

Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) uses eight interlocking strategies to build intentional staff-to-staff, staff-to-student, and student-to-student relationships in secondary schools.

1. **Focus on the whole student.** In every interaction with students (or discussion about students), educators address students' academic, emotional, social, and physical needs.
2. **Provide professional development for teachers, counselors, and administrators.** BARR educators participate in in-person trainings yearly and receive remote and in-person coaching throughout the school year.
3. **Use BARR's I-Time Curriculum to foster a climate for learning.** I-Time is a 30-minute weekly lesson facilitated by the cohort's core subject teachers, which helps students build strong relationships with teachers and each other.
4. **Create cohorts of students.** Students take a group of courses as part of a cohort with shared core subject teachers.
5. **Hold regular meetings of the cohort teacher teams.** BARR teachers meet weekly to discuss each student's performance in the cohort at a granular level with a focus on identifying strengths, fostering relationships, and engaging with students more deliberately.
6. **Conduct risk review meetings.** BARR educators move the most at-risk students into a structured risk review process and work with the community to determine the most effective response.
7. **Engage families in student learning.** BARR improves communication with families and makes them active partners.
8. **Engage administrators.** BARR trains administrators in how to integrate the model into their school culture and use it to reach their specific goals for the school.



To learn more about BARR, visit <https://www.barrcenter.org>.

The description of the model is adapted from the BARR website.



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Improving Student Outcomes in High School by Strengthening Relationships

Results From a Rigorous Evaluation of
Building Assets, Reducing Risks (the BARR Model)



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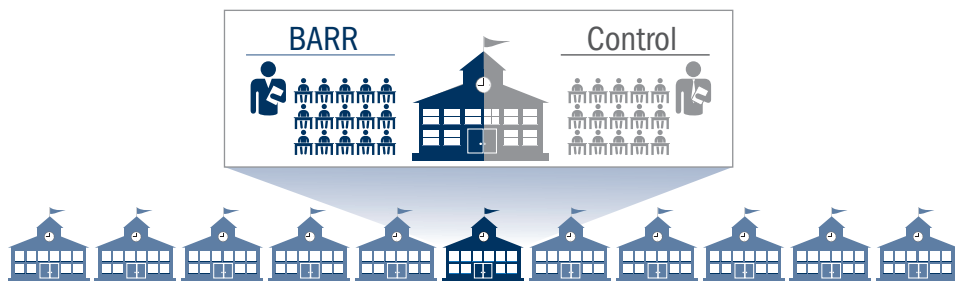
BARR aims to strengthen in-school relationships

The transition from eighth grade to ninth grade is a critical point for students that can set them on a path toward successfully graduating from high school or dropping out. One way some schools have sought to support ninth-grade students is through the Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) model. BARR focuses on building in-school relationships and using students' strengths to improve student outcomes and achievement.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) examined the impact of BARR on Grade 9 students during their schools' first year implementing the model. This evaluation, funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Investing in Innovation program, included more than 100 teachers and 4,000 students in 11 high schools. Each school was followed for one academic year (2014–15, 2015–16, or 2016–17).



Within each of the schools, Grade 9 students were randomly assigned to take at least three of their core academic classes (i.e., English language arts, mathematics, science, and/or social studies) with either BARR teachers or non-BARR teachers. Students in the treatment condition were taught by teams of teachers trained in the BARR model. Students in the control condition were taught by teachers operating in “business-as-usual” conditions in the school.

