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1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

A Profile of the School

Old County Road School opened as a Junior High School in 1955. Currently, Old County Road School is an elementary school housing approximately 325 students in grades K-5. Old County Road School serves a socio-economically and academically diverse community of learners. The student population is 97 percent White. The principal is in her first year as a principal. She came from a school outside Rhode Island.

Old County Road School is located in the town of Smithfield, a residential, suburban community. Approximately 80 percent of Smithfield residents are homeowners. The other 20 percent are renters. According to the 1990 census, the median family income of \$49,060 is the state's third highest. Families with incomes below the poverty level account for 3.4 percent of the population. However, 23 percent of Old County Road's students have qualified for free or reduced lunches, this number is higher than the other three elementary schools in the district. Old County Road is the district's Title I school.

The school is under the jurisdiction of the Smithfield School Department. Based on the 1996-97 figures, the per pupil expenditure for the district is \$5,897.00, as compared to the state average of \$7,233.

Entrance doors at Old County are kept locked during the day. A buzzer and an intercom system are used to permit entry into the building. A mirror allows office staff to view visitors as they enter the school.

Each month a group of eight students from the fifth grade is selected to serve on the Student Council. The Student Council meets weekly with the principal. The Student Council has made many contributions to the school. Among them - the construction of the memorial playground, and the DARE wall.

Several teachers, in conjunction with the Lab at Brown University, are involved in an action research project entitled "Maximizing Success for All Students." As a result of this project students in grades four and five participate in flexible, success-based instructional groups.

Old County Road School is a Feinstein School. A "Caught in the Act" program recognizes students' contributions to the social climate of the school. Many classrooms participate in a "Buddy Reading" program where older students read with younger students. A Response Team meets weekly to take a proactive approach to the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of the students.

Old County Road School has a web site created in cooperation with WSBE Channel 36, <http://www.ocrs.org>.

An active PTO raises funds and plans special events. A VIPS (Volunteers in Public Schools) program provides volunteers for classroom and clerical assistance. Students from the Service Learning course at Smithfield High School volunteer in classrooms on a regular basis. Old County Road School has recently been "adopted" by a group of sororities from Bryant College who assist in fund raising efforts, outdoor chores, and chaperoning events. The combined efforts of many members of the school community have led to the construction of the stage, the installation of the sound system, and the installation of the high speed internet connections found in all classrooms and in the 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 Old County Road School from November 2-5, 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. Two observers from the Panasonic Foundation also participated in parts of the Visit. The affiliations of the team members are included in Appendix A.

Old County Road School's Strategic 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 Old County Road School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 109 hours of classroom observation. All classrooms were visited at least once. Many teachers were observed 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, principal, and the District Administrators
- *Old County Road School Strategic Plan 1999*
- *Old County Road Mentor Plan K-5*
- 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 and documents
- *1999 Information Works! Data Book* (1998 results)
- 1998 state testing results, 1999 State Writing Assessment
- Professional Development Activities
- SALT Survey Report 1999

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 23 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 Old County Road 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 Smithfield, 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 vibrant colors of a community quilt, murals depicting core values determined by the children, walls and display cases filled with exceptional student artwork greet the visitor at the entrance to Old County Road School. Venture further into the building and hear the sounds of teachers coaching, children working, recorders whistling, and guitars strumming.

Teachers and administrators have worked hard to develop a warm and inviting environment while accepting the difficult task of developing and implementing academic standards that will challenge children. As a result the children have just begun the difficult work of taking responsibility for their own learning. This work is most evident in Writing where the students have a wonderful grasp of standards and rubrics. Although it is not so evident in math, the work has begun with a new curriculum that will be introduced to the teachers this month. In addition to a strong academic program, children are encouraged to express themselves artistically through an excellent program of music and mixed media. All members of the school staff support the children in their efforts.

Both teachers and children know why they are here, and both are committed to success.

3. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- *1999 Information Works!* (1998 scores)
- 1998 State Assessment results
- 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment scores
- Classroom observations
- Examination of student work

Conclusions

Seventy-nine percent of third graders did not achieve the standard on the RI State Writing test. This is surprising in light of the amount of writing observed in the classrooms and the excellent performance of fourth grade students on the 1998 English Language Arts writing sub-tests of the New Standards Reference Exam. (1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment scores, 1998 State Assessment results, classroom observations, examination of student work))

Old County Road School students also performed well on the Reading sub-tests of the English Language Arts New Standards Reference Exam with 80 percent of fourth graders achieving the standard in Basic Understanding and 68 percent achieving the standard in Analysis and Interpretation. (1998 State Assessment results)

