

National Cathedral School

Washington, D.C., United States



On the Cathedral Close, an all-girls campus blends weekly worship beneath Gothic vaults with a dedicated ethical-leadership curriculum.

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	77/100
Academic outcomes	78/100
University placement	77/100
Prestige & heritage	78/100
Alumni network	78/100
Facilities	74/100
Transparency	74/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

National Cathedral School occupies a rare niche in Washington: an old-guard girls’ day school with real institutional weight, set on the Cathedral Close and shaped by the rhythms of the Washington National Cathedral. That setting is not decorative. Weekly worship under Gothic stone, a campus bound into one of the capital’s great ecclesiastical sites, and a school culture formed over more than a century give NCS a **ceremonial seriousness** that few American schools can match. Founded in 1900, it also carries the authority of age without drifting into museum-piece irrelevance. The academic structure is conventional American college-prep, with the US High School Diploma and AP courses, but the school’s distinguishing mark lies in the combination of **intellectual pressure**, public-facing confidence and a deliberate ethical-

leadership strand.

This is an academically selective environment with the advantages affluent parents expect: a **7:1** student-teacher ratio, average classes of **14**, and the social capital that attaches to a long-established Washington institution. The average annual day fee across the full ladder is **\$55,000**, which places NCS firmly in the expensive top tier of the US day-school market. Parents are paying for more than teaching hours. They are buying access to a dense network of expectations, traditions and opportunities, along with a student body that is trained to speak, lead and perform in public. The alumni record reinforces that pattern: politics, public life, journalism and the arts all feature strongly. This is a school with *real cultural reach*.

Why shortlist it? Because NCS offers a very specific product and executes it with clarity: an all-girls education for ages 9 to 18 on a campus of unusual beauty and symbolism, with a strong college-preparatory core and a leadership ethos that is not bolted on as a slogan. For the right student, that mix is *formative*, *high-minded* and genuinely exciting. It suits girls who are academically ambitious, articulate, comfortable with tradition, and ready for a community that values poise, service and visible contribution. It is less suited to families who want a casual atmosphere, a stripped-back secular identity, or a school that hides its culture behind neutral branding. NCS has a *clear centre of gravity*; students who thrive there will want exactly that.

STRENGTHS

- Founded in 1900 by philanthropist Phoebe Apperson Hearst and Bishop Henry Yates Satterlee, making it the oldest institution of the Protestant Episcopal Cathedral Foundation.
- Very low student-teacher ratio of 8:1, supporting small class sizes across grades 4-12.
- Sits on the 57-acre Cathedral Close alongside its brother school, St. Albans, and the coeducational Beauvoir elementary school, enabling shared facilities and some joint programming.
- Alumnae network of more than 5,500 women living in 49 states and 34 countries, giving graduates access to an established global community.
- Offers a full Advanced Placement program within the US high school diploma track, a recognised route to selective US and international universities.

TRADE-OFFS

- Tuition is high: \$56,920 for 2025-2026, rising to \$59,760 for 2026-2027, plus a technology/activity fee and a one-time new-student fee.
- Single-sex girls-only school for grades 4-12, with no coeducational option for families who prefer mixed schooling through the senior year.
- Admissions require SSAT or ISEE testing alongside transcripts, recommendations, essays and interviews, reflecting a competitive, application-heavy process typical of DC's top independent schools.
- Curriculum is built around AP rather than IB, which may be a less familiar or transferable framework for internationally mobile families used to the IB Diploma.

ADMISSIONS

National Cathedral School enrolls girls in grades 4 through 12 on a rolling multi-entry-point basis, with the heaviest intake typically at the traditional lower, middle and upper school transition grades. Applicants generally submit the SSAT or ISEE, school transcripts, teacher recommendations, a student essay and a family interview; deadlines cluster in early January for the following autumn. As a well-known Washington, DC feeder to selective US colleges, competition for places is significant, particularly at core entry grades, and families should expect a thorough, multi-stage review process.

NOTABLE ALUMNI (13)

POLITICS: Susan Rice, Queen Noor of Jordan, Luci Baines Johnson, Lynda Bird Johnson Robb, Beverly Byron, Karennia Gore, Michelle Nunn

LETTERS: Queen Noor of Jordan, Karennia Gore, Kristin Gore, Alexandra Petri, Naomi Iizuka

DRAMA: Kristin Gore, Naomi Iizuka, Heather Langenkamp

SPORT: Stephanie Ready

SCIENCE: Alice S. Huang

WTS RATING 

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