

## ABSTRACT

Through the Illinois Striving Readers Project, the Illinois State Board of Education proposes to address *Absolute Priority 1–Supplemental Literacy Intervention for Struggling Readers in Middle and High School Grades* through implementation of a supplemental literacy intervention program at the grade 9 level and *Absolute Priority 2–Rigorous and Independent Evaluation* through the experimental evaluation of the effectiveness of the supplemental literacy intervention.

ISBE will implement *Passport Reading Journeys* for grade 9 students who are reading two grades below level. Project Year 1 will involve preparation for implementation and evaluation of the intervention; activities will include developing plans for randomizing students, tracking students, screening students for placement, collecting data, providing professional development, and other crucial processes identified by the technical assistance provider.

Full implementation of *Passport Reading Journeys* will occur during Project Years 2-4 (school years 2010-11 through 2012-13) in six Title I participating high schools located in Danville Community Consolidated School District 118, Decatur School District 61, Kankakee School District 111, and Springfield School District 186. The reading intervention program will be implemented in daily lessons during the regular school day to supplement for striving readers their regular English language arts instruction.

The one-year *Passport Reading Journeys* supplemental curriculum will be provided to 75 randomly selected struggling readers per school for the duration of one school year during Project Years 2-4 (450 per year). The remaining 75 randomly selected struggling readers per school will participate in other activities, such as study hall or electives, that do not involve supplemental reading instruction for the duration of one school year during Project Years 2-4 (450 per year).

## ABSTRACT

The project goals are:

- 1) To foster reading improvement in grade 9 striving readers, and
- 2) To contribute to the scientific research base for identifying and replicating supplemental reading programs that are effective in improving adolescent literacy.

The objectives are to:

- Develop implementation and evaluation plans for *Passport Reading Journeys*.
- Provide supplemental reading intervention classes to 1,350 grade 9 striving readers in six participating high schools.
- Have 50 percent of students in the intervention cohorts demonstrate a gain in reading achievement, at a minimum, of one grade level or its equivalent.
- Have 75 percent of students in the intervention cohorts score at or above proficient on the state reading assessment.
- Assess the implementation effectiveness of the intervention in the six participating high schools.
- Assess the effectiveness of the intervention in raising the literacy levels of grade 9 striving readers in the six participating high schools.
- Disseminate research findings on the effectiveness of the intervention in raising the literacy levels of grade 9 striving readers.

Long-term Outcomes: 1) Intervention cohorts will maintain the reading gains achieved through the intervention and ISBE and LEA staff will 2) expand knowledge of the reading intervention to other Illinois LEAs, 3) expand knowledge of reading progress assessments, and 4) expand knowledge and use of reading intervention in other Illinois LEAs.

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## ILLINOIS STRIVING READERS PROJECT—NARRATIVE

### Absolute Priorities

#### *1. Supplemental literacy intervention for struggling readers in middle and high school*

*grades: 1.a.* The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) proposes to implement the supplemental literacy intervention program, *Passport Reading Journeys*, in six high schools for grade 9 struggling readers as determined by results on the grade 8 Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and the grade 8 ACT-EXPLORE<sup>®</sup>. Each of the schools is eligible to receive funds under Title I, Part A, pursuant to ESEA section 1113. (See Appendix A for proof of Title I eligibility.)

During Project Year 1, project staff and the external evaluator will work closely with the U.S. Department of Education to prepare for implementation and evaluation of the intervention. Year 1 activities will include developing plans for screening students for placement, randomizing students, tracking students, collecting data, providing professional development, and other crucial processes identified by the technical assistance provider.

*1.b/c/d.* Full implementation of *Passport Reading Journeys* will occur during Project Years 2-4 (school years 2010-11 through 2012-13) in the six high schools, which are located in Danville Community Consolidated School District 118, Decatur School District 61, Kankakee School District 111, and Springfield School District 186. *Passport Reading Journeys*, a year-long standard protocol involving daily, 45- to 55-minute lessons that provide explicit, systematic instruction in critical reading skills, will supplement for striving readers the regular English language arts instruction provided during the regular school day, five days a week. The intervention will be delivered as a course for the participating striving readers and students will earn course credit for graduation purposes.

The project will involve 2,700 grade 9 students (900 per year in Project Years 2-4) who are identified as struggling readers. The intervention program will be provided to 75 randomly selected struggling readers per school for the duration of one school year during Project Years 2-4 (450 students per year). The remaining 75 randomly selected struggling readers per school will participate in other activities, such as study hall or electives, that do not involve supplemental reading instruction for the duration of one school year during Project Years 2-4 (450 students per year).

*I.e.* ISBE will use ISAT to screen students for participation in the project. This state assessment, which measures individual student achievement relative to the *Illinois Learning Standards*, is used for accountability purposes and to collect NCLB-required data. The state reading assessments are administered annually to all Illinois public school students at grades 3-8 and grade 11. ISAT is a reliable, and valid screening reading assessment that includes norm- and criterion-referenced items. The norm-referenced items are abbreviated from the Stanford 10 Reading Assessment developed by Pearson, Inc. The reading benchmarks that are included in *Passport Reading Journeys* will be used frequently during the school year to monitor student progress.

*I.f.* The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests® (GMRT®) are nationally normed, reliable, and valid diagnostic reading assessments that will be administered twice to grade 9 students during school years 2010-11 through 2012-13 to pinpoint students' instructional needs.

The *Passport Reading Journeys* assessment system includes Lexile, Vital Indicators of Progress (VIP) Reading Connected Text fluency measures, end-of-lesson assessments, progress monitoring, and student self-assessments through SOLO. The Lexile Framework® for Reading®, developed by MetaMetrics, Inc., is a scientific approach to reading and text measurement. The

two Lexile measures are Lexile reader and Lexile text. A Lexile reader measure represents a person's reading ability on the Lexile scale. A Lexile text measure represents a text's difficulty level on the Lexile scale. When used together, they can help a reader choose a book or other reading material that is at an appropriate difficulty level. The Lexile reader measure can also be used to monitor a reader's growth in reading ability over time. Approximately two dozen tests can report Lexile reader measures, including Scholastic Reading Inventory, PASeries Reading, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and many end-of-grade state assessments. The reader's score on the test is reported as a Lexile measure from a low of 0L to a high of 2000L. The VIP measures in *Passport Reading Journeys* will provide immediate information about the reading progress of individual students. VIP is equivalent to DIBELS and was developed by Dr. Roland Good and colleagues at the University of Oregon. Reading Connected Text (RCT) and Retell Fluency (RF) are two VIP measures used to monitor progress in oral reading fluency. RCT and RF scores will be entered into VPORT<sup>®</sup>, allowing interventionists to identify students who may require additional support, keep track of progress, and make appropriate data-based instructional decisions that will allow students to experience success in reading.

