



MATUNUCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

South Kingstown, Rhode Island

SALT Visit Team Report

May 26, 2000



School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)

The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education

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1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

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

The purpose of the visit to Matunuck Elementary School from May 23-26, 2000 was to draw conclusions about the School in the three focus areas of SALT:

- *Student Learning*
- *Teaching*
- *The School*

The design of the SALT visit ensures that accountability supports improvement of schools by directly connecting judgments of quality and recommendations for improvement to the actual life and work of a school.

This report is built upon the observations and conclusions of the visit team. The visit team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners and a parent. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The school improvement plan for Matunuck 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 Matunuck Elementary School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- *a total of 104 hours of classroom observations. All classrooms were visited at least once. Most teachers were observed more than once.*
- *many observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- *following 8 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*
 - *teacher assistants*

- *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 teacher schedules*
- *review of the following documents:*
 - *Matunuck Elementary School Improvement Plan*
 - *district strategic plan*
 - *Matunuck Elementary School Self-Study*
 - *South Kingstown School Department curricula documents*
 - *South Kingstown School Department Teacher Evaluation Document*
 - *SALT Survey report*
 - *Information Works! 2000*
 - *Information Works! 1999*
 - *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
 - *1998, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
 - *1999 Rhode Island Health 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, 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 Matunuck 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 South Kingstown, 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 MATUNUCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Matunuck Elementary School is one of six elementary schools that serves students from the villages of Matunuck, East Matunuck, Green Hill, and Perryville in the town of South Kingstown. It is part of the South Kingstown School System. An elected school committee of seven members governs the South Kingstown School System.

The school first opened its doors in 1975. Additional wings were added to the one story building in 1987 and 1990.

An interim principal, who has been at the school since September, leads a staff of 47 full and part time personnel. Of the 422 students in grades K-6 attending the school, 96 percent are white, 2 percent are Hispanic, and 2 percent are Native/American. Eighteen percent receive special education services in resource or self-contained settings. Eleven percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

3. PORTRAIT OF MATUNUCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Set in rural South County, Matunuck Elementary School provides a nurturing environment for its students. School pride is evident as one criss-crosses the building. Annual art shows, cabarets, and family nights extend the learning community beyond the school walls.

Together teachers, assistants, parents, and students gather to form a relaxed, comfortable yet energetic atmosphere that enhances teaching and learning in and around the school.

Individually teachers give their professional best to meet the learning needs of their students in the absence of district curriculum, planned professional development, common planning time, current materials, and dramatic growth in the district.

Unanticipated changes in leadership at Matunuck Elementary School and the lack of monetary support and professional direction from the district fogs-in a learning community that is seeking new ideas and change. The actualization of the district wide action plans for improved student performance should burn away the fog.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- *Information Works! 2000*
- *Information Works! 1999*

- *1998, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *1999 Rhode Island Health Assessment results*
- *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *following students*
- *classroom observations*
- *conversations with teachers, staff, and building administrator*

Conclusions

On the 1999, Grade 4 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination, the fourth grade students at Matunuck Elementary School achieved or exceeded the standard in the following: Skills 70%, Concepts 49%, and Problem Solving 61%. These scores show signs of improvement especially on the Concepts and Problem Solving subtests. All scores are above those of similar students statewide. (Information Works! 2000, 1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results)

On the 1999, Grade 4 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination, the students at Matunuck Elementary School achieved or exceeded the standard in the following: Reading: Basic Understanding 91%, Reading: Analysis & Interpretation 82%, Writing: Effectiveness 75%, and Writing: Conventions 68%. The reading scores are similar to students statewide and the writing scores are above those of similar students statewide. (Information Works! 2000, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results)

On the 1999, Grade 3 Rhode Island Writing Assessment 46% of the students achieved or exceeded the standard. This is a significant increase from the 25% of students who achieved the standard in 1998. These scores are significantly above those of the district and state. (Information Works! 2000, 1998, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results)

On the 1999, Grade 5 Rhode Island Health Assessment 40% of the students achieved or exceeded the standard. These scores are above the district and state percentages. (Information Works! 2000, Information Works! 1999, 1999 Rhode Island Health Assessment results)

For the second year in a row, there are no identified equity gaps for the fourth grade students at Matunuck Elementary School. (Information Works! 2000, Information Works! 1999)

