

Evaluation of the Achievement Gap Reduction Program

for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction | 2020-21

Over the past fifty years, achievement gaps by socioeconomic status have been stagnant, both nationwide and in Wisconsin. Providing additional funding to low-income students, however, has been shown to increase achievement and improve later-life outcomes. 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 third annual evaluation, focusing on programmatic impacts on test score growth, absences, and out-of-school suspensions during the 2015-16 through 2019-20 school years.**

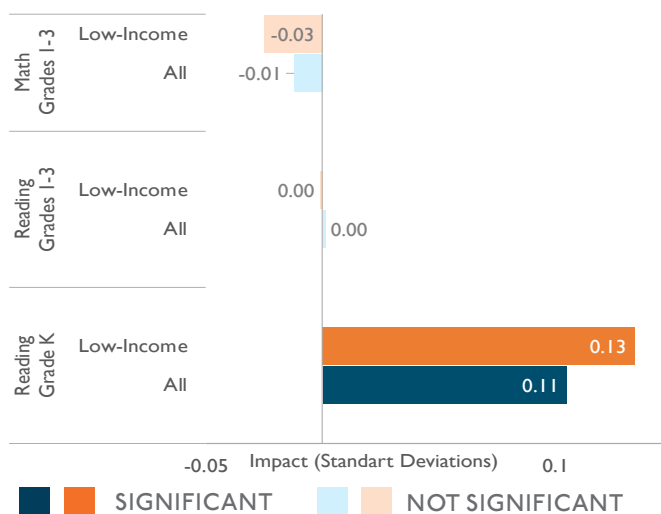
 **73,646**
AGR STUDENTS

 **412**
AGR SCHOOLS

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 displayed in **Figure 1**. Using data through 2018-19, the evaluation found that 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. 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 (using data through 2019-20).

FIGURE 1 AGR IMPACT ON TEST SCORE GROWTH



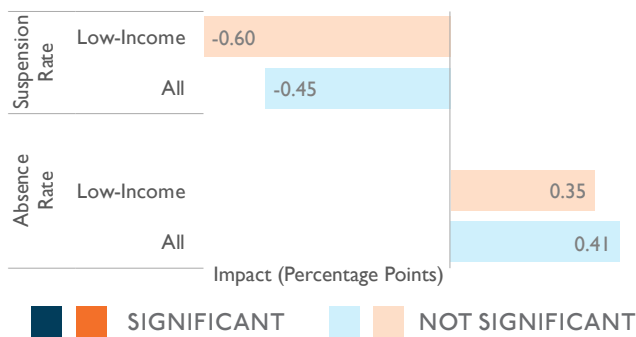
IMPACTS | ABSENCES & SUSPENSIONS

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 Black students, approximately equal to 1.4 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 Hispanic students and English learners by 0.8 and 0.5 percentage points, respectively.

IMPLEMENTATION & STRATEGIES

Schools implemented a wide variety of AGR strategies, as shown in Figure 3. Over 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 2 IMPACT ON ABSENCES AND SUSPENSIONS



AGR SCHOOLS | WI SCHOOLS

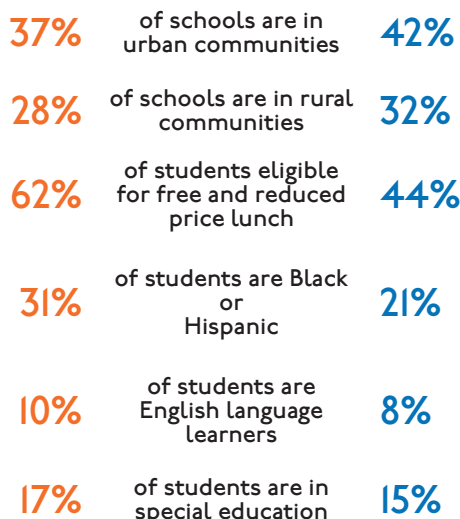
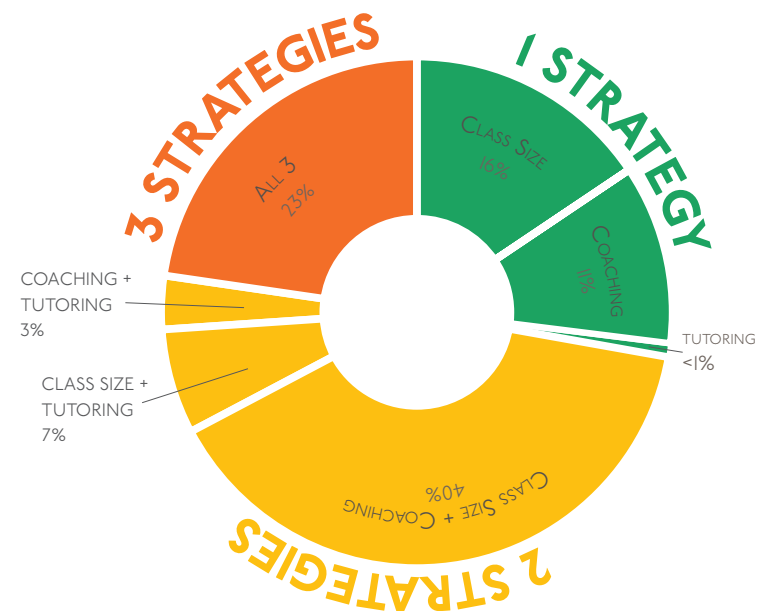


FIGURE 3 AGR STRATEGIES



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. To address the lack of Spring 2020 assessment scores due to COVID-19, we estimate a predictive model that uses student MAP and STAR math and reading scores from Fall 2019 and Winter 2020, student demographics, and school characteristics, to predict what Spring 2020 test scores would have been had the school year proceeded normally.

About the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative

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>. The full evaluation report can be found at <https://bit.ly/agr2020>. Please direct questions to Principal Investigator Jed Richardson at jed.richardson@wisc.edu