

The Potomac School

McLean, United States



Founded in 1904 by three women who studied John Dewey, its 90-acre wooded campus outside Washington spans four distinct school divisions.

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	69/100
Academic outcomes	77/100
University placement	75/100
Prestige & heritage	75/100
Alumni network	26/100
Facilities	78/100
Transparency	71/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

Set on a ****90-acre**** wooded campus in McLean, The Potomac School offers something many Washington-area day schools cannot: a full K-12 education on one site, with four distinct divisions and the continuity that brings. Founded in 1904 by three women influenced by John Dewey, it has an old-school independent pedigree without a religious frame, and that matters. This is an American-curriculum, English-medium, non-religious day school with NAIS accreditation, serving ages 3 to 18. The scale of the campus and the all-through structure give it a ***rare institutional coherence***: older pupils are visible to younger ones, traditions can carry real weight, and families avoid the repeated churn of reapplying at key transition points.

What marks Potomac out is not novelty but **serious breadth**. The school's own emphasis falls on curiosity, challenge, support, character and life skills, alongside a connected K-12 community and strong use of the Washington region itself. That combination places it in the top tier of the local market for families who want a conventional American independent education done with substance rather than flash. At an average annual fee of ***\$52,142***, it sits firmly in the expensive bracket, and parents are paying for campus, continuity and opportunity as much as for classroom teaching. The direct access to the national capital area — from the National Mall to the Chesapeake Bay, plus music festivals, robotics competitions and speech and debate tournaments — gives the school a **practical, outward-facing** dimension that many suburban campuses promise and fewer can deliver.

This is not the right fit for every child. Potomac suits students who will use a big campus, a broad co-curricular menu and a cross-age community well: children who like to be busy, who respond to structure, and who can thrive in a school that talks openly about courage, humility, integrity, respect and perseverance. It will also appeal to parents who want an education with **clear social expectations** rather than a laissez-faire culture. Children who need a very small, niche or radically progressive environment may find it too established in its habits. For families seeking a **high-functioning**, academically grounded, all-through day school near Washington, with genuine room to grow from early childhood to graduation, Potomac belongs on the shortlist.

STRENGTHS

- Founded in 1904 by three Washington, D.C. women who researched John Dewey's teaching model, making Potomac one of the older independent day schools in the capital region.
- The school sits on a wooded 90-acre campus in McLean, Virginia, three miles from Washington, D.C., giving a suburban setting with easy access to the city.
- Potomac has four divisions - Lower School (K-3), Middle School (4-6), Intermediate School (7-8), and Upper School (9-12) - each providing a balanced educational experience.
- Average class size is 15-17 students, supporting close faculty attention across the K-12 span.
- In the past four years, Potomac graduates have enrolled at more than 120 colleges and universities across the United States and internationally.

TRADE - OFFS

- Tuition is steep even by regional independent-school standards: tuition ranges from Grades K-3 \$44,970, Grades 4-6: \$48,250, Grades 7-8: \$51,550, Grades 9-12: \$52,800.
- Admissions require an interview at every level and, for older applicants, standardized testing: an interview for each applicant is required, and the PSAT or SAT is also accepted for applicants to grades 10 and 11, alongside SSAT or ISEE scores.
- Financial aid, while available, is structured on the assumption that the primary obligation for financing a student's education will rest with the family, and families are expected to draw on discretionary income and outside resources before assistance is calculated.
- As a single-campus day school in an affluent Northern Virginia suburb, Potomac draws heavily from the McLean/Tysons corridor, meaning geographic and socioeconomic reach is narrower than at schools with broader catchments or boarding options.

ADMISSIONS

Entry points exist across grades, but K, 7, and 8 see the heaviest volume. For the 2026-27 cycle, applications close December 29, 2025, and are processed through the Ravenna platform. An interview is required for every applicant; assessment format varies by grade, with SSAT/ISEE or an internal test used for middle grades and PSAT/SAT accepted for grades 10-11. English and math teacher recommendations are required for grades 9-11. Financial aid runs on a separate Clarity application with its own deadline. Demand from the affluent McLean corridor keeps competition for places real, though Potomac is not among the hyper-selective handful of Northeastern day schools.

WTS RATING 

This profile summarises editorial research by World's Top Schools. Verify all admissions dates directly with the school before submitting. Sources are cited in the full online profile at WorldsTopSchools.com/schools/sch_90d8a3c0e9.