

# WOONSOCKET AREA CAREER AND TECHNICAL CENTER

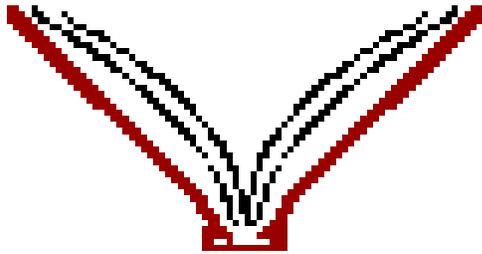
Woonsocket, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

December, 1999

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

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

#### **Woonsocket Area Career and Vocational Center, 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 SALT Report Endorsement Protocol 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 Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center from December 7, 1999 to December 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 representative of the Rhode Island Department of Education. Their affiliations are included in Appendix A.

Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center'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, at the cooperative placement 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 Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- observations of a total of 41 full (block length) classroom, observations and 57 partial classroom observations which totaled over 118 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. Most classrooms were visited at least once. Most teachers were observed more than once
- many observations of the school (outside of classroom)
- following six students for a full day
- observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day
- scheduled meetings with the following groups:
  - students
  - parents
  - building and district administrators
  - School Improvement Team
- conversations and interviews with many staff, students, and school administrators
- examination of student work, including a selection of work collected by the school
- analysis of achievement and equity gaps based on Information Works Data
- review of district and school policies
- review of professional development activities
- review of classroom assessments.
- review of the following documents:
  - School Improvement Plan

- District Strategic Plan
- SALT Survey Report
- Departmental Curricula
- *1998 Information Works!* Data book
- *1999 Information Works!* Data Book
- classroom textbooks

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 108 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 reached consensus agreement for each conclusion, each recommendation, and each commendation 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 Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center 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 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 in the context of the conclusions since that is the way they were written.

A SALT Visit was conducted at Woonsocket High School at the same time as this SALT visit. While each report is separate, some readers may find it important to consider both reports.

## **2. PROFILE OF WOONSOCKET AREA CAREER AND TECHNICAL CENTER**

The Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center serves as the regional career and technical school for the community of Woonsocket as well as the communities of Cumberland, Burrillville, and North Smithfield. The Center is located in the city of Woonsocket, just fifteen miles north of Providence and forty-five miles south of Boston. The city of Woonsocket is home to approximately 45,000 people.

Serving nearly 500 students in eleven different career and technical areas, the Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center operates under the regulation of the Rhode Island Board of Regents and in conjunction with the advice of several boards. Noticeable among these are: the Regional Planning Committee, the Perkins Planning Committee, the Regional Coordinating Committee, and the craft Advisory Boards.

A five-member school committee whose members are elected to staggered four-year terms governs the Woonsocket Public School District. A Mayor and a 7-member council govern the city. A professional staff of 3 administrators, 6 pupil personnel staff, 15 faculty, 3 clerks, 2 custodians and 6 career facilitators serves the students at Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center.

Of the students attending Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center, 33% are minority. Approximately 1% of the 500 students receives LEP services, 21% receive special education services and 12% are economically disadvantaged. Contiguous to the Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center is the Woonsocket High School. Approximately 85% of the Career and Technical students are enrolled in Woonsocket High School.

Woonsocket students enrolled at the Center are presently scheduled using a 4 by 4 block scheduling process (now in its second year). This permits students to enroll in eight to sixteen classes per year, or four classes per day for an entire semester or quarter. The faculty and staff of Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center also participated in the Breaking Ranks initiative and are presently working to integrate mathematics and English language arts instruction into the career and technical subject areas.

## **3. PORTRAIT OF THE CONDITION OF WOONSOCKET AREA CAREER AND TECHNICAL CENTER AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT**

The Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center is an upbeat "*work in progress*". As soon as you enter, the vibrant and informative surroundings entice you to learn more about careers and technology. The photographs of students engaged in applied learning, the bulletin boards of student achievement, the program descriptions and the cases filled with awards and trophies are evidence of a strong commitment to personalized learning and positive affirmation. The building is strikingly clean, visually appealing and imbued with a sense of purpose.

Students, teachers, counselors, and administrators have rolled up their sleeves and are building an active community of learners. Elbow to elbow, teachers encourage students to develop new skills, venture into new terrain, learn from their mistakes and support each other's progress. Building on their efforts the skilled and experienced staff have created a positive learning environment for their students. The administration is supporting staff to research and implement new programs to address students' academic deficiencies and gaps in achievement.

The Center's staff has now expanded their work to include integrated learning, the potential of portfolios, as well as new pathways for career and technical education. The staff's strong commitment to student learning, progress and achievement coupled with professional development will help them sustain these ambitious efforts.

