

SILVER SPRING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

East Providence, 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

Silver Spring School is located on Silver Spring Avenue in the City of East Providence under the jurisdiction of the East Providence School Department and The East Providence School Committee. The school opened its doors on November 4, 1968. Currently it serves 326 students in grades K-6. There is 29 staff members led by a principal who has been leading the school for three years. The

configuration of the school has not changed much since its opening. There are twelve regular classrooms, one Kindergarten, a special education room, a resource/speech room, a computer/reading/arts room and a cafeteria. Off the lobby are the central office, nurse's station, a 1500 square-foot library, and an ESL room. Due to the two levels of the school 504 compliance is limited especially for younger students who have classrooms in the lower level.

A playground providing a blend of hard top areas as well as grass-covered areas accesses the front of the school. Students have the benefits of basketball courts, playground equipment, baseball field and a kickball area.

Most of the students attending Silver Spring School are from the surrounding neighborhood. 5% are Asian, 18% are Black, 5% are Hispanic and 72% are white. 30% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch, 3% are special needs children, and 5% receive resource services. 32 students qualify for ESL (9%). The ESL program works as pull out as well as inclusion. One full time ESL teacher works with grades 2-6 and one part time teacher works with grade 1 students. One special education self-contained class services 10 students in grades 4-6. The resource teacher serves 17 students at Silver Spring and is split between two schools.

Recent initiatives include adoption of the Chicago Math Program, involvement in the KITES program and a movement towards standards-based education.

There are many community programs and a very involved Parent Teacher Club at the school. The parent Resource Room was started several years ago. Parents donate their time to provide educational displays for the teachers. Other programs include a basketball program, street hockey program, game day, cheerleading, and computer club. The school also participates in RIF. This year the school is hosting before and after school daycare supplied by the Newman YMCA.

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 Silver Spring 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, and
- The School as a Teaching and Learning Community.

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.

Silver Spring School's Improvement Plan (prepared in February 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 playground 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 Silver Spring Elementary School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 86 hours of classroom observation. Every classroom teacher was observed at least once and many more than once
- many informal observations in and around the school
- following 7 students for a full day
- observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day
- meeting with the School Improvement Council
- meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators
- Silver Spring School's Improvement Plan
- District and school policies, budget, East Providence School District test data, *Information Works!* Data book; SALT Survey Report
- analysis of student work including a selection of work collected by the school
- analysis of the school's performance on state assessments of standards

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 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.

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 Silver Spring 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 East Providence School Department, the citizens of East Providence 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.

It is important to read and consider this report as a whole. Recommendations and commendations should be considered in context of the conclusions, since that is the way they are written.

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

Silver Spring School provides a safe, nurturing environment where the children sparkle with enthusiasm and pride. Its faculty and staff are caring, dedicated and committed professionals. It has a respectful atmosphere where children and adults are sharing the excitement and interaction of learning. Children are proud of their school, their teachers and themselves. They are motivated to achieve.

Teachers are sincere in their quest to provide the best possible education for their students. Teaching is currently going through transition and there is a sense of commitment among the faculty to expand their knowledge. Attempts are being made to better their teaching methods by the use of rubrics, Chicago Math, and KITES. Funding and administrative concerns have not allowed for proper math training, materials and Standards-Based education development, limiting the opportunity for teachers to truly grow.

The Town Meeting with the students, breakfast with the faculty, classroom visits and conversations with parents demonstrated a warm and welcoming school community.

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
- Following students
- Meeting with School Improvement Council
- Silver Spring School Improvement Plan (February, 1999)
- Metropolitan Achievement Tests, 7th Edition (1998, 1999)
- SALT Survey Results

Conclusions

A 29% increase in the Mat 7 scores in Mathematics from 1997 to 1998 in the areas of Concepts and Problem Solving for grade 4 indicate that progress has been made. However the results of the Mathematics Reference Examination reveal a tremendous gap between student achievement and the standards. (MAT 7 results 97 and 98, State Assessment Results 98)

The emphasis in classrooms is largely skill-based and little attention is paid to student performance as a means of guiding instruction. The current transition in curriculum (Rubrics, Chicago Math, KITES) and the use of student performance assessment is a good shift to improve scores in higher order thinking. (SALT survey 98-99, classroom observation)

The analysis of equity gaps in Infoworks 98 is not based on enough data to draw conclusions for Silver Spring School, however, the school should pay close attention to possible gaps in all future test results. (Infoworks 98)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Silver Spring Elementary School for:

Enthusiasm and pride of students for learning.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Silver Spring Elementary School:

Continue to work toward closing the gap between student achievement and the standards on the Mathematics Reference Exam

Use student work and classroom performance as a means to guide instruction in addition to program guides

When looking at the 1999 Grade 3 Writing Assessment, consider what additional strategies would be most effective to improve scores

Provide students with opportunities to utilize a variety of writing forms.

