



**To: Emily Parks, Superintendent of Schools**  
**From: Allison Borchers, Assistant Superintendent**  
**Date: October 31, 2019**  
**Re: 2019 MCAS Results**

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### **Background**

In 2019, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education continued the process of moving toward revised MCAS tests. Whereas in the past, high school students took the “Legacy” pencil-and-paper assessment, this spring 10th graders started taking the computer-based “Next Generation” assessments in math and English language arts. These tests differ in content and format from their predecessors, and the resulting scores cannot be compared with the Legacy version scores. The goals of the shift included realigning the test content with new state frameworks and setting more ambitious benchmarks for students to achieve passing scores.

In order to give districts time to adjust to the new assessments, the more rigorous scoring is being phased in over time. The threshold for passing scores will be gradually increased so that educators can adjust instruction and ensure that their students can meet then new benchmarks.

The spring 2019 high school science exams were still Legacy-style exams, based on old frameworks. In Westwood, 9th and 10th grade students take the Biology exam to meet their science competency requirement.

### **Accountability and Commendation**

Accountability scoring is designed to provide districts with feedback about efforts to improve instruction over time. The ultimate goal of an accountability system is to ensure that all students meet standards. Like the MCAS test itself, the Massachusetts accountability system has undergone a change in recent years, with the 2017 and 2018 results providing baseline data for new improvement targets. *Appendix A* provides a simplified overview of the system.

Under the new system, districts are given overall ratings based on a formula that factors in the performance of all students. A comparison of the district’s 2018 and 2019 accountability designation follows.

**Westwood Public Schools**  
**District Accountability Designations 2018 & 2019**

	2018	2019
<b>Overall classification</b>	Not requiring assistance or intervention	Not requiring assistance or intervention
<b>Reason for classification</b>	Meeting targets	Meeting or exceeding targets
<b>Progress toward improvement targets</b>	75%	83%

Available subgroup data at the district level indicates that the district is also on track in its efforts to support High Needs students and Students with Disabilities. For these cohorts, the district is designated as making “Substantial Progress Toward Targets.” Growth for students in these cohorts was particularly notable in our elementary results.

At the school level, accountability designations varied. All five elementary schools and the high school were designated as “Meeting or exceeding targets.” The middle school was designated as “Substantial Progress toward targets.” Four elementary schools (Deerfield, Downey, Martha Jones and Sheehan) earned commendations this year, with Deerfield receiving commendation in all three possible categories: “high achievement,” “high growth” and “exceeding expectations.” It is also encouraging to note that Thurston’s criterion-referenced accountability score improved significantly from 2018 (46%) to 2019 (55%). Finally, Downey’s performance was a factor in its receipt of the National Blue Ribbon Award.

District administrators will continue to monitor the accountability measures in our efforts to ensure that the Westwood Public Schools continues to make progress toward universal proficiency for all students.

**Comparable District Performance**

In order to have a comprehensive view of Westwood’s performance in context, two groups of comparison districts are considered here. The first group includes “DART” districts, identified by the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as having similar “grade span configuration, total enrollment and special populations” as the Westwood Public Schools. The second group are school districts that Westwood’s Finance and Warrant Commission and School Committee have asked school and district administrators to examine as model, high-performing districts.

**2019 Comparison Districts**

DART Districts	High Performing Districts
Duxbury Groton-Dunstable	Concord/Concord-Carlisle Dover/Dover-Sherborn

Hanover	Lexington
Holliston	Lincoln/Lincoln-Sudbury
Longmeadow	Medfield
Nashoba	Needham
Norwell	Wayland
Reading	Wellesley
Wilmington	Weston
Winchester	

*Appendix B* contains detailed data for each subject area and grade level. The primary metric used to compare scores between districts in this analysis is the sum of the percentages of students who are Meeting (M) and students who are Exceeding (E) expectations.

There is some good news worth highlighting:

- In grades 3, 4, 5 and 6 Westwood was among the top five out of all comparison districts in the total percentage of students either Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on the English language arts test.
- In grades 3, 4, 5 and 10 Westwood was among the top five out of all comparison districts in the total percentage of students either Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on the math test.
- In grades 5 and 10, Westwood was among the top five out of all comparison districts in the total percentage of students either Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on the science, technology and engineering test.

M + E (meeting plus exceeding expectations) totals were in the “middle of the pack” for the 6th, 7th and 8th grade math test as well as the 8th grade science, technology and engineering test. While Westwood’s grade 10 English language arts M + E total also appears in the middle of the pack (84%), the range of scores is much narrower.

Our comparative data also reveals some focus areas for further investigation and possible intervention. English language arts M + E totals in 7th and 8th grade are among the lowest of the comparison schools. This trend, which was first noted three years ago in grade 7, is not necessarily mirrored in comparison districts and cannot be dismissed as a result of the particular grade level test. In some districts, performance actually improves during middle school years (see *Appendix C*). A careful item analysis in grades 7 and 8 will help to identify any curriculum or instructional issues that need to be addressed.

Some additional, encouraging news comes from a close examination of our subgroup data. While we are still seeing gaps between the performance of all students and some of our subgroups, some of the gaps in Westwood appear to be less substantial than those of selected comparison districts (see *Appendix D*) when considering the grade 3 - 8 English language arts data in aggregate. This data is interesting but needs to be examined more fully and monitored over time. Some of our subgroups are very small, which can lead to dramatic score changes from year-to-year.

