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Tidewater's child care crisis: Pandemic drives underlying need, parents see limited access, high costs

By EM HOLTER
TIDEWATER REVIEW | AUG 10, 2020



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With six facilities across the region, Creative Critters offers up childcare to families in New Kent and West Point. (Kathy...

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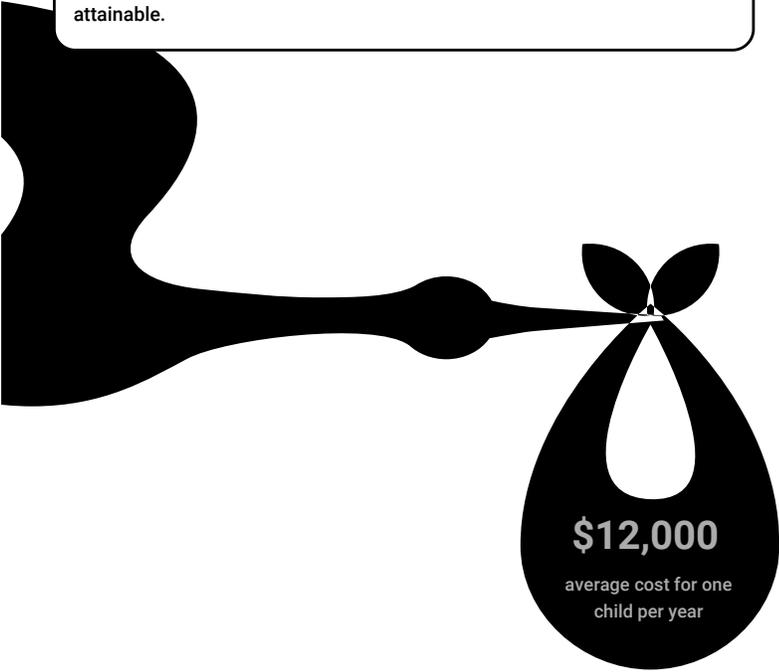
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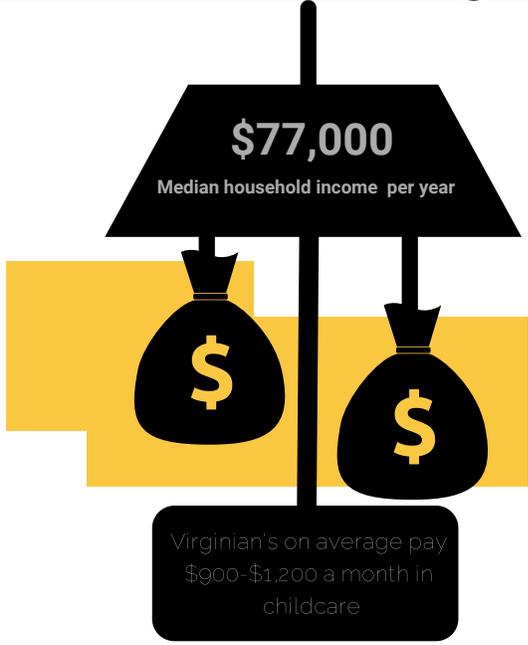
America's childcare system: is it accessible to everyone?



With the average household seeing both parents in the workforce, access to childcare is crucial. From infant to child care, parents rely on facilities to provide adequate education and socialization needed for early childhood development. But, for many, the cost and accessibility of childcare is not attainable.



