

Schools: Growth in student enrollment slowed down statewide

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The school district's 10-year projections call for fairly steady enrollment, Hoppes said, although educators are seeing a sustained increase in at-risk students based on the number of free and reduced-price lunches.

"I would assume that it's the nature of the type of jobs that are available right now," he said of the growth in lower-paying service sector positions. "I don't think Walmart's paying \$35 an hour."

Warrenton was at 1,041

students this fall, up slightly from the previous year. The school district has grown by more than 22 percent since 2011, when it reported 849 students after several years of shrinking enrollment. Enrollment has stayed above 1,000 since 2015, but has plateaued. The district estimates enrollment will eventually peak at 1,159 students in the 2024-25 school year.

Close on the heels of Warrenton has been Seaside. At 1,650 students this fall, Seaside has grown by 4 percent from last year,

nearly 7.8 percent over the past five years and more than 12 percent since 2011.

Knappa reported 499 students this fall, almost unchanged from five years ago. Jewell School, a small, rural, K-12 campus that averages around 150 students, reported 155 students.

Growth in student enrollment has slowed down statewide. After growing by more than 2.2 percent between 2012 and 2015, enrollment has grown by less than 1 percent over the past three years.



Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

Enrollment growth in Clatsop County has been nearly twice as fast as the state, driven by increases in Warrenton and Seaside.

Library: Council said event is an important way to encourage diversity

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Though Rudduck, wearing a red "Make America Great Again" hat, livestreamed videos for his Facebook page, proclaiming his view that the reading was harmful to children, none of the men with him carried signs or spoke openly about their concerns. They did not interact with a crowd of people who supported the event, nor did they talk to Marco Davis, a community volunteer who did the reading in his drag persona, "Miss Daylight."

None of the men went inside the library to try to hear the reading.

"We used to protect the children," Rudduck said on one of his livestreams, "now we protect the men. It's upside down."

Not sure what to expect, Spalding attended the event himself, out of uniform, along with Kenny Hansen, the police department's homeless liaison officer, and other city leaders, including Mayor Bruce Jones and City Manager Brett Estes.

'WWDD'

A dozen friends escorted Davis to the library. Some also made small buttons for people to wear that asked, "WWDD," or "What would Daylight do?"

"Be like Daylight," one friend posted on Facebook ahead of the reading, "focus on the love, bring the light, don't feed the hate."

Adults who attended only to support Davis and the library waited outside the Flag Room to make sure children and their parents were able to get seats. Some of the kids dressed up as princesses and unicorns.

More supporters remained in the main lobby



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Miles Rudduck, right, livestreams commentary outside of the Astoria Library at the start of a Drag Queen Story Hour on Saturday. He was one of four men who showed up to protest.

and outside the library for the duration of the reading.

To protect the minors, the library did not allow people to record or take pictures inside. Pearson gave parents a chance to take pictures of their children with Davis if they wanted.

Jessie Weis, of Astoria, attended a similar event at the library last year. She wasn't originally planning to go to the reading Saturday until she heard people planned to protest and were writing about Davis and the event in terms she considered "hate speech."

"Hate has nothing to do

about being a Christian," she said.

Vivian Battjes, of Gearhart, and Sheila Forte, of Astoria, were not part of Rudduck's protest but attended because they believe a man dressed as a woman reading to children sends a confusing and possibly harmful message. Sexual and gender preference are adult decisions that come with different health risks, and young children are very impressionable, they said.

"It's one thing to make a choice for yourself in regards to gender and sex-

ual preference, it's another thing to include children and influence them," Forte said, adding that she was not judgmental of parents who chose to let their children attend, just concerned.

Battjes had asked the library if a religious group could come in and do a story hour, perhaps with someone dressed as a biblical character. She was told she could not. Pearson spoke with Battjes at the event and plans to talk to her again about the options. In general, libraries cannot host political or religious events, he said.

For Estes, the event was a success for free speech.

"It didn't devolve into arguing or fighting on either side," he said afterward. People who had concerns were able to express them and attend alongside the many people who supported the event.

"That's what you want — is for that dialogue to occur," he said.

A number of parents said their children had attended and enjoyed last year's reading with Davis. One woman said her daughter dressed up in a princess dress as Daylight for days afterward to

hold read-aloud story times with her siblings.

Negative attention

Last year, the story hour was one of the library's most popular events. There was no public outcry or any protests.

Pearson is not sure why the reading, advertised in a similar way as it was last year, garnered so much negative attention this year. The library received messages and calls from people who were concerned. Pearson said the people who were the most adamant that the library should shut down the reading live outside of Astoria.

