



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian, File

**Pendleton High School graduates cross the stage May 29, 2021, at the Pendleton Round-Up Grounds to receive their diplomas. The Oregon Department of Education's latest report cards on schools shows local students are falling off the graduation track.**

## Report:

*Continued from Page A1*

But Yoshioka said that boost was a result of the grant-funded universal free-lunch program the district operated during distance learning rather than a dramatic change in McKay Creek's demographics.

"If you look at that, you would think that everyone is on welfare," he said.

Yoshioka and other local administrators still are trying to glean relevant data from the report cards as they attempt to keep student performance on-track during COVID-19.

### Districts try to keep freshman on track

One of the more important pieces of data the state releases each year is its ninth-grade on track for graduation rate. Using the number of credits a freshman has completed by the end of their first year in high school, the on-track rate can be fairly predictive of future graduation rate.

Hermiston's 84% graduation rate was a bright spot in the 2019-20 school year, but Scott Depew, the director of secondary education for the Hermiston School District, said they're

already taking actions to keep that rate from backsliding.

Hermiston's on-track rate for 2020-21 was only 72% and Hermiston now is using that statistic to identify credit-deficient students to get them back on track.

Pendleton's on-track rate is 77%, only a few percentage points above the state average. Yoshioka said it's not where the district wants it to be, but Pendleton has had success boosting the rate by the time those freshmen become seniors.

The Umatilla School District was another local success story in 2019-20 when it posted a 93% graduation rate, one of the highest in the county. So it came as a surprise to Umatilla Superintendent Heidi Sipe when the state showed a 51% on-track rate, the lowest in the county.

Sipe said 10 students were one-credit shy of meeting the on-track requirements, but the resulting boost to a 65% rate still is well below Umatilla's past rates. Sipe attributed the decline to online learning and an ability for Spanish speakers to earn credits through a proficiency test, but anticipated the class would rebound in time for graduation.

"Last year, with so many

students being online until February, a lot of students ended up being off-track as freshmen," she said. "It does not necessarily mean it's going to stay that way. It just means that is where they were."

### Attendance craters during pandemic

Attendance was another statistic Yoshioka was skeptical of.

Superficially, Pendleton's attendance numbers don't look good: The state reported less than two-thirds of the district's students attended school regularly during the last school year. But during the pandemic, the state redefined what counted as attendance.

Yoshioka said a student didn't need to log into class to be counted as attending during distance learning. Activities such as turning in assignments or having a conversation with a teacher were counted as attendance. Yoshioka said that meant there was no way to truly measure if a student was being completely exposed to instruction.

Even with all the caveats in mind, Depew said Hermiston wants to work at improving its attendance rate, especially in light of the report card, which showed more than 1 in 4

students were considered chronically absent.

### Equity gap persistent

Nearly a year of distance learning tended to only cement the public school system's inequities rather than cure them.

Pendleton's ninth grade-on track for graduate rate hid a glaring disparity: American Indian students were 11 points below their white counterparts.

As in past years, Yoshioka said American Indian high school student performance is largely out of Pendleton's hands. Most American Indian students in the area attend Nixyaawii Community School on the Umatilla Indian Reservation, a charter school that operates with its own administration and school board.

While most American Indian students attend schools in-town K-8, Yoshioka said the responsibility of addressing on-track rate lies with Nixyaawii.

In Hermiston, Depew was concerned about English language learners, where less than half are on track to graduate on time. Depew said its an area of focus for the district this year.

*East Oregonian reporter Erick Peterson contributed to this feature.*

## Adoption:

*Continued from Page A1*

Her goal is to receive a child and impart her Christian faith. Also, they will raise the child to be productive members of society and to be good to other people.

The adoption process could take five years, which will be difficult. Still, she is happy to wait, as long as she can achieve her dream in the end.

### Zach plans for fatherhood

Sarah's husband, Zach, shares her dream. Though a math teacher at Nixyaawii Community School in Pendleton, he grew up in Hermiston. He attended Northwest Nazarene University, then transferred to Concordia University to join Sarah. She was a student at Concordia, and he wanted to be with her as they were dating.

Zach, who has only ever taught at Nixyaawii, is in his

ninth year of teaching. He said he likes that his school is small and his town is small. He said he thinks it would be a good fit for any child he would have, adopted or otherwise.

He said the five years he and Sarah have been trying to have a child have been difficult. He said he feels frustrated because doctors have given him little explanation or solution. They have done tests and taken medications, but they seem no closer to their desired outcome. The doctors tell them they have fertility problems, but they have no other diagnosis.

