

Navient Corporation (NAVI)

\$13.76 (As of 03/19/21)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **\$16.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months

Zacks Recommendation: **Outperform**
(Since: 01/19/21)

Prior Recommendation: Neutral

Short Term: 1-3 Months

Zacks Rank: (1-5) **2-Buy**

Zacks Style Scores: VGM:D

Value: B | Growth: F | Momentum: B

Summary

Shares of Navient have outperformed the industry over the past six months. The company has an impressive earnings surprise history. The company's bottom line surpassed the Zacks Consensus Estimate in three of the trailing four quarters. The company remains focused on leveraging asset recovery and processing businesses to boost the top-line performance. Also, it continues to undertake cost-control measures to aid bottom-line growth. Improving economy and gradually declining unemployment rate along with investments in technology platform and digital marketing tools to attract originations bode well for the company's financials. Although the company continues struggling with regulatory claims and litigation burden due to practices in handling a large number of student loans, its position as a leading servicer of education loans is a tailwind.

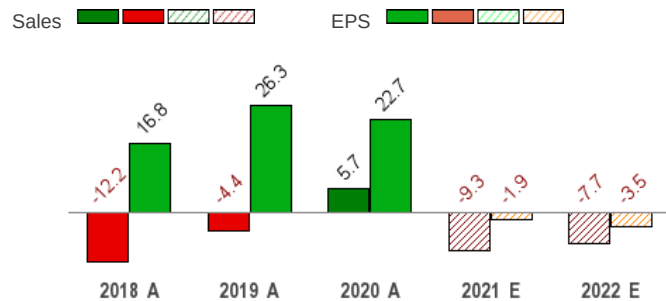
Price, Consensus & Surprise



Data Overview

52-Week High-Low	\$13.93 - \$5.48
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	2,258,687
Market Cap	\$2.5 B
Year-To-Date Price Change	40.1%
Beta	1.77
Dividend / Dividend Yield	\$0.64 / 4.7%
Industry	Financial - Consumer Loans
Zacks Industry Rank	Top 15% (37 out of 253)

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Last EPS Surprise	8.6%
Last Sales Surprise	20.5%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.0%
Expected Report Date	04/20/2021
Earnings ESP	7.7%
P/E TTM	4.2
P/E F1	4.3
PEG F1	1.4
P/S TTM	0.7

Sales Estimates (millions of \$)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2022	242 E	243 E	234 E	244 E	1,048 E
2021	303 E	287 E	275 E	272 E	1,135 E
2020	297 A	329 A	336 A	343 A	1,252 A

EPS Estimates

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2022	\$0.80 E	\$0.83 E	\$0.79 E	\$0.89 E	\$3.07 E
2021	\$0.78 E	\$0.81 E	\$0.82 E	\$0.80 E	\$3.18 E
2020	\$0.51 A	\$0.92 A	\$0.99 A	\$0.88 A	\$3.24 A

*Quarterly figures may not add up to annual.

The data in the charts and tables, including the Zacks Consensus EPS and sales estimates, is as of 03/19/2021. The report's text and the analyst-provided price target are as of 03/22/2021.

Overview

Headquartered in Wilmington, DE, Navient is a leading provider of education loan management and business processing solutions for education, healthcare, and government clients at the federal, state and local levels. Navient is one of the four large servicers to the U.S. Department of Education ("ED") under its Direct Student Loan Program (DSLP).

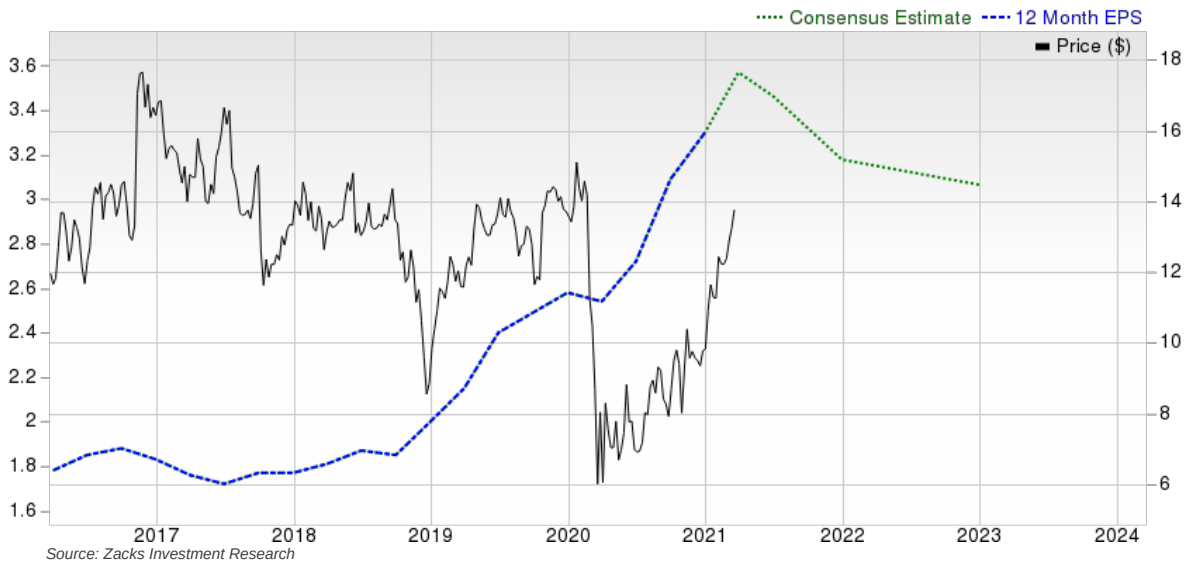
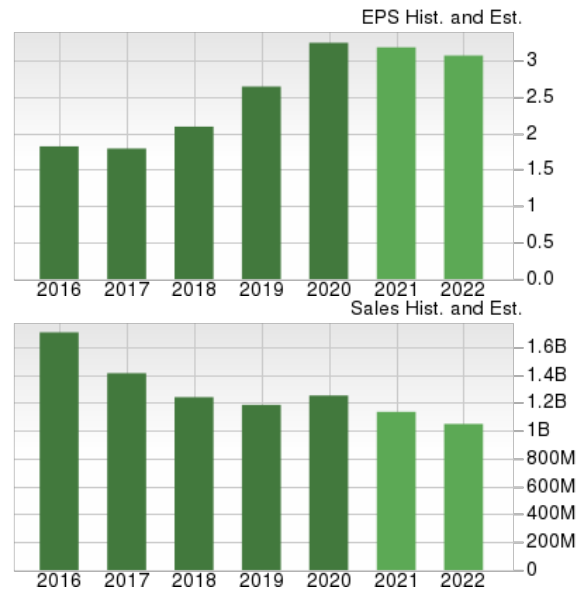
In fourth-quarter 2017, Navient entered the Private Education Refinance Loan origination market, following which, the company reports through the following business segments:

