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# Minority students make gains, but achievement gap remains

December 10, 2015 11:07 PM



Darrell Sapp/Post-Gazette

A report released today identifies a "mismatch" between graduation rates among African-American students and the college readiness rate.



By Mary Niederberger / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

While there has been some improvement in academic achievement among African-American students since the early 1990s, overall performance levels remain critically low nationally, and Pennsylvania's results fall below national averages.

That information was contained in the report "The Path Forward: Improving Opportunities For African-American Students," released today by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and the

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NAACP.

“We certainly want to highlight that there is good news. But the reason we are doing this is that we want to impress upon folks that this is a crisis in our community,” said Cheryl Oldham, vice president for the Center for Education and Workforce Development at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation.

The report identifies a “mismatch” between graduation rates among African-American students and the college readiness rate, and shows that black students are not getting access to higher-level and AP classes, particularly those in STEM (science technology engineering math) subjects, excluding them from jobs in some of the fastest-growing and highest paying segments of the job market.

Test scores on the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress exams, given to a representative sample of students every two years since the 1970s, show some significant progress, the report said.

However, scores are still alarmingly low, with just 18 percent of fourth grade African-American students nationwide scoring proficient in reading and 19 percent in math. Scores in eighth-grade are worse, with 16 percent of African-American students scoring proficient in reading and 13 percent in math.

This compares with a national average among all students of 36 percent proficiency for fourth grade reading and 40 percent in fourth grade math, and 34 percent in eighth grade reading and 40 percent in eighth grade math.

In Pennsylvania, eighth grade math scores among African-American students in 2015 were among the bottom five with just 8 percent hitting proficiency.

The 2015 NAEP scores compare with those from the early 1990s when just 8 percent of African-American fourth graders nationally scored proficient in reading and 1 percent scored proficient in math. During the same timeframe, 9 percent of African American eighth graders scored proficient in reading and 5 percent in math.

“We don’t want to retreat on the things that we have been doing over the last 10 to 15 years and we think those pieces are important but surely there is a long, long way to go,” Ms. Oldham said.

Other 2015 scores from Pennsylvania show 13 percent of African-American eighth-grade students scoring proficient in reading. Among fourth graders in the state, 15 percent scored proficient in math and 17 percent in reading.

The report shows high school graduation rates, based on the 2013 graduating class, ranging from 84 percent in Texas to 57 percent in Nevada and Oregon, with Pennsylvania at 73 percent. Pennsylvania’s average for African-American students is higher than the national average of 71 percent, but lower than the state average of 86 percent for all students.

And while high school graduation rates across the board are on the increase, there is a “clear mismatch” between the graduation rates and college readiness among African-Americans, the report said.

College readiness rates as measured in English, math, reading and science, by black students taking the ACT range from 17 percent in Massachusetts to 3 percent in Mississippi, with Pennsylvania seeing 8 percent of the 2,887 black students who took the ACT measuring as college-ready.

According to the report, no state with at least 500 African-American ACT test takers saw more than 17 percent score college ready. In Pennsylvania, where there were 2,887 African-American students who took the test, just 8 percent tested college-ready.

## Four Quick Questions

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- Pancakes
- Waffles
- Not a fan of any of those

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Just five states had 5 percent of their high school graduating class pass at least one AP test in a STEM subject. Pennsylvania was not one of them. It saw just 1.4 percent of African-American students pass a STEM-related AP class.

Students who are not exposed to STEM-related classes cannot get jobs in the fastest-growing and highest-paying job markets where employers are struggling to fill jobs, Ms. Oldham said.

As for Advanced Placement courses, 14.8 percent of African-American students in Pennsylvania took an AP exam, as compared with 24.2 percent nationally. Among the African-American students, just 4.1 percent passed an AP exam, while 17 percent of all students in the state passed.

The report said to find solutions educators and business leaders need to look at states that are “advancing educational equity,” and look seek “elements of promising programs” that could work in individual communities.



