

## Narrowing the Achievement Gap: Schools in Minnesota that are Making Significant Progress, 2003-04 to 2004-05

### Summary Findings

This report represents Standard & Poor's first analysis of achievement gaps in Minnesota, examining performance trends through the 2004-05 school year. This study takes a closer look at achievement gaps by focusing on schools that have made significant progress in narrowing the achievement gap between higher- and lower-performing student groups.

Standard & Poor's has identified 45 schools that have significantly narrowed achievement gaps between the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years. The schools are located in 34 school districts throughout the state, with many districts having multiple schools that merit recognition. In fact, two school districts—North St. Paul-Maplewood and St. Paul—each have no fewer than three schools that have significantly narrowed at least one achievement gap between student groups.

### Defining the Achievement Gap

There are many ways that achievement gaps can be defined and assessed. Given the local, state, and federal emphasis on measurable academic standards, this report focuses on differences in “proficiency” rates on state reading and math tests among student groups. Racial achievement gaps are analyzed between white students and their black and Hispanic peers since these are the three largest racial/ethnic groups enrolled in the nation's schools. This report also analyzes gaps between economically disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students.<sup>1</sup>

There are five ways that an achievement gap can be narrowed. These ways are not equally beneficial, as shown in the adjacent box, where they are listed in order of declining benefit to the system's students as a whole.

The optimal way to reduce the gap between lower- and higher-performing groups requires that both groups simultaneously improve their performance. This analysis focuses on achievement gap reductions that are achieved in conjunction with performance improvements by both student groups.

#### **Five Ways to Narrow the Achievement Gap**

1. Lower-performing group *improves more than the higher-performing group improves* (\*\*best way\*\*).
2. Lower-performing group *improves* while the higher-performing group *remains unchanged*.
3. Lower-performing group *improves* while the higher-performing group *declines*.
4. Lower-performing group *remains unchanged* while the higher-performing group *declines*.
5. Lower-performing group *declines less* than the higher-performing group declines.

<sup>1</sup> Due to the lack of available data, it is not possible to analyze achievement gaps for student groups identified by more than one characteristic at a time. For example, achievement data are available for economically disadvantaged students and for Hispanic students, but not economically disadvantaged Hispanic students.

## Detailed Findings

Schools with achievement gap reductions that meet this study's criteria<sup>2</sup> are rare. However, there clearly are a number of schools whose accomplishments stand out as both difficult and desirable to achieve. These schools are recognized here in the hopes that they may serve as benchmarks and sources of promising practices for educators elsewhere in the state who are trying to close achievement gaps while improving the achievement of all students.

Standard & Poor's has identified 45 schools (2.5 percent of Minnesota's 1,782 schools, or 12.6 percent of the 356 schools in the state with sufficient data for analysis) for significantly narrowing achievement gaps between the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years. These schools have reduced at least one achievement gap between two student groups by more than five percentage points while simultaneously improving the proficiency rates of each of these groups, both on a school-wide basis and for at least one specific grade-level test in reading and math.

Overall, reading and math proficiency (RaMP™) rates have increased by an average of 9.3 percentage points in these 45 schools, compared with an average increase of 5.1 percentage points for the state as a whole (or 5.4 percentage points for the subset of schools statewide with sufficiently large student groups to be analyzed).

Of these 45 schools, five schools have been recognized for reducing their black-white gap, three schools for narrowing their Hispanic-white gap, and 39 schools for narrowing their "economically disadvantaged-non-disadvantaged students tested" gap. Particularly noteworthy is that two of these schools have been recognized for narrowing achievement gaps between two different sets of student groups.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1: Schools that are Narrowing Achievement Gaps between Student Groups, 2003-04 to 2004-05**

	Achievement Gaps between Student Groups		
	Black and White Students	Hispanic and White Students	Economically Disadvantaged and Non-disadvantaged Students
Number of Schools Recognized for Narrowing the Achievement Gap	5	3	39
Number of Schools with Sufficient Data*—Statewide	57	19	352
<b>Percentage of Schools Narrowing the Achievement Gap</b>	<b>8.8%</b>	<b>15.8%</b>	<b>11.1%</b>

\* Schools with sufficiently large student groups (at least 30 students tested in each group being analyzed).

