Editor’s Note: The Summer 2012 issue of the CURA Reporter launched our Neighborhood Map series with maps showing 2011 housing values in Minneapolis and St. Paul neighborhoods. In this issue, we look at school performance, and shift our focus from individual neighborhoods to the schools themselves and their attendance areas. Because these data are available statewide, we also present school performance across the entire seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan region. The Neighborhood Map series will appear in future issues as space allows.

Educational opportunities are one of the most important reasons for choosing a place to live, at least for families with children. In this article, we present maps of school performance in the third and eighth grades in the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. The measures we use are third-grade reading scores and eighth-grade math scores.1

In every case, we map the data by school attendance area. Typically, these areas represent “neighborhood” schools, but it is worth noting that many children attend school elsewhere. Statewide, some 30% of Minnesota’s K–12 public-school students take advantage of some form of school choice, including open enrollment, charter schools, and magnet schools.2 In addition, 10% of all school-age children in Minnesota are in nonpublic schools, including both home schools and private schools.

We map each school-performance measure across four or five data classifications, with class boundaries.

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1 These data are available from the Minnesota Department of Education’s online Data Center (education.state.mn.us/MDE/Data). We thank the University of Minnesota’s Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity, which provided us with a mapping-ready version of the data.

2 This percentage is even higher in some districts. For example, 50% of the school-age children in St. Paul do not attend their neighborhood schools.
defined by natural breaks in the data. One of those classes always spans the state average; schools in that class are performing at the level typical for the state. Other classes show schools that are well above or well below that average.

For both measures, school performance tends to be worse in low-income areas of the Twin Cities metro region. Many factors may contribute to this association, including that low-income parents may not have had a good school history themselves, and therefore are less able to help their children succeed. Efforts are under way in Minnesota and elsewhere to compensate for these shortcomings with early-childhood intervention programs that assist parents in supporting their children’s learning and that enroll children in high-quality daycare programs. In addition to being coincident with high rates of poverty, lower scores are often located in areas with large immigrant populations, some of whom are struggling with English as a second language, which may adversely affect students’ performance.

**Third-Grade Reading Proficiency**

Statewide, 78.5% of third-grade students met or exceeded the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) standards for reading in 2010–2011. In elementary schools across the seven-county metro area, third-grade reading proficiency falls into four classifications, with the 78–88% class straddling the state average (Figure 1). The darkest areas (89%+) show schools that are well above that average; they are found both in a ring of suburbs and in the southwest corners of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The low-performing schools (31–60%) are all in the central cities or spurs that extend from there.

By examining the central cities more closely, we can add a fifth class, dividing the lowest class into two subgroups: low-low (31–43%) and low-high (44–60%) (Figure 2). Five schools in north and south Minneapolis are in the low-low class. In St. Paul, the pattern is more complicated, in part because the St. Paul schools have extended attendance areas for some of their more successful schools, providing educational opportunities to remote enclaves in other parts of the city. Much of the pattern of lowest third-grade reading performance in both cities mimics the distribution of high-poverty rates in the central cities.

**Eighth-Grade Math Proficiency**

Statewide, 53.2% of eighth-grade students met or exceeded the MCA standards for math in 2010–2011. In eighth-grade schools (typically middle schools) across the seven-county metro area, the 41–58% class straddles the state average (Figure 3). The highest performing schools (74–94%) are more scattered, with small pockets appearing west, east, and south of the central cities. As with third-grade reading performance, large portions of the central cities have the smallest percentage of students meeting the MCA math standards, with some spillover into Richfield and the northwest suburbs of Minneapolis.

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4 Individual students do not pass or fail the reading and mathematics tests given in grades 3–8. Each student receives a score that falls into one of four achievement levels: Does Not Meet the Standards, Partially Meets the Standards, Meets the Standards, or Exceeds the Standards.

5 For example, French and Spanish language-immersion schools and the Capitol Hill Gifted and Talented Magnet School are open to families across the city, and attract some of its brightest students.