

CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL

Providence, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

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

District:

- 5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMUNITY
 - Sources of Evidence
 - Conclusions
 - The SALT Visiting Team commends Central High School for:
 - The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Central High School:
 - The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Providence School District:
 - The SALT Visiting Team recommends that RIDE:

 - 6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS
 - Most Important Conclusions
 - Final Advice to the School

 - APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT
 - MEMBERS OF CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM
 - MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM
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1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

A Profile of the School

Central High School is the largest comprehensive high school in the Providence School District servicing approximately 1755 students. The school has three magnet programs: Business, Law & Government, and the Hanley Career & Technology Center. Daily attendance at Central High School averages 77 percent with an annual dropout rate of just under 24 percent. Information Works 1998 reports student mobility for Central High School at 38.93%, for the Providence School District at 28%, and for the State of Rhode Island at 17.29%. Central High School accepts new and transferring students throughout the year resulting in up to 13 new students a week.

The full-time teaching staff numbers 121 with an additional 39 support and ancillary personnel. The student body is diverse representing some 64 nationalities and languages. There is a 92 percent minority population. The majority of the non-English speaking population is Hispanic. Central High School has

the largest ESL/Bilingual program and the largest Special Needs Program in the City of Providence.

Support services provided include: Crisis Intervention Counseling, Substance Abuse Program, Day Care Center, Health Clinic, Family Center, Navy Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps, Students as Mediators (SAM), and Student Advocates for a Non-Violent Environment (SANE).

Central High School maintains relationships with outside agencies and with higher educational institutions that assist the school in meeting the growing demands of its students.

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 Central High 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
- 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.

Central High School's Self Study (April 1999) and the School Improvement Team Plan for 1998-99 served as the Visiting Team's first touchstones 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 Central High School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 201 classes were observed, including 175 full period classes. Most classrooms were visited at least once.
- many informal observations in and around the school and at career work sites
- following 16 students for a full day
- observing the work of teachers, and staff for a full day
- conversations with students, teachers, staff, site mentors,
- meetings with School Improvement Team, students, parent, guidance staff, school administrators, union representatives, department heads, librarians, school district officials, and community partners
- Central High School Self-Study (April 99)
- Other School Improvement Team Documents: Fiscal Year “F” Budget Request (1999-2000), School Improvement Team Plan for 1998-99, NEASC Strategic Plan, Summer of 1998 School Improvement Team Accomplishments, School Improvement Self-Survey Tools, Self-Study Tool Guide for “4x4 Accelerated Schedule”
- District and school policies, union contract
- *1998 Information Works!* Data book, 1998 State Assessment results
- SALT Survey Report
- analysis of student work including a limited selection 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 28 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 Central 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 School Department, the citizens of 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 Team indicates the most important conclusions and ends with the Team's final advice to the school.

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

Central High School is a 21st century global community existing in a school that is structured both physically and educationally from a different era. The rich diversity of the Central High School community is at once its greatest asset and its most serious liability. The cultural mosaic of courteous and respectful students should provide a solid base for a vigorous academic learning community. However, the faculty and administrators struggle to meet the needs of this urban, diverse, and transient population in isolation – frustrated by a negative image, lack of clear educational leadership, severe attendance problems, high drop out rate, and low test scores.

There is lack of adequate communication between and among teachers, department heads, School Improvement Team, administrators and the Providence School District Office. In some ways the school appears to have become a victim of its undeserved reputation by failing to set uniformly high standards for its students. Professional conversation is lacking. No one or no group has successfully taken on the responsibility for the educational leadership required to address the need for high standards for all students, for a schedule that will meet the needs of all students, and for a system to support teachers as they work to improve teaching and learning.

In spite of formidable barriers that inhibit both teaching and learning at Central High School, there is evidence of significant achievement by some teachers and some students.

3. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING, PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Sources of Evidence

- *1998 Information Works!* (1997 scores)
- 1998 State Assessment results
- Classroom and school observations

- Meeting with guidance staff
- Following a student
- Student meeting

Conclusions

1. Of the total tenth grade population – exact number of tenth grade students in Spring 1998 was unavailable from the school- only 256 completed state testing in 1998. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the accuracy of state testing results limiting the certainty of conclusions based on state testing. (1998 State Assessment Results, meeting with guidance staff)
2. Of the students tested, most Central High School students did not reach acceptable performance levels on statewide assessments in 1998. The gaps to performance standards were notable: 65% failed to meet the criteria for proficient work in Mathematical Skills; 98% failed to meet the criteria in Math Concepts; 100% failed to meet the criteria in Problem Solving; 98% failed to meet the criteria in Health; and 88% failed to meet the criteria in Writing. (1998 State Assessment Results)
3. Improvement in Statewide testing can be seen in these areas: Math Skills went from 14% of test takers showing “little evidence of achievement” in 1997 to only 5% in 1998. In the State Writing Assessment 55% of the students in 1997 went from “considerably below proficient” to only 48% in 1998. (*1998 Information Works!*, 1998 State Assessment Results)
4. Declining performance is seen in these areas: Math Concepts went from 54% showing “little evidence of achievement” in 1997 to 67% in 1998. Problem Solving went from 25% showing “little evidence of achievement” in 1997 to 71% in 1998. (*1998 Information Works!*, 1998 State Assessment Results)
5. An equity gap based on 1997 scores was noted in the following areas: white students out-performed black students and females out- performed males in Mathematical Skills. In the area of Problem Solving, white students out-performed black students again; and Limited English Proficiency students out- performed general education students. (The State defines an equity gap as a difference of 15% in scores disaggregated by groups of those performing at or above proficiency level.) (*1998 Information Works!*)
6. Students’ respect for each other, for faculty and other adults in the school, and for the campus affords opportunities for teaching and learning. (Classroom and school observations, following a student, student meeting)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Central High School for:

Courteous, cooperative, and caring attitude of Central High School students

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Central High School:

Disseminate test results and other information about students to all faculty and staff.

Use the test information to design and improve instruction.

4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- Central High School Self-Study (1999)
- Classroom observations
- Examination of student work
- Conversations with teachers, specialists, school and district administration, students, community partners and staff
- Student meeting
- Following students

Conclusions

1. Many students enter Central High School with significant gaps in their school-based knowledge and skills. The lack of programs to address these gaps makes it close to impossible for those students to succeed and contributes to poor performance, high absenteeism, and a high drop out rate. (Central High School Self-Study 1999, classroom observations, conversations with teachers, meetings with students, school and district administration)
2. The lack of effective on-going assessment of student performance that is closely tied to instruction contributes to the school's inability to meet diverse student needs.(Examination of student work, classroom observations)
3. Quality of instruction is inconsistent and many programs are not designed to meet the needs of all students. (Central High School Self-Study, classroom observation, conversations with teachers, student meeting, following a student, meeting with district administrators)
4. The effectiveness of practices such as the use of hands-on activities, real life connections, performance assessments, and interdepartmental communication was demonstrated in several programs including the ESL/Bilingual, Special Education, Law and Government, Career and Technical, and art programs at Central High School. (Classroom observation, examination of student work, following a student, meetings with community partners and guidance staff)

5. Although the Outcomes, Assessment and Teaching Strategies (OATS) initiative is mandated by the Providence School Department for all Providence schools, it is not implemented at Central High School, depriving the school of an effective way to organize its curriculum and assessment practices to achieve high standards for all its students. (Central High School Self-Study, classroom observations, conversations with teachers, meeting with Providence District administrators)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Central High School for:

ESL/Bilingual teaching and placement strategies

Special Education inclusion program

Law and Government Magnet

Visual Art elective

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Central High School:

Develop a transitional program for those students with significant gaps in their knowledge and skills. The new program should be started in September 1999 and be focused on the incoming 9th grade. The School Improvement Team should begin a dialogue immediately about student needs and how Central High School's program can best meet them. This dialogue must engage the entire faculty and administration.

Implement OATS as a way to organize its curriculum and assessment practices to achieve high standards for all students.

Submit a plan to the Providence School District for OATS training in ways that will enable all faculty and administrators to participate.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Providence School District:

Provide all Central High School teachers and administrators with OATS training in a manner that supports Central High School's plan for training.

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

Sources of Evidence

- School and classroom observations
- Central High School's Self-Study (1999)
- Meeting with School Improvement Team
- Meetings and conversations with administrators, school staff, and faculty
- Meeting with parents
- Following students

Conclusions

1. Central High School provides a safe, orderly, and clean environment. (School observations, following a student)
2. Central High School accepts all students throughout the year. Given the current practice of refusing most new students at the city's other high schools, Central High School's admission policy plays an important role for Providence students and the Providence school system. These practices affect teaching and learning and expectations for student performance. Yet, Central High School's role is not understood, valued or supported by the Providence School District, the media, or the people of Providence. (Meeting with district administrators, guidance staff, school administrators and School Improvement Team, conversations with teachers)
3. Whereas the continuing and pervasive community attitude is that Central High School is a school with poor teaching and difficult students, this historic attitude is dreadfully wrong and totally inaccurate and creates difficult barriers for the school, its faculty, and its students to overcome. (Student meeting, School Improvement Team Meeting, conversations with teachers)
4. The low expectations of district and school administrators, faculty and students about what students can accomplish, contribute to the lack of a rigorous curriculum, low performance, chronic absenteeism, tardiness and high drop out rate. (State assessments, school and classroom observations, conversations with students and teachers, meetings with district administrations)
5. Central High School's failure to adequately account for its economically disadvantaged students has resulted in the loss of significant federal monies.(Central High School's Self-Study, meeting with school and district administrators)
6. The Family Center and the Health Center provide a good base for future necessary outreach to families and the provision of other family and community services.(School observations, meeting with students, conversations with school staff)
7. The school's lack of sufficient technology and its inability to sustain existing technology,

including a Media Center, undermine Central High School's management and teaching functions. (Classroom observation, meeting with district administrators, conversations with teachers, departments heads, guidance staff, students, Central High School's Self-Study)

