

EMMA G. WHITEKNACT SCHOOL

East Providence, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

October 1999

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1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

A Profile of the School

Emma G. Whiteknact School, an attractive one-story school with spacious classrooms, was built in the late 1950s. The school is governed by the East Providence School District. An addition to the original building was added in 1989. Until June 1998 the school served students in grades K-6. In June 1998 the Grove Avenue Elementary School in East Providence was closed. One half of the students from Grove Avenue School were relocated to the Emma G. Whiteknact School. The grade structure changed from two classrooms of each grade level to three classrooms of each grade level. Kindergarten has two half sessions, a morning and an afternoon session. Grade six students were moved to the middle school.

The total enrollment of the school is 372 students. Fifty one percent (190 students) of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Twenty-nine percent (109 students) of the student population is made up of African American, Asian, Hispanic, and Native American children.

Fifty-six students receive ESL services. Forty-three students are eligible for Title I services and 23 students receive resource help.

This is the principal's second year at Whiteknact. Prior to that she served for two years as principal of Grove Avenue School.

Emma G. Whiteknact School has been a Math Focus School with the East Bay Educational Collaborative (EBEC) for three years. It has recently been awarded a Working Wonders II, Round 3 grant for software, hardware, and training for computers. Each classroom has at least one on-line computer. Kindergarten Youth Services (KEYS), a Title I initiative, allows fourth and fifth graders to tutor children in the kindergarten classes.

A Child Opportunity Zone (COZ) is housed at Whiteknact. It has served East Providence for six years. There are several after school opportunities offered to children. Teachers who apply for Title I funding staff ASK (After School Kids). Volunteers from outside agencies staff a tutorial program.

The school has partnerships with URI and East Providence Reads. The Title One Program supported a summer program for some students and prepares Home Video Kits for parents to share literature with their children.

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 Emma G. Whiteknact School from October 5 to October 8, 1999 was to draw conclusions about the School in the three focus areas of SALT:

- Student Learning
- Teaching
- The School

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 and a parent. Their affiliations are included in Appendix

A.

Emma G. Whiteknact's School 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, 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 Emma G. Whiteknact School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 83 hours of classroom observation. Most classrooms were visited at least once. Many teachers were observed 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, principal, the special education director, and the Superintendent
- Emma G. Whiteknact School's Improvement Plan, 1999
- meeting with the School Improvement Team
- examination of student work including a selection of work collected by the school
- analysis of the school's performance on state assessments of standards
- 1999 Rhode Island Third Grade Writing Assessment results
- 1999 *Information Works!* Data Book (1998 test scores before the students from Grove Avenue School were transferred to Emma G. Whiteknact)
- Professional Development Activities
- SALT Survey Report
- *East Providence K-12 Curriculum: All Subject Areas*
- MDT Meeting

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 26 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 Emma G. Whiteknact 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 East 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 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 were written.

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

The spacious, colorful classrooms of Emma G. Whiteknact School, the smiling faces of its children, and the warmth of its teachers welcome the visitor. It is an efficient, well-organized, spotless school bordered by a park in a neighborhood of well cared for single family homes.

The SALT Visit began on the nineteenth day of the school year. Eleven teachers were new to the school.

Teachers at Emma G. Whiteknact School work together to find ways to meet the needs of a diverse population following prescribed methods and breaking new ground in their efforts to improve student learning. Although teachers have begun to implement standards based active learning strategies, students remain predominantly passive learners in whole class instruction. Opportunities to explore the arts and to engage in physical activity are limited.

Students feel safe and welcome in the school. Parent involvement is evident and important to the school, but parents do not feel valued in their capacity to make suggestions or impact final decisions.

New administration, new teachers, new curriculum, and New Standards present challenges to students, teachers, and parents alike. Although it will take time, Emma G. Whiteknact has the potential to meet its goals for improvement. With patience, communication, self-study, and understanding it will all come together.

3. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- 1999 Rhode Island Third Grade Writing Assessment results
- 1999 Information Works! (1998 scores before the Grove Avenue School students were transferred to Whiteknact)

Conclusions

Eighty nine percent of third graders did not achieve the standard on the RI Third Grade Writing Assessment. Fewer than forty percent of fourth graders achieved the standard on the writing effectiveness and conventions sections of the English Language Arts New Standards Reference Exam. Most teachers have begun the hard work of improving writing instruction and assessment to close the gap to standard in writing. (1999 Rhode Island Third Grade Writing Assessment results, 1999 *Information Works!*)

Although considerable gaps to standard exist in the three areas of the Mathematics New Standards Reference Exam, Emma G. Whiteknact students' performance was the same as similar students statewide except in the area of skills where Emma G. Whiteknact students performed lower than similar students. (1999 *Information Works!*)

Gender gaps were noted in the Math Skills subtest of the New Standards Reference Exam and the Writing Effectiveness subtest of the New Standards Reference Exam. (1999 *Information Works!*)

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Emma G. Whiteknact School:

Examine 1999 New Standards Reference Exam results as soon as they become available to inform your efforts to close gaps in student performance.

4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- Classroom observations
- Following a student
- Examination of student work
- 1999 Rhode Island Third Grade Writing Assessment
- 1999 Information Works! (1998 scores before the Grove Avenue School students were transferred to Whiteknact)
- Conversations with teachers, students and staff
- Student meeting
- SALT Survey 1999
- Following students
- Meetings with School Improvement Team, School Administrators, District Administrators, Students, and Parents

Conclusions

The Emma G. Whiteknact teachers have been involved in the KITES project through the East Bay Educational Collaborative and are implementing the program in their classes providing hands on Science experiences for students.(Classroom observation, meeting with school administrator, following students, meeting with students)

Participation as a Math Focus School with the East Bay Educational Collaborative has provided rich opportunities for training in the school's new math program, developing assessments and rubrics, and sharing materials and ideas with other schools. Classroom practice has changed to reflect these experiences.(Meeting with Superintendent, conversations with teachers, classroom observations)

To address low test scores in writing, teachers are working together to evaluate student writing, familiarizing students with the RI Writing rubrics, and beginning to implement writing in all subject areas.(1999 Rhode Island Third Grade Writing Assessment, classroom observation, conversations with teachers, meeting with principal)

Instructional strategies are not varied enough to meet the needs of all children. Most classroom instruction is teacher directed.(Following a student, classroom observations)

Regular classroom instruction is interrupted for students who receive resource instruction (Special Education, ESL, Reading) outside their classrooms. This deprives students of opportunities to participate fully in classroom learning experiences. (Following a student, classroom observations)

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Emma G. Whiteknact School:

Differentiate instruction to meet the needs of every student.

Develop rubrics with the students and insure that students understand how to use those rubrics to improve their work.

Review the needs of students receiving resource help (Special Education, Reading, ESL) to see if some of those needs can be better met through an inclusion model which teams resource and classroom teachers in the regular classroom.

Continue to look at student work with colleagues.

5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- School and classroom observations
- Meeting with district superintendent
- Meeting with School Improvement Team
- Meetings and conversations with school administrators, parents, and teachers
- *East Providence K-12 Curriculum: All Subject Areas* revised 6/18/99

Conclusions

The School Improvement Plan 1999 reflects an insufficient level of self-study to allow the School Improvement Team to develop state mandated action plans that will lead to improved student performance. (School Improvement Plan 1999, School Improvement Team meeting, classroom observations)

The East Providence School Department has developed and distributed to all teachers a curriculum that is well articulated and standards based. The implementation of this curriculum will move Emma G. Whiteknact School toward raising expectations for all students. (East Providence K-12 Curriculum: All Subject Areas, meeting with District administrators, conversations with teachers)

The principal supports teachers in exploring initiatives to improve student learning -- e.g. the third grade program, pre and post running records in some classrooms, and looking at student work. This encourages teachers to take risks in their classrooms. (Conversations with teachers, meeting with school

administrators, classroom observations)

Through the Title I and the Child Opportunity Zone (COZ) programs, Emma G. Whiteknact School reaches out to parents with valuable activities and materials to support children's learning throughout the whole year. (School Improvement Team meeting, meeting with school administrator, parent meeting)

