



# Dunn's Corners School

Westerly

## SALT Visit Team Report

October 20, 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 Dunn's Corners School from October 17, 2000 to October 20, 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 Dunn's Corners School was the touchstone document for the team. However informative written reports may be, there is simply no substitute for being at the school while it is in session in the classroom, in the lunchroom, and in the hallways. The specific information generated by a team visit is about how the students, staff and administrators go about their day. Thus, this visit allowed professional colleagues and stakeholders to build informed judgments about the teaching and learning that actually takes place at Dunn's Corners School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 75 full and partial classroom observations which totaled over 100 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. Most 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 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 assignments and assessments.*
- ◆ *Examination of textbooks and materials*
- ◆ *review of the following documents:*
  - *Dunn's Corners School Improvement Plan*
  - *Westerly Public Schools Strategic Plan*
  - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
  - *classroom textbooks*
  - *1999 Information Works!*
  - *2000 Information Works!*
  - *1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
  - *1998, 1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
  - *2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam School Summary*
  - *Dunn's Corners School Site Council Newsletter*
  - *Drafts, September, 1998, Westerly Public Schools Curriculum*

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 25 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 Dunn's Corners 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 Westerly, 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 Dunn's Corners School

Dunn's Corners School serves students in Kindergarten through 5th grades. It is located in the Dunn's Corners area of Westerly, Rhode Island, is part of Westerly's School System, and services the Dunn's Corners, Misquamicut, Weekapaug, and Shelter Harbor areas of town. The Dunn's Corners School is 34 years old and houses a population of 406 students heterogeneously grouped into classrooms consisting of one kindergarten (A.M. and P.M), one full day K, four 1<sup>st</sup> grades, three 2<sup>nd</sup> grades, three 3<sup>rd</sup> grades, four 4<sup>th</sup> grades, and four 5<sup>th</sup> grades.

The school system is administered by a superintendent and a district staff of three. It is governed by an elected school committee of 7 members. Dunn's Corners students are served by a professional staff of 1 administrator, 39 full and part-time faculty and numerous support personnel.

Of the 406 students attending Dunn's Corners School 95 percent are white, 2 percent are black, and 3 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander. Nine percent of students receive special education services and 11 percent are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.

Students at Dunn's Corners School made significant gains in three of the four subtests of the New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam from 1998 to 2000. On the 2000 exam 96% of the students met or exceeded the standard on Reading: Basic Understanding, 87% met or exceeded the standard on Reading: Analysis and Interpretation, and 75% met or exceeded the standard in Writing Effectiveness. Student performance on the Writing Conventions subtest has declined, with 25% of the students meeting or exceeding the standards on the 2000 exam. More modest gains were made in the Mathematics subtests of the New Standards Reference Exam, with 77% of the students meeting or exceeding the standards in Mathematics Skills, 44% of the students meeting or exceeding the standards in Concepts, and 31% of the students meeting or exceeding the standards in Problem Solving. Student performance on the 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment nearly doubled with 43% of the students meeting or exceeding the standard.

An equity gap (a difference of 15% or greater) between male and female students exists on the Mathematics Problem Solving, Reading Analysis and Interpretation, and Writing Effectiveness subtests of the New Standards Reference Exam, with more females meeting or exceeding the standard. To obtain more information on students' achievement and equity gaps, and other statistical information about Dunn's Corners School, refer to Information Works! at [www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu](http://www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu).

### 3. PORTRAIT OF Dunn's Corners School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Tucked away at the end of a tree-lined street, Dunn's Corners typifies the neighborhood school. Its brightly colored walls and shiny floors reflect the warmth and glow of its occupants. Visitors are made to feel welcome within the school, being greeted respectfully and enthusiastically. The students, teachers, parents, staff and principal justifiably take great pride in their school. Many efforts have been made to supply students with the tools they need, from a well-supplied library to a beautiful playground. The classrooms are bright and inviting. Charts, pictures, and student work adorn the walls along with murals that serve as an affirmation of the creativity that is encouraged here. Cozy touches such as curtains, comfortable chairs, and pillows reflect the "home away from home" atmosphere of comfort and familiarity.

The students at Dunn's Corners School genuinely love their school, their principal, and their teachers. The children are friendly, well behaved, and respectful. Students are courteous and helpful to one another and to their teachers. They are inquisitive, motivated and serious about learning. They know what is expected of them and rise to meet challenges.

The teachers at Dunn's Corners are hard working and dedicated, continually incorporating new ideas and techniques into their teaching. Teachers support one another and have established collegial and collaborative relationships. They are patient and kind, listen to children, and value students' ideas. Along with the support staff and the principal they have created an environment where children come first. Every effort has been made to make learning fun for all students.

