

RESERVOIR AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Providence, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

October 1998

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1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

A Profile of the School

Reservoir Avenue School is a small neighborhood school, located in Providence, Rhode Island with a population of 322 children. It has a culturally diverse population: 22% white; 27% black, 31% Hispanic and 20% Asian. The students are served by a total of 44 faculty, staff and ancillary staff.

The school houses kindergarten to Grade 5 in a small, well-maintained brick building built in 1924 with a recent addition of five rooms including a room that serves as a cafeteria, meeting room and gym. A small, well-equipped playground is maintained with a safe surface for children. The school is organized with two classes at each grade level and one self-contained special needs class.

Beginning in the 1998 school year, the school instituted an all day kindergarten and a beginning ESL track in kindergarten and first grade. As part of Providence's policy of defining elementary schools as grades 1-5, the sixth grade was moved to another school.

The School is in the Southern Zone of the Providence Public School system which is under the jurisdiction of the Providence School Committee.

The Nature of this Report

The purpose of the visit to Reservoir Avenue School from October 20th to October 23rd, 1998 was to draw conclusions about the School in the three focus areas of SALT: Student Learning, Progress and Achievement; Teaching and Learning, and 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. Two team members are teachers on leave and serving as staff members of the Rhode Island Department of Education.

Reservoir Avenue School's Improvement Plan (prepared in the summer of 1998 as part of the school's work as a pilot school), served as the Visiting Team's first touchstone in coming to an understanding of the 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 playground and in the hallways. The specific information generated by a Team visit is about how the students and staff, parents and administrators go about their day. Thus, this visit allowed professional colleagues and stakeholders to build informed judgments about the teaching and learning that actually takes place at Reservoir Avenue Elementary School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 84 hours of classroom observation. Every classroom teacher was observed more than once.
- many informal observations in and around the school
- following eight students for a full day
- observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day
- observing a meeting of the School Improvement Team
- meetings with the SALT Pilot Committee
- meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators
- Reservoir Avenue School's Improvement Plan
- District and school policies, Providence School District test data, Information Works! Data book;

SALT Survey Report, union contracts

- a large selection of student work collected 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 21 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 and 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 statewide 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 the 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. The Providence School Department, the citizens of Providence and the Rhode Island Department of Education will share that responsibility. The SALT Visit and this report are part of a pilot process for SALT. Reservoir Avenue Elementary School has served since January 1998 as a SALT pilot school and the school, its School Improvement Team and the Providence School Department 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, Team conclusions, commendations and recommendations are presented for each of the SALT focus areas. The report continues with the Team's most important commendations and recommendations and concludes with the Team's final advice to the school.

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

Reservoir Avenue School is a culturally diverse community where children are educated in a safe and traditional setting.

Teachers recognize that test results indicate a need to improve teaching and learning. Their commitment to change and improvement is demonstrated by their initiating self-study, making some changes in classroom instruction and stepping forward as the first elementary school in the state to host a SALT Visit.

The school possesses many of the tools necessary for effective teaching and learning. Enabling all teachers to use these tools well is the biggest challenge facing this school.

3. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING, PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Sources of Evidence

- 1998 *Information Works!* (1997 scores)
- 1998 State Assessment results
- Examination of student work
- School and classroom observations
- Meeting with SALT Pilot Committee,
- Meeting with School Improvement Team (SIT)
- Reservoir Avenue School Improvement Plan (July 1998)

Conclusions

Reservoir Avenue students did not meet standards by a wide gap on the baseline 1998 New Standards English/Language Arts and Math Reference Exams, and the Rhode Island Writing and Health assessments. (1998 State Assessment results)

When the school is compared to the district on state performance assessments, test scores in math and health show some improvement from 1997 to 1998. (1998 *Information Works!* and 1998 State Assessment results)

The high percentage of students in the nearly achieved category of the 1998 test scores indicate that with focused teaching the objectives as set out in the 1998 School Improvement Plan for improving 4th grade test scores are realistic and achievable. (1998 State Assessment Results, 1998 School Improvement Plan)

Equity data is unavailable from the 1997 test results. (1998 Information Works!)

