Evaluation of
Wisconsin's Achievement Gap Reduction Program

WEC
Supporting PreK-12

In Wisconsin, achievement gaps are a persistent and well-documented issue. Gaps between students who are economically disadvantaged and their non-economically disadvantaged peers actually increased between 2003 and 2017 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

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 economically disadvantaged 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 beginning in 2018-19. This brief includes results from the first evaluation of AGR, focusing on programmatic impacts on test score growth, absences, and out-of-school suspensions during the 2015-16 through 2017-18 school years.

409
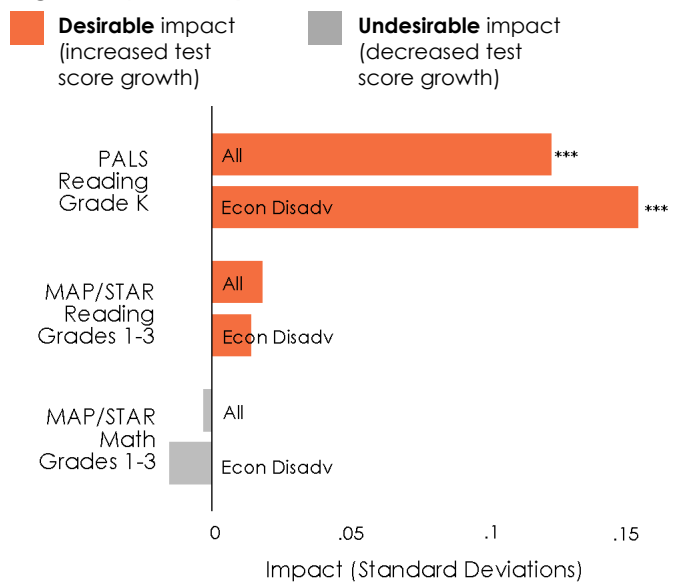Schools

75,237
K-3 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. AGR impacts on test score growth, for both the statewide AGR sample and economically disadvantaged students, are

AGR had a substantial, statistically **significant impact on kindergarten reading** growth, as measured by the PALS assessment.

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 0.12 standard deviations more reading growth than students at comparable, non-AGR schools. Impacts were even higher for economically disadvantaged students. 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.
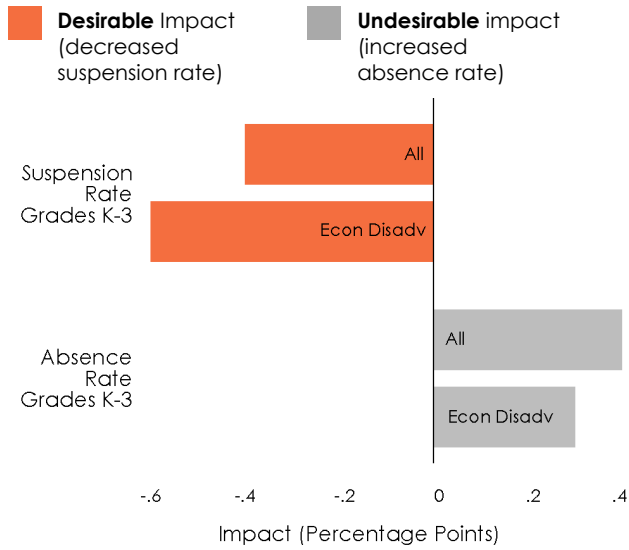
Figure 1 | AGR Impacts on Test Score Growth

Desirable impact (increased test score growth)

Undesirable impact (decreased test score growth)

*** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

IMPACTS | ABSENCES & SUSPENSIONS

Figure 2 shows estimated AGR impacts on student absences and out-of-school suspensions. For both outcomes, negative impacts (i.e. reducing absences or suspensions) are desirable. Both

statewide and for economically disadvantaged 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 additional day 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 0.9 and 0.7 percentage points, respectively.

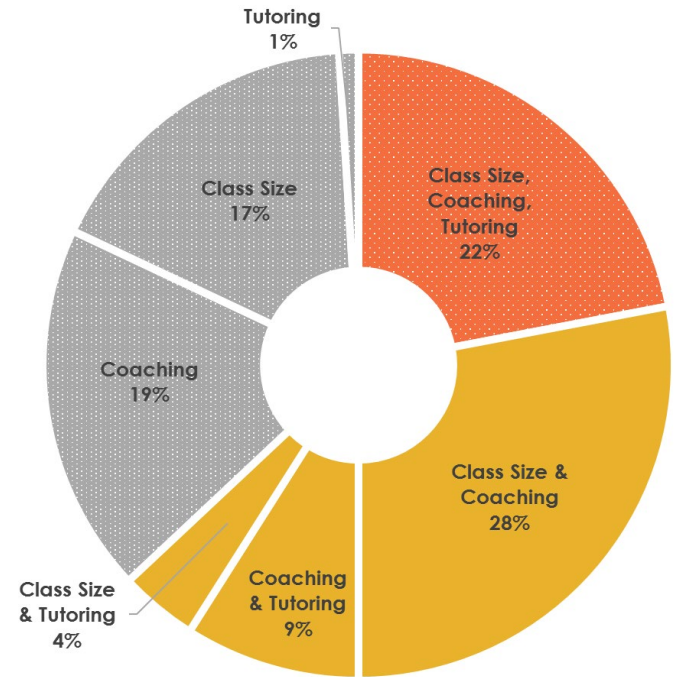### Figure 2 | AGR Impacts on Absences & Suspensions

Desirable Impact (decreased suspension rate)

Undesirable impact (increased absence rate)

*** Statistically significant at the 5% level.

Non-AGR Schools | **AGR Schools**

	Non-AGR		AGR
44%	of schools are in urban or rural communities	**73%**	of schools are in urban or rural communities
37%	of students are economically disadvantaged	**64%**	of students are economically disadvantaged
18%	of students are Black or Hispanic	**31%**	of students are Black or Hispanic
8%	of students are English learners	**12%**	of students are English learners
13%	of students are in special education	**16%**	of students are in special education

IMPLEMENTATION & STRATEGIES

Schools implemented a wide variety of AGR strategies, as shown in **Figure 3**. Over 60 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

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.