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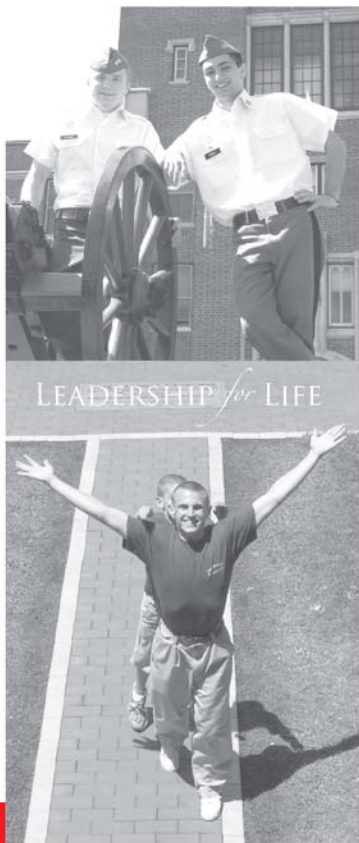
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Private Schools Feel The Economy's Pinch

Local schools report increase in requests for financial aid.

By JULIA O'DONOGHUE
THE CONNECTION

Robert McIntyre will say goodbye to all his students when they head off for summer break June 12. He knows a handful of them won't be returning next fall because their families cannot afford the \$26,400 price tag for a year of education at Oakwood School.

"I am focusing on the kids who can't come because of the money. That is heartbreak," said McIntyre, Oakwood's founder and head of school.

The 38-years old private institution in Fairfax County caters to students with special learning needs. Only about 110 children attend the kindergarten-through-eighth-grade program and there is one staff member for every three students.

McIntyre expects anywhere from eight to 12 of his current students will not be able to enroll next year for financial reasons.

Though Oakwood will be able fill the vacant attendance slots, McIntyre still worries about what will happen to the students who cannot afford to come back.

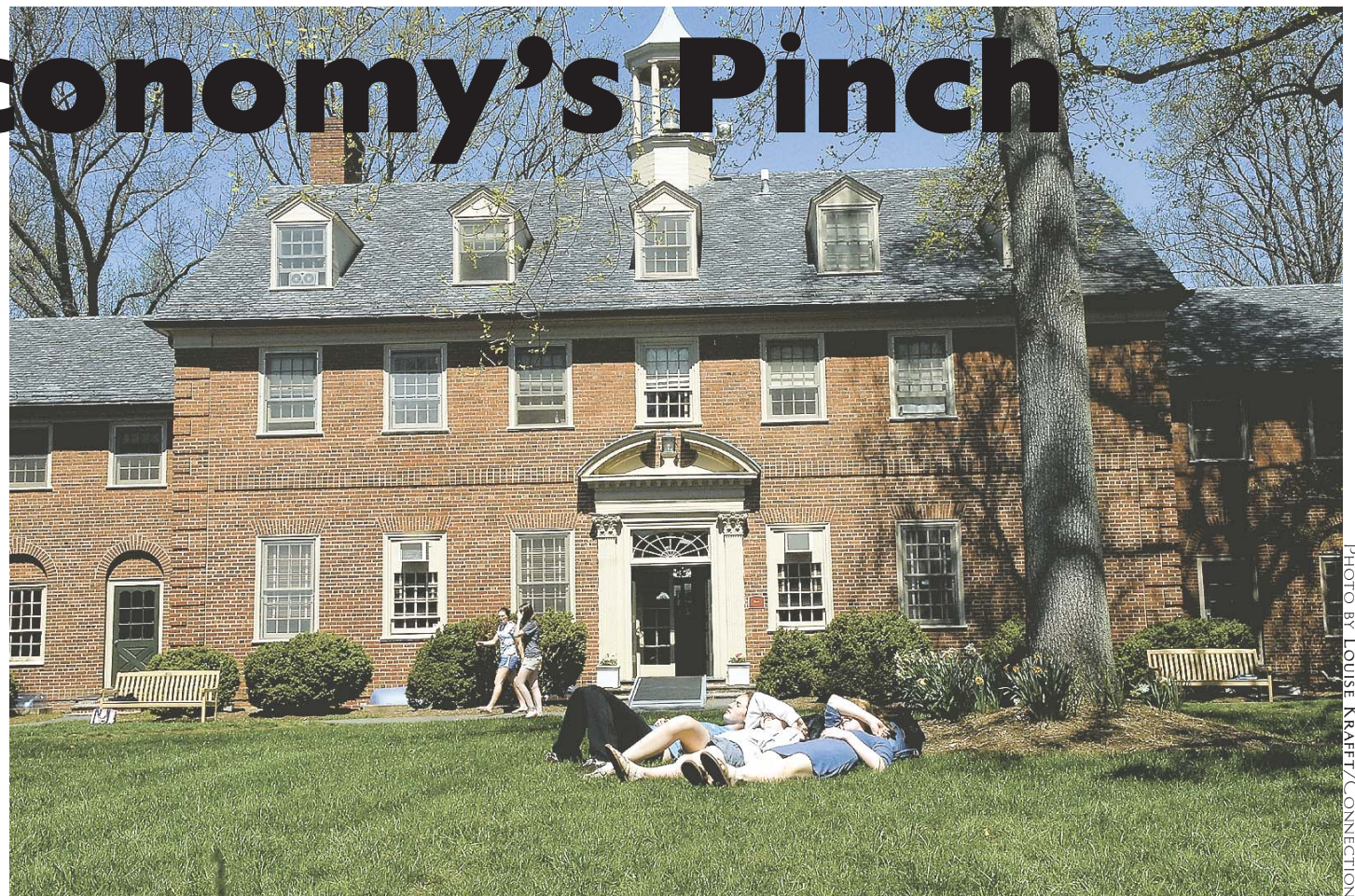
"These kids are not coming and they desperately need a special education program like ours. Our kids are all college material but they need a chance to get the help they need when they are younger," he said.

