



America's Best Places to Raise Kids, 2011

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More than half the population of Blacksburg, Va., is Virginia Tech students, so it may be easy to mistake this town of 41,383 as just another college town. Yet this small community, between the Blue Ridge and Alleghany Mountains, also has the makings of a great place to raise children. Excellent schools draw many families to Blacksburg, which also has such amenities as a community center with sports, fitness, educational, and social activities; an indoor pool; and even a nine-hole, 54-acre municipal golf course.

"There's very little crime. There are kids' programs, green space, trails. It is a nice place to live and a nice place to raise kids. Everyone knows everyone. The weather is nice. The cost of living is not that high," says Becky MacKenzie, a 34-year-old mother of three and a resident of Blacksburg since 2003.

Excellent schools, combined with an affordable cost of living, relatively low crime, and plentiful amenities lifted Blacksburg to first place in Businessweek.com's sixth nationwide ranking of best places in each state in the U.S. to raise kids.

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Criteria We Use

With help from Bloomberg Rankings, Businessweek.com evaluated 4,169 places with a crime index less than 10 percent above the national average, populations between 1,000 and 50,000 people, and median family income within 20 percent of the state median, using data from real estate information firm Onboard Informatics.

We evaluated educational factors (such as school scores, the number of public and private schools, and colleges), economic factors (including median family income, expenses, job growth, and unemployment), crime, amenities (such as child day-care centers, zoos, aquariums, museums, theaters, recreation centers, green space), air quality, and ethnic diversity. School performance, expenditures, and income were given the most weight.

After Blacksburg, Arlington, Neb., ranked second, and Morton Grove, Ill., placed third in the country. Businessweek.com also selected a top place in each state.

Here's America's five best places to raise kids:

No. 5 - Spring Arbor, MI

Nearby city: Jackson, Mich.

Population: 2,049

Median family income: \$68,635

Avg. school math score: 95.67 (State

avg.: 83.74)

Avg. school reading score: 94.97

(State avg.: 83.75)

Spring Arbor returns to the ranking for the second year in a row. Home to one of the largest evangelical Christian universities in Michigan, Spring Arbor was settled in the 1830s by people with strong religious convictions. The city is less than an hour's drive from Ann Arbor, one hour from Battle Creek, and less than 20 minutes from Jackson, the local county seat. Major employers in the area include Spring Arbor University, as well as the Michigan Department of Corrections and the Michigan International Speedway, both in Jackson.



No. 5 - Spring Arbor, MI is near Jackson, MI.
Photo: Greg Ceo/Getty Images

No. 4 - St. Henry, OH

Nearby city: Dayton
Population: 2,264
Median family income: \$67,802
Avg. school math score: 95.69 (State avg.: 79.08)
Avg. school reading score: 94.97 (State avg.: 84.12)

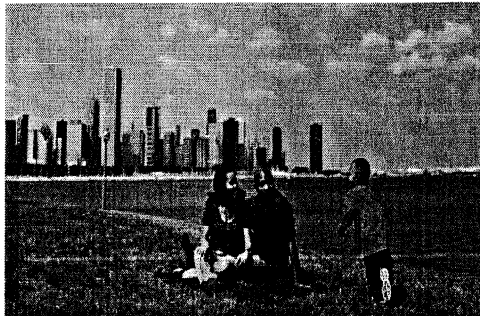


No. 4 - St. Henry, OH is near Dayton.
Photo: Andrew Hetherington/Getty Images

A small town in western Ohio centered on the gothic revivalist St. Henry's Catholic Church, St. Henry is great for kids. That's even more the case if your kids want to be athletes. The excellent local school system, St. Henry Consolidated Local Schools, with about 1,000 students enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grade, has sports teams that have notched numerous state championships. Three athletes from the school have gone on to play in the National Football League and one has gone on to Major League Baseball.

No. 3 - Morton Grove, IL

Nearby city: Chicago
Median family income: \$83,601
Population: 23,464
Avg. school math score: 93.25 (State avg.: 86.19)
Avg. school reading score: 88.83 (State avg.: 79.96)



No. 3 - Morton Grove, IL is near Chicago.
Photo: Bryce Pincham/Getty Images

Morton Grove, a suburb about 15 miles from Chicago, is part of a park district that comprises 14 parks totaling more than 70 acres, two outdoor pools, a museum, four field houses, a 50,000-square-foot community center, and an outdoor ice rink, according to Morton Grove Park District. The village is home to several high-performing schools, including Hynes Elementary School, Park View Elementary School, Golf Middle School, and Melzer School, according to greatschools.org.

No. 2 - Arlington, NE

Nearby city: Omaha
Population: 1,174
Median family income: \$70,881
Avg. school math score: 98.69 (State avg.: 93.01)

Avg. school reading score: 99.67
(State avg.: 94.55)

The No. 2 best place to raise your kids in the U.S. A small, rural community 30 miles northwest of Omaha, Arlington is a classic Midwest farming town that hosts the annual Washington County Fair, with rabbit showmanship, mud volleyball, and other fun for the kids. Arlington public schools are top-notch, serving 600 students in an elementary, middle, and high school.



No. 2 - Arlington, NE is near Omaha.

Photo: Philip Nealey/Getty Images

No. 1 - Blacksburg, VA

Nearby city: Roanoke

Population: 41,383

Median family income: \$83,670

Avg. school math score: 90.17 (State avg.: 88.11)

Avg. school reading score: 93.42
(State avg.: 88.85)

Nestled between the Alleghany Mountains and the Blue Ridge, Blacksburg is an upscale college town that is home to Virginia Tech. The area is known for education and lays claim to seven great public schools for the younger students.



No. 1 - Blacksburg, VA is near Roanoke.

Photo: Getty Images