

CHESTER BARROWS SCHOOL

Cranston, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

January 28, 2000

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1. THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS 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 Chester Barrows School from January 25-28, 2000 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.

Chester Barrows School'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, 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 Chester Barrows School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 66 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 the following groups:
 - students
 - parents
 - building and district administrators
 - the school's School Improvement Team
- conversations and interviews with many staff, students, and school administration
- 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:
 - School Improvement Plan
 - District Strategic Plan
 - 1998,1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment
 - 1998,1999 New Standards Reference Exams
 - SALT Survey Report
 - *1998,1999 Information Works!* Data book
 - Curriculum Documents
 - Teacher Evaluation Instrument

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 19 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 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 Chester Barrows 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 Cranston School Department, the citizens of Cranston, 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. A PROFILE OF CHESTER BARROWS SCHOOL

Chester Barrows School houses roughly 260 students in grades K-5, and is one of eighteen elementary schools in the city of Cranston. It is governed by the Cranston Public Schools District, which is in turn governed by a five member elected school committee.

Chester Barrows School is a neighborhood school. Its building has undergone only a few changes since it opened its doors in 1924; in 1993 an all-purpose room was built.

The principal, who has thirteen years of experience at the school, leads a staff of 22 personnel, eleven of whom are classroom teachers. Twenty-nine percent of the 258 students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Seventy-six percent of the students are White, 12% are Hispanic, 7% are Black, and 5% are Asian/Pacific Islander. Eleven percent receive special education resource services while fourteen percent receive speech and language servicing. There are no self-contained or ESL services at the school.

3. PORTRAIT OF CHESTER BARROWS SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Small in size but large in heart, the Chester Barrows School pulsates with the strong beat of an engaged, learning community. This school provides an enriching, safe and nurturing environment where children can strive to excel. Parents are welcomed partners in this endeavor.

Chester Barrows School students show an eagerness and enthusiasm for learning as they are challenged to do their best. Students are actively involved in their education as they participate in creative learning activities.

At Chester Barrows School, the principal is the catalyst that generates the cooperative and cohesive atmosphere. The teachers conduct themselves professionally as they tirelessly work to be effective and stay current with educational practices. They set clear expectations as they incorporate rubrics and standards into innovative lessons.

Together, children, parents, teachers, staff and administration exhibit an enthusiasm and drive for excellence, which is challenging, contagious and safe.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- *1999 Information Works!* (1998 scores)
- 1999 New Standards Reference Exam results
- 1998 New Standards Reference Exam results
- 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results
- 1998 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results
- Examination of student work
- Classroom observations
- Following students

Conclusions

The students at Chester Barrows School show an extraordinary sense of pride and respect for themselves, others and their school. Most children are engaged, enthusiastic learners who have a propensity for helping each other. The team was impressed by the generally well-behaved, courteous and friendly student body of Chester Barrows School. (following students, classroom observations)

On the Grade 3 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, 42% of the students at Chester Barrows School met or exceeded the standard. These scores are above state and district percentages. The significant increase of 28% over the 1998 scores may be attributed to the school's emphasis on writing activities and assessments. (1998,1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results, classroom observations, examination of student work)

On the 1999 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam the students at Chester Barrows School met or exceeded the standard in the following: *Skills* - 66%, *Concepts* - 50%, and *Problem Solving* - 38%. These scores show great improvement over the 1998 scores, especially in the areas of concepts and problem solving. The scores are above district and state percentages. (1999 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam, 1998 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam results)

On the Grade 4 1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam the students at Chester Barrows School met or exceeded the standard in the following: Reading: *Basic Understanding* - 95%, Reading: *Analysis & Interpretation*- 82%, Writing: *Effectiveness* - 41% and Writing: *Conventions* - 48%. While the scores on the reading subtests show signs of growth, the scores on the writing subtests are at or below state and district percentages. (1998, 1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam results)

Equity gaps (a difference of 15% or greater) exist on the Grade 4 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam Reading: *Analysis & Interpretation*, Writing: *Effectiveness* subtests and on the New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam *Skills* subtest between special education and general education students. In addition, no special education students achieved the standard on the New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam Problem Solving subtest. (1999 *Information Works!* Data book)

A gender equity gap exists on the Grade 4 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam Reading: *Analysis & Interpretation* subtest with females outperforming males. (1999 *Information Works!* Data book)

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Chester Barrows School:

Stay focused and continue to work with standards and rubrics to maintain and improve student academic achievement for *all* students.

Attend to any equity gaps on state assessments and modify plans accordingly.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- Classroom observations
- Following a student
- Examination of student work
- Conversations with teachers, students, staff and administration
- Student meeting
- Parent meeting

Conclusions

At Chester Barrows School, standards and rubrics are part of the active instructional process and are posted in every classroom. It is clear that standards and rubrics are being used in instructional planning and that students are aware of what they are working towards and how their work is assessed. (classroom observations, following students, meeting with students, conversations with teachers and students)

At Chester Barrows School, teachers are working towards using the writing process to help children become proficient writers. This emphasis on effective written communication based on shared school rubrics helps give teachers and students a clear focus which improves the variety and quality of writing in all areas. Students are exposed to a variety of writing styles and purposes as delineated in the standards. (classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers and administrators, examination of student work)

The integration of subjects is a component of the applied learning standards at Chester Barrows School. In many rooms reading, writing, math, technology, social studies and science are all linked. This connection across the disciplines helps to make learning real for the students. The thought provoking questioning by the teachers along with project based activities enrich the learning atmosphere. (classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers)

As in every school, there is a wide range of student abilities and learning styles. At Chester Barrows School, teachers and students are working as a team to try to support all learners. As the demographics change, and students with varying needs arrive, the school must find additional ways to adequately serve these students. (classroom observations, meetings with students and parents, conversations with administrator and teachers)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Chester Barrows School for:

The use of standards along with child friendly rubrics that support and challenge learning as part of the daily routine.

