

EDUCATION

The greater Washington area has a wealth of school options, some of the best in the United States, from which you may select. No matter what kind of school your family seeks, there are a few guidelines to keep in mind as you choose the best option for your child:

Public v. private school options

Public schools are free for all students whose parents or permanent legal guardians reside in the assigned neighborhood of the school district. Public schools are co-educational and provide non-religious education only. Each state in the U.S. determines curriculum subjects, sets graduation and grade advancement requirements, and monitors education compliance with standardized testing. If parents do not want to have their children enrolled in the state system of education, they may apply for admission to a number of private schools which charge tuition fees and usually require a competitive application process that includes interviews, essays, and testing of the children. Generally, families seek out private schools for smaller class sizes, closer relationships with teachers and school administrators, a close-knit community, and specific academic rigor and cultural fit.

Best fit v. perceived prestige

It is misguided to believe that the prestige of the school will by definition better position a student for his or her future. Families should always seek out the best fit for a student, an environment well-suited for his or her academic and personal needs. Colleges will want to see how the student has fared in the context of his school. In other words, it is best for the student's academic growth and college prospects to find an environment where the student can emerge at the top, not deciding solely on the brand or perceived prestige of the institution.

College readiness (i.e., university placement)

It is useful to take a look at the school's historical record with college placement. Over time, schools develop relationships with colleges that can often be to a student's advantage (or disadvantage), and it is reasonable to ask to see from a high school the college placement for previous graduating classes.

Academic rigor and curricula available (e.g., International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, Advanced Placement courses, foreign language options)

Ideally, a student will find appropriately rigorous coursework so that the demands are not overwhelming but also not so light that the student does not have to put forth any extra effort to perform well. Students need this time to stretch themselves and grow but not overextend themselves. Colleges value academic rigor as much as academic performance and test scores, but they do not wish to see rigor at the expense of academic performance and test scores. Finding the appropriate rigor for the individual student is one of the most important factors in selecting the right school. And of course, it's important to understand the specific requirements to graduate with a diploma.

Special interests and organizations (e.g., athletics, music, arts)

Almost all schools offer programs and activities to keep students involved in various interests such as sports,

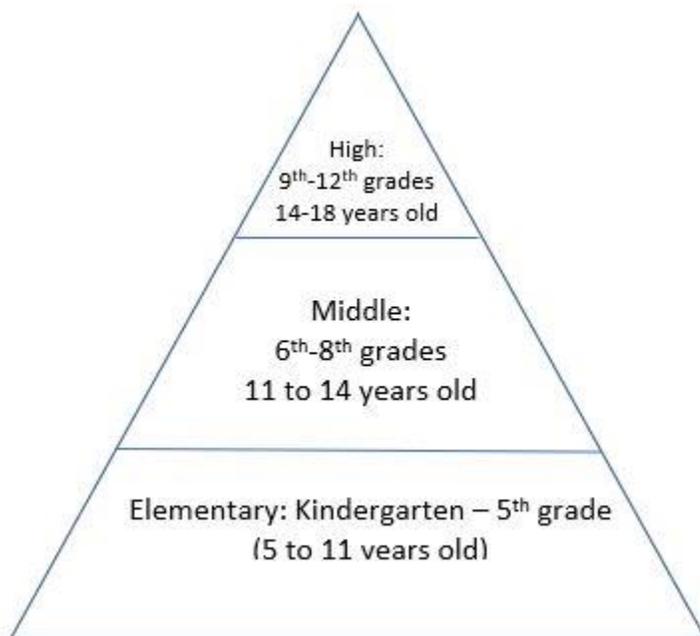
the arts, academic strengths, etc. In fact, some schools specialize in distinct talents and academics and could be the right fits for students who wish to take those on more seriously.

