



WILLIAM J. UNDERWOOD SCHOOL

Newport, Rhode Island

SALT Visit Team Report

May 19, 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 William J. Underwood School from May 16-19, 2000 was to draw conclusions about the school in the three focus areas of SALT:

- Student Learning
- Teaching
- The School

The SALT visit to William J. Underwood School was conducted during the same week that a SALT visit was conducted at these other Newport public schools: F.E. Thompson Middle School, Cranston Calvert Elementary School, and Carey Elementary School. As planned RIDE was also conducting its regular district School Support Visit (with a focus on special needs education) which includes visits to all Newport Schools.

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 William J. Underwood 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 William J. Underwood School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- *a total of 70 hours of classroom observations. All classrooms were visited at least twice. Most*

teachers were observed more than once.

- *many observations of the school (outside of classrooms)*
- *following 6 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*
 - *building and district administrators*
 - *students*
 - *parents*
- *conversations with many students, parents, teachers, staff, and building administrator*
- *examination of student work, including a selection of work collected by the school*
- *analysis of achievement and equity gaps based on Infoworks data*
- *review of district and school policies*
- *review of professional development activities*
- *review of classroom assessments.*
- *review of the following documents:*
 - *William J. Underwood School Improvement Plan*
 - *district strategic plan*
 - *SALT Survey report*
 - *Curriculum documents*
 - *Information Works! 2000*
 - *Newport Public Schools Teacher Evaluation Program*
 - *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
 - *1998, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*

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 22 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, 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 William J. Underwood 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 Newport, 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 WILLIAM J. UNDERWOOD SCHOOL

William J. Underwood School is one of six schools in the city of Newport that houses students in grades K-5. It is part of the Newport School District, which is governed by a seven member elected school committee.

The school first opened its doors to students in January 1962. Instruction for the 215 students takes place in four separate buildings.

A principal, who has been at the school for seven years, leads a professional staff of 23 faculty, and classroom teachers. Thirty-nine percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Sixty-eight percent of the students are white, 8 percent Hispanic, 23 percent are black, and less than one percent are Asian/Pacific Islander. Twenty percent of the students receive special education services.

The school is in the second year of participation in a Working Wonders Grant focusing on literacy.

3. PORTRAIT OF WILLIAM J. UNDERWOOD SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

William J. Underwood School, unique in its setup of four separate buildings, not connected by hallways, has established itself as a very close-knit unit of grade families. Classes with children eager to learn and teachers who love to teach is the magic that is Underwood.

Rubrics are carefully hung for students to examine and writing is integrated into all parts of the day. KITES science kits, technology in use and reaching towards higher standards move into the picture as students walk the winding paths to the future.

The teachers have embraced the standards and their work and efforts in this area show through in the quality of the students' writing. This school is a work in progress. Inclusion and co-teaching are on board with a capable captain who keeps it moving forward.

The configuration of the school and the building organization of the grades do not promote collaboration among like grade levels. The campus-like set up of this school creates a challenge in regards to limited physical space. Besides these challenges of physical space, the school faces a lack of sufficient support services.

William J. Underwood School is a wonderful place for students, staff, and parents. It is agreed by all that while there is not much space, stop by anytime, for you are always welcome.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- *Information Works! 2000*
- *1998, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *examination of student work*
- *following students*
- *school and classroom observations*
- *conversations with students and staff*

Conclusions

The students at William J. Underwood School are excited and engaged in learning. This enthusiasm for learning is shared and cultivated among students, staff, and visitors. (*following students, school and classroom observations, conversations with students and staff*)

On the 1999, Grade 4 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam, the students at William J. Underwood School achieved or exceeded the standard in the following: *Skills* 82%, *Concepts* 32% and *Problem-Solving* 18%. The scores on the *Skills* subtest are above those of similar students statewide. The scores on the *Concepts* and *Problem Solving* subtest are below those of similar students statewide. It is disturbing to note that the number of students in the lowest category of achievement on the *Problem Solving* subtest has increased from 3% to 23% in 1999. (Information Works! 2000, *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*)

On the 1999, Grade 4 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, the students at William J. Underwood School achieved the standard in the following: Reading: *Basic Understanding* 82%, and Reading: *Analysis & Interpretation* 68%. These scores are above district percentages yet are below those of similar students statewide. (Information Works! 2000, *1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*)

On the 1999 Grade 4 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, the students at William J. Underwood School achieved the standard in the following: Writing: *Effectiveness* 27%, and Writing: *Conventions* 32%. These scores are significantly below those of similar students statewide. (Information Works! 2000)

On the 1999, Grade 3 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, 14% of the students at William J. Underwood School achieved the standard. The number of students who achieved the standard has remained the same as the 1998 assessment results, however, there has been a significant decrease in the number of students at the lowest level of achievement. The school's commitment and focus on writing may have been a positive contributing factor. (Information Works! 2000, *1998, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results, examination of student work*)

There are no identified equity gaps for the one fourth grade class at William J. Underwood School. (Information Works! 2000)

Recommendations for William J. Underwood School:

Review future assessment results and determine if any equity gaps exist.