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

- 1999 Information Works! (1998 scores)
- Examination of student work
- Conversations and interviews with teachers, administrators and staff
- Conversations and interviews with students
- Classroom observations
- Meeting with parents

### Conclusions

Students are respectful, productive and engaged at Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center. They take pride in their work and their school. (Evidence: Classroom observations; Conversations and interviews with students; Conversations and interviews with teachers, administrators and staff; Examination of student work)

Student performance is strong enough to generate more employment opportunities than there are students to fill those opportunities. Employers in both the public and private sector also continue to actively seek students from the career and technical programs for employment. A high regard for student performance has made meaningful cooperative placements possible. (Evidence: Conversations and interviews with teachers, administrators and staff; Conversations and interviews with students; Meeting with parents; Classroom observations)

The results of the 1998 state assessment of tenth grade students in mathematics show that 48% of the Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center students met or exceeded the standard in skills and only

2% of the students met the standards in concepts and problem solving. This is a concern in relation to a student's ability to be successful in a technologically demanding work place. (Evidence: 1999 Information Works! --1998 scores)

Based upon the 1998 test results of the state assessment in mathematics, there is a gender equity gap in skills, with boys outperforming girls. There is insufficient data, however, to identify further equity gaps. (Evidence: 1999 Information Works! --1998 scores)

## **The SALT Visiting Team commends Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center for:**

The high quality of student performance across career and technical areas

## **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center:**

Examine the 1999 state assessment results in mathematics and English language arts to determine level of progress and next step for closing the gaps in student performance

Examine the 1999 state assessment results in mathematics and English language arts to determine if there are equity gaps

# **5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING**

## **Sources of Evidence**

- Classroom observations
- Examination of student work
- Conversations and interviews with teachers, staff, and school administrators
- 1999 Information Works! (1998 Scores)
- SALT Survey 1999
- Following students
- Review of curricula
- Meetings with School Improvement Team, school administrators, district administrators, students, and parents
- Review of classroom assessments

## **Conclusions**

Personalization is a predominant feature of teaching at the Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center. Teachers working with individual students and small groups, teachers tailoring instruction, counselors and other support staff making frequent contacts with students and parents, teachers demonstrating new skills, teachers providing direct, immediate and productive feedback has led to the success of students at the Center. (Evidence: Conversations and interviews with teachers, staff, and school administrators; Meetings with School Improvement Team, school administrators, district administrators, students, and parents; Following students; Classroom observations)

The clear expectations of teachers for students in the classrooms, labs, and on the job support the high quality of student performance and enhance the nurturing learning environment. (Evidence: Review of classroom assessments; Following students; Review of curricula; Meetings with School Improvement Team, school administrators, district administrators, students, and parents)

The first year of the three-year effort to provide: integrated academic and technical education is focused on mathematics and English instruction for 25% of the Center students. This is a promising response to the critical standards gap in student performance. (Evidence: Review of curricula; Meetings with School Improvement Team, school administrators, district administrators, students, and parents; Examination of student work; SALT Survey; 1999 Information Works - 1998 Scores)

The use of portfolios has been underway for several years and is widespread throughout the Center. However, they are not effective assessment tools because they lack consistency and are not based upon academic or industry standards. (Evidence: Review of curricula; Review of classroom assessments; Classroom observations; Examination of student work; Following students)

Although teachers effectively use industry standards and norms to organize curricula and instruction, they are only beginning to use New Standards (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Applied Learning) to plan instruction and assess student learning. (Evidence: Review of curricula; Review of classroom assessments; Classroom observations; Examination of student work)

Teachers provide multiple opportunities for students to use technology; however, teachers themselves do not routinely use educational technology as an effective instructional tool. (Evidence: Classroom observations; Following students Conversations and interviews with teachers, staff, and school administrators)

## **The SALT Visiting Team commends Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center for:**

Their commitment to personalized instruction and counseling

## **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center:**

Provide job embedded professional development that enables all teachers to understand and use New Standards to strengthen student learning

Align New Standards with industry standards and norms

Build integrated units, which enable students to attain both industry and academic standards

Continue and expand the promising program of "integrated academic and career and technical education," including curriculum development, professional development and evaluation

Ensure that portfolios become effective assessments of student performance by creating and implementing rubrics

Examine ways to modify the delivery of instruction by fully utilizing existing educational technology such as: overhead projectors, LCD panels, data projectors, graphing calculators and the like

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

### **Sources of Evidence**

- School and classroom observations
- Meeting with district and school administrators
- Meeting with School Improvement Team
- Interviews with teachers
- Meeting with parents
- Meeting with students
- Following students
- School Improvement Plan
- Self-Study document
- District Strategic Plan