Other pragmatic considerations such as commute times, school demographics, facilities, etc. It is not trivial to seriously evaluate how the school will fit into the daily life of you, your student, and the rest of the family. Commuting and traffic can detract from the quality of life. It may serve you well to check out the demographics of a school if you seek a diverse student body. Depending on the student's interests, particular school facilities should be updated and well-kept. All of these pragmatic concerns are additional criteria to think about.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Public School System

Education is compulsory in the United States. It starts in kindergarten at the age of five and continues through high school until the age of 18. The school year for most institutions begins in late August or early September and ends in May or June. Public schools are free for all students whose parents or legal guardians reside in the assigned neighborhood of the school district. American public schools are general broken up into three categories: elementary school, middle school, and high schools. Elementary schools (Kindergarten through 5th grade) feed into middle schools (6th through 8th grades), and middle schools feed into high schools (9th through 12th grades). Grades are made up of age cohorts, and the age cut-off is usually on or around September 1. For example, if your child turns 11 before September first, then he or she will be eligible for 6th grade. If he doesn't turn 11 until September 1, then he will be placed in 10th grade.



Most of the school quality is driven by the quality of the high schools. The best high schools are made up of students who come from the elementary and middle schools in the same district.

To find the pyramid or school clusters, visit these websites:

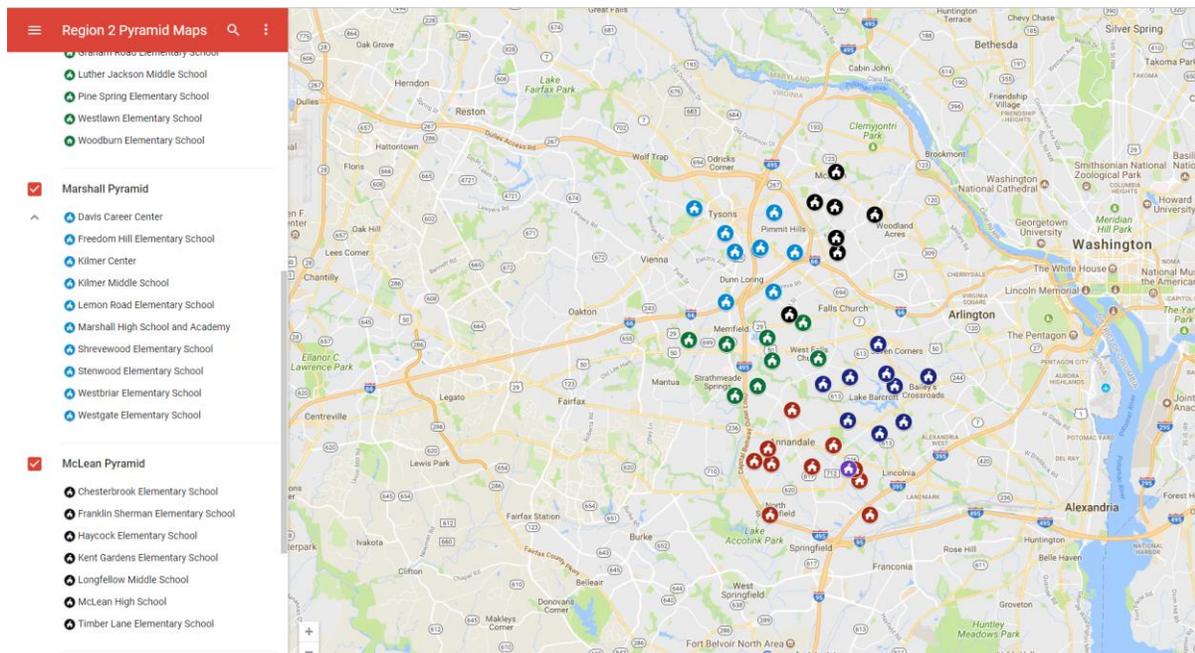
[Fairfax County and Falls Church Public Schools \(VA\)](#)

[Arlington Public Schools \(VA\)](#)

[Montgomery County Public Schools \(MD\)](#)

[District of Columbia Public Schools \(DC\)](#)

Here is an example of how some of the pyramids in Fairfax County are organized:



Public School Enrollment

Each county has its own set of criteria that must be met in order to enroll your child in a public school. The following is a list of what most public school districts require for enrollment. It is important to look up the specific school district for the exact requirements, as they can vary from county to county.

