



WESTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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TO: School Committee

FROM: Caitlin Ahern, Assistant Superintendent

DATE: May 14, 2026

RE: K-5 Literacy Curriculum Review and Intent to Pilot

During the 2025-2026 school year, a Steering Committee was formed to launch a targeted K-5 Literacy Curriculum Review. The Curriculum Review process will inform the district's adoption of a new, high-quality elementary literacy curriculum to better meet the needs of all students through strong Tier 1 classroom instruction, as well as respond to pending state legislation requiring such a curriculum shift (see the [2025-2026 Curriculum Review Summary](#) presented to the School Committee in October 2025).

Over the course of this year, under K-5 Literacy Coordinator Marisa Wyler's purposeful and steady leadership, the Steering Committee has engaged in learning together around literacy research and best practices, solicited feedback from students, staff and families around current literacy instruction, and crafted a vision for K-5 literacy going forward.

With that data and vision as our foundation, the Steering Committee then researched literacy curriculum programs. We focused our research on four programs that each received a rating of "Meets Expectations" (the highest rating) on both the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education CURATE evaluation, and on the EdReports curriculum evaluation:

- EL Education
- FishTank Plus
- ARC Core
- Arts and Letters

Steering Committee members conducted individual and small group explorations of the various programs and materials. Collectively, we participated in demonstration sessions with representatives from each of the curricular programs, where we could explore materials, ask questions, and get a better understanding of the core components of each program. We used a common rubric (developed using our staff and family feedback) to evaluate each program. After much discussion, the Steering Committee has recommended that we move two programs forward to pilot in selected classrooms next Fall: EL Education and ARC Core.

While we are still soliciting teacher interest in piloting these programs, and working out the logistics of the pilot program, we anticipate approximately 12 classrooms will engage in the pilot (with six classrooms piloting EL Education, and six classrooms piloting ARC Core). Pilot teachers will be supported with summer professional learning, additional professional learning on early release Wednesdays, and a biweekly

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to collaborate with one another on planning and instruction. We will conduct “labsites” for teachers to have the opportunity to get into the pilot classrooms, try out the curriculum materials and see what it looks like in action; we also plan to visit other districts that have implemented these literacy curriculums. Teachers who are piloting these curriculum programs will share more information with the parents of their students during the Fall 2026 Back to School night.

We aim to make a decision about the best literacy program for Westwood students and teachers in December 2026. Once the decision has been made, we will work through the budget process as well as grant opportunities to procure funding for the new instructional materials and professional development needed to ensure our teachers are equipped to implement the new curriculum in SY2027-2028.

We are deeply grateful to the Steering Committee for their time and contributions to this process:

Marisa Wyler, K-5 Literacy Coordinator - Facilitator

Shannon Ballou, Robbie Bartlett, Laura Cavanagh, Kate Doyle, Lisa Fiore, Deb Gallagher, Reid Jones, Matt Kuklantz, Christine Layton, Liz MacNeil, Amy Monteiro, Bonnie O’Connor, Dori Parmelee, Maya Plotkin, Rena Rizzi, Amber Sleath-Crowley, Priscilla Stephens, Emily Warren

More information about the Curriculum Review and pilot process:

Why is the district moving away from the current K-5 literacy curriculum, and what are the main drivers for this review?

The decision to conduct a targeted curriculum review is based on evolving state requirements, a need for more comprehensive core curriculum resources and differentiation supports, as well as a need for greater instructional consistency.

The current curriculum program used in Westwood elementary schools, Teachers College Reading and Writing Program (Units of Study) is not considered a High-Quality Instructional Material (HQIM) by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Pending state legislation around high-quality literacy instruction may soon require the district to adopt a new elementary curriculum. Starting the process now ensures the district is not rushed in making a decision.

The previous K-12 ELA Curriculum Review recommendation to fully implement the Units of Study was never realized due to the pandemic and other factors, leading to inconsistent use across classrooms and schools. Additionally, teachers are finding that the Units of Study lack adequate supports in certain pillars of a comprehensive literacy instructional approach, including foundational skills, word study/spelling, writing, and differentiation.

What specific information did the Steering Committee gather from students, staff and families?

The Steering Committee administered surveys and focus groups to gather input from students, teachers, and families for developing the vision and evaluation rubric. The staff survey focused on preparation and instructional time spent on the literacy resources currently in use, perceived effectiveness of literacy instruction across domains, and teacher hopes and wishes for a literacy curriculum. The student survey was administered as an interview to selected students across grade levels in each elementary school, and focused on attitudes toward reading and writing. Finally, the parent survey was sent home via School Messenger to elementary families, and asked for feedback on how informed parents felt about literacy instruction, and perceptions of program effectiveness.

How will we determine which program to choose, EL Education or ARC Core? What happens after the pilot?

During the pilot period, pilot teachers and our team of Literacy Specialists will be working to identify the strengths and challenges of each program. They will track student progress in each program, and invite other teachers in to see each program in action. Additionally, we will connect with districts who have adopted each program, and learn from their successes and challenges in implementation. Finally, we will consider the financial investment required for each program, and endeavor to make the decision that strikes the optimal balance of being 1) strongest for our students, 2) meeting our teachers' needs, and 3) fiscally responsible.

After the pilot, we will begin the process of planning for implementation. There are many decisions to make at that point, such as whether we implement the curriculum in grades K-5 all at once in 2027-2028, or stagger the implementation by starting with a few grades, and then scaling up. Once the implementation plan is developed, we will procure the materials, and begin professional development for teachers. If resources allow, pilot classrooms that are working with the selected curriculum will be able to continue using that curriculum for the remainder of the year.

What are the financial considerations of adopting and implementing a new curriculum?

When purchasing a new literacy curriculum, the district will have to procure not only the materials (teacher handbooks, student books, "consumable" materials like student workbooks, etc.) but also professional development to ensure teachers are trained in why and how to use the new materials.

The district will work to identify cost savings and allocate funds to the elementary literacy program adoption from our existing Curriculum and Instruction budget. However, we expect that the expense of a new program will significantly exceed what we are able to absorb in our regular operating budget. Therefore, we are applying to the state's Partnership for Reading Success (PRISM) grant, and hope that we will be awarded funds to offset some of the costs.