

WOONSOCKET MIDDLE SCHOOL

Woonsocket, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

February 11, 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 Woonsocket Middle School from February 8 to February 11, 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 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 Woonsocket Middle School.

The visiting team collected its evidence from the following:

- A total of 153 classes were observed. Of these 153 full class periods were observed. This totaled to 117 hours of classroom observation. Most teachers were observed at least once and many were observed more than once.
- many observations of the school (outside of classroom)
- following 15 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, 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 Plan
- District Strategic Plan
- Curriculum Documents
- *1998, 1999 Information Works!* Data Book
- 1998, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment
- 1997, 1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Exams
- SALT Survey Reports
- 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 28 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 Middle 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 Woonsocket 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 Woonsocket Middle 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 WOONSOCKET MIDDLE SCHOOL

Woonsocket Middle School is the largest middle school in Rhode Island both in its physical size and the number of students it serves. The school building, which fills an entire city block, is actually made up of two separate buildings connected by a third. The first building, Woonsocket High School, opened in 1915. The second, Woonsocket Junior High School, was constructed next to the high school in the late 1920's. Years later the construction of an addition between the two buildings connected them. In 1972 with the construction of a new high school in the city the entire complex became first Woonsocket Junior High School, then in 1992 Woonsocket Middle School. Since 1994 Woonsocket Middle School has served all sixth, seventh, and eighth graders in the city of Woonsocket.

One principal, two assistant principals, 117 teachers, and 23 para-professionals (teacher aides) serve the 1448 students of Woonsocket Middle School. The school is part of the Woonsocket School System which is governed by a five-member elected school committee.

66% of the total student population is white, 17% are Hispanic, 8% are Asian, and 9% are African American. 23% of the students receive special education services and 6% of Woonsocket Middle School students receive ESL services. More than half of the ESL students are Hispanic. 65% of the total student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch.

When Woonsocket Middle School became a Carnegie middle school in 1993, the 8 principles of *Turning Points* were adopted as the guiding principles for the school.

3. PORTRAIT OF WOONSOCKET MIDDLE SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Visitors to Woonsocket Middle School, at first overwhelmed and confused by this labyrinth of a building, are struck by the warm and friendly atmosphere within it. The students love their school and are proud of it. The teachers and administration, in turn, care about those students and about each other.

Woonsocket Middle School has begun the hard work of school reform that can move the school and its students to high achievement. The school recognizes the need for reading instruction across the school; some teachers have introduced rubrics as part of student assessment; some have implemented performance assessments in their classes. The move towards positive change, however, is spotty and haphazard. Most teachers still rely on whole group instruction and ask little of their students. Most students sit passively in class while volunteers answer factual recall questions. Exposure to standards has not changed instruction in most classrooms. No school wide vehicle for curriculum coordination exists.

Communication is a major problem in the Woonsocket Middle School community. Just as the building

is a complex maze of twists, turns, and dead ends, so is communication among all the staff. Teachers, while grouped in clusters, work in isolation. Their Team Development Time (TDT) often must be used for class coverage throughout the school. Teachers in the various academic areas do not work together. The School Improvement Team does not include representatives from all the clusters, and its work is not shared among all teachers. The three administrators in the building have to spend most of their time in the role of managers and have little time to function as the educational leaders in the school. Each of these factors contributes to the fragmentation and the disjointedness of Woonsocket Middle School.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- *1999 Information Works! (1998 scores)*
- *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *1997, 1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *Examination of student work*
- *Following students*
- *Meeting with students*
- *Classroom observations*

Conclusions

Students at this school demonstrate their learning generally through rote memorization and short answers. They respond to what is expected of them. These skills alone limit students' opportunities to practice the higher order thinking skills necessary to achieve high standards. (classroom observations, following students, meeting with students, examination of student work)

Only 13% of Woonsocket Middle School students achieved the standard on the seventh grade *Rhode Island Writing Assessment* in 1999. (1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results)

On the eighth grade *English Language Arts New Standards Reference Examination* only 29% of students achieved the standard on the **Reading Basic Understanding** subtest and an even lower 10% achieved the standard on the **Reading Analysis and Interpretation** subtest. On the **Writing Effectiveness** and **Writing Conventions** sub-tests, 13% and 31% respectively achieved the standard. (1999 New Standards Reference Examination results)

