WEC Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative

January 2025

SURGE Final Evaluation Report

for Milwaukee Public Schools – Advanced Academic Programs

WISCONSIN UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

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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 https://www.wec.wceruw.org.

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Acknowledgements

The WEC evaluation team would like to extend our sincere thanks to Dr. Martha Lopez and Dr. German Diaz, the SURGE programming team, for their longtime, fruitful partnership and collaboration. WEC also would like to thank Susan O'Brien from the SURGE programming team and Dr. Angela Ford, Advanced Academic Programs Manager at Milwaukee Public Schools.

The authors thank members of the WEC team, as well – Dr. Carmen Bartley for her assistance with qualitative data collection in focus groups and interviews and McKenna Goetz for her assistance with survey data cleaning and analysis.

Copyright Information

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Section 1

Introduction

Introduction

From the 2019-20 academic year through 2023-24, the Office of Advanced Academic Programs at Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) implemented the Serving the UnderRepresented by Grouping Equitably (SURGE) project, a federally-funded grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program. A five-year project, SURGE built on prior Javits-funded grants MPS had received to work with advanced learners: SEE US! (Scaling-up and Expanding Excellence for Underrepresented Students), which started its programming in 2018, and Expanding Excellence, which began in 2015 and was led by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in partnership with MPS. The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC), within the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, was the external evaluator on the SURGE grant and is pleased to present this final, summative evaluation report.

Through SURGE, MPS continued its focus on closing excellence gaps among its high-ability/high-potential learners. According to Plucker, Burroughs, & Song (2010), excellence gaps are the difference in proportions of advanced students across demographic subgroups.[1] Excellence gaps are a persistent national and local policy concern; SURGE, like its companion program SEE US!, endeavored to narrow MPS's excellence gap by using a Response to Intervention (RtI) approach to increase the number of students from historically underserved populations identified as high-ability/high-potential. Components of this approach included the use of inquiry-based practices and culturally responsive identification and instruction. Throughout the program, participating educators received robust professional development intended to impact their mindset, knowledge, skill, and practice in their work with advanced learners. This evaluation's findings show that these efforts were successful in many cases.

SURGE also included several other priorities. The grant fostered engaging STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) learning environments to cultivate student curiosity and allow talent to emerge. SURGE also sought to improve family engagement and to improve student outcomes on assessments. Additionally, the project focused on implementing Total School Cluster Grouping, a model by which teachers can target instruction by reducing the range of student needs present in any single classroom. Gentry (2014) identifies the components of cluster grouping as follows:

> First, groups of students (varying in number from three to more than 10) identified as gifted, high-achieving, or high-ability are placed in classrooms with students of other achievement levels. Second, teachers differentiate curriculum and instruction for the high-achieving students in the clustered classroom. Third, successful teachers of the high-ability students have an interest or background in working with gifted students.[2]

After a discussion of data collection and methodology and the limitations of WEC's evaluation, the remainder of the report focuses on the evaluation's findings and the extent to which SURGE met its goals.

1 Plucker, J.A., Burroughs, N, & Song, R. (2010). *Mind the (Other) Gap!: The Growing Excellence Gap in K-12 Education*. Center for Evaluation & Education Policy. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED531840.pdf

2 Gentry, M. (2014). What Is Cluster Grouping?: An Introduction to Total School Cluster Grouping. In B. Johnsen (Ed.), *Total School Cluster Grouping & Differentiation: A Comprehensive, Research-Based Plan for Raising Student Achievement and Improving Teacher Practices* (pp. 3-25). Prufrock Press Inc.

Section 2

Data Collection and Methodology

Data Collection and Methodology

The evaluation is organized around three guiding questions which are framed around three goals of the SURGE initiative:

1.

Evaluation of

Process

What are patterns in implementation, and to what extent does SURGE implement the proposed activities as intended?

2.

Evaluation of

Outcomes

What are patterns in outcomes of interest in participating students, educators, schools, and families?

3.

Evaluation of

Impact

To what extent are observed patterns in outcome a result of the SURGE initiative?

To address the above guiding questions, WEC conducted a mixed-methods evaluation of SURGE, triangulating data from focus groups, interviews, classroom observations, pre/post surveys of educators, and student-level outcome data.

Pre/Post Survey

In each year of the grant, participating teachers attended required annual trainings after the conclusion of the school year. These trainings were held virtually during the pandemic and in-person thereafter. Before the first training in 2020 and during each subsequent training, the MPS programming team administered the pre/post program survey. The survey was identical each year, aside from a question on sustainability added in the final years of the grant (see Appendix A). Though teachers were asked to complete the survey during each training, not all did so; the numbers of responses by year are as follows:

Table 1: Survey Responses, by school year

SCHOOL YEAR	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
2019-20	41
2020-21	45
2021-22	40
2022-23	8
2023-24	26

Thus, when we report survey findings in this report, we omit the 2022-23 school year due to the low number of responses.

Focus Groups

Each summer, the WEC evaluation team held focus groups with all participants at the annual SURGE professional development training. Focus groups were conducted virtually in summer 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and in-person in subsequent years. Often, separate focus groups were held with each school, though sometimes multiple school teams were combined in focus groups depending on the available time at the training and the number of participants attending from each school. To assess implementation of cluster grouping, we also held a round of additional virtual focus groups in Spring 2024, the results of which were presented in a report to the MPS programming team and are included in this report, as well. The focus group protocol for 2023-24 (which was nearly identical to that of previous years) can be found in Appendix B and included questions on overall impressions of the program, implementation logistics and challenges, perceptions of professional development, identification of advanced learners, cultural responsiveness, student growth, and family engagement. Table 2 shows the number of participants in each round of focus groups.

Table 2: Focus Group Participants at Annual Trainings

TRAINING YEAR	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
2020	42
2021	35
2022	42
2023	36
2024	26

Classroom Observations

In April 2023, a WEC evaluator observed classrooms at four of the nine participating schools to gain further knowledge of how participating teachers were employing STEM- and inquiry-based activities with their students. These observations provided additional context for understanding SURGE's implementation and allowed the evaluation team to see certain activities in person, which was especially valuable given the in-person restrictions of the pandemic in the early years of the grant.

Interview with MPS Programming Team

At the conclusion of the grant, a WEC evaluator interviewed the MPS programming team to collect their perceptions of the grant's implementation, successes, and challenges. The interview protocol touched on similar themes to the annual focus group protocol (such as implementation successes and challenges, identification of advanced learners, student growth, and family engagement). Findings from this interview are included throughout this report, and the protocol is included in Appendix C.

Student Data and Outcomes

Although the primary focus of SURGE programming was to impact educator mindset, knowledge, skill, and practice, we were interested in investigating student level outcomes as well. Analysis of the impact on student outcomes encompassed both identification and student performance. With respect to identification, participants in the program were trained on the Teacher Observation of Potential in Students (TOPS), a culturally responsive identification tool that includes nine domains of advanced learning potential:

1. Learns Easily
2. Shows Advanced Skills
3. Displays Curiosity & Creativity
4. Has Strong Interests
5. Shows Advanced Reasoning & Problem Solving
6. Displays Spatial Abilities
7. Shows Motivation
8. Shows Social Perceptiveness
9. Displays Leadership

Participating educators continually used TOPS to identify students with advanced potential, and WEC utilized TOPS identification data from each year of the grant to assess the program's efficacy in closing the excellence gap. These data are presented in the Findings section below.

To estimate SURGE's impacts on student performance, WEC used a propensity score matching methodology that compared the outcomes of students in SURGE schools with the outcomes of students in comparable MPS schools that did not implement SURGE. If SURGE had a measurable impact on student outcomes, we would expect that improvements in outcomes at SURGE schools would surpass improvements in outcomes at comparable non-SURGE schools.[3] We used propensity score matching to select a group of comparable MPS schools, based on similar fall 2019-20 school-level averages of STAR scores and demographic characteristics. We matched at the school level because SURGE was implemented at the school level, despite allowing educators to choose whether to participate in SURGE training. We chose school-level matching because there is ample evidence that SURGE impacts would extend beyond the classrooms of SURGE-trained teachers: many non-classroom teaching staff who float across grades received SURGE training, there is evidence from qualitative data of SURGE teachers seeking to share their learning with other staff who did not participate in training, and, as students progressed through grades at SURGE schools, they received instruction both from teachers who participated in SURGE and from teachers who did not.

The final impact analysis sample included only SURGE schools and matched comparison schools. The analysis excluded schools that had 1) participated in SEE US!, which began two years before SURGE and operated concurrently for the first three years of SURGE; 2) other schools where teachers received professional development similar to SURGE; 3) charter schools and non-Title I schools (as all SURGE schools are non-charter and Title I); 4) schools without all grades 1-3; and 5) schools that did not exist for the entire sample period. After matching comparison schools, we checked for balance in school characteristics and parallel trends in outcomes across the treatment and control groups. We then analyzed outcomes for the 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 school years, as testing was either non-existent or sparse in 2020-21 due to the pandemic.

3 Outcomes as measured by the STAR reading and math and 4th grade Forward Science assessments.

Limitations

The SURGE program began in 2019-20, and the end of that school year – when teachers were learning about the program in preparation for implementation in 2020-21 – coincided with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This especially impacted our analysis of student outcomes as measured by assessment data, as there was no pre-program pre-test since testing was canceled in Spring 2020. Much of the following 2020-21 school year then took place in an environment of virtual learning. Thus, the full program, as intended, was not able to be fully implemented until its third year. It is thus important to underscore that this delay in full implementation may not have allowed the program to reach its true potential, in addition to the measurement challenges it posed.

Our evaluation has other limitations related to analysis of student assessment data:

1. There were limitations involved with reviewing impacts across years with "dosage" (the number of years students had a SURGE teacher). As noted above, there was no pre-test measure for schools beginning SURGE in 2020-21 because of the pandemic. Also, many students are removed from a multi-year sample due to mobility.
2. A possible way to address the first limitation is to use fall-to-spring growth *within* years. However, this approach could bias results toward zero since the pre-test will have the SURGE impact "baked in" if the student received SURGE in the previous school year. (That is, they would already have received some effects of the program.)
3. Matches were of low-quality. As discussed above in the methodology section, we treated SURGE as a school-level intervention, but the pool of comparison schools ended up being relatively small after excluding charters, non-Title I schools, SEE US! schools, and other schools that received similar treatments as SURGE.
4. SURGE expanded beyond grades 1-3 at some schools. While this allowed the program to serve more students, it also created challenges from an analytic standpoint, as certain grades (such as Kindergarten) do not have pre-test measures.
5. Even though some schools may have expanded SURGE beyond grade 3, the program ended in 3rd grade in many schools. Thus, using Forward Science – a 4th grade outcome – may not be appropriate, as many students would be a year removed from the program at that point.

Additionally, pre/post survey participation waned in the later years of the program; as noted above, we do not report 2022-23 survey results in this report at all due to the low number of respondents. Low participation also limited our ability to review survey results by subgroup. Furthermore, only a small number of the same educators took the survey each summer. Thus, while we report survey findings in aggregate, analyses of individual growth on the pre/post survey were limited due to the small numbers of repeat participants from year to year.

Section 3

Findings

Findings

Most of the following section combines the first two evaluation questions by assessing both the implementation of grant priorities and the themes and patterns associated with those priorities at participating schools, drawing on findings from surveys, focus groups, interviews, and observations:

1. What are patterns in implementation, and to what extent does SURGE implement the proposed activities as intended?
2. What are patterns in outcomes of interest in participating students, educators, schools, and families?

Identification of traditionally underrepresented students

SURGE began in five schools in the first full implementation year (2020-21), added three schools in 2021-22, and added one school in 2022-23. Given the demographic characteristics of SURGE schools are tightly aligned to characteristics of historically underrepresented groups in advanced learning (i.e., high concentrations of students of color, students who are economically disadvantaged, and English learners), increasing advanced learning identification in these schools has a clear impact on addressing the excellence gap in the district – one of the grant's primary goals. Table 3 shows the proportions of subgroups across participating SURGE schools in the final year of the grant (2023-24).

Table 3: Characteristics of Students in SURGE Schools, 2023-24

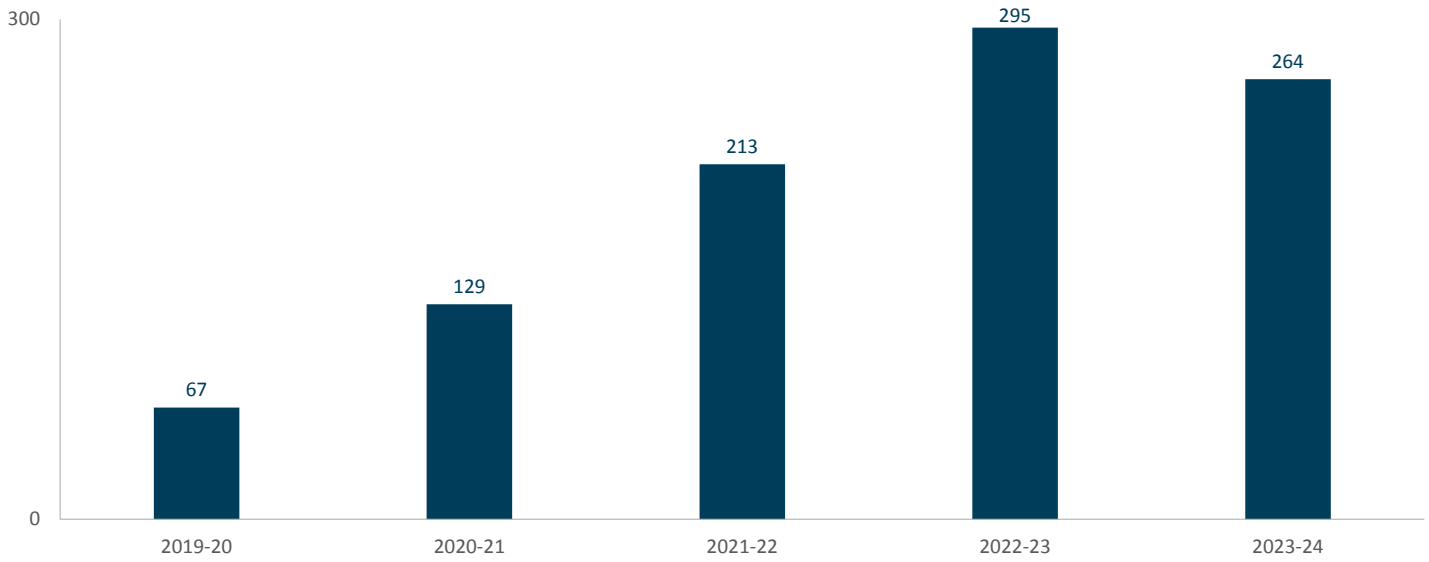
SCHOOL	AMERICAN INDIAN/ ALASKA NATIVE	ASIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	PACIFIC ISLANDER	TWO OR MORE RACES	WHITE	STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED	ENGLISH LEARNER
Emerson	0.0%	3.5%	82.2%	7.9%	0.5%	4.0%	2.0%	27.7%	90.1%	0.5%
Garland	0.0%	32.1%	11.0%	22.2%	0.0%	4.3%	30.4%	15.7%	87.3%	44.0%
Hawthorne	0.7%	0.4%	83.5%	7.4%	0.0%	7.0%	1.1%	20.0%	n/a*	0.0%
Hayes	0.0%	0.3%	2.4%	95.9%	0.0%	0.2%	1.3%	22.7%	87.0%	74.0%
Lowell	0.0%	11.2%	20.4%	49.5%	0.5%	6.8%	11.7%	18.0%	92.7%	20.4%
Manitoba	0.5%	18.7%	24.0%	43.4%	0.2%	4.9%	8.3%	27.6%	87.6%	17.1%
Rogers St.	0.2%	0.7%	6.8%	89.3%	0.0%	2.1%	0.9%	16.1%	93.0%	46.0%
Zablocki	1.4%	16.6%	10.2%	55.6%	0.3%	6.1%	9.8%	28.1%	90.5%	26.1%
SURGE total	0.3%	10.7%	21.9%	54.6%	0.1%	3.7%	8.6%	21.3%	90.3%**	36.7%

Source: DPI 2023-24 enrollment file.
*Data are suppressed in DPI's enrollment file, likely because nearly all students at Hawthorne are economically disadvantaged.
**Given recent trends, we assign all students at Hawthorne as "economically disadvantaged." Thus, this percentage is slightly higher than the actual percentage of economically disadvantaged students in SURGE schools.

