



MYRON J. FRANCIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

East Providence, Rhode Island

SALT Visit Team Report

February 18, 2000



School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)

The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

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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 Myron J. Francis Elementary School from February 15 to February 18, 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.

The School Improvement Goals 1999-2000 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 Myron J. Francis Elementary School.

The visiting team collected its evidence from the following:

- *a total of 72 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 classroom)*
- *following 7 students for a full day*
- *observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day*
- *scheduled meetings with the following groups:*
 - *the school's School Improvement Team*
 - *building and district administrators*
 - *students*
 - *parents*
- *conversations and interviews with many teachers, staff, parents, 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*
- *district and school policies*
- *review of professional development activities*
- *review of classroom assessments*
- *review of the following documents:*
 - *School Improvement Goals 1999-2000*
 - *Curriculum Documents*
 - *1998, 1999 Information Works! Data Book*
 - *1998, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment*
 - *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Exams*
 - *SALT Survey Report (1999)*
 - *teacher evaluation instrument*
 - *teachers schedules*
 - *Myron J. Francis Portfolio*

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 25 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 Myron J. Francis 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 East Providence, and the Rhode Island Department of Education will share that responsibility.

Following the Team's summary statement, Portrait of Myron J. Francis Elementary 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. PROFILE OF MYRON J. FRANCIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Myron J. Francis Elementary School is one of eight elementary schools in the city of East Providence, Rhode Island. It first opened its doors in this middle class neighborhood in 1989. This year with the sixth grade relocated to Martin Middle School, Myron J. Francis is home to kindergarten through fifth grade classes. The school also has a new principal for the first time in eight years. A staff of 53, which includes 32 full and part time teachers, serves a student population of 486. Myron J. Francis, as part of the East Providence School District, is governed by an elected school committee.

88 percent of the students attending Myron J. Francis Elementary School are White, 8 percent are Black, 2 percent are Native American/Alaskan Native, 1 percent are Hispanic, and 1 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander. 82 students totaling 17 percent of the total student population receive special education services. 17 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and 3% of the kindergartners are eligible for free milk.

3. PORTRAIT OF MYRON J. FRANCIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Myron J. Francis Elementary School is a pleasant place where students and teachers alike want to be. Teachers share a good working relationship with each other and work hard to ensure that their students receive a solid foundation of skills and knowledge. Students, like their teachers, are proud of their school. An active group of parents supports both teachers and students.

The first time visitor to this school is impressed by classrooms that hum with purposeful activity as students engage in daily tasks. Routines are embedded in every activity and students are comfortable. Yet, while they are challenged to complete those structured activities, students are not challenged to stretch their understanding beyond a set framework, nor do they have many opportunities to initiate their own learning.

The focus of the School Improvement Goals 1999—2000 is limited to state assessment results. The plan does not include other essential areas of a complete self-study that would help Myron J. Francis School to meet the needs of all its students, as well as to challenge them.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- *1999 Information Works! (1998 scores)*
- *1999 Rhode Island Health Education Assessment results*
- *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *1999 New Standards Reference Exam results*
- *Examination of student work*
- *Meeting with parents*
- *Classroom observations*

Conclusions

Students do what is expected of them and they do it well. They perform a variety of learning tasks such as paper and pencil assignments, hands on activities, and group work that reinforce skills and knowledge in all subject areas. We do not see examples of students initiating their learning nor activities which encourage students to take risks. (classroom observations, examination of student work, meeting with parents)

On the 1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination fourth grade students achieve or exceed the standard in the following subtests: Reading Basic Understanding (86%), Reading Analysis and Interpretation (73%), Writing Effectiveness (53%), and Writing Conventions (59%). In each case the school's performance exceeds district and state levels. (1999 New Standards Reference Examination results)

On the 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment 26% of third grade students at Myron J. Francis Elementary School achieved or exceeded the standard. Although this exceeds both district and state achievement levels, it still means that only 21 of the 81 third grade test takers achieved or exceeded the standard. (1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results)

