



John Greene Elementary School

Warwick

SALT Visit Team Report

January 19, 2000



School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)

The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education

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For information about SALT, please contact Ken Fish at 401-222-4600, x 2200 or salt@ridoe.net.

This report is available at www.ridoe.net/schoolimprove/salt

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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 John Greene Elementary School from January 16-January 19, 2001 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 visit team. The visit team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners and a parent. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for John Greene Elementary School was the touchstone document for the team. 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 John Greene Elementary School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 112 classroom observations which totaled over 97 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 8 students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with the following groups:*
 - *School Improvement Team*

- *school and district administrators*
- *students*
- *parents*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff, 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 action plans*
 - *district strategic plan*
 - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
 - *classroom textbooks*
 - *2000 Information Works!*
 - *1998,1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
 - *1998,1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*

The full Team has built the conclusions, commendations and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussions. The visit team met for a total of 32 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 John Greene Elementary 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 Warwick, and the Rhode Island Department of Education will share that responsibility.

It is important to read and consider this report as a whole. Recommendations and commendations should be considered in context with the conclusions. That is the way they were written.

2. PROFILE OF John Greene Elementary School

John Greene Elementary School is one of twenty elementary schools in the city of Warwick, Rhode Island. It is part of the Warwick school system. The five-member school committee that is elected serves 4-year terms and governs the Warwick Public School District. The school first opened in 1950. In October of 1976 an all-purpose room/gymnasium and a faculty room were added to the school building.

Of the 307 students attending John Greene Elementary school, 294 are white, three are Hispanic, one is Asian/Pacific Islander and six are black. Fourteen percent of students receive special education services and 34% are eligible for free/reduced lunch. For the past three years, the school has utilized a full inclusion model, placing all students in regular classrooms. Students receive separate special education services only for significant areas of weakness.

John Greene Elementary school's students are served by a professional staff of 1 administrator, 37 full and part time faculty, 6 teacher assistants, 1 clerk, and 2 custodians.

John Greene's students participate in several special programs, such as "BOOKS & BEYOND", a national reading incentive program, sponsored by the school's parent-teacher organization. An individual mentoring program is also offered. John Greene is a Feinsteins school, focusing on safety, good deeds and peaceful solutions. Volunteers from the community assist students on a regular basis.

On the New Standards Reference Exam, John Greene Elementary school students' performance remained fairly stable in most areas from 1998-2000. Notable exceptions are reading analysis/interpretation, and writing effectiveness, both of which showed substantial growth. Scores on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment also improved markedly from 1998-2000. However, students' scores on the New Standards Reference Exam declined in all three Mathematics subtests from 1998-2000, most dramatically in the mathematical skills subtest. Equity gaps exist between poverty and non-poverty students in the Mathematics Skills subtest and between male and female students in the Writing Effectiveness subtest.

The team used the test score information found in *Information Works!* and the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam School Summaries to determine the performance and equity gaps discussed in the student learning conclusions. 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report. *Information Works!* data for John Greene Elementary School is available at www.ridoe.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF John Greene Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

John Greene Elementary school's classrooms and playground resound with the joyful sound of energetic and enthusiastic children who demonstrate a love of learning. The hallways have displays of students' work that are an invitation to look beyond to the classrooms. Little disorder is noticed in the halls or the classrooms; the building is clean and tidy. Students are polite, friendly, and show acts of kindness.

There is a group of dedicated Parent Teacher Organization members working tirelessly to bring resources to the school. Volunteers of Warwick Schools (VOWS) provides parent and community support to a variety of school activities.

The school has implemented a special education inclusion program that places all students, including special needs students, in the same classrooms. Under the visionary leadership of the building principal, systemic and schoolwide change has been in progress for three years. This program is truly an admirable effort toward meeting the needs of all learners. However, there is disagreement as to how to implement it successfully. Low expectations for some students are coupled with inconsistent instruction in and among classrooms. Often, ineffective instruction has left students with few challenges.

Communication and consideration for each others' ideas among faculty and principal is lacking. Some teachers are making great efforts to research, share and implement standards based methods and instruction. However, in this school, professional collegiality is not always valued. It is apparent that not all teachers are engaged in or value the process of establishing school improvement goals and implementing district strategic plans.

John Greene School hums with anticipation. The children are waiting patiently to exceed expectations that are benchmarked too low.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *1998,1999,2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *meeting with students*
- ◆ *conversations with students*

Conclusions

The students at John Greene Elementary school are hard working, friendly, polite, and articulate. These students love their school and their teachers. They are eager to learn and want to be challenged. The children are a wonderful asset to their school. (*conversations with students, meeting with students, following students, classroom observations*)

Students regularly practice writing conventions. They write in narrative and expository genres. They write creatively, respond to text, write poetry, take notes, write in journals, write abbreviated answers, use graphic organizers and at times, use incomplete sentences to answer questions. However, too often students' writing occurs in isolation without consistent and deep connection to text and real life experiences. Children do not write well enough to communicate effectively. Although students' scores have improved over the past three years, their overall performance is unacceptable. On the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam, only 32 percent met the standard in writing effectiveness and 44 percent met the standard in writing conventions. (1998, 1999, 2000 *New Standards Reference Exam, classroom observations, following students, examining student work*)