Over the course of the grant, participants grew in their use and understanding of the TOPS tool. TOPS served multiple functions in SURGE, both as a tool with which to identify high potential and ability and as a tool to facilitate culturally responsive practices. Both programming staff and the evaluation team found that identification using TOPS increased greatly in SURGE schools over the course of the grant; the programming staff noted the "unintended consequence" that TOPS had a "powerful effect on helping teachers to change their instruction." The MPS programming team also worked to make TOPS more user-friendly (moving from paper-pencil to an online form) and provided supplemental resources to help teachers identify students in specific domains.

Figure I shows the counts of students nominated using the TOPS tool in SURGE schools in each year of the grant, starting with just 67 students in the first year before increasing nearly fourfold by the conclusion of the grant.

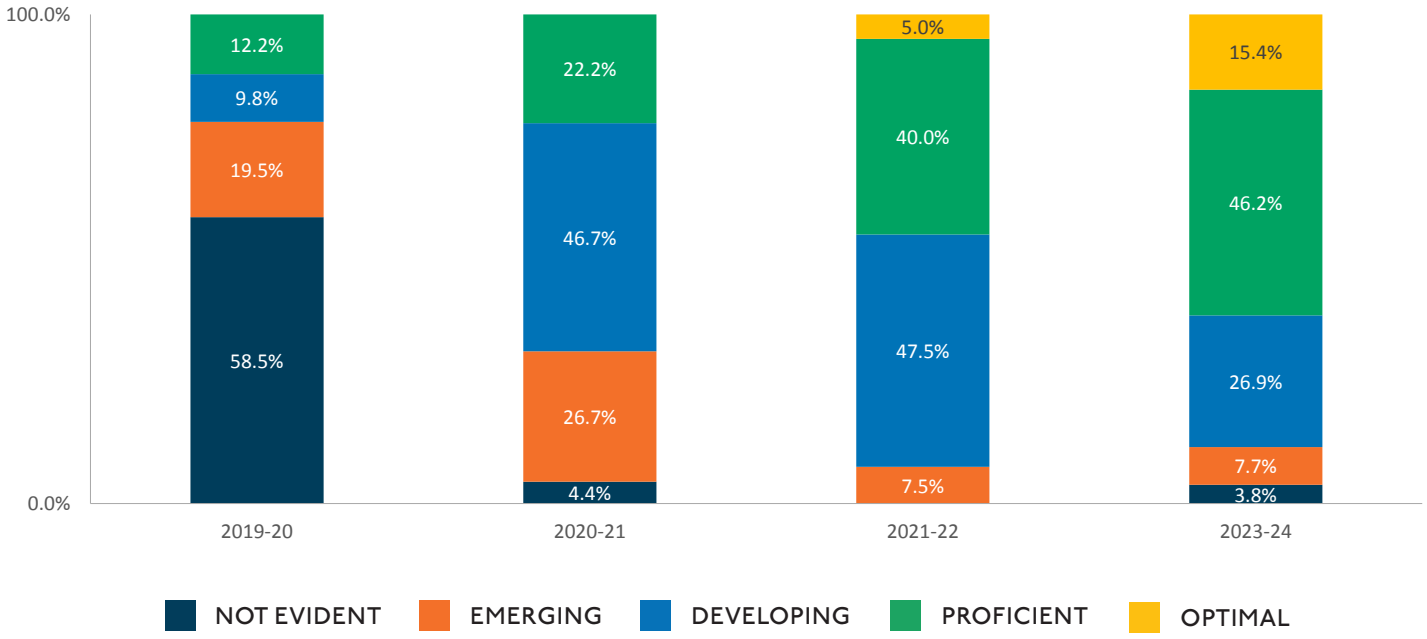
Figure I: TOPS Identification in SURGE Schools, by year



Similarly, the pre/post survey showed substantial improvement in participants' use and understanding of the TOPS tool (Figure 2). In the pre-survey in 2020, the majority of participants indicated they did not use TOPS at all. By the final post-survey at the conclusion of the 2023-24 school year, over 60 percent of respondents indicated their use was "proficient" or "optimal." The progression and definitions of these terms are as follows:

- **Not Evident**
- **Emerging**: Beginning evidence of understanding of theoretical background and practical application of TOPS. Used for a few students, sporadically. Completed in one sitting or in retrospect.
- **Developing**: Use of TOPS on a regular basis, beginning with the whole-class observation which leads to some individual observations. Experimenting with guiding classroom instruction and sharing students' strengths and needs.
- **Proficient**: Consistent integration of TOPS for student observations. Entire observation process followed; students with outstanding potential are recognized. Information from observations are used to plan appropriate response for students' strengths and needs.
- **Optimal**: Significant and intentional use in classroom to see high potential in students, including those from educationally vulnerable populations. Seamless use to guide classroom instruction, share student strengths and needs with other teachers, and communicate with families. Use as a base for creating a body of evidence to document the child's strengths and needs. Helps to guide advanced learning referrals, placement and services in and out of the general education classroom, and policy issues.

Figure 2: TOPS Proficiency, by year



Note: We omit 2022-23 due to the small number of respondents.

Focus group responses also provide evidence of participants' use and understanding of TOPS. Through their use of and training on TOPS, participants often reflected on "non-teacher-pleasing behaviors" that could be a hallmark of advanced learning potential – high-potential students may act out because they are bored or not challenged. Teachers noted shifts from looking at students' deficits to looking at their strengths and strived to see their students as individuals. They also noted that TOPS allowed them to look at students' strengths aside from academics (as opposed to the academics-based CogAT exam, in particular). Themes that came up less frequently, but that may be relevant to the future of such programs, were the impact on subgroups (such as English learners and younger students) and the permission teachers felt to teach their students things they felt would enrich them. Themes and representative quotes are presented in Table 4.

TOPS identification also appears to have led to more equitable access to advanced learning opportunities. Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6 present TOPS identifications in 2023-24 by race/ethnicity, economic status, English learner status, and special education status, respectively.

Table 4: Focus Groups Themes on TOPS

THEME	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTE(S)
Non-teacher pleasing behaviors	"I think yes it will be a great way to identify those students! There is one kiddo that keeps coming to mind of one that could be GT. He did not exhibit teacher pleasing behaviors, but reflecting back and looking at the TOPS tools, I would have identified him. His knowledge of nature and dinosaurs is amazing when not performing well in other areas. It may help see through the behaviors and see true potential."
	"One thing that I really got from the TOPS tool is to differentiate between non-teacher-pleasing behaviors and gifted behaviors. That was really a fundamental shift for me. I expect our gifted kids to be well-behaved. And that was an a-ha for me – they might not be exhibiting those characteristics that I would expect in my classroom."
Shifts in mindset	"On the first day, when they were talking about, changing, our shift from the at-risk mentality versus the at-potential mentality. Focusing more on that gift than some of their deficits. Every year you start with a brand-new group of kids, in most cases. When you look at the kids on the first day, they come in with all of these unknown gifts to us, and we start tapping into those with these different activities we're going to be doing."
	"It helps us see each student as an individual, which we try to do anyway. Even your 'annoying' kids, the ones that get on your last nerve, you start to see their strengths in a different way. Which I think is helpful overall and also lends itself to giving a little more patience in what the kid has to offer."
Non-academic	"I like it. I think it's cool. It has me look at my students under a different lens. A lot of times when you think of gifted and talented, you think in terms of academics. I like the mindshift that it's offering me, of looking at other ways students might be qualified."
	"In the past, you think about gifted and talented only academically. With the TOPS tool, you're able to see students in a different light."
	"A lot of people just think, gifted and talented, oh you're smart in math, oh you're smart in reading. No, there's so much you could be gifted in. … it pulls out things that the average Joe or the veteran teacher might not see as gifted because their scores are low."
Subgroups	"With our school having such a high population of ESL kids, this will help them as well to show some of their skills in other ways than just a way to talk about it."
	"Starting in early ages was very important with this program because we don't qualify for many programs in early ages… It provided me a deeper understanding of talented students and to identify them since early ages so they can continue."
Permission	"…It also gives me permission if somebody comes into my room to observe me and I'm doing something a little bit off the charts, we're making something really wild and crazy – okay, this is where this goes, in engineering practices and in gifted and talented. I have more permission to do that."

