

Outperforming School Districts in Massachusetts, 2002-03

Summary Findings

A recent analysis by Standard & Poor's found that of the 213 school districts in Massachusetts that have sufficient data for analysis, 29 school districts, or 13.6 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 0.7 to 80 percent economically disadvantaged, while achieving average proficiency rates in reading and math that range from 28.7 to 83.6 percent.

S&P believes that highlighting Massachusetts's 29 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.

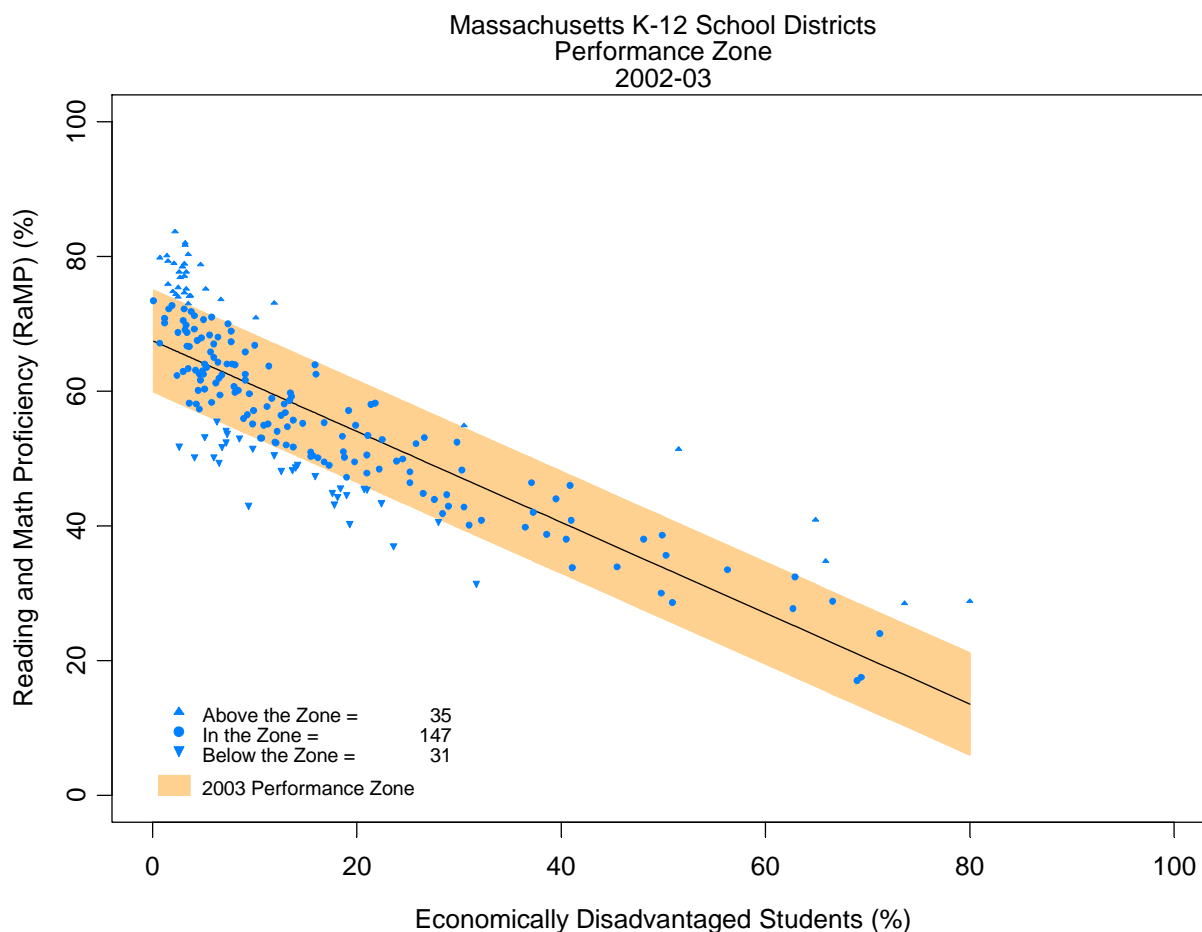
The analysis is limited to K-12 school districts and uses state-provided data where available. For states where enrollment data were not accessible, economically disadvantaged enrollment data are as reported by states to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

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.

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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.

