

# MPS has ups, downs in urban ranking

## Reading better, math worse than other cities' schools

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Test score data released Wednesday for dozens of urban school districts across the United States suggest that kids in Milwaukee Public Schools may be doing better in reading and worse in math than kids in schools in other large cities.

Perhaps of equal importance, the increase in the percentage of students who are scoring proficient or better in reading and math has been stronger in other urban districts than in MPS, the report shows, which could mean that Milwaukee is not making the progress that many other places are making in closing performance gaps.

Comparisons in the report from the Council of the Great City Schools, an organization that advocates for 66 large school districts, are tentative because of the different definitions of *proficient* used by states and school systems across the country. In other words, what it means to be proficient in reading in Milwaukee may or may not be comparable to what it means in any of the other school districts.

That said, 59% of fourth-graders in MPS were proficient or better in state reading tests given in the 2005-'06 school year. Nationwide, 55% of urban fourth-graders were proficient or better. For eighth-graders, the figures for reading were 56% in MPS and 42% nationally.

But significantly smaller portions of MPS students were at least proficient in math: 41% in fourth grade here, compared with 59% nationally, and 36% in eighth grade here, compared with 46% nationally.

Better reading and worse math proficiency in MPS than in urban districts as a whole held true over the last several years, the report indicates.

The report stressed trends in test scores across the U.S., on the assumption that trends could be compared better than specific results, and found generally good news in urban districts. The overall percentage of students who are reading and doing math at proficient levels has risen in recent years, and gaps between racial and ethnic groups have narrowed in many places.

"Urban schools are clearly increasing the number of students scoring above proficiency levels and decreasing the numbers at the lowest, contributing to overall progress where America wants it most," said Michael Casserly, executive director of the urban schools

council. He said the trends show that "urban kids can meet the highest standards," though there is still a lot of work to do.

But while the percentage of U.S. urban fourth-graders who were proficient or better in reading increased 7 percentage points, to 55%, from the 2002-'03 through the 2005-'06 school years, the percentage in Milwaukee dropped 2 points, to 59%. In fourth-grade math, the national result went up 8 percentage points, to 59%, while the MPS result went down 5 percentage points, to 41%. In eighth-grade reading and math, progress in MPS also trailed the nation.

MPS spokeswoman Roseann St. Aubin said Superintendent William Andrekopoulos was traveling Wednesday but had seen the results. She said he thinks the data underscore the need to pursue efforts under way in MPS, especially those involving weak schools that have come under more centralized control of their education programs this year.

She said the data did not reflect the results of this year's round of statewide testing, and Andrekopoulos is confident that those results - to be released in late May - will show improvements.

The council's report did not give trend data for high school grades.