

# DR. EDWARD A. RICCI SCHOOL

North Providence, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

December, 1999

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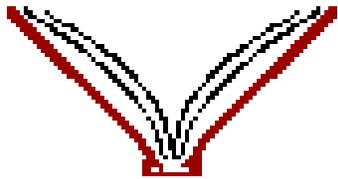
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## **Catalpa Ltd. Endorsement of Report Legitimacy**

### **SALT School Visiting Team Report**

**Dr. Edward A. Ricci School, December 10, 1999**

To complete the Catalpa Ltd. report endorsement, I have reviewed this report, observed a portion of the visit and discussed the conduct of the full visit with the Visit Chair. Based on my knowledge derived from these sources of evidence, using the criteria specified in the *Endorsing SALT Visiting Team Reports by Catalpa Ltd.* and using the methodology and procedures specified in the *SALT Visit Handbook* -(3rd edition), I conclude that:

1. This report was produced by a legitimate SALT Visit that was led by a trained SALT Visit Chair and conducted in a manner that is consistent with SALT Visit procedures.
2. The conclusions and all other content of this report meet the criteria specified for a SALT Visit report.

Accordingly, Catalpa Ltd. endorses this report as a legitimate SALT Visit Report.

Thomas A. Wilson, EdD  
Principal Partner, Catalpa Ltd.

December 22, 1999

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## 1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

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 Dr. Edward A. Ricci School from **December 7-10, 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.

Dr. Edward A. Ricci School's Academic Improvement Team Initiative 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 Dr. Edward A. Ricci School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 67 hours of classroom observation. All classrooms were visited at least once. Many teachers were observed more than once
- many observations of the school (outside of classrooms)
- following 6 students for a full day
- observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day
- scheduled meetings with:
  1. students
  2. parents
  3. school administration
  4. district administrators
  5. Academic Improvement Team
- conversations and interviews with many staff, students, and school administrators
- observation of MDT(Multi-Disciplinary Team) meeting
- observation of team meetings
- examination of student work including a selection of work collected by the school
- analysis of achievement and equity gaps based on Infoworks Data
- district and school policies
- review of professional development activities
- review of classroom assessments
- review of the following documents:
  1. Academic Improvement Team Initiative
  2. District Strategic Plan
  3. SALT Survey Report
  4. 1998 Information Works! Data book
  5. 1999 Information Works! Data book
  6. North Providence Teacher Evaluation Form

The full Team has built the conclusions, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussions. The Visiting Team met for a total of 24 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, 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 reached consensus agreement for each conclusion, 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 Dr. Edward A. Ricci 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 North 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 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 should be considered in the context of the conclusions since that is the way they were written.

## **2. PROFILE OF DR. EDWARD A. RICCI SCHOOL**

The Dr. Edward A. Ricci School, located in a residential neighborhood, is one of eight elementary schools in the North Providence School District under the governance of the North Providence School District and a seven member elected School Committee. Four of the schools in the district serve students in grades K-6, and three serve students in grades K-8. One school in the district serves students in grades 7-8, yet is considered an elementary school. One high school serves students in grades 9-12.

The one story brick building opened in September 1968 as the Lymanville Elementary School. In October 1981, the school was renamed the Dr. Edward A. Ricci School after a former student and school physician. Two courtyards and a library connect the two wings of the K-8 school.

A principal and an assistant work with a staff of 67 full time and itinerant staff at the Dr. Edward A. Ricci School. Thirty percent of the 480 students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Eighty-eight percent of the students are White, 6% are Hispanic, 4% are Black, and 2% are Asian/Pacific Islander. Eight percent of the students receive ESL, and 14% receive special education services in a resource or

self-contained setting.

A middle school model for grades 7-8 is being piloted at Dr. Edward A. Ricci School. This is a major focus of the school.

### **3. PORTRAIT OF DR. EDWARD A. RICCI SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT**

Nestled in a neighborhood setting, the Dr. Edward A. Ricci School is a place where children are happy and eager to learn, dedicated professionals care about children and both students and staff share a common respect for each other.

The school has begun the difficult trek through the maze of effective school reform that will lead all of its students to achieve high standards. The initiation of proven middle school practices in grades 7 and 8 will provide teachers and students opportunities for high academic performance. A strong special populations faculty is working to meet the individual needs of the students assigned to them and to integrate them into the mainstream as much as possible.

Although a conscientious effort for effective teaching is in place, professional development is haphazard and the use of effective teaching strategies is inconsistent.

The lack of an understanding of standards-based curriculum throughout the school makes it difficult for students to reach the state performance standards contributing to low test scores. Teachers rely on whole group instruction that ignores individual learning styles.

As the Dr. Edward A. Ricci School enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a changing school population is creating more and different needs and challenges.