*I.g. Passport Reading Journeys* is a research-based, mixed method model that incorporates whole group, small group, computer assistance, and individual instruction. The flexibility of the intervention program enables it to meet the needs of struggling readers and the intensity accelerates development of literacy skills. *Passport Reading Journeys* includes all of the stated requirements: explicit vocabulary instruction, direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction, opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation, instruction in reading foundational skills (including decoding and fluency), course content that offers high-

interest text intended to improve student motivation and engagement in literacy learning, and instruction in writing.

**1.h.** Since 2006-2007, *Passport Reading Journeys* has been implemented in large urban school systems, including the Dallas and Houston Independent School District, the Miami-Dade Public School District, and the Los Angeles Unified School District. The program has also been implemented in rural school districts, the Bureau of Indian Education schools, Supplemental Educational Services programs, and with English language learners and special education students. (See 1.b of the Significance section.)

**2. Rigorous and independent evaluation. 2.a.** Upon receipt of a Striving Readers Grant award ISBE will issue a Request for Proposals, aligned with the Illinois Procurement Code Guidelines, from qualified external evaluators to conduct an independent evaluation of the implementation and impact of the *Passport Reading Journeys*. The external evaluator will be required to implement the evaluation plan developed in Project Year 1, which will be designed to meet the following requirements:

**2.b.** Include objective, “blind” random assignment of eligible struggling readers into intervention and control groups via a random lottery. Students assigned to the intervention group will be enrolled in a year-long literacy intervention course at each high school, which will be taught by the reading intervention teacher. Students assigned to the control group will be enrolled in nonliteracy-based courses, such as study hall or other electives.

**2.c.** Monitor and control the integrity of the random assignment of students; minimize crossover and contamination between the intervention and control groups; and monitor, document, and minimize student attrition from the sample.

**2.d.1.** Measure student reading achievement outcomes with the grade 11 ACT<sup>®</sup>, which is embedded in the grade 11 state assessment and used to determine adequate yearly progress.

**2.d.2.** Measure student reading achievement outcomes with GMRT<sup>®</sup>, the grade 9 ACT-EXPLORE<sup>®</sup>, and the grade 10 ACT-PLAN<sup>®</sup>.

**2.e.** Employ rigorous statistical models that include a pretest covariate and account for the clustering of students within schools.

**2.f.** Analyze the fidelity of implementation of the supplemental literacy intervention by coordinating site visits with external evaluation team members and the ISBE project director.

**2.g.** Obtain high response rates on all data collections by monitoring the timely and accurate use of the web-based data portal linked to the ISBE student databases.

**2.h.** Include 900 eligible students per year, randomly assigned to intervention and control groups.

**2.i.** Employ a design to detect an effect size of at least 0.10 in order to meet the research design requirements.

### ***Significance***

#### ***1. Potential contribution to the field of adolescent literacy through:***

##### ***1.b. Effectiveness of intervention in improving reading skills of struggling readers.***

*Passport Reading Journeys* was designed to focus on upper-grade struggling readers and is age- and interest-appropriate for adolescents. Voyager Expanded Learning, the publisher of *Passport Reading Journeys*, has conducted analyses of the impact of the curriculum on student academic performance. These analyses involved approximately 50,000 students in more than 400 schools across 35 states. Student gains are measured by curriculum-specific benchmarks. Average gains for students served by the curriculum have consistently exceeded the expected Lexile gains, with

calculation of effect sizes ranging from 0.5 to 0.9. Despite the large-scale size of these studies, they rely on the one-group pre-/post-test design.

*Passport Reading Journeys* has been implemented in many large-scale school districts across the nation, including the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Dallas Independent School District, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and the Roanoke School Division, Virginia. The program has also been implemented in schools under the Bureau of Indian Education and in numerous small school districts.

Two large-scale studies were conducted with grade 9 students. Denton (2008) used a quasi-experimental design with a sample of 200 students from Dallas Independent School District to study the impact of *Passport Reading Journeys* in comparison with programs that did not use technology for students. The author compared students receiving instruction using *Passport Reading Journeys* (book and computer) with students matched for demographics and reading abilities who were instructed using traditional (book only) curricula. The study found that *Passport Reading Journeys* students made statistically significant gains when compared with their peers on a norm-reference test (ITBS) and a criterion-reference test (TAKS). Shneyderman (2006) conducted a large-scale, quasi-experimental study involving approximately 1,400 grade 9 students in Miami-Dade, using a propensity score to select comparison schools. Students were randomly selected within these schools for the comparison group. *Passport Reading Journeys* students showed small positive gains on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test when compared with their peers.

Despite the program's widespread use, no study using a randomized, controlled design has been conducted. Although all of these studies provide evidence that the *Passport Reading Journeys* intervention is likely to be effective in improving the reading skills of high school

striving readers, a randomized, controlled trial study is essential to establish causal links between curriculum and outcomes. It was not made clear whether the control students in the Shneyderman study received any other reading intervention in addition to *Passport Reading Journeys*. The Illinois Striving Readers Project will conduct a randomized, controlled study that ensures no additional supplemental reading instruction will be provided to the participants, which will be valuable in determining the effectiveness of the intervention. The Illinois project will provide a rigorous evaluation that can address the question of whether Passport Reading Journeys is an effective program for adolescent striving readers nationwide.

