



## COLORADO'S K-12 ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

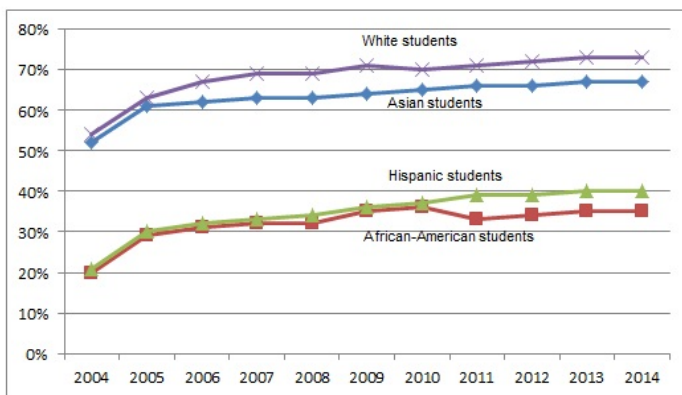
by Lisa Gezelter

State law defines "achievement gap" as the difference in academic achievement attained by student groups on the statewide assessments and "growth gap" as the differences among student groups in the rates of academic growth.<sup>1</sup> Achievement gaps are observable between racial or ethnic groups of students in Colorado, as well as between socioeconomic groups and genders. This issue brief provides a statistical overview of the achievement gap in Colorado.

### Current achievement gaps in Colorado.

Figure 1 illustrates achievement gap data among racial groups in Colorado from 2004 to 2014, while Figure 2 illustrates the achievement gap between students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches and those who do not qualify. Results are reported as the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced in math. Results for reading proficiency show the same gaps.

**Figure 1. Math Proficiency Rates by Racial/Ethnic Group**



Source: Colorado Department of Education

**Figure 2. Math Proficiency Rates by Income Group**



Source: Colorado Department of Education

Proficiency rates as illustrated in these two charts are based on student performance on statewide standardized assessments.

Further examples of achievement gaps among Colorado students is provided by examining on-time graduation rates. According to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), while white and Asian students had an on-time graduation rate of 83 percent and 86 percent respectively in 2013, only 70 percent of African-American students and 65 percent of Hispanic students graduated from high school on time.

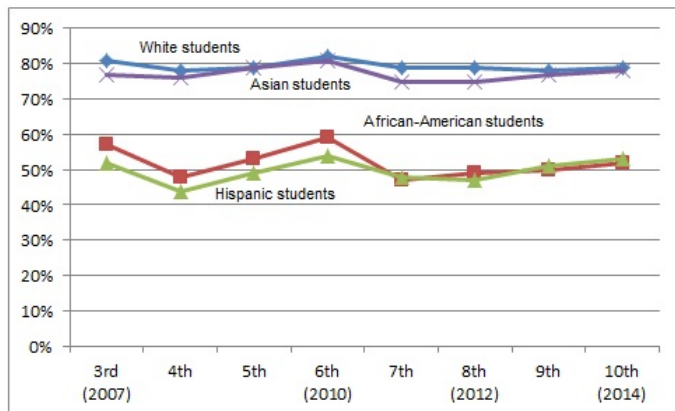
Similarly, the state as a whole registered an on-time graduation rate of 77 percent, but only 64 percent of economically disadvantaged students graduated on time in 2013.

Achievement gaps are also apparent when dividing students by gender. From 2010 to 2014, girls graduate on-time at a rate eight percentage points higher than boys.

<sup>1</sup>Section 22-11-103 (3), C.R.S.

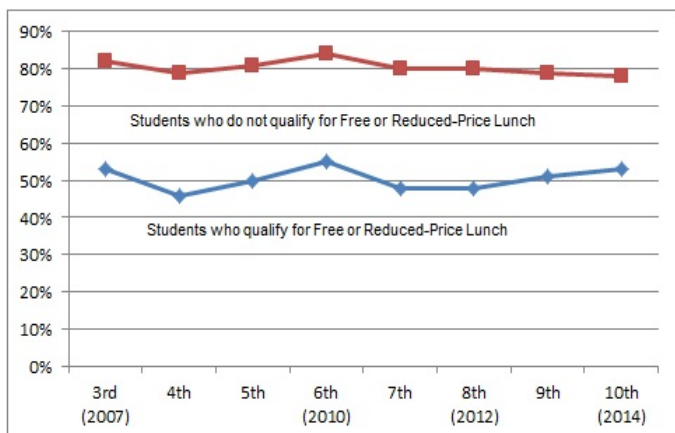
**Achievement gaps over time.** Achievement gaps stay roughly the same as students age. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate reading proficiency for the class of 2016 from third grade through tenth grade.

**Figure 3. Reading Proficiency Rates by Racial/Ethnic Group for the Class of 2016**



Source: Colorado Department of Education

**Figure 4. Reading Proficiency Rates by Economic Status for the Class of 2016**



Source: Colorado Department of Education

**Legislative efforts to close achievement gaps.** In 2003, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 03-254, which created the Closing the Achievement Gap Commission, and directed the commission to address effective approaches to closing the achievement gap in elementary and secondary education. The commission submitted its final report to the legislature in 2005.

The report listed six recommendations: a data system to identify gaps; commitment to both high expectations and cultural sensitivity; an aligned P-16 curriculum addressing issues of access and affordability; increasing the number

of minority teachers; greater parent and community involvement; and employing strategies based on best-practice research.

The law also created a Closing the Achievement Gap Program within the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). The program was tasked with assisting eligible schools and districts by providing information, personnel, and program and technical support.

The General Assembly appropriated \$1.8 million each year from 2008 to 2010 to fund the program within CDE. The monies were distributed first to six school districts as part of a pilot project. Later, grants were distributed to 11 additional districts. Districts were given an appraisal and then provided with financial and technical support to address issues identified in the appraisal. An external evaluation of the program revealed mixed results in improving standardized test scores. The pilot districts narrowed gaps for most student groups, but sometimes these gains were no greater than state average gains.<sup>2</sup>

The General Assembly passed other legislation intended to close achievement and growth gaps, such as the Preschool to Postsecondary Alignment Act in 2008.<sup>3</sup> In 2009, the General Assembly repealed and reenacted the state's accountability system. The new accountability system made closing achievement and growth gaps a factor in accrediting school districts. The same year, legislators added requirements for certain districts to create student graduation and completion plans.

In 2014, legislation passed to measure and close opportunity gaps in education by tracking participation and proficiency rates at the core course level for high school students.<sup>4</sup> The Public School Finance Act aims to close gaps by funding the Education Innovation grant program as well as staff support and professional development aligned with closing gaps.

<sup>2</sup>Final Report for the Evaluation of the Colorado Department of Education Closing the Achievement Gap (CTAG) Project. Center for Education Policy Analysis and Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, 2011.

<sup>3</sup>Section 22-7-1001, et seq, C.R.S.

<sup>4</sup>Section 22-11-503, C.R.S.