Figure 3: TOPS Identifications by Race/Ethnicity, 2023-24

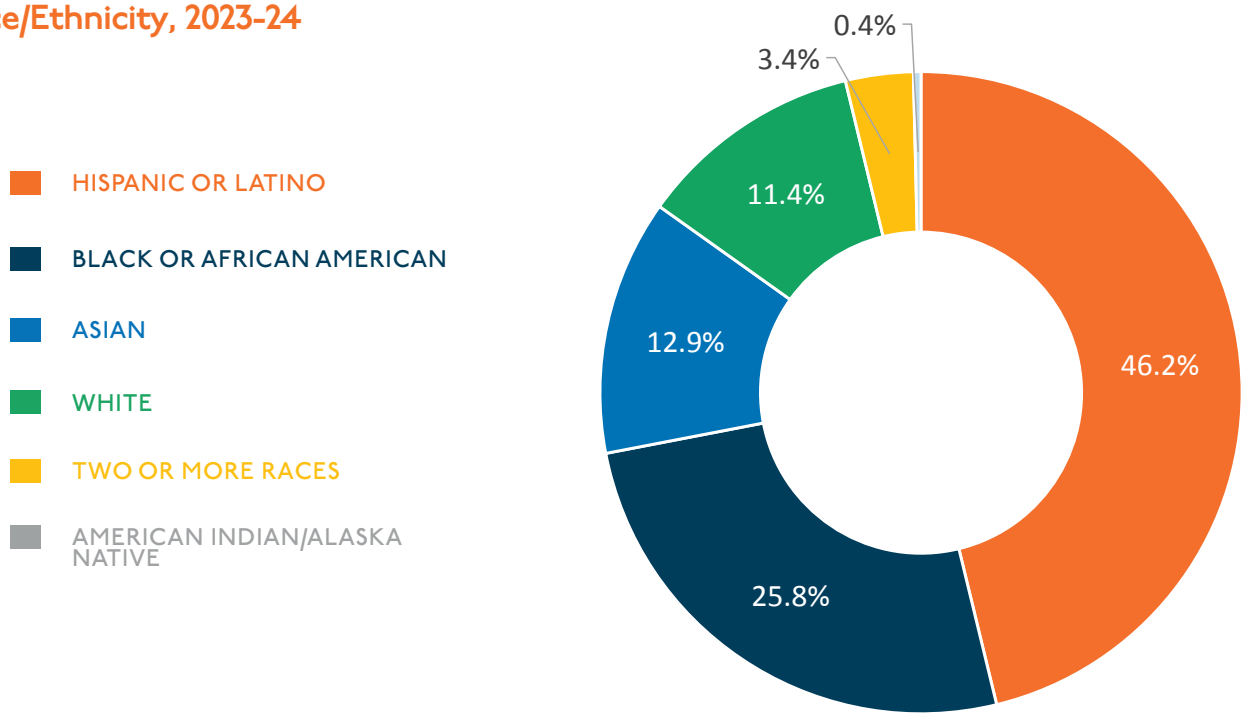


Figure 4: TOPS Identifications by Economic Status, 2023-24

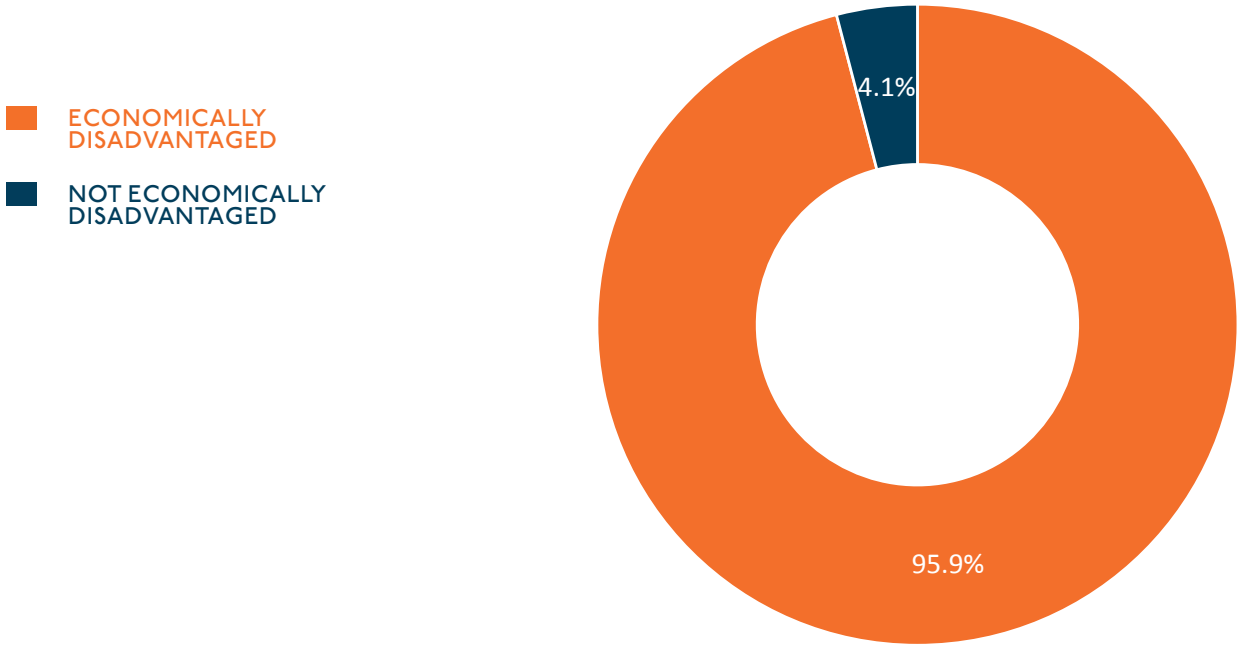


Figure 5: TOPS Identifications by English Learner Status, 2023-24

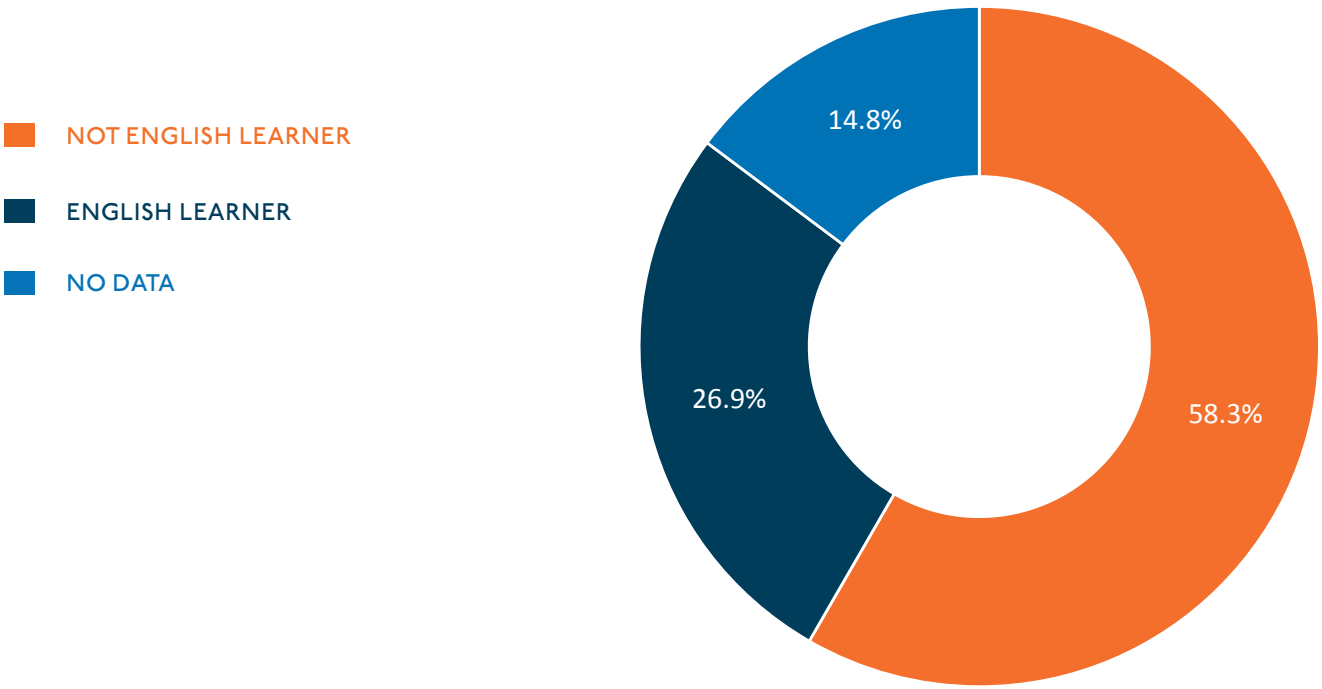
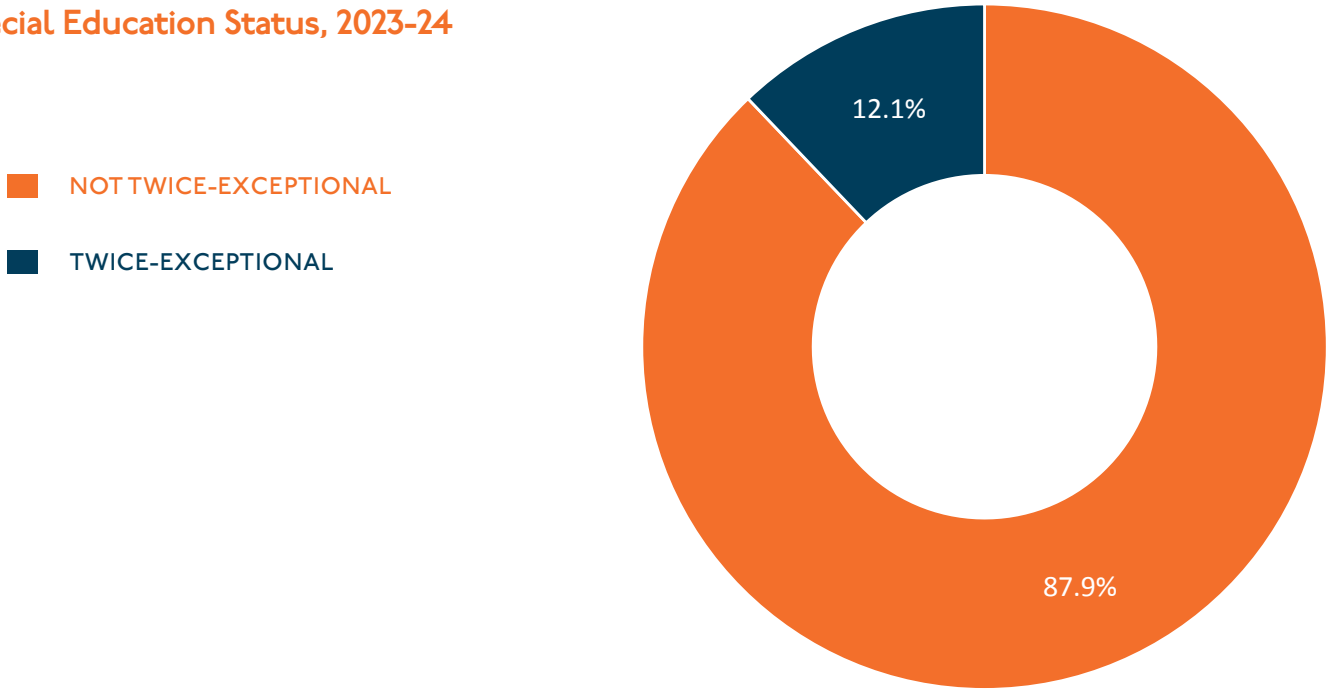


Figure 6: TOPS Identifications by Special Education Status, 2023-24



To assess the extent to which SURGE successfully addressed MPS's excellence gap, an important goal of the grant, we can calculate a Representation Index (RI) for each subgroup of students in SURGE schools.[4] The Representation Index is calculated by taking the percentage of identified students within a subgroup and dividing it by the percentage of that subgroup population within a school:

$$\frac{\text{(\% gifted in subgroup)}}{\text{(\% total of subgroup)}}$$

An RI of exactly one indicates perfect representation, while an RI below one indicates that a group is underrepresented, and an RI greater than one indicates overrepresentation. Nationally, students from Black, Hispanic, Native, and/ or low-income families are significantly underrepresented within gifted education programs, while Asian and White students are overrepresented.[5] Twice Exceptional (2E) students (advanced learners also identified for special education services) are also underrepresented.[6] These inequities at the national scale represent a persistent policy concern,[7] and MPS is not immune – this is the root of the excellence gap MPS has desired to rectify in its successful applications for Javits funding over the last several years.

Representation indices for subgroups in 2023-24 are calculated in Table 5 by comparing demographic data at SURGE schools (see Table 3) to the program's TOPS identification data (Figures 3-6). Using these representation indices, Asian and White students remain slightly overrepresented in SURGE, but we also see a RI greater than one for students who are American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and economically disadvantaged, and near one for Hispanic or Latino students, which is an impressive achievement of the program compared to national trends.

4 Yoon, S. Y., & Gentry, M. (2009). Racial and ethnic representation in gifted programs: Current status of and implications for gifted Asian American students. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 53*(2), 121-136. https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986208330564

5 Hodges, J., Tay, J., Maeda, Y., & Gentry, M. (2018). A Meta-Analysis of Gifted and Talented Identification Practices. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 62*(2), 147-174. https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986217752107

6 Walrod, D.P. (2022). Equity through the Participation of Twice-Exceptional Students in Gifted Programming. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 66*(2), 142-143. https://doi.org/10.1177/00169862211037717

7 Peters, S.J., Gentry, M., & McBee, M.T. (2019). Who Gets Served in Gifted Education? Demographic Representation and a Call for Action. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 63*(4), 273-287. https://doi.org/10.1177/0016986219833738

Table 5: Representation Indices by Subgroup, 2023-24

SUBGROUP	2023-24
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.26
Asian	1.20
Black or African American	1.18
Hispanic or Latino	0.85
Two or More Races	0.92
White	1.32
Students with Disabilities	0.57
Students who are Economically Disadvantaged*	1.09
English Learners	0.73

*TOPS data in 2023-24 did not include economic status, so this is the RI for students who were economically disadvantaged in 2022-23.

One area of future improvement remains with 2E students, who show an RI of only 0.57; however, this is quite a bit higher than the RI for 2E students in the final year of SEE US! (0.35). MPS received another Javits grant for work with this population; this grant began concurrently with the final years of the SURGE program, which may help explain the improvement from the SEE US! grant with this subgroup of students. Indeed, in focus groups, participants, without being prompted, referenced employing SURGE with twice-exceptional students:

- "I had the opportunity to attend the Twice Exceptional convention virtually. It really gave me knowledge of what that term means, twice exceptionality. It has helped me to reflect on those students we think don't have the ability, capacity to be high-performers."
- "This year we're focusing on twice-exceptional. That is something I never even thought of, a child with an IEP could possibly be put into one of those groups."
- "Just because you're super good in one area doesn't mean you're good in other areas. The 2E training that we did helped with that. This school year, I had a very, very, very smart kid who's also very weird. And it just points out, you are so good at science you're so good at all these different things, but you also don't get social cues. Another way the brain works. Learning about that helped me understand my students and think about that while getting to know my students."
- "…if they were twice-exceptional…All their lives, [parents have] been told what their child can't do, and suddenly it's like someone's recognizing what they can do."

In addition to TOPS identification data and Representation Indices, we can also review pre/post survey data to assess teachers' identification practices. Two survey items dealt with identification, both on a five-point "not evident"-"optimal" scale:

- Use multiple measures in our universal screening process
- Use a process to analyze disaggregated universal screening results (i.e., by student demographic groups)

Figure 7 shows the percentage of respondents answering "proficient" or "optimal" to both items over time. Both items showed substantial improvement, especially in the final year of the grant.

