



# OLIVER HAZARD PERRY MIDDLE SCHOOL

Providence, Rhode Island

## SALT Visit Team Report

April 7, 2000



**School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)**

**The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education**

**Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education**

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## 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 Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School from April 4-April 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 visit team. The visit team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners and a parent. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for Oliver Hazard Perry Middle 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 Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- *a total of 118 full classroom observations and 10 partial classroom observations which totaled over 102 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 the classroom*
- *following 12 students for a full day*
- *observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day*
  - *including common team planning time*
- *scheduled meetings with the following groups:*
  - *School Improvement Team*
  - *School and district administrators*
  - *students*
  - *parents*
- *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- *examination of student work, including a selection of work collected by the school*
- *analysis of achievement and equity gaps based on Information Works data*
- *review of district and school policies*
- *review of professional development activities*
- *review of classroom assessments.*
- *review of the following documents:*
  - *Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School Strategic Plan*
  - *Rekindling the Dream, district strategic plan*
  - *A Guide to Providence Schools 1999-2000*
  - *SALT Survey 2000 report*
  - *classroom textbooks*
  - *1999 InformationWorks!*
  - *2000 InformationWorks!*
  - *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
  - *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*

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 27 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 Oliver Hazard Perry 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 school department, the citizens of Providence, 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 OLIVER HAZARD PERRY MIDDLE SCHOOL

Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School, which serves students in grades 6-8, is one of 10 middle schools in the city of Providence, Rhode Island. One principal, two assistant principals, 68 teachers, 10 teacher assistants, eight ancillary services staff, five office/clerical staff, seven kitchen staff, and six custodial staff serve the 817 students of the school. Perry is part of the Providence school system, which is governed by a nine-member school committee that is appointed by the mayor of the city. The building, constructed in 1929, was a junior high school for forty years, after which it became a middle school.

The student population includes a wide ethnic mix. Sixty percent of Perry's students are Hispanic, 17 percent are black, 16 percent are white, six percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and one percent are Native American. The faculty and staff of the school include an ethnic mix as well. Seventy-eight percent of the faculty are white, 14 percent are Hispanic, six percent are black, and two percent are Asian/Pacific Islander. Of the non-certified staff 50 percent are white, 39 percent are Hispanic, and 11 percent are black.

Twenty-one percent of Perry's students receive special education services and 96 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Sixty-two percent of the students come from homes in which English is not the primary language. Thirteen percent of the students are LEP, eight percent are ESL, and nine percent are bilingual. These numbers include two percent of Perry's students who are migrants. Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School has a transiency rate of 30 percent which the school notes is lower than in previous years.

## 3. PORTRAIT OF OLIVER HAZARD PERRY MIDDLE SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Beyond the heavy brass doors of Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School is an architectural gem filled with decorative columns, archways, beautiful murals, and stained glass. Within its halls, faculty and administrators are intent on providing a safe and nurturing environment. Teachers care deeply about their students and work hard to serve their many needs. Students and adults treat each other respectfully. In classrooms, students show a strong willingness to

help and support each other.

The entire Perry community is proud of their safe and disciplined school. Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School has made tremendous strides in confronting and overcoming its discipline problems. Students have a clear understanding of behavioral limitations and expectations, and they do feel safe here.

Perry's culturally diverse population energizes this school. The school is alive with a rich variety of extra curricular and support programs that provide positive role models for the students and connect them to real life experiences.

While Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School does provide a safe and nurturing environment for its students, it fails to provide a rigorous, equitable, and appropriate middle level education for them. Students do not experience teaching styles that would challenge them and lead them to high achievement.

Perry's doors are open to its parents, but communication with those parents is not consistent and meaningful family involvement is minimal.

Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School's current challenge is to face its academic shortcomings. Test scores are unacceptable. The faculty and support staff work very hard for their students, but students spend too much time completing skills based assignments that do not challenge them. Teacher expectations for students are low and students have figured out how to get by with minimal effort. As a result they do not learn the complex skills necessary for them to succeed outside of school.

