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Learning Centers

TLC

Toddler (18-36 months) Autism Evaluations at TLC - The Treatment and Learning Centers

TLC offers a specialized autism diagnostic program to help families get answers faster. We understand that many parents face long wait times when seeking evaluations and support for their younger children. Our new program is designed to connect children to neurodiversity-affirming early intervention services sooner.

Expert Assessments

TLC's interdisciplinary team of Psychologists & Speech-Language Pathologists collaboratively conduct evaluations using the ADOS-2, a gold-standard tool for observing behaviors related to autism. Combined with a child's social history and developmental impact, this assessment helps determine if they meet DSM-5 diagnostic criteria.

- Comprehensive and evidence-based
- Collaborative expert evaluation
- Faster access to early intervention

Comprehensive Autism Assessments at TLC

Includes occupational therapy screenings to assess sensory and motor needs. Plus, our Family Hearing Center provides specialized testing for children with hearing concerns.

TLC's Testing, Tutoring, and Counseling Department

We provide psychoeducational assessments throughout the lifespan, including psychoeducational evaluations, neuropsychological evaluations, and autism diagnostic evaluations for older children and adults. This new interdisciplinary collaboration will allow for a more streamlined autism diagnostic assessment of younger children (18-36 months). With this earlier identification comes customized recommendations to support each child and improve access to early intervention therapy services.

Signs of Autism May Include:

- Not responding to name.
- Limited eye contact.
- Not speaking as much or in the same way as peers.
- Not initiating play.
- Limited pointing or showing items of interest to others, or difficulty shifting attention to others' interests
- Repetitive interests or behaviors.
- Difficulty with changes in routine.
- Sensory sensitivities (sound, textures, touch, flavors).

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BACK TO SCHOOL BONANZA

WASHINGTON Parent

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ON THE COVER

It's Back to School time!

3 THINGS TO KNOW THIS MONTH



DAVID ARKIN, EDITOR

Three ways to beat the end-of-summer blues

Enjoy a little more summer fun before back-to-school readiness begins.

The last few weeks before school bells ring don't have to feel like a countdown to homework and early bedtimes. This August, the DMV is serving up three very different ways to soak up what's left of summer — one for families chasing the freshest kicks, one for anyone who's ever wanted to watch the sky fill with giant glowing balloons and one for the fast-paced families who love a bit of adrenaline. Here's where to be before the backpacks come out.

Sneaker Con Washington, DC

The self-proclaimed "Greatest Sneaker Show on Earth" is back in the District for a full weekend of buying, selling, and trading. Expect 100,000+ sneakers and collectibles from 200+ vendors — Jordans, Travis Scotts, SBs, vintage tees, and more — plus free on-site authentication so buyers can trade with confidence. The Cash Out Crew will be making real-time cash offers for anyone looking to clear out a closet, and Streetwear Alley, stage games, giveaways, and surprise guest appearances round out the weekend. It's a hit with tween and teen sneaker collectors, and a solid excuse for a family outing downtown before the school year starts.

■ **Aug. 8-9**, Walter E. Washington Convention Center, 801 Allen Y. Lew Place NW, Washington, DC



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Freedom 250 Grand Prix of Washington, DC

History is being made on the National Mall: this is the first-ever NTT INDYCAR SERIES race held in the nation's capital, and it's part of the official America's 250th anniversary celebration. Current INDYCAR stars will race a 1.7-mile, seven-turn street circuit that winds past the Washington Monument, U.S. Capitol, and National Archives — a course unlike anything the series has run before. Saturday brings an IROC exhibition featuring racing legends like Jeff Gordon and Helio Castroneves in identical vintage Firebirds, plus a free autograph session. Sunday is race day, broadcast live on FOX. General admission is free, with kids' zones planned to feature interactive Smithsonian exhibits and racing simulators — a rare chance for young motorsports fans to get this close to the action.

■ **Aug. 22-23**, 1.7-mile street circuit around the National Mall, Washington, DC



BIGSTOCK/IONGDO



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DC Hot Air Balloon Festival

Rosecroft Raceway lights up for two nights of giant hot air balloons, live music, food trucks, and family-friendly fun — with tethered hot air balloon rides available for anyone ready to check "float above the DMV" off the bucket list (rides sold on-site during the event only). Each night builds to a 9 p.m. Balloon Glow & Laser Light Show, with giant glowing balloons synced to a high-energy soundtrack and a countdown that gets the whole crowd involved. A portion of proceeds benefits local special needs organizations.

■ **5-10 p.m. Aug. 14-15**, Rosecroft Raceway, 6336 Rosecroft Drive, Fort Washington, MD

EDUCATION

Get your little star ready for the spotlight

Whether your child is ready for the spotlight or working up the courage to try, these DMV theater programs offer a welcoming stage for every kind of kid.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

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BIGSTOCK/NICOLETA IONESCU



Is your child ready for the spotlight or suffering from stage fright? Acting classes can be a great way to help children break out of their shell or explore new talents. Read up on some of the best theatre classes in the DMV.

WASHINGTON, DC

The Theatre Lab

This award-winning theatre program encourages students to take risks and develop their creative spirits. The Theatre Lab offers several school year and summer courses to help students develop confidence and acting skills. This organization was a finalist for Washington Parent Picks best DC day camps.

- **Address:** 900 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC
- **Best ages:** 8-16
- **Cost expectation:** Prices vary based on level and type of production
- **Tip:** Consider taking your child to an adult production at the Lab so they can get a feel for the experience.

The Keegan Theatre

An imaginative way for young kids to develop creative skills and social skills. Activities include interactive events surrounding featured Keegan plays and immersive play production activities.

- **Address:** 1742 Church St. NW, Washington, DC
- **Best ages:** 6-10
- **Cost expectation:** Up to \$20 for single day events, \$500 per week of summer camp
- **Tip:** See if Keegan has any programs at your child's school.

MARYLAND

Imagination Stage

Take your kids inside their favorite stories at Imagination Stage. While younger kids can take part in educational musical production courses, older students can explore social issues in the Theater for Change program. Imagination Stage was the winner of Washington Parent Picks best theater and performance venues.

- **Address:** 4908 Auburn Avenue, Bethesda
- **Best ages:** 6 and up
- **Cost expectation:** Prices vary based on program
- **Tip:** Use Theater for Change as an opportunity to discuss and learn about your child's social and political value system.

Drama Learning Center

Providing theater education for nearly 40 years, the Drama Learning Center offers programs that allow students to learn about all aspects of the production process.

- **Address:** 9130 Red Branch Road Suite 1, Columbia
- **Best ages:** 4-18
- **Cost expectation:** \$300-\$700 for younger kids, \$810-\$875 for teen programs
- **Tip:** Consider starting with a shorter "bootcamp" program to help your kids get a feel for the stage before diving into a full production.

CONTINUED...

EDUCATION

VIRGINIA

Traveling Players

A great place to develop a variety of acting skills, Traveling Players' curriculum encompasses character creation, stage combat, improv, comedy and play reading. Classes are offered in a variety of formats from traditional performance to Dungeons & Dragons Improv.

- **Address:** 1961 Chain Bridge Road, Tysons
- **Best ages:** 4 and up
- **Cost expectation:** Prices vary based on program type
- **Tip:** Improv can help kids develop social skills and think on their feet.

Lopez Studios

With various levels and focuses, Lopez Studios is a great location for students looking to develop specific skills or dive into more niche theatrical interests. Students from Lopez Studios have gone on to perform in Off-Broadway plays and in Netflix series.

- **Address:** 11425 Isaac Newton Square, Reston
- **Best ages:** 4 and up
- **Cost expectation:** \$425 per month
- **Tip:** Explore the different class types to see what your child might be interested in.

Northern Virginia Performing Arts

Teaching a number of skills from dance to scene study to film, NoVAPA puts well-trained and impressive young actors center stage in a variety of shows in different genres.

- **Address:** 18980 Upper Belmont Place, Leesburg
- **Best ages:** 5 and up
- **Cost expectation:** \$300-\$1,000
- **Tip:** Consider bringing toddlers to a Parent & Me Dance class.

Alexandria Children's Theatre

A welcoming environment for children of all levels and backgrounds, ACT encourages children to come together and get on stage. Scholarships are available for all winter programs.

- **Address:** 3700 Burgundy Road, Alexandria, and 1200 N Quaker Lane, Alexandria
- **Best ages:** 4-14
- **Cost expectation:** \$1,200
- **Tip:** Encourage your child to step out of their shell at camp and try new things.

Moonlit Wings

Give your kids a chance to soar at Moonlit Wings. With drama classes inspired by popular stories and stage interpretations of films like "KPop Demon Hunters," Moonlit Wings is a fun and unique theater experience.

- **Address:** Locations vary based on program; private in-home classes available. Check the website for more details.
- **Best ages:** 7-14
- **Cost expectation:** \$1,440 for two-week programs, \$720 for one-week programs
- **Tip:** If your kids love Moonlit programs, consider booking an acting workshop for their birthday.

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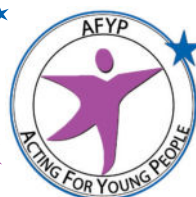


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Keep kids learning over fall break

From Spanish immersion and parkour to dinosaur digs and chess strategy, here are the DMV's best programs to keep kids learning and engaged during fall breaks and school holidays.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

VIRGINIA

Dinosaur Days Camp

Give your child a chance to explore the past at Fairfax County Park Authority's Dinosaur Days Camp. Students become junior paleontologists and learn scientific skills while playing games and undertaking creative projects.

- **Address:** 7701 Royce St., Annandale
- **Age range:** 4-7

Ultimate Music Camp

This program introduces students to key music concepts and allows them to try a variety of instruments including piano, violin, drums and guitar. This five-day program is a great way for students curious about joining their school band or orchestra to try their hand at an instrument before committing.

- **Address:** 2017 Belle View Blvd., Alexandria
- **Age range:** 5-12

Chess Camp

Take on the complexities of this ancient game with Silver Knights' Chess Camp. A perfect course for beginners and experienced players, this program helps students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills from a young age.

- **Address:** 2017 Belle View Blvd., Alexandria
- **Age range:** 6-13

WASHINGTON, DC

Casa Lala

This language immersion program helps kids develop Spanish skills while having fun and exploring the city. Casa Lala offers day programs throughout the school year to help kids learn Spanish while engaging with DC sites and activities.

- **Address:** 1244 Taylor St. NW, Washington, DC
- **Age range:** Age ranges vary based on program

Urban Adventure Squad

Full day programs offered throughout the year on school holidays and teacher training days. These programs allow students to explore the outdoors while learning about their favorite school subjects.

- **Address:** Vary based on date and program
- **Age range:** Varies based on program

Polite Piggy's

Polite Piggy's Day Off camps offer a wide range of activities to keep kids engaged, educated and entertained when school is out. Campers go on hikes, play chess, participate in sports and work on art and STEM activities.

- **Address:** 920 F St. NE, Washington, DC
- **Age range:** 3-12

Discover Fun Camp

Specially designed to entertain kids during school holidays, Discover Fun Camp helps kids take on creative projects and outdoor games while they make friends and develop social skills.

- **Address:** 4606 16th St. NW, Washington, DC
- **Age range:** 3-13

Motus Crucis Parkour

For the adventurous children in your life, a day-off parkour camp with Motus Crucis will help them burn off their energy and learn new skills that will impress their friends and help them keep fit.

- **Address:** 1508 Okie St. NE, Washington, DC
- **Age range:** 7-14

MARYLAND

Silver Star Gymnastics

Silver Star Gymnastics' camps allow young children to learn new skills or for older kids to hone their craft. Camps are offered in late August and during school breaks. The program combines structured play and focused practice so kids can enjoy their time off while growing.

- **Address:** 2701 Pittman Drive, Silver Spring
- **Age range:** 4 and up

Extracurriculars your kids will love

From ballet and martial arts to cooking classes and STEM tutoring, here are some of the DMV's best extracurricular programs to help your child find their thing this school year.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

With school fast approaching, many parents are looking for ways to fill their kids' nights and weekends with engaging, fun and productive activities. We've consolidated some of our Washington Parent Picks favorite extracurriculars to help you find the best program for your child in the DMV.

PERFORMING ARTS

WASHINGTON, DC

Musicfully

With in-home and virtual private music lessons, Musicfully instructors can help your student achieve mastery in a variety of instruments including piano, guitar, violin, drums, flute, cello, clarinet and more. Musicfully was also a 2025 Washington Parent Picks finalist.

- **Location:** In-home and virtual lessons
- **Age range:** 4 and up, adult lessons available





The Theatre Lab

An opportunity for your student to take part in a full scale production or simply develop their core stage skills, the Theatre Lab offers several programs that help kids develop their performing arts skills. Additionally the “Life Stories” program teaches students to share their own thoughts and feelings about the world through personal stories and stage production.

■ **Location:** 900 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington DC

■ **Age range:** 8-16

MARYLAND

Imagination Stage

At Imagination Stage, young kids have a chance to act out their favorite stories while learning about music and acting. For older children, the Theater for Change Program explores social issues through art and performance and gives them an opportunity to make a difference.

■ **Location:** 4908 Auburn Ave., Bethesda

■ **Age range:** 6 and up

VIRGINIA

Tiny Dancers

Nurturing a creative environment to help young ones find their place on the stage, Tiny Dancers helps new students develop their skills. Classes offered for ballet, tap, jazz, hip-hop and musical theater. They were a winner of Washington Parent Picks best arts camp.

■ **Location:** 621 S. Washington St., Alexandria

■ **Age range:** 3-12

Virginia National Ballet

With classes in ballet, tap and contemporary dance for all ages, the Virginia National Ballet is the best place to help your beginner find their feet or an experienced dancer improve their skills. This program was named Washington Parent Picks’ best dance program.

■ **Location:** 8104 Flannery Court, Manassas

■ **Age range:** 2-18

Dance Academy of Virginia

With locations in Del Ray and McLean, Dance Academy of Virginia helps students develop the intellect and physical skill of an experienced dancer. Dance Academy of Virginia provides a gentle hand to guide dancers to their best and was a Washington Parent Picks finalist.

■ **Location:** 6723 Whittier Ave., McLean and 2402 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria

■ **Age range:** 2-18

CONTINUED...

Encore Stage and Studio

Supporting young people's independence, Encore Stage and Studio provides kids with the guidance they need to be true creatives and connect with their communities. This program was a finalist for Washington Parent Picks best performing arts classes.

- **Location:** 3701 Lorcom Lane, Arlington
- **Age range:** 5-15

Acting For Young People

With after school classes and showcase performances throughout the year, Acting for Young People can help your child find their voice. This program was a finalist for Washington Parent Picks best performing arts classes.

- **Location:** 4260 Chain Bridge Road, Fairfax
- **Age range:** 5-18

Mason Community Arts Academy

With music, visual arts, film and performance programs, this arts program at George Mason University supports young artists in all their endeavors and helps them develop lifelong skills. This program was named Washington Parent Picks best visual arts class.

