Outperforming School Districts in Kentucky, 2003-04

Summary Findings

A recent analysis by Standard & Poor's found that of the 171 school districts in Kentucky that have sufficient data for analysis, 18 school districts, or 10.5 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 4.3 to 81.4 percent economically disadvantaged, while achieving average proficiency rates in reading and math that range from 43.6 to 79.1 percent.

S&P believes that highlighting Kentucky's 18 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:

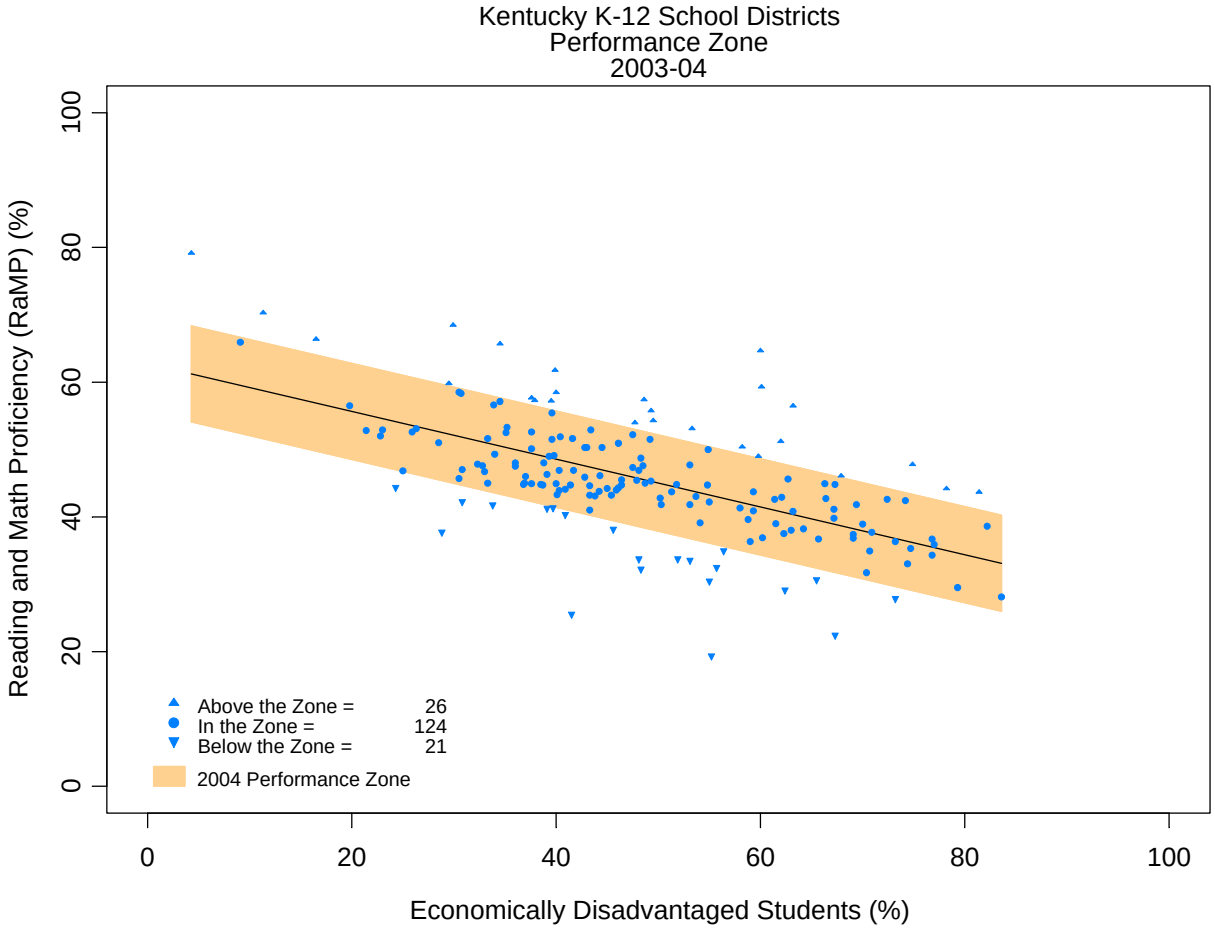
1. **School districts must achieve higher levels of student proficiency than peers.** Outperformers must report higher percentages of students that score at or above state standards on reading and math tests than other school districts that serve similar proportions of economically disadvantaged students.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

