Frustrated with Public Schools?

As an Independent School, Westminster School May Be the Answer



A great education lays the foundation for future success. Academically. Personally. Professionally.

The COVID-19 pandemic took more than a year of that development from most students.

If the education your child is receiving leaves you frustrated, concerned, or underwhelmed, know there is a different path forward.

Academic and Social Problems in Public School Systems Nationwide

Despite the best efforts of hardworking teachers and administrators, the effects of the pandemic continue to rock school systems across the country, including Northern Virginia.

Unprecedented Drop in Academics

The pandemic continues to have devastating academic effects on public school students.

Data from 5.4 million American students[1] (grades 3 to 8) across the first two years of the pandemic found the following:

- Math test scores: 0.20 to 0.27 standard deviations below pre-pandemic students
- Reading test scores: 0.09 to 0.18 standard deviations below pre-pandemic students

The National Assessment of Educational Progress found similar results in U.S. nine-year-olds[2]:

- National reading and math test scores regressed two levels (from two decades ago)
- First time in 50 years the age group regressed in math test scores
- National reading test scores fell by the largest margin in 30 years

Public school

reading results
down by largest margin in
30 years

math results
fell for the first time in
50 years

The National Assessment of Educational Progress found eighth-grade history and civics scores told a similar story[3]:

- 40% were “below basic” in US history, compared to 34% in 2018
- Civics scores dropped for the first time since testing began in the late 1990s
- 22% tested proficient in civics today compared to 24% in 2018

After a year of distance learning, many public school students find themselves a full grade level or more behind.







1. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2022/03/03/the-pandemic-has-had-devastating-impacts-on-learning-what-will-it-take-to-help-students-catch-up/
2. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/01/us/national-test-scores-math-reading-pandemic.html
3. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/03/us/us-history-test-scores.html
4. https://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt575.pdf

At Westminster School, the story is very different.

- Students read elevated works of literature (*Number the Stars* and *The Year of Jackie Robinson* in third grade, *Treasure Island* and *King Arthur* in sixth grade, and *The Scarlet Letter* and Dante's *Inferno* in eighth grade). With clear guidance and support from their English teachers, students are taught to analyze and make connections within these classic, timeless tales.
- Students are explicitly taught spelling and grammar rules, equipping them with the knowledge and ability to articulate their thoughts and to express themselves in written form.
- Students leave eighth grade with high school–level math credits, either in Algebra 1 or, in many cases, both Algebra 1 and Geometry.

Budget Issues Leave Extracurricular Programs Vulnerable

A 2023 JLARC report[4] found Virginia's budget for K–12 public school education was significantly underfunded. Compared to the fifty-state national average, Virginia's educational budget was underfunded by 14 percent. Compared to the South Atlantic regional averages, it was underfunded by 4 percent.

These kinds of budgetary shortfalls directly threaten programs like the arts and extracurricular activities.

At Westminster School, families don't have to worry about bureaucratic budgets affecting the deeply meaningful programs and experiences their children love.

For example, every Westminster student participates in the following:

- Grade-level play every year (kindergarten to eighth grade) performed for the entire student body and school community.
- Art, music, library, technology, and SEL classes (multiple times per week)
- PE class daily
- Foreign language as a core academic subject, starting in preschool- Multiple field trips each year, specifically geared toward and designed to reinforce curriculum content.

Art, music, library, technology &
SEL classes
multiple times per week

Foreign language as a core
academic subject







5. https://wtop.com/fairfax-county/2022/11/fairfax-co-weighs-changes-to-high-school-grading-policy/

Changes to Grading Policies

In response to pandemic-related academic challenges, the local Fairfax County Public School (FCPS) system and others put a new grading policy in place[5]. No grade lower than 50% shall be earned.

New grading policy:
No grade lower than 50%

Even if an assignment isn't turned in, it still gets half credit. How is this preparing students for college or future employment?

At Westminster School, we hold our students to high levels of excellence, while also offering systems to support that. In addition to daily help sessions with the subject teachers, our academic resource program, and available in-house tutoring, every staff member leads with the belief that resilience and hard work contribute to an inherent sense of accomplishment and self-worth. Rather than shying away from future challenges in the classroom and in life, a Westminster graduate confronts and welcomes challenges with confidence and capability.

Historically Low Teacher Retention

The disorganization, inconsistencies, and challenges of distance learning in public school pushed teachers to resign in historic numbers.

In 2022, 896 teachers in the FCPS system resigned[6]. That was 45% more resignations compared to data collected between 2018 and 2021.

45% **increase in teacher resignations**
(2022 FCPS system)

This lack of continuity and experience in the teaching staff directly hurts students.

Again, it's an entirely different picture at Westminster School.

- Average tenure of a Westminster teacher:5.75 years
- Number of teachers holding advanced degrees: 16 of 29 teachers

Large Class Sizes

The FCPS system enrolled 180,127 students in the 2022–2023 school year[7]. As of October 29, 2021, average class sizes were 20.8[8]. Some classes (Greenbriar East Elementary, sixth grade) averaged as high as 29.4.

With those kinds of numbers, public school teachers become overworked and overwhelmed. It's simply not possible to give the individual attention and tailored learning needed for every child to make up (let alone surpass) the ground lost during distance learning.







6. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/07/15/teacher-resignations-rise-dc-area/
7. https://p1pe.doe.virginia.gov/apex/f?p=180:1:16728250640463:SHOW_REPORT::::
8. https://www.fcps.edu/sites/default/files/FCPS-Elementary-Class-Size-2021-10-29.pdf
9. https://thesocialinstitute.com/about/

The Westminster School Difference

Westminster School can help your child make up for lost ground—academically, socially, and emotionally. Here's how:

Smaller Class Sizes

Westminster School has fewer than 300 students. That gives us the time, space, and ability to give individual attention to every learner, in every subject, during each and every class period.

