

JOHN F. DEERING MIDDLE SCHOOL

West Warwick, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

November 1998

CONTENTS

- [1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS](#)
 - [A 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](#)
 - [Sources of Evidence](#)
 - [Conclusions](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team commends John F. Deering Middle School for:](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team recommends that John F. Deering Middle School:](#)
- [4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING](#)
 - [Sources of Evidence](#)
 - [Conclusions](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team commends John F. Deering Middle School](#)

for:

- [The SALT Visiting Team recommends that John F. Deering Middle School:](#)

- [5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING ORGANIZATION](#)

- [Sources of Evidence](#)
- [Conclusions](#)
- [The SALT Visiting Team commends John F. Deering Middle School for:](#)
- [The SALT Visiting Team recommends that John F. Deering Middle School:](#)

- [6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS](#)

- [Most Important Commendations](#)
- [Most Important Recommendations](#)
- [The School's Questions](#)
- [Final Advice to the School](#)

- [APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT](#)
- [MEMBERS OF JOHN F. DEERING MIDDLE SCHOOL SALT PILOT COMMITTEE](#)
- [MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM](#)

1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

A Profile of the School

John F. Deering Middle School is located in West Warwick, Rhode Island, a primarily residential town of 30,000 residents. Four elementary schools in the town feed into the middle school for grades six through eight. Students then move on to West Warwick High School. Although Deering has been a middle school since 1994, this is only the second year that all sixth, seventh, and eighth graders have begun day one in the same building. Prior to that time the sixth grade was housed in another building located approximately one-half mile from the main facility.

Deering Middle School's administration is made up of one principal, one assistant principal, and this

year one assistant principal intern. The 882 students and 74 faculty members at Deering are organized into teams with sixth grade teams of approximately 50 students and two teachers and seventh and eighth grade looped teams of approximately 100 students and four teachers. Some sixth grade students and all seventh and eighth grade students are homogeneously grouped for math.

Deering Middle School operates on a seven period schedule with a two-day rotation. Teams can reschedule their academic time to meet their needs. Teachers have a team planning period every other day with a guidance counselor meeting with each team at least once a week. This year the encore teachers have also been teamed and meet every other day with a counselor.

Deering became a Carnegie school in 1996 only two years after moving from a junior high structure to that of a middle school. The faculty has worked hard through their School Improvement Team to focus on Turning Points and has created a caring community.

The Nature of this Report

The purpose of the visit to John F. Deering Middle School from November 3rd – 6th, 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. One team member is a teacher on leave and serving as a staff member of the Rhode Island Department of Education. The Team was joined during the first three days by a reporter from Education Week interested in the Team's work as a new method of effective school accountability. The Deering SALT Self-Study (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 and in the hallways. The specific information generated by a Team visit is about how the students and staff 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 Deering Middle School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following sources:

- following eleven students selected by the school for each student's complete school day
- observations of a total of 167 classes. 143 of those were for the full class time. Nearly every classroom teacher was visited.
- observations of core teachers, encore teachers, and staff working in settings other than classrooms
- observations of meetings of teacher teams
- many informal observations in and around the school
- observations of a meeting of the School Improvement Team
- Team inquiry meetings with the SALT Self-Study Team
- Team inquiry meetings with students, parents, school, and district administrators
- a large selection of student work collected by the school
- Deering Middle School Five Year Plan for School Development
- Deering SALT Self-Study
- District and school policies, West Warwick School District test data, Information Works!, union contracts, school newsletters, reporting forms, yearbooks, and other school documents
- SALT Survey and Carnegie Self-study

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 27 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 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 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 West Warwick School Department, the citizens of West Warwick, 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. John F. Deering Middle School has served for the last two years as a SALT pilot school. The school, its School Improvement Team and the

West Warwick School Department are to be commended for the leadership they have shown by their willingness to take part voluntarily in this process.