- **Location:** 4260 Chain Bridge Road, Fairfax
- **Age range:** 4 and up, adult classes available

SPORTS

WASHINGTON, DC

Mystics Youth Basketball Game Day Clinics

Give your young hoops fan a taste of the pros with the Washington Mystics' Game Day Clinics. Kids get a two-hour skills clinic right on the CareFirst Arena game court, followed by a ticket to that night's Mystics game, an early-access peek at team warm-ups and a take-home T-shirt. It's a fun, hands-on way for kids to build basketball fundamentals while soaking up some WNBA magic, and they were named a 2025 Washington Parent Picks finalist.

- **Location:** 1100 Oak Drive SE, Washington, DC
- **Age range:** 6-14

Go Play Youth Sports for All

Children deserve to play and explore different sports, but that can be difficult in a cramped city space. But in 2018, the Go Play team established fields and play spaces for children across the city to support productive recreation. Today, they offer programs in a variety of unique sports including golf, trapeze, aerobics and more.

- **Location:** Vary based on program, many based at The Fields at RFK Campus
- **Age range:** 5-13

MARYLAND

Ness Skills and Drills

An elite basketball training program, Ness Skills and Drills teaches students to set goals, follow plans and master their skills. Winner of Washington Parent Picks best basketball program.

- **Location:** Various locations in the DMV based on program; contact the organization for more details
- **Age range:** 8-16

Cabin John Ice Rink

With public skating sessions, figure skating and hockey classes, Cabin John Ice Rink is the perfect place to become a talented skater and cool off after school this fall and winter. They're also the winner of Washington Parent Picks best hockey and skating program.

- **Location:** 10610 Westlake Drive, Rockville
- **Age range:** 2 and up, adult programs available

Montgomery Soccer Inc.

A soccer program for every stage of skill and life, Montgomery Soccer Inc. uses soccer as an opportunity to connect kids to each other and to broader life lessons. This program is perfect for little ones still finding their feet and older kids trying for varsity teams. This program won Washington Parent Picks best soccer program.

- **Location:** 651 Great Falls Road, Rockville
- **Age range:** 4 and up, adult programs available

VIRGINIA

Fitwize 4 Kids

With a holistic approach to fitness, Fitwize 4 Kids offers circuit training, cardio and agility, boxing, balance and core classes that help kids develop healthy habits that will last a lifetime. This organization was named Washington Parent Picks best gym and recreation venue.

- **Location:** 21720 Red Rum Drive, Suite 112, Ashburn
- **Age range:** 4-14

Cardinal Fencing Academy

A unique and impressive skill, fencing classes for ages 6 and up teach healthy competition and help them make new friends. This group was a finalist for Washington Parent Picks best sports and recreation camp.

- **Location:** 45980 Center Oak Plaza, Suite 140, Sterling
- **Age range:** 6 and up

OneKick Martial Arts

Help kids develop their focus, agility and coordination through safe and structured Taekwondo classes at OneKick. Focused on developing skills for self-defense, competition and fitness, OneKick creates strong kids, mentally and physically.

This program won Washington Parent Picks best sports and recreation camp.

- **Location:** 8311 Leaman Farm Road, Germantown, MD; 55 Kentlands Blvd., Gaithersburg, MD; 364 Pickett St., Alexandria, VA
- **Age range:** 4 and up, adult classes available

COOKING

WASHINGTON, DC

DC Cooking School

Whether you're trying to teach your child the basics of cooking or want to introduce them to cuisines from around the world, the DC Cooking School can help them grow in the kitchen. In addition to teen and adult courses, the Cooking School also hosts fun activities for kids parties.

- **Location:** 1369 New York Ave. NE, Washington DC
- **Age range:** 7-17

MARYLAND

Culinary Craft Workshop

Through meal focused course series, Culinary Craft Workshop teaches students how to prepare healthy and tasty meals while teaching them the cooking skills they can carry for a lifetime. Culinary Craft also offers Parent & Child classes so your family can bond while preparing dinner.

- **Location:** 75 Mellor Ave., Catonsville
- **Age range:** 10-16

VIRGINIA

Tiny Chefs

Tiny Chefs create an opportunity to teach your kids a vital life skill and have fun as a family. With virtual and in person class options as well as parties and events, Tiny Chefs is a great way to make family dinners fun. This program was named Washington Parent Picks best cooking class.

- **Location:** 6100 Franconia Road, Suite D, Alexandria
- **Age range:** 4-12

Cookology Culinary School

With classes at different skill levels for all ages, Cookology teaches kids fine motor skills and helps expand their palates. When they start learning professional level knife skills, your child may become a better cook than you are. They were a finalist for Washington Parent Picks best cooking class.

- **Location:** 4238 Wilson Blvd., third floor, Suite 3110, Arlington
- **Age range:** 3-18

Romp n' Roll

At the courses offered at this kids gym, little ones have a chance to learn to prepare simple and tasty treats for themselves without putting the burden (or the cleaning up) on parents. This group was a finalist for Washington Parent Picks best cooking classes.

- **Location:** 9600-B Main St., Fairfax
- **Age range:** 3-5

EDUCATION/TUTORING

WASHINGTON, DC

Higher Achievement

While a lot of pressure is put on high school students to do well academically, foundations built in middle school can help kids succeed. Higher Achievement helps middle school students complete difficult assignments, develop social emotional skills and apply to prestigious high schools.

- **Location:** 3178 8th St. NE, additional locations across DC
- **Age range:** 11-14

VIRGINIA

Georgetown Learning Center

Targeted toward classroom and test success, Georgetown Learning Center can help struggling students regain their confidence and gain new academic opportunities. They were a finalist for Washington Parent Picks best tutoring service.

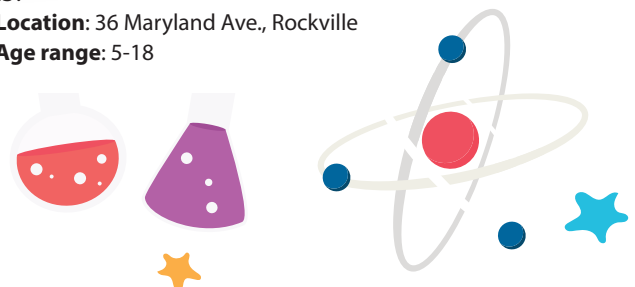
- **Location:** 148 Chain Bridge Road, Suite 203, McLean
- **Age range:** 5-18

MARYLAND

Avatar Learning Center

This award winning STEM program will help your child expand their knowledge in even the hardest subjects. The online tutoring service offers flexible scheduling and means of study to accommodate every learner. Washington Parent Picks named this program the best tutoring service in the DMV in 2025.

- **Location:** 36 Maryland Ave., Rockville
- **Age range:** 5-18



Public school policy changes you need to know

Make sure that your kid is prepared for the year ahead by staying informed on these policy changes for the 2026-27 school year.

BY TALLULAH RECTOR



The back-to-school season is all about change — and the same goes for school district policies. So as the 2026-27 school year approaches, make sure that you're in the loop on all the latest policy changes across the DMV.

Here's your guide to all the policy shifts that public schools across DC, Maryland and Virginia will be seeing this fall.

Washington, DC

DCPS swing space locations

This coming school year, 10 DCPS schools are undergoing a modernization, meaning that they will be located in temporary swing space locations. The following elementary schools will be affected: Brent, Burroughs, Burrville, Chisholm, Drew, King, Ketcham and Ketcham CDC, Seaton and Whittier. [Click here to view the addresses of the temporary locations.](#)

DCPS completed modernizations

The modernizations of four elementary schools have been completed, and they will return to their permanent locations this year. Those elementary schools are: J.O. Wilson, Malcolm X at Green, Thomas and Tubman. [Click here to view the list of permanent addresses.](#)

Maryland

Phone-free policy in Washington County

New Maryland legislation requires that county boards of education develop policies banning phones in their public schools by the 2027-28 school year. Baltimore City, Harford County and Howard County school boards are already enforcing phone bans.

This upcoming school year, Washington County is now implementing its bell-to-bell phone-free policy. Students will be required to store their personal devices at the first bell, and they will be allowed to retrieve them after dismissal. Students will not be allowed to use their devices during lunchtime, breaks or passing periods.

Statewide K-12 mathematics policy

The Maryland State Department of Education recently designed a new mathematics policy aimed at strengthening growth in the subject earlier on in children's development while supporting their mathematical learning until college.

The 2025-26 school year was spent preparing for the implementation of this policy, and now in the 2026-27 school year, the policy will come into full force as new preK through grade eight math standards will be implemented and a Multi-Tiered System of Support will be introduced. Read more about the initiative here.

Virginia

Statewide phone-free policy

As of July 1, 2026, cell phones are prohibited at all public schools across Virginia, due to new legislation. Personal devices must be put away from bell-to-bell and cannot be accessed during lunchtime.

New standard calendar in Fairfax County

The Fairfax County School Board recently voted to standardize the annual school calendar to create a regular guideline for future school years. The policy states that summer break must begin before Juneteenth and end no earlier than two weeks before Labor Day. The calendar mandates that winter breaks will be two weeks long and spring breaks will be one week long.

Boundary changes in Fairfax County

Fairfax County Public Schools will be implementing new boundary changes this school year. However, current students are not required to move schools to align with the new boundaries. Transportation routes may change for the new zoning. Read more about the new boundaries and determine your school assignment here.

Updated dress code in Loudoun County

Loudoun County has introduced a new dress code for the 2026-27 school year. The amendments include requirements for shorts to be longer and shirts to have more coverage around the waist and neck. A motion was proposed to prohibit pajamas, slippers and hats, but it was denied.

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‘Stage is shifting rapidly’ for high schools:

Are states helping them keep up?

A new report from the XQ Institute finds that while most states offer internships and college credit in high school, none have cracked the hardest challenge: measuring whether students can actually think, collaborate and adapt.

BY PATRICK O'DONNELL FOR THE 74

The rise of artificial intelligence and other technology has traditional high schools scrambling to keep up, with states doing an uneven job of encouraging schools to embed critical thinking skills and offer students access to internships and college courses, according to a new report reviewed by The 74.

Today's world, the nonprofit XQ Institute argues in its new report *The Future Is High School*, “requires an entirely new kind of educational experience — one that traditional high schools were never designed to deliver.”

“We live in an age of self-driving taxis, blockchain, and renewed interest in space exploration. The public launch of ChatGPT placed a powerful form of generative artificial intelligence (AI) within the reach of every American,” the report continued. “But that stage is shifting rapidly. Our young people are growing up at a time when the economy and workforce are in constant flux. And high schools must keep pace.”

Schools not only need to emphasize work and early college experiences, XQ found, but also teach interpersonal and thinking skills as much as academics.

“What do we need to know when we leave our high school doors?” asked XQ CEO Russlynn Ali. Math, English and science are still important, she said.

“But layered on top of that, we need to be critical thinkers,” Ali said. “We need to be able to collaborate. We need adaptability. We need these skills that will help us succeed in life, no matter what direction we choose after we leave high school.”

XQ wants states to encourage schools to follow the lead of Purdue Polytechnic High School in Indianapolis or the Museum High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where students learn



Students at Latitude High School in Oakland, CA, collaborate on designing an autonomous vehicle to aid senior citizens.

academics and interpersonal skills through projects, not lectures. Another standout: Oakland, California's Latitude High School, where every 10th grader follows an adult through a work day to learn about the job, 11th graders have month-long internships and older adults can choose to do a longer one.

The new report takes a different approach from XQ's previous work, which has centered on schools.

“States have more responsibility and authority over their schools than certainly in recent memory, if not in my lifetime,” Ali said. “They must be the locus of change.”

States are mixed, however, XQ reports in the new study, on how they are succeeding in meeting 10 goals XQ considers key to school innovation. XQ met with school leaders across the country to create the goals — and then researched how much progress each state and Washington D.C. has made toward them:

- 46 states have met the goal of offering work experience, such as internships, as credit toward high school diplomas.
- 38 states give every student a chance to earn college credit before graduating, by taking Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate or college classes.
- 32 states give schools the ability to award students class credit under a mastery or competency system, showing they know the material, instead of just attending a class.
- 32 states have identified key skills students need to learn for the future, including nonacademic skills XQ has made a major part of its work, such as teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving. States often created a “Portrait of a Graduate” spelling these out.
- Just eight states — Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Utah and Washington — met six of the goals; and no state met all 10, though 31 met at least four. Two states — Alaska and Florida — met only two of the goals.
- Two of XQ's goals — finding ways to measure how well students have learned interpersonal and thinking skills, then showing

those on report cards — haven't been realized by any state.

- XQ plans to track changes and update the report every two years for the next decade.

"I think of these as a start, definitely not a finish line," Ali said.

To highlight the 10 policy goals and encourage states to adopt them, XQ is planning to visit schools and policymakers in 25 communities, likely over the next two years. Details of that tour, which starts March 4 in Indianapolis and stops in Columbus, Ohio, the week after, are still being developed.

XQ, a nonprofit and affiliate of investing and philanthropic firm Emerson Collective, was cofounded by Ali and Laurene Powell Jobs. Powell Jobs is Emerson's founder and president, and wife of the late Apple founder Steve Jobs.

XQ has been refining its vision for redesigning high schools since launching in 2015 with a well-publicized campaign to identify and support innovative "Super Schools" across the country. It gave a total of \$102 million in 2016 to 18 schools — including the schools mentioned above — before expanding its work to 28 states.

XQ's vision has its critics, who say it overstates how much jobs will change in the future and who are unsure if XQ's priorities are the best way to prepare students. But school districts and several states, including Indiana, Rhode Island and Utah, agree with the approach and are open in their support.

Utah's state superintendent, Molly Hart, said the state rarely adopts any national approach, but there is great overlap in what XQ promotes and the state's push to redesign high schools, including the support of mastery teaching approaches and requiring students to earn a meaningful professional credential before graduating.

"We align closely when you look at some of the goals and policy actions that XQ does," she said. "We have a lot of similarities in what we're looking at."

The report, and shorter reports XQ released for individual states, also highlight policy changes and efforts already in place that XQ considers "beacons" for change. Among them:

Indiana: For giving schools increasing flexibility in giving students class credit for showing proficiency in a subject, rather than just sitting through a class all semester or year.

Rhode Island: For changing diploma requirements so that all students, beginning in 2028, must take the courses in math, foreign language and even art that qualify them to attend college. "Our kids were not even taking the classes to be able to apply to those schools," said state education commissioner Angelica Infante-Green. "Once they got there, they were in remedial courses because we weren't preparing them for college-level achievement."

Texas: For allowing students to earn 12 hours of college credit in high school, either through college, AP or International Baccalaureate classes.

Colorado: For encouraging the growth of CareerWise high school apprenticeships, the largest youth apprenticeship program in the country. Colorado also broke career preparation into three categories — Learning ABOUT Work, Learning THROUGH Work, and Learning AT Work.

