



NORTHERN LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Lincoln, Rhode Island

SALT Visit Team Report

April 28, 2000



School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)

The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

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NORTHERN LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM *

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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 Northern Lincoln Elementary School from April 25-28, 2000 was to draw conclusions about the School in the three focus areas of SALT:

- Student Learning
- Teaching
- The School

The design of the SALT visit ensures that accountability supports improvement of schools by directly connecting judgments of quality and recommendations for improvement to the actual life and work of a school.

This report is built upon the observations and conclusions of the visit team. The visit team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for Northern Lincoln 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 Northern Lincoln Elementary School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- *a total of 107 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. Most classrooms were visited at least once. Many teachers were observed more than once.*
- *many observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- *following nine 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*
 - *13 students*
 - *12 parents*
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- *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 InformationWorks 2000*
 - *review of district and school policies*
 - *review of professional development activities*
 - *review of classroom assessments.*
 - *review of the following documents:*
 - *School Improvement Plan*
 - *Self-Study Report, March 2000*
 - *district strategic plan*
 - *SALT Survey Report 1998-99*
 - *SALT Survey Report 1999-2000*
 - *classroom textbooks*
 - *1998 InformationWorks!*
 - *InformationWorks! 1999*
 - *InformationWorks! 2000*
 - *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
 - *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
 - *Lincoln School Department: Certified Staff Evaluation*
 - *Draft homework policy*

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 24 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 Northern Lincoln 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 Lincoln,

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 NORTHERN LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Northern Lincoln Elementary School is one of five elementary schools in the town of Lincoln, Rhode Island, and is part of the Lincoln Public School District. The school serves students from extremely diverse socio-economic neighborhoods. A five-member school committee, whose members are elected to two-year terms, governs the Lincoln Public School District. The present school opened its doors to students in 1971. An addition to the building was added in 1997.

In 1997, the Lincoln School Department housed all preschool, kindergarten, and grade one classrooms in two early learning centers. The concept behind the centers was to create separate, yet appropriate, learning environments for young children. The Northern Early Learning Center is one of two early learning centers in Lincoln. Although conceived as a separate school, the Northern Early Learning Center, unlike its counterpart, is not in a separate building but shares a building and its administration with Northern Lincoln Elementary School.

There are two administrators, the principal of the school and the early learning center coordinator. The early learning center coordinator has been with the program since its inception in 1997. The principal has been in his position for 14 months. The addition to the school three years ago increased student and faculty numbers significantly. There are 52 full and part time teachers, 6 teachers who job share, 18 aides and support personnel, and three custodians. The Northern Early Learning Center consists of two half-day preschool programs, six half-day kindergartens, seven first grades, and one self-contained class. Northern Lincoln Elementary School consists of four each of grades two through five, three sixth grade classes, and one self-contained class.

Of the 391 students attending Northern Lincoln Elementary School in grades two through six 93 percent are white, 3 percent are black, 3 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent are Hispanic. Fourteen percent of the students receive special education services. Of the 298 students attending the Northern Early Learning Center in pre-school through grade one 93 percent are white, 2 percent are black, 4 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent are Hispanic. Five and a half percent receive special education services. Twenty-seven percent of the grade1-6 population are eligible for free and reduced lunch.

The school is equipped with a computer lab and all classrooms are wired and connected to the Internet. A \$500,000 matching technology grant has been awarded to the district, and technology standards have been developed.

Last year, Very Special Arts, Rhode Island, funded a six-week creative movement program for all first graders. This year, the Regional Alliance for Mathematics and Science Education provided funds to the Northern Early Learning Center for a whole faculty study group to study mathematics education. The Northern Lincoln Elementary School along with the Early Learning Center was just awarded a Reading Excellence Grant for professional development. This summer, the District will provide funds to the Early Learning Center for a five-week remedial reading program. Project S.N.A.P. (Students Needing an Additional Push) will provide reading support for 25 children. The Northern Lincoln PTA supports

learning in many ways including providing funds for a yearlong aquarium project to support the science curriculum. The school administration and parents of participating students support the Lincoln Lions Rope Skipping Team, a group of about 35 children who practice and perform rope skipping techniques under the guidance of a teacher volunteer.

3. PORTRAIT OF NORTHERN LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Northern Lincoln Elementary School is a large elementary school that houses motivated, enthusiastic teachers and learners. The atmosphere is encouraging, friendly, and polite. The school itself struggles with growing pains as it adapts to a larger building, a greater population of students, and an expanded faculty. Scheduling problems in such a large facility along with assigned non-teaching duties make it difficult for teachers to share and to plan. In spite of this Northern Lincoln Elementary School staff is working hard to create a standards-based school.

An exceptional Early Learning Center promotes the growth and development of pre-school, kindergarten, and first grade students through the implementation of innovative instructional strategies and practices. Together the staff and the early learning center coordinator develop instructional units that utilize a wide variety of strategies to foster the achievement of all students. Assistants and volunteers provide additional support within the classroom.