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
- Meeting with school administrator
- School Improvement Team Meeting
- SALT Survey Results
- 1998 School Improvement Plan
- Following students

Conclusions

A lack of teacher training in the methods and materials used in Standards-Based education has caused apprehension about and resistance to change in the delivery of instruction (meeting with school administrator, teacher conversations)

The inability of the teachers to collaborate between grades and curricula has created a lack of integration across curricula areas limiting the ability of students to apply skills learned to other disciplines. (classroom observations, teacher conversations)

Students are learning what they are being taught. Classroom instruction is more teacher-directed than student-driven; therefore, student tasks are geared toward a specific outcome rather than allowing students the opportunities for exploration and discovery. (following students, classroom observations)

Writing topics in classrooms tended to be teacher-prompted limiting practice of different writing forms (i.e., persuasive, informational/expository, narrative). (classroom observation, examination of student work)

The impressive use of rubrics was widespread across curricula and grades initiating the involvement of students in self-assessment. (classroom observation, following students)

There were pervasive demands from parents, teachers, and students for additional arts education to contribute to better teaching and learning. (parent, student and teacher conversations)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Silver Spring Elementary School for:

Teacher initiatives to implement the Chicago Math Program despite a lack of training and materials.

Implementation of rubrics in classrooms across the curricula.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Silver Spring Elementary School:

Provide time for teachers to collaborate across grades, integrate curricula and assess student work and performance.

Extend time allotted for art and music to better meet the children's needs.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that East Providence School Department:

Provide training in standards-based education for all staff.

Extend time allotted for art and music to better meet the children's needs.

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, budget

Conclusions

The extremely low amount of funds available to Silver Spring School for necessary supplies takes unfair advantage of teachers' generosity and makes it difficult for the full implementation of the curriculum. (conversation with district administrator, school observation, teacher conversations)

The daily schedule for instruction is not conducive to a flow of learning due to the fluctuating times of recess and numerous lunch periods (following students, classroom observations)

A significant amount of available Article 31 funds have not been utilized to keep staff current with newly purchased programs which would enhance their ability to deliver the standards based curriculum which the school is beginning to employ. (meeting with school administrator, classroom observations)

The dedication and commitment of teachers and staff as witnessed in the town meeting, creates the sense of community and fosters a spirit of enthusiasm, which sets the warm and inviting climate. (school observations, student interviews)

The Parent Teacher Club plays an important part in the learning environment by supplementing materials and organizing activities that contribute to the sense of community and school spirit (parent conversations, school observations, teacher conversations, student conversations)

The district's style of responding to problems by placing blame rather than taking responsibility for finding solutions is an obstacle to school improvement and student achievement on test scores at Silver Spring School. (conversations with district administrators, conversations with parents)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Silver Spring Elementary School for:

Moving forward together in spite of a lack of support from the district

A safe environment conducive to learning

Dedication and commitment of staff and PTC

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Silver Spring Elementary School:

Expend Article 31 monies effectively prior to the end of the school year to support Standards Based education

Make more funds available for necessary supplies to work towards standards based curriculum

Reorganize daily schedule to optimize use of staff.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that East Providence School Department:

Develop funding and policies that support school efforts to improve student performance at Silver Spring School

Work together with Silver Spring School and the state to solve problems and improve student performance

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Commendations

Dedication and commitment of staff and PTC

Enthusiasm and pride of students for learning

Moving forward together in spite of a lack of support from the district

Most Important Recommendations

Reorganize daily schedule to optimize use of staff

Extend time allotted for art and music to better meet the children's needs.

Expend Article 31 monies effectively prior to the end of the school year to support Standards Based education

Use student work and classroom performance as a means to guide instruction in addition to program guides

Final Advice to the School

Silver Spring School is a community full of nurturing knowledgeable and determined teachers, parents and staff. It is obvious as one visits the school that laughter, pride, respect and education are priorities for all. As a result of these wonderful qualities the process of preparing children to succeed as knowledgeable caring citizens is evolving. To further this evolvement it is time to provide more opportunities for growth. Disperse educational monies to enhance this growth and allow time for teachers to collaborate and share their growth with colleagues. Explore, experiment and place learning responsibility on the children. Let them conclude the outcomes and learn from the process. These provisions will then engender the increase in achievement among the students.

We encourage you to use this report as a springboard for further change. You are admired for the efforts you have made to encourage your students to do their very best. Continue those efforts. Strive to learn as your students do. Help each other as you help your students and pat yourselves on the back. You deserve it!

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF SILVER SPRING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT COUNCIL

Mr. William Marcel, Principal
Mr. Ralph Wales, Community Member
Mrs. Charlene McGloin, Parent
Mrs. Edith Menard, Community Member
Mr. Victor Silva, Parent
Mrs. Brenda DeMedeiros, Teacher

Mr. Edward O'Brien, Parent
Mrs. Linda McCarthy, Parent
Mrs. Phyllis Leber, Parent
Mr. Brian Petsch, Teacher

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Patricia K. Ribeiro, Grade 1 Teacher
Providence Street Elementary, West Warwick
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as SALT Fellow)
Chair of the Team

Janice Stavros, Office of Special Needs
RI Department of Education

Kathleen Adams, Principal
Randall Holden School, Warwick

Nikki Karon, Grade 5 Teacher
Asa Messer School, Providence

Elizabeth Butler, Grade 1-2 Special Education Inclusion Teacher
Melrose School, Jamestown

Barbara Martin, Parent
Johnston School District

Mary Geoghegan, Grade 2 Teacher
Main Street School, Warren

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