

Consider array of options for your children's care

BY COURTNEY BERTRAND
Special to the Record-Eagle

So, we all want the American Dream, right? A nice house, a good job, 2.5 kids and a loyal dog to bring us our slippers. But this is not "Leave it to Beaver"-land. For many families, both Mom and Dad have to work. And where does that leave those 2.5 children?

Stay-at home parenting
Some parents opt to stay at home.

Scott Okerlund of Empire and his wife Melissa decided to swap stay-at-home duty and have Scott in the Mr. Mom role for a while. "We decided to reverse roles because I wanted to have the opportunity to be a part of my children's early development. We also wanted the boys to learn that both moms and dads can do well in non-traditional parenting roles," said Okerlund.

Okerlund said that while the cost of child care played a small part in their stay-at-home choice, they ultimately wanted their children home with them instead of learning from other adults.

"A stranger will never love a child like their parents do," Okerlund said.

Okerlund's sons Oscar, 4, and Xander, 2, say they love having their father home because he "plays toys" with them.

Low-income families
For families who cannot afford the weekly/hourly rates of child care providers, there are some options. The Michigan Family Independence Agency (FIA) developed a program called Child Development and Care (CDC) Services providing assistance with child care expenses to low-income families who need child day care to work.

FIA pays 30 to 95 percent of child care costs depending on the income of the qualified families. Check with your Community Coordinated Child Care (4C) agency to get a list of eligible child care providers near you.

Head Start & Ready "Four" School and Early Head Start are other programs designed for low-income families. Ready "Four" School is a joint pro-

ject of the Traverse City Area Public Schools and Head Start of Northwest Michigan Human Services Agency. Kids 3 to 5 years old, including those with special needs, are the focus of this preschool program. Early Head Start is for infants through age 3 and is offered year-round.

Head Start offers low-income families child care options they would not otherwise be able to afford.

"We try to help families avoid unregulated, dangerous programs," said Kathy Kundrat, Head Start Program director.

Many families with low incomes feel they have no choice but to opt for unlicensed in-home care settings that charge less than accredited day cares. The Head Start programs offer many of the same features as other preschools and day cares.

"The push for more academic programs is pretty strong right now," said Kundrat.

Day care centers
When both parents work, challenges can include finding a day care provider with

compatible hours, that instills the similar values, is affordable and is convenient.

When choosing a day care for her son Nicklas, Cathlyn Sommerfield of Traverse City said she chose primarily by word-of-mouth.

"It was important to me to be able to talk with other parents about their experiences with the provider," said Sommerfield.

Nicklas, now 16 months old, has been in day care for one year. It wasn't an easy decision to leave him in day care, said Sommerfield.

"I think the decision was based on a combination of a desire to continue in my career and also a need to maintain a certain level of household income," she said.

Nicklas attends Noah's Ark day care, which is affiliated with Peninsula Bible Church.

"I've had to accept the fact that there is not a provider that will do things just the way I like, all of the time. And, as long as Nicklas is safe and happy, we will keep him there," said Sommerfield.

Noah's Ark charges \$145 per week for infants up to age 3 and \$125 per week for 3-to 6-year-olds. Parents can bring their children as many days as they'd like (and pay per day) as long as the schedule stays consistent.

Group day care
Group and family day cares offer almost all the comforts of home.

"Children don't feel like they are being left at a business," said Sherry Messner, owner of Country Lane Day Care in Traverse City.

Messner has been involved in day care for 33 years and has owned and operated Country Lane for more than two decades. With a degree in social work and some background in elementary education, Messner chose to pursue a career in day care because she loves being with kids.

Jan Baumgartner of Traverse City, whose daughter Angela, 8, has gone to Country Lane since she was 4 months old, said that she enjoys the personal relationship Messner develops with the children — and parents.

"She is an extension of our family now," said

Baumgartner.

The cost of home day care can be significantly less than day care centers. Messner charges \$2.10 per hour for full-timers and \$3 per hour for part-time, for all ages.

Before and after school care

What do you do with your child for that hour before school and the two hours after school if you've got to be at work?

The Traverse City Area Public Schools (TCAPS) offers Extended Day Before & After School Child Care for working parents who need just those few extra hours of help.

Available to children from pre-kindergarten through the sixth grade, the program costs \$19 to \$41 a week depending on how often a child attends. TCAPS offers many other programs including Young Fives (Sept. - June), Safety City (summer), Montessori School (Sept. - June), Summer School and Summer Day Camp, just to list a few.

Courtney Bertrand is a local freelance writer.

Final stanza for music in the school curriculum?