The elementary school serves students from grades two through six. The teachers and administrator provide a warm, nurturing environment encouraging creative, integrated learning. The teachers employ strategies and learning practices to encourage high standards for all students.

Evidence of clear expectations along with teacher designed rubrics provide a vehicle for students to achieve. General education teachers work effectively with special education teachers to provide integration of their students into the general education setting. Teachers readily share materials, ideas, and support with grade level colleagues.

Teachers here, as elsewhere, struggle with the changes required by reform efforts. These teachers, however, feel supported by school and district administrators. They celebrate their professional growth and are not afraid to take risks as they work together to become a standards-based school.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- InformationWorks! 2000
- *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *1998 New Standards Reference Examination results*

Conclusions

Only 25 percent of third graders met the standard on the 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment. On the writing subtests of the fourth grade 1999 English Language Arts New Standards Reference Exam, 49 percent met the standard on the Effectiveness subtest and 47 percent met the standard on the Conventions subtest. (*1999 New Standards Reference Examination results, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*)

Fourth graders at Northern Lincoln Elementary School scored below the district in both subtests of the Reading section of the English Language Arts New Standards Reference Exam with 82 percent meeting the standard in *Basic Understanding* and 64 percent achieving the standard in *Analysis and Interpretation*. Although these results are disappointing and below the scores of similar students statewide, they represent a considerable improvement over 1998 scores. (*InformationWorks!2000, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results, 1998 New Standards Reference Examination results*)

Fourth graders scored as well as similar students statewide on the Skills and Concepts subtests of the Mathematics New Standards Reference Exam, but scored below similar students on the *Problem Solving* subtest with only 25 percent of students meeting the standard. (*InformationWorks!2000, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*)

Equity gaps (a difference of fifteen percent or greater) exist:

- *between students who are and students who are not eligible for free and reduced lunch on the Mathematics Skills subtest and both the Reading: Analysis and Interpretation and Writing: Effectiveness subtests with students who are not eligible for free and reduced lunch scoring higher*
- *between male and female students on the Writing: Effectiveness subtest with females scoring higher*
- *between special education students and general education students on the 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment*

(*InformationWorks! 2000, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment*)

Recommendations for Northern Lincoln Elementary School:

Continue the exploration of mathematics curriculum and programs aligned to standards to close gaps in student achievement.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *Self-Study Report, March 2000*
- *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff, parents, and school administrators*
- *following students*

- *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, parents, and students*
- *SALT Survey 1999-2000*
- *examination of student work*

Conclusions

Most teachers at Northern Lincoln Elementary School have completed Course One in standards-based instruction. The effects are evident in the classrooms. Most teachers set clear expectations for student work. Students understand and are able to communicate the criteria necessary to meet an acceptable level of achievement. Teacher created rubrics and scoring guides are used appropriately by students in most classrooms to plan and revise their work. (*classroom observations, following students, meeting with school administrators, meeting with students*)

Teachers effectively employ a variety of teaching strategies including cooperative learning, peer tutoring, small group instruction, one to one instruction, use of teacher assistants and parent volunteers, and hands-on activities to engage and focus students' learning. This addresses the different learning styles of students and facilitates learning. (*classroom observations, following students, SALT Survey 1999-2000*)

Although teachers use rubrics regularly, benchmarks for performance have not been determined across all grade levels. This results in inconsistent scoring of student work. (*examination of student work, classroom observation*)

Many excellent learning practices in the Early Learning Center are not continued as the students move to second grade. Articulation especially in reading and language arts is lacking. This may contribute to low scores on the third grade writing test. (*classroom observations, following students*)

Although the district will not address mathematics curriculum revision and textbook selection until next year, the Northern Early Learning Center is exploring new programs and materials through grant funding. The present math program K-6 is skills-based and lacks performance activities. Although teachers regularly supplement with other materials, this is not adequate to close gaps in student achievement in mathematics. (*classroom observation, meeting with district administrators, conversations with teachers, InformationWorks!2000, Self-Study Report March 2000*)

Students in the self-contained special education classes are successfully integrated for social studies, science, and special subjects. This integration provides peer models for children with special needs. (*classroom observations, meetings with parents and district administrators, conversations with teachers*)

Commendations for Northern Lincoln Elementary School:

Northern Lincoln Elementary School and Early Learning Center teachers and administrators demonstrate a true commitment to standards-based instruction.

Recommendations for Northern Lincoln Elementary School:

Provide time for teacher collaboration and articulation of instructional practices as students move from the Early Learning Center to second grade.

Examine and discuss student work at grade and cross grade level meetings to establish benchmark papers and ensure consistent grading.

Involve students in the creation of rubrics and setting criteria.

