


FREE UNION COUNTRY SCHOOL

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SCHOOL

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The School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or national or ethnic origin in its staffing, admissions, tuition assistance, educational policies, and extracurricular or other programs.





What if learning was about wonder and discovery, not tests and mandates? And each child was seen as a person to be known and nurtured?

For more than 30 years, one learning community has been exploring these ideas.

Free Union Country School is just 15 minutes from downtown Charlottesville yet somehow a world apart, tucked into the rolling Virginia countryside. Here, students don't just learn.

They learn to love learning.



FREE UNION'S PHILOSOPHY begins with the child at the center. Natural curiosity, creativity and eagerness to explore are powerful forces that drive learning. Children have important questions and big ideas, so their voices are heard and taken seriously.

Why progressive education?



LEARNING BY DOING.

A memorized fact is difficult to retain, yet a personal discovery is almost impossible to forget. This truth underlies all learning at Free Union.

Students don't just read about Colonial America—they stage their own Boston Tea Party–style protest and craft a declaration of independence. In a study on immigration, role play takes the place of lecturing as kids become immigrants and submit their passports at an imaginary Ellis Island. Kindergartners study space wearing space packs and gravity boots. Students *live* their learning.

GROWTH IN CHARACTER, NOT JUST INTELLECT.

Each student is seen as a person, with his or her own emotional, social, and intellectual gifts and needs. As community members, students learn to resolve conflicts, greet others with eye contact and a clear hello, and listen to each other. Kindness, respect and tolerance are as important as math, science and history.

As one parent puts it, Free Union kids are good people when they leave the school.

TEACHERS ASK RATHER THAN TELL.

Curiosity fuels the Free Union classroom. Answers aren't handed out; teachers pose questions to guide students in making their own observations. Often, children's interests shape coursework. An affinity for rocks might lead to a materials science course with explorations in the field. Say a child likes a famous painting; the class will talk about the artist and time period, and then pull out the brushes.



**“What we want for our
children is better than what
we have for ourselves.”**

—FREE UNION PARENT





STUDENTS ARE KNOWN, NOT GRADED.

Bug collectors, mathematicians, poets, peacemakers, superheros, gentle souls. Free Union children are embraced as individuals by their teachers, their peers and their school community.

Instead of assigning letter grades, Free Union teachers offer personal, thorough and insightful narratives about their students. Conversations with parents are ongoing. Teachers are expert observers who pay close attention to classroom life.



“Free Union helps kids form an identity, to know who they are. Because of this positive feedback, they know they count.”

—FREE UNION PARENT AND TEACHER



Traditions, traditions.

Every vibrant community has them. Here are a few Free Union favorites.

PARENT TEACH DAY

Through this ritual, almost as old as the school itself, parents lead classes for a day. The topics? Almost anything—making flashlights from mint tins, baking bread, crafting mittens, studying electronic circuitry, even playing Capture the Flag.

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

From Kindergarten on up, students select a topic, dive into research, and then present what they know to their peers, parents, and other classes as well.

SPRING FAIR

This delightfully low-tech affair draws the Charlottesville community together. Students, parents, alumni and friends gather for balloon tosses, fortunetelling, pony rides, food, music and a magical fairy trail.

MAY DAY

At this annual celebration of spring and renewal, students put on a concert, crown a king or queen, and weave ribbons around maypoles. The company of parents and grandparents, live music, and a picnic lunch add to the merriment.

GRADUATION

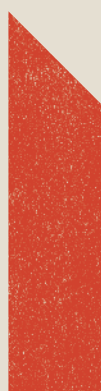
The entire school gathers to end the year with music, singing, food and remarkable speeches by fifth-grade graduates. These addresses are funny, sweet and insightful, drawing a few tears and many smiles.





Why Free Union?

THE WAY OF LIFE AND
LEARNING at Free Union centers
around curiosity, ideas, play, nature
and, most of all, people. Teachers,
parents and students all play a part.



PARENTS AND TEACHERS ARE PARTNERS.

Free Union began with a few parents around a kitchen table, dreaming of a better way for their kids. When those ideas took shape as a school, parents helped build the first classrooms.

Today, parents continue tending the community with their own hands. They run fundraisers. They cook with 3-year-olds. They help out at the annual spring fair. Sometimes they simply show up, because they want to be there—and because they're welcome.



**“My child is as
comfortable at school
as he is at home.”**

—FREE UNION PARENT



STRUCTURE MEETS SPONTANEITY.

Days at Free Union are grounded by predictable rhythms. Morning meetings, for example, offer a chance for students to transition from home to school—to settle in and take a few deep breaths before activities begin. Yet teachers aren't bound by rigid schedules. Classes might take a hike to study trees or tracks, go on a gallery trip to look at aboriginal art, or visit a local food pantry to help out.

This responsive, flexible approach allows teachers to be creative with the curriculum. Chinese history lessons inspire art classes in which students paint scrolls. Studies in math, science, art, literature and history all build upon each other.

“

**We're helping shape individuals
who are thoughtful, creative,
independent and kind.”**

—FREE UNION TEACHER AND PARENT



HEIGHT DOESN'T MATTER.