Utah: For giving schools grants to train teachers how to educate students using a mastery/competency approach and how to rate student progress. Utah also backed some schools in trying out vastly different report cards — keeping the traditional A-F grade scale, but also giving students a new Mastery Learning Record that shows their progress on durable skills.

Ali said XQ also wanted to highlight two goals that haven't been met yet, but that she considers vital — developing tests to measure how well students have learned key nonacademic skills and then changing student report cards to rate students on those skills.

Ali said the standardized tests states use to measure student skills in math, English and science offer some sense of what students know, but are outdated. There's no clear way yet to assess how well students have mastered durable skills to prove to colleges or employers that they have those skills. And Ali said that schools tend to prioritize learning the state measures and judges them on, so schools won't teach them vigorously until they are part of report cards and school ratings.

But XQ recognized 12 states for trying to develop those tests and report cards, six of them for participating in a pilot project with the Educational Testing Service, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Mastery Transcript Consortium (now part of ETS). The Skills for the Future project has been working to create tests on durable skills, starting with three: collaboration, communication and critical thinking.

XQ is not part of this effort but partners with Carnegie on some related work and says it enthusiastically backs it.

The Skills for the Future team, which includes Indiana, Missouri, North Carolina, Nevada, Rhode Island and Wisconsin, is still working on creating new tests but recently broke down each of those three skills into smaller skills as one step toward creating tests.

Communication, for example, is broken down into segments — presentation skills, making messages more clear, adapting messages for different audiences or comprehending the communication of others — that are then broken down further into sub-skills.

Infante-Green said measuring these skills will be a "game changer."

"I think it will give employers things that they have been looking for, as well as change how we teach, what we teach, and how we incorporate (those skills) into the academic field," she said. "It's important. It won't be one or the other, it'll be both."

Ali also stressed that just passing policy changes won't be enough. Schools, teachers and parents need to also be on board.

"It's not a checklist," Ali said. "It has to be implemented in a way that is sustained and empowering and supportive of what needs to happen in the classroom."

DISCLOSURE: XQ PROVIDES FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO THE 74.

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BACK TO SCHOOL BONANZA



WASHINGTON
Parent

SATURDAY, AUGUST 29TH

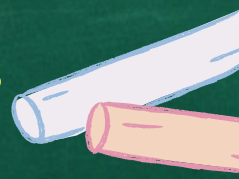
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PARENTING

Growing Confident Kids

As a new school year approaches, families are juggling everything from back-to-school routines and school choices to helping children navigate big emotions and build confidence. In this month's Parenting section, you'll find practical advice, expert insights, and encouraging resources to help you support your child through every stage.

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Starry with a chance of meteor showers



BIGSTOCK/CHOREOGRAPH

Before the Perseid meteor shower lights up the August sky, stock up on these picture books, field guides and graphic novels that will have kids counting down to the show.

BY MARY QUATTLEBAUM

Look up! What could be more magical than a summer night rife with twinkling lights? And if you have a telescope, what a delight to share with your kids a close-up view of the stars and planets in our vast universe. Come mid-August and your family is in for an amazing treat: the Perseid meteor showers. For optimal viewing, try leaving the light-polluted DMV area for a rural enclave or a national or state park.

If you want to see meteorites up close, visit the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC. It houses one of the largest collections in the world, in the hall of geology, gems and minerals.

These books spotlight the wonders of the night sky, with some explaining meteors and the Perseid showers in greater detail.

Tots to Age 7

The Night Sky

By Marion Dane Bauer
Illustrated by John Wallace
Simon & Schuster, 2023, \$4.99

Why do stars twinkle? What's a falling star? Little ones have a million questions, and Newbery Honor-winning author Marion Dane Bauer can help to answer them. With his whimsical animals and curious youngsters, artist John Wallace sets a tone of

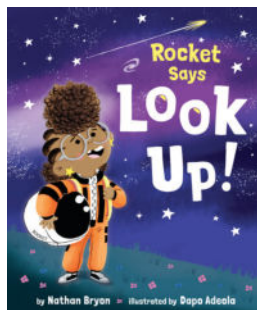


warmth and wonder in accompanying illustrations. Bauer explains that “stars twinkle because their light bounces and bumps through our atmosphere to reach us.” And that a falling star is really a meteor, which is “made up of rocks from outer space.” She mentions that during the annual Perseid meteor shower, “you might see up to one hundred meteors in an hour.” A page of interesting facts at the end rounds out this gem of an early reader.

Rocket Says Look Up!

By Nathan Bryon
Illustrated by Dapo Adeola
Random House, 2019, \$17.99

In her astronaut playsuit, Rocket is a kid on a mission. She’s inspired by her role model Mae Jemison, the first African-American woman in space. Rocket wants to share her knowledge and joy with others. The problem: everyone keeps talking on or looking down at their phones, especially her older brother Jamal. But when she organizes a meteor-shower watch party in a local park one night, Rocket finally gets everyone’s attention. Time passes, though, and nothing happens. People start to leave and then “SUDDENLY ... there’s a big bright light” and meteors begin zooming across the sky. This book captures a child’s single-minded passion as it intersects with a magnificent natural phenomenon.



Tweens

Exploring Meteor Showers

By Brigid Gallagher
Capstone, 2018, \$8.99

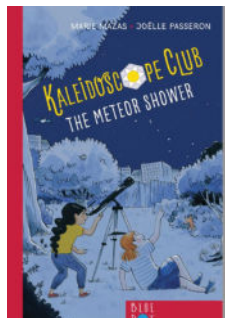
Vivid photos and intriguing text showcase all things meteor, including a calendar of annual showers. For example, the Lyrids every April is “one of the oldest reported meteor showers,” dating back to 687 B.C. The Perseids are “known as the best meteor shower of the year.” In Antarctica, there’s a meteorite, discovered in 1984, that had crashed into Earth 13,000 years ago. Scientists believe that it came from Mars! And did you know that studying meteorites can “help us to understand more about the history of the planetary system”? They’ve allowed us to date the origin of our solar system to 4.6 billion years ago.



Kaleidoscope Club: The Meteor Shower

By Maria Mazas
Illustrated by Joelle Passeron
Blue Dot Kids, 2024, \$7.95

The second book in the Kaleidoscope Club series finds best friends Nour and August planning a meteor-watch party. This



chapter book ingeniously blends in facts about engineering and science, so that young readers might try them too. They can make their own bat-box habitat as Nour constructs hers. And like the two friends, they might share information about the dangers of light pollution in their communities and advocate for change. But when the duo adds a haunted treehouse to their watch party, complete with goopy and fizzy substances, that’s when the science fun hits the fan.

Night Sky

By Howard Schneider
National Geographic Kids, 2016, \$12.99

This National Geographic Ultimate Explorer Field Guide is a must-have for any family interested in star gazing. Its organization into double-page spreads, with a heading and sidebars for each, makes information easy to find, and the many color photos allow readers to visualize content. There are spreads devoted to Ancient Skywatchers; Our Galaxy: The Milky Way; Comets; and various constellations. A three-page glossary defines key terms and suggests “be a skywatcher” activities that encourage participation and experimentation. Eager to get started? Learn about helpful equipment in the section on binoculars and telescopes and then turn to Tips for Reading the Night Sky.



Teens

Meteor Men

By Jeff Parker
Illustrated by Sandy Jarrell
Oni Press, 2022, \$19.99

This compelling sci-fi graphic novel chronicles the adventures of recent orphan Alden Baylor. The largest meteor shower in history brings a passive invasion of aliens. Alden is able to make contact with and communicate with them. What do they want? Do they plan to take over the Earth? The answers are surprising, and the government remains suspicious. The ending is both gut punch and mystical revelation. The panel art is stunning, with the vast panoply of the starry universe often in the dark background.



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 and is a popular school and conference speaker. maryquattlebaum.com



Navigating My School DC lottery

Lottery results can feel disappointing, but families still have options. Here's what to do next, how waitlists work and how to make the most of the My School DC process.

BY JENNA DOLCH

Opening your My School DC lottery results can bring a mix of emotions.

For some families, it's exciting. For others, it's disappointment after seeing that their child didn't receive a seat at their top-choice school.

The good news? A lottery result isn't always the end of the story.

Each year, thousands of families across the District navigate waitlists, acceptances and enrollment decisions after lottery results are released. Understanding how the process works can help parents make informed decisions and reduce some of the stress that often comes with school selection season.

First, know that you're not alone

One of the biggest misconceptions about the My School DC lottery is that most students receive their first-choice school.

In reality, many families are placed at schools lower on their rankings or are initially waitlisted at their preferred programs. Because popular schools often receive far more applications than available seats, waitlists are a normal part of the process.

A few important things to remember:

- Thousands of DC families receive waitlist placements every year.
- Many students ultimately enroll at schools that weren't their first choice.
- Waitlists often move throughout the spring and summer.
- A lottery result is not necessarily your child's final placement.

It's understandable to feel frustrated, especially if you've spent months researching schools, attending open houses and carefully ranking your options. But lottery results are just one step in a much longer process.

Understand what your offer means

If your child receives an offer through My School DC, you'll typically have a limited window to accept and enroll.

Many parents worry that accepting an offered seat means giving up hope of getting into a higher-ranked school. Fortunately, that's not how the system works.

Here's what families should know:

- Accepting an offered seat does **not** remove your child from higher-ranked waitlists.
- Your child can remain on waitlists for schools you ranked above the school that offered admission.
- Securing an offered seat gives your family a backup plan while you wait to see if a preferred option becomes available.
- Schools may continue making waitlist offers throughout the spring and summer.

Think of it as keeping your options open. By accepting an offered seat, you're protecting your child's placement while still allowing for the possibility of moving into a higher-ranked school later.

Don't ignore waitlist numbers

After results are released, families receive waitlist positions for schools where they were not offered seats.

That number matters, but not always in the way parents think.

A waitlist position of 10 may sound encouraging, while a position of 100 may feel hopeless. However, waitlist movement varies significantly from school to school and year to year. Some schools see substantial movement over the summer as families relocate, choose private schools or accept other offers. Others

Do you have a question you'd like to see answered here?
Send it to us at editor@washingtonparent.com.

may have very little movement at all.

Instead of focusing solely on the number, consider reaching out to the school, attending any available information sessions and reviewing historical waitlist trends if they're available. Staying informed can help you better understand what your child's chances may be.

Don't panic if your waitlist number seems high. Many families make changes to their plans throughout the spring and summer, which can create movement in unexpected places.

Research the school you were offered

It's natural to focus on the disappointment of not getting your first choice, but don't overlook the opportunity in front of you.

Many families discover that a school they initially ranked lower ends up being an excellent fit.

Take time to:

- Schedule another visit
- Attend family information sessions
- Talk with current parents
- Explore extracurricular offerings
- Review transportation options
- Learn about academic programs and support services

You may find strengths that weren't obvious during the initial application process.

Keep track of deadlines

One of the biggest mistakes families make is missing enrollment deadlines while waiting for another school to call.

If you receive an offer, make sure you understand all required enrollment steps and submit paperwork on time.

Create a simple checklist that includes:

- Enrollment deadlines
- Required documents
- School contact information
- Waitlist updates
- Important email notifications

Missing a deadline could mean losing a seat you've already been offered, so staying organized is critical.

Be prepared for summer movement

Many families assume lottery results are final once they're released, but that's often not the case.

In reality, some of the biggest waitlist movement happens during late spring and summer as families make final decisions, move out of the area or choose different school options. That means a waitlist position that feels disappointing in March could look very different by June or July.

Good to know: Schools may contact families with waitlist offers throughout the summer, sometimes with only a short window to respond.

For that reason, it's important to regularly check your email, voicemail and My School DC account for updates. Staying responsive and keeping your contact information current can help ensure you don't miss an opportunity if a seat becomes available.

Consider the bigger picture

It's easy to focus entirely on rankings, waitlists and school reputations, especially after spending months researching your options.

Before making a final decision, remember that a great school experience is about more than a lottery result.

Consider factors like:

- Teacher and staff support
- Your child's social and emotional well-being
- Extracurricular activities and enrichment programs
- Transportation and daily commute
- Opportunities for family involvement
- The overall school culture and community

Many families who were initially disappointed by their lottery results later discover that their child thrives at a school they hadn't originally considered their top choice. Sometimes the best fit isn't the school that started at the top of your list.

Parent tips: What to do next

- **Accept your offered seat if you're comfortable with it.** Protect your child's placement while remaining on higher-ranked waitlists.
- **Monitor your waitlists regularly.** Movement can happen quickly, especially during the spring and summer months.
- **Stay organized.** Keep track of enrollment paperwork, deadlines and important school communications.
- **Visit schools again.** A second visit often provides a different perspective than an open house or initial tour.
- **Keep an open mind.** Many families discover that their eventual school placement ends up being the right fit for their child.

Questions to ask before making a final decision

Before declining or accepting a school offer, consider:

- Does the school meet my child's academic needs?
- How manageable is the commute?
- What extracurricular activities are available?
- How does the school support students socially and emotionally?
- What do current families say about their experience?
- These conversations can help families feel more confident about whichever path they choose.

FAQs

- **Can I accept a school offer and stay on a waitlist?** Yes. Accepting an offered seat does not remove your child from higher-ranked waitlists.
- **How often do My School DC waitlists move?** It varies by school and grade level. Some schools see significant movement, while others see very little.
- **Should I decline an offer if I'm hoping for a better waitlist result?** Most experts recommend securing the offered seat first unless you're confident you have another plan.
- **When do waitlists typically move the most?** Many schools see the largest amount of movement during late spring and throughout the summer.
- **Can schools see where I ranked them?** No. Schools do not see how families ranked other schools in the lottery process.
- **What if I don't receive any offers?** Families can continue to pursue schools with waitlists and explore additional enrollment options available after lottery results are released.
- **Is it common not to get your first-choice school?** Yes. Many families do not receive their first-choice school but still find excellent educational options through the lottery process.

Raising resilient kids

PARENTING
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BIGSTOCK/SHAROMKA

Why small challenges today build confidence for tomorrow.

BY LYNNE TICKNOR

Parents want their children to be happy. But happiness alone isn't enough to prepare children for real life. Eventually, every child faces disappointment, frustration, failure, conflict and unexpected change. The goal isn't to remove those experiences — it's to help children develop the confidence and skills to work through them.

Researchers often describe these abilities as resilience: the capacity to adapt, recover and continue moving forward after setbacks. Fortunately, resilience is not a personality trait that children either have or don't have. It is a skill that can be developed through practice and supportive relationships.

The physician and psychiatrist Alfred Adler believed that children thrive when they feel capable, connected and encouraged. His protégé, Rudolf Dreikurs, expanded on this idea, teaching that mistakes and challenges are valuable opportunities for learning, rather than signs of failure. When adults respond to difficulties with encouragement instead of rescue, children gradually learn, "I can handle hard things."

Why resilience matters

Research continues to show that resilient children are better equipped to manage stress, build healthy relationships, solve problems and adapt to change throughout life.

