



EXTRA ordinary DISTRICTS

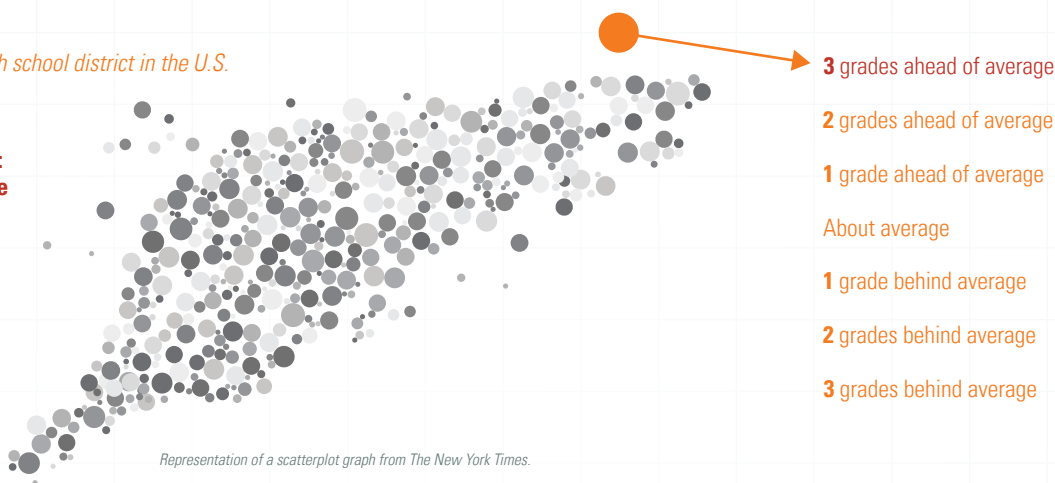
Ordinary school districts that get extraordinary results

ExtraOrdinary Districts is a podcast from The Education Trust that demonstrates the power that schools and school districts have to educate all children, regardless of background. To identify leading districts, we used an analysis of almost 12,000 districts done by a team led by Stanford University's Sean Reardon.

Episode 2: Lexington, Massachusetts

Educational attainment in each school district in the U.S.

Lexington, Massachusetts:
3.8 grade levels above average



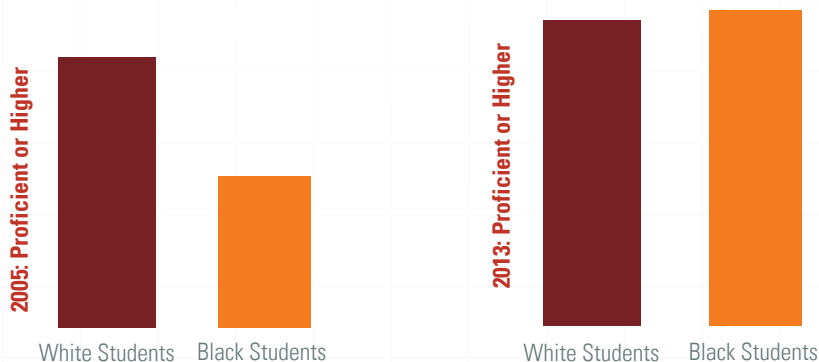
POORER ← Parents' socioeconomic status → RICHER

Why focus on Lexington? Lexington, Massachusetts emerged as the district where third through eighth graders perform at the very top of the nation — 3.9 grade levels above the average. But there's another way it stands out: Unlike other wealthy, mostly White school districts, it does not have large achievement gaps between its White students and its African American and Hispanic students, or between its students from high-income families and low-income families. And at the high school level, just about every 10th grader — of every group of students — has scored proficient or advanced on the Massachusetts high school graduation test for several years running. It's important to note that this was not always the case. In 2005, African American, Hispanic, and low-income students were significantly behind their White peers. This dramatic improvement raises the question: What did Lexington do?

Basic Facts

- 6,925 Students
- 4% Black
- 3% Hispanic
- 6% English language learners
- 60% White
- 5% Economic disadvantage
- Number of schools: 10
- 14% Students with disabilities
- Graduation rate:**
- Lexington: 97%
- Massachusetts: 87.5%

English Language Art Mass.10th Grade Graduation Test





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What contributed to Lexington's improvement?

Lexington's superintendent recognized the district's achievement problem and determined to solve it. Initially, he focused on ensuring that African American and Hispanic students were better served and brought together a wide array of teachers, school leaders, and parents to come up with ideas to solve the problem of the gap in achievement.

Within a year, he shifted the focus slightly, recognizing that although poor performance by African American and Hispanic students was easily identifiable, there were other students who were failing to achieve in similar ways. Thus, the solutions initially designed to help a subsection of students became available to any student who needed help.

Such solutions included temporary, mandatory tutoring that would kick in any time a student faltered without waiting for the semester or year-end grades.

But administrators also there recognized that classroom instruction needed improvement. This was not easy to admit — Lexington teachers were used to being thought of as being among the best. But over time, they realized that if they were to ensure that all students learn at high levels, they would have to join together in deep collaboration about instruction.

Lexington underwent an intense round of professional development, much of it aimed at developing professional learning communities, which provide a structure for teacher collaboration. Although this initially required a considerable investment of resources (some of which came in the form on one-time federal funds after the 2008 financial crisis), Lexington no longer spends much on outside professional development. Instead, it holds regular "Lexington Learns" days, in which educators from the district learn from each other.

At every stage, Lexington educators have chosen meaningful ways to measure whether what they were doing succeeded in improving students' academic achievement and sense of well-being, as measured by surveys. When what they were doing seemed successful, they continued and expanded. When not, they abandoned. In this way, they kept a focus on continual improvement.

What can other districts learn from Lexington?

- Disparities in achievement can be difficult for educators to face head on and take responsibility for. But a superintendent who makes it clear that achievement gaps are unacceptable and helps support teachers and principals through a process of improvement can have a huge effect.
- Systems of improvement mean not only focusing on additional help for students but ensuring that teachers and principals continually improve their knowledge and skills. They also need to be able to sit together to monitor their progress and make any necessary adjustments.
- Parents can be an important voice in any kind of school improvement process, but time and effort must be put into building trust with parents.