Evaluation of Wisconsin's Achievement Gap Reduction Program

for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction | *2015-16 through 2018-19*

The Achievement Gap Reduction (AGR) program, created by 2015 Wisconsin Acts 53 and 71, aims to improve the academic performance of students in schools with high concentrations of low-income students. AGR provides funds for kindergarten through third grades at participating Wisconsin schools based on their numbers of low-income students. To receive this funding, schools must implement one or more strategies in each participating grade:

- ◆ Class Size: A class size no more than 18, or, no more than 30 with at least two teachers.
- ◆ Coaching: Instructional coaching by licensed teachers to classroom teachers in participating grades.
- ◆ Tutoring: One-to-one tutoring by licensed teachers to students struggling with reading or math.

Acts 53 and 71 provide for an annual evaluation of AGR. **This brief includes results from the second annual evaluation, focusing on programmatic impacts on test score growth, absences, and out-of-school suspensions during the 2015-16 through 2018-19 school years.**
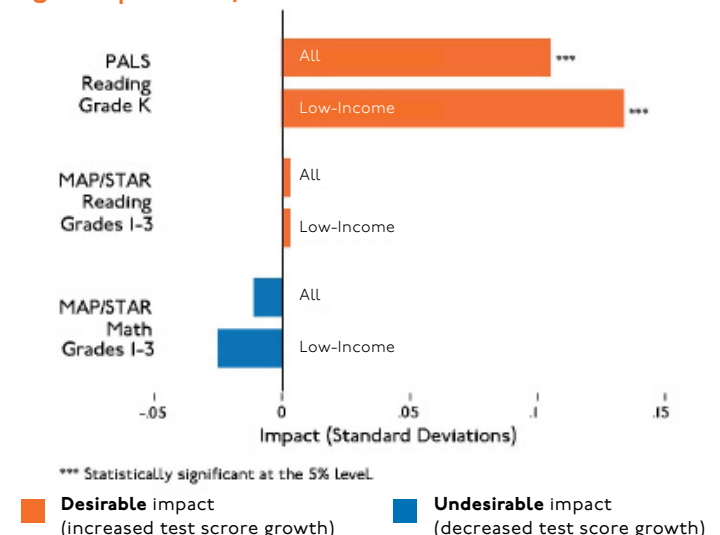
412
SCHOOLS

74,320
STUDENTS

IMPACTS | TEST SCORE GROWTH

The impact analysis examined how AGR students performed relative to non-AGR students in similar schools, while controlling for student and school characteristics. Estimated AGR impacts on test score growth, for both the statewide AGR sample and low-income students, are

AGR impacts on kindergarten reading translate to a 0.05 standard deviation reduction in the statewide achievement gap by income in 2018-19.

displayed in **Figure 1**. AGR had a substantial, statistically significant impact on kindergarten reading growth, as measured by the PALS assessment. Statewide, students at AGR schools experienced moderately higher reading growth (0.11 standard deviations or 5 percent higher average annual growth) than students at comparable, non-AGR schools. Impacts were even higher for low-income students. AGR impacts on kindergarten reading translate to a 0.05 standard deviation reduction in the statewide achievement gap by income in 2018-19. In contrast to the significant impacts in kindergarten, however, there were small and not statistically significant impacts on reading and math growth in Grades 1-3.
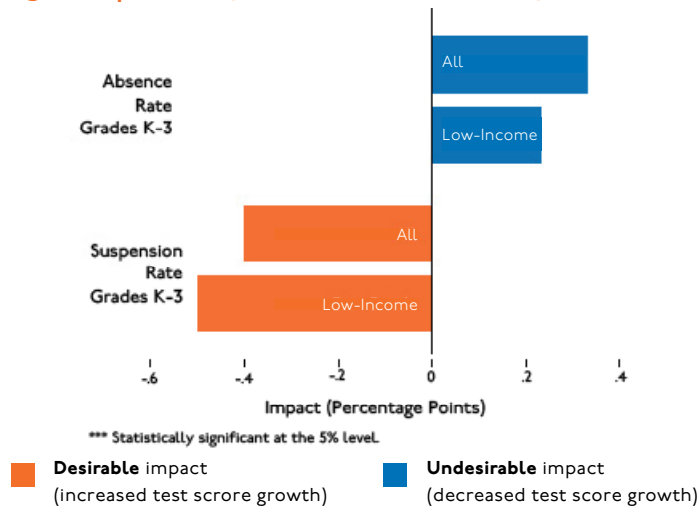
Figure 1 | AGR Impacts on Test Score Growth

*** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

■ **Desirable** impact (increased test score growth)
■ **Undesirable** impact (decreased test score growth)

IMPACTS | ABSENCES & SUSPENSIONS

Figure 2 shows estimated AGR impacts on student absences and out-of-school suspensions. Both statewide and for low-income students, AGR impacts were not statistically significant. Among other subgroups not pictured, AGR had a statistically significant impact on absences for urban students, approximately equal to 1.2 additional days absent per year, on average. More importantly, given the severity of behavior necessary for students to be suspended in Grades K-3, AGR decreased out-of-school suspensions for English learners and Hispanic students by 0.5 and 0.6 percentage points, respectively.

### Figure 2 | AGR Impacts on Absences & Suspensions

*** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

Desirable impact (increased test score growth)

Undesirable impact (decreased test score growth)

AGR Schools | Wisconsin Schools

79%	of schools are in urban & rural communities	**60%**
61%	of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch	**46%**
30%	of students are Black or Hispanic	**22%**
12%	of students are English language learners	**9%**
17%	of students are in special education	**15%**

IMPLEMENTATION & STRATEGIES

Schools implemented a wide variety of AGR strategies, as shown in **Figure 3**. Nearly 70 percent of schools used multiple strategies. Instructional coaching and reduced class size were most common, while comparatively few schools used tutoring alone or in combination with other strategies.

Figure 3 | AGR Strategies
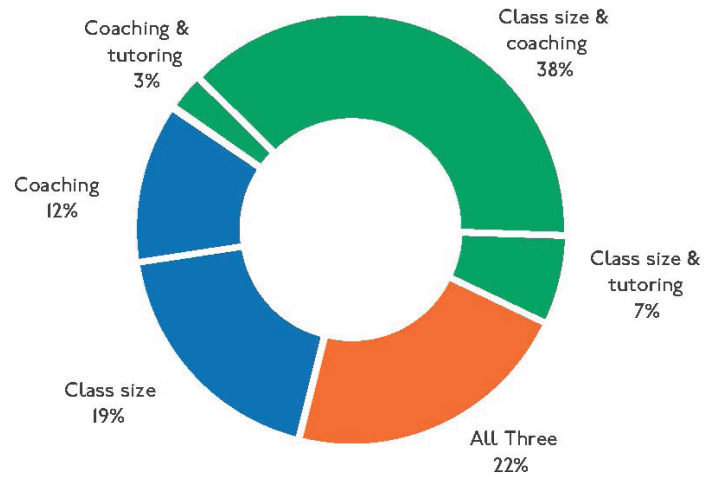
Note: Tutoring accounts for 0.2% of schools, not shown in the figure above.

METHODOLOGY

Because AGR targets higher poverty schools where outcomes are typically lower than Wisconsin averages, WEC used a two-part statistical method in order to address selection bias. The first part of the analysis used propensity score matching to identify non-AGR Wisconsin schools that were similar to those receiving AGR funding. These observationally similar schools then acted as a comparison group for the second part of the analysis, estimating the impact of AGR through multivariate regression techniques.

The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) is housed at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. WEC's team of evaluators supports youth-serving organizations and initiatives through culturally responsive and rigorous program evaluation. Learn more at http://www.wec.wceruw.org.

A detailed discussion of the evaluation can be found in the full report at https://bit.ly/agr2020. Questions can be directed to WEC Principal Investigator Jed Richardson at jed.richardson@wisc.edu.