This past school year, about 10 percent of Oakwood students received some financial assistance, with most of the grants covering somewhere between a third and half of a student's tuition.

"This is the most aid we have ever given in the history of the school. We typically go into the school year with some extra funds but we spent every nickel we have on children who needed assistance," said McIntyre.

Many private and parochial schools in Northern Virginia report that requests for financial aid surged this year, both in terms of the number of families asking and the total dollar amount sought.

"Given the economy, it is obviously not surprising that among new families and returning families, there might be an increase in requests for financial aid," said Rachel Faulkner, chief operating officer of the Association of Independent Schools of Greater Washington, which includes 21



On the Madiera campus earlier this year, students enjoy a bit of sun and spring air between classes.

schools in Northern Virginia.

Faulkner's association has heard from several members who saw a jump in requests for financial help from last year, she said.

In response to additional requests for help this year, the Catholic Diocese of Arlington added \$250,000 to the \$1.7 million it normally uses for tuition assistance. The Northern Virginia diocese runs 52 schools – including five in Alexandria, seven in Arlington, and 20 in Fairfax.

"We were able to secure some additional money for families through a privately funded grant and some emergency funds," said Ken Balbuena, assistant to the diocese's school superintendent.

NORTHERN VIRGINIA is in better economic shape than most other parts of the country. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the region's unemployment rate is 5.2 percent in March 2009 compared to 8.5 nationwide at the same time.

But tens of thousands Northern Virginia residents still lost their jobs over the last year. The government reports that 39,023 Northern Virginia residents were unemployed in March 2008. A year later, that number had jumped to 74,183 people.

At the 21 Virginia schools that belong to Faulkner's private school association, the average tuition is \$20,144 for a third grader, \$21,819 for a sixth grader and \$26,479 for a 12th grader.

The Arlington's diocese parochial schools are cheaper, costing an average of \$4,445 per elementary school student and \$9,348 per high school student.

In the 2008-2009 school year, the inde-

pendent school association's 21 Virginia schools doled out \$21.5 million in financial aid to approximately 16 percent of their population. The median endowment was \$1.3 million. Approximately 35.5 percent of students at the diocese's schools also received aid last year, according to Balbuena.

FOR SOME SCHOOLS, the increase in financial aid requests is coming from current families who never had to ask for help but are now struggling to cover tuition.

"We don't normally see that at all. But now, we are seeing it a little bit because people have lost jobs in this economy," said Stacey Ahner, director of institutional advancement at Flint Hill School in Oakton.

