

## Success?

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going the other way."

Much of the disparity is related to problems originating outside the schools, such as poverty and unstable living situations, that threaten the success of students in every urban school district in America.

But community leaders and some residents argue that the Madison School District, with its slogan "Success for All," has set a higher standard that can be approached if the community's considerable resources are harnessed.

For the community as a whole, the racial disparity in achievement is likely to take on increased significance in coming years as the district — and the community — continue to become more racially diverse. African Americans comprise one in 10 members of this year's senior class, but two in 10 members of its first-grade class.

Though imperfect as a measure of achievement, GPAs and scores from standardized tests remain the chief forms of assessing students' accomplishments and often determine who gets into advanced



**MORE ONLINE:** See Most on Madison (<http://www.madison.com>), for a link to the 1993-94 statewide School Performance Report. The report contains text and data that may be viewed and downloaded. Information includes districts' student test scores, enrollment, attendance, dropout rates and school finances.

teaching techniques and climate we have in our school system," Mickler said.

However, John Matthews, executive director of Madison Teachers Inc., the teachers union, said the district's extensive employee-training program has kept institutional racism from becoming a serious problem.

Madison, he said, has the finest training program in the country "on how to deal with different types of kids, different learning styles and different types of cultures."

### Poverty, grades linked

Disparities in achievement levels parallel economic and demographic trends in Madison.

During the first half of the 1990s, the number of poor black students began to exceed poor whites, although overall, blacks are outnumbered 5-1. Black students are six times more likely than whites to be poor.

Student test scores also reflect a district of haves and have-nots.

Madison whites are achieving at academic levels matched at few other places. Their average 10th grade test scores, for example, ranked at the 88th percentile, meaning they bettered 88 percent of all students who took the test nationwide.

On the same test, Asians fared nearly as well as whites, at the 81st national percentile.

For Hispanics, the average ranking was the 68th national percentile.

For blacks, it was the 43rd national percentile.

The Madison gap ranks: ■ Largest among nine districts in an analysis of Third Grade Reading Test scores.

■ Second-largest among seven districts in an analysis of Eighth Grade Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) scores.

■ Largest among seven districts in an analysis of 10th Grade WSAS scores.

Wilhoite and other district officials said they don't know why Madison third-graders' scores rank below the state average, or why the districts' students fare much better in the eighth and 10th grade tests. They are investigating.

### Report echoes findings

Many State Journal findings are echoed by a recently formed citizens group, Allied for Children's Education, which examined similar data in a study that will be released today.

The group was formed last year to lobby for a neighborhood school for the low-income, racially diverse Allied Drive area but has ranks last among those districts.

■ Grade point averages — the scores obtained through day-to-day school work — of Madison blacks in the ninth, 10th, 11th and 12th grades fell or remained stagnant while those of whites climbed.

The disparities shrink slightly in the last two years of high school, largely because disproportionate numbers of blacks drop out. But at all four grade levels, the GPA gap grew by nearly a quarter-point (on a four-point scale). It now surpasses a full grade point for ninth- and 10th-graders.

The average GPA for a black Madison freshman is equivalent to a D+.

### Part of a pattern

Madison schools superintendent Cheryl Wilhoite said the achievement disparities fit into a larger, troubling pattern that also involves disproportionate numbers of blacks being disciplined and placed into special education classes.

"There are significant differences," Wilhoite said. "And the major factor appears to be race."

Wilhoite said she has become convinced that blacks' lagging performance is due, in part, to a form of institutional racism that pervades the school district: Expectations of blacks are lower, at times, than those of whites. Teachers, at times, fail to find ways to teach and discipline children of diverse backgrounds.

"I wouldn't point fingers at the faculty and staff," Wilhoite said. "It's the whole institution."

Mickler said the schools and community should follow the example of other urban areas and make fundamental changes in the way they handle students who don't come from typical white, middle-class, two-parent households.

"Something is wrong with the

some African-American parents, district officials this year discarded race from the formula that determines which schools receive millions of dollars to pay for extra teachers and programs to aid students with the highest risk of failure. District officials contend it's better to use poverty status in the formula because, they argue, low household incomes are a slightly stronger predictor of low grades.

School district researchers say that, overall, no single factor appears to influence more than about a fifth of a student's performance. And the biggest single factor, they say, is poverty. That is followed by race — particularly being African American — and a variety of other factors such as living in a single-parent household, parents' education levels and how often a student changes residences. Frequent moves are often a signal that a family is unable to afford its housing or is involved in some turmoil such as a marriage breaking up.

