



LEO A. SAVOIE SCHOOL

Woonsocket, Rhode Island

SALT Visit Team Report

April 14, 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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This report is available at www.ridoe.net/schoolimprove/salt

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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 Leo A. Savoie School from April 11-14, 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. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for Leo A. Savoie 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, on the playground, on field trips, 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 Leo A. Savoie School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- *a total of 90 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. All classrooms were visited at least once. Most teachers were observed more than once.*
- *many observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- *following seven 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*
 - *students*
 - *parents*

- *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, school and district staff, and school administrator*
- *examination of student work, including a selection of work collected by the school*
- *analysis of achievement and equity gaps based on InformationWorks!*
- *review of district and school policies*
- *review of professional development activities*
- *review of classroom assessments*
- *review of the following documents:*
 - *school improvement plan*
 - *April 2000 self-study reports*
 - *district strategic plan*
 - *SALT Survey report*
 - *classroom textbooks*
 - *1998 InformationWorks!*
 - *1999 InformationWorks!*
 - *2000 InformationWorks!*
 - *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
 - *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
 - *teacher evaluation document*

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 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 Leo A. Savoie 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 Woonsocket, 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 LEO A. SAVOIE SCHOOL

Leo A. Savoie School is one of 12 elementary schools in the city of Woonsocket, Rhode Island. It is part of the Woonsocket School System. A five-member school committee whose members are elected to two-year terms governs the Woonsocket Public School District. Woonsocket is an urban city with a population of approximately 44,000. The present school first opened its doors to students in 1967.

There are two half-day kindergartens, three each of grades one through five, two special education primary self-contained classrooms, and two special education intermediate self-contained classrooms. Of the 418 students attending grades K-5 at Leo A. Savoie School 91 percent are white, 4 percent are Hispanic, 2 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 3 percent are black. Fifteen percent receive special education services and 31 percent are eligible for free or reduced lunch. A professional staff of one administrator, 29 full and part-time faculty including a class size reduction resource teacher, eight full and part time teacher assistants, 12 support personnel, and two custodians serves Leo A. Savoie School students.

A nature trail behind the school provides science enrichment. A computer room was added to the school this year. A half-time computer teacher provides instruction to all grades.

3. PORTRAIT OF LEO A. SAVOIE SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

The Leo A. Savoie School is a safe, nurturing community of educators and students who are committed to their own and to each other's well being. Both the children and the adults share a clear understanding of standards for conduct, kindness, and respect. They practice these standards as routine habits throughout the school day.

The teachers at Savoie, a faculty of experienced, caring, and hardworking professionals, are on the brink of launching standards-based instruction. They are experiencing the acute discomfort of being in the early stages of awareness regarding their practice. They are anxious for real models, knowledge, and skills for implementation. Some have begun and others are ready to accept the challenge of this new way of teaching and learning.

Teachers, many of whom come from this close-knit Woonsocket community, are like a family. Savoie teachers take pride in their work with their students, they have high standards for their own practice, and they want to change with the times. They do not, however, regularly engage in professional conversation and planning at the school level. Except for some grade level collaboration and recent self-study efforts, they work mostly in isolation. Doors are closed to sharing of student work, effective-teaching strategies, and concerns about district and state reform efforts.

The apprehension Savoie staff feels towards reform is no different from apprehension felt by other faculties when they begin their reform. Change may prove particularly hard for this school that is at ease with its community and has enjoyed an established identity of competence.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- 2000 InformationWorks!
- 1999 InformationWorks!

- *1998, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *classroom observation*
- *following students*

Conclusions

Fourth graders performed as well as similar students in the reading subtests with 87 percent achieving the standard in *Basic Understanding* and 71 percent achieving the standard in *Analysis and Interpretation*. (*1999 New Standards Reference Exam results, 2000 InformationWorks!*)

Fourth graders performed very well on the writing subtests of the 1999 English Language Arts New Standards Reference Exam with 65 percent achieving the standard in *Writing Effectiveness* and 60 percent achieving the standard in *Conventions*. These scores were above district and state averages and were above the scores of similar students statewide. In 1998 fourth graders performed above similar students in these same subtests. (*1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Exam results, 1999 InformationWorks! 2000 InformationWorks!*)

On the fourth grade 1999 Mathematics New Standards Reference Exam 58 percent of students met the standard on the *Skills Sub-test*, 26 percent on the *Concepts Sub-test*, and 19 percent on the *Problem Solving Sub-test*. These scores are disappointing and are below the scores of similar students statewide. (*1999 New Standards Reference Exam results, 2000 InformationWorks!*)