Students love to read and listen to books. Almost all students show proficiency in decoding and comprehension skills. Students are able to make personal connections to what they read. They actively and enthusiastically read in small groups, listen to literature, read independently, build their vocabulary and self-select books. The children demonstrate exceptional phonemic awareness as they decode text. They respond to the literature in a variety of ways, both independently and collaboratively. On the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam, students at John Greene School scored at 70 percent meeting the standard in reading basic understanding and 52 percent meeting the standard in analysis and interpretation. This shows steady improvement. (1998, 1999, 2000 *New Standards Reference Exams, classroom observations, examining student work, following a student, conversations with students, meeting with students*)

Most students at John Greene School are doing poorly in mathematics. Some students are engaged in hands on math lessons. Others spend an inordinate amount of time correcting math problems without an understanding of how these corrections apply to the problem, the process, and the concept. Children do not demonstrate understanding of the purpose of the mathematical tasks they are given. This is consistent with the students' low performance reported in the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam. (*Classroom observations, following a student, conversations with students, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam scores*)

Commendations for John Greene Elementary School:

The friendly, enthusiastic students who love to learn.

Recommendations for John Greene Elementary School:

Make writing connected to all subject areas and a regular and rigorous experience.

Employ constructive feedback to help all students improve and communicate effectively through their writing.

Provide additional opportunities for students to read and respond to high quality literature.

Implement a strong, sequential, skills-based mathematics program, encompassing thorough development of problem solving and math concepts connected to real-life experiences.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff and school administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *scheduled meeting with students, parents , school and district administration*
- ◆ *meeting with School Improvement Team*
- ◆ 2000 Information Works!
- ◆ *SALT Survey 2000*

Conclusions

Too many John Greene teachers have low expectations for student learning because of a belief that their daily instruction is impacted by certain key factors such as the number of special education students, mobility of student population, and needy students. These teachers use this as an excuse for poor instruction. The equity gap between poverty and non-poverty students on the mathematics skills portion of the New Standards Reference Exam may be due to this overarching belief. New Standards Reference Exam testing results and Information Works data do not confirm the importance of this belief. In spite of this overriding belief, some teachers do hold high expectations for all students by giving them challenging assignments that meet their individual learning needs. (*classroom observations, following a student, interviews with teachers, meetings with district and school administration, meeting with parents, meeting with School Improvement Team, SALT Survey data*)

Teachers ineffectively use valuable class time. Many waste time in transitions, switching classes, at the end of the day, and by not instructing students who are waiting for others to finish a singular task. Teachers are not actively engaging students at all times. Students are not being given sufficient work to do in the amount of time allotted. (*classroom observations, following a student, conversations with students*)

Some teachers at John Greene School are at the emergent stage of implementation of Standards Based Instruction. These teachers use rubrics to allow students to self-assess and engage children in higher order thinking skills. Disappointingly, other teachers' lessons lack follow up activities and thorough explanations, differentiated instruction, constructive feedback and utilize excessive amounts of dittos, rather than engage students in higher level tasks. Most children are asked to answer factual recall and simple comprehension questions, rather than questions requiring critical thinking or higher order understandings. These practices hinder John Greene's students from reaching high standards and becoming thoughtful and successful learners. (*examining student work, conversations with students, following students, classroom observations, interviews with teachers*)

Many teachers at John Greene are attempting to integrate core subject areas. They demonstrate this technique

by creating interdisciplinary units, providing learning centers, and connecting literature with Social Studies topics. However, a more thorough implementation of integrated studies is not apparent. Science instruction is disconnected from any core curricular areas. Regularly planned opportunities for children to make connections between subject areas are not evident. (*classroom observations, following students, examining student work, conversations with students, interviews with teachers*)

Recommendations for John Greene Elementary School:

Raise the bar of expectations for your students.

Plan and utilize school time more effectively for instruction to deepen student learning.

Facilitate student-centered learning and empower students to think critically.

Make connections between content areas to deepen students' understanding

Recommendations for the Warwick Public School District:

Raise the bar of expectations for all students

Focus the work of staff development and involve all teachers

Evaluate the use of itinerant teachers with regard to scheduling and instructional efficacy

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many teachers, staff and school administrators*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators*
- ◆ *School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *Warwick Public schools teacher evaluation instrument*

Conclusions

This school has not created a common understanding of inclusion as evidenced through disagreement on appropriate strategies and methodologies. Three special educators and six teacher assistants serve approximately 40 students with individual education plans and work with the classroom teacher to assist other students. This level of staffing should adequately serve the amount of students and meet their needs. However, special educators, classroom teachers and teacher assistants do not choose to communicate and/or collaborate on a regular basis as a team. This results in the poor coordination of time, resources, and expertise, leaving all children participating in this model under-served. (*following students, classroom observations, interviews with teachers, meeting with school administration, meeting with district administration*)