### **Additional Science Assessment Highlights**

It is worth noting that the high school's investment in a biology concepts course continues to produce excellent results. The course, which ran for the second time last year, offered specialized instructional support to students who struggled with the science assessment in the past. As a result, this year all of our juniors have met the science portion of their competency determination.

In addition, it appears that our transition to a new, hands-on approach to science instruction in the elementary grades is not only giving students opportunities to question and explore, it is also helping them retain key concepts and skills that are assessed during the grade 5 science MCAS. Westwood's students were among the top performers in the state on the grade 5 science assessment.

### **Data Analysis Teams 2019**

A team of thirty educators from throughout the district, including principals, teachers and curriculum leaders, met on October 28 to examine district-level data and discuss achievement over time, Westwood's performance in comparison to other districts, and the performance of subgroups. In addition, MCAS data analysis is ongoing at the school, department and classroom levels. While curriculum leaders will examine item analysis data to look for opportunities to shore up gaps in student understanding, school leaders and teachers are reviewing classroom and student-level data in order to identify particular students who might need intervention or classroom-based support.

### **Changes Ahead and Conclusion**

There are a few remaining changes and challenges ahead. At the high school this spring, ninth grade biology students will take the pencil-and-paper Legacy version of the biology test, while 10th graders will take the computer-based Next Generation biology test. This strange split is, unfortunately, required by the state, otherwise Westwood would certainly opt for having all biology students take the same version and format of test. In 2021, all ninth graders will be able to take the new, computer-based version.

In addition, starting with the 2020-2021 school year, districts are required to have 8th graders and high school students complete civic engagement projects as a social studies MCAS assessment measure. The state has recently released guidance for this new approach to assessment, and some districts are piloting projects this year. This fall, Westwood has launched a social studies curriculum review and the civic engagement project requirement is part of what the team will consider as it completes its examination of our current curriculum and instruction and forms recommendations for improvement.

Overall, Westwood seems to have weathered the transition to new frameworks and new assessments quite successfully. Our elementary students are performing at extremely high levels. The focus on aligning curriculum and refining instruction at the middle school is beginning to produce tangible results. Our high school performance remains strong overall and efforts to support students who struggle to show what they know on the MCAS assessment have been very successful.

# Massachusetts' school and district

## What is an accountability system?

An accountability system measures school and district performance. It helps schools improve the performance of all students, and helps communities and the state decide how to allocate resources. Accountability results answer two questions: *How is the school doing?* and *What kind of support does the school need?*

## What are some highlights of the system?

**Indicators** that provide more information about school performance and student opportunity:

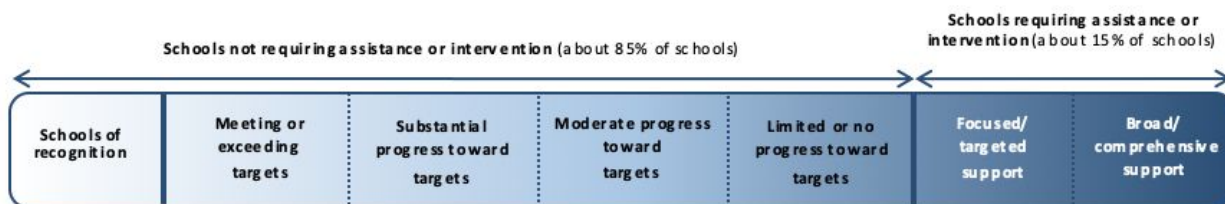
- ✓ Achievement
- ✓ Student progress or growth
- ✓ High school completion
- ✓ Progress towards English proficiency for English learners
- ✓ Chronic absenteeism
- ✓ Advanced coursework completion

Information on each school's **progress toward improvement targets** and how it is doing **compared to other schools across the state**

An increased focus on raising the performance of each school's **lowest performing students**

## How are schools classified?

Schools are **placed into categories** that describe how they are doing and what kind of support they may receive from the state.



