

The Pueblo Chieftain Online

Achievement gap report highlights 3 schools

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Chieftain Photos/Chris McLean

South Park Elementary fifth-grader Autriana Martinez, 10, seems to be lost in a good book Tuesday afternoon in Edith Calhoun's class.

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By Charles Ashby, Chieftain Denver Bureau

DENVER - Three Pueblo city schools were among eight statewide that were highlighted in a report released Tuesday for their work in reducing the state's achievement gap.

While there are 39 schools around Colorado that have high instances of students in their free and reduced lunch programs, but have shown consistent improvements in closing the so-called achievement gap for poor and minority students, only eight were chosen to take part in a study about why.

Three of those schools - Cesar Chavez Academy, Pueblo School for the Arts & Sciences and South Park Elementary - were picked to be more closely examined. They're all in the Pueblo City Schools, which has nine other schools that similarly have a narrower achievement gap than other schools in the state.

The report, Profiles of Success: Eight Colorado Schools that are Closing the Achievement Gap, attempts to highlight why as a way of helping other schools in the state close their gaps, too, said Amy Berk Anderson, one of its authors. Anderson, who works for the Donnell-Kay Foundation, an education advocacy group, completed the study with Dale DeCesare of Augenblick, Palaich & Associates, a Denver consulting firm.

"Schools that we identified have been able to beat the odds by not just reducing the gap, but actually raising their students' scores above the statewide average," Anderson said.

The authors said the eight schools were chosen out of all the well-performing schools for a variety of reasons, but primarily as examples of different types of schools with varying sizes.

According to the study, key elements to the schools' success include:

- South Park Elementary staff review information every two weeks to examine progress and make adjustments based on what the data shows.
- Cesar Chavez's approach to staffing is that it is always hiring. If the school finds a teacher that appears to be a good fit, it finds a place for that person regardless of whether a position is currently open.
- At Pueblo School for the Arts & Sciences, all faculty members and families have a voice about important decisions affecting the school.

The underlying similarity, the study's authors said, was the schools had more on-the-ground decision-making authority and more flexibility in dealing with curriculum.

"We saw a lot of similarities in how these schools operate," DeCesare added. "What looked to be most important to success was the school leaders had flexibility and authority to direct resources to the areas of greatest need."

ON THE NET

Donnell-Kay Foundation: <http://www.dkfoundation.org> .



Members of Edith Calhoun's fifth-grade class stay busy Tuesday afternoon at South Park Elementary. The school was recognized earlier in the day during a press conference in Denver as a 'Profile of Success,' for consistently bridging the gap in student achievement.

SCHOOLS MOVING UP

Thirty-nine schools throughout, which have a large percentage of students in the federal free and reduced lunch program, have shown improvement over the past three years in closing the achievement gap between minority students and white students. Nineteen of those schools are located in Southern Colorado. They are:

Pueblo City Schools:

- Belmont Elementary

- Beulah Heights Elementary
- Carlile Elementary
- Cesar Chavez Academy*
- Columbian Elementary
- Goodnight Elementary
- Heritage Elementary
- Highland Park Elementary
- Minnequa Elementary
- Pueblo School for the Arts & Sciences*
- South Park Elementary*
- Sunset Park Elementary

District 70 Schools:

- Sierra Vista Elementary
- Sky View Elementary
- South Mesa Elementary

North Conejos Schools:

- La Jara Elementary
- Manassa Elementary

Trinidad Schools:

- Trinidad High

Monte Vista Schools:

- Monte Vista Senior High

*Included in study