

2003–04

## Are Kansas City Students Prepared To Succeed?

A closer look at the performance of  
Kansas City, Missouri, district and charter schools

PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN

IS IT GOOD  
FOR THE  
CHILDREN?<sup>SM</sup>

KANSAS CITY'S PROMISE  
THE ALLIANCE FOR YOUTH



*Produced with support from the  
Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation*



The school performance reports would not have been possible without the cooperation and assistance of the Kansas City, Missouri School District and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

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*Photos by Mark McDonald.*

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## INTRODUCTION

As technology permeates every aspect of daily life, today's jobs require higher levels of skills and knowledge than ever before. To earn a decent salary and support a family, workers need a solid education, particularly in core subjects such as communication arts, math and science.

The United States has long been considered a leader in education, which has helped us maintain our worldwide economic leadership. But studies show that U.S. students now trail their international peers in math and science performance. This is a significant concern because technology and globalization are making it easier for companies to look abroad for highly skilled workers if they are unable to fill their needs at home for the same cost.

Recognizing that America's economic leadership is threatened because not all students are receiving a solid educational foundation, the federal government enacted the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law in 2002. The law requires all students to be proficient in reading and math — the foundation for all learning — by 2014. Over the next 10 years, districts and schools will be required to make annual yearly progress toward that goal and to report their progress to the public. If they do not make their annual targets, they will have to take various steps, such as allowing parents to transfer their children to better-performing schools or providing free tutoring to students.

In Missouri, state leaders have worked to improve student achievement by raising academic standards, holding educators more accountable for student achievement,

providing parents with more choices through charter schools and offering additional resources to help support student learning. In addition, Missouri officials currently are reviewing recommendations from a task force commissioned by the state board of education aimed at better preparing students for college. The recommendations include increasing the number of English, science, math and social studies courses needed for graduation and implementing a high-stakes graduation exam that students must pass to earn a diploma.

At the same time, recognizing that improvement takes time, Missouri recently decided to lower the annual yearly progress goals it set in 2003 to meet NCLB requirements. However, the state pledges to meet the NCLB goal of 100 percent proficiency by 2014.

### Improving performance in Kansas City, Missouri, district and charter schools

At the local level, district and charter schools in Kansas City have been working hard to put these policies into action and raise student performance. However, teachers, principals, other school leaders and students cannot do it alone. To ensure that our students have



the chance to prosper and the community has the well-educated workforce it needs to thrive, everyone needs to be involved in school improvement efforts.

One way that Partnership for Children (PFC), the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation (EMKF), other community organizations, businesses and religious groups have been working to raise district and charter school performance is by encouraging more parents to be involved in their children's education. Research shows that when parents are involved, students do better in school.

PFC provides a variety of resources to support parents and other community members in these efforts (see page 10); its district and school performance reports are one tool for getting started.

### **Using the PFC performance reports**

The performance reports include district- and school-level data on Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test scores, along with information on student absenteeism and graduation and dropout rates. The reports also look at each school's enrollment, the qualifications of the school's teachers, class size and school expenditures. The data were supplied by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

These are the types of information that the federal government requires states and school districts to report and that the state uses to decide whether a district should be accredited. They also are the types of information that parents and teachers in Kansas City district and charter schools said were important

to them, according to focus group interviews conducted in fall 2002.

**Data alone cannot create district and school improvement.** That is up to teachers, students, parents and others working together. The findings on the following pages focus on the test score results, but many factors contribute to performance, including characteristics of the student population, student-teacher ratio and percentage of teachers who are qualified to teach their subjects. Each school is unique and faces unique challenges. Use the findings in this report and the district and school performance reports as a stepping stone to find out:

- what is going well and why;
- what is not going well and why;
- what district and school leaders, teachers, parents, and others can learn from schools that are improving and/or doing well;
- how they are using what they find out; and
- what you can do to help Kansas City's children succeed.

### **Pay careful attention to the trends.**

One year's worth of information alone is less valuable than looking at performance over a few years. But also bear in mind that trends may be deceptive in schools with smaller student populations, where a single student's success or failure can have a greater impact on a school's total results in a given year.

**Go beyond the averages.** Look at more than just the percentages of students who are performing at the highest levels. Notice whether students are moving out of the lower performance levels. Pay attention to how different groups of students and different schools are performing.

## **Visit [www.pfc.org](http://www.pfc.org) to find out more about district and school performance.**

This report summarizes key findings from district and individual school performance reports produced by Partnership for Children (PFC). Much more data is available on PFC's website ([www.pfc.org](http://www.pfc.org)), including online comparisons of individual school performance on test scores, attendance and other indicators.

Often there are hidden pockets of good news that can provide valuable information for school improvement efforts.

### **Talk to the district advisory committee, school advisory committee, principals, and other district and school leaders about what you see.**

The district and schools have a wealth of information that goes well beyond what is provided in these reports. Principals should be able to answer questions and provide more detail. They also should be able to tell you how you can best support the learning of children in Kansas City, both at home and through volunteer efforts at school.

