

PENDLETON: Nixyaawii's four-year graduation rate fell to 42.1 percent last year

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Yoshioka expanded the scope further, saying district staff as far back as kindergarten and first grade deserve credit for a strong class of 2017.

The district's other two high schools — Hawthorne Alternative High School and Nixyaawii Community School — weren't nearly as successful.

After graduating 88.2 percent of their students in 2015-2016, Nixyaawii's rate fell to 42.1 last year, although its five-year completer rate, a metric that includes students who received a diploma or GED within a year after their targeted graduation date, was a much more respectable 83.3 percent.

Hawthorne, a school for students who have trouble learning in a traditional setting, saw a modest rise from 27.6 percent in 2015-2016 to 30.8 percent in 2016-2017.

Yoshioka acknowledged the gap between schools and said district officials will have to focus on Hawthorne to raise the district-wide rate above the low 80s.

Greenough, who also serves as the principal of Hawthorne, said counselors will need to hone in on Hawthorne students and their needs.

District administrators will have less direct influence over Nixyaawii, a charter school with its own governing board — a "district within a district" — as Yoshioka called it.

How Nixyaawii performs is important to the district's overall graduate rate for American Indian



EO file photo
Graduates of the Pendleton High School class of 2015 toss their hats into the air at the conclusion of their graduation ceremony at the Pendleton Round-Up Grounds.

students, which was 53.6 percent, more than 5.5 points below the state average.

While Pendleton High School graduated nine out of 10 tribal students, Hawthorne only graduated one out of four and Nixyaawii five out of 14.

Nixyaawii Principal Ryan Heinrich said the class of 2016 mostly stuck together and graduated while the class of 2017 was more transient. Students would enroll for a few weeks or months before dropping out.

Those students would go on to leave the state, become parents or join the workforce, but they wouldn't re-enroll at Nixyaawii or another school.

Heinrich said this year is already different because an enrollment surge means Nixyaawii isn't able to accept any middle-of-the-year enrollees.

In response to the poor graduation rate and the increase in students, Heinrich said the school made two support staff full-time and added a part-time certified position.

Other measures Nixyaawii took to improve graduation include extending summer school, adding a study hall period and issuing a student survey to see what they want to see improved.

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HERMISTON: 14 students in this year's dropout data had been with the district since kindergarten

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rates between the two years were roughly the same — with a 65.82 percent rate for 2016-2017, and 65.68 percent for the previous year. Those rates include students who take classes online.

Interim superintendent Tricia Mooney said many students from surrounding areas come to Hermiston to earn a GED, which counts as a completion but not a graduation.

"We know that counts against our graduation rate, but we feel it's the right thing to do," she said.

Mooney and Spoo both said they are trying to focus on improving the graduation rate over the long term.

"It takes several years to see the results of what we are doing," Spoo said. He pointed to the newly-hired graduation coach, Omar Medina, who works with students, mostly freshmen and sophomores, to help them get back on track.

Spoo said he and assistant principal Scott Depew also meet one-on-one with struggling juniors and seniors, checking in with them regularly to help them get back on track.

"Research shows that once you bring an administrator in, there's a little more of an impact, a sense of urgency," he said.

Hermiston's dropout rate is also nearly two points higher than the state average — 5.6 percent to the state's 3.8 percent. Spoo said the district hopes to study those numbers further, but said there were some challenges with dropouts.

"The district will make phone calls and try to get those kids to come back in," he said. "We don't have a lot of control over that. Those habits have already been created — and that's a frustration for us."

But he said if they can get struggling students to complete a GED or a five-year diploma, they'll attempt to

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— Heidi Sipe, Umatilla School District Superintendent

"Walking out the door with nothing shouldn't be an option," he said.

Mooney said she examined the dropout data to figure out where those students were going. Many of the students included in the dropout data were those who had moved, or students who came to Hermiston late in their educational careers. But, she said, 14 students in this year's dropout data had been with the district since kindergarten.

"We need to figure out how to do a better job with them," she said.

Other schools in the area attributed their rates to continued efforts at all levels of schooling.

Umatilla School District saw a jump of nearly 10 points in the rate of its four-year cohort, with a graduation rate of 81.7 percent. Last year's rate was 72.2 percent.

Superintendent Heidi Sipe credited staff members' commitment to following through with students.

"I think that's one of the things [Principal] Bob Lorence provides really well at the high school," Sipe said. "He follows through, and makes sure students are meeting those expectations. When he first started, the kids weren't very thrilled about the level of expectation and accountability. But kids need boundaries."

She said Umatilla High School staff have been diligent about checking in with struggling students. They also have benefited from resources from the InterMountain Educational Service District.

"There are a host of services

through the ESD at the K-12 level, which are essential to our collective success as a region," she said.

She cited monthly meetings between all the superintendents in the ESD, where they share ideas and discuss things that are successful for their respective schools.

Another opportunity, she said, is the ESD's migrant summer school program, which she said Umatilla has expanded to all students.