## What else should I know?

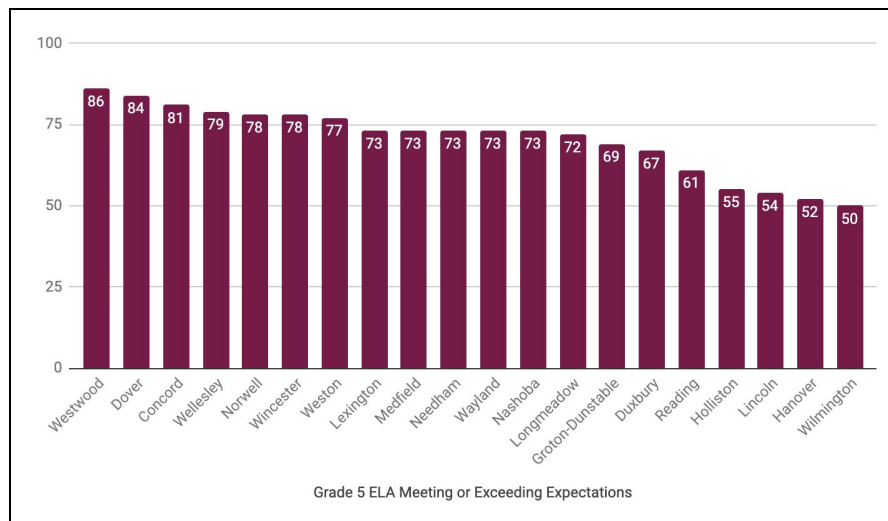
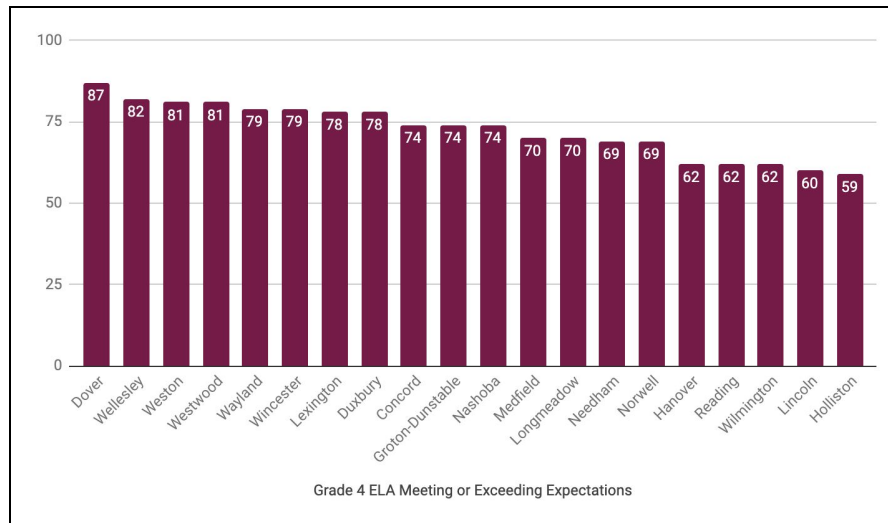
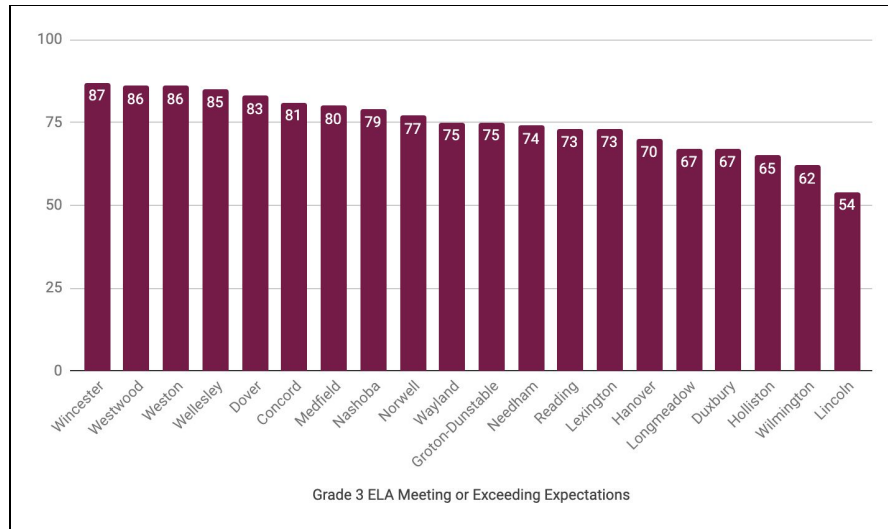
- ★ **Detailed performance data** are reported for all districts, schools, and subgroups.
- ★ Accountability results are used to **recognize schools that are demonstrating success** in addition to identifying schools in need of support.
- ★ Massachusetts is committed to **monitoring the system's effectiveness** in providing clear and actionable information to districts, schools, parents, and the public.