### **Work with educators to help students.**

The district offers a number of programs and has formed partnerships with other organizations to improve student learning and school performance. Supporting these efforts by volunteering your time and professional expertise is one of the many ways you can get involved. Educators cannot do this alone. They need your help.

## WHAT DO THE PERFORMANCE REPORTS TELL US?

The following section uses data from Partnership for Children's (PFC) district and school performance reports to provide a closer look at how students in the Kansas City, Missouri School District (KCMSD) and charter schools performed on the 2003–04 Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests.

MAP tests are administered several times during students' schooling:

- Grade 3 (communication arts and science);
- Grade 4 (math and social studies);
- Grade 7 (communication arts and science);
- Grade 8 (math and social studies);
- Grade 10 (math and science); and
- Grade 11 (communication arts and social studies).

These tests measure how well students meet the state academic standards, which describe what students should know and be able to do in each subject. Students' scores fall into one of five categories (listed from highest to lowest): Advanced, Proficient, Nearing Proficient, Progressing or Step 1.

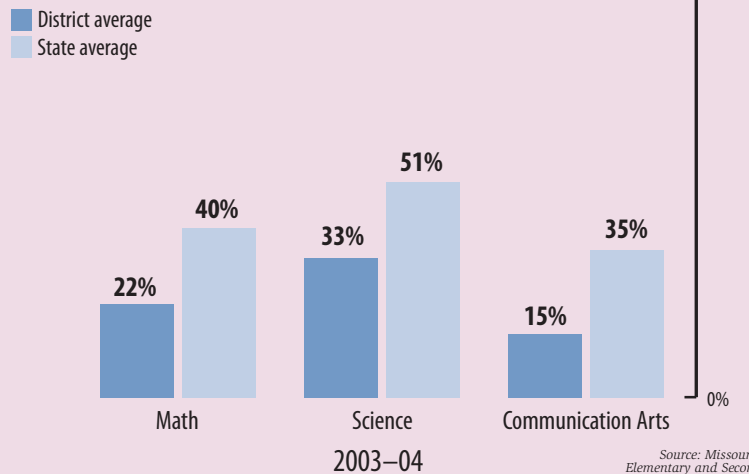
To meet the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind law, all students must perform at proficient levels by 2014. In Missouri, proficiency is defined as scoring Advanced or Proficient on the MAP. Therefore, the PFC district and school performance reports focus on the percentage of students scoring in these two top categories.

The social studies and science tests are not currently required or funded by the state. Science will be required in 2008, so many districts and schools still administer the test. However, very few administer the social studies test, so this report

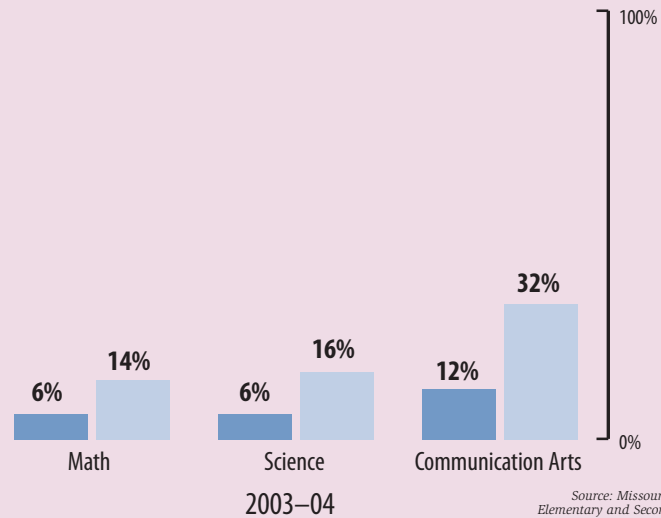
### The Big Picture Elementary Schools Doing Best

#### ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

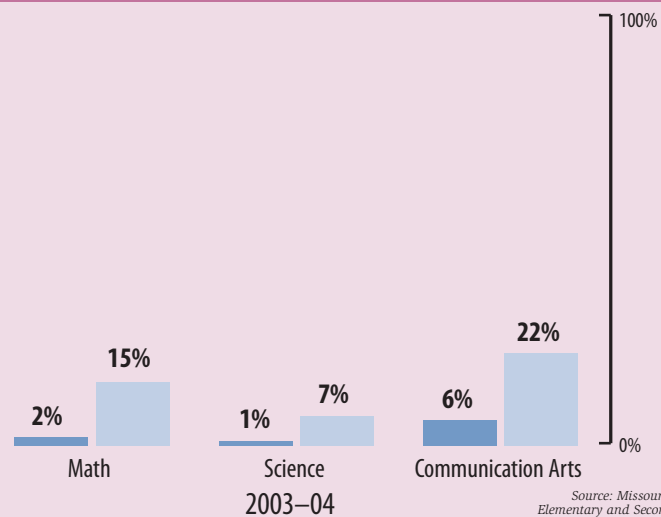
Percentage of students scoring at Advanced or Proficient on the MAP



