



## Press Release

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### **12 Virginia School Districts, 69 Schools Recognized by Standard & Poor's**

NEW YORK--Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services today recognized 12 Virginia school districts as academic "outperformers." This is the second consecutive year that 10 of these districts were identified as outperforming. In a separate analysis, Standard & Poor's announced it has identified 69 Virginia schools that have significantly narrowed the achievement gap between higher- and lower-performing student groups.

#### **Outperformers Analysis**

To be identified as an outperformer by Standard & Poor's, school districts, over the course of two consecutive school years (2003-04 and 2004-05), had to report significantly higher percentages of students that scored proficient or above on state reading and math tests than other school districts with similar levels of economically disadvantaged students. Of the 12 outperforming districts, 10 districts were recognized as outperformers last year by Standard & Poor's, and, therefore, have outperformed for three consecutive years (2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05).

Academic achievement levels were compared with the percentage of economically disadvantaged students because the two indicators are often correlated.

The 12 outperforming districts include Charlotte County Public Schools, Franklin County Public Schools, Halifax County Public Schools, Mecklenburg County Public Schools, Norfolk City Public Schools, Northampton County Public Schools, Patrick County Public Schools, Poquoson City Public Schools, Rockingham County Public Schools, Salem City Public Schools, Scott County Public Schools and West Point Public Schools.

Charlotte, Franklin, Halifax, Mecklenburg, Norfolk, Northampton, Rockingham, Salem, Scott and West Point were identified as outperforming school districts last year as well, meaning they outperformed for three consecutive years.

Standard & Poor's developed the analysis used to identify outperforming school districts as a way to highlight outstanding academic performance, and to help educators in school districts with similar characteristics identify appropriate benchmarks to guide their own improvements.

"Congratulations to these outstanding school districts," said Thomas Sheridan, vice president of Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services. "The data reveal that ongoing improvements are occurring in these Virginia classrooms. We hope that the effective strategies these districts are employing can be replicated or adapted elsewhere."

Achieving proficiency in reading and math for all students by 2014 is one of the goals of the federal No Child Left Behind law. Linking school districts in need of improvement with outperforming school districts that have similar student demographics so that effective practices can be shared, replicated or adapted is one method that can help educators reach that target.

Standard & Poor's conducted its analysis using state-reported data. Standard & Poor's used the state department of education's definition of economically disadvantaged students. Analysts determined academic performance by using the aggregate percentages of students scoring proficient or better on the state's reading and math tests.

## **Achievement Gap Analysis**

In analyzing available data, Standard & Poor's found 69 schools in 41 school districts that had narrowed the gaps in student achievement between black, Hispanic or economically disadvantaged students and their higher-performing classmates while simultaneously raising the average proficiency rates of the student groups being compared.

Standard & Poor's identified school districts in Virginia that significantly narrowed achievement gaps last year. This is the first year Standard & Poor's conducted this analysis at the school level.

To be recognized for significantly narrowing these achievement gaps, schools had to meet all of the following criteria:

- test at least 30 students in each student group being analyzed;
- reduce at least one achievement gap between student groups in Reading and Math Proficiency (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; and
- 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. Schools must demonstrate similar progress in math, though not necessarily at the same grade level. For example, an elementary school might reduce the achievement gap between black students and white students in third grade reading by at least five percentage points while raising reading proficiency rates for both black students and white students, while doing the same in fifth grade math.

“It is difficult to narrow achievement gaps,” explained Thomas Sheridan, vice president of Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services. “However, this analysis shows that there are a number of schools that have made outstanding progress. Their success should be commended, and their practices should be more closely examined to illuminate the strategies that can be implemented by educators in other parts of Virginia who are working hard to raise the performance of all students.”

Schools that narrowed the black-white achievement gap include:

Appomattox Elementary, part of Appomattox County Public Schools;  
Liberty High, part of Bedford County Public Schools;  
Great Bridge High and Indian River High, part of Chesapeake City Public Schools;  
Cumberland High, part of Cumberland County Public Schools;  
George Washington High, part of Danville City Public Schools;  
Irving Middle, Lake Braddock Secondary, Lanier Middle and Lorton Station Elementary, part of Fairfax County Public Schools;  
Central Elementary, part of Fluvanna County Public Schools;  
Franklin County High, part of Franklin County Public Schools;  
James Monroe High, part of Fredericksburg City Public Schools;  
Greensville County High, part of Greensville County Public Schools;  
Varina Elementary, part of Henrico County Public Schools;  
Magna Vista High, part of Henry County Public Schools;  
Hopewell High, part of Hopewell City Public Schools;  
King George Middle, part of King George County Public Schools;  
Heritage High, Park View High, River Bend Middle and Sterling Middle, part of Loudoun County Public Schools;  
E.C. Glass High, part of Lynchburg City Public Schools;  
Bluestone Middle, part of Mecklenburg County Public Schools;  
Riverside Elementary, part of Newport News City Public Schools;  
Granby Elementary, part of Norfolk City Public Schools;  
Occohannock Elementary, part of Northampton County Public Schools;

Northumberland Elementary, part of Northumberland County Public Schools; Forest Park High, Gar-Field High, Louise A. Benton Middle and Stonewall Jackson High, part of Prince William County Public Schools; Ni River Middle, Smith Station Elementary and Spotsylvania High, part of Spotsylvania County Public Schools; King's Fork Middle and Nansemond River High, part of Suffolk City Public Schools; and Thalia Elementary, part of Virginia Beach City Public Schools.

Magna Vista High, Hopewell High, Occohannock Elementary, Stonewall Jackson High and King's Fork Middle have the added distinction of having narrowed the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and all students.

River Bend Middle was noted for narrowing the achievement gap between Hispanic students and white students in addition to narrowing the black-white gap.

Seneca Ridge Middle, part of Loudoun County Public Schools; and Osbourn High, part of Manassas City Public Schools were recognized for narrowing the achievement gap between Hispanic students and white students.

Schools that narrowed the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and all students include:

Ft. Defiance High and S. Gordon Stewart Middle, part Augusta County Public Schools; William Campbell High, part of Campbell County Public Schools; Fort Belvoir Elementary and Kilmer Middle, part of Fairfax County Public Schools; Galax High, part of Galax City Public Schools; C.H. Friend Elementary, part of Halifax County Public Schools; Francis Mallory Elementary and Paul Burbank Elementary, part of Hampton City Public Schools; Hardy Elementary, part of Isle of Wight County Public Schools; Lancaster Primary, part of Lancaster County Public Schools; Larrymore Elementary, part of Norfolk City Public Schools; Northumberland Middle, part of Northumberland County Public Schools; Luray High, part of Page County Public Schools; Douglass Park Elementary, part of Portsmouth City Public Schools; Enterprise Elementary and Elizabeth Vaughan Elementary, part of Prince William County Public Schools; Albert Hill Middle, part of Richmond City Public Schools; Plains Elementary, part of Rockingham County Public Schools; Gate City Middle, part of Scott County Public Schools; Forest Glen Middle, part of Suffolk City Public Schools; Richlands High and Tazewell Middle, part of Tazewell County Public Schools; Brandon Middle, Brookwood Elementary, Frank W. Cox High and Landstown Middle, part of Virginia Beach City Public Schools; John S. Battle High, part of Washington County Public Schools; and L.F. Addington Middle, part of Wise County Public Schools.

To see how many percentage points and in which grades each school has narrowed these gaps, reporters should consult the analytical report on Virginia's achievement gaps, located on the Virginia homepage at [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com).

The analyses used to identify the outperforming districts and the schools that have narrowed achievement gaps also can be found on the Virginia homepage of [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com).

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