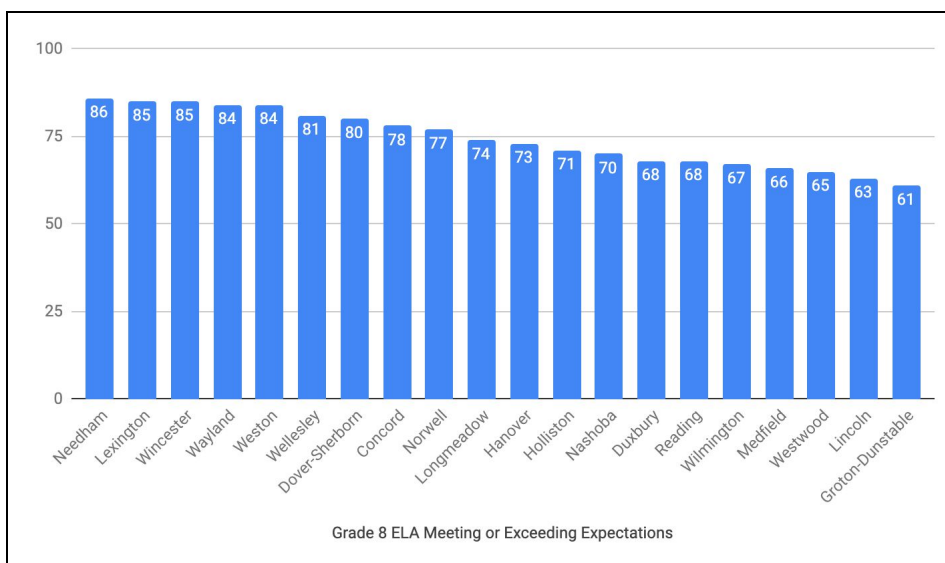
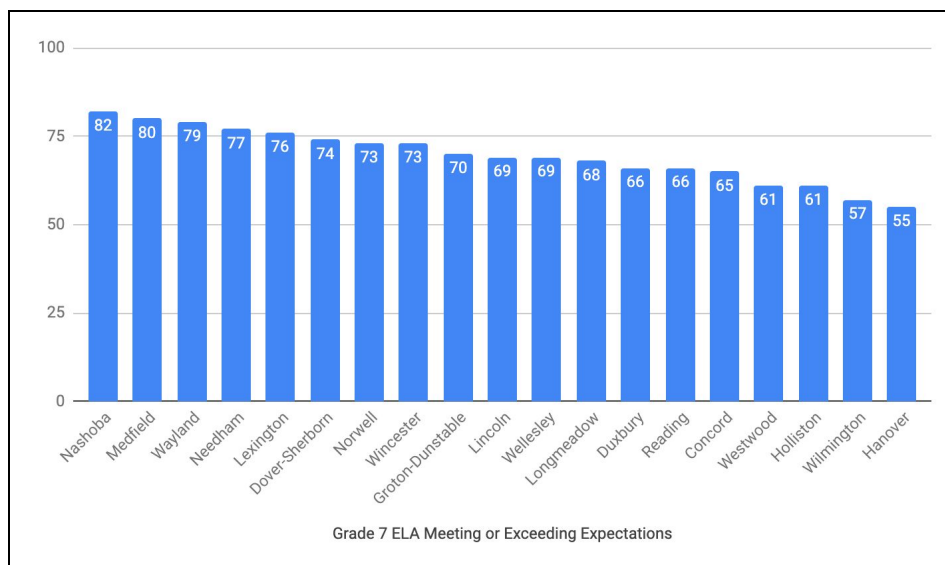
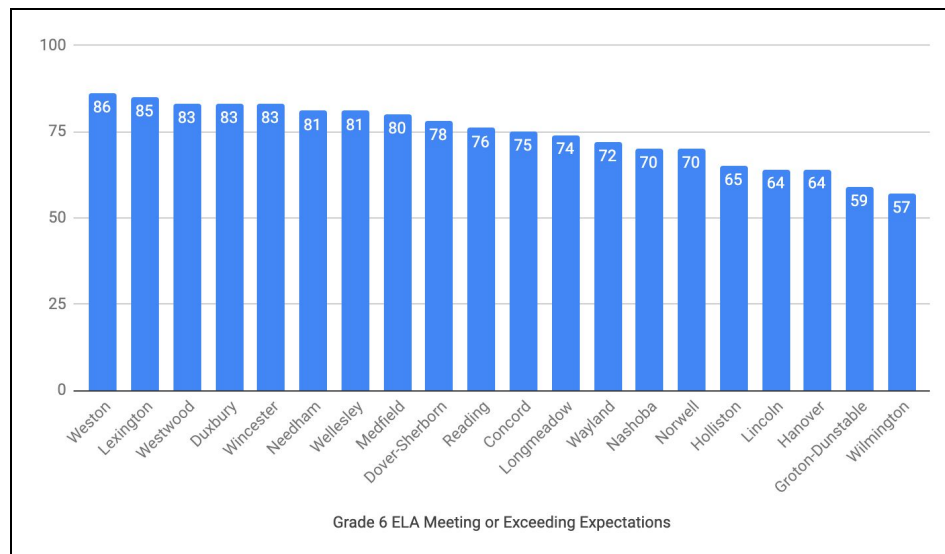
For more information, visit [www.doe.mass.edu/accountability](http://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability).