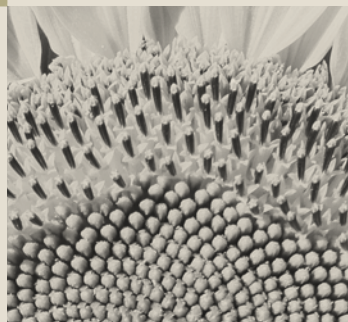
One parent chose Free Union after observing her 5-year-old shooting baskets with an encouraging and supportive fifth-grader during his visit. Whether students are sharing ideas or playing tag, everyone counts and everyone is included.

At Free Union, kids of all ages become friends. Younger students have weekly visits from the big kids, their buddies for the year. The whole school gathers weekly to share their excitement for what they have learned that week. Students walk around school and see friends of all ages they know—and who know *them*—and their connection to the place deepens. They feel safe.

NATURE: A GREAT TEACHER.

At Free Union, the great outdoors becomes an extension of the classroom. First-graders adopt a tree on school grounds, which yields lessons in math, science and language—they discuss the symmetry of a leaf; they learn to measure the tree's trunk and name its parts; they even write letters to the tree. In a unit on westward migration, students go on a journey with covered wagons, then gather around the campfire to cook lunch and play games from the time period (petticoats, hats and boots included).

Recess in sun, rain or even snow also brings opportunities to learn—through playing, imagining and negotiating. There is plenty of room for kids to be kids. Childhood is honored.



Where are they now?

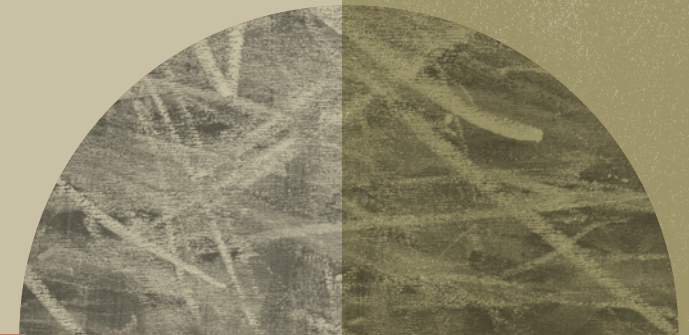
Free Union graduates go on to do great things. And many of them say they can trace their current paths back to a moment or a lesson at Free Union.

FURTHER SCHOOLING

College of Wooster
Colorado College
Connecticut College
Duke University
George Mason
Haverford College
Kenyon College
Reed College
University of Vermont
University of Virginia
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Tech
William and Mary

FOCUS

Economics
Engineering
Law
Political science
Stem cell research
Wildlife biology
Women's studies
Bridges to Community
International Rescue Committee
Office of the Honorable Al Gore
Smithsonian Institution





**How am I going to
pay for private school
education?**

It's a question asked by many parents who want the best for their kids.

We at Free Union believe that the early years are the right time to invest in education—before middle and high school, before college and jobs. And we know that every family has its own story and needs. The School offers an active program of financial aid—let's talk about how we might help you.



Free Union parents say it best.

**“My children are
happy in their own
skin and see the world
with an eye toward
working together.”**

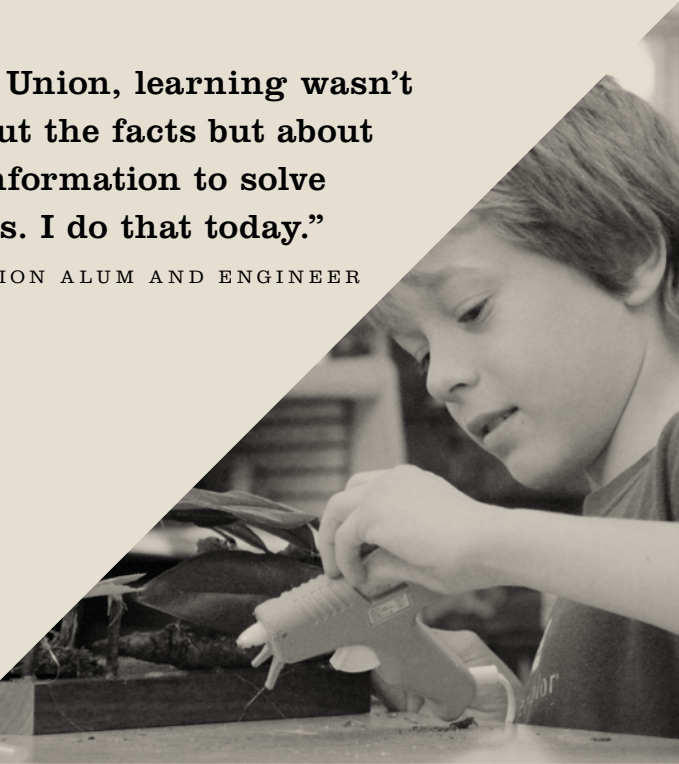
**“My child can write
well and speak in
front of groups,
and he is confident
among his peers.”**

**“My child has learned
that school is a safe and
nurturing place where
he can be himself.”**



“At Free Union, learning wasn’t just about the facts but about using information to solve problems. I do that today.”

—FREE UNION ALUM AND ENGINEER



“

The last day of school is a very sad day for our child.”

—FREE UNION PARENT