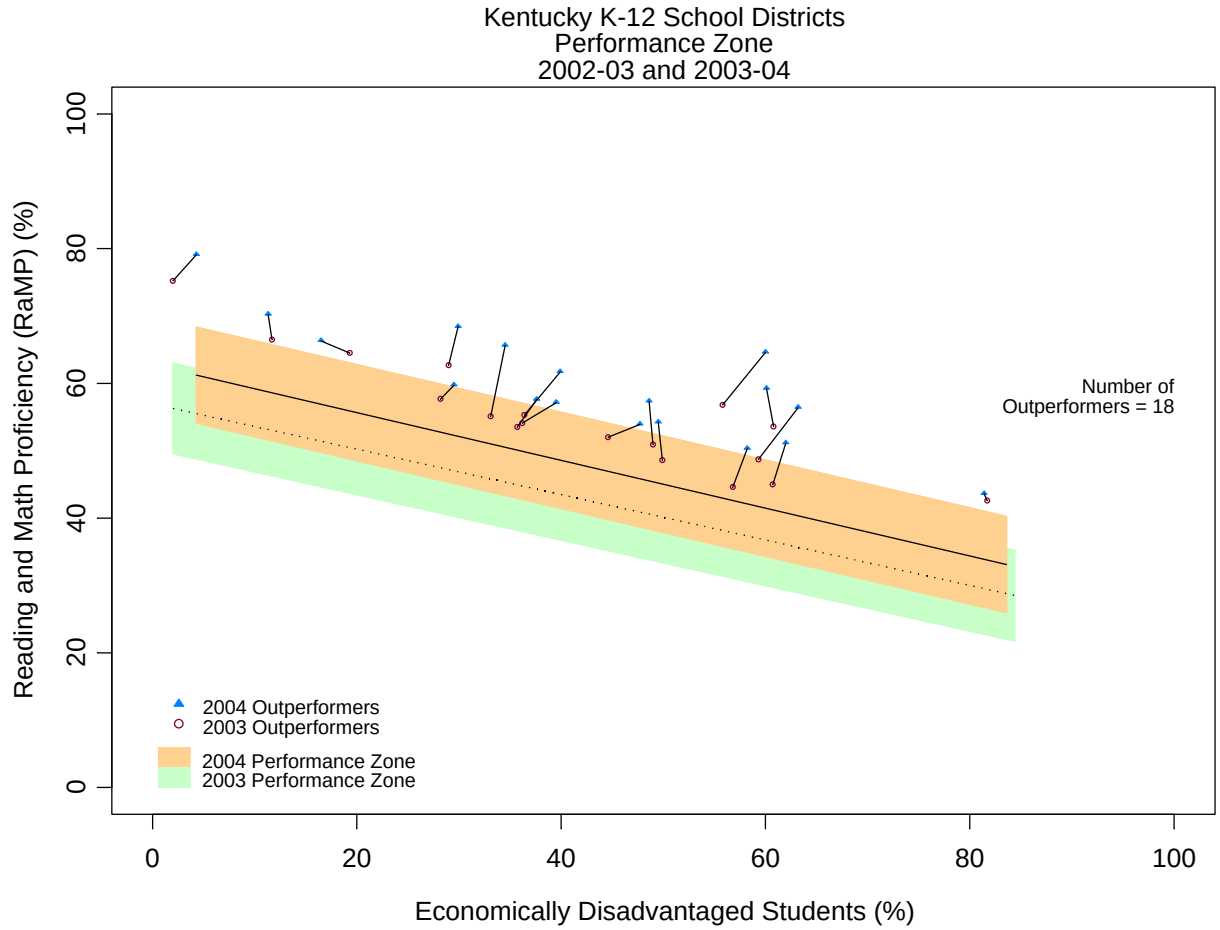
Looking for More about Outperformers?

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 Kentucky

Figure 2 shows the 18 school districts that have consistently outperformed their peers over the past two years (2002-03 and 2003-04). The great majority of these school 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



Kentucky's 18 outperforming school districts are listed in Figure 3 in alphabetical order.

Figure 3

Kentucky's Outperforming School Districts, 2003-2004

School District	County	Economically Disadvantaged (%)	Reading and Math Proficiency (RaMP) (%)
Bowling Green Independent	Warren	48.6	57.3
Daviess County	Daviess	29.9	68.4
Fort Thomas Independent	Campbell	4.3	79.1
Graves County	Graves	39.9	61.7
Hancock County	Hancock	34.5	65.6
Johnson County	Johnson	60.1	59.2
Marion County	Marion	49.5	54.2
Mason County	Mason	47.7	53.9
Mclean County	Mclean	39.5	57.1
Murray Independent	Calloway	29.5	59.7
Oldham County	Oldham	11.3	70.2
Owensboro Independent	Daviess	63.2	56.4
Paducah Independent	Mccracken	62.0	51.1
Russell County	Russell	58.2	50.3
Walton Verona Independent	Boone	16.5	66.3
Warren County	Warren	37.6	57.6
Williamsburg Independent	Whitley	60.0	64.6
Wolfe County	Wolfe	81.4	43.6
State Average		**44.7**	**46.9**

Data displayed are for the 2003-04 school year.

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