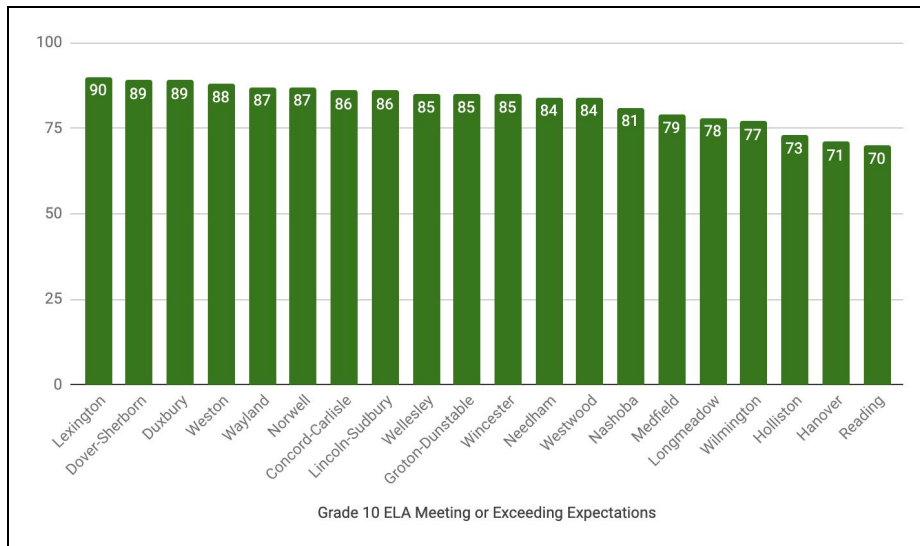


## Appendix B - District Comparisons

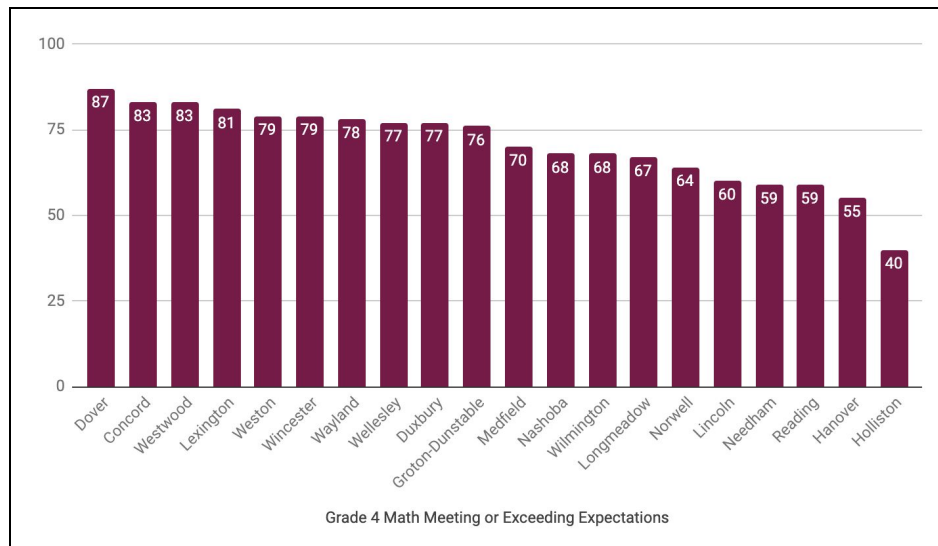
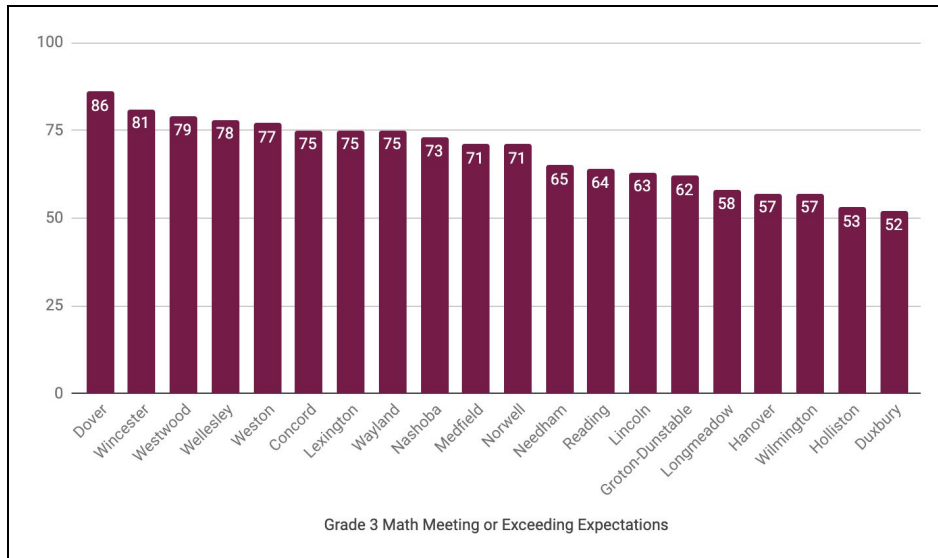
### English Language Arts