#### MIDDLE SCHOOL



#### HIGH SCHOOL

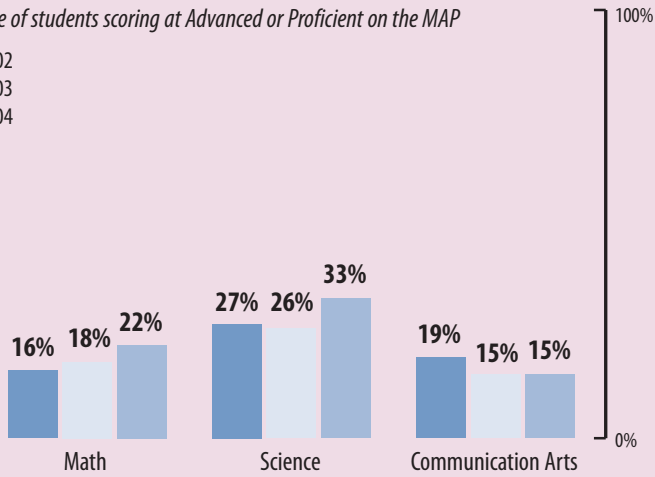


**Finding 1**  
**Achievement Up in Elementary Math, Science**

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

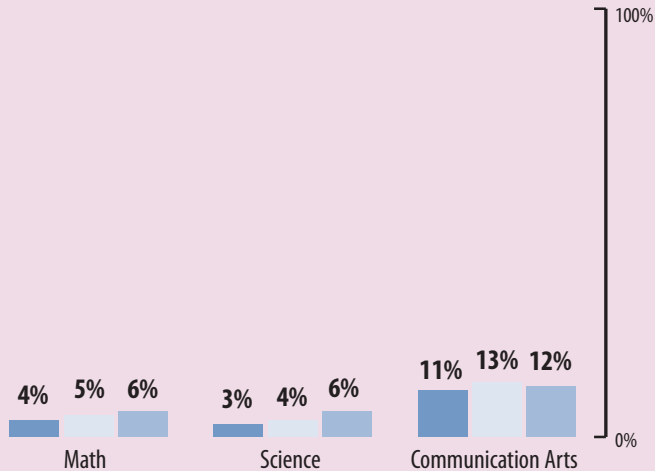
Percentage of students scoring at Advanced or Proficient on the MAP

■ 2001-02  
■ 2002-03  
■ 2003-04



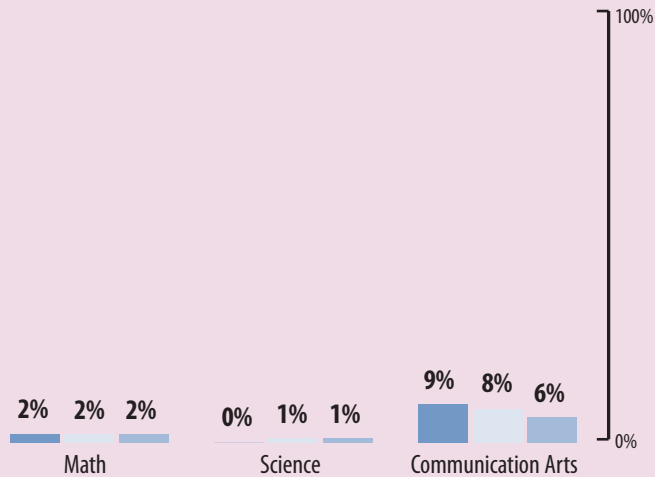
Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

**MIDDLE SCHOOL**



Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

**HIGH SCHOOL**



Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

focuses only on communication arts, math and science results.

In addition, the MAP results in these reports may vary slightly from MAP results you see in other places. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education uses data on school performance to meet a variety of needs, all with different reporting requirements, so in some places MAP results may include only certain portions of the student population. The PFC reports include all students.

**1. Performance of elementary schools has improved in two of three core subjects but still trails the state averages. Middle and high school performance remains low.**

In 2003-04, proficiency levels for elementary school students ranged from a high of 33 percent of students scoring Proficient or above on the state science test to a low of 15 percent performing that well in communication arts. Since PFC began producing the district and school performance reports in 2001-02, the percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced has increased by six percentage points in both math and science.

However, although these results provide some encouraging news, elementary schools still are not performing well enough. Results for communication arts have declined slightly, and district averages in all three subjects trail the state by 18 to 20 percentage points.

At the middle and high school levels, performance has been relatively flat. In 2003-04, middle school proficiency levels ranged from a high of 12 percent in communication arts to a

low of 6 percent in science and math. **High school** proficiency levels ranged from 6 percent in communication arts to 1 percent in science. The difference in district performance between elementary school and the upper grades in all three subjects is striking, but particularly in math and science. State averages also show lower levels of performance in the upper grades.

