

POTTER-BURNS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Pawtucket, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

April 1999

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1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

A Profile of the School

Potter-Burns School is located on Newport Avenue in the Darlington section of the city of Pawtucket. The two story brick building is over 85 years old and there have been two additions to the original structure. Wide hallways, big windows and a variety of sized rooms characterize this school. An aquarium, BIOMES tank, and two rocking chairs sit in the main hallway outside the office.

The school serves students in grades Kindergarten to six led by an administrator who has been at the school for four years. There are 53 staff members including 3 custodians and 2 office staff. Of the 650 students in the school 39% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. 90% of the students are white, .17% are Asian, 5% are Hispanic, 4% are Black and .4% are American Indian. 7.6% of the students receive special education services in self contained or collaborative programs.

A collaboration model has been implemented in grade three. New to the school staff is The Accelerated Reader Program, Mimosa and Glencoe math programs, and the use of standards to guide instruction.

The school is under the governance of the Pawtucket School District and the seven-member elected 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 Potter-Burns School from April 6 to April 9, 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.

Potter-Burns School's Self-Study Action Plan (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 Potter-Burns Elementary School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 83 hours of classroom observation. Every classroom teacher was observed at least 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
- meeting with School Self-Study Team
- observing a School Improvement Team meeting
- meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators
- Potter-Burns School's Self-Study Action Plan
- District and school policies, Pawtucket 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 25 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 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 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 Potter-Burns 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 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

Potter-Burns School is a warm caring school community of students and staff. The parents and children seem content. In several classrooms magic is happening, where students and teachers are actively involved in projects involving writing, reading, talking, sharing and problem solving. Students are well behaved, friendly and helpful. The Principal and staff are caring, diligent and conscientious.

Teachers are working very hard but are limited due to a lack of training, a chance to collaborate, and appropriate materials. In some classes children answer many questions and fill in many worksheets and order is what appears to be the norm of most activities. Many children eagerly accept what is taught, are excited about learning, but want to know and do more. Accommodations are not always made to provide appropriate challenges and respond to different learning styles.

The staff recognizes the need for increased training, time and resources to achieve their mission statement.

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
- Conversations with students
- Meeting with school administrator
- Meeting with SALT Self-Study Committee,
- Meeting of School Improvement Team (SIT)
- Potter-Burns School Self-Study Action Plan (February, 1999)

Conclusions

Students were eager and excited when they had the opportunity to actively participate in learning. Examples include the Accelerated Reader Program and the Heritage Day Project.(following students, interviews with students)

Over 95% of Potter-Burns students failed to achieve the standard on all State Assessments in Math, Reading, Writing and Health over the last two years. Further the analysis of the 1997 scores shows that

Potter-Burns students were performing at a level that is significantly lower than Rhode Island students with similar characteristics. Student work also shows lower level learning in relationship to content standards. (Infoworks 98, 1998 State Assessment Results, Self- Study Plan)

No Potter-Burns students on the 1998 grade 4 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam achieved the standard in Problem Solving. Student work demonstrates few examples of application of problem solving strategies. (Infoworks 98, Student work examination, 1998 state assessment results, Self-Study Plan)

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

Individual classroom assessments that utilize rubrics and/ or evaluate critical thinking, problem solving skills and application of learning are at the beginning stages of implementation. However, for the most part classroom assessments measure rote or factual learning limiting the student's capacity to perform problem solving and critical thinking tasks on the state assessments in all areas. (examination of student work, classroom observations, conversations with teachers and school administrator)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Potter-Burns School for:

Enthusiasm of students for accelerated reader computer program

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Potter-Burns School:

Employ more performance-based assessments in daily work.

Work to find ways to align testing with state and national standards.

Make rubrics available to guide student work.

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
- 1999 School Self-Study Action Plan
- Following students

Conclusions

The staff is hard working and dedicated. A number are frustrated by a lack of training in math and writing limiting their ability to provide standards based instruction across all grade levels. (classroom observations, conversations with teachers, Self-Study Plan)

New hands-on mathematics programs in grades K-3 and 6 have been introduced, encouraging students to take an active part in learning and problem solving. Currently, there is no such program for grades 4-5 at Potter-Burns School. (meeting with district administrators, classroom observations, Self-Study Plan)

All teachers have, just recently, been provided with performance standards manuals and some teaching materials that would support standards based instruction, but not all have received training. However, for the most part teaching is not yet standard-based, as evidenced by an emphasis on rote learning of facts and skills, a lack of flexible grouping and limited focus on process writing skills, problem solving and tools for self-evaluation. (meeting with district and school administrators, meeting with self-survey team, classroom observation, review of student work, Self-Study Plan)

Collaboration models, which support greater inclusiveness, have begun to emerge. Opportunities do not yet exist at every grade level for students with varying abilities to learn together in a natural social environment. In general, teachers have not been provided the strategies for differentiating instruction that encourage children with different learning needs and styles to succeed. (classroom observations, teacher interviews, Self-Study Plan, review of school schedule)

In a number of cases, students spent time waiting for their turns, for other students to finish, or for class transitions to take place, rather than continuously and actively learning, causing much instructional time to be lost during the school day. (classroom observations, following students)

Technology is available in Potter Burns classrooms, but cannot be used to its fullest potential in teaching and learning due to limited training and equipment maintenance. (classroom observation, Self-Study Plan, interviews with teachers)

