



JAMES H. ELDREDGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

East Greenwich, Rhode Island

SALT Visit Team Report

May 12, 2000



School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)

The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

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1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) is Rhode Island's comprehensive school accountability system. SALT is based on using information to improve learning and teaching so that the learning of all students in the state dramatically improves. The SALT visit and other major SALT components are designed to aid schools in their ongoing development and implementation of effective School Improvement Plans.

The purpose of the visit to James H. Eldredge Elementary School from May 9-May 12, 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 at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for James H. Eldredge 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, on the playground, and in the hallways. The specific information generated by a team visit is about how the students, staff and administrators go about their day. Thus, this visit allowed professional colleagues and stakeholders to build informed judgments about the teaching and learning that actually takes place at James H. Eldredge Elementary School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- *A total of 81 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 eight 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, 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! data*
- *review of district and school policies*
- *review of professional development activities*
- *review of classroom assessments*
- *review of the following documents:*
 - *James H. Eldredge School Improvement Plan/Team Action Plan*
 - *district strategic plan*
 - *SALT Survey 2000*
 - *Information Works! 1999*
 - *Information Works! 2000*
 - *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
 - *James H. Eldredge Staff Development Plan 1999-2000*
 - *Article 31 Professional Development Plan*
 - *District curriculum draft documents*
 - *Teacher schedules*
 - *The Creative and Productive Thinking Program (CPT) brochure*
 - *Student Handbook*

The full team has built the conclusions, commendations and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussions. The visiting team met for a total of 25 hours in six separate meetings spanning the four days of the visit. This time is exclusive of the time spent in classrooms, with teachers, and in meetings with students, parents, and school and district administrators. The team sought to develop conclusions, commendations and recommendations in the three focus areas that, in its judgment, would be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning.

The team reached consensus agreement for each conclusion, each recommendation, and each commendation in this report.

It is important to note that this report reflects a "moment" in the life of the school. The conclusions here are different from those that can be made from statewide assessment data or from information collected and analyzed by members of the school. This report is not intended to be prescriptive. Rather, it is a different lens, one not clouded by the daily life of the school. This new lens is one through which the school can look to help focus on important issues resulting in the development of strategies for overall improvement in the teaching and learning process.

The value of this report is not determined by the hard work of the team. The value will be determined by how James H. Eldredge Elementary School responds to the report. At first, the critical criteria will be the

thoughtfulness of that response and later it will be its actual effectiveness in improving teaching and learning. The response of the faculty and staff will be most critical early on, but later there is a shared responsibility to support the school in making progress. The school department, the citizens of East Greenwich, 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 JAMES H. ELDREDGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

James H. Eldredge Elementary School is one of two schools that serve students from grades four through six in the town of East Greenwich, Rhode Island. Eldredge School is part of the East Greenwich school system, which is governed by a seven-member, elected school committee. One principal, 19 fulltime and four part-time teachers, six teaching assistants, five part-time support personnel, one secretary, and two custodians serve the 320 students of the school. The principal transferred to Eldredge this year from Frenchtown School where he had served as principal also. Frenchtown School is the feeder school for Eldredge.

The building, constructed in 1927, was dedicated in honor of an East Greenwich physician and school committee member, Dr. James H. Eldredge. It is East Greenwich's oldest operating school. Renovations to the building in 1994 included the installation of an elevator, new lighting, a new roof, and a new heating and air circulation system.

Ninety-four percent of Eldredge's students are white, four percent are Asian-Pacific Islander, one percent are black, and one percent are Hispanic. Eleven percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, 11 percent receive special education services, and 10 percent of the students participate in the gifted and talented program.

The James H. Eldredge Elementary School earned the National School of Excellence Blue Ribbon School Award in the 1991-92 school year and the Invent America National School Award in 1991.

Current initiatives in the school include the following: the piloting of an electronic portfolio program, the GEMS-Net science curriculum, the New Standards-referenced social studies curriculum, the fifth grade mathematics collaborative, the sixth grade team teaching that includes English/LA, math, and science, Invent America in grade four, the Creative and Productive Thinking Program for gifted and talented students, the student council, and the Student Mediation Program.

3. PORTRAIT OF JAMES H. ELDREDGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

What a school! The James H. Eldredge School community joins students, teachers, and parents in a dynamic atmosphere that is both welcoming and task oriented. All in the Eldredge community are committed to excellence and have high expectations for their school.

Students come ready and eager to learn and they do learn here. Teachers willingly make time to coordinate plans with their colleagues to increase learning for their students. Not only do they engage in personal professional development, many teachers assume active roles on district committees for planning. Parents support the work of teachers and students in many different ways at Eldredge. Some serve on the School Improvement Team; others

organize fundraising activities for special school projects; and some literally roll up their sleeves to paint walls in the building. The Eldredge School Improvement Team Plan/Action Plan is comprehensive. Its full implementation can and will move this school forward.

