

Project Narrative (Mid-Phase)

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Introduction

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®), in collaboration with Ancora Publishing (“Ancora”), proposes a mid-phase grant focused on **Scaling and Evaluating the Impact of The Third Quest (TTQ)**. Aligned to college- and career-ready grade-level standards, TTQ is a Tier 2 small-group reading intervention for students in Grades 5–8 who are reading below grade level. Students who are reading below grade level are striving to develop their reading skills; in this proposal, we use asset-based language and refer to these students as “striving readers.” To date, TTQ has been used nationwide to support more than 8,900 striving readers in increasing their reading skills.

TTQ, which consists of 75 lessons delivered by Ancora-trained teachers or reading specialists (hereafter “instructors”) in Tier 2 intervention groups, has a **consistent emphasis on evidence-based practices (EBPs) to promote literacy skills for striving adolescent readers**, including foundational phonics skills, multisyllabic words, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Drawing on informational and narrative texts as well as multimedia resources, TTQ uses **strategies that build background knowledge** in content areas important for secondary coursework. To provide a more comprehensive level of support for striving adolescent readers, TTQ integrates **motivational strategies that enable academic progress, including the use of positive behavioral supports and social and emotional supports**. During TTQ’s 75 lessons (each 50–60 minutes in length), groups of 6–10 students per instructor participate in choral word study practice to decode multisyllabic words; complete repeated reading practice with partners to increase oral reading fluency; read relevant and engaging narrative fiction text that reinforces taught vocabulary and builds motivation and content knowledge; and complete written quizzes to assess their understanding of the material. These lessons take place in a supportive, positive, identity-safe, and inclusive intervention setting that immerses students in a fictional story about a diverse group of adolescents with relatable life experiences.

Following 2 years of interrupted schooling, educators need interventions that address student needs in a more comprehensive and integrated way. Adolescent students need reading skills and

sufficient content knowledge to help prevent the lifelong consequences of low literacy. TTQ provides an innovative alternative to typical adolescent reading interventions that focus on building reading proficiency but lack engaging content or explicit supports that address the decreased motivation commonly experienced by striving adolescent readers after years of insufficient reading instruction. Additionally, the training and instructor materials for TTQ provide sufficient implementation support to enable a wide range of instructors to deliver the program, including those without extensive backgrounds in reading instruction. The overarching goal of the project is to understand whether TTQ is an effective solution for the pressing problem facing so many educators and administrators at the middle school level: how best to accelerate reading proficiency for striving adolescent readers. The project aims to do this by implementing TTQ in new and diverse settings (e.g., various-sized districts across multiple states), using purposeful strategies to scale implementation across settings, and evaluating its effectiveness and learning lessons for future implementation.

Absolute and Competitive Preference Priorities

This proposed project addresses **Absolute Priority 1—Moderate Evidence** by scaling and testing TTQ. Rigorous research has demonstrated that the program’s key components meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards for moderate to strong evidence (see Appendix J.2 and Evidence Form). These components include (a) explicit instruction in decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, (b) building background knowledge using content-rich texts, and (c) increasing student motivation through the use of positive behavioral supports, social and emotional supports, and high-interest texts. This project also addresses **Absolute Priority 4—Field-Initiated Innovations—Meeting Student Social, Emotional, and Academic Needs**, as it uses engaging narrative fiction and informational texts, alongside positive behavior and social emotional supports, to build reading motivation and reading skills among striving adolescent readers. The development of reading motivation and reading skills will help students to succeed and belong in school across all subjects, not just in English language arts classrooms. Finally, through a partnership with a community college chosen from a call for applications from a state intermediary partner, the project

will address **Competitive Preference Priority—Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities: Implementers and Partners**. Community college programs in social work and related fields serve many students from underrepresented backgrounds with an interest and expertise in the development of high-needs youth, and these students will serve as thought partners in developing relevant, engaging, and culturally responsive strategies to ensure that TTQ serves the social-emotional needs of the students who could benefit most from it.

A. Significance

A1. Demonstration of Promising Strategies That Build on Existing Strategies

Reading proficiency and motivation are essential for success in secondary grades. Secondary learning in all subjects relies on a student’s ability to read and comprehend challenging text (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Adolescents who read below grade level will experience a variety of challenges as they progress through school and as courses become increasingly dependent on sophisticated academic texts. Students who lack grade-level decoding skills and are unable to read fluently will have trouble keeping up with the increased level of text complexity and sheer volume of independent reading required in secondary settings (Wanzek et al., 2010). Without a robust vocabulary, students will have difficulty understanding the individual words in the texts they read, which will negatively impact their reading comprehension and ability to learn grade-level content (Elleman et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2023).

Low reading comprehension and overall reading performance not only reduces a student’s ability to learn grade-level content, it also has a negative impact on motivation over time (Hebbecker et al., 2019; Toste et al., 2020). Student motivation is also described as a barrier to adolescent reading development (e.g., O’Brien et al., 2007)—which points to the interconnectedness of reading and motivation and the importance of addressing both. In the long run, both low reading motivation and poor reading performance in secondary grades are predictive of future academic difficulties, including an increased likelihood of failure to graduate (Hernandez, 2011; Neild & Balfanz, 2006).

More middle school students are striving readers than in the period prior to the COVID-19

pandemic. Unfortunately, data indicate that far too many middle school students lack proficient reading skills. The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) found that 30% of eighth-grade students scored “below basic” in reading (NAEP, 2022). The percentage of students scoring “below basic” was even higher for some student groups, including Black students (47%), Hispanic students (39%), students eligible for the National School Lunch Program (42%), and students with disabilities (64%). These findings indicate that improving reading skills is an important and necessary lever for schools focused on creating a more equitable educational experience for students from different racial and cultural backgrounds.

Trends in NAEP data also indicate that fewer eighth-grade students were proficient in reading after pandemic-related disruptions to schooling. Average reading scores at eighth grade in 2022 were the lowest since 1998 (NAEP, 2022). These NAEP results, combined with other recent findings related to the impacts of the pandemic on reading (i.e., Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Locke et al., 2021), indicate that adolescent students may have lost opportunities to learn some foundational skills needed for middle school reading proficiency. Disaggregated NAEP data suggests that these lost opportunities were disproportionately experienced by historically marginalized student groups—including students of color, students with disabilities, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (NAEP, 2022).

TTQ provides an evidence-based solution to this problem. To support the growing number of striving readers in middle school, educators across the country need evidence-based adolescent reading interventions. However, even pre-pandemic studies on adolescent reading interventions show inconsistent effects, with many studies showing no discernible effect on literacy skills (Herrera et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2013). Although reading interventions for adolescents tend to show lower effect sizes than interventions in the elementary grades (Hall & Burns, 2018), interventions that incorporate explicit instruction, predicable instructional routines, and cooperative learning have shown greater outcomes for striving middle school readers (Herrera et al., 2016).