Following Section II entitled 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

Deering Middle School is in the early stages of middle school development. The faculty has demonstrated unusual commitment to improving student achievement, teaching and learning, and strengthening ties to the community. There is unevenness in the quality of education offered to students and a lack of focus on priorities that will close gaps in student performance.

3. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

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)
- Meeting with students
- *Deering SALT Self-Study*
- *Deering Middle School Five Year Plan for School Development*

Conclusions

Deering Middle School recognizes there is a large gap in student achievement compared to the educational standards of the new state assessments. The largest gaps are in *Reading Analysis and Interpretation* and in *Mathematical Concepts and Problem Solving*. (1998 State Assessment Data; *Deering SALT Self-Study*)

1997 state assessment data shows an equity gap between boys and girls in writing. 1998 data for equity gaps is not available.(1997 State Assessment Data)

Deering has made a conscious effort to use state assessment data to inform the SALT *Self-Study* and *Deering Middle School Five Year Plan for School Development*. (SALT Self-Study, and *Deering Middle School Five Year Plan for School Development*)

Students too frequently take short answer and/or multiple choice tests which results in limited information about what students know and are capable of doing. (Examination of student work; classroom observations)

Deering students are ready for a more challenging academic experience. (Following a student; observation of classrooms)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Generic School for:

Students' respect for each other and for their teachers.

Students' eager participation in many classes.

Curriculum work and professional development in math.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Generic School:

Make student progress in reading and writing the central academic focus of the school and the Deering Middle School Five Year Plan for School Development.

Include alternative assessments to measure student progress toward meeting educational standards.

Examine 1998 state assessment and Salt Survey data for any equity gaps that need attention when data becomes available.

4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- Classroom observations

- Following students
- Examination of student work
- Conversations with teachers, specialists, students and staff
- Parent meeting
- Student meeting
- SALT Self-Study Committee Meeting
- School Improvement Team Meeting
- SALT Survey Results
- *Deering Middle School Five Year Plan for School Development*

Conclusions

The quality of teaching practices and expectations for student performance vary among teams and teachers, leading to inequality of learning opportunities for students. (Classroom observations, following students)

While some teachers are using high standards to drive instruction, a standards based curriculum would support all teachers in providing a more challenging academic experience for all students. (Classroom observations, conversations with teachers)

Many instructional strategies currently used by teachers do not require students to use higher order thinking skills. (Following students; classroom observations)

Deering has built an impressive infrastructure for the use of information technology; however, the current lack of instructional use must be addressed. (Technology grant, school observations, conversations with administration and staff)

While some reading and writing has been implemented across the curriculum, the present focus on reading and writing skill development is not sufficient to close the identified gaps in student performance. (classroom observation; examination of student work, 1998 state assessment scores)

Tracking is present on some teams creating inequities in learning, expectations and social competence. (Classroom observations; conversations with students and staff)

The SALT Visiting Team commends John F. Deering Middle School for:

Willingness and commitment to tackle change in order to improve teaching and learning.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that John F. Deering Middle School:

Develop and implement a deliberate, systematic school-wide plan to address the reading and writing gaps that exist.

Restructure team planning time so that curriculum, assessment, and interdisciplinary instruction are emphasized.

Accelerate the implementation of the technology plan to ensure its integration with instruction.

Focus professional development on reading, writing, and standards based instruction; and create ways to support teachers in using new ideas in their classrooms.

Take advantage of the expertise and knowledge of Deering teachers who can provide professional development to their peers.

Eliminate tracking within teams and set high academic standards for all.

