DC locations like the National Mall or Jefferson Memorial. Sessions are customized to each graduate, with guidance on locations, outfits and timing to create a mix of posed, candid and story-driven images.

- **Location:** Serving Washington, DC, Northern Virginia and Maryland
- **Contact:** Inquiry form via website

Tips for families

- Sessions typically range from \$550 to \$900 depending on package and length.
- Great option if you want iconic DC backdrops like monuments or Capitol Hill.
- Photographer helps plan locations and timing for the best lighting and overall look.



PHOTOS © DIVINO RISTORANTE(1)

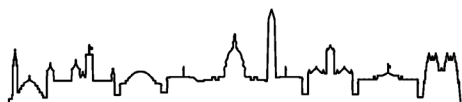
Angelika Johns Photography

Angelika Johns Photography offers stylish, emotive graduation portraits with a polished, editorial feel. Based in Washington, DC, her work blends candid moments with guided posing, often using iconic city locations like Georgetown to create timeless, elevated images.

- **Location:** Washington, DC
- **Contact:** hello@angelikajohns.com

Tips for families

- Great choice if you want a more editorial, magazine-style look.
- Sessions often incorporate iconic DC backdrops for a classic feel.
- Photographer provides guidance to help clients feel comfortable and natural on camera. (price varies by day and type of event)



DC EVENTS MAY 2026

Messick's
Farm Market
Strawberry
Festival



Hershey Super Sweet Adventure

Every Monday and Thursday-Sunday in May. Step into a whimsical, candy-filled world as this interactive, family-friendly experience makes its East Coast debut at Tysons Corner Center. Families can explore hands-on games, multi-sensory activities and playful experiences celebrating favorite Hershey treats. Discover the magic behind Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, Hershey's Kisses, Twizzlers Twists and Jolly Rancher candies, plus enjoy new features like a Bubble Yum Bubble Gum activation and a grand finale where guests can create a personalized Hershey's Milk Chocolate bar wrapper with a selfie. Designed for all ages, this immersive adventure blends fun, creativity and sweet memories in one unforgettable outing. Tickets start at \$19.99 per person.

■ **Location:** Tysons Corner Center, 1961 Chain Bridge Road, Tysons, VA

"Aesop's Fables"

May 1-24. "Aesop's Fables" is a lively theatrical adventure that brings classic stories to life through humor and imagination. A troupe of traveling storytellers retells beloved tales including "The Tortoise and the Hare," "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" and "The Lion and the Mouse." Each story shares lessons about patience, honesty and kindness, creating a fun and meaningful experience for young audiences.

■ **Location:** Adventure Theatre, 7300 MacArthur Blvd., Glen Echo, MD



Maryland Show

May 1-31. Celebrate Maryland with original artwork in this featured gallery show, highlighting local artists and themes inspired by Maryland. An opening reception takes place on Sunday, May 3, from 2-5 p.m. Gallery hours are Wednesday 11 a.m.-3 p.m., and Thursday-Sunday 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Admission is free.

■ **Location:** Artists Gallery, 8197 Main St., Ellicott City, MD

Barracks Row Main Street's Unofficial Star Wars Weekend

May 1-3. The Force is strong on 8th Street SE as Barracks Row Main Street brings back its Unofficial Star Wars Weekend—a lively, family-friendly celebration packed with immersive experiences, themed entertainment and activities for all ages. Enjoy cosplay, live performances, interactive lightsaber training, themed food and drinks, and a dedicated kids' zone with games and crafts. Highlights include appearances by the Galactic Empire Band, costume contests, Jedi training sessions, movie screenings and unique pop-up experiences.

■ **Location:** 8th Street SE, Washington, DC



Strawberry Festival at Messick's Farm Market

May 2-25. Celebrate strawberry season at this annual festival packed with family favorites. Admission includes activities such as hayrides, the barrel train, a candy launch and more. Strawberry picking will also be open for those ready to gather their own fresh berries. The festival runs on weekends from May 2-17, plus May 23-25 (including Memorial Day Monday), with activities throughout the day.