Figure 7: Screening Procedures, by year

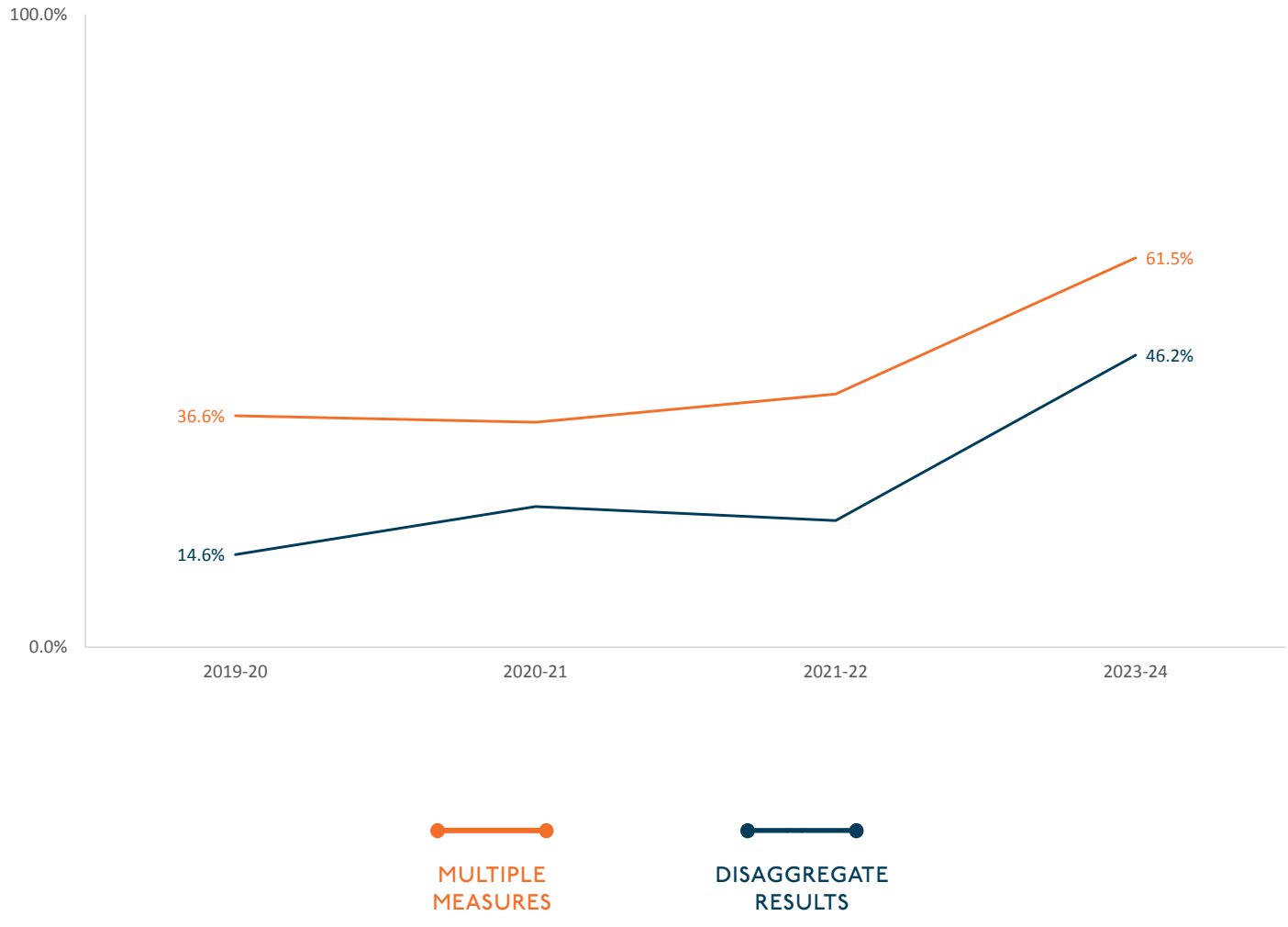


Figure 8: Survey Responses to STEM Items, by year, Part I

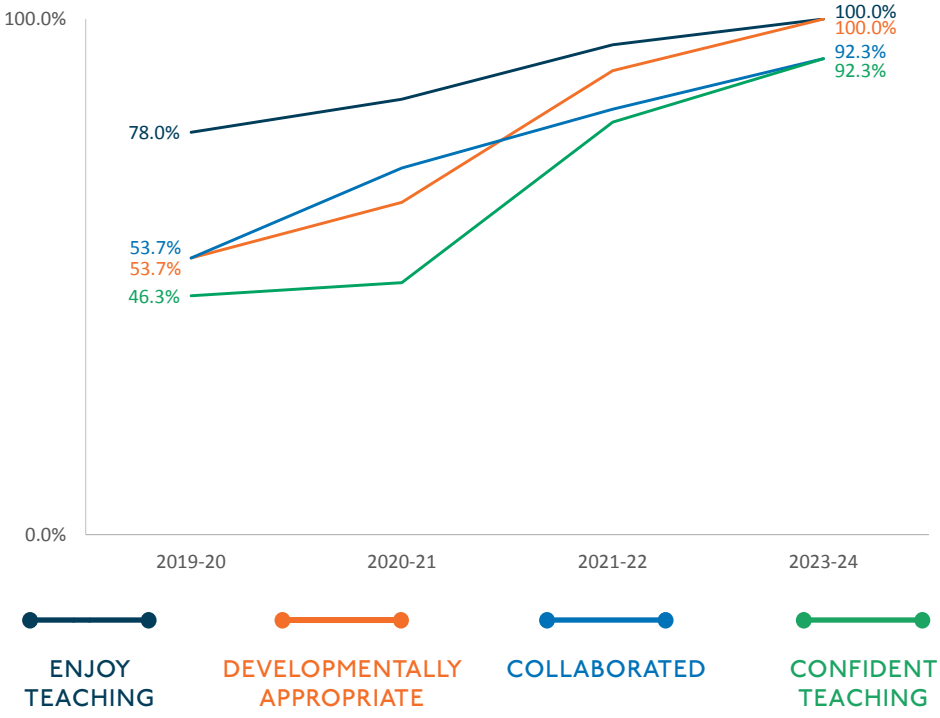
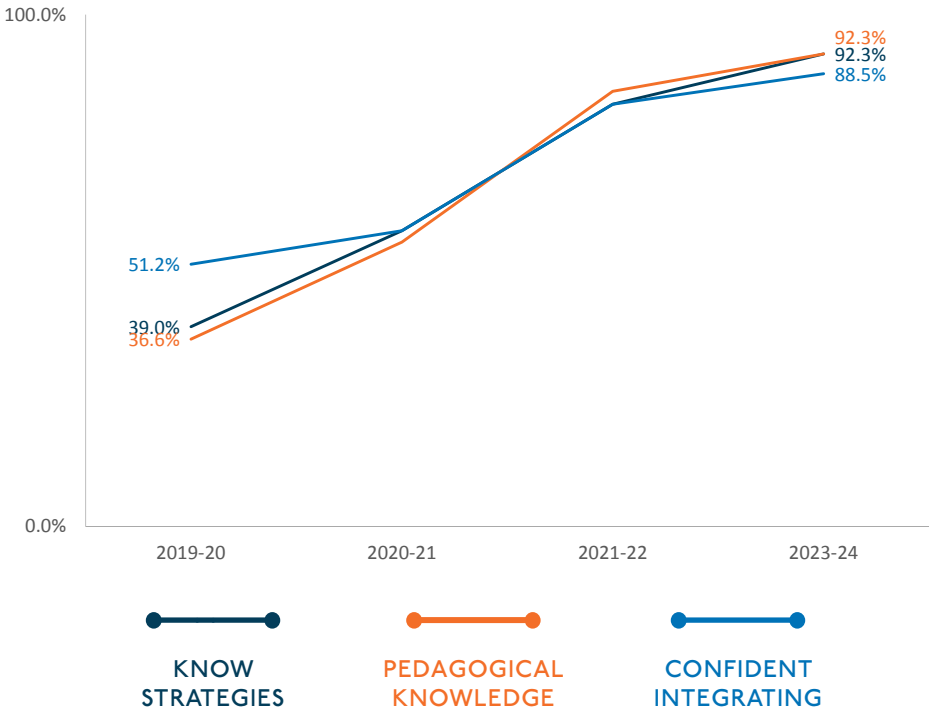


Figure 9: Survey Responses to STEM Items, by year, Part 2



STEM and inquiry-based activities

General perceptions of activities

Seven survey items sought to assess participating educators' perceptions and understanding of STEM- and inquiry-focused activities:

- I enjoy teaching STEM.
- I know how to teach developmentally appropriate STEM subjects in my classroom.
- I have collaborated with my colleagues on teaching STEM education.
- I am confident about teaching STEM education in my classroom.
- I know the teaching strategies of STEM education.
- I have pedagogical knowledge about STEM teaching.
- I am confident about integrating STEM learning into my regular instructional practices.

Participants responded to these items on a 4-point strongly agree-strongly disagree scale. Combining "strongly agree" and "agree" responses, each of these items showed steady, year-over-year improvement; by 2023-24, each item had 88 percent agreement or better, as shown in Figure 8 and Figure 9. (We have separated these items into two figures for ease of interpretation.)

The MPS programming team described how teachers

> expanded their vision of what STEM should look like… through questioning, exploration. The teachers doing hands-on exploration… some teachers really took it to the next level to make it inquiry-based, problem-based. They began to incorporate more rigorous instruction using the engineering design process. Let's think of how we can solve this problem, let's think of what we can change, and doing a model. How can we improve? Where can we take it from here? The application of STEM was wider than many teachers had in mind at first.

Focus groups also show that participants had a positive impression of STEM activities. Participants discussed ways in which STEM activities engaged their students, fit with other school priorities, helped to create an observable environment for identification, and even eased the transition back to in-person schooling during the pandemic. These themes, with representative quotes, are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Focus Group Themes on STEM- and Inquiry-Based Activities

THEME	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES
Engagement	"I've seen more creativity. Once a week, we have STEM bins where they just get to explore. The things that I've seen them build at the end of the year as opposed to the beginning of the year and how they learn from each other, it's really great." "I think the STEM portion of it really lends itself – hands-on activities. That's where I see my ESL kids excel – If they can't speak the language, they can show me." "Having them exposed to this hands-on learning and inquiry, they totally bought into it."
Integration with school priorities	"We also have a lot of STEM things happening this year. We're starting a new STEM fair, science fair, we're a Green school – we're getting this new initiative to green our school. There is a lot – some of it connects to this, so I think that will be beneficial." "One of the things this year is knowing that we were getting this grant money to work with, it helped us at the 3rd grade level commit to doing a science fair because we knew we would be able to finance it and give the kids the materials that they need to have an enjoyable experience. It's another added layer of pressure and stress for the teachers to manage that, but thank you to the grant! Thank you, thank you. I'll tell you at the end of the year how grateful we are, but I know the kids are gonna love it." "It's also forwarded science expectations in our building dramatically."
Observable environment	"Incorporating a lot of the STEM into the observable environment. My class loves STEM. I think this is a great segue into integrating it. It's not really adding anything, it's just integrating it." "You can immediately see that a lot of students that I regularly did not see present awesome ideas in a traditional way – in STEM they're a completely different person. They can show you things hands-on." "That push to do the STEM activities will really give every kid an opportunity to demonstrate their talents in different areas. Teamwork skills, and things like that, that the normal curriculum doesn't do a great job of encouraging."
Return from pandemic	"The STEM toys we got really brought back that aspect of play and cooperative learning. Because they hadn't had that opportunity." "Coming off of virtual learning, this year was so much better. The supplies, just seeing them working with the things. I teach K5 – these kids really didn't know what school was about, being virtual in K4."

Aside from the feedback presented in Table 6, focus group participants often discussed three additional aspects of STEM- and inquiry-based instruction: resources, camps, and Genius Hour. Findings on those items are presented in the following sections.

Resources provided through SURGE

SURGE teachers greatly appreciated the resources they had access to by virtue of their participation in the program. Participants frequently noted that it would have been cost-prohibitive to secure these resources were it not for SURGE. They also mentioned that students often do not have access to high-quality resources at home, and thus the resources helped with student engagement. The following focus group responses illustrate the importance of the resources SURGE provided:

- "I'm also enjoying the monies to be able to get STEM supplies in the classroom that I wouldn't otherwise be able to have."
- "...all of the materials that they've allowed us to purchase has allowed me to become more of a hands-on educator. The students really are getting more in-depth learning because of that."
- "It allows us to give our students things that they might not get at home because of their poverty levels, or access to manipulatives that the parents don't have. SURGE allows us to provide that to our students."
- "I like that I had choices in the materials. It allowed me to not just stick with cookie-cutter things. I was able to think out of the box and get things that really still work within the standards but really help kids to explore."
- "They were so excited to get back together [after virtual learning]. Making their little zoos out of the building blocks. Just to be in those small groups, have time to talk and play together was really big. Without SURGE, we wouldn't have had those tools in our classroom."
- "I had a student the last week of school – he used the newest thing that [the MPS programming team] brought to us. They're like wooden blocks, and there's a ball, and he built a tunnel but took the middle one out so that light could still get through in his tunnel. Then he asked my permission to grab his cell phone because he wanted to take a picture of this, and the light from one end showed through to the other because of how he built this tunnel."

Enrichment Camps for Students

SURGE held several enrichment camps for advanced learners over the course of the grant. Participating educators were widely complimentary of the camps, not only related to the impact on students but also of how teachers benefited:

- "…[Students] have experiences they otherwise they would not have. That's one of the things that could help students get more engaged. A lot of these kids don't have background knowledge – they get exposed to other things that they usually don't get exposed to. That could be helpful to them. Those camps, the different activities they can participate in are a good experience for these kids."
- "…An opportunity for [students] to have a creative outlet that they don't get in the regular classroom. Them being very engaged with it and very excited about going home with the materials. To continue experimenting on their own with whatever area the camp was about. It's been a very, very positive experience."
- "[Camps] are very engaging. Especially when we did the animals, the tortoise and all that – the kids were just beyond themselves. They loved it!"
- "Those camps are amazing for those kids. They always leave with so many resources, they leave with books for their personal libraries at home and then all those supplies so they can continue learning. Those camps are great, the kids always love them."
- "…I love that they get to network and meet other kids."
- "…really a huge PD. Because you're getting an opportunity to work with kids in a new way. If we weren't part of the grant, [educators] wouldn't have that opportunity."
- "I enjoyed working the camps. My kids really enjoyed it too, and they wanted to be there on a Saturday."
- "They were fun to teach as well as for the kids."

Camps also factored into the ways in which SURGE fostered family engagement, which is discussed in greater detail below.

Sample Activity: Genius Hour

One prominent exemplar of the STEM- and inquiry-based activities in SURGE was Genius Hour at Hawthorne, in which students got to choose activities or clubs to participate in during the school day, outside of traditional academic activities. Hawthorne's teachers took the initiative to employ Genius Hour as part of their SURGE implementation; Genius Hour occurs every other Friday, in six-week rotations. Students list their activity or club preferences, and teachers make assignments based on those preferences. Small posters outside of each classroom show which activity took place in which classroom. Some examples of Genius Hour activities observed in WEC's visit to the school were as follows:

- Chess Club
- Painting
- Geography
- Qwirkle (a strategy game)
- Building group (using blocks and magnet tiles)
- Coding club
- Lego club
- Jewelry-making
- Jump Rope
- Greeting Card-making

In focus groups, Hawthorne teachers described their positive experiences with Genius Hour:

- "We do Genius Hour. Everyone gets to be part of SURGE because of that. The growth is the confidence, they get to make choices about what kind of club they want to go to, go to things that interest them instead of us just saying, you've got to go to art, or you've got to do this. They're excited about coming to school, building a rapport with other teachers, getting to know other teachers in the building."
- "…I built relationships with [students] as a result of them coming to my club. Now because I have built a relationship, they're more receptive to me saying something to them. And that makes a huge difference. So now, if I see that child in the hallway, I say to them, when we have genius club, we're going to win that game!"
- "What I have seen is that my students are gaining more confidence in their abilities and their skills. They are stepping out and identifying their worth by saying 'I am really smart.' Especially when we're having our Genius Club. Students are really involved. Their attention span is longer. They're willing to take some risks. They're excited about doing the work. Versus when we first started. They're more comfortable with it."

While Hawthorne was the only school doing Genius Hour at the whole-school level, other teachers indicated in focus groups that they had employed (or are trying to employ) similar strategies in their classrooms:

- "I had a weekly Genius Hour. In the afternoon, when I had a special like Second Step, I could dedicate the time with my students. They got to investigate things. They tend to like to pick the same things. I was using the manipulatives, every now and again I added projects. One of their family members has a farm, so I was able to take little pumpkins, and I had them have a little paper pumpkin. Okay, here's your plan, you need to formulate a plan, then you have to put your plan into action. When you're done, you had to be like, did it go according to what you had originally planned? Some yes, some no, I got really distracted thinking about all the things else I could do with it. I brought in puffy paint, paint, googly eyes, all sorts of stuff for them. I would do that with a few different projects too. That was one they really, really enjoyed because they got to take something home with them."
- "…the Genius Hour was something that we've tried to implement at our school that came because of the SURGE grant… It's a work in progress."

However, Genius Hour requires time, support, and buy-in across a school, which has created obstacles to implementation elsewhere:

- "Scheduling is something that we've talked about that makes it a little difficult. Finding time to do a Genius Hour. There are so many mandated minutes – how can we be creative with what we're doing in order to make sure that we're giving these opportunities for students to participate in activities."
- "We can't do Genius Hour…we need teacher buy-in. And if everyone does it but [a certain] grade, then they're going to be sitting there sad, why does everybody else get to do this but I don't? Well, it's because your teacher doesn't want to. And then whose fault is that, the teachers or the admin, because they're not making them. And then the kids feel left out."
- "[Another school] said they do Genius Hour during recess. I have duty every single recess, every week, every day. We don't have specialists. There's gaps in staff, and it does make people get worn out. You just want to have the time to plan. I try to do the Genius thing on Fridays just because my students are too exhausted, so listening to me at the end of the day on Friday, maybe we can do it then. It's really hard without the support. Even to go through our district science kit and do the things that are in there when you don't have any prep time or barely a lunch."
- "We've played with Genius Hour, but if there was maybe a little bit more support to do more quantity, more quality time..."

While Genius Hour appears to have worked well and been quite popular at Hawthorne, it may be difficult to scale such activities to other schools and settings in MPS. Those seeking to implement Genius Hour should consider both the successes and challenges identified here.

Spotlight on Cluster Grouping

Cluster Grouping is a model by which teachers can target instruction by reducing the range of student needs present in any single classroom. In Spring 2024, the WEC evaluation team conducted focus groups on cluster grouping with eight of the nine SURGE schools and prepared a report on participants' implementation and perceptions of cluster grouping in their schools. We classified cluster grouping models as either "structural" or "student-level." The structural models schools could employ, using definitions from Gentry (2014), were as follows:

- **Total School Cluster Grouping**: Cluster grouping model that takes into account the achievement levels of all students and places students in classrooms yearly in order to reduce the number of achievement levels in each classroom and facilitate teachers' differentiation of curriculum and instruction for all students and thus increase student achievement.
- **Between-Class Grouping**: Students are regrouped for a subject area (usually within an elementary grade level) based on ability or achievement. Teachers instruct students working at similar levels with appropriately challenging curricula, at an appropriate pace, and with methods most suited to facilitate academic gain.
- **Within-Class Grouping**: These groups are different arrangements teachers use within their classes. Groups may be created by interest, skill, achievement, job, ability, self- selection – either heterogeneous or homogeneous – and can include various forms of cooperative learning grouping arrangements. Groups are intended to be flexible.
- **Flexible Grouping**: The use of various forms of grouping for instruction, pacing, and curriculum in such a manner to allow for movement of students between and among groups based on their progress and needs.