Parents often feel pressure to shield children from discomfort. But while support matters, removing every obstacle can unintentionally suggest they are unable to handle challenges on their own.

Instead, resilience develops when children encounter manageable difficulties and receive guidance as they work through them. The good news is that everyday family interactions provide countless opportunities to strengthen resilience. Here are some practical ways parents can help:

Listen before solving

Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child emphasizes that supportive adult relationships are one of the strongest protective factors in building resilience. When children share a problem, resist the urge to immediately fix it. Listening helps children feel understood and encourages them to think through solutions.

- Ask: "What do you think might help?"
- Reflect feelings before offering advice.
- Focus on understanding rather than correcting.

Use encouragement instead of praise

Adlerian parenting emphasizes encouragement over evaluation. Rather than focusing solely on outcomes, acknowledge effort, persistence, improvement and courage. Examples:

- "You kept trying even when it was difficult."
- "You found another way to solve the problem."
- "That took persistence."

Allow age-appropriate independence

According to the Child Mind Institute, children build confidence by making decisions and experiencing the results, even if it's the wrong decision.

- Let young children choose between acceptable options.
- Encourage school-age children to solve minor conflicts.
- Involve teens in planning, budgeting and decision-making.

Teach healthy coping skills

The American Psychological Association offers guidance on resilience and coping skills for children and families. Children need practical tools for handling stress. Helpful strategies include:

- Deep breathing
- Physical activity
- Journaling
- Mindfulness exercises
- Creative hobbies

Normalize mistakes

Many children become discouraged because they believe mistakes are signs of inadequacy. Mistakes are essential to learning. Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck's work on growth mindset demonstrates how viewing mistakes as development opportunities promotes resilience and persistence. So, when something goes wrong – and it will – do the following:

- Discuss what was learned.
- Explore alternative solutions.
- Focus on progress rather than perfection.

Strengthen connections

Resilient children rarely develop resilience alone. Strong relationships with family members, teachers, coaches and friends provide emotional support and perspective during difficult times. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identifies connectedness as a powerful protective factor for youth well-being.

Prioritize physical well-being

The ability to be more resilient is closely connected to physical health, regardless of whether you are a parent or a child. Support resilience by encouraging:

- Consistent sleep routines
- Nutritious meals
- Daily movement
- Time outdoors

Growth happens gradually

A common misconception is that resilience develops quickly. It builds gradually through repeated experiences over time.

A child who learns to handle a forgotten homework assignment may later be better prepared for academic setbacks. A child who navigates friendship conflicts may eventually handle workplace challenges more effectively. Small struggles become practice opportunities for larger ones.

The key is finding the balance between support and independence. Children need adults who are available, encouraging and confident in their children's abilities — not adults who remove every obstacle from their path.

As Alfred Adler taught, courage grows when children experience themselves as capable contributors to their world. By providing encouragement, opportunities for problem-solving and room to learn from mistakes, parents help children build a lasting belief in their own ability to face life's challenges.

That belief may be one of the greatest gifts we can give them.

Lynne Ticknor is the director of education at the Parent Encouragement Program (PEP) in Kensington, MD. For more information about PEP's parenting programs and resources, including the free [Family Resiliency Program](#), please visit PEP's website. See more from PEP on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter/X.



Tackling Screen Time: Setting Limits with Your Children

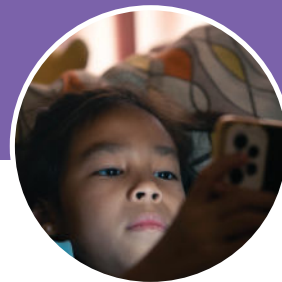
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Is your child avoiding school?



A child psychiatrist explains why school avoidance tied to anxiety is more common than ever — and what parents can do when their child refuses to get out of bed.

BY DR. AFIFA ADIBA, MD

On a Monday morning, your child clutches their stomach and insists they can't go to school. By Tuesday, they're in tears. By Wednesday, they refuse to get out of bed altogether. Is it a phase? A power struggle? Or something else?

For many children and teens, school avoidance (also called school refusal) is directly related to anxiety.

As a board-certified child and adolescent psychiatrist at Kaiser Permanente, I am seeing this more often than ever. Since the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted routines, learning environments and social development, many kids have struggled to readjust to in-person school. The result is a pattern of increasing distress and anxiety around school for many kids.

What is school avoidance?

School avoidance is when a child experiences intense emotional distress related to attending school, leading them to miss days or resist going altogether.

This isn't the occasional "I don't feel like going" moment that many kids have before a big test or after an argument with friends. All children have those. Instead, school avoidance tends to look like:

- Ongoing difficulty getting to school
- Frequent absences or partial days
- Calling or texting parents from school asking to be picked up early
- Panic, tears or physical symptoms tied specifically to school
- A pattern that worsens over time

Why is this happening more now?

Several factors may be at play to explain why we are seeing more kids experiencing school avoidance.

Post-pandemic social challenges: Many children spent formative years learning from home, with limited peer interaction. Returning to crowded classrooms, especially in middle and high school, can feel overwhelming. Social anxiety is one of the most common drivers of school avoidance today. Children may worry that classmates are judging them, that they don't fit in or that they may say something wrong. Bullying is also a real concern. Kids who are victims of bullying may develop intense anxiety about going to school.

Academic pressure and learning gaps: Some students fell behind academically during remote or hybrid learning. Others are dealing with undiagnosed learning differences, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or executive functioning challenges. When school starts to feel like a place where they "fail," avoidance becomes a coping mechanism.

Technology and attention shifts: Many parents report that their children prefer staying home on their phones. Excessive screen use can reduce attention span, increase need for constant stimulation and make classroom learning feel intolerably slow or boring. When children say school feels "too hard" or "too boring," and they don't want to go, their brains may simply be struggling to adapt.

Underlying mental health conditions: School avoidance can be a symptom of anxiety disorders (including social anxiety disorder), depression or ADHD. Sometimes school refusal is the first sign that something deeper needs attention.

How anxiety shows up at different ages

One of the biggest challenges for parents is recognizing anxiety.

Elementary school children

- Younger kids often express anxiety through the body, not words. This is called somatization: emotional distress appearing as physical symptoms. Look for:
- Stomachaches, headaches, nausea, particularly on school-day mornings
- Frequent visits to the school nurse
- Clinginess or refusal to separate
- Irritability, tantrums or sudden mood changes
- Avoidance of school, activities or social situations they previously enjoyed
- Excessive reassurance-seeking ("Will you pick me up?" "What if something bad happens?")
- Statements of "I don't want to go" without a clear reason

Middle schoolers

- This is the age when social awareness and social anxiety skyrocket. You may notice:
- Crying or emotional overwhelm
- Fear of embarrassment or being judged
- Avoidance of presentations or group settings
- Declining confidence or negative self-talk
- Increased sensitivity to peer opinions or social media interactions
- Perfectionism or excessive worry about mistakes

High schoolers

- Teens are more likely to verbalize their anxiety. You might also see slipping grades, missed assignments and withdrawal from activities they once enjoyed. They may:
- Say "I'm going to fail" or "It's too much"
- Have panic attacks, shortness of breath, chest tightness and sweating, which are signs of a panic attack
- Have trouble falling or staying asleep due to racing anxious thoughts
- Show signs of irritability, mood swings or defiance

When is it "normal" versus a problem?

It's important to distinguish between healthy stress and problematic anxiety. Feeling anxious about a test, presentation or social conflict is normal and common for kids. In fact, a moderate level of anxiety can be motivating in some instances. But anxiety becomes a concern when:

- Anxiety is frequent or daily
- It leads to avoidance (missing school, refusing to go)
- It includes panic symptoms or physical complaints
- It disrupts sleep, mood or functioning
- It persists over weeks, not days

If your child hasn't attended school consistently for a couple of weeks or is regularly calling to be picked up, reach out for help.

What parents can do

As a parent, knowing what to say when a child is experiencing school avoidance anxiety can be challenging. Here are some ideas.

Try to listen without judgment or trying to fix the problem. Instead of saying "You'll be fine" or "Just go. It's not a big deal," try to validate the child's concerns. You can say: "I've noticed this has been really hard for you" or "Can you help me understand what's going on?"

Create space where your child feels safe being honest. Encourage communication. Let your child know you are a safe space.

Establish structure and routine. Anxious children thrive on predictability. Focus on building and maintaining a consistent sleep schedule; calm and structured mornings; designating homework time; and finding time for regular family check-ins. A stable rhythm at home often reduces emotional overwhelm.

Also try to limit excessive screen time – and model it yourself. Children notice what we do more than what we say so if you are trying to limit your child's screen time, you may need to put your device away too.

Encourage one extracurricular activity, whether a sport, music, art or volunteering. Find something that gives your child space to feel competent and calm. Getting involved in an activity also provides emotional outlets to relieve stress.

Also, remember, you are not alone. If you need support, reach out to school counselors, teachers and your child's pediatrician. Work with your child's school – and your child – to come up with a plan to address underlying causes of school anxiety. Maybe changes to the child's schedule or testing accommodations can be helpful. If you think your child may have an undiagnosed mental health condition or physical condition that is contributing to school avoidance, talk to your child's medical team to get a proper diagnosis. Once the root problem is diagnosed, treatment can be very effective.

Sometimes, working with a mental health professional can be extremely valuable. Try not to see therapy as a last resort. Seeking help does not mean something is "wrong" with your child. It means you are supporting them in learning lifelong emotional skills. Therapy can help children understand their anxiety, develop coping skills and gradually face fearful situations.

Most of us, as adults, have had days when we didn't want to go to work or get out of bed. Now imagine feeling that way every single morning – and not yet having the tools to manage it. That's what school avoidance feels like for many kids.

With patience, consistency and the right support, children learn to face their fears, rebuild confidence and reconnect with school in a healthier way.

The goal is not to eliminate anxiety completely. It's to teach kids how to handle it.

Dr. Afifa Adiba, MD, is a board-certified child and adolescent psychiatrist at the Mid-Atlantic Permanente Medical Group. She sees patients at the Kaiser Permanente Burke Medical Center.



THINGS TO DO

Pop into Bubble Planet this summer

From the ball pit-style Bubble Pit to a VR add-on, here's what DC-area parents should know about ages, timing, strollers and whether the Fun Pass pays off.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

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PHOTOS © BUBBLE PLANET

A vibrant, colorful advertisement for the Bubble Planet Experience. The background is a deep blue with large, stylized, multi-colored clouds in shades of orange, yellow, and green. In the center, a large, translucent, multi-colored face of a person is visible, with a child's arm reaching up towards it. The floor is covered in a thick layer of white foam. Several children are playing in the foam; one girl in a blue dress is in the foreground, and another child is visible in the background. The title 'Bubble' is written in large, bubbly, multi-colored letters at the top, with 'PLANET' in white block letters below it, and 'EXPERIENCE' in smaller white block letters at the bottom. A copyright symbol is visible to the right of 'PLANET'.

Bubble

PLANET

EXPERIENCE

Washington summers bring plenty of afternoons when the heat, the humidity or a pop-up thunderstorm sends families hunting for an air-conditioned plan B. Bubble Planet DC, the immersive pop-up experience at Rhode Island Center in Northeast DC, is worth having on that list — not just as a once-and-done outing, but as a go-to for rainy days, birthday parties or a break in a packed summer camp schedule. It tends to land best with toddlers through elementary-age kids; tweens and teens can enjoy it too, particularly if the VR add-on is part of the plan.

Who will love it — and what to expect

Bubble Planet DC's biggest strength is how tactile it is: kids can climb, jump and pose in nearly every room, and there's no shortage of backdrops built for a phone camera. Families with toddlers and elementary-age kids tend to get the most out of a visit, and it works well for groups spanning several generations, since there's something for both little kids and grandparents to enjoy.

CONTINUED...



PHOTOS © BUBBLE PLANET

It's worth a heads-up for sensory-sensitive kids: the experience includes strobe lighting in some rooms, along with music, close crowds during busy time slots and quick transitions between spaces. Going right when doors open, or on a weekday, can help cut down on crowding and wait times.

Keep expectations in check for tweens, teens and adults who skip the VR upgrade — at least one local review described the standard rooms as feeling like a quick pass-through without it, and recommended treating Bubble Planet as a kid-focused outing rather than a must-do for the whole family.

What to know before you go

- **How long to plan for:** Most visits run 60-90 minutes. Arrive about 30 minutes before your ticketed slot to allow time for check-in.
- **Best ages:** All ages are technically welcome, and children 2 and under enter free, but the rooms are most engaging for kids roughly ages 3-10. The VR room is limited to ages 8 and up.
- **Strollers:** Not practical. Strollers stay at the entrance, so little ones need to be able to walk or be carried through the space.
- **Is VR included?:** No. Standard tickets cover the walk-through rooms only. The VR experience is an add-on you can purchase with your ticket or pay for on-site — worth confirming before you buy if it's a must-do for your family.
- **Best room for younger kids:** The Bubble Pit, a ball pit-style bubble bath area, is the standout for toddlers and preschoolers. Socks are required there.



- **Is the Fun Pass worth it?:** If you're local and likely to visit more than twice in six months, yes — it pays for itself quickly. For a single visit, standard tickets are the better value.

Why kids will love it

Bubble Planet is built around fully interactive thematic environments. Exhibits include:

- The LED room, which simulates undersea life
- The Bubble Pit ball room
- The surreal visual illusion Infinity Room
- A Selfie Room
- Bubble Ocean, where you can take a dip into an ocean of living balloons
- The Giant Bubble, where you can step inside and experience a colorful bubbly planet
- A Sketch and Post room

The mix of climbable, colorful rooms keeps younger kids moving, while the photo-ready backdrops give older siblings, parents and grandparents their own reason to linger.

If you upgrade to the VR add-on, kids ages 8 and up can try on headsets and explore a vibrant, colorful bubble planet from the safety of a hanging chair.

Keep an eye on the Bubble Planet Instagram for special events. Bubble Planet has collaborated with kid-favorite franchises and brands, including Winx Club and Nesquik.



Planning your visit

- **Location:** 524 Rhode Island Ave. NE, Washington, DC
- **Hours:** 9:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m.
- **Dress code:** None required, but socks are mandatory for the Bubble Pit area, and skirts or dresses aren't ideal since some rooms have mirrored floors.
- **Duration:** Most visits last 60-90 minutes.
- **Standard tickets:** \$22.90 for adults, \$17.90 for children. Children 2 and under enter free. Prices can vary by date and time slot.
- **VR add-on / VIP tickets:** Sold separately from standard admission, or available to purchase on-site; VIP tickets also include perks like coat check and skip-the-line entry.
- **Fun Pass:** \$52.90 for adults and \$40.90 for children for six months of unlimited visits.
- **Group bookings:** Available for birthdays, school visits and corporate gatherings.
- **Accessibility:** The venue follows Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines.

