

# CITIZEN'S MEMORIAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Woonsocket, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

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# **1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS**

## **A Profile of the School**

Citizen's Memorial Elementary School is one of 12 elementary schools in the city of Woonsocket under the governance of the Woonsocket School Committee. Located in a valley, the school was built in 1958 on existing wet lands. Structural damage to the entire school was discovered in the spring of 1999. Major reconstruction of steel supports was completed as of 9/9/99. As a result of the moisture problem, three classrooms needed to be carpeted. Due to space constraints some services are provided in a trailer, a truck, and on a stage.

An administrator leads 46 full-time and itinerant staff in grades K-5. Approximately 81% of the 363 students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Forty-nine percent of the student population are White, 38% are Hispanic, 10% are Black and 4% are Asian/Pacific Islander. Seventeen percent receive special education services in resource or self-contained settings and 17% are in ESL programs. The mobility

rate is higher than the district and state averages.

The computer lab was updated in the spring of 1999 with 25 new Imacs. Internet capabilities were installed school wide. The school has moved to block scheduling in reading/language arts.

## **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 Citizen's Memorial Elementary School from September 28 to October 1, 1999 was to draw conclusions about the School in the three focus areas of SALT:

- Student Learning
- Teaching
- The School

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.

Citizen's Memorial Elementary School's Improvement Plan 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 Citizen's Memorial Elementary School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 98 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 8 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
- Citizen's Memorial Elementary School Improvement Plan
- Meeting with Citizen's Memorial Elementary School Improvement Team
- Minutes of Citizen's Memorial Elementary School Improvement Team meetings
- District and school policies, Citizen's Memorial Elementary School District test data, 1998 and 1999 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 15 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 Citizen's Memorial 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 Woonsocket School Department, the citizens of Woonsocket 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 as coming from the conclusions, since that is the way they were written by the

Team.

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

Citizen's Memorial Elementary School opens its doors daily to the challenge of working with a student population of many different abilities and language backgrounds. The school, led by a creative leader, is in a period of transition and is struggling to find new strategies to improve teaching and student performance in the school. The staff has taken a risk to improve reading instruction for all of the children through block scheduling, where class size has been reduced and extensive class time is spent on reading/language arts.

There is much passion and desire for growth with many dedicated teachers striving to provide effective educational experiences for students. Some exemplary practices are evident throughout the school, but they are not practiced on a school-wide basis. Successful strategies to implement school-based standards have been impeded by a lack of professional development that is consistent with the school's goals for improvement. The absence of high standards in mathematics and writing deprive students of vital and necessary elements in reaching high achievement.

There are some examples of warm, respectful, relaxed environments in this school in which students are comfortably and cooperatively involved in learning. However, in many cases, control of student voices and movement takes precedence over student interaction with the curriculum and each other.

The staff appears to recognize the obstacles that are in the way of the students' performance including limited materials, space, professional development and time to work together. Their efforts are hindered by the limited support and direction provided by the district.

## **3. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING**

### **Sources of Evidence**

- 1998 Information Works! (1997 scores)
- 1999 Information Works! (1998 scores)
- 1998 State Assessment results
- 1999 State Assessment results
- Woonsocket District test results
- Examination of student work

- School and classroom observations
- Meeting with School Improvement Team (SIT)
- Citizen's Memorial Elementary School Improvement Plan
- Following students

## Conclusions

On the 1998 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam, 2% of the students at Citizen's Memorial Elementary School achieved the standard in problem solving, 2% achieved the standard in concepts and 31% achieved the standard in skills. In addition, the performance of Citizen's Memorial Elementary School is below that of similar students statewide on the skills and concepts subtests of the New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam. The lack of a cohesive school-wide standards-based mathematics curriculum is contributing to the students' exceedingly low performance on the state assessment exams. (1999 Information Works!, classroom observations)

The inconsistent expectations for student performance that vary from class- to-class, the incongruent approaches to the teaching of writing, and a lack of focus on daily classroom writing throughout the curriculum contribute to a low level of student performance in language arts. Citizen's Memorial Elementary School students scores on the Writing: Effectiveness and Conventions subtests of the 1998 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam are below that of similar students statewide with 17% achieving the standard in Effectiveness and 21% achieving the standard in Conventions. (1999 Information Works!, classroom observations, following students)