These results simply are not good enough. Far too many of our students are not learning the knowledge and skills they need to meet the demands of today's workplaces. State, district and school leaders and community members — including parents, businesses, and community and religious groups — need to ask themselves why students in the upper grades are performing at such low levels and what they can do to help students, teachers and principals improve achievement in all grades. Only by raising performance throughout the educational experience will we ensure that all of our students have the opportunity to succeed.

### *Some positive exceptions*

At the school level, however, some schools are excelling, including schools with large populations of low-income students. Nationally, a large achievement gap separates low-income students from their more affluent peers, but some KCMSD schools are proving that the gap can be closed.

- **McCoy Elementary School**, which is 91 percent low income, scored higher than the state average in science and communication arts. In science, 90 percent of McCoy students scored Proficient or Advanced on the MAP. The state average in that subject was far lower (51 percent). In

communication arts, 72 percent of McCoy students versus 35 percent of state students scored in the top two levels.

- **J.S. Chick Elementary School**, which is 76 percent low income, continues to shine. Just as it did in 2002–03, the school outpaced the state and district averages in math, science and communication arts.
- At the middle and high school levels, **Lincoln College Preparatory**, a grade 6–12 school, also continued to do well. Lincoln students performed at or above the state average in all four grades tested in communication arts, science and math, with the exception of grade 10 math.

## **2. More elementary and middle schools met adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals in 2003–04, but high schools continue to underperform.**

To ensure that schools are making steady progress toward the goal of having all students proficient by 2014, the federal No Child Left Behind law requires districts and schools to set annual benchmarks for performance in communication arts and math and to report progress toward those goals. The district and schools as a whole must make the annual goals and so must each group of students: white, black, Hispanic, Asian, low income, special education and students learning to speak English.

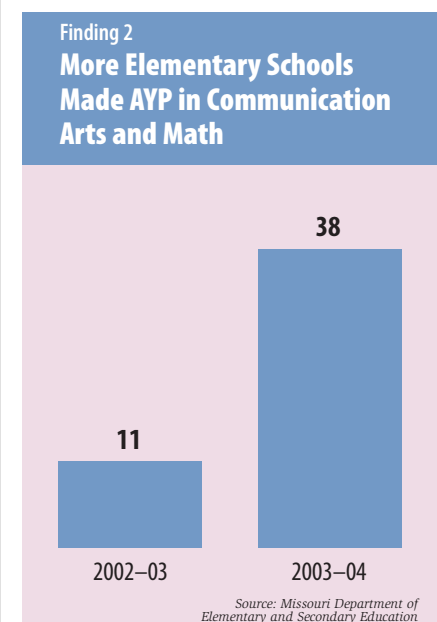
In 2003, Missouri set AYP goals through 2013, leading up to 100 percent proficiency in 2014. The goals were ambitious, and the state recently relaxed them to remove some of the pressure from districts and schools, many of which were struggling to ramp up improvements quickly. However, the goal of 100

percent proficiency by 2014 remains in place.

Even with the ambitious 2003 benchmarks, more elementary and middle schools made AYP in 2003–04 than in 2002–03.

- Thirty-eight **elementary schools** made AYP in both math and communication arts in 2003–04, more than three times the number that cleared this bar in 2002–03. All but one elementary school made the annual goal in at least one subject.
- Four **middle schools** made AYP in both subjects, and another eight made it in one subject. This is an improvement from 2002–03, when only one school made AYP in both subjects, and only another three schools made it in one subject.

However, at the high school level, only **Lincoln College Preparatory** made AYP in both subjects. In 2002–03, Lincoln made AYP only in communication arts and was the only high school to meet the goal in even one subject.



### 3. Elementary science continues to be an area of relative strength, with steady gains in performance each year, but performance is not nearly as strong in middle and high school.

In our increasingly technical, knowledge-driven workplaces, science and math skills are more vital than ever. Companies report drastic shortages of highly skilled workers who can perform the research and development needed to keep the United States on the leading edge of technological advances, even while countries such as India are producing larger numbers of Ph.D.s who can fill this void, often at lower costs. To reverse this trend and ensure that both the United States and individual citizens prosper, students need to graduate high school with a solid foundation in science and math skills.

At the **elementary school** level, the news is encouraging. Although not all schools in the state administered the science test in 2003–04, all KCMSD schools and all except five

Kansas City charters did. Among the district and charter schools that gave the test, elementary schools continue to perform better in science than in other subjects:

- average elementary school performance increased 7 percentage points, rising from 26 percent to 33 percent of students scoring Proficient or above on the state test.
- 12 elementary schools had fewer than 10 percent of students scoring in Step 1 and Progressing (the bottom two levels of MAP). Six schools had 5 percent or fewer students in the bottom two levels.