It is difficult, researchers say, to precisely determine how much of a role a specific factor plays because numerous factors may be present in a student's family.

As a result, a study designed to measure one factor may end up measuring additional influences. For example, two-thirds of the black students live in low-income households, so an analysis of black students' performance also becomes, in many respects, an analysis of the effects of poverty.

### Race disparity detailed

New district research helps shed light on factors linked to success, and to academic struggles. The research, performed at the request of reporters working on the Schools of Hope project, used student records to quantify, for the first time, who is succeeding — and who is not — in high school.

■ Blacks are four times more likely than whites to be low achievers (scoring below the 50th percentile on the state 10th Grade Test).

■ Among low-achieving students, blacks are eight times more likely to be poor than are whites.

■ Single-parent households are three times more prevalent among high-achieving blacks than among high-achieving whites.

■ Regardless of achievement level, blacks are substantially more likely than whites to have been suspended from school and to have higher levels of unexcused absences. Blacks with low achievement levels had the highest rates of suspensions and unexcused absences.

In addition, researchers provided a comparison of how test scores vary according to race and poverty status.

A key question emerges from that data: If poverty is the strongest indicator of academic success, why do poor white students score higher on standardized tests than black students who aren't poor?

The gap between poor whites (those eligible for free and reduced-price lunches) and blacks who aren't poor is 7 percentile points on the state Eighth Grade Test. It is 2 percentile points on the state 10th Grade Test.

Many district officials say the achievement gap illustrates difficulties in educating African-American students who, in increasing numbers, show up at school with characteristics linked to lower academic achievement.

Significant changes in the past five years include:

■ The percentage of African-American high school students listed as low-income grew from 45 to 50. Among whites, poverty increased from 5 to 6.

■ The mobility factor — the number of students moving into or out of a school during a school year — soared among black high school students from 64.6 to 99.5. Among whites, it held steady at 23.9. The rates are increased by some students who move more than once during the year.

But district critics, including an increasingly vocal segment of the African-American community, charge that the district isn't putting enough energy into finding the right answers and isn't serious about living up to its motto, "Success for All."

"We definitely need more of a comprehensive plan of action, for our kids to develop the way we want them to develop," Martin Hull, vice president of the local chapter of 100 Black Men, said this month while visiting two roomfuls of students at Mendota Elementary School on Madison's North Side.

Like scores of other residents, Hull, youth program coordinator at the Broadway-Simpson-Waunona Neighborhood Center, is brimming with ideas: Teachers should spend time in their students' neighborhoods and develop rapport with children from a wide range of racial and economic backgrounds; parents need to feel welcome to visit schools and speak with teachers; businesses should help employees find time to volunteer in schools.

"It takes everybody," Hull said.

— State Journal reporter Phil Brinkman contributed to this report.

