

Outperforming School Districts in Minnesota, 2002-03

Summary Findings

A recent analysis by Standard & Poor's found that of the 332 school districts in Minnesota that have sufficient data for analysis, 22 school districts, or 6.6 percent, outperformed demographically similar school districts in reading and math proficiency (RaMP) for two consecutive years (2001-02 and 2002-03). These "outperforming" school districts are diverse, serving student populations in 2002-03 that range from 30.2 to 60.3 percent economically disadvantaged, while achieving average proficiency rates in reading and math that range from 80.3 to 98.9 percent.

S&P believes that highlighting Minnesota's 22 outperforming school districts is important because it may help shed light on effective strategies and "best practices" that can help lower-performing "peers" make needed improvements necessary to impact student achievement.

What does it mean to be an "outperforming school district"?

To identify school districts that consistently outperform demographically similar school districts, or peers, Standard & Poor's has developed the Outperformers Method. The method uses three fundamental criteria to identify outperforming school districts:

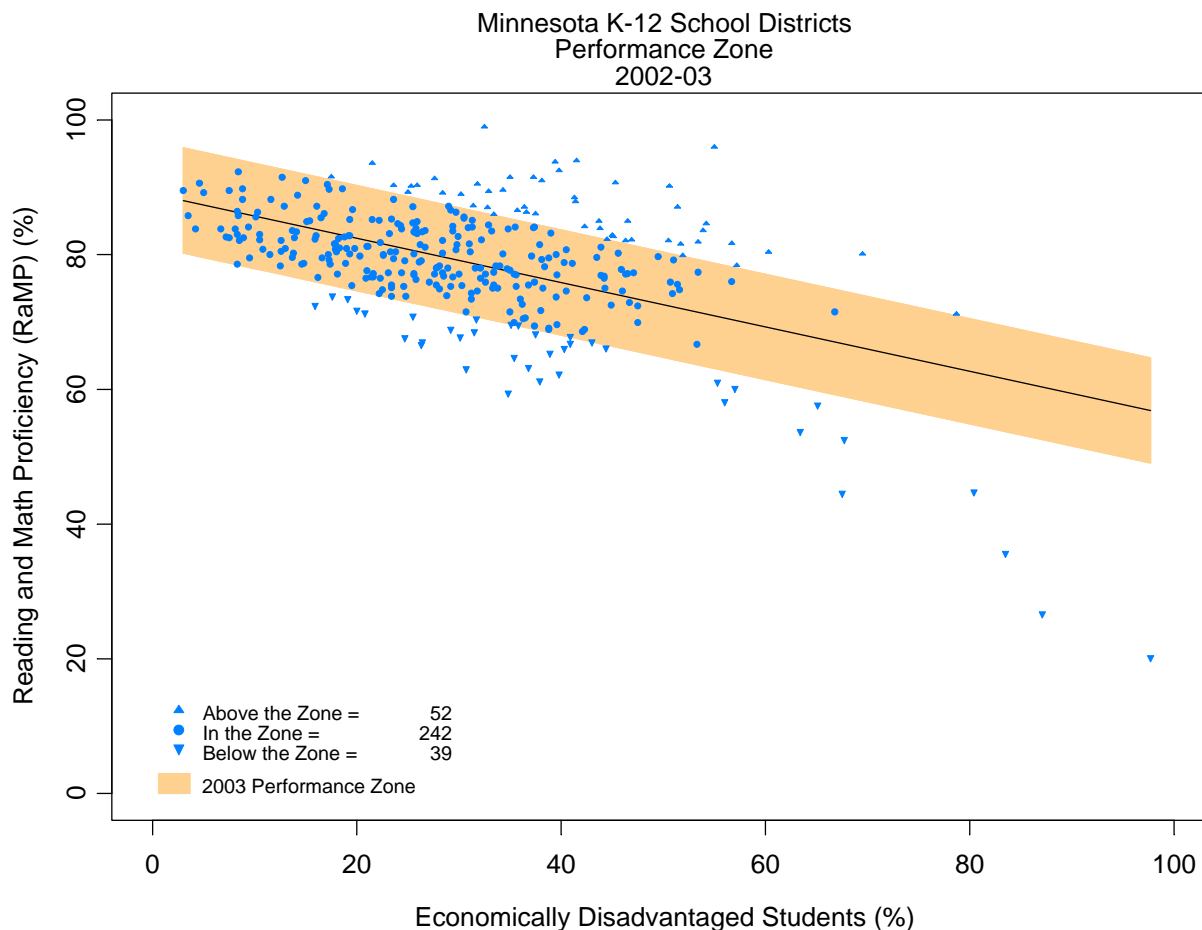
1. **School districts must achieve higher levels of student proficiency than peers.** Outperformers must report higher percentages of students that score at or above state standards on reading and math tests than other school districts that serve similar proportions of economically disadvantaged students.
2. **School districts must perform at a level that significantly exceeds statistical expectation.** Outperformers must achieve proficiency levels that fall above the threshold for the expected performance zone, as simply beating peers is not sufficient.
3. **School districts must outperform consistently.** Outperformers must repeat this performance for at least two consecutive years.