FAQs

- **Is parking available?** Yes, parking is available at the venue.
- **Can we bring a stroller-bound baby who's sleeping, or a pet?** Strollers must be parked in a designated area at the entrance regardless of whether a child is napping. Pets aren't allowed, though service animals are welcome.
- **Is food available on-site, and can we bring our own snacks?** Outside food and beverages aren't permitted. Snacks and drinks are sold on-site and are typically purchased at the end of the experience.
- **Are there seats if a child (or a parent) needs a break?** It's a walkthrough experience without a formal rest area, but a few seats are available along the way if you need a moment.
- **Can we take photos and videos?** Yes — photos and videos are encouraged, just avoid disturbing other guests. Professional camera equipment and tripods aren't permitted.
- **My child has a latex allergy — is that a problem?** Most rooms are latex-free, but one room involves direct contact with latex. Let staff know at check-in so they can guide your family around it.
- **Can tickets be transferred to another family member, or refunded if plans change?** Tickets aren't transferable to another person. Date changes are allowed up to 48 hours before your visit, but the venue doesn't offer refunds.
- **At what age can a kid attend without a parent?** Anyone under 18 must be accompanied by an adult — worth noting for families with teens who might otherwise assume they can go solo or with friends.

Explore the Depths of Luray Caverns

A parent's guide to timing, cost, ages and which add-on attractions are actually worth the stop.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

A mix of natural wonder, small-town history and just enough theme-park fun, Luray Caverns is one of the more reliable summer day trips within striking distance of the DC area. It's also easy to underestimate: what looks like a quick cave tour can turn into a five- or six-hour outing once you add in the museum, the village and the ropes course. Here's what to know before you commit the gas money and the day.

Is Luray Caverns worth the drive?

Luray Caverns is about 90 minutes to two hours from the DC area depending on traffic, making it a realistic single-day trip rather than an overnight one. The caverns themselves are the draw: well-lit, paved walkways lead past old, 10-story stone formations that are over 400 million years old, the mirror-like Dream Lake, the 47-foot Double Column and the Stalacpipe Organ, which plays music by tapping the surrounding stone. The self-guided cavern tour takes about an hour, so families who just want the caverns can be in and out in under two hours — but most of the value of the trip comes from combining it with the other attractions on-site.

What to see and what to skip

- **Ages:** Best for kids age 5 and up. The caverns themselves are stroller- and wheelchair-friendly with no steps, though some inclines may require assistance. Toddlers can handle the cave tour fine; the Garden Maze and Rope Adventure Park skew toward school-age kids and up.
- **Half day vs. full day:** The caverns plus the included museum and village make a solid half-day trip (roughly three hours). Add the Garden Maze and Rope Adventure Park and plan on a full day.
- **Nervous about caves?** The caverns are spacious, well-lit and climate-controlled year-round — not the tight, dark experience some kids expect, which makes it a good option for cave-tour first-timers.
- **Budget extra time:** Lines for tickets and the cave entrance can back up on summer weekends. Arriving by mid-morning helps you avoid the worst of it and leaves more daylight for the add-on attractions.

What else is on-site and what's worth adding?

General admission includes the caverns, the Car & Carriage Caravan Museum, Shenandoah Heritage Village and Toy Town Junction. Two attractions cost extra, and they're the ones to weigh most carefully:



- **Rope Adventure Park:** \$12 per person (children must be 48 inches or taller). Worth it if your kids are comfortable with heights and you have an extra hour; skip it for a shorter visit or younger kids, since the Low Ropes Course is really the only option under that height requirement.
- **The Garden Maze:** \$12 per person. A one-acre hedge maze that takes most families 20-30 minutes to solve. Good for kids who like a challenge; skippable if you're short on time.

Food and drink

Food and drinks aren't allowed inside the caverns, so plan to eat before or after. On-site, the Stalactite Cafe near Toy Town Junction has quick-service options, and the Heartpine Cafe in the Heritage Village's Burner Barn offers fast-casual bistro fare. Weekend wine tastings are also available at the Burner Barn through fall, for parents who want a break of their own. Bringing a picnic for the grounds afterward is another option if you'd rather skip on-site dining.

Things to know before you go

- General admission is \$36 adults, \$34 seniors, \$18 children 6-12, free under 6. It covers the caverns, museum, village and Toy Town Junction.
- Guided tours run once a day at 8:30 a.m. and cost extra; the self-guided tour is included in general admission and runs continuously.
- Wear comfortable shoes — the cavern route is long, and the Garden Maze and Rope Adventure Park add more walking.
- The caverns are wheelchair- and stroller-accessible with no steps, though some inclines may require help; the attraction isn't formally listed as "accessible" for that reason.
- No food or drinks inside the caverns — eat before, after or bring a picnic for the grounds.
- Hours vary by season, so check ahead before you go.

Planning your visit

- **Address:** 101 Cave Hill Road, Luray, VA
 - **Phone:** (540) 743-6551
 - **Hours:** Vary by season — confirm current hours before you go.
- Reservations are required to tour the caverns; tickets are available online or in person. Learn more or book tickets at luraycaverns.com.



145 years of fair food and family fun

Pig races, horse racing, butterfly encounters, live concerts and 145 years of tradition — here's everything you need to know before heading to the Maryland State Fair this summer.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

The fun doesn't stop after the country's 250th anniversary; the Maryland State Fair is celebrating its 145th anniversary this summer. This classic American summer experience is an opportunity to form long-lasting memories and bring families closer together.

Why families will love it

Kids will love classic carnival rides like the teacups, merry-go-rounds and the Ferris wheel. Ride credits can be purchased at the fair, but wristbands can be purchased in advance and give access to unlimited rides.

Attendees can also watch the 4-H and Open Class competitions to see some of the most beautiful animals, interesting art and scientific talents in the state. Some more novel categories include expressive arts, mechanical sciences and engineering.

Arts and entertainment are not limited to the competitions, however. Attendees can watch blacksmiths, glass blowers and wood carvers at work as they turn simple materials into great works of art. People strolling through the fair may also have a chance to catch a "Strolling Piano" performance or a magic show.

Kids who like animals can connect with them throughout the fair, not just at the competitions. They can stroll through a magical butterfly encounter, take in an educating and exciting otter show or watch pigs race at the Swiftly Swine competition.



PHOTO BY EDIE BERNIER OR COURTESY MD STATE FAIR



People looking for a more thrilling way to connect with fair animals can do so on the track at one of the state fair's horse races. The event is free to watch, but off-track betting is available nearby. College students can also bet on the races for a chance to win \$1,000 scholarships. Attendees can also stop by the rodeo to see bull riding and barrel racing.

Music lovers can also attend one of the state fair's summer concerts. Music styles vary from the indie rock of Congress the band, to hard rock group Clutch and kid-friendly Pop Princesses and K-pop Dance Party shows. Ticket prices for these events vary but max out at \$50 per person.



Planning your visit

- **Location:** 2200 York Road, Lutherville-Timonium
- **Dates:** The official fair will take place Aug. 27-30, Sept. 3-7, and Sept. 10-13, but events are running throughout the summer.
- **Cost:** \$15 for adults and \$10 for children.

The more you know:

Tickets can be purchased online or at the entrance, though there is a small discount for purchasing online in advance.

Limited parking near the fair grounds is available on a first-come, first-served basis for \$15. The Fair is also accessible via Light Rail and free parking is available in lots across the Light Rail tracks. Drivers cannot make left turns into the fair gates.

Pets are not allowed at the fair, though service animals are permitted. Mobility scooters, manual wheelchairs and child wagons can be rented at the gate.



FAQs

- **Are there discounts?** Yes — the Fair partners with sponsors for periodic deals and discount days; check the Fair's Deals and Discounts page for current offers.
- **What about ride tickets?** Rides are priced individually, and unlimited-ride wristbands are offered on select days and times.
- **Can we bring our dog?** Only service animals are allowed inside the fairgrounds. Pets are permitted in the off-site parking/camping areas but must stay leashed or confined.
- **Is there a weapons policy?** Yes — the fairgrounds are private property, guns and other weapons are prohibited, and all guests pass through security screening to enter.
- **How can our family/organization get more involved?** Families can enter animals or items in competitions, and organizations can apply to volunteer, sponsor or set up as vendors — details are on the Fair's website.

Cool off with these local artisan popsicles

From Mexican paletas and Colombian gelato pops to vegan dairy-free treats and boozy flavors for parents, here's where to find the DMV's best artisan popsicles this summer.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

While swims and air conditioning are great ways to cool off, try a more creative way to beat the heat by visiting one of the DMV area's best artisan popsicle stands. These delicious treats come in a variety of flavors and styles that make every location unique, and many are within a short drive from the DMV area.

WASHINGTON, DC

Jarabe Gourmet Pops

Offering elite summer treats for kids and adults, Jarabe Gourmet Pops has multiple locations across the DMV so any family can enjoy a cool summer treat. A new twist on

Mexican paletas, Jarabe's pops are inspired by Mexican, Latin American, Jamaican and Caribbean flavors. Jarabe features classic flavors like watermelon, mango and lemonade as well as new takes like tamarind, cucumber lime and hibiscus rosemary. Ice cream lovers can also enjoy creamy pops in flavors like strawberry yogurt, chocolate ganache and café con leche. If parents want to relax after a long day of kids' activities and summer fun, they can try a "boozy pop" in specialty flavors that update monthly. Jarabe embraces a zero-waste and upcycling philosophy, utilizing fruits that otherwise would have been thrown away by local grocers and turning fruit rinds into compost.

- **Address:** Pops offered at farmers markets across DC and Maryland; check the website for upcoming locations.
- **Who it works for:** 10 and up
- **Cost expectation:** \$5 and up

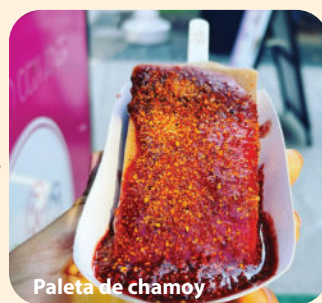


PHOTO COURTESY JARABE GOURMET POPS

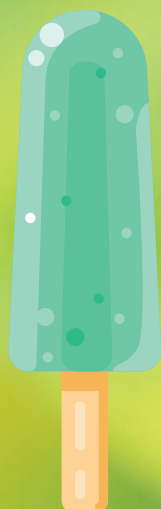
Maracas Ice Pops

Shake things up at Maracas Ice Pop stand. With locations at FRESHFARM Markets and in the Nationals Stadium, Maracas Ice Pops use all natural flavors and fresh ingredients.

- **Address:** FRESHFARM Markets, 1098 New York Ave. NW, Washington, DC; Old Town Farmers' Market, 301 King St., Alexandria, VA
- **Who it works for:** 2 and up
- **Cost expectation:** \$5 and up



BIGSTOCK/JULIADOL



MARYLAND

Amano Real Fruit

Offering Colombian-inspired handmade ice pops, Amano combines Colombian flavors with Italian gelato techniques. Located in Rockville, Amano is dedicated to creating fun and healthy treats.

- **Address:** Based in Rockville, popsicles are available at restaurants, farmers markets and retail partners. Check social media for upcoming events and partners near you.
- **Who it works for:** 10 and up
- **Cost expectation:** \$3-\$10



Tasty Toucan

With a diverse range of flavors, Tasty Toucan's vegan and dairy-free paletas are a delicious way to cool off this summer. Be sure to check out their ice cream and candy treats while you're there.

- **Address:** 400 Love Point Road, Stevensville
- **Who it works for:** 6 and up
- **Cost expectation:** \$4 and up



VIRGINIA

Happy Michoacana

Innovative and delicious treats, Happy Michoacana offers cream-based and dairy-free popsicles in addition to their ice cream and drink selections. This Fredericksburg-based family business has unique flavors kids, teens and parents can enjoy.

- **Address:** 1146 Patriot Highway, Fredericksburg
- **Who it works for:** 8 and up
- **Cost expectation:** \$3.25 and up

Fantasticks

Home to gourmet custom gelato pops, Fantasticks offers a creative way to enjoy a sweet treat. Kids will love the ability to choose their own flavors, toppings and chocolate drizzle.

- **Address:** 44715 Thorndike St., Ashburn, VA, and Rio Lake Front, MD
- **Who it works for:** 9 and up
- **Cost expectation:** \$6 with additional costs for toppings



Big Lick Ice Cream Co.

Big Lick's richly flavored, small-batch ice pops are a family-favorite at the Blacksburg Farmers Market. In addition to their many fruit pops, Big Lick also makes artisan ice cream and cookie sandwiches.

- **Address:** 100 Draper Road, Blacksburg
- **Who it works for:** 7 and up
- **Cost expectation:** \$4 and up

Joysicles

Available at multiple farmers markets across the state, these natural popsicles are a unique summer treat. Pops are made from locally grown fruits, vegetables and herbs.

- **Address:** Available at farmers markets across coastal Virginia, check the website for more details.
- **Who it works for:** 7 and up
- **Cost expectation:** \$4 and up

Pop Love

Elevate your beach day with a stop at Pop Love at Virginia Beach. This company's gelato on a stick provides tropical flavors in a low-calorie and low-sugar treat.

- **Address:** 4291 Holland Road, Suite 111, Virginia Beach
- **Who it works for:** 2 and up
- **Cost expectation:** \$4-\$10 per pop





BIGSTOCK/CHICCOBIDFC

Local sandwich shops worth visiting

Keep the whole family happy with casual atmospheres and kid-approved custom sandwich menus across DC, Maryland and Virginia.

BY MIRANDA SIMPSON

Looking for a mouth-watering sandwich for both you and your kid? Look no further, because we've found the 15 best kid-friendly sandwich shops in the DMV. Whether your kid is a picky eater or ready to try anything, these options will have both parents and children in the best food coma of their life. With stress-free atmospheres, fresh ingredients and quick service, your new local sandwich spot awaits.

DMV TOP PICKS

Bub and Pop's

A family-owned restaurant in the heart of DC, Bub and Pop's is one of DC locals' most well-loved sandwich shops. With a masterclass in comforting, kid-friendly hospitality, it is an exceptionally welcoming spot for parents navigating downtown DC with children in tow. The restaurant also features bowling lanes, an arcade and pool tables, so families can stay for an entire afternoon!

The sandwich recipes are inspired by Mae and Irv Wagner (Bub and Pop themselves), who had a deep passion for home-style food, particularly the Italian Hoagie and Braised Beef Brisket Sandwiches. The restaurant's menu now displays their grandson Chef Jon Taub's reinvented version of these family classics.

Families love coming here to dive into massive Philly-style hoagies and braised pork melts. Parents routinely order the legendary Beef Brisket or the classic Italian hoagie, while kids are won over by the gooey, melted provolone and soft, freshly baked rolls that are easy for small hands to hold. The portions are notoriously huge, making it incredibly simple and cost-effective for parents to split a full-sized sandwich between multiple kids. It is a noisy, high-energy neighborhood staple where kids can enjoy their food and the multiple amusements the spot has to offer.