The students at Matunuck Elementary School display respect for themselves, each other, and the staff. They are a highly motivated community of learners. (following students, classroom observations, conversations with teachers, staff and building administrator)

Commendations for Matunuck Elementary School:

The students as a community of learners

Recommendations for Matunuck Elementary School:

Continue to review assessment results to improve student learning.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *examination of student work*
- *conversations with teachers*
- *following students*
- *scheduled meetings with School Improvement Team, building and district administrators, students, and parents*
- *South Kingstown School Department curricula documents*

Conclusions

The lack of coherent, consistent, standards-based curricula across and within grades creates learning gaps and repetition in student learning. Despite this lack teachers make sincere efforts to provide quality educational opportunities for their students. (following students, classroom observations, meetings with School Improvement Team and parents, conversations with teachers, South Kingstown School Department curricula documents)

The understanding of rubrics and their use to set clear expectations and to assess student work varies widely from class to class at Matunuck Elementary School. In a few classrooms, students regularly use rubrics effectively, but in many other classrooms students are unaware of or are not clear about the use of rubrics which limits their self-assessment skills. (classroom observations, following students, meetings with building administrator, students and parents, conversations with teachers)

Teachers' classroom management skills and styles result in maximum student time on task. Practices such as the use of a color code behavior chart, the refocusing of student attention through positive means, and the establishment of clear routines are prevalent in classrooms. Students exhibit a strong sense of personal responsibility. (classroom observations, following students, meeting with students, conversations with teachers)

In science and math, teachers facilitate rather than direct student learning, allowing students to construct their own understanding. However, students' learning styles and needs are not always provided for in content areas where instruction is teacher centered. (classroom observations, following students, examination of student work)

In some classrooms students have daily opportunities to express themselves through a variety of writing genres. In other classrooms, the variety and frequency of writing opportunities are limited. Students do not have a balanced experience between grades and classes. Equity in writing opportunities across classes and grades could increase student performance. (classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, meetings with parents, students, and building administrator)

Currently there are split classes based on economic and contractual reasons rather than a multi-age educational philosophy. The resulting inequities in learning experiences negatively affect some students socially and academically. (meetings with parents, students, district administrators, and School Improvement Team, conversations with teachers, classroom observations)

Commendations for Matunuck Elementary School:

Teachers' efforts to provide quality education for their students

Teachers' management skills and styles

Recommendations for Matunuck Elementary School:

Provide students opportunities to write daily across the curriculum using different genres.

Develop school wide rubrics with student involvement.

Participate in standards-based professional development opportunities.

Recommendations for the South Kingstown School District:

Develop, write, and implement standards-based curricula that include grade level benchmarks, teaching strategies, sample assessments, rubrics, samples of student work that meet the benchmarks, and suggested resources and materials.

Provide opportunities and incentives for on-going standards-based professional development.

Set aside time and resources to involve teachers and administrators in curriculum development.

Actualize plan to eliminate split classes.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *observations of the school*
- *conversations with many teachers, staff, and building administrator*
- *scheduled meetings with School Improvement Team, building and district administrators, students, parents, and teacher assistants*
- *following students*
- *SALT Survey 2000*
- *Matunuck Elementary School Improvement Plan*
- *Matunuck Elementary School Self-Study*
- *teacher schedules*
- *South Kingstown School Department Teacher Evaluation Document*

Conclusions

The nurturing environment at the Matunuck Elementary School mirrors the description in its mission statement. The entire school community works together to fulfill the needs of the whole child in an effort

to provide a positive, meaningful, and successful school experience. (classroom and school observations, following students, meetings with students, parents and building administrator, conversations with teachers ,staff, and building administrator, SALT Survey 2000)

The Matunuck Elementary School has been very much affected by the extent of support from the district. The staff and faculty have had to deal with situations such as the absence of a direct plan for curriculum development, limited professional development, split classes, lack of updated materials, and dramatic population growth. The unfortunate circumstances surrounding the change in leadership over the past two years exacerbate these issues. (meetings with School Improvement Team and building and district administrators, conversations with teachers and staff)