<sup>2</sup> The full criteria used are detailed in the **Methodology** section at the end of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Both schools have narrowed the achievement gaps between black and white students, and between economically disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students. See **Figure 6a-b** for the list of schools.

## Black-White Achievement Gap

The black-white achievement gap has been narrowed by 11.2 percentage points in the schools being recognized, compared to the gap narrowing by an average of 3.3 percentage points for the state (or 3.0 percentage points for the schools with sufficiently large student groups to be analyzed). Black students in these schools have increased their RaMP rates by 16.0 percentage points, while white students have improved by 4.8 percentage points.

**Figure 2: Schools that are Narrowing Achievement Gaps between Black and White Students**

	Change in Reading and Math Proficiency (RaMP), 2003-04 to 2004-05 (percentage points)			Remaining Achievement Gap between Black and White Students, 2004-05
	Black Students	White Students	Black-White Gap	
<b>Schools Recognized for Narrowing the Achievement Gap</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>32.4</b>
Schools with Sufficient Data*	7.7	4.7	3.0	36.8
State Average (Overall)	7.9	4.6	3.3	36.6

\* Schools with sufficiently large student groups (at least 30 students tested in each group being analyzed).

However, there is still additional progress left to be made. The average black-white achievement gap for these schools remains 32.4 percentage points. By contrast, the average achievement gap for the state is 36.6 percentage points (or 36.8 percentage points for the schools with sufficiently large student groups to be analyzed).

## Hispanic-White Achievement Gap

The Hispanic-white achievement gap has been narrowed by 9.8 percentage points in three schools being recognized, compared to the gap narrowing by an average of 3.7 percentage points for the state (or 3.5 percentage points for the schools with sufficiently large student groups to be analyzed). Hispanic students in these three schools have increased their RaMP rates by 14.2 percentage points, while white students have improved by 4.4 percentage points.

**Figure 3: Schools that are Narrowing Achievement Gaps between Hispanic and White Students**

	Change in Reading and Math Proficiency (RaMP), 2003-04 to 2004-05 (percentage points)			Remaining Achievement Gap between Hispanic and White Students, 2004-05
	Hispanic Students	White Students	Hispanic-White Gap	
<b>Schools Recognized for Narrowing the Achievement Gap</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>30.9</b>
Schools with Sufficient Data*	10.1	6.6	3.5	35.5
State Average (Overall)	8.3	4.6	3.7	31.3

\* Schools with sufficiently large student groups (at least 30 students tested in each group being analyzed).

However, there is still additional progress left to be made. The average Hispanic-white achievement gap for these schools remains at 30.9 percentage points. By contrast, the average Hispanic-white achievement gap for the state is 31.3 percentage points (or 35.5 percentage points for the schools with sufficiently large student groups to be analyzed).

### Economically Disadvantaged-Non-disadvantaged Students Achievement Gap

The achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students has been narrowed by an average of 11.3 percentage points in the 39 schools being recognized, compared to the gap narrowing by an average of 3.3 percentage points for the state (or 3.0 percentage points for the schools with sufficiently large student groups to be analyzed). In these 39 schools, economically disadvantaged students have raised their RaMP rates by 17.8 percentage points, while non-disadvantaged students have improved by 6.5 percentage points.

**Figure 4: Schools that are Narrowing Achievement Gaps between Economically Disadvantaged and Non-disadvantaged Students**

	Change in Reading and Math Proficiency (RaMP), 2003-04 to 2004-05 (percentage points)			Remaining Achievement Gap between Economically Disadvantaged and Non-disadvantaged Students, 2004-05
	Economically Disadvantaged Students	Non-disadvantaged Students	Economically Disadvantaged-Non-disadvantaged Students Gap	
<b>Schools Recognized for Narrowing the Achievement Gap</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>20.6</b>
Schools with Sufficient Data*	7.7	4.7	3.0	21.7
State Average (Overall)	7.7	4.4	3.3	26.2

\* Schools with sufficiently large student groups (at least 30 students tested in each group being analyzed).

However, there is still additional progress left to be made. The average gap between economically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students in the schools being recognized remains at 20.6 percentage points. By contrast, the average achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students for the state is 26.2 percentage points (or 21.7 percentage points for the schools with sufficiently large student groups to be analyzed).