There does not seem to be a district curriculum to guide teaching, leading to lack of continuity in scope

and sequence, thematic units and integration of subject matter across classes and grades. (meeting with district administrators, classroom observations, Self-Study Plan, teacher interviews)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Potter-Burns School for:

Hard working and dedicated teachers

Teacher efforts towards collaboration and co-teaching

Technology that includes a network with at least four computers in every classroom with Internet access

Collaboration among some teachers in science, reading and health and social studies

The Heritage Day Project, which brings students from several classrooms together for group work which will enrich the entire school community

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Potter-Burns School:

Continue to expand collaboration models

Explore further ways to integrate across the curriculum

Expand teacher's repertoire of strategies for differentiating instruction

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Pawtucket School District:

Provide effective and accessible professional development in standards based instruction

Insure that materials are available to implement programs

Develop and implement district wide standards based curriculum

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 parents and students
- Following students
- School and District policy documents
- School Improvement Team Meeting
- Potter-Burns Self-Study Action Plan

Conclusions

Current staffing and scheduling constraints do not allow common planning time for teachers to work together in improving teaching and learning and supporting individual student needs. (classroom observation, self-study plan, conversation with principal and teachers.)

One administrator serving a school of 650 students limits his capacity to be an educational leader who is free to support the ongoing growth of the teaching and learning community. (classroom observation, conversation with district administration and principal.)

Through self-study the school has recognized strengths and weaknesses and has begun to address them through The Potter-Burns Self-Study Action Plan and the School Improvement Team. (School improvement team meeting, The Self Study Action Plan, conversations with teachers and administrators)

The staff has identified a need for a consistent plan to improve student behavior and promote positive attitudes throughout the school community. (Self-Study Action Plan, School Improvement meeting, conversations with teachers)

The relocation of some classes would facilitate a more positive learning environment where continued collaboration, peer support, and planning would be more accessible. (classroom observation, self-study plan, conversation with principal and teachers.)

The school department has level funded the district for the past 5 years inhibiting the school's capacity to implement needed reforms, including additional personnel, professional development, instructional materials, building maintenance and expansion. (conversations with Principal, District Administrator and teachers.)

The current teacher evaluation does not support professional growth or encourage effective teaching and

learning. (teacher evaluation document, conversation with District Administrator)

The lunchroom is not a healthy environment for children to eat due to noise and stress levels. (following students, conversations with parents and students)

There is a strong active parent organization that supports many school activities. This provides human and financial resources to the school community. (parent meeting, conversations with teachers, classroom observations)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Potter-Burns School for:

Collaboration among some teachers in science, reading, health and social studies
A fair, hardworking, and respected Principal

Their school self study team's recognition of the need to reorganize

Its welcome reception and utilization of parental support and involvement

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Potter-Burns School:

Seek outside supplemental grants and funding

Involve faculty in creative problem solving to increase common planning time and collaboration

Explore available resources to build a safe supportive school community.

Provide formal coordination for the school's volunteer program

Explore options on how to manage a peaceful, healthful lunchroom climate

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Pawtucket School District:

Work with the Pawtucket Teachers Union to develop a new teacher evaluation instrument

Work to increase funding and seek outside supplemental grants and funding

Investigate the need for additional administrative and instructional personnel.

Encourage realignment of district itinerant schedules to facilitate common planning time.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Commendations

Their school self study team's recognition of the need to reorganize
Teacher efforts towards collaboration and co-teaching

Technology that includes a network with at least four computers in every classroom with Internet access.

Its welcome reception and utilization of parental support and involvement.

Most Important Recommendations

Align testing with state and national standards
Continue to expand collaboration models

Expand teacher's repertoire of strategies for differentiating instruction

Involve faculty in creative problem solving to increase common planning time and collaboration

Explore available resources to build a safe supportive school community.

Final Advice to the School

The SALT Visiting Teams' job at Potter-Burns School is complete. Improvement can only come from within. As teachers we must analyze what we are doing to give our students the tools they need to listen, think, write and solve problems well. Embrace the strategies that are successful in which your children are truly learning, and adopt new strategies to replace those that are less effective. Challenge yourself and your students to reach beyond the norm in search of excellence.

Work together to find time to plan and talk with each other. Work with the district to find ways to solve problems. Participate in trainings that are available to improve teaching and learning at the school.

Help parents understand the changes that are happening here.

Build student capacity to participate as respectful, respected, responsible members of this school community. Adopt strategies to build a supportive climate and systems that avoid social and behavioral conflicts and resolve them if they occur.

Seek to learn what you don't know or do well and share what you do know and do well.

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF POTTER-BURNS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SELF-STUDY ACTION TEAM

Ms. Patricia Grant, Grade 1 Teacher
Mrs. Diane Ferreira, Kindergarten Teacher
Mrs. Beverly Holmes, Grade 2 Teacher
Mrs. Doris Lawson, Special Education Teacher
Mrs. Ellen Ercolano, Reading Teacher
Mrs. Patricia Mazza, Grade 4 Teacher
Mrs. Laraine Rawnsley, Grade 5 Teacher
Mrs. Mary Murray, Grade 6 Teacher
Mr. Raymond Beretta, Principal

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

Karen Leach, Principal
Sackett Street School, Providence

Donna Bettencourt-Glavin, Grade 5 Teacher

Colt-Andrews School, Bristol

Deborah E. Doyle, Kindergarten Teacher
Reservoir Avenue School, Providence

Ann Pace, Grade 5 Teacher
West Broadway School, Providence

Laura Rivera, Parent
Central Falls School District

Ina S. Woolman,
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