

Truant: Principals say their students face tough work-home-life balance

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Late start
“I think sometimes people with kindergartners think it doesn’t matter,” said Kate Gohr, principal at John Jacob Astor Elementary School. Gohr said parents often say “Oh, they’re sick,” about their kids. “But they’re just sick all too often. That’s a lot of sickness.”

Improving attendance has been a continuing goal for Gohr, who started last year as principal and said she and staff continue to make phone calls on absent children and send letters home. “It’s hard to teach them if they’re not here,” she said, citing a study by national policy group Attendance Works showing 17 percent of students who were chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade were able to read proficiently by third grade, compared to 64 percent of students who had good attendance. Reading proficiently by third grade, when kids are supposed to stop learning to read and start reading to learn, is a key indicator of how successful they will be educationally.

‘It’s hard to teach them if they’re not here.’

Kate Gohr
principal at John Jacob Astor Elementary School

Setting an example
At 9 percent, Warrenton-Hammond School District had the second-lowest rate of chronic absenteeism last year of any Oregon district with more than 500 students. Only 7.8 percent of Warrenton’s kindergartners last year were chronically absent, a third of the rate of absenteeism in Astoria and Seaside. Robbie Porter, vice principal of Warrenton Grade School, credits the district’s focus on reaching out early to parents of preschoolers. For three years, Warrenton has offered its own preschool inside the elementary school, while also offering full-day kindergarten over the past few years, before it became a state mandate this year. “Opening the building early to young children and their families makes it easier for them when they start,” Porter said.

She said state law mandating regular attendance for anyone over the age of 5 and enrolled in school has also helped her efforts to ensure parents get their kids to school on time, which can sometimes lead to a truancy officer visiting homes and imposing fines. Knappa’s Hilda Lahti Elementary School experienced a 10 percent drop in its chronic absenteeism rate among kindergartners from two years ago, from 24 to 14 percent. “Our feeling is that we made a pretty concerted effort to make connections with families,” Hilda Lahti Principal Leila Collier said, adding the effort involved a proactive approach of reaching out to parents and offering assistance. A lesser breakout of sickness, she said, has also led to fewer absences. “The hunting is the same,” Collier said about families’ willingness to take their chil-

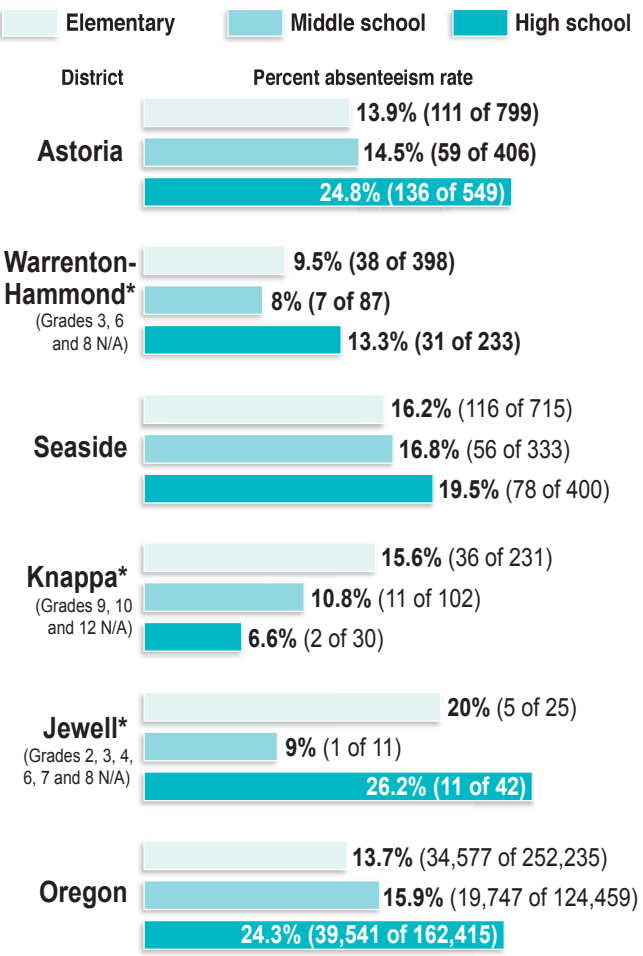
dren out for mid-year vacations and hunting trips. “It’s the same families. I think that’s a county thing.”

Young adulthood
High school principals Sheila Roley from Seaside and Lynn Jackson of Astoria said their students face a difficult work-home-life balance. Nearly half of students at both schools were considered economically disadvantaged last year. Nearly a fifth were considered mobile, enrolling in more than one Oregon school district, enrolling in the state for the first time or missing more than two weeks at a time.

Jackson said he was just talking to one student who works from 4 to 10 p.m. “And that’s after being at school from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.” Roley said some families moving in between districts don’t tell their previous school, leaving staff to count their students as chronically absent and dropouts. “I don’t think it’s that they don’t want to tell us,” Roley said. “They just have different priorities.”