Students represent a rich diversity of cultures and are friendly, considerate, polite and respectful of all members of the school community. (Information Works! Demographic data, school and classroom observations)

Teacher assessment of student learning is inconsistent and limited in scope. (Classroom observations and examination of student work)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Reservoir Avenue School for:

Efforts to build the School Improvement Plan using gap analysis

Commitment to improving student performance

Students' respect and support for each other

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Reservoir Avenue School:

Attend to the 1998 equity data in order to identify gaps and interpret their meaning especially in regards to baseline information for the ESL population.

Employ a variety of performance based assessments.

4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- Classroom observations
- Examination of student work
- Conversations with teachers, specialists, students and staff
- Parent meeting
- Student meeting
- SALT Pilot Committee Meeting
- School Improvement Team Meeting
- SALT Survey Results
- 1998 School Improvement Plan
- Following students

Conclusions

Faculty devotes personal time and energy towards identifying professional development and curriculum needs. (School Improvement Plan, SALT Pilot Committee meeting, School Improvement Team meeting, and conversations with administrators, teachers, parents and students)

In classroom practice, a significant lack of standards based instruction and assessment is evident. (OATS Framework, classroom observations, examination of student work, following students)

In the academic environment, ESL and Special Education inclusion practices do not promote rich learning experiences. (teacher conversations, classroom observations, following a student)

School and classroom practices engender sameness. (examination of student work, classroom observations, following a student, bulletin boards)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Reservoir Avenue School for:

Efforts to establish the writing process across the curriculum

The faculty's commitment to school improvement

Utilization of shared planning time for collaboration

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Reservoir Avenue School:

Participate with Providence in OATS/NCEE Standards Based Instruction--Course I.

Identify and utilize faculty models of effective teaching

Participate in professional development to implement inclusive practices and to use support personnel more effectively.

5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Sources of Evidence

- School and classroom observations
- Meeting with district administrators
- Meetings and conversations with administrators, school staff and faculty
- Meeting with parents
- Following students
- School and District policy documents, union contracts
- School Improvement Team Meeting
- SALT Pilot Committee Meeting

Conclusions

The faculty and staff provide a safe, secure, clean and pleasant environment for students. (School observations, conversations with parents, following students)

Having forged positive relationships between administration and staff, the school community is poised to tackle the ongoing challenges of school improvement. (School and classroom observations, meeting with District administrators, meetings and conversations with administration, staff and faculty, 1998 *Information Works!*)

Present use of limited space infringes on student privacy and hinders program effectiveness. (School observation, conversations with administration and teachers, following students)

The rich cultural diversity of the community provides both challenges and opportunities to engage parents in support of their children's learning. (School observations, meetings with students and parents)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Reservoir Avenue School for:

Effective school leadership

Excellent rapport between and among students, teachers, administrators, staff and parents

Committed involvement of parents and community representatives on School Improvement Team

Discipline that supports the safe and secure environment (1998 *Information Works!* data on student suspensions is wrong. Accurate records indicate no suspensions in any category.)

Positive reputation within the neighborhood and City of Providence

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Reservoir Avenue School:

Explore, celebrate and preserve its rich cultural diversity

Break language barriers and establish different ways to involve families in the life of the school

Solve space and privacy issues with common sense and ingenuity.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Providence Public Schools:

Provide Reservoir Avenue School with professional development in OATS/NCEE Standards Based Instruction Course I.

Provide Reservoir Avenue School with adequate support as the school implements its technology plan for improvement in teaching and learning.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Commendations

The faculty's commitment to school improvement

Students' respect and support for each other

Excellent rapport between and among students, teachers, administrators, staff and parents

Most Important Recommendations

Participate with Providence in OATS/NCEE Standards Based Instruction--Course I.

Explore, celebrate and preserve its rich cultural diversity

Participate in professional development to implement inclusive practices and to use support personnel more effectively.

Final Advice to the School

As we leave Reservoir Avenue school the image of melodious names and faces beaming with a sense of pride and joy warms our hearts.

We ask you to take the time to reflect on this report both individually and collectively. Determine how you can take small steps from within that will have an immediate impact on teaching and learning in the lives of your students. With time and effort, along with the cooperation of central administration, the challenges of standards based education, professional development and cultural diversity will be met.

In time Reservoir Avenue School will be the exemplary center of teaching and learning for the City of Providence.

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF RESERVOIR AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SALT PILOT COMMITTEE

Eileen Biancuzzo, Principal
Gail Cafferty, Teacher
Deborah Doyle, Teacher
Tammy Gambaradella, Teacher
Joanne Kearns, Teacher
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MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

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