FCPS system:

180,000+

students

Westminster School:

<300

If your child is still needing to catch up as a result of disrupted learning, Westminster has the resources and ability to bridge—and exceed—that gap.

Holistic Education

As any parent knows, the pandemic didn't just affect academics. There was also a loss of social and emotional development.

Westminster's curriculum focuses on promoting growth in all aspects of the child: intellectual, personal, and social.

This is a core reason we recently implemented a social-emotional learning program called #WinAtSocial from The Social Institute[9]. All our students (grades four to eight) have weekly classes, group discussions, and opportunities for real-world applications in order to more confidently navigate the complex world of social media and technology.

Independent Governance and Agility

As a private school, Westminster was able to make quick, decisive plans around distance learning. We put together a comprehensive, proactive, and effective COVID-19 mitigation plan for the 2022–2023 school year. The result? Students didn't lose an educational beat.

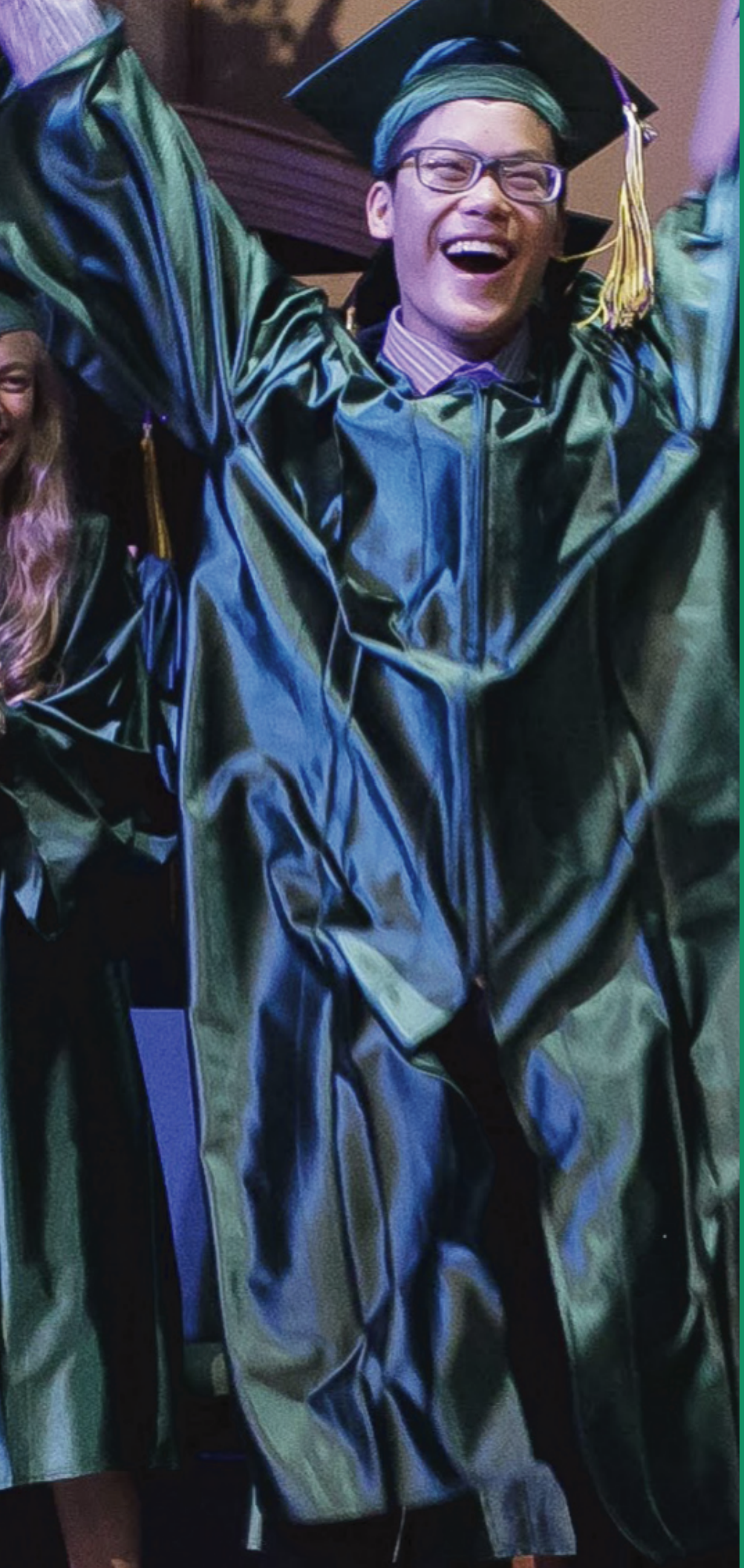
Dedicated, Experienced Teaching Staff

Teacher retention is a critical issue in public schools right now. Not at Westminster School.

Westminster's teachers love working at this school because of the empowering mission and the professional agency they enjoy. As a result, the students benefit from their years of experience in education and dedication to the school.







Is Westminster the Path Forward for Your Child?

If you're concerned about the learning and development lost due to the pandemic, know that it's not too late.

Westminster School has the curriculum, teaching staff, processes, and resources to get your child not only back on track, but ahead.

Questions?

Want to see the school in person? We look forward to getting to know you and your family!

Contact us today, and our admissions director, Ms. Jori Sapper, will be in touch soon.

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