- **Location:** 100 Florida Ave. NE, Washington, DC
- **What to order:** Large Bub's Italian hoagie to split.
- **Review:** "Bub couldn't have been more helpful explaining what they could do for our 'fussy eater' child - a pepperoni pizza sandwich that he ate with no fuss! The rest of us all devoured our sandwiches which were loaded with our chosen filling and decided it was the best meal we'd had on vacation so far! Definitely recommend this kind of quick informal lunch." Liz B on TripAdvisor
- **Cost expectation:** Small sandwiches are around \$14-\$15 and a large is typically \$23. I recommend splitting!
- **Helpful visit tip:** Seating is limited, so prepare to take the sandwich to go. The restaurant is closed Monday and Tuesdays.

Jetties

Jetties is arguably the ultimate local sandwich shop to take kids to in Maryland. The atmosphere is bright, airy and beach-themed, filled with nautical decor that instantly lowers the stress levels of parents walking in with energetic children. The counter-service setup keeps lines moving quickly, meaning you won't have to keep toddlers entertained at a table for long before the food arrives.

What makes Jetties a standout for families is its clever menu named after Nantucket beaches and its genuine dedication to fresh, wholesome ingredients. While parents can dive into massive artisan salads or gourmet turkey creations, kids are treated to a specialized menu that goes far beyond generic fast food. Families consistently order the Nobadeer Thanksgiving sandwich to share or look to the "Little Jetties" menu for perfect kid-sized portions of freshly roasted turkey, ham or grilled cheese that comes with two sides and a drink. With plenty of napkins on hand and a lively environment to eat in it is an effortless neighborhood favorite.

- **Location:** 4829 Fairmont Ave., Bethesda, MD
- **What to order:** The "Nobadeer" (freshly roasted turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce and mayo on sourdough) or the kid-favorite grilled cheese.
- **Review:** "Forget Chop't and Sweet Green. Jetties has the best and freshest selection and you just fill out your card and they make it fresh. Great home cooked warm turkey breast and roasted broccoli as well as many other selections. Not too much lettuce and good balance of goodies" - David K, TripAdvisor
- **Cost expectation:** Sandwiches and salads range from \$12-\$17, kids' meals are \$10.95
- **Helpful visit tip:** Gets very busy at lunchtime, so try to avoid peak meal hours!

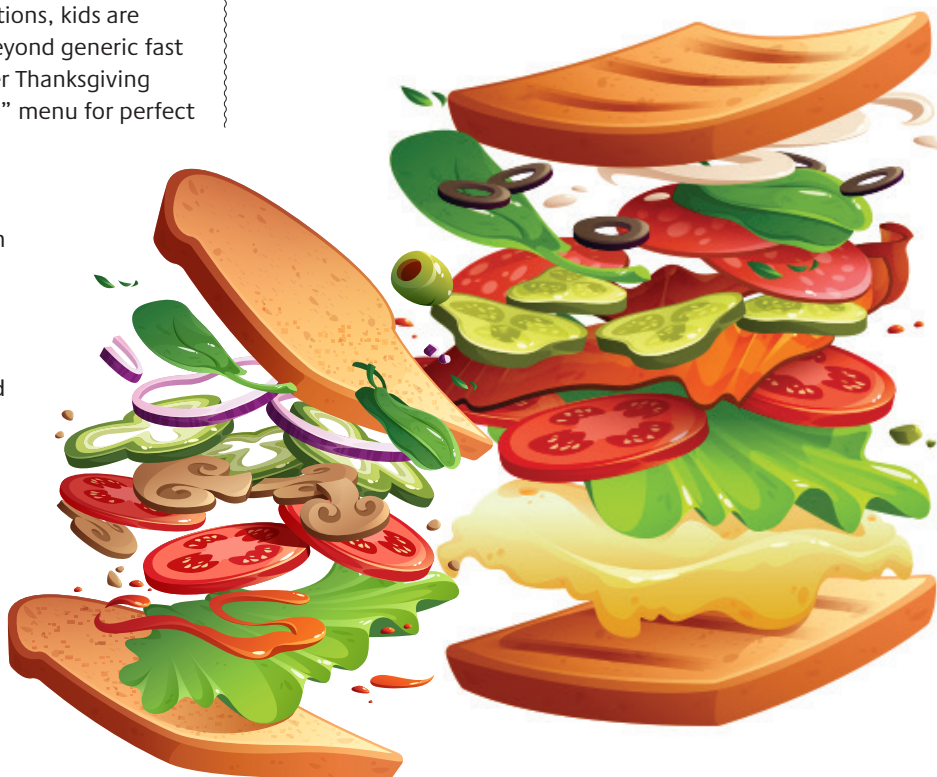
Earl's Sandwiches

Earl's Sandwiches is an absolute favorite spot to take kids to in Northern Virginia. The atmosphere is incredibly casual and fast-paced, meaning parents can sit back and relax without worrying about their children making a little noise. The open-style counter system allows kids to watch exactly how their food is built, which is a great way to keep short attention spans occupied.

Earl's is famous for slow-roasting their turkey, pork and beef completely from scratch every day, providing a wholesome quality that parents can feel great about. Families consistently head here to order their roasted turkey creations that taste like a Thanksgiving holiday wrapped inside a fresh roll. Picky eaters love their incredibly soft breads and simple, perfectly melted grilled cheeses, while parents can enjoy complex hot premium sandwiches packed with homemade stuffing and rich gravy.

- **What to order:** The "Turkey Club" or the "Roasted Turkey" sandwich with stuffing, cranberry sauce and gravy on thick-sliced sourdough. Hot dogs and grilled cheese on the kids menu are perfect for pickier eaters.
- **Review:** "As a Northern Virginia native myself, this has always been one of my personal favorite spots. The service is quick and friendly, and the sandwiches are filling enough to share between two people. Their cane sodas, featuring flavors like mandarin orange and black cherry, were my favorite treat when I was younger, and I still go back for them now." - Miranda S
- **Address:** 2603 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA
- **Cost expectation:** Sandwiches and salads range from \$6.49-\$12.99, depending on meal options, and kids' meals start at \$3.49.
- **Helpful visit tip:** Lacks a ton of seating, so consider an alternate location to enjoy your sandwiches.

CONTINUED...



BIGSTOCK/KYAKSUN

THE KID-FRIENDLY SANDWICH SHORTLIST



WASHINGTON, DC

Mangialardo's

This neighborhood fixture has been serving up some of the best Italian subs on Capitol Hill for decades. The quick-moving counter line is perfect for families who need to grab a high-quality lunch quickly without waiting around.

- **Location:** 1317 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, Washington, DC
- **Who it works for:** Families with active teenagers and school-aged children.
- **Cost expectation:** \$12-\$18 per sandwich.
- **Helpful visit tip:** Take your sandwiches to go and picnic at the nearby park blocks on Capitol Hill.

SUNdeVICH

This spot serves up globally inspired sandwiches built on perfectly crisp, freshly baked baguettes. The unique menu layout features items named after major international cities, making lunch a fun geography game for kids and a much more exciting bite for parents.

- **Location:** 601 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC
- **Who it works for:** Curious, adventurous young eaters and parents looking for creative flavors.
- **Cost expectation:** \$14-\$19 per sandwich.
- **Helpful visit tip:** You can avoid long waits by ordering ahead online via SUNdeVICH or by scanning the QR code when you walk in.

Compliments Only

This trendy sandwich counter has taken the local food scene by storm with its clever menu names and top-tier ingredient pairings. The staff is exceptionally accommodating, and kids can build their own sandwich, customizing it to fit the needs of pickier eaters. There are locations on both Capitol Hill and in Dupont, so you don't have to travel far.

- **Location:** 526 8th St. SE, Suite A, Washington, DC
- **Who it works for:** Young families looking for a trendy, laid-back lunch spot.
- **Cost expectation:** \$15-\$20 per sandwich.
- **Helpful visit tip:** Grab one of their signature house-made chocolate chip cookies as a reward for finishing lunch.

Stachowski Market

A butcher shop, deli and grocery store, Stachowski Market has both incredible sandwiches and lots of aisles for kids to wander down. They craft some of the most massive sandwiches in the city, so splitting is a great money-saving option.

- **Location:** 1425 28th St. NW, Washington, DC
- **Who it works for:** Families with big appetites looking for shareable, meat-packed classics.
- **Cost expectation:** \$18-\$26 (Note that a single sandwich easily feeds two people).
- **Helpful visit tip:** Buy some sandwich meat to take home for school lunches!



PHOTO COURTESY STACHOWSKI'S MARKET

MARYLAND

Sister's Sandwiches and Such

A loved Bethesda spot, Sister's Sandwiches and Such has freshly made salads, sandwiches, nachos and desserts. With a kids menu containing basics like a PB&J, a mac and cheese, or a half a sandwich offer, this restaurant is made for hungry families looking for a local spot.

- **Multiple Locations:** 16834 Georgia Ave., Olney; 20201 Century Blvd., Suite 150, Germantown; 4520 East-West Highway, Bethesda
- **Who it works for:** Kids and parents of all ages.
- **Cost expectation:** \$7 for kids menu, \$10-\$12 per sandwich
- **Helpful visit tip:** This spot has covered outdoor seating so families don't need to worry about noise!



Filippo's Italian Specialties

Located in Wheaton, Filippo's Italian Specialties serves up old-school sub sandwiches packed with fresh sliced-to-order meats. The market also sells colorful, varied desserts imported from New York, so you can treat your kids to lemon drop and jelly sugar cookies.

- **Who it works for:** Families looking for traditional, fresh sandwiches.
- **Cost expectation:** \$10-\$15 per sub.
- **Helpful visit tip:** They offer smaller, half-sized subs that are perfect for elementary-aged kids.

Santucci's Deli

With wraps, sandwiches, pizzas, wings, pasta and more, Santucci's Deli has something for the whole family. Reviews boast speedy service and consistently delicious food, making it a great option for families in a rush.

- **Location:** 10107 Colesville Road, Silver Spring
- **Who it works for:** Families looking for a classic, reliable neighborhood joint with zero pretense.
- **Cost expectation:** \$11-\$15 per sub
- **Helpful visit tip:** The hot meatball parmigiana sub is served at a perfect, kid-friendly temperature upon request.

The Corner Market & Greenhouse

This unique destination combines a scenic country market with a fantastic deli counter, allowing you to enjoy gourmet sandwiches surrounded by beautiful plants. The massive outdoor grounds provide plenty of open space for children to play while parents eat.

- **Location:** 1141 Berrymans Lane, Reisterstown
- **Who it works for:** Families who are looking for scenic outdoor seating and a wide-open, relaxed atmosphere.
- **Cost expectation:** \$13-\$17 per sandwich
- **Helpful visit tip:** Be sure to check out the seasonal greenhouse displays and local farm treats after finishing your lunch.

VIRGINIA

The Italian Store

Both a deli and a grocery store, this sandwich spot is not only delicious, but is packed with rows of colorful imported candies for kids to wander through. With both an espresso bar and gelato, everyone in the family can have a mid-day pick-me-up.

- **Location:** 5837 Washington Blvd., Arlington; 3123 Lee Highway, Arlington

- **Who it works for:** All age groups and families looking for a lively local marketplace.
- **Cost expectation:** \$10-\$15 per sub.
- **Helpful visit tip:** Order the "Milano" sub on a soft roll if you are sharing with younger toddlers.

Soko Butcher & Deli

The Leesburg location opened in May 2026, Soko Butcher and Deli is known for butcher cuts, gourmet deli sandwiches, breakfast favorites, loaded fries, wings, salads and specialty meats. Kids can peer through the glass displays at custom cuts while waiting for their expertly grilled burgers or turkey sandwiches.

- **Location:** 15 Loudoun St. SE, Leesburg
- **Who it works for:** Foodie parents and kids who love a great, high-quality backyard-style smash burger.
- **Cost expectation:** \$15-\$22 per sandwich.
- **Helpful visit tip:** Their massive beef tallow fries are an absolute must-order item to share with the table.

Grazie Grazie

With locations in Arlington and DC, Grazie Grazie features Philly-style cheesesteaks, pizzas, hoagies and more. The venue sits right in the lively Ballston Quarter area, making it easy to pair lunch with a family shopping day.

- **Location:** 4121 Wilson Blvd., Arlington
- **Who it works for:** Families looking for a clean, vibrant dining space with options to please everyone.
- **Cost expectation:** \$13-\$18 per sandwich.
- **Helpful visit tip:** If you're looking to feed a big family, the Let's Be Friends sandwich box includes four sandwiches, four sides and cookies to share.

The Sandwich Shop

The Sandwich Shop in Vienna has an extensive kids menu, including salami and provolone sandwiches and meatballs, as well as a delicious array of options for parents. Loved by locals, it boasts hot, cold and vegetarian sandwiches, making sure the whole family is full.

- **Location:** 132 Church St. NW, Vienna
- **Who it works for:** Families of all ages
- **Cost expectation:** \$10-\$12 per sandwich.
- **Helpful visit tip:** Kids love the tater tots as a side!



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PHOTO COURTESY ARLINGTON COUNTY FAIR

Enjoy the last bits of summer with these August events

From Renaissance festivals and county fairs to waterfront movie nights and glowing lanterns on the Potomac, here's how to fill the final weeks of summer across the DMV.

BY STEVIE ROSENFELD

Find ways to fill the long summer days this August by exploring some of the great events in our DMV Summer Fun Guide.

FEATURED DESTINATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

In this section, Washington Parent's advertising partners share their top summer destinations and activities.

Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay

The award-winning Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Golf Resort, Spa and Marina is the kind of place where families can do as much or as little as they want — and still come home feeling like they made the most of summer. Water lovers will be right at home with multiple outdoor pools overlooking the waterfront, including an adventure pool with a waterslide, plus an indoor pool where nightly dive-in movies make for a perfect end to a full day. Throughout the summer, the resort partners with Black Water Adventures for water sport rentals and guided kayak excursions. Parents looking for some me-time can head to Sago Spa & Salon for standout treatments like the



PHOTO COURTESY HYATT REGENCY CHESAPEAKE BAY GOLF RESORT

VOYA seaweed poultice massage or the Eminence marine flower hydrating peptide facial. Golf enthusiasts can hit the links at the onsite River Marsh Golf Club. Before you book, check out the resort's "Sunny Days, \$100 Ways" package. Available for stays between June 15 and Sept. 30, 2026 — when booked by Sept. 30 — guests receive a \$100 resort credit to use toward spa services, golf or dining at one of the resort's on-site restaurants. Visit the resort's website to book.

- **Time needed:** A weekend is suggested to get the full experience.
- **Cost:** Rooms start at \$424 per night
- **Reservation requirement:** Reservations are required for overnight stays.
- **Location:** 100 Heron Blvd US-50, Cambridge, MD

MORE DESTINATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

This section features other DMV summer destinations and activities chosen by Washington Parent staff. Many of these destinations and activities have high reviews according to Google, Yelp and other destination websites.

WASHINGTON, DC

The National Building Museum

With something for everyone, The National Building museum lets kids learn, explore art, culture and play. Consider visiting “THE PLAYGROUND” exhibit, which explores how fun and architecture intersects.