Even some elementary schools with large populations of low-income students performed well in science.

- Of the 11 elementary schools that scored higher than the state average, 10 had 75 percent or more low-income students, including **Milton Moore Elementary School** (96 percent low income), **Whittier Elementary School** (93 percent low income) and **Wendell Phillips Elementary Magnet** (87 percent low income).

- **Fairmount Elementary School**, which is 86 percent low income, not only scored higher than the state average, but it also had 0 percent of students in either of the bottom two MAP performance levels.

However, performance is dramatically lower at the higher grade levels.

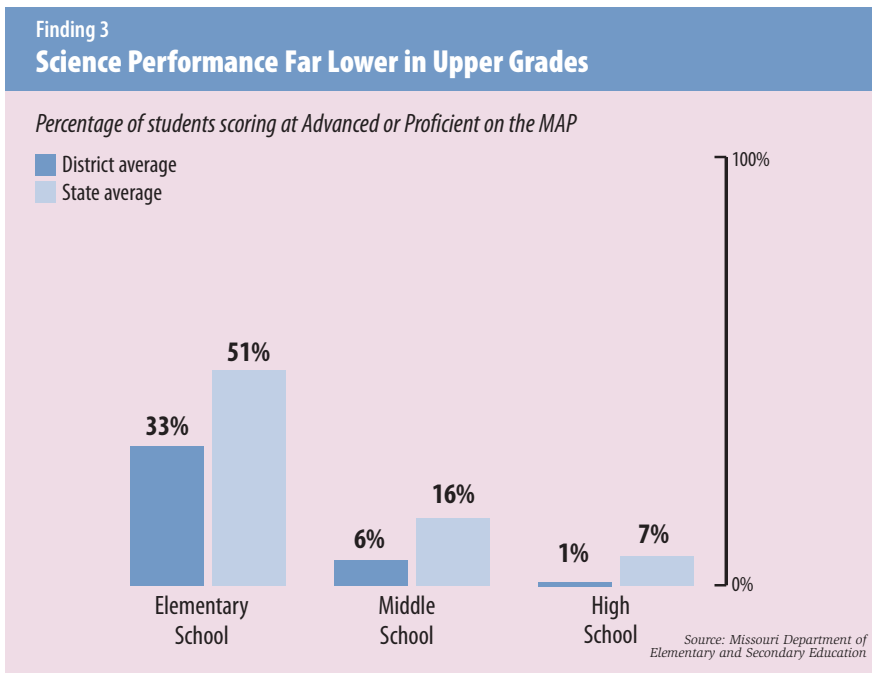
- At the **elementary school** level, an average of 33 percent of students scored Proficient or Advanced.
- At the **middle school** level, only 6 percent of students scored in the top two levels.
- At the **high school** level, only 1 percent of students scored in the top two levels.

These trends mirror results at the state and national levels. Parents, teachers and other school leaders should ask themselves what is helping students improve performance at the elementary level and how that can be translated to middle and high school.

### 4. Many elementary schools also are making progress in improving performance in math.

Like science, math skills are increasingly important in today’s high-tech workplaces. Yet almost one-quarter (22 percent) of first-year college students require remedial coursework to catch up in math, according to the 2003 National Center for Education Statistics report *Remedial Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions in Fall 2000*. Students who go directly into the workplace also frequently need remedial training in math skills, costing the companies that hire them valuable time and money.

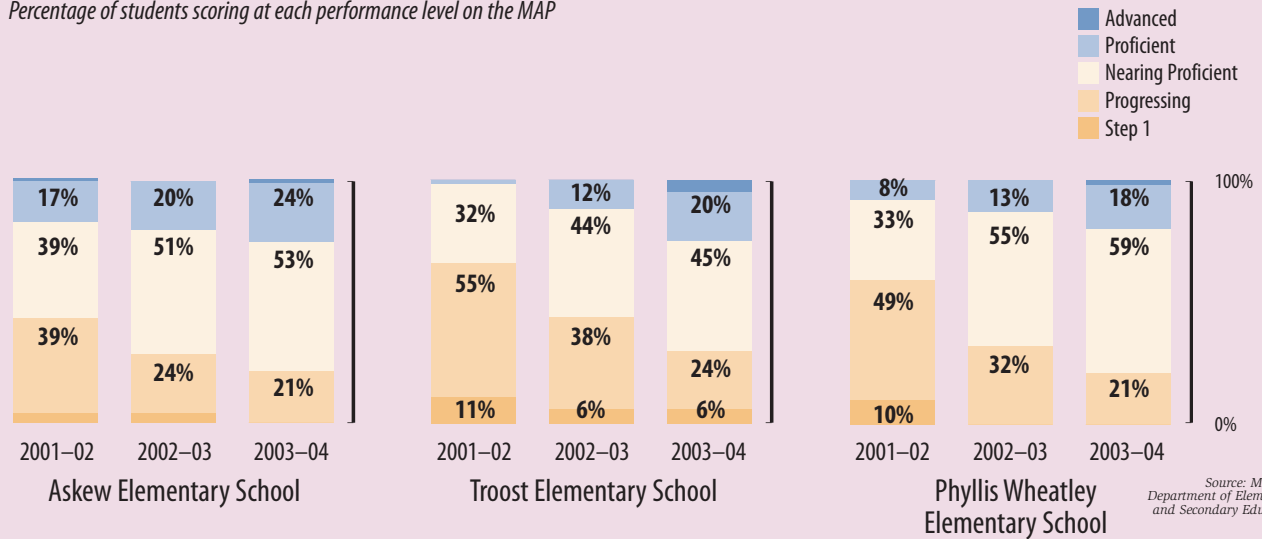
Although the district average in elementary math is not as high as it



