



# SCITUATE HIGH SCHOOL

Scituate, Rhode Island

## SALT Visit Team Report

May 5, 2000



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

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

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### SCITUATE HIGH SCHOOL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM \*

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## 1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

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

The purpose of the visit to Scituate High School from May 2, 2000 through May 5, 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 Scituate High 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 Scituate High School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- *a total of 152 full and partial classroom observations which totaled over 138 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 12 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 Infoworks data*
  - *review of district and school policies*
  - *review of classroom assessments.*
  - *review of the following documents:*
    - *School Improvement Plan for Scituate High School*
    - *district strategic plan*
    - *1999 SALT Survey report*
    - *classroom textbooks*
    - *1998 Information Works!*
    - *1999 Information Works!*
    - *2000 Information Works!*
    - *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
    - *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
    - *Review of newly written curricula*

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 28 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 Scituate High 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 Scituate, 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 SCITUATE HIGH SCHOOL

Scituate High School is the only school serving grades 9-12 for the town of Scituate, Rhode Island. It is one of five schools in the Scituate School System. Scituate is a rural suburban town with a population of approximately 9,700. The present school first opened its doors to students in 1956. Additions were added in 1985 and 1994.

A five-member school committee, whose members are elected to four-year terms, governs the Scituate Public School District. A seven-member town council governs the town. Scituate High School students are served by a professional staff of one and one-half administrators, fifty full and part-time faculty, seven full-time equivalent aides, one student assistance counselor, three guidance counselors, and five full-time equivalent custodians.

Fifty-four students totaling 10 percent receive special education services, 4 percent are eligible for free or reduced price lunch, and students receive assistance from the Student Support Center. Of the 541 students attending Scituate High School, 99 percent are white, .5 percent are Hispanic, and .5 percent are black.

Scituate High School is presently reviewing and revising its curricula to reflect New Performance Standards and State Frameworks. Departments are at different stages of revision: the music curriculum has been approved by the school committee. A curriculum sub-committee comprised of the high school and middle school principal, the assistant superintendent in charge of instruction, and three teachers serve on this committee and are guiding the departments in the revision process. Scituate High School also has a School-To-Career program in place, serving over two hundred and fifty students. Connections with over sixty businesses have been made. Students visit these businesses as part of their job-shadowing experience.

## 3. PORTRAIT OF SCITUATE HIGH SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Scituate High School is a small suburban school that has a history of achieving positive results on standardized measures of academic achievement. The school community takes pride in the congenial atmosphere that exists between and among administration, faculty, and students. The students are courteous, polite, helpful, and prideful in their school. Faculty and staff model an atmosphere of mutual respect. Scituate High School allows its students to grow, shine, and learn.

The high school community recognizes the need to change, grow, and improve in order to increase the academic and personal successes of their students. The School Improvement Team has created a comprehensive School Improvement Plan. The faculty has begun the process of changing from comfortable, traditional, educational practices, toward an educational approach focused on current needs of students and society. However, teachers are at varying levels of understanding and implementation of these practices.

During the last two years the faculty and administration have begun to rewrite the curricula to be standards-based. The school is currently in a state of transition. While there are a variety of plans, objectives, and tactics in place designed to better educate Scituate High School students, the school could benefit from a more focused, prioritized approach to school improvement.

Issues relating to curriculum, scheduling, professional development, and assessment must be addressed in an organized, prioritized manner with increased leadership from the district. This will require a change in structure, attitude, and practice by the school community as a whole. There is a generally cooperative atmosphere in spite of some frustration and communication concerns on the part of faculty, parents, and students. The lack of uniformity in the commitment to educational reform is a limiting factor hindering the school-wide change in educational

practice.

Scituate is a good school that has the potential to be great, if it avails itself of this opportunity for growth. We hope that the school considers the conclusions and recommendations in this report within a context of continuous improvement, for that is the spirit in which they were written.

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

- 2000 Information Works!
- 1999 Information Works!
- *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *meeting with students*
- *classroom observations*
- *observations of the school*
- *following students*
- *conversations and interviews with students and teachers*

### Conclusions

On the 1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam the tenth grade students at Scituate High School met or exceeded the standard in the following: *Reading Basic Understanding* – 46 percent, *Reading Analysis and Interpretations* – 30 percent, *Writing Effectiveness* - 29 percent. These scores are above the average state scores, equivalent to similar students statewide on two subtests, and slightly above similar students on the *Writing Effectiveness* subtest. (2000 Information Works!)

On the 1999 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam the tenth grade students at Scituate High School met or exceeded the standard in the following: *Skills* – 51 percent, *Concepts* – 31 percent, *Problem Solving* - 26 percent. These scores are above the average state scores and equivalent to similar students statewide. (2000 Information Works!)