The School Improvement Plan has a mission statement supported by tactics but at this time no action plans have been developed. Without action plans the tactics to achieve performance targets cannot be implemented. For instance, one of the tactics is to involve all staff and faculty in professional development. The professional development plan does not describe how this will be accomplished, resulting in an inequity of opportunities for all to participate in professional development. (meetings with building administrator, School Improvement Team, and teacher assistants, Matunuck Elementary School Improvement Plan, conversations with teachers and staff)

The current schedule does not allow common planning time for teachers. This contributes to the lack of consistency and continuity within a given grade level and across the span of grades creating gaps and repetition in student learning and limits curriculum integration. (Matunuck Elementary School Self-Study, classroom observations, teacher schedules)

Informal communication between parents and teachers is a strength at Matunuck Elementary School. Parents find teachers are available and open to discuss their child's progress and needs. This discussion fosters collaboration and cooperation between parents and teachers to the benefit of the child. However the annual parent-teacher conference does not fulfill the informational needs of all parents, making it difficult for some parents to understand and support their child's learning. (meeting with parents, conversations with teachers and staff, school and classroom observations, SALT Survey 2000)

Events such as Cabaret, Art Museum Night, and Pumpkin Night support the mission and belief statements of the school. The Matunuck PTO is very active in the school sponsoring extra curricular activities that involve the school community. Parent volunteers and volunteers from the South Kingstown C.A.R.E.S. organization are regularly assisting within and outside many classrooms. Instruction is enriched and connections with parents and community are strengthened. (meetings with parents and building administrator, conversations with teachers and staff, classroom and school observations, SALT Survey 2000)

The current teacher evaluation system is outdated. Efforts have been made to update the process by having teachers develop three professional goals (personal, school, and district) each year. This is only a beginning and not enough to sustain and promote ongoing teacher professional growth. (meetings with building and district administrators, South Kingstown School Department Teacher Evaluation Document)

Commendations for Matunuck Elementary School:

Communication between teachers and parents

Parent and community involvement

Nurturing school environment

Dedication and commitment of teachers and staff

Recommendations for Matunuck Elementary School:

Develop action plans for school improvement plan tactics.

Revise teacher schedules to include common planning time.

Increase formal communication opportunities between parents and teachers.

Design a professional development plan for faculty and staff that includes mentoring, action research, study groups, school visits, and peer coaching as well as more traditional professional development approaches.

Recommendations for the South Kingstown School District:

Support the school in its implementation of a professional development plan.

Work with NEA/SK to develop a teacher evaluation system that is aligned with the beginning teacher standards.

7. FINAL ADVICE TO THE SCHOOL

You are an impressive group of educators who are to be commended for your successes in spite of the obstacles concerning leadership, curriculum, and professional development you have had to overcome. You have exhibited grace under pressure. The children have been and are your first concern.

Although you have been successful operating as individual professionals, collaboration will provide needed consistency and eliminate repetition and gaps and provide opportunities for sharing effective classroom practices and resources. The establishment of common planning time would facilitate collaboration.

Use the energy of the school and community to advocate at the district level for positive changes that will ultimately benefit the Matunuck Elementary School community. These changes include the elimination of split classes, participation in curriculum development, adequate funding for materials and resources, and involvement in relevant professional development.

Review the district strategic plan to ensure the School Improvement Plan is aligned with the district's goals. Then encourage full participation of the school community in the writing and implementation of the action plans for the tactics to achieve performance targets.

With the multitude of talents exhibited in this building and the arrival of a new educational leader anything

is possible for Matunuck Elementary School.

APPENDIX

MATUNUCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Elke Burkhardt, parent

Linda Kenyon, parent

Christine LeFaiver-Heid, teacher

Eileen Riley, parent

Dawn Sauro, teacher

Lisa B. Walsh, teacher

Jane Maxson, community member

Manuel H. Perry, principal

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

Marcia Campbell, Office of Integrated Social Services
Rhode Island Department of Education

Dr. Eula Fresch, professor
Salve Regina University, Newport, Rhode Island

Barbara Keegan, grade 3 teacher
Veazie Street Annex, Providence, Rhode Island

Tammy Lyons, reading specialist
Ashaway School, Ashaway, Rhode Island

Dr. Doug Pierson, Principal
Hamilton School, North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Sarah Terranova, grade 1 teacher
Dunns Corner School, Westerly, Rhode Island

Susanne Theriault, parent
Little Compton School District

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Matunuck Elementary School

May 26, 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