While 42% of students met or exceeded the standard on the **Mathematical Skills** sub-test of the 1999 *New Standards Reference Examination*, only 5% met the standard on the **Concepts** sub-test and 9% on the **Problem Solving** sub-test. Of equal concern, for the third year in a row the percent of students showing "Little Evidence of Achievement" in two of the mathematics sub-tests has increased steadily. The 1999 results in this **lowest** achievement level are **Skills** 11% and **Concepts** 62%. (1997, 1998, 1999

New Standards Reference Examination results)

Equity gaps (differences of 15% or greater) exist between special education and general education students and between Whites and other ethnic groups on three of the four *New Standards Reference Examination* sub-tests: **Mathematics Skills**, **Reading: Analysis and Interpretation** and **Writing Effectiveness**. Gender equity gaps exist on three of the four sub-tests. Males scored higher on the **Mathematics Skills** sub-test, while females scored higher on both of the English Language Arts sub-tests. (*Information Works! 1999-1998 scores*)

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Woonsocket Middle School:

Re-examine state assessment results and revise your school strategic plan accordingly.

Engage in and implement professional development on varieties of teaching strategies that address higher order thinking skills.

The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Woonsocket School District:

Provide the resources and support for professional development in higher order thinking skills.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- *Classroom observations*
- *Examination of student work*
- *Conversations with teachers*
- *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *SALT Survey 1999*
- *Following students*
- *Review of curriculum guides*
- *Meetings: school administrators, students, and parents*

Conclusions

Teachers have responded positively to concerns about the low reading levels of their students by participating in a broad based school wide focus on reading. However, the reading strategies we observed: round robin reading and silent reading, are not sufficient in themselves to raise the level of reading achievement of all students. (classroom observations, following students, conversations with

teachers, meeting with school administrators)

Although solid writing instruction takes place in some classrooms, no concerted or systemic emphasis is placed on writing. (classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, review of curriculum guides)

With some notable exceptions, teachers rely on a limited variety of instructional strategies which require lower order thinking skills including short answers, reading from the textbook, recall questioning, and worksheets. These strategies do not challenge all students to achieve high standards. (classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, meeting with students)

Math instruction focuses primarily on the development of skills; minimal emphasis is placed on concepts and problem solving. This practice allows students to perform comparatively well on the Skills subtest, but it denies them the opportunity to develop the conceptual and problem solving skills needed to reach high standards. (classroom observations, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results, following students, examination of student work)

Teachers at Woonsocket Middle School have begun to use standards based assessment. Rubrics are used in some classes and students in those classes understand their purpose. Most teachers, however, do not use a wide variety of authentic and alternative assessments which is necessary for all students to have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. (classroom observations, following students, meeting with students, SALT survey, examination of student work, conversations with teachers)

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Woonsocket Middle School:

Develop a comprehensive reading program designed to meet the needs of students at all levels using a variety of research-based strategies. Monitor the impact of the direct instruction reading program currently being piloted. Implement additional strategies to improve the reading proficiency of **all** students.

Develop a comprehensive, research-based plan to incorporate writing instruction in all content areas.

Provide professional development in the effective use of the new math texts.

Expand the implementation of standards based assessments.

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that the Woonsocket School District:

Hire the additional reading specialist as proposed in the school improvement plan.

Provide the school with the resources to develop, implement, and support comprehensive reading and writing programs.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- *Classroom observations*
- *Conversations with teachers, students, and school administrators*
- *SALT Survey 1999*
- *Following students*
- *Examination of curriculum guides*
- *Meetings with School Improvement Team, school administrators, district administrators, students, and parents*

Conclusions

Students love their school, are proud of it, and feel safe here. Teachers, support staff, and administrators genuinely care about their students and each other. Everyone contributes to the warm and friendly atmosphere in the building. (classroom observations, following students, meetings and conversations with students, parents, and teachers, and school administration, SALT Survey 1999)

No vehicle for curriculum coordination currently exists. This contributes to inconsistency of instruction from cluster to cluster and a lack of articulation from grade to grade. This haphazard approach results in an inequality of learning opportunities for all students. (meetings and conversations with students, parents, district and school administrators, examination of curriculum guides, meeting with School Improvement Team)

The extensive after school program is a justifiable source of school and community pride. Hundreds of students engage in teacher-led activities that encourage academic achievement and social development. (meetings with students, parents, district, and school administrators)

An inadequate network for communication among the administration, faculty, and parents hinders any cohesive school wide effort to implement school reform. Limited representation of the entire school community on the school improvement team, the isolation of the clusters, the size and shape of the building, the large population, the small number of administrators, and the lack of parent and community involvement all contribute to ineffective communication. (meetings with SIT, parents, building and district administrators, conversations with teachers)

The SALT Visiting Team Commends Woonsocket Middle School for:

Its warm, friendly, and safe atmosphere

The extensive after school program

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Woonsocket Middle School:

Enable teachers to develop and implement curricula.

