

STATE STREET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Westerly, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

May 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 recommends that State Street Elementary School:](#)

- [4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING](#)
 - [Sources of Evidence](#)
 - [Conclusions](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team commends State Street Elementary School for:](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team recommends that State Street Elementary](#)

[School:](#)

- [5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMUNITY](#)
 - [Sources of Evidence](#)
 - [Conclusions](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team commends State Street Elementary School for:](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team recommends that State Street Elementary School:](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Westerly School District:](#)

 - [6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS](#)
 - [Most Important Conclusions](#)
 - [Final Advice to the School](#)

 - [APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT](#)
 - [MEMBERS OF STATE STREET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SELF-STUDY COMMITTEE](#)
 - [MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM](#)
-

1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

A Profile of the School

State Street School is a Pre-K-5 elementary school. It is one of five elementary schools under the jurisdiction of the Westerly School Department. The school became a site-based managed school in 1993 with Mr. Dean Springer as facilitator. A Site Council composed of the facilitator and faculty and parent representatives meets twice a month and is a part of the decision making process for the school.

The school was built and opened in 1955 for grades K through six. The building was closed due to a decrease in enrollment in 1981. In 1986 an LEP kindergarten class was housed at the school as an annex to Tower Street School. The building reopened with grades K and 1 in 1987. Grade 2 was added in 1988, grade 3 in 1989, grade 4 in 1992. In 1995 a grade 5 and a multi-room addition (library, multi-

purpose room, 3 classrooms, and art and music rooms) were added.

Presently, there are 324 students and 53 professional and support staff. Twenty five percent of the student population is eligible for free or reduced lunch. The majority of the students are white, 12% are Asian/Pacific Islander, 2% are Native American, and 1% black. Sixteen percent of the children receive special education services in an inclusion environment.

State Street School provides the Limited English Proficiency classes for the elementary students in the Westerly School District. Thirty-four students are included in this program. In 1997 the Westerly Special Education Department added an Early Childhood Program for students diagnosed with PDD (Pervasive Development Disorder)/Autism which now serves 6 children.

State Street teachers with other teachers from the District are developing math curriculum and piloting new math texts. Westerly schools participate in the Gems Net Science Program that provides science kits and teacher training for grades K-5.

In September 1998 a “Parent/Student/Teacher Agreement” was introduced. Parents, students, and teachers commit to making education a priority. A PTO supports fund raising activities for the school and was instrumental in providing playground equipment for the children.

The Pfizer Foundation has supported the school with grants that encourage employees to volunteer in the school. WalMart and the Dante Society have also provided grants to the State Street Library.

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 State Street Elementary School from May 4 to May 7, 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.

State Street Elementary School Improvement Plan Spring 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, 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 State Street Elementary School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 99 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 6 students for a full day and one kindergarten student for a half day
- observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day
- meetings with students, student council members, parents, school facilitator, and District representatives
- District and school policies, Professional Development Plan, union contract
- School Improvement Plan Spring 1999
- 1998 *Information Works!* , 1998-99 *Information Works!*, 1998 State Assessment Results
- SALT Survey Report, 1999; Literacy Curriculum Handbook
- analysis of student work including a large selection of work collected by the school
- analysis of the school's performance on state assessments of standards
- Harcourt Brace Assessment Software review

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 State Street Elementary 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 Westerly, 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 conclusions 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 the 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

State Street School is a suburban neighborhood school. A large, welcoming media center is at the heart of the school. Student work, science in progress, artwork and projects were evident in classrooms.

The State Street School staff works as a team and is willing to take risks in experimenting with management and practice that will affect student achievement. Teachers regularly participate in professional development.

The children at State Street outperform similar students in most areas of State testing. Children work well together and understand the rules of cooperative groups. This performance and cooperation provides a strong foundation from which to elicit more challenging projects and student outcomes than exist at the present time.

The inclusion model for PDD/ Autistic, Special Education and LEP students is exemplary and is accepted and supported by teachers and students.

The professionalism of most of State Street School's staff and its collegiality and openness to change put this school in a position to move forward and to meet its goals.

3. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING, PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Sources of Evidence

- 1998 *Information Works!* (1997 scores)
- 1998-99 *Information Works!* (1998 scores)
- 1998 State Assessment results
- SALT Survey 1999 data
- Examination of student work
- Classroom and school observations

Conclusions

State Street fourth graders scored above similar students in 6 of 7 areas of the New Standards Reference Exams. This achievement is statistically significant. The Writing Effectiveness subtest where the students scored significantly lower than similar students is the only exception. (1998-99 *Information Works!*)

Notable gaps to standards exist in writing on state assessments. 72% of third graders scored below the proficient level on 1998 testing, 64% of fourth graders scored below the proficient level on the 1997 testing. In addition on the writing subtests of the 1998 English Language Arts New Standards Exam 70% of fourth graders did not reach the standard.(1998 State assessment results, 1998 *Information Works!*)

Emphasis on computation in the classroom has contributed to 89% percent of fourth graders achieving the standard in math skills. Nevertheless, 65% did not achieve the standard in math concepts and 68% did not achieve the standard in problem solving.(Classroom observations, 1998-99 *Information Works!*)

Gender equity gaps exist in the Reading: Analysis and Interpretation and the Writing Effectiveness subtests of the English Language Arts New Standards Reference Exam. The percentage of male students who met or exceeded standards was higher than female students.(1998-99 *Information Works!*)

The SALT Visiting Team agrees with the State Street School staff that teaching to standards would have a positive effect on student achievement. (SALT Survey Chart G.2, classroom observations, examination of student work)

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that State Street Elementary School:

Experiment with and implement effective strategies to improve writing scores

Expand and enhance opportunities for concept development and problem solving in mathematics

Explore the reasons for and the implications of the gender gap on the English Language Arts New Standards Reference Exam

4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- Classroom observations
- Examination of student work
- Conversations with teachers, specialists, students and staff
- Student meeting
- 1998 state assessment results
- Following students
- Parent meeting
- Harcourt Brace Assessment Software review
- *Literacy Curriculum Handbook* (Westerly)

Conclusions

The strong focus on early learning by successfully using proven strategies such as Reading Recovery, LIPS, literacy resources, literacy assistants, and small class size has contributed to excellent reading scores for the students at State Street School. (Classroom observations, *Literacy Curriculum Handbook*, State Assessment results)

Writing tasks are generally limited to rote exercises that are insufficient to teach the processes required for meeting standards. Most children do not write for a variety of purposes, do not understand how to

improve their writing, and are not offered opportunities for peer editing, to author for a specific audience or to share their writing. (1998 State assessment results, classroom observations, examination of student work, student conversations)

The LEP and Early Childhood PDD/Autistic Program for the Westerly School District, housed at State Street School, are exemplary model programs. The LEP rooms were “electrified” with the joy of learning. (Classroom observations, examination of student work, meeting with district administrators)

While teachers have begun to experiment with alternative assessments, students still do not assess their own work for the purpose of improving it. Teachers have not yet made full use of the tools available to assist them. (Classroom observation; conversations with teachers, parents, and students; Harcourt Brace assessment software review; examination of student work)

While teachers deliver lessons with technical skill, assignments lack choice, depth, breadth, and rigor and fail to challenge children to use their individual learning styles.(Classroom observations, conversations with students and parents, student meeting, examination of student work)

Computer technology is not effectively integrated into the students’ day as a learning tool depriving students of a tool for investigation, communication, and discovery.(Classroom observations, student meeting, conversations with teachers and students)

The Media Center is truly the heart of State Street School. It is an effective and welcoming resource for students, staff, and community.(Observation, student meeting, parent meeting)

The SALT Visiting Team commends State Street Elementary School for:

The LEP Program

Early Childhood PDD/Autistic Program

The Media Center

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that State Street Elementary School:

Focus on improving writing across the curriculum at all grade levels

Review test results and student work together as a whole school to understand each teacher’s responsibility and role in teaching what students need to be able to do

Challenge students with multiple and open-ended projects that have clear learning outcomes.

Turn on the computers and allow the students to explore them as learning tools

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

Sources of Evidence

- School and classroom observations
- Meeting with district superintendent
- Meetings and conversations with administrators, school staff and faculty
- Meeting with parents
- Following students
- Professional Development Plan

Conclusions

The children of State Street School are eager and well behaved, deserving of consideration and respect as captured in the school's motto "We Cherish Children." It is disturbing that sometimes in the cafeteria, at recess, in the hallways, and in a few classes and groups, rules and expectations are not clear, children are not respected, and enforcement of discipline is inappropriate and inconsistent. (School observations, student meetings, parent meeting, conversations with teachers)

Although parents are encouraged to participate on the Site Council and there is regular communication between the school and its families; it is unfortunate that this does not foster shared responsibility for the children's education as described in State Street's Parent/Student/Teacher/ Agreement. (Parent/ Student/ Teacher Agreement, SALT Survey 1999, meeting with parents, conversations with teachers)

Site-based management as practiced at State Street School empowers teachers to assume responsibility, supports communication among staff, and facilitates growth. (Meeting with Site-based Team, meeting with district administrators, meeting with school administrators, parent meeting, conversations with staff)