Proof of Residency: House deed, tax documentation, rental lease, notarized letter

Language proficiency: placement test or proof of English instruction at previous school (English as a Second Language instruction is provided for non-native English speakers)

Proof of birth/relationship to child: Birth certificate, physician's or hospital's letter

Documents from previous education institution: transcript (grades), teacher reports (if translated into English, originals must be included)

Physical examination: The requirement for a physical examination varies by school district.

Proof of Inoculation: You will need to have certain immunizations for your child before being admitted into a school or childcare. Most schools do not require that immunizations be administered by a U.S. physician, but

they must be documented in English. If your child did not already have these inoculations or you cannot obtain written evidence, you must then have the inoculations done in the United States. Here are the inoculation requirements for each district so you can confirm what your child still needs before arriving in the DC metro area:

[DC Immunization Requirements](#)

[Montgomery County Immunization Requirements](#)

[Fairfax County and Falls Church Immunization Requirements](#)

[Arlington County Immunization Requirements](#)

And here are the websites for each county's public school general enrollment requirements:

[Fairfax County Public Schools](#)

[Arlington Public Schools](#)

[Falls Church Public Schools](#)

[Montgomery County Schools](#)

[District of Columbia Public Schools](#)

BUS TRANSPORTATION

Public school districts are responsible for getting students to and from school using a bus system if they live beyond a certain distance from the school (i.e., a distance not walkable to school). Many private schools also offer bus transportation, but that is not the standard. Below are links to transportation services for public school districts in the metro area:

- [FCPS Transportation](#)
- [APS Transportation](#)
- [MCPS Transportation](#)
- [DCPS Transportation](#)

AFTER SCHOOL CARE

Many public schools and almost all private schools offer either formal after-school care or after-school activities to keep students engaged on campus even after the instructional day has ended. For public schools, after-school can be free or come at an extra cost based on the financial situation of the family. Visit these websites to learn more:

[FCPS After-School Care](#)

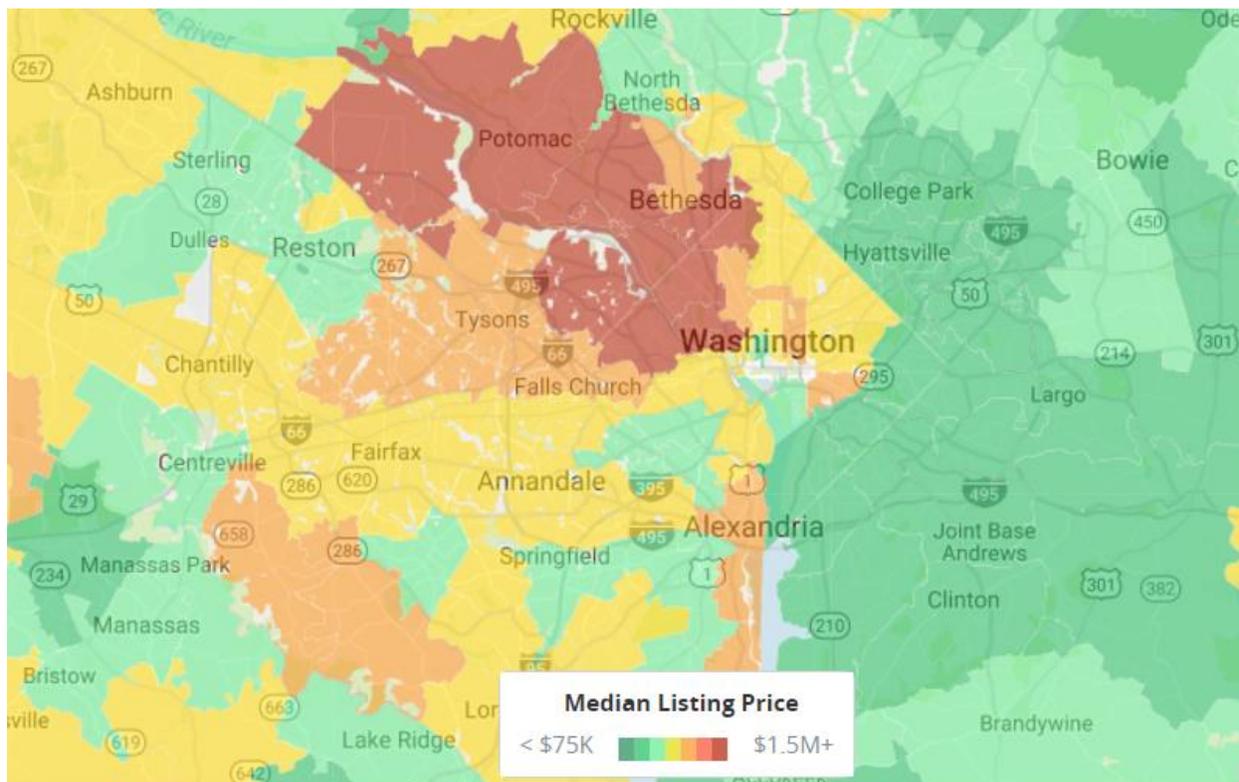
[APS After-School Care](#)