- **Time needed:** 2-3 hours
- **Cost:** Access to the Great Hall where THE PLAYGROUND is located is free, but entry to the full museum is \$10 for adults and \$7 for children.
- **Reservation requirement:** None
- **Location:** 401 F St. NW, Washington, DC

MARYLAND

Movies on the Potomac

Throughout August and into September, visit the National Harbor any Sunday for a family movie night on the Potomac. From recent hits like “Elio” to classics like “Babe,” every movie at National Harbor is a hit.

- **Time needed:** 2 hours
- **Cost:** Free
- **Reservation requirement:** None
- **Location:** 165 Waterfront St., National Harbor



PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL HARBOR



PHOTO COURTESY WATER LANTERN FESTIVAL

Water Lantern Festival

Create a personalized lantern and release it across the water. Develop beautiful memories and new bonds with the people around you at the Washington Water Lantern Festival.

- **Date:** 5:30-9:30 p.m. Aug. 8-9
- **Time needed:** 2-3 hours
- **Cost:** \$34.99 for regular tickets, \$24.99 per person in groups of four
- **Reservation requirement:** Tickets must be purchased in advance.
- **Location:** 802 National Harbor Blvd., Oxon Hill

Howard County Fair

At the 80th annual Howard County Fair, your kids can see what it's like to be a farmer at the Kids & Critters Barn and the Little Farmers Building. Stop by the fairgrounds throughout the month to take in live music and square dancing.

- **Date:** Aug. 8-15
- **Time needed:** 3-4 hours
- **Cost:** \$10 for adults, \$5 for seniors and free for kids. Season passes available for \$40.
- **Reservation requirement:** None
- **Location:** 2210 Fairgrounds Road, West Friendship

Montgomery County Agricultural Fair

Celebrate local farmers with games, music, food and fun at the Barn in the USA fair. Check out the county's biggest pigs and best cakes at this year's 4-H competition.

- **Date:** Aug. 14-20
- **Time needed:** 3-4 hours
- **Cost:** \$18 for adults, free for children 11 and under. Additional costs for carnival rides.
- **Reservation requirement:** None
- **Location:** 16 Chestnut Street, Gaithersburg

CONTINUED...

THINGS TO DO

Maryland State Fair

See incredible farm creatures, play novel games and go on exciting rides at the Maryland State Fair Aug. 27-30 in Lutherville-Timonium.

- **Date:** Aug. 27-30
- **Time needed:** 3-4 hours
- **Cost:** \$10 for 100 ride credit. Rides range from 32-100 credits. Additional fees for games, food and parking
- **Reservation requirement:** None
- **Location:** 2200 York Road, Lutherville-Timonium

Maryland Renaissance Festival

Step into the past and into power as your child can become a knight, royalty or magical being as you take in music, plays, duels and animal shows at the Renaissance Fair.

- **Dates:** Aug. 27-30, Sept. 3-7 and Sept. 10-13
- **Time needed:** 3-4 hours
- **Cost:** \$31 for adults, \$27 for seniors, \$17 for children.
- **Reservation requirement:** Tickets are available for each day online. Tickets frequently sell out so purchase them in advance. No tickets are sold at the festival gate.
- **Location:** 1821 Crownsville Road, Annapolis

VIRGINIA

Water Country USA

Make memories and a splash at Water Country USA, part of the Busch Gardens family. Visit the AquaGlow family-friendly party zones with a live DJ.

- **Date:** 8-11 p.m. select nights through Aug. 15
- **Time needed:** 2-3 hours
- **Cost:** \$34.99 per person
- **Reservation requirement:** Tickets available for purchase online.
- **Location:** 176 Water Country Parkway, Williamsburg

Fairfax Summer Carnival and Fair

See shows, watch tractor demonstrations and have some "old-fashioned family fun" at the Fairfax County Summer Fair.

- **Date:** July 30-Aug. 2
- **Time needed:** 2-3 hours
- **Cost:** \$10 parking fee, \$30 ride ticket wrist band
- **Reservation requirement:** None
- **Location:** 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax



PHOTO COURTESY FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY



PHOTO COURTESY NATIONAL HARBOR

Arlington County Fair

Play classic carnival games and old-school rides at the Arlington County Fair from Aug. 12-16.

- **Date:** Aug. 12-16
- **Time needed:** 3-4 hours
- **Cost:** Admission is free, with rides, games and food costing extra.
- **Reservation requirement:** None
- **Location:** 3501 2nd St. S, Arlington



PHOTO COURTESY AROUND THE WORLD CULTURAL FOOD FESTIVAL

Around the World Cultural Food Festival

Enjoy tasty treats from around the globe as you stroll the streets of Old Town Alexandria. Vendors are carefully selected, with only one representing each featured country.

- **Date:** 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Aug. 29
- **Time needed:** 2-3 hours
- **Cost:** Admission is free; food is available for purchase.
- **Reservation requirement:** RSVP available on Facebook
- **Location:** 100 Madison St., Alexandria



PHOTO COURTESY AROUND THE WORLD CULTURAL FOOD FESTIVAL

Celebrate Labor Day the DMV way

From waterfront festivals and concerts to fairs, parades and family-friendly celebrations, here are some of the best ways to spend Labor Day weekend around DC, Maryland and Virginia.

BY JENNA DOLCH

Labor Day weekend always feels a little bittersweet. It's the unofficial end of summer, but it's also one final excuse to squeeze in festivals, fireworks, concerts, fairs and family adventures before fall routines officially take over. Luckily, the DMV knows how to send summer out in style.

From waterfront celebrations in Maryland to street festivals in DC and family fairs across Virginia, there's no shortage of ways to spend the long weekend. Whether your family wants carnival rides and live music or a weekend getaway nearby, these events make it easy to celebrate the final big weekend of summer.

WASHINGTON, DC

DC JazzFest Labor Day Weekend Events

DC JazzFest transforms parts of the city into a massive celebration of live music every Labor Day weekend. Families can enjoy outdoor performances, waterfront stages and kid-friendly daytime events throughout The Wharf and other DC venues.

- **Date:** Sept. 2-6
- **Address:** 101 District Square SW, Washington, DC, and other locations around DC
- **Phone:** (202) 688-3590

Good to know

- **Time needed:** 2-5 hours
- **Cost:** \$\$\$
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Mostly outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Busy
- **Reservation requirements:** Some ticketed performances require advance purchase



PHOTO COURTESY DC JAZZ FESTIVAL

DC Festival of Magic

The DC Festival of Magic brings together magicians from around the world for a weekend filled with illusion shows, comedy magic and interactive performances that are especially fun for families. The event features multiple performances throughout Labor Day weekend, ranging from kid-friendly daytime acts to larger evening stage shows.

- **Date:** Sept. 4-6
- **Address:** Capital Hilton, 1001 16th St. NW, Washington, DC

Good to know

- **Time needed:** 1.5-3 hours
- **Cost:** \$\$-\$\$\$
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Indoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate
- **Reservation requirements:** Advance tickets strongly recommended

Old Town Trolley Tours Labor Day Weekend Sightseeing

Labor Day weekend is one of the busiest and most exciting times to explore Washington, DC, and Old Town Trolley Tours make it easy for families to see the city without stressing over parking or endless walking. The hop-on, hop-off tours allow visitors to explore major landmarks like the Lincoln Memorial, Smithsonian museums, the Capitol and Arlington National Cemetery all at their own pace.

- **Date:** Daily tours throughout Labor Day weekend, Sept. 4-6
- **Address:** 50 Massachusetts Ave. NE, Washington, DC

- **Good to know**
- **Time needed:** 2-6 hours depending on stops
- **Cost:** \$\$
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Outdoor sightseeing with covered seating
- **Crowd level:** Moderate to busy holiday weekend crowds
- **Reservation requirements:** Advance ticket purchase recommended during Labor Day weekend

CONTINUED...

National Symphony Orchestra Labor Day Concert

One of DC's classic Labor Day traditions, the National Symphony Orchestra Labor Day Concert brings live music and patriotic performances to the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol. Families often bring blankets and picnic dinners while enjoying the open-air concert atmosphere.

- **Date:** Sept. 6
- **Address:** U.S. Capitol West Lawn, Washington, DC

Good to know

- **Time needed:** 2-3 hours
- **Cost:** Free
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Very busy
- **Reservation requirements:** No reservations required, but arriving early is strongly recommended

Paddle the Potomac With Key Bridge Boathouse

Families wanting one final outdoor summer adventure over Labor Day weekend, renting kayaks or paddleboards from Key Bridge Boathouse is one of the best ways to experience DC from a completely different perspective. Located in Georgetown along the Potomac River, the boathouse offers rentals that let visitors paddle past the Kennedy Center, Roosevelt Island and scenic waterfront views while soaking up the holiday weekend weather.

- **Date:** Labor Day weekend rental hours vary
- **Address:** 3500 Water St. NW, Washington, DC

Good to know

- **Time needed:** 1.5-3 hours
- **Cost:** \$\$
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate to busy during afternoons
- **Reservation requirements:** Online reservations recommended for holiday weekends

MARYLAND

Maryland State Fair

The Maryland State Fair is one of the biggest Labor Day weekend attractions in the state, featuring carnival rides, concerts, food vendors, farm animals and games. Families can easily spend an entire day exploring everything the fairgrounds offer.

- **Dates:** Aug. 27-30, Sept. 3-7 and Sept. 10-13
- **Address:** 2200 York Road, Timonium

Good to know

- **Time needed:** 4-8 hours
- **Cost:** \$\$
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Mostly outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Extremely busy
- **Reservation requirements:** Advance tickets strongly recommended

Greenbelt Labor Day Festival

The Greenbelt Labor Day Festival is one of Maryland's longest-running and most community-focused Labor Day celebrations, bringing together carnival rides, live music, parades, bingo, craft vendors and family activities all weekend long. Families can enjoy midway rides, games, handmade craft booths, food vendors and live performances throughout the weekend.

- **Date:** Sept. 4-7
- **Address:** 101 Centerway, Greenbelt

Good to know

- **Time needed:** 3-6 hours or full-day visit
- **Cost:** Free admission; rides and food extra
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Mostly outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Busy, especially evenings and parade day
- **Reservation requirements:** None; ride wristbands and tickets available onsite



PHOTO BY KAREN YOHIO

Gaithersburg Labor Day Parade & Block Party

The Gaithersburg Labor Day Parade is one of the DMV's longest-running Labor Day traditions and a perfect way for families to celebrate the unofficial end of summer. The 88th annual parade will bring marching bands, community groups, performers, vintage vehicles and festive floats through Olde Towne Gaithersburg, creating a classic small-town parade atmosphere that feels nostalgic and family-friendly. After the parade, families can stick around for a block party featuring live music, food vendors and inflatable activities for kids.

- **Date:** Sept. 7
- **Address:** 9 S Summit Ave., Gaithersburg
- **Phone:** (301) 258-6300

Good to know

- **Time needed:** 2-4 hours
- **Cost:** Free
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Busy along parade route
- **Reservation requirements:** None; arrive early for shaded viewing spots and easier parking

Spend Labor Day Weekend at Deep Creek Lake

If your family wants a more laid-back Labor Day weekend escape, Deep Creek Lake is one of Maryland's best end-of-summer destinations. Families can spend the day boating, kayaking, swimming, hiking or simply relaxing by the water while enjoying cooler mountain air compared to the DMV heat. The area also offers mini golf, lakeside restaurants, scenic overlooks and family-friendly cabins if you want to turn it into a full weekend getaway.

- **Date:** Open year-round
- **Address:** Deep Creek Lake area, Garrett County

Good to know

- **Time needed:** Half-day to full weekend
- **Cost:** \$\$-\$\$\$\$, depending on activities and lodging
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Mostly outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate to busy holiday weekend crowds
- **Reservation requirements:** Lodging and boat rentals should be reserved early for Labor Day weekend

Take a Boardwalk Day Trip to Ocean City

For many Maryland families, Labor Day weekend means squeezing in one final beach trip before summer officially ends. Ocean City offers the perfect mix of beach days, boardwalk snacks, amusement rides and classic summer nostalgia that works for nearly every age group. Families can spend the day swimming, biking the boardwalk in the morning or grabbing late-night funnel cake and arcade games before heading home.

- **Date:** Beaches, boardwalk and attractions open throughout Labor Day weekend
- **Address:** Ocean City Boardwalk, Ocean City

Good to know

- **Time needed:** Full day or weekend trip
- **Cost:** \$\$-\$\$\$\$, depending on activities and lodging
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Mostly outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Very busy near the boardwalk and beach
- **Reservation requirements:** Hotels and restaurants should be booked in advance for holiday weekends

VIRGINIA

Highland County Fair

If your family wants a true small-town fair experience over Labor Day weekend, the Highland County Fair delivers exactly that. Celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2026, the fair combines classic carnival fun with deep agricultural roots in one of Virginia's most scenic mountain communities. Families can enjoy rides, games, farm animals, truck and tractor pulls, demolition derbies, live bluegrass music, clogging performances and even horse shows throughout the multi-day celebration.

- **Date:** Sept. 2-5
- **Address:** 386 Myers Moon Road, Monterey

Good to know

- **Time needed:** Half-day to full-day visit
- **Cost:** \$-\$\$
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Mostly outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate to busy during evening events
- **Reservation requirements:** None; some grandstand events may fill early so arriving ahead of time is recommended

Virginia Scottish Games

The Virginia Scottish Games bring bagpipes, Highland athletics, live Celtic music and Scottish traditions to Northern Virginia for one of the region's most unique Labor Day weekend experiences. Held at Great Meadow in The Plains, the festival combines cultural demonstrations with family-friendly entertainment, competitions, shopping and incredible mountain scenery. Families can watch heavy athletic competitions, explore clan tents, and listen to live music.

- **Date:** Sept. 5-6

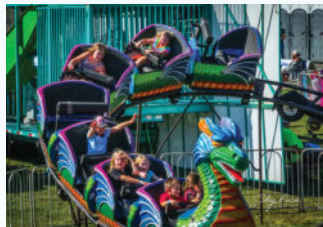


PHOTO COURTESY DAVID COCKERHAM AND SKYPAC

- **Address:** 5089 Old Tavern Road, The Plains

Good to know

- **Time needed:** 3-6 hours or full-day visit
- **Cost:** \$\$
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate to busy throughout the weekend
- **Reservation requirements:** Advance tickets recommended for Labor Day weekend attendance

Annual Labor Day Car Show in Downtown Fairfax

Car-loving families won't want to miss the Annual Labor Day Car Show in Downtown Fairfax, where classic cars, muscle cars, custom builds and vintage vehicles line the streets for one of Northern Virginia's most popular Labor Day traditions.