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<b>Academic Achievement</b>	<b>Pennsylvania</b>	<b>U.S. nationwide</b>
4th Grade Proficient Reading Exam (African-American Students)	17%	18%
4th Grade Proficient Math Exam (African-American Students)	15%	19%
8th Grade Proficient Reading Exam (African-American Students)	13%	16%
8th Grade Proficient Math Exam (African-American Students)	8%	13%
% African-American Students Taking an AP Exam:	14.80%	24.20%
AP STEM Passage Rate	1.40%	2.60%
AP World Language Passage Rate	0.40%	0.50%
High School Graduation Rate (African-American Students)	73%	71%
High School Graduation Rate (All Students)	86%	81%
Percentage of Students Who Passed an AP Exam (African-American Students)	4.10%	7.20%
Percentage of Students Who Passed an AP Exam (All Students)	17.00%	21.60%

Data from [academic-achievement-results.silk.co](http://academic-achievement-results.silk.co)

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Mary Niederberger; [mniederberger@post-gazette.com](mailto:mniederberger@post-gazette.com); 412-263-1590.

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First Published December 10, 2015 11:02 AM

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## 22 Comments



**Everett Burns** 6 days ago

And yet all "Black Leaders" want to protest are the one off shootings by white cops. That is what they choose to protest over.

A simple fix is to start telling black kids, please stop having babies. Please, please stop! End this vicious cycle of kids without 2 parents, who perform poorly in school, who can't get a job, who commit crime, then rinse and repeat.

STOP HAVING BABIES! Put that on the signs on the parkway instead of "click it or ticket"

Reply

+1



**Orville Whitehead** 6 days ago

If black kids learn differently, maybe we need all black schools in places like Wilkinsburg, Homestead, etc. where the teaching can cater specifically to how black kids learn.

Oh wait.

Reply

-2



**Michael Blastos** 6 days ago

As someone who mentored for a brief period at a PPS HS this is not a "teacher issue or a system issue" that the school needs to deal with. The teachers I dealt with loved what they did and taught the kids as best they could. You would not believe the amount of disturbance they faced on a daily basis and the problems they had to deal with. Teachers earn every penny and probably should make more for all the things they have to deal with. Many of these kids have horrible environments to live in let alone try to study in. If a child attempts to grow up in that environment they will do what is necessary to survive and school achievement will be a distance second. Many of the kids came to school simply because they had to, because it got them away from the conflicts and chaos at home or simply to get a meal. But to have the schools try and address this issue is, in my opinion, a flawed solution. Before the racist/bigot comments start look at how high achieving students get to where they are. They come from stable, caring and nurturing environments that foster learning and provide an environment to do it in. They have parents(notice the plural) who watch and encourage them and invest in them and who had someone show THEM the right path. All that success didn't just happen. It was built and came from somewhere. If you want these kids to succeed you have to build from the ground up. You have to build the family(and I don't care if it's same sex, biracial, yellow, black, white, red etc etc.) the key is the foundation on which to start. Without that solid foundation you will have nothing. If you address that things will slowly change but it will take years. Failing to address that will simply lead to more money being thrown at the problem and the achievement gap never closing.

Reply

+2



**a c** 6 days ago

Teachers loathe results that dismiss their effect on the outcomes of students, next thing you know citizens will stop approving endless soft blackmail in the form of escalation of local schools' expenditures "for the little children". The unions are burning the midnight oil trying to reposition themselves as pertinent in light of such blinding flashes of the obvious.

Reply

0



**Ginger Underwood** 6 days ago

It has much more to do with it than that. The racist comments are appalling.

Parents play a huge role, but if you didn't get a proper education, then how can you pass that on? Let's talk about the inequities of the resources and children not being nurtured by those that are teaching them. The system is failing.

Reply 0

 **Bernard Jones** 6 days ago

Time to stop blaming the teachers and put the blame where it belongs, the parents! If the child does not want to learn and is disruptive in the classroom, does not do his or her homework, does not study for a test then they are failures. It has nothing to do with the color of their skin it is the student and the parent who are to blame!

Reply +3

 **Anonymous** 6 days ago

You are all missing the point.  
The tests are not relevant and do not correlate to college success!!!!

Reply 0

 **Derek Langer** 7 days ago

FIRST....Take off your politically correct binders.

NEXT.....Read "The Bell Curve - Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life" by Richard J. Herrnstein, Ph.D. Psychology, Harvard University, and Charles Murray, Ph.D. Political Science, M.I.T.

.....you have your answer! Embrace the truth and it will set you free .....

Reply +2

 **Victor Edwards** 7 days ago

Strange, sounds like all the kids are failing, yet we are spending record amounts of money and teachers are getting rich with free health care for life. What a system!

