



SANTA MONICA - MALIBU UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

April 20, 2021

Superintendent's Message: State Assessments

Dear Parents, Guardians and Staff,

As you are aware, this school year has been challenging, unique, and filled with changes we have had to navigate in order to deliver a meaningful education to our students. We are close to the end of the school year, and I appreciate your agility and growth mindset as we tackle the “roller coaster” educational experience.

One change that the federal government, as well the State of California, recently authorized is the flexibility for school districts to determine the viability of implementing the state and federal end-of-the-year summative assessment and replace it with a local measure that would provide similar academic information regarding our students' grade-level literacy skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening, research and inquiry) and numeracy skills (concepts and procedures, problem solving, reasoning and data analysis). Due to our district's current context -- time constraints, the various and numerous adjustments with teaching and learning modalities, and our staff's focus on addressing the social-emotional needs of our students -- I have recommended that we take advantage of the state's authorized flexibility and forgo the state summative assessment (California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress, CAASPP) this year and implement local measures that will provide our district with similar information regarding student learning.

Elementary assessments

At the elementary level, the district is better positioned to address the situation, since elementary schools have become accustomed to implementing our local district-wide assessment that measures students' literacy and numeracy skills as aligned to grade-level standards through the use of Fastbridge eReading or aReading and Fastbridge aMath. The Fastbridge assessments are designed to provide teachers and support staff with information on a broad range of skills:

- to improve instructional practices and isolate what adjustments need to be made to the delivery of instruction;
- to identify what skills students need to improve and have mastered in terms of literacy and language and numeracy and math skills as aligned to grade level standards;
- that provides guidance for the district to provide individual student, class and grade-level, school wide, and district wide responses within the school year; and
- that can provide insight on how students would perform when they take the end of the year state level assessment.

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Secondary assessments

At the secondary level, we want to introduce the Renaissance Star Reading Assessment. This K–12 comprehensive assessment provides all the insights needed to guide literacy growth for emergent readers, struggling readers, and high achievers, whether the student is being tested in-person, remotely, or a combination of both and would provide the necessary information to inform staff regarding student's progress. Renaissance Star Reading is efficient and predictive of a student's ability to perform on the state CAASPP as well as other standardized assessments, such as SAT and ACT. In the area of mathematics, we will be administering the CSU/UC Mathematics Diagnostic Testing Project (MDTP) assessment and it also produces the same level of information as Star Renaissance does but would focus on math skills.

I want to conclude my letter by explaining the rationale of state and local assessments, including the valuable, useful data school districts receive. As students matriculate through the education system from pre-school to high school, it is necessary to deliver a curriculum that is engaging, purposeful, and provides great context for students. Our efforts to achieve this involves integrating subject areas through project-based learning and incorporating social justice standards into the curriculum while simultaneously providing students with the academic skills outlined in the state academic standards.

The way in which school districts monitor and evaluate the progress of a student's mastery of the academic standards from elementary through high school is by monitoring the results of state assessments, year by year. And, in order for us to make the necessary instructional, programmatic, and student support adjustments within the school year, we need to incorporate local assessments that are predictive of state assessments.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ben Drati, Superintendent