



# Edward R. Martin Middle School

East Providence

## SALT Visit Team Report

September 29, 2000



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

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

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**This report is available at [www.ridoe.net/schoolimprove/salt](http://www.ridoe.net/schoolimprove/salt)**

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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 Edward R. Martin Middle School from September 26-29, 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 Edward R. Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan 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 Edward R. Martin Middle School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *Classroom observations which totaled 148 full classroom observations and 32 partial classroom observations. All classrooms were visited at least once. Many teachers were observed more than once.*
- ◆ *many observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- ◆ *following 15 students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with the following groups:*
  - *Edward R. Martin 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 Information Works! data*
- ◆ *review of district and school policies*
- ◆ *review of professional development activities*
- ◆ *review of classroom assessments.*
- ◆ *review of the following documents:*
  - *Edward R. Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan*
  - *East Providence School Department K-12 Curriculum All Subject Areas*
  - *East Providence Administrative Team Reference Book 2000-2001*
  - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
  - *Martin Middle School Portfolio*
  - *1998 Information Works!*
  - *1999 Information Works!*
  - *2000 Information Works!*
  - *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
  - *1998, 1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*

The full team has built the conclusions, commendations and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussions. The visit team met for a total of 29 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 Edward R. Martin Middle 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 East Providence School Department, the citizens of East Providence, 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 Edward R. Martin Middle School

Edward R. Martin Middle School is one of two middle schools that serves students in the sixth through eighth grades in the East Providence school system in East Providence, Rhode Island. Students come to Martin from seven East Providence elementary schools. The school system is administered by a superintendent and a district staff of 12. It is governed by an elected school committee of five members.

The building that houses Edward R. Martin Middle School contains 162,000 square feet and sits on fourteen acres of land. The school opened in December of 1977 as Central Junior High School. Two years later the school committee renamed the building Edward R. Martin Junior High School in honor of the retiring Dean of Superintendents. In 1998 the school began to implement the district's plan to convert Martin to a middle school model that would ultimately include grades six, seven, and eight. In the fall of 1999 that move was completed.

In June of 2000, the school district conducted a professional job fair that has had a tremendous effect on the composition of Martin's interdisciplinary teams. Between 1998 and 2000, 39 professional staff changes occurred in the school. The superintendent and school committee have created an ad hoc committee to study the current and future plans for the school.

Of the 985 students who attend Edward R. Martin Middle School, 78 percent are white, 18 percent are black, 3 percent are Hispanic, 1 percent are Asian, and 1 percent are Native American. Twelve percent of Martin's students are identified as ESL learners. Seventeen percent of the students at Martin receive special education services. Fifty-eight percent of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Martin Middle School has a seven percent retention rate.

One principal and one assistant principal administer Edward R. Martin Middle School. The 104 faculty members and 985 students are clustered in four houses within the building. Each house includes a house leader and three teams of students and teachers: one sixth grade team, one seventh grade team, and one eighth grade team.

Edward R. Martin Middle School is a Focus School in the East Bay Educational Collaborative. Teachers have participated in professional development activities with the collaborative during the past school year around The University of Chicago School Mathematics Program, Kites and High Expectations for Learning Middle School Science training, and technology training. Other initiatives in the school include training in the Balanced Literacy model and in NCEE Course I: Standards Based Instruction.

Student performance levels on state assessments vary widely and gaps to standard as well as equity gaps exist in all areas. 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report. Information Works! data for Edward R. Martin Middle School is available at [www.rido.net](http://www.rido.net).

### 3. PORTRAIT OF Edward R. Martin Middle School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Edward R. Martin Middle School has just begun its second year as a middle school. It appears to be logically organized with students clustered into grade level teams and teams grouped into one of four houses. However, the regulated geometry of the building belies its inner turmoil. The school lacks a commonly held vision that could mobilize teachers and students alike to move forward.

The failure of school administrators, house leaders, and teachers to share open lines of communication severely inhibits Martin Middle School's improvement efforts. Fragmented, one way communication from the school administrators to the houses and finally to the teachers results in confusion and isolation.

The Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan is a plan in name only. The school community lacks ownership of it because few in the school had input into the document. The plan therefore lacks credibility among the very people expected to implement it.

Students are treated as groups, not as individuals at Martin. They are labeled and function within a schedule that is unwieldy and unfair to many of them. Many students believe they have no voice in this school. They do the work asked of them without knowing the rationale for assignments nor the relationship of assignments to their lives.

Some teachers challenge all their students in lively standards based classrooms. These teachers promote the development of higher order thinking skills in their students. The Talent Development Program is a wonderful, student centered, challenging program. Unfortunately its strategies are not mirrored throughout the school and only a few students experience its challenges. Far too many teachers expect little from their students. They focus on teacher directed whole class instruction and depend on review and homework assignments.