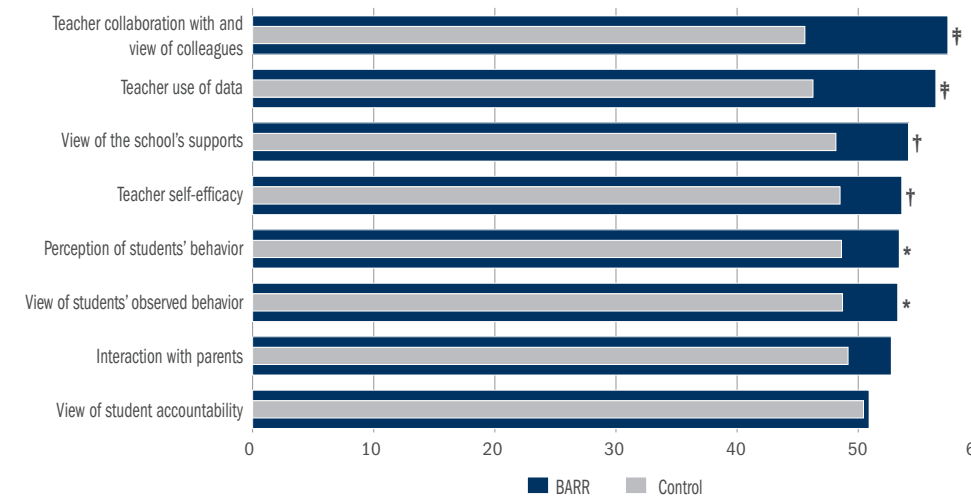


This is BARR

- BARR brings together core subject teachers serving the same students for regular structured block meetings to discuss the progress and challenges of all students in their cohort. Drawing on personal relationships, teachers discuss how to use each student's individual strengths to overcome challenges and improve their in-school experience.
- In special risk review meetings, teachers, administrators, and specialists such as counselors or social workers develop and monitor interventions for students facing more severe academic and social and emotional challenges.
- A trained part- or full-time BARR coordinator employed by the school organizes and facilitates all block and risk review meetings.
- Students receive periodic I-Time lessons from their core teachers to develop social and emotional skills while building stronger teacher-student and student-student relationships.
- The BARR program provides summer training for teachers and coordinators and offers ongoing on-site or virtual coaching during the school year.
- Parent engagement is a key focal point of block meetings, risk review meetings, and associated interventions.

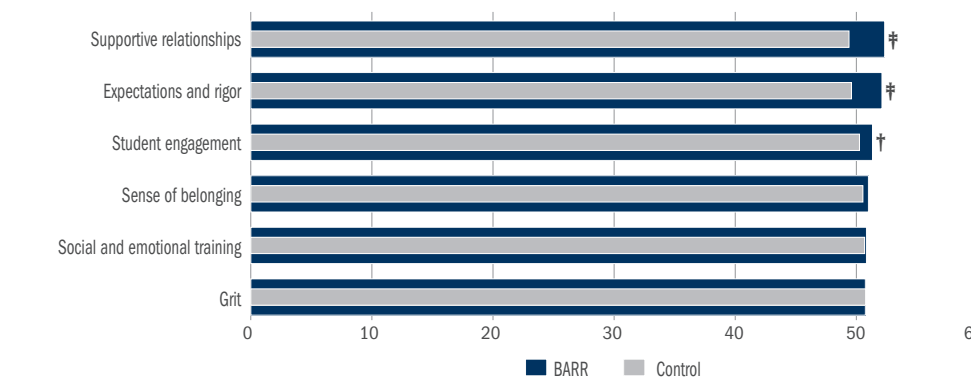
BARR teachers and students reported better school experiences across several dimensions

At the end of the first year of implementing the BARR program, AIR surveyed students and teachers about their in-school experiences. Compared with teachers operating in a “business-as-usual” mode, BARR teachers reported more positive views about their colleagues and collaborating with them, greater satisfaction with school supports, greater likelihood to use data to inform their instruction, higher levels of self-efficacy, and more positive views of their students.¹



Source: AIR calculations from AIR-administered teacher surveys.
Note: * = statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level; † = statistically significant at the $p = .01$ level; ‡ = statistically significant at the $p = .001$ level.

BARR students reported experiencing more supportive relationships in school, higher expectations of their performance, and increased levels of engagement in the classroom than students not instructed by BARR teachers.