Only 20 percent of third graders achieved the standard on the third grade 1999 State Writing Assessment. However, this represented an increase of 8 percent from 1998 with six more students achieving the standard. (*1998, 1999 State Writing Assessment results*)

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

- *between those students eligible and those not eligible for free or reduced lunch on the fourth grade Writing Effectiveness subtest; students eligible for free or reduced lunch scored higher*
- *between those students eligible and those not eligible for free or reduced lunch on the fourth grade Problem Solving subtest; students not eligible for free or reduced lunch scored higher*

(1999 New Standards Reference Examination results, 2000 InformationWorks!,)

Students strive to do their best. However, without clear expectations, many students have no model of what makes good or exemplary work. This deprives them of opportunities to plan, create, revise and improve their work. (*classroom observations, following a student*)

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Leo A. Savoie School:

Address the problem of low math scores immediately by planning strategically for focused professional development and adopting standards aligned with the district direction.

Provide rubrics and criteria for assessment so students know what is expected and how they can improve their

work.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *conversations and interviews with many teachers*
- *following students*
- *examination of student work*
- *scheduled meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, parents, students*
- *2000 InformationWorks!*
- *SALT Survey 1999-2000*

Conclusions

Teachers at Leo A. Savoie School are competent and experienced practitioners who provide a traditional education in an atmosphere of trust and care. They are tentatively exploring standards-based instruction and performance assessments and expressing a desire to know more about this approach to learning and teaching. Some want to develop competency. (*meeting with district administrators, conversations with teachers, meeting with school administrator, classroom observations, SALT Survey 1999-2000, examination of student work*)

Current instruction in mathematics is inconsistent across the school and does not provide for articulation between classrooms and among grade levels. Although some professional development has been offered, the school lacks a standards-based mathematics plan with clear goals, purpose, direction, and provisions for professional development. Staff appears confused about how to use the variety of materials provided to them. Current practice does not provide students with the competencies required to close gaps in mathematics achievement. (*meeting with School Improvement Team, meeting with parents, classroom observation, conversations with teachers, 2000 InformationWorks!*)

The current emphasis on spelling, vocabulary review, and creative writing does not promote analytical and critical thinking. This traditional approach to the teaching of English language arts does not provide children adequate opportunities to generate and exchange ideas, reflect on their own thinking, evaluate their process, and share their work. (*classroom observation, following a student, conversations with teachers*)

Quarterly performance assessments for students based on rubrics are provided by the district and implemented by the school. Other forms of performance assessment in the school are few and far between. Many assessments are limited to measuring skills. Opportunities for students to demonstrate analytical thinking and problem solving or to explain and defend their work are not evident school-wide. (*examination of student work, meeting with students, meeting with district administrators, conversations with teachers, classroom observations*)

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Leo A. Savoie School:

Develop a focused plan for professional development to support teaching and learning objectives, and then take advantage of opportunities offered by the district, state, or professional organizations that will support that plan.

Make a school wide commitment to develop and assess the higher-order skills of analytical and critical thinking in all students.

Address the critical need to improve math instruction.

Take the leap into standards-based instruction and performance assessment.

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, building and district administrators, parents*
- *following students*
- *School Improvement Plan*
- *April 2000 self-study reports*
- *SALT Survey 1999-2000*
- *Teacher evaluation document*

Conclusions

Students and teachers share a relationship based on respect and courtesy. All adults in the building model concern for others. Children mirror this behavior, creating a climate that promotes learning. (*following students, observations of the school, classroom observations, conversations with students, SALT Survey*)

The safety of students who walk to school is jeopardized because there is no adult crossing guard at arrival and dismissal time. Parent, teacher, and principal concerns about this hazardous condition go unheeded. (*meeting with parents, meeting with school administrator, observations of school*)

The lack of communication and collaboration among and between grade levels prevents the teaching of a coordinated curriculum, the sharing of student work, and the school-wide development of appropriate assessments and criteria/rubrics. The school has not developed a culture to promote this type of professional collaboration. (*meeting with School Improvement Team, conversations with teachers*)

The lack of a teacher support team to design strategies to address learning and behavioral challenges diminishes the school's capacity to meet the needs of diverse learners within regular classes. (*conversations with staff, classroom observations*)

The school has conducted self-study based on data, but the self-study groups' worthwhile ideas about focused professional development for teaching mathematics and developing standards-based instruction are not incorporated into the School Improvement Plan. This, along with the absence of a professional development committee, inhibits professional growth and reform in this school. (*meeting with School Improvement Team, meeting with school administrator, April 2000 self-study reports*)

