

Mid-Phase Competition Absolute Priority 4 (SEL)
American Institutes for Research
S411B230022
Scaling and Evaluating the Impact of The Third Quest (TTQ)

Applicant Name: American Institutes for Research

Project Title: Scaling and Evaluating the Impact of The Third Quest (TTQ)

Type of Grant Requested: (select one) Early-Phase Mid-Phase Expansion

Absolute Priorities the Project Addresses: (select all that apply)

Absolute Priority 1—Demonstrate a Rationale (Early), Moderate (Mid), Strong (Expansion)

Absolute Priority 2-- Field-Initiated Innovations—General

Absolute Priority 3-- Field-Initiated Innovations—Promoting (STEM) Education

Absolute Priority 4-- Field-Initiated Innovations—Meeting Student Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs

Absolute Priority 5-- Educator Recruitment and Retention

Competitive Preference Priorities the Project Addresses: (select all that apply)

Competitive Preference Priority 1—Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities: Implementers and Partners

Competitive Preference Priority 2—Supporting a Diverse Educator Workforce and Professional Growth to Strengthen Student Learning* (FOR EARLY-PHASE AP5 APPLICANTS ONLY)

Total number of students to be served by the project: 640 (64 in pilot study and 576 in randomized controlled trial)

Grade level(s) to be served by the project: Grade 6 and Grade 7

Definition of high-need students: The Third Quest (TTQ) is designed to address students in middle school who are reading below grade level. As such, we define students in high need of reading supports as sixth- and/or seventh-grade students who read between 60 and 130 words correct per minute on a sixth-grade oral fluency passage (students who read between a second and fifth-grade reading level).

Brief description of project activities: The American Institutes for Research (AIR) and Ancora Publishing propose to study the implementation and impact of The Third Quest (TTQ), a Tier 2 reading intervention for middle school students who read below grade level. TTQ includes 75 lessons focused on evidence-based adolescent literacy skills, including comprehension, decoding multisyllabic words, reading secondary text fluently, and understanding vocabulary. Drawing on informational and narrative texts, as well as multimedia, TTQ helps students build the background knowledge needed for other, secondary content areas in middle school, such as science, history, and geography. It also integrates the use of positive behavioral supports to promote students' reading motivation. The study will investigate the impact of TTQ on students' reading skills, overall reading achievement, and reading motivation. In addition, the study will examine whether the impact of TTQ varies across students of different backgrounds or across different school settings. The study will also examine the cost-effectiveness of TTQ. Questions guiding the implementation study include the extent to which teachers implemented TTQ with fidelity, whether teachers found the intervention useful, and whether students found it helpful in developing their reading skills. The study will take place in middle schools or K–9 schools with sixth and/or seventh graders who read between a second- and fifth-grade reading level. The intervention will take place during a dedicated intervention period, with instructors leading small groups of 6–12 students. AIR will engage three cohorts of districts to scale and evaluate the impact of TTQ. The first cohort of districts will pilot test TTQ during the 2024–25 school year, providing input on how to implement the intervention at scale in schools with varying urbanicity, enrollment size, and intervention schedules. The schools in the second two cohorts will participate in an impact study during the 2025–26 and 2026–27 school years and be randomized into treatment and business-as-usual

conditions. Participating districts will be asked to share student demographic data and test data, including the DIBELS 8th Edition, a 3-minute group Maze Test, and the Gates-MacGinitie vocabulary and comprehension assessment. Project findings will inform efforts to accelerate student reading achievement in middle school—efforts that are critically important for all students, particularly high-need students.

Summary of project objectives and expected outcomes: The goal of this project is to scale and evaluate the effectiveness of TTQ with a diverse set of schools and students. When teachers implement TTQ with fidelity, we expect students will make improvements in comprehension, word study and vocabulary, and foundational literacy skills, including decoding and fluency. Through this project, we will learn lessons that can be applied to future refinement and implementation of the program, so that we can support teachers to implement TTQ with fidelity. The study also will build research evidence about how to effectively serve struggling adolescent readers.

Summary of how the project is innovative: TTQ leverages evidence-based approaches to provide an alternative to existing strategies for reading intervention. TTQ, which consists of 75 interventionist teacher-delivered lessons, employs a comprehensive focus on evidence-based practices to promote the development of literacy skills and reading motivation among striving adolescent readers. The program targets reading comprehension and fundamental literacy skills that striving readers need to accurately decode multisyllabic words, read secondary text fluently, and understand vocabulary. Drawing on informational and narrative texts as well as multimedia, TTQ also uses strategies that build background knowledge in content needed for middle school content-area learning important for secondary coursework. It also integrates the use of positive behavioral supports to promote students' reading motivation by prompting students to set individualized goals and track their progress toward these goals, increasing their self-efficacy and ownership of their learning. The overarching goal of the proposed project is to support underserved students who are striving readers (reading below grade level) by implementing TTQ in new and diverse settings, evaluating its effectiveness, and learning lessons that can be applied to future implementation. This proposed project addresses equity by providing an intervention for underserved middle school students that prepares them to participate in grade-level coursework.

TTQ also helps educators meet students' increasingly divergent literacy skills, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions. The results of the project will provide critical information about the implementation and effectiveness of a comprehensive intervention such as TTQ in different types of school settings and with diverse student groups. Because reading motivation will be empirically explored, this project provides an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the role and nature of how positive behavioral supports within the context of a literacy intervention can support reading motivation and the extent to which reading motivation is related to adolescent reading outcomes.

Other studies related to the proposed project: TTQ implements many components and recommendations that are foundational to adolescent literacy interventions, as described in two What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guides (Vaughn et al., 2022, and Kamil et al., 2008).

Proposed implementation sites: We have letters of support (see Appendix C) from the following districts: Central Kitsap School District, School District of Cudahy, Edmond Public Schools, NYC Public Schools, Oakland Unified School District, and Watertown School District.

Organizations partnering with this project: Ancora Publishing is the main partner along with Northwest Education Services, Michigan's MTSS Technical Assistance Center (MiMTSS), LaGrange Area Department of Special Education, Clackamas Educational Service District and the Pennsylvania Training and Technical