The physical plant is ill equipped to handle Martin's expanding population and is in a serious state of disrepair.

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *1999 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *meeting with students*

### Conclusions

It is encouraging that student test scores at Martin Middle School have improved over the past three years in the Mathematical Skills and Problem Solving subtests of the New Standards Reference Examination, exceeding the school's performance targets. At the same time, it is alarming that 72 percent of the students fail to meet the standard in Problem Solving and 82 percent fail to meet the standard in Mathematical Concepts. (2000 New Standards Reference Examination results, 2000 Information Works!, 1999 Information Works!, Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan)

The percentage of Martin students who achieve the standard is far below district and state performance levels on all four of the English Language Arts subtests of the New Standards Reference Examination. This is significant. In Reading, performance targets at Martin Middle School have not been met. It is unacceptable that the percentage of students who meet or exceed the standard has declined every year for the past three years. In Writing, 1999-2000 performance targets were met. However, performance on the Writing Effectiveness and Conventions subtests is still below district and state averages. (2000 New Standards Reference Examination results, 2000 Information Works!, 1999 Information Works!, Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan)

Rhode Island Writing Assessment scores for Martin seventh graders indicate steady improvement. These students have not only met, but have exceeded the school's performance targets for each of the past three years. (2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results, 2000 Information Works!, 1999 Information Works!, Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan)

Equity gaps exist at Martin Middle School between general education students and special education students. It is disappointing that general education students outperform special education students on all four measured subtests of the New Standards Reference Examination. The gap is especially wide on the

Mathematics Skills subtest. (2000 Information Works!)

All too often students are not active participants in their own learning. They believe their voice makes no difference. Students are unable to make connections between their classwork and real life situations. One student commented that “Only some kids get to think.” (classroom observations, following students, meeting with students)

## Commendations for Edward R. Martin Middle School:

The three year steady improvement in the seventh grade Rhode Island Writing Assessment scores

## Recommendations for Edward R. Martin Middle School:

Continue and expand on the practices that have contributed to the positive trend in the Rhode Island Writing Assessment scores.

Adjust math instruction to include equal emphasis on skills, concepts, and problem solving.

Institute reading instruction in all classes.

Listen to your students. Involve them in decision making in their classes, in their houses, and in their school.

Engage in professional development around the teaching of reading and writing.

Examine equity gaps and develop strategies that will narrow existing gaps.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *review of student work*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *meetings with students and parents*
- ◆ 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results
- ◆ 1999-2000 SALT Survey data
- ◆ *Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan*

### Conclusions

Some teachers waste valuable instructional time at Martin Middle School. Instruction often begins late, proceeds slowly, and ends early. Much class time is spent in review. Too much time is allotted for homework instead of instruction. Teachers allow students to wait idly while other students complete tasks. They fill time with activities vaguely related to the lesson. They sometimes lack a plan. (classroom observations, following students)

Some teachers routinely engage their students and accommodate individual learning styles through a wide variety of instructional practices that promote higher level thinking skills. However, many more teachers ignore individual learning styles and underestimate their students' potentials. They rely heavily on lecturing, notetaking, and assigning worksheets that focus on basic skills. These practices do not allow students to develop critical thinking skills and may contribute to low student performance on state assessments. (Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan, classroom observations, following students, meetings with students and parents, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results)

There are pockets of exceptional teachers within Martin Middle School who facilitate student-centered learning while holding their students to high expectations. However, too many teachers do not hold all students to high standards and their expectations for their students' achievement are uniformly low. (classroom observations, following students, 1999-2000 SALT Survey data, meetings with students and parents)

Groups of teachers at Martin Middle School have successfully implemented standards based instruction in their classrooms. Others are at the beginning stages of making themselves and their students aware of standards. Still others show little evidence of the use of standards in their classes. This results in unfair and inconsistent opportunities for student achievement. (classroom observations, following students, Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan, meetings with students and parents, review of student work)

Instruction in some classrooms is uneven at times, jumping from topic to topic and from activity to activity without a common thread. Many times students cannot “find relevance in the education they are receiving and the impact it will have on their lives.” (classroom observations, following students, Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan)

### Commendations for Edward R. Martin Middle School:

The pockets of exceptional teachers

### Recommendations for Edward R. Martin Middle School:

Hold all students to high standards.

Engage in professional development concerning individual learning styles, standards based instruction, and critical thinking skills.

Identify and use your exceptional teachers to model effective classroom strategies.

### Recommendations for the East Providence School District:

Provide the resources necessary for teachers at Martin Middle School to participate in professional development concerning individual learning styles, standards based instruction, and critical thinking skills.