MCPS does not offer before and after-care. You can locate child care through the [Maryland Child Care Resource Network](#) or by calling 301-279.1773. Some organizations rent space at individual schools; contact your school to see if programs are being held there.

[DCPS After-School Care](#)

PUBLIC SCHOOL QUALITY

Public schools are funded by local property taxes; therefore, real estate value directly correlates with the quality of school facilities and education. Generally, the higher the median real estate value, the better the schools.



School districts in the Northwest quadrant of Washington, DC, are in close proximity to that quadrant tend to be the best quality.

Because of the pyramid set-up, whether your family is look for an elementary, middle, or high school, it's best to let the high school quality direct you.

Examples of High Quality High Schools

Fairfax County Public Schools	Langley, McLean, Madison, Marshall, South Lakes, Oakton
Arlington Public Schools	Yorktown, Washington-Lee

Montgomery Public Schools	Walt Whitman, Bethesda-Chevy Chase, Walter Johnson, Thomas S. Wooton
District of Columbia Public Schools	Wilson

It is important to keep everything in perspective. The DC metro area is home to the top 1% best public schools in the country. The US News & World Report rank high schools every year on a number of criteria, such as graduation rates, college readiness, and advanced coursework. Here are lists to use as resources:

US News & World Report Top High Schools

- Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (VA)
- Winston Churchill High School (MD)
- School Without Walls (DC)
- Thomas S. Wootton High School (MD)
- Poolesville High School (MD)
- Walter Johnson High School (MD)
- McLean High School (VA)
- Langley High School (VA)
- Richard Montgomery High School (MD)
- Oakton High School (VA)
- Yorktown High School (VA)
- River Hill High School (MD)

Magnet Schools

Another option for public school is known as a magnet school, a school offering special instruction and programs not available elsewhere, designed to attract students to a particular interest or field (*e.g.*, music, science and technology, arts). These are still free to attend; however, some require a separate application for admission and many are competitive.

- School Without Walls
- Benjamin Banneker Academy
- Duke Ellington School for the Arts
- Poolesville High School
- Richard Montgomery
- Lake Braddock High School
- Woodbridge High School

A very popular magnet option at a number of public schools (and international schools) is the International Baccalaureate Programme. This tends to be a good option to consider for globally mobile families because the diploma is recognized all over the world, unlike an American high school diploma. You can look for IB schools on the website: <http://ibo.org/>

Advanced Placement courses are uniquely American and offer students who seek college-level difficult to enroll in those classes during high school. They are offered in various subjects (the sciences, histories, English, world languages, computer science, music theory, art history, etc.) and cumulate in an exam score that can be used in college admissions, though not required.

