

GOFF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Pawtucket, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

March 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 Goff Junior High School for:](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Goff Junior High School:](#)
- [4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING](#)
 - [Sources of Evidence](#)
 - [Conclusions](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team commends Goff Junior High School for:](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Goff Junior High School:](#)

- [5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMUNITY](#)
 - [Sources of Evidence](#)
 - [Conclusions](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team commends Goff Junior High School for:](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Goff 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 GOFF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL SELF-STUDY COMMITTEE](#)
 - [MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM](#)
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1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

A Profile of the School

Goff Junior High School is under the jurisdiction of the Pawtucket School Committee and School Department. It serves 662 students in grades 6-8. The faculty and staff are comprised of a principal, an assistant principal, 48 teachers and 6 teacher assistants.

The building was constructed 68 years ago as the neighborhood school for the Darlington Section of Pawtucket. While there are several problems related to the age of the building, it is by and large well maintained. The school clocks don't keep time any longer.

Goff's student population is approximately 18% minority, and 18% special education. 54% of Goff's students qualify for free and reduced school lunch.

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 Goff Junior High School from March 2 to March 5, 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 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 Visiting Team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners, a parent and a member of the RIDE staff. Their affiliations are included in Appendix A.

While the Visiting team did not receive the Goff Junior High School's Self-Study 1999 until the Team arrived at the school, it served as the Visiting Team's first touchstone in building conclusions about the strength of student performance at Goff.

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 that a Visiting Team uses is how the students, staff and administrators go about their day. Thus, the Visit allowed professional colleagues and stakeholders to build informed judgments about the teaching and learning that actually takes place at Goff Junior High School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from:

- a total of 118 classes were observed; of those 94 were for the full class period. Every classroom was visited at least once. Many teachers were observed more than once. A number of teachers were absent during the visit and were not observed. State assessment and field trips limited classroom observations.
- many informal observations in and around the school, including the administration of Rhode Island 7th Grade Writing Assessment
- following ten students for a full day
- observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day
- observing three Team Meetings

- meeting with the School Improvement Team (5 faculty and 2 building administrators)
- meeting with students, parents (total of 3), school and district administrators
- Goff Junior High School's Self-Study
- District and school policies; Pawtucket School District Strategic Plan and budget; *1998 Information Works!* Data book; SALT Survey Report; union contracts, teacher evaluation form
- analysis of student work observed during class visits and a limited selection of work collected by the school for the SALT Team
- 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 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. It is intended to provide the school with a different lens to help the school focus on the most important issues the school faces as it works to improve the teaching and learning it provides its students.

The value of this report is not determined by the hard work of the Team. The value will be determined by how Goff 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.

Following *Portrait of the Condition of Your School at the Time of the Visit*, which is the Team's summary statement, this report presents the Team's conclusions, commendations and recommendations are presented for each of the three 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

Goff Junior High School is steeped in a rich history and tradition reflective of a neighborhood school. It still connects to several generations of families and continues to provide a caring atmosphere. The students are kind and considerate, good school citizens and eager to learn. Goff provides a stable environment that values traditional educational practices.

There are some examples of standards based instruction, integrated teaching units, and hands on learning. However, most students are not challenged to work to their potential and are given very few opportunities to use higher level thinking skills.

Ineffective communication and teaming practices are clear barriers to effective teaching and learning. Goff needs to establish itself as a unified, cohesive learning community building upon initiatives that are dedicated to meeting the needs of the young people it serves.

Goff Junior High School is poised to build on its tradition and collectively create a vision designed to serve today's students. Give it a voice. Share it with all stakeholders and move forward.

Don't let time stand still. Set your clocks now and keep them ticking.

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
- Meeting with the School Improvement Team (SIT)
- Goff Junior High School Self-Study Report (1999)

Conclusions

Significant achievement gaps exist between student performance and the Standards on the Rhode Island state assessments, especially in mathematics. (*1998 Information Works!* (1997 scores), 1998 State Assessment Results, Goff Junior High School Self-Study (1999))

Significant equity gaps exist between the different student ability groups in the school. (Goff Junior High School Self-Study (1999), classroom observations)

The Goff Self-Study Committee did a thorough gap analysis of Assessment results that can be used to improve student learning, progress and achievement. (Goff Junior High School Self-Study (1999))

Most students are content, exhibit good citizenship and are eager to learn. (following students, classroom and school observations)

A limited variety of classroom assessments do not adequately measure student understanding and the results are rarely used to improve teaching. (classroom observations, analysis of student work)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Goff Junior High School for:

School citizenship and good behavior of students

Thorough analysis of 1998 state assessment results

Focus on reading and writing across the curriculum

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Goff Junior High School:

Utilize standards and performance assessments to improve student learning across grades.

Use school's analysis of equity gaps in state assessment results to develop differentiated strategies to improve student learning and achievement.

Reexamine ability grouping policies in light of equity gap analysis and move toward heterogeneous / inclusionary grouping.