While Dunn's Corners students' have experienced considerable success on several subtests of the New Standards Reference Examination, the faculty and school administrator have expressed concern over student performance in the areas of Mathematics and Writing Skills. Positive steps are being developed to address these shortcomings. The Dunn's Corners School community has identified challenges, set goals, and committed itself to helping all students reach high standards.

The Westerly School District supports this school in its efforts. District and school administrators provide educational leadership and opportunities for staff to continue their professional growth and development. Parents take an active role in support of the school's mission. With continuing efforts this collaboration of all stakeholders will make this already fine school even better.

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with students, staff, teachers, and school administrator*
- ◆ *1999-2000 SALT Survey Results*
- ◆ *meeting with School Improvement Team*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam School Summary*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with students and parents*

### Conclusions

Students at Dunn's Corners School are exceptionally well behaved, courteous and friendly. They are enthusiastic learners and are happy and proud to be part of this school community. Students are confident and comfortable in this environment and embrace the risks they are encouraged to take. Many are self-directed and take charge of their learning. This provides a strong foundation for fostering student learning. *(Following students, classroom observations, meetings with students and parents, conversations and interviews with students, staff, teachers and school administrator)*

Most students at Dunn's Corners School are reading very well. On the 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, the fourth grade students at Dunn's Corners School met or exceeded the standard on the following subtests: Reading Basic Understanding – 96%, and Reading Analysis and Interpretation – 87%. These results are exceptional. Primary students are developing phonemic awareness, hearing sounds in words and blending sounds together to make words. Many students are employing different reading strategies, while some students are responding to literature using higher order thinking skills. Many students are analyzing, making predictions, sequencing events, developing comprehension skills and applying those skills in several content areas. Many students are practicing reading at home and are

keeping track of their reading in journals and reports. (*Meetings with students and parents, 1999-2000 SALT Survey, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers*)

Students demonstrate a level of comfort with the process of writing. Students write for a variety of purposes, and most write well when given a format for their writing. Students demonstrate a stronger proficiency in writing effectiveness than they do the conventions of grammar. Students are better at diagnosing deficiencies in existing sentences than using their knowledge of grammar as an effective tool to guide their own writing. This coincides with the discrepancy in student performance on the New Standards Reference Exam. On the 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, the fourth grade students at Dunn's Corners School met or exceeded the standard in the following: Writing Effectiveness – 75%, and Writing Conventions – 25%. On the 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, 43% of the third grade students at Dunn's Corners School met or exceeded the standard. (*2000 New Standards Reference Exam, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, classroom observations, examination of student work, meeting with the School Improvement Team*)

On the 1999 New Standards Reference Exam fourth grade students at Dunn's Corners School performed below the level of similar students statewide on the Mathematical Skills and Problem Solving subtests. Currently students are developing their mathematical communication skills, practicing computational skills, using manipulatives on a daily basis, and employing a variety of strategies to approach the solving of problems. However, many are not necessarily able to apply the appropriate concepts and strategies independently. On the 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam the fourth grade students at Dunn's Corners School met or exceeded the standard on the following subtests: Mathematical Skills – 77%, Mathematical Concepts – 44%, and Problem Solving - 31%. (*2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam School Summary, 2000 Information Works!, classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations and interviews with teachers and students*)

#### Commendations for Dunn's Corners School:

The friendly, courteous, well-behaved, confident student body.

The high level of performance on the Basic Understanding and Reading Analysis and Interpretation subtests of the 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam.

#### Recommendations for Dunn's Corners School:

Continue to foster a nurturing and challenging environment for your students.

Continue efforts to improve student performance in writing and mathematics.

Examine the "What Students Need" section of the New Standards Reference Exam School Summary Reports from the last three years, and use that information to make changes in curriculum, instruction and assessment.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, and school administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *review of classroom assignments and assessments*
- ◆ *examination of textbooks and materials*

### Conclusions

Teachers at Dunn's Corners School are doing a very good job of encouraging and developing a love of reading among their students. They are creating visual imagery, making stories come alive in children's minds, and stressing reading for meaning. Teachers are providing a solid foundation for employing different strategies in reading. Some teachers are engaging students in thought provoking discussions that exercise their higher order thinking skills. Teachers are providing opportunities for students to read different genres, incorporating literature across content areas, and asking students to respond to literature in a variety of formats. Teachers are holding students accountable for the reading standard requiring them to read and respond to at least twenty-five books. (*Conversations and interviews with teachers and students, classroom observations, meeting with School Improvement Team, meeting with students*)

