



**To:** Tim Piwovar, Superintendent  
**From:** Allison Borchers, Assistant Superintendent  
**Date:** Friday, December 8, 2023  
**Subject:** Renaissance Star Reading and Math Assessment Implementation in Westwood

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### 1. Introduction:

The **Renaissance Star Reading and Math Assessment** is a screening tool that assists educators with the evaluation of students' foundational reading and math skills, providing insight into academic progress and helping to identify areas that may require additional attention. The Star assessment is used by many schools throughout the country, and it is designed to allow districts track student progress toward state level end of year benchmarks (e.g., MCAS).

### 2. Implementation in Westwood:

WPS first started using the Star reading assessment on a pilot basis during 2017-2018 at the middle school. Use was expanded at Thurston over the next several years in order to support the development of intervention programming. Star was launched in grades K-5 during the 2021-2022 school year.

Star was selected for several reasons. First, it is easy to implement. Each assessment typically takes about 20 minutes, so there is minimal loss of instructional time. The screenings are computer-based, so results are available immediately, and there are a variety of report formats, allowing educators to either see individual students' results in depth or to investigate classwide or school-wide trends. In addition, the assessments are adaptive, so that they adjust based on an individual student's answers, which allows us to get a more accurate sense of students' performance relative to their peers both locally and nationally.

Also, using the same assessment throughout grades K - 8 is helpful for parents and educators to track students' growth and development over time. This was an important consideration post-pandemic, as we looked to ensure that we are working to address any learning loss that kids have experienced.

Finally, the screening meets most of the state's requirements for early literacy screening and dyslexia identification. We currently supplement Star with other assessment data so that we are meeting DESE's requirements in full.

### 3. Integration with Other Assessments:

The Renaissance Star assessments work in concert with other measures to help provide a comprehensive view of student learning. Alongside Star, educators in K - 5 use [an array of additional literacy assessments](#). In math, pre- and post-unit assessments ([Grade 3, unit 1 example](#)) provide additional valuable information for both planning and intervention.

MCAS results, although they are released too infrequently to support day-to-day instructional planning for specific students, are used throughout the district to identify potential focus areas for improving curriculum and instruction. These results are also helpful in thinking about student course placement at the secondary level as well as intervention needs in grades K - 8.

Finally, and most importantly, teachers are constantly assessing student learning through classwork, homework, tests, quizzes and observation.

#### 4. Rationale for Sending Family Reports:

##### Enhanced Communication:

Sending family reports home fosters transparency and supports communication between educators and parents. It allows families to understand their child's academic strengths and areas for improvement, enabling them to actively participate in the learning process. Research shows that partnering with families is a critical step toward improving student learning outcomes.

##### Empowering Families:

By sharing insights from the assessments, we empower families to support their child's learning journey. Parents know their children's needs and interests, and can help bolster students' achievement by reading to and with children, playing games that support math skills, encouraging conversation about what children are learning at school, and engaging in activities that spark curiosity and engagement.

#### 5. Limitations of Renaissance Star Assessments:

While the Renaissance Star assessments offer valuable insight into students' academic proficiency, it's crucial to note some key limitations. Star assessments do not provide insight into students' mathematical reasoning processes, they do not assess students' capacity to handle multi step problem-solving tasks, they do not ask students to analyze complex texts, and they do not give educators information about students' developing writing skills. No single assessment tool provides us with a complete picture of student progress.

#### 6. Next Steps:

The middle school will begin sending out reports this year as well. Moving forward, we hope to share results in grades K - 8 with parents twice a year: once around the time of fall conferences and again in the spring.