Increase membership on the School Improvement Team so that it is more representative of the entire school community.

Broaden the means of communication among the entire Woonsocket Middle School community.

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that the Woonsocket School District:

Hire curriculum coordinators as proposed and charge them with leadership in the development and implementation of standards based curricula in the core areas.

7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Conclusions

Teachers have responded positively to concerns about the low reading levels of their students by participating in a broad-based school wide focus on reading. However, the reading strategies we observed: round-robin reading and silent reading, are not sufficient in themselves to raise the level of reading achievement of all students. (classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers, meeting with school administrators)

Although solid writing instruction takes place in some classrooms, no concerted or systemic emphasis is placed on writing. (classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, review of curriculum guides)

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Final Advice to the School

The SALT visiting team recognizes the effort you have initiated to raise the level of learning and teaching in your school. We know it is difficult and that you have much hard work ahead of you to improve and coordinate the learning and teaching in this school.

Addressing the poor level of reading proficiency is an important step, but it is only one step. You must also focus carefully on all areas of learning and teaching. Engage in professional development to learn how to implement effective standards based instruction. Use the teachers in your building who have successfully implemented those strategies in their classrooms as models. Build on their successes. Provide time for them to share with you.

Make your School Improvement Team the center of your reform discussions. Include more teachers, administrators, parents, and other Woonsocket community members in those discussions. Examine your state assessment results and use them to focus your school improvement plan on increasing student achievement. Re-examine your professional development plans and re-align them with the Woonsocket Middle School Strategic Plan.

Developing wonderful plans to raise the level of learning and teaching is not enough, however. Clear communication and understanding among all the players in the Woonsocket Middle School community is essential if those plans are to succeed. You will need to explore creative ways to ensure this.

Think about the important issues the SALT visiting team has focused on in this report. Use them to guide you in the work ahead. We wish you well in your efforts.

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Karen Saccoccio, Chair, ESL teacher

Alyson Aldrich, student, grade 8

Carolyn Aldrich, parent

Edward Benjamin, math teacher, grade 8

Sandra Gasbarro, ESL teacher

Henry Hatcher, Principal

Bernard Heath, business teacher

Colin Kane, music teacher

Ann Malbon, librarian

Brian Maney, librarian

Carolyn Maney, health teacher

Elaine Marques, English teacher, grade 8

Corlis Moniz, art teacher

Peter Moniz, math teacher, grade 8

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Sandra L. Olson, grade 7 English Language Arts teacher, Team Leader
Ponaganset Middle School, Foster-Glocester
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)
Chair of the Team

Lisa Beaudoin, Special Education teacher
Park View Middle School, Cranston, RI

Debra Blais Reddy, PE/Health teacher
Lincoln Middle School, Lincoln, RI

Gerardine Cannon, Reading specialist
Slater Junior High School, Pawtucket, RI

Joan Crothers, Library/Media Specialist
Wickford Middle School, North Kingstown, RI

Betsy Dietrich, ESL teacher
Nathanael Greene Middle School, Providence, RI

Margaret Della-Bitta, Science teacher,
South Kingstown High School, South Kingstown, RI

Dr. Patrick Hannigan, Principal
Ponaganset Middle School, Foster/Glocester, RI

Morgan Hardwick-Witman, Parent
Education Director, Save the Bay

William Jeonotte, English Language Arts teacher
Jenks Junior High School, Pawtucket

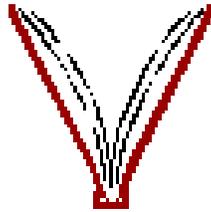
Nidia Karbonik, Assistant Principal
Bridgham Middle School, Providence

Richard Latham
Rhode Island Department of Education, Providence, RI

Eileen Montalto, Special Education teacher
Babcock Middle School, Westerly, RI

Maria Ortiz-Cruz, Foreign Language teacher
Nathanael Greene Middle School, Providence, RI

Linda Tanner, Math teacher
Gorton Junior High School, Warwick, RI



Catalpa Ltd.

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Woonsocket Middle School
February 11, 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
Principal Partner, Catalpa Ltd.

March 6, 2000