



FOREST PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

North Kingstown, Rhode Island

SALT Visit Team Report

June 2, 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 Forest Park Elementary School from May 30, 2000 through June 2, 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. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for Forest Park 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 Forest Park Elementary School.

The visiting team collected its evidence from the following:

- *classroom observations which totaled over 94 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 7 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 administrator*
- *examination of student work, including a selection of work collected by the school*
- *analysis of achievement and equity gaps based on Information Works! data*
- *review of district and school policies*
- *review of professional development activities*
- *examination of reading texts*
- *examination of classroom texts*
- *review of the following documents:*
 - *1998-1999 (draft) School Improvement Plan for Forest Park Elementary School*
 - *North Kingstown District Strategic Plan*
 - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
 - *1998, 1999, 2000 Information Works!*
 - *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
 - *1998, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
 - *1999 New Standards Reference Examination School Summary Reports*
 - *SPECTRA RI Summer Institute at Brown 1999 workshop materials*
 - *classroom assessments*
 - *student portfolios*
 - *National Center on Education and the Economy Reading and Writing Grade by Grade [provided by the school]*
 - *faculty meeting minutes*
 - *school improvement team minutes*
 - *writing journals*
 - *teachers' portfolios*
 - *portfolio workshop materials*
 - *1999-2000 Professional Development Data Chart*
 - *math curriculum [draft document 3-23-00]*
 - *English Language Arts K-12 curriculum [provided by school]*
 - *Forest Park After School Program Portfolio*

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 Forest Park 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 North 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 FOREST PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Forest Park Elementary School is one of six elementary schools for the town of North Kingstown, Rhode Island. North Kingstown is a suburban town with a population of approximately 25,000. The present school first opened its doors to students in 1962. No additions have been added to the school. Renovations have included a guidance office, computer lab, and upgrading of electrical equipment and the fire alarm system.

A five-member school committee, whose members are elected to four-year terms, governs the North Kingstown Public School District. A town manager and a five-member town council governs the town. Forest Park Elementary School students are served by a professional staff of one administrator, twenty-nine full and part-time faculty, thirteen aides and support personnel, and two custodians.

Forest Park Elementary School is a community school serving 270 students in grades 1-5. Of the 270 students attending Forest Park Elementary School 93 percent are White, 3 percent are Hispanic, 3 percent are black, and 1 percent are either Asian / Pacific Islander or Native American. Forty-two students totaling 15.6 percent receive special education services, and 26 percent are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch.

Forest Park Elementary School is one of three schools in North Kingstown that has been designated as a SPECTRA school. SPECTRA is a comprehensive school reform program, grounded on the research, that uses an arts-integrated curriculum to engage students interest, and improve their behavior and academic performance. The teachers and principal attended a five-day SPECTRA training conducted at Brown University during the first week of August to help participants strengthen their own artistic ability and link the arts to Rhode Island’s standards in the other core areas. This year the school improvement team targeted the area of writing. Professional conversations, instruction, and assessment have focused on the school-wide goal of improving the quality of student writing.

3. PORTRAIT OF FOREST PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Forest Park Elementary School is a warm, caring, nurturing, student-centered learning environment. Students feel safe, comfortable, and express pride in this school. Students undoubtedly enjoy being in the school and actively participating in their own learning. Their enthusiasm and excitement resounds in the classrooms and hallways.

This school is staffed by a visionary educational leader and a hard-working, dedicated, and professional faculty that have accepted their own leadership role in the shared decision-making process. The strong leadership of the school and the mutual respect among principal, faculty, and students are readily apparent. The principal invites the teachers to become invested in their own work by encouraging their involvement in decision-making.

The willingness of the teachers to set goals and direct their own professional development towards these goals is noted in the investment they have made in improving the process of teaching and learning at Forest Park Elementary School.