Three issues may explain the limited effects of most adolescent reading interventions. First, secondary interventions tend to focus less time on the fundamental skills students need to accurately

decode multisyllabic words and fluently read more complex secondary text (see Vaughn et al., 2022; Scammacca et al., 2015). Teachers at this level often lack pedagogical and content knowledge needed for effective foundational skill instruction despite research that striving adolescent readers benefit from instruction in these areas (Clemens et al., 2017). Second, interventions for adolescents typically do not focus enough time on building background knowledge needed for secondary content learning (Catts et al., 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2019). Background knowledge is important for reading comprehension because it helps students connect information within and across texts and make inferences when important information is missing in the text (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Duke & Cartwright, 2021). As a result, students with strong background knowledge typically demonstrate better reading comprehension (Smith et al., 2021). Given the wide range of increasingly complex texts that middle school students encounter, strong background knowledge is essential. Third, few adolescent literacy interventions systematically infuse motivational supports—a missed opportunity given the research demonstrating a strong association between reading motivation and literacy, and the positive effects of motivation interventions on reading outcomes and student motivation at the elementary level (Guthrie et al., 2012; Toste et al., 2020; Van der Sande et al., 2023).

TTQ addresses these three limitations by leveraging multiple EBPs (in this case, practices with moderate to strong evidence according to WWC Practice Guides [PG]) and integrating those into one comprehensive Tier 2 intervention. Thus, TTQ is a promising intervention strategy that *builds on* a strong base of EBPs, making it exceptionally well grounded in theory and evidence, and a potential solution to educators seeking to meet the range of student literacy and motivation needs resulting from the pandemic period.

The Theory of Change (i.e., conceptual framework; described in Section C1) outlines the three previously mentioned EBPs for middle school literacy used by TTQ and supported by evidence from the WWC PG (see also Appendix J.2). The first EBP is grounded in four areas of reading: multisyllabic word decoding, fluency training, vocabulary and word study, and reading comprehension skills. Four WWC PG recommendations compose the strong evidence base for practices that target those four areas: (1) “Build students’ decoding skills so they can read complex

multisyllabic words,” (2) “Provide purposeful fluency activities to help students read effortlessly,” (3) “Provide explicit vocabulary instruction,” and (4) “Routinely use a set of comprehension building practices to help students make sense of the text” (Kamil et al., 2008; Vaughn et al., 2022). These EBPs include the use of explicit and systematic instruction to target skills in those four key areas of literacy (see also Baker et al., 2014; Kamil et al., 2008; Kelley et al., 2010; Vaughn et al., 2022). TTQ addresses these recommendations by providing explicit instruction and practice in decoding, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension built into each lesson. Exhibit 1 breaks down the skills developed within TTQ and the different activities incorporated into each lesson that seek to develop each of those skills.

Exhibit 1. Literacy Skills Developed and Relevant Activities

Skill	Lesson Activities
Reading fluency	Students engage in fluency practice as an arrival task at the beginning of the lesson, individual and choral reading during the lesson, and partner reading and a one-minute timed reading at the end of the lesson.
Vocabulary	The instructor provides explicit vocabulary instruction with student friendly definitions. Students then engage in interactive activities using the words in multiple contexts.
Listening comprehension	The instructor reads parts of the text aloud to the students and asks comprehension questions.
Reading comprehension and engagement	The instructor models and guides students in using multiple comprehension strategies including activating prior knowledge, summarizing, visualization, using graphic organizers, and providing practice with comprehension testing formats.
Decoding	The instructor provides systematic and explicit instruction in a variety of phonics patterns, including vowel combinations, affixes, and multisyllabic words. The instructor builds student automaticity by varying the rhythm and style of student responses, including group and individual responses.
Phonological awareness	The instructor provides student practice blending and segmenting the sounds in multisyllabic words.

A second key TTQ component are EBPs grounded in building background knowledge in content needed for secondary coursework. Two recommendations from the WWC PGs (Kamil et al., 2008; Vaughn et al., 2022) compose the moderate–strong evidence base for this component: (1) “Build students’ world and word knowledge so they can make sense of the text,” and (2) “Provide opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation.” These EBPs include methods for integrating literacy instruction with content-area topics often found in middle school and scaffolding practices to support students’ engagement with those topics (Kim et al., 2017; Stover et al., 2015). TTQ addresses these recommendations by including narrative fiction and informational

text focused on a variety of topics relevant to middle school science and social studies curricula, including the scientific method, the natural world, and world history and cultures. TTQ developers used content from AP History course study guides to ensure relevance and utility for middle school students. The program supports students in building deep content knowledge by revisiting these topics over time throughout its scope and sequence.

The third key TTQ component is the use of strategies to increase reading motivation. There is one recommendation for this component from the WWC PG: “Increase student motivation and engagement in literacy learning” (Kamil et al., 2008). This recommendation describes practices for goal setting, self-regulation, task valuing, and teamwork as well as informing students about the value of reading strategies and integrating content themes into the reading program (see also Guthrie & Klauda, 2012; Wigfield et al., 2016). TTQ incorporates a variety of social and emotional learning supports to increase student motivation, as described below in Exhibit 2.

Exhibit 2. Social-Emotional Skills Developed and Relevant Program Components

Skill	Program Components
Self-efficacy	Students set individualized oral reading fluency goals and track their progress.
Collaboration and active listening	Students are explicitly taught active listening skills when engaging in class discussions and work collaboratively on partnered oral reading fluency timings, group quizzes, and other group activities.
Self-management	Students self-evaluate using four “Guidelines for Success” including perseverance, teamwork, integrity, and professionalism. The instructor uses positive behavior supports, including clear and predictable routines around the start of activities and consistent sequencing of lessons to help students increase independence during lessons.

TTQ also builds motivation through its use of engaging and relevant texts that incorporate characters and storylines that are appealing to adolescents, including story arcs that navigate family dynamics and characters’ sense of self. Interventions that trigger student interest by using interesting texts and creating real-world connections have demonstrated some of the largest effects among reading motivation interventions (Van der Sande et al., 2023).

While typical adolescent interventions target these EBPs individually, TTQ’s innovative approach integrates them into one comprehensive, well-sequenced intervention program (see Appendix J.14 for sample instructional materials). Reading interventions are a common mechanism

in schools, with support structures in place or readily put in place for Tier 2 supports. By combining multiple EBPs into one program that can be implemented by existing Tier 2 instructors leveraging existing multi-tiered systems of support, TTQ provides a promising model for increasing the overall success of striving middle school readers.

The proposed project will provide new evidence about implementation of TTQ, supports for effectively scaling the program, and the program’s effectiveness. This project will also build on our current understanding of how motivational components can be incorporated into reading interventions and help address the need for more comprehensive interventions for adolescents—interventions that embed positive behavior and social-emotional supports aimed at increasing reading motivation and reading outcomes (Kim et al., 2017; Van der Sande et al., 2023; Wigfield et al., 2016). The project evaluation will explicitly measure reading motivation and explore mediator relationships between motivation and reading outcomes, which will provide more information on the role of motivation in reading outcomes. Results from the project will provide crucial information to practitioners about how to accelerate student learning using an intervention that includes targeted support in literacy skills and social and emotional wellbeing when delivered using the scaling and sustaining strategies described in Section B1, while also informing Ancora’s refinement of TTQ and promotion of best practices for future implementation and scaling.