- **Federal Education Loans:** In this segment, the company holds and acquires the Federal Family Education Loan Program (FFELP) loans and performs servicing and asset recovery services on its own loan portfolio, federal education loans owned by the U.S. Department of Education and other institutions.
- **Consumer Lending:** Under this segment, the company holds, originates and acquires consumer loans and performs servicing activities in its own loan portfolio. Originations and acquisitions leverage its servicing scale and generate incremental earnings and cash flow.
- **Business Processing:** In this segment, Navient performs business processing services for non-education related government and health care clients. The company provides services to more than 600 clients in the health care and public sectors.
- **Other Segment:** This segment mainly comprises activities such as corporate liquidity portfolio and the repurchase of debt, unallocated overhead (corporate overhead and certain information technology costs), restructuring/other reorganization expenses, regulatory-related costs, etc.

In November 2017, Navient acquired Earnest, a financial technology company in an all cash deal. On completion, it took over education refinancing loans of more than \$500 million.

In August 2017, Navient acquired Duncan Solutions in order to expand presence in the municipal and toll services market.

As of Dec 31, 2020, Navient had total assets of \$87.4 billion, FFELP loans of \$58.3 billion and private education loan of \$21.1 billion.



Reasons To Buy:

- ▲ Following its separation from SLM Corporation in 2014, Navient continues to be the biggest portfolio holder of Private Education Loans and education loans insured or guaranteed under the FFELP. Further, Navient is a leading servicer of education loans. Also, the company remains focused on introducing new products leveraged with technology. The economic recovery and declining unemployment rate should further enhance its business prospects. Particularly, the specialized focus post-split will be advantageous to Navient.
- ▲ Navient seems on track with initiatives that lays the foundation for independent growth. Strengthening its asset recovery and business process outsourcing capabilities, the company has entered into a number of acquisitions since 2015. In November 2017, it acquired Earnest, a financial technology and education-finance company serving consumers unable to get finance from traditional banks. We remain encouraged as the company is focused on growth opportunities to boost overall business.
- ▲ Navient's cost-control efforts are encouraging. The company witnessed stable expenses in the last three years (ended 2019) despite incurring restructuring expenses. It seeks to improve operating efficiency by undertaking cost-control initiatives. Notably, costs declined in 2020 on lower operating expenses. We expect such efforts to support the company's bottom-line growth.
- ▲ Navient's trailing 12-month return on equity (ROE) reflects its superiority in terms of utilizing shareholders' fund. The company's ROE of 28.36% compares favorably with the industry's 17.47%.
- ▲ Shares of Navient have underperformed the industry over the past three months. Despite this unfavorable trend, the company's current-year earnings estimates have been revised 13.2% upward over the past 60 days. The stock seems undervalued as its price-to-book (P/B) and price-to-earnings (P/E) (F1) ratios are below the respective industry averages. Additionally, it has a Value Score of B. Therefore, given the progress on fundamentals and positive estimates revision, the stock has upside potential.

Navient's focus on tapping growth opportunities will likely boosts overall business performance. Further, improving economy and declining unemployment rate should provide support to the company.