Childcare costs in Virgin



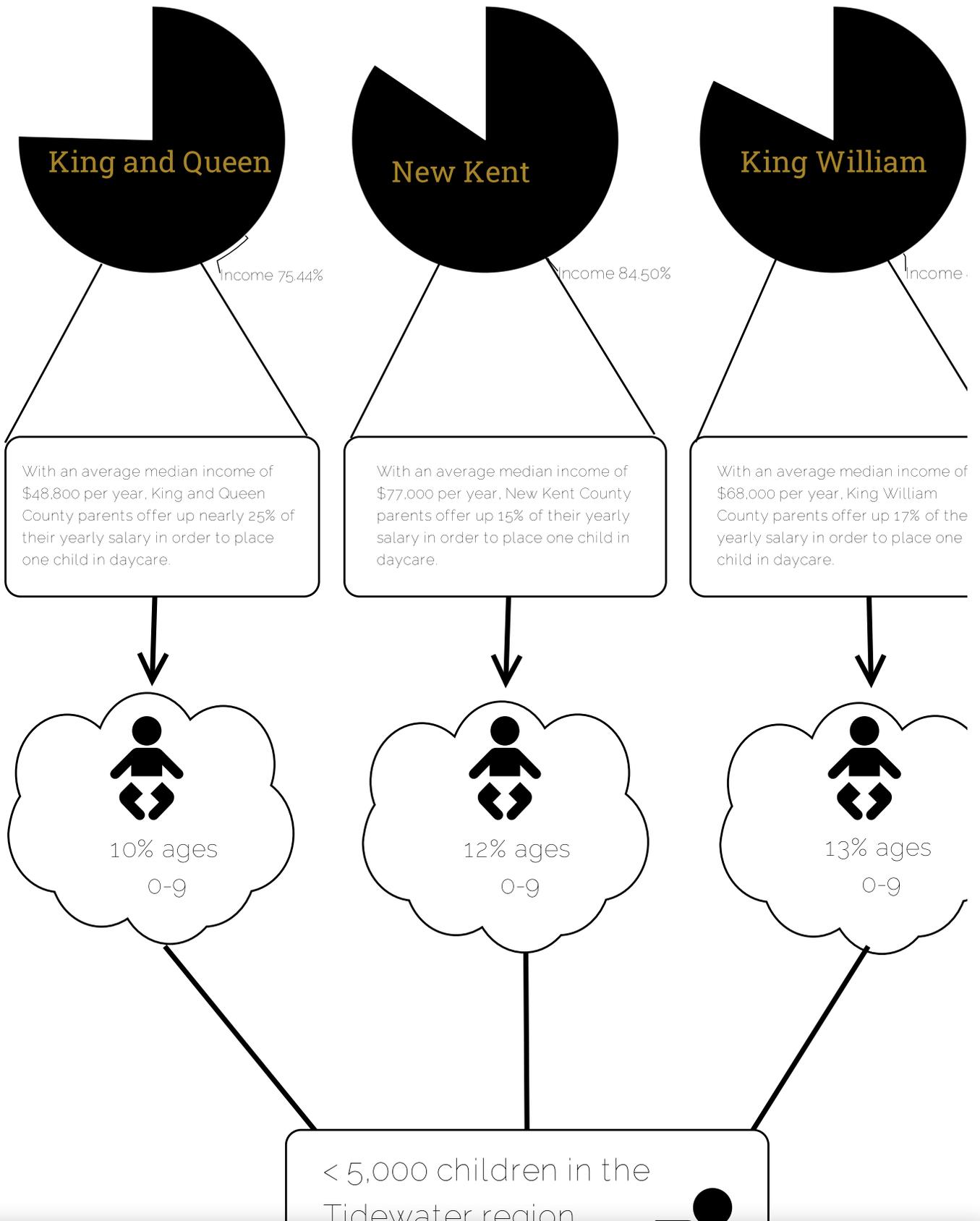
According to the Economic Policy Institute, the cost to place one child in daycare ranges from \$10,000 to \$14,000 each year. With Virginian's median household income resting at \$77,000 a year, daycare expenses make up over 16 percent of their yearly income.



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Created by: Emily Holter Data from: U.S. Census and Economic Policy I

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America's childcare system: Is it accessible to everyone?
Infogram

On most days, King and Queen County resident Amy Wyatt and her family's day begins long before sunrise. Relying on those crucial morning hours, Wyatt spends most of her time preparing for the day ahead.

Between getting her daughters, ages 7 and 4, up and dressed, filling snack bags, cutting crusts off sandwiches and making breakfast, it is a race against the clock.

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But, somehow, she always manages to make it out the door and on the road. Once she drops her daughters off at day care, her long commute to work begins.

For most American families with young children, Wyatt's morning routine is reminiscent of their own. With most households seeing both parents in the work force, day care centers and at-home child care is a necessity.

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Amid the COVID-19 outbreak with most school divisions adopting reopening plans that include students staying home most days, the need for child care has increased drastically and parents are now left searching for safe and reliable care in a pandemic.