After five years, Zach and Sarah realized they could not go on the way they were doing things. Zach had always thought they would have a few kids and then adopt. Now they were having trouble with the first part of this plan, he figured it would be better to go straight to adopting.

This, however, was not as easy as he originally thought.

"It's been eye-opening," he said.

First, they planned to adopt within the United States, but that proved difficult. They went through the Oregon Department of Human Services, but the process stalled. COVID-19 slowed the process even more than usual, Zach said.

The Gaulkes changed gears again, planning to adopt a child from a foreign country, which also is complicated. Adoption law varies by nation, but adoption agencies help people navigate these laws. Zach and Sarah chose an agency, which set them up with different countries. They have filled out paperwork, submitting their qualifications. After they are accepted, they will begin home study, choose a target country and submit country specific documents. Then they will wait for translations, more approvals and finally a match with their child.

### The expense and the fundraising

This is an expensive process,

costing \$30,000 to \$42,000, which the Gaulkes do not have.

Their first fundraiser was a large yard sale, with items donated by fellow church members, friends and strangers. It was a big hit, netting the pair \$4,500.

The next fundraiser is happening now, a drive to collect gently-used shoes, which the Gaulkes will hand over to Shoes with Heart, a charity organization that pay the Gaulkes and ship the shoes to third-world countries. There, the shoes will be given to shop owners for sale.

Laura Gaulke, Zach's mother, has been helping with organizing the fundraisers. She said people can donate their shoes at two locations in Hermiston — Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 515 S.W. Seventh St., and Sassafras Flowers by Shera, 611 E. Highland Ave.

She said she is excited to be a grandmother and is a big believer in the couple.

"They're going to be great parents," she said.

## Dora:

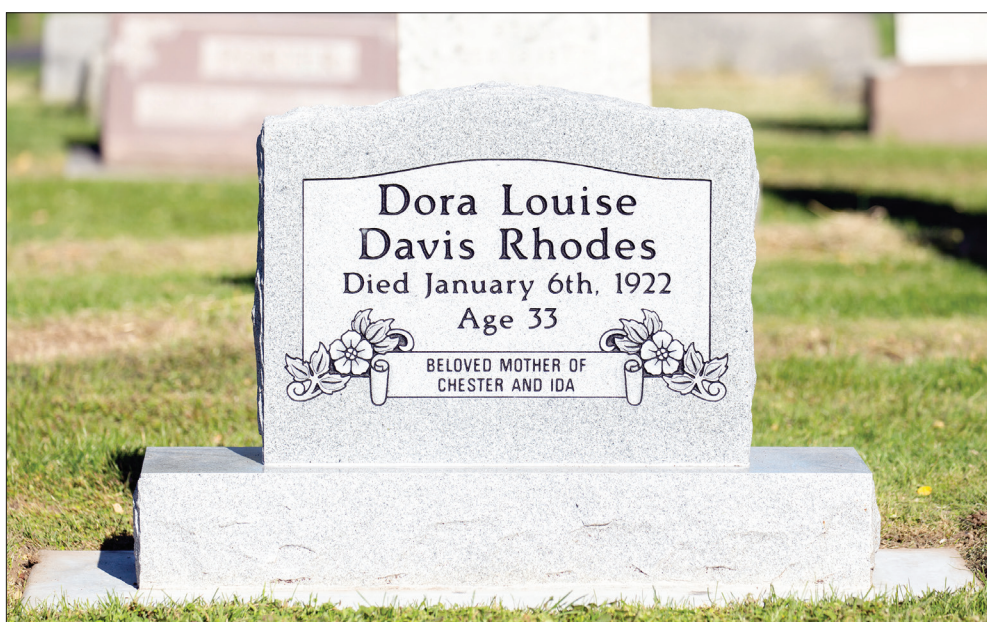
*Continued from Page A1*

Dora had a short, but eventful life. Born in Pendleton in 1888, she married as a teenager. At age 15, with her father's permission, she wed Willam Waddle, 26, and gave birth to son, Chester, and daughter, Ida. Waddle eventually abandoned the family and she married Arthur Rhodes, a popular auto mechanic and they eventually settled in Hermiston.

In 1922, Dora died at St. Anthony Hospital at age 33 after a long illness. The death certificate specifies the cause of death as pernicious anemia with the complications of flu and hysterectomy. According to the East Oregonian obituary, mourners at a Pendleton mortuary filled every seat at her funeral.

Jack said he imagines the anguish Dora felt on her deathbed, fretting about her two children.

