

10 BEST TOWNS FOR FAMILIES

Family Circle
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In our yearly roundup of perfect places to raise kids, we salute these communities for their affordable homes, green spaces, blue-ribbon schools and giving spirit.

BY SEEMA NAYYAR

The Great Schools rating listed in each town's information box is based on performance on standardized tests by local elementary, middle and high schools relative to other schools in the state, based on a scale of 1 to 10. A rating of 10 means that overall test scores are as good as, or better than, 90% of scores elsewhere. The ratings are provided by GreatSchools.net, a nonprofit website with a mission to improve education by inspiring parents to get involved. To find out how your child's school is doing, go to the site and enter your school's name and state for test results according to grade, stats on student-teacher ratios and diversity, and parent reviews.

Bettendorf, Iowa

Population 32,306
Median Income \$68,994
Median Home Price \$144,000
Households with Children 28%
Student/Teacher Ratio 15:1
Great Schools Rating 8

For Daniel Byrne, 18, and all the other football players at Bettendorf High, community service is a competitive sport. Last year they split into defensive and offensive teams to see who could do more charity and volunteer projects. "Our side lost, so we had to work out while the winners chowed down on pizza," he says. "Rough for us, but good for the town." Pitching in is the norm here. Daniel and parents Joan and John, and younger siblings Michael, 16; Thomas, 13; Katie, 11; and Joseph, 9, have all worked at soup kitchens, helped senior citizens during fall cleanup days and even sand-bagged the mighty Mississippi. When families aren't busy volunteering, they often can be found at a park or museum, varsity game or high school musical.



"All the parents here attend athletic, artistic and scholastic events," says John, 45, a marketing professor at St. Ambrose University in nearby Davenport. "Everyone's invested in their kids." So are the schools. "We've had many teachers who've really gotten to know our children as individuals, and they've stayed in touch over the years," says Joan, 45, a physical therapist. "They've made a permanent, positive impression on our whole family." Good Deeds At Pleasant Valley High School cheerleaders formed a team that included seven girls with autism and Down syndrome. The Spartan Sparkles won the gold medal at the last two Special Olympics, and an offshoot program now helps schools around the country create similar squads.