## ***2. Replicability without significant modifications.***

*Passport Reading Journeys* is an easy-to-implement program that provides guided manuals, professional development, and coaching support for teachers. The curriculum includes video segments on DVD, books, and online interactive lessons. It is formatted as a series of 15 two-week reading Expeditions on engaging topics related to science, social studies, and literature content areas. A library of Lexile-leveled books and magazines on age-appropriate topics is provided for each intervention classroom. The program includes adaptations for English language learners and students with special needs.

### ***Project Design***

ISBE will implement *Passport Reading Journeys* for grade 9 students who are reading two grades below level. Project Year 1 will involve preparation for implementation and evaluation of the intervention; activities will include developing plans for randomizing students, tracking students, screening students for placement, collecting data, providing professional development, and other crucial processes identified by the technical assistance provider.

Full implementation of *Passport Reading Journeys* will occur during Project Years 2-4

(school years 2010-11 through 2012-13) in the six participating high schools located in Danville Community Consolidated School District 118, Decatur School District 61, Kankakee School District 111, and Springfield School District 186. The reading intervention program will be implemented in 45- to 55-minute daily lessons during the regular school day to supplement for striving readers their regular English language arts instruction.

The one-year *Passport Reading Journeys* supplemental curriculum will be provided to 75 randomly selected struggling readers per school for the duration of one school year during Project Years 2-4 (450 per year). The remaining 75 randomly selected struggling readers per school will participate in other activities, such as study hall or electives, that do not involve supplemental reading instruction for the duration of one school year during Project Years 2-4 (450 per year).

Staff from ISBE and the participating LEAs will have important roles in implementing the Illinois Striving Readers project. These roles will include:

*ISBE Project Director (0.50 FTE)*—This position will ensure that all activities are completed, providing project oversight and coordination among the participating schools, the professional development provider, the external evaluator, and the U.S. Department of Education, including:

- Ensure LEA participation in intensive professional development.
- Coordinate meetings with the LEA project coordinators and intervention teachers.
- Ensure accuracy of screening data.
- Ensure random assignment of students to intervention and control groups.
- Ensure fidelity of *Passport Reading Journeys* implementation.
- Ensure that all project schools obtain appropriate intervention materials.

- Monitor budget details for ISBE and all project sites.
- Monitor implementation fidelity through onsite visits to each LEA.
- Monitor external evaluation plan implementation.
- Review annual reports submitted to ISBE by LEAs and develop the required federal annual performance report.

*LEA Project Coordinators (4 @ 0.10 FTE)*—Each of the four school districts have designated a coordinator for the project. The coordinators have teaching, professional development, supervisory and administrative experience. The project coordinators will:

- Plan the number of sections to be provided at each school and the number of students assigned to each course.
- Assist with screening and random assignment procedures.
- Coordinate the reading intervention teacher hiring procedures.
- Coordinate participation of school staff in professional development.
- Serve as liaison for communication with ISBE, all LEA project staff, the professional development provider, the external evaluator, and the U.S. Department of Education.
- Oversee fidelity of *Passport Reading Journeys* implementation within their school districts, including materials purchase, budget management, and day-to-day project management at the district and school levels.
- Maintain regular communication with the ISBE project director.
- Provide an annual report to ISBE.

*Reading Intervention Teachers (6 @ 1.00 FTE)*—The school districts will employ one reading intervention teacher for each participating high school, for a total of six teachers. Those hired for this position will be required to:

- Have a valid Illinois teaching certificate with a reading endorsement and two to three years of teaching experience.
- Have excellent classroom management skills, including the ability to balance teaching whole groups, small groups, and tutoring during the course of a 45- to 55-minute teaching period.
- Understand the Response to Intervention process.
- Implement *Passport Reading Journeys* with fidelity to the materials and practices as dictated in the intervention and by the project implementation plan.
- Attend all required professional development sessions.

(See number 5 of the Project Evaluation section for external evaluator information and Appendix B for résumés.)

**Table 1. Goals, Objectives, Activities, Responsible Parties, and Indicators**

<b>Goal 1: To foster reading improvement in grade 9 striving readers.</b>		
<b>Objective 1.1:</b> By the end of Project Year 1, project staff and the external evaluator, in consultation with the U.S. Department of Education, will have developed implementation and evaluation plans for <i>Passport Reading Journeys</i> .		
<b>Activity 1.1.1:</b> Develop a plan to screen grade 8 students for inclusion in the Illinois Striving Readers Project during grade 9.	<b>Responsibility:</b> ISBE project director/LEA project coordinators/external evaluator/USED (by 3/10)	<b>Indicator:</b> Screening plan developed that includes grade 8 ISAT and grade 8 ACT-EXPLORE <sup>®</sup> as screening assessments.
<b>Activity 1.1.2:</b> Develop a plan for random assignment of 75	<b>Responsibility:</b> ISBE project director/LEA project	<b>Indicator:</b> Student assignment plan developed that includes a

<p>struggling readers to year-long reading intervention classes and 75 struggling readers to other non-reading activities in the six participating high schools for each school year during Project Years 2-4.</p>	<p>coordinators/external evaluator/USED (by 3/10)</p>	<p>multisite randomized trial where randomization will occur within sites that results in objective, "blind" assignments into intervention and control groups.</p>
<p><b>Activity 1.1.3:</b> Develop a plan to track participating students.</p>	<p><b>Responsibility:</b> ISBE project director/LEA project coordinators/external evaluator/USED (by 6/10)</p>	<p><b>Indicator:</b> Tracking/monitoring plan developed that provides web-based portal to track student enrollment and demographic data and interfaces with the ISBE Student Information System (SIS).</p>
<p><b>Activity 1.1.4:</b> Develop a data collection plan.</p>	<p><b>Responsibility:</b> ISBE project director/LEA project coordinators/external evaluator/USED (by 6/10)</p>	<p><b>Indicator:</b> Data collection plan developed that provides a web-based portal that provides functionality of interfacing with ISBE databases.</p>
<p><b>Activity 1.1.5:</b> Develop a plan for providing <i>Passport Reading Journeys</i> professional development opportunities to</p>	<p><b>Responsibility:</b> ISBE project director/LEA project coordinators/external evaluator/Voyager Expanded</p>	<p><b>Indicators:</b> Plan for delivery of Voyager professional development created that includes: a) presentation to</p>

