

HOPE VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Chariho, 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 commends Hope Valley School for:](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Hope Valley School:](#)

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

- [5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMUNITY](#)
 - [Sources of Evidence](#)
 - [Conclusions](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team commends Hope Valley School for:](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Hope Valley School:](#)
 - [The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Chariho Public Schools:](#)

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

 - [APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT](#)
 - [MEMBERS OF HOPE VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SITE COUNCIL](#)
 - [MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM](#)
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1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

A Profile of the School

Hope Valley Elementary School is located high on a hill in Hopkinton, Rhode Island in the village of Hope Valley. The Hope Valley Elementary School is the smallest of the four elementary schools in the Chariho Regional School District under the governance of an eleven member elected school committee representing the three towns in the district: Charlestown, Richmond, and Hopkinton. The Chariho community has a median family income below the state average.

There has been a school on the current site since 1822. The three-story brick building was constructed in 1933 and the one addition was built in 1955. The school originally was a junior high and the computer lab and classrooms on the top floor used to be a stage. Students have access to an outdoor play area that includes a grassy area, blacktop area, swings and playground equipment. Some instruction in physical education takes place on an adjacent town field.

An administrator leads 37 full-time and itinerant staff in grades K-4. Sixteen percent of the 231 students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Ninety-eight percent of the student population are White, 1% are Black, and 1% are Hispanic. Fifteen percent receive special education services and there are no students in bilingual or ESL programs. School and staff mobility is low.

Every classroom is wired and networked for internal use and every classroom has access to email and the Internet. During the summer of 1998, a large majority of the staff participated, as a team, in the Rhode Island Teachers in Technology program. Teachers are involved in the Mentor Teacher Program and the Peer-Sharing Program.

A strong PTO is involved in cultural arts, HOPE, classroom grants, volunteering in classrooms and publishing a newsletter.

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 Hope Valley Elementary School from May 11 to May 14, 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.

Hope Valley Elementary School's Improvement Plan (prepared November 1998), 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 Hope Valley 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 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
- meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators
- Hope Valley Elementary School Improvement Plan
- District and school policies, Chariho School District test data, *Information Works!* Data book; SALT Survey Report, union contracts
- 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 Hope Valley 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 Chariho School Department, the citizens of Chariho 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 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

The Hope Valley Elementary School is a small neighborhood school with one rule – “treat others the way you want to be treated.” The staff and students welcome visitors with great pride and a willingness to share their extraordinary accomplishments.

Staff share responsibility for the academic, social, emotional and developmental needs of the children. They work together cooperatively to provide classrooms that meet the needs of all of the students. Their feeling of “Focused, not nuts”, sets the stage for a comfortable working environment where teachers can plan together to promote student success. Small class size, a balanced approach to teaching, a variety of teaching strategies, and a well developed curriculum contribute to outstanding test results where Hope Valley students out perform similar students on all areas of the New Standards testing.

Classrooms and hallways are showcases for a wide variety of student work. This student work reflects the variety of learning styles of the students. The classroom atmosphere is warm and friendly. Teachers have rigorous expectations for students in all areas. As students work hard to meet these high expectations, they are happy and supported.

The principal’s leadership creates this comfortable place that supports both growth and change for students and teachers. Parents are partners at Hope Valley Elementary School and are important to the education that takes place here.

Hope Valley Elementary School is an extraordinary place for students to learn.

3. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING, PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Sources of Evidence

- 1999 Information Works! (1998 scores)
- 1998 State Assessment results
- Examination of student work
- School and classroom observations
- Conversations with staff, students and administration

- Meeting with Hope Valley Site Council
- Hope Valley School Improvement Plan (November, 1998)
- Following students

Conclusions

High expectations for all students contribute to the outstanding test results at Hope Valley Elementary School. (classroom observations, following students, conversations with staff members and students)

Hope Valley fourth graders performed extremely well on the English Language Arts New Standards Reference Exam. 91% of the students achieved or exceeded the standard in basic understanding, 81% in analysis and interpretation, 82% in writing effectiveness and 70% in writing conventions. These scores were noticeably higher than scores in the district, state and of similar students statewide. (1999 Information Works, 1998 state assessment results)

Hope Valley fourth graders also performed well on the Mathematics New Standards Reference Exam. 73% achieved or exceeded the standard in skills, 47% in concepts and 32% in problem solving. These scores were higher than scores in the district, state and of similar students statewide. (1999 Information Works, 1998 state assessment results)

Students in grade 3 scored surprisingly low on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment. 91% of the students scored below proficient, which is lower than the results of the state and the district. Examination of student work shows a higher quality of writing than the test results indicate. (1999 Information Works, 1998 state test results, examination of student work)

An equity gap between males and females, with females scoring higher, exists in the Writing Effectiveness portion of the English Language Arts New Standards Reference Exam. (1999 Information Works)

The appreciation of Hope Valley Elementary School students for learning and their genuine respect for each other and their teachers fosters student achievement. (following students, classroom observations, parent conversations)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Hope Valley School for:

High expectations for all students

Student performance on grade 4 state assessments

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Hope Valley School:

Maintain the level of high expectations

Examine 1999 state test results for continued gender gaps

Examine 1999 Rhode Island writing results for a pattern of poor performance

4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- Classroom observations
- Examination of student work
- Conversations with teachers, specialists, students and staff
- Meeting with school and district administrators
- Parent meeting
- Student meeting
- Hope Valley Elementary School Improvement Plan
- Individual Action Plans
- Following students