Although not strongly reflected in the school improvement plan, there is a clear purpose and direction to the activities currently taking place at Forest Park Elementary School. During the past year, the school has developed a considerable focus, purpose, and direction. This staff works as a cohesive unit that understands its charge to hold all learners to high standards. Good, sound, standards-based educational practices are emerging in this school. Instruction in the print rich classrooms provides a snapshot of an educational community engaged in the process of professional growth.

Under the direction of a new leader and an empowered professional staff, the school has developed a focus designed to have a direct impact on student achievement. In the process, the school staff has given themselves an identity as a powerful force for change in the school and district. The desire to provide the students of Forest Park with a quality education extends to the parents and community. The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), School Advisory Council (SAC), and Laymen in North Kingstown Schools (LINKS) are an integral part of the teaching and learning experience of Forest Park students.

Teachers have made the improvement of student writing a school-wide focus. Students have apparently internalized their teachers' interest and desire to improve their writing. This is evident in the high-quality examples of student writing included in the student portfolios. Although the school has an abundance of computers, hardware, and software, the school does not seem to have successfully embraced technology and woven it into the curriculum.

The school, which primarily had been a group of hard-working, individual teachers, has become a cohesive group in the process of change. The needs of the children and the targets of high standards appear to be the driving forces of this school

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- 1999, 2000 Information Works!
- 1998, 1999 *Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*

- *1998, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *1999 New Standards Reference Examination School Summary Reports*
- *1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *conversations and interviews with students, teachers, staff, and the school administrator*
- *examination of student work*
- *review of student portfolios*
- *meetings with students*
- *following students*
- *classroom observations*

Conclusions

On the 1999 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam, the fourth grade students at Forest Park Elementary School met or exceeded the standard in the following: *Skills* – 82 percent, *Concepts* – 71 percent, *Problem Solving* - 53 percent. In all three categories these scores are above the scores of similar students statewide and above the average scores of fourth grade students in the district. (2000 Information Works!, *1999 New Standards Reference Examination School Summary Report*)

On the 1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, the fourth grade students at Forest Park Elementary School met or exceeded the standard in the following: Reading Basic Understanding – 87 percent, Reading Analysis and Interpretations – 81 percent. These scores are at or below the scores of similar students statewide, and at or below the average scores of fourth grade students in the district. (2000 Information Works!, *1999 New Standards Reference Examination School Summary Report*)

On the 1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, the fourth grade students at Forest Park Elementary School met or exceeded the standard in the following: *Writing Effectiveness* -29 percent, and *Writing Conventions* 46 percent. These scores are below the scores of similar students statewide and below the average scores of fourth grade students in the district. (2000 Information Works!, *1999 New Standards Reference Examination School Summary Report*)

On the 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, 36 percent of the third grade students at Forest Park Elementary School met or exceeded the standard. This represents a 17 percent increase over the 1998 Rhode Island Writing Assessment scores. (*1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, 1998 Rhode Island Writing Assessment*)

On the 1999 Rhode Island Health Education Assessment, only 12 percent of the fifth grade students at Forest Park Elementary met or exceeded the standard on this assessment. (*1999 Rhode Island Health Assessment*).

An equity gaps (a difference of 15 percentage points or greater) exists between male and female students on the *Mathematics Problem Solving* subtest of the 1999 Mathematics New Standards Reference Exam. The male students scored higher than female students on this assessment. (2000 Information Works!)

The students at Forest Park Elementary School are joyful, exuberant, and excited about learning. Students feel respected and respect each other, their school, teachers, and the principal. Many students are motivated and self-directed, and engaged in their own learning. All these factors along with the cooperative atmosphere that exists between and among students contribute to the quality of work exhibited in student portfolios, and their strong sense of pride in their school. (*conversations and interviews with students,*

teachers, staff, and the school administrator, examination of student work, review of student portfolios, meetings with students and parents, following students, classroom observations, observations of the school)

Commendations for Forest Park Elementary School:

The enthusiastic, engaged student body

Exceeding the performance of similar students statewide in all three mathematical subtests

Recommendations for Forest Park Elementary School:

Expand the current focus on writing to include the traits of good writing to close the achievement gaps that exist in writing effectiveness and conventions.

