

# OAKLAND BEACH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Warwick, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

January 7, 2000

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January 10, 2000

Dr. Richard D'Agostino, Principal  
Oakland Beach Elementary School  
383 Oakland Beach Avenue  
Warwick, Rhode Island

Dear Dr. D'Agostino,

During the week of January 4-7, 2000 the Oakland Beach Elementary School opened its doors to the SALT Visiting Team. The task of the team was to look at how well the school was doing in the three focus areas of SALT: Student Learning, Teaching, and the School. In the three days at the school the team was able to form conclusions, award commendations and make recommendations. The resulting conclusions, recommendations and commendations are outlined in the attached report.

On behalf of the team I would like to thank you for your work and efforts to insure that the visit went well. You and the faculty of Oakland Beach Elementary School are to

be commended for opening your doors to this process. These efforts not only insured that the Visit went well but also furthered the important work of the SALT process. The team hopes this report can be helpful to the work of the school and will use the information contained here to further School Improvement.

Sincerely,

Patricia K. Ribeiro  
Team Chair

## 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 Oakland Beach School from January 4-7, 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.

Oakland Beach 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, 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 Oakland Beach School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 90 hours of classroom observation. Most classrooms were visited at least once. Many teachers were observed more than once
- many observations of the school (outside of classrooms)
- following 8 students for a full day
- observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day
- scheduled meetings with:
  - students
  - parents
  - school administrators
  - 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 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
  - SALT Survey Report
  - *1998 Information Works!* Data book
  - *1999 Information Works!* Data Book
  - Warwick 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 21 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 Oakland Beach 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 Warwick School Department, the citizens of Warwick, 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 OAKLAND BEACH SCHOOL**

The Oakland Beach Elementary School was built in 1900, and started as a two-room wooden school building. Over the years, there have been several additions to the school. The first addition, a four-room brick structure was added in 1920. This was followed with an eight-room brick structure in 1922. In 1955, a four-room cement block addition was added to the southern side of the building. Due to increasing enrollment a major addition was added in 1965. The scope of this project included the demolition of the original wooden school house and the construction of a multi-purpose room, main office, principal's office, nurse's room, boiler room, library and six classrooms. Four years later, the library was expanded when a temporary two room metal structure was added. Over the next twenty years the population fluctuated at this school. In 1992, again due to increasing enrollment, an addition was once again added to the school. This new addition served to connect the "permanent" temporary building with the rest of the school and also provided space for four Title 1 teachers, a math teacher, computers, parent center and a pre-school classroom for 4 year olds.

To the present, the Warwick School Department has focused on internal modifications and updates. With the funding from bond money the school received the following: a complete new heating system for the entire school, a new oil tank, new floor tiles, electrical outlets, both interior and exterior lighting, new roof, windows, paving, parking spaces and new paint in several areas.

Future planning for this school includes the construction of a much larger multi-purpose room that will provide for physical education, auditorium and cafeteria services. This would allow the older structure to be remodeled into workspaces (i.e. psychologist, O.T., P.T., etc) a conference room, teacher planning room and a much needed teachers room.

Oakland Beach Elementary School is the largest of twenty elementary schools serving PK-6 students in the City of Warwick under the governance of the Warwick Public Schools District and a five member elected school committee. The Warwick Public School District is the state's second largest district after Providence.

A principal and an assistant lead a professional staff of 60 full and part-time educators and support personnel. Fifty-one percent of the 523 students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Ninety-six percent of the students are White, 3% are Black, and 1% are Hispanic. Fourteen percent receive special education services in a resource setting and 7% in a self-contained setting. There are no ESL services at the school.

### **3. PORTRAIT OF THE CONDITION OF OAKLAND BEACH SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT**

Oakland Beach Elementary School is a school whose history proclaims its resilience. It has demonstrated its uncanny ability to reinvent itself time and again. It stands as a beacon in a community that values its presence and trusts its judgments.

Eager students and hard working staff members have worked to establish an atmosphere where a tone of respect and caring are evident in interpersonal relationships.

The school is faced with realizing its needs for change to better serve a diverse mix of students. Teachers are in the emergent stage of learning and understanding standards-based instruction and learning. The prevalent strategy used in many classrooms is whole class instruction. Much instruction is presented in a highly structured, teacher directed fashion which inhibits spontaneous and creative learning. There are some shining stars who are willing to try new and different techniques, however, many staff members are unsure about how to make the needed changes in instructional strategies and assessments.

The implementation of the STAR program has helped the students to develop respect and responsibility. The school is now poised to take the next steps in working to improve student learning.