In the Spring 2024 focus groups, we asked schools which of the structural models they were using. Responses to this item are shown in Table 7. Participants often selected more than one model and indicated whether a model was only implemented in certain grades. Within-class grouping was the most common model identified (by 7 of the 8 schools). Notably, no schools appeared to be using total school grouping.

Table 7: Use of Structural Cluster Grouping Models

MODEL	N	SCHOOLS
Total School Cluster Grouping	0	
Between-Class Grouping	5	Hartford, Hawthorne (grades 2-5), Lowell (grade 3), Manitoba (grades 6-8), Zablocki (grade 3)
Within-Class Grouping	7	Garland, Hartford, Hayes, Lowell, Manitoba, Rogers, Zablocki (grade 3)
Flexible Grouping	5	Garland, Lowell, Manitoba, Rogers, Zablocki

In the focus groups, participants touted benefits of the specific models, discussed the advantages of using different models in different subject areas, and appreciated the flexibility cluster grouping provided. Participants also identified barriers or challenges they encountered, such as staff shortages and buy-in, student attendance and behavior, time, and logistics. The MPS programming team also indicated that schedules limited the ability of schools to engage in cluster grouping, so it was usually easier for schools to do so at the within-classroom (or in certain cases, between-classroom) level.

Next, we asked participants to identify which of the three student-level grouping strategies their schools were implementing, again using definitions from Gentry (2014) for achievement and ability grouping:

- **Ability Grouping**: Students are grouped for the purpose of modification of pace, instruction, and curriculum. Groups can be flexible and arranged by subject, within classes, or between classes.
- **Achievement Grouping**: Focuses on demonstrated levels of achievement by students and is viewed as something dynamic and changing. Groups can be arranged by subject, within classes, or between classes.
- **Interest-Based Grouping**

Responses to this item are shown in Table 8. Participants often selected more than one strategy and indicated whether a strategy was only implemented in certain grades. Nearly every school used nearly every strategy; as of Spring 2024, Hayes had not yet systematically employed interest-based grouping, while Garland was not using ability or achievement grouping.

Table 8: Use of Student-Level Cluster Grouping Models

MODEL	N	SCHOOLS
Ability Grouping	7	Hartford, Hawthorne, Hayes, Lowell, Manitoba, Rogers, Zablocki
Achievement Grouping	7	Hartford, Hawthorne, Hayes, Lowell, Manitoba, Rogers, Zablocki
Interest-Based Grouping	7	Garland, Hartford, Hawthorne (Genius Club), Lowell, Manitoba, Rogers, Zablocki

*Emerson did not participate in focus groups but is utilizing both ability and achievement grouping across all grades.

Participants discussed their perceptions of the positives of the student-level strategies they had implemented, which included heightened student interactions and leadership, student choice, and subject-specific advantages. Participants also mentioned project-based learning, achievement gains, and the student voice and choice that can result from interest-based grouping. As with the structural models, participants identified improvements, barriers, and challenges related to student-level strategies; addressing different ability levels was the most common challenge identified. Participants also referenced difficulties in finding topics for interest-based grouping.

Even though most schools described challenges with ability grouping, teachers at Hawthorne indicated it had worked well for them:

> Sometimes the worry about ability grouping, you worry kids are going to be pointing each other out – they're the high group, they're the low group. We try to make it not as obvious. That's something we are aware of and don't want. We don't want anyone to feel funny about a grouping situation. That's why having a little bit of mixture has worked well, using the different models. When we've tried that in the past – where we've had the low, the medium, the high – it's not always great. Having a little bit of mixture has always been the better way.
>
> --Hawthorne Teacher

The pre/post survey also asked about cluster grouping practices via the following items:

1. My school provides a variety of research-based grouping practices for advanced learners that allow them to interact with individuals of various talents, abilities, and strengths.
2. My school regularly uses multiple forms of grouping, including clusters, resource rooms, or special classes.
3. My school creates policies and procedures to guide and sustain grouping practices built on an evidence-based foundation in advanced learning education.

For each of these three items, the survey asked three sub-questions, each on a 1-4 scale.

1. To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue? (Not at all – to a great extent)
2. How much will a change in our practices on this item increase access or the academic achievement of students? (Not at all – to a great extent)
3. How much effort will it take to significantly change our practices regarding this issue? (None – a great deal)

Given the challenges identified in the cluster grouping focus groups and in the conversation with the MPS programming team, it is unsurprising that responses to these items were mixed, as shown by the matrix in Table 9. Participants indicated that they engaged in research-based grouping practices and created policies and procedures to a greater extent in the post-survey (as measured by the percentage responding with a rating of 3 or 4). However, they engaged in multiple forms of grouping to a lesser extent. On the extent to which grouping practices and policies would increase access or achievement, the percentages of participants responding with a 3 or 4 declined from the pre-survey but were still quite high, with over 2/3 of participants responding with those ratings. Perceived effort required increased from the pre-survey for each item, perhaps due to concerns about buy-in, support, or feasibility.

Table 9: Percentage of Ratings of 3 or 4 by Cluster Grouping Survey Item, pre to post

	TO WHAT EXTENT		INCREASE ACCESS OR ACHIEVEMENT		EFFORT REQUIRED	
	2020	2024	2020	2024	2020	2024
Research-based grouping practices	26.8%	42.3%	82.9%	73.1%	65.9%	69.2%
Multiple forms of grouping	56.1%	42.3%	78.0%	73.1%	63.4%	76.9%
Policies and procedures	24.4%	34.6%	82.9%	69.2%	70.7%	84.6%

Given the inconsistent results from the closed-ended survey items, we can also track the progression of an open-ended survey item on the pre/post surveys: *What is your understanding of "cluster grouping"?* Ten participants answered this question both on the pre-survey in 2020 and on the post-survey in 2024. Their responses clearly evolved to a more accurate and nuanced understanding of cluster grouping (Table 10), specifically that advanced learners can be grouped in otherwise heterogeneous classrooms and identifying student-level grouping strategies (ability, achievement, and interest). Responses are sorted randomly, and the portions of the post-survey responses relating to cluster grouping models, strategies, and purposes are bolded.

Table 10: Understanding of Cluster Grouping, 2020 pre-survey to 2024 post-survey (n=10)

2020 PRE-SURVEY RESPONSE	2024 POST-SURVEY RESPONSE
I believe it is ability based grouping. Students who have similar understanding work together, but groups are fluid. They can be remixed to suit the learning intentions. I often use triads so no student is left without a voice. I find larger groups often make way for stronger voices to take over.	Grouping kids according to their abilities, **but some mix of abilities as well**. Classrooms can be constructed with clusters of students whose abilities can be grouped and groups can be advanced based on their abilities.
Cluster grouping is grouping students with similar academic levels and abilities.	Cluster grouping is grouping a small number advanced learners in a regular education classroom. This allows the teacher to **address the needs of advanced learners while still supporting the rest of the class**.
Instruction from a specialized trained teacher to a group of gifted and talented students.	Grouping students according to their needs and abilities so they can **receive instruction geared towards their skill level** and increase the quality of their learning experience.
It is the grouping of gifted and talented students together in one classroom. The teacher must be trained in gifted and talented instruction. The hope of cluster grouping is that these gifted and talented students would learn at a faster rate and from the teacher and each other.	Cluster grouping is how the students are grouped for instruction. **1. Passion Project. 2. Cross Grade Level. 3. Instructional Level Grouping. 4. Genius Hour. 5. Interest Based. 6. Grade Level Clustering by instructional Levels**
Standards grouped together to support learning	High achieving students are integrated **into heterogenous classes or groups**, along with their grade level peers.
My understanding would be grouping students based on their different talents in order to better benefit the group.	Grouping students by **ability or interests** to provide activities that are more engaging
I am not familiar with this term.	Putting students in groups according to an **interest, an intervention that is needed or to [provide] acceleration** in their learning.
My understand of "cluster grouping" is grouping students based on students personal, cultural and community assets and interests as well as students ability levels.	Cluster grouping is grouping high achieving students **according to their abilities** and having them work on a project where they are taking the lead.
By ability. An advanced group has opportunities for advanced work	High-achieving students are assigned to an **otherwise heterogeneous group**
Cluster grouping is an educational process in which four to six gifted and talented or high-achieving students or both are assigned to an otherwise heterogeneous classroom within their grade to be instructed by a teacher who has had specialized training in differentiating for gifted learners.	Cluster grouping is an educational strategy where students with similar abilities, particularly those identified as gifted or advanced learners, are placed together in the same classroom or group within a classroom. This approach allows teachers to **tailor instruction to meet the needs of these students more effectively**, providing them with appropriately challenging curriculum and opportunities for enrichment. By clustering advanced learners together, teachers can implement **differentiated instruction strategies** that target their higher-level thinking skills, promote peer learning and collaboration, and help maintain high levels of engagement and motivation. At the same time, this method allows for more efficient use of resources and **support for the varied learning needs within the classroom**.

Finally, participants were asked how the MPS programming team could support them further in their cluster grouping efforts. Most of the responses for the MPS programming team were characteristically positive – as one teacher said, "They're just so willing to jump in and help wherever needed. If we needed them, they would be here in a heartbeat." Participants at two schools mentioned that they could use support giving more information about cluster grouping to administrators. Teachers at a third school also suggested included providing more real-world examples of cluster grouping: "Maybe just some examples of opportunities of how to get the different types of grouping in, just to see in the real world. Obviously, they all are beneficial in some way, but how to fit it in day to day." Others provided additional suggestions, such as providing additional training to paraprofessionals and involving parents and families to a greater extent.

Culturally responsive practices

Employing SURGE activities in a culturally responsive manner was one of the stated goals of the grant. Data from surveys and focus groups provide evidence of the grant's effectiveness in this area.

The pre/post survey contained three items on cultural responsiveness at the student level and three items at the grade/building level, as follows:

- Provide universal curriculum and instruction that uses the cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences of our students
- Provide additional challenges relevant to the cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences of our students exceeding benchmarks
- Use a screening process that is relevant to our students' cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences
- Demonstrate cultural competence when collaborating in grade level/ content area teams about universal student data and instructional practices
- Demonstrate cultural competence when collaborating in grade level/ content area teams about the appropriate nature of support at the selected level
- Use a culturally competent process when collaborating in our building-level problem-solving team

Figure 10: Student-Level Cultural Responsiveness, Percent Responding Proficient or Optimal, by year

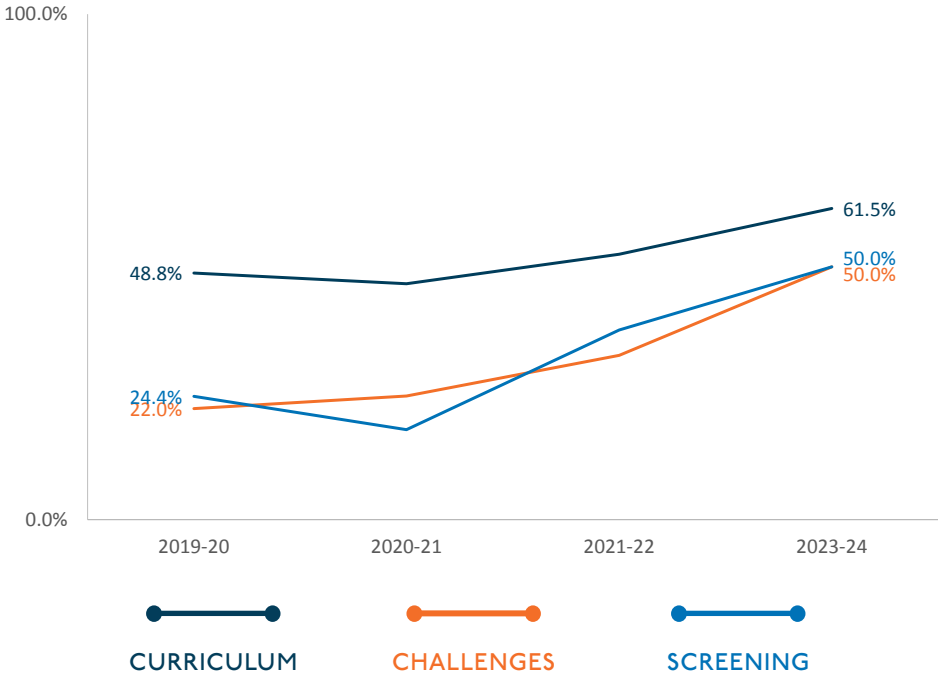
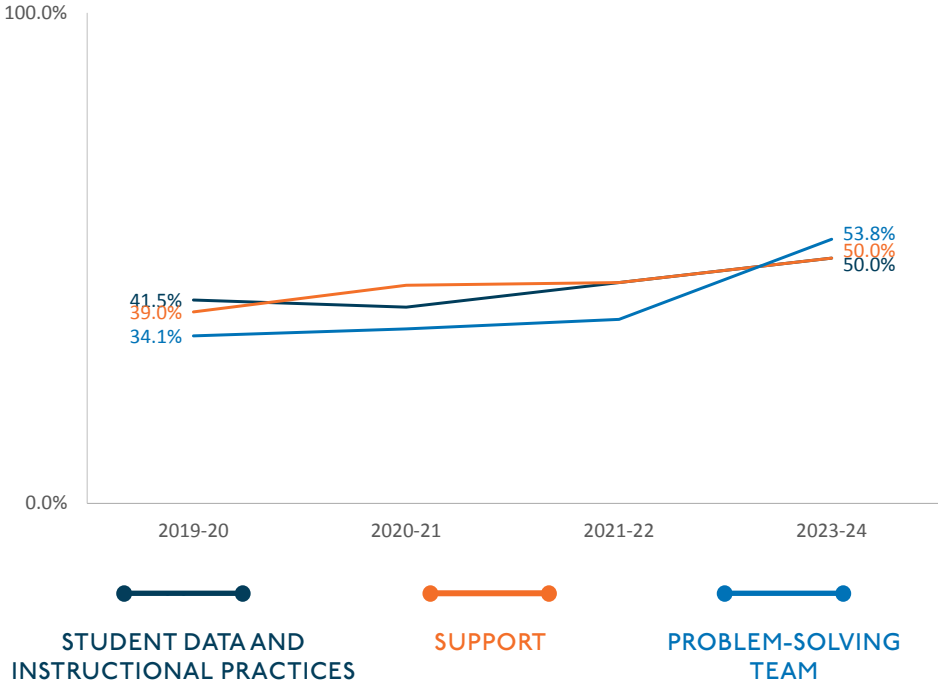


Figure 11: Grade/Building-Level Cultural Responsiveness, Percent Responding Proficient or Optimal, by year



As with TOPS use, respondents rated these items on a 1-5 scale, from "not evident" to "optimal." Over the course of the grant, participants' perceptions that SURGE was culturally responsive grew steadily, especially for providing challenges to students and in the identification process. Figure 10 shows the percentage of survey-takers responding "proficient" or "optimal" for each of the student-level items, and Figure 11 shows the percentage of survey-takers responding "proficient" or "optimal" for each of the grade/building items.

