

TIOGUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Coventry, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

March 1999

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1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

A Profile of the School

Tiogoue School, surrounded by wooded areas and bordering on Tiogoue Lake, is a single story handicapped accessible building opened in 1971. Its affiliation with Foundation for Excellent Schools allows Tiogoue School to network with other schools in Rhode Island and throughout the country.

The population of 513 students is predominately white. Sixteen percent of the students receive free or reduced lunch. The Reading Recovery teacher, the remedial reading teacher, and/or the literacy specialist support 21 percent of the students, and 16 percent are identified as Special Education students.

Ability grouping scaffolds the language arts and mathematics curriculum in the middle grades. A new integrated language arts program, Harcourt Brace, has been adopted by the Coventry School Department and implemented at Tiogoue.

Many activities are offered to the children -- among them a school bank, a school store, a newspaper

club, a homework club, and an after school chorus.

Special activities such as Art and Music Night, Girls' Choice Dance, Open House, and Fun Fair encourage family involvement. Parents are integral to the Principal's Advisory Committee and they are represented on the Steering 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 their ongoing development and implementation of effective School Improvement Plans.

The purpose of the Visit to Tiogue School from March 23 to March 26, 1999 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 Community

The design of the SALT Visit ensures 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 is built upon the observations and conclusions of the Visiting Team. The Visiting Team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners. Their affiliations are included in Appendix A.

Tiogue School's Self-Study Report 1999 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 playgrounds, 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 Tiogue Elementary School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 116 hours of classroom observation. Every classroom was visited at least once. Many teachers were observed more than once
- many informal observations in and around the school
- following 8 students for a full day
- observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day
- meetings with students, parents, principal and head teacher, and the Superintendent of Schools
- Tiogue School's Self-Study Report
- District and school policies
- Coventry School District test data
- *1998 Information Works!*
- analysis of student work including a selection of work collected by the school
- analysis of the school's performance on state assessments of standards
- Professional Development Center Newsletter
- Article 31 Professional Development Plan
- Tiogue Self-Study
- Tiogue School Improvement Plan
- Teacher Evaluation Plan
- Meeting with Steering Committee

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 24 hours in six separate meetings spanning the four days of the visit. This time is exclusive of the time spent in classrooms, with teachers and in meetings with students, parents, and school and district administrators. 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 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 Tiogue 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 School Department, the citizens of Coventry, and the Rhode Island Department of Education will share that responsibility.

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 environment of Tiogoue Elementary School is warm, inviting, colorful, and creative. There is artwork on every wall and throughout most classrooms. Professional and support personnel share a sense of pride in their school and a concern and caring for each other and for the children and their families.

The school has a feeling of something growing, changing, and bursting. It seems overflowing with ideas. There is the sense of being on an adventure full of excitement with some confusion about the destination. Although growing pains are evident, most teachers have accepted the challenge of this journey to accountability and standards based instruction. Intermediate teachers seem further along on this journey than the primary teachers.

As the District provides curriculum leadership and professional development, teachers struggle to meet the needs of their children mixing traditional methods and new materials in language arts and traditional materials and new methods in mathematics. This mix of practice and material is sometimes successful for students, sometimes not, but no one gives up.

The cohesiveness of this strong school community provides a foundation for the development of an environment where all can grow socially, physically, emotionally, and academically.

3. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING, PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Sources of Evidence

- *1998 Information Works!* (1997 scores)

- 1998 State Assessment results
- Examination of student work
- Classroom and school observations

Conclusions

Tiogue fourth graders performed significantly above similar students on math, writing, and health assessments in 1997 state testing. They also scored above district and state results on New Standards Reference Exams in 1998. (1998 Information Works!, 1998 State Assessment results)

On assessment of performance to standards, there are wide gaps in writing, health, and problem solving. (1998 Information Works, 1998 State Assessment data)

While 83% of Tiogue's fourth graders achieved the standard in mathematical skills, it is disappointing that 83% failed to achieve the standard in Problem Solving. (1998 State Assessment data)

On the 1997 State assessments there is a significant gap between the number of girls and boys who achieved the standard in writing and health. (1998 Information Works!)

