

## Education Innovation and Research Program (EIR) Project Abstract

**Applicant Name:** United Way of West Central Mississippi

**Project Title:** Scaling SOAR United High-Impact Literacy Tutoring in Rural After School Settings to Improve Reading Outcomes for K-5th Grade Students

**Type of Grant Requested:** X Mid-Phase  Expansion

**Absolute Priorities the Project Addresses:**

X Absolute Priority 1-- Field-Initiated Innovations: Promoting Evidence-Based Literacy

**Competitive Preference Priorities the Project Addresses:**

X Competitive Preference Priority 1— Returning Education to the States

X Competitive Preference Priority 2— Education Choice (High-Impact Tutoring)

**Total number of students to be served by the project:** 3,600

**Grade level(s) to be served by the project:** K-5

**Definition of high-need students:** Target population for this proposal refers to students living in rural Mississippi with deficits in reading as evidenced by scoring below grade-level on Star Reading.

**Brief description of project activities:** The purpose of this project is to enhance, scale, and evaluate a high-impact literacy tutoring program, SOAR United, that is embedded within after-school centers run by community-based partners to improve the literacy and reading skills of high-need, rural students.

**Summary of project objectives and expected outcomes:** The objectives are threefold: 1) to scale the SOAR United literacy high-impact tutoring program; 2) conduct a rigorous evaluation of SOAR United that will measure the impact of the program and understand the key features needed to replicate and scale the program; and 3) to broadly disseminate the findings to practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to broaden the reach, replication, and scalability of the program. Expected outcomes include: 1) train, equip, deploy, and continually support 885 reading tutors to provide evidence-based reading instruction in community-based afterschool settings; 2) build lasting and authentic tutor-student relationships; 3) continuously engage parents in building their children's literacy and reading skills; 4) strengthen the coordination among the United Ways, Mississippi Department of Human Services, and Mississippi Department of Education; 5) increase the literacy and reading achievement of high-needs students in rural communities; 7) create a toolkit to guide interested stakeholders in replicating and scaling SOAR United; and 8) disseminate study findings via publicly available websites, reports, articles, presentations, webinars, and social and traditional media campaigns.

**Summary of how the project is innovative:** SOAR United combines community-based out-of-school learning, high-impact tutoring, evidence-based reading instruction, and a data-driven infrastructure to create a replicable statewide innovation that uniquely addresses the needs of high-needs and struggling rural readers.

**Other studies related to the proposed project:** Jones, C. J., Christian, M., & Rice, A. (2016). The results of a randomized control trial evaluation of the SPARK Literacy Program. Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/WWC/Study/32028>; Jones, C. J., & Christian, M. (2021). The results of a randomized control trial evaluation of the SPARK Literacy Program: An innovative approach that pairs one-on-one tutoring with family engagement. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 26(3), 209–225.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2021.1965718>; Wanzek, J., Petscher, Y., Al Otaiba, S., Rivas, B. K., Jones, F. G., Kent, S. C., Schatschneider, C., & Mehta, P. (2017). Effects of a year-long supplemental reading intervention for students with reading difficulties in fourth grade. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(8), 1103–1119. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000192>

**Proposed implementation sites:** High-impact tutoring will occur in 130 community-based afterschool and childcare centers in 21 rural Mississippi counties via 5 United Way hubs.

**Organizations partnering with this project:** Mississippi Department of Education; Mississippi Department of Human Services; RAND Research Services; Pearl; Voyager Sopris Learning; United Way Hubs: United Way of West Central Mississippi; United Way of Southeast Mississippi; United Way of the Golden Triangle; United Way of Washington County; United Way of East Mississippi; Children's Foundation of Mississippi.