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**The Siena School finds a new home in Silver Spring** [Kara Rose](#) Staff writer

*This story was corrected on July 24, 2012. An explanation follows the story.*

Debbie Weinberger feels lucky to have found a home away from home for her daughter.

Alison, 10, of Silver Spring was diagnosed a little more than a year ago with dyslexia, a learning disability that can hinder language skills. Weinberger knew Alison needed a school that specialized in teaching children with such challenges, so she turned to The Siena School in Silver Spring.

"It's a great school," Weinberger said. "We are very lucky and fortunate to have found a home for Alison."

The Siena School began with 15 students six years ago as a school for children who are bright and have a potential to go to college and be successful, but need a different mode of learning than what is offered in other schools, with an emphasis on experiential learning, said founder Erik Heyer. The school has since expanded to a group of 80 students in grades four through 12 and soon will call the Boys and Girls Club building on Forest Glen Road in Silver Spring home.

"We're so excited about this opportunity," Heyer said. "It's really, for the school, an exciting moment in its history. This is a wonderful group of kids with a huge potential, and it's nice to see them getting a building that's deserving of their potential success for life."

The announcement of the move from Montgomery Hills Baptist Church on Georgia Avenue came after engagement with neighborhood associations and members of the community and having zoning permits approved by the Montgomery County council. Although it had informally talked for several years about the move, The Siena School formally signed the contract to acquire the building in May 2011.

The Boys and Girls Club has owned the building for almost 70 years, and Heyer said The Siena School is investing millions to purchase and renovate the building to bring it up to code and to better accommodate a classroom setting. So far, the school has begun improving some of the outside landscaping. The upper level of the building will have meeting space, a gymnasium and a computer room that the Boys and Girls Club can use after school. The lower level will have classrooms, offices and administrative space. The Boys and Girls Club also will be able to use the practice fields at the site.

"We're very excited that we're able to remain in the Forest Glen neighborhood," said Clay Kauffman, who serves alongside Jilly Darefsky as joint heads of school. Kauffman said the school employs about 22 staff members with class sizes of about 10 students per teacher.

The permit obtained by The Siena School will allow for three phases of renovation. The current building accommodates 115 people, Heyer said, and with an addition in the next 10 or 20 years, the building can accommodate as many as 225 people.

Tracey Heckel of Silver Spring said she first heard about The Siena School from a friend. Heckel's 13-year-old daughter, Laura, has only attended the school for a year, but Heckel said she already has begun to see huge changes.

She said she is not worried about larger class sizes after the move and is excited to see the school have a place of its own.

"A bigger building so more kids can come is huge," she said. "I'm fine with that, and I think it's awesome."

Similarly, Northwest Washington, D.C. resident Kathleen Miles said the move will benefit her daughter, 16-year-old Chase Miles, who is interested in sports and has grown tremendously since starting at the school in January 2008.

“It gives a sense of permanence, investing in something that’s going to be there for a while,” Miles said. “When they are alums, they can go back to it.”

Heyer said he expects the school to be fully moved in by the end of the year.

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