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U.S. Chamber and NAACP partner to improve black student performance

By Eric Stirgus

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ATLANTA (TNS) — Georgia NAACP officials and local chamber of commerce leaders are working with their national counterparts on a campaign to help African-American students improve academically.

A U.S. Chamber of Commerce report released Thursday shows African-American students, including those in Georgia, lag behind the rest of the nation on national assessments, performance in programs for academically gifted students and graduation rates. The report mirrors other research on African-American student performance, but it has prompted the two organizations — which are often on opposite sides of some issues — to work together on raising awareness about the issue and to propose solutions.

The U.S. Chamber report noted, for example, only 19 percent of African-American fourth-graders in Georgia were proficient in the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress math assessment, compared to the national average of 40 percent. Georgia, the study found, has the fourth-highest percentage of African-American students in the nation at 37 percent.

“There’s a lot of opportunity to do so much better,” Cheryl Oldham, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Vice President of Education and Workforce, said of student performance.

The 40-page report was done after discussions between leaders of the two organizations. While the report notes improvements in African-American students in recent decades, Oldham said the achievement gap is still too great.

The report suggests “staying the course” on accountability measures, such as annual testing in math and reading starting in the third grade. It also supports school choice initiatives and more programs where struggling students get help from higher-performing students. Oldham said she believes education legislation signed into law Thursday by President Barack Obama will improve making schools more accountable to ensure African-American students succeed.

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