



METCALF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Exeter-West Greenwich, 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

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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 Metcalf Elementary School from May 23-May 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 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 Metcalf School Strategic Plan 1996-2001 for Metcalf 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 Metcalf Elementary School.

The visiting team collected its evidence from the following:

- *a total of over 123 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. Most classrooms were visited at least once. Many teachers were observed more than once.*
- *many observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- *following 11 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 Effectiveness 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 professional development activities*
- *review of classroom assessments.*
- *review of the following documents:*
 - *district strategic plan*
 - *Metcalf School Strategic Plan 1996-2001*
 - *Metcalf School Improvement Plan for 1999-2000*
 - *SALT Survey 2000*
 - *InformationWorks! 1999*
 - *InformationWorks! 2000*
 - *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 visiting team met for a total of 24 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 Metcalf 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 Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District, the citizens of Exeter and West 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 METCALF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Metcalf Elementary School serves students in grades three through six from the towns of Exeter and West Greenwich, Rhode Island. The Metcalf School is part of the Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District, which is administered by a superintendent and governed by an elected school committee of seven members, four of whom are elected from Exeter and three of whom who are elected from West Greenwich.

Two years after the establishment of the Exeter-West Greenwich School District in 1965, the Metcalf School was constructed to house students in grades four through eight. With a large growth in population in the rural towns of Exeter and West Greenwich in the following years, students were relocated. Currently Exeter-West Greenwich students in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten attend the Lineham School, students in grades one and two attend the Wawaloam School, and students in grades three through six attend Metcalf Elementary School. Metcalf and Lineham share the same principal. A second principal serves the Wawaloam School.

One principal, one assistant principal, 60 full and part-time teaching professionals, 12 full and part-time teacher assistants, two clerks, one secretary, one maintenance worker, and five custodians serve the 700 students in the school.

Ninety-seven percent of Metcalf's students are white, two percent are Hispanic, and one percent are black. Eighteen percent of the students receive special education services and fifteen percent of Metcalf's students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

The Metcalf School has been involved in school wide strategic planning for the past five years. This year the Exeter-West Greenwich school district has instituted a new teacher evaluation tool that is based on standards designed to improve teaching and learning in the district's schools.

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

Metcalf School is a good school that is working hard to become a great school. Students are happy and love it here! They show a great respect for their peers, teachers, and administrators and are comfortable in school. Parents are not only welcomed, they are a vital part of the work of the school in a multitude of activities that include reading with students, supporting the work of teachers, and chaperoning field trips. Teachers enjoy and respect their students and work hard to meet their needs. Many arrive long before their students in the morning and remain long after their students leave in the afternoon. Administrators also respect students and work hard to meet their needs.

Test scores show some areas of success and some areas of concern, particularly in the surprisingly low third grade

Rhode Island Writing Assessment results. Many teachers have taken the initiative to use standards-based instruction. Rubrics, reading and writing across the content areas, and authentic performance tasks are visible throughout the school.

Yet, a gulf exists within Metcalf Elementary School that threatens this school's ability to move all of its students to achieve high standards. Teachers, staff, and administrators clearly focus their energies on students and learning, but they lack open paths of communication among themselves that would enable them to talk together in a supportive atmosphere and effect the changes necessary to move all their students forward.

Teachers and staff believe they have little voice and that their expertise is not valued. Neither teachers nor administrators really "hear" each other. The administrative style does not facilitate the type of communication and educational results that the administrators support. The adults within this building lack a strong sense of community and that "wonderfully natural sense of acceptance" and support for each other that their students take for granted.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- *InformationWorks! 2000—1999 results*
- *1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *classroom observations*
- *following students*
- *conversations with students*
- *SALT Survey 2000*

Conclusions

Students at Metcalf School help one another. They clearly demonstrate a genuine acceptance of one another's differences and work well in pairs and cooperative learning groups. A shared respect among students permeates this school. (*classroom observations, following students, conversations with students, SALT Survey 2000*)

An impressive ninety percent of Metcalf students achieve or exceed the standard on the *Reading: Basic Understanding* subtest of the New Standards Reference Examination, and 72 percent achieve or exceed the standard on the *Reading: Analysis and Interpretation* subtest of the same examination. Fifty-four percent of students achieve or exceed the standard on the *Writing Effectiveness* subtest, and 51 percent achieve or exceed the standard on the *Writing Conventions* subtest. (*1999 New Standards Reference Examination results, Information Works! 2000*)

It is surprising that only twenty-five per cent of third graders at Metcalf School achieve or exceed the standard on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment given the amount of time devoted to writing in the classroom. (*1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*)

Sixty-four percent of Metcalf students achieve or exceed the standard on the *Mathematics Skills* subtest of the New Standards Reference Examination, 33 percent of students achieve or exceed the standard on the *Mathematics Concepts* subtest, and only 27 percent achieve or exceed the standard on the *Mathematics Problem Solving* subtest. (1999 New Standards Reference Examination results, *Information Works!* 2000)

Equity gaps (a difference of fifteen percent or greater) exist in several areas on the New Standards Reference Examination. Gaps exist between general education students and special education students on all four subtests reported, with general education students scoring higher. Another gap exists on the *Writing Effectiveness* subtest between students eligible for free or reduced priced lunch and students not eligible. Students not eligible for free or reduced priced lunch outperform those students who are eligible. A gender gap exists on the *Writing Effectiveness* subtest with females outperforming males. (*Information Works!* 2000)

Commendations for Metcalf Elementary School:

Students' genuine acceptance and respect for each other

Students' high performance on the Reading Basic Understanding subtest of the New Standards Reference Examination

Recommendations for Metcalf Elementary School:

Look closely at all equity gaps and revise the School Improvement Plan to include strategies that will help to close those gaps.