Although 64 percent of fourth graders achieved the standard in Mathematical Skills, it is disappointing that only 28 percent achieved the standard in Math Concepts and 14 percent achieved the standard in Problem Solving on the Mathematics New Standards Reference Exam. (1998 State Assessment results)

Equity gaps (a difference of 15 percent or greater) between the special education students and the general education students are evident on the Third Grade Rhode Island Writing Assessment (1999) and

all reported sub-tests of the Fourth Grade New Standards Reference Exam (1998). These gaps are greatest on the English Language Arts New Standards Reference Exam -a nearly 60 percent gap on the Analysis and Interpretation sub-test and more than a 40 percent gap on the Writing Effectiveness subtest. (1999 *Information Works!*, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment scores)

There is a large equity gap - just over 20 percent- between the performance of males and females on the Analysis and Interpretation subtest of the Fourth Grade English Language Arts New Standards Reference Exam with females scoring higher. (1998 State Assessment results)

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Old County Road School:

Examine 1999 test results, when available, for gaps between the special education population and general education population and, if found, determine ways to close the 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
- 1998 state assessment results
- SALT Survey 1999
- Following students
- Meetings with School Improvement Team, school administrators, district administrators, students, and parents

Conclusions

The teachers' obvious commitment to standards as a means to improve student learning, their willingness to adopt and implement new district curricula, and the diligence with which they approach these tasks has provided an excellent educational climate for Old County Road School. As a result teachers and students benefit from a focus on teaching and learning which raises expectations for both. (Meetings with principal, district administrators, teachers, students, and parents, classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations with staff)

Most teachers are using rubrics (scoring guides) very effectively as a tool to define and assess student work, especially in Language Arts. Students understand rubrics and are able to articulate at an outstanding level how they apply to their own work. Because they understand the rubric they also

understand the standard, which is often an elusive goal. The consequence is that students are producing high quality work in Language Arts. (Student meeting, classroom observation, examination of student work, conversations with teachers)

Teachers employ a wealth of instructional strategies in their daily lessons. In some classrooms, however, these strategies are not applied to reach the full range of students' learning abilities, leaving some children struggling and others unchallenged. (Following a student, classroom observations, conversations with teachers)

Time spent on math varies considerably from grade to grade. Many teachers do not emphasize problem solving, and their reliance on direct instruction does not encourage inquiry, cooperative learning, or use of manipulatives. This may contribute to low scores on the math New Standards Reference Exam. (Following a student, classroom observations, examination of student work, 1998 state assessment results)

The designated Special Education Resource Room, isolated from the general population, is inadequate for the number of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Two teachers provide special education (resource) services to all children (K-5) who require either extensive resource for over half the child's school day or resource for shorter periods. When one of the two teachers leaves the room to provide inclusion services, to test children, or to attend IEP or Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) meetings, no substitute is available leaving the other teacher responsible for the education of too many children. This adversely effects the learning of these children. (Following a student, classroom observations, conversations with teachers and students)

Classrooms are wired and each is equipped with at least one computer. Although classroom computers are being used as a center activity, there is little evidence that technology is integrated into classroom practice. This limits the teaching strategies available to teachers. (Classroom observations, conversations with students and teachers)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Old County Road School for:

Commitment of faculty

Effective use of rubrics to support standards-based instruction

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Old County Road School:

Make problem solving a priority in all classrooms.

Provide professional development to staff in the areas they have requested on the SALT Survey: mathematics instruction, differentiated instruction, and technology.

Use allotted (by contract) "recess/remedial" time for grade level teachers to share student work and establish benchmark papers.

Implement Tactic 2, the technology action plan, of the Old County Road School Strategic Plan.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Smithfield School District:

Examine existing resource services to insure that teachers have appropriate coverage, space, and caseloads so that the needs of the children can be met effectively.

Support professional development for Old County Road School in the areas identified by the teachers.

5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- School and classroom observations
- Meeting with district administrators
- Meeting with School Improvement Team
- *Information Works 1999*
- Meetings and conversations with school administrators, teachers, and staff
- Meeting with parents
- Meeting with students
- Following students
- Review of school documents
- Old County Road Self-Study

Conclusions

Adults and children treat each other with mutual respect in a safe and caring environment that fosters personal growth and learning. (School and classroom observations, following a student, student meeting, conversations with teachers and staff)

Many parents are not aware of the new standards-based curricula and assessments implemented in the school. This makes it difficult for parents to appreciate and understand their children's work. (Parent meeting, conversations with teachers)

The current report card does not translate the standards-based assessments used in the school causing

confusion within the school community. (Report cards, conversations with teachers, parent meeting)