With limited availability, long wait lists and overall high costs, many are left empty-handed.

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For many Virginians, child care is a luxury they simply cannot afford.

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According to the Economic Policy Institute, a national data-collecting organization focusing on how economic factors affect lower- and middle-class Americans, Virginia has the 10th most expensive child care costs in the country.

On average, Virginians pay between \$900 to \$1,400 monthly, totaling \$11,000 to \$14,000 a year to place one child in child care. With a average median household income of \$77,000, Virginians see more than 15% of their yearly salary going toward child care, according to the institute.

In comparison, Virginians, on average, pay \$12,000 a year for higher education.

For a parent making \$7.50 an hour, the state's current minimum wage, they would have to work 48-hour weeks for a year, giving up 93% of their \$17,800 yearly salary, in order to afford infant child care for one child.

How does the Tidewater region compare?

While the state's average median household income is \$77,000, most localities in the Tidewater region fall below the state average.

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According the 2019 U.S. Census estimates, King and Queen County's average

salary for child care.

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Likewise, King William County households average \$68,000 yearly. With the annual child care cost average, county residents forfeit nearly 18% of their yearly salaries.

While New Kent County's median income is in line with the state average at \$77,000, county residents on average pay 15% of their annual salaries for child care.

Availability also plays a big part in whether or not parents can place their children in child care.

With four state-recognized child care options in the region, parents can choose among sending their children to a brick and mortar facility, an licensed at-home provider, an unlicensed at-home provider or an unlicensed faith-based provider.

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Often, brick and mortar centers can hold more children and they focus heavily on scheduled curriculum learning.

At-home licensed providers can house roughly a classroom of students, and they are subject to state guidelines including educational materials, food servings and nutrition, and these facilities are subject to state monitoring.

While unlicensed at-home providers can only house up to four children at a time, they are not subject to state guidelines.

Typically, churches carry out faith-based child care. They can house a classroom of students and they are not subject to state guidelines.

In King William, King and Queen, New Kent and West Point, there are five day care

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“We live in a desert,” Wyatt said. “There’s nothing here.”

With a little more than 5,000 children, ranging in age from infant to 9 years within the four localities, the demand outweighs the supply.

According to a survey issued by the New Kent School Division, nearly 40% of responding parents are in need of child care as a result of the pandemic. A similar survey released by the King William School Division found nearly 40% of its responding parents in need of child care.

While the region has always seen a lack of availability, it has become even more evident amid the pandemic. With child care centers operating at half capacity, space is limited. Many licensed and unlicensed home providers closed their doors for the families’ safety and their own.

Some have closed their doors permanently.

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For nearly a decade, West Point resident Kelly Magovero ran her own unlicensed at-home child care facility.

While she never imagined she would one day run a day care, Magovero got her start helping a friend. While living on a military base, Magovero said shaken baby syndrome cases were on the rise. After a friend’s child was attacked by a provider, Magovero stepped in.

When she moved to West Point, Magovero continued her business.

Starting at 7 a.m., folks dropped their children off at Magovero’s house. From there,

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For seven years, Magovero never changed her rates. For \$35 a day or \$160 a week, families could send infants and children to her. The cost included trips to museums and other activities.

According to Magovero, she kept costs low to make it easier for families.

“My main focus wasn’t on making a lot of money, I just wanted to be family flexible,” Magovero said. “Paying for child care could be the difference between groceries that month.”

But amid the pandemic, many families pulled their children from child care as they were left unemployed, furloughed or working from home. From the second week of April, Magovero said she didn’t have anyone enrolled.

From there, Magovero decided to hang up her hat and look for work elsewhere.

For several years, Wyatt’s daughters were among the children on Magovero’s roster. With she and her husband returning back to work, Wyatt had to find another child care provider that met her needs.

With her youngest daughter living with an auto-immune disorder, Wyatt said now more than ever it’s crucial for her children to be in a place that takes the necessary precautions to ensure children are safe.

Many parents rely on relatives to watch their children during the week. But amid the pandemic, that may not be an option, as people fear they might bring the pandemic to their door.

Wyatt’s children used to spend days at their grandparents’ house, but she said she worries about their safety.