The average verbal and math scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test were 1060 combined, with an 86 percent participation rate. This is above the state average of 996 combined, with a 57 percent participation rate. (2000 Information Works!)

An equity gap (a difference of 15 percentage points or greater) exists between male and female students on the 1999 tenth grade Mathematics New Standards Reference Exam. Female students scored higher than male students on the *Mathematics Skills Sub-test*. An equity gap also exists between male and female students on the 1999 tenth grade English Language Arts New Standards Reference Exam. Female students scored higher than male students on the *Reading: Analysis and Interpretation Sub-test* and the *Writing: Effectiveness Sub-test*. The *Writing Effectiveness* equity gap existed on the 1998 New Standards Reference Exam. (2000 Information Works!, 1999 Information Works!)

An equity gap (a difference of 15 percent or greater) exists between regular education and special education students on all sub-tests of the 1999 New Standards Reference Exams. No special education students were proficient on any of these sub-tests. One special education student was proficient on the

1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment. (2000 Information Works!, *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment*)

Most Scituate High School students rise to the level of expectations set forth by the school community. Many of the students are respectful, are engaged in their own learning, are goal orientated, have varied interests, work well collaboratively, desire to show what they can do, are proud of their work, seek clarification when things are not clear, and accept positive criticism. However, some students put forth the minimum effort, don't attend class, are disengaged, unmotivated, and unfocused. (*meeting with students, classroom observations, observations of the school, following students, conversations and interviews with students and teachers*)

## Recommendations for Scituate High School:

Encourage and support greater student voice to make students more invested in their own learning.

Develop strategies to address the needs of the disengaged, unmotivated, unfocused students.

Investigate the factors contributing to equity (gender and special education) and achievement gaps, and design programs to help all students meet or exceed standards

Analyze the "What Students Need" section on the New Standards Reference Exams School Summary Report and use this to inform your sequencing of curricula.

## Recommendations for the Scituate School District:

Provide support to the school for the strategies they develop to improve achievement at the high school level.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- *following students*
- *examination of student work*
- *review of classroom assessments*
- *review of textbooks*
- *scheduled meetings with school administrators, students, and parents*
- *school improvement plan*
- *1999-2000 SALT Survey Report*

### Conclusions

There are some excellent examples of high expectations across the disciplines, but they are not the same for all students. The level of challenge and expectations are not the same in all classes. Students in some courses are provided with clear expectations and challenged to reach a high level of performance. In other courses learning expectations are not as clearly stated, and fewer students are challenged to perform at high levels. *(classroom observations, meetings with students and parents, following students, examination of student work, conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff, and school administrators)*

There are a number of classroom activities that focus on higher-order thinking skills, where students are encouraged to use technology as a tool, make connections, analyze information, and form opinions. However, many classroom activities over-emphasize content, low-level skills and the presentation of factual material to the detriment of the application of knowledge, mastery of concepts, and problem solving. *(classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, review of textbooks, meeting with students, 1999 SALT Survey Report, conversations and interviews with teachers)*

There are examples of excellent teaching, both traditional and innovative, across most disciplines. Although there are some wonderful examples of students engaged in their own learning, teacher-delivered lessons are predominant. There is an effort to improve instructional techniques as evidenced by project-based learning, student presentations, student analysis of information, etc. that encourage substantive dialogue between and among students. *(classroom observations, conversations and interviews with students, teachers and school administrators, following students, meeting with students, examination of student work)*

Assessments that are designed to provide students opportunities to assess their own work and have implications for future instruction are not the norm. Many classroom assessments focus on content knowledge and skills, more often than on reasoning, problem solving, student outcomes, and life-long learning as identified in the mission statement of the School Improvement Plan. There is a lack of annotated comments on work that has been graded. This fails to provide students with the depth of feedback necessary to revise and improve their work. *(school improvement plan, examination of student work, classroom observations, following students, meeting with students, conversations and interviews with teachers, review of classroom assessments)*

Many teachers motivate and encourage students to reach their personal best by exhibiting enthusiasm for the teachers' own subject areas, appreciating the input of students in the classroom, and individualizing instruction. Unfortunately, some teachers fail to elicit student participation in the learning environment and permit disengagement. *(classroom observations, meetings with students and parents, following students, conversations and interviews with students and teachers)*

## Commendations for Scituate High School:

The emerging examples of innovative classroom practices.

## Recommendations for Scituate High School:

Establish clear expectations for student performance and mastery in all programs.

Encourage all students, regardless of level, to reach the identified expectations.

