

WEEKEND EDITION

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## Schools post mixed graduation rates for 2020-21

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Graduation rates fell across Oregon during the first full year of the pandemic and Umatilla County wasn't immune from the trend's effects.

The county's 82% high school graduation rate for 2020-21 still is about two points higher than the state average, but it also represents a nearly three point drop from the year before.

The Pendleton School District bore the brunt of the trend, its 76.8% graduation rate a significant drop from the year before and the second-worst rate

### GRADUATION RATES IN UMATILLA AND MORROW COUNTIES

The numbers in the parentheses show how much each district grew or shrank its rate compared to last year.

**Hermiston: 88% (+4.3)**  
**Pendleton: 75.5% (-4.7)**  
**Morrow County: 96.3% (+4.7)**

**Milton-Freewater: 74.6% (-10.9)**  
**Umatilla: 81.1% (-12)**  
**Athena-Weston: 83.3% (-7.4)**  
**Stanfield: 92.1% (-5.5)**  
**Pilot Rock: 82.8% (-4.7)**  
**Echo: 94.4% (+8.7)**  
**Ione: 100% (+5.6%)**  
**Helix: 100% (+30)**  
**Ukiah 100% (-)**

in the county. Pendleton High School, usually the standard bearer among the district's three high schools, tumbled

from 90.4% the previous year to 78.5% in 2020-21.

"The drop in our data, it's obviously disappointing," Matt Yoshioka, Pendleton's director of curriculum, instruction and assessment, said in an interview Wednesday, Jan. 19.

"Because there's student names tied to all of those numbers. It was certainly a hard year."

Like most other school districts in the state, Pendleton spent more than half of 2020-21 providing its classes online. Yoshioka said some seniors used it as an opportunity to pick up a job and then struggled to balance work and school. Others didn't log into classes consistently.

Yoshioka said staff worked hard to target students who were in danger of

not graduating and credited summer school programs from preventing the graduation rate from being even lower.

He also pointed to a few bright spots in the data. Hawthorne Alternative High School's graduation rate rose by 10 points, although the school still only graduated less than 40% of its seniors.

Yoshioka also noted that American Indian graduation rates rose sharply in 2020-21, gains that actually put them ahead of their white peers contrary to past trends. He credited the work done by Nixyaawii Community School,

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### PORT OF MORROW



East Oregonian, File

**Ryan Neal, executive director of the Port of Morrow, died Monday, Jan. 17, 2022. He was 40.**

## Executive Director Ryan Neal dies at 40

By GEORGE PLAVEN  
Capital Press

BOARDMAN — Ryan Neal, executive director of the Port of Morrow in Boardman, has died.

Neal, 40, suffered a fatal heart attack Monday, Jan. 17, while at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center in Portland, said Don Russell, a Morrow County commissioner and family friend.

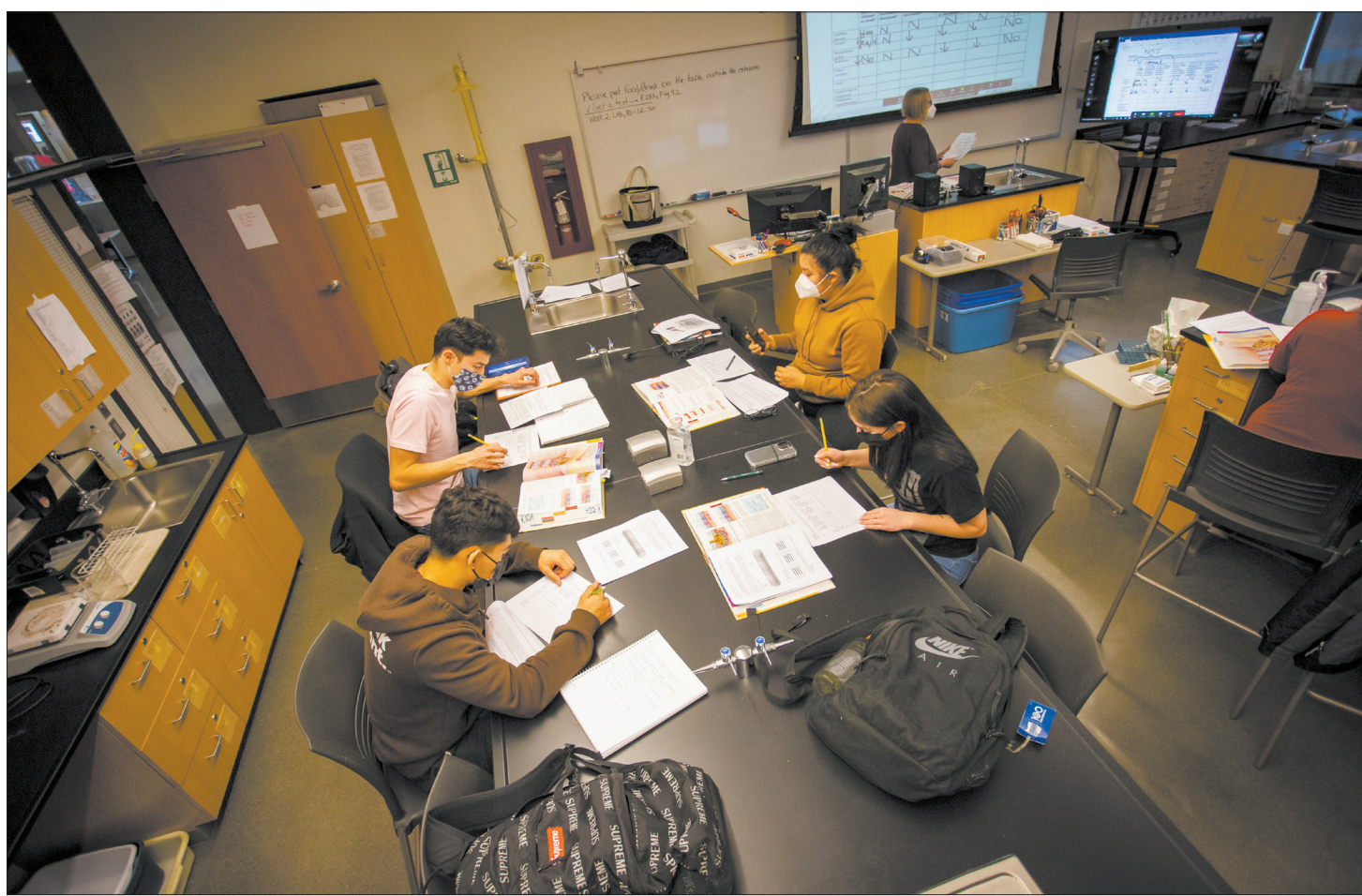
"It's a tough loss for the community, for his family and really for the region as a whole," Russell said. "He's going to be hard to replace."