B. Strategy to Scale

B1. Strategies That Overcome Barriers to Sustaining and Scaling

Educators need multiple supports, guidance materials, and learning and engagement opportunities for successful implementation of new programs (Kraft et al., 2018). AIR and Ancora have identified common barriers to sustaining implementation (long-duration adoption of a program) and scaling (increased usership of the program) of TTQ, drawing from Ancora’s experience implementing the program in middle schools. One barrier is limited capacity within districts or limited availability of local leaders to support implementation of Tier 2 programs. A second barrier is insufficient educator knowledge acquisition, buy-in, and planning prior to the program implementation. Finally, a third

barrier is insufficient scaffolding for educators to implement TTQ successfully; this is particularly important in the context of a Tier 2 environment where educators will use the program to serve the needs of diverse individual students. To address these barriers, our team will incorporate implementation supports that include three specific sustaining and scaling strategies (as depicted and described in the Theory of Change, Section C1 and Appendix G).

Sustaining and Scaling Strategy 1: Build capacity of district-level coordinators. For a program to take hold, district staff capacity needs to be built beyond the classroom teacher implementing the program (Fixsen et al., 2009; Rodgers, 2016); district-level coordinators are key staff to work with program developers in ensuring local fit for a new program (George et al., 2018). Ancora will involve district-level coordinators in several ways. First, after reviewing introductory materials that summarize the program, coordinators¹ will participate in the summer training (described in Strategy 2). Following that training, Ancora will meet with the coordinators to review the plan for the instructor collaborative workshops and discuss refinements. With support from Ancora and AIR, district coordinators will become primary managers of the implementation of TTQ within each district or consortium, and principal points of contact with implementing instructors. Ancora will develop a coordinator handbook with accompanying videos to use with instructors to support implementation after the duration of the project. Written guidance and meetings between coordinators and Ancora will ensure shared purposes and expectations (e.g., instructor time commitments) for program implementation.

Sustaining and Scaling Strategy 2: Develop instructors' expertise and engage with instructors as experts. Training opportunities for educators are most effective when they occur at convenient times for teachers and use multiple means of representation—including group discussion, lectures, application of new knowledge, videos, and modeling—and incorporate leaders and teachers (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Buczynski & Hansen, 2010; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Yoon, et al., 2007). Incorporating these adult learning techniques, Ancora will facilitate a 3-day summer virtual training

¹ Eligible staff will already be in a district-level coordinator, instructional specialist, or coaching role (e.g., multi-tiered system of supports coordinators, English language arts coordinators, or district reading coaches).

for instructors and coordinators to become familiar with TTQ, practice using the materials, and plan for implementation. Since district coordinators will participate in this opportunity, specific issues related to the local context can be discussed during the training. Instructors will complete a brief follow-up survey to gauge their engagement with the training and the material, which will inform future communications from Ancora to instructors, both within the study and in the future. Trained instructors will then be able to serve as ambassadors for TTQ and help colleagues determine whether TTQ fits their own local contexts and how it may best be implemented.

Sustaining and Scaling Strategy 3: Provide follow-up implementation supports through guidance materials, implementation checklists, and collaborative workshops. While research tells us that advance training aids educators in learning about the intervention, follow-up collaborative workshops are needed for educators to hone implementation and address challenges they are encountering (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Desimone, 2011; Birman et al., 2000; Stein & Coburn, 2008). Moreover, educators who are starting new programs benefit from user-friendly guidance materials and tools that include information on how to adapt the program to their local context and explicitly outline key concepts of the program to support their use (Brown, 2011; Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Metz & Louison, 2019; Remillard, 2018). Therefore, Strategy 3 focuses on three substrategies: (a) guidance materials, (b) quick-reference implementation checklists, and (c) follow-up workshops.

Guidance Materials. Instructors and coordinators will receive a TTQ instructional guide that provides illustrative practice examples of TTQ implementation in different scenarios (e.g., learning blocks that vary in time) as well as step-by-step plans for making the best use of time in intervention sessions based on session length and frequency. Other materials, such as a user-friendly visual “playbook” for implementation, will be developed to introduce TTQ goals and materials and to share case examples of successful TTQ implementation. Links to video recordings of practice examples will be incorporated into the playbook.

Implementation Checklists. Along with the curriculum and training materials, coordinators and instructors will receive implementation checklists with detailed procedures for implementing the

lessons. These checklists are quick-reference tools that spell out each step, giving busy instructors a guide that allows them to easily monitor their own implementation. The checklist also includes student motivation and classroom management strategies to help instructors ensure they are using the behavioral strategies as intended.

Collaborative Workshops. After they have participated in the summer training and taught approximately 14 weeks of lessons, instructors will take part in a series of two TTQ workshops facilitated by Ancora. In each workshop, instructors will share successes and challenges they have encountered in implementing the curriculum with their students according to the publisher's guidance and in using the implementation checklists, playbook, and other resources. Ancora will give instructors feedback and discuss strategies they can use to ensure program fidelity.

Participants. AIR and Ancora have accessed their networks to recruit six school districts and five intermediary organizations, from a total of ten states, who have committed interest in participating in the evaluation (see letters of support in Appendix C). Intermediary organizations will handle communication and coordination between geographically proximate schools in smaller districts and will recruit districts to participate; their recruiting strategy will focus on districts that are representative of the national population of striving readers, with an emphasis on districts in cities and rural areas, districts with high percentages of Black, Latino, and Native American students, and districts with high percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. While not all schools served by the intermediary organizations will participate, this sample of districts and schools exceeds our estimated sample size of 72 study schools and eight pilot schools and demonstrates our ability to attract the requisite number of participants for each cohort of the project (see Appendix J.1 for projected district demographics and J.9 for the initial recruitment plan).

All participating districts (a) have striving adolescent readers and at least 25% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, (b) have a dedicated reading intervention block and at least one instructor to provide reading instruction along with at least one coordinator at the district or intermediary organization level, (c) want to support instructors' professional learning on high-leverage literacy practice efforts, (d) have identified high-need students as a priority in strategic

plans, (e) will use the same criteria in all schools to determine enrollment in Tier 2 instruction, and (f) have agreed to participate in random assignment, unless they are recruited for the pilot phase. This pool of interested districts encompasses rural and urban schools and varied student bodies and enrollment sizes. The large and diverse sample will provide information about the equitable provision of intervention services by identifying which striving adolescent readers in which settings receive the greatest benefit from a comprehensive, evidence-based intervention such as TTQ.

B2. Adequacy of the Management Plan

Each partner brings a track record that demonstrates its capacity to bring the project to scale, as well as experienced personnel (see Section B3 and Appendix J.7). Drawing on Ancora's role as the program developer and AIR's long-standing experience in conducting large-scale research, the management plan is designed to leverage the complementary strengths and expertise of the AIR and Ancora teams to achieve the study's objectives (see Section C2).

AIR is the lead organization for the project. AIR will recruit eligible schools from the school district partners for the pilot study (Objective 1), support project management and coordination across Ancora and the school districts, conduct an independent evaluation of TTQ (Objective 2), and lead the dissemination of the project's findings (Objective 3). Ancora will support implementation of TTQ in schools, provide materials, facilitate the sustaining and scaling supports, and refine TTQ materials and scaling supports based on evaluation input. The district partners will assist in recruitment of suitable middle schools and implement TTQ. Additionally, district partners will support data collection by entering into a data sharing agreement and establishing a district point of contact; providing time for instructors to complete lesson logs, fidelity checklists, surveys, and video recordings of instruction; and allowing students to participate in testing. Two statewide centers for technical assistance and training related to multi-tiered systems of support—MI-MTSS in Michigan and PaTTAN in Pennsylvania—along with three intermediate school districts (Clackamas ESD in Oregon, LaGrange Area Department of Special Education in Illinois, and Northwest Education Services in Michigan) will facilitate district recruitment and communication within their states.