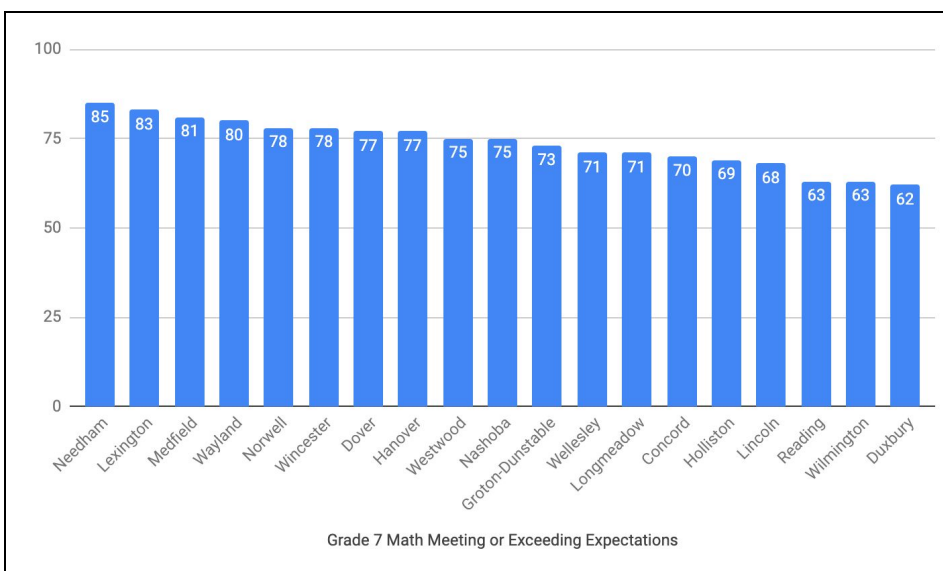
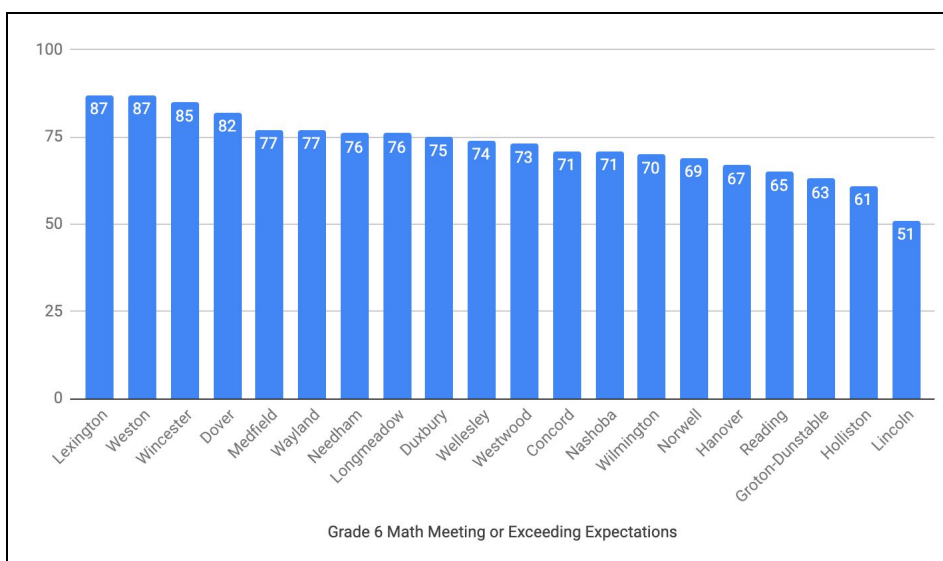
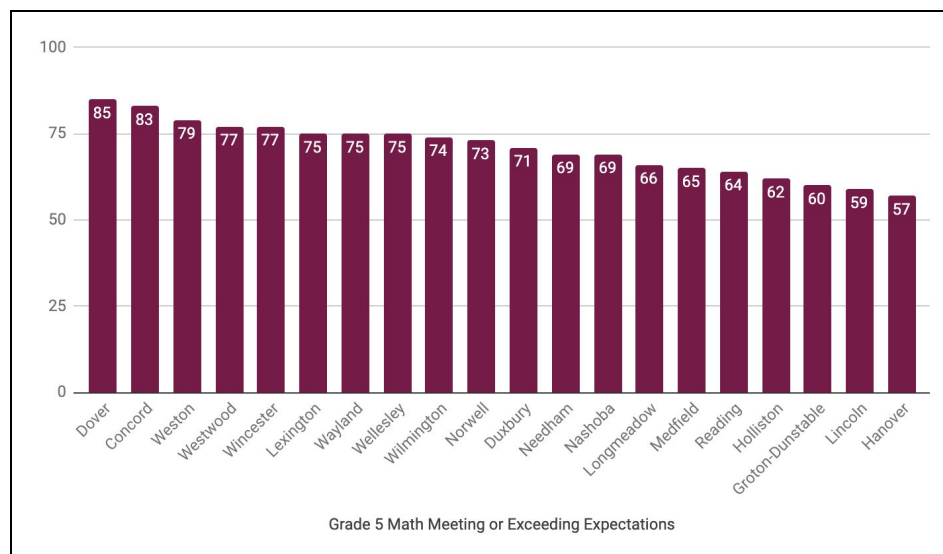


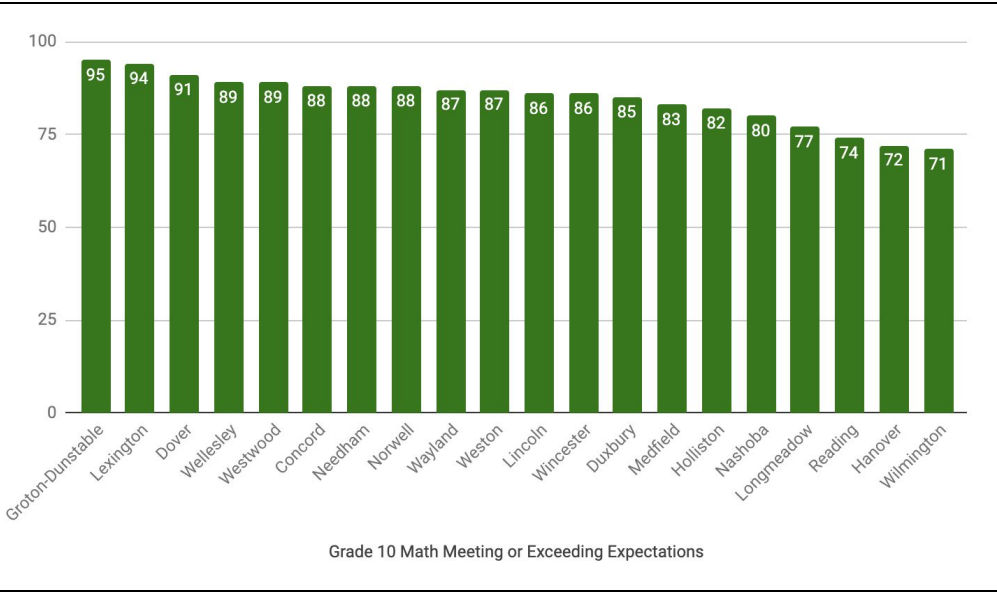
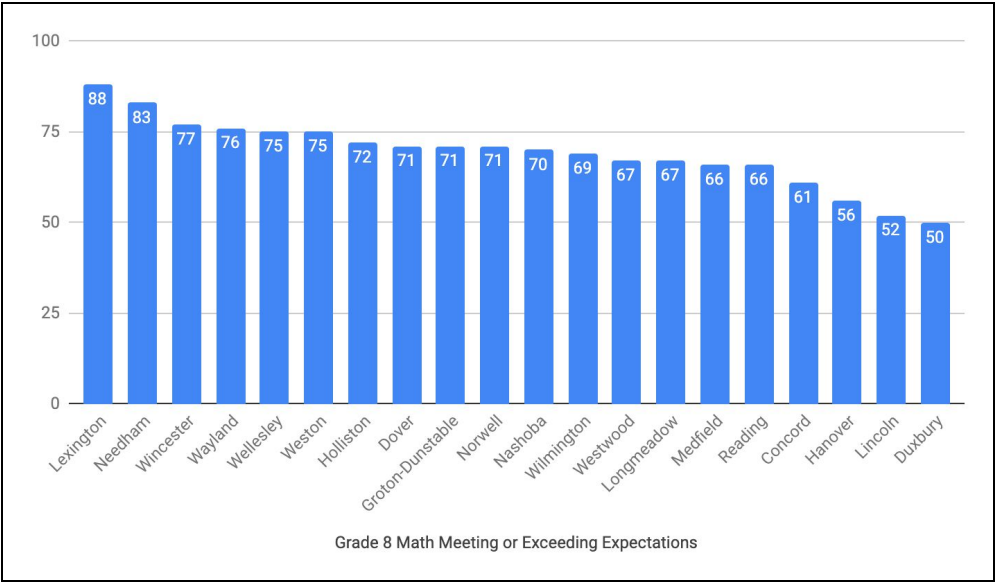