Drag queen story hours, programs intended to promote reading and literacy, are rising in popularity across the country. Many libraries have faced pushback from some in their communities over the events, but most have chosen to proceed anyway.

In Astoria, the City Council defended the event, calling it an important way to encourage diversity.

Davis read three picture books on Saturday, chosen from a list of suggestions compiled by Suzanne Harold, the children's librarian: "Julian Is A Mermaid," by Jessica Love, about a boy who sees people dressed up as mermaids and is inspired to make his own costume; "Neither," by Airlie Anderson, about a land where blue bunnies and yellow birds stick to their own kind until one day a green bird with rabbit ears is hatched and must find a new place to call home; and the children's classic "Elmer," by David McKee, about an elephant with a conspicuous multicolored patchwork hide.

Fierce battles near final IS foothold in Syria

By **BASSEM MROUE** and **ZEINA KARAM**
Associated Press

BEIRUT — Islamic State group militants cornered in their last foothold in eastern Syria fought back with suicide car bombs, snipers and booby traps today, slowing Kurdish fighters advancing under the cover of U.S.-led coalition airstrikes, Kurdish news agencies and a Syrian war monitor said.

An Italian photographer was wounded in the clashes between the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces and the militants holed up in the village of Baghouz, near the border with Iraq. No one knows exactly how many Islamic State fighters are still holding out in the sliver of territory under attack, although they are estimated to be in the hundreds, most of them foreign fighters. It is also unclear if civilians are still inside, caught under heavy bombardment.

The SDF on Saturday launched its final push to clear the area from IS, after months of fighting that saw 20,000 civilians fleeing just in the past few weeks. The numbers have overwhelmed Kurdish-run camps in northeastern Syria, where humanitarian conditions are already dire amid a cold winter and meager resources.

The capture of the IS-held



HONS

Civilians flee fighting near Baghouz, Syria on Sunday

village of Baghouz and nearby areas would mark the end of a devastating four-year global war to end the IS extremists' territorial hold over large parts of Syria and Iraq, where the group established its self-proclaimed "caliphate" in 2014. That in turn, would open the way for U.S. President Donald Trump to begin withdrawing U.S. troops from northern Syria as he has promised to do once the Islamic State group has been defeated.

"The U.S. will soon control 100% of ISIS territory in Syria," Trump tweeted Sunday. He has said repeatedly that he doesn't want the U.S. to be the world's policeman and that he intends to bring the 2,000 U.S. troops home.

U.S. officials and Trump's own military advisers, however, have warned that losing its territorial hold does not mean that the Islamic State group is defeated, warning that IS could stage a comeback

in Syria within six months to a year if the military and counterterrorism pressure on it is eased. Gen. Joseph Votel, the commander of U.S. forces in the Middle East, estimated there are between 1,000 and 1,500 IS fighters in the small area they still control, but he said others have "dispersed" and "gone to ground."

In recent weeks, U.S. officials have said IS has lost 99.5 percent of its territory and is holding on to under 2 square miles, where most of the fighters are concentrated in Syria. But activists and residents say IS still has sleeper cells in Syria and Iraq and is laying the groundwork for an insurgency.

Williams: Astoria's parkland is similar to other places he's managed

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Manager Brett Estes said. Also, it was the first year of "going through and saying, 'OK, where are things budgeted too high, where are they budgeted too low?'"

Cosby herself had planned to spend the year focused on rebuilding and evaluating the department's internal processes, until a job possibility came up in Colorado that she didn't feel she could ignore. Her departure came at a time when Estes was already looking to fill several other department director vacancies.

Now Estes will look to Williams to work with staff to put those internal processes and procedures into place, to ask, "Are we being efficient? Are we being effective?" Williams, who grew up in rural southeast Idaho, has experience at different kinds of

parks departments, including in Roswell, New Mexico, where he oversaw divisions such as a zoo and a cemetery. While Astoria is one of the smaller departments he's been involved with, the parkland is similar to other places he has managed.

"What really intrigued me about this was it seemed like a great opportunity to get more involved with the community," Williams said. "There's great leadership. People really know their stuff and then the altruism of all the volunteers and volunteer groups. The staff is second to none."

Williams moved here with his wife and the three youngest of his six children. They had visited Astoria before, but this is their first time living in Oregon. His downtime is spent with his family.

"If they have an activity, I follow them," he said.

As Williams becomes more familiar with what the department offers and what the community wants, he hopes to conduct an analysis of recreational providers. He plans to look at what groups and organizations provide programs for youth and identify gaps the department could fill.

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