Schools Know for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)

Virginia	Maryland
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology • McLean High School • Langley High School • Woodson High School • Chantilly High School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Churchill High School • Wootton High School • Poolesville High School • Walter Johnson High School • Richard Montgomery High School • Marriotts Ridge High School • River Hill High School

Schools with Strong Athletics

Virginia	Maryland	DC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodgrove High School • Yorktown High School • Bishop O'Connell • Lake Braddock High School • Wakefield High School • Washington-Lee High School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dematha Catholic • Good Counsel • Holton-Arms School • Damascas High School • Quince Orchard High School • Glenelg High School • Urbana High School • Paint Branch High School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. John's College HS • National Cathedral School • Wilson High School • Georgetown Visitation

Language Immersion Options

For public schools, no admission tests are required, but new students may be tested to assess their proficiency in English, usually by the international enrollment office. Some districts have separate offices for international student enrollment (MCPS), but most handle enrollment for all students through one office.

[Fairfax Public Schools International Enrollment](#)

[Arlington Public Schools International Enrollment](#)

[Montgomery Public Schools International Enrollment](#)

[District of Columbia Public Schools International Enrollment](#)

Some school options allow for instruction to be conducted in English and another language, which is a great option for students who wish to maintain their language or equip themselves with a new one.

- Oyster Adams (Spanish) in DC
- Washington Yu Ying (Mandarin) in DC
- Elsie Whitlow Stokes (French/Spanish) in DC
- Sela (Hebrew) in DC

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Enrollment

If parents do not want to have their children enrolled in the state system of education, they may apply for admission to a number of private schools which charge tuition fees. School tuition generally ranges from \$20,000 to \$40,000 per child per school year. Bear in mind that private schools here can be quite competitive and applications deadlines generally occur in January for the following school year. Advance preparation is therefore critical for a private school search. Private schools hold open houses in the fall. Interested families are encouraged to attend. Private schools send admittance notices by mid-March. Though private schools offer a certain sense of prestige, it is always important to consider best "fit" for a student before the school reputation. Many public school options offer an excellent education with tremendous return on investment. Still, private schools offer a number of benefits, too.

In addition to some of the public school enrollment requirements, private schools will expect the following:

- Completed Application
- Student and Parent Essays
- Student and Parent Interviews
- Standardized Testing or Educational Testing
- Letters of recommendation

Some schools offer admission based on "entry years," certain grades that accept a large number of students. So be sure to find out whether the school you are interested in has enough openings to fill.

Private Schools (co-ed)		
MD	VA	DC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullis School (3-12) • St. Andrew's (PS-12) • Sandy Spring Friends (PS-12) • Good Counsel (9-12) • Jewish Day School (K-12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potomac School (K-12) • Flint Hill (PS-12) • St. Stephen's and St. Agnes (9-12) • Episcopal (9-12) • Bishop O'Connell (9-12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Georgetown Day School (PS-12) • Maret School (K-12) • Sidwell Friends School (PS-12) • Edmund Burke School (6-12) • St. John's College High School (9-12)

Private Schools (all girls)		
MD	VA	DC

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stone Ridge (K-12) • Holton-Arms School (3-12) • Holy Child (6-12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Madeira School (9-12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Cathedral School (4-12) • Georgetown Visitation (9-12)
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Private Schools (all boys)		
MD	VA	DC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landon School (3-12) • Georgetown Prep (9-12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodberry Forest School 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Albans School (4-12) • Gonzaga (9-12) • St. Anselm's (6-12)

PS/K-8 th Grade Schools		
MD	VA	DC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Acres (PS-8) • Norwood School (K-8) • The Woods Academy (PK-8) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nysmith School for the Gifted • Burgandy Farm (K-8) • Green Hedges (PS-8) • Langley School (PS-8) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beavor (PS-3) • Lowell School (PS-8) • St. Patrick's (PS-8) • Sheridan (K-8)

LEARNING DISABILITIES/DIFFERENCES

By law, public schools must reasonably accommodate students with disabilities and learning differences, whether they are physical, emotional, or intellectual. However, there are a number of private options available.