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *interviews and conversations with many students, house leaders, teachers, maintenance and custodial staffs, school administrators, and present and former members of the Martin School Improvement Team*
- ◆ *meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *Review of Talent Development Program documents*
- ◆ *review of student work*
- ◆ *East Providence School Department K-12 Curriculum All Subject Areas*
- ◆ *East Providence Administrative Team Reference Book 2000-2001*
- ◆ *Martin Middle School Portfolio*

### Conclusions

The school improvement team that authored Martin Middle School's current plan is a committee on paper at best. Input from house leaders, faculty, parents, students, and the community on this team is minimal or nonexistent. The Martin School Improvement Plan as revised in February, 2000, is a document that was unknown to most members of the Martin Middle School community until very recently. Because they lack ownership, the plan lacks credibility and can do little or nothing to guide this school in improvement. (meeting with school improvement team, interviews and conversations with present and former members of the Martin School Improvement Team, conversations with teachers, meeting with parents, Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan)

The building schedule does not give all students equal educational opportunities. Students do not have equal access to course offerings. Some students even spend part of their day sitting in the hallways because they don't fit in anywhere. Combined with the practice of tracking, the schedule promotes labeling of students as part of a group rather than treating them as individuals with unique needs and talents. (following students, classroom observations, meetings with students, parents, and school administrators, interviews and conversations with house leaders and teachers, observations of the school)

Reading is addressed in a variety of ways at Martin Middle School. Reading specialists service identified students through a pull-out model and also within the regular classroom. Resource teachers have been trained in Ortin Gillingham and SRA reading programs. These are positive approaches. Students who do not meet the standard in reading are also expected to read during Instructional Lab. Although this sounds good in theory, the reality is there is no formal reading instruction or assessment taking place during this time. These practices also do not address reading instruction for all students and will not help raise their reading competencies. (classroom observations, conversations with teachers, following students, Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan, meetings with school administrators and students)

The Talent Development Program is an exciting, challenging, and innovative program that helps students relate what they learn in school to the community. Its participants are students who exceed the standard on the New Standards Reference Exam or the California Achievement Test and perform very well in the classroom. They are invited to attend a pullout program twice a week. This program encompasses a variety of learning styles and focuses on critical and creative thinking skills, self-management, problem solving, research, and exposure to technology. Also, the TDP provides some school-wide enrichment activities for all students. These activities include field trips, speakers, presentations, and independent studies. (following students, classroom observations, conversations with teachers and students, review of Talent Development Program documents, and review of student work)

Communication flows one way if it flows at all at Martin Middle School. The lack of a formalized plan for the communication of information to the faculty, staff, students, and parents leads to gaps in what people know. These gaps affect their perceptions about the school and limit their opportunities for involvement. One result of ineffective communication is that a standards based curriculum document has been developed, but not distributed or communicated to staff and community. At present, there is no known plan for the implementation and monitoring of the written curriculum. Likewise there has been little communication of the school's mission statement to staff regarding instructional strategies, resources, and assessment. Last year sixteen teachers from Martin participated in the district's mentoring program. However, when questioning this year's new teachers, few were aware that such a program exists. These examples of weaknesses in communication have resulted in fragmented efforts to improve teaching and learning and further limit student opportunities at Martin Middle School. (meetings with school administrators, district administrators, parents, conversations with teachers, classroom observations, Martin Middle School Revised School Improvement Plan, East Providence School Department K-12 Curriculum All Subject Areas, East Providence Administrative Team Reference Book 2000-2001)

The Martin Middle School building is ill equipped to handle its expanding population and is in a serious state of disrepair. The area of the twelve instructional classrooms in each house does not meet Rhode Island guidelines. Sixth grade classrooms are over capacity already, according to those guidelines, and the school anticipates an even larger sixth grade next year. The air quality is poor due to the demountable walls, the leaking roof, the moldy black ceiling tiles, and the stench emitted from the water stained carpet prevalent throughout the building. Since more than half the classrooms have no window access and of the ones that do, only a small number actually open, air circulation is severely compromised. In addition, the limited accessibility to classrooms, an elevator that is not wheelchair accessible, the high noise level, and the malfunctioning heating/cooling systems, all negatively impact the health, safety, and welfare of the occupants of the building. (observations of the school, Martin Middle School Portfolio, conversations with teachers and maintenance and custodial staffs, meetings with school administrators, district administrators, and students)

## Commendations for Edward R. Martin Middle School:

The exceptional Talent Development Program

## Recommendations for Edward R. Martin Middle School:

Establish an effective school improvement team using the guidelines from the Office of School Improvement at the Rhode Island Department of Education.

Rebuild the entire schedule so that it is fair and equitable.

Tap into the Talent Development Program as a model for all students.