Why is the cost so high?

While the majority of households see both parents in the workforce, the demand for

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Child care costs have increased by more than 40% since the 1990s; nearly twice as fast as the overall inflation rate, the U.S. Census reports.

While U.S. Health and Human Services recommend child care should cost no more than 7% of a family's income, there are few government programs offered to help field costs.

The state offers financial aid for both providers and parents through its ChildCareVa program. Through the program, residents can apply for assistance if they meet specific requirements, including providing citizenship, immunization and income documentation.

While costs remain high for both parents and providers, the average child care worker would not be able to afford child care for their own children. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the average child care worker would have to forfeit 60% of their roughly \$22,000 yearly salary to place one child in infant care.

With six child care facilities across Eastern Virginia, Creative Critters owner Kathy Gray has spent 16 years in the business. As a former teacher, she said she understands the importance of keeping costs reasonable for parents.

Charging parents roughly \$650 a month per child, Gray said the company tries to keep costs below average. According to Gray, they charge the same for both children and infants.

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While most facilities charge more for infant care -- nearly \$2,000 more per year on average -- Gray said they are working to help families; especially, amid the pandemic. But, the company is also committed to paying their employees an adequate wage.

“I want anyone to be able to access our facilities; I was a teacher, I know how hard it can be,” Gray said. “But, on the other hand, my workers deserve to be paid for the work they do. It’s a balancing act.”

For West Point resident Jessica Coggsdale, the child care facility has helped prepare her children for the school year. While child care should be more affordable, the teachers deserve to make more, she said.

“My kids are at the center at least nine hours a day, so while the cost is a little more than one of my paychecks a month, the teachers definitely deserve it and probably more,” Coggsdale said.

Emily Holter, emily.holter@virginiamedia.com, 757-256-6657, [@EmilyHolterNews](#).

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Em Holter is an award-winning reporter covering West Point, King William, King and Queen, New Kent, Williamsburg and James City County. At VCU, she studied both communications and history. Hailing from a small, rural community in West Virginia, Em strives to report on underrepresented spaces and give a voice to those who often go unheard.

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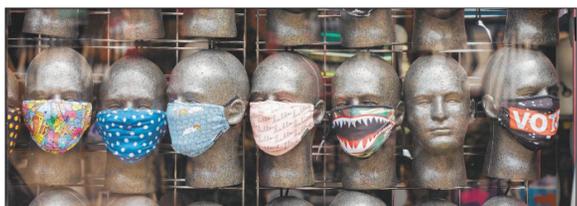
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24-HOUR COVERAGE OF WEST POINT, KING WILLIAM, NEW KENT AND KING & QUEEN

Tidewater Review

AUGUST 12, 2020

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Pandemic fueling Tidewater child care crisis

Increased need, limited access and high costs among issues for parents

BY EMILY HOLTER
Staff writer

On most days, King and Queen County resident Amy Wyatt and her family's day begins long before sunrise. Relying on those crucial morning hours, Wyatt spends most of her time preparing for the day ahead.

Between getting her daughters, ages 7 and 4, up and dressed, filling snack bags,

cutting crusts off sandwiches and making breakfast, it is a race against the clock.

But, somehow, she always manages to make it out the door and on the road. Once she drops her daughters off at day care, her long commute to work begins.

For most American families with young children, Wyatt's morning routine is reminiscent of their own. With most households seeing both parents in the work force, day care centers and at-home child care is a necessity.

Amid the COVID-19 outbreak with most school divisions adopting reopening plans that include students staying home most days, the need for child care has increased drastically and parents are now

left searching for safe and reliable care in a pandemic.

With limited availability, long wait lists and overall high costs, many are left empty-handed.

"The cost is a lot," Wyatt said. "I don't care where you look, it's always a huge cost."

Virginia's child care crisis

For many Virginians, child care is a luxury they simply cannot afford.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, a national data-collecting organization focusing on how economic factors affect lower- and middle-class Americans, Virginia has the 10th most expensive

child care costs in the country.

On average, Virginians pay between \$900 to \$1,400 monthly, totaling \$11,000 to \$14,000 a year to place one child in child care. With a average median household income of \$77,000, Virginians see more than 15% of their yearly salary going toward child care, according to the institute.