### **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

## Conclusions

On the 1999 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam, 58 % of the students achieved or exceeded the standard in skills, 31% in concepts and only 16% in problem solving. While this is an improvement from the 1998 scores, the Skills and Problem Solving subtests are still below the district and state percentages. (1999 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam test results, *1999 Information Works!* Data book, 1998 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam results)

On the 1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, 87% achieved or exceeded the standard in Reading: Basic Understanding, 67% achieved the standard in Reading: Analysis & Interpretation, 26% in Writing: Effectiveness, and 40% in Writing: Conventions. While the Reading: Basic Understanding subtest shows growth, the Reading: Analysis & Interpretation, and Writing: Conventions subtests are still slightly below the state and district percentages. In addition, the Writing: Effectiveness subtest is significantly below the state and district percentages. (1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam test results, *1999 Information Works!* Data book, 1998 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam results)

On the 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, only 10% of the students achieved the standard. While this is a noteworthy improvement over the 4% who achieved the standard on the 1998 writing assessment, these scores are still below those of the district and state. (1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, 1998 Rhode Island Writing Assessment)

Equity gaps (a difference of 15% or greater) exist on the 1998 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam between special education and general education students. General education students outperformed students receiving special education on the Skills and Problem Solving subtests. (*1999 Information Works!* Data book)

A significant gender gap exists on the 1998 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam Analysis & Interpretation and Writing: Effectiveness subtests with females outperforming males. (*1999 Information Works!* Data book)

## The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Oakland Beach School:

Review and apply the “What students need” portion of the 1999 New Standards Reference Exam summary sheets to assist in instructional planning.

Examine any future test results for continuing equity gaps.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- Classroom observations
- Following a student
- Examination of student work
- Conversations with teachers, students and staff
- Meeting with students
- 1999 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam results
- Meetings with School Administrators, District Administrators, and Parents
- Oakland Beach Elementary School Writing Assessment Plan
- Oakland Beach Elementary School Improvement Plan

### Conclusions

In many classrooms at Oakland Beach Elementary School the overuse of whole class/teacher directed method of instruction minimizes opportunities for alternative teaching methodologies such as cooperative learning, collaborative teaching, and differentiated instruction. As a result, diverse learning styles are not always accommodated, thereby negatively impacting student achievement and enthusiasm for life long learning. (classroom observations, following students, examination of student work)

The district and school have a standards-based curriculum action plan. Standards and rubrics are posted in most classrooms and students are aware of these standards. Currently, most instruction is inconsistent and not aligned to the standards. (classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers)

Problem solving is a cornerstone of the state assessment process. Problem solving tasks are isolated rather than integrated throughout the curriculum. In the majority of classrooms, students are not engaged in meaningful problem solving activities. As a result, a life long learning skill is compromised. (classroom observations, examination of student work, 1999 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam results)

Oakland Beach Elementary School has developed a writing assessment plan (1997-98). In most classrooms, instruction, which is based on the plan, is focused on mechanics rather than content and/or creativity. The absence of comprehensive and consistent writing instruction impedes high student performance in alignment with state standards. (Oakland Beach Elementary School Writing Assessment Plan, classroom observations, Oakland Beach Elementary School Improvement Plan, examination of student work, meeting with students)

While separate special needs services are available, there is little evidence of shared ownership among general education teachers, Title 1, and special education personnel. Many students with special needs (special education, gifted, at risk) are not being supported in all settings. As a result, appropriate modifications and accommodations in general education are seldom made contributing to a gap in achievement. (classroom observations, meetings with school and district administration)

### **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Oakland Beach School:**

Take advantage of and put into practice appropriate standards-based professional development training when offered in the district and state.

Use newly developed district benchmarks and standards in mathematics to integrate problem-solving activities into all areas of the curriculum.

Build a more collaborative approach to instructional decision making and implementation. Share areas of responsibility to promote maximum student achievement.

### **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Warwick School Department:**

Offer appropriate, on-going standards-based professional development training to all staff at Oakland Beach Elementary School.

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

### **Sources of Evidence**

- School and classroom observations
- Meeting with district administration
- Meeting with School Improvement Team
- *Information Works 1999*
- Meetings and conversations with school administrators and teachers
- Meeting with parents
- Meeting with students
- Following students
- Warwick School Department Professional Evaluation and Observation
- Oakland Beach Elementary School Improvement Plan

### **Conclusions**

The current teacher evaluation tool is not a vehicle for change and yields little or no valuable information that supports ongoing professional growth for teachers at Oakland Beach Elementary School. (Warwick School Department Professional Evaluation and Observation, meetings with school and district administration)

In order to develop caring, honest, respectful and responsible students the Oakland Beach Elementary School designed and implemented a highly effective assertive discipline program (STAR). Discipline problems have diminished and students display acceptance of personal responsibility. Each and every member of the school community has joined together to build a caring and nurturing environment where all are welcome. (school and classroom observations, meeting with School Improvement Team, meeting with students, meeting with parents, Oakland Beach Elementary School Improvement Plan)