IMESD Superintendent Mark Mulvihill also praised the collaboration between the ESD and specific schools.

He said he was especially happy with the growth in Milton-Freewater and Umatilla school districts.

"Those are both high-poverty areas," he said. "One thing we've done well to help kids get to the finish line is to have an adult advocate for them."

He said having adults work with kids to develop a plan, and identifying groups of students vulnerable to dropping out, have been some successful strategies.

"We've gotten better at understanding how vulnerable high school freshmen are, and boys especially," he said.

Mulvihill said the success was the result of years of work.

He said in order to raise graduation rates even further, he wanted to see increased mental health services to students and families.

"I believe if we're going to go from the mid-80s to a 90 percent graduation rate, that's the area we need to focus on," he said.

MAKAD: Hasn't started work on the land yet

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the lease, which was supposed to start Aug. 31, 2016. In November 2016, the city and Makad announced that the lease start date would be pushed back to Dec. 31, 2017.

Corbett declined to talk about the status of the data center project, referring questions to Makad.

When an email inquiring about the project was sent to Tawni Camarillo, Makad vice president of operations, Allan Fulsher, general counsel and vice president for Makad, responded.

"Progress continues to be made on the proposed data center," he wrote. "When CyDat is prepared to announce any significant milestones in the development, you will receive a press release making that announcement."

Corbett said Makad hasn't

started work on the land yet, but he's still confident the project will move forward. Although the city has already made infrastructure investments at the property, Corbett said they can serve future industrial projects even if the data center falls through.

Makad has a spotty project development record in Eastern Oregon.

Although Makad developed the River Lodge and Grill in Boardman, its plans to build an ethanol plant and a fertilizer plant at the Port of Morrow in the early 2000s never got off the ground. Another port project — a 31-megawatt power plant — operated for a short time before it got wrapped up in a lawsuit with a partnering company. It was eventually shuttered and sold.

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HART: Fewer people using the city-subsidized taxi tickets for seniors

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manager Mark Morgan had told the *East Oregonian* in March 2017 he expected ridership to grow to 600 people per month that year.

Morgan said Wednesday that routing was "a challenge" during the first nine months of the year but he expects to see the ridership curve hit its stride now that the faster route is in place.

"We hope more people will realize it is a good, usable system that they can utilize," he said.

When the HART first began in January 2017, it made four loops per day through town, stopping about 30 times each loop. In October a new schedule was adopted that pruned the number of stops to 20 with six passes per day. Following feedback from riders who complained having to wait too long for the bus to pick them up, the route was also changed from a continuous loop in one direction to one that reversed direction after every stop at Hermiston Plaza. Johnson said before there was about an hour and fifteen minute wait between each time the bus stopped at a location. Now there are some waits that are as short as 20 minutes and others that stretch almost two hours, allowing people to plan short or long errands and appointments accordingly.

"We try and have a little bit of time in the schedule for everybody," she said.

The city started an online advertising campaign in October, and has given printed advertising and bus schedules to the Umatilla County Housing Authority, which has agreed to disseminate the information to residents of their properties. The hospital's Healthy Communities Coalition has also been helping spread the word. Johnson said bus dispatcher Katherine Palmer participated in the Third Annual Special Education Linkage Fair put on by Hermiston School District and will be attending similar events in the future to help explain the HART to potential users.

HART's most popular stops have been at Hermiston

Plaza, Walmart, and Southeast Columbia Drive located near the Stafford Hansell Government Center, Eastern Oregon Higher Education Center and Department of Human Services. Other frequently-used stops include the corner of Southwest Third Street and Orchard Avenue across from the post office, Southwest 10th Street and Orchard near Victory Square Park, and Fiesta Foods.

"It's nice that we're able to go to three grocery stores," Johnson said.

Near the end of 2017 the city purchased some surplus Plexiglas bus shelters and this week installed one at the Third and Orchard stop, which is also where Kayak Public Transit's Hermiston Hopper picks up riders to transport them to Stanfield and Pendleton. Morgan said other possible future locations for permanent shelters include Victory Square Park and Columbia Drive.

Johnson said the CTUIR has also applied for a grant to purchase a larger bus, in anticipation that ridership will grow in 2018.

Morgan said the city's contract with the CTUIR is for \$150,000 per year no matter the ridership, so ridership patterns for 2017 didn't affect the city's costs. One way the city might save money is if the free bus service results in fewer people using the city-subsidized taxi tickets for senior and disabled riders. Morgan said taxi tickets were down from 17,730 in 2016 to 17,502 in 2017 — a relatively small drop, but at a level he had expected because many bus riders wouldn't have qualified for the taxi tickets. He said, however, that since the HART started he had stopped getting complaints from taxi ticket users who said no taxis were available when they called for one.

A schedule for the HART can be found online at ctuir.org/hermiston-hart and a dispatcher is available from 4 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Monday through Friday at 541-429-7519 to answer questions.

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