In comparison, Virginians, on average, pay \$12,000 a year for higher education.

For a parent making \$7.50 an hour, the state's current minimum wage, they would have to work 48-hour weeks for a year, giving up 93% of their \$17,800 yearly

See **CARE**, page 2A



EMILY HOLTER/STAFF

Originally set to open on June 1, New Kent Farmers Market postponed its schedule until July 1. Since then, people have been pouring into the New Kent High School parking lot to check out nearly 15 to 20 vendors each week.

Responsible retail

New Kent celebrates National Farmers Market Week with socially distanced market

BY EMILY HOLTER
Staff writer

NEW KENT — With several food vendors, retail vendors and a petting zoo, not even gray skies and storm clouds overhead could stop folks from filling the New Kent High School parking lot to see what the farmers market had to offer.

Celebrating National Farmers Market Week, the New Kent Farmers Market held its sixth event Saturday, bringing in folks from across the region to see all of its cottage businesses.

While the county planned to open the season the first week of June at its designated market pavilion, but amid the pandemic the county had to change its plans to ensure everyone's safety, County Administrator Rodney Hatha-



EMILY HOLTER/STAFF

New Kent farm Urban Egg-Scape Farm brought its goats and rabbits for folks to play with at the farmers market.

See **MARKET**, page 2A

Local school divisions release plans to reopen

BY EMILY HOLTER
Staff writer

Following Gov. Ralph Northam's June announcement in which school divisions can begin a three-phase return to class, officials got to work, with Virginia Department of Education's guidance, to develop their plans.

After months of planning, the West Point and New Kent school divisions announced their reopening plans following their August school board meetings.

While one division is planning on a late, staggered start, the other is set to kick-off with a hybrid schedule. Both plan to offer 100% virtual models.

West Point

After several discussions with the Virginia Department of Health, Three Rivers Public Health Director and the Virginia Department of Education, the school board unanimously voted 4-0 on a staggered return, hybrid plan.

According to a statement released to parents, Superintendent Laura Abel said all students will begin the school year 100% virtually.

While instruction will be completed at home, the division plans to continue teaching lessons. Grades will be consistent with the division's previous grading scale and attendance will be taken on a daily basis.

Beginning Sept. 8, students will complete all of their schoolwork at home and online. In the upcoming weeks, Abel said each schools' principals will be in contact with parents with additional information on what to expect with reopening and what the virtual instruction will look like for each grade level.

Parents will have an opportunity to request Chromebooks and hot spots for internet support.

After a month of virtual learning, the division plans to reopen schools and begin staggering students' return until all students are back in the classroom by November.

Beginning Oct. 5, schools will reopen with in-person instruction for preschoolers through third-graders returning on a hybrid model with two days in-person and three days of virtual instruction.

See **SCHOOLS**, page 2A

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CARE, from 1A

salary, in order to afford infant child care for one child.

How does the Tidewater region compare?

While the state's average median household income is \$77,000, most localities in the Tidewater region fall below the state average.

According to the 2019 U.S. Census estimates, King and Queen County's average median household income is \$48,800. With yearly child care costs averaging \$12,000 a year, King and Queen residents would pay more than 25% of their yearly salary for child care.

Likewise, King William County households average \$68,000 yearly. With the annual child care cost average, county residents forfeit nearly 18% of their yearly salaries.

While New Kent County's median income is in line with the state average at \$77,000, county residents on average pay 15% of their annual salaries for child care.

Availability also plays a big part in whether or not parents can place their children in child care.

With four state-recognized child care options in the region, parents can choose among sending their children to a brick and mortar facility, an licensed at-home provider, an unlicensed at-home provider or an unlicensed faith-based provider.

Often, brick and mortar centers can hold more children and they focus heavily on scheduled curriculum learning.

At-home licensed providers can house roughly a classroom of students, and they are subject to state guidelines including educational materials, food servings and nutrition, and these facilities are subject to state monitoring.

While unlicensed at-home providers can only house up to four children at a time, they are not subject to state guidelines.

Typically, churches carry out faith-based child care. They can house a classroom of students and they are not subject

to state guidelines.

