

Achievement gap still a 'crisis,' report shows



Kirsten Clark, @kirstenlclark 5:10 p.m. EST December 10, 2015



(Photo: File photo)

Despite some progress in closing the achievement gap among the nation's African-American students and their peers over the last 15 years, the gap remains a national "crisis," a chamber of commerce official said of her group's annual [report \(http://www.leadersandlaggards.org/\)](http://www.leadersandlaggards.org/).

The data in the new U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation report - which pulls together test scores, graduation rates and other figures - is pretty clear. "We're not doing our best to ensure that every young person has the opportunity to succeed," said Cheryl Oldham, vice president of education and workforce for the group.

In Kentucky, scores from the National Assessment of Education Progress, or NAEP, show the achievement gap among black students and the rest of their peers has remained largely unchanged since 2003 for both fourth- and eighth-grade students in math and reading, according to reports by the [Kentucky Department of Education \(http://education.ky.gov/aa/reports/pages/naep.aspx\)](http://education.ky.gov/aa/reports/pages/naep.aspx).

In Indiana, there were significant gaps in proficiency on the 2015 NAEP exam between African-American students and students overall, particularly among eighth-grade students. Just under 40 percent of all Indiana eighth-graders scored high enough to be proficient in math, compared to only 10 percent of African-American students, according to the scores.

"While it's all publicly available data already, we have been able to bring together in one report this data that really focuses on one population and, I think, really tells a pretty compelling story of how we're doing as a nation on behalf of these kids," Oldham said.

The foundation, a nonprofit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People released the report on Thursday.

To illustrate gaps in academic achievement, the report cites scores from the 2015 NAEP assessment. According to the report, the tests, administered every two years to a representative sample of fourth- and eighth-graders in math and reading, are considered "low stakes" since scores are not tied to teacher or school evaluations. This minimizes concern there is "teaching to the test" or cheating, the report says.

Nationally, only 18 percent of African-American fourth-graders who took the 2015 NAEP assessment scored high enough to be considered proficient in reading, compared to a 36 percent national average, according to the report. In math, 19 percent of African-American fourth-graders were proficient, compared to the national average of 40 percent.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation report also shows African-American students lag behind their peers in high school graduation rates and college preparedness.

For the class of 2013, the most recent class for which data are available, the national graduate rate for all students was 81 percent. The rate for African-American students was about 10 percentage points lower at 71 percent, according to the report.

The report also revealed that African-American students in the class of 2014 nationally were less likely than their peers to take an AP exam. About 36 percent of all students took an AP exam during high school, compared to 24 percent of African-American students, according to the report.

The report also cited college-readiness based on ACT benchmarks, achievement levels set by ACT that reflect a 50 percent chance of earning a B or higher in a 100-level college class. Only 5 percent of Kentucky's African-American high school seniors were deemed "college-ready" in all four ACT-tested subjects, according to the report. This compares to 21 percent of all Kentucky students, based on [data released by ACT \(http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2015/states/pdf/Kentucky.pdf\)](http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2015/states/pdf/Kentucky.pdf).

The percentage was only slightly higher in Indiana, where 6 percent of African-American students scored high enough to be "college-ready" in all four subjects, according to the report. This compares to 34 percent of all Indiana students.



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To solve the "macro-problem" of the achievement gap, the report calls for "the smallest countermeasures," like teacher-initiated phone calls to parents when children, particularly male students, display positive behavior.

The report holds up Boston Public Schools as an example for other school districts. The district enrolled more than 54,000 students for the 2014-15 school year, one-third of which were African-American, according to the Massachusetts Department of Education.

In 2009, Boston Public Schools administrators established its Office of the Achievement Gap and instated several measures to close the gap: a mentorship program, a more robust early education program and increased commitment to diversity in the workplace. According to the report, in the first year of the district's mentorship program, participants saw a nearly 12 percent increase in those scoring proficient or advance on state assessments. Attendance rates increase. Suspension rates decreased.

Jefferson County Public Schools could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Reporter Kirsten Clark can be reached at (502) 582-4144. Follow the Courier-Journal's education team on Facebook at [Facebook.com/SchooledCJ](https://www.facebook.com/SchooledCJ) (<http://facebook.com/SchooledCJ>).

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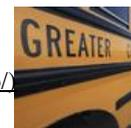
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