

Study: Number of certified child care centers in county declining

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child care facilities in Clatsop County, though the list only covers organizations that want to be included.

The number of certified child care centers in Clatsop County appears to have declined in recent years, according to Eva Manderson, director of Northwest Regional Child Care Resource and Referral, which primarily works with providers in Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties on professional development and licensing.

Many issues play into this decline, she said.

Child care can be costly to provide, with payroll at the top of the list. Often centers struggle to pay staff more than the minimum wage and still keep costs low for parents. High staff turnover is a common concern. State licensing requirements are constantly changing, but in recent years, there has also been an increase in new requirements.

Then there are changes to providers' personal lives.

"People will often go into child care because they want to be home with their kiddo, so they take on other kids, and that works," Manderson said. But then the provider's child grows up, and maybe they decide it's time to close.

Lil' Sprouts, run by the city in Astoria, is one of the few facilities in the region that offers programs for children as young as 6 weeks old. In recent years, it has become one of the city's primary child care providers.

Erin Reding, preschool recreation coordinator at Lil' Sprouts and Port of Play, said the closure of a large center in Warrenton several years ago seemed to hit the county especially hard.

High cost

For parents, child care easily costs hundreds of dollars a month, even with



Stephanie Seehawer, left, plays with a child under her care at Lil' Sprouts.

Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

state or Coast Guard subsidies to help ease the burden. People often turn to family and friends for help with babysitting.

Heidi Sather's family relocated to Astoria last summer, following her husband, who serves in the Coast Guard. Sather planned to go back to work in social services and started looking at child care options months ahead of the move.

As a state contractor working in the Oregon Department of Human Services' self-sufficiency office, Sather tells clients often, "If you know you're going back to work or school, start looking for child care now. Don't just put your name on a waitlist and wait. Keep calling. If there's a full-time care option available, but you only need part

time, you might as well secure full time while it's there."

It was advice she found herself following before the move to Astoria. The family arrived at the end of June and her youngest son started at Lil' Sprouts in early July.

"To me it is the best place I could have gotten him in," Sather said.

For Sather and her family, a Coast Guard subsidy helps, but child care is still a major cost. "It's tight on the budget, but I see the long-term benefits," she said.

With her youngest cared for and her oldest now in second grade and enrolled in after-school programs, she is free to start her career again and contribute financially to the household. But it's a juggling act that many parents struggle with, espe-

cially those in tighter financial situations.

"You could be going to work and pay half of what you make to child care," she said.

At that point, some couples ask themselves if it makes more sense for one parent to remain at home.

"Availability of child care plays a critical role in the lives of Oregon's families with young children, including if, where and when parents work," Megan Pratt, an associate professor and the lead author of Oregon State's report, said in a statement.

"There's also a growing understanding of the central role stable, quality child care plays in supporting a child's early development, providing the foundation for lifelong learning and well-being."

The study, commis-

sioned by the Oregon Early Learning Division, did not delve into questions of affordability or quality of care, two factors that play a major role in how parents are able to access child care. Instead, it focused on the number of slots available.

Quality

For one local group, in particular, quality and affordability are chief concerns.

Dan Gaffney, a retired Seaside principal, has been involved in looking at ways to provide preschool and early learning services in Clatsop County for years.

He helped start Clatsop Kinder Ready after his retirement, working as the group's coordinator. He left that role in 2017 to focus on a feasibility study to look at providing sub-

sidized, high-quality preschool slots in Clatsop and Tillamook counties.

The feasibility study followed the Pay for Success model, which posits that services like quality preschool are an investment that can lead to a cascade of benefits and cost savings elsewhere in a child's life and development.

Educators see the long-term effects and differences between children who receive good early education and care and those who don't, Gaffney said.

Quality preschool is key to preparing children for what comes next, helping them develop important social and emotional skills, he said. Providers can also intervene earlier on learning or behavioral issues that may otherwise place a child in special education later.

Lack of access to early care disproportionately hits lower-income and minority families hardest.

Gaffney's feasibility study is now complete and he is moving into a second phase. His team's work will be taken on by the regional Northwest Early Learning Hub to further investigate child care needs and barriers in Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook counties.

Gaffney hopes the move will put the three counties in a good position if more state money for early learning services becomes available.

Gov. Kate Brown pitched a budget plan in November that added \$38.3 million for child care as part of an overall funding package for schools and education.

The money would go to increasing the availability of infant and toddler child care and provide more support for early childhood educators, among other measures.

"Let's get ourselves in position," Gaffney reasoned. "If there is more money, we're shovel-ready."

School: Rogozinski has shown an ability to think outside the box

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"I'm very humbled to have the vote of confidence in the work we've done," Rogozinski said.

