



A Community of Learners

Information Memo: Renaissance Learning STAR Assessment & Selection of New Assessment

TO: The Winnetka Public Schools Board

FROM: Trisha Kocanda, *Superintendent*

DATE: January 26, 2016

Overview & Background

Renaissance Learning's STAR Enterprise assessment was recommended and approved in spring 2012. It was distinguished by the fact that it was the only assessment system reviewed by the National Center on Response to Intervention as having "convincing evidence" that it adheres to essential progress monitoring tool features. It also was the most time efficient system, meaning that less instructional time would be displaced with the STAR system than the other two systems under consideration. Finally, it had an explicit link to specific interventions and differentiated lesson plans. It also claimed to be in alignment with the new Common Core State Standards.

The STAR assessment was administered to students in grades 3-8 beginning in fall 2012. Therefore, the fall 2015 assessment administration marked the fourth consecutive year of administering the STAR.

The STAR assessment was primarily used as a screening tool for grade-level teams to determine if students are in need of intervention. The assessment results were compared to other information and data teachers have collected on students to ensure all students continue to grow and achieve, receiving the appropriate support and challenge along the way.

December 2015 Work Session

Renaissance Learning representatives, Vice President of Educational Partnerships, Laurie Borkon, and Regional Vice President, Christine Oris, addressed the School Board at a special work session to provide an overview of [STAR Renaissance Learning assessment](#), explain the measures Student Growth Percentile (SGP) and quartile achievement, show Winnetka School District 36's performance (2012-2015), and answer School Board questions.

Renaissance Learning representatives presented the District's 2012-2015 math performance data. The 2012-2013 SGP measure was corrected by the company with accurate results embedded in the presentation. The initial calculations of the 2012-2013 SGP metric were inadvertently computed using an "alternative norming group." Renaissance Learning reported the following to summarize the math growth and achievement data:

"For Winnetka, growth and achievement appear steady. The district is generally maintaining growth above 50 SGP. Further, the percentage of students in the top quartile have remained consistent since 2012-2013."

Renaissance Learning officials were unable to report the District's 2012-2015 reading performance data, as District staff detected errors in the multiple reports that were presented as "final" by the company. [The attached email](#) by EVP, Sales and Services Samir Joglekar of Renaissance Learning was received on December 14, 2015.

Renaissance Learning reported that the company is unable to advise the District in setting growth targets, as the company's position is that each district needs to make its own decision. The assessment company also confirmed it is unable to provide benchmarking data for demographically similar districts. In summary, the company is unable to produce performance targets or demographically similar comparison data.

STAR Reading Audit Update

On December 18, 2015, the District received a letter from Renaissance Learning stating that the "wide-reaching audit of all our systems...led to the conclusion that the STAR product has worked and continues to work as designed and produced consistent results across all reporting mechanisms." The District asked for a copy of the audit report to better understand the company's assertion. The District also asked for a clean report of the final 2012-2015 reading and math data and all measures. Renaissance Learning is unable to supply an audit report and shared that the research department's work was "not completely in synch with the tables used in the product (the software)." We were advised to "ignore the files Research provided." Communication remains ongoing with Renaissance Learning to confirm the District's final reading data and to better understand the rationale for the discrepancy of data among multiple reports produced by the company. When the District asked the company why our school district is the only one questioning the data in this way, officials responded by stating that we were the only district with a data analyst to detect the issues. At the time this memo is written, final STAR reading data remains under review.

Outcome

After much discussion and thought, the administrative team collectively determined that the STAR assessment will no longer be administered to students. The decision is supported by three key reasons:

1. Lack of data integrity - As early as 2014, questions related to the reports and measures produced by STAR arose by District administrators. The company was unable to seriously address our concerns until this fall. Over a course of two months, multiple reports of data presented as “final” were provided to the District. On at least four occasions, the District detected errors that required STAR to update the results. This eventually led to a system-wide audit of the STAR assessment (described above). Although the audit is reported as concluded, the District’s data analyst is still unable to reconcile multiple reports.
2. Poor service and knowledge of assessment data - Renaissance Learning is unable to consistently provide definitions to key measures (such as SGP), nor are they able to guide the District in determining the most appropriate ways to set performance targets or make comparisons over years or by cohorts of students. Access to quality personnel is limited (affirmed by Renaissance Learning officials at work session). In addition, communication about system updates and renorming is severely lacking. Renaissance Learning stated that they are working to improve communication in this area.
3. Limited ability to provide customized reporting - The District is interested in benchmarking data with demographically-similar Districts and setting research-based growth targets for our students. STAR is not equipped to meet these demands.

Next Steps

An important component to monitoring student growth and achievement includes access to nationally-normed data. Therefore, we are setting a target to recommend a computer adaptive assessment by April 2016 with intent for May 2016 administration. This will allow us to have an initial benchmark this spring and prepare for full implementation next fall.

Three years ago, the RtI Assessment Committee conducted an extensive study on the available computer adaptive tests and identified the various strengths and weaknesses. NWEA MAP and Scantron Performance Series were the other two assessment options identified and evaluated. Both of these assessments are used in other New Trier Township schools. For these reasons, the District is looking to replace the STAR with one of these two well-known assessments.

A representative team of administrators is leading the assessment selection process, which will include teacher feedback and consult at key times in the process. A monthly update on this process will be included in the Board materials, with a final recommendation no later than April.