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Foundation releases report criticizing state education leaders

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The Donnell-Kay foundation has been working on improving public education for the last 40 years. It released its first-ever Colorado State Report Card Monday, giving the entire system a mediocre grade.

Tony Lewis is the executive director of Donnell-Kay Foundation. Lewis says, "We thought to ourselves, it's great to hold schools accountable, but shouldn't we also be holding state officials accountable?" The report gives Colorado's Education system a rating of "average" compared to other states.

Lewis says the foundation in cooperation with the Colorado Children's Campaign looked at everything from test scores to census data to compile this report. Lewis says the biggest problem is an achievement gap between white students and minority students.

In February of 2000, the state formed the coalition to find ways to eliminate the gap, which shows white students outperforming others by far. However, Lewis says, "What's the gap today? It's widened. It's worse than it was six years ago."

Education Commissioner William Moloney disagrees. He says data can be interpreted in many ways. Moloney says, "Each of the last five years, the learning gap has narrowed." He adds, "When you have an opening statement that says many minority students are being failed. That can be written of all 50 states."

But, Lewis says state leaders are in denial. He says the reason the problems exist is that no one has taken firm action to fix them. "The education leaders of this state need to get up and say we have a problem. We're going to address it and here are the ways we're going to address it," Lewis says. "Instead they've been notably absent, they've been notably quiet."

Commissioner Moloney says he and Governor Owens have been at the forefront of trying to improve performance in Colorado classrooms. Moloney says, "A variety of independent sources have ranked Colorado near the top in the nation in terms of education reform." He adds that many people around the state have been recognized for their work. "That is what leadership is about. It's a mix of exultation, encouragement, reproof."

Lewis says the point of this report is to let state leaders know they're being watched. "I think it's kind of a surprise to the state," Lewis says. "We aren't serving our own and we aren't leading to a healthy economy and a healthy state."

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