## Finding 4

## Some High-Poverty Schools Improving in Grade 4 Math

Percentage of students scoring at each performance level on the MAP



is in elementary science, many **elementary schools** have been making progress in improving student performance in this subject. Between 2001 and 2004:

- 60 percent of elementary schools increased the portion of students performing at Advanced or Proficient levels by more than 10 percentage points.
- 65 percent of elementary schools decreased the portion of students in Step 1 and Progressing (the bottom two levels on MAP) by more than 10 percentage points.

In addition, in 2003-04, seven elementary schools scored higher than the state average in grade 4 math.

Another encouraging sign is that even some elementary schools that are not among the district's top performers have made significant progress in reducing the percentage of students in the bottom two levels on MAP and increasing the percentage of students in the top two levels. Included are schools with large populations of low-income students, such as **Askew Elementary School** (90 percent low

income), **Troost Elementary School** (88 percent low income) and **Phyllis Wheatley Elementary School** (92 percent low income).

### 5. Like district schools, elementary charters are making progress in some subjects, but performance remains low in middle and high school charters.

Charter schools are independent public schools designed to foster educational choice and innovation and to support community needs. They are not subject to many of the regulations that guide district schools, but they are held accountable for student achievement, and their students must take statewide tests.

Only two cities in Missouri currently have charter schools — St. Louis and Kansas City. The first charter schools in Kansas City opened in fall 1999, and to date, the performance of charter students and schools mirrors that of the district — elementary schools are showing progress, but results are far lower in middle and high schools.

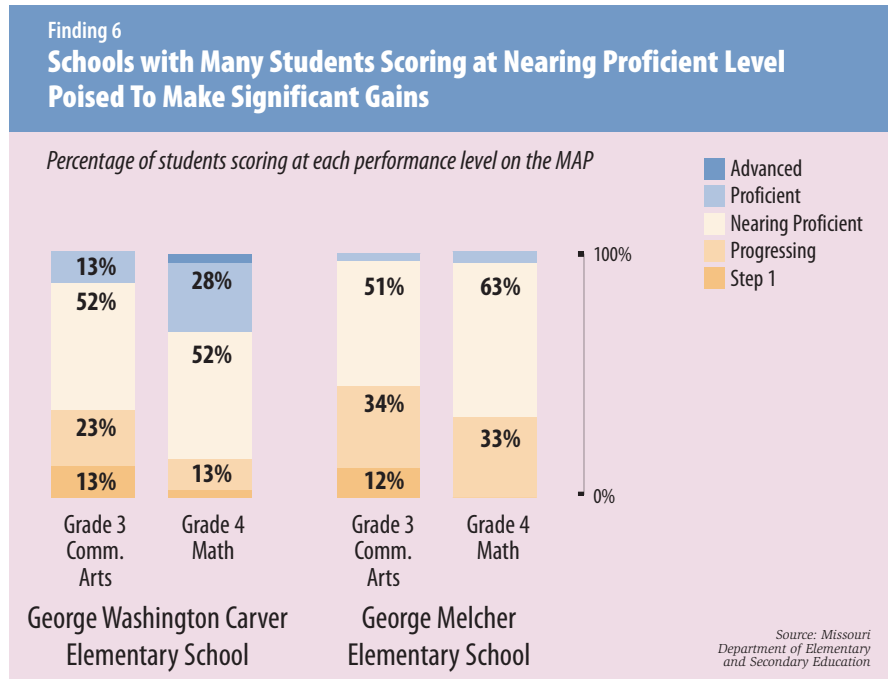
- At the **elementary school** level, six of eight charter schools that have been open for three years showed improved performance in grade 3 communication arts. Four of 10 charter schools scored higher than the district average.
- In grade 4 math, five of eight charter schools that have been open for three years showed improved performance. Six of 10 charter schools scored higher than the district average.
- At the **middle school** level, only three of 11 charters showed improved performance over three years in grade 7 communication arts, and four scored higher than the district average.
- In grade 8 math, three charters showed improved performance; the remaining eight stayed the same or declined. Three outperformed the district.
- At the **high school** level, only one charter — **University Leadership Academy** — showed improved performance over three years, and even that school only improved in math. However, it still outperformed the district average in math, communication arts and science.