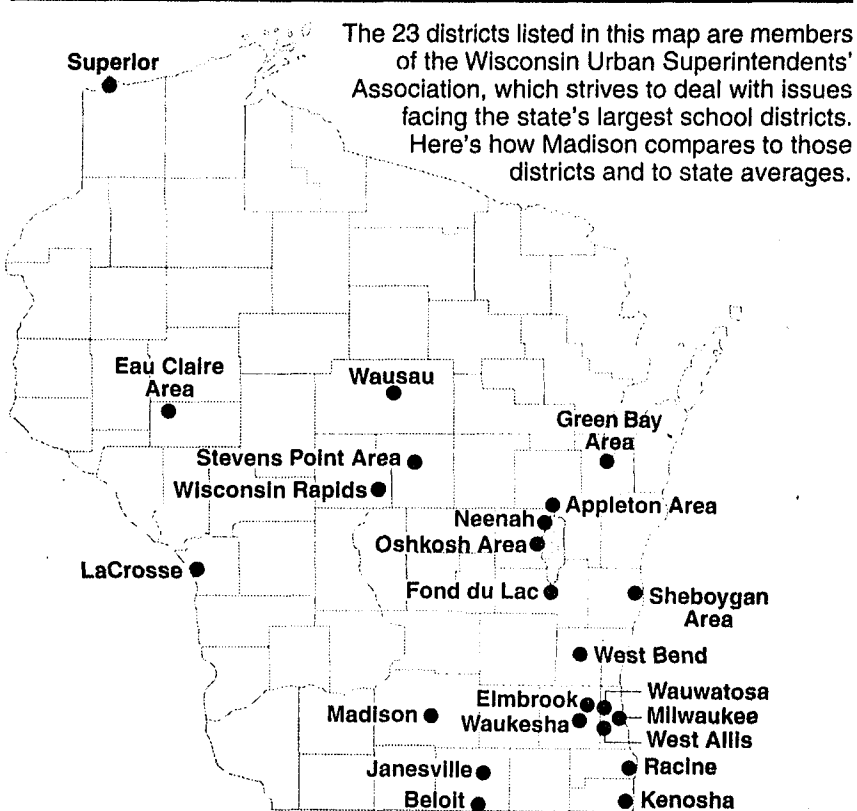
## 1995-96 test scores listed by race

**THIRD GRADE:** Third Grade Reading Test. Listed: Percentage of students performing above the state standard that demonstrates appropriate reading performance for a "marginal" third-grade student.

**EIGHTH GRADE:** Eighth Grade Wisconsin Student Assessment. Listed: Percentage of a perfect score attained on Average Grand Composite Scores, covering tests on reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies and language. A perfect score is 246.

**TENTH GRADE:** 10th Grade Wisconsin Student Assessment. Listed: Average Grand Composite Score as described above.

### Largest school districts



### Dane County

Here's how Madison compares to other Dane County districts. Listed are test scores for all students and white students. Districts outside Madison contained too few students of other races for comparison.

#### THIRD GRADE

All students	
Cambridge	100
Oregon	96
Waunakee Community	95
DeForest Area	93
Deerfield Community	93
Middleton-Cross Plains	93
Verona Area	92
McFarland	89
Stoughton Area	89
Mount Horeb Area	88
Belleville	87
Sun Prairie Area	86
Marshall	85
MADISON	84
Monona Grove	82
Wisconsin Heights	82
White students	
Cambridge	100
Oregon	97
Waunakee Community	95
DeForest Area	93
Deerfield Community	93
Middleton-Cross Plains	93
Verona Area	93
MADISON	91
McFarland	91
Mount Horeb Area	89
Stoughton Area	89
Belleville	87
Sun Prairie Area	87
Marshall	86
Monona Grove	83
Wisconsin Heights	82

All students	
Cambridge	100
Oregon	97
Waunakee Community	95
DeForest Area	93
Deerfield Community	93
Middleton-Cross Plains	93
Verona Area	93
MADISON	91
McFarland	91
Mount Horeb Area	89
Stoughton Area	89
Belleville	87
Sun Prairie Area	87
Marshall	86
Monona Grove	83
Wisconsin Heights	82

#### EIGHTH GRADE

All students	
Verona Area	72
DeForest Area	71
Mount Horeb Area	71
Middleton-Cross Plains	70
Waunakee Community	70
McFarland	69
Monona Grove	69
MADISON	69
Oregon	69
Wisconsin Heights	69
Belleville	68
Deerfield Community	67
Stoughton Area	67
Cambridge	66
Marshall	66
Sun Prairie Area	63
White students	
Verona Area	72
MADISON	71
DeForest Area	71
Mount Horeb Area	71
Middleton-Cross Plains	71
Monona Grove	70
Waunakee Community	70
Deerfield Community	69
McFarland	69
Wisconsin Heights	69
Oregon	69
Stoughton Area	67
Belleville	67
Cambridge	66
Marshall	66
Sun Prairie Area	65

All students	
Verona Area	72
MADISON	71
DeForest Area	71
Mount Horeb Area	71
Middleton-Cross Plains	71
Monona Grove	70
Waunakee Community	70
Deerfield Community	69
McFarland	69
Wisconsin Heights	69
Oregon	69
Stoughton Area	67
Belleville	67
Cambridge	66
Marshall	66
Sun Prairie Area	65

#### TENTH GRADE

All students	
Middleton-Cross Plains	73
MADISON	71
Cambridge	71
McFarland	71
Monona Grove	71
Verona Area	71
Waunakee Community	70
Oregon	70
Wisconsin Heights	70
Verona Area	69
DeForest Area	69
Sun Prairie Area	69
Mount Horeb Area	67
Stoughton Area	67
Deerfield Community	65
Marshall	65
Belleville	64
White students	
Middleton-Cross Plains	74
MADISON	73
Cambridge	72
McFarland	71
Monona Grove	71
Verona Area	71
Waunakee Community	70
Wisconsin Heights	70
DeForest Area	69
Oregon	69
Sun Prairie Area	69
Mount Horeb Area	68
Stoughton Area	67
Deerfield Community	65
Belleville	64
Marshall	64