project staff and participating high school reading instructors.	Learning/USED (by 2/10)	participating LEAs in summer 2010, b) ongoing online training, c) ongoing consultant support, d) content-based assistance, as needed.
<b>Activity 1.1.6:</b> Coordinate assessment administration procedures and materials.	<b>Responsibility:</b> ISBE project director/LEA project coordinators/external evaluator (by 7/10)	<b>Indicators:</b> a) Test administration (TA) manuals and other ancillary materials developed, b) TA training materials developed, c) educators trained to administer assessments.
<b>Objective 1.2:</b> By the end of Project Year 4, provide <i>Passport Reading Journeys</i> supplemental reading intervention classes to 1,350 grade 9 striving readers in six participating high schools.		
<b>Activity 1.2.1:</b> Hire grade 9 reading intervention teachers for each of the six participating high schools.	<b>Responsibility:</b> LEA administrators & project coordinators (by 6/10)	<b>Indicator:</b> The six high schools will have hired grade 9 reading intervention teachers.
<b>Activity 1.2.2:</b> Provide reading intervention professional development opportunities to the ISBE project director, LEA project coordinators, reading intervention teachers, and evaluation team.	<b>Responsibility:</b> Voyager Expanded Learning professional development staff/ISBE project director/LEA project coordinators (summer 2010/ongoing, as needed)	<b>Indicator:</b> All project staff will participate in a minimum of three days of in-person training and have access to ongoing online training and consultant support.

<p><b>Activity 1.2.3:</b> Use grade 8 ISAT reading and grade 8 EXPLORE® scores, screen and identify grade 8 students for inclusion in the Illinois Striving Readers Project during grade 9.</p>	<p><b>Responsibility:</b> ISBE project director/LEA project coordinators (by 6/10, 6/11, &amp; 6/12)</p>	<p><b>Indicator:</b> Project Years 2–4 cohorts will be identified.</p>
<p><b>Activity 1.2.4:</b> Randomly assign 75 struggling readers to year-long reading intervention classes and 75 struggling readers to other year-long nonreading activities in the six participating high schools for each school year during Project Years 2-4.</p>	<p><b>Responsibility:</b> External evaluator, with ISBE project director/LEA project coordinators (by 7/10, 7/11, &amp; 7/12)</p>	<p><b>Indicator:</b> Project Years 2–4 cohorts will be assigned to intervention or control groups.</p>
<p><b>Objective 1.3:</b> By the end of each school year during Project Years 2-4, 50 percent of students in the <i>Passport Reading Journeys</i> intervention cohorts will demonstrate a gain in reading achievement, at a minimum, of one grade level or its equivalent.</p>		
<p><b>Activity 1.3.1:</b> Monitor attendance and participation patterns of intervention and control group students.</p>	<p><b>Responsibility:</b> External evaluator/ISBE project director/LEA project coordinators/intervention teachers (ongoing)</p>	<p><b>Indicator:</b> Data entered through web-based portal of student attendance, assessment, and progress in meeting evaluation measures.</p>

<b>Activity 1.3.2:</b> Monitor implementation of assessment plan.	<b>Responsibility:</b> External evaluator/ISBE project director/LEA project coordinators (ongoing)	<b>Indicator:</b> Reporting instruments show completion rate of formative and standardized assessments for intervention and control group students.
<b>Objective 1.4:</b> By the end of Project Year 4, 75 percent of students in the <i>Passport Reading Journeys</i> cohorts will score at or above proficient on the state reading assessment.		
<b>Activity 1.4.1:</b> Administer ACT-EXPLORE® to grade 8 students.	<b>Responsibility:</b> LEA project coordinators/intervention teachers (by 3/10, 3/11, & 3/12)	<b>Indicator:</b> Student score rosters that show performance results for cohort screening.
<b>Activity 1.4.2:</b> Administer ACT-EXPLORE® to grade 9 intervention and control groups.	<b>Responsibility:</b> LEA project coordinators/intervention teachers (by 9/10, 9/11, & 9/12)	<b>Indicator:</b> Student score rosters that show performance results for cohort screening.
<b>Activity 1.4.3:</b> Administer GMRT® (fall/spring) to grade 9 intervention and control groups.	<b>Responsibility:</b> LEA project coordinators/intervention teachers (by 9/10, 9/11, & 9/12)	<b>Indicator:</b> Student score rosters that show performance results for cohort screening.
<b>Activity 1.4.4:</b> Administer <i>Passport Reading Journeys</i> assessments to grade 9 intervention group to provide progress monitoring data.	<b>Responsibility:</b> LEA project coordinators/intervention teachers (ongoing during Project Years 2-4)	<b>Indicator:</b> Student score rosters that show performance results for cohort screening.
<b>Activity 1.4.5:</b> Administer ACT-PLAN® to grade 10	<b>Responsibility:</b> LEA project coordinators/intervention	<b>Indicator:</b> Student score rosters that show performance

intervention and control groups.	teachers (by 9/11, 9/12, & 9/13)	results for cohort screening.
<b>Activity 1.4.6:</b> Administer ACT <sup>®</sup> (PSAE) to grade 11 intervention and control groups.	<b>Responsibility:</b> LEA project coordinators/intervention teachers (by 5/13)	<b>Indicator:</b> Student score rosters that show performance results to for cohort screening.
<b>Goal 2:</b> <i>To contribute to the scientific research base for identifying and replicating supplemental reading programs that are effective in improving adolescent literacy.</i>		
<b>Objective 2.1:</b> By the end of Project Year 4, the external evaluator will conduct a project evaluation that assesses the effectiveness of the implementation of <i>Passport Reading Journeys</i> in the six participating high schools.		
<b>Activity 2.1.1:</b> Select external evaluator to conduct project evaluation.	<b>Responsibility:</b> ISBE project director (by 12/09)	<b>Indicator:</b> Posting of RFP to Illinois Procurement Bulletin with resulting ISBE documentation of fair and unbiased selection process; multiyear contract executed with external evaluator.
<b>Activity 2.1.2:</b> Develop and implement evaluation plan in coordination and collaboration with all project partners.	<b>Responsibility:</b> ISBE project director/external evaluator/LEA project coordinators (by 2/10)	<b>Indicator:</b> a) Research designed and initiated, b) databases and data reporting portals created, c) initial analyses conducted, d) initial findings reported regarding level of intervention implementation fidelity