The analysis is limited to K-12 school districts and uses state-provided data where available. For states where enrollment data were not accessible, economically disadvantaged enrollment data are as reported by states to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

It is important to note that school districts may be identified as outperformers and still not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). There are two reasons for this. The first reason is that the criteria used for determining outperformers differ from those used to determine if school districts make AYP, for example. The second reason is more fundamental: examining school districts that are not meeting AYP may nonetheless uncover practices that, if replicated, can help lower-performing school districts to improve.

During the last 40 years, the statistical relationship between student poverty and performance has been well documented in education research, and yet the true meaning of the relationship is often lost amidst the debate. Generally, the greater the concentration of economically disadvantaged students who are served, the lower student proficiency levels are, on average (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



However, this relationship does *not* indicate that “poor children” cannot learn; rather, it indicates that for *any given level of student poverty*, there is a fairly wide range of student proficiency. The Performance Zone method allows for the identification of the most exceptional school districts across the spectrum of student poverty. Using the Performance Zone method could address two goals shared by all states, and codified by NCLB: flattening the performance zone by eliminating achievement gaps between economically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students, and raising the performance zone to 100 percent so that all students can demonstrate proficiency in reading and math.

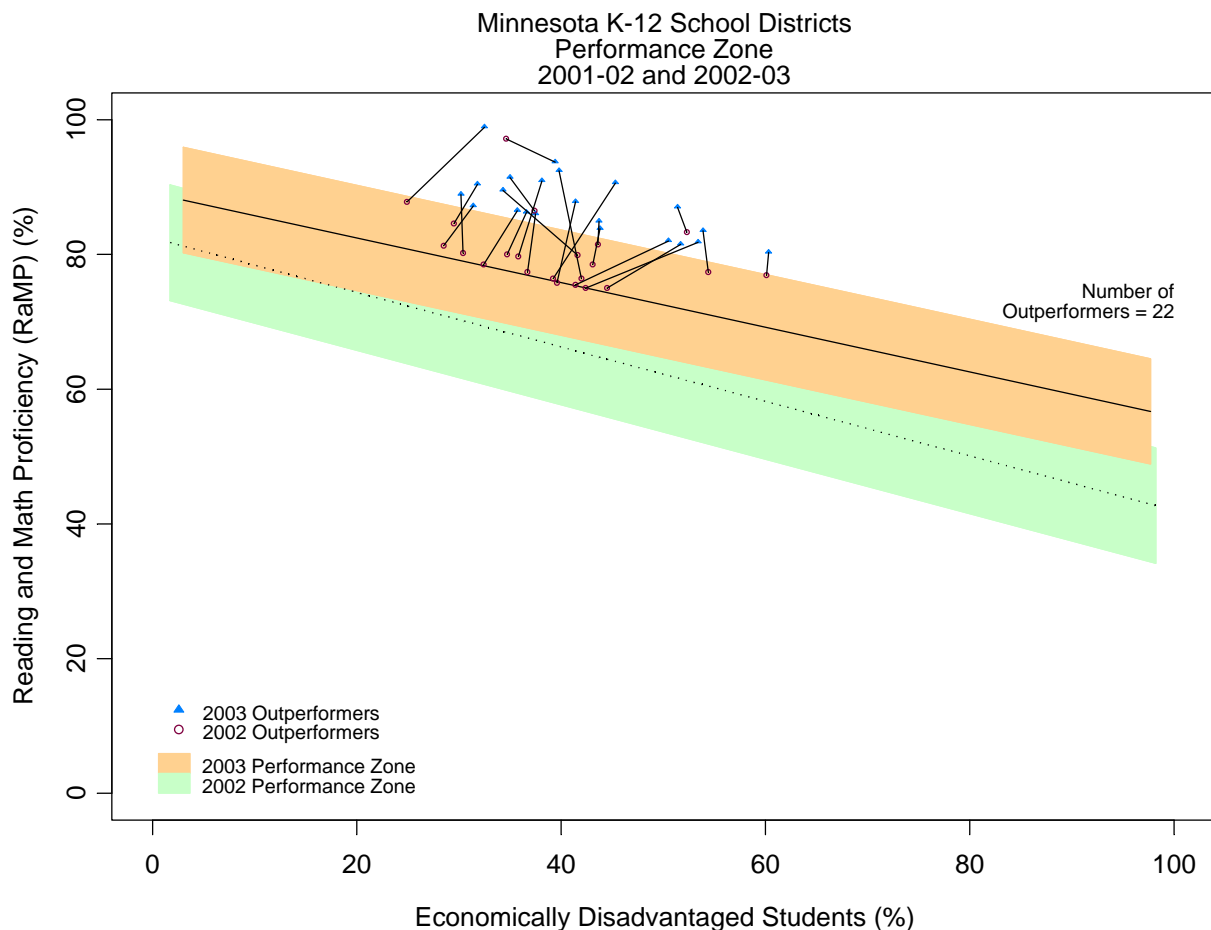