### 6. Focusing on the percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced on the state tests masks some encouraging data.

Because the No Child Left Behind law focuses on raising students to the level of proficiency and Missouri defines proficiency as scoring Advanced or Proficient on the MAP tests, much of the analysis of the test results focuses on the percentage of students scoring in these top two levels.

But as reported in the results for grade 4 math (page 7), focusing solely on those two levels can hide some encouraging trends. For example, a school with few students in the top two categories but a large percentage of students in the Nearing Proficient category is performing far better than a school with the same percentage of students in the top two categories but more students in the bottom two.

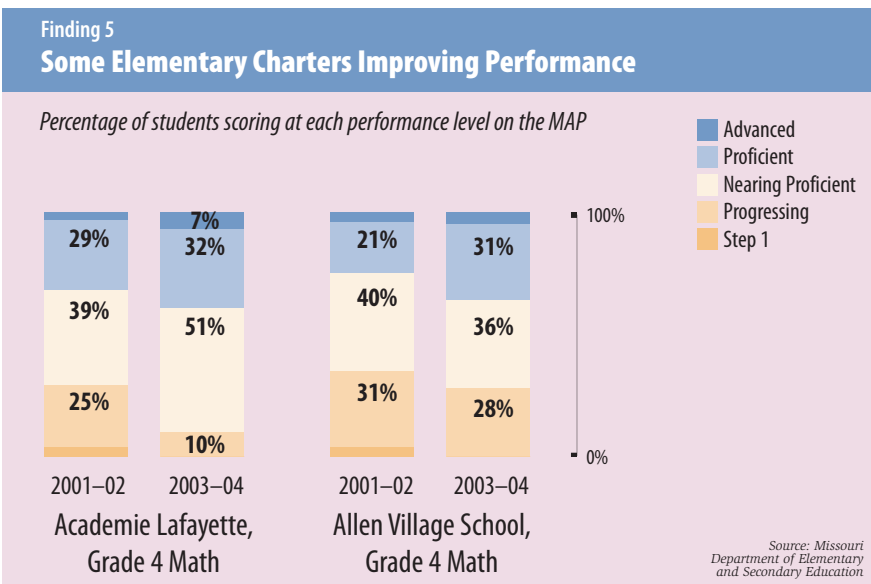
- **George Melcher Elementary School** had only 2 percent of students scoring in the top two MAP levels in grade 3 communication arts, but 51 percent scored Nearing Proficient. In grade 4 math, 5 percent of its



students performed at the Advanced or Proficient level, 63 percent at Nearing Proficient, and 33 percent Progressing. Better yet, 0 percent of its students performed at Step 1 (the lowest level of achievement).

- Only 13 percent of **George Washington Carver Elementary School's** students performed in the top two levels in grade 3 communication arts, but more than half of its students (52 percent)

scored just one level lower (Nearing Proficient). Increasing the percentage of students scoring Advanced or Proficient by just 2 percentage points would bring the school in line with the district average. Similarly, in grade 4 math, 32 percent of Carver's students scored Advanced or Proficient, but 52 percent scored Nearing Proficient, which means that only 15 percent of its students performed in the bottom two levels.



## HOW CAN WE IMPROVE DISTRICT PERFORMANCE?

### Find out more

The findings in this report are just the beginning. Principals, teachers, school advisory committees, parents and others have much more information about district, school and student performance. Ask them questions: What is the district doing to improve performance? What are individual schools doing? What is going right in the schools that are making improvements? Do they have a new curriculum, tutoring or a new after-school program, more involved parents, or new leadership?

In particular, look at schools with large populations of low-income students that are performing well to see whether those schools can be used as models for improving the performance of other schools across the district. Do these schools have higher percentages of teachers who are fully certified? Do they have smaller student populations? Are their students doing better because the schools are smaller and students' learning experiences are more personal?

Every school has programs and incentives for improving student achievement. Find out what schools are doing. For example:

- The **Academy of Kansas City** has developed a partnership with Swope Renaissance Corridor to create an after-school program that provides accelerated math and reading programs. The school also issues Praise Reports daily to acknowledge students' accomplishments, and the Principal's Wall of Fame shows off exemplary student work.
- **C.A. Franklin Elementary School** holds a family fair once a month to help parents become more involved in their child's learning. The fair includes classes in parenting, learning along with your children, family communication and how to help children deal with the pressure in their lives.
- **J.A. Rogers Middle School** is partnering with the Whatsoever Community Center to support strong parental involvement and community relationships.
- **Whittier Elementary School** leaves its library media center open until 5:30 p.m. so parents can go there and read with their kids.
- At **Sugar Creek Elementary School**, students receive books for their birthdays to add to their personal libraries and increase home/school involvement.