With implementation support from Ancora, AIR will facilitate a scholars' group through our higher education partner institution. Within the scholars' group, students in pre-social work programs or other fields related to social-emotional learning will exchange expertise with the developers of the intervention, drawing on the students' lived experiences and new ideas as well as the extensive academic and field experiences of the developers. Scholars will attend a virtual meeting with Ancora intervention developers to hear how the development of TTQ was informed by the principles of social-emotional learning and to ask questions about the lessons learned by the developers over the course of creating and refining the program. The scholars will also work with the research team to develop interview questions related to social-emotional learning for instructors in the pilot schools, providing the scholars with valuable experience in the formative stage of a large-scale education study. Later in the academic year, after the scholars have completed more of their own coursework, they will observe recorded lessons and assess how social-emotional components are incorporated into the instruction, both in the lesson plans and in the delivery. These scholars will provide feedback to Ancora about their findings, which will be used to inform refinements to the instructional materials; the students' recommendations will also be incorporated into future trainings to instructors about how to effectively deliver the social-emotional components of the intervention. The relationship will be mutually beneficial for the scholars, AIR, Ancora, and the populations served by TTQ, as the scholars will gain experience in designing and implementing education projects in the field, as well as a firsthand look at how curricula can incorporate social-emotional components, while the scholars draw on their academic knowledge and lived experiences to inform feedback about the delivery of social-emotional components and the development of survey questions, all to promote the social-emotional well-being of the highest-need students.

The management plan (see Appendix J.5) ensures that the objectives will be achieved on time and within budget; it assigns responsibility for each project objective and specific strategy to a lead staff member with a track record of success. To begin coordination efforts, the Project Director and Deputy Director will convene a project launch meeting for each objective with all relevant partners to clarify the management plan and lines of communication. They will then set up regular task-based

meetings with appropriate partners and team members and employ project management tools (such as Airtable and Costpoint) to monitor progress and costs.

Moreover, the management plan is designed to maintain distance between implementation and research, consistent with the U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education guidance for independent evaluations. To ensure an independent evaluation, the AIR evaluation team will have no role in the TTQ implementation except through evaluation feedback. AIR trains staff to report concerns about independence and tracks labor charges by task to ensure independence of the evaluation team.

B3. Organizational Capacity to Bring the Project to Scale

With a mission to generate and use rigorous evidence that contributes to a better, more equitable world, AIR is highly qualified for its role in the project. It has decades of experience in conducting large-scale research and managing complex projects and has built the corporate infrastructure to efficiently manage and support these projects, including extensive support for staff development, quality assurance, dissemination, financial management, information technology, data security, and an established project oversight and risk management system. AIR’s Institutional Review Board reviews and approves data collection and analysis.

AIR has a distinguished track record of leading projects focused on reading interventions, including several large scale-up studies. In each project shown in Exhibit 3, AIR played a lead role in coordinating with partner organizations, including intervention developers and school districts; recruited participating districts, schools, and teachers; and conducted an independent evaluation to assess impacts. AIR has proven experience recruiting the requisite number of districts and schools to participate in comparable projects that included randomized controlled trials (RCTs).

Exhibit 3. AIR-Led Contracts and Grants to Scale and Test Reading Interventions

Project name	Partner(s) that provided the intervention	Districts	Schools
TeacherRead Targeted Shared Book Reading Efficacy Study	University of Notre Dame	3	120
Children’s Literacy Initiative Scale-Up Evaluation	Children’s Literacy Initiative (CLI)	4	30
Impact Evaluation of Training in Multi-Tiered Systems of Support	Enhanced Classroom Reading Instruction (ECRI) by Boston University and University of	8	122

for Reading in Early Grades	Oregon		
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Furthermore, AIR has extensive institutional experience partnering with higher education institutions, most notably through the AIR Pipeline Partnership Program, a joint venture among AIR, Georgia State University in Atlanta, Howard University in Washington, DC, and the University of Texas at San Antonio, funded through the AIR Equity Initiative.

AIR and Ancora’s management plan (described in Section B2 and Appendix J.5) designates five experienced key staff who bring diverse, complementary experiences and expertise to this project.

██████████, **PhD, Project Director**, is a school psychologist with 10 years of experience managing the implementation of district-wide literacy interventions and scaling and providing technical assistance to refine, evaluate, and scale interventions. ██████████ will have primary responsibility for ensuring all resources and partner work are aligned with the broader vision and objectives of the project and reflect existing knowledge and expertise on supporting striving readers.

██████████, **Deputy Director**, will work closely with ██████████ and will be responsible for managing the budget and project timelines shown in Appendix J.4; he will also coordinate study activities related to recruitment and implementation. He has 11 years of experience in education research and is currently the project director on an evaluation of a state early warning system to identify students requiring extra support to ensure on-time graduation. ██████████

██████████ will also work with a financial analyst and quality assurance reviewers from AIR, meeting regularly to discuss the project progress relative to the planned timeline and budget and to troubleshoot any challenges encountered. ██████████

of Ancora, Implementation Lead, will lead implementation activities. ██████████ is the lead author of TTQ and of Read Well K–2 (a scientifically based early reading program). ██████████ also serves as an educational consultant and has provided training in literacy, curriculum adaptation, and collaborative instruction for thousands of teachers throughout the United States and Canada. As the developer of TTQ, she will lead professional development, refinement of the fidelity tool, and incorporate feedback from the formative evaluation to improve the intervention. ██████████, **Partnerships Lead**, will lead

outreach to state and local education agencies to recruit study participants. She will also coordinate

and support the work of the scholars' group, in collaboration with higher education partners. She has more than 10 years of recruitment experience on large-scale education studies, including for Education Innovation and Research (EIR) projects for the past 4 years; she has extensive experience brokering relationships between researchers and school administrators. [REDACTED], PhD, *Evaluation Lead*, will oversee the independent evaluation study. A certified reviewer for the WWC, [REDACTED] is a researcher with deep expertise in the design and conduct of RCTs. Additionally, the project is supported by experienced advisors and quality assurance reviewers (described in Appendix J.8) with deep collective expertise in adolescent literacy, research methodology, and implementation of large-scale literacy projects.

B4. Mechanisms for Dissemination to Support Further Development or Replication

To reach policymakers, researchers, and practitioners, we have developed an initial dissemination plan (Appendix J.6) based on our work with other large-scale projects. Dissemination activities will include the use of social media, scholarly journals, and publications and conferences aimed at practitioners such as multi-tiered systems of support coordinators, reading specialists, and middle-school literacy instructors. Given that a central purpose of our plan is to disseminate information of the effectiveness of TTQ among the research community, practitioners, policymakers, and professional development providers, these dissemination mechanisms will help support program replicability. The dissemination plan will also allow for educators to learn about the experience of other educators in utilizing TTQ and about the opportunities and barriers for high-quality implementation. Evidence from the wide variety of settings in the study—reflecting racial, socioeconomic, geographic, and regional diversity—will inform future potential adoptees of TTQ about how the program will suit the needs of their students.