On the 1999 Grade 3 Rhode Island Writing Assessment only 13% of the students at Citizen's Memorial Elementary School met the standard. Student work reflects low-level expectations. (1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, classroom observations)

An equity gap (a difference of 15% or greater) exists on the New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam Skills subtest between Hispanic and White students' performance with white students outperforming Hispanic students. (1999 Information Works)

## The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Citizen's Memorial Elementary School:

- Implement standards-based benchmarks for student performance in all grades (K-5), in Language Arts (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and Mathematics (skills, concepts and problem solving)
- Examine 1999 state test results to determine changes needed in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and to plan professional development
- Place a high priority on implementing the district mathematics curriculum

## 4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- Classroom observations
- Examination of student work
- Conversations with teachers, parents, students and staff
- Parent meeting
- Student meeting
- Meeting with School Improvement Team (SIT)
- SALT Survey Results
- School Improvement Plan
- Following students
- Meeting with school and district administrators

### Conclusions

Citizen's Memorial Elementary School has worked hard to gather and analyze data to determine students' instructional needs in math, reading, and language arts. Some teachers have begun to use performance-based assessments. In general, classroom assessment practices do not provide constructive feedback to students or teachers about student learning on a regular basis. (Citizen's Memorial Elementary School Improvement Plan, classroom observations, conversations with teachers)

In an effort to improve student performance in reading, block scheduling has been implemented. Despite a funding setback, Citizen's Memorial Elementary School demonstrated perseverance, courage and tenacity, forging ahead with a program that potentially addresses the needs of all students, enables inclusion of all, reduces class size, and increases direct instruction opportunities. (Classroom observations, conversations with teachers and administrators, following students)

Recognizing that block scheduling is in its early stages, a number of obstacles need to be addressed to improve instruction and learning. Specifically, these include: inconsistent implementation of planned block components; limited teaching strategies that fail to meet the diverse learning needs of students; unfocused staff development; a lack of materials; and the use of the trailer, stage and other inappropriate spaces. (school and classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers and administrators)

There is not yet clear, school-wide understanding and implementation of standards in the areas of writing and math problem solving which are instrumental in achieving high performance on state assessments. (Citizen's Memorial Elementary School Improvement Plan, classroom observations, examination of student work)

High expectations and a clear focus and purpose of instruction are inherent in standards driven reform. In many classrooms low expectations for student performance and limited alignment of lessons to standards were evident. (SALT Survey results TSRS chart A4, classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations with parents, students, teachers, school and district administrators)

## **The SALT Visiting Team commends Citizen's Memorial Elementary School for:**

The sense of purpose and commitment to improve student performance driving the implementation of block scheduling

Analysis of data to determine student needs

## **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Citizen's Memorial Elementary School:**

Make the time to work together as you implement and revise the components of the reading/language arts block

Obtain the professional development needed to implement standards-based curriculum, to develop differentiated instructional strategies and to develop performance-based assessments tied to standards

Demonstrate your commitment that each and every student can reach high standards

Use creative ways to find appropriate space to serve student needs

## **5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL**

### **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,

Meeting with School Improvement Team

School Improvement Team minutes

Citizen's Memorial Elementary School Improvement Plan

District test results  
SALT Survey results

## Conclusions

Professional development is a critical requirement in the implementation of new programs and improvement in the art of teaching. The lack of clear direction from the district and insufficient opportunities for staff to participate in standards-based professional development are detrimental to the quality of teaching and learning in the school. (conversations with teachers, SALT survey results, conversations with school and district administrators)

There is rich diversity in the student population at Citizen's Memorial Elementary School. This richness is not visibly celebrated or utilized effectively as a resource, ignoring the presence of almost half of the students in the school. The lack of representation and bilingual resources limits the school's ability to assess student learning or achievement. (school and classroom observations, conversations with students and parents)

The absence of common planning time hinders the process of teachers making effective curriculum based decisions or implementing new methods of instruction, and does not foster an environment conducive to professional cooperation. This vital missing link at Citizen's Memorial Elementary School has proven to be a detriment to the consistency of teaching strategies and pedagogy within the school. (SALT survey results, conversations with teachers, conversations with school and district administrators)

