Early-Phase Competition Absolute Priority 4 (SEL)
American Institutes for Research
S411C230090
Thinking Pro: Accelerating Social, Emotional, and Academic Development in High School English Language Arts (ELA) Classes

Applicant Name: American Institutes for Research
Project Title: Thinking Pro: Accelerating Social, Emotional, and Academic Development in High School ELA Classes

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-- Promoting STEM Education

☒ Absolute Priority 4-- 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: 10,368
Grade level(s) to be served by the project: 10

Definition of high-need students: The proposed study defines high-need students as those living in underserved urban communities who have inequitable access to educational resources and learning opportunities. The project will specifically work to recruit districts serving at least 30% of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and/or at least 25% of students from marginalized racial/ethnic groups.

Brief description of project activities: The project addresses challenges about how to improve meeting students' social, emotional, and academic needs in high needs schools, with a particular focus on students living in underserved urban communities. Our innovation is Thinking Pro's 12-week curriculum that includes two key components each with multiple subcomponents. The first key component is teacher supports, which includes three subcomponents: (a) an initial 6-hour training, and (b) three coaching sessions over the course of the 12-week implementation period, and (c) a community of practice. The second key component is the instructional model with five subcomponents: (a) explicit instruction, (b) challenging texts, (c) text-based discussions, (d) adaptive learning experiences, and (e) integration of reading comprehension and social and emotional learning.

Summary of project objectives and expected outcomes: Expected study outcomes include the following: (a) increase teachers' knowledge of, self-efficacy in, and use of instructional strategies that accelerate reading comprehension, critical thinking, and civic efficacy and (b) increase 10th-grade students' reading comprehension, critical thinking, and civic efficacy. The project has four objectives: (1) develop new curricular resources to supplement the current version of the curriculum; (2) refine the Thinking Pro through two research and development (R&D) cycles; (3) test Thinking Pro for impact; and (4) analyze, report, and disseminate findings about Thinking Pro.

Summary of how the project is innovative: This project is innovative in five ways. First, Thinking Pro is a place-based intervention that encourages students to access text from written media sources about issues in their local communities that are relevant and connected to their lived experiences. This approach is in direct contrast to traditional reading interventions that curate a standardized portfolio of

reading text at different Lexile/reading levels based on assumptions about generic interest and relevance, do not acknowledge students' cultural backgrounds, and are often edited to account for Lexile levels. Second, teachers use explicit instruction of reading comprehension and critical thinking strategies and facilitate text-based discussions that use stretch text from local and regional written media. These learning opportunities will increase students' capacity to comprehend and critically think about local issues and invite students to use their voice as they apply their skills to generate solutions to address those issues. Third, Thinking Pro's 20 instructional videos adapt to each student's learning pace and ability and measure student progress using built-in mini-assessments. The videos build on and extend the teacher's explicit instruction and facilitated, interactive, text-based discussions by defining and explaining each strategy, modeling how to apply each strategy to authentic informational text, and using assessment items with which students can practice the strategies multiple times throughout the videos and receive immediate feedback on their performance for each item. Thinking Pro's videos and mini-assessments do not require a constant, reliable, high-speed internet connection as many other programs do. Students can complete Thinking Pro's adaptive, interactive explainer videos and mini-assessments without internet connectivity. Once students can access the internet, the system automatically syncs to the server version, and students are able to upload their work and receive feedback. Finally, Thinking Pro's pricing structure makes it a more affordable alternative compared to existing curricula.

Other studies related to the proposed project: The Thinking Pro intervention draws upon two recommended practices from the Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4–9 What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guide. Specifically, Recommendation 3 (Routinely use a set of comprehension-building practices to help students make sense of the text) is backed by studies demonstrating "strong evidence" for the impact of this practice on reading comprehension and measures of general reading and proficiency and English language arts. Recommendation 4 (Provide students with opportunities to practice making sense of stretch text (i.e., challenging text) that will expose them to complex ideas and information) is characterized as backed by "moderate evidence." Studies contributing to the "moderate evidence" supporting the effectiveness of Recommendation 4 reported statistically significant impacts of this practice on reading comprehension.

Proposed implementation sites: AIR obtained letters of support (see Appendix C) from 2 Ohio districts (Toledo Public Schools and Springfield Local Schools) and a regional education service agency that delivers professional development to the 33 districts in Wayne County, Michigan. Wayne County is the most populous county in Michigan and the 18th most populous county in the nation. These letters describe the writers' plans to support recruitment, implementation, and dissemination efforts.

Organizations partnering with this project: AIR is submitting in partnership with local educational