5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- School and classroom observations
- Meetings with district administrators
- Conversations with union leaders
- Meetings and conversations with school 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
- *Deering Middle School Five Year Plan for School Development*
- *Deering SALT Self-Study*

Conclusions

The work of the School Improvement Team has been outstanding. (*Deering Middle School Five Year Plan for School Development*, School Improvement Team Meeting)

A respectful and supportive climate exists at Deering. (classroom and school observations, conversations with students and parents)

There is no clear, organized procedure at the administrative level for responding to violations of the code of conduct which leads to inconsistent administrative responses to discipline. (school code of conduct, school observation)

Some special education classrooms are segregated resulting in inequality of access to school programs. (classroom observation; conversations with teachers)

The current schedule hinders the school's ability to maximize student learning and frustrates teachers and staff. (Conversations with teachers, school and classroom observations)

The strong and active support of a small group of families needs to be expanded to engage all families in the academic lives of their children. (SALT Self-Study, parent interviews)

The collaboration among the school, the union, the district administration, and school committee supports school improvement. (School Improvement Team Meeting, *Deering Middle School Five Year Plan for School Development*, meetings with district administrators, conversations with union leaders)

The SALT Visiting Team commends John F. Deering Middle School for:

Team structure with common planning time every other day.

Accessibility of teachers and staff to students and parents.

The comprehensive after school program.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that John F. Deering Middle School:

Simplify the school's code of conduct and clarify personnel roles and procedures for its enforcement.

Locate special education classes near regular education classes and continue to take steps to integrate special education students onto teams.

Find a variety of ways to communicate with families about how they can become more actively involved in the academic lives of their children.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Commendations

Willingness and commitment to tackle change in order to improve teaching and learning.

Students' respect for each other and for their teachers.

The comprehensive after school program.

Most Important Recommendations

Make student progress in reading and writing the central academic focus of the school and the Deering Middle School Five Year Plan for School Development.

Develop and implement a deliberate, systematic school-wide plan to address the reading and writing gaps that exist.

Focus professional development on reading, writing, and standards based instruction and create ways to support teachers in using new ideas in their classrooms.

Eliminate tracking within teams and set high academic standards for all.

The School's Questions

Each school is asked to identify two questions it would like the Visiting Team to address. Deering Middle School asked the following questions:

How do we modify our teaching methods so that children of all abilities can learn the same lesson within the same classroom?

Standards should be the same for all students. The instructional strategies and the time to reach the standards will vary. Some of the Team's conclusions and recommendations address teaching methods.

What steps other than what is already being done can we take to improve curriculum and ensure that we are teaching to the standards?

This is a major focus of this report.

Final Advice to the School

Celebrate what you have accomplished in a brief time through your hard work and commitment. Recognize the positive school climate you have created and acknowledge that your students are ready for a greater academic challenge.

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF JOHN F. DEERING MIDDLE SCHOOL SALT PILOT COMMITTEE

Nancy Daley, Teacher, Chair
Pat Andrade, Teacher
Catherine Boutin, Teacher
Paul Bovenzi, Teacher
Tricia Colon, Teacher
Michele Daniels, Teacher
Jane Drechsler, Teacher
Lori Huntley, Teacher
Jill LePage, Teacher
Gina Poulos, Teacher
Caterina Rabaiotti, Teacher
Rosemary Wardle, Teacher
Marceline Zambuco, Teacher

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Sandra L. Olson, Teacher/Team Leader,
Ponaganset Middle School, Foster/Glocester
Chair of the Team

Terri Adelman, Chair School Committee
Barrington

Carol Belair, Teacher-SALT Fellow,

Little Compton on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education

Kate Carbone, Administrator,
Roger Williams Middle School, Providence

Diane Devine, School Improvement Specialist
Rhode Island Department of Education

Bonnie Harris, Teacher,
Joseph Jenks Junior High School, Pawtucket

Richard W. Kelly, Grade Leader
Gaudet Middle School, Middletown

Debourah Raleigh, Teacher
Kickemuit Middle School, Bristol/Warren

Mary Anne Roll, Parent
Lincoln

Liza Sporcic, Teacher
Thompson Middle School, Newport

Thomas A. Wilson, Coach to the Team,
Catalpa Ltd., Providence