Plan activities that require students to focus on higher-order thinking skills, use technology as a tool, make

connections to the real world, analyze information, and form opinions.

Expand the use of instructional techniques that are project-based and student-centered.

Provide students with opportunities to self-assess and edit their own work.

Increase the number of teacher comments on student work to provide the necessary feedback for revision and improvement.

Create assessments that measure concepts, higher-order thinking skills, and student ability to apply knowledge.

Make consistent efforts to engage and motivate all students.

Find ways to learn from and use the teaching expertise that exists in this building.

## Recommendations for the Scituate School District:

Continue and expand the opportunities for the professional development necessary for teachers to successfully implement the above referenced changes in instructional practice.

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *observations of the school*
- *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff and school administrators*
- *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- *following students*
- *1999-SALT Survey Report*
- *school improvement plan*
- *district strategic plan*
- *review of newly written curricula*

### Conclusions

Scituate High School offers a comfortable, safe, clean environment free of major issues of discipline. There is a mutual respect that exists between and among students and adults. The students feel that the teachers care about them, and the students know one another. The small size of the school is a contributing factor to a culture of tolerance, courtesy and acceptance that has been cultivated by the school community. (*following students, classroom observations, observations of the school, meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, conversations and interviews with school administrators, teachers, staff, and students, 1999-SALT Survey Report*)

The school community has conducted a thorough evaluation of the high school. This self-study effort has led to the production of a school improvement plan that recognizes and protects strengths, identifies areas of weakness, and lays the framework for school improvement. However, the identified "action steps" lack prioritization, timelines, measurable outcomes, and identified personnel responsible for implementation. This leads to uncertainty about the purpose of improvement efforts and diminishes the impact of the school community's efforts. *(school improvement plan, meetings with school administrators and school improvement team, conversations and interviews with teachers and staff)*

The high school has taken the initiative to develop curricula based on national standards. However, the development of a sequential program of studies designed to progressively deepen students mastery and understanding of content, concepts, problem solving and real-life applications is currently fragmented. Curricular usefulness and the link between curriculum development and actual improvement in student learning is not apparent to all faculty. *(review of newly written curricula, meetings with school and district administrators, school improvement plan, conversations and interviews with teachers)*

The issue of professional development is clearly a central theme in both the district and school strategic plans. There is district support for building level initiatives, and professional development activities must be linked to the School Improvement Plan. However, professional development that links to the school's reform effort is neither focused in a formal plan at the building or district level nor based on an assessment of faculty identified needs. In-district and out-of-district opportunities to learn about technology, authentic assessment practices, student motivation, and instructional strategies needed to accomplish Scituate High School's needed reforms are unfocused. The maximization of results is hindered because there are insufficient opportunities for sharing of expertise and practices between and among members of this learning community. *(1999 SALT Survey Report, school improvement plan, district strategic plan, meetings with the school improvement team, school and district administrators, conversations and interviews with teachers and staff)*

There are a number of new and part-time faculty members at Scituate High School who have expressed a desire to improve the quality of their instruction and their understanding of the school's expectations. Changing norms and expectations, driven by school reform efforts, further challenge new and part-time teachers, as well as veteran staff. *(classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, district strategic plan, meetings with students and school administrators)*

## Commendations for Scituate High School:

The thoughtful School Improvement Plan.

The comfortable and inviting atmosphere of the school.

## Recommendations for Scituate High School:

Improve the School Improvement Plan by prioritizing the existing action steps, affixing responsibility for implementation of tactics, establishing milestones for accomplishment, and creating a timeline for completion.

Involve more people in your continuing efforts to develop curricula based on standards to insure that it has instructional value and guides daily instruction.

Map curriculum development, using a common model for all subject areas, to actual classroom practice and emphasize areas needed to improve student performance.

Identify professional development based on an assessment of the faculty's needs, especially in the areas of student assessment, standards-based curriculum development, strategic planning, and examining student work.

Devise and implement a comprehensive, coordinated professional development plan in order to provide focus to the faculty's educational experiences. Base this plan on the needs identified above.

Expand the effort to share expertise and the school's written and unwritten expectations among new, part-time, and veteran faculty members.

## Recommendations for the Scituate School District:

Provide a mechanism that insures the uniformity and continuity necessary for coordinated, articulated curriculum development and K-12 student growth.

Take a leadership role in providing professional development that enhances teaching and learning, leading to improve student performance, as identified in the third objective of the district strategic plan revised November 1999.

## 7. FINAL ADVICE TO THE SCHOOL

When a school community is deemed successful by a number of indicators, sometimes its members become too comfortable, savoring the accolades for its success. The danger is that such an attitude may delay the recognition of the need for growth. Many members of your school recognize the need for change, but it is important for your entire learning community to embrace the improvements you have begun.