## Mathematics

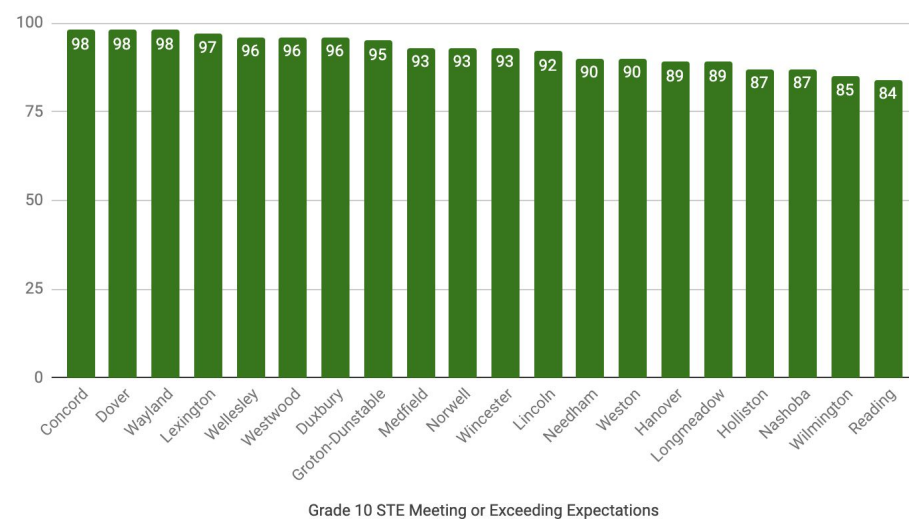
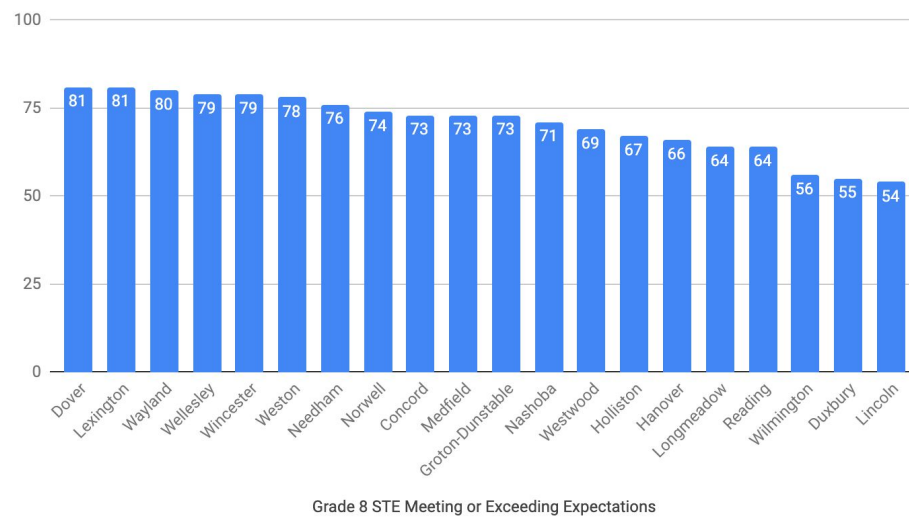
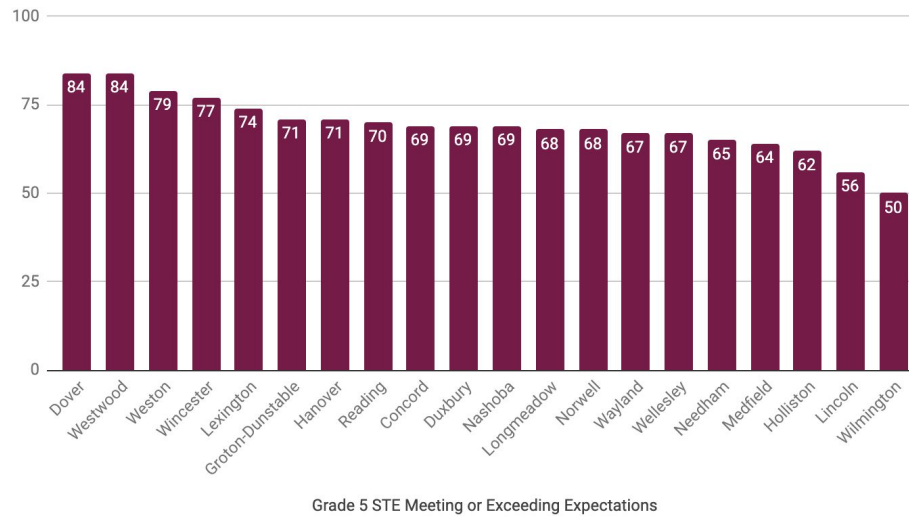