### **Conclusions**

The Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center provides a supportive environment which fosters student development. The faculty and support staff are both responsive and proactive in dealing with student and parent needs. They provide a non-judgmental atmosphere that assists students in handling

personal and family challenges. (Evidence: Meeting with parents; Meeting with students; Following students; School and classroom observations; Interviews with teachers)

The students, staff and faculty take pride in their impeccably clean and well-maintained facility. Students are attentive to and respectful of the physical plant, which makes for a positive learning environment. Moreover, the utilization of visual communication throughout the Center is effective as an informational and affirming tool for all members of the community. (Evidence: School and classroom observations; Meeting with School Improvement Team; School Improvement Plan; Self-Study Document)

Although the newly instituted block schedule provides most Center faculty with the opportunity for one common planning period per day, many members of the faculty are not taking full advantage of this time to enhance teaching and learning. (Evidence: School Improvement Plan; Self-Study Document; Meeting with district and school administrators; Interviews with teachers)

The strategic direction of the Center benefits from and is constrained by multiple external decision making groups such as the Regional Planning Committee, the Perkins Planning Committee, the Regional Coordinating Committee, and the craft Advisory Boards. (Evidence: District Strategic Plan; Meeting with district and school administrators; District Strategic Plan Meeting with School Improvement Team; School Improvement Plan; Self-study document)

The Center has a School Improvement Team that functions internally without a clear structure and norms of operation. The School Improvement Plan does not show the analysis or use of available school and student performance data for decision-making. Parents, students and community representatives are not members of the School Improvement Team. (Evidence: Meeting with School Improvement Team; Meetings with parents; Interviews with teachers)

The Center actively initiates mutually beneficial partnerships to ensure that its students are prepared to meet industry standards and SCANS proficiencies. These partnerships include regional employers, service organizations, and city government. They provide work based learning opportunities for students, curricular and technical assistance to staff, financial and resource support for student activities, and enhancement of student skill mastery to ensure successful post-secondary enrollment and employment. (Evidence: Interviews with teachers; Meeting with School Improvement Team; School Improvement Plan; Self-Study document)

## **The SALT Visiting Team commends Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center for:**

Its impeccably clean, well maintained and visually informative physical plant

Non-judgmental and supportive environment

## **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center:**

Ensure that the School Improvement Team is representative of the entire Center community, including Woonsocket High School; that it develops operating guidelines; and holds meetings at times convenient for all members.

Take advantage of the time afforded by the block schedule to enhance academic and career and technical integration, to align curricula to standards, and to implement self-study activities.

## **7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **Most Important Conclusions**

Personalization is a predominant feature of teaching at the Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center. Teachers working with individual students and small groups, teachers tailoring instruction, counselors and other support staff making frequent contacts with students and parents, teachers demonstrating new skills, teachers providing direct, immediate and productive feedback has led to the success of students at the Center.

Student performance is strong enough to generate more employment opportunities than there are students to fill those opportunities. Employers in both the public and private sector also continue to actively seek students from the career and technical programs for employment. A high regard for student performance has made meaningful cooperative placements possible.

The first year of the three-year effort to provide integrated academic and technical education is focused on mathematics and English instruction for 25% of the Center students. This is a promising response to the critical standards gap in student performance.

Although teachers effectively use industry standards and norms to organize curricula and instruction, they are only beginning to use New Standards (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Applied Learning) to plan instruction and assess student learning.

The Center has a School Improvement Team that functions internally without a clear structure and norms of operation. The School Improvement Plan does not show the analysis or use of available school and student performance data for decision-making. Parents, students and community representatives are not members of the School Improvement Team.

## **Final Advice to the School**

You are a group of dedicated professionals. Celebrate your successes. Support one another. Complement one another's strengths and weaknesses. Invite each other into the conversations about your Center's future and your students' successes. Become an active participant in the formal and informal decision making that will shape the future outcomes of career and technical education in the northern Rhode Island region. Woonsocket Area Career & Technical Center is a good school that is looking to get better. A "work in progress" is continuous!

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

### **MEMBERS OF THE WOONSOCKET SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

Ed. Boucher

Deborah Heath

Michael Lavigne

John Ward

Ed Chmiel

### **MEMBERS OF WOONSOCKET AREA CAREER AND TECHNICAL CENTER SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM**

Doreen M. Corrente, Director/Principal

Andrew Riley, Supervisor of Instructional Services

Lee Ashcraft, Regional Technology Coordinator

David Balunas, Integrated Math Instructor

Dr. Lynne Bedard, Child Studies/Human Services Instructor

Colleen Curis, Child Studies/Human Services Instructor

William Gardner, Construction Technology Instructor

Meryl Levinson, Integrated English Instructor

Charles Myers, Jr., Property Management Instructor

Linda C. Stanley, Work Readiness Instructor

Maureen Walusiak, Electronics Technology Instructor

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