### **4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING**

#### **Sources of Evidence**

1. *1999 Information Works!* (1998 scores)
2. *1998 Information Works!* (1997 scores)
3. 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results
4. Classroom observations
5. Examination of student work

#### **Conclusions**

Eighteen percent of the Grade 3 students at Dr. Edward A. Ricci School achieved the standard on the 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, and 36% of the Grade 7 students achieved or exceeded the standard. While these scores show modest gains from 1998, the quality, types, and amount of student work in writing are inconsistent from class to class. (examination of student work, classroom observations, *1999 Information Works!*, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results)

On the Grade 4 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam, 63% of the fourth grade students at Dr. Edward A. Ricci School achieved or exceeded the standard in the Skills subtest. However, only 4% achieved or exceeded the standard in Problem Solving and 8% achieved the standard in Concepts. The Concepts and Problem Solving scores are significantly below those of similar students statewide. (*1999 Information Works!*)

On the Grade 8 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam, 33% of the students at Dr. Edward A. Ricci School achieved or exceeded the standard in the Skills subtest. However, only 6% achieved or exceeded the standard in Concepts and 5% achieved the standard in Problem Solving. The scores on all three subtests are for the second consecutive year significantly below those of similar students statewide. (*1999 Information Works, 1998 Information Works!*)

On the Grade 4 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam 75% of the students at Dr. Edward A. Ricci School achieved or exceeded the standard in Reading Basic Understanding, 65% in Reading Analysis & Interpretation, 45% in Writing Effectiveness and 53% in Writing Conventions. These scores are at or above those of similar students statewide. (*1999 Information Works!*)

On the Grade 8 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, 53% of the students at Dr. Edward A. Ricci School achieved or exceeded the standard in Reading Basic Understanding, 36% achieved or exceeded the standard in Reading Analysis & Interpretation, 79% achieved the standard in Writing Effectiveness, and 68% achieved the standard in Writing Conventions. Three of the four scores are below those of similar students statewide. (*1999 Information Works!*)

Equity gaps (a difference of 15% or greater) exist on the Grade 8 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam and on the New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam between special education and general education students. No special education students were proficient on the Skills, Problem Solving or Analysis & Interpretation subtests. (*1999 Information Works!*)

Gender equity gaps exist on the Grade 4 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam Writing Effectiveness subtest and on the Grade 8 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam Reading Analysis & Interpretation subtest with females outperforming males. (*1999 Information Works!*)

**The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Dr. Edward A. Ricci School:**

Look at class and school summary reports from state assessments, pay particular attention to the section "What students need," and utilize this information to develop a plan to improve student learning.

Examine 1999 State Assessment results for continued patterns in equity gaps.

## **5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING**

### **Sources of Evidence**

1. Classroom observations
2. Examination of student work
3. Conversations with teachers, students and staff
4. 1999 SALT Survey
5. Following students
6. Meetings with School Improvement Team, students and parents
7. State assessment results

### **Conclusions**

At the Dr. Edward A. Ricci School there is not a common understanding of effective writing strategies, how to teach them, or how to incorporate those strategies into all curricular areas. Direct instruction about purpose, audience, voice, effective details, and organization, for example, is not evident in most classrooms. Although sincere attempts are being made to include writing in classroom activities such as journals, reports, and writing prompts, these types of activities alone do not constitute standards-based instruction in writing and will not sufficiently raise achievement. (classroom observations, examination of student work, 1999 SALT Survey staff chart D.1.14, conversations with teachers)

While rubrics are displayed in many classrooms, the appropriate use and understanding of rubrics are not conveyed to students and parents. It appears that teachers do not understand rubrics and use them only for grading. This limits their effectiveness in the teaching and learning process. (classroom observations, examination of student work, meetings with students and parents)

Improving math scores is a priority in the North Providence School district. Class size reduction in math for students in grades K-3 has been implemented at the Dr. Edward A. Ricci School. This and the purchase of the Problem of the Day and a new grades 6-8 math series will only begin to address the school wide low math performance on state assessments. Although a textbook-based program supplemented with manipulatives and real world problems can be effective, many teachers do not have an understanding of how these approaches can complement one another. This contributes to students' poor daily math performance, and thereby impacting state assessment scores. (classroom observations, meeting with students, state assessment results)

Many teachers do not have clear learning expectations for their students at the Dr. Edward A. Ricci School. Many students do not know why a particular assignment is given, how the assignment helps them achieve the goals of the curriculum, how to complete the assignment, and what or why revisions would make it better. In all learning areas, written and/ or oral feedback that teaches students how to revise their own work is sparse. This form of assessment is most critical prior to the completion of an assignment. (classroom observations, meetings with parents and students, examination of student work, 1999 SALT survey)

### **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Dr. Edward A. Ricci School:**

Engage all teachers in long term, on-going, professional development that includes modeling, coaching, and mentoring.