Conclusions

The extraordinary quality and professionalism of the teachers, specialists and support staff, the variety of traditional and current teaching practices and the use of student-centered activities help students with different learning styles to be successful. (classroom observations, conversations with school and district administrators, meeting with parents)

Teachers consistently hold students responsible for their work at a rigorous level contributing to the high quality of work that students produce. (classroom observations, examination of student work)

Writing across the curriculum is abundant with excellent examples evident in classes at Hope Valley Elementary School. The variety of writing is outstanding and related to everyday life. This meets the goals in the school improvement plan and individual action plans of teachers (classroom observations, following students, examination of student work)

Problem-solving strategies to develop critical-thinking skills are used effectively in most classrooms on a daily basis. These strategies are consistent with the goals in the school improvement plan and teachers' individual action plans. (Hope Valley Elementary School Improvement Plan, classroom observations, individual action plans)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Hope Valley School for:

High expectations

Integration of writing across all curricula areas

Content rich classroom centers

Teachers' individual action plans

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Hope Valley School:

Continue to provide opportunities and models for problem solving

Assure that all classrooms are writing across the curriculum

Increase opportunities for cooperative learning

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
- Meeting with students
- Following students
- School and District policy documents, union contracts
- Meeting with Hope Valley Elementary School Site Council Team
- Hope Valley Elementary School Improvement Plan

Conclusions

Adults and students alike contribute to the extraordinary family atmosphere at Hope Valley Elementary School where each person is considered part of the school community. Everyone works together for the good of the children. (classroom observations, meetings with parents, district and school administrators)

Parents are true partners in education and serve as an integral part of the school community by volunteering in classrooms, serving on district and school committees, supplementing cultural arts where they are lacking and raising money for school activities and projects. (classroom observations, meeting with parents and district administrators)

Thoughtful consideration of the developmental levels and learning styles of the children in classroom placement, along with small class size, contribute to the early success, particularly in language arts, and continued success throughout their elementary experience. (meeting with school and district administrators, conversations with parents)

The school web site (<http://www.chariho.k12.ri.us/hv>) links community, administrators, parents, teachers, staff, and students. It is a forum for communication and a place to share student work with the world. (classroom observations, conversations with student, staff and parents)

Teachers at Hope Valley Elementary School follow the curriculum conscientiously. Curricula are thoroughly linked to standards, developed by teachers and administrators, reviewed by parents and the community, updated annually and available at each school library. (meeting with district administrators, school and district documents)

The Site Council at Hope Valley Elementary School has prepared a school improvement plan that is remarkable in its simplicity. They have taken a state requirement and shaped their plan to meet their needs, based it on data, and expanded it to include individual action plans that teachers actually use to drive their daily instruction. (meeting with Hope Valley Elementary School Site Council, Hope Valley Elementary School Improvement Plan, classroom observations)

The Fine Arts program is limited by the lack of space, time, and money, which inhibits its ability to draw on the considerable talents of the Hope Valley Elementary School children. (conversations with students and parents, school observations)

The Chariho district administration provides an impressive array of resources focused on supporting teachers. (meeting with school and district administrators, school observations)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Hope Valley School for:

High participation of staff involvement in school and district curriculum development

Openness of the school to the community

Parent volunteers

The Hope Valley Elementary School web page

Placement procedures for students

Small class size

Health education curriculum

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Hope Valley School:

Increase the number of classroom computers

Strengthen fine arts program

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Chariho School District:

Finalize and implement technology curriculum

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Conclusions

High expectations for all students contribute to the outstanding test results at Hope Valley Elementary School. (classroom observations, following students, conversations with staff members and students)

The extraordinary quality and professionalism of the teachers, specialists and support staff, the variety of traditional and current teaching practices and the use of student-centered activities help students with different learning styles to be successful. (classroom observations, conversations with school and district administrators, meeting with parents)

Teachers consistently hold students responsible for their work at a rigorous level contributing to the high quality of work that students produce. (classroom observations, examination of student work)

Parents are true partners in education and serve as an integral part of the school community by volunteering in classrooms, serving on district and school committees, supplementing cultural arts where they are lacking and raising money for school activities and projects. (classroom observations, meeting with parents and district administrators)

Thoughtful consideration of the developmental levels and learning styles of the children in classroom placement, along with small class size, contribute to the early success, particularly in language arts, and continued success throughout their elementary experience. (meeting with school and district administrators, conversations with parents)

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Final Advice to the School

Hope Valley Elementary School is a school with all the pieces of the puzzle in place. There is a clear practical vision that is obvious in your school improvement plan and reflected in daily practice. Remain focused on what will best meet the needs of your students. Insist on your right to make site-based decisions that will enable you to continue your successful programs.

Do not become complacent. Celebrate your successes and enjoy your recognition. Continue to strive for better teaching practices and greater enthusiasm for learning among students.

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF HOPE VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SITE COUNCIL

Mrs. Terry Koussa
Mrs. Lynn Haberek, Grade 1 Teacher
Mrs. Lorna Rinaldo, Grade 2 Teacher

Mrs. Christine Anderson
Mrs. Diane Pardington, Teacher Aide
Mrs. Rachel Biello
Mr. David Gever
Mr. Richard Finlaw, Principal

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

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

Carol Belair, Grade 4 Teacher,
Wilbur McMahon School, Little Compton
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as SALT Fellow)

Cynthia Y. Corbridge
Office of Assessment
Rhode Island Department of Education

Silvia S. Gans, Parent
East Greenwich School District

Deborah Gamelin, Grade 1 Teacher
Hope Elementary School, Scituate

Lori Hughes, Magnet Focus Teacher
Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy, Providence

Leigh Riesenfeld, Librarian
Cranston Public Schools, Cranston

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