With its reputation and reach among teachers, districts, and state organizations in developing educational resources, Ancora will develop briefs, infographics, web events, and videos with information on the project, its results, and lessons learned; these will be made available on the TTQ

and Ancora websites. These dissemination products will focus on applications to practice and supporting the scaling of TTQ, and they will provide evidence and testimonials about the relationship between social-emotional learning, particularly motivation, and the development of reading skills. AIR will translate the evaluation findings into accessible highlights through products such as blogs, videos, social media posts, brief practitioner-friendly reports and examples in practice, and infographics. AIR will also leverage its leadership of national and regional education centers—such as the National Center on Intensive Intervention (NCII), the regional comprehensive centers, and the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders—to reach broad audiences of policymakers, practitioners, professional development providers, and researchers. For example, we will submit the results to the NCII Instructional Tools Chart, a widely used resource for schools and districts to find program information. The AIR and Ancora team will publish articles in journals, including peer-reviewed journals (e.g., *Exceptional Children*, *Journal of Learning Disabilities*) and practitioner journals and trade publications (e.g., *Reading Teacher*, *Educational Leadership*), and present on the results of this project at conferences (e.g., National Center for Teacher Effectiveness, Association for Middle Level Education).

B5. Utility of Products That Result From the Proposed Project

The proposed project will inform journal articles, conference presentations, policy briefs, and electronic media content, which will provide useful information to a wide range of audiences with varied levels and types of expertise. As described in Section A1, there is a tremendous need for evidence-based and content-relevant reading interventions for middle school students. At the completion of the proposed project work, the proposed study design will identify the impact on TTQ on reading achievement, skills, and motivation, as well as identify in which contexts TTQ is most effective, with particular emphasis on racial, socio-economic, and geographic diversity. This will provide rigorous information to inform broader use of TTQ and help educators and other audiences better understand the features and implementation of a comprehensive Tier 2 reading program. The emphasis on implementing and learning from the project in diverse contexts will help educators

understand how TTQ can support local needs and students. The dissemination plan as described in Section B4 is designed to share the information learned through the proposed study to relevant stakeholders, including researchers, teachers, districts, and state education organizations. The variety of target audiences for the study's products will ensure that the study informs the conversation about middle-grade reading among teachers, parents, district and state coordinators, students, and researchers.

C. Quality of the Project Design

C1. Conceptual Framework

The Theory of Change, depicted in Appendix G, provides a visual representation of how TTQ is hypothesized to improve student reading motivation and performance outcomes for striving readers. The Theory of Change assumes that when the three scaling and sustaining strategies (discussed in Section B1) are implemented with the three key components of TTQ, student outcomes will improve and in turn support the overall goal of grade-level reading. We expect instructors' use of the TTQ enhanced evidence-based literacy and behavior strategies to improve students' reading fluency, vocabulary, and general reading comprehension (see Section A1). Those TTQ literacy strategies include repeated readings from the sentence to the passage level, choral reading, explicit vocabulary instruction across multiple contexts throughout the program, and multiple comprehension strategies combined with increasing student background knowledge. With TTQ's integration of behavioral and social emotional supports with engaging texts, we expect increased reading motivation as an intermediate outcome, which will in turn mediate student performance outcomes in reading related to increased reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Evidence-based components of TTQ that have positive effects on reading motivation include providing frequent social interaction and teamwork activities around reading, having students develop mastery goals and self-evaluate academic and behavioral performance, and triggering student interest through relevant and interesting texts (Van der Sande et al., 2023; Wigfield et al., 2016). We also expect increased reading skills to have a positive effect on reading motivation (Hebbecke et al., 2019; Toste et al., 2020)

C2. Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes That Are Clearly Specified and Measurable

The goal of the project is to implement TTQ with fidelity in a variety of new settings (i.e., small, medium, and large districts across different states; see Appendix J.1 for the full list of districts and their demographics) with a diverse population of striving readers, while evaluating its effectiveness and using the findings to refine the mechanisms to support implementation and scaling of TTQ. A summary of the project’s objectives, strategies, outcomes, and measures is shown in Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4. Objectives, Strategies, Outcomes, and Measures

Strategies	Outcomes	Measures
Objective 1: Implement and refine TTQ scaling supports through a yearlong field test (2024–25 SY)		
Strategy 1.1: Recruit 8 pilot schools who are willing to participate in field test.	Districts and schools agree to participate in the implementation of TTQ for 1 school year.	Measure 1.1: Districts and schools provide signatures on the project MOU for eight schools in the pilot phase.
Strategy 1.2: Build capacity of district-level coordinators to support TTQ implementation.	Each coordinator is able to support implementation of TTQ.	Measure 1.2: A district coordinator from each school (8 coordinators) attends the summer training and two follow-up trainings, and completes a survey indicating readiness.
Strategy 1.3: Provide summer training prior to the start of implementation and collaborative workshops during implementation of TTQ.	Pilot instructors and district coordinators understand the delivery and purpose of the program and have support to implement the program as designed.	Measure 1.3: Responses to a survey administered to instructors and district coordinators indicates they understand the purpose of TTQ and perceive they have adequate supports to implement the program.
Strategy 1.4: Provide follow-up implementation materials to pilot schools.	Pilot instructors and coordinators receive guidance materials and implementation checklists that support implementation of TTQ.	Measure 1.4: Biannual memo of implementation materials provided to instructors and coordinators.
Strategy 1.5: Implement TTQ with a high degree of fidelity in 8 schools (2024-25 school year).	Instructors implement TTQ as designed.	Measure 1.5: The average intervention instructor in the pilot phase completes at least 67 out of 75 TTQ lessons across the school year.
Strategy 1.6: Collect formative evaluation data from instructors on program alignment, student learning experiences, and implementation feasibility.	Formative evaluation data are collected to inform revisions to TTQ.	Measure 1.6: All instructors and at least 80% of students complete project surveys and at least 75% of instructors participate in an interview about their implementation of TTQ.
Strategy 1.7: Refine scaling supports based on feedback.	Training materials, coordinator guides, and implementation schedules are revised.	Measure 1.7: Biannual memo summarizing revisions to each of the three types of scaling supports.
Objective 2: Implement TTQ at scale with fidelity and determine its impacts (2025–26 and 2026–27 SY)		
Strategy 2.1: Recruit schools to implement TTQ in Grade 6 and/or Grade 7.	Districts and schools agree to participate and to be randomly assigned to conditions.	Measure 2.1: Districts and schools provide signatures on the project MOU for 72 schools in the impact evaluation phase.