School Improvement goals for John Greene School were developed by a School Improvement Team that lacked teacher representation during the period of goal development. Some teachers later joined the team after goals, action plans, and much of the professional development were already decided by the team in conjunction with Warwick Public Schools System's strategic plan for professional development. Professional development has targeted a number of teachers in this school. Additionally, professional development is not equitable among grade levels. The sharing and implementation of new instructional methodologies, i.e., standards based instruction, has been limited and has not globally impacted all teaching at John Greene School. (*classroom observations, following students, meeting with School Improvement Team, School Improvement Plan, interviews with teachers, meeting with district administration*)

The Warwick Public Schools' professional evaluation plan is insufficient for improving instructional practice. There is no goal setting or self-reflection required as a tool to guide improvement and encourage teacher development. (*Warwick Public schools teacher evaluation instrument, interviews with teachers, meetings with school and district administration*)

John Greene School is a community divided due to a lack of professional courtesy and mutual trust among some of its members. A professional dialogue is not in place. Staff development presented by peers is not

always received in a manner of professional collegiality. There is a reluctance to share ideas and instructional strategies with each other. Consequently, John Greene School is a fragmented learning community.
(interviews with teachers)

School Improvement goals are only connected to the fourth grade assessments. There is a lack of grade level to grade level information to adequately track the progress of students prior to the fourth grade assessments. This lack of regularly collected information and its effective use impedes the school's ability to connect instruction to students' needs. *(meeting with School Improvement Team, meetings with building and district administration, School Improvement Plan)*

Commendations for John Greene Elementary School for:

The emergent use of an Inclusion model

Recommendations for John Greene Elementary School:

Continue to implement Inclusion and provide staff development to improve instruction for all students.

Revisit the school improvement process as it is designed and begin the work again by conducting a thorough self-study, re-targeting goals and strategic plans.

Implement quality, intensive professional development involving all teachers, focusing on School Improvement Plan goals.

Examine the factors that impede or prevent a professional dialogue. Remove these impediments and reaffirm that students come first.

Develop internal assessments and collect the data to assist in grade to grade articulation.

Recommendations for Warwick Public School District:

Assist John Greene School in the successful implementation of their Inclusion program

Continue to train John Greene's School Improvement Team

Update the Warwick Public Schools' professional evaluation instrument to connect it with the School Improvement process.

7. Final Advice to the school

Your bright, thoughtful children are ready to accept whatever challenges you give them. Renew your commitment and belief that all of your students can achieve high standards. Put your students and their needs first by sharing the gifts and knowledge that you have with each other. Demonstrate the mutual respect to all of your colleagues that must permeate a true learning community. Embrace change and work as a team to conquer obstacles. Expect from yourselves what you expect from your students: commitment to learning from and with each other, compassion, and citizenship.

JOHN GREENE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Bonnie Robinson
Principal

Susanne Archambault
Teacher

Wendy Bentley
Teacher

Lynne Blais
Teacher Assistant

Richard Conti
Teacher

Brenda Crighton
Community

Linda Desrosiers
Parent

Nancy Fountain
Teacher

Judy Ghanem
Teacher Assistant

Annette Giem
Parent

Lucy Harlowe
Teacher Assistant

Eric Houle
Teacher Assistant

Carolyn Jussila
Teacher

Mary McGovern
Community Member

Brian Mercurio
Parent

Sandra Mercurio
Parent

Barbara Palmateer
Parent/Chairperson

Paula Palumbo
Parent/PTO President

Joan Petit

Teacher

Patricia Pfeiler

Teacher

Donna Ryder

Parent/Chairperson

Diana Williams

Teacher Assistant

THE SALT VISIT TEAM

Elisabeth Newman, Chair
On loan to the Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow
Bristol Warren Arts Magnet Program at Reynolds School
Bristol Warren, Rhode Island

Wendy Andre,
Grade 6 Teacher
John F. Deering Middle School
West Warwick, Rhode Island

Ruth Beck,
Parent
East Greenwich, Rhode Island

Stephanie DeNicola,
Grade 2 Teacher
John W. Horton Elementary School
Cranston, Rhode Island

Donald DeSantis,
Grade 6 Teacher
Woonsocket Middle School
Woonsocket, Rhode Island

Pamela Rowland,
Library/Media, Enrichment Specialist
Wickford Elementary School
North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Robert Vincze,
Principal
Forest Park Elementary School
North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Susan Wiegand,
Grade 4 Teacher
Colt Andrews School
Bristol Warren, Rhode Island

New Standards Reference Examination and RI Writing Assessment Results (2000)

Catalpa Ltd. Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

John Greene Elementary School

January 19, 2000

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 Visit team Reports by Catalpa Ltd.*, and using the methodology and procedures specified in the *Handbook for SALT Visit Chairs, 1st 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
Catalpa Ltd.
January 31, 2001