#### THIRD GRADE

All students	
Elmbrook	95
Janesville	95
Neenah	95
Wauwatosa	95
LaCrosse	93
West Allis	93
West Bend	93
Kenosha	92
Oshkosh Area	92
Waukesha	92
Sheboygan Area	91
State average	88
Beloit	88
Green Bay Area	88
Stevens Point Area	88
Wausau	88
Eau Claire Area	87
Fond du Lac	86
Racine	85
MADISON	84
Appleton Area	82
Wisconsin Rapids	82
Superior	76
Milwaukee	75
White students	
Wauwatosa	97
Elmbrook	96
Janesville	95
Kenosha	94
LaCrosse	94
Neenah	94
Waukesha	93
West Allis	93
West Bend	93
Beloit	92
Oshkosh Area	92
State average	91
MADISON	91
Sheboygan Area	91
Eau Claire Area	90
Racine	90
Green Bay Area	89
Milwaukee	88
Stevens Point Area	88
Wausau	88
Fond du Lac	86
Appleton Area	83
Wisconsin Rapids	83
Superior	77

White students	
Elmbrook	73
Wauwatosa	72
MADISON	71
Green Bay Area	70
Neenah	70
Wausau	69
Eau Claire Area	69
LaCrosse	69
Waukesha	69
Appleton Area	68
Racine	68
Fond du Lac	68
Oshkosh Area	68
State average	67
West Bend	67
Kenosha	67
Stevens Point Area	67
Janesville	65
Sheboygan Area	65
Wisconsin Rapids	65
West Allis	64
Beloit	63
Superior	63
Milwaukee	63

Black students	
Green Bay Area	86
Wauwatosa	85
West Allis	81
Kenosha	80
Beloit	80
Elmbrook	78
Racine	71
State average	70
Milwaukee	69
MADISON	56
Asian students	
Green Bay Area	97
Elmbrook	96
Oshkosh Area	91
Waukesha	90
Wausau	90
State average	86
Sheboygan Area	85
Stevens Point Area	85
Milwaukee	83
LaCrosse	82
MADISON	81
Appleton Area	60
Eau Claire Area	58

Hispanic students	
Sheboygan Area	90
Beloit	89
Kenosha	85
MADISON	83
State average	80
Waukesha	78
Milwaukee	75
Racine	74

#### EIGHTH GRADE

All students	
Elmbrook	72
Neenah	69
MADISON	69
Wauwatosa	69
Wauwatosa	69
Eau Claire Area	68
LaCrosse	68
Waukesha	67
Green Bay Area	67
Oshkosh Area	67
West Bend	67
Appleton Area	67
Fond du Lac	67
Sheboygan Area	67
Stevens Point Area	66
State average	66
Janesville	65
Kenosha	65
Wisconsin Rapids	65
West Allis	63
Racine	62
Superior	62
Beloit	61
Milwaukee	52

White students	
Elmbrook	73
Wauwatosa	72
MADISON	71
Green Bay Area	70
Neenah	70
Wausau	69
Eau Claire Area	69
LaCrosse	69
Waukesha	69
Appleton Area	68
Racine	68
Fond du Lac	68
Oshkosh Area	68
State average	67
West Bend	67
Kenosha	67
Stevens Point Area	67
Janesville	65
Sheboygan Area	65
Wisconsin Rapids	65
West Allis	64
Beloit	63
Superior	63
Milwaukee	63

Black students	
Elmbrook	59
Wauwatosa	54
Beloit	54
MADISON	52
Kenosha	51
State average	49
Racine	48
Milwaukee	48
Asian students	
Elmbrook	74
MADISON	67
Stevens Point Area	65
Eau Claire Area	63
Wausau	63
State average	63
LaCrosse	61
Appleton Area	57
Green Bay Area	56
Milwaukee	56
Oshkosh Area	54
Wisconsin Rapids	53

Hispanic students	
West Allis	67
MADISON	60
State average	57
Kenosha	57
Appleton Area	56
Waukesha	56
Racine	55
Milwaukee	52

#### TENTH GRADE

All students</
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