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

- *2000 InformationWorks!*
- *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *SALT Survey 2000*
- *examination of student work*
- *classroom observations*
- *following students*
- *meetings and conversations with students, teachers and parents*

### Conclusions

Students complete worksheets, copy notes, memorize and recall facts, answer true-false, fill-in the blank, and multiple choice questions. They demonstrate primarily basic skills in their classwork, homework, and projects. Students do not demonstrate practice in problem solving, analysis, and interpretation. This limits their ability to meet the school's performance targets. (classroom observations, following students, meeting with students, examination of student work, *2000 InformationWorks*, *SALT Survey 2000*)

Many students come to this school without their homework. This interferes with classroom learning. (following

students, classroom observations, meetings with parents and students)

Students know the daily routine. At the same time some have a clear understanding that what is being expected of them is not challenging. (following students, classroom observations, *SALT Survey 2000*, meeting with students, conversations with teachers)

Fifteen percent of the students at Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School achieve the standard on the *Reading Basic Understanding* subtest of the New Standards Reference Examination and six percent achieve the standard on the *Reading Analysis and Interpretation* subtest. (1999 New Standards Reference Examination results)

Nine percent of Perry's students achieve the standard on the *Writing Effectiveness* subtest of the New Standards Reference Examination and 13 percent of students achieve the standard on the *Writing Conventions* subtest of the same examination. (1999 New Standards Reference Examination)

Three percent of the seventh grade students at Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School achieve the standard on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment. (1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment)

Twenty-five percent of Perry's students achieve or exceed the standard on the *Mathematical Skills* subtest of the New Standards Reference Examination. One percent achieve the standard on the *Mathematical Concepts* subtest and two percent achieve the standard on the *Problem Solving* subtest of the New Standards Reference Examination. At the same time, the number of students who show "Little Evidence of Achievement" is significant: 31 percent in *Mathematical Skills*, 79 percent in *Mathematical Concepts*, and 72 percent in *Problem Solving*. (1999 New Standards Reference Examination results)

An equity gap (a gap of 15 percent or more) exists between special education students and general education students on the *Mathematics Skills* subtest of the New Standards Reference Examination. General education students outperform special education students. (2000 *Information Works!* – 1999 scores)

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School:

Engage all teachers in professional development training in a variety of teaching techniques. Implement it in all classrooms.

Use the homework policy guidelines as written in the Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School handbook to define specific steps to implement the complete policy.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *following students*
- *meetings and conversations with parents and students*
- *2000 Information Works!*

- *SALT Survey 2000*
- *examination of student work*
- *examination of Rekindling the Dream (Providence school district strategic plan)*

## Conclusions

Teachers genuinely care about their students and treat them with respect. They are concerned about students' physical and emotional well being. They often display a sense of humor that creates rapport, which is essential to learning. (classroom observations, following students, meetings and conversations with students and parents)

Although standards are posted in classrooms, the implementation of standards based instruction is in its infancy. In most classrooms standards do not drive instruction. Teachers just refer to them. Standards are not reflected in student work and not used for assessment. This limits the teachers' capacity to align their instructional strategies with district goals. (classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, meeting with students, examination of *Rekindling the Dream*)

Rubrics are emerging as a means to evaluate student work. Many teachers use different rubrics within departments and within grade levels as assessment checklists. They do not use rubrics to allow for the revision of student work. The use of rubrics in this way limits teachers' ability to redirect their teaching and limits students' ability to improve their work. (following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, meeting with students)

Many teachers have low academic expectations for their students. (following students, classroom observations, meeting with students, examination of student work, SALT Survey 2000)

Most teachers use one method of instruction such as lecturing, assigning worksheets, and bookwork for all students. This method is teacher directed, isolated, and content driven without consideration of its relevance to the student. For the most part teachers do not use methods such as hands-on, cooperative, or critical thinking activities that meet the needs of diverse learners. (following students, classroom observations, meeting with students, examination of student work, SALT Survey 2000)

## SALT Visiting Team Commends Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School for:

Teachers nurture students with respect and care.

## The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School:

Focus and coordinate ongoing professional development on standards based instruction for all teachers.

Engage all teachers in professional development training in a variety of teaching techniques. Implement it in all classrooms.

Implement a standards driven curriculum that will demand high expectations of all students.

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that the Providence School District:

Provide the opportunities and incentives for professional development in standards based instruction and varied teaching techniques.

Support the school in its efforts to implement standards that are aligned with district goals.

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *observations throughout the school*
- *observations of common team planning time*
- *conversations with many students, teachers, and school administrators*
- *meetings with school improvement team, students, parents, and school and district administrators,*
- *following students*
- *Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School Strategic Plan*
- *A Guide to Providence Schools 1999-2000*
- *SALT Survey 2000*

### Conclusions

Perry Middle School is a middle school in name only. Misconceptions exist about teaming and the use of common planning time. The current schedule does not support middle school practice. (observations of common team planning time, conversations with teachers, meetings with school and district administrators, *SALT Survey 2000*)

The Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School Strategic Plan does not help the faculty to make decisions that impact on student achievement. The plan goes in too many different directions which prevents the school from accomplishing its mission, targets, and tactics. (*Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School Strategic Plan*, meeting with school improvement team, conversations with teachers)