He credited his staff with much of the success the grade school has experienced during his tenure. He was brought in to replace Jan Schock, principal for 15 years, and improve academic rigor, while Porter was brought in to improve behavior.

The grade school has since experienced a rapid, sustained growth in enrollment and academic performance.

School board members said that track record played into his selection.

"Out of the applications, his stood out," said Dan Jackson, a board member. "But then in the interview, we knew he was the one."

Rogozinski came into his interview with a specific plan to continue improving the school district, said Darlene Warren,



Debbie Morrow

Newly chosen Superintendent Tom Rogozinski, left, with Warrenton-Hammond School Board member Greg Morrill.

a board member. Neal Bond, recently appointed to the school board to replace Stacey Brown, said Rogozinski's vision for the district aligned with the school board's.

Rogozinski has shown an ability to think outside the box on education and empower teachers, said Debbie Morrow, the board's chairwoman.

"Listening to him talk about

education, you can see him get really excited about it, his passion for not only seeing students succeed, but for taking challenges and finding a way to engineer success," said Greg Morrill, a board member.

Rogozinski, originally from Pittsburgh, has 26 years in education. Before Warrenton, he was principal at several K-8 Catholic schools, including Holy Trinity Catholic School in Beaverton and St. Mary Star of the Sea Catholic School in Astoria until its closure in 2011. He first became a principal at Gallup Catholic School in New Mexico, where he previously taught algebra and precalculus.

While at Holy Trinity, Rogozinski commuted on weekends to Astoria, where he lives with his partner, Peggy Boisvert, and two stepsons.

Applying to Warrenton, Rogozinski didn't know if the Catholic background would hurt his candidacy, but he knew Heyen and Jef-

fery and was convinced to apply, he said. Warrenton at the time was struggling with enrollment, sparse funding during the Great Recession and a lackluster academic reputation.

There were challenges in the way the grade school was being operated, Rogozinski said, but he got a good sense of the team he had in place.

"It wasn't a job that was by any means doable by one person," he said of the grade school's improvement. "But a lot of the framework was in place."

Rogozinski would have been a great candidate for any number of positions, and he was relieved the school district hired him, Jeffery said.

"Working with him over the past six years, I got to take his measure and really see what he's capable of," he said. "I honestly believe that he is the one to help this district get to the next level in this push to be the best district in the state."

Taxes: 'I have a feeling we're going to take additional actions'

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Inn owes \$125,837.40 in unpaid lodging taxes, penalties and accrued interest.

Representatives of the Shilo Inn did not immediately respond to questions.

City Manager Linda Engbretson said the city received a call Thursday from Shilo Inn representatives, who left a message requesting a payment plan, but Engbretson was not able to reach anyone when she called back.

"I'm willing to hear what they propose," she said, "however, they have consistently been late and have not met previous arrangements as agreed."

Mayor Henry Balensifer said that the hotel has yet to take any steps to pay



Warrenton has sought lodging taxes from the Shilo Inn.

the taxes owed.

"I have a feeling we're going to take additional actions," he said. "This isn't a simple fact of ... say, your personal income

tax where you don't pay it one year and it compounds over the years. We're talking about money that was never theirs to begin with."

Balensifer could not speak to any past issues with collecting taxes from the hotel, but said utility billing has always been "a cat-and-mouse game" for the city.

During his time as a city commissioner, he often heard from staff that the hotel was behind on paying city utility bills, or paid them only at the last minute.

"It's a strange business model," he said.

The Shilo Inn company, founded by Mark S. Hemstreet in 1974, has faced tax payment issues in Clatsop County before. In 2016, Seaside filed a lawsuit against the company for more than \$100,000 in unpaid lodging taxes at the Shilo Inn Seaside Oceanfront Resort.

Seafood: 'It's kind of hard to run a business on a month-to-month lease'

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announced the businesses were closing and converting to Hurricane Ron's. He had issues finding help at the restaurant and tiki bar, and reached out about leasing out the spaces, Cordero said.

Holboke's offer provided a backup plan for Neva and Cordero, who have been on tenuous footing with the Port of Astoria, owner of the Chinook Building.

"We couldn't get our lease renewed with the Port of Astoria," Cordero said. "They would only give us a month-to-month lease. It's kind of hard to run a business on a month-to-month lease, so we figured

we had to diversify."

The two parties have been at loggerheads regarding plumbing, bathrooms, trash and other operational issues. The two sides reached a detente after developer Chester Trabucco — amid a bid with partner William Orr to take over the adjacent Astoria Riverwalk Inn — agreed to manage the Chinook Building. But after their bid failed, Trabucco bowed out.

In the latest salvo, the Port locked the bathrooms in the Chinook Building because of mechanical issues and has been forcing customers into a port-a-potty, Neva said.

"I think it's just another way of them jabbing at me," he said.