## Locating Success: Identifying Grade Levels where Achievement Gaps are Narrowing

In addition to narrowing achievement gaps on a school-wide basis, each school being recognized has also done so within at least one specific grade level for reading and math. This requirement ensures that the progress can be observed “in the classroom” and is not merely the result of averaging students across a range of grades and subjects. The following table provides a summary view of where (i.e., in which grade levels) the schools being recognized have achieved the most significant reductions in achievement gaps.

**Figure 5: Schools that are Narrowing Achievement Gaps in Reading and Math, by Grade Level**

Subject Area	Achievement Gap Between	Grade Level			
		Grade 3	Grade 5	Grade 7	Grade 10 (Reading) Grade 11 (Math)
Reading	Black and White Students	none	none	4 schools	1 school
	Hispanic and White Students	none	2 schools	1 school	none
	Economically Disadvantaged and Non-disadvantaged Students	7 schools	11 schools	20 schools	4 schools
Math	Black and White Students	none	none	4 schools	1 school
	Hispanic and White Students	1 school	1 school	1 school	none
	Economically Disadvantaged and Non-disadvantaged Students	6 schools	11 schools	20 schools	5 schools

For both reading and math, there are more schools that have managed to significantly reduce their achievement gaps in grades 5 and 7 than in grade 3 and in high school. This pattern holds true for each of the three achievement gaps between particular student groups analyzed in this study.

## Schools Meriting Recognition for Significantly Reducing Achievement Gaps

The following tables provide a complete list of the 45 schools in Minnesota that have significantly narrowed at least one achievement gap between student groups from 2003-04 to 2004-05. **Figure 6a-b** identifies the schools and the gaps for which they are being recognized, while **Figure 7a-c** identifies the specific grade level(s) in which they have narrowed the gaps in reading and math.

**Figure 6a: Minnesota Schools that are Significantly Narrowing Achievement Gaps**  
Listed alphabetically by school district (A-S)

District	School	Enrollment	Reading and Math Proficiency (RaMP) (%)	Change in Proficiency Gaps, 2003-04 to 2004-05 (percentage points)		
				Black and White Students	Hispanic and White Students	Economically Disadvantaged and Non-disadvantaged Students
Anoka-Hennepin	Coon Rapids Middle	1,557	79.5			7.6
Austin	Ellis Middle	929	69.2			7.7
Brainerd	Washington Middle	797	83.6			6.1
Buffalo	Parkside Elementary	743	82.4			10.7
Burnsville	Metcalf Junior	782	76.5			11.6
Chaska	Chaska Middle East	952	93			19.3
	Chaska Middle West	896	85.9			10.9
Dassel-Cokato	Dassel-Cokato Middle	702	81.8			8.7
Hibbing	Lincoln Middle	559	89.8			17
Hopkins	<b>Hopkins North Junior</b>	1,025	84.9	9.2		12.9
	Hopkins Senior	2,030	86.4	15.5		
Hutchinson	Hutchinson Park Elementary	872	79.1			6.3
Little Falls	Lindbergh Elementary	577	83.1			7.3
Mankato	Franklin Elementary	585	76.8			8.2
Minneapolis	South Senior	1,834	75.4			6.7
New Ulm	New Ulm Junior	360	89.4			12.3
North St. Paul-Maplewood	John Glenn Middle	920	71.6			10.7
	Richardson Elementary	516	67.4			8
	Tartan Senior	1,748	75.5			9.5
Northfield	Northfield Middle	926	86.8			15
Park Rapids	Park Rapids Area Century Middle	476	86.2			9.2
Perham	Prairie Wind Middle	480	87			16.3
Red Wing	Twin Bluff Middle	652	78			6.1
Richfield	<b>Richfield Middle</b>	929	60.1	16.8		9.1
Robbinsdale	Plymouth Middle	1,083	69.3	8.2		
Rochester	Gage Elementary	792	73.2			11.9
	Willow Creek Middle	1,035	82.1			15.4
South Washington County	Cottage Grove Junior	1,099	82.6			9.1
St. Francis	St. Francis Intermediate Elementary	443	90.3			14.3
St. James	St. James Armstrong Elementary	376	66.1		7.9	
	St. James Northside Elementary	368	71.3			17.1
St. Louis Park	Cedar Manor Elementary	359	78.1			11.8
St. Paul	Capitol Hill Magnet/Rondo	972	92			10.1
	Expo/Harriet Bishop Center	664	80.3			19.8
	Hazel Park Middle School Academy	763	50.2	6.3		
	Highland Park Junior	806	59.2		11	
	Ramsey Junior	752	59.5			9

Reading and Math Proficiency rate and Enrollment data displayed are for 2004-05 unless otherwise indicated.