Focus group responses also revealed participating educators' perceptions of cultural responsiveness, including ways they adjusted their instruction or practice to be more responsive or equitable. Many responses related to other grant priorities, such as the identification process and STEM focus. Others referenced student voice and choice. Themes and representative quotes from focus groups are presented in Table II.

Table II: Focus Group Themes on Cultural Responsiveness

THEME	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTE(S)
Identification	"…one of the things I remember being struck by are [non-teacher-pleasing] behaviors. To look at those as something that maybe the student isn't being engaged or challenged, something that may be non-teacher-pleasing based on the culture or environment of one person, kind of gets you to look at a student in a different light, and might be really affirming to who they are and what they live and experience." "In looking at how the assessment tool is used, all kids have an opportunity to be gifted. The inclusiveness is there to build upon that equity."
Hands-on/ Inquiry/STEM focus	"…exposing to girls that it is all right for you to build. There's so many stereotypes of, this is how girls are. It is changing in society, but is that changing in the household? You're a girl, so you get this for your birthday whether you ask for it or not."
Adjusting teaching practice	"In terms of culturally responsive teaching, TOPS has really impacted the way that I go about my job, and it makes me stop and think about the way that I'm viewing my students. It gives me a way to look at my students, their demographics, what I'm seeing in those kids, examining bias as we're going along, too." "You see that disparity in minority students being disciplined at a higher rate, it has stopped me from reprimanding and disciplining so much."
Student choice	"Being able to provide the student choice. And learning about how to provide student choice is culturally responsive."

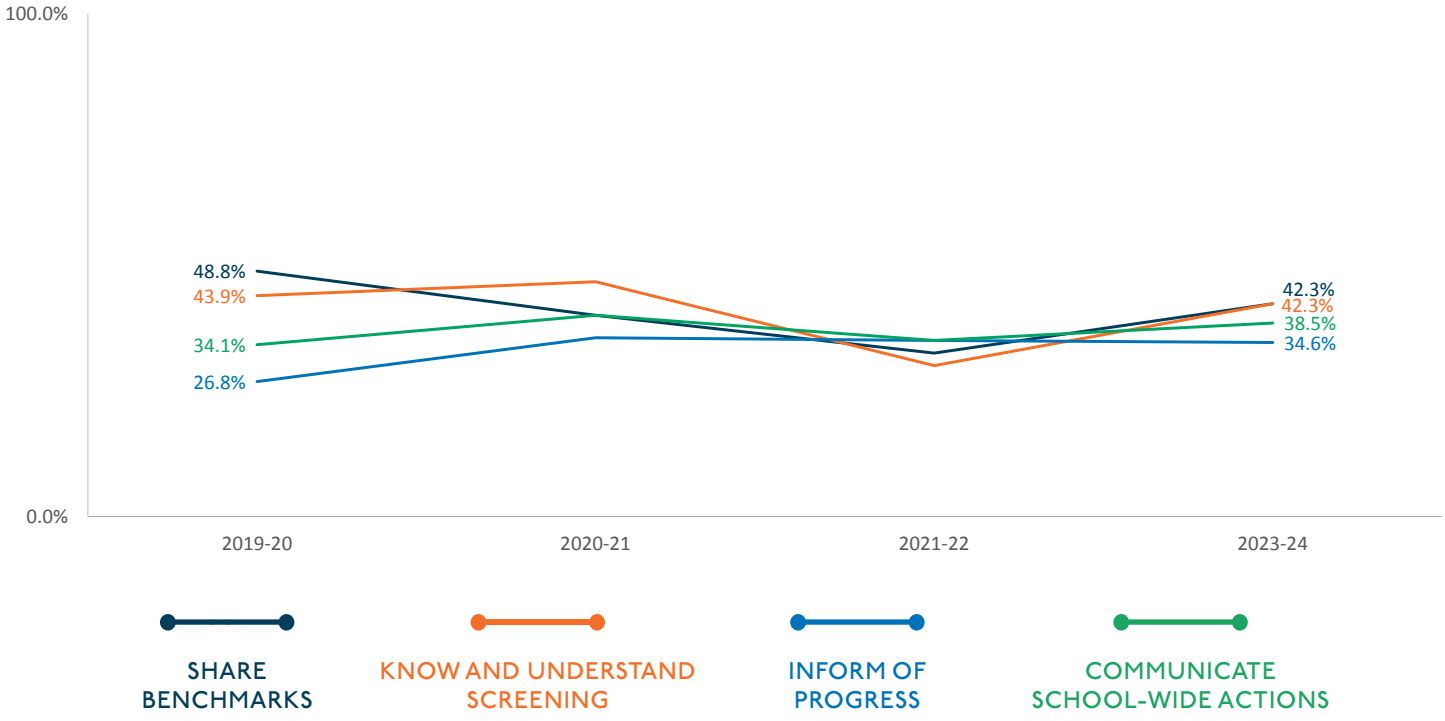
Family Engagement

Four survey items assessed participating educators' perceptions of family engagement:

- Use formal strategies to share our grade-level/course benchmarks with all parents/guardians
- Use formal strategies that ensure parents/guardians know and understand universal screening results
- Use a process to regularly inform parents/guardians of ongoing student progress in advanced learning opportunities
- Use a process to regularly communicate our school-wide RtI actions and results to multiple stakeholder audiences, including all staff, families, school board members, and the community

Responses to these items showed little movement over time at the "proficient" and "optimal" level, as shown in Figure 12. This finding is reminiscent of SEE US!, when family engagement according to the pre/post survey was also rather flat over time.

Figure 12: Survey Responses on Family Engagement, by year



However, aside from these findings, the MPS programming team commented that family-engaged events with caregivers were well-attended, noted that caregivers have started to inquire about opportunities for their children, and pointed out that MPS had the best family attendance at events staged by districts in a regional advanced learner coalition. Focus groups also revealed positive impressions of family engagement among participants, especially related to the camps and resources provided. Participants indicated that the TOPS identification process allowed for family engagement, as they could better convey students' positive attributes to their families. Participants also described challenges, such as language barriers and the difficulty of engaging parents during virtual instruction (which affected family engagement from the start). Table 12 provides common themes and representative quotes from the focus groups.

Table 12: Focus Group Themes on Family Engagement

THEME	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTE(S)
Camps	"I nominated a kid last year – he quietly really knew a lot of information. I was very surprised that I wound up nominating him because he was virtual with me and basically looked kind of uninterested in school most of the year. I nominated him because I really believed that he had a whole bunch of stuff going on in that brain of his. His parents brought him for summer camp, and I was blown away, he came to 2 or 3 weeks of summer camp. That was family engagement because there's no transportation. And there he was. He took the ornithology summer camp and he did the carnival summer camp. His parents drove him every day. Without this program, that kid never would've shown up in a school in the middle of summertime…" "One way that we were able to engage with families a little bit more was because of camps, we had a final project where the families were invited in." "They're so appreciative their children have these opportunities they couldn't afford otherwise. And just, 'you really really know my kid.'"
Identification	"It's going to be really nice to have conversations with parents and be able to tell them that their child is excelling at something or many things that they might not have heard because they're used to just the regular, my kid's a poor speller, or my kid can't add or subtract. We're going to be able to have such a wider range of things that we can praise the children on and support them and grow them. All parents love their kids and think that they're wonderful at many things, but when it comes to school, they feel their kids are in a box of certain skills, and then they feel bad that their kid might be struggling." "For some parents, it may be a surprise when their child gets nominated. It may make them think about their child in a different way. Especially those kids that have those non-teacher-pleasing behaviors. I think it's going to get parents more invested – oh, that teacher sees something in my child. That makes parents automatically more invested." "I was able to shift some of the dynamics, like in conferences with parents when they would say, look at how low that math score is. I'm like, yeah, but look at what a leader your child is. Let's look at what path can they take to further this? Again, recommending, maybe they should get involved in a debate. Those are things to look for in a middle school or a high school as you go on. We were able to shift some of that conversation to really positive things for kids."
Resources	"Just from the money I got to spend, with the consumables, I think the parents are going to be super involved when kids take these projects home, that they made and that they get to keep. A racecar they could make, hot air balloon. They'll be able to talk to their moms and dads about, look at what I made, this is how it works. I'm looking forward to that." "They were conscientious in coming to pick up the materials. They made sure their students got the materials. They had follow up if they didn't get them; they asked how they could get them." "…We always are strategic in what projects we pick. All families can participate. We provide all of the materials so they don't have to have something at home they might not have. They can bring their own cultural twist on it."
Challenge – Language Barriers	"…I do think there will be challenges with our ELL learners and reaching those families in their own language." "More support and promotion for bilingual families and students. Sometimes they feel "afraid" to participate because they feel like, 'I don't know, maybe there's nobody who speaks Spanish there.'"
Challenge – Support	"…One child brought [supplies] back to me in a bag – let's figure out, how do you think it should be? If they're not going to have the support or help, that makes it difficult too…"
Challenge – Virtual Instruction	"We've done virtual open houses. It just isn't the same." "We can't have them in the building very much."

Emergent Findings

Three additional findings that were not listed as grant priorities emerged over time: SURGE led to increased student voice and agency, SURGE teachers rediscovered their joy of teaching by participating in the grant, and participants greatly appreciated the efforts and assistance of the MPS programming team.

Student Voice and Choice

Many teachers noted that participating in SURGE allowed their students to voice their interests by choosing the activities they worked on. Hawthorne's Genius Hour is an obvious example of the way SURGE cultivated student voice and choice, but teachers also noted that allowing for student choice can be a culturally responsive practice. The following quotes are illustrative of our findings:

- "Being able to let the children choose what they're interested in learning really brings about an ownership of themselves. Which in my mind is culturally responsive because they're getting to be themselves. They don't have to try to fit into a mold of, this is what it has to be."
- "For my students, it really helped to build their leadership abilities. Their ability to really self-advocate for themselves: this is what I want to learn, this is how I want to present my information. They really took ownership of their learning. A lot of the students over time were able to develop more independent skills where they could monitor their own learning and their own work."
- "I allow my students a lot of choice in my classroom. I really want them to feel ownership in my room. Does it always go according to plan? No, but I'm trying to help them become better learners, better thinkers, using a lot more of their decision-making process…"
- "…with a lot of the activities and the STEM projects, there's going to be a lot more student choice. You're just being the facilitator, not telling kids what to do. So they're going to be able to use their own background knowledge and previous experiences to do the projects. And fail probably at first, which is a good thing, and then figure out why they failed and hopefully solve the problem."
- "[Advanced learners] thrive when given more choice and freedom to inquire."
- "I really tried to give them more hands-on activities and more student choice. I really like teacher-led a lot, but I'm learning to do more release and have more student-led learning. That's what I got from SURGE."

Joy of Teaching

Gholdy Muhammad, a leading scholar of curriculum and instruction, has identified joy as an important pursuit for successful teaching.[8] Throughout the program, participating teachers mentioned that SURGE allowed them to rediscover their love of teaching and return to practices and activities they felt they could not do within the strictures of the curriculum, as evidenced by the following focus group quotes.

- "Every time I go to a workshop or do a camp, I get really fired up and energized. It brings back what I got into teaching for."
- "The style of teaching is the style that those of us who have been around a while…for me, it's like going back to the past. It's how I liked to teach when I liked teaching more. Something we've gotten away from with more and more requirements…this many minutes of this, this many minutes of that. I think that has kept us from going back to our roots, which is building on kids' interests and their curiosity and creativity, letting them go for as long as they're interested in."
- "A lot of us, when we first started teaching, this is how we were taught to teach, and then a big long political slide happened, and now we get to come back."
- "I've appreciated that a lot of it is about being creative and getting to go outside of the box. It's helping me get excited about teaching again and feel like I get to use part of myself as a person, not only what I've learned in the curriculum, to bring to the table and have more fun with students. I think it's been good at activating different parts of my brain that I haven't always remembered that I can use."

Expertise and Responsiveness of MPS Programming Team

Participants universally praised the MPS programming team throughout the course of the grant. Teachers appreciated the MPS programming team's responsiveness, content knowledge, and expertise, and valued their continual support (including within the classroom), as shown in the following focus group remarks:

- "…they will come into your classroom, they'll talk with you, they're very responsive via email, and they're very warm. You never feel like you're wasting their time or anything like that. They're just very eager to help. It's just really important, especially with what happens now in education, when sometimes we have so many initiatives thrown at us – to feel that support is big."
- "Every time I've had to reach out to them, they've always responded very quickly, exactly what I needed. If not, give me a second, I'll find whatever you need."
- "Even when they're dropping off things, they're very mindful and respectful…They're just very mindful of the climate of the classroom. It's always nice to see them come in."
- "I learn things best when I see things modeled or demonstrated. I'm excited for when [the MPS programming team] can be in our classrooms and modeling how to do some things. Obviously, as experienced educators, we have our own ideas, and a lot of expertise as well, but sometimes what we envision things mean might not be exactly what it means. Seeing it in action always helps me understand better."
- "I…like that they actually come out to the schools to visit, they do the drop-ins, they make sure they deliver everything we need."
- "The administrators of the SURGE program value the expertise of teachers and help us to grow."

8 Muhammad, G. (2023). *Unearthing Joy: A guide to culturally and historically responsive curriculum and instruction*. Scholastic.

Understanding Student Outcomes

As noted above in the discussion on methodology, we reviewed student outcomes such as growth on the STAR and Forward assessments to help answer the third evaluation question, *to what extent are observed patterns in outcomes a result of the SURGE initiative?* Overall, it appears that students in SURGE schools were not harmed by their school's participation in the program. However, we did not see any meaningful differences in student outcomes between SURGE and similar non-SURGE schools over the course of the full program. There are a few potential explanations for this finding (in addition to the data constraints and methodological challenges described above in the Limitations section). First, STAR and Forward might be improper tools for measuring growth, as SURGE does not have a direct Reading or Math focus, and Forward Science is given for the first time in 4th grade, a year after most students would have exited the SURGE program (as it ended in 3rd grade at most schools). Second, it might simply be too soon to see growth, as in other interventions that have shown impacts later on in students' careers – it would be unrealistic to expect SURGE to have immediate impacts on student performance. For instance, being identified as advanced in elementary school could manifest itself in greater self-efficacy, which could be measured by outcomes such as AP/IB course-taking in high school or college attendance. Third, SURGE began in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic – the first full year of implementation occurred when students were attending school virtually, meaning that many activities on which teachers were trained (identifying students based on their classroom behaviors, using hands-on and inquiry-based materials) were severely constrained and thus almost certainly blunted the potential impact of the full program.