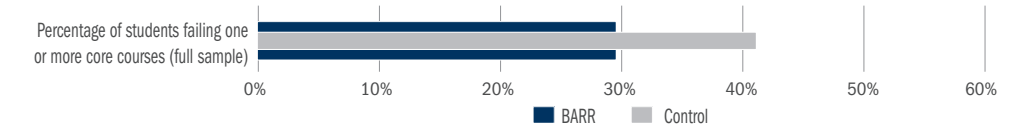
Source: AIR calculations from AIR-administered student survey.
Note: † = statistically significant at the $p = .01$ level; ‡ = statistically significant at the $p = .001$ level.

To create the teacher and student survey scores, we used a scaling process known as the Rasch model for ordered response categories (Andrich, 1978; Rasch, 1980; Wright & Masters, 1982). As part of this process, scores were standardized to have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10.

¹ Because teachers were not randomly assigned to BARR or the control group, these differences cannot be conclusively attributed to BARR, but they are consistent with ongoing research on the BARR model.

BARR students failed fewer courses and had higher grade point averages

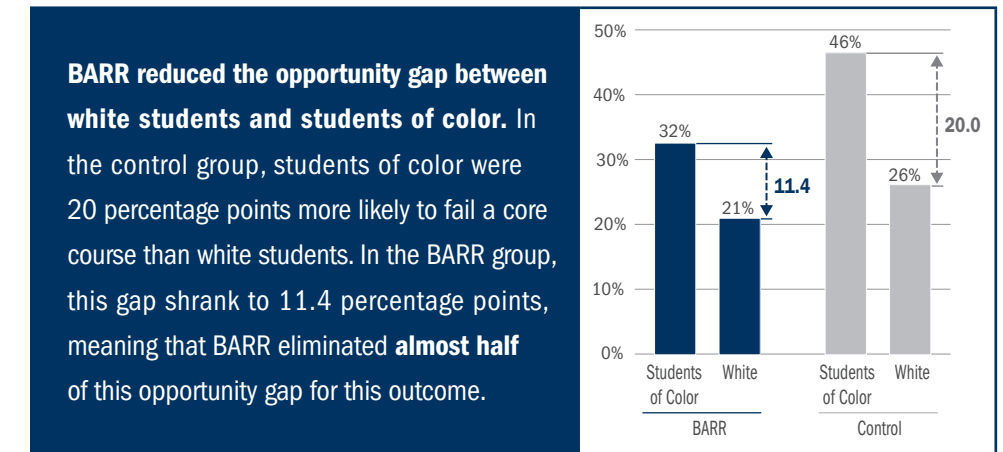
During Grade 9, BARR students were less likely to fail a core course (i.e., English language arts, mathematics, science, and/or social studies) than their peers. BARR students also had a higher grade point average at the end of Grade 9.



Source: AIR calculations from school-provided administrative data.

BARR narrowed opportunity gaps on course failure

The effect of BARR on course failure was greatest for students more at risk of course failure, including male students, students of color, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. BARR narrowed the gap in course failures between these students and their peers, including female students, white students, and students not eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, respectively.



Source: AIR calculations from school-provided administrative data.

AIR also measured how BARR affected student achievement in reading and math with the Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. There was no impact on these outcomes for the full sample of schools and students with valid MAP scores in this evaluation. This finding is different from earlier findings in which BARR positively affected these outcomes, including findings from the 2014–15 and 2015–16 cohorts of this study.²

AIR's evaluation concluded that the BARR model is a successful Grade 9 intervention. Students in the BARR model report better in-school experiences and are making greater strides toward completing the core courses that they need to advance through high school.

To learn more about this evaluation, visit <https://www.air.org/BARR> validation study.

² Over time, the MAP assessment became less relevant to some schools, causing problems with the administration in six of the 11 schools. These problems included low participation rates, differences in participation between the BARR and control groups, and students not taking the assessment seriously, as evidenced by many spending too little time to obtain a valid score. This may partially explain why no positive effects were found.