The Port of Morrow in a press release reported Neal also had COVID-19.

Russell described Neal as "a brilliant guy," who cared deeply about Eastern Oregon and his hometown of Boardman.

He took charge of the Port

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Students work on course material Jan. 14, 2022, during an anatomy and physiology lab at Blue Mountain Community College in Hermiston.

## ENCOURAGING ENROLLMENT

### BMCC aims to reengage students with a variety of study options

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — Blue Mountain Community College has changed a great deal, according to school administrators. Its students are adjusting, too.

Eric Hoyos, 18, of Umatilla, is one of those students who has had to make difficult adjustments. In his last two years of studies at Umatilla High School, he had to grow accustomed to online studies. When

the pandemic closed his school, his in-person classes switched to online ones.

"I feel kind of odd talking to a screen," he said.

This being the case, he struggled with working online with teachers, which led to a drop in his grades. His usual A and B grades fell, and he had difficulty maintaining a 3.0 GPA, he said.

In time, however, he got used to his online classes, and he was able to move on to studies at BMCC, his current school. Hoyos has completed two terms at the college, and is doing well, he said. He has even taken a hybrid class, in which he studied online and in person, and he felt good about it, he said.

Hoyos said he wants to become a nurse because he has seen a need for people in health care. When his mother became sick with COVID-19 and was hospitalized, he witnessed first-hand the importance of

nurses. He said he will complete studies to accomplish his goal, even if he must do all his courses online.

Hoyo's example is typical, said Nayeli Contreras, director of Blue Mountain's Hermiston center. Like Hoyos, many other students are getting used to studying online, she said.

"Since COVID forced everyone to go online, (students) have become much more comfortable with taking classes online," Contreras said.

### Fighting declining enrollment

BMCC President Mark Browning said enrollment at the college is down 5%, year to year, and getting students to return to classes is one of the big challenges.

The school recently held sessions in

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## Going international

### Avery Brown of Pendleton makes it to the highest level in peace poster contest

By BEN LONERGAN  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — When 13-year-old Avery Brown submitted her entry to the Pendleton Lions Club Peace Poster Contest in November, she wasn't expecting much to come of it.

"I was honestly just aiming for the local competition and didn't think I would get that far," she said.

But Brown, an eighth grader at Sunridge Middle School, has been on a winning streak. In the months since, Brown's poster has won not

only the Pendleton competition, but also the district and state level competitions. She is now in the running for the International Lions Peace Poster Contest against participants from around the globe.

"It's really exciting," she said. "I never thought I would get this far at all."

According to Risa Riggen, who organizes the competition for the Pendleton Lions Club, Brown is the first student from Pendleton to make it to the international

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Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Sunridge Middle School eighth grader Avery Brown, 13, poses for a portrait Tuesday, Jan. 18, 2022, at her family's home in Pendleton. Brown recently learned she will be competing at the international level of the International Lions Club Peace Poster Contest after winning the Pendleton, regional and state levels of the competition.



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