STAR READING ASSESSMENT: Questions and Answers

BUSD is adding additional structures and supports to our literacy instruction for students in elementary school.

This year, we are planning to add a brief and adaptive assessment, The STAR Reading Assessment, along with an explicit phonics program, to compliment our more holistic core language arts curriculum. This additional assessment, once we fine tune its administration, takes, on a national average, 20 minutes three times per year. We are also postponing the participation of Kindergarten students on this assessment until winter as we consider the best ways to contextualize and administer this in a way that is mindful of the challenges associated with assessing our youngest students.

Ultimately, BUSD's Educational Services Division believes that the level of specificity we will receive from these assessments regarding very specific reading challenges, when coupled with our core Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) curriculum and a newly adopted phonics component, will provide a holistic, complementary, and structured approach to early literacy that positions us for improving or sustaining the learning of all the students we are responsible to serve.

The questions below reflect queries we have received from staff and anticipate from the community as we move forward.

Q: Why do we need another way to measure students' reading ability?

After multiple years of looking at data and visiting classrooms, the Educational Services team feels that we need additional and more specific information about the root causes of reading struggles for our youngest students in order to better direct resources and make more informed decisions about support options.

Additionally, the frequent disconnect we see between outcomes on TCRWP assessments and the SBA lead us to believe that another specific data point will be useful in supporting kids and understanding our broader literacy challenges in deeper detail.

Furthermore, the earliest non-local assessment data in reading we get is from the SBA at the end of 3rd grade. With some persistent gaps between TCRWP and SBA scores, we need an earlier benchmark to effectively support our most underserved students.

Q: Is this STAR Reading Assessment a Dyslexia Screener?
No. STAR is a universal screening tool that we feel will deepen our understanding of specific reading levels and specific reading and literacy challenges of all students. Students who reveal certain challenges on the STAR screener can then be assessed in greater detail relevant to possible concerns around dyslexia.

Q: Why not just use a low score on TCRWP (our core language arts program) as the screener for dyslexia?

TCRWP does not test for phonics or phonemic awareness. For this reason it is an unreliable screener for dyslexia. The STAR assessment provides much more specific information about **every reader** and is a better predictor of scores on other external assessments.

Q: Couldn't our new phonics component be used as a screener?
The assessments for Fast Track (phonics program) do measure some of what would be needed to flag potential dyslexia, but those brief assessments are incremental and a part of each series of lessons. STAR is comprehensive and adaptive, and STAR is also K-8 where Fast Track (phonics program) is K-3.

Q: What is the dyslexia screener in BUSD?

The District is currently leaning towards using DIBELS. It is included in the International Dyslexia Association's list of recommended assessments.

It will be used for select students following the STAR screening, students whose assessment of discrete skills might warrant a screening for potential challenges like dyslexia.

It is important to note that DIBELS, not the STAR Reading Assessment, is the dyslexia screening tool.

Q: Will this STAR 360 Reading Assessment take the place of current curriculum as the primary data source from which intervention decisions are made?

No. This was not communicated effectively to Literacy Coaches initially, and Educational Services management takes responsibility for that.

TCRWP and LLI are still the primary components of our program, and remain what our current data cycles will be based upon.

However, STAR 360 Reading data will add another useful set of information to our overall understanding of the root causes of why kids struggle with reading.

Ultimately the implementation of this adaptive assessment three-times per year, as well as the adoption of a phonics program, will complement our more holistic core language arts curriculum in a move toward a more structured approach to literacy overall.

Q: What is STAR Reading Aligned to?

The Common Core State Standards.

Q: Is it true that BEARS assessment is being eliminated?

Yes, in an effort to moderate and manage the assessment volume for kids and staff, the elimination of BEARS relieves staff of an assessment component that is included/embedded in the STAR reading and phonics assessments; namely, screenings for phonics and phonemic awareness challenges.

Q: What data does this give us?
Star Early Literacy tracks development in multiple critical domains; for grades TK-1 they include:

- Word Facility and Skills
- Alphabetic Principle
- Concept of Word
- Visual Discrimination
- Phonemic Awareness
- Phonics
- Structural Analysis
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension Strategies and Constructing Meaning
- Sentence-Level Comprehension
- Paragraph-Level Comprehension

Star Reading tracks development in multiple domains for grades 1-5:
- Word Knowledge and Skills
- Comprehension Strategies and Constructing Meaning
- Analyzing Literary Text
- Understanding Author's Craft
- Analyzing Argument and Evaluating Text

Q: Aren't interventionists are going to spend too much time supporting these assessments?

STAR Renaissance is designed to be administered in the tier 1 setting by the classroom teacher. Some schools may opt to include their interventionists in administering the assessment, but this is not a District requirement.

Q: What else does the District plan to do with this information?

These assessments will also be helpful when designating instructional support for specific subsets of our student body, like English learners or homeless students. During a recent collaboration with and audit by the County Office of Education, we agreed that deeper and more detailed assessments of particular subgroups would be helpful in providing additional and more specific types of support to students in these categories. Supports that could be increasingly customized for kids and include targeted tutoring, access to online adaptive skill-based software, and even more informed site-based case management and intervention.

Q: Is there any research behind this?
STAR Reading is a computer adaptive test that has received high ratings for reliability from multiple national associations and has been developed with advising from experts from multiple universities and research centers.

In 2012 STAR Assessments were given high ratings by the federally funded **National Center on Intensive Intervention (www.intensiveintervention.org)**

In 2009, the U.S. department of Education funded the National Center on Response to Intervention (RTI) and STAR Assessments were among the assessments given high ratings by that organization. The assessments have maintained a strong rating for screening and progress monitoring by this association ever since. (www.rti4success.org)

The quality (validity and reliability) of the data provided to teachers is critical. A reliability coefficient is (1.0 = perfect) and good, better, and best are 0.7, 0.8, and 0.9 respectively. The National Center for Response to Intervention considers two measures over 0.8 to be the top rating, and STAR Reading and STAR Early Literacy received coefficients of .91 and .86 respectively, significantly exceeding the standard.

Q: Who made this decision?

The Educational Services Team made this decision during a 2-year development of our goal to create a more structured approach to literacy instruction.

While a formal adoption process was used for our phonics program, this complimentary assessment, again, given three times a year, was a an executive decision given our analysis of data and our bigger picture goals for literacy. While this assessment decision did not include a formal adoption process or extensive set of meetings, again, it is a periodic and comparably brief assessment, **not a curriculum,** and it is a decision informed by multiple years of classroom observations, discussions at LCAP committees around the need for increasingly specific data, and informal conversations with principals and teachers.

Q: What about little kids on computers?

As a computer adaptive assessment, the STAR reading assessment continually adjusts the difficulty of each student's test based on their previous performance. Decades of research have shown that computer adaptive tests can be more efficient than conventional tests, particularly in the formative sense, which present all students with the same questions (e.g., Lord, 1980; McBride and Martin 1983; Weiss 2004).[2] Computer adapted assessments can shorten testing time and also spare students "both the frustration of items that are too difficult and the boredom of items that are too easy."

We realize that logistics and the bumps that sometimes accompany new implementations may add initial challenges, but we believe that it is well within the capacity of our schools to ultimately reach the 20-minute average that research shows this assessment requires. We know that a caring and supportive context can be created by our classroom teachers and school leaders that can lower any potential stress around these assessments for our youngest learners.

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[1] **Center on response to Intervention 2016**
[2] **Research Foundation for STAR Assessments 2013.**