

Outperforming School Districts in Virginia, 2003-04

Summary Findings

A recent analysis by Standard & Poor's found that of the 132 school districts in Virginia that have sufficient data for analysis, 16 school districts, or 12.1 percent, outperformed demographically similar school districts in reading and math proficiency (RaMP) for two consecutive years (2002-03 and 2003-04). These "outperforming" school districts are diverse, serving student populations in 2003-04 that range from 15.2 to 68.9 percent economically disadvantaged, while achieving average proficiency rates in reading and math that range from 69.3 to 90.5 percent.

S&P believes that highlighting Virginia's 16 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:

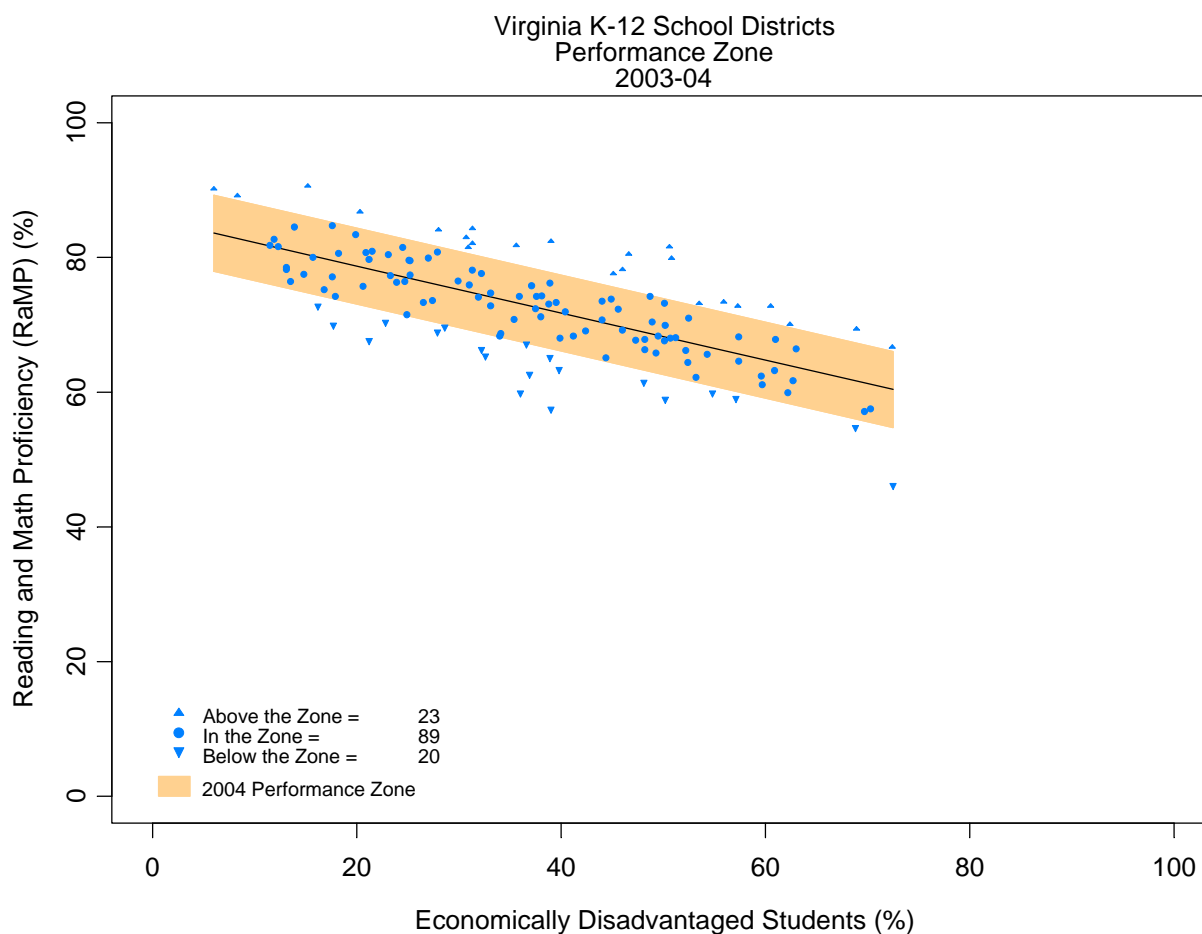
1. **School districts must achieve higher levels of student proficiency than peers.** Outperformers must report higher percentages of students that score at or above state standards on reading and math tests than other school districts that serve similar proportions of economically disadvantaged students.
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.