Schools that have significantly narrowed the achievement gap for more than one set of student groups are highlighted in **boldface**.

**Figure 6b: Minnesota Schools that are Significantly Narrowing Achievement Gaps**  
*Listed alphabetically by school district (T-W)*

District	School	Enrollment	Reading and Math Proficiency (RaMP) (%)	Change in Proficiency Gaps, 2003-04 to 2004-05 (percentage points)		
				Black and White Students	Hispanic and White Students	Economically Disadvantaged and Non-disadvantaged Students
Thief River Falls	Challenger Elementary	849	82.8			15.6
Virginia	James Madison Elementary	367	85			13.6
Wadena-Deer Creek	Wadena-Deer Creek Senior	658	84.4			14.4
Wayzata	Wayzata High	3,083	88.8			8.7
West St. Paul-Mendota Hts.-Eagan	Friendly Hills Middle	698	82.3			11.7
White Bear Lake	Sunrise Park Middle	908	84.8			12.7
Worthington	Prairie Elementary	972	68		10.6	
	Worthington Senior	718	77.6			8.9
Average Change - Schools Making Progress		880	78.6	11.2	9.8	11.3
Average Remaining Gap - Schools Making Progress				32.4	30.9	20.6
Average Change - Statewide		455	77.3	3.3	3.7	3.3
Average Remaining Gap - Statewide				36.6	31.3	26.2
Reading and Math Proficiency rate and Enrollment data displayed are for 2004-05 unless otherwise indicated.						
Schools that have significantly narrowed the achievement gap for more than one set of student groups are highlighted in <b>boldface</b> .						

**Figure 7a: Minnesota Schools that are Significantly Narrowing Achievement Gaps, by Grade Level  
Black-White Achievement Gap**

District Name	School Name	Grade Level(s) in Which School Has Narrowed Gap	
		Reading	Math
Hopkins	Hopkins North Junior	Grade 7	Grade 7
	Hopkins Senior	Grade 7	Grade 7
Richfield	Richfield Middle	Grade 10	Grade 11
Robbinsdale	Plymouth Middle	Grade 7	Grade 7
St. Paul	Hazel Park Middle School Academy	Grade 7	Grade 7

**Figure 7b: Minnesota Schools that are Significantly Narrowing Achievement Gaps, by Grade Level  
Hispanic-White Achievement Gap**

District Name	School Name	Grade Level(s) in Which School Has Narrowed Gap	
		Reading	Math
St. James	St. James Armstrong Elementary	Grade 7	Grade 7
St. Paul	Highland Park Junior	Grade 5	Grade 3
Worthington	Prairie Elementary	Grade 5	Grade 5

**Figure 7c: Minnesota Schools that are Significantly Narrowing Achievement Gaps, by Grade Level  
“Economically Disadvantaged-Non-disadvantaged Students” Achievement Gap**