Risks

- We remain cautious owing to limited growth opportunities for Navient. Following the 2010 reform law, DSLP of the ED originates all federal student loans. As a result of this legislation, Navient's interest income on its FFELP loan portfolio and fee-based revenue from servicing that portfolio and third-party FFELP loans will gradually decrease as existing FFELP loans are paid down, refinanced or repaid after default by guarantors. If Navient fails to acquire new loans or expand or develop alternative sources of revenue to replace or enhance its declining revenue from FFELP loan portfolio, its top line will be under pressure.
 - As of Dec 31, 2020, the company held debt worth \$83.9 billion, along with cash and cash equivalents of \$3.5 billion. Given such high debt burden, the company does not seem to be well positioned in terms of its liquidity profile, and hence it might not be able to continue meeting debt obligations in the near term if the economic situation worsens.
 - Navient's capital deployment activities keep us apprehensive. The company last declared a 7% hike in its quarterly dividend in January 2015. Also, in October 2019, the company approved an additional share buyback program of up to \$1 billion with immediate effect. As of Dec 31, 2020, it had \$600 million of remaining share-repurchase authority. However, Navient's debt/equity ratio seems unfavorable compared with its industry average. Hence, we believe that the company's capital deployment activities might not be sustainable in the long term.
 - Interest earned on FFELP loans and private education loans is primarily indexed to 1-month LIBOR rates and either 1-month LIBOR rates or the 1-month Prime rate, respectively, whereas the cost of funds is primarily indexed to 3-month LIBOR rates. This leads to re-pricing risks related to these assets. In a gradually rising interest rate environment, this difference in timing may create pressure on net interest margin for FFELP and private education loans. On the other hand, relatively higher interest rates will lower Navient's floor income.
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Last Earnings Report

Navient Q4 Earnings Beat Estimates as Provisions Fall

Navient reported fourth-quarter 2020 core earnings per share of 88 cents that surpassed the Zacks Consensus Estimate of 81 cents. Also, the bottom line was above the year-ago quarter figure of 69 cents.

Core earnings excluded the impacts of certain other one-time items, including mark-to-market gains/losses on derivatives along with goodwill and acquired intangible asset amortization, and impairment.

Fourth-quarter results of Navient were supported by a rise in net interest income (NII). Also, a fall in provisions was a tailwind. However, private education loans declined. Moreover, a year-over-year fall in fee income was an undermining factor.

GAAP net income in the quarter was \$186 million or 99 cents per share compared with \$171 million or 78 cents a year ago.

In full-year 2020, Navient reported GAAP net income of \$412 million or \$2.12 per share compared with \$597 million or \$2.56 in 2019.

NII Increases, Provisions Fall (on Core Earnings Basis)

NII in the quarter increased 1.3% year over year to \$314 million.

Non-interest income declined 4% to \$169 million. The fall was mainly attributed to lower servicing along with asset recovery and business processing income.

Provision for loan losses fell substantially to \$2 million from \$50 million reported in year-ago quarter.

Total expenses climbed 13.5% to \$269 million. Higher operating expenses mainly led to the rise.

Segment Performance

Federal Education Loans: The segment generated core earnings of \$134 million, down 1.5% year over year. Lower revenues were partly offset by a fall in expenses.

As of Dec 31, 2020, the company's FFELP loans were \$58.3 billion, down 2.1% sequentially.

Consumer Lending: The segment reported core earnings of \$108 million, up 21.3% year over year. Lower provisions and rise in revenues were positives. Net interest margin was 3.02%, down 29 basis points.

Private education loan delinquencies of 30 days or more of \$554 million were down from \$1 billion in the prior-year quarter.

As of Dec 31, 2020, the company's private education loans totaled \$21.1 billion, down nearly 1% from the prior quarter. Also, Navient originated \$1.1 billion of private education refinance loans in the quarter.

Business Processing: The segment reported core earnings of \$15 million compared with \$8 million in the year-ago quarter. Higher fee revenues led to the upside.

Source of Funding and Liquidity

In order to meet liquidity needs, Navient expects to utilize various sources, including cash and investment portfolio, issuance of additional unsecured debt, repayment of principal on unencumbered student-loan assets, and distributions from securitization trusts (including servicing fees). It might also issue term asset-backed securities (ABS).

During the reported quarter, Navient issued \$2.3 billion in term ABS. Notably, it had \$1.2 billion of cash as of Dec 31, 2020.

Capital-Deployment Activities

In the fourth quarter, the company paid out \$30 million in common stock dividends.

2021 Outlook

Management expects net interest margin in federal education loan segment to be mid-to-high 90's bps. Also, charge-off rate in the segment is expected to be about 0.1%.

Net interest margin in the consumer lending segment is expected to be 2.7-2.8%. Also, charge-off rate in the segment is estimated to be 1.5-2%. In Business Processing segment EBITDA margins in high teens is expected.

EPS (on core earnings basis) is expected to be in the range of \$3.10-\$3.25. Also, return on equity is likely to be in low 20s.

The company targets to achieve an efficiency ratio of approximately 52%. Further, adjusted tangible equity ratio is expected to be 5.5%.

Quarter Ending	12/2020
Report Date	Jan 26, 2021
Sales Surprise	20.50%
EPS Surprise	8.64%
Quarterly EPS	0.88
Annual EPS (TTM)	3.30

Recent News

Dividend Update

On Feb 4, Navient declared first-quarter 2021 common stock dividend of 16 cents per share. The dividend was paid out on Mar 19 to shareholders on record as of Mar 5.

Valuation

Navient's shares are up 40.1% so far this year and up 127.1% over the trailing 12-month period. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the Zacks Finance sector are up 18.4% and 11.2% in the year-to-date period, respectively. Over the past year, the Zacks sub-industry and sector are up 181.6% and 78.9%, respectively.

The S&P 500 Index is up 4.5% and 76.6% in the year-to-date period and trailing 12-month period, respectively.