Depending on the grade level, Flint Hill tuition ranges from approximately \$24,000 to \$27,500. Ahner said the school normally allocates about \$2 million in financial aid to 15 percent of its student body each year.

"We give priority to the students who are already here. ...We don't have sufficient aid to meet everyone's needs," said Ahner.

The Potomac School in McLean has never had to turn a student away for financial reasons, even though they saw a significant increase in requests for assistance this year.

"Once the students are accepted, they are part of the Potomac family. We do everything that we can to make it possible for those students to attend Potomac," said Sheila O'Marah, assistant head of school and director of financial aid.

Depending on the grade level, tuition ranges from \$24,000 to \$27,500 at Potomac and approximately 15 percent of the student body receives assistance.

O'Marah said about eight families with a total of 11 or 12 students currently enrolled in the school sought financial help for the first time this year but the school was able to ensure that the students could stay.

A few schools said they are looking at grants or doing more fundraising to help meet new demands for financial aid.

"We have extended ourselves further than we ever have before and it impinges on us to get a new source of support for next year but we are committed to do so," said Zvi Schoenberg, head of school at Geshar Jewish Day School in Fairfax.

THOUGH SCHOOLS saw an increase in requests for financial aid, most said they have not seen a drop off in applications or their enrollment numbers.

"Our applications were down slightly but not significantly enough to cause concern," said Kerry Moody, director of admissions and financial aid at The Langley School in McLean.

Paul VI High School had been apprehensive about a drop in applications and enrollment earlier in the year but has seen both remain steady, according to Eileen Hanley, who works in admissions.

The increase in class size at Fairfax County Public Schools may have contributed to interest remaining high, she said. Tuition at the Catholic high school in Fairfax is about \$9,200 for members of the Arlington diocese and \$12,100 for non-Catholics.

"People are looking for value and, as long as they are getting a good value and education, they are willing to sacrifice the money," said Hanley.

Making a 'PACT' with Area Camps

Program sends children and teens from shelters and transitional housing to camps with other local young people.

BY JASON MACKAY
THE CONNECTION

Sousan Frankeberger and Ellen Werthmann share an inside joke: Frankeberger does all the work, while Werthmann gets to have all the fun. Or, put another way, Frankeberger raises the money, and Werthmann just worries about spending it. The philosophy has worked.

Frankeberger of Vienna and Werthmann of Clifton co-founded the Fairfax County Park Authority's Parks and Community Together (PACT) program back in 1997 and have since influenced the lives of more than 400 children typically between the ages of 3 and 15. Think of Frankeberger and Werthmann as a sort of Santa Claus with sun-tan lotion and a brown-bagged lunch.

As an FCPA employee, Werthmann spent most of her time coordinating her organization's hundreds of summer camps, which can include anything from mountain biking to zoology to chess camps. She was also aware that the cost of some of the FCPA's camps can be a bit prohibitive, especially to those in homeless shelters or transitional housing. So Werthmann, always eager to spend a buck or two, contacted Frankeberger, who was more than willing to accommodate on the fundraising end; she already had several donors with whom she had struck up a relationship, only to find that they wanted something tangible to give to, a feel-good cause.

"There's a need to have somewhere safe and enjoyable that only our camps can offer," said Werthmann, who works primarily as the PACT program's recruitment coordinator, placing youths with their camps of choice. "For homeless families, there's no way to come up with the extra money."

Added Frankeberger, "We wanted to not only provide children with the opportunity to feel normal because everyone else gets to go to a camp and they don't, but we also wanted to give their parents an opportunity not to worry about what to do with their children."

"It's an opportunity for the parents to take care of other things that are of immediate urgency." Last summer, 36 children from local shelters were placed in FCPA camps — free of charge. When a child is placed in a camp, complete anonymity is granted. Often, the camp counselors never even find out which campers arrived courtesy of the PACT program and which did not.

The influence of the PACT program stretches all over Northern Virginia. Partners include Alexandria's Mondloch House, NOVACO of Fairfax, Falls Church's Shelter House, Fairfax's Bethany Home, Lutheran Social Ser-



PHOTOS COURTESY FAIRFAX COUNTY PARK AUTHORITY

With the Parks and Community Together program, often camp counselors never find out which campers benefit from PACT and which do not.

vices, Northern Virginia Family Services, New Hope Housing and Good Shepherd Housing and Family Services — both of Alexandria.