The school's emphasis on writing.

The integration of subject areas to maximize learning opportunities.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Chester Barrows School:

Continue the use of standards and rubrics as an active dynamic process.

Explore professional development opportunities for alternatives in supporting students with varying needs.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- School and classroom observations
- Meeting with district administration
- Meeting with School Improvement Team
- Meetings and conversations with school administration and teachers
- Meeting with parents
- Meeting with students
- Teacher Evaluation Handbook
- Chester Barrows School Improvement Plan
- 1999 SALT Survey

Conclusions

Chester Barrows School has a welcoming, nurturing atmosphere which is the result of the hard work of all involved: the strong leadership of the administrator, the professionalism of the staff, the active participation of parents and the enthusiasm of students are vital parts of this cohesive learning community. (classroom observations, meetings with students, parents and administration, SALT survey,

1999)

The staff at Chester Barrows School demonstrates a high level of professionalism. Many teachers spend additional time providing extra services for the children, exploring alternative avenues for instruction, and working with each other to maximize their effectiveness. The level of conversation and the cohesiveness of the staff and administrator are the driving forces behind the growth at Chester Barrows School. (school and classroom observations, meeting with administrator)

Systemic professional development is limited for the staff at Chester Barrows School. While the staff has opportunities to share and learn from each other at monthly meetings, there is limited time for the staff to plan grade level activities and therefore ensure continuity and consistency between and among grade levels. Teachers must choose to use their own time and resources in their planning and search for professional growth at both the building and district levels. This level of voluntary participation is difficult to sustain over the long term. (meetings with school and district administration, conversations with teachers)

The School Improvement Plan at Chester Barrows School has clearly delineated goals and action plans. There was an effective use of data to create the plan. The participation of the school community and the entire staff on the School Improvement Team demonstrates the high level of commitment. The School Improvement Plan is realistic and achievable. With prioritized goals in different stages of implementation, the plan is obviously a work in progress. (meeting with School Improvement Team, Chester Barrows School Improvement Plan, conversations with teachers and administrator, classroom observations)

The Cranston School Department is currently piloting a new teacher evaluation process that was developed to promote effective instructional practices which are directed at the importance of teaching, learning and student achievement. This is good starting point for professional conversation about evaluation. (Teacher Evaluation Handbook, meeting with school and district administration)

The SALT Visiting Team commends Chester Barrows School for:

A warm, welcoming family atmosphere.

The professionalism of the staff.

The quality and effectiveness of the leadership.

A realistic and achievable School Improvement Plan.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Chester Barrows School:

Explore ways to find common planning time for grade level meetings.

Continue professional conversations around rubrics and standards.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Cranston School District:

Provide more systemic professional development opportunities at the grade and district levels that do not rely solely on voluntary participation.

7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Conclusions

Chester Barrows School has a welcoming, nurturing atmosphere which is the result of the hard work of all involved: the strong leadership of the administrator, the professionalism of the staff, the active participation of parents and the enthusiasm of students are vital parts of this cohesive learning community. (classroom observations, meetings with students, parents and administration)

Systemic professional development is limited for staff at Chester Barrows School. While staff has opportunities to share and learn from each other at monthly meetings, there is limited time for staff to plan grade level activities and therefore ensure continuity and consistency between and among grade levels. Teachers must choose to use their own time and resources in their planning and search for professional growth at both the building and district levels. This level of voluntary participation is difficult to sustain over the long term (meetings with school and district administration, conversations with teachers)

As in every school, there is a wide range of student abilities and learning styles. At Chester Barrows School, teachers and students are working as a team to try to support all learners. As the demographics change, and students with varying needs arrive, the school must find additional ways to adequately serve these students. (classroom observations, meetings with students and parents, conversations with administrator and teachers)

At Chester Barrows School, standards and rubrics are part of the active instructional process and are posted in every classroom. It is clear that standards and rubrics are being used in instructional planning and that students are aware of what they are working towards and how their work is assessed. (classroom observations, meeting with students, conversations with teachers and students)

The integration of subjects is a component of the applied learning standards at Chester Barrows School.

In many rooms, reading, writing, math, technology, social studies and science are all linked. This connection across the disciplines helps to make learning real for the students. The thought provoking questioning by the teachers along with project based activities enrich the learning atmosphere. (classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers)

Final Advice to the School

Chester Barrows School is special – which is acknowledged by students, parents, teachers, administration and staff. The task will be to continue these practices while investigating ways: to institute common planning time through school and district innovations, to include the children in the process of setting criteria for their learning tasks, and to keep searching for those techniques which will help children who are struggling. Most of all, congratulate yourselves on your successes and challenge yourselves to keep the enthusiastic educational dialogue on-going. This openness to change will be the foundation for future growth in our rapidly changing world.

APPENDIX

MEMBERS OF CHESTER BARROWS SCHOOL

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Doreen Brinson – Chair

Joan Borden – Secretary

Cheryl Berube

Leigh Reisenfeld

Doreen Baeder

Kathy Tomasso

Craig Jamieson

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Patricia K. Ribeiro, Grade 2 teacher
Providence Street School, West Warwick
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as SALT Fellow)
Chair of the Team

Doreen Bethea, Parent
Providence School District

Denise Missry Milburn, Educational Coordinator
Asa Messer School, Providence

Rene Pincince, Grade 5 teacher
Citizen's Memorial School, Woonsocket

Dolores Voccola, Grade 5 teacher
William Winsor School, Greenville

Sharron Wolfe ,NBCT, Grade 1 teacher
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