The teacher evaluation system currently in place does not acknowledge and promote professional growth and development. (Conversations with district administrators and principal, teacher evaluation document)

The mentoring program does not sufficiently address the needs of new teachers. This deprives all teachers the opportunity to exchange successful teaching techniques and classroom management strategies. (Old County Road School Mentor Program K-5, classroom observations)

The work and role of the School Improvement Team in the school is not clear. This limits its effectiveness as a vehicle for reform/school improvement efforts. (School Improvement Team Meeting, conversations with district administrators, principal, and teachers)

Old County Road School's Self-Study effectively uses data to form conclusions about the school. (Old County Road School Self-Study Fall 1999, School Improvement Meeting)

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Old County Road School:

Empower the School Improvement Team to develop and implement action plans for school improvement.

Provide many and varied opportunities to ensure effective communication with all parents (e.g. workshops, School Report Night, notices).

Revise the Old County Road School Mentor Program.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Smithfield School Department with the Smithfield Teachers' Association:

Develop a plan for evaluating teachers that promotes professional growth

Develop a district mentoring plan

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Conclusions

The teachers' obvious commitment to standards as a means to improve student learning, their willingness to adopt and implement new district curricula, and the diligence with which they approach these tasks has provided an excellent educational climate for Old County Road School. As a result teachers and students benefit from a focus on teaching and learning which raises expectations for both. (Meetings with principal, district administrators, teachers, students, and parents, classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations with staff)

The designated Special Education Resource Room, isolated from the general population, is inadequate for the number of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Two teachers provide special education (resource) services to all children (K-5) who require either extensive resource for over half the child's school day or resource for shorter periods. When one of the two teachers leaves the room to provide inclusion services, to test children, or to attend IEP or Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) meetings, no substitute is available leaving the other teacher responsible for the education of too many children. This adversely effects the learning of these children. (Following a student, classroom observations, conversations with teachers and students)

Time spent on math varies considerably from grade to grade. Many teachers do not emphasize problem solving, and their reliance on direct instruction does not encourage inquiry, cooperative learning, or use of manipulatives. This may contribute to low scores on the math New Standards Reference Exam. (Following a student, classroom observations, examination of student work, 1998 state assessment results)

Teachers employ a wealth of instructional strategies in their daily lessons. In some classrooms, however, these strategies are not applied to reach the full range of students' learning abilities, leaving some children struggling and others unchallenged. (Following a student, classroom observations, conversations with teachers)

Many parents are not aware of the new standards-based curricula and assessments implemented in the school. This makes it difficult for parents to appreciate and understand their children's work. (Parent meeting, conversations with teachers)

Final Advice to the School

Old County Road School is setting a standard for school reform - not only within your district but also within the state. Continue your hard work and maintain your commitment to all your students.

Reach out to all parents and involve them in your learning community. Don't underestimate parents' interest and desire to understand the work you do. Share your work with them.

As you implement the new math curriculum and explore new texts, make math one of your priorities. Give mathematics the same, intense work and study you have applied to Language Arts.

Use your School Improvement Team as the driving force behind your reform. It can be a powerful tool for you.

The Visiting Team leaves Old County Road School with a better understanding of how standards can work in an elementary school. Like your students, we have benefited and learned from the effort you have devoted to your teaching practices. We hope that this report acknowledges the fine work you have done and promotes discussion of where you should go next.

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF OLD COUNTY ROAD SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Jill Barnhardt, Principal

Joanne Carey, Parent

Mary Ann Hennessey, Teacher

Richard Iannitelli, Parent

Donna Olson, Teacher, Co-Chair

Denise Pelletier , Teacher

Kathryn Tancrelle, Co-Chair, Co-Chair

Patricia Twohey, Teacher

Dawn Wakim, Parent

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Chair of the Team

Carol Belair, Grade 4

Wilbur McMahan School, Little Compton

(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as SALT Fellow)

Joan F. Borden, Grade 5
Chester Barrows Elementary School, Cranston

Teri Cicero, Respiratory Therapist
Rhode Island Special Education Advisory Committee
Chair, Exeter/West Greenwich Special Education Advisory Committee
Parent

Kathleen Curtis, Grade 5
Cottrell F. Hoxsie Elementary School, Warwick

Joyce S. Fitzpatrick, Reading Recovery/Resource
Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy, Providence

Carol A. Frisk, Principal
Leo A. Savoie School, Woonsocket

Diane MacGregor, Grade 3
Wilbur and McMahon School, Little Compton

Susan M. Remington, Grade 5
Harry L. Halliwell Memorial School, North Smithfield

Scott Thompson and Jerry Cohen, Observers
The Panasonic Foundation

Tom Wilson, Principal
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