On the 1999 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination fourth grade students achieve or exceed the standard in the following subtests: Skills (79%), Concepts (56%), and Problem Solving (45%). In all three subtests the school's performance is above district and state levels. (1999 New Standards Reference Examination)

39% of the fifth graders in this school achieved or exceeded the standard on the 1999 Rhode Island Health Education Assessment. (1999 Rhode Island Health Education Assessment results)

According to the *Information Works! Data* book there is no equity gap (gap of 15% or greater) by gender at Myron Francis Elementary School. The same data shows that the number of test takers in minority, special education (both fewer than 10), and LEP (0 students) categories does not allow for a statistical analysis for equity gaps. (1999 *Information Works! Data* – 1998 results)

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Myron J. Francis Elementary School:

Provide opportunities for more open-ended student tasks.

Examine state assessment data to determine possible equity gaps for minority and LEP students.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- *Classroom observations*
- *Examination of student work*
- *SALT Survey 1999*
- *Following students*
- *Meetings with School Improvement Team, building administrator, students, and parents*
- *Conversations with teachers, parents, and students*
- *School Improvement Goals 1999-2000*
- *Myron J. Francis Elementary Portfolio*

Conclusions

Teachers have established routines that create a predictable atmosphere for their students and themselves. While students are comfortable, they are not challenged. (classroom observations, following students, meetings and conversations with parents and students, examination of student work)

Teachers are at an introductory level of rubric usage. They have been working together on the development of rubrics throughout the school, yet they acknowledge their lack of understanding of standards based instruction. As a result, many times teachers do not effectively use rubrics to improve learning and teaching in the classroom. Instead of being used to guide students through a process, they often are used merely to correct a product. (classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, Myron J. Francis Elementary Portfolio, SALT survey 1999, meeting with School Improvement Team)

Teachers go well beyond what's expected of them. They dedicate many hours during and after the regular school day and on weekends to activities such as professional development, the Student Intervention Team, technology training, and grade level planning meetings. (meeting with School Improvement Team, conversations with teachers, meeting with building administrator)

The faculty has devoted much time in analyzing state assessment results and formats in order to focus their instruction on areas where they want to improve their students' scores. For example, in many classrooms students respond to writing prompts and explain their answers in math. While these are good first steps, a similar analysis of students' daily work is not used as a tool to improve teaching and learning. (classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, School Improvement Goals 1999-2000, meeting with School Improvement Team)

Teachers are organized and very efficient in their use of class time. They use the time to cover the content and manage the classroom well. The pressure of covering the content, however, limits student initiative. (classroom observations, following students, examination of student work)

SALT Visiting Team Commends Myron J. Francis Elementary School for:

The dedication of its teachers

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Myron J. Francis Elementary School:

Provide additional professional development in the effective use of rubrics and standards-based instruction.

Analyze daily work to improve teaching and learning.

Consider how students can be at the center of their own learning.

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that the East Providence School District:

Provide funding for professional development in the effective use of rubrics and standards-based instruction.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- *Classroom observations*
- *Examination of student work*
- *Conversations with teachers and students*
- *SALT Survey 1999*
- *Following students*
- *Examination of teacher schedules*
- *Meetings with School Improvement Team, building administrator, district administrators, students, and parents*
- *Meeting with School Improvement Team*
- *School Improvement Goals 1999-2000*
- *Myron J. Francis Elementary Portfolio*

Conclusions

The Myron J. Francis school improvement plan focuses solely on state assessment results. The plan does not, however, address the other SALT focus areas of Student Learning, Teaching, and the School. (School Improvement Goals 1999-2000, meeting with School Improvement Team)