Currently, student performance on state assessments is exceptionally high in Reading Basic Understanding with 99 percent of students achieving or exceeding the standard; yet writing scores sag dramatically by comparison. Teachers acknowledge this weakness and have begun to address it, but classroom strategies do not yet provide students with many opportunities to grow as writers.

Much of the classroom instruction at Eldredge is whole group instruction. Every student completes exactly the same tasks and assessments as every other student. At times, teachers miss opportunities to seize students' curiosity to further their learning and to challenge them.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- Information Works! 2000
- *Classroom observations*
- *Following students*
- *SALT Survey 2000*
- *Conversations with students*

Conclusions

An impressive ninety-nine percent of Eldredge students achieve or exceed the standard on the *Reading Basic Understanding* subtest of the New Standards Reference Examination and 87 percent achieve the standard on the *Reading Analysis and Interpretation* subtest. (Information Works! 2000)

Fifty-eight percent achieve or exceed the standard on the *Writing Effectiveness* subtest while 64 percent achieve or exceed the standard on the *Writing Conventions* subtest of the New Standards Reference Examination. (Information Works! 2000)

Seventy-three percent of Eldredge students achieve or exceed the standard on the *Mathematics Skills* subtest of the New Standards Reference Examination, 42 percent achieve or exceed the standard on the *Concepts* subtest, and 48 percent achieve or exceed the standard on the *Problem Solving* subtest. (Information Works! 2000)

Equity gaps (a difference of fifteen percent or greater) exist between male and female students on the *Reading Analysis and Interpretation* and *Writing Effectiveness* subtests of the New Standards Reference Examination with females outperforming males. Gaps between special education and general education students exist on four of the subtests with general education students outperforming special education students. Gaps also exist on the four subtests measured between students eligible for free and reduced price lunch and students not eligible, with those students not eligible outperforming those students who are. (Information Works!2000)

Students, teachers, and parents all have high expectations for academic achievement. This is reflected in the students' eagerness to learn. (*classroom observations, following students, SALT Survey 2000, conversations with students*)

Commendations for James H. Eldredge Elementary School:

The high expectations of parents, students, and the staff/faculty

The extraordinary student achievement on the Reading Basic Understanding subtest

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *conversations with teachers*
- *following students*
- *meetings with school improvement team and district administrators*
- *examination of student work*
- *James H. Eldredge School Improvement Plan/Team Action Plan*
- *James H. Eldredge Staff Development Plan 1999-2000*
- *Article 31 Professional Development Plan*

District curriculum draft documents

Conclusions

Teachers' participation in professional development in this school is impressive. Many teachers assume critical roles on district curriculum and performance task committees that have identified effective instructional strategies. Some teachers have begun to implement these strategies in their classrooms. (*meetings with district administrators and school improvement team, district curriculum draft documents, conversations with teachers, classroom observations*)

Teachers at Eldredge have made a commitment to find the time to collaborate with their colleagues on behalf of their students. They meet before and/or after school to plan instruction, to create flexible groups, and to discuss concerns. (*conversations with teachers, meeting with school improvement team*)

Eldredge teachers often use whole group instruction that sometimes looks like "one-size-fits-all". While teachers generally actively engage their students in learning, they sometimes miss opportunities to spark the teachable moment. (*classroom observations, following students*)

Teachers recognize that writing effectiveness is an identified weakness among Eldredge students. Teachers post in their classrooms and articulate to students, the five steps of the writing process. However, much of the writing students do during the course of the day consists of brief responses, short answers, and observations. These activities limit students' opportunities to improve as writers. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work*)

Teachers acknowledge the need to become more skillful at using a variety of strategies to assess learning in order to drive and improve instruction. Many teachers have begun to address this need, but little evidence exists that these goals have become part of the day to day routine at Eldredge. (*classroom observations, examination of student work, James H. Eldredge School Improvement Plan/Team Action Plan, James H. Eldredge Staff Development Plan 1999-2000, Article 31 Professional Development Plan*)

Commendations for James H. Eldredge Elementary School:

Teachers' willingness to find time to collaborate with their colleagues.

Teachers' assumption of critical roles on district committees.

Recommendations for James H. Eldredge Elementary School:

Engage in professional development around writing instruction and using assessments to improve instruction.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *observations of the school*
- *conversations with students, teachers, and staff*
- *meetings with school improvement team, school administrator, students, and parents*
- *following students*
- *Student Handbook*
- *James H. Eldredge School Improvement Plan/Team Action Plan*
- *James H. Eldredge Staff Development Plan 1999-2000*
- *The Creative and Productive Thinking Program (CPT) brochure*
- *SALT Survey 2000*
- *Review of teacher schedules*
- *Article 31 Professional Development Plan*

Conclusions

The welcoming and purposeful atmosphere at Eldredge envelops the school and fosters a sense of community. (*meetings with parents and students, observations of the school, conversations with staff and students*)

