

Executive Summary

The following are summaries of the six major recommendations of the Colorado Closing the Achievement Gap Commission. They constitute a body of work and as such should be considered as such. Taken in isolation or implemented haphazardly or indifferently they are unlikely to affect the change that the children that are victims of the achievement gap deserve. Embraced and implemented together in a comprehensive approach, they have a power that can transcend their individual components.

Data & Assessment

Closing the gap begins by understanding data and assessment. Colorado must develop a comprehensive, centralized, user-friendly and easily accessible data and assessment system that identifies gaps and deficiencies at the student, school and district level. This data and assessment system should gather available data and centralize it in a consistent and understandable format that can be applied with best practices to address gaps and deficiencies by informing instruction by classroom teachers. Data should be accessible to parents and the community to further understanding of achievement gaps. Data from the higher education system should be linked with K-12 to promote partnerships between the two systems as well as informing public policy makers, parents, teachers and the community at large about the efficacy of strategies that have been implemented to close the gap.

High Expectations

The achievement gap cannot be addressed without a commitment to high expectations. From the business community, students, parents, teachers, administrators and board members at the local level to the Department of Education, State Board of Education, General Assembly and Governor's Office at the state level, must develop high expectations of success for all students and accept no excuses. The foundation of high expectations is by establishing and maintaining academic rigor in all grade levels from kindergarten through higher education and across school district boundaries. Cultural sensitivity and the impacts of cultural biases on expectations must also be addressed.

Higher Education

Higher Education is an essential participant in eliminating the gap. We must develop and infuse a strong connection between higher education and K-12 by emphasizing shared responsibilities, success indicators, rigorous and connected curriculum and a systemic, proactive support systems that encourages and enables all students to access and succeed in college. This would consist of establishing a rigorous and aligned P-16 curriculum that is the default for all students that begins with the destination in mind, preparing students for life and continuing education. P-16 must provide continuous support that enables all students (especially under-represented groups) to access and succeed in college by providing early counseling, "can-do" values and clear financial options. We must ensure that the P-16 system is seamless and includes elementary and middle schools as part of the solution. The committee recommends that access and affordability to higher education by under-represented groups be ensured.

Administrator/Teacher Qualifications and Professional-Development

The classroom teacher and the school administrator are the front line in ending the gap. We must develop administrator and teacher cultural competencies and sensitivity so that they can effectively embrace high expectations for all students. We must embed the same cultural competencies in local and state leadership. The state should require that administrator and teacher preparation programs are data-driven. As a state we should increase the number of minority teachers and administrators. Teachers should be involved in the choice of professional-development opportunities. We must establish incentives that would place the most capable administrators and teachers to work in the most challenged and impacted schools.

Parent & Community Involvement

Schools alone cannot close the achievement gap without the involvement of parents and the broader community. We must build connections with parents, guardians, families, business and non-traditional leaders that will require more culturally sensitive behavior. We must make certain that we understand the strengths as well as the weaknesses of individual students and understand the circumstances that may affect their ability to learn. We must also effectively articulate why parents, guardians, families, business and non-traditional leaders are so important to creating an environment of high expectations.

Best Practices

Embracing and implementing strategies based upon research-based best practices at the classroom; school, district and state levels are the only means of effectively addressing the gap. We must collect, share and fund strategies that have demonstrated success in addressing the gap. This will involve not only the school districts, Colorado Department of Education and the State Board of Education, but must include the Colorado Education Association, Colorado Association of School Executives, Colorado Association of School Boards, the General Assembly and the Governor's Office. The P-16 systems must reward best practices by linking them to funding and incentives.