An active group of parents enthusiastically supports school activities. Conflicting evidence about how parents feel about their participation is disturbing. Although eighty-nine percent of parents reported feeling that "this school views parents as important partners" in the 1999 SALT Survey (administered in late January, 1999), during the SALT Visit some parents expressed concern that they were not viewed as partners. (SALT Survey 1999, meeting with parents, conversations with principal, School Improvement Team meeting)

Children spend 80 minutes per week in a prep/recess period monitored by supervisory aides. The prep time deprives children of valuable instruction time. (East Providence Teachers' Contract, classroom observation, conversation with school administrators)

Three ESL teachers work with students from grades 1-5 in a classroom that is cold and noisy. The room is divided into three sections by low partitions. Despite attempts to keep the noise down, the noise level is distracting. (Following a student, classroom observations)

Carpets in the new wing are held together with duct tape and are stretched to an extent that they are a hazard to both children and teachers. (Conversations with teachers, School Improvement Team Meeting, classroom observation)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Emma G. Whiteknact School for:

Title I Program

The COZ

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Emma G. Whiteknact School:

Use the new curriculum document to add challenge and rigor to your classrooms and to inform parents.

Establish common goals and improve communication among the PTA, School Improvement Team, COZ, and administration.

Begin the challenging work of self-study to develop action plans and focus professional development.

Evaluate thoroughly the overall effectiveness of the third grade pilot program considering not only the effects on the RI Writing Assessment but also the developmental appropriateness of the grouping practice.

Eliminate the prep time for students and develop ways to provide more educational opportunities especially in the arts and physical education.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the East Providence School District:

Provide professional development for teachers in the use of the standards based curriculum document.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Rhode Island Department of Education:

Provide technical assistance to Emma G. Whiteknact School as it develops its School Improvement Plan.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Conclusions

Instructional strategies are not varied enough to meet the needs of all children. Most classroom instruction is teacher directed.

Participation as a Math Focus School with the East Bay Educational Collaborative has provided rich opportunities for teacher training in the school's new math program, developing assessments and rubrics, and sharing materials and ideas with other schools. Classroom practice has changed to reflect these experiences.

To address low test scores in writing, teachers are working together to evaluate student writing, familiarizing students with the RI Writing rubrics, and beginning to implement writing in all subject areas.

An active group of parents support school activities enthusiastically. Conflicting evidence about how parents feel about their participation is disturbing. Although eighty-nine percent of parents reported feeling that "this school views parents as important partners" in the 1999 SALT Survey (administered in early 1999), during the SALT Visit some parents expressed concern that they were not viewed as partners.

Regular classroom instruction is interrupted for students who receive resource instruction (Special Education, ESL, Reading) outside their classrooms. This deprives students of opportunities to participate fully in classroom learning experiences.

Children spend 80 minutes per week in a prep/recess period monitored by supervisory aides. The prep time deprives children of valuable instruction time.

Final Advice to the School

Emma G. Whiteknact School is at a critical point in its progress toward its goals. Use the self-study process and engage all the stakeholders in the Whiteknact community in your efforts to close gaps in your students' performance, improve student learning, and strengthen your School Improvement Plan. The School Improvement Plan must include action plans that will move your students forward. The plans should address ways to provide differentiated instruction and focused professional development.

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF EMMA G. WHITEKNACT SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

1999-2000

Julie Borja-Penha, Acting Chairperson
Chrisitne Almeida, Parent
Ilda Andrade, Parent
Sandra Cabral, Parent
Patricia Clark, Parent
Joy Dorsey, Title I Teacher
Francisca Gomes, Parent
Patricia Hendrickson, Grade 1 Teacher
Izhav Kazi, Parent
Karen Oliviera, Community Representative
Grace Osediacz, COZ Director
Debbie Rolle, Parent
Tara Sant'Anna, ESL Teacher
Priscilla Sousa, Grade 2 Teacher
Karen Speaks, Parent

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

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

Carrie Booker, Grade 3 Teacher
Asa Messer School, Providence, RI

Norma I. Lopez
Parent Consultant, Department of Health
Parent

Angela Lombardo
Principal
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Sandy Olson, Grade 7 English Language Arts Teacher
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