Examine the “What Students Need to Know” section of the New Standards Reference Exam School Summary and use that to develop the scope and sequence of curricula.

Develop a school wide program aimed at improving students’ mastery of reading analysis and interpretation and basic understanding.

Develop strategies to close equity gap between male and female students in math

Increase the focus on health instruction to close the achievement gaps that exists on this assessment.

Recommendations for the North Kingstown School District:

Provide assistance to the school as they attempt to analyze student performance and develop strategies to close the gaps that exist in student achievement.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- *classroom observations*
- *observations of the school*
- *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff and school administrator*
- *following students*
- *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- 1999 Information Works!
- 1999-2000 SALT Survey

- *National Center on Education and the Economy Reading and Writing Grade by Grade [provided by the school]*
- *examination of student work*
- *review of classroom assessments*
- *examination of reading texts*
- *examination of classroom texts*
- *faculty meeting minutes*
- *review of writing journals*

Conclusions

Faculty recognized that students had poor test scores in writing. This led to a strong emphasis on writing. Teachers have effectively engaged students in writing and made them excited about the process and craft of writing. Teachers use daily journals, responses to literature, mathematical problem-solving explanations, teacher-student writing conferencing, and writing across the curriculum as a way to strengthen the writing process. Furthermore, some teachers are focusing on both the process (pre-writing, rough draft, revising, editing, publishing) as well as the traits (voice, style, word choice, rhythm of text) of effective writing. (*Meeting with school improvement team and school administration, examination of student work, classroom observations, review of writing journals, review of student portfolios, examination of classroom texts, following students, conversations and interviews with teachers and students*)

There is an emergent use of performance-based assessment, particularly in the area of writing. Rubrics have been posted in all classrooms and teachers are using this assessment tool to different degrees. Most teachers are using these to provide clear criteria that students can use to create and revise writing. Assessment strategies are evolving in other areas of the curriculum as well. However, the lack of constructive comments focused on the desired standards in these curricula areas provide insufficient feedback to students on how to improve the quality of their work. (*classroom observations, meetings with students and parents, examination of student work, review of classroom assessments, conversations and interviews with teachers, following students*)

There is an abundance of computers, hardware and software in this school. Some teachers are using this as educational tool to reinforce classroom learning. However, most teachers are not effectively using technology to deliver instruction, or as a tool to collect, organize, analyze, and present information. (*classroom observations, meetings with school administrator and students, conversations and interviews with teachers, following students*)

The chosen reading text of the district uses a whole language approach. Recognizing the limitation of this approach, classroom teachers have augmented this method of reading instruction with the use of phonics and trade books at developmentally appropriate reading levels. However, a schoolwide approach to reading instruction was not apparent and appeared inconsistent. Furthermore, the increased emphasis on writing unaccompanied by a similar accentuation on reading is not consistent with the philosophical approach of the Primary Literacy Standards that the school has adopted. (*classroom observations, meetings with students and school administrator, conversations and interviews with teachers, following students, examination of reading texts, faculty meeting minutes, National Center on Education and the Economy Reading and Writing Grade by Grade*)

Most teachers use a variety of instructional strategies in their classroom. These include cooperative grouping, independent work, problem-solving strategies, peer tutoring, self-evaluation, hands-on activities, the use of manipulatives, and small and whole group instruction. These varied approaches engage students

in their own learning and contribute to the excitement that students express about learning and their school. These are good standards-based instructional practices. However, when setting up these activities, teachers' instruction often focused on the steps students should take to complete a task rather than the standards and principles underlying the activity. (*following students, classroom observations, meetings with parents and district administrators, conversations and interviews with students and teachers*)

Commendations for Forest Park Elementary School:

The schoolwide focus on improving writing instruction

Implementing a schoolwide writing prompt to improve writing performance

Recommendations for Forest Park Elementary School:

Expand the development of grade level writing benchmarks to all grades.