Nonetheless, we can draw on qualitative data from the annual focus groups to inform our understanding of how SURGE impacted student growth and achievement, and we can review survey data on advanced learning opportunities and progress monitoring. For instance, five survey items provide information on the extent to which participating teachers provided advanced learning opportunities and assessed student progress within those opportunities, both for all advanced learners and by subgroup:

- Provide evidence-based advanced learning opportunities for students exceeding benchmarks
- Use valid and reliable tools to monitor the progress of students receiving advanced learning opportunities
- Frequently review progress-monitoring data to gauge whether students are making adequate progress in advanced learning opportunities and adjust accordingly
- Regularly review the overall effectiveness of advanced learning opportunities for students receiving selected and intensive support
- Regularly review the effectiveness of advanced learning opportunities for demographic groups of students receiving selected and intensive support

Figure 13 shows the percentage of survey respondents answering "proficient" or "optimal" for each of these items. The trajectory is upward for each item, suggesting that teachers are indeed paying attention to their students' progress. Focus group data confirm this as well; Table 13 presents themes on student academic and personal growth, even for those students not identified by TOPS. Several focus group participants also discussed fostering a growth mindset in their students.

Figure 13: Survey Responses on Student Progress, by year

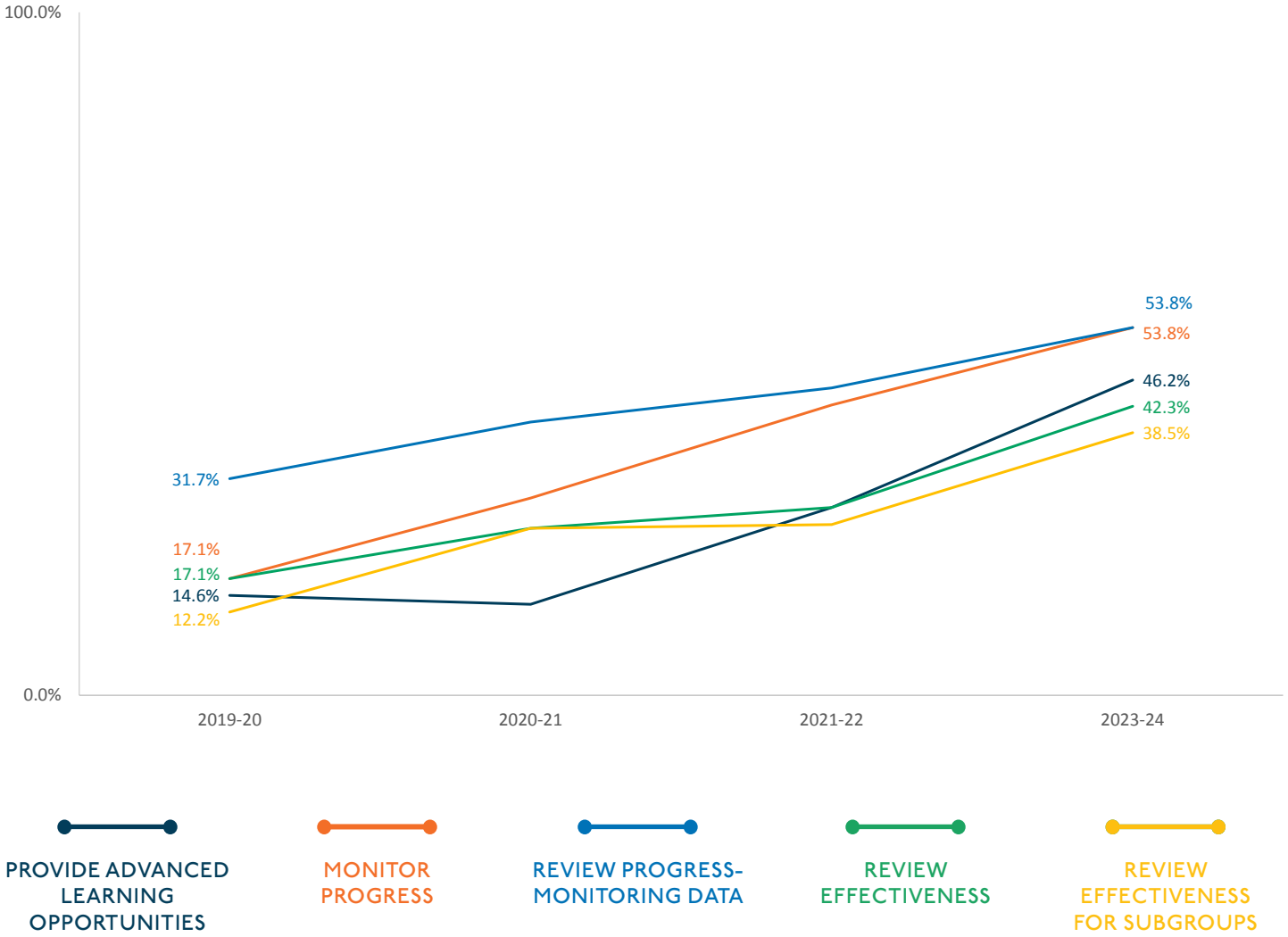


Table 13: Focus Group Themes on Student Achievement and Growth

THEME	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTE
Academic Growth	"My high kids really grew too this year. And I feel like they did it in so many areas that they didn't expect." "With the small class sizes and differentiated math, I did see my high group really grow this year." "…our intervention teacher started seeing an acceleration group. They were building cars they could make and then they were racing them. It was something she was doing prior to us even being in there. We saw good growth with students in the acceleration group compared to average growth of those grade levels." "I saw an increase in math scores. Due to the vocabulary for the ELs. Because with a lot of the STEM, you're thinking of position words, how many long, you're building. We did coding, you're thinking one step ahead. I saw a huge difference. I would see more proficient and advanced versus not getting it."
Personal Growth	"I'm seeing a lot of growth, my advanced kids, my TOPS kids, are being an example for their other classmates. They want to do what everybody else is doing. They're learning off each other. Peer relationships are getting stronger because of working together and growing together and learning off of each other." "I saw growth in leadership. I wanted to be in charge of these beautiful new materials, and I had to be like, to the kids, okay, you're the group leader, you keep the pieces together. Kids who I didn't think would be leaders, all of a sudden when they were in charge of keeping the pieces together and teaching the rules, they really emerged as leaders. That was a surprise to me – that was not something I was expecting. Because I thought I was the only one that could lead." "They go to each other before they're coming to me now."
Growth mindset	"It's taught them – it's okay to fail, to have to do things a zillion times to figure it out." "What I have seen is that my students are gaining more confidence in their abilities and their skills. They are stepping out and identifying their worth by saying 'I am really smart'…" "You're brilliant. Look at all these things you can do. Let's build on that."
Non-Identified Students	"I did see a lot growth in my students – reading, more comprehension. In math, they were able to do more higher-thinking abilities…Even the lower ones were achieving because it's a different way of looking at things, both for us as teachers and students." "It has made a huge difference, not only for the students that are in the program, but for all of our students." "There were kids that I did not identify that I should have identified, they also were showing growth."

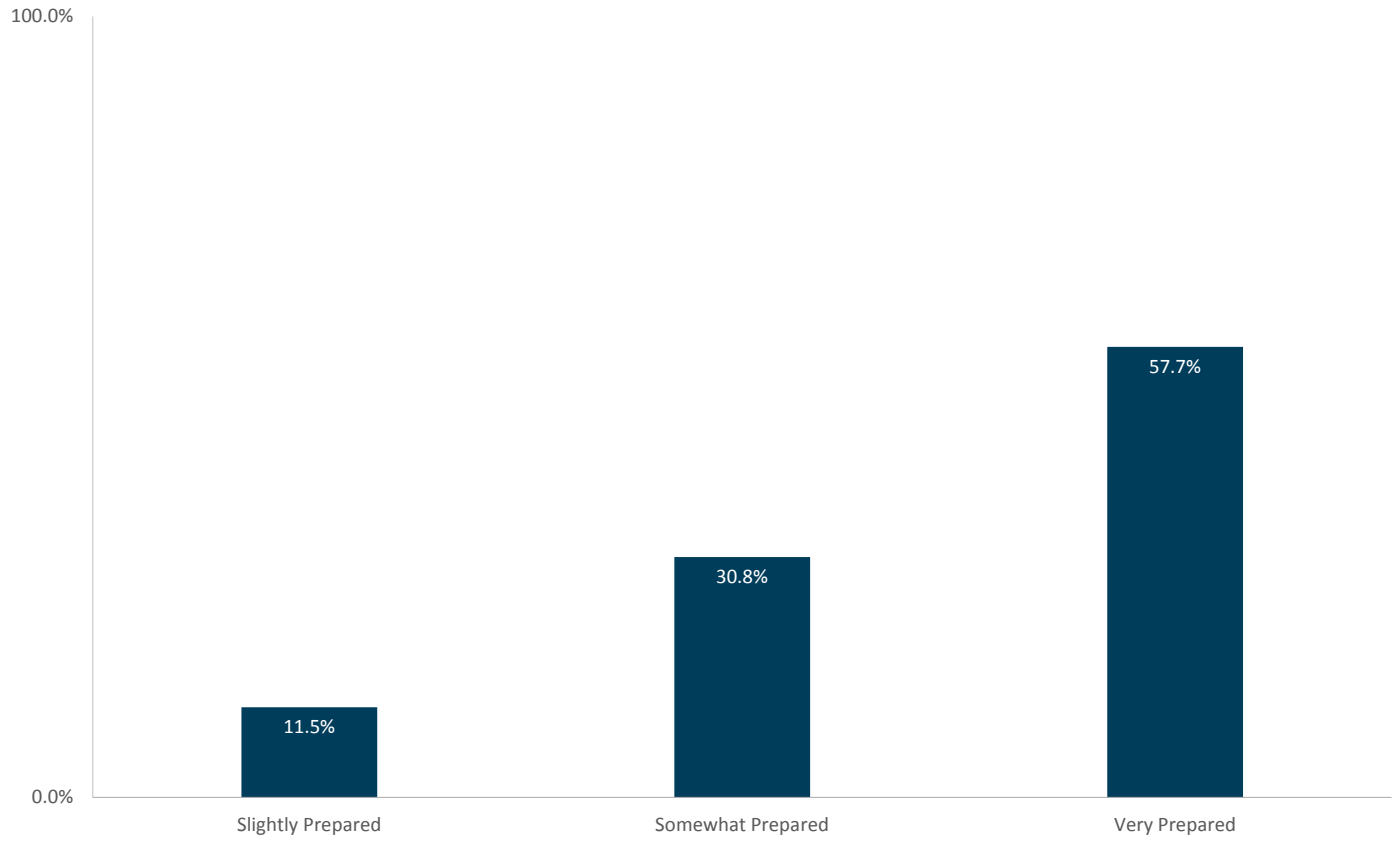
The MPS programming team also referenced data showing that non-identified students and students identified for special education services had the ability to grow as a result of SURGE's implementation in their classrooms:

> Data comes in student attendance. Classrooms have very good attendance and that's something we can measure. It provided growth for all students, especially for students who are denied opportunities because they are identified as special education… these barriers [language, special education identification] were removed because we were offering students opportunity to participate in their activities.

Sustainability of the SURGE Model

Sustainability was a major focus of the final year of the grant, as SURGE trainings and resources will no longer be available. (Educators participating in the 2E Milwaukee grant will continue to receive support for their work with Twice-Exceptional students.) The MPS programming team worked to empower educators at each school to continue the work of SURGE and worked with them to create action plans for their schools. Additionally, the 2023-24 post-survey asked participants about their level of preparedness to sustain SURGE after the grant funding ran out. A majority of respondents indicated they were "very prepared" to sustain the work, with only a small percentage saying they were only "slightly prepared" (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Preparedness for Sustainability (n=26)



Nearly all of the respondents then followed up with more detail about their level of preparedness, and we also asked about sustainability in the last round of focus groups. Common themes in both survey and focus group responses included the need for resources and additional professional development, school and administrative support, time and scheduling, and staff collaboration and buy-in. (The MPS programming team also indicated that administrative support in each school has determined, and will determine, how well aspects of SURGE are implemented and sustained.) Notably, several respondents noted they were prepared to continue without additional support, which matches the survey results. These themes, with representative quotes, are presented in Table 14.

Table 14: Survey and Focus Group Themes on Sustainability, 2023-24

THEME	REPRESENTATIVE QUOTE(S)
Prepared	"I can sustain gifted and talented practices in the classroom by continuously engaging in professional development to stay informed about the latest strategies and research in gifted education. I can implement differentiated instruction and create a flexible curriculum that challenges advanced learners while meeting their diverse needs. By fostering a supportive and stimulating learning environment, I can encourage creativity, critical thinking, and independent exploration. Additionally, maintaining open communication with parents and collaborating with other educators and specialists ensures a comprehensive support system for gifted and talented students. All of which can be supported by MPS support systems. " "I have the knowledge to identify potentially gifted students. I have the ability to group students and to deliver content at their instructional levels. I have materials to use with students, and I know what is available and can be ordered as needed."
Resources and professional development	"It would be important for MPS or my school to provide additional materials and professional development support in addition to the flexibility within the daily schedule to provide STEM opportunities for students." "It would be nice if there could still be some PDs like this workshop in the summer or the spring one we had, even the fall one, those are really energizing for us. It brings us more tools for us to go back into the classroom to use."
School or administrative support	"Making sure that we still have district support even if there's not district funds. Because a lot of times, if that's not being shown, even though we know it's best practice, we know it's the right thing to do, we do it – now someone comes in the building and you don't have that support. So having top-down support as well, not just peer-to-peer support, is important. Then we can find funding sometimes or find ways. If we don't have the support, there's not going to be the ways. Then it gets real tricky." "I feel prepared to sustain my classroom work with SURGE practices. I feel like we need to MPS "higher ups" to have an understanding of what these practices entail and to understand that we won't look like their "cookie cutter" version of a classroom/school as we implement these practices."
Time, scheduling, events	"I will need the time to plan and prepare lessons and materials to sustain this work. It takes a great deal of planning to execute STEM in an early childhood classroom…" "…it's going to be into our schedule as STEM Friday in the afternoon. That's what our goal is. I don't know what we're going to need to make that happen at this point." "I know one topic is trying to have more STEM nights at school, just trying to keep it alive that way. Because again, once the funding runs out, you don't want to forget about all the great activities and all the great hands-on activities and the TOPS program. So we have talked about continuing that at our school."
Staff collaboration and buy-in	"Without the buy-in, it's hard to sustain any program for the long-term." "I would like to see more collaboration among the staff members at our school. Many of us who have been involved in SURGE are also involved in other committees and activities, my concern is we won't have enough energy among the group to keep up with the same energy."