In King William, King and Queen, New Kent and West Point, there are five day care centers, two licensed at-home providers and four unlicensed providers in a 100-mile radius, according to the Virginia Department of Social Services.

"We live in a desert," Wyatt said. "There's nothing here."

With a little more than 5,000 children, ranging in age from infant to 9 years within the four localities, the demand outweighs the supply.

According to a survey issued by the New Kent School Division, nearly 40% of responding parents are in need of child care as a result of the pandemic. A similar survey released by the King William School Division found nearly 40% of its responding parents in need of child care.

While the region has always seen a lack of availability, it has become even more evident amid the pandemic. With child care centers operating at half capacity, space is limited. Many licensed and unlicensed home providers closed their doors for the families' safety and their own.

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While she never imagined she would one day run a day care, Magovero got her start helping a friend. While living on a military base, Magovero said shaken baby syndrome cases were on the rise. After a friend's child was attacked by a provider, Magovero stepped in.

When she moved to West Point, Magovero continued her business.

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For seven years, Magovero never changed her rates. For \$35 a day or \$160 a week, families could send infants and children to her. The cost included trips to museums and other activities.

According to Magovero, she kept costs low to make it easier for families.

"My main focus wasn't on making a lot of money, I just wanted to be family flexible," Magovero said. "Paying for child care could be the difference between groceries that month."

But amid the pandemic, many families pulled their children from child care as they were left unemployed, furloughed or working from home. From the second week of April, Magovero said she didn't have anyone enrolled.

From there, Magovero decided to hang up her hat and look for work elsewhere.

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Why is the cost so high?

While the majority of households see both parents in the workforce, the demand for child care has increased. With more children in child care, the need for labor has increased. Between labor, up-to-date, a state-certified educational curriculum and infant and toddler resource, there are high costs associated with providing care.

Child care costs have increased by more than 40% since the 1990s; nearly twice as fast as the overall inflation rate, the U.S. Census reports.

While U.S. Health and Human Services recommend child care should cost no more than 7% of a family's income, there are few government programs offered to help field costs.

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While costs remain high for both parents and providers, the average child care worker would not be able to afford child care for their own children. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the average child care worker would have to forfeit 60% of their roughly \$22,000 yearly salary to place one child in infant care.

With six child care facilities across Eastern Virginia, Creative Critters owner Kathy Gray has spent 16 years in the business. As a former teacher, she said she understands the importance of keeping costs reasonable for parents.

Charging parents roughly \$650 a month per child, Gray said the company tries to keep costs below average. According to Gray, they charge the same for both children and infants.

While most facilities charge more for infant care — nearly \$2,000 more per year on average — Gray said they are working to help families; especially, amid the pandemic. But, the company is also committed to paying their employees an adequate wage.

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Emily Holter, 757-256-6657, emily.holter@virginiamedia.com, @EmilyHolterNews



EMILY HOLTER/STAFF

Toano-based flower company Bouquet of Blessing has been setting up shop at the New Kent Farmers Market since July.

MARKET, from 1A

four daughters to express their passions and be together. Since its fruition, Plocharczyk said it the business has grown exponentially.

Selling their flowers and produce at various markets around the region, Plocharczyk said they love the feel of the New Kent farmers market.

"We love coming here," Plocharczyk said. "It's a way for us to offload the abundance of flowers we have and it's great because that way they don't go to waste. It's been nice, we've built a clientele and people have learned about us."

While Plocharczyk and her family are no stranger to New Kent's Farmers Market, Uncle Dave's Kettle Korn franchise owners, Mario Redd and Starmeeka Edmonds set up shop for the first time, and they said it was all worth the drive.

After speaking with Supervisor Patricia Paige, Redd said he knew they needed to come out to New Kent to the farmers market.

"I gave out samples at work and she said, 'we gotta have y'all, New Kent's been waiting on y'all,'" Redd said. "So, we came out and tried it out and we're

glad we did. It's been a good day, good environment, we'll definitely be coming back."

After driving to Williamsburg almost every weekend to buy Uncle Dave's Kettle Korn, the pair said they knew they needed to get in the game. Starting their franchise in January, the pair is working in Richmond and planning on setting up shop in the city.