Scituate High School has within its structure and School Improvement Plan valuable components that can lead to change. You begin the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with the opportunity to make a good school great. Look to all sources within your school community for advice and assistance with your reform efforts. Both parents and students have expressed a desire for a greater voice in the operation of the school. You have valuable resources within the professional staff and community. Finding ways to promote and improve two-way communication between and among these parties will advance your efforts.

Our society, economy, and context in which schools operate have changed significantly. All teachers need to actively engage students, regardless of their perceived educational and career path, in a learning environment that develops the new and complex skills, knowledge, and abilities needed for a digital world. The practices that have served your students well in the past are insufficient to prepare them to live and work in today's society.

There is enthusiasm for interdisciplinary teaching and School-to-Career program among the teachers and students participating in these programs. They were identified as strengths in the School Improvement Plan and appear to have a motivational benefit. Look for ways to expand these promising practices.

It is important that the school engages all students and maximizes the benefits of their educational experience. The perceived non-college bound, and the students in the middle-two quartiles, deserve the same expectation of intellectual rigor you demand from your "high performing" students. Similarly, some of the structural components of the School-to-Career program would enhance the educational experience of Scituate High School students preparing for competitive academic institutions.

Let your standards-based curricula be more than paper documents. Use them to provide a coherent sequence of inquiry designed to progressively deepen the mastery of content, concepts, problem solving and applications of all your students. Connect these standards to your daily instruction, classroom assignments, and let them provide indicators for student success in each course and grade level. The standards you have chosen contain both the content and performance indicators that Scituate High School students will need to understand and apply in order to be productive citizens and life-long learners.

The infusion of new teachers can add energy and new ideas to your school. However, the wisdom gained by veteran teachers over the years in the art of teaching and classroom management is a source of knowledge that must be shared. Each group has knowledge worth sharing with the other. Work to establish a collegial learning community that shares and builds on the collective wisdom existing within this building. Every teacher, regardless of his/her experience has room for personal and professional growth. Celebrate the successes, hard work, and extra effort of both teachers and students. An increased emphasis to appreciate, both privately and publicly, the efforts of the faculty and staff will yield its own rewards.

Scituate High School has many of the necessary components to implement your plans for improvement. However, you must add focus, direction, and increase the circle of involvement if you want to maximize your efforts and results. A challenge for this school will be to support all members of the educational community as they work to achieve at higher levels and to create a culture of academic rigor and high expectations that truly meet the needs of each child attending Scituate High School.

## APPENDIX

### SCITUATE HIGH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Sheila Durfee, Parent, Co-Chair

David Light, Principal, Co-Chair

David Finnegan, Parent

Pat Gervais, Parent

Barbara Klitz, Parent

Joyce Sevigny, Parent

Jean Angell, Teacher

Doris Duggan, Teacher

Anne-Marie Kachanis, Teacher

David Neves, Teacher

Roland Nipps, Teacher

Otilia Nobrega, Teacher

Theresa Papio, Teacher

Kelly Pelletier, Teacher

Donna Whitehead, Teacher

Loriann Nardacci, Student

Christopher Smith, Student

Brian Venditelli, Student

Mellissa Walsh, Student

## THE SALT VISITING TEAM

Dr. Michael S. Barnes, Technology Education / Department Chairperson  
Ponaganset Middle / Senior High School  
Foster-Glocester, Rhode Island  
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)  
Chair of the Team

Mr. Frank Barnes, Project Manager  
Annenberg Institute  
Providence, Rhode Island

Mr. Albert Beaton, Special Education Teacher  
Central High School  
Providence, Rhode Island

Ms. Francesca Bedell, English Teacher  
Westerly High School  
Westerly, Rhode Island

Mr. Ernest Begin, French Teacher  
Shea High School  
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Mr. Joe Gaudiosi, Teacher Certification  
Rhode Island Department of Education  
Providence, Rhode Island

Ms. Patricia McCarthy, Mathematics Teacher  
Portsmouth High School  
Portsmouth, Rhode Island

Dr. Christine A. Mulligan, Health Education Teacher  
Coventry High School  
Coventry, Rhode Island

Mr. Virginia O'Hayer, Parent  
North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Mr. Roger Parent, Principal  
N. Cumberland Middle School  
Cumberland, Rhode Island

Mr. David Shadrick, Assistant Principal  
East Providence High School  
East Providence, Rhode Island

Ms. Lois Short, Mathematics Department Chair / Teacher  
Burrillville High School  
Burrillville, Rhode Island

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Scituate High School

May 5, 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 22, 2000