Many Tiogue teachers and students use rubrics effectively to assess student writing. However, performance based assessments do not appear to be used consistently across all grades levels in all subjects. (Examination of student work, classroom observation)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Tiogue School for:

Students' understanding of writing rubrics

Teachers' use of writing rubrics

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Tiogue School:

Provide problem-solving activities that engage children in active learning

Integrate writing to explain reasoning and thinking across the curriculum

Develop and use rubrics and performance assessments in all subject areas and across all grade levels

Examine 1998 state assessment data for gender equity gaps and develop strategies to address inequities

4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- Classroom observations
- Examination of student work
- Conversations with teachers, specialists, students and staff
- Student meeting
- Following students
- Parent meeting
- Meeting with Steering Committee
- Meeting with Special Education teachers
- Examination of student work

Conclusions

Teachers collaborate and support each other in the struggle to provide effective standards based instruction.(Conversations with teachers, meeting with Steering Committee, meeting with Special Education teachers)

The focus on writing, the use of rubrics to assess it, and the display of varied writing samples throughout the building demonstrate a real commitment to quality work.(Examination of student work, classroom observations, conversations with teachers)

The school provides a supportive, stimulating, and enriching environment for most special needs students.(Classroom observations, meeting with Special Education teachers)

The Tiogoue School community uses the Fine Arts to enhance the children's instruction and enrich their experience.(Classroom observations, parent meeting)

Classroom instruction is mainly teacher directed, lacking a variety of teaching strategies that effectively accommodate different learning styles. (Classroom observations, student meeting)

The focus of the primary level (K-2) is on paper and pencil tasks, auditory learning, whole class instruction, and teacher directed activities instead of assessing and addressing students' needs. (Following a student, classroom observations)

The focus in many primary math classes on computation has resulted in high scores on math skills on

state testing. Limited use of manipulatives, calculators, technology, or a problem solving approach contributes to below standard performance in math problem solving on state assessments. (Classroom observations, parent meeting, following a student)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Tiogoue School for:

Teacher collaboration

Work towards standards based instruction

Writing program

Music program and its connections to standards and other subjects

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Tiogoue School:

Continue your work towards standards based instruction in all areas

Engage children actively in their own learning and encourage critical thinking throughout all content areas

Use varied teaching strategies and materials to address the different learning styles of students

Implement your technology plan to address the lack of technology in the curriculum

Provide opportunities and models for teachers to improve math problem solving

Employ best practice and current research-based methods to improve instruction in the primary grades

Develop content rich learning centers, classroom libraries, and time for children to read independently

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Coventry School District:

Adopt a new math curriculum and provide appropriate training and support to teachers

5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL AS A TEACHING AND

LEARNING COMMUNITY

Sources of Evidence

- School and classroom observations
- Meetings and conversations with administrators, school staff and faculty
- Meeting with parents
- Following students
- Professional Development Center Newsletter
- Article 31 Professional Development Plan
- Tiogue Self-Study
- Tiogue School Improvement Plan
- Teacher Evaluation Plan
- Meeting with Steering Committee

Conclusions

The Tiogue faculty and staff take ownership and responsibility for providing a safe, respectful, and congenial environment that allows teachers to focus on instruction (School observation, conversations with teachers)

The Tiogue Steering Committee has used SALT data to effectively inform their School Improvement Plan to close gaps in performance. (Tiogue Self-Study, Tiogue School Improvement Plan)

The Coventry School District and the Tiogue School Professional Development Plan provide multiple opportunities for teachers to participate in professional development to close gaps in student performance. (Tiogue School Article 31 Professional Development Plan, Professional Development Center Newsletter, conversation with district administrators)

As part of the evaluation process, teachers are developing professional portfolios that encourage the process of reflection on teaching, student learning, and outcomes. (Conversations with teachers, Teacher Evaluation Plan)