Work together within and across grade levels to develop examples of clear expectations of various types of activities for all students.

Engage teachers in discussions focused on standards.

### **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the North Providence School District:**

Work with the Dr. Edward A. Ricci School to engage all teachers in long term, on-going, professional development that includes modeling, coaching, and mentoring.

Work with the staff at Dr. Edward A. Ricci School to engage teachers in discussions focused on standards.

## **6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL**

### **Sources of Evidence**

1. School and classroom observations
2. Meeting with district administrators
3. Meeting with Academic Improvement Team
4. Academic Improvement Team Initiative
5. Meetings and conversations with school administrators and teachers
6. Meeting with parents
7. Observation of team meetings
8. Teacher evaluation form

## Conclusions

To meet the unique needs of the young adolescent, the Dr. Edward A. Ricci School is piloting a middle school model this year for grades seven and eight. Good first steps include working with a middle level consultant, the establishment of teams, and the implementation of common planning time. These efforts support the staff, administration, and community who are enthusiastic and determined to make the middle level model successful. (observation of team meetings, meetings with parents, school and district administration, conversations with teachers)

The current teacher evaluation process used at Dr. Edward A. Ricci School is outdated. It does not promote the professional growth of teachers. (teacher evaluation form, meetings with school and district administration)

Professional development for teachers at the Dr. Edward A. Ricci School is haphazard, sporadic, and disconnected. Also, the decision to offer all district professional development outside of school hours reduces participation. These conditions do not encourage teachers to follow through and the impact of the professional development is minimal. (meetings with school and district administration, meeting with Academic Improvement Team, conversations with teachers)

The Academic Improvement Team has looked at assessment results and the SALT survey to form its Initiative. The resulting plan and strategies/ activities are insufficient or are not directly connected to the stated "tactics." Little emphasis is placed on what is required to change instruction and the strategies/ activities are not embedded in standards. (meeting with Academic Improvement Team, review of Academic Improvement Team Initiative, meeting with school administrators)

The lack of a comprehensive district curriculum and no formal district endorsement of particular content standards make it extremely difficult for teachers to know and use standards in designing their instruction and student learning activities. (meetings with school and district administrators, conversations with teachers, classroom observations)

### **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Dr. Edward A. Ricci School:**

Continue to work on the implementation of a middle school model

Work with the district to develop and use curricula that are aligned with specific content standards

Review the Academic Improvement Team Initiative, align it with the standards, and use it to change instruction

Find ways to include all teachers in professional development activities and in implementing their new learning

## **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the North Providence School District**

Increase the professional development budget to include funds beyond Article 31/23.

Develop district wide curricula that are aligned with specific content standards.

Redesign the teacher evaluation process to support the professional growth of teachers within a standards-based environment.

## **7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **Most Important Conclusions**

At the Dr. Edward A. Ricci School there is not a common understanding of effective writing strategies, how to teach them, or how to incorporate those strategies into all curricular areas. Direct instruction about purpose, audience, voice, effective details, and organization, for example, is not evident in most classrooms. Although sincere attempts are being made to include writing in classroom activities such as journals, reports, and writing prompts, these types of activities alone do not constitute standards-based instruction in writing and will not sufficiently raise achievement. (classroom observations, examination of student work, 1999 SALT Survey staff chart D.1.14, interviews with teachers)

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The lack of a comprehensive district curriculum and no formal district endorsement of particular content standards make it extremely difficult for teachers to know and use standards in designing their instruction and student learning activities. (meetings with school and district administrators, conversations with teachers, classroom observations)

## **Final Advice to the School**

You are in the early stages of transition. Embrace the standards and continue with your focus in the areas of math and writing in all content areas as well as across all grades. Remember that reading, too, must be a centerpiece of daily instruction in all content areas.

Use your "lead teachers" to help and support you in your journey with your students towards their achieving high standards. Find creative ways to talk, work, and learn with each other. Commit yourselves to on-going professional development and use it in your teaching.

Celebrate the growing diversity of your population.

Keep working on the middle school model.

You are a dedicated, hard-working staff. Draw on your strengths, talents and professional relationships as you work with your wonderful group of students who have told us and shown us that they genuinely like and respect you.

## **MEMBERS OF DR. EDWARD RICCI SCHOOL ACADEMIC IMPROVEMENT TEAM**

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Donna Castellone, Parent  
Donna Ross, Parent  
Deb Norato, Special Education Grades 7-8  
Donna Fishback, Grade 7 Teacher

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## Catalpa Ltd., Providence