The stock is currently trading at 4.37X forward 12 months earnings, which compares to 8.42X for the Zacks sub-industry, 17.14X for the Zacks sector and 22.17X for the S&P 500 Index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 9.17X and as low as 1.60X, with a 5-year median of 6.44X. Our Outperform recommendation indicates that the stock will perform better than the market. Our \$16 price target reflects 5.08X forward earnings.

The table below shows summary valuation data for NAVI

Valuation Multiples - NAVI					
		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/E F12M	Current	4.37	8.42	17.14	22.17
	5-Year High	9.17	13.14	17.14	23.8
	5-Year Low	1.6	4.42	11.6	15.3
	5-Year Median	6.44	8.75	14.58	17.9
P/TB TTM	Current	1.51	1.15	3.56	16.63
	5-Year High	1.84	1.5	4.05	16.89
	5-Year Low	0.43	0.49	2.05	8.07
	5-Year Median	1.27	1.18	3.54	11.16
P/S F12M	Current	2.16	1.53	7.6	4.52
	5-Year High	3.73	1.76	7.6	4.52
	5-Year Low	0.88	0.71	5.02	3.21
	5-Year Median	2.74	1.46	6.13	3.69

As of 03/19/2021 Source: Zacks Investment Research

Industry Analysis Zacks Industry Rank: Top 15% (37 out of 253)



Top Peers

Company (Ticker)	Rec	Rank
Ally Financial Inc. (ALLY)	Outperform	2
Capital One Financial Corporation (COF)	Outperform	1
MR. COOPER GROUP INC (COOP)	Outperform	1
Santander Consumer USA Holdings Inc. (SC)	Outperform	2
SLM Corporation (SLM)	Outperform	1
Citizens Financial Group, Inc. (CFG)	Neutral	3
Discover Financial Services (DFS)	Neutral	3
First Cash, Inc. (FCFS)	Underperform	4

The positions listed should not be deemed a recommendation to buy, hold or sell.

Industry Comparison Industry: Financial - Consumer Loans				Industry Peers		
	NAVI	X Industry	S&P 500	ALLY	DFS	SC
Zacks Recommendation (Long Term)	Outperform	-	-	Outperform	Neutral	Outperform
Zacks Rank (Short Term)	2	-	-	2	3	2
VGM Score	D	-	-	B	B	B
Market Cap	2.53 B	1.33 B	28.48 B	16.88 B	29.04 B	8.19 B
# of Analysts	4	3	13	6	9	6
Dividend Yield	4.65%	0.00%	1.38%	1.68%	1.86%	0.00%
Value Score	B	-	-	A	A	A
Cash/Price	1.45	0.33	0.06	0.92	0.43	0.28
EV/EBITDA	137.77	11.27	15.90	5.40	16.89	10.19
PEG F1	1.44	0.78	2.36	NA	2.62	NA
P/B	1.05	1.44	3.90	1.15	2.96	1.46
P/CF	3.93	5.76	15.91	6.16	22.24	2.64
P/E F1	4.33	10.04	21.22	10.00	10.48	8.21
P/S TTM	0.68	1.23	3.30	2.52	2.24	1.01
Earnings Yield	23.11%	9.96%	4.61%	10.00%	9.54%	12.18%
Debt/Equity	31.60	1.50	0.67	1.50	2.16	7.32
Cash Flow (\$/share)	3.51	4.12	6.78	7.33	4.26	10.15
Growth Score	F	-	-	D	C	D
Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years)	13.19%	12.05%	9.32%	8.99%	-2.49%	-0.26%
Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0)	-1.93%	10.81%	14.54%	49.17%	151.11%	13.59%
Current Cash Flow Growth	2.51%	6.58%	0.72%	-9.42%	-56.06%	6.67%
Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years)	-1.55%	15.18%	7.32%	-15.45%	-10.36%	18.58%
Current Ratio	12.54	3.28	1.39	0.94	1.19	58.94
Debt/Capital	96.93%	60.06%	41.42%	59.95%	66.12%	87.98%
Net Margin	11.05%	11.05%	10.59%	16.23%	8.81%	11.26%
Return on Equity	28.36%	17.47%	14.75%	8.12%	12.43%	17.55%
Sales/Assets	0.04	0.25	0.51	0.04	0.11	0.17
Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0)	-13.03%	0.00%	7.02%	8.25%	2.83%	4.93%
Momentum Score	B	-	-	A	A	A
Daily Price Change	6.34%	-0.24%	-0.12%	-0.24%	-0.94%	-2.58%
1-Week Price Change	2.87%	5.27%	2.96%	3.66%	4.34%	5.27%
4-Week Price Change	13.81%	7.96%	3.72%	9.36%	5.01%	1.94%
12-Week Price Change	40.84%	24.06%	8.75%	30.89%	7.35%	25.99%
52-Week Price Change	119.11%	148.34%	72.55%	251.01%	234.56%	114.42%
20-Day Average Volume (Shares)	2,258,687	535,818	2,394,762	4,267,314	2,220,242	1,018,823
EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.52%	0.57%	0.72%
EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change	0.00%	0.18%	0.00%	2.07%	0.84%	7.30%
EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change	17.25%	18.53%	2.10%	20.48%	18.95%	41.53%
EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.71%	-0.72%	0.86%

Source: Zacks Investment Research

Zacks Stock Rating System

We offer two rating systems that take into account investors' holding horizons: Zacks Rank and Zacks Recommendation. Each provides valuable insights into the future profitability of the stock and can be used separately or in combination with each other depending on your investment style.