		with each intervention group.
<p><b>Objective 2.2:</b> By the end of Project Year 4, the external evaluator will conduct a project evaluation that assesses the effectiveness of <i>Passport Reading Journeys</i> in raising the literacy levels of grade 9 striving readers in the six participating high schools.</p>		
<p><b>Activity 2.2.1:</b> Select external evaluator to conduct project evaluation.</p>	<p><b>Responsibility:</b> ISBE project director (by 12/09)</p>	<p><b>Indicator:</b> Posting of RFP to Illinois Procurement Bulletin with resulting ISBE documentation of fair and unbiased selection process; multiyear contract executed with external evaluator.</p>
<p><b>Activity 2.2.2:</b> Develop and implement evaluation plan in coordination and collaboration with all project partners.</p>	<p><b>Responsibility:</b> ISBE project director/external evaluator/LEA project coordinators (by 2/10)</p>	<p><b>Indicator:</b> a) Research designed and initiated, b) databases and data reporting portals created, c) initial analyses conducted, d) initial findings reported regarding level of intervention effectiveness comparing intervention and control group literacy levels.</p>
<p><b>Objective 2.3:</b> By the end of Project Year 4, disseminate research findings on the effectiveness of <i>Passport Reading Journeys</i> in raising the literacy levels of grade 9 striving readers.</p>		

<b>Activity 2.3.1: Disseminate</b> results of a) program effectiveness in raising literacy levels of striving readers and b) program fidelity of implementation effects in raising literacy levels of striving readers	<b>Responsibility: ISBE project</b> director/external evaluator (by 9/13)	<b>Indicator: Research results</b> disseminated through print and web-based media.
<b>Activity 2.3.2: Provide</b> professional development opportunities based on research findings regarding effective intervention strategies with struggling high school students.	<b>Responsibility: ISBE project</b> director/external evaluator/LEA coordinators (ongoing)	<b>Indicator: Research results</b> disseminated through print and web-based media, conferences, meetings, and other outlets.

***1. Intervention uses a flexible, intense research-based literacy model.***

*Passport Reading Journeys* is a research-based mixed method model that incorporates whole group, small group, computer assistance and individual instruction. The library contains novels and texts that allow for partnered and guided reading. The books are Lexile-leveled, which allows a student to choose a book at his/her level. The individual computerized vocabulary lessons reinforce the whole group, teacher-led vocabulary lessons. The word study guide provides the teacher with lessons specifically for use with tutoring students who have difficulty with decoding and fluency. The word study lessons comprise phonemic awareness, recognition of high-frequency words, and irregular words, as well as sight words, spelling, and phonics. The

phonics lessons focus on suffixes, prefixes, phonics rules, and decoding multisyllabic words.

The student book allows students to independently practice and apply the teacher-directed comprehension strategy and vocabulary lessons. *Passport Reading Journeys* is also appropriate for students with special needs and those receiving special education services.

**1.a. Explicit vocabulary instruction.** *Passport Reading Journeys* is flexible enough to meet the needs of struggling readers and intense enough to accelerate development of literacy skills. This intervention program includes explicit vocabulary instruction that focuses on words the students must understand in order to comprehend each text segment. Explicit vocabulary lessons taught throughout the lessons will make connections between words; context clues; word parts, including compound words; morphology; dictionary skills; high-frequency words; content-related words; synonyms and antonyms; multiple-meaning words; and homophones.

**1.b. Direct and explicit comprehension strategy instruction.** Teachers will directly and explicitly convey comprehension strategy instruction, as well as model the comprehension strategy. The comprehension strategies explicitly taught are making connections, brainstorming prior knowledge, making predictions, reading charts and graphs, identifying the main idea, making inferences, summarizing, generating questions, and generating research questions. Students will read expository text, which will allow the teacher to focus on student comprehension of sequential order, how to, compare and contrast, persuasive, cause and effect, and problem and solution texts. The narrative selections will enable the teacher to directly teach story elements such as setting, character motivation and comparing characters, problem, solution, and events. The selections also have examples of figurative language, poetry, and description for the teacher to highlight and explain. Graphic organizers in the student book will be used to guide

comprehension. In subsequent lessons students will reread the text selection to build fluency and then have the opportunity to apply comprehension strategy in the student book.

***1.c. Opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation.*** The intervention will allow opportunities for extended discussion of text meaning and interpretation. The critical thinking questions incorporated in lesson plans evoke conversation about the text. The teacher-student and student-student dialog will enable students to make connections between life experiences and what they are reading.

***1.d. Instruction in reading foundational skills.*** The word study guide provides teachers with lessons specifically for tutoring students who have difficulty with decoding and fluency. The word study lessons comprise phonemic awareness; recognition of high-frequency, irregular, and sight words; spelling; and phonics. The phonics lessons focus on suffixes, prefixes, phonics rules, and decoding multisyllabic words.

***1.e. Course content to improve student motivation and engagement in literacy learning.*** The materials to be used with the intervention have been specifically chosen to increase motivation and engagement in literacy learning. The student anthology includes high-interest fiction and nonfiction text. Career excerpts are highlighted throughout the anthology, matching the high-interest social studies and science topics. Functional literacy documents are also included that relate to possible future careers. A library is included in the intervention materials, the purpose of which is to incorporate self-selected reading with a variety of genres. DVDs are to be used before lessons to build background information about the text to be read and to improve student engagement.

***1.f. Instruction in writing.*** Students will be actively involved in responding to text through writing. The goal in writing is to reinforce comprehension of the text. Writing lessons also

include modeling planning, elaboration, word choice, conventions, sentence fluency, organization, and writing paragraphs.

