



Education Analytics INC.

## **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS:**

# **SPARK CENTER EVALUATION: SCALING AND VALIDATING A RESEARCH-BASED COST-EFFECTIVE LITERACY INTERVENTION**

NOVEMBER 2017

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### **BACKGROUND**

Education Analytics, Inc. (EA), a nonprofit education research firm based in Madison, Wisconsin, uses data to help clients make informed, data-supported decisions on policies and programs that lead to school and student success. As an organization, we work with education systems of all types and sizes across the country to solve tough problems around the topics of data, analytics and education policy. Learn more at [www.edanalytics.org](http://www.edanalytics.org).

In late September, EA was awarded a \$7.8 million Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grant from the Department of Education to expand the SPARK Early Literacy Program, a research-based Kindergarten through 2nd grade early reading intervention developed by Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM). Through its newly-created SPARK Center, Education Analytics will implement the SPARK Early Literacy Program in 15 high-need schools in partnership with Boys & Girls Clubs in both urban and rural locale in Wisconsin, Alabama and South Carolina.

The SPARK Early Literacy Program is a cost-effective, early reading intervention that improves student reading achievement through research-based literacy programming that integrates one-on-one tutoring, family engagement, and after-school programming into its design. First launched by BGCGM in 2006, multiple research studies have proven SPARK's effectiveness, and the Center for Research and Reform in Education (CRRE) has described the program as one of a



small number of literacy interventions that both work and meet the “strong evidence definitions” laid out in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

The Education Innovation and Research (EIR) Program, established under section 4611 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), provides funding to create, develop, implement, replicate, or take to scale entrepreneurial, evidence-based, field-initiated innovations to improve student achievement and attainment for high-need students; and rigorously evaluate such innovations. The EIR program is designed to generate and validate solutions to persistent educational challenges and to support the expansion of effective solutions to serve substantially larger numbers of students.

## PROJECT GOALS AND PROPOSED OUTCOMES

The SPARK Center and partners have the following 3 goals over the course of the project:

- **Impact:** Improve student outcomes by implementing SPARK with fidelity across sites
- **Scale:** Extend the reach of SPARK through a technology-enabled SPARK Center with the core functions of stakeholder engagement / communication and dissemination, implementation resources, and online real-time implementation data.
- **Evaluate and Disseminate:** Conduct an evaluation (which meets WWC standards without reservations) to validate the program’s impact in various settings and provides formative results that support continuous improvement.

Program success will be measured across the following outcomes:





### Short term outcomes

- Improved student attendance;
- Improved student literacy (on the PALS assessment);
- Improved student Social-Emotional Development (teacher survey on student social-emotional development (T-CRS: Teacher-Child Rating Scale))

### Medium term outcomes

- Improved student reading achievement

### Long term outcome

- Sustained improvement in reading achievement; school success

See the separate attachment for SPARK Center logic model.

## DESCRIPTION OF SERVICES TO BE PERFORMED

As part of our proposal, EA seeks an experienced research team to conduct a 4-year validation study focused on student outcomes, fidelity of implementation, and exploration of SPARK's impacts across various targeted student populations. The proposed early literacy intervention is anticipated to serve at least 960 students across 14 school sites within 6 LEAs, which include urban and rural locales.

As described in the EIR mid-phase NIA, the evaluation must "identify and codify the core elements of the EIR-supported practice that the project implements in order to support adoption or replication by other entities; furthermore, the evaluation must examine effectiveness of the project for any new populations or settings that are included in the project." We expect the evaluation will meet What Works Clearinghouse design standards without reservations, and for the evaluation to measure multiple outcomes including student outcomes (including but not limited to school attendance, literary achievement, and social-emotional development) and implementation outcomes (e.g. interview and observations on implementation). In the first two years of the independent evaluation (through August 2019), the evaluation team will support the development, scale-up and implementation of the SPARK intervention, and over the remaining two years we expect the evaluation to employ a multisite randomized control trial selection framework at the student level to measure SPARK's impact.





EA seeks a research team with experience with rigorous evaluation of student learning outcomes across both urban and rural settings, as this proposed project includes the expansion of SPARK implementation to new student populations in rural locales. Desired qualifications (detailed below) include experience in designing and implementing evaluations that meet WWC standards (without reservations).

The first project period began on **October 1, 2017** and is expected to conclude on **December 31, 2021**. A maximum budget of up to **\$1,100,000** over this time period is available to the selected research team. Cost will be one factor considered when evaluating proposals, with competitive preference given to teams that balance rigorous design with cost efficiency.

The evaluation team is expected to conduct a study designed around these specific research questions:

1. To what degree is SPARK being implemented as intended?
2. How effective are the information, supports, and trainings provided to SPARK sites?
3. To what extent does SPARK affect student literacy?
4. To what extent does SPARK affect students' regular school-day attendance?
5. To what extent does SPARK affect social-emotional development?
6. What is the unique impact of the tutoring and family components?
7. What evidence is there that SPARK has a differential impact on student subgroups?
8. How much variability exists in SPARK's impact across sites?

All efforts to obtain student and school performance data from participating LEAs will be led by the evaluation team. Additionally, the evaluation team will conduct analyses of the relationship between participation in the SPARK Literacy intervention and student outcomes, summarizing and disseminating the results on a national scale.

## EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

Across the entirety of the project the evaluation team is expected to support the following activities/deliverables:

- Attend all project meetings organized by EA, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee, or any of the other partners engaged in the project.
- Attend any required Department of Education meetings;
- Participate in all technical assistance meetings and phone calls required by the EIR program.