Zacks Recommendation

The Zacks Recommendation aims to predict performance over the next 6 to 12 months. The foundation for the quantitatively determined Zacks Recommendation is trends in the company's estimate revisions and earnings outlook. The Zacks Recommendation is broken down into 3 Levels; Outperform, Neutral and Underperform. Unlike many Wall Street firms, we maintain a balance between the number of Outperform and Neutral recommendations. Our team of 70 analysts are fully versed in the benefits of earnings estimate revisions and how that is harnessed through the Zacks quantitative rating system. But we have given our analysts the ability to override the Zacks Recommendation for the 1200 stocks that they follow. The reason for the analyst over-rides is that there are often factors such as valuation, industry conditions and management effectiveness that a trained investment professional can spot better than a quantitative model.

Zacks Rank

The Zacks Rank is our short-term rating system that is most effective over the one- to three-month holding horizon. The underlying driver for the quantitatively-determined Zacks Rank is the same as the Zacks Recommendation, and reflects trends in earnings estimate revisions.

Zacks Style Scores

The Zacks Style Score is as a complementary indicator to the Zacks rating system, giving investors a way to focus on the highest rated stocks that best fit their own stock picking preferences.

Academic research has proven that stocks with the best Value, Growth and Momentum characteristics outperform the market. The Zacks Style Scores rate stocks on each of these individual styles and assigns a rating of A, B, C, D and F. We also produce the VGM Score (V for Value, G for Growth and M for Momentum), which combines the weighted average of the individual Style Scores into one score. This is perfectly suited for those who want their stocks to have the best scores across the board.

Value Score	B
Growth Score	F
Momentum Score	B
VGM Score	D

As an investor, you want to buy stocks with the highest probability of success. That means buying stocks with a Zacks Recommendation of Outperform, which also has a Style Score of an A or a B.

Disclosures

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Returns quoted represent past performance which is no guarantee of future results. Investment returns and principal value will fluctuate so that when shares are redeemed, they may be worth more or less than their original cost. Current performance may be higher or lower than the performance shown.

Investing involves risk; principal loss is possible. There is no guarantee that companies that can issue dividends will declare, continue to pay or increase dividends.

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

52-Week High-Low: The range of the highest and lowest prices at which a stock has traded during the past year. This range is determined based on the stock's daily closing price which may differ from the intra-day high or low. Many investors use it as a technical indicator to determine a stock's current value and future price movement. The idea here is that if price breaks out from the 52-week range, in either direction, the momentum may continue in the same direction.

20-Day Average Volume (Shares): The average number of shares of a company traded in a day over the last 20 days. It is a direct indication of a security's overall liquidity. The higher the average daily trading volume, the easier it is to enter or exit the stock at a desired price with more buyers and sellers being available.

Daily Price Change: This is the percentage difference between a trading day's closing price and the prior trading day's closing price. This item is updated at 9 p.m. EST each day.

1-Week Price Change: This is the percentage change in a stock's closing price over the last 5 trading days. This change reflects the collective buying and selling sentiment over the 1-week period.

A strong weekly price increase for the stock, especially when accompanied by increased volume, is an indication of it gaining momentum.

4-Week Price Change: This is the percentage change in a stock's closing price over the last 20 trading days or past 4 weeks. This is a medium-term price change metric and an indication of the stock gaining momentum.

12-Week Price Change: This is the percentage change of a stock's closing price over the last 60 trading days or past 12 weeks. Similar to 4-week price change, this is a medium-term price change metric. It shows whether a stock has been enjoying strong investor demand, or if it has been in consolidation, or distress over this period.

52-Week Price Change: This is the percentage change in a stock's closing price over the last 260 trading days or past 52 weeks. This long-term price change metric is a good reference point for investors. Some investors seek stocks with the best percentage price change over the last 52 weeks, expecting the momentum to continue.

Market Cap: The number of outstanding common shares of a company times its latest price per share. This figure represents a company's size, which indicates various characteristics, including price stability and risk, in which investors could be interested.

Year-To-Date Price Change: Change in a stock's daily closing price in the period of time beginning the first day of the current calendar year through to the previous trading day.

of Analysts: Number of EPS estimates used in calculating the current-quarter consensus. These estimates come from the brokerage analysts tracking this stock. However, the number of such analysts tracking this stock may not match the number of estimates, as all brokerage analysts may not come up with an estimate or provide it to us.

Beta: A measure of risk commonly used to compare the volatility of a stock to the overall market. The S&P 500 Index is the base for calculating beta and carries a value of 1. A stock with beta below 1 is less risky than the market as a whole. And a stock with beta above 1 is riskier.

Dividend: The portion of earnings a company is expected to distribute to its common shareholders in the next 12 months for each share they own. Dividends are usually paid quarterly. Dividend payments reflect positively on a company and help maintain investors' trust. Investors typically find dividend-paying stocks appealing because the dividend adds to any market price appreciation to result in higher return on investment (ROI). Moreover, a steady or increasing dividend payment provides investors a cushion in a down market.

