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Report faults state over academic gaps

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By Karen Rouse

Colorado gets high marks in the category of college-educated adults and wealth, but a new "State Accountability Report" gives the state an "unsatisfactory" rating for failing to close academic achievement gaps.

Across the state, black and Latino students score below their white peers on tests. Graduation rates also lag for black and Latino students, the report for 2005-06 shows.

Tony Lewis, executive director of the Donnell-Kay Foundation, one of four organizations that put the report together, said he hopes the public would "feel angry enough" about the findings to make changes, such as supporting funding programs to close the achievement gap.

"We're a wealthy state, yet we can't get kids to graduate high school," Lewis said. "That is pretty worrisome."

Overall, Colorado received a score of "average" in academic performance on the report, modeled after the School Accountability Reports, which are produced by the state annually and give a rating to every public school in Colorado.

The state ranks 14th in wealth but 37th in funding for K-12 public schools, according to the report.

If the numbers in the new report didn't make some troubling aspects of public education in Colorado clear enough, the authors said they had a few sobering illustrations.

The report notes that in 2004, there were more Coloradans struck by lightning than there were black students who scored "advanced" in math.

And there was a 9 percent chance that a Denver Public Schools ninth-grader would complete college in 2004, but a 41 percent chance of that student dropping out of high school.

On the positive side, students overall are performing better on the Colorado Student Assessment Program test, which measures how well students meet state standards for math, reading, writing and science.

The report also lists questions the public should ask public officials. Among them, what is the state doing to reduce the high school dropout rate?

The Piton Foundation, the Colorado Children's Campaign and the Center for Education Policy Analysis also contributed to the report.

Read the report at reportcardcolorado.com.

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How Colorado compares

Indicator 2005-06 U.S. rank

Wealth 14th

School funding K-12 37th

Funding for higher ed 48th

High school graduation rate 25th

Sources: Center for Education Policy Analysis, Colorado Children's Campaign, Donnell-Kay Foundation and Piton Foundation