**2. Intensity of professional development model.** The professional development model proposed for the project has sufficient intensity in terms of number of hours and days. Three days of required professional development will be scheduled at the beginning of Project Years 2-4, with two supplemental days built in for any requesting school. In addition to the ISBE project director, intervention teachers, building administrators, and project coordinators will be required to attend the professional development sessions. In addition to the onsite professional development provided by Voyager Expanded Learning, online training will be available for individuals, as well as independent learning with professional development materials. Teachers may also take other online professional development courses designed to focus on fluency, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and content area literacy through the same company, with follow-up monthly meetings. Higher education course credit is available for teachers at some affiliated universities.

**3. Experience of professional development provider.** Voyager Expanded Learning has provided professional development programs and reading interventions since 1994. More than 1,000 school districts throughout the United States have implemented their programs. The Voyager Learning Company also comprises Learning A-Z and ExploreLearning. The company's professional development trainer job descriptions require a minimum of an undergraduate degree, with some positions requiring a master's degree in reading. Requirements include 2-3 or 5-7 years of classroom teaching experience, depending on the project, and as many years of previous experience in providing professional development. Qualifications also include possession of a valid teaching certificate.

*4. Use of nationally normed, valid, and reliable screening reading assessments; diagnostic reading assessments; and outcome assessments.* The project will use valid and reliable screening assessments, diagnostic assessments, and outcome assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of the supplemental literacy intervention.

*Screening Reading Assessments*—The grade 8 reading ISAT (state assessment) and grade 8 ACT-EXPLORE® will be used as reading difficulties screening measures to identify grade 8 struggling readers who would benefit from supplemental reading intervention at the grade 9 level.

ISAT is the Illinois state assessment and is a reliable and valid screening reading assessment of vocabulary development with words in isolation and in context; reading comprehension strategies, such as inferencing, summarizing, sequencing, drawing conclusions, and interpreting instructions and the author's purpose; and literary elements, such as story structure, characterization, literary terms, and interpreting a variety of literary works. ISAT includes norm- and criterion-referenced items; the norm-referenced items are abbreviated from the Stanford 10 Reading Assessment developed by Pearson, Inc. The grade 8 reading ISAT includes multiple-choice and extended-response item formats. The grade 8 reading ISAT includes four strands: vocabulary development, reading strategies, reading comprehension, and literature. The test is administered annually in three 45- to 55-minute sessions. Scores are reported for four performance categories: academic warning, below standards, meets standards, and exceeds standards. Adequate reliability and validity have been established for the grade 8 reading ISAT.

State assessment data indicate a dramatic decrease in reading achievement scores between the grade 8 ISAT and the grade 11 Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE). Therefore, the grade 8 ACT-EXPLORE® reading test will be administered to all grade 8 students in the

participating school districts to ensure that all below-level readers are identified for possible assignment to the grade 9 intervention. The grade 8 ACT-EXPLORE® will be used to assess a student's ability to understand written materials from different school subjects. Reading skills measured by the 30-question test include referring to details in the passage, drawing conclusions, and making comparisons and generalizations.

*Diagnostic Reading Assessments*—The GMRT®, which measure reading achievement in grades K-12 and have been deemed appropriate for use with the Striving Readers program, will be used to diagnose reading difficulties. GMRT® may be used for identifying student reading skills and needs and for monitoring student progress in pre-reading and reading skills. GMRT® is used to place students in remedial or accelerated reading programs, to evaluate the reading programs, and as an aid in advising students and monitoring their progress.

The GMRT® 4<sup>th</sup> Edition will be administered online at the beginning and end of grade 9 for each cohort of students. For the Illinois Striving Readers Project, three scores will be used for diagnostic purposes: vocabulary, comprehension, and total score.

*Outcome Assessments*—The GMRT® 4<sup>th</sup> Edition will also be used as one of the outcome measures for the evaluation, in addition to the grade 9 ACT-EXPLORE®, grade 10 ACT-PLAN®, and grade 11 ACT® assessments. (See number 1 of the Project Evaluation section.)

### ***Project Evaluation***

***1. Inclusion of state reading assessment AYP data and evaluator-administered measure of reading achievement.*** Student performance on the GMRT® 4<sup>th</sup> Edition and on the reading assessment portions of ACT-EXPLORE® (grade 9), ACT-PLAN® (grade 10), and ACT® (grade 11) will be used as the outcome measures for student reading achievement.

The GMRT<sup>®</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Edition is a general assessment of reading achievement. The psychometric qualities of the test, including evidence of reliability and validity, are well documented in a 2002 technical report. Alternate form reliability coefficients for test levels appropriate for grades 6–8 range from 0.82 to 0.91. K-R 20 estimates of reliability range from 0.90 to 0.95 (MacGinitie, et al, 2002). The test was renormed during the 2005-2006 school year. A variety of score types is available to support analysis and interpretation: extended scale scores, percentiles, Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs), stanines, and grade equivalents. The evaluators will work with the schools to ensure appropriate administration of the test.

The assessment system used by ISBE to measure adequate yearly progress includes ISAT in grades 3-8 and the PSAE at grade 11. The reading assessment portion of the PSAE is the ACT<sup>®</sup> reading subtest.

In addition to the required PSAE at grade 11, the participating school districts will administer the reading assessment portions of ACT-EXPLORE<sup>®</sup> at grade 9 during intervention implementation years. As components of the ACT<sup>®</sup> testing system, EXPLORE<sup>®</sup>, PLAN<sup>®</sup>, and ACT<sup>®</sup> measure student educational development in the same subject areas and student performance on one test relates to student performance on the other components. ACT-EXPLORE<sup>®</sup> serves as the entry point into the testing system. Based on a sample of more than 350,000 students, the reading scale scores on ACT-EXPLORE<sup>®</sup> were found to correlate 0.68 with the ACT<sup>®</sup>. Reliability estimates for the ACT-EXPLORE<sup>®</sup> reading assessment range between 0.83 and 0.89.

The student-level data on the assessments will be obtained from the participating school districts each school year during Project Years 2-4. The school district project coordinators will provide test data files to the external project evaluator. For the impact analyses beginning in

Project Year 2, the reading achievement data obtained at the end of the previous school year will be used as the baseline measure covariate, and the data obtained at the end of the school year in Project Year 2 will be used as the dependent variable. Similarly, Project Year 2 data will be used as the baseline covariate and Project Year 3 data will be the dependent variable for the Project Year 3 analyses. The Project Year 3 and Project Year 4 data will be used for the Project Year 4 analyses.