Recommendations for the Lincoln School District:

Assist the Northern Lincoln Elementary School in finding times and ways for teachers to collaborate.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *observations of the school*
- *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff and school administrators*
- *scheduled meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, parents, and students*
- *School Improvement Plan*
- *Lincoln School Department: Certified Staff Evaluation*
- *draft homework policy*
- *SALT Survey 1998-1999*
- *SALT Survey 1999-2000*

Conclusions

Mutual respect and a sense of caring are evident between students and staff. Parents report that faculty and administrators are available and responsive to their needs. Students feel supported by their teachers and view them as trustworthy adults. District administrators and parents said that teachers are the strength of the school. This respect creates a feeling of community despite the size of the school. (*meetings with students, parents, and district administrators, classroom observation, conversations with teachers*)

Northern Lincoln Elementary's School Improvement Plan addresses the need to develop better home/school relationships based on SALT survey data from 1998 and 1999. Action plans to increase parent involvement have been implemented and have resulted in increased volunteer activity, informational evening meetings, and the development of a homework policy. Most teachers communicate regularly with parents. (*SALT Survey 1998-1999, SALT Survey 1999-2000, meetings with school and district administrators, meeting with parents, School Improvement Plan, draft homework policy*)

Although a School Improvement Plan is in place and self-study is completed, a clear understanding of the correct role and function of the School Improvement Team does not exist. Efforts to link the School Improvement Team to the PTA are confusing. This misunderstanding leads to a focus on school issues. Attention to overall teaching and learning issues is a minor focus for the team. (*meetings with School Improvement Team, parents, and school administrators, School Improvement Plan*)

Northern Lincoln Elementary School's environment is inviting and attractive. Student work is celebrated on every wall and in every classroom. The school is bright and clean, and classrooms are equipped with child friendly storage space. This creates a positive learning atmosphere for students. (*classroom observations, observations of the school*)

The Lincoln School District supports teaching and learning through strong, focused professional development opportunities, regular curriculum review, a new teacher evaluation tool, and sensitivity to building needs. This support empowers teachers to focus on teaching and learning, grow professionally, and embrace change. (*conversations with teachers, meetings with district and school administrators, Lincoln School Department: Certified Staff Evaluation*)

Supervision on the playground is inadequate for the large number of students at recess. In addition, the pathway from the upper playground area to the hardtop is unsafe. The overflowing dumpster in the parking lot is a health and safety concern for the school and the community. These conditions create potential safety issues. (*meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, observations of school, conversations with teachers, SALT Survey 1999-2000*)

Commendations for Northern Lincoln Elementary School:

Teachers and administrators at Northern Lincoln Elementary School are willing to extend themselves for parents and students.

Northern Lincoln Elementary School has used data effectively for self-study and school improvement planning.

Recommendations for Northern Lincoln Elementary School:

Use the School Improvement Team to consider and address teaching and learning issues and plan school-based professional development.

Change the schedule to allow for fewer children or increased supervision at recess.

Recommendations for the Lincoln School District:

Arrange for more frequent trash disposal or a larger dumpster.

Construct a stairway from the upper playground to the lower hardtop area.

7. FINAL ADVICE TO THE SCHOOL

The commitment of all teachers at Northern Lincoln Elementary School to standards-based instruction is commendable. The seed is planted and fed by district and administrative support. Now it is time to grow the application of standards in your classrooms by examining student work together, developing benchmarks, and making students accountable for their learning.

So many of you willingly participate in professional development activities. You have a wealth of information and experience to share with each other. Try to find ways to build a culture of collaboration

despite the difficulties involved with scheduling, school size, and non-teaching duties.

Self-study groups and the School Improvement Team have used data effectively to plan and implement change in your school. Empower the School Improvement Team to consider teaching and learning issues. Be certain teachers have a strong voice on that team. As teaching and learning objectives and action plans are developed, determine school-wide professional development to bring the entire faculty together to support the plan.

APPENDIX

NORTHERN LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Sue Ayotte, Teacher

Celeste Bowler, Early Learning Center Director

Dave Cartier, Parent

Eileen Chaput, Parent

Gary Costello, Parent

George Defond, Parent

Linda Guarino, Parent

John Haidemenos, Parent

Tom Hazard, Principal

Roberta Hunter, Teacher

Linda Newbury, School Nurse

Yvonne Costello, Parent

THE SALT VISITING TEAM

Carol A. Belair, Grade 4 Teacher
Wilbur and McMahan Schools
Little Compton, Rhode Island

(on leave to serve as SALT Fellow, Rhode Island Department of Education)
Chair of the Team

Mary Carvalho, Reading Specialist
Garvin Memorial School
Cumberland, Rhode Island

Rayna Ciano, Grade 3 Teacher
Thornton School
Johnston, Rhode Island

LindaDaPonte, Grade 5 Teacher
Pleasant View School
Providence, Rhode Island

Kathryn Desjardins, Principal
B. F. Norton School
Cumberland, Rhode Island

Carol Marginson, Grade 4 Teacher
Harold F. Scott School
Warwick, Rhode Island

Bernice Martins, ESL Kindergarten Teacher
George J. West School
Providence, Rhode Island

Margaret Ratcliffe, Grade 1 Teacher (Job Share)
Community School
Cumberland, Rhode Island

Barbara Traverse, School Change Facilitator
East Bay Educational Collaborative/East Providence School Department
Portsmouth, Rhode Island

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Northern Lincoln Elementary School

April 28, 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.

May 9, 2000