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## Great Places to Raise Kids -- for Less

Family-oriented neighborhoods with the most affordable homes and the best schools may be hiding in places you've never heard of

By [Douglas MacMillan](#)

Echelon, N.J.? Arapahoe, Neb.? Lackland, Tex.? You've probably never heard of most of the small towns that make up BusinessWeek.com's 2007 list of the Best Places to Raise Your Kids. And there's a reason: Tight-knit communities like to stay private.

Working with national real estate researcher OnBoard in New York City, BW came up with a list of 50 places in the U.S. that offer kids—and their parents—the right combination of safety, community, and education. Whether you're expecting your first-born or preparing your kids for college, our list weighs the five criteria every parent should consider when choosing a new home: test scores, cost of living, recreational and cultural activities, number of schools, and risk of crime.

### WHY GROESBECK TOPS OUR LIST

The results spanned the country: 11 places in Nebraska, 7 in both Illinois and Ohio; 6 in New York; 4 in Tennessee; 3 in Michigan; 2 apiece in Georgia, Kentucky, and Texas; and 1 each in Alabama, Mississippi, and Oregon. And on a semirural patch of land seven miles northwest of Cincinnati, we found the clear winner: Groesbeck, an unincorporated suburb that shares its government, law enforcement, and school system with the Colerain Township.

Groesbeck wasn't first in any of the five categories we judged, but a close look at the town and its people shows a community that provides a good measure of all the things a child needs to grow and prosper. It's not the largest suburb of Cincinnati (it's home to about 7,200 people) or the wealthiest (the median household income is \$49,235, according to the most recent Census Bureau data). Pay Groesbeck a visit and you'll find one-floor ranch houses and multifamily condo units lining the streets, with the occasional patch of farmland dotted with cows, chickens, and bales of hay.

To gauge a community's education options, researcher OnBoard took into account the number of public and private schools in the vicinity and how well the reading and math test scores at those schools stacked up against the state average. Groesbeck's public school system offers parents a choice among three elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school in the area—Colerain High School, whose Colerain Cardinals football team is currently vying for a championship. The town also neighbors one of the top private elementary schools in the state, St. James School, which was honored in 2007 for the fourth time by the No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon Schools Program. To receive that award, a school must be in the top 10% of all schools in the state in both reading and math scores for the current year.

### AND WHY FOLKS STAY THERE

On our list, cost of living measures the area's average household expenditures compared with the national average in mortgages, rent, insurance, repairs, maintenance, apparel, education, entertainment, food and

beverages, health, furniture, and transportation. Groesbeck ranks just 23rd in this category, but Colerain Township assistant administrator Frank Birkenhauer says "affordable housing, retail, and entertainment choices factor strongly into this being a great place for families."

Birkenhauer adds that Groesbeck has traditionally seen very few incidents of crime—another reason it tops our list. OnBoard identified places with the lowest crime rates by comparing the risk of rape, murder, assault, robbery, burglary, larceny, and vehicle theft with the national average risk.

But perhaps the most attractive feature of the small Ohio town for young parents is its proximity to a wide variety of recreational and cultural activities. There are two parks within a five-minute drive of the area, where kids can kayak on the Great Miami River, play on soccer and baseball fields, or take to the hiking trails. Being close to a major city like Cincinnati is a huge advantage, as a trip to the museum, aquarium, theme park, zoo, or sports venue is never more than a half-hour drive away.

There are new developments in and around Groesbeck, says local Realtor Tony Eckhardt of Huff Realty, a sign the town anticipates growth. But in a place where every face is familiar, he says, "People in Groesbeck tend to stay in Groesbeck."

Doubtless, many of the families in the other cities on our list feel the same way.

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