Parents are recognized for their extraordinary support of the school, its teachers, and students. They are actively involved in a wide variety of ways including fundraising activities, advocating for the school in the reinstatement of the Talent Development Program, and sponsoring the Rumford After School Program. Teachers and administration see parents as a valued link between school and home. (meetings with parents, School Improvement Team, and building and district administrators, conversations with teachers, Myron J. Francis Elementary Portfolio, SALT Survey 1999)

Students, teachers, and parents take great pride in this school. Students feel safe and successful here, teachers share common goals that enable them to work together for their students, and parents actively involve themselves in the life of the school. (classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers and students, meetings with parents and students, School Improvement Goals 1999-2000, SALT Survey 1999)

The current schedule limits the effectiveness of instruction in the specialty areas of music, art, library, and physical education. As a result all students miss opportunities to express their abilities in these areas. (classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers, examination of teacher schedules, meetings and conversations with students and parents)

Most teachers in this school feel empowered in making decisions of importance to them. Some teachers have initiated programs in the areas of technology and enrichment. A few teachers are the acknowledged leaders in the school. However, most teachers do not recognize the impact of extending that strength throughout the building to benefit their teaching and their students' learning. (conversations with teachers, meetings with building and district administrators, Myron J. Francis Elementary Portfolio)

The SALT Visiting Team Commends Myron J. Francis Elementary School for:

parents who are actively involved in their children's school life.

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Myron J. Francis Elementary School:

Reflect on how teacher empowerment and leadership affect the culture of the school.

Continue your self-study process in all of the SALT Focus Areas and use your findings to revise your School Improvement Goals.

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that the East Providence School District:

Expand opportunities for instruction in the specialty areas of music, art, library and physical education.

7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Conclusions

Students do what is expected of them and they do it well. They perform a variety of learning tasks such as paper and pencil assignments, hands on activities, and group work that reinforce skills and knowledge in all subject areas. We do not see examples of students initiating their learning nor activities which encourage students to take risks. (classroom observations, examination of student work, meeting with parents)

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Final Advice to the School

We recognize that your school and district are in transition. As the district moves forward in the development of a district strategic plan, take advantage of the opportunity to further build the relationship between the school and the district.

Teachers at this school have a number of strengths. They take initiative and are an empowered group.

We recommend that you use that initiative to investigate how your classes can become student centered.

Take your time. Re-examine your School Improvement Goals 1999-2000 carefully as you continue your self-study activities. Consider the needs of each student. Examine the strength of your teachers and the entire school community. Use those findings to make the most of the teaching and learning at Myron J. Francis Elementary School.

APPENDIX

MYRON J. FRANCIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Michelle Kazarian, Parent
Chairperson

Pete Barilla, City Representative

Kathy Caffrey, Grade 4 Teacher

Kathleen Coelho, Grade 5 Teacher

Laraine Costa, Inclusion Aide

Jane Cotter, Parent, Special Educator

Jacqueline Daley, Grade 5 Teacher

Peggy DeAngelis, Community Member

Marie Gahzal, Parent

Connie McCarthy, Grade 1 Teacher

Janet Miller, Parent

Stephanie Vinhateiro, Grade 3 Teacher

Maria Harris, Principal

THE SALT VISITING TEAM

Sandra L. Olson, English Language Arts Teacher
Ponaganset Middle School, Foster/Glocester
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)
Chair of the Team

Kendra Anderson, Parent
Bristol, RI

Bruce Butler, Teacher
Winters Annex, Pawtucket

Judith Costa, Principal
Clayville Elementary School, North Scituate

Linda Freudigmann, Teacher
B.F. Norton School, Cumberland

Cathy Scampoli, ESL Teacher
Asa Messer School, Providence

David Niguidula
Technology Consultant to Rhode Island Department of Education

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Myron J. Francis Elementary School

February 18, 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 Visiting Team Reports by Catalpa Ltd.*, and using the methodology and procedures specified in the *SALT Visit Handbook –(3rd edition)*, I conclude that:

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

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



Thomas A. Wilson, EdD

CATALPA, LTD.

March 13, 2000