Section 4

Conclusion

Conclusion

The SURGE program set out to achieve several important goals: address MPS's excellence gap through identifying advanced learners from traditionally underrepresented populations; employ STEM- and inquiry-based instruction for advanced learners; utilize cluster grouping; implement the program in a culturally responsive manner; engage families; and improve student outcomes. We summarize our findings on each of those goals here:

- **Identification of advanced learners**: The use of the TOPS tool allowed for more representative identification of students by subgroup, as well as having a positive effect on teachers' mindsets about the potential of students in their classrooms and how powerful their instruction can be.
- **STEM- and inquiry-based instruction**: Participants appreciated the resources they were given for STEM instruction, praised the advanced learning camps, and discussed successes and challenges with implementing Genius Hour-type activities in their schools.
- **Cluster grouping**: Grouping practices varied by school; participants indicated greater understanding of the mechanics of cluster grouping but also identified several challenges with implementation, such as staff buy-in and the time required to implement cluster grouping practices.
- **Culturally responsive practices**: Several aspects of the grant (identification, hands-on instruction) appear to have been implemented with a focus on culturally responsive practices, as evidenced by surveys and focus groups.
- **Family engagement**: As with similar programs, engaging families has been a challenge, especially early on in the grant when the pandemic limited in-school activities; however, the MPS programming team and participants cited identification practices and the opportunities provided by the camps as particularly helpful for stimulating greater family engagement.
- **Student outcomes**: The impact of SURGE on standardized assessment performance was inconclusive. However, as the program is not explicitly aimed at short-term impacts on achievement, we would expect impacts to show up later in students' careers (as in other, similar interventions), rather than in immediate assessment results. Additionally, participants indicated in surveys and focus groups that they monitored their students' progress and saw academic and personal growth among their students.
- **Sustainability**: The final year of SURGE focused heavily on sustainability and respondents indicated that they largely feel prepared to sustain the work, though they would like increased support (training, resources) from their schools and the district.
- **Additional findings**: Additional, positive aspects of the program included increased student voice and choice, participating teachers' sense of joy with teaching, and widespread appreciation of the SURGE programming team's efforts.

MPS has been fortunate to secure multiple and complementary advanced learning grants over the past decade and employ strong programming teams to implement those grants. Regardless of whether MPS is able to secure similar grants going forward, SURGE presents many successes, as well as a few challenges, for the district to consider as it continues to seek to address its excellence gap. Dedicated staff at both the administrative and school levels can make programs such as SURGE successful and serve MPS's advanced learners, and their families, effectively and equitably.

Section 5

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Section 6

Appendices

Appendix A: Pre/Post Survey

The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) at UW-Madison's Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) is conducting the evaluation of the SURGE program. In part, the evaluation will assess you and your school's understanding of advanced learning, cultural responsiveness, cluster grouping, and STEM practices throughout the lifespan of the project, as well as inform future professional learning. This survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Although we may use quotes in reporting, nothing you say will ever be connected to you.

Please contact Martha Lopez (lopezm2@milwaukee.k12.wi.us) or German Diaz (diazga@milwaukee.k12.wi.us) with any questions related to the evaluation process. Thank you in advance for your participation!

Please provide brief responses to the following four questions. Consider your responses carefully; you will not be able to edit after you advance past this page.

What are characteristics of advanced learners?
How do you identify these characteristics in students?
How would you define "high-quality" STEM instruction?
What is your understanding of "cluster grouping"?

One aspect of SURGE is to provide training and professional development to participants on cluster grouping. **Please read the project's definition of cluster grouping before moving on to the rest of this survey**:

Total School Cluster Grouping (TSCG) is a method of reducing the range of student needs present in any one classroom such that teachers can better target instruction as a focused intentional way to ensure that a wider range of learners has access to effective educators. Classroom teachers break students into achievement groups based on reading achievement scores, math achievement scores, or both to group students for differentiated instruction. Teachers then continually monitor student progress and flexibly adjust student placement when needed. Cluster grouping results in classrooms with reduced instruction ranges that allow teachers to better target their instruction efforts.

As a reminder, you defined cluster grouping as: [Response]

Name:

Please select the name of your school or site.

Please use the slider bar to indicate how many years you have been **at your current school or site.** (If you have been at your current school or site for more than 30 years, please check the 30+ box.)

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 30+

Please use the slider bar to indicate how many years you have been in Milwaukee Public Schools. (If you have been with the district for more than 30 years, please check the 30+ box.)

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 30+

What is the highest degree you have received?

- Bachelor's
- Master's
- Doctorate

Please list all licenses you currently hold.

Sustainability - To what extent are you prepared to sustain SURGE practices going forward?

Not Prepared Slightly Prepared Somewhat Prepared Very Prepared

Feel free to elaborate on the previous question. Do you feel you are prepared to sustain this work? What might you need from your school or MPS to do so?

The first set of questions relates to your practices with respect to Identification and Measurement.

In your opinion, your school's procedure for screening advanced learners correctly identifies approximately what proportion of students?

Proportion
0%-25% 26%-50% 51%-75% 76%-100%

Think about the overall racial and ethnic demographics of students at your school. How would you describe the representation of students in advanced learning programs at your school?

Under-represented Neither over- nor under-represented Over-represented

Black or African-American Students

Hispanic/Latinx Students

White Students

Students of races/ethnicities not listed here

Special Education Students or Students with IEPs

English Learners

Female Students

You may explain or elaborate on your answers to the previous question here.

Please describe your own practice related to the following identification-related practices. To view the rubric for each option, hover over the answer choices, or click on them if using a mobile device or tablet.

(Not Evident, Emerging, Developing, Proficient, Optimal)

Use multiple measures to review the effectiveness of our universal curriculum and instruction for demographic groups of students and adjust accordingly

Use multiple measures in our universal screening process

Use valid and reliable tools to monitor the progress of students receiving advanced learning opportunities

Frequently review progress-monitoring data to gauge whether students are making adequate progress in advanced learning opportunities and adjust accordingly

Please describe your practices with respect to the **Teacher's Observation of Potential in Students (TOPS)** tool. Hover over the word "TOPS" below to see an expanded description of the tool's purposes, and hover over the answer choices to view the rubric for each option. (Note that these are different from the rubric in the previous question.) If using a mobile device or tablet, click instead of hovering.

(Not Evident, Emerging, Developing, Proficient, Optimal)

The next set of questions relates to your practices with respect to Differentiation/Engagement and Grouping. Please describe your own practice related to the following practices. To view the rubric for each option, hover over the answer choices, or click on them if using a mobile device or tablet. (Note that these are different from the rubrics in previous questions.)

(Not Evident, Emerging, Developing, Proficient, Optimal)

Differentiate universal curriculum and instruction based on student needs

Provide evidence-based advanced learning opportunities for students exceeding benchmarks

Regularly review the overall effectiveness of advanced learning opportunities for students receiving selected and intensive support

Regularly review the effectiveness of advanced learning opportunities for demographic groups of students receiving selected and intensive support

Use a process to analyze disaggregated universal screening results (i.e., by student demographic groups)

Please respond to each of the following three statements about grouping on a scale of I to 4 using the slider bars. To select (I), just click on the bar to register your answer.

I) My school provides a variety of research-based grouping practices for advanced learners that allow them to interact with individuals of various talents, abilities, and strengths.

To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue?
Not at all (I), 2, 3, To a great extent (4)

How much will a change in our practices on this item increase access or the academic achievement of students?
Not at all (I), 2, 3, To a great extent (4)

How much effort will it take to significantly change our practices regarding this issue?
None (I), 2, 3, A great deal (4)

2) My school regularly uses multiple forms of grouping, including clusters, resource rooms, or special classes.

To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue?
Not at all (I), 2, 3, To a great extent (4)

How much will a change in our practices on this item increase access or the academic achievement of students?
Not at all (I), 2, 3, To a great extent (4)

How much effort will it take to significantly change our practices regarding this issue?
None (I), 2, 3, A great deal (4)

3) My school creates policies and procedures to guide and sustain grouping practices built on an evidence-based foundation in advanced learning education.

To what extent do we engage in this behavior or address this issue? Not at all (I), 2, 3, To a great extent (4)

How much will a change in our practices on this item increase access or the academic achievement of students?
Not at all (I), 2, 3, To a great extent (4)

How much effort will it take to significantly change our practices regarding this issue?
None (I), 2, 3, A great deal (4)

The next set of questions relates to your practices with respect to Cultural Responsiveness. Please describe your own practice related to the following practices. To view the rubric for each option, hover over the answer choices, or click on them if using a mobile device or tablet. (Note that these are different from the rubrics in previous questions.)

(Not Evident, Emerging, Developing, Proficient, Optimal)

Use research-based practices and/or programs within our universal curriculum and instruction

Provide universal curriculum and instruction that engages students

Provide universal curriculum and instruction that uses the cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences of our students

Provide additional challenges relevant to the cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences of our students exceeding benchmarks

Use a screening process that is relevant to our students' cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences

Demonstrate cultural competence when collaborating in grade level/content area teams about universal student data and instructional practices

Demonstrate cultural competence when collaborating in grade level/content area teams about the appropriate nature of support at the selected level

Use a culturally competent process when collaborating in our building-level problem-solving team

The following set of questions relates to your perceptions and practices with respect to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Instruction.

(Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree)

I enjoy teaching STEM.

I know how to teach developmentally appropriate STEM subjects in my classroom.

I have collaborated with my colleagues on teaching STEM education.

I am confident about teaching STEM education in my classroom.

I know the teaching strategies of STEM education.

I have pedagogical knowledge about STEM teaching.

I am confident about integrating STEM learning into my regular instructional practices.

The final set of questions relates to your practices with respect to Strategies and Processes related to Family and Community Engagement. Please describe your own practice related to the following practices. To view the rubric for each option, hover over the answer choices, or click on them if using a mobile device or tablet. (Note that these are different from the rubrics in previous questions.)

(Not Evident, Emerging, Developing, Proficient, Optimal)

Use formal strategies to share our grade-level/ course benchmarks with all parents/guardians

Use formal strategies that ensure parents/ guardians know and understand universal screening results

Use a process to regularly inform parents/guardians of ongoing student progress in advanced learning opportunities

Use a process to regularly communicate our school-wide RtI actions and results to multiple stakeholder audiences, including all staff, families, school board members, and the community

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

Teacher focus group protocol

Introductions and thank you

1. Introduce yourself as working with WEC on the SURGE evaluation. The evaluation is a partnership between MPS and WEC to take a close look at both the successes and potential challenges of gifted programming in the district.
2. Any questions or concerns about the evaluation can be directed to the project director, Annalee Good, annalee.good@wisc.edu, (608) 262-2063.
3. Thank you for taking part in the focus group. It is a very important way for us to get a full picture of SURGE.
4. A summary of this evaluation will be available at the conclusion of the project.

Format of focus group

- Your participation is totally voluntary. Nothing you say will be connected to your name or any identifiable information in evaluation reports. Please respect others' confidentiality and not share specific comments made outside of this group.
- This focus group is a structured, but informal conversation about your experiences with SURGE. We have a list of guiding questions or topics, but there may be other, related topics that come up.
- Please do not feel like you need to raise hands to speak, but also be aware that there are many here who may want a chance to talk. If you do not get the chance to speak, please feel free to email responses to either myself or the project director, Annalee Good.
- With your consent, we would like to audio record the focus group to help us accurately collect what you all say. There will not be a transcript made of the recording and it will be destroyed after we write up the summary report.
- We expect this focus group to last about 30 minutes. Are there any questions?

FOCUS GROUP QUESTION	EVALUATION QUESTION ADDRESSED
1. What are your overall impressions of SURGE?	2. What are patterns in outcomes of interest in participating students, educators, schools, and families?
2. What have you found helpful in the professional development and training you've received so far? What could be improved?	1. What are patterns in implementation, and to what extent does SURGE implement the proposed activities as intended?
3. How has participating in SURGE led you to be more culturally responsive in terms of the following practices (if at all)? · Identification · Grouping · STEM instruction	2. What are patterns in outcomes of interest in participating students, educators, schools, and families?
4. Think about your identification of advanced learners: · What was your process with respect to completing TOPS? · Do you feel it was a good way to identify advanced learners with outstanding potential from typically underrepresented populations? Why or why not?	1. What are patterns in implementation, and to what extent does SURGE implement the proposed activities as intended?
5. Discuss the implementation of SURGE in your school. What challenges have arisen throughout the course of this program? What logistical issues have you encountered, if any? How have you dealt with these challenges?	1. What are patterns in implementation, and to what extent does SURGE implement the proposed activities as intended?
6. Think about the growth of your advanced learners/students identified using TOPS in SURGE: · Have they experienced academic growth? How do you know? · Have they experienced personal growth? How do you know? · Have you seen the engagement of your students improve since the beginning of the program? How do you know? · Have you seen growth among students who were not identified as advanced? How do you know?	3. To what extent are observed patterns in outcomes a result of the SURGE initiative?
7. Have you experienced greater family engagement as a result of your participation in SURGE? Why or why not?	2. What are patterns in outcomes of interest in participating students, educators, schools, and families?
8. Based on your experience with SURGE: · What has worked well? · What has not worked? · What could be improved?	1. What are patterns in implementation, and to what extent does SURGE implement the proposed activities as intended?

Appendix C: MPS Programming Team Interview Protocol

District staff interview protocol

Introductions and thank you

1. Introduce yourself as working with WEC on the SURGE evaluation. The evaluation is a partnership between MPS and WEC to take a close look at both the successes and potential challenges of gifted programming in the district.
2. Any questions or concerns about the evaluation can be directed to the project director, Annalee Good, annalee.good@wisc.edu, (608) 262-2063.
3. Thank you for taking part in this interview. It is a very important way for us to get a full picture of SURGE.
4. A summary of this evaluation will be available at the conclusion of the project.

Format of Interview

- Your participation is totally voluntary. Nothing you say will be connected to your name or any identifiable information in evaluation reports.
- This interview is a structured, but informal conversation about your experiences with SURGE. We have a list of guiding questions or topics, but there may be other, related topics that come up.
- With your consent, we would like to audio record the interview to help us accurately collect what you say. There will not be a transcript made of the recording and it will be destroyed after we write up the summary report.
- We expect this interview to last about 30-45 minutes. Are there any questions?

1. What are your overall impressions of this program?
2. Discuss the implementation of SURGE. What logistical issues did schools encounter? Were they able to address those challenges and improve their implementation? Why or why not?
3. What other challenges have arisen throughout the course of this program? How have schools dealt with these challenges?
4. What is your impression of the professional development teachers have received in this program?

- Has participating in SURGE led teachers to engage in culturally responsive identification and instructional practices? How do you know?
- Has participation in SURGE led teachers to understand and use grouping strategies? How do you know?
- Has participation in SURGE led to improved STEM instruction? How do you know?

5. Think about how teachers identified advanced learners:

- What is your impression of teachers' processes with respect to completing TOPS?
- Do you feel it was a good way to identify advanced learners with outstanding potential from typically underrepresented populations? Why or why not?
- Do teachers feel it is a good way to identify advanced learners with outstanding potential from typically underrepresented populations? Why or why not?

6. Think about student growth since the start of the program:

- Have advanced learners experienced academic growth? How do you know?
- Have advanced learners experienced personal growth? How do you know?
- Have you seen the engagement of advanced learners improve since the beginning of the program? How do you know?
- Have you observed growth in students in SURGE classrooms who were not identified as advanced learners?

7. How has SURGE involved families? Have you seen greater family engagement? Why or why not?
8. What is your impression of program sustainability after Javits funding runs out?
9. Anything else to add?