Chronic absenteeism in Clatsop County schools, 2014-15

Students who missed 10 percent or more of school days in the first eight months of the 2014-15 school year.



*Oregon DOE withholds information when there are fewer than five students in a group, and also when there are fewer than 5 percent of students absent.

Source: Oregon Department of Education

Edward Stratton and Alan Kenaga/EO Media Group

Fish: There is no single formula that fits for all

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Determining if an obstruction is “passable” is somewhat subjective, but the state estimates about 6,400 structures are completely blocking fish passage; nearly 6,000 are partially blocking passage; more than 5,000 are passable; and about 13,000 are unknown. The state does not “have a handle” on where all the obstructions are located or who owns the property, Apke said. “The theme is, we’ve got a big problem and there are a lot of different culprits,” he said. In 1997, under former Gov. John Kitzhaber, the state created the Oregon Plan For Salmon and Watersheds to restore Oregon’s native fish populations and aquatic systems. The complex plan “means a lot of different things to a lot of different folks,” but the primary element of the plan is to encourage private landowners to engage in voluntary “on-the-ground restoration projects at the local level,” Apke said.

Looking at the big picture
Before attempting fish passage and habitat restoration projects, landowners should look at the bigger picture, because many issues are intertwined, said Guillermo Giannico, associate professor at Oregon State University and fisheries specialist. Otherwise, projects are less likely to be successful. Without a long-term plan, projects may fail to restore watersheds or their benefits may be nullified by human activities taking place elsewhere in the system, Giannico said. Successful restoration projects tend to address the cause of the ecosystem change; match the scale of the physical and biological processes taking place and act to maximize the local poten-

tial of a specific area. Most importantly, the project should have explicit expected outcomes.

Finding solutions
Landowners should “think like a fish” when designing for passage and habitat, Giannico said. Fish movement is based on environmental conditions that optimize growth, survival and reproductive success. Humans can aid natural movement by reducing barriers to passage and creating proper habitats. However, Giannico warned workshop participants against oversimplifying. “Universal rules are not always applicable in nature,” Giannico said. There is no single formula that fits for all fish species, systems and habitats.

Fran Cafferata Coe, a certified wildlife biologist, said habitats should be clean, cold, connected and complex. Some suggestions to restore or enhance forest habitats include planting diverse tree species in riparian areas; maintaining conifer and hardwood trees in riparian areas for large-wood recruitment, shade and sediment retention; decommissioning and obliterating roads near streams and adding logs, root wads and boulders to streams. “If you come up with a great idea, don’t hoard that idea. Share it with your neighbors,” Coe said. Giannico believes “the system will heal back once you remove the pressure,” he said. During the workshop, participants went to the Lewis and Clark Tree Farm, managed by Greenwood Resources, to view a few fish passage and habitat projects. In 2007, former landowner Weyerhaeuser partnered with the Necanicum Watershed Council, ODFW, the U.S. Fish and Wild-

life Services, Rainland Flycatchers and the North Coast Land Conservancy on a project. The partners obliterated half a mile of gravel road along Hawley Creek and restored the area to its former natural floodplain condition; placed trees into the stream to improve habitat and floodplain functions; replanted the former road surface area with native trees, shrubs and wetland plants; and removed two passage barrier culverts and replaced them with a single structure that met fish passage standards. At Klootch Creek, partners did a habitat restoration project in the late 1990s, shortly after the Oregon Plan implementation. They placed wood and boulders in the creek to provide shade, induce the stream to meander naturally, cause natural erosion and scouring, enhance the floodplain and create deeper pools for fish refuge, according to ODFW’s Troy Laws.

Working together
Landowners are not alone when it comes to planning and implementing projects. Watershed councils are one resource, said Melyssa Graeper, Necanicum Watershed Council coordinator. Working with a local watershed council helps a landowner see how their project fits into the bigger scheme, she said. “It’s about trying to do these things on a strategic level,” she said. Additionally, watershed councils can help obtain permits, funds, partnerships with other agencies and other forms of support. Councils can help landowners leverage their own funds to obtain grants. “Leverage is a word we like to use a lot,” Graeper said. The Oregon Forest Resources Institute also provides a website, KnowYourForest.org, to help educate landowners about

managing their lands and getting help for various projects. One participant asked if a landowner alerts an agency of a potential problem, will the state then require the landowner to find a solution, regardless of cost? Apke responded landowners are required to address passage for fish species if they engage in an action that triggers state requirements. Trigger events include creating a new road or stream-crossing structure over a channel; widening a road footprint within a stream channel; constructing a new culvert or overflow pipe within a stream channel; and several others. Landowners are responsible for knowing if native migratory fish are in their stream and if fish pas-



Katherine Lacaze/EO Media Group
A workshop participant looks through the Hawley Creek arch, a structure that replaced a fish passage barrier culvert during a project in 2007.

sage requirements apply to them. Kyle Abraham, with the Department of Forestry, said the department is preparing a voluntary measures survey, to get information on actions by landowners that go above and beyond regulations. Since 1995, there have been about 15,800 projects.

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