The school is unsure about its authority to act. It is unsure about how to set a direction for the school, develop action plans, and move forward. This uncertainty perpetuates the status quo and delays the transition to standards-based practice. (*meeting with School Improvement Team, conversations with staff*)

Teachers' awareness is uneven across the school regarding opportunities, expectations, and support from the district. Teachers are skeptical about how their efforts and input are utilized in decision making at the district level. This creates reluctance to invest energy, time, and effort into reform initiatives. (*conversations with teachers, meeting with school administrator*)

It is very surprising that only one student in the four self-contained special education classes participates in general education for any subject areas such as math, reading, or unified arts. There is no evidence that full segregation of these students is justified or ensures equitable access to high expectations, academic and social challenge, or peer models for achievement. (*classroom observations, following students, conversations with staff*)

Although the Parent Teacher Council supports activities that promote cultural awareness and supplement classroom needs, parents report a lack of opportunities to volunteer in the school. The school's self-study recognizes a need for better communication and plans well for ways to offer a range of options for parent involvement to meet parent needs. These ideas are not incorporated into the School Improvement Plan. (*meeting with parents, SALT Survey 1999-2000, April 2000 self-study reports, School Improvement Plan*)

District evaluation for tenured teachers includes goal setting. The principal is requiring that teachers address standards-based instruction as one of their goals for this year's evaluations. This prompt for teachers reflects a commitment to the implementation of standards-based practices. (*teacher evaluation document, meetings with school and district administrators*)

The SALT Visiting Team Commends Leo A. Savoie School for:

The Leo A. Savoie School is a respectful learning community.

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Leo A. Savoie School:

Complete the School Improvement Plan by identifying student performance objectives, incorporating self-study groups' action ideas, and developing action plans.

Identify a professional development committee to create a focused professional development plan that supports the revised School Improvement Plan.

Engage in professional conversations regularly.

Establish a teacher support team to address the diverse learning and behavioral needs of students in the regular classroom.

Convene IEP review meetings as frequently as necessary to ensure that each child with disabilities participates in regular classes, with necessary supports, to the fullest extent appropriate to their needs.

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that the Woonsocket School District:

Immediately secure a crossing guard for Leo A. Savoie School.

7. FINAL ADVICE TO THE SCHOOL

Leo A. Savoie School is on the brink of becoming a standards-based school. Everything is in place for this change to happen. Staff and students have accomplished an exemplary standard of behavioral expectations. The effort is supported and sustained school-wide. A similar school-wide effort can also produce an exemplary standard of academic expectations.

Through your School Improvement Team you can take charge of the direction for your school, select and direct the action plans, and promote a vision to ensure the success of all students. The quality of a school derives from the people who make up the community. You have the staff, the children, and the parents. Don't wait for someone else to determine your direction and vision — begin the hard work now for all of your students.

Any improvement or reform requires change. Leo A. Savoie School faculty must develop a sense of professional community. Talk to each other about your students, review student work between and across grade levels, select your professional development activities together, and reflect together on your experiences. Opening doors to these activities and to new ideas will enhance student achievement.

APPENDIX

LEO A. SAVOIE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Renee L. Fleurette, Chair

Carol Frisk, Principal

Joanne Vincent, Teacher

Albert Menard, Teacher

Dorothy Germano, Teacher

Heidi Stauffacher, Teacher

Katherine Guilmette, Teacher

Kathleen Crowley, Teacher

Pat Gaudreau, Teacher

Tricia Callas, Parent

Priscilla Laferte, Parent

THE SALT VISITING TEAM

Carol Belair, Grade Four Teacher
Wilbur and McMahon School, Little Compton
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)
Chair of the Team

Tracie Gagnon, Grade Three Teacher
Mandela Woods School
Providence, Rhode Island

Colleen Jermain, Principal
Nonquit and Fort Barton Schools
Tiverton, Rhode Island

Rita Loffredo, Grade Five Teacher
Southside School
Providence, Rhode Island

Kimberly McGowan, Grade Six Teacher
Northern Lincoln Elementary School
Lincoln, Rhode Island

Sally Radford
Office of Special Needs
Providence Field Service Team
Rhode Island Department of Education

Marianne Russo, Special Education Resource Teacher
Roger Williams Middle School
Providence, Rhode Island

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Leo A. Savoie School

April 4, 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 2, 2000