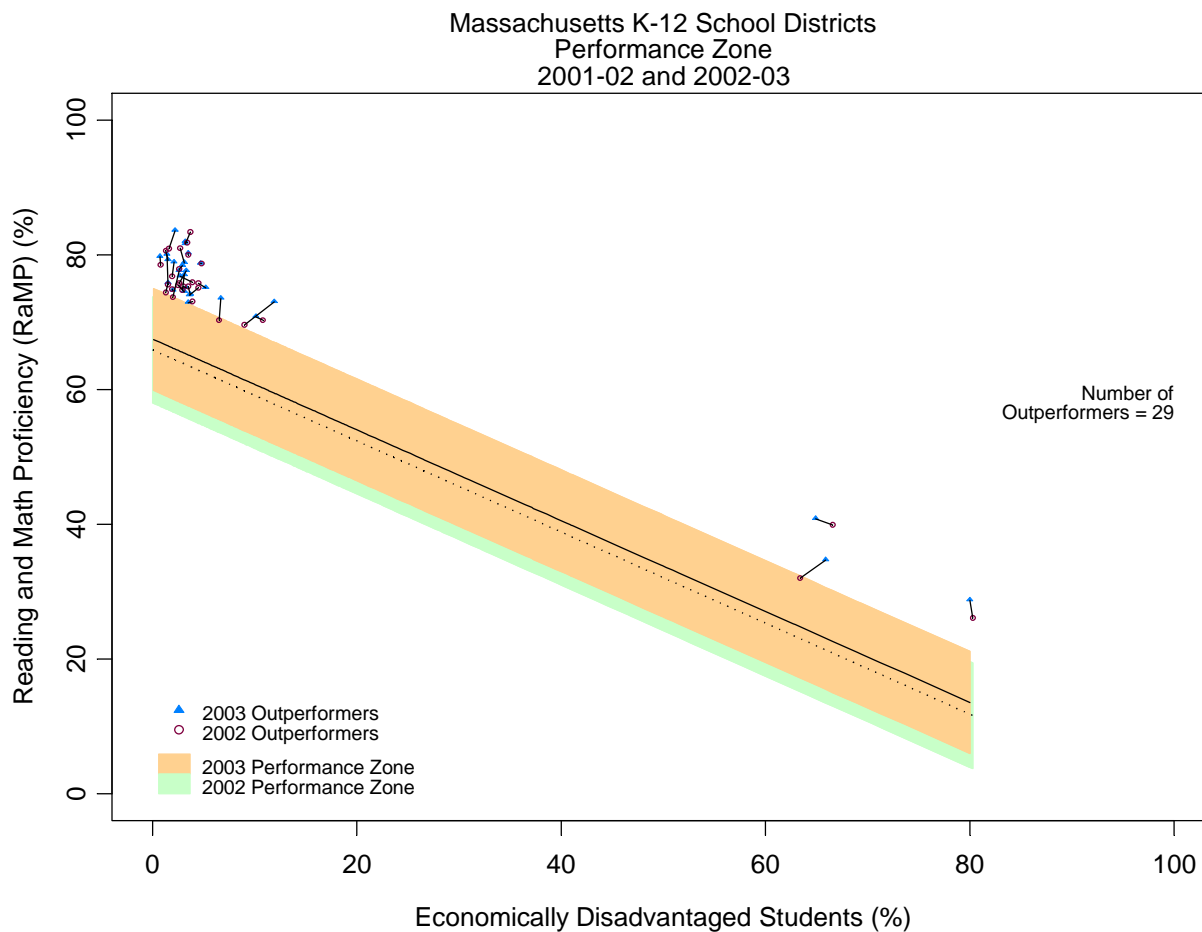
Looking for More about Outperformers?

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 Massachusetts

Figure 2 shows the 29 school districts that have consistently outperformed their peers over the past two years (2001-02 and 2002-03). Some of the outperformers improved their student proficiency levels while others saw declines between the two years. Overall, 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).

Figure 2



Massachusetts's 29 outperforming school districts are listed in Figure 3 in alphabetical order.

Figure 3

Massachusetts's Outperforming School Districts, 2002-2003

School District	County	Economically Disadvantaged (%)	Reading and Math Proficiency (RaMP) (%)
Andover	Essex	2.9	78.4
Belmont	Middlesex	5.2	75.1
Brookline	Norfolk	10.1	70.8
Chelsea	Suffolk	80.0	28.7
Foxborough	Norfolk	6.7	73.5
Hamilton-Wenham	Essex	3.1	74.5
Harvard	Worcester	0.7	79.7
Hingham	Plymouth	2.0	74.7
Lexington	Middlesex	3.5	80.2
Longmeadow	Hampden	3.1	77.0
Lynn	Essex	65.9	34.7
Medfield	Norfolk	1.5	79.2
Nashoba	Worcester	3.6	74.0
Nauset	Barnstable	11.9	73.0
Needham	Norfolk	2.7	76.8
Newton	Middlesex	4.7	78.7
North Reading	Middlesex	3.3	75.1
Norwell	Plymouth	1.5	75.8
Reading	Middlesex	2.6	77.6
Scituate	Plymouth	3.5	72.9
Sharon	Norfolk	3.3	77.6
Somerville	Middlesex	64.9	40.8
Wayland	Middlesex	3.2	81.9
Wellesley	Norfolk	3.2	81.6

Westborough	Worcester	3.7	74.1
Westford	Middlesex	2.1	78.9
Weston	Middlesex	3.1	78.8
Westwood	Norfolk	1.4	80.0
Winchester	Middlesex	2.2	83.6
State Average		26.2	51.6

Data displayed are for the 2002-03 school year.

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