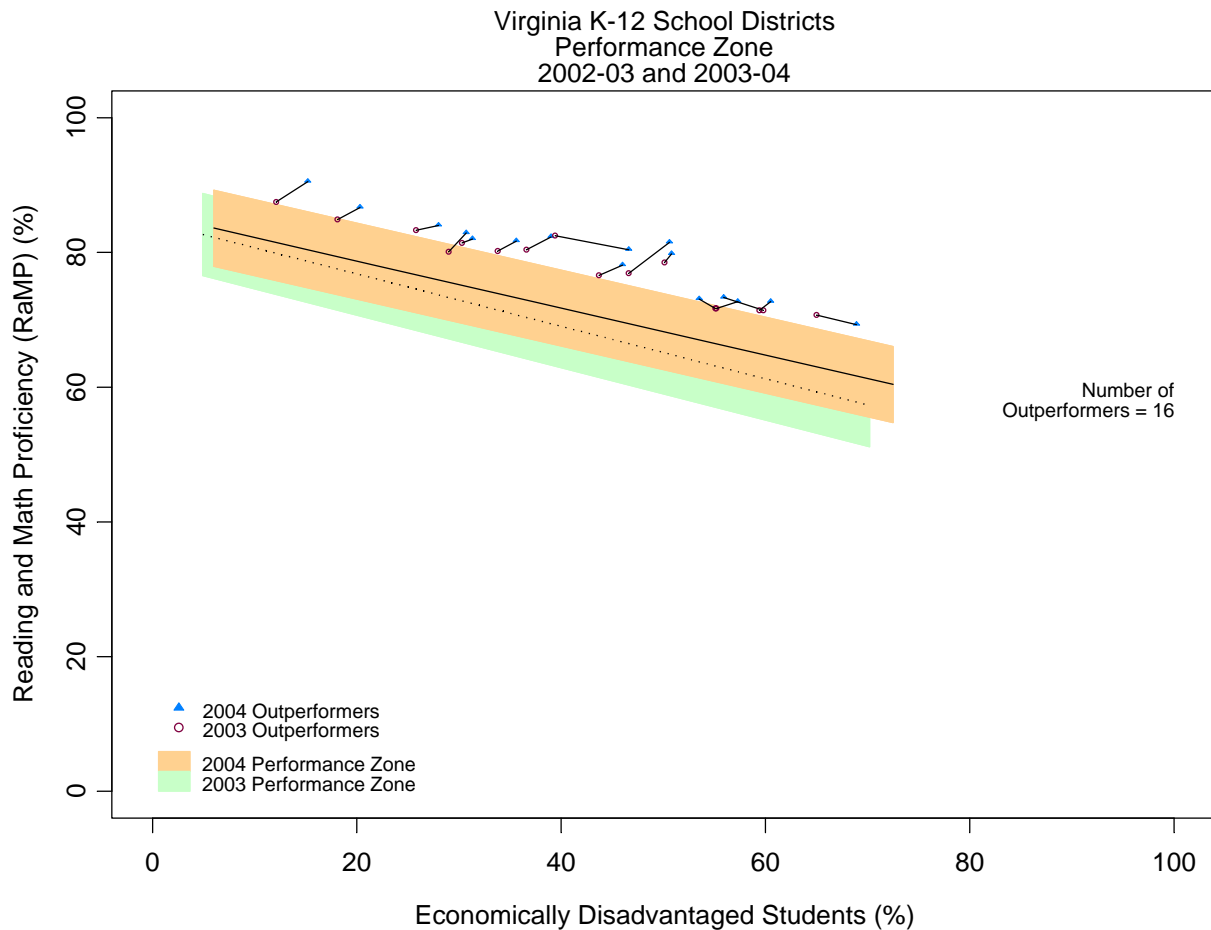
Looking for More about Outperformers?

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 Virginia

Figure 2 shows the 16 school districts that have consistently outperformed their peers over the past two years (2002-03 and 2003-04). 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 2002-03 (note how the Performance Zone band has shifted upwards from 2002-03—the green/lighter band—to 2003-04—the orange/darker band), the performance of these school districts remains noteworthy.

Figure 2



Virginia's 16 outperforming school districts are listed in Figure 3 in alphabetical order.

Figure 3

Virginia's Outperforming School Districts, 2003-2004

School District	County	Economically Disadvantaged (%)	Reading and Math Proficiency (RaMP) (%)
Charlotte County Public Schools	Charlotte	50.8	79.8
Franklin County Public Schools	Franklin	39.0	82.3
Halifax County Public Schools	Halifax	53.5	73.1
Harrisonburg City Public Schools	Harrisonburg City	46.0	78.1
Highland County Public Schools	Highland	46.6	80.4
Hopewell City Public Schools	Hopewell City	60.5	72.7
Mecklenburg County Public Schools	Mecklenburg	57.3	72.7
Norfolk City Public Schools	Norfolk City	55.9	73.3
Northampton County Public Schools	Northampton	68.9	69.3
Prince George County Public Schools	Prince George	30.7	82.9
Richmond County Public Schools	Richmond	35.6	81.7
Rockingham County Public Schools	Rockingham	28.0	84.0
Salem City Public Schools	Salem City	20.3	86.7
Scott County Public Schools	Scott	50.6	81.5
Virginia Beach City Public Schools	Virginia Beach City	31.3	82.0
West Point Public Schools	King William	15.2	90.5
State Average		32.6	76.0

Data displayed are for the 2003-04 school year.

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