Dividend Yield: The ratio of a company's annual dividend to its share price. The annual dividend used in the ratio is calculated based on the most recent dividend paid by the company. Dividend yield is an estimate of the dividend-only return from a stock in the next 12 months. Since dividend itself doesn't change frequently, dividend yield usually changes with a stock's price movement. As a result, often an unusually high dividend yield is a result of weak stock price.

S&P 500 Index: The Standard & Poor's 500 (S&P 500) Index is an unmanaged group of securities considered to be representative of the stock market in general. It is a market-capitalization-weighted index of stocks of the 500 largest U.S. companies. Each stock's weight in the index is proportionate to its market value.

Industry: One of the 250+ groups that Zacks classifies all stocks into based on the nature of business. These groups are termed as expanded (aka "X") industries and map to their respective (economic) sectors; Zacks has 16 sectors.

Zacks Industry Rank: The Zacks Industry Rank is determined by calculating the average Zacks Rank for all stocks in the industry and then assigning an ordinal rank to it. For example, an industry with an average Zacks Rank of 1.6 is better than an industry with an average Zacks Rank of 2.3. So, the industry with the better average Zacks Rank would get a better Zacks Industry Rank. If an industry has the best average Zacks Rank, it would be considered the top industry (1 out of 250+), which would place it at the top 1% of Zacks-ranked industries. Studies have shown that roughly half of a stock's price movement can be attributed to the industry group it belongs to. In fact, the top 50% of Zacks-ranked industries outperforms the bottom 50% by a factor of more than 2 to 1.

Last EPS Surprise: The percentage deviation of a company's last reported earnings per share from the Zacks Consensus Estimate. Companies with a positive earnings surprise are more likely to surprise again in the future (or miss again if they recently missed).

Last Sales Surprise: The percentage deviation of a company's last reported sales from the Zacks Consensus Estimate.

Expected Report Date: This is an estimated date of a company's next earnings release. The information originated or gathered by Zacks Investment Research from its information providers or publicly available sources is the basis of this estimate.

Earnings ESP: The Zacks Earnings ESP compares the Most Accurate Estimate to the Zacks Consensus Estimate for the yet-to-be reported quarter. The Most Accurate Estimate is the most recent version of the Zacks Consensus EPS Estimate. The idea here is that analysts revising their estimates closer to an earnings release have the latest information, which could potentially be more accurate than what they and others contributing to the consensus had predicted earlier. Thus, a positive or negative Earnings ESP reading theoretically indicates the likely deviation of the actual earnings from the consensus estimate. However, the model's predictive power is significant for positive ESP readings only. A positive Earnings ESP is a strong predictor of an earnings beat, particularly when combined with a Zacks Rank #1 (Strong Buy), #2 (Buy) or #3 (Hold). Our research shows that stocks with this combination produce a positive surprise nearly 70% of the time.

Periods:

TTM: Trailing 12 months. Using TTM figures is an effective way of analyzing the most-recent financial data in an annualized format that helps neutralize the effects of seasonality and other quarter-to-quarter variation.

F1: Current fiscal year. This period is used to analyze the estimates for the ongoing full fiscal year.

F2: Next fiscal year. This period is used to analyze the estimates for the next full fiscal year.

F12M: Forward 12 months. Using F12M figures is an effective way of analyzing the near-term (the following four unreported quarters) estimates in an annualized manner. Instead of typically representing estimates for the full fiscal year, which may not represent the nitty-gritty of each quarter, F12M figures suggest an all-inclusive annualized estimate for the following four quarters. The annualization helps neutralize the potential effects of seasonality and other quarter-to-quarter variations.

P/E Ratio: The price-to-earnings ratio measures a company's current market price per share relative to its earnings per share (EPS). Usually, the trailing-12-month (TTM) EPS, current-fiscal-year (F1) EPS estimate, or forward-12-month (F12M) EPS estimate is used as the denominator. In essence, this ratio shows what the market is willing to pay today for each dollar of EPS. In other words, this ratio gives a sense of what the relative value of the company is at the already reported level of earnings or at a future level of earnings.

It is one of the most widely-used multiples for determining the value of a company and helps comparing its valuation with that of a competitor, the industry group or a benchmark.

PEG Ratio: The price/earnings to growth ratio is a stock's P/E ratio using current fiscal year (F1) EPS estimate divided by its expected EPS growth rate over the coming 3 to 5 years. This ratio essentially determines a stock's value by factoring in the company's expected earnings growth and is thus believed to provide a more complete picture than just the P/E ratio, particularly for faster-growing companies.

P/S Ratio: The price-to-sales ratio is calculated as a company's current price per share divided by trailing 12 months (TTM) sales or revenues per share. This ratio shows what the market is willing to pay today for each dollar of TTM sales per share. The P/S ratio is at times the only valuation metric when the company has yet to become profitable.

Cash/Price Ratio: The cash-to-price ratio or Cash Yield is calculated as cash and marketable securities per share divided by the company's current share price. Like the earnings yield, which shows the anticipated yield (or return) on a stock from earnings for each dollar invested, the cash yield does the same, with cash being the source of return instead of earnings. For example, a cash/price ratio of 0.08 suggests a return of 8% or 8 cents for every \$1 investment.

EV/EBITDA Ratio: The EV/EBITDA ratio, also known as Enterprise Multiple, is calculated as a company's enterprise value (market capitalization + value of total long-term debt + book value of preferred shares - cash and marketable securities) divided by EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization). Usually, trailing-12-month (TTM) or forward-12-month (F12M) EBITDA is used as the denominator.