"She undoubtedly worried about what would become of them after her death," he said. "I wish she could know that her kids went on to live such happy, meaningful lives. She was their angel and she gave them the wings to survive."



photos by Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

**The grandsons of Dora Rhodes replaced her gravestone recently after visiting Olney Cemetery, Pendleton, a few years ago and finding the grave had no marker.**

Dora's son Chester, Jack and Don's father, was 17 when his mother died. His stepfather took Ida and headed to California. Ches-

ter lived on his own. He attended Hermiston High School and the University of Puget Sound, earning money by doing ranch work.

## Sams:

*Continued from Page A1*

The order is meant to stop "a pendulum that swings back and forth depending on who is in public office," Biden said.

Trump did not fill the National Parks Service director position when it became vacant in January 2017, instead naming acting directors. The move skirted any Senate involvement with who would fill the position or questions on National Parks Service policies.

Under the U.S. Constitution, key presidential appointments require the "advice and consent" of the Senate.

After stepping down from his leadership role at the Umatilla reservation, Gov. Kate Brown selected Sams early this year as a representative of Oregon on the Northwest Power and Conservation Council.

But even before he officially assumed that position, Brown and Oregon's U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, were advocating Biden select Sams as National Parks Service director.

"Chuck Sams is among Oregon's finest, and I can't think of a better person for the important role of National Park Service director," Brown wrote to Biden. "I have worked closely with Chuck for many years, and have witnessed firsthand his unparalleled devotion and service to his Tribe, our state, and our nation."

At the Oct. 19 hearing, Wyden, a member of the committee, will introduce Sams, who will make an opening statement and then answer questions from the 10 Democrats and 10 Republicans on the committee.

If prior hearings before the committee are any indication, Sams can expect sharp questions about his plans for the service and his views on issues from global warming to the federal government's annexation of land.

Biden has asked for up to \$3.5 billion for the National Parks Service, saying outdated facilities, roads and staffing levels could permanently endanger the natural areas.

The committee hearings have been the source of partisan fireworks earlier this year.

The nominations of New Mexico Rep. Deb Haaland, D, as secretary of the interior and National Wildlife Foundation executive Tracy Stone-Manning as director of the Bureau of Land Management were contentious over environmental and land-use priorities.

The Senate eventually confirmed both. With most of the policy issues already hashed out with Haaland, who as secretary of the interior oversees both the National Parks Service and Bureau of Land Management, the nomination of Sams is unlikely to generate a similar level of political heat as earlier confirmations.

A key sign that Sams' nomination is unlikely to be contentious is that he will be one of three Biden nominees to appear on Oct. 19.

The committee also will take up the nominations of Willie L. Phillips Jr. to be a member of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and Brad J. Crabtree to be an assistant secretary of energy.

While Republicans have focused on the environmentalist philosophies of Biden's nominees, some liberals have questioned if Sams is the best choice to lead the agency. They say experience is needed to rebuild morale after more than four years of turbulence over policies that led many career NPS employees to resign or retire rather than implement Trump's orders.

Sen. Angus King of Maine, an independent who caucuses with Democrats and is counted among the 50 votes to give the party parity with Republicans, sits on the committee that will question Sams.

King had publicly chastised Biden in May for taking what he felt was too long to nominate a new head of the park service.

When Biden announced Sams as his choice in August, King's reaction was mixed.

In an August interview with Energy & Environment, a publication affiliated with Politico magazine, King said he was concerned that Sams had no previous experience with the park service.

Directors had historically been selected from among the agency's senior managers.

"I'm reserving judgment," King said.

But after reassurances from those who had worked with Sams on public land trust and conservation issues, King said he could see an upside to Sams serving as head of the service.

"I've heard from people that know him that he's very capable and would bring fresh eyes and new perspective to the department, to the service," King said.

The hearing will at 10 a.m. Oct. 19 in room 366 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C. The hearing will be livestreamed on the U.S. Senate website, senate.gov.

He worked as a teacher and eventually became superintendent of schools in Chehalis, Washington.

Daughter Ida graduated from a technical school in Oakland, California. She worked as a telephone operator before marrying and raising two daughters with her husband Merle West.

Midway through the graveside ceremony, Don, age 85, read Psalm 23 from the family Bible.

"The Lord is my shepherd," he read, "I shall not want..."

Afterwards, he mused he wished Dora could observe the celebration of her life.

"I hope that somehow she will feel our connection spiritually today," he said.

Jack said he missed the presence of his grandmother, who would have been 56 when he was born and 47 at Don's birth. Though none of them would ever hear Dora's laugh or the sound of her voice, he said he is sure she would have been a central part of their lives.

He spoke directly to his grandmother.

"All of us are here because of you and all of us are in your debt," he said. "We love you. Rest in peace."