

Report: 4 percent of TN's black students are 'college ready'



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African-American student achievement is improving, but still lags behind national averages for academic achievement, post-secondary readiness and international competitiveness, according to a U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation report

(Photo: File / The Tennessean)

http://www.leadersandlaggards.org/sites/default/files/ThePathForward_Improving_Opportunities_AfricanAmerican_Students.pdf.

Almost 23 percent of Tennessee students are African-American, and their academic performance mirrored key takeaways from the chamber's report — especially the huge gaps between graduation rates and rates of college readiness.

Tennessee ranked in the top five states for highest graduation rates for African-American students, but ranked in the bottom five when it came to college readiness.

Seventy-eight percent of the state's African-American students graduate from high school, but only 4 percent of students are "college ready." College readiness was based on ACT performance, one of two major tests that many colleges use to determine student acceptance and scholarship offers. All Tennessee students are required to take the ACT.

The report also includes data on AP test participation, another indicator for college readiness. Students can take rigorous AP courses in high school and earn college credit depending on their scores on end-of-year AP tests.

In Tennessee, rates of AP participation and success for African-American students were lower than national levels.

For the class of 2014, 15 percent of African-American graduates took an AP test during high school, but only 3.7 percent of those students scored high enough on AP exams to earn college credit. Nationwide, 20.4 percent of graduates from the class of 2014 took an AP test during high school and 10.7 percent of those students scored high enough on the AP exams.

Tennessee also ranked in the bottom five states for the percentage of students who passed math and science AP exams. About 1.10 percent of Tennessee's African-American students passed AP math and science exams.

When it comes to core subjects, Tennessee's African-American students do not perform on grade level, trailing behind national averages for all African-American students and the national average for all students. The report looked at performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), commonly known as the "Nation's Report Card."

In Tennessee, 20 percent of fourth-graders scored at or above proficient on the NAEP math exam and 16 percent of fourth-graders scored at or above proficient on the reading exam.

Eighth-grade performance on the NAEP exams was worse. Only 9 percent of eighth-grade students score at or above proficient on the NAEP math exam and 15 percent of eighth-graders scored at or above proficient on the reading exam.

"This focus on this particular demographic, the statistics are pretty sobering," said Cheryl Oldham, vice president for the Center for Education and Workforce for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. "We're not getting a significant amount of African-American kids on grade level on some of these basics."

"We're raising our expectations for all students, and so, I think over time, that is going to hopefully result in a closing of the gap between the students graduating high school and students prepared to be successful in college," Oldham said.

By the numbers

- Seventy-eight percent of African-American students graduated from high school.
- Four percent of African-American students scored "college-ready" in all four ACT-tested subjects.
- Fifteen percent of African-American graduates in the Class of 2014 took an AP exam during high school.
- Almost 4 percent of African-American graduates in the Class of 2014 scored a 3 or higher on an AP exam during high school, the minimum score needed to earn college credit in most colleges.

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