Design a process for effective communication among all Martin stakeholders.

Reexamine the reading program for Instructional Lab. Develop curriculum and assessment guidelines.

Participate in professional development involving the instruction of reading across the curriculum.

Provide every teacher in the building with a copy of the current curricula guides that have been aligned with standards.

## Recommendations for the East Providence School District:

Finalize and implement a plan to bring the building into compliance with all state statutes.

Take appropriate steps to eliminate the unhealthy environment within the Martin building.

Reduce the overcrowding in Martin Middle School.

Provide the resources necessary for Martin Middle School teachers to participate in professional development involving the instruction of reading and reading across the curriculum.

Provide the resources for Martin Middle School to implement recommended changes.

## 7. Final Advice to the School

The Martin Middle School community faces difficult challenges as it moves towards becoming a high performing middle school, but it must meet those challenges if Martin students are to succeed. It is essential that open lines of communication among all of Martin's stakeholders be established immediately. Fragmented improvement efforts must be eliminated and teachers, students, and administrators alike must be empowered to make the decisions that affect the teaching and learning at Martin Middle School.

Parents and other community members have to come together with teachers, students, and administrators to develop a common vision for this school. After a careful self study they need to develop a comprehensive improvement plan that will provide the strong framework necessary to build a solid community of teaching and learning—a community that includes all students and challenges all students to reach high standards.

Use the SALT visit report to help you work through this maze of change. Make sustained and ongoing professional development for teachers and administrators an important part of your plan to move your students forward.

Tap the resources within the school. Use your exceptional teachers to model for others effective classroom strategies. Include the strategies of the Talent Development Program in the instruction of all of Martin's students. Focus on reading instruction in all classes to raise the levels of student performance.

Develop a completely new schedule that allows all students fair and equitable choices. Make optimal use of time within that schedule and within classes.

Work with the district and the larger East Providence community to repair and restructure this building to bring it into compliance with all state statutes as well as to make it a pleasing and healthy place in which to teach and learn.

## Edward R. Martin Middle School Improvement Team

### **(1999-2000 Team Members)**

George Burke, principal

Frank DeVall, assistant principal

Candy Winter, guidance director

Cindy Sadler, math dept. chair/house leader/focus team member

Linda DeFalco, science dept. chair/house leader

Mary Cabral, school wide enrichment specialist

Nick Acquaviva, school technology plan coordinator

Chris Durigan, technical education coordinator

Shani Wallace, focus school facilitator

Jack McNamara, music coordinator

Valarie Lawson, building union rep/faculty advisory member

Kathy Campopiano, health/PE representative

Alfred Tente, parent/computer technology consultant

Melinda Theis, English department representative

Fatima Avila, ESL teacher

Isaura Pereira, ESL/special needs parent

Suzanne Gorham, special needs representative

Maria Rodrigues, PTA president

Del Marshall, business community/parent

Antonette Rodrigues, Portuguese advisory group liaison

Julie Bailey, parent representative/secretarial services

Frank Fogarty, parent representative/custodial representative

## THE SALT VISIT TEAM

Sandy Olson, ELA teacher/team leader  
Ponaganset Middle School  
Foster-Glocester Regional School District  
(on leave to the Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a regents SALT fellow)

Paul Amaral, Curriculum Coordinator  
Tiverton School Department  
Tiverton

Doreen Bethea, parent  
Providence

Alan Cabral, Title I/language arts teacher  
Calcutt Middle School  
Central Falls

Carol Cullen, social studies teacher  
Hugh B. Bain Middle School  
Cranston

Margaret Della Bitta, science teacher/SALT fellow  
South Kingstown High School  
South Kingstown

Larry Donahue, school board member  
Coventry School Department  
Coventry

Ted Fuller, Ela teacher  
Bridgham Middle School  
Providence

Elaine May, math teacher  
Aldrich Junior High School  
Warwick

Susan McGreevy-Nichols, director of dance program  
Roger Williams Middle School  
Providence

Mary McNally, math teacher  
North Cumberland Middle School  
Cumberland

Elisabeth Newman, teacher/SALT fellow  
Reynolds School  
Bristol-Warren

Jane Paquet, science teacher  
North Cumberland Middle School  
Cumberland

Jane Shugrue, math teacher, math department chair  
Bridgham Middle School  
Providence

Michael Watson, art teacher  
Park View Middle School  
Cranston

# New Standards Reference Examination and RI Writing Assessment Results (2000)

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## Catalpa Ltd. Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

### **Edward R. Martin Middle School**

September 29, 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 Visit team Reports by Catalpa Ltd.*, and using the methodology and procedures specified in the *Handbook for SALT Visit Chairs, 1<sup>st</sup> 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.  
October 18, 2000

