

Youth Education hopes to re-open soon

GRADUATION continued
from front page

In Sheridan, the statistics were unavailable due to the small number of Native American students. If the number is 10 or fewer, the state doesn't report the numbers. Last year, the district estimated the on-time graduation rate to be approximately 95 percent.

School Superintendent Dorie Vickery, who began her job after the class of 2020 graduated, has said the percentage of Native American students there is approximately 5 percent.

"With the shutdown last March, I think teachers and support staff really worked with our seniors, helping them to complete their credits," she says. "Some might have also had the opportunity to finish over the summer."

The Salem-Keizer School District's on-time Native graduation rates have decreased from 70.3 in 2019 to 65 percent in 2020. Public Engagement Specialist Aaron Harada said approximately 1 percent of the district's students identify as Native American.

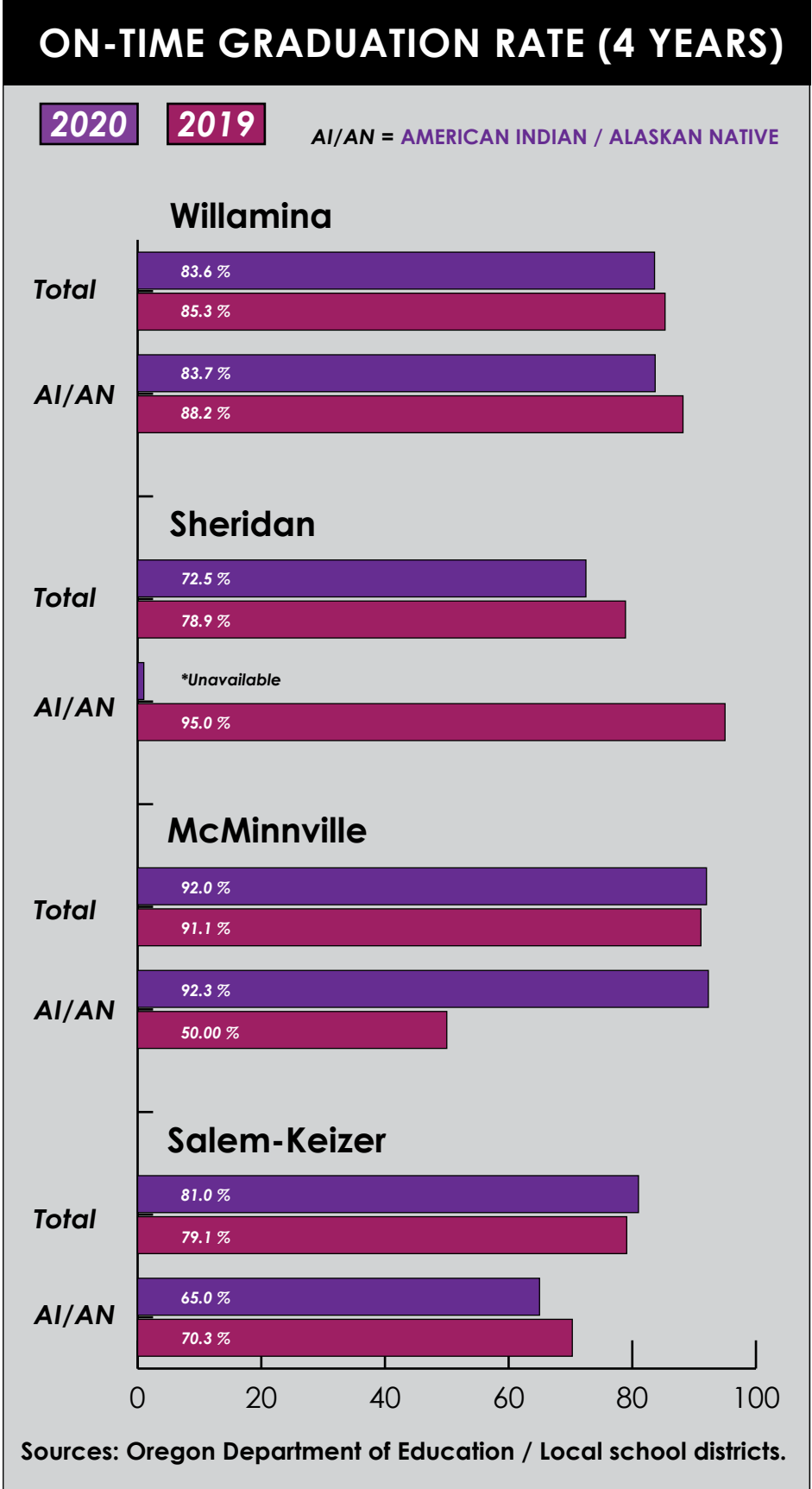
The district has an Indian Education Program that provides tutoring and academic support, in addition to relationship building with students and families, and before the pandemic, in-person cultural enrichment events. All of the district's six high schools have Native American clubs, which have switched to a virtual format.