Private Schools – Learning Support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field School (DC) • Lab School (DC) • McLean School (MD)

PRESCHOOLS

School before Kindergarten is not compulsory nor guaranteed. Some school districts offer services, sometimes at cost or low to no cost for families with low income. Generally, families rely on private organizations, churches, and independent schools.

[FCPS Early Childhood Programs](#)

[APS Early Childhood Programs](#)

[MCPS Early Childhood Programs](#)

[DCPS Early Childhood Programs](#)

One popular option for preschool is the Montessori school program, a discovery-led model that allows for ample freedom and teaches students life skills alongside academics. Here is a list of options to look into:

Montessori Schools (MS)

Full Circle MS

Children's House MS

Children's House of Washington

Family Academy of Bethesda

Beanstalk MS and Daycare

Bethesda MS

Georgetown MS

MS of Chevy Chase

MS of McLean

Kindergarten Age Cut-Offs

The cut-off dates for Kindergarten vary, but usually the student must turn five by some date in the month of September. Here are the links to specific age cut-offs for Kindergarten (age 5-6) by district:

[Montgomery County Public Schools](#) (Sept. 1)

[Fairfax County Public Schools](#) (Sept. 30)

[Arlington Public Schools](#) (Sept. 30)

[District of Columbia Public Schools](#) (Sept. 30)

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

If a family wishes to continue their child's education in an international system, there are options that allow that:

- The British School of Washington
- The Germany School of Washington
- Washington International School (International Baccalaureate)
- Lycée Rochambeau
- Bethesda Dutch School

UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

Note that higher education in the United States is expensive. Many Americans start saving for college almost soon after their children are born. On the other hand, many universities have substantial endowment funds which provide financial aid, either need-based or merit-based, and this varies from college to college. There are more than 4,000 universities and colleges in the United States, both private and public. State universities tend to be less expensive and have in-state tuition (for residents of that state) and out-of-state tuition (much more expensive).

Fees vary from \$40,000+ (private) a year excluding room and board to \$8,000 (in-state tuition, out-of-state \$22,000). Further education is also available at Community Colleges. Fees are dependent on residency.

International students coming to the United States to study at university, who have previously studied at college or university abroad, will need to get their prior qualifications evaluated by the World Educational Services (www.wes.org) by submitting their original transcripts. This will allow WES to calculate the equivalent U.S. grade.

There are also a number of private organizations that evaluate educational credentials for employment and other purposes. All operate on a fee based on the extent of the education to be evaluated.

Credentials Evaluation Service P.O. Box 24679 Los Angeles, CA 90024	International Consultants of Delaware, Inc. 914 Pickett Lane Newark, DE 19711
Education Equivalency Evaluation World Education Services PO. Box 745 Old Chelsea Station New York, NY 10011	Foundation for International Services, Inc. P.O. Box 230278 Portland, OR 97223
Education Credential Evaluators, Inc. P.O. Box 17499 Milwaukee, WI 53217	

Other resources for higher education include:

[College Board](#)

Comprehensive guidance for the college and grad school application process:

[Early Decision/Early Action](#)

- College/University rankings websites:
 - <http://www.usnews.com/rankings>
 - <http://www.forbes.com/top-colleges/list/>

RESOURCES

Websites:

[US News and World Report for High School Rankings](#)

<https://www.niche.com/>

<https://www.greatschools.org/>

Local services:

[PrepMatters](#)

[Fran Turner](#)

Additionally, do not hesitate to visit schools yourself to directly question and work closely with the school advisors and teachers. In the U.S. this is not only an accepted practice but it is expected from you.