Communication with students' families is ineffective. Even though the school uses a variety of means to notify families about school events, student progress, and family programs, many families are not aware of the programs which are offered to the students of Perry or to their families. (meeting with parents, *SALT Survey 2000*, conversations with teachers and school administrators)

The literacy skills classes and Reading for Pleasure are not sufficient to equip students to meet the school's performance targets. (following students, classroom observations, *A Guide to Providence Schools 1999-2000*, *Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School Strategic Plan*)

Safety issues have been successfully addressed at Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School and prejudice is not tolerated. (classroom observations, following students, meetings with students, parents, and school administrators, *SALT Survey 2000*)

The school has a water problem. Most water sources are inoperable. Impure water is a pervasive problem throughout the school. Student facilities lack necessary resources for maintenance of personal hygiene. (following students, meetings and conversations with students, teachers, building administrators, and parents, observations throughout the school, *Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School Strategic Plan*)

The SALT Visiting Team Commends Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School for:

The Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School is a safe place for learning.

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School:

Revise the *Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School Strategic Plan* with district help.

Pursue professional development in middle school practices that includes teaming and scheduling.

Look closely at the school's identified literacy performance targets and redesign the approaches to meet them.

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that the Providence School District:

Work with the school to revise their school improvement plan.

Provide the professional development opportunities and resources for Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School to become a true middle school.

## 7. FINAL ADVICE TO THE SCHOOL

The SALT visit team recognizes the hard work that takes place in your classrooms and throughout the school. You have implemented effective discipline practices that have made Perry a safe school where meaningful teaching and learning can take place. Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School does face many challenges. Student absenteeism is high, the transience rate is high, the building is old; but you cannot wait any longer to take effective action that will enable your students to master complex skills so that they achieve and succeed.

The entire Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School community must stop making excuses for its low student performance. Make the same commitment to raising those performance levels that you have to improving their behavior.

Begin with a hard look at your school improvement plan. Focus that plan to include a schedule of specific and sustained professional development around reading instruction, rigorous standards based instruction, and strong middle school practice so that you can build the capacity within your school to create effective and meaningful learning communities for both students and teachers.

Include your parents in your plan of action. Many of them want to be part of this school community, but often do not know how to do that. Use the wonderful array of extracurricular activities and programs at Perry to find creative ways to involve your parents with their children's education.

You already have a solid base on which to build. Your care and concern for and your commitment to your students is very clear. Use those strengths to help you make Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School a school where students are challenged and meet high goals.

## APPENDIX

### OLIVER HAZARD PERRY MIDDLE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Jan Smith, special education math teacher, SIT chair

Dr. Jorge Alvarez, principal

Jeff Doucette, social technology teacher

Elaine Ellis, art teacher

Jane Forbes, literacy skills teacher

Bridget Hawthorne, assistant principal

Andrea Haywood, ESL teacher

Louis Jannetta, assistant principal

Alan Leach, resource teacher

Deb Lockwood, social studies teacher

Donna Perrotta, music teacher

Ferdinand Rodriquez-Vega, bilingual special education teacher

Teresa Suarez-Harris, human resource specialist

Connie Tavares, parent

Thomas Taylor, AMICA

## THE SALT VISITING TEAM

Sandra L. Olson, ELA 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

Gail Abromitis, grade 7 science teacher/standards coach  
Gaudet Middle School  
Middletown, Rhode Island

Manuel Cabral, principal  
Tiverton Middle School  
Tiverton, Rhode Island

Kathleen Chadwick Egan, grade 8 math teacher/team leader  
Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School  
Exeter-West Greenwich, Rhode Island

Marilyn Gounaris  
Rhode Island Department of Education  
Providence, Rhode Island

Miriam Hernandez, Parent  
Central Falls, Rhode Island

Myrna Higgins, grades 7/8 ELA teacher/ reading specialist  
Gaudet Middle School  
Middletown, Rhode Island

Mary Beth Letendre, grade 6 science teacher  
Martin Middle School  
East Providence, Rhode Island

Robert Lloyd, 7/8 loop math teacher,  
Barrington Middle School  
Barrington, Rhode Island

Dolores O'Rourke, library/media specialist  
Coventry Middle School  
Coventry, Rhode Island

Melissa Robert, grades 6/7/8 Spanish teacher  
Jenks Junior High School  
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Michael Watson, grades 6/7/8 art teacher  
Park View Middle School  
Cranston, Rhode Island

## Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School

**April 7, 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.

April 20, 2000