8. The notable isolation and insularity of teachers impede the faculty dialogue and common action required to improve teaching and learning. (Classroom and school observations, conversations with teachers, meeting with School Improvement Team)
9. The Hanley Career and Technical Center provides important services to students. However, its dual functioning as a skills center servicing nearby communities and as a magnet of Central High School for Providence, creates organizational confusion resulting in inefficient and sometimes ineffective services to students. (School observations, conversations with school administrators and teachers)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Central High School for:

Clean, safe and orderly environment

Health Center

School to career work placements

Students as Mediators

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Central High School:

Restructure the school based on the needs of the students. Consider the yearly and daily schedule, appropriation of time for instruction and planning, faculty and administrative organization, shorter curriculum units, and ramp-up programs.

Develop, through the School Improvement Team, a Comprehensive Professional Development Plan and organizational structures that will increase professional dialogue and common action among the teachers at Central High School.

Ensure that all eligible students return appropriate documentation to qualify for Title 1 status.

Work with the Family Center to plan for broader engagement of families with a strong focus on student learning.

Resolve the confusion of the dual organizational identity so that Hanley can effectively pursue its educational mission as a career and technical center.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Providence School District:

Vigorously support Central High School's restructuring efforts.

Develop procedures that ensure equitable distribution of student assignments for new and transferring students throughout the year.

Eliminate social promotion or provide Central High School with the resources to ramp-up unprepared students.

Establish an electronic network among Central High School, the Providence School District, and RIDE for effective management of student information.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that RIDE:

Assist Central High School in appealing Title 1 disqualification.

Help Central High School network its information systems.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Conclusions

1. Many students enter Central High School with significant gaps in their school-based knowledge and skills. The lack of programs to address these gaps makes it close to impossible for those students to succeed and contributes to poor performance, high absenteeism, and a high drop out rate. (Central High School Self-Study 1999, classroom observations, conversations with teachers, meetings with students, school and district administration)
2. Quality of instruction is inconsistent and many programs are not designed to meet the needs of all students. (Central High School Self-Study, classroom observation, conversations with teachers, student meeting, following a student, meeting with district administrators)
3. Central High School accepts all students throughout the year. Given the current practice of refusing most new students at the city's other high schools, Central High School's admission policy plays an important role for Providence students and the Providence school system. These practices affect teaching and learning and expectations for student performance. Yet, Central

High School's role is not understood, valued or supported by the Providence School District, the media, or the people of Providence. (Meeting with district administrators, guidance staff, school administrators and School Improvement Team, conversations with teachers)

4. The low expectations of district and school administrators, faculty and students about what students can accomplish, contribute to the lack of a rigorous curriculum, low performance, chronic absenteeism, tardiness and high drop out rate. (State assessments, school and classroom observations, conversations with students and teachers, meetings with district administrations)
5. The notable isolation and insularity of Central High School's teachers impede the faculty dialogue and common action required to improve teaching and learning. (Classroom and school observations, conversations with teachers, meeting with School Improvement Team)

Final Advice to the School

The dreary entrances, the locked and curtained doors, and the tired looking main office space of the Central High School building belie the warmth and openness of many of the school's students, teachers, and staff. They also contribute to the perception that Central High School is not a good place to be. The entire Providence community including the Providence School District Central Office and the media must work together diligently to dispel that historic myth.

It is time to engage in serious assessment of the needs of the students at Central High School. Such a diverse population requires a diverse curriculum and a flexible schedule to meet those needs. You, the administrators and teachers at Central High School, must become advocates for the changes required to equip your students for their futures. Your efforts to revise the student schedule show us that you have begun this conversation. Although you may be discouraged, this work must continue. The restructuring of Central High School is absolutely necessary to prepare the students for the future. Ramp up programs that meet the needs of incoming students, flexible scheduling including shorter curriculum units for students entering during the year or requiring remedial attention, common planning time, and provision for educational leadership and discussion are things that must be considered.

Teachers at Central High School must become aware of the authority and power of the School Improvement Team (SIT). We hope these powers are real and expect that the Providence School District and the State of Rhode Island will hear your voices through the SIT. Communication at Central High School must improve so that the SIT truly represents the Central community and the Central community is part of the work of the SIT.

The School Improvement Team must begin immediately to address the problems of chronic absenteeism and high dropout rate. The Visiting Team suggests that you focus your initial efforts on the incoming ninth grade class. We recognize the problems appear insurmountable, but we believe that no one is better able to address these problems than the teachers who know the students are.

You must use every resource available to you. See that your students receive any monies or services due

them. The work is hard and the needs are great. It is time to begin.

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

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Cynthia Santiago, Student

Bonnie Siharath, Student

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MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

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Wilbur McMahon School, Little Compton

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Chair of the Team

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