"We love popcorn and that's what sparked our interest," Redd said. "There's nothing better than good kettle corn. You smell that caramel and you're going to want it."

Every Saturday, folks fill the parking lot. With more than 20 vendors offering their own creations, folks can make their way down the line of socially distanced tents. From flowers to pies to soups to pickles to a petting zoo, the local cottage industry comes out showcasing all they have to offer.

"The farmers markets will be going on until Oct. 31," Hathaway said. "We're taking the necessary safety precautions and following procedures and it been successful. We just hope we can continue to provide."

Emily Holter, 757-256-6657, emily.holter@virginiamedia.com, @EmilyHolterNews

SCHOOLS, from 1A

On Nov. 9, all students will return on a hybrid two-day in-person, three-day virtual plan. Dividing students into two teams, each team will return on different days.

"The board is very aware of the impact that this decision will have on our students and families; however, after thoughtfully considering the information ... it was the shared belief that delaying in-person instruction was the responsible decision," Abel stated.

While this is the current scheduled plan, Abel said the division is continually monitoring the situation with COVID-19 and if the staggered timetable can be accelerated then the division will reassess and go from there. Any decision regarding changing the current plan will be given with at least two weeks' notice.

According to Abel, the division considered several options but, ultimately it did not feel comfortable bringing students back with a potential COVID-19 outbreak happening within the schools.

The staggered model will help limit the risk and lead to students returning to school sooner, Abel stated.

"As a school division, we have a responsibility to protect the health and safety of our students, staff and community, to do our part in limiting the spread of COVID-19 and to help our community to get back to school and keep our schools open," Abel stated. "We will continue to do whatever is needed to help Pointer families meet this challenge and we appreciate your unwavering support."

For more information, visit wpschools.net.

New Kent

Following its Aug. 5 School Board vote on plans for the fall, the New Kent County school division released plans Friday for its Return to Learn 2020 plan featuring a hybrid plan with 100% virtual option.

Planning to start the school year Sept. 8, the division will separate students into two different groups. Mondays and Wednesdays will be designated as A Days and Tuesdays and Thursdays as B-Days. Fridays will be reserved as at-home days, according to the division's plan.

The division placed students in its designated group based on where they live in the county. Letters will be sent out to parents with more information.

With the division's current hybrid model, students will go to school two days out of the week and will do at-home instruction three days of the week.

This will cut the overall number of people in school facilities to half, keep classroom sizes small and make it easier for students and staff to stay 6-feet apart at all times, the plan stated.

For elementary students, on in-person days, they will receive science, history, English and math instruction. On at-home days, kindergarten through second-grade students will receive learning packets that will be completed and turned in. Third- through fifth-grade students will complete their work virtually.

For middle school and high school students, on in-person days, their classrooms will be grouped into teams and they will primarily stay within those groups throughout the day. On at-home days, they will access online curriculum and complete assignments from there.

The division also is offering a 100% virtual model for parents who would rather keep students at home.

For 100% virtual students, they are expected to log on and work on their coursework every day. Students will have different online platforms they will access depending on their grade level. But every student will receive curriculum curated by their teachers. The virtual model will include independent assignments as well as daily live sessions in order to collect attendance, according to the division plan.

While this is an available option, it is limited and the division cannot guarantee it will be available to everyone.

With a seating limit on buses, the division said parents should strongly consider providing transportation for their students in order to ensure the division will have enough seats on buses.

If a student or faculty member is COVID positive, the division said it will implement its health and safety plan. To date, the division has not released that specific plan.

While on school grounds, students will be required to wear face masks and maintain social distancing practices, which will be enforced by faculty.

The division will not be conducting health screenings and is asking parents to complete their own health screenings at home. The division asks parents take their child's temperature each morning.

If they have a 100 degree or higher temperature, a sore throat, uncontrollable cough, muscle aches, severe headaches, a runny nose or have been in contact with someone who has tested positive, then parents should keep their children at home.

The division said it plans to regularly clean and disinfect all of its facilities in the morning and evening and is taking additional methods to ensure safety. If a student or faculty member tests positive, the division said it will inform parents and the local health department.

For more information, visit bit.ly/31xjmSL.

Emily Holter, 757-256-6657, emily.holter@virginiamedia.com, @EmilyHolterNews