

JOSEPH JENKS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Pawtucket, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

January 1999

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 Joseph Jenks Junior High School for:](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Joseph Jenks Junior High School:](#)

- [4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING](#)
 - [Sources of Evidence](#)
 - [Conclusions](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team commends Joseph Jenks Junior High](#)

School for:

- The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Joseph Jenks Junior High

School:

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

- Sources of Evidence
- Conclusions
- The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Joseph Jenks Junior High School:
- The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Pawtucket School District:

- 6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Most Important Commendations
- Most Important Recommendations
- Final Advice to the School

- APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT
- MEMBERS OF JENKS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL SELF-STUDY COMMITTEE
- MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

A Profile of the School

More than twenty years ago, Joseph Jenks Junior High School moved from downtown Pawtucket to a new site across from McCoy Stadium. In 1995, Jenks' proposal to the Carnegie Foundation was accepted. This acceptance as a Carnegie School made it one of a growing number of Rhode Island schools to embrace the Turning Points philosophy and begin the transition from a Junior high school to a middle school.

The Joseph Jenks Junior High School houses 671 students in grades 6, 7, and 8. Four hundred and twenty-seven students receive free lunches and eighty-six students receive reduced-price lunches. Though economically deprived, the community of Joseph Jenks is rich in cultural diversity with students

and staff representing more than 20 countries. Of the total student population, 215 are described as Limited English Proficient. Jenks houses the entire 6th, 7th and 8th grade LEP middle school population in Pawtucket. Fifty-three students are described as Special Education students. Jenks also houses all of the moderate and severe/profound middle school students in Pawtucket.

There are three LEP classes and three non-LEP classes in the 6th grade. The 7th grade contains 5 LEP classes and 8 non-LEP classes. The 8th grade contains 4 LEP classes and 8 non-LEP classes.

There are approximately 108 staff members. Only two of the six teams in the 7th and 8th grade are complete. Each team has two scheduled planning periods per week.

The twenty-three year old building is clean, orderly, and well maintained. It was built in the 1970's with large areas for open classrooms. The open areas have been partitioned into classrooms which house the ESL, 7th, and 8th grade classrooms.

Joseph Jenks Junior High School is under the jurisdiction of the Pawtucket School Department and the Pawtucket School Committee.

The Nature of this Report

School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) is Rhode Island's comprehensive school accountability system. SALT is based on using information to improve learning and teaching so that the learning of all students in the state dramatically improves. The SALT Visit and other major SALT components are designed to aid schools in developing and implementing effective School Improvement plans.

The purpose of the visit to Joseph Jenks Junior High School from January 12 to January 15, 1999 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. Five of the nine members of the Team are teachers in Rhode Island middle schools. One is a principal of a Rhode Island middle school. One is a parent of a middle school student. One is a teacher on leave serving this year as a staff member of the Rhode Island Department of Education. One is a staff

member of the Rhode Island Department of Education.

Joseph Jenks Junior High School's 1998-99 *Self-Study* 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, 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 Joseph Jenks Junior High School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from:

- analysis of the school's performance on state assessments of standards
- analysis of student work including a selection of student work collected by the school
- a total of 120 classes were observed, 105 for the full class period. Most classroom teachers were observed, many more than once
- many informal observations in and around the school
- following nine students for a full day
- observing the work of teachers and staff
- observing a meeting of the School Improvement Team
- meeting with the SALT Self Study Committee
- meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators
- conversations with teachers, staff, students, parents, school and district administrators
- team meetings
- *Joseph Jenks Junior High School's SALT Self Study*
- *Jenks Plan for Action*
- *Joseph Jenks Junior High School Five Year Plan for School Development (1995-96)*
- District and school policies, *Information Works!* Data book; SALT Survey Report, teacher evaluation plan

The full Team has built the conclusions, commendations and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussions. The Visiting Team met for a total of 26 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.

The Team by consensus agreed to each conclusion, each commendation and each recommendation in this report.

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 clouded by the daily life of the school. This new lens is one the school can use to 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 the Joseph Jenks Junior High School responds 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 Pawtucket School Department, the citizens of Pawtucket and the Rhode Island Department of Education will share that responsibility.

This SALT Visit and report are part of the pilot process for SALT. Joseph Jenks Junior High School has served for the last two years as a SALT pilot school. The school, its School Improvement Team and the Pawtucket 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

The administration, faculty, and staff at Jenks are giving, caring, and hard working. Jenks students are culturally and linguistically diverse, respectful and eager to be challenged in their learning.

Jenks is a well-maintained school building with open classrooms that was built for another time. Teachers struggle to work under difficult physical conditions that inhibit their abilities to use a full range of teaching strategies. Without walls, students are frequently distracted by noise, student traffic, and poor ventilation.

Teachers are isolated and handicapped by the lack of true teaming and integrated work. Teachers have not had intensive, on-going professional development in teaming, and differentiated and integrated instruction. Without these experiences, teachers in the school do not have the capacity to create small communities of learning that will encourage professional conversations, support interdisciplinary work and meet the needs of a diverse student population.

