

JOSEPH H. GAUDET MIDDLE SCHOOL

Middletown, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

May 1998

CONTENTS

- [1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS](#)
 - [Profile of the School](#)
 - [The Nature of this Report](#)
- [2. PORTRAIT OF THE CONDITION OF YOUR SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT](#)
- [3. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING, PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT](#)
 - [Conclusions](#)
 - [Commendations](#)
 - [Recommendations](#)
- [4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING](#)
 - [Conclusions](#)
 - [Commendations](#)
 - [Recommendations](#)
- [5. FINDINGS ON SCHOOL AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING ORGANIZATION](#)
 - [Conclusions](#)

- [Commendations](#)
 - [Recommendations](#)

 - [6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS](#)
 - [Most Important Commendations](#)
 - [Most Important Recommendations](#)
 - [Final Advice to the School](#)

 - [APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT](#)
 - [Members of the School's Self-Study Team](#)
 - [Members of the Visiting Team](#)
-

1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

Profile of the School

The Joseph H. Gaudet Middle School is located in Middletown, Rhode Island. Serving students in grades five through eight, this school has an enrollment of 859 and a staff of 89 certified personnel. The school has one principal, one assistant principal and is broken into grade level clusters. Gaudet has been a Carnegie School for several years and the faculty, staff and administrators have worked hard to make the principles of Turning Points meaningful for them.

The Gaudet Middle School operates on a flexibly scheduled day with no bells. The clusters are free to reschedule their academic offerings as the need arises. There is a library with a full-time library media specialist operating with a partially flexible schedule; there are two computer labs with two computer teachers. Gaudet has a strong elective program and numerous after school offerings. Gaudet has a full inclusion program and mainstreams at-risk children through a cooperative program with Bradley Hospital.

Gaudet Middle School is the only middle school in the Middletown School District. There is strong community support for the school and its activities and there is strong administrative support as well. The community of Gaudet is caring, focused on reform and willing to expend the effort to improve teaching and learning.

The Nature of this Report

The purpose of the visit to Gaudet Middle School during the period April 28th - May 1st was to draw conclusions about the School in the three focus areas of SALT: Student learning, progress and achievement; Teaching and learning; The school as a teaching and learning organization. The purpose of the SALT Visit is to ensure that accountability supports improvement of schools by directly connecting judgments of quality and recommendations for improvement to the actual life and work of a school.

This report of the visiting Team is built upon the observations and conclusions of Rhode Island school practitioners. The majority of the members of the Visiting Team, whose names and affiliations are included in Appendix A, are practicing Rhode Island educators. Other team members were staff members of the Rhode Island Department of Education.

The comprehensive Gaudet Self Study report (April 1998), which the school prepared for the visit, served as the Visiting Team's first touchstone in coming to an understanding of the Gaudet Middle School.

However informative written reports may be there is simply no substitute for being at the school while it is in session - in the classroom, in the lunchroom, on the field and in the hallways. The specific information generated by a Team visit is about how the student and staff, parents and administrators go about their day. Thus, this visit allowed professional colleagues to live through a teaching event with the teacher, to find common ground, and to form judgments about the teaching and learning that actually takes place at Gaudet Middle School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- 118 lengthy classroom observations
- many informal observations in and around the school
- following ten students for a full day
- observing the functioning of each cluster for a full day
- observing the Co-curricular Cluster meeting
- observing the Shared Decision Making meeting
- meetings with the Self-Study Committee
- meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators
- Gaudet's Self-Study document, strategic plan, District policies and budgets
- attendance records, suspension reports, test data, Carnegie and Salt survey data and Information Works data
- a large collection of student work prepared by the school

The conclusions, commendations and recommendations presented here have been built through intense and thorough discussions by the full Team. The Visiting Team met for a total of 22 hours in six separate meetings spanning the four days of the visit. This time is exclusive of the time spent in classrooms and with teachers. The Team sought to develop conclusions, commendations and recommendations in the

three focus areas that, in its judgment, would be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning.

Each conclusion, each commendation, each recommendation in this report was agreed to by the Team using consensus.

It is important to note that this report reflects a "moment" in the life of the school. The conclusions here are different from those that can be made from state-wide assessment data or from information collected and analyzed by members of the school. This report is not intended to be prescriptive. Rather, it is a different lens, one not already clouded from being entrenched in the daily life of the school. This new lens is one through which the school can look to help focus on important issues resulting in the development of strategies for overall improvement in the teaching and learning process.