Examine low test scores and determine a course of action to improve student performance.

Recommendations for the Exeter-West Greenwich School District:

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *conversations with teachers*
- *following students*
- *meeting with School Effectiveness Team*
- *1998 and 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *1998 and 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *SALT Survey 2000*
- *examination of student work*
- *Metcalf Elementary School Strategic Plan 1996-2001*
- *review of teacher schedules*
- *observation of grade level team meeting*

Conclusions

Many teachers at Metcalf, without formal on site training, have taken the initiative to implement standards-based instruction in their classrooms. To varying degrees throughout the school teachers engage students in hands on, performance-based tasks with clear objectives. At the same time the overwhelming majority of teachers recognize the need to participate in ongoing professional development in standards-based instructional strategies in order for them to enable all students to perform at higher levels. (*classroom observations, following students, SALT Survey 2000, conversations with teachers*)

Many assessments are driven by rubrics. Rubrics are widely used to measure student achievement and for student self-assessment. This empowers teachers to effectively focus their instruction and clearly express their expectations to students. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, SALT Survey 2000, Metcalf Elementary School Strategic Plan 1996-2001*)

Heterogeneously grouped classes at Metcalf can provide an excellent opportunity for differentiation of instruction and flexible grouping to take place. While a few teachers do take advantage of this opportunity and many other teachers desire training in these practices, the implementation of effective differentiation of instructional strategies remains limited. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, SALT Survey 2000, conversations with teachers, Metcalf Elementary School Strategic Plan 1996-2001*)

Teachers provide a wide variety of reading opportunities for their students. Literature circles, partner reading, read aloud, DEAR, and round robin reading are incorporated into their classrooms. While these strategies support Metcalf's high achievement level in reading basic understanding, the emphasis on them may limit students' ability to achieve at the same high level in analyzing and interpreting a variety of reading materials. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, SALT Survey 2000, 1998 and 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*)

Classroom practices and student work reflect writing across the curriculum. Examples include creative writing, responses to literature, original poems, journal entries, math journals, written explanations of problem solving, and science logs. This emphasis on writing contributes to the increase in student performance on fourth grade state assessments. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, 1998 and 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results, 1998 and 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*)

Teachers and students at Metcalf benefit from collaboration within grade levels. Common planning time provides opportunities for teachers to learn from each other's strengths, articulate curriculum, and integrate learning activities for their students. This in house example of life long learning benefits the entire school community. (*conversations with teachers, following students, examination of student work, review of teacher schedules, observation of grade level team meeting, SALT Survey 2000, meeting with School Effectiveness Team*)

Commendations for Metcalf Elementary School:

Teacher initiative to implement effective instructional changes

Recommendations for Metcalf Elementary School:

Engage all teachers in professional development around standards-based instruction, differentiated instruction, and flexible grouping.

Plan and implement strategies to increase analytical reading skills.

Continue and expand the scheduling of common planning time.

Recommendations for the Exeter-West Greenwich School District:

Provide the necessary resources for Metcalf Elementary School to engage in professional development around standards-based instruction, differentiated instruction, and flexible grouping.

Provide the necessary resources for Metcalf School to continue and expand the scheduling of common planning time.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *observations throughout the school*
- *conversations teachers and staff*
- *meetings with School Effectiveness Team, school and district administrators, students, parents*
- *Following students*
- *SALT Survey 2000*
- *Metcalf School Strategic Plan 1996-2001*
- *APT (Association of Parents and Teachers) binder*
- *Metcalf Elementary School Action Plan*
- *Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District Teacher Evaluation Handbook*

Conclusions

A fragmented relationship exists between teachers and staff and administrators. A majority of teachers and staff are troubled by what they perceive to be a lack of effective communication and respect from the administrators and seek a willingness to be heard and treated fairly. Clearly these issues have not negatively affected children or instruction, but staff morale suffers seriously. Administrators are aware of these issues and express a willingness to address them. (*conversations with teachers and staff, meeting with school administrators, SALT Survey 2000*)

Metcalf recognizes clearly the need for professional development in the areas of teaching to new national standards, using computers as part of instruction, standards-based curricula and assessment, strategies for teaching broad-range ability levels in the same classroom, and reading skill development. The lack of sustained, ongoing professional development limits the school's ability to move its students forward. (*conversations with teachers, meeting with school administrators, Metcalf School Strategic Plan 1996-2001*)