EV/Sales Ratio: The enterprise value-to-sales ratio is calculated as a company's enterprise value (market capitalization + value of total long-term debt + book value of preferred shares - cash and marketable securities) divided by annual sales. It is an expansion of the P/S valuation, which uses market value instead of enterprise value. The EV/Sales ratio is perceived as more accurate than P/S, in part, because the market capitalization does not take a company's debt into account when valuing it.

EV/CF Ratio: The enterprise value-to-cash flow ratio is calculated as a company's enterprise value (market capitalization + value of total long-term debt + book value of preferred shares - cash and marketable securities) divided by the trailing-12-month (TTM) operating cash flow. It's a measure of how long it would take to buy the entire business if you were able to use all the company's operating cash flow.

The EV/CF ratio is perceived as more accurate than the P/CF ratio, in part, because the market price does not take a company's debt into account when valuing it.

EV/FCF Ratio: The enterprise value-to-free cash flow metric compares a company's enterprise value to its trailing-12-month (TTM) free cash flow (FCF). This metric is very similar to the EV/CF ratio, but is considered a more exact measure owing to the fact that it uses free cash flow, which subtracts capital expenditures (CAPEX) from a company's total operating cash flow, thereby reflecting the actual cash flow available for funding growth activities and payments to shareholders.

P/EBITDA Ratio: The P/EBITDA ratio is calculated as a company's per share market value divided by EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization). This metric is very similar to the EV/EBITDA ratio, but is considered a little less exact measure as it uses market price, which does not take a company's debt into account. However, since EBITDA is often considered a proxy for cash income, the metric is used as a measure of what the market is willing to pay today for each dollar of the company's cash profitability in the trailing 12 months (TTM) or forward 12 months (F12M).

P/B Ratio: The price-to-book ratio is calculated as a company's current price per share divided by its book value (total assets – liabilities – preferred stocks) per share. In short, the book value is how much a company is worth. In other words, it reflects the total value of a company's assets that its common shareholders would receive if it were to be liquidated. So, the P/B ratio indicates whether you're paying higher or lower than what would remain if the company went bankrupt immediately. Investors typically use this metric to determine how a company's stock price stacks up to its intrinsic value.

P/TB Ratio: The price-to-tangible-book value ratio is calculated as a the per share market value of a company divided by the value of its tangible assets (total assets – liabilities – preferred stocks – intangible assets) per share. Tangible book value is the same thing as book value except it excludes the value of intangible assets to get a step closer to the baseline value of the company.

P/CF Ratio: The price-to-cash flow ratio measures a company's per share market price relative to its trailing-12-month (TTM) operating cash flow per share. This metric is used to determine whether a company is undervalued or overvalued relative to another stock, industry or sector. And like the P/E ratio, a lower number is typically considered better from the value perspective.

One of the reasons why P/CF ratio is often preferred over P/E ratio is the fact that operating cash flow adds back non-cash expenses such as depreciation and amortization to net income. This feature helps valuing stocks that have positive cash flow but are not profitable because of large noncash charges.

P/FCF Ratio: The price-to-free cash flow ratio is an extension of P/CF ratio, which uses trailing-12-month (TTM) free cash flow per share instead of operating cash flow per share. This metric is considered a more exact measure than P/CF ratio, as free cash flow subtracts capital expenditures (CAPEX) from a company's total operating cash flow, thereby reflecting the actual cash flow available for funding activities that generate additional revenues.

Earnings Yield: The earnings yield is calculated as current fiscal year (F1) EPS estimate divided by the company's current share price. The ratio, which is the inverse of the P/E ratio, measures the anticipated yield (or return) from earnings for each dollar invested in a stock today.

For example, earnings yield for a stock, which is trading at \$35 and expected to earn \$3 per share in the current fiscal year (F1), would be 0.0857 ($3/35 = 0.0857$) or 8.57%. In other words, for \$1 invested in the stock today, the yield from earnings is anticipated to be 8.57 cents.

Investors most commonly compare the earnings yield of a stock to that of a broad market index (such as the S&P 500) and prevailing interest rates, such as the current 10-year Treasury yield. Since bonds and stocks compete for investors' dollars, stock investors typically demand a higher yield for the extra risk they assume compared to investors of U.S. Treasury-backed securities that offer virtually risk-free returns. This additional return is referred to as the risk premium.

Debt/Equity Ratio: The debt-to-equity ratio is calculated as a company's total liabilities divided by its shareholder equity. This metric is used to gauge a company's financial leverage. In other words, it is a measure of the degree to which a company is financing its operations through debt versus its own funds. The higher the ratio, the higher the risk for shareholders.

However, this ratio is difficult to compare across industry groups where ideal amounts of debt vary. Some businesses are more capital intensive than others and typically require higher debt to finance their operations. So, a company's debt-to-equity ratio should be compared with other companies in the same industry.

Cash Flow (\$/share): Cash flow per share is calculated as operating cash flow (after-tax earnings + depreciation + other non-cash charges) divided by common shares outstanding. It is used by many investors as a measure of a company's financial strength. Since cash flow per share takes into consideration a company's ability to generate cash by adding back non-cash expenses, it is regarded by some as a more accurate measure of a company's financial situation than earnings per share, which could be artificially deflated.