Continue to analyze state assessment results to plan for instructional changes and professional development activities.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *examination of student work*
- *conversations with many students and teachers*
- *following students*
- *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, students, building and district administrators*
- *1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *SALT Survey 2000*

Conclusions

Most students and teachers at William J. Underwood School understand the use of rubrics as teaching and learning tools. Teachers and students generate task specific rubrics to develop, edit, and evaluate their work. The students are actively engaged in creating their own path to excellence. (*classroom observations, following students, conversations with students and teachers, examination of student work, SALT Survey 2000 chart C.1.5*)

In most classrooms at William J. Underwood School math instruction is largely skills based. In some classrooms students do not develop strategies for problem solving because they are not encouraged to solve problems in different ways with a variety of tools and manipulatives. This may be contributing to problem solving scores that are significantly below the standard. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, conversations with teachers and students, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*)

Students at William J. Underwood School have many opportunities to experience science through an inquiry based, hands-on program (KITES). Students have opportunities to explore, experiment and discover the connection between theory and practice. The new KITES writing component is being integrated into language arts activities in many classrooms. This program promotes creativity and higher-order thinking skills for all students. (*classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations with teachers and students*)

The students at William J. Underwood School write frequently and consistently throughout all grades as reflected in the quality of their daily work. Students have opportunities to generate various forms of writing such as: poetry, letter writing, persuasive, narrative, creative, and responses to literature. The amount of writing crafted in classrooms should produce an increase in student achievement on state

assessments. (*classroom observations, examination of student work, Rhode Island Writing Assessment results, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results, meeting with students*)

The teachers at William J. Underwood School employ a variety of teaching strategies to meet the needs of their diverse student population. In most classrooms whole group, small group, hands-on, partnering, learning centers and the use of technology are being utilized. In three early childhood classrooms, inclusion and co-teaching models are successfully being implemented. Generally in other classrooms instruction is not being differentiated to meet the individual needs and learning styles of all students. (*following students, classroom observations, meeting with building and district administrators, conversations with teachers*)

Reading instruction at William J. Underwood School is guided by a system-wide, standards-based literacy curriculum. The school has adopted a new anthology as one vehicle to teach reading. This new anthology as well as the supplemental materials teachers are using successfully enhances instruction, however, an inadequate collection in the library media center inhibits literacy growth. (*following students, classroom observations, meetings with school improvement team, building and district administrators*)

Teachers have a clear understanding of standards in literacy through their work with the Working Wonders Grant. Through their own initiative, teachers have advanced in standards-based instruction and are working towards improving student achievement in literacy. (*examination of student work, conversations with teachers, meetings with building, and district administrators*)

Commendations for William J. Underwood School:

Efforts in the development of student centered and student generated rubrics

Quality and quantity of writing

Recommendations for William J. Underwood School:

Provide more opportunities for students to engage in a variety of problem-solving activities.

Continue and expand the inclusion and co-teaching models into more classrooms.

Evaluate the present collection in the library media center in order to meet the library media standards.

Make the library media center an integral part of the school's instructional program.

Continue the development and use of rubrics across the curriculum.

Take advantage of any professional development offered by the district in standards-based instruction.