Parents are a welcomed and integral part of the Metcalf Elementary School community. Teachers and

administrators alike involve parents in various activities throughout the school. A sample of those activities includes: volunteering in classrooms, reading to and with students, helping students with computer research, chaperoning field trips, beautifying the grounds, and sharing careers. The Association of Parents and Teachers (APT) is actively involved in the school and promotes "a positive relationship among children, school personnel, and the community." The APT sponsors many events including parent workshops, summer reading, and family events throughout the year. (*meeting with parents, APT (Association of Parents and Teachers) binder, observations throughout the school, SALT Survey 2000*)

The Metcalf School Strategic Plan 1996-2001 identifies five objectives and with one year to go in the plan, most action plans have been met. Some of the community involvement action plans are scheduled to be implemented in the 2000-2001 school year. The School Improvement Plan for 1999-2000 focuses on improving student performance on state assessments. The results of those assessments are not yet available. (*Metcalf School Strategic Plan 1996-2001, Metcalf Elementary School Action Plan, meeting with School Effectiveness Team, conversations with teachers*)

The comprehensive, new Exeter-West Greenwich teacher evaluation tool implemented this year in Metcalf School is confusing to teachers. (*conversations with teachers, meetings with school and district administrators, Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District Teacher Evaluation Handbook*)

The special education/regular education collaborative classrooms function effectively in this school. There is not always an equal distribution of special needs students among the remaining regular education classrooms. This practice results in unequal learning opportunities for some students. (*classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers*)

Commendations for Metcalf Elementary School:

The exceptional commitment of parents to the school

Recommendations for Metcalf Elementary School:

Find ways to more equitably distribute special needs students.

Seek ways to open lines of communication between staff and administrators.

Review the almost completed Strategic Plan as part of self study. Develop the next improvement plan that will move Metcalf School forward in raising student performance.

Participate in professional development around computer technology, standards-based instruction, and differentiated instruction.

Recommendations for the Exeter-West Greenwich School District:

Provide support to Metcalf Elementary School to open the lines of communication between staff and administrators.

7. FINAL ADVICE TO THE SCHOOL

You must all remember that Metcalf is a **good** school. The hard work of every teacher and administrator has helped to create classrooms filled with students who work well with each other as they engage in meaningful learning activities. The inquiry based science program (GEMS-NET) is a highly motivating tool that encourages students to perform at high levels. The art and music programs are outstanding. School to Career, Go Write Ahead, and other grant programs enhance the educational experience of your students. Continue to support all of your programs and activities.

Provide teachers with more opportunities to participate in professional development that will further equip them to help their students move ahead. Explore and support the pilot teaming program in grade six proposed for next year. It has both teacher and parent support.

Other issues of concern for the Metcalf community include the poor acoustics and excessive noise distractions in classrooms that will be exaggerated with the removal of the carpeting this year. The networked printers that serve more than one classroom cause further distractions for teachers and students alike. Find practical solutions to resolve these problems.

Above all, come together to talk openly about all of your issues. Listen carefully to each other. You all clearly demonstrate your commitment to the students of Metcalf. Open the lines of communication among you so that Metcalf Elementary School can become a **great** elementary school.

APPENDIX

METCALF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Sue Mosca, grade 3 teacher, chair

Chris Petrarca, grade 4 teacher

Donna Lavoie, grade 5 teacher, SALT

Tony Bucu, grade 6 teacher

Kristen Allen, physical education teacher

Robin Hanley, grade 6 special education teacher

Sharon Roberts, teaching assistant/Council 94

Sharon Pelsler, parent/APT

Heidi Dugan, parent/SALT

Susan O'Brien, parent

Kathy Staley, community member

Sue Kresinski, grade 5 teacher/professional development

Jacqueline Lisa, principal

Deborah McGuckin, assistant principal

THE SALT VISITING TEAM

Sandra L. Olson, ELA teacher, team leader
Ponaganset Middle School, Foster-Glocester, Rhode Island
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT fellow)
chair of the team

Mary Lou K. Almonte, grade 1 teacher
Tower Street School
Westerly, Rhode Island

Stacey L.M. Bouthillier, grade 3 teacher
Lincoln Central Elementary School
Lincoln, Rhode Island

Teri L. Cooney, special education teacher
Stadium School
Cranston, Rhode Island

Mary E. Lebeau, reading specialist/consultant
Maisie Quinn Elementary School
West Warwick, Rhode Island

Joanna Lerner-Sweet, grade 8 math/social studies teacher
Barrington Middle School
Barrington, Rhode Island

Kimberly A. O'Connell, grade 4 teacher
Hopkins Hill School
Coventry, Rhode Island

Nancy Plumb, kindergarten teacher
Lippitt Elementary School
Warwick, Rhode Island

Adrian P. Poland, grade 3 teacher

Wickford Elementary School
North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Colleen Printer, parent/PTA president
Hopkins Hill School
Coventry, Rhode Island

Frank E. Vitale, assistant principal
Babcock Middle School
Westerly, Rhode Island

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Metcalfe 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 8, 2000