Strategies	Outcomes	Measures
Strategy 2.2: Randomly assign schools to treatment and control conditions.	All schools that agree to participate in the evaluation are randomly assigned.	Measure 2.2: Baseline equivalence and integrity of the random assignment documented by evaluation team in a memo.
Strategy 2.3: Build capacity of district-level coordinators to support TTQ implementation.	Each coordinator is able to support sustained implementation of TTQ.	Measure 2.3: A district coordinator from each treatment school (36 coordinators) attends the summer training and two follow-up trainings and completes a survey indicating readiness.
Strategy 2.4: Provide summer training prior to start of implementation and collaborative workshops during implementation of TTQ.	Instructors and district coordinators in treatment schools understand the delivery and purpose of the program and have support to implement the program as designed.	Measure 2.4: All instructors and district-level coordinators in the treatment schools attend the summer training and 90% of instructors and district-level coordinators attend two collaborative workshops during the school year and complete a survey indicating readiness.
Strategy 2.5: Provide follow-up implementation materials to treatment schools.	Instructors and coordinators in treatment schools receive guidance materials and implementation checklists that support implementation of TTQ.	Measure 2.5: List of guidance materials and checklists provided to treatment schools documented in memo.
Strategy 2.6: Implement TTQ with a high degree of fidelity in 18 schools each across 2 years (total 36 schools; 2025–26 and 2026–27 school years).	Treatment instructors complete lessons as scheduled.	Measure 2.6: The average treatment instructor delivers at least 67 out of 75 TTQ lessons throughout the year.
Strategy 2.7: Collect and measure fidelity of implementation data as well as cost information (e.g., labor hours).	Fidelity of implementation data and costs of implementation are collected; social-emotional components of lessons are reviewed by scholars' group.	Measure 2.7: At least 90% of treatment schools have a video classroom observation completed; at least 85% of instructors complete the implementation survey and provide cost information.
Strategy 2.8: Evaluate the impact of TTQ on student reading performance.	Data on outcome measures are collected and analyzed.	Measure 2.8: Data collection progress and findings documented in memos and reports. Impact findings meet WWC standards without reservations.
Objective 3: Broaden the project's impact through dissemination and further implementation (2025+)		
Strategy 3.1: Create products such as peer-reviewed journal articles, briefs, infographics, web events, videos.	Impact study interim and final reports; report briefs; cost analysis report; and journal, blog, infographics, videos, and newsletter articles are created based on project learnings.	Measure 3.1: Number of written products and number of times each product is cited or shared.
Strategy 3.2: Leverage distribution channels including social media outlets to share research products.	Partners collaborate to engage their internal and external networks to share research products.	Measure 3.2: Number of times each product is shared or cited.
Strategy 3.3: Present findings at research conferences and large practitioner convenings.	Partners collaborate to share project learnings at 1 or 2 conferences per year beginning in Year 2, building knowledge among potential TTQ users and the wider field.	Measure 3.3: Number of presentations made per project year.

Strategies	Outcomes	Measures
Strategy 3.4: Implement TTQ in control schools following conclusion of RCT data collection.	Control schools receive TTQ with scaffolding supports following the conclusion of the impact evaluation data collection.	Measure 3.4: Number of control schools implementing TTQ at the project conclusion.

C3. Appropriateness to Needs of Target Population

As we describe in Section A1, most middle school English language arts (ELA) curricula assume a basic mastery of literacy fundamentals frequently taught in elementary school, without supporting the skills that striving readers need to build such mastery. Students who enter middle school without those fundamentals are disproportionately students of color, English learners, students in rural and urban schools, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Unless they are provided a setting in which they can catch up, they could be left further behind. TTQ meets the needs of striving readers in middle school by leveraging Tier 2 time to deliver evidence-based instructional routines for students to further develop their reading decoding, fluency, word study and vocabulary, and comprehension skills as well as build background knowledge and enhance reading motivation through the use of positive behavioral and social emotional supports—all of which supports their literacy development. The program also promotes four “Guidelines for Success” (perseverance, teamwork, integrity, and professionalism) aimed at employability skills, in addition to supporting increased self-management and self-awareness through personal goal-setting and self-evaluation of academic and behavioral performance. Leveraging social interaction through teamwork, providing and encouraging autonomy, building self-efficacy, and having students set mastery goals are all effective strategies in improving reading motivation (Wigfield et al., 2016). All of these program components promote equitable access to higher level course-taking as students reach high school by making students more comfortable in non-ELA classes with substantial reading components.

D. Quality of the Project Evaluation

The TTQ Theory of Change posits that a consistent emphasis on key secondary literacy skills, combined with strategies for building student background knowledge and positive behavioral support practices, will result in increased motivation in reading, reading skills, and ultimately attainment of grade-level reading ability. AIR will conduct an independent evaluation of TTQ that

aligns with the Theory of Change and includes both formative and summative components.

D1. Evaluation Designed to Meet WWC Evidence Standards Without Reservations

The outcome evaluation will examine the impact of TTQ on the intended student outcomes, shown below in Exhibit 5. AIR’s use of a blocked school-level cluster RCT research design, valid and reliable outcome measures, and rigorous analytic methods are designed to produce an impact evaluation with evidence of effectiveness eligible for a rating of *Meets WWC Standards Without Reservations*. After accounting for possible attrition of 10% of schools in the randomized impact study, the expected analytic sample size of 576 students in 72 schools would enable the study to meet the requirements for strong evidence under the Every Student Succeeds Act if a positive and significant effect on reading achievement is found. AIR will preregister the study with the **Registry of Efficacy and Effectiveness Studies**, a mechanism that increases transparency in research.

Exhibit 5. Impact Evaluation Research Questions and Data Sources

Research question (RQ)	Data sources
RQ1. What is the impact of TTQ on student reading achievement and skills?	Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and Gates-MacGinitie composite and subscale scores from beginning and end of study year; district-reported student demographic data (2025–26 and 2026–27)
RQ2. Does the impact of TTQ on reading achievement vary among different populations of students and school settings?	DIBELS and Gates-MacGinitie composite and subscale scores from beginning and end of study year; district-reported student and school demographic data (2025–26 and 2026–27)
RQ3a. What is the impact of TTQ on students’ reading motivation and engagement with reading? RQ3b. How does the impact of TTQ on students’ reading motivation mediate program impact on student reading achievement and skills?	Learning with Others Survey (2025–26 and 2026–27)

AIR will use a blocked cluster RCT to generate evidence to answer RQs 1–3. Two cohorts of approximately 36 schools each will participate in the evaluation, the first cohort in 2025–26 and the second in 2026–27. Districts or consortia of districts working together on implementation will serve as the random assignment blocks, as outlined in the sample letters of support shown in Appendix C. There will be an average of four blocks of nine schools each per cohort. Prior to the start of their year in the evaluation study, half of the schools in each block will be randomly assigned to implement the intervention during the study period; the other half will be randomly assigned to the control group

and will continue with business as usual through the study period. Schools in the control group will be offered TTQ training and curricular materials at no charge for 1 year after data collection ends. To ensure students do not change schools in anticipation of the program, AIR will request that districts not publicize TTQ until after implementation begins. After randomization, AIR will conduct a baseline equivalence check to confirm balance on student pretest scores and background characteristics. The primary analysis will be an intent-to-treat framework, in which all schools randomly assigned to implement TTQ during the study period will be analyzed as the intervention group and all schools randomly assigned to begin implementing after the study period will be analyzed as the control group, regardless of whether districts implemented TTQ in accordance with the random assignment results.

