

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

### Summary Findings

This report represents Standard & Poor's first analysis of achievement gaps in Wisconsin, 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 20 schools that have significantly narrowed achievement gaps between the 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years. The schools are located in 19 school districts throughout the state. One school district—Madison Metropolitan School District—has two 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.

### Detailed Findings

<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.

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 that are trying to close achievement gaps while improving the achievement of all students.

Standard & Poor's has identified 20 schools (1.0 percent of Wisconsin's 1,936 schools, or 9.9 percent of the 202 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 9.9 percentage points in these 20 schools, compared with an average increase of 3.4 percentage points for the state as a whole (or 4.8 percentage points for the subset of schools statewide with sufficiently large student groups to be analyzed).

Of these 20 schools, one school has been recognized for reducing their black-white gap, two schools for narrowing their Hispanic-white gap, and 18 schools for narrowing their "economically-disadvantaged-non-disadvantaged students tested" gap. Particularly noteworthy is that one of these schools has 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	1	2	18
Number of Schools with Sufficient Data*—Statewide	36	22	196
<b>Percentage of Schools Narrowing the Achievement Gap</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>9.1%</b>	<b>9.2%</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> This school has narrowed the achievement gaps between Hispanic and white students, and between economically disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students. See **Figure 6** for the list of schools.

## Black-White Achievement Gap

The black-white achievement gap has been narrowed by 12.0 percentage points in the school being recognized, compared to the gap widening by an average of 0.2 percentage points for the state (or narrowing by an average of 1.0 percentage points for the schools with sufficiently large student groups to be analyzed). Black students in this school have increased their RaMP rates by 17.5 percentage points, while white students have improved by 5.5 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>17.5</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>23.0</b>
Schools with Sufficient Data*	5.3	4.3	1.0	31.5
State Average (Overall)	2.6	2.8	-0.2	38.5

\* 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 this school remains 23.0 percentage points. By contrast, the average achievement gap for the state is 38.5 percentage points (or 31.5 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 26.0 percentage points in two schools being recognized, compared to the gap narrowing by an average of 0.5 percentage points for the state (or widening by an average of 0.7 percentage points for the schools with sufficiently large student groups to be analyzed). Hispanic students in these two schools have increased their RaMP rates by 33.8 percentage points, while white students have improved by 7.8 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>33.8</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>19.0</b>
Schools with Sufficient Data*	4.6	5.3	-0.7	26.2
State Average (Overall)	3.3	2.8	0.5	26.0

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

There is still additional progress left to be made. The average Hispanic-white achievement gap for these schools remains at 19.0 percentage points. By contrast, the average Hispanic-white achievement gap for the state is 26.0 percentage points (or 26.2 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 14.3 percentage points in the 18 schools being recognized, compared to the gap narrowing by an average of 0.4 percentage points for the state (or 1.8 percentage points for the schools with sufficiently large student groups to be analyzed). In these 18 schools, economically disadvantaged students have raised their RaMP rates by 21.0 percentage points, while non-disadvantaged students have improved by 6.7 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>21.0</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>13.2</b>
Schools with Sufficient Data*	6.6	4.8	1.8	19.5
State Average (Overall)	3.1	2.7	0.4	25.3

\* 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 gap between economically-disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students in the schools being recognized remains at 13.2 percentage points. By contrast, the average achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students for the state is 25.3 percentage points (or 19.5 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 4	Grade 8	Grade 10
Reading	Black and White Students	none	1 school	none
	Hispanic and White Students	none	1 school	1 school
	Economically Disadvantaged and Non-disadvantaged Students	none	14 schools	4 schools
Math	Black and White Students	none	1 school	none
	Hispanic and White Students	none	1 school	1 school
	Economically Disadvantaged and Non-disadvantaged Students	none	14 schools	4 schools

For both reading and math, there are more schools that have managed to significantly reduce their achievement gaps in grade 8 rather than in grade 10, while no schools were recognized for closing the achievement gap in grade 4. 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 20 schools in Wisconsin that have significantly narrowed at least one achievement gap between student groups from 2003-04 to 2004-05. **Figure 6** 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 6: Wisconsin Schools that are Significantly Narrowing Achievement Gaps**  
*Listed alphabetically by school district*

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
Altoona School District	Altoona Middle School	435	87.0			15.0
Appleton Area School District	Roosevelt Middle School	452	82.0			17.1
Ashland School District	Ashland High School	809	82.0			10.0
Baraboo School District	Baraboo Middle School	700	79.1			6.7
Beloit School District	Memorial High School	1,938	60.5			7.0
Brown Deer School District	Brown Deer Middle School	614	80.0	12.0		
Eau Claire Area School District	Delong Middle School	929	80.0			10.0
Green Bay Area School District	Preble High School	2,145	77.5		13.6	
Madison Metropolitan School District	Black Hawk Middle School	440	81.5			23.1
	<b>Cherokee Heights Middle School</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>84.0</b>		<b>38.4</b>	<b>20.4</b>
Menomonee Falls School District	North Junior High School Campus	753	81.5			17.0
Neenah School District	Neenah High School	2,167	77.0			11.0
New Richmond School District	New Richmond Middle School	621	84.0			17.5
Oak Creek-Franklin School District	Oak Creek High School	1,743	82.0			17.5
Rice Lake Area School District	Rice Lake Middle School	585	92.0			8.5
Sheboygan Area School District	Horace Mann Middle School	716	81.0			17.7
Superior School District	Central Middle School	1,193	75.5			12.5
Wausau School District	Horace Mann Middle School	947	85.0			16.9
West Allis School District	Frank Lloyd Wright Middle School	802	85.0			11.9
Wisconsin Rapids School District	East Junior High School	786	84.5			17.5
Average Change - Schools Making Progress		967	81.1	12.0	26.0	14.3
Average Remaining Gap - Schools Making Progress				23.0	19.0	13.2
Average Change - Statewide		436	76.2	-0.2	0.5	0.4
Average Remaining Gap - Statewide				38.5	26.0	25.3
Reading and Math Proficiency rate are for 2004-05 while Enrollment data are for 2003-04.						
Schools that have significantly narrowed the achievement gap for more than one set of student groups are highlighted in <b>boldface</b> .						

**Figure 7a: Wisconsin 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
Brown Deer School District	Brown Deer Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8

**Figure 7b: Wisconsin 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
Green Bay Area School District	Preble High School	Grade 10	Grade 10
Madison Metropolitan School District	Cherokee Heights Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8

**Figure 7c: Wisconsin 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
Altoona School District	Altoona Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8
Appleton Area School District	Roosevelt Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8
Ashland School District	Ashland High School	Grade 10	Grade 10
Baraboo School District	Baraboo Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8
Beloit School District	Memorial High School	Grade 10	Grade 10
Eau Claire Area School District	Delong Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8
Madison Metropolitan School District	Black Hawk Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8
	Cherokee Heights Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8
Menomonee Falls School District	North Junior High School Campus	Grade 8	Grade 8
Neenah School District	Neenah High School	Grade 10	Grade 10
New Richmond School District	New Richmond Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8
Oak Creek-Franklin School District	Oak Creek High School	Grade 10	Grade 10
Rice Lake Area School District	Rice Lake Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8
Sheboygan Area School District	Horace Mann Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8
Superior School District	Central Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8
Wausau School District	Horace Mann Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8
West Allis School District	Frank Lloyd Wright Middle School	Grade 8	Grade 8
Wisconsin Rapids School District	East Junior High School	Grade 8	Grade 8

## 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 Wisconsin's Department of Education, and can be explored further at [www.schoolmatters.com](http://www.schoolmatters.com).



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