

HENRY J. WINTERS SCHOOL

Pawtucket, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

November 1999

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1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

A Profile of the School

Henry J. Winters School is one of 10 elementary schools in the city of Pawtucket under the governance of the Pawtucket School District and a seven member elected school committee.

The main building was built in 1961 and the 636 students are currently served in three different buildings. The main building serves students in grades K-4; an inclusion third grade is located across the street in a church basement. Students in two fourth grade classes as well as all students in grades 5-6 are located in an annex which is 3 blocks from the main building.

A principal, new to the school and state, leads a staff of 84 personnel with the aid of an assistant principal. Seventy-three percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Forty-three percent of the students are White, 41% are Hispanic, 11% are Black, 1% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% are Native American. Twenty-three percent of the students receive special education services in a self-contained or resource setting and 9% are ESL.

A kindergarten classroom in the main building and a grade 3 classroom across the street are two

inclusion classrooms at the Henry Winters Elementary School.

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 Henry Winters School from November 8-12 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. At the time of the SALT Visit to Henry Winters Elementary School a School Support System Visit was taking place in the Pawtucket School district.

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.

Henry Winters 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, 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 Henry Winters School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 85 hours of classroom observation. Most classrooms were visited at least 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 administrators, and District Administrators
- School Improvement Plan
- 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
- District and school policies
- *1998 Information Works!* Data book, *1999 Information Works!* Data Book
- SALT Survey Report

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, 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 Henry Winters 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 Pawtucket, 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 Henry Winters Elementary School is a school in transition. The staff appears to be divided – by building, by training, by basic beliefs and by level of commitment. While thinking its educational practices are effective, it is not receiving the message that its students are not learning. By placing blame on transient and unprepared students it has washed its hands of the underachiever. Small pockets of teachers are working in isolation rather than functioning together as a school. Everyone is moving in different directions at different paces.

There is vibrant new leadership at Henry Winters Elementary School, thus bringing a new philosophy to a building that is still dealing with financial and administrative issues from the previous year. There is a determination to focus on the issues of space, safety, professional development, and communication with a staff that is separated by more than city blocks. The administration realizes that much time and energy must be invested on the part of the staff to implement changes in instruction.

3. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- *1999 Information Works!* (1998 scores)
- 1998 State Assessment results
- 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment
- Conversations with teachers
- Examination of student work
- Following students
- Classroom observations
- Meeting with students

Conclusions

On the 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment only 9% of the third grade students at Henry Winters Elementary School achieved the standard. On the 1998 Grade 4 New Standards English Language Arts

Reference Exam Writing Effectiveness subtest, 23% of the students achieved the standard, and on the Conventions subtest, only 19% achieved the standard. A lack of consistency in writing instruction between and across the grade levels, little or no direct writing instruction, and little connection between reading and writing contribute to scores which are below similar students statewide. (1999 Information Works, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, classroom observations, examination of student work)

On the 1998 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam, 35% of the students achieved the standard in skills, 6% achieved the standard in problem solving, and only 4% achieved the standard in concepts. These scores are at or below those of similar students statewide. Overall, math instruction stresses paper and pencil/ rote instruction. Little use of manipulatives, attention to learning styles, instruction in problem solving strategies and discovery learning was evident. (classroom observations, 1999 Information Works, examination of student work, meeting with students)

Based on poor state writing assessment results some attempt has been made to change groupings to improve instruction. However, there appears to be minimal use of classroom assessments driving instruction to meet the needs of diverse learners. (classroom observations, conversations with teachers)

A gender equity gap (a difference of 15% or greater) exists on the New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam Reading: Analysis & Interpretation subtest with females outperforming males. (1999 Information Works)

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Henry Winters Elementary School:

Review and analyze state, district, school, and classroom test results to drive and evaluate instruction.

Examine 1999 state assessment results for any equity gaps.

4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- Classroom observations
- Following a student
- Examination of student work
- Conversations with teachers, students and staff
- Student meeting
- SALT Survey Results 1999
- Meetings with School Administrators, District Administrators, and Parents

Conclusions

Writing as an ongoing process and writing for a variety of purposes such as poetry, recipes, nonfiction, effective prompt writing, letter writing, and functional writing as outlined in a standards-based curriculum is not present in most classrooms. (classroom observations, meeting with school administrators, following students)

Students at Henry Winters Elementary School show an enthusiasm for learning yet many times teachable moments are missed. The lack of varied strategies inhibits the teachers' in meeting the needs of a diverse group of students. (following students, classroom observations, meeting with students)

Valuable teaching time is lost daily on non-academic activities such as bathroom routines, excessive recess, free time, traveling between buildings, classroom pull-outs and waiting for all students to finish an assignment. (following students, classroom observations, meetings with parents and students, conversations with teachers)