The analytic sample will consist of all schools in study districts that are randomized to conditions, and the analytic sample of students will consist of all students enrolled in sixth- or seventh-grade Tier 2 intervention settings based on beginning-of-year universal screening data. Joiners, defined as students who enroll in sixth- or seventh-grade Tier 2 intervention settings after services have begun to be delivered, will be excluded from the analytic sample. AIR anticipates that each school participating in the study will enroll at least one small group of students in sixth- or seventh-grade Tier 2 intervention settings, serving an average of eight students per group, with the flexibility to enroll more students in larger schools as needed. To ensure adequate power for RQs 1 and 2, AIR will recruit 80 schools to participate in the RCT, with the understanding that some attrition is possible. If 10% of schools exit and the intervention is implemented in one small group per school, the remaining 72 schools will allow the detection of an effect size of 0.17 *SD*, which is similar to the average effects on ELA achievement found in the WWC Practice Guide on Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4–9. See Appendix J.12 for power calculations, including sensitivity analyses related to attrition of schools and the number of students per school.

To ensure that students are not differentially placed into Tier 2 reading classrooms based on their perceived potential responsiveness to the treatment, AIR will require that treatment and control schools in the same district or consortium have the same criteria for placing students into Tier 2

reading classrooms and provide the same Tier 1 reading instruction to students placed into Tier 2 reading classrooms. However, different districts or consortia may differ with regard to their criteria for placing students into Tier 2 reading classrooms. To provide a standard criterion for inclusion while also respecting each local district's process, AIR will remove from the analytic sample students who score above the cut-off score of 335 on the beginning-of-year DIBELS composite.

Low attrition of schools is expected during the evaluation period, as the evaluation window is only 1 school year for each cohort, the burden of implementing the intervention and participating in the study is small, and there are only two periods in which student testing data will be collected, in the fall and spring of the study school year. The evaluation team will keep in regular contact with schools to ensure their continued participation, as well as to hear informal reports about challenges that instructors and schools are facing in implementing TTQ and successes that students are having in learning from it. Intermediary partners will help facilitate this communication, particularly if participating districts are small. Prior to conducting the impact evaluation, AIR will assess overall and differential treatment group attrition, examining both the cluster (school) and subcluster (student) levels. A school-level RCT with low attrition of schools and students is expected to meet the WWC standards without reservations if joiners are excluded from the sample. If cluster-level attrition is high, the study may still meet WWC standards without reservations if baseline equivalence is established on beginning-of-year test scores. When possible, data collection will use passive (opt-out) consent. When active consent is necessary, information will be distributed to parents with clear descriptions of the data being collected and the purpose of the data collection; AIR will work with schools to track consent rates on a weekly basis and facilitate conversations with parents whose students have not returned consent forms. Student surveys will be administered during class to facilitate high completion rates.

All analytic specifications will control for beginning-of-year test scores, and for other baseline characteristics, including eligibility for special education, English learner status, and free or reduced-price lunch eligibility; they will also control for characteristics of the delivery of Tier 2 services, including group size, instructor background (e.g., special education teacher, general education

teacher, aide), class period length, number of sessions per week, and whether a student also receives separate Tier 1 instruction in ELA. To estimate the effect of TTQ on student achievement, AIR will regress test scores obtained at the end of the program on test scores obtained at the beginning of the year, an indicator for whether a student is enrolled in a treated school, student demographic characteristics, and district/consortium fixed effects (see Appendix J.13 for analysis details). To determine whether TTQ works effectively for students in populations that are highly represented in the national population of students reading below grade level, we will estimate these effects specifically for students in these groups, including Black students, Latino students, English learners, students in rural or urban schools, and economically disadvantaged students (RQ 2).

Trained data collectors will administer the DIBELS 8, a 5-minute test with oral reading fluency and Maze fill-in-the-blank sentence comprehension sections, and the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT), a 55-minute test of vocabulary and passage comprehension, to measure **student reading achievement and skills** (RQs 1 and 2). Each assessment has been used to measure reading achievement gains in numerous studies meeting WWC standards, including Baker et al. (2014), Kamil et al. (2008), and Vaughn et al. (2022). Median test-retest reliability for each subscale of the DIBELS in Grades 6 and 7 ranges from 0.74 to 0.91; the alternate-form reliability of the GMRT in Grades 6 and 7 ranges from 0.82 to 0.91. (See Appendix J.11 for proposed measure information.) The DIBELS and GMRT will be administered once before the start of the intervention and once immediately following the intervention by Tier 2 instructors during their usual instructional time. To understand outcomes related to student **reading motivation** (RQ 3a and 3b), students will complete a validated survey (Learning with Others, LWO) that measured student reading motivation in a prior adolescent learning study (Haynes et al., 2016; Surr et al., 2018). The survey contains six constructs (three to four items in each construct) with Cronbach's α between 0.74 and 0.94, well above the minimum of 0.60 required by the WWC (see Appendix J.11). Results of confirmatory factor analyses indicated that the survey constructs fit well as a single measure of student motivation (Surr et al., 2018). LWO will be administered at the beginning and end of the school year in treatment and control settings. To ensure low attrition, LWO will be administered during class and instructors will be encouraged

to follow up with any students who were absent on the day that LWO was first administered.

Formative Evaluation

The formative evaluation will examine fidelity and quality of implementation (Exhibit 6), using mixed methods with quantitative and qualitative data and will include both a pilot phase (2024–25) and an impact evaluation phase (2025–26 and 2026–27). Evaluation activities for **RQs 4–6** monitor program implementation, examine instructor and student perspectives on the utility and relevance of the intervention, with special emphasis on its motivational components, and solicit instructor and student feedback on ways the intervention might be improved. **RQ 7** examines the effectiveness of TTQ relative to its costs. The pilot cohort, which will include eight schools participating in TTQ during the 2024–25 school year, will allow AIR and Ancora to fine-tune program components and data collection instruments in response to feedback from participants and findings from the pilot, while providing preliminary formative data to answer RQs 4–6, including instructor interviews co-developed with the community college scholars’ group. Annual implementation and study reporting in 2024–25, 2025–26, and 2026–27 will be timed to provide Ancora program staff with data, findings, and insight that will allow for the continuous improvement and implementation of TTQ. The findings from RQs 4–6 will also be reported in public-facing deliverables to contextualize the impact findings from RQs 1–3 and share lessons learned about implementation.

Exhibit 6. Formative Evaluation Research Questions and Data Sources

Research question	Data sources
RQ4a. To what extent was TTQ implemented with fidelity? RQ4b. What barriers did instructors face to implementing TTQ with fidelity, and how successfully did the scaling strategies prepare instructors to implement TTQ with fidelity?	Instructor lesson logs, instructor fidelity checklist, video recordings of instruction, instructor survey (2024–25, 2025–26, and 2026–27)
RQ5a. To what extent did instructors implementing TTQ find the curriculum useful and aligned to their goals, particularly in relation to motivating striving readers? RQ5b. What modifications to TTQ components and supports could improve the delivery of TTQ by instructors in the future?	Instructor survey (2024–25, 2025–26, and 2026–27) and interviews with pilot instructors (2024–25), video recordings of instruction (2024–25, 2025–26, and 2026–27)
RQ6a. To what extent did students engaging in TTQ find the curriculum helpful in developing their reading and language skills, as well as their motivation for reading? RQ6b. What modifications to TTQ components and supports could improve students’ learning experiences in the future?	Student Satisfaction Questionnaire (2024–25, 2025–26, and 2026–27)

