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From self-doubt to self-confidence, students who learn differently "become their very best" at **Delaware Valley Friends School.**

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Emma, Class of 2026, delivers her graduation speech at DVFriends 38th annual ceremony. Each graduate speaks at graduation.



English teacher Caroline reviewing an assignment with student Kai '29

Celebrating

Every Student's Journey

From self-doubt to self-confidence, students who learn differently "become their very best" at **Delaware Valley Friends School**.



Students performing DVFriends' 11th original musical, *Escape the Game*, written and performed by students

For the 33 members of the Delaware Valley Friends School (DVFriends) Upper School Class of 2026, graduation on June 12th was a celebration of perseverance, growth, and achievement marked by a special feature: Every graduate was the keynote speaker.

"The focus is entirely on the students," explains DVFriends Director of Enrollment Management Jim Miller. "We don't have one speaker talking for 45 minutes. Every graduate gives a heartfelt speech about his or her journey. It's incredibly powerful."

That graduation format reflects the life-changing work that DVFriends does with students leading up to that big day. DVFriends is one of the region's pre-

mier schools for bright students who learn differently. Through a combination of specialized expertise and a close-knit Quaker school community, DVFriends empowers students to reach their fullest potential while thriving academically, socially, and emotionally.

"At the graduation, we celebrated the victory of students who not only reached their goals, but often exceeded what they thought was possible," Miller says.

Located in Paoli, DVFriends serves approximately 200 students in grades one through 12. For nearly 40 years, the Quaker school has specialized in educating students with learning challenges in reading (dyslexia), writing, and math, as well as students with ADHD, working-memory

challenges, language-processing differences, or other learning profiles that can make traditional classrooms difficult.

“These are students for whom the traditional classroom isn’t working,” Miller says. “We know what those students need and how to reach them. We know how to challenge them in the right way.”

For the past seven years, Miller has watched students discover strengths they didn’t always know they possessed. Recent graduates have pursued fields ranging from education and computer science to marine biology and many other disciplines.

“We frequently meet ninth-grade families who wonder whether their child will be able to attend the college of their choice because of challenges with math, writing, or other learning differences,” Miller says. “Because we understand what they need and how to guide and support them, they get there. That’s the beauty of what happens here.”

According to Miller, the school’s philosophy centers on combining expertise in learning differences with a values-driven approach.

“As a Friends school with learning experts in every room, students come here and are truly seen, sometimes for the first time in school,” he says. “We see and leverage their strengths; when students begin to see those strengths themselves, amazing things happen.”

Equally important is helping students become confident self-advocates.

“We care deeply about teaching students to advocate for themselves,” Miller says. “Whether they’re talking to a college professor or entering the workplace, we want them to feel confident speaking up for what they need.”

Miller strongly believes students should never feel the need to apologize for learning differently.

A Parent’s Perspective

Julie Presgraves is the mother of 17-year-old Darby, a DVFriends Upper School junior who was struggling in a local public school due to ADHD, executive functioning issues, and other learning differences. She notes that her daughter said she did not fit the

Students on the turf field enjoying Community Time, an unstructured block of time built into the daily schedule for student clubs, activities, and friendship



program her school was giving her.

Presgraves and her husband toured DVFriends first and, on the last day of Darby’s sophomore year, brought their daughter to the school. Once she began attending DVFriends, her mom no longer had to manage her assignments or ask teachers for forgiveness.

“We love everything about it,” Presgraves explains. “The school has fabulous arts and music programs and the ability to teach the neurodivergent community. Darby is succeeding very well, and from the day she started, we knew that she had found her place.”

Today, Darby is visiting college programs to pursue a degree in psychology after her 2027 graduation, with help from the school counselor and prep work.

“My daughter loves studio arts, the music programs, lots of different clubs, and has made several new friends,” Presgraves says. “She is doing the absolute best that she can. Her confidence came back, and her grades greatly improved. I wish we had found this school a year or two earlier. I cannot say enough good things about it.”

A Full High School Experience

While individualized academics are at the heart of DVFriends, students also enjoy what Miller calls “a rich, traditional high school experience.”

Academic elective offerings include STEM, forensics, finance, and robotics, while students can participate in a full range of arts, athletics, clubs, and activities.

“We offer as much as schools two or three times our size,” Miller says.

Experiential learning through

outdoor education is another hallmark of the school. Recent students have participated in rock-climbing and biking trips, sailing excursions in the Bahamas, ski adventures in the Adirondacks, and educational travel experiences to Hawaii and the Galápagos Islands. Students even collaborate each year to write and produce their own theatrical productions, serving as actors, musicians, and stage crew members.

The result is a school environment where students can fully participate in academics, athletics, arts, leadership, and travel opportunities while still getting the academic support they need.

“What we tell families is that students need to be taught the right way,” Miller says. “It’s rarely a matter of trying harder or paying more attention.”

Instead, success often depends on finding an environment that matches how a student learns best.

For the members of the Class of 2026, that balance has already helped open doors. As they move on to college and future careers, they leave with more than a diploma; they leave with confidence, self-knowledge, and the belief that their differences can be strengths.

“We’re always looking for the right balance of challenge and support,” Miller says, “so students can continue to grow and become their very best.” ■



DVFriends boys’ varsity lacrosse team (2024 League Champions)

Delaware Valley Friends School

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