Looking for More about Outperformers?

A technical paper that explains the analytical method used to identify outperforming school systems can be found at www.schoolmatters.com in the **News & Publications** section.

Outperforming School Districts in Minnesota

Figure 2 shows the 22 school districts that have consistently outperformed their peers over the past two years (2001-02 and 2002-03). The great majority of these districts have improved their student proficiency levels significantly from one year to the next. Thus, even while the state as a whole has posted gains in student proficiency since 2001-02 (note how the Performance Zone band has shifted upwards from 2001-02—the green/lighter band—to 2002-03—the orange/darker band), the performance of these school districts remains noteworthy.

Figure 2



Minnesota's 22 outperforming school districts are listed in Figure 3 in alphabetical order.

Figure 3

Minnesota's Outperforming School Districts, 2002-2003

School District	County	Economically Disadvantaged (%)	Reading and Math Proficiency (RaMP) (%)
Ada-Borup	Norman	38.1	90.9
Badger	Roseau	39.8	92.4
Brainerd	Crow Wing	31.4	87.2
Browerville	Todd	50.5	82
Butterfield	Watonwan	53.4	81.8
Cedar Mountain	Redwood	31.8	90.4
Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley	Big Stone	51.4	87.0
E.C.H.O. Charter School	Yellow Medicine	51.7	81.5
Eden Valley-Watkins	Meeker	36.6	86.2
Greenbush-Middle River	Roseau	41.4	87.8
Henning	Otter Tail	39.4	93.7
Hills-Beaver Creek	Rock	32.5	98.9
Lancaster	Kittson	45.3	90.6
Mcgregor	Aitkin	60.3	80.3
Minnewaska	Pope	34.3	89.5
Nevis	Hubbard	53.9	83.5
Osakis	Douglas	35.7	86.5
Parkers Prairie	Otter Tail	37.5	86.0
Pierz	Morrison	43.8	83.8
Pipestone Area Schools	Pipestone	30.2	88.9
Red Rock Central	Cottonwood	43.7	84.9
Stephen-Argyle Central Schools	Marshall	35.0	91.4
State Average		27.5	77.1

Data displayed are for the 2002-03 school year.

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