Jenks Junior High School has been a Carnegie School for the past four years. It is the judgment of this Visiting Team that in spite of the school's expressed commitment to the goals in the Jenks' *Five-Year Plan for School Development* (1995), little progress has been made. Because teachers and administrators have not taken full advantage of the opportunities provided by the Carnegie initiative, they are unprepared to implement their plan.

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 Self-Study Committee,
- Meeting with School Improvement Team (SIT)
- Meeting with students
- *Joseph Jenks Junior High School Self-Study and Plan for Action* (July 1998)

Conclusions

Students are respectful of one another and of adults and respond well to meaningful work. (Following a student, classroom and school observations, meeting with students)

Jenks Junior High students showed significant gaps to standards in reading and math on New Standards Reference Exams -and in writing on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment. (1998 *Information Works!* [1997 scores], 1998 State Assessment results)

A significant number of students in the last year moved out of the lowest category, "little evidence of achievement," up to the next category "below the standard" in math skills, concepts and problem solving. (1998 *Information Works!* [1997 scores], 1998 State Assessment results)

There is an equity gap in the percentage of students meeting Standards in math skills between white and other racial groups. There is also an equity gap in math skills and writing between general education students and special education and LEP students. (Reading data disaggregated by student populations was not available to do an equity gap analysis.) (1998 *Information Works!* [1997 scores])

The Self-Study team worked diligently to use test information to support its Self-Study and to develop its Plan of Action for improving teaching and learning. There are, however, some discrepancies in its

analysis of the test scores:

Infoworks! compares students with similar characteristics, not schools.

Jenks students fit the statewide pattern of doing well on the writing subtest of the New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, but not doing well on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment.

There are no gender equity gaps in Jenks reported scores. An equity gap is defined as a gap of 15% between scores for different student groups.

(1998. *Information Works!* [1997 scores], 1998 State Assessment results, *Joseph Jenks Junior High School Self-Study*)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Joseph Jenks Junior High School for:

Improvement that narrowed the gap in student math performance at the lowest level

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Joseph Jenks Junior High School:

Use test information to inform instruction and improve student performance school wide.

Build understanding among students, faculty and parents of the standards assessed in the classroom and on statewide tests.

4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

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

Conclusions

Overall, the quality of the teaching and learning does not challenge students and does not meet their needs. (Following students, classroom observation, examination of student work, conversations with students, meeting with students)

Teachers have low expectations of what students can do. (Following students, classroom observations, conversations with teachers and students, meeting with students)

The lack of a standards-based curriculum deprives the faculty of a common language to discuss goals and plan instruction and leads to an over reliance on textbooks and worksheets. (Self-Study, classroom observations, conversations with teachers, meetings with school and district administrators)

The lack of standards to inform instruction results in student work that is seldom revised, displayed or used to guide instruction. Student assessment is only understood as tests and does not guide the instructional process. This results in students being disconnected from the purposes and processes of their learning. (Examination of student work, classroom observations, conversations with teachers)

While tools for learning are used well in music and family and consumer science classes, the limited use of basic tools in core academic subjects weakens student interest and performance. (Following students, classroom observations, conversations with teachers)

The needs of students in self-contained special education classes are well met. However, general education classroom teachers are not familiar enough with students' IEPs to provide the needed accommodations. (Classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers)

ESL teachers use their knowledge of individual students to provide appropriate grouping for language instruction. (Classroom observations, conversations with teachers, team meetings)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Joseph Jenks Junior High School for:

Standards-based, student-centered, collaboratively taught reading program

Opportunities for community experiences for special education students

A music program which integrates technology and promotes student creativity

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Joseph Jenks Junior High School:

Implement standards-based curriculum to promote high expectations and to plan instruction that meets student needs.

Use available resources to provide in-depth and focused professional development to insure that every faculty member is able to implement standards-based curriculum.

Recognize and celebrate effective teaching practice and student work that meets and exceeds standards to encourage the development of a community of learners.

Examine student work in ways that will inform a student and the teacher about that student's learning.

Employ effective and correct use of assessment tools such as rubrics and portfolios.

Use available technology, including calculators and manipulatives, to improve student learning.

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
- School Improvement Team Meeting
- Self-Study Committee Meeting
- Teacher evaluation form
- *Joseph Jenks Junior High School Five Year Plan for School Development (1995-96)*

Conclusions

The current organization of the school (teaming, grouping practices and scheduling) does not support

effective teaching and learning. (Classroom and school observations, meeting with school administration, conversations with teachers)

The school administrator's focus on the management of daily operations without delegating educational leadership to the School Improvement Team (SIT) or the faculty results in an inability to move the school forward toward meeting its educational goals. (School observations, self-study, conversations with teachers, meeting with school administrator)

The open-space pods for the 7th grade, 8th grade and ESL teams are noisy, cramped, stuffy and not conducive to good learning. (Classroom observations, conversations with teachers)

While the small percentage of parents who responded to the SALT survey indicated satisfaction, there is neither effective communication with families nor programs to involve them in the Jenks school community. (SALT Survey, school observations, meeting with parents)