Tiogue School involves parents in many and varied school activities, educates them on standards based instruction, and informs them of school activities and volunteer opportunities resulting in close family connections to the school. (Parent meeting, Tiogue Self-Study, meeting with Steering Committee)

Children are very well behaved and polite, rules and consequences are posted in every room, and there is a general atmosphere of respect for children and adults. However, a few teachers were noted to dispense

discipline that appeared arbitrary, insensitive, and did not follow school procedure. (Classroom observations, following a student)

Many educational and resource programs suffer from the lack of appropriate space and storage resulting in a distracting learning environment. (Classroom observation, conversations with teachers)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Tiogue School for:

Courtesy of children, faculty, and staff

Parent involvement and support of the school and its activities

Article 31 Professional Development Plan 1998-99

Quality of lunch and recess supervision

Professionalism of support and custodial staff

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Tiogue School:

Assure that all children are disciplined in a fair and respectful manner

Encourage professional development that promotes inclusion, accommodation, diversity and gender equity

Address space and storage issues

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Coventry School District:

Address critical space needs at Tiogue School

Support Tiogue School in its efforts to implement its technology plan

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Commendations

Teacher collaboration

Work towards standards based instruction

Courtesy of children, faculty, and staff

Parent involvement and support of the school and its activities

Most Important Recommendations

Engage children actively in their own learning and encourage critical thinking throughout all content areas

Employ best practice and current research based methods to improve instruction in the primary grades

Develop content rich learning centers, classroom libraries, and time for children to read independently

Implement your technology plan to address the lack of technology in your curriculum

Final Advice to the School

The SALT Visiting Team has completed its time at Tiogoue School. You must continue on your journey to proficiency. Your work has been difficult but rewarding. We applaud your efforts and hope this report will serve as a map to you on your journey.

In the struggle to develop a standards based curriculum do not lose sight of your real purpose – the education and development of the children. Although the walls of Tiogoue burst with the energy of the children, we rarely heard the buzz of excitement and discovery. Encourage more movement and student to student conversations in your classrooms. Connect real life projects to the day to day life of the classroom.

Take some time to step back and enjoy the wonder of watching the children grow. Relax a bit! Celebrate more often your little accomplishments! Blend the traditional with the new in creative ways. Increase opportunities for working between and among grades and levels. Continue to share your resources and ideas. The trip is a long one with many bumps along the way.

As the Visiting Teams leaves Tiogoue to return to our own classrooms, we hope that in some way we too

have left our handprints on the walls of Tiogue.

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF TIOGUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STEERING COMMITTEE

Suzanne Barlett, Kindergarten Teacher
Barbara Werchadlo, Grade One Teacher
Patricia Antonellis, Grade Two Teacher
Jeanna Sinotte, Grade Three Teacher
Ann Benzo, Grade Three Teacher
Sharon Curley, Grade Four Teacher
Sandy Berk, Grade Five Teacher
Jeannine Hicks, Grade Five Teacher/SALT Liaison
Susan Flynn, Grade Five Teacher/SALT Liaison
Joanne McDermott, Grade Six Teacher
Dawn Castaldi, Resource Teacher
Paula Mercurio, Resource Teacher
Linda Stump, Librarian
Kathy Fielder, Parent
Bruce Thompson, Parent

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Carol Belair, Teacher, Grade 4
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as SALT Fellow)
Chair of the Team

Dorie Freeman, Multi-Age K-1 Teacher
Wilbur and McMahon School, Little Compton

Jackie Harrington, Specialist IV, Integrated Social Services
Rhode Island Department of Education

Kathleen Kuiper, Parent
North Kingstown

Pauline Lisi, Grade 3 Teacher
Metcalf School, Exeter

Judith Lundsten, Grade 3 Teacher
J.W.Horton School, Cranston

Sylvia A. Natale, Principal
Citizens Memorial Elementary School, Woonsocket

Donna Olson, Reading Teacher
Old County Road School, Smithfield

Susanna Parsons, Literacy
William D'Abate Memorial Elementary School, Providence

Tom Wilson, Coach to the Team
Principal, Catalpa Ltd.