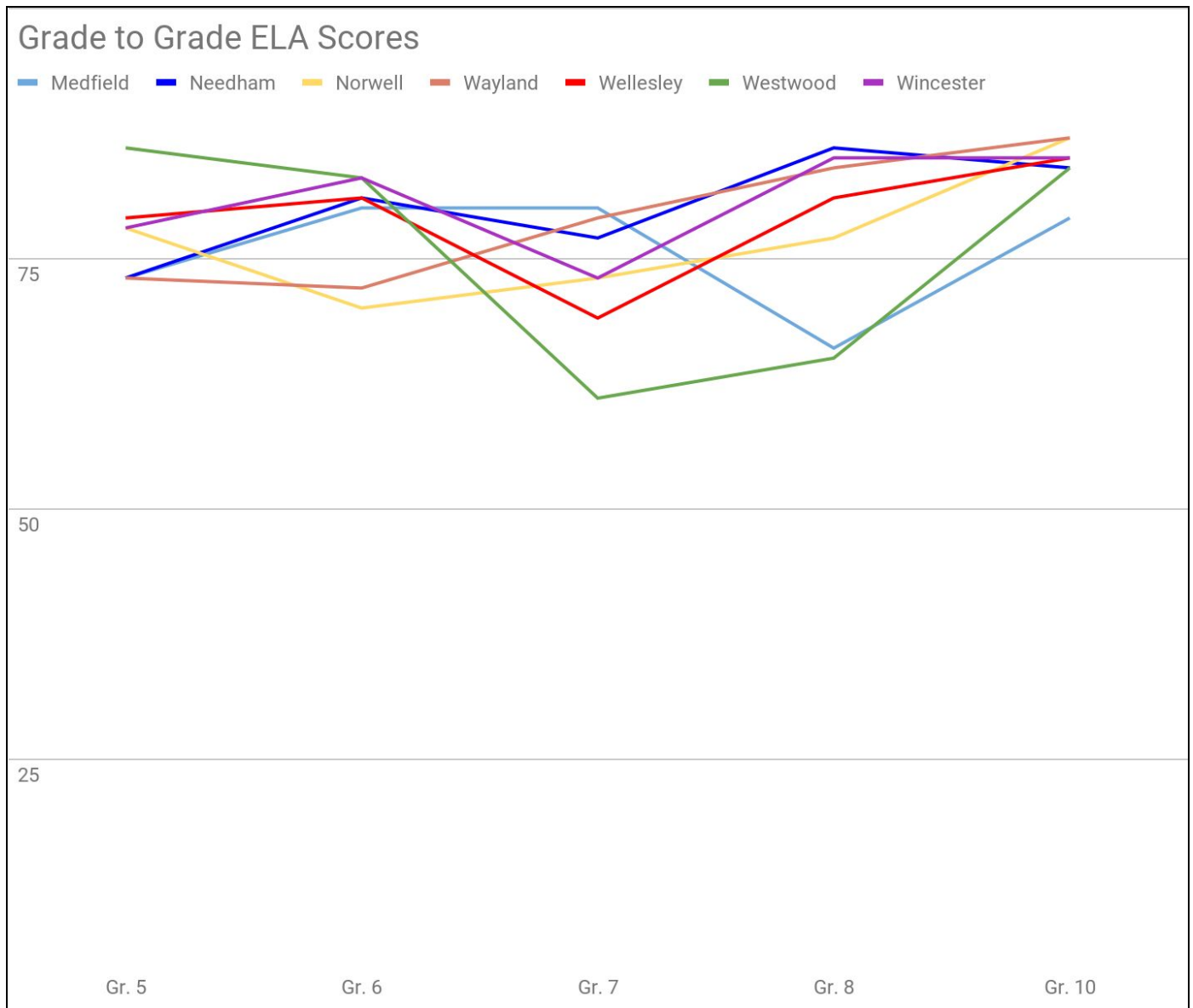




## Science, Technology & Engineering



## Appendix C - Performance Across Levels (Selected Districts)



## Appendix D - Performance Gaps (Selected Districts)

<i>Grade 3 - 8 ELA % Meeting or Exceeding Expectations</i>	<b>Westwood</b>	<b>Wayland</b>	<b>Medfield</b>	<b>Winches- ter</b>	<b>Norwell</b>	<b>Lexington</b>	<b>Dover- Sherborn</b>
All	77	77	74	81	74	78	77
Economically Disadvantaged	59	42	48	59	66	50	33
Non-Economically Disadvantaged	78	80	77	82	75	81	79
<b>Economic Gap</b>	19	38	29	23	9	31	46
Students with Disabilities	38	43	29	42	31	37	34
Non-Disabled Students	86	86	82	90	83	86	87
<b>Disability Gap</b>	48	43	53	48	52	49	53
African/American /Black	58	32	46	54	n/a	38	44
White	77	78	76	80	n/a	75	77
<b>Race Gap</b>	19	46	30	26	n/a	37	33
Male	72	73	69	76	68	73	71
Female	81	81	81	86	82	85	85
<b>Gender Gap</b>	9	8	12	10	14	12	14