Research question	Data sources
RQ7. What is the cost-effectiveness of TTQ?	Findings from RQ1; cost study logs (2025–26 and 2026–27); see Appendix J.14 for cost study information

D2. Guidance About Effective Strategies Suitable for Replication or Testing

This evaluation will produce evidence about the implementation and impact of TTQ in a large and diverse sample of schools across a variety of settings. The first evaluation cohort will contain 36 schools from two large districts and two intermediary partners across four states, while the second cohort will contain 36 schools from two states recruited by three intermediary partners—including rural, suburban, and urban schools. Demographic information about the projected participating districts is included in Appendix J.1. AIR will analyze a rich set of implementation data to assess both implementation fidelity and quality, which will be used to provide independent feedback to Ancora throughout the grant period (RQs 4–6). These data will be interpreted in the context of the findings from the interviews with instructors during the pilot phase, to identify the aspects of TTQ that instructors struggle most with implementing, using instructors’ ideas about how those aspects could be improved to inspire future updates to the program; the interviews will also emphasize how each of the scaling strategies were implemented. The data from RQ 5b will also be interpreted in the context of program replication, focusing on how the program can be refined to scale most efficiently.

AIR also proposes a cost-effectiveness study to estimate the cost of replicating the delivery of TTQ and scale the cost by the program’s estimated effectiveness from RQs 1 and 3. While TTQ is a purchasable intervention with a set price (which will be discounted for study participants), there are other costs that could affect the feasibility of implementing it, such as the time spent in training by instructors, principals, and literacy coordinators. Data will be collected through instructor and program developer surveys and logs. The results of the cost-effectiveness study will put implementation of TTQ into context for prospective future users, allowing them to benchmark its cost-effectiveness against their business-as-usual and other programs they may be considering. The study will also help Ancora to share best practices about efficient implementation of TTQ with prospective users, by finding districts that implemented each component of TTQ in the most cost-

efficient way, identifying their efficient practices and suggesting them to other current and future users of TTQ to ensure these practices become standard. (See Appendix J.14 for details about the cost-effectiveness study.)

D3. Articulation of Components, Mediators, Outcomes, and Measurable Threshold

TTQ is designed to deliver each of the key components described in the Theory of Change, as shown in Appendix G. As described above, the project has clearly identified focal outcomes for reading achievement, specified in the logic model, that will be measured through valid, reliable assessments. The analyses will also examine student reading motivation as a mediator.

The formative evaluation will examine the implementation fidelity (RQ 4a and 4b) of the program's three key components: EBPs related to (a) multisyllabic word decoding, (b) fluency training, (c) vocabulary and word study, and (d) reading comprehension skills; EBPs related to building background knowledge in content needed for secondary coursework; and the use of positive behavioral supports to promote engaged learning and reading motivation. In the project's first year, Ancora and AIR, in collaboration with EIR technical assistance providers, will work together to develop a detailed plan for measuring implementation of each key program component, establishing thresholds for "high," "moderate," and "low" levels of implementation for each component.

To measure fidelity of program implementation, AIR will analyze data from three sources during the 2024–25 (pilot year), 2025–26, and 2026–27 school years. First, instructors participating in the intervention will keep a log of lessons they have completed, and AIR will collect these logs each month. Second, AIR will collect self-assessment rubrics from participating instructors twice a year. Instructors will use these Ancora-designed checklists to indicate which EBPs they have implemented in their classrooms during the semester. Third, once a year all participating instructors will record the same lesson. AIR researchers will then score these video observations against a fidelity of implementation rubric, while social work students will review the delivery of social-emotional components and share feedback with Ancora about how those components may be refined.

Using data from these three sources, AIR will then analyze and describe implementation fidelity

for each program component across student, school, and educator contexts. AIR will analyze variation in implementation by school performance history, location, and instructor years of experience to identify factors that support or inhibit program implementation. AIR will also use data from these sources to provide instructors with feedback on the degree to which they have implemented the program with fidelity, including suggestions for improvements.

To provide more nuanced evidence on implementation, quality, and utility, AIR will examine qualitative data from interviews with instructors participating in the pilot cohort (RQ 5a and 5b). Interviews will focus on participants' perceptions of program quality and utility, barriers to successful implementation, possible solutions to these barriers, and the extent to which TTQ helped them implement EBPs in their classrooms to improve student reading motivation and achievement. AIR will analyze the interview data for common themes, including the types of barriers to successful implementation. The TTQ development team will use the findings from these interviews to improve program implementation during the impact evaluation period.

To better understand student experience with TTQ (RQs 6a and 6b), AIR will administer a brief survey to participating students in treatment schools. The survey will ask students about their satisfaction with TTQ and the extent to which their experience is helpful for learning and motivation. AIR will conduct the survey midway through each implementation year and provide a rapid summary of the results to Ancora, to inform any short-term adjustments within the school year as well as modifications to implementation in subsequent years.

AIR will conduct a mediator analysis (RQ 3b) to examine the extent to which program impact on student reading motivation mediates impact on student literacy skills. AIR will classify students into three groups based on their observed reading motivation at the beginning and end of the school year: Always High Motivation, Always Low Motivation, and Newly Motivated. AIR will then analyze the extent to which growth in student motivation is associated with growth in student test scores. Ancora will use the findings from this analysis to fine-tune TTQ's emphasis on increasing student motivation for future cohorts of participants.

D4. Procedures Ensuring Feedback and Periodic Assessment of Progress

The multi-cohort structure of the evaluation will ensure that each successive cohort benefits from the knowledge shared among AIR, Ancora, and previous cohorts of schools implementing TTQ, with formative feedback and continuous improvement happening throughout the project cycle. The pilot cohort will provide data on implementation to Ancora to shape training for future cohorts with greater emphasis and clarity on any activities that pilot instructors found challenging to implement (RQs 4 and 5). In all years, implementation indicators and thresholds, and responses to surveys, will provide periodic assessment of progress and inform updates to the training and materials provided to future instructors and students (RQs 4–6). In particular, if pilot instructors are having trouble completing the full length of the curriculum, Ancora may adjust aspects of the training or curriculum to ensure that all key concepts are being delivered to students.

Estimates of the effects of TTQ on student reading achievement and skills and student reading motivation (RQs 1–3) will be computed for students in the first cohort and shared with Ancora through an interim brief report and a formal presentation before the second cohort of schools begins training. Ancora will use the interim results, matched to implementation data, to understand what skills TTQ is imparting most and least successfully and fine-tune its training for the second cohort to address any shortcomings in how the key components of TTQ are being conveyed to instructors.

To provide ongoing data on TTQ implementation, during all three cohorts of the study, the evaluation team will examine instructor lesson logs monthly on how many lessons they have completed (RQ 4a). AIR will provide necessary data to Ancora about instructors who are not on pace to complete the curriculum, so that the implementation team can provide support. This cycle of continuous improvement allows adjustments to be made while the current cohort is still implementing and informs adjustments to program design that will benefit future users of TTQ. The dissemination of the study findings to diverse audiences of scholars and practitioners, as described in Section B4, will broaden the conversation and help schools and districts to make more informed decisions about how they can use TTQ in their contexts to support striving middle-grade readers.

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