Expand the depth and breadth of feedback provided on writing assignments to other content areas.

Expand the current focus on writing to include more teacher modeling of effective writing strategies and direct instruction on both the process and traits of effective writing using the *Primary Literacy Standards*.

Provide professional development focused on the use of technology as an instructional and educational tool.

Refocus the current professional development to provide training that supports strategies for aligning classroom assignments and assessments to standards and the recommendations in this report.

Expand the schoolwide focus on writing to include a systematic approach to improving students' reading comprehension analysis and interpretation.

Set up classroom activities with concrete, specific, teacher-led instruction that focuses on the underlying standards and principles behind the activity.

Recommendations for the North Kingstown School District:

Expand the district level commitment from hardware acquisition and technical support to include professional development focused on the use of technology as an instructional and educational tool.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- classroom observations

- observations of the school
- conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff and school administrator
- scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students, and parents
- following students
- 1998-1999 (draft) School Improvement Plan for Forest Park Elementary School
- minutes of faculty meetings and school improvement team
- review of teachers' portfolios
- 1999-2000 Professional Development Data Chart
- review of classroom texts
- math curriculum [draft document 3-23-00]
- English Language Arts K-12 curriculum [provided by school]
- Forest Park After School Program Portfolio
- SPECTRA RI Summer Institute at Brown 1999 Workshop Materials

Conclusions

A high degree of professionalism exists within Forest Park Elementary School. The school principal has empowered the professional staff to engage in shared decision making. The teachers have accepted the leadership role they play in moving this school forward. Over the past year the staff has come together in a collegial manner. A high degree of sharing and professional conversation exists between and among the grades. Teachers and the principal clearly have the best interests of their students at heart and are investing a significant amount of time in restructuring this school to better meet the needs of the school community. *(meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, minutes of the faculty meetings, classroom observations, observations of the school, conversations and interviews with students, staff and teachers, review of teacher portfolios, following students)*

The community involvement by the Parent Teachers Organization (PTO), School Advisory Committee (SAC) and Laymen in North Kingstown Schools (LINKS) is a great strength in this school. Activities such as After School Enrichment, fund raising, family events, field trips, and cultural programs contribute to the sense of community that exists in this school. In addition, parental volunteering in the classrooms and the support provided to the teachers and the school contribute to the teaching and learning that take place in this school. This partnership between the school and community contributes to mutual respect and open communication. *(meetings with school improvement team, students, and parents, Forest Park After School Program Portfolio, conversations and interviews with students, staff, and teachers)*

Individual teachers and the faculty as a whole have participated in many hours of professional development, with an emphasis on SPECTRA, writing, literacy team building, and science. Common planning time and devotion of the faculty meetings to curriculum have contributed to the professional conversation between and among grade levels. The staff has begun the process of professional portfolios as an opportunity to reflect on their own personal growth. This professional development has not always been driven by curricula and aligned with the needs of the faculty. *(Forest Park 1999-2000 Professional Development Data Chart, conversations and interviews with teachers and the school administrator, minutes of school improvement team and faculty meeting minutes, review of teachers' portfolios, SPECTRA RI Summer Institute at Brown 1999 workshop materials)*

The draft 1998-1999 School Improvement Plan lacks objectives and tactics consistent with the current focus of the school's reforms. This document was not formally revised nor was a self-study conducted to drive the 1999-2000 school improvement efforts. Current efforts focus on the achievement targets

mandated by the RIDE Department of Education. The school improvement team is comprised of teachers and the building principal, and does not include broad representation from the community, especially parental organizations. The lack of a formalized plan developed by a broad-based constituency limits the school's ability to develop standards-based curricula and improve student and teacher performance in a systematic and effective manner. *(1998-1999 (draft) School Improvement Plan for Forest Park Elementary School, meetings with school improvement team and school administrator, minutes of faculty meeting)*