Professional development is not well implemented in the school. As a result school wide professional development has been of little benefit to the school. (Self-Study, Five-year plan, conversations with teachers, classroom observations)

With some exceptions, the school community as a whole is not effectively informed about the resources available to help close gaps and improve teaching and learning. The SIT works in isolation, decreasing the effectiveness of school wide planning. (School observations, SIT meeting, conversations with teachers, meeting with school administrator)

Support services, like summer school and parenting courses, to move at-risk students to high standards are not available. (Self-Study, school observations, meeting with district administrators, conversations with staff, student meeting)

Neither the current teacher evaluation system nor the teacher mentoring program effectively support teachers. (School evaluation forms, conversations with teachers, meeting with school administrator)

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Joseph Jenks Junior High School:

Reorganize school structure to create more opportunities for complete teams, to create heterogeneous groupings and to allow teachers to flexibly schedule their students within teams.

Create and compensate a cadre of recognized leaders (house, grade or team leaders, curriculum coordinators) to provide educational leadership and serve as representatives to the school improvement team.

Not use the limitations of classroom space as an excuse for failing to implement fun teams and interdisciplinary teaching.

Strengthen communication and offer opportunities and incentives for greater family involvement in the school community.

Provide opportunities for teachers and parents to share in decisions that will impact education.

Develop a long-term plan for in-depth professional development to include the following identified needs: a course in middle school curriculum, teaming, differentiated and integrated curriculum, New Standards, and assessment.

Use this report, the school's self-study, SALT survey results, and assessment data as the needs assessment to build a school improvement plan and empower SIT to develop and implement this plan.

Develop after-school, summer school, and other ramping up programs to move all students to high standards and to reduce retention and social promotions.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Pawtucket School District:

Redesign its mentoring program to provide new teachers with one to one mentoring by Jenks teachers.

Spend time in the school to understand the seriousness of the school's space problems.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Commendations

Standards-based, student - centered, collaboratively taught reading program

Opportunities for community experiences for special education students

Most Important Recommendations

Implement standards-based curriculum to promote high expectations and to plan instruction that meets student needs.

Reorganize school structure to create more opportunities for complete teams, to create heterogeneous

groupings and allow teachers to schedule their students flexibly within teams.

Create and compensate a cadre of recognized leaders (house, grade or team leaders, curriculum coordinators) to provide educational leadership and serve as representatives to the school improvement team.

Develop a focused plan for in-depth professional development. Identified needs include: a course in middle school curriculum, teaming, differentiated and integrated curriculum, New Standards, and assessment.

Provide opportunities for teachers and parents to share in decisions that will impact education.

Develop after-school, summer school, and other ramping up programs to get all students to high standards and to reduce retention and social promotions.

Final Advice to the School

In spite of Joseph Jenks Junior High School's expressed commitment to the goals established in its *Five-Year Plan for School Development (1995)*, the school is not close to realizing those goals. No one person or group of people has led the school toward reaching its stated goal of becoming a middle school. All schools have obstacles. The Pawtucket School Department, the Pawtucket School Committee, and members of the Joseph Jenks Junior High School community need to stop using obstacles as excuses and start implementing changes that will improve the performance of every student in the school.

Teachers need to talk to each other. Help each other make the best of the difficult conditions. Think creatively to get beyond the challenges presented by the pod areas. Integrate curriculum. Take the lead in making changes. Use this report, the school's self-study, survey results, and assessment data to build a school improvement plan and then give the School Improvement Team the power to develop and implement that plan.

The students at Joseph Jenks Junior High School are eager to learn. Challenge these students to learn as much as they can and help them succeed. Make them aware of, and hold them to, high standards and do not be content with mediocrity. Use the support and resources available to you from the Carnegie Network and the State Department of Education to improve the quality of teaching and learning taking place in your school. Use this report to make a difference in the lives of the children you teach.

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF JENKS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL SELF-STUDY COMMITTEE

Patricia S. Anderson, Teacher

Gerardine Cannon, Teacher

Joseph Cunha, Principal

Bonnie Harris, Teacher

William Jeonotte, Teacher, Chair

Michael O'Donnell, Teacher

Cynthia Onken, Teacher

Melissa Robert, Teacher

Kathleen Suriani, Teacher

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Anna Saccoccio, Grade 8 Science Teacher,
Nathanael Greene Middle School, Providence
Chair of the Team

Carol Belair, Grade 4 Teacher,
Wilbur and McMahon School, Little Compton
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as SALT Fellow)

Olga Henao, Parent and Teacher Assistant
Calcutt School, Central Falls

Elizabeth McCarthy, Grade 5 Teacher,
Gaudet Middle School, Middletown

Michael Paul, ESL Teacher,
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Susan Rotblat-Walker, Office of School Improvement and Accountability
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Marty Sprague, Grade 6-8 Dance Teacher
Roger Williams Middle School, Providence

Donna Vigneau, Principal,
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Barbara Walton-Faria, Grade 8 Science Teacher,
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