To address the crucial developmental needs of children and their families in the Oakland Beach School community, a Title 1 Family Center and a Pre-School /Extended Day Kindergarten have been established to provide critical support. This year the school is also piloting a full day Kindergarten program. (classroom observations, meetings with district and school administration, staff interviews, meeting with parents)

Many teachers who have taken part in professional development activities utilize current reform strategies in their classrooms. Yet, these same teachers are often not utilized as resources in the building. Monthly, time is available at Oakland Beach Elementary School to share this information regarding school reform initiatives. Most teachers do not take advantage of this opportunity to work, plan and learn together around instructional issues that will lead to systemic change. (classroom observations, conversations with teachers, meeting with school and district administration, record of faculty continuing education and activities)

The School Improvement Team of Oakland Beach Elementary School effectively used data in developing their school improvement plan. Initiatives, such as the STAR program, Homework Without Tears, and the student mentor program have been effective in achieving Action Plan #1 (To promote personal responsibility). However, Action Plan #2 (To promote high student achievement in performance in alignment with State standards) may encompass too many curricula areas to impact improvement of student performance in any one subject. (Oakland Beach Elementary School Improvement Plan, classroom observations, 1999 SALT Survey)

### **The SALT Visiting Team commends Oakland Beach School for:**

The design and implementation of a highly successful assertive discipline plan that results in a safe and nurturing environment.

### **The SALT Visiting Team commends the Warwick School Department for:**

Recognition and support of expressed needs of the community in establishment of the Title 1 Family Center and full day Kindergarten programs.

### **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Oakland Beach School:**

Reexamine Action Plan #2 to focus attention on limited subject areas based on state assessment results.

### **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Warwick School Department:**

Work with the Warwick teachers union to develop an evaluation tool that supports professional growth for teachers.

## **7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **Most Important Conclusions**

In order to develop caring, honest, respectful and responsible students the Oakland Beach Elementary School designed and implemented a highly effective assertive discipline program (STAR). Discipline problems have diminished and students display acceptance of personal responsibility. Each and every member of the school community has joined together to build a caring and nurturing environment where all are welcome. (school and classroom observations, meeting with School Improvement Team, meeting with students, meeting with parents, Oakland Beach Elementary School Improvement Plan)

In many classrooms at Oakland Beach Elementary School the overuse of whole class/teacher directed method of instruction minimizes opportunities for alternative teaching methodologies such as cooperative learning, collaborative teaching, and differentiated instruction. As a result, diverse learning styles are not always accommodated, thereby negatively impacting student achievement and enthusiasm for life long learning. (classroom observations, following students, examination of student work)

While separate special needs services are available, there is little evidence of shared ownership among general education teachers, Title 1, and special education personnel. Many students with special needs (special education, gifted, at risk) are not being supported in all settings. As a result, appropriate modifications and accommodations in general education are seldom made contributing to a gap in achievement. (classroom observations, meetings with school and district administration)

Problem solving is a cornerstone of the state assessment process. Problem solving tasks are isolated rather than integrated throughout the curriculum. In the majority of classrooms, students are not engaged in meaningful problem solving activities. As a result, a life long learning skill is compromised.

(classroom observations, examination of student work, 1999 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam results)

The district and school have a standards-based curriculum action plan. Standards and rubrics are posted in most classrooms and students are aware of these standards. Currently, most instruction is inconsistent and not aligned to the standards. (classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers)

## **Final Advice to the School**

We recognize the giant steps you have taken to establish an environment of warmth and caring. We applaud the strength of the STAR program and the community collaboration it took to implement. Building on that experience of collaboration it is now time to take the leap forward into standards based instruction and comprehensive school reform.

Continue opening your doors and talking with each other. Utilize the many models, supports, and personnel available. Share your strengths and talents as you struggle with the multiple demands of school reform. Your school administration is sensitive to your needs. Work together to make the ambitious goals in your School Improvement Plan a reality.

In spite of the many challenges you face we hope that you will continue to be persistent in reform initiatives to improve teaching and learning at Oakland Beach Elementary School.

Once again we see you rising to the challenges that lie before you.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **MEMBERS OF OAKLAND BEACH SCHOOL**

#### **SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM**

Richard D'Agostino

Alfred Monaco

Beverlee Ann Powell

Kathy Zachirchuk

Joanne Heffernan

Cynthia Albanese

Donna Travis

Marilyn Feeney

## **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

Virginia Bazin, Media Specialist  
Glen Hills School, Cranston

Cheryl Berube, Speech/Language Pathologist  
Chester Barrows School, Cranston

Doreen MacLane-Baeder, Parent  
Cranston School District

Kimberly Pezzillo, Grade 3 Teacher  
George J. West School, Providence

Marlene Ponte Correia  
Salve Regina University, Newport

Robert Pryhoda  
Office of Special Needs,  
Rhode Island Department of Education

Linda H. Washington, Assistant Principal  
Henry J. Winters School, Pawtucket