"We are exploring ways to provide the activities students are expressing an interest in, whether it is assistance with college scholarships or cultural/artistic expression, all in a virtual setting," Harada said.

Additionally, the district is trying to maintain relationships with students through having cultural resource facilitators visit in what is called "Knock and Connect" opportunities.

Harada says on-time graduation rates have likely decreased due to students struggling with a sense of belonging at school, getting on board with technology required for distance learning, and having families who are in poverty or students who are sick themselves.

"We have hired an additional cultural resource facilitator to expand our team, allowing us to reach more high school students," he said. "We have established team goals to monitor attendance, ninth grade on-track data, high school completion, increased en-



Graphic created by Samuel Briggs III

agement in cultural events/family events, and increased engagement in school-related and/or Indian Education Program activities. We are also monitoring student and family perception of sense of belonging through survey data and empathy interviews."

In McMinnville, approximately 1.5 percent of the student population is Native American. Last year's numbers were too small to be included in the report for privacy reasons, but district officials estimated on-time graduation rates were approximately 50 percent. By contrast, the 2020 graduation

rate for Native students was 92.3 percent, slightly higher than the overall average of 92 percent.

"The strategy of creating teacher relationships with students (as freshmen) carried over into the pandemic, and if a student isn't engaging, there's an adult at the school who follows up and gets the student what they need (school supplies, Chromebook, food boxes in some cases) to get back to their learning," Communications Director Laurie Fry says.

High School Principal Amy Fast said that the administration wants every student at school to know there is an adult who is there for them.

"We treat their social-emotional issues as seriously as their academic struggles," she said. "During the pandemic, these strategies were ramped up. We track students who are not attending distance learning classes to find out why and work with them to solve the problem, whether it's connectivity, emotional issues like motivation, or physical needs like food or clothing. We always say we're wrapping our arms around our students and helping them find

what they need to be successful. We've been moving in that direction for several years, and I think those efforts are reflected in our rising graduation rates."

The overall statewide graduation rate is 82.6 percent, the highest graduation rate ever recorded in Oregon.

"While the class of 2020 ended their high school careers in a way no one wanted or expected, the graduation rate shows how much work they put in over the last 13 years with the support of their teachers and families," Education Department Director Colt Gill says. "Seeing greater growth in graduation rates for most students of color, students with disabilities and students navigating poverty than the state as a whole means our continued efforts to foster equity and excellence for all Oregon students continues to yield positive results."

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the rules regarding graduation were changed. Seniors still had the same 24-credit requirement, but they were given credit for any course in which they were passing at the time of the extended school closure.

Gill says that this allowed schools to provide additional focus on securing credit-earning opportunities and learning for seniors who were not yet passing all required courses at the time of the school closure.

Locally, the Tribe's Youth Education Department has completely shifted the methods in which it offers services to students. When school began in September, the Tribe started offering onsite assistance to small groups, but that was switched to an all virtual format when COVID-19 cases surged again in November.

"We are hoping to re-open that in the near future," Youth Education Program Manager Tim Barry says. "Also, the dynamics of the department have changed so that we now have academic advisors and academic coaches to help students, instead of having one person do both."

Currently, the department has two academic advisors and three coaches, and is currently serving approximately 127 students who utilize virtual academic coaches or guided study classes.

"We believe this will provide a far more effective outcome for our students," Barry says. "Graduation is important, but so is understanding the content and not just passing a test."

Other methods the Education Department has utilized to assist students with remote learning included a popular technology assistance grant, which provided \$500 to help purchase a laptop, tablet or desktop. The grant, which was funded from federal CARES Act monies, originally expired Dec. 31. In total, 563 students accessed it.

The program has been extended through the end of 2021 and now includes Tribal descendants and Tribal members three and older, who can get reimbursed for up to \$200 for a device. ■

Certified Application Assisters at the Health & Wellness Center

Cassandra Rhamey is available to assist with
recertification and applications for the Oregon Health Plan.

She can be reached at 503-879-1359
or cassandra.rhamey@grandronde.org.

Leah Bailey also is a Certified
Application Assister available to help.

She can be reached at 503-879-2197
or leah.bailey@grandronde.org. ■