The inclusion of special education and LEP students is supported and accepted by teachers and students. It allows for classroom participation and pull out time on a schedule that supports individual student needs. (Classroom observation, conversations with teachers and district administrators)

Literacy Assistants receive excellent preparation for their positions and provide exemplary instruction and support for student learning and overall success in daily school life.(Classroom observations, conversations with teachers and district administrators)

The lack of a full time school nurse teacher at State Street School is a threat to the health and welfare of the students.(Conversations with staff, parent meeting, student meeting)

The strategies acquired through many hours of quality professional development are not yet fully implemented in the classrooms.(Classroom observation, conversations with students and staff, Professional Development Plan and activities, examination of student work)

Although a new formal teacher evaluation process is being piloted in Westerly, a protocol for supervision, mentoring, and support for teachers in need is not yet clearly articulated nor implemented. (Meeting with school facilitator, meeting with district administrators, conversations with teachers)

The SALT Visiting Team commends State Street Elementary School for:

Acceptance of inclusion

Literacy Assistants

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that State Street Elementary School:

Treat all children with respect

Revise the “Guidelines for the Playground” and establish clear expectations for recess and cafeteria behaviors

Train recess and cafeteria aides with appropriate management strategies

Improve acoustics and lighting in common areas

Form a committee of parents and teachers to identify ways to involve parents in the children’s school life

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Westerly School District:

Provide a full time school nurse teacher to State Street School

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Conclusions

The children of State Street School are eager and well behaved, deserving of consideration and respect as captured in the school's motto "We Cherish Children." It is disturbing that sometimes in the cafeteria, at recess, in the hallways, and in a few classes and groups, rules and expectations are not clear, children are not respected, and enforcement of discipline is inappropriate and inconsistent.

The SALT Visiting Team agrees with the State Street School staff that teaching to standards would have a positive effect on student achievement.

Writing tasks are generally limited to rote exercises that are insufficient to teach the processes required for meeting standards. Most children do not author for a purpose, do not understand how to improve their writing, and are not offered opportunities for peer editing, to author for a specific audience or to share their writing.

Although parents are encouraged to participate on the Site Council and there is regular communication between the school and its families; it is unfortunate that this does not foster shared responsibility for the children's education as described in State Street's Parent/Student/Teacher/ Agreement

Although a new formal evaluation process is being piloted in Westerly, a protocol for supervision, mentoring, and support for teachers in need is not yet clearly articulated nor implemented.

The strategies acquired through many hours of quality professional development are not yet fully implemented in the classrooms.

Final Advice to the School

State Street is a school at the threshold of systemic change. So many good things are in place: successful students; a committed, empowered and collegial faculty; strong programs with support; many excellent professional development opportunities; and a school day structured to support school reform. We have seen that you are open to taking risks and supporting reform efforts.

To frame your efforts the Visiting Team suggests that you move toward a standards based performance assessed system. Focus at first on student writing by connecting all professional development to your writing targets. Examine student work together, link the use of technology to writing, and use writing

across the curriculum to develop critical thinking skills. Map your Language Arts curriculum to standards so that all students and teachers know what the end result looks like.

Truly cherish your children. Insist that they be treated fairly in every part of their school day. Hear their voices and allow them in the leadership loop. The Student Council is a structure in place to give them voice and celebrate their leadership. Give them access to the Site Council.

In spite of your efforts, data indicates that you need to work on community relationships. Work with families to find the best way to enlist the support of the community. Consider a parent volunteer organization.

The work of teaching and learning is ongoing and difficult. Your efforts have shown promising results in the work of your students. Challenge them and yourselves to succeed at even greater levels.

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF STATE STREET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SELF-STUDY COMMITTEE

Dean Springer, Facilitator
Robert Alfiero, Parent
Robin Goodwin, Teacher
Terri Landau, Parent
Nancy McCormack, Parent
Marianne McGregor, Teacher
Louise Pankiewicz-DiCarlo Teacher
Pam Salimeno, Community Member
Linda Schackner, Teacher
Nancy Trachtman, Parent
Donna Ursillo, Parent
Stuart Vyse, Parent
State Street School Staff

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Carol Belair, Teacher
Wilbur McMahon School, Little Compton
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as SALT Fellow)
Chair of the Team

Jane Bessette, Parent
Wakefield

Karen Castagno, Assistant Professor
Rhode Island College

Ann D. Fagundes, Interim Administrator
Peace Dale School

Gail B. Gruber, Kindergarten Teacher
Winsor School

Lauri McTeague, Teacher
Block Island School

Becky Wright, Education Specialist
Rhode Island Department of Education

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