



McNary's class of 2021 received their diplomas on Wednesday, June 9 at Volcanoes Stadium. FILE PHOTO, Keizertimes

# McNary earns top graduation rate in the district

BY MATT RAWLINGS  
Of the Keizertimes

While the rest of the state experienced a slight decrease, McNary High School's class of 2021 posted one of the best graduation rates in the state, continuing the notable recent success for the school.

McNary's 2021 four-year senior cohort received the top mark in the

Salem-Keizer School District with a graduation rate of 96.23%, over 16% higher than the state average and more than five percentage points higher than last school year.

It is the fourth highest graduation rate in the state among schools that had 100 kids or more in their graduating class.

"It's a great feeling to have the

success that we did. It evokes a tremendous sense of pride. The efforts from staff to navigate some of the roughest stretches in recent history has been incredible," McNary Principal Erik Jespersen said. "Not only did they give kids all their educational needs, but also social and emotional needs."

"This is a K-12 accomplishment. Our Keizer schools played a big part of this. This is a win for Keizer."

Jespersen said that one of the key reasons for the school's success was safely bringing in select students for in-person learning at a time when the entire state was participating in school virtually.

In November 2020, it was estimated that nearly half of the nearly 13,000 high schoolers in Salem-Keizer Public Schools (SKPS) were failing at least one class. During a two-day period, McNary hosted a total of 300 students in 56 cohorts for in-person instruction.

The aggressive approach paid dividends for McNary, who was able to cut their failing grades down from 38% to 17% before the month of December.

"School was significantly altered, but we figured out how to get kids in the building during distance learning. I think that made all the difference," Jespersen said. "That was our teachers, our (instructional assistants) our people doing whatever it took to help our kids. It was about face to face contact."

Building and developing

relationships is a priority for Jespersen and his staff, and it's how McNary was able to overcome multiple challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in regards to school.

Before students returned to school for hybrid learning in April 2021, McNary staff members organized hundreds of home visits with kids that were either struggling with school or lacked the resources to get their assignments done in a timely fashion.

"Our home visits really worked. I was a little bit hesitant to do it at first, but kids responded really well to us leaving our desks and showing them that we cared," said Aris Astorga, the community school outreach coordinator for

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— ERIK JESPERSEN

McNary Principal

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