- Provide EA with quarterly summaries of evaluation activities engaged in and planned for the next quarter.
- Obtain and maintain all IRB and local permissions and human subject protections documents necessary to conduct the research.
- Collect and maintain all research and evaluation data.
- Coordinate the collection of and maintain all informed consent documents.

In the 2017-18 school year, the evaluation team will be responsible for:

- Helping potential and confirmed Clubs, Schools, and Districts understand the process and requirements for participating in the evaluation.
- Creating an evaluation guide for schools and clubs.
- Participating in any trainings organized by EA.
- Creating an online form for collecting fidelity of implementation information.
- Travelling to all project clubs and schools in the spring to go over guide with SPARK, club, and school staff.
- Gather feedback from SPARK, club, and school staff regarding their progress toward being ready to implement SPARK and the utility of trainings and tools provided to them by EA and the evaluation team. This will involve direct interviews with SPARK, club, and school staff.
- Provide EA with a summary report with recommendations about club readiness to implement SPARK.

In the 2018-19 school year, the evaluation team will be responsible for:

- Monitoring the implementation of SPARK through ongoing communications with local and EA SPARK staff, school staff, parents, and students.
- Monitoring the implementation of the SPARK evaluation and addressing any issues that arise.
- Conducting site visits in the fall and spring. The fall site visits will be focused more on monitoring the implementation of the evaluation and on documenting the preparation of SPARK staff and schools for implementing SPARK. Spring visits will focus again on ensuring that the evaluation is done as designed. Spring visits will also focus on documenting implementation and on the perceived effectiveness of SPARK activities.
- Analyzing implementation data, including participation numbers and fidelity of implementation results.
- Collecting all SPARK-related data from schools/districts and Clubs.
- Analyzing student outcome data for evidence of impact and growth. This will include attendance, achievement, PALS, and Social-Emotional Development.





In 2019-20 and 2020-2021 school years, the evaluation team will be responsible for:

- Continuing to analyze student outcome data from 2018-19 and 2019-20 for evidence of impact and growth. This will include attendance, achievement, PALS, and Social-Emotional Development.
- Providing EA will a report of implementation and impact of the 2018-19 SPARK program.
- Submit 2018-19 and 2019-20 evaluation reports to a national conference.
- Monitoring the informed consent process.
- Assigning students to the SPARK and control (wait-list) groups.
- Monitoring the implementation of SPARK through ongoing communications with local and EA SPARK staff, school staff, parents, and students.
- Monitoring the implementation of the SPARK evaluation and addressing any issues that arise.
- Conducting site visits in the fall and spring. The site visits will be focused mostly on monitoring the implementation of the evaluation.
- Collecting all SPARK-related data from schools/districts and Clubs.
- Analyzing student outcome data for evidence of impact and growth. This will include attendance, achievement, PALS, and Social-Emotional Development.
- Provide EA will a report of implementation and impact of EA.
- Preparing and submitting 2019-20 evaluation report for publication.

In 2021, the evaluation team will be responsible for:

- Continuing to analyze student outcome data from 2020-21 for evidence of impact and growth. This will include attendance, achievement, PALS, and Social-Emotional Development.
- Producing a public report of implementation and impact of 2020-21 SPARK.
- Producing a public final report of the impact of SPARK that combines the results from 2019-20 and 2020-21.
- Submitting final evaluation report to a national conference.

## **CREDENTIALS, QUALIFICATIONS AND DATA SECURITY REQUIREMENTS**

EA seeks a nationally recognized and experience research team to conduct the evaluation of the SPARK Center project. The research team will have a history of publication on topics related to student literacy, social-emotional development, school attendance, and Investing in Innovation grant-funded projects, and extensive experience working with district Research and Evaluation staff to access student-level assessment data. More specifically, the research and evaluation





team should have widespread and long-term exposure to programs similar to SPARK in design and implementation, including supporting evaluation of third-party providers for in-school, pull-out literacy programs in early education (Kindergarten through second grade).

Additionally, this project involves extensive collaboration with Boys and Girls Club (BCG) affiliates to support implementation and evaluation activities. As such, EA seeks a team with previous exposure to and knowledge of BGC affiliates in both rural and urban locales (to align with the new settings included in the project). In addition, responses that demonstrate previous performance or experience with multistate consortiums will be prioritized.

Education Analytics takes great consideration to protect confidential data throughout the lifecycle of data use which the partnering research group will be required to follow. The research group will be required to abide by the confidentiality provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 USC 1232g, 34 CFR 99, sec. 118.125 Wis. Stats., and low income information under the National School Lunch Act, 42 USC 1758(b)(2)(C)(ij) to (v) and other relevant state education laws. The research group will be required to data security policies and procedures designed based on industry best practices and NCIS security recommendations in addition to following protocols for secure data collection, data transfer and data storage of personally identifiable student level information and other confidential data.

## SUBMISSION PROCESS

Please submit proposals of no more than 15 pages via email to [admin@edanlaytics.org](mailto:admin@edanlaytics.org) by 5pm CST on **November 21, 2017**. In your proposal, please describe a methodologically rigorous study design that addresses the research questions above, including your proposed sampling framework, publication plan, brief biographies of key team members, timeline, and budget.



# SPARK CENTER SCALING & VALIDATION LOGIC MODEL