Standards-based education is an emerging focus of this school. Teachers have received a variety of standards-based professional development, but their proficiency with delivering standards-based education varies. Instructional materials and textbooks that are not standards-based have hindered these attempts. The district is in the process of developing standards-based curricula. These completed and draft documents provide a framework but are insufficient to guide classroom instruction. *(Math Curriculum [draft document 3-23-00], English Language Arts K-12 curriculum [provided by school], conversations and interviews with teachers, review of classroom texts)*

Commendations for Forest Park Elementary School:

The passion of the professional staff toward teaching and learning and professional growth

The sense of community and cooperation that exists within this school and between the community

Recommendations for Forest Park Elementary School:

Establish a professional development committee to assess faculty and student needs and develop a focused plan based on these needs

Include members of the broader community on the school improvement team

Conduct a formal self-study. Use the findings from your self-study, and the conclusions and recommendations from this SALT report to guide the development of the School Improvement Plan. Include measurable goals, objectives, tactics and action plans with timelines in this plan.

Recommendations for the North Kingstown School District:

Use this SALT report and School Improvement Plan that Forest Park develops to determine the best allocation of resources to support their school improvement efforts.

Expand the current support provided by the district for district-wide standards-based curriculum development and materials.

7. FINAL ADVICE TO THE SCHOOL

Forest Park Elementary School has many wonderful strengths, a dedicated staff, strong leadership, motivated students, and community support. The friendly learning environment that exists at Forest Park Elementary School is a credit to all members of the school community, principal, teachers, students, and support staff. You have developed a kind, caring, nurturing environment that has allowed your students to thrive academically and socially.

You have made great strides this year targeting the weak areas of student performance and working together to make improvements. Be proud of your efforts and accomplishments. Maintain the enthusiasm and positive attitude that you convey to your students, it will help raise them to greater successes.

Bringing the various groups together—School Improvement Team School Advisory Committee, Parent Teachers Organization—focused on one common agenda is an important task still facing this school. These constituencies share a common desire to provide all students of Forest Park Elementary School with the high-quality education they will need to succeed in life. Work to foster a cohesive effort and a shared focus among these groups, and include members from each of these constituencies in the planning and implementation of the work of your dedicated school improvement team.

Continue your efforts to strengthen student learning by providing opportunities for systematic professional development for all staff members that focuses on designing classroom activities based on the standards, and developing assessments based on indicators of the desired standards. Designing rubrics for tasks other than writing and involving your students in this process can be powerful teaching approach that helps focus both instruction and the students pursuit of knowledge.

Take time to step back and recognize all your accomplishments this year and build on those successes next year. Expand your current strategies for improving student writing and branch out to other curricula areas. Helping your students develop an understanding and mastery of the standards will require a deep foundation in literacy, especially reading and writing. Focus on the Primary Literacy Standards in the lower grades and expand the focus, emphasis, and support for literacy development in the upper grades.

The Forest Park community has accomplished and experienced a great deal of change in a year's time. The enthusiasm of teachers and their professional orientation as a faculty lend itself to increased student achievement and productivity. While a great deal remains to be accomplished, your determination to bring success to your students has already started to reveal growth.

While recommendation in this report may seem overwhelming at times, use them as a guide to achieve the goals you have for your students. Forest Park has all the pieces necessary to help all students achieve at high levels. Educating the students of Forest Park is a shared responsibility. You have the right to expect your district and all community stakeholders to share your commitment and support for the students of this school. Continue your quest to provide the best possible educational experiences for your students. You will succeed because of your loyalty, respect, and devotion to each other and more importantly your students.

APPENDIX

FOREST PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

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THE SALT VISITING TEAM

Dr. Michael S. Barnes, Technology Education / Department Chairperson
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Dr. Mary Jane Barry, School Committee Member
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Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Forest Park Elementary School

June 2, 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 23, 2000