***2. Description of objective and method for conducting random assignment of students, monitoring, and minimizing crossover, contamination, and student attrition.*** Six high schools from four school districts will participate in the project. The range of low-income levels in these schools during 2008-09 was 44-66 percent and the grade 9 enrollment ranged between 390 and 587 per school. ISBE estimates that at least 900 students are eligible as striving readers in the grade 9 enrollments of these six schools.

Before the beginning of each school year during Project Years 2-4, ISBE will generate a list of eligible grade 9 students in each participating school based on their performance on the grade 8 reading ISAT. Students not meeting the state standard score demonstrating proficiency in reading for NCLB accountability will be included in the list of eligible students. The external evaluator will then work with the ISBE project director and LEA project coordinators to review grade 8 ACT-EXPLORE<sup>®</sup> scores to determine the final list of eligible struggling readers. The list will be shared with each school and updated based on changes in enrollment. In Project Years 2-4, the independent evaluator will randomly assign 50 to 75 of the eligible striving readers to the intervention group at each school. The independent evaluator will not have access to any information that will identify any specific student. The students will be assigned to the intervention or control group via use of a multi-site randomized trial where randomization will

occur within sites. These objective, “blind” assignments will be provided to the school district project coordinators, who will inform each school which students are to be assigned to the *Passport Reading Journeys* class and which students are to be assigned to the control group for the school year. These students will constitute the group for the impact analyses for the school year.

At the end of Project Year 1, each school will hire a teacher with reading certification who will be dedicated to teaching the supplemental instruction and will not teach the regular English language arts class. At each school the reading intervention teacher will have three to four classes of no more than 25 students each. Students randomly assigned to the control group will be enrolled in study hall or other nonliteracy-based electives. Students assigned to the intervention group will be taught with *Passport Reading Journeys* for the entire school year.

As one of the conditions for participating in the project, the six high schools have agreed that the students assigned to the control group will not receive supplemental reading instruction at any time during that high school year. Multiple measures will be taken to monitor the integrity of the random assignment and to minimize crossover. The evaluation team, with the assistance of the school districts and schools, will monitor the composition of the intervention and control groups to ensure that only the students who are assigned to the intervention group are enrolled in *Passport Reading Journeys* classes and that those assigned to the control group do not receive any supplemental reading instruction/intervention during their year of participation. The independent evaluator also will collect information from the school administrators and teachers regarding the integrity of random assignment and crossover effects. Prior to the beginning of Project Years 3 and 4, new lists of grade 9 striving readers will be generated in the same manner and new random assignments will be made.

*Sample size and attrition:* It is expected that 900 eligible grade 9 striving readers from the six participating schools will participate annually during Project Years 2-4. Half of these students will be randomly assigned to participate in the *Passport Reading Journeys* classes (treatment group) and half will participate in a class other than supplemental literacy instruction (control group). Students randomly assigned to the treatment and control groups who transfer into another participating school in the same school district during the school year will continue their assignment as treatment or control students (Illinois uses a unique student identification number that allows for tracking students as they move from one school to another within the state). Treatment students will continue to participate in *Passport Reading Journeys*, and control students will not receive supplemental reading instruction.

Springfield School District 186 is the only participating school district with a nonparticipating high school that serves grade 9 students. Students from a participating school who transfer into this nonparticipating school during the school year will continue to be part of the impact analyses based on ACT-EXPLORE<sup>®</sup> testing results of the intervention school year, but not on GMRT<sup>®</sup> results. The only students who will not be included in the impact analyses will be those who miss the administration of the two outcome measures and those who transfer out of the school district or otherwise stop attending school in the district. Based on 2008-09 mobility data for the participating schools and the high participation rates in the state assessment, attrition during any one year should not be more than 10 percent, providing more than 800 students for the impact analyses. As a precaution, differential attrition will be studied each year by determining if there is a significant interaction between attrition status and experimental condition on baseline outcome measures.

***3. Inclusion of a clear, well-documented, and rigorous method for measuring implementation***

*fidelity.* The focus of the implementation evaluation will be to ensure fidelity to the program (*Passport Reading Journeys*) and to the impact evaluation design. The implementation evaluation will be divided into two phases:

*Planning phase:* This phase will occur during Project Year 1 (October 2009-September 2010). The evaluation activities will focus on two objectives: (a) to ensure that all stakeholders understand the project and are supportive of it and (b) to finalize the evaluation plan, addressing comments from the U.S. Department of Education. The evaluators will meet (face-to-face and technology-mediated) with the project director, the school district project coordinators, and school administrators to discuss details about the project, clarify participants' roles and responsibilities, establish a process for data collection and data transfer to evaluators, and finalize timelines. The evaluators will also attend meetings at the participant schools to address staff questions and ensure that all participants understand what the project entails. Additionally, the evaluators will attend the professional development sessions for the *Passport Reading Journeys* teachers to conduct a focus group with the teachers and interview instructors.

*Implementation phase:* This phase accompanies implementation of the *Passport Reading Journeys* intervention during Project Years 2-4 (October 2010-September 2013). The evaluation activities will focus on ensuring the integrity of the intervention and the evaluation. A theory of change approach will be used to follow up the implementation, ensuring that the steps defined in the logic model are accomplished. Activities for this phase will include: a) a yearly site visit to each of the participating schools to observe the intervention classrooms and the activities offered to the control group students; b) yearly interviews with the project director, school district project coordinators, school administrators, reading intervention teachers, and English language

arts teachers; and c) a survey of engagement and motivation for the treatment and control group students.