The value of this report is not determined by the hard work of the Team. The value will be determined by how people respond to the report. At first, the critical criteria will be thoughtfulness of that response and later it will be its actual effectiveness in improving teaching and learning. The response of the faculty and staff will be most critical early on but later there is a shared responsibility to support the school in making progress. That responsibility will be shared by the Middletown School Department, the citizens of Middletown and the Rhode Island Department of Education. The SALT Visit and this report are part of a pilot process for SALT. Gaudet Middle School and its community are to be commended for the leadership they have shown by their willingness to take part in this process.

Following the Team's summary statement, "Portrait of the condition of your school at the time of the visit," each of the SALT focus areas are presented. For each focal area Team conclusions, commendations and recommendations are laid out. The report ends with the Team's most important commendations and recommendations.

2. PORTRAIT OF THE CONDITION OF YOUR SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Gaudet Middle School is working actively and successfully toward becoming a school that practices standards based education. This is an effort in which they are poised to take the lead. Currently, this effort is in the beginning, evolutionary stage. The effort is fragile and may appear to be scattered. To affect teaching and learning, this effort must be supported throughout the school with consistent staff development, thoughtful reviews of current practice and continued rigor.

It is the judgment of the Visiting Team that the faculty and staff at Gaudet Middle School have to reflect on the various reform initiatives that they are currently struggling to implement and then limit their efforts to one or two. These efforts must focus on student learning, student progress and student

achievement. Therefore, much of this report is focused on that topic. The teachers, the foot soldiers of reform, need to embrace a sustainable and focused agenda. This agenda will then become the rock upon which worthy school reform will be based at Gaudet Middle School.

Gaudet Middle School is a good middle school that is working hard to prepare its students for life in the new century. These efforts, as noted during the Team's visit, are chronicled in this report. They present the school as caring and concerned about the teaching and learning with which it is charged. The recommendations offered are intended to support the school as it proceeds to "do good as it goes."

While the school needs to be deliberately aware of the problems beyond its parameters, such as the changing presence of the Department of Defense and the turnover of students, it should not be distracted from working as well as it can, directly with students. The Visiting Team found a solid school that has the capacity to struggle successfully and to make education more challenging for the learner. They found a school not content with current efforts and ready to move forward for the improvement of all.

3. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING, PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Conclusions

The students have high academic expectations for themselves and want more intellectual challenge. Some remain disengaged because of content repetition, lack of personal and real-world connection, and a fragmented learning experience.

Many students are performing basic functions in mathematics class but only one-half demonstrated the ability to apply these skills on the New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination.

Very few students are performing higher order thinking tasks in mathematics classes; approximately one in ten demonstrated the ability to apply these skills on the New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination.

Student writing is focused on the structure of composition and the mechanics of language but does not often reflect student voice; half of the students in the school met the state standard in writing.

While students are encouraged to do a great deal of reading across the curriculum, their engagement with text and depth of understanding varies greatly; one-third of the students tested on the Metropolitan Achievement Test were below grade level.

Commendations

High level of student respect for peers, adults and the physical environment

Enthusiasm for learning experiences when they are coherent, relevant and contextual

Deep student engagement when work is intellectually challenging

Strong student performance in sustained and hands on learning activities

Recommendations for Improvement

Increase the intellectual challenge to students.

Make learning more personal.

Create real world connections to what students are learning.

Allow more time for in-depth study.

Increase learning that begins with and builds on critical questions.

Create learning experiences that allow students to raise questions and build on their own interests.

Encourage students to become responsible for their own learning.

4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Conclusions

Teachers have worked hard for a long time to implement reform initiatives in order to provide more effective education.

Teachers have been successful at implementing a seamless inclusion program for children with special needs.

Teachers work hard to develop skills but do not provide enough opportunities for students to exercise those skills in a meaningful and challenging context.

There is not enough visual and kinesthetic stimulation because instruction is primarily delivered in an auditory mode.

Teaching does not intentionally begin with nor build upon what students know and are able to do.

The school's practice of group work often does not enhance individual student learning or cooperative skills.

The learning experience is not strongly enough connected to the school's vision that each student "will explore and discover pathways to the highest standards, and become creative, lifelong learners."

Commendations

Teacher leadership and responsibility for the quality of the school's instruction

Performance based instruction in Co-curriculars

Emerging use of interdisciplinary units by academic clusters and Co-curriculars

Emerging use of rubrics to assess and communicate the quality of student work

Display of standards and rubrics in classrooms

Recommendations for Improvement

Establish priorities and limit the focus to a few reform initiatives that are targeted at improving teaching and learning.