Work to build more student centered learning experiences that tap the resources students bring.

Create opportunities to nurture students' eagerness to learn.

4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- Classroom observations
- Examination of student work
- Conversations with teachers, specialists, students and staff
- Team planning meetings
- Student meeting

- Following students

Conclusions

With few exceptions the narrow range of instructional approaches does not intellectually challenge or engage students in learning. (classroom observations, examination of student work, following students)

The use of standards based instruction and rubrics that set clear expectations for student performance produce better quality work. (examination of student work, classroom observations)

The teaming of teachers is not used effectively to improve teaching and learning. (Team planning meetings, conversations with teachers)

Lessons are too often driven by covering the curriculum at the expense of depth and student understanding. (classroom observation, examination of student work)

Goff has a strong foundation of caring relationships between teachers and students, but teachers do not build on this foundation to effectively address individual student learning needs. (school and classroom observations, following students, student meeting)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Goff Junior High School for:

School wide career awareness program

The teachers who are taking the lead in initiating standards based instruction

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Goff Junior High School:

Use the Team planning time for professional dialogue in order to improve teaching strategies to meet the learning needs of all students.

Provide a broader range of instructional strategies to intellectually challenge all students at every level.

Use present staff as a resource for staff development.

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

Sources of Evidence

- School and classroom observations
- Meeting with district administrators
- Meetings and conversations with administrators, school staff and faculty
- Meeting with students
- Goff Junior High School Self-Study
- Following students

Conclusions

The school's ability to build an effective and cohesive learning community is impeded by the isolation of the sixth grade and the lack of full inclusion of special education students. (classroom observations, following students)

The rigid tracking of students at Goff limits the educational opportunities that Goff provides its students and creates serious achievement gaps and adversely affects many student and teacher expectations. (Goff Junior High School Self-Study, classroom observations, conversations with teachers and students)

Communication between critical constituencies (district administrators, school administrators, staff, teachers, parents) is ineffective. It lacks clarity and follow through and does not promote meaningful exchange or action. (meetings with district administrators, meetings with school administrators, school staff and faculty)

District, school and teacher leaders indicate an interest in improving the education of Goff's students. However, the current organizational structures do not promote responsible and accountable leadership. (meetings with district administrators, meetings with school administrators, school staff and faculty)

Goff provides a stable and comfortable environment for teachers, staff and students. (following students, meeting with students and parents, classroom observations)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Goff Junior High School for:

Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Goff Junior High School:

Establish an active and ongoing dialogue between administrators, teachers, teams, departments, students and parents focused on creating an authentic, child-centered learning community.

Investigate, as you develop your school improvement plan, how the following practices will work at Goff: flexible scheduling, effective teaming practices and teaching to diverse learning styles.

Develop educational leadership throughout the school by defining roles and responsibilities and structures that promote school improvement.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Pawtucket School District:

Transfer more real authority and responsibility to Goff as called for in the Pawtucket School District Strategic Plan.

Support Goff's efforts to improve teaching and learning, including providing for released time, funding for teachers to participate in professional development, and support for necessary educational equipment, supplies and materials.

Stop the busing practice of picking up students before the end of school and provide late buses for after school activities and detention.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Commendations

School citizenship and good behavior of students

Thorough analysis of 1998 state assessment results

Focus on reading and writing across the curriculum

Most Important Recommendations

Reexamine ability grouping policies in light of equity gap analysis and move toward heterogeneous / inclusionary grouping.

Use the Team planning time for professional dialogue in order to improve teaching strategies to meet the learning needs of all students.

Establish an active and ongoing dialogue between administrators, teachers, teams, departments, students and parents focused on creating an authentic, child-centered learning community.

Provide a broader range of instructional strategies to intellectually challenge all students at every level.

Investigate, as you develop your school improvement plan, how the following practices will work at Goff: flexible scheduling, effective teaming practices and teaching to diverse learning styles.

Final Advice to the School

You have the power to dramatically impact the lives of the young people you serve. Use it wisely to communicate your vision as a joint effort between faculty and administration. Take the time to thoroughly investigate practices that will benefit the teaching and learning at Goff. Your students want and deserve your very best efforts. Use this report as a springboard for action.

Communication, community and leadership are keys to creating a rich, genuine connected Goff learning community. Accept ownership and commit yourselves to making Goff a school attentive to student, parent, and community needs. Use the process of developing a school improvement plan as a solid foundation to support the implementation of best practices.

You have available, right here at Goff, a number of advocates for change. Take a chance - seize the leadership role given to you by the district to make Goff the best it can be. Effective leadership will come from all levels in your school community. You are far more powerful together than you are as isolated islands. Find ways to become involved in school initiatives: join your School Improvement Team, become a mentor, participate in team planning and collaboration, seek professional development and visit other schools.

As we heard in an interview here at Goff, "Teachers don't know the powers they have. They need to learn to use it."

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF GOFF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL SELF-STUDY COMMITTEE

Names

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

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