Teachers are making sincere efforts to improve the quality of mathematical instruction to deepen students' understanding of skills, concepts, and problem solving. Recognizing the present level of student achievement they are encouraging students to explain solutions to problems clearly and logically, to show mathematical ideas in a variety of ways, use manipulatives, and employ known strategies, skills, knowledge, and concepts. However, opportunities to help students connect their knowledge of skills and concepts in the problem solving process are often missed. (*Classroom observations, following students, meeting with district administrators, conversations and interviews with teachers and school administration, review of classroom assignments and assessments, examination of textbooks and materials*)

Many teachers are using a variety of strategies to improve student writing. The current reading series facilitates the integration of reading and writing and affords students an opportunity to explore different genres. In most classes daily writing is taking place across the curriculum. In some classes journal writing takes place. While these are positive steps for improving students' skills, the focus is more on format and structure than on creative and free writing. In some cases the appearance of student work receives more attention than the substance. (*Examination of student work, classroom observations, following students, meeting with the School Improvement Team, meetings with parents and students*)

Most teachers at Dunn's Corners School set clear expectations for their students. The emergent use of rubrics is visible in many classrooms. Some teachers have designed rubrics with student input that are user friendly. However, teachers' knowledge and the proficiency with which they use rubrics vary greatly among the professional staff. At times the present use of rubrics does not provide sufficient guidance to students or properly assess the substance of the work they do. (*Classroom observations, following students, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, meetings with students and district administrators*)

Most teachers use a variety of written and oral strategies to provide feedback to their students. However the written feedback sometimes lacks in-depth analysis and does not always provide opportunities for students to improve their work. (*Classroom observations, following students, examination of student work*)

Many teachers at Dunn's Corners School have recognized the importance of differentiating instruction to better meet the needs of all students. They have provided opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding of skills and concepts through a variety of modalities. Some teachers have made adjustments to instructional materials and classroom assignments in order to accommodate a variety of students' learning styles and abilities. However, the need for all children to be challenged still exists. These challenges need to be provided on a daily basis in all subjects, especially for those students who have achieved mastery. (*Classroom observations, meetings with parents, students, school and district administrators, following students, meeting with School Improvement Team, conversations and interviews with teachers*)

#### Commendations for Dunn's Corners School:

Teachers' role in creating the positive atmosphere in this school

Teachers' collegial and collaborative relationships

Teachers' dedication to their students

Teachers' fostering of a love of literature

#### Recommendations for Dunn's Corners School:

Engage in professional development to improve student performance in mathematics problem solving and writing.

Increase opportunities for students to engage in creative and free writing.

Engage in professional development which will help you provide challenging opportunities for all children on a daily basis.

Create rubrics that help guide students to produce work that focuses more on substance than form. Closely follow the criteria provided in the rubric to assess the depth of their understanding. Continue to include your students in this process.

Provide more in depth written feedback on students' work.

#### Recommendations for the Westerly School District:

Identify presenters capable of providing the professional development described above.

Continue to provide substitutes that support teacher collaboration.

Provide opportunities for teachers to look collectively at student work.

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students and teachers*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- ◆ *Dunn's Corners School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *Westerly Public Schools Strategic Plan*
- ◆ *samples of classroom and grade level newsletters to homes*
- ◆ *Site Council Newsletter*
- ◆ *Review of the Drafts, September, 1998, Westerly Public Schools Curriculum*

### Conclusions

The students at Dunn's Corners Elementary School benefit from strong leadership on many fronts. These

include teachers, SITE Council, building principal and district administration. There is a strong emphasis on professional collaboration in this school. The building principal and district administration have provided enhanced opportunities for grade level teachers to share a common planning time each week, and bi-weekly collaborative meetings for staff who service special needs students. Additionally, numerous and varied opportunities exist for teachers to engage in professional development, some of which is provided by members of the professional staff. The Effective Schools model has been embraced by the district and this school. Its correlates serve as the basis for the Westerly Public Schools Strategic Plan and the Dunn's Corners School Improvement Plan. (*Westerly Public Schools Strategic Plan, Dunn's Corners School Improvement Plan, meetings with district and school administrators, meeting with the School Improvement Team*)

The school collects and effectively analyzes data from a variety of sources. Student performance on standardized tests and other measures have prompted changes in instructional practices and in the scope and sequence of curricula. While these are positive steps, efforts to sufficiently coordinate and implement these changes have not been fully realized. Inconsistencies in the information students learn exist within some grade levels and knowledge is not always sequentially developed from year to year. The recent adoption of common planning time for teachers and the demonstrated willingness of teachers to work collaboratively is having a positive impact on this phenomenon. (*Meeting with the School Improvement Team, conversations and interviews with teachers, meetings with parents, school and district administrators*)

Parents are viewed as important allies in the education of their children at Dunn's Corners School and have shared the