- **Date:** Sept. 7
- **Address:** 4081 University Drive, Fairfax

Good to know

- **Time needed:** 1.5-3 hours
- **Cost:** Free; donations encouraged
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Moderate to busy midday crowds
- **Reservation requirements:** None for spectators; arrive earlier for easier parking and cooler temperatures

Spend the Weekend Exploring Shenandoah National Park

For families wanting a quieter Labor Day weekend outdoors, Shenandoah National Park is one of Virginia's best end-of-summer escapes. Families can drive Skyline Drive, stop at scenic overlooks, hike beginner-friendly trails and enjoy cooler mountain temperatures before fall arrives. Kids especially love spotting wildlife and stopping at picnic areas throughout the park. It's a great option for families wanting nature without committing to a huge event or crowded festival.

- **Address:** Skyline Drive, Shenandoah National Park

Good to know

- **Time needed:** Half-day to full-day trip
- **Cost:** \$
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Busy holiday weekend afternoons
- **Reservation requirements:** None for park entry, though nearby lodging books quickly

Have a Beach Day in Virginia Beach

Labor Day weekend is one of the last big beach weekends of the year, and Virginia Beach still feels lively without being quite as hectic as peak midsummer. Families can spend the day swimming, biking the boardwalk, grabbing seafood and letting kids enjoy arcades and beachside attractions before school routines fully return. The boardwalk atmosphere makes it easy to turn a simple beach day into a full family outing.

- **Address:** Virginia Beach Oceanfront, Virginia Beach

Good to know

- **Time needed:** Full-day or weekend trip
- **Cost:** \$\$-\$\$\$\$, depending on activities and lodging
- **Indoor or outdoor setting:** Outdoor
- **Crowd level:** Busy near the boardwalk and beachfront
- **Reservation requirements:** Hotels and oceanfront restaurants should be booked in advance for Labor Day weekend

Enjoy Takoma Park with the family

Parks, farmers markets, free concerts and more: Here's how to spend a great day in one of Maryland's most charming neighborhoods.

BY MIRANDA SIMPSON

Takoma Park earns its reputation as one of the DMV's most distinctive family neighborhoods and spending a day here with kids proves exactly why. With a thriving arts and music scene, walkable streets and beautiful parks, the city is defined by its eclectic community spirit and hippie-leaning charm. The community calendar is packed with free and low-cost events that families can drop into without planning weeks in advance. Whether you're a longtime local or visiting for the first time, these 10 picks capture the best of what Takoma Park has to offer.

Spend a perfect morning at our top pick: Takoma Park Farmers Market

Sunday mornings don't get much better than this. The Takoma Park Farmers Market has been running since 1983, open every Sunday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., rain or shine, with



PHOTO BY SAM JAFFEE

everything for sale having traveled no more than 125 miles to get there. The market boasts stalls packed with the freshest breads, eggs, artisan cheese and pasture-raised meats, sold by incredibly friendly merchants who make or grow their own products. Younger kids are enchanted by the smell of fresh bread and the lively street performers near the entrance. Older kids zero in on the prepared food vendors, where breakfast sandwiches and fresh pastries make for a built-in snack stop. Parents may wander through and pick up a beautifully curated bouquet of flowers, or stop by and chat with vendors like Waterpenny Farm about their sustainable, organic vegetable farm. It's the kind of place you plan to spend 30 minutes and end up staying for two hours.

- **Who it works for:** All ages
- **Cost expectation:** Free to browse; low to moderate for food
- **Helpful visit tip:** Most vendors prefer cash, so have some prepared before your visit. No worries if you forget — the market has a fee-free ATM at the entrance.
- **Reviews say:** According to TripAdvisor, the market is compact but packed; reviewers consistently praise the quality and variety, especially eggs, baked goods, honey and local produce.

Go for an afternoon stroll on the Sligo Creek Trail

The Sligo Creek Trail runs on a secluded route through neighborhood parks with picnic spots along the way, and the eastern trailhead connects to 25-plus miles of interconnecting trails. It's wide enough for strollers and bikes, shaded by a full woodland canopy and dotted with playgrounds along the route.

- **Who it works for:** All ages, great for bikes and strollers
- **Cost expectation:** Free
- **Helpful visit tip:** Two sections of Sligo Creek Parkway close to motor vehicles over the weekend, making it the best time to bring bikes.

Enjoy a great meal on Carroll Avenue Restaurant Row

Carroll Avenue is the heart of Takoma, where families eat, meet and hang out. The walkable stretch is lined with family-friendly restaurants spanning Ethiopian, American and Middle Eastern cuisines, and it's genuinely easy to navigate with kids.

- **Who it works for:** All family types
- **Cost expectation:** Low to moderate
- **Helpful visit tip:** Go for an early lunch or a late afternoon snack to avoid the weekend rush.



Experience the neighborhood's culture using the Takoma Park Community Events Calendar

Takoma Park's community calendar runs year-round with a Music in the Park family series, Earth Day celebrations at Sligo Creek Park, a Children's Business Fair, a Bluegrass Block Party and a monthly Takoma Flea on Grant Avenue. There's almost always something free happening on a given weekend.

- **Who it works for:** All family types
- **Cost expectation:** Free to low
- **Helpful visit tip:** Check the calendar before you visit so you can time your trip perfectly with a free outdoor concert or market day.

Relax at Belle Ziegler Park

This is the neighborhood's most central and accessible park, with a tree-shaded green space with playgrounds, walking paths and plenty of open room for younger kids to run. It is the perfect picnic spot, with bonus points for excellent people-watching.

- **Who it works for:** Families with toddlers and young children
- **Cost expectation:** Free
- **Helpful visit tip:** If you're not in the mood for a picnic, Carroll Avenue restaurants and ice cream spots are just a short walk away.

Go to free performances at the Takoma Park Arts Series

The Takoma Park Arts Series brings free film screenings, concerts, theater and dance performances to the Community Center auditorium year-round, with no tickets or reservations required — seating is first-come, first-served. Past shows

have included Balkan folk singers, Irish step dancing and documentary screenings with live Q&As; it's one of the best free family nights out in the entire DMV.

- **Who it works for:** Families with kids 6 and up
- **Cost expectation:** Free
- **Helpful visit tip:** Seating is first-come, first-served. Doors open at 7 p.m. and close before showtime at 7:30 p.m. so arrive early!

Browse downtown boutiques and art stores

Spend an afternoon exploring locally-owned boutiques like The Girl and The Vine for specialty wines and cheeses, or pop into art stores like Artful Framing & Gallery or Tabletop, that sell both ornate jewelry and children's storybooks.



- **Who it works for:** Families with kids 6 and up
- **Cost expectation:** Free to moderate
- **Helpful visit tip:** The main commercial and shopping corridor in Takoma Park spans across Carroll Avenue and merges into Laurel Avenue, so make sure you wander through there!

Wander the trails of Takoma-Piney Branch Local Park

Takoma-Piney Branch Park has winding trails that follow Piney Branch stream, offering hiking, birdwatching and a connection to nature right in the middle of the city. Kids love hunting for frogs and birds along the creek, and it's quiet enough to actually have a conversation while they explore.

- **Who it works for:** Nature-curious kids and toddlers through elementary age
- **Cost expectation:** Free
- **Helpful visit tip:** Pair it with the Farmers Market on a Sunday, as both are within easy walking distance.

Let it all out at Takoma Park MOVES

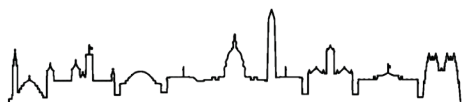
Takoma Park MOVES is a drop-in movement class open to everyone (families, kids, adults) led by Dance Exchange artists with no experience necessary. A 4-year-old and a parent can fully participate together, and kids love the freedom of a class where there's genuinely no wrong way to move.

- **Who it works for:** All ages; especially great for toddlers and younger kids
- **Cost expectation:** Low
- **Helpful visit tip:** No signup required — just show up in comfortable clothes.

Browse local books

Visit People's Book on Westmoreland Avenue to browse a curated selection of reads, catch an author reading, or join an indie board game fair. You could also check out Laurel Leaf, a women-owned shop featuring a collection of plants, books and mid-century modern furniture and decor.

- **Who it works for:** Enjoyed the most by parents and older kids
- **Cost expectation:** Low
- **Helpful visit tip:** Grab a bite to eat and stay for an Open Mic Night at Busboys and Poets!



BIGSTOCK/VARRUTA

Prince William County Fair

Aug. 1-8. Northern Virginia's biggest fair returns with rides, festival food, animals and entertainment. It runs for eight days, so there is plenty of room to pick an evening that works for your family.

■ **Location:** 10624 Dumfries Road, Manassas, VA

The Summer of Sunflowers

Aug. 1-9. Pick-your-own sunflowers across 78 acres, with more than 30 varieties of cutting sunflowers plus fields of oil sunflowers planted in successive crops. Come early for the coolest picking, or stay late for the golden-hour photos. It runs throughout the month.

■ **Location:** Burnside Farms, 11008 Kettle Run Road, Nokesville, VA

CFTC Presents

"Frozen: The Broadway Musical"

Aug. 2. The stage version of Disney's "Frozen," with all the songs from the film plus new music written for the theater. Anna and



PHOTO BY CHAD TRUJILLO, REBECCA KALANT

Elsa's story plays out with a 15-minute intermission, which is a helpful reset for younger viewers. Enter through Door 10.

■ **Location:** Katherine Johnson Middle School auditorium, 3801 Jermantown Road, Fairfax, VA

National Night Out

Aug. 4. Meet officers from the 2nd District police station, the B-CC Rescue Squad and the Bethesda Fire Department. Kids can tour fire trucks and ambulances, play free carnival games and enjoy face painting, balloon animals and crafts, with food and treats from local favorites. A low-effort weeknight outing that always lands well with younger children.

■ **Location:** Norfolk Avenue, between St. Elmo and Del Ray avenues, Bethesda, MD

2026 Family Fun Fair

Aug. 7. A free, family-friendly afternoon of games, crafts and hands-on activities, with local organizations hosting booths for kids of all ages. It runs alongside Sterling's Hot Dog Day, so you can easily make a full afternoon of it.

■ **Location:** Sterling Marketplace, Avenue A and W. Second Street, Sterling, VA

80th Howard County Fair

Aug. 8-15. Rides, animal shows, the Kids and Critters Barn, the Little Farmers Building, agricultural demonstrations, competitions, food and live entertainment. Children 12 and under get in free, adults 13 and over are \$10, and seniors 62 and over are \$5. A season pass is \$40. This year's fair also celebrates the nation's 250th birthday.

■ **Location:** Howard County Fairgrounds, 2210 Fairgrounds Road, West Friendship, MD

Storytime at the National Gallery of Art

Aug. 8. A bilingual read-aloud in English and Spanish, followed by creative play activities. The book is read twice, so wiggly toddlers get a second chance to settle in. All ages are welcome, especially the youngest visitors and nursing parents. Strollers can be parked at coat check. Free, and no registration is required.

■ **Location:** East Building Atrium, National Gallery of Art, 4th Street and Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, DC

Sunday Storytime at Planet Word

Aug. 9. A monthly hour of songs and read-alouds led by children's librarians from the DC Public Library, ideal for ages 2 to 6. Storytime runs from 10:00 to 10:30 a.m., and families are welcome to stay afterward for activities, to explore the museum, or to borrow books from the pop-up library wagon. Registration includes general museum admission.

■ **Location:** Planet Word, 925 13th St. NW, Washington, DC

Foam Party

Aug. 11. Families with children ages 0 to 6 are invited to cool off in the foam, with pizza and popsicles to go with it. Pack bathing suits and towels for anyone planning to get in.

■ **Location:** 8401 Grubb Road, Chevy Chase, MD



Culinary Arts for Kids: Pickling

Aug. 12. Kids learn how families in Colonial Maryland preserved food, then make and take home their own batch of refrigerator pickles. A hands-on history lesson that ends with something in the fridge.

■ **Location:** 14800 Governor Oden Bowie Drive, Upper Marlboro, MD

Arlington County Fair

Aug. 12-16. Billed as one of the largest free events on the East Coast, the Arlington County Fair returns for its 50th year with carnival rides, live entertainment, food vendors and an indoor exhibit hall. Admission is free, with rides priced separately, and a free shuttle runs from the Ballston garage. An easy-to-reach outing that packs in a lot for families.

■ **Location:** Thomas Jefferson Community Center, 3501 2nd St. S., Arlington, VA

Movies Under the Moon

Aug. 14. A family movie night under the stars on an inflatable screen, held the second Friday of the month at City of Fairfax parks through September. Bring blankets, chairs and your own snacks. Start times can shift later in the summer, so plan for a flexible bedtime.

■ **Location:** 3800 Keith Ave., Fairfax, VA



"KPop Demon Hunters" Sing-Along

Aug. 15. An interactive sing-along and dance-along for fans of all ages. Lyric sheets are available for newcomers, though most kids will already have "Golden," "How It's Done" and "What It Sounds Like" memorized. Expect a loud, joyful room.

■ **Location:** 2001 Olney Sandy Spring Road, Olney, MD



Panda Fest DC 2026

Aug. 15-16. Panda Fest makes its D.C. debut with more than 90 Asian food vendors, over 200 street food offerings, cultural performances, 40-plus merchandise vendors and family-friendly activities. Pandas turn up throughout the festival in inflatables, games and food. Tickets are required.

■ **Location:** Pennsylvania Avenue NW, between 4th and 7th streets, Washington, DC

2026 National Book Festival

Aug. 22. The 2026 National Book Festival will be held at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center on Aug. 22. Doors open at 8:30 a.m. Some programs will be live-streamed, and recordings will be available shortly after the festival. Attendees can meet various bestselling authors, storytellers and illustrators.

■ **Location:** Walter E. Washington Convention Center, 801 Allen Y. Lew Place NW, Washington, DC

Back to School Bonanza

Aug. 29. Springfield Town Center closes out the summer with a lively outdoor festival built for the whole community, with great food, shopping, live entertainment and plenty of fun before the school year starts. Presented by Kojam and sponsored by Washington Parent, it is free to attend and an easy way to shake off the back-to-school jitters. Scan the event QR code on the flyer or search Kojam events for the latest details.

■ **Location:** Springfield Town Center, 6500 Springfield Mall, Springfield, VA

Jennie the Cat: Jennie's Beach Day

Aug. 29. Jennie the Cat visits the beach for the first time and needs help packing, making friends, sharing and being brave. The puppet show features soft-hand puppets and original music, with plenty of opportunities for the audience to sing and dance along. Made for ages 2 to 8.

■ **Location:** 2001 Olney Sandy Spring Road, Olney, MD



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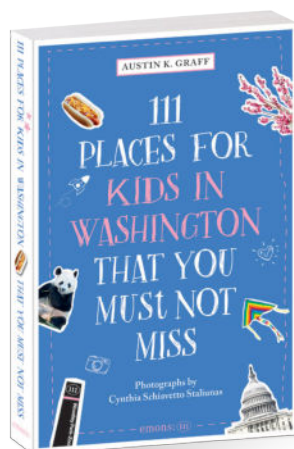
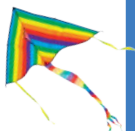
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