Recommendations for the Newport School District:

Provide on going professional development in standards based instruction.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *observations of the school*
- *conversations with many teachers and staff*
- *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, building and district administrators, students, and parents*
- *SALT Survey 2000*
- *School Improvement Plan*
- *Newport Public Schools Teacher Evaluation Program*

Conclusions

Teachers and staff at William J. Underwood School are committed to meeting the needs of their students. The lack of a literacy specialist, full time library media specialist, guidance counselor, and nurse, has forced the teachers to bond together and support themselves individually and collectively. Teachers do their best to fulfill these roles as well as provide the necessary materials to meet the students' needs. (*school and classroom observations, conversations with teachers, meeting with parents and building administrator*)

William J. Underwood School is a welcoming, nurturing, environment where mutual respect among all members of the school community flourishes. The approachable, open door policy is seen everywhere. The leadership exemplifies the pervasive pro-child climate. (*school and classroom observations, meetings with students, parents, building and district administrators, SALT Survey 2000, conversations with teachers and staff*)

The William J. Underwood School Improvement Team has used data in deciding objectives and goals for the school. The goals relating to yearly in-services regarding policies and procedures, increasing the availability of the Family Service Coordinator and developing a link with the Newport Parent Advisory Council to facilitate a parent liason are realistic and attainable. However, there are several long-term goals, which are not based upon the immediate needs of the school. (*meeting with School Improvement Team, William J. Underwood School Improvement Plan, school and classroom observations*)

Parents are encouraged to take an active role in the school. The PTO has taken several steps to reach out to members of the school community by offering baby-sitting services and changing the venue of meetings. Parent involvement in such programs as Books and Beyond, volunteering in classrooms and fundraising enhances the home school connection. This provides an impetus for learning at William J. Underwood School (*meeting with parents, school and classroom observations, SALT Survey 2000*)

All teachers at William J. Underwood School are involved in the first year of implementing the teacher evaluation program. The evaluation system is aligned with the Rhode Island Beginning Teacher Standards. Its purpose is the professional development of staff and the improvement of teaching. Non-tenured teachers have two formal observations and one informal observation each year. Tenured teachers have one formal observation in a three-year cycle with two informal observations in the interim years. Tenured

teachers have the opportunity to participate in a growth plan. This process shows promise. (*Newport Public Schools Teacher Evaluation Program, meetings with building and district administrators, conversations with teachers*)

Commendations for William J. Underwood School:

Collegiality and commitment of the teachers

Administrator who is an advocate for her students

Recommendations for William J. Underwood School:

Look for ways to increase support services for **all** students.

Review and revise action plans based upon the needs of the school.

Seek ways to continue and improve communication within the school community.

Recommendations for the Newport School District:

Evaluate the need for more equitable distribution of support services.

7. FINAL ADVICE TO THE SCHOOL

You are a dedicated group of individuals who are working hard to increase the achievement of your students. Continue to support each other despite the many challenges you face on a daily basis. Although you are separated by grade and building you have established a cohesive bond with each other. Work as a team towards establishing lines of communication among district, building and staff.

Your inclusion and co-teaching models are successful due in part to the level of support given to these programs. As you work to expand these programs, insist upon professional development and support services that are essential for their implementation. Continue to be risk takers with your diverse population.

Your work with the Working Wonders Grant has been a positive influence in the use of standards and rubrics in guiding your instruction. Expand your efforts across the curriculum especially in the area of math problem solving. Take advantage of professional development opportunities offered by state, district and school as they relate to your students' needs.

The instruction by the itinerant teachers complements classroom instruction and the spirit of this school. Continue this integration and work to expand the utilization of the library media center and technology in your classrooms.

You are the keys to your students' success and have unlocked their enthusiasm and curiosity for learning. These efforts have created an impressive community of learners. Keep making those keys which will unlock those doors to your students' future.

APPENDIX

WILLIAM J. UNDERWOOD SCHOOL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Harriet Coleman, community member

Linda Hall, teacher

Kathleen Kitsvanheyningen, parent

Patricia McGrath, parent

Kathy Tobak, parent

Sandra Flowers, community member

Julie Janson, parent

Mary Letourneau, teacher

Marilyn Moskol, principal

Brian Toracinta, teacher

Kathryn Farrington, parent

Patricia Lynch, parent

Jane Perry, parent

THE SALT VISITING TEAM

Patricia K. Ribeiro, grade 2 teacher

Providence Street School, West Warwick, Rhode Island
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as SALT Fellow)
chair of the team

Sandra Deckett, reading specialist/consultant
John F. Horgan School, West Warwick, Rhode Island

Patricia Lisi, reading specialist/consultant
Edgewood Highland School, Cranston, Rhode Island

Edward Mara, director of elementary education
Middletown School District, Middletown, Rhode Island

Beth McCurdy, parent
Wilbur & McMahon Schools, Little Compton, Rhode Island

Amy Mullen, resource specialist/diagnostician
Pocasset School, Tiverton, Rhode Island

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

William J. Underwood School

May 19, 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.

June 4, 2000