■ **Location:** Messick's Farm Market, 6025 Catlett Road, Bealeton, VA

Berwyn Heights Day 2026

May 2. Celebrate community spirit at this annual parade and festival hosted by the town of Berwyn Heights and the Recreation Commission. The day includes a 5K Fun Run, a free pancake breakfast, a senior bake sale, a parade along Pontiac Street and a festival at Sports Park.

■ **Location:** 5700 Berwyn Road, Berwyn Heights, MD

Around the World Embassy Tour

May 2. Participants can travel the world as they experience the food, art, dance, fashion and music of different countries. In the past, visitors have been treated to karate demonstrations, sari wrapping lessons, dance performances and more. This free event invites families to explore cultures from across the globe in one day.

■ **Location:** Various embassies along Embassy Row and Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC

May the 4th Family Fun Parade (All ages)

May 4. Celebrate Star Wars Day with a pet-friendly, family-themed parade through downtown Ellicott City. The parade

begins at the Log House and ends at the B&O Ellicott City Station Museum. Stop at participating stores along the way to collect raffle tickets for a chance to win prizes. After the parade, enjoy light refreshments at the Admiral Ackbar snack bar and take part in a costume contest. Registration is required.

■ **Location:** Thomas Isaac Log Cabin, 8394 Main St., Ellicott City, MD



Virginia Renaissance Faire

May 9-June 7, Saturdays-Sundays. Step into a world of revelry at the Virginia Renaissance Faire, held over five spring weekends at Lake Anna Winery. Wander through Staffordshire Village's lively marketplace filled with unique goods and services, and enjoy classic festival eats like turkey legs, funnel cakes, gyros and more.

■ **Location:** 5621 Courthouse Road, Spotsylvania, VA

Cirque de Paris by Anouchka Bouglione

May 14-24. Step under the big top for an all-new spectacle featuring 90 minutes of high-energy entertainment from Europe's finest circus artists. Expect BMX trial riders, skilled jugglers, aerialists, acrobats and comedic clowns, all woven into a show rooted in French circus tradition. With multiple showtimes across the weekend, families can pick the experience that fits their schedule. Children 2 and under are free, and special family packages are available online.

■ **Location:** Dulles Town Center, 21100 Dulles Town Circle, Sterling, VA

McLean Day at Lewinsville Park

May 15-16. McLean's biggest annual festival returns with something for everyone—live music, carnival rides, gourmet food trucks, a beer and wine garden, games, a magician, a petting zoo, and more than 100 exhibitors. The event draws over 10,000 attendees each year. Enjoy rides and games on Friday evening, with full festival activities continuing Saturday. Ride tickets are available for purchase online and onsite. Free admission.

Location: Lewinsville Park, 1659 Chain Bridge Road, McLean, VA



CONTINUED...



DC EVENTS MAY 2026



Freedom Flows Festival

May 30. A family-friendly event celebrating the theme “Freedom Flows Through Us.” The day highlights the Shenandoah River’s role in commerce, movement and independence through children’s games, demonstrations, interactive exhibits and local food and artisan vendors. It’s about connecting people to place, honoring the stories that shaped Warren County, and inviting the next generation to see themselves as part of the nation’s ongoing story.

■ **Location:** Eastham Park, 850 Luray Ave., Front Royal, VA

Sesame Street Live!: “Elmo’s Got the Moves”

June 5. Make unforgettable memories with your little ones at “Elmo’s Got the Moves,” the all-new Sesame Street Live show. This exciting experience brings Elmo and his Sesame Street friends to the stage with singing and dancing to favorite songs like “Sunny Days,” “Elmo’s Got the Moves,” and “Letter of the Day.” Families will



laugh, learn and play together in a heartwarming celebration that they’ll treasure long after the final song.

■ **Location:** Capital One Hall, 7750 Capital One Tower Road, Tysons, VA

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by Lisa McClelland • August 21, 2024 • @lisa.mcclelland
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