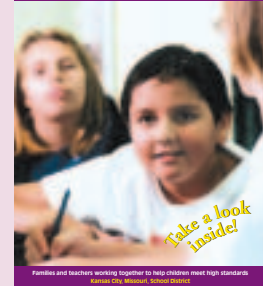
### Resources from PFC

PFC provides many other resources to find out more about school and student performance. In addition to individual school reports, PFC provides online comparisons, at [www.pfc.org](http://www.pfc.org), that let you see at a glance how each school is doing compared to other schools and to the district and state averages on key performance indicators. PFC also provides grade-by-grade standards guides that show what students should know at each grade level and give tips for how parents can help their children at home in communication arts, math, science and social studies.

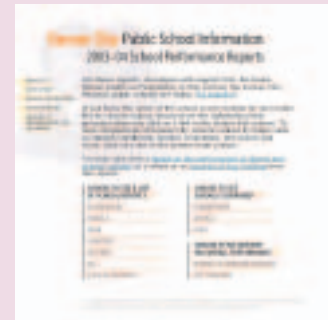
Beyond these resources, PFC trains parents and other community members to take an active role in improving student learning. These stakeholders then put their training

### More resources from PFC

Do you know what your fifth grader is learning in school?



PFC's **standards guides** show what students should know and be able to do at each grade level and provide tips for how parents can help their children at home.



PFC's **website** ([www.pfc.org](http://www.pfc.org)) includes district and school performance reports and online comparisons of individual school performance on test scores, attendance and other indicators.

to use teaching other parents how to be involved.

PFC also reaches out to schools to help improve parental involvement. Through the Empowering Parents in the Classroom (EPIC) program, PFC is helping 20 district schools develop goals and detailed plans for

improving parental involvement. The plans are targeted to the specific needs of each school and include goals such as:

- Increasing parent participation in school advisory committee meetings, parent-teacher conferences and other school-related activities.
- Increasing the skills of individual parents to help their children with their homework and to support their education.
- Increasing the capacity of schools to improve parental involvement by training parents on understanding the standards.

To help schools meet their goals, PFC is providing assistance in areas such as recruiting parents, training parents to understand and use the standards guides, training parents to understand and use the school performance reports, developing parent leaders to assist schools in successfully engaging other parents, and training school staff on reaching out to and including parents.

## WHO WE ARE

Partnership for Children published these reports with support from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. KSA-Plus Communications and School Wise Press prepared the school performance reports and the accompanying online school comparisons.

### Partnership for Children (PFC)

PFC is Greater Kansas City's leading children's advocacy organization. Created in 1991 to improve conditions for children and youth in Kansas City's five-county metropolitan area, PFC stands for the

principle that children are our most valuable and vulnerable natural resource. It is essential that everyone in this community work together to make this a great place to be a kid.

PFC, working in collaboration with the Kansas City, Missouri School District (KCMSD), has launched a parental involvement campaign aimed at building a partnership between parents, teachers and school administrators to improve the educational achievement of children in the KCMSD. You can get more information about Partnership for Children at [www.pfc.org](http://www.pfc.org).

### Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation (EMKF)

EMKF works with partners to encourage entrepreneurship across America and improve the education of children and youth. EMKF was established in the mid-1960s by the late entrepreneur and philanthropist Ewing Marion Kauffman. More information about the EMKF is available at [www.kauffman.org](http://www.kauffman.org).

### KSA-Plus Communications

KSA-Plus Communications believes that schools belong to the public. And the more information parents and community members have about their schools, the more able they are to make good decisions for kids and to work with educators to improve schools for everyone.

The nation's leading education public affairs firm, KSA-Plus has expertise in publishing school performance reports, building public awareness about them, and training educators and parents on how to use them. The team has worked closely with communities in Missouri and Kansas, as well as many others. Working

with partners, KSA-Plus developed school performance reports in Kansas City, Missouri, that inform, engage and educate. KSA-Plus also designed and wrote standards guides for parents and community members in Kansas City, Missouri and Kansas, to help them know what their children should know and be able to do from one grade to the next.

The company is based in Arlington, Virginia, with offices in suburban Maryland; Portland, Oregon; and Seattle. You can get more information about KSA-Plus Communications at [www.ksaplus.com](http://www.ksaplus.com).

### School Wise Press

School Wise Press is a publishing company dedicated to helping parents get school-smart. Since its inception in 1995 as a publisher of guidebooks to California schools, the firm has broadened its services to include accountability reporting, online comparisons of schools, newsletters, books, and a range of news and opinion features on its website, [www.schoolwisepress.com](http://www.schoolwisepress.com). Clients include school districts, libraries, realty firms, parents and foundations.

Visit [www.pfc.org](http://www.pfc.org) to find out more about district and school performance in Kansas City, Missouri.

- See how all district and charter schools are performing overall — and compared to the state averages.
- Read a short report on each individual school.
- Compare schools to each other on indicators ranging from test scores to teacher qualifications.

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