Overall, students at Henry Winters Elementary School receive whole-class, teacher-directed instruction regardless of ability or needs. Most students are given the same materials without evidence of modifications. The staff has little awareness of and sensitivity to the diverse learning needs of the students. (classroom observations, following students, meeting with administrators)

Students at Henry Winters Elementary School are seldom afforded the opportunity to assess and take responsibility for their own learning. There is minimal application to real world situations. Subjects are taught in isolation and there is little integration, communication, or collaboration among the learning community, which makes instruction less meaningful to students. (classroom observations, following students, meetings and conversations with students)

Most teachers have adequate language arts materials and math manipulatives yet lack the knowledge, skills and training to use them effectively, limiting the ability of teachers to address the diverse needs of their students. (classroom observations, conversations with teachers and administrators)

The SALT Visiting Team commends the Pawtucket School District for:

Providing teachers with an annual stipend to supplement classroom materials

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Henry Winters Elementary School:

Provide an ongoing system of professional development for standards-based instruction in reading, math and writing.

Realign curriculum to close gaps and reflect standards-based instruction.

Work together for more effective classroom time management.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Pawtucket School District:

Work with the school to provide an ongoing system of professional development.

5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- School and classroom observations
- Meeting with district administrator
- Meeting with School Improvement Team
- *Information Works 1999*
- Meetings and conversations with school administrators and teachers
- Meeting with parents
- Meeting with students
- Following students

Conclusions

The obvious neglect of the Henry Winters Elementary School facility seriously impedes the day to day academic climate, affects instruction, and makes it impossible to build a working school community. The neglect has also caused serious safety issues. (following students, classroom observations, meeting with school administrators, conversations with teachers)

The lack of a common direction, shared responsibility, and ownership between all members of the school community at Henry Winters Elementary School results in serious communication breakdowns between buildings, teachers and parents. (meetings with parents, conversations with teachers, meeting with school administrators)

The absence of a school-based professional development plan as required by Article 31 has limited the effectiveness of professional development. It does not address the issues the school faces. The way

instruction is currently delivered does not work for most students. (meeting with School Improvement Team, classroom observations, conversations with teachers and administrators)

There appears to be sufficient personnel to serve the students at Henry Winters Elementary School, however, their purpose and use is not effectively addressing diverse student needs. (classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers)

The school improvement team at Henry Winters Elementary School recognizes parents are partners in an effective school. However, a lack of communication breaks the network of support between administration, teachers, staff, students and parents. (meeting with School Improvement Team, meeting with parents and school administrators)

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Henry Winters School:

Work with the Pawtucket School District to correct any facilities and grounds issues that impacts the safety of students and staff.

Establish communication between all members of the school community.

Create an ongoing professional development plan that is aligned with Article 31.

Design and implement ways to maximize effectiveness of support personnel.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Pawtucket School District:

Work with the administration of Henry Winters Elementary School to correct any facilities and grounds issues that impact the safety of students and staff.

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Conclusions

The lack of a common direction, shared responsibility, and ownership between all members of the school community at Henry Winters Elementary School results in serious communication breakdowns between buildings, teachers and parents. (meetings with parents, conversations with teachers, meeting with school administrators)

The obvious neglect of the Henry Winters Elementary School facility seriously impedes the day to day academic climate, affects instruction, and makes it impossible to build a working school community.

The neglect has also caused serious safety issues. (following students, classroom observations, meeting with school administrators, conversations with teachers)

Valuable teaching time is lost daily on non-academic activities such as bathroom routines, excessive recess, free time, traveling between buildings, classroom pull-outs and waiting for all students to finish an assignment. (following students, classroom observations, meetings with parents and students, conversations with teachers)

Most teachers have adequate language arts materials and math manipulatives yet lack the knowledge, skills and training to use them effectively, limiting the ability of teachers to address the diverse needs of their students. (classroom observations, conversations with teachers and administrators)

On the 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment only 9% of the third grade students at Henry Winters Elementary School achieved the standard. On the 1998 Grade 4 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam Writing Effectiveness subtest 23% of the students achieved the standard, and on the Conventions subtest only 19% achieved the standard. A lack of consistency in writing instruction between and across the grade levels, little or no direct writing instruction, and little connection between reading and writing contribute to scores which are below similar students statewide. (1999 Information Works, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, classroom observations, examination of student work)

Final Advice to the School

The Henry Winters Elementary School faces many challenges. Through parental and community involvement, team building, and trust in the new leadership these challenges can be met.

You have the potential for change. Share your strengths and build upon them. Work with those staff members who have already begun the process. By keeping an open mind, embracing change, and opening doors to each other these challenges can be met. The staff needs to believe that “we are here for the kids, they are not here for us.”

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF HENRY WINTERS SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

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