

Michigan's black students lag behind the nation

Lori Higgins, Detroit Free Press 8:32 p.m. EST December 10, 2015



(Photo: Getty Images/iStockphoto)

Michigan ranks as among the worst states in the nation for the performance of African American students, according to a [report out today](#)

(http://www.leadersandlaggards.org/sites/default/files/ThePathForward_Improving_Opportunities_AfricanAmerican_Students.pdf) from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

It's an alarming reality, but one that's been borne out in other analyses of national test data.

Just 10% of African-Americans were proficient or above proficient in fourth-grade math on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 9% in fourth-grade reading, 5% in eighth-grade math and 9% in eighth-grade reading, according to the chamber's report.

Michigan ranked in the bottom five among all states in each of those categories.

Results were poor nationwide also. Nineteen percent of black students across the nation were proficient or above proficient in fourth-grade math, 18% in fourth grade reading, 13% in eighth-grade math and 16% in eighth-grade reading. That compares to the average numbers for all students nationwide: 40% proficient or above proficient in fourth-grade math, 36% in fourth-grade reading, 33% in eighth-grade math and 34% in eighth-grade reading.



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[Tough new state exam stumps Michigan students](#)

(<http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/10/27/tough-new-state-exam-stumps-michigan-students/74650964/>)

The report shows that Michigan has 283,322 African American students, 18.8% of the total population of about 1.5 million students.

"The challenge for Michigan is great," said Michael McShane, director of education policy for the Show Me Institute in Kansas City, and the lead researcher and writer of the report for the chamber. "They're struggling on some of the most basic indicators."

The chamber, in its report, said the fact that African American student results have improved is encouraging, but overall, more work is needed.

"It puts front and center the fact that too many of our nation's young people are failing to achieve their potential, and that African American students are disproportionately impacted by the shortcomings in our education system," the report said.

Michigan overall performance's is likely impacted by Detroit Public Schools. Data released last month showed DPS students rank last among more than 20 big-city school districts on the NAEP.

Here are some other highlights from the chamber's report:



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[ACT results show mixed gains for many schools](#)

(<http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/11/13/act-results-michigan-schools/75711058/>)

• The graduation rate for black students in the class of 2013 in Michigan was 61%, compared to 71% for black students nationwide, 77% for all students

in Michigan and 81% for all students nationwide.

- Just 3.3% of Michigan's black students in the 2014 graduation class passed an Advanced Placement exam, compared to 7.2% for black students nationwide, 19.4% for all Michigan students and 21.6% of all students nationwide.

The low performance of African American students — and that of other minority groups — has been a consistent concern in the state for years. The State Board of Education has as one of its goals to improve efforts to close achievement gaps, particularly for African American male students.

Education Trust-Midwest, a Royal-Oak-based education policy, research and advocacy organization, also has noted concerns about the poor performance of African-American students in its reports and analyses.

"Student achievement in Michigan for all students is deeply troubling, and Michigan's school performance for black students is nothing less than shameful," said Amber Arellano, executive director of the organization.

"For our students and communities to flourish, we need strong leadership, thoughtful solutions, and a commitment to educational equity to help all of our student succeed, no matter where they live or who they are."

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How Michigan ranked

Michigan ranked among the worst states for achievement of African American students on every category of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Here's a breakdown, including the percentage of students who were proficient or above proficient on various portions of the exam:

- Fourth-grade math: Alabama (10%), Michigan, (10%), South Dakota (11%), West Virginia (11%), Illinois (12%) Nebraska (12%) and Ohio (12%).
- Eighth-grade math: Alabama (5%), Michigan (5%), Louisiana (7%), Wisconsin (7%), Iowa (8%), Nevada (8%), Oklahoma (8%), Pennsylvania (8%), South Carolina (8%) and West Virginia (8%).
- Fourth-grade reading: Michigan (9%), Wisconsin (11%), California (14%), Iowa (14%), Maine (14%), Mississippi (14%) and Nevada (14%).
- Eighth-grade math: Arkansas (8%), Mississippi (8%), Michigan (9%), Oklahoma (9%) and Wisconsin (10%).

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