Current Ratio: The current ratio or liquidity ratio is a company's current assets divided by its current liabilities. It measures a company's ability to pay short-term obligations. A current ratio that is in line with the industry average or slightly higher is generally considered acceptable. A current ratio that is lower than the industry average would indicate a higher risk of distress or default. A higher number is usually better. However, a very high current ratio compared to the industry average could be an indication of inefficient use of assets by management.

Debt/Capital Ratio: Debt-to-capital ratio is a company's total debt (interest-bearing debt + both short- and long-term liabilities) divided its total capital (interest-bearing debt + shareholders' equity). It is a measure of a company's financial leverage. All else being equal, the higher the debt-to-capital ratio, the riskier the stock.

However, this ratio can vary widely from industry to industry, the ideal amount of required debt being different. Some businesses are more capital intensive than others and typically require higher debt to finance their operations. So, a company's debt-to-capital ratio should be compared with the same for its industry.

Net Margin: Net margin is calculated as net income divided by sales. It shows how much of each dollar in sales generated by a company translates into profit. For example, if a company's net margin is 15%, its net income is 15 cents for every \$1 of sales it makes.

A change in margin can reflect either a change in business conditions, or a company's cost controls, or both. If a company's expenses are growing faster than sales, its net margin will decline. However, different net margin rates are considered good for different industries, so it's better to compare net margin rates of companies in the same industry group.

Return on Equity: Return on equity (ROE) is calculated as trailing-12-month net income divided by trailing-12-month average shareholder equity (including reinvested earnings). This metric is considered a measure of how effectively management is using a company's assets to generate profits. For example, if a company's ROE is 10%, it creates 10 cents profits for every \$1 shareholder equity, which is basically the company's assets minus debt. A company's ROE deemed good or bad depends on what's normal for its peers or industry group.

Sales/Assets Ratio: The sales-to-assets ratio or asset utilization ratio or asset turnover ratio is calculated as a company's annual sales divided by average assets (average of assets at the beginning of the year and at the year's end). This metric helps investors understand how effectively a company is using its assets to generate sales. For example, a sales-to-assets ratio of 2.5 indicates that the company generated \$2.50 in sales for every \$1 of assets on its books.

The higher the sales-to-assets ratio, the better the company is performing. However, similar to many other ratios, the asset turnover ratio tends to be higher for companies in certain industries/sectors than in others. So, a company's sales-to-assets ratio should be compared with the same for its industry/sector.

Historical EPS Growth (3-5 Years): This is the average annual (trailing-12-month) EPS growth rate over the last 3-5 years. This metric helps investors see how a company's EPS has grown from a long-term perspective.

Note: There are many factors that can influence short-term numbers — a recession will reduce this number, while a recovery will inflate it. The longterm perspective helps smooth out short-term events.

Projected EPS Growth (F1/F0): This is the estimated EPS growth rate for the current financial year. It is calculated as the consensus estimate for the current fiscal year (F1) divided by the reported EPS for the last completed fiscal year (F0).

Current Cash Flow Growth: It measures the latest year-over-year change in operating cash flow. Cash flow growth tells an investor how quickly a company is generating inflows of cash from operations. A positive change in the cash flow is desired and shows that more 'cash' is coming in than going out.

Historical Cash Flow Growth (3-5 Years): This is the annualized change in cash flow over the last 3-5 years. The change in a longer period helps put the current reading into proper perspective. By looking at the rate, rather than the actual dollar value, the comparison across the industry and peers becomes easier.

Projected Sales Growth (F1/F0): This metric looks at the estimated sales growth for the current year. It is calculated as sales estimate for the current fiscal year (F1) divided by the reported sales for the last completed fiscal year (F0).

Like EPS growth, a higher rate is better for sales growth. A look at a company's projected sales growth instantly tells you what the outlook is for their products and services. However, different sales growth rates are considered good for different industries, so it's better to compare sales growth rates of companies in the same industry group.

EPS F1 Estimate 1-Week Change: The percentage change in the Zacks Consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal year over the past week. The change in a company's consensus EPS estimate (or earnings estimate revision) has proven to be strongly correlated with the near-term price movement of its shares. It is an integral part of the Zacks Rank.

If a stock's consensus EPS estimate is \$1.10 now versus \$1.00 a week ago, that will be reflected as a 10% upward revision. If, on the other hand, it went from \$1.00 to 90 cents, that would be a 10% downward revision.

EPS F1 Estimate 4-Week Change: The percentage change in the Zacks Consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal year over the past four weeks.

A stock's earnings estimate revision in a 1-week period is important. But it's more meaningful to look at the longer-term revision. And, of course, the 4-week change helps put the 1-week change into proper perspective.

EPS F1 Estimate 12-Week Change: The percentage change in the Zacks Consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal year over the past 12 weeks.

This metric essentially shows how the consensus EPS estimate has changed over a period longer than 1 week or 4 weeks.

EPS Q1 Estimate Monthly Change: The percentage change in the Zacks Consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal quarter over the past four weeks.

While the revision in consensus EPS estimate for the current fiscal year is strongly correlated with the near-term price movement of its shares, the estimate revision for the current fiscal quarter is an important metric as well, especially over the short term, and particularly as a stock approaches its earnings date. If a stock's Q1 EPS estimate decreases ahead of its earnings release, it's usually a negative sign, whereas an increase is a positive sign.