Students who are English language learners (ESL), and other children with insufficient language development frequently appeared confused, embarrassed or hesitant to ask questions of teachers or peers, limiting their ability to demonstrate what they know and are able to do. (following students, school and classroom observations, conversations with teachers and students)

The School Improvement Team and parents share the desire for improved communication and the establishment of an effective parent organization. While parents feel welcome in the school, communication between and among parents, teachers and administration is problematic. (conversations with parents, meeting with School Improvement Team)

A supportive school climate is a stated priority for the school, and some of the planned initiatives are being carried out. But, one of the major components for building a supportive school climate, the peer mediation program, was not maintained last year and is not yet in evidence this year. (Citizen's Memorial Elementary School Improvement Plan, conversations with students, parents and teachers)

There is no classroom alternative support team (CAST) in the school to assist teachers in building their

capacity to use strategies which support all students. Diverse learning needs of students are rarely accommodated. Special Education and ESL services are provided almost exclusively outside of the regular classroom. (classroom observations, conversations with parents, teachers and district administrators)

## **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Citizen's Memorial Elementary School:**

Inform all parents and staff concerning meeting time, agendas and decisions of the School Improvement Team (SIT)

Celebrate the diversity of the student population and ensure that all students can participate in the learning environment

Create and find ways for staff to meet together for planning

Work in cooperation with the district to conform to Article 31 requirements and implement a student intervention team (eg. CAP/CAST)

Reinstate peer mediation program

## **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Woonsocket School District:**

Provide the professional development and support needed to enable all teachers to implement standards-based curriculum, to develop differentiated instructional strategies and to develop performance-based assessments tied to standards

Work in cooperation with the school to monitor and support their compliance with Article 31 requirements and implement a student intervention team (eg. CAP/CAST)

Work with the school to provide common planning time for teachers

## **6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **Most Important Conclusions**

Professional development is a critical requirement in the implementation of new programs and improvement in the art of teaching. The lack of clear direction from the district and insufficient opportunities for staff to participate in standards-based professional development are detrimental to the quality of teaching and learning in the school. (conversations with teachers, SALT survey results, conversations with school and district administrators)

High expectations and a clear focus and purpose of instruction are inherent in standards driven reform. In many classrooms low expectations for student performance and limited alignment of lessons to standards were evident. (SALT Survey results TSRS chart A4, classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations with parents, students, teachers, school and district administrators)

In an effort to improve student performance in reading, block scheduling has been implemented. Despite a funding setback, Citizen's Memorial Elementary School demonstrated perseverance, courage and tenacity, forging ahead with a program that potentially addresses the needs of all students, enables inclusion of all, reduces class size, and increases direct instruction opportunities. (Classroom observations, conversations with teachers and administrators, following students)

There is rich diversity in the student population at Citizen's Memorial Elementary School. This richness is not visibly celebrated or utilized effectively as a resource, ignoring the presence of almost half of the students in the school. The lack of representation and bilingual resources limits the school's ability to assess student learning or achievement. (school and classroom observations, conversations with students and parents)

There is not yet clear, school-wide understanding and implementation of standards in the areas of writing and math problem solving which are instrumental in achieving high performance on state assessments. (Citizen's Memorial Elementary School Improvement Plan, classroom observations, examination of student work)

## **Final Advice to the School**

Citizen's Memorial Elementary School has set forth on a journey of change and discovery, the end result of which is to bring all students to high performance. A major obstacle which must be overcome is for the entire school community to truly believe that all children can and will achieve at high levels. This process will require a sustained and organized effort among parents, teachers, administrators and students.

Everyone is now challenged with helping one another change to reflect powerful initiatives in teaching and learning that will result in higher student performance. The enormity of this endeavor and the ability of this community to take the first steps of change have opened a powerful door towards attaining success.

# **APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT**

## **MEMBERS OF CITIZEN'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

### **School Improvement Team**

Elizabeth D'Abbraccio ( Chairwoman)

Vivian Marchetti

Carol Keyes

Rene Pincince

Mary Ann Grintchenko

Patricia Gaudreau

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Evelyn Berrios

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## **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

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Providence Street School, West Warwick

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Chair of the Team

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Christine Davidson, Principal  
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Patricia King, ESL Teacher  
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Roy Roberts, Principal  
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Ina S. Woolman  
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