District Name	School Name	Grade Level(s) in Which School Has Narrowed Gap	
		Reading	Math
Anoka-Hennepin	Coon Rapids Middle	Grade 7	Grade 7
Austin	Ellis Middle	Grade 7	Grade 7
Brainerd	Washington Middle	Grade 7	Grade 7
Buffalo	Parkside Elementary	Grade 5	Grade 5
Burnsville	Metcalf Junior	Grade 7	Grade 7
Chaska	Chaska Middle East	Grade 7	Grade 7
	Chaska Middle West	Grade 7	Grade 7
Dassel-Cokato	Dassel-Cokato Middle	Grade 7	Grade 5
Hibbing	Lincoln Middle	Grade 5	Grade 5
Hopkins	Hopkins North Junior	Grade 7	Grade 7
Hutchinson	Hutchinson Park Elementary	Grade 5	Grade 5
Little Falls	Lindbergh Elementary	Grade 3, Grade 5	Grade 3
Mankato	Franklin Elementary	Grade 3	Grade 3
Minneapolis	South Senior	Grade 10	Grade 11
New Ulm	New Ulm Junior	Grade 7	Grade 7
North St. Paul-Maplewood	John Glenn Middle	Grade 7	Grade 7
	Richardson Elementary	Grade 3	Grade 3
	Tartan Senior	Grade 10	Grade 11
Northfield	Northfield Middle	Grade 7	Grade 7
Park Rapids	Park Rapids Area Century Middle	Grade 5	Grade 7
Perham	Prairie Wind Middle	Grade 5	Grade 5
Red Wing	Twin Bluff Middle	Grade 7	Grade 7
Richfield	Richfield Middle	Grade 7	Grade 7
Rochester	Gage Elementary	Grade 3, Grade 5	Grade 3
	Willow Creek Middle	Grade 7	Grade 7
South Washington County	Cottage Grove Junior	Grade 7	Grade 7
St. Francis	St. Francis Intermediate Elementary	Grade 5	Grade 5
St. James	St. James Northside Elementary	Grade 3	Grade 3
St. Louis Park	Cedar Manor Elementary	Grade 5	Grade 5
St. Paul	Capitol Hill Magnet/Rondo	Grade 7	Grade 5, Grade 7
	Expo/Harriet Bishop Center	Grade 3	Grade 3
	Ramsey Junior	Grade 7	Grade 7
Thief River Falls	Challenger Elementary	Grade 3, Grade 5	Grade 5
Virginia	James Madison Elementary	Grade 5	Grade 5
Wadena-Deer Creek	Wadena-Deer Creek Senior	Grade 7	Grade 7, Grade 11
Wayzata	Wayzata High	Grade 10	Grade 11
West St. Paul-Mendota Hts.-Eagan	Friendly Hills Middle	Grade 7	Grade 5, Grade 7
White Bear Lake	Sunrise Park Middle	Grade 7	Grade 7
Worthington	Worthington Senior	Grade 10	Grade 11

## Methodology

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For this report, Standard & Poor's analyzed changes in reading and math proficiency rates (RaMP) as well as individual grade-level tests over the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years, the most recent two-year period for which test data are publicly available.<sup>4</sup> These differences were used to determine which schools have narrowed the achievement gap between at least one set of student groups by more than five percentage points, while simultaneously increasing the RaMP of both groups being compared.

In addition to the overall achievement gap reduction represented by RaMP, the school must also narrow the achievement gap in at least one specific test for reading and math, although not necessarily in the same grade. For example, an elementary school might narrow the gap in third grade for reading, and fifth grade for math. For each of these tests, the schools must narrow the achievement gap between the same set of student groups by more than five percentage points, while simultaneously increasing the proficiency rates of both student groups being compared. This requirement serves to ensure that the school is not only making school-wide improvements (measured using RaMP), but has also managed to reduce achievement gaps in reading and math within a specific classroom or set of classrooms in a grade level.

Finally, to address issues of statistical significance, Standard & Poor's has limited its analysis to schools with sufficiently large populations of students within each student group being analyzed. To be considered, each student group must represent 30 students tested in the grade and subject for which the gap has been reduced. For example, to be recognized for narrowing its black-white achievement gap, a school must have at least 30 white students tested and 30 black students tested in each of the two assessments where the achievement gap has been reduced. This is not meant to discount the efforts of schools that have narrowed achievement gaps among student groups comprised of fewer students; it simply means that the margin of error in test results is large enough to reduce the confidence with which such data can be interpreted.

In summary, for the purposes of recognition in this report as having made significant progress in narrowing the achievement gap between student groups, each school must meet *all* of the following criteria:

- Must test at least 30 students in each student group being analyzed.
- Must reduce at least one achievement gap between student groups in RaMP rates by more than five percentage points from one year to the next; and simultaneously raise the RaMP rates for each student group being compared.
- Additionally, must reduce at least one achievement gap between student groups in a grade-level reading test by more than five percentage points from one year to the next; and simultaneously raise that grade-level reading proficiency rate for each student group being compared. Must demonstrate similar progress in math, though not necessarily in the same grade level.

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<sup>4</sup> Standard & Poor's calculates combined Reading and Math Proficiency rates (RaMP) for each student group assessed for schools, districts, and the state as a whole using state test data as reported by Minnesota's Department of Education, and can be explored further at [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com).

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