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## Exceptional Schools Fair

**Event provides information for parents of special needs children.**

By [Marilyn Campbell](#)

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Parents of special needs children will have a forum to learn about educational opportunities available to them in the Washington, D.C. area next month. Representatives from more than more than 30 mid-Atlantic Schools will be available at the 8th Annual Exceptional Schools Fair (ESF) on Nov. 16 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

“Twenty years ago, not only did we not have acknowledgement of learning differences and learning challenges, we did not have support,” said Lois McCabe, head of the Diener School in Potomac, Md., which has been participating in the fair since its inception. “A decade and a half later, it’s a new world. And we as schools in the community are involved in this fair because we are invested in supporting parents who are faced with a difficult situation.”

The event founder and organizer, Bekah Atkinson, director of admissions at The Sienna School in Silver Spring, Md., says the ESF was created solely to provide a resource to parents whose lives changed when they received a diagnosis that their child was disabled. “ESF is a forum for parents to explore educational options for their children,” she said. Atkinson says the event is meant to be a helpful resource for parents who are facing an unknown future for their children, educationally, financially and emotionally.

Atkinson says that ESF brings most of the area’s “exceptional schools” to parents. She describes the fair as a place where families that may be floundering can feel empowered as they walk through one-location to see the number of options available to them. “It can be a very isolating emotional situation, and this one environment, one location to research what’s out there makes it less scary,” she said. “You can see there is a world of other families out there in the same situation. You can talk to professionals who are passionate about what they do in their schools.”

Local schools including Commonwealth Academy in Alexandria, The Diener School in Potomac, Oakwood School in Annandale and Phillips School in Annandale will have representatives at the event.

Event organizers say the fair has been endorsed by the National Institutes of Health. The ESF will be held at the Katzen Art Center at American University in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit [exceptionalschoolsfair.com](http://exceptionalschoolsfair.com) or call Bekah Atkinson at 301-244-3600