Reply [3 replies](#) -1

 **J Coli** 7 days ago

It is a great system!!! It's hard to be unhappy when you can be in your 30's collecting your \$10,000 a month for 10 months of work, 7 hours a day and retire at 56. I'm confident that's NOT going to change in MY lifetime. So let's allow cranky old Victor who must have either made a bad career choice or a bad decision about where he chose to live spew his sour grapes over teachers. I'm happy with my job and the city where I live. Maybe you should have gotten in on the system yourself if you are so terribly clever. If there was a job where I could do less work for more money, I would be dumb not to go after that job!

Reply [2 replies](#) -1

 **J Coli** 7 days ago

Except Victor would probably pee his pants if he had to be in the Hill District everyday without carrying a weapon, lol. I guess he can't get in on the system after all.

Reply [1 reply](#) +1

 **Jason Robi** 6 days ago

I live in the Hill, and carry a weapon about half the time, but depending on the day/time.

Reply +1

 **M B** 7 days ago

Further proof that no matter how much money you throw into the bottomless pit of an urban school, no amount will ever make up for the lack of basic parenting at home, which prevents many kids from succeeding. The only programs anywhere in the country that have been even remotely successful are ones which are "in loco parentis" - that is, they basically take over raising the child. They are feeding kids, tutoring them after school, and looking after their well-being. All of which are things that parents are supposed to do, but quite frankly are not.

I think we shouldn't be increasing funding for schools because all that does is help teachers earn more money. If anything, we should cut funding at the schools and use it to help people become better parents. For people who are trying, a carrot - we help them themselves. For people who can't be bothering raising the children they sired, a stick - we force them under penalty to do better. Giving teachers raises and buying ipads for kids is not going to help them as much as an hour a night with their parents reviewing their homework will.

Reply [1 reply](#) +3

 **Michael Canine** 7 days ago

Agree completely. This is not a matter of funding, and any use of these findings for that purpose is cynical beyond words.

Reply

+2



**Anonymous** 7 days ago

So you have these tests where .5 to 21.6 % of students "pass":  
A) the test does not represent what they learn  
B) the test is too hard  
C) 78.4 to 99.5 % of them are not learning or can't learn  
D) the test is irrelevant

I pick D.

I wish the author of this piece would delve further to inform the reader that college success is based on several factors. While SAT scores, curriculum, GPA, and class rank are all predictive of college success, I am not aware of any research connecting performance on STEM testing with future academic achievement.

Reply

0



**Dave Stroud** 7 days ago

I would like confirmation of this: "black students are not getting access to higher-level and AP classes, particularly those in STEM (science technology engineering math) subjects." What does that mean - "not getting access"? Are the courses not offered (inexcusable), or "black" students are not qualified or signing up? I think this is a significant point.

Also, if only 8% of high school "grads" are college-ready then the taxpayers and the students are being robbed. Especially since not all the kids are even taking the ACT.

Reply

[3 replies](#)

+1



**Anonymous** 7 days ago

If that were the case, then only 8% of graduates would attend college. I would think this is higher, but I cant find the #.  
I believe nationally the # of HS grads going on to college is 70% (all races).

Reply

0



**Michael Canine** 7 days ago

It doesn't sound like they are ready for AP or STEM classes anyway. Placing them in these classes arbitrarily would be counterproductive.

Reply

0



**M B** 7 days ago

Of course it doesn't mean that they are not offered - It means that after 9+ years of schooling, that they are woefully unprepared to take an advanced placement class. I'm not sure when the transition took place where everyone is expected to be "advanced" but if you spend your entire life getting pushed through an education system without actually learning anything, what else can you expect when you get to high school than to be unprepared and unqualified to take an AP class.

Whatever happened to kids without book smarts just learning a trade? We're trying to push everyone into college whether or not they would actually benefit from going. People can make a fine living learning a skilled trade.

Reply

+1



**Mark R** 7 days ago

So only 15% of these kids can read proficiently less than 10% are ready for college - yet over 70% are still graduating high school.

Couple things going on here ranging from support at home to effective teaching methods, and everything in between - but the bottom line to me, is that it seems these kids are getting pushed through the system whether they learn anything or not.

Reply

[2 replies](#)

+4



**Erik McCormick** 7 days ago

Welcome to no child left behind

Reply

[1 reply](#)

0



**Michael Canine** 7 days ago

I think NCLB was just repealed. Thank goodness.

Reply

0



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