Interview protocols will be developed in collaboration with the project director during the planning phase and submitted for approval to the U.S. Department of Education. Classroom observations will use the Implementation Fidelity Index (IFI), a qualitative instrument created by Voyager Extended Learning specialists to assess the fidelity of implementation of *Passport Reading Journeys*. IFI was reviewed by the curriculum authors and has established content validity. The observers will be trained in the use of the IFI and inter-rater reliability will be established before the observations are conducted. The Motivation and Engagement Scale will be used with the treatment and control group students. The scale is based on Dr. Andrew Martin's Student Motivation Wheel framework and is published by the Lifelong Achievement Group. It has been tested with different samples of middle and high school students. A recent sample comprised 2,561 grades 7-11 students. Confirmatory factor analysis yielded an acceptable fit to the data (chi square=4018.91,  $df=695$ ; TLI=.91, RNI=.92, RMSEA=.45). Cronbach's alpha for the scales ranged from .79 to .83.

*4. Description of rigorous statistical procedures for analysis of the collected data.* The random assignment of eligible grade 9 students at the beginning of Project Years 2-4 will create three separate samples and allow for three separate analyses of the impact of participating in the *Passport Reading Journeys* intervention on the reading achievement of striving readers. The primary analytical model that will be used to determine this impact is a two-level regression model with fixed and random effects.

*4.a. Relationship between hypotheses, measures, and independent and dependent variables.* The two dependent variables representing student reading achievement will be the

end-of-year NCEs on the assessments. The primary independent variable will be the treatment variable, modeled at the student level and representing a student's random assignment to the intervention or control group. A variety of other student-level covariates, especially the baseline test score from the previous year, will be included in the analytical models to: a) reduce residual variation, increasing the power to detect a treatment effect, and b) control for the confounding of the treatment variable with other student characteristics (i.e., protect against the possibility of a "bad draw" in the random assignment). The regression coefficient for the treatment variable represents the treatment effect adjusted for the baseline test score and other student covariates. A t-test will be used to test the null hypothesis that the treatment effect equals zero.

***4.b. Statistical techniques for taking into account student clustering within schools.*** This model will account for the clustering of students within schools by taking into account the variation of average student achievement among schools. The first level will model end-of-year student reading achievement scores as a function of: a) the school mean, b) whether the student is in the intervention or control group, c) the student's baseline reading achievement score in the previous school year on the same test, and d) other student demographic variables (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, free/reduced lunch, etc.). The second level will model the school reading achievement averages as a function of selected school characteristics (e.g., contextual school aggregates of student demographic variables, enrollment size, etc.). While the school average will be modeled as a random effect, the regression coefficient for the treatment variable (i.e., the treatment effect) will be assumed constant across schools and model as a fixed effect.

***4.c. Use of previous years' student achievement data as a covariate to improve statistical precision.*** In addition to the impact and other exploratory analyses, descriptive analyses will be carried out to assist ISBE in meeting the reporting requirements for the two GPRA performance

indicators: a) the percentage of adolescent students reading significantly below grade level who demonstrate a gain in their reading achievement, at a minimum of one grade level or its equivalent after participating in an intensive intervention over an academic year, and b) the percentage of students in schools participating in the Illinois Striving Readers Project who score at or above proficient on the state assessment in reading/language arts.

To address the state's interest on whether the gains that may be obtained during the project remain as students move into grades 10 and 11, a follow-up of the participating students will be conducted. Illinois students take the ACT-PLAN<sup>®</sup> in grade 10 and the ACT<sup>®</sup> in grade 11 (as part of the state assessment); both are norm-referenced, standardized tests. Students who were in the intervention and control groups while in grade 9 will be followed as they move into grades 10 and 11 (follow-up may be conducted if the students remain in the participating school districts). Results of the ACT-PLAN<sup>®</sup> and ACT<sup>®</sup> assessments will be examined to identify potential differences in performance for the students who were in the intervention group vs. those who were in the control group.

*4.d. Use of methods to index, summarize, and interpret qualitative data.* All qualitative data derived from interviews will be analyzed for content using Ethnograph. A comparison of means test will be used to assess the results of the Motivation and Engagement Scale for the treatment and control groups and a Structural Equation Modeling test will be used to correlate student results in the scale and in the outcome assessments.

*5. Experience of the independent evaluator.* Illinois state rules and regulations preclude ISBE from identifying a specific external evaluator for the project at this point in time due to the required use of a competitive procurement process for any state contract in excess of \$20,000. Upon receipt of a Striving Readers grant award, ISBE will issue a Request for Proposals that will

reflect the scope of work defined in this proposal and specify the required, rigorous qualifications for the project evaluator, which will include personnel qualified to conduct the intensive implementation and impact evaluation required in this design. Members of the evaluation team will be required to have expertise in educational research methodology; reading-related research, including adolescent literacy, struggling readers, reading intervention effectiveness, and response to intervention; assessment and multiyear program evaluation; K-12 evaluation; experimental and quasi-experimental design; qualitative and quantitative analysis; NCLB Title I accountability; use of data for school improvement; and providing consulting services to state and local educational agencies. The evaluation team leader will be required to have a doctoral degree and at least 10 years of experience in educational research, including conducting randomized, controlled trials in education settings, including in secondary schools; program evaluation experience, and experience with previous Striving Readers grants. The evaluation team will be required to have experience in conducting classroom observations in secondary schools and in urban and suburban settings, have the ability to conduct analyses of large data sets, and provide proof of security in data handling. The external evaluation team will be required to include a coordinator to serve as liaison among the team, ISBE, and other project staff. The coordinator will be required to have a doctoral degree and five or more years of experience conducting evaluations of educational initiatives at the school district or state level of analyses. The evaluators also must have technological capability to maintain cost-effective communication with the project staff.

**6. Allocation of sufficient funds for high-quality evaluation.** ISBE has allocated \$800,000 of the requested grant funds for the external evaluation of the project. Based on ISBE experience, the budget is cost-effective, reasonable, and adequate to accomplish the goals and objectives

within the established timelines, and the amount allocated for the evaluation is sufficient to conduct a high-quality evaluation.

*References*

Denton, K., (2008), *Comparison of the reading achievement of Passport students with students receiving traditional instruction*, [http://voyagerlearning.com/ResearchStudyDocuments/dallas\\_comparison\\_report.pdf](http://voyagerlearning.com/ResearchStudyDocuments/dallas_comparison_report.pdf).

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