The Eldredge School community has high expectations for respect and behavior. To their credit, they plan to explore the impact of a character education program in order to maintain and enhance those standards. (*Student Handbook, meetings with school administrator and school improvement team, James H. Eldredge School Improvement Plan/Team Action Plan*)

The current school schedule limits opportunities for common planning time among teachers. The proposed schedule for 2000-2001 effectively provides a solution. (*meeting with school administrator, conversations with*

teachers, SALT Survey 2000, review of teacher schedules)

Eldredge's systemic strategic plan for professional development allows teachers to engage in common initiatives that can move instructional practice forward. (*James H. Eldredge School Improvement Plan/Action Plan, Article 31 Professional Development Plan, James H. Eldredge Staff Development Plan 1999-2000*)

In an attempt to ensure that every child is challenged to meet his/her potential, Eldredge School has in place support programs that include the homework club, learning lab, math collaborative, and the Creative and Productive Thinking Program (CPT). The needs of some students who do not qualify or choose not to participate in these programs are not fully met in the classroom because these models do not necessarily meet the needs of all students. (*classroom observations, following students, meeting with parents, The Creative and Productive Thinking Program (CPT) brochure, conversations with teachers*)

Commendations for James H. Eldredge Elementary School:

High expectations for respect and behavior

The welcoming and purposeful atmosphere

Recommendations for James H. Eldredge Elementary School:

Implement the proposed 2000-2001 schedule change to accommodate common planning time.

Accelerate the timeline for implementing the Tactic 4 of the School Improvement Team Action Plan ("Examine current models of instructional practices, programs, and scheduling to ensure that every child is challenged to meet their potential.")

Recommendations for the East Greenwich School District:

Support training in the instructional strategies as identified in the proposed district curricula.

Provide the resources necessary for Eldredge to implement the proposed schedule changes.

7. FINAL ADVICE TO THE SCHOOL

James H. Eldredge School accomplishes much for its students, yet recognizes the need for more. The School Improvement Plan is clear, logical, and all encompassing. It clearly reflects a good self study, addresses the needs of the school and its students, and includes solid professional development that can equip all teachers to meet those needs. The Eldredge community must continue to apply the same thoughtful approach to implementing its action plans as it engages in effective school reform.

While the current schedule contributes to the fragmentation of lessons, teachers still need to take the time in classes to capitalize on students' enthusiasm and curiosity that can take the lesson beyond the teacher's carefully constructed plan. They must challenge every student to construct meaning for him/herself. Teachers need to continue to participate in professional development around the comprehensive assessment strategies that will enable students to realize their potential through complex and varied

activities.

Teachers express concern about the lack of technology tools in the school, yet the seamless integration of technology takes place in several classes. Teachers need to share their existing technology expertise by modeling for others. At the same time, Eldredge must continue to push the district to include technology on its agenda, as it has in its proposed budget for the coming year, so that ultimately, more hardware can be added in the school and more technology professional development can take place.

James H. Eldredge School is a high performing school that is well on its way to becoming a cutting edge school in which students experience learning that will enable them to achieve wherever their lives lead them. With continued and constant thoughtful consideration of its goals and the implementation of them, the James H. Eldredge School community will move its students to that higher level.

APPENDIX

JAMES H. ELDREDGE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Cathy Mondillo, parent
chair

Sylvia Gans, parent

Barbara Horan, parent

Sue McKenna, grade 5 teacher

Charles Meyers, principal

Kara Ratigan, grade 6 teacher

Pat Rakovic, speech pathologist

Elaine Smith, grade 5 teacher

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

Sylvia Blanda, principal
Tower Street School

Westerly, Rhode Island

Gail Lury, special education teacher
Lippitt School
Warwick, Rhode Island

J. Carol Palmer, parent
Forest Park School
North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Janice Santos, grade 5 teacher
Hope Highlands Elementary School
Cranston, Rhode Island

Jan Stelljes, grade 3 teacher
Quidnessett Elementary School
North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Barbara Werchadlo, grade 1 teacher
Tiogue School
Coventry, Rhode Island

Becky Wright, education specialist
Rhode Island Department of Education

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

James H. Eldredge Elementary School

May 12, 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.

SALT is based on important assumptions about how public schools can be best supported by a state-based accountability system. One of those assumptions is that all schools can always improve their teaching and their students' learning. SALT visit reports are designed to be useful in helping schools in this work. The Eldredge SALT team chose to greatly limit the number of recommendations it made to the school. In my judgment, there is no question of either the legitimacy of the conclusions, nor of the full report. However, the team's limited use of recommendations is a departure from normal visit practice. It may sharply reduce the report's usefulness to the Eldredge Elementary School. The team did not want to detract from its central point that the school is doing well. However, this report may not give the school the opportunity to take full advantage of the work of the team in the school's efforts to do even better.



Thomas A. Wilson, EdD

CATALPA, LTD.

May 30, 2000