BY BEN FELLER
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — "The Star-Spangled Banner" isn't exactly gallantly streaming in the nation's classrooms. Most children, in fact, aren't learning children's

classics, patriotic songs or folk tunes in school, a University of Florida survey of nearly 1,800 music teachers finds.

"American children's folk music is a national treasure that holds keys to under-

standing our country's people, their values, their history and their culture," said Marilyn Ward, who conducted the research.

The study highlights a bigger concern for music teachers this school year: that budget cuts, combined with a federal focus on reading and math, has made music expendable.

"It's taken a long, long time to bring music and the arts to the forefront," said Nellie Hill, a middle-school music teacher in Howard County, Md.

And now, the priorities of leaders are changing, she said.

The states' worst fiscal crisis in decades has prompted lawmakers, school boards and principals to make unpopular cuts in many disciplines, including the arts. Many music teachers seem even more troubled by the nation's new elementary and secondary education law — not by its push to raise achievement, but by how it is playing out in their schools.

The No Child Left Behind law requires all students to be performing at their grade level in math and language arts by 2014, and schools must prove yearly

progress until then.

To chart achievement, for example, all states by 2005 must test students in grades three through eight in math and reading annually, and at least once during high school grades.

Nothing in the law suggests less focus on music; in fact, music is named as a core subject. But educators say school leaders are so driven to improve their test scores that music suffers in the form of diminished class time, fewer offerings and less personnel.

Aaron Paragoso, a music specialist in Pearl City on the Hawaiian island of Oahu said that he's had to fight to keep students from being pulled out of his class for extra instruction in other subjects.

"What subject do they parade out before the world to see when some official comes to school?" Paragoso said. "It's not reading and math. It's the chorus. It's the band. It's the orchestra." Educators say beyond music's obvious values, there are benefits to academic progress. Research shows that students engaged in music tend to do better in other subjects because of skills and disci-



AP Photo/Lisa Nipp

Kim Farwood, 14, and Christina Berg, 13, right, perform Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's "Divertimento #14 in B Flat" during their advanced wind ensemble class with teacher Keith Taylor at Fairfax High School in Fairfax, Va.

pline they develop.

"We are part of the solution, very definitely," said Tim McConnell, who teaches elementary and high school music in Lakefield, Minn. "We can help with the reading and the math scores."

But are they preaching to the choir? Leaders at the Education Department, who oversee the new law's implementation, say they understand music's value — led by Education Secretary Rod Paige, who considered a career as a musician. The law should not be viewed as a call to narrow curriculum, said Susan Sclafani, a counselor to Paige at the department.

"If you look at schools in states that have been doing accountability for a long time, they have given up on the drill-and-practice routine, because it didn't help achievement," she said. "And they brought back the arts...When you look at high-performing schools, what you find is a rich curriculum."

How to find that balance is the challenge for superintendents and principals,

she said.

"The bill does not ask that we test in every subject because we were worried that would be overkill," she said.

Music classes need not come at the expense of other subjects, according to MENC: The National Association for Music Education (formerly known as Music Educators National Conference), which represents more than 100,000 music teachers, students and other advocates.

The group developed national standards that call for music-education choices in every grade, from reading and composing music to playing instruments and improvising melodies.

"We don't want a cultural caste system that relegates music to only those who can afford private lessons on the weekend," said John Mahlmann, the association's executive director.

Members of the music community have launched a Web site — <http://www.supportmusic.com> — that offers tips on how people can fight for strong music education in their towns.



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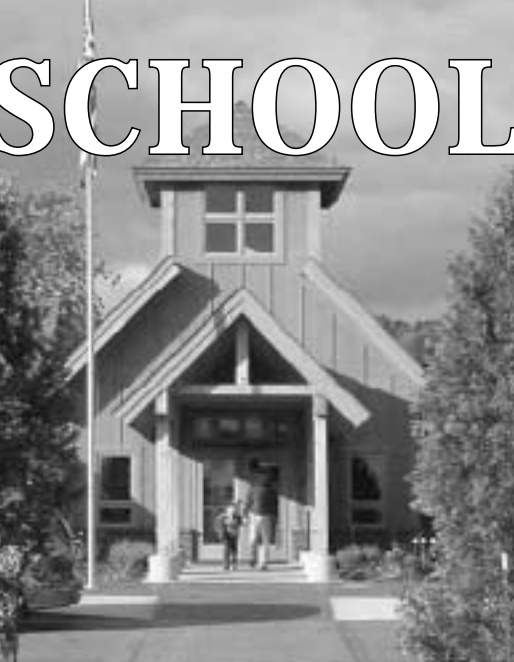
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