"It's awesome because otherwise these kids would be sitting at home."
— Victoria Neeley, executive director, NOVACO

Transportation to and from the camps must be taken care of by the individual or shelter, and attendees must figure out meals and snacks on their own. Other than that, PACT assumes 100 percent of each camp's tuition.

VICTORIA NEELEY is the executive
www.ConnectionNewspapers.com

on vacations."

Naomi Collins started work at Alexandria's Bethany House in the spring of 2006 and two weeks later began to panic about what to do with her son and daughter for the summer. After some online research and a few phone calls placed to friends, Collins found out about the PACT program and met Werthmann.

As a result, this summer will be her son's fourth year of attendance — each one more special than the last.

"Oh my goodness," Collins said. "Most parents who are homeless or who live in a shelter or are in a domestic violence program cannot afford the price of the camp. The PACT program makes it very affordable. Having that camp available to children puts a structure in place for the summer and for the children to have something to do."

KATHERINE, a 24-month resident of NOVACO transitional housing for victims of domestic abuse, has sent her two children to PACT programs for the past two summers.

In addition to meeting new friends which they have been able to reconnect with throughout the year, Katherine said the PACT program has enabled her kids to experience certain things that they might not normally have gotten the chance to experience due to the family's current situation.

"I'm a single mom and I cannot take care of everything," she said. "They have a lot of programs, and my kids love those programs. They're learning new things, too. With me working, I cannot take them to museums or anything like that."

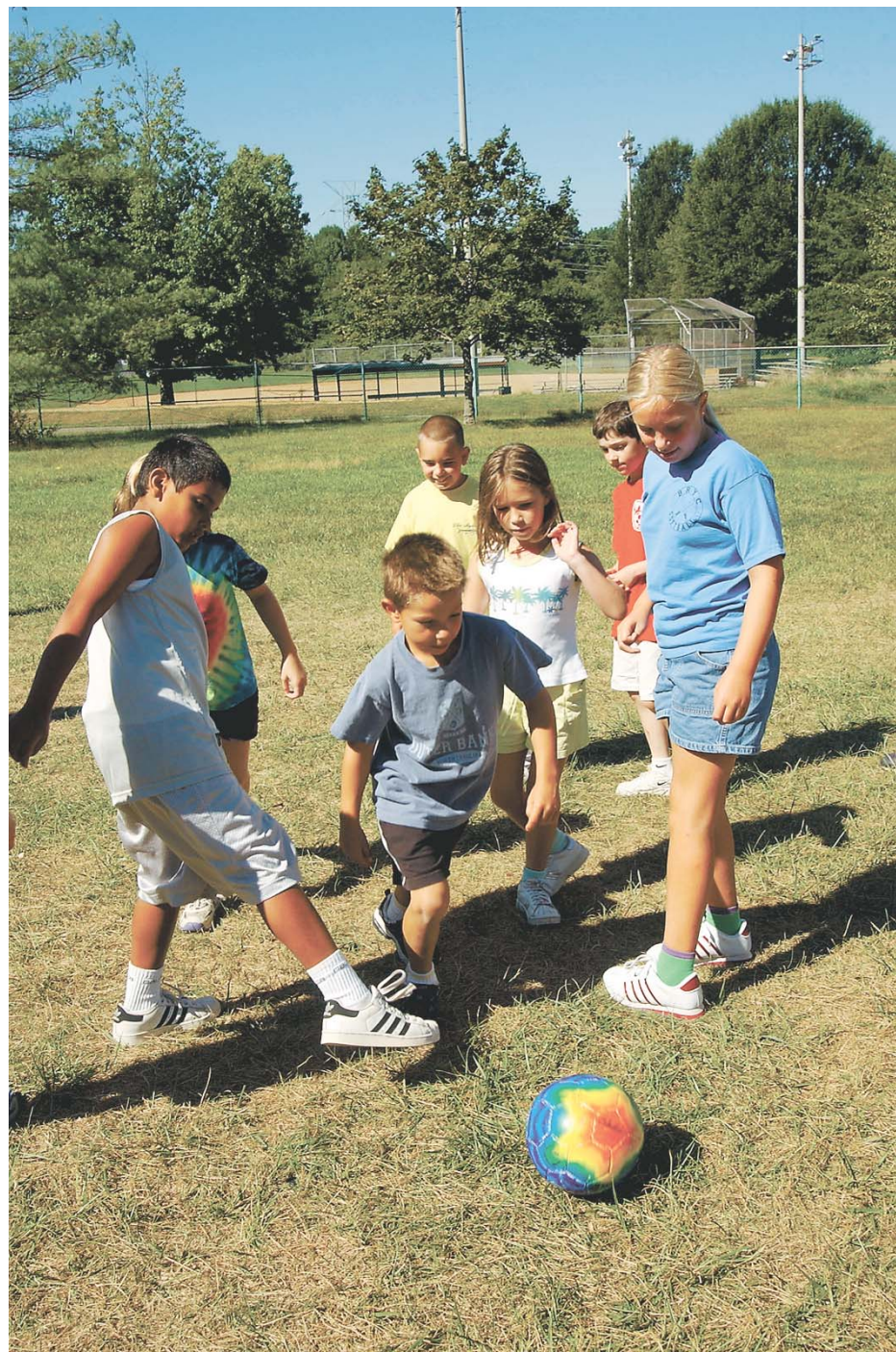
THERE ARE no restraints on how many sessions one camper can enjoy. Werthmann and Frankeberger both said that some campers stay the whole summer, some for only one or two sessions. And after some outgrow the point where they would attend a

"I'm a single mom and I cannot take care of everything. My kids love those programs."
— Katherine, resident of NOVACO transitional housing

How to Help

The Fairfax County Park Authority's Parks and Community Together (PACT) program is still accepting donations for this summer. Whether it's on an individual basis or a company-wide sponsorship, any donation to PACT helps ensure that needy young people receive a summer experience resembling that of their peers.

Fees for a two-week session start at \$340 for a single child and that number can multiply greatly based on how many campers the PACT program helps and for how long. In 2008, PACT provided 112 two-week sessions for 36 children at a cost of \$35,920. Contact Sousan Frankeberger at 703-324-8566 or sousan.frankeberger@fairfaxcounty.gov.



Since 1997, the Fairfax County Park Authority's Parks and Community Together (PACT) program has helped more than 400 needy children and teens attend various summer camps for free.



In 2008, fundraising director Sousan Frankeberger of Vienna raised \$36,763 for Ellen Werthmann, the PACT program's recruitment and placement coordinator, to work with. This summer, that total has jumped to around \$40,000.

particular camp, there's also a Counselor In Training (CIT) program that's offered.

Fiscal issues are simple as well. Each year Frankeberger sets a goal — this year it was \$50,000 — and tries her best to reach that goal by mailing fliers and soliciting donations from area businesses.

In 2008, Werthmann spent \$35,920

that Frankeberger raised. This year, Frankeberger has totaled around \$40,000 for Werthmann to work with, and, by all accounts, the program will have its best summer yet, with an expectancy of 50 to 60 youths, hardly resembling the 1997 total of four.

"Sousan brings it in, and I spend it," Werthmann joked. "But we have been able to help hundreds of children."

Choosing the Right School

Adapted from the National Association of Independent Schools.

For more, visit the Parents' Guide from the National Association of Independent Schools at www.nais.org/go/parents.

Start Early

Public schools take in new children all year round. But not independent schools. Most schools' admissions and financial aid timelines are like colleges; applicants start the process almost a year before they plan to attend.

Learn the deadlines — for both admission and financial aid — by checking Web sites. Call individual schools if you have questions. The entire process will be easier on your family if you know the deadlines, keep track of them carefully, and give yourself plenty of time to meet them.

Do Your Homework

Start by working with your family to determine your ideal educational community. Ask yourself whether the school would be: small or large; day school or boarding school; coeducational or single-sex; traditional or pro-

School Search Timeline

AUGUST: Finalize schools that you plan to inquire about.

SEPTEMBER

- Request admissions and financial aid material by phone or online.
- Review admissions materials to determine which schools to visit.

- Keep a calendar of pertinent deadlines for admission and financial aid and procedures, such as when schools start taking reservations for individual tours and interviews.

- Register for standardized tests—the SSAT or ISEE (for middle school and high school).

- Review the test Web sites to learn procedures and see sample questions; consider whether you want to buy a test-preparation book.

- Call to schedule individual tours, interviews, class visits, and “shadow days.” Ask elementary schools about their test schedules and how to make an appointment.

OCTOBER

- Visit open houses.
- Call to schedule tours, interviews, class visits, and school-based tests if you haven't already.

- Attend information sessions and take tours.

- Finalize school(s) to which you will make application.

- Take standardized test.

NOVEMBER

- Follow through on activities you may not have completed, such as scheduling tours, interviews, class visits, and standardized or school-based tests.

- Continue to watch for open houses you may want to attend.

- Start lining up teacher recommendations.

- Start working on applications, financial aid forms, student questionnaires, essays, etc.

DECEMBER Complete any remaining applications, questionnaires, etc. Most application materials are due in January or early February.

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Consider the Possibilities

Call potential schools to request admissions literature, and examine their Web sites. Then compare what you read there with what you're looking for in your ideal school. Among the questions you should ask yourself about each school:

Basic Facts: How many students does the school have? Where is it, and how does the location affect your transportation needs?

For high schools, what are the graduation requirements? What percentage of students enter college, and what kinds of colleges do they attend? Is the school accredited, and if so, by whom?

Educational Quality: What is the school's mission, and does its philosophy appeal to you? Does it have a particular educational focus? Is the atmosphere competitive? Nurturing? Or what?

Beyond the Basics: What

types of learning experiences are available — in class, on the playing field, in extracurricular activities, and in community service? Do the school materials discuss parental involvement?

Costs: What is the tuition? Are there extra charges, such as for books, lab fees, transportation, and so on? What are the school's financing options? What is the financial aid application process? When are the deadlines?

The Open House: Although the majority of open houses occur in the fall, some schools have one right after the first of the year. Most schools list open houses in the admissions section of their Web sites; if you can't find the information there, call the admissions office.

Check to see if you need to register or if you can just drop in. Also find out if there will be a formal welcome at the open house and what time it will occur. This brief presentation is an ideal opportunity to hear how the school head and admissions director speak of the school.

Local School Tuition

SOURCE: school Web sites and the Catholic Diocese of Arlington.

NAME	LOCATION	TUITION (GRADES)
Alexandria County Day School	Alexandria	\$19,830 (K-3) \$21,430 (4-8)
Bishop Ireton High School*	Alexandria	\$10,400 (parishioner) \$11,800 (Catholic non-parishioner) \$14,950 (non-Catholic)
Bishop O'Connell High School*	Arlington	\$9,200 (parishioner) \$10,630 (Catholic non-parishioner) \$13,245 (non-Catholic)
Browne Academy	Alexandria	\$12,975 (preschool) \$21,505 (K-8)
Burgundy Farm Country Day	Alexandria	\$20,575 (jr. K/K) \$21,520 (1-5) \$22,675 (6-8)
Commonwealth Academy	Alexandria	\$28,336
The Congressional Schools of Virginia	Falls Church	\$17,770 (K) to \$20,500 (8)
Episcopal High School	Alexandria	\$40,875 (boarding)
Flint Hill School	Oakton	\$21,370 (jr. K) \$24,050 (K-4) \$26,460 (5-8) \$27,510 (9-12)
Gesher Jewish Day School	Fairfax	\$15,950
Green Hedges School	Vienna	\$11,754 (pre-K) to \$20,924 (8)
The Langley School	McLean	\$12,600 (pre-K) \$24,140 (K-5) \$25,410 (6-8)
The Madeira School	McLean	\$35,050 (day student) \$46,160 (boarding student)
Oakcrest School	McLean	\$14,721 (6-8) \$15,696 (9-12)
Oakwood School	Annandale	\$26,400
Paul VI High School*	Fairfax	\$9,270 (parishioner) \$12,140 (non-Catholic)
The Potomac School	McLean	\$24,340 (K-3) \$25,930 (4-6) \$27,445 (7-12)
St. Stephen's & St. Agnes School	Alexandria	\$20,400 (jr.K) \$22,840 (K-5) \$24,710 (6-8) \$26,925 (9-12)
Westminster School	Annandale	\$16,856



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