Use the flexible scheduling opportunities for extended, in-depth study and integrated learning.

Vary instructional strategies to address diverse learning styles.

Create opportunities for students to become self-guided and active learners.

Return student work with substantial comments on what is good and what can be improved; collect that work over time.

Develop a range of strategies and techniques for assessing student work including self-assessment, peer

critiquing, portfolios and conferencing.

Build the skills of students to work cooperatively to solve problems.

5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL AS A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Conclusions

Teachers meet regularly and often and communicate across disciplines and within grade level clusters to address student needs and schedules.

There is little evidence that teachers collegially explore new directions in standards based education and/or inquire into their own practice.

The master schedule provides the clusters with the opportunity for depth over breadth which they have just begun to explore.

The kind of information the teachers record to document student learning limits the school's ability to use assessment to make informed decisions about instruction.

The school does not have well defined strategies for engaging families as partners in the educational process.

The goals of the school's improvement plan (The Gaudet Strategic Plan) are not measurable and the plan is not used to guide the improvement of teaching and learning.

The professional development process has raised awareness of new strategies for teaching and learning but has not systemically impacted practice.

While initial steps have been taken to make effective use of information technology, there is not school wide access to the Internet nor does the school have an internal system of electronic mail.

The design of the current system of teacher evaluation does not support teachers to improve their practice.

Some students are supported by adults very well while others do not sense that they have an adult advocate.

Commendations

Safe, secure and orderly environment for students and staff

Strong culture of caring and support for students experiencing difficulty

Highly effective administrative leadership

Rich extra curricular activities

Strong partnerships with the Defense Department and with varied community agencies and organizations.

Recommendations for Improvement

Include all families as partners in student education.

Focus professional development on student learning needs.

Create the capacity of the school to communicate electronically both internally and externally.

Embed professional development in the school day by maximizing the flexibility of the schedule to give teachers time to observe and discuss each other's practice and to raise questions about teaching and learning on an ongoing basis.

Develop student-centered, measurable goals for the school improvement plan.

Commit to developing a school wide system that provides an adult advocate for every student.

Connect discussion and design of curriculum to improving actual student learning.

Revise the current system of teacher evaluation so that it supports teachers to improve their professional practice and improve student learning.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Commendations

High level of student respect for peers, adults and the physical environment

Teacher leadership and responsibility for the quality of the school's instruction

Safe, secure and orderly environment for students and staff

Highly effective administrative leadership

Rich extra curricular activities

Most Important Recommendations

Establish priorities and limit the focus to a few reform initiatives that are targeted at improving teaching and learning.

Create real world connections to what students are learning and encourage them to become responsible for their own learning.

Create learning experiences that allow students to raise questions and build on their own interests; vary the instructional strategies to address diverse learning styles.

Return student work with substantial comments on what is good and what can be improved; collect that work over time.

Include all families as partners in student education.

Focus professional development on student learning needs and develop student-centered, measurable goals for the school improvement plan.

Final Advice to the School

Gaudet Middle School offers a strong academic program and a positive learning environment. The

faculty is committed and caring. There is a strong sense of community here. You have many of the pieces in place to make Gaudet Middle School a great place to learn and to teach. Use this report to make a difference in the lives of the children you teach. Address the test scores head on, look to continuing to work with small communities of learners and try to make those communities even smaller. Focus your efforts on one or two reform initiatives that will assist you as you work with the state standards. Select professional development opportunities that will assist you to deal with the test scores and the standards. You have used other resources in the past -- use this now to purposefully and thoughtfully leap into the future.

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL'S SELF-STUDY TEAM

Carolyn Booth
Kim D'Arpino
Richard Kelly
Carol Lopes
Liz McCarthy
N. Peveler
Stephen Ponte
Suzette Wordell
Judy Brennan, Chair

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Sally Caruso, Teacher, Kickemuit Middle School, Bristol-Warren

Marilyn Crocker, Evaluator of the Goals 2000 grant which funded the SALT Middle Grades Pilot

Ernest Frias, Principal, Deering Middle School, West Warwick

Brian Lemieux, Teacher, UCAP, Providence

Grace McEntee, Teacher Emeritus, Warwick School Dept.

Denise Missry Milburn, Teacher, Asa Messer School, Providence

Rick Richards, RIDE, Office of the Commissioner

Susan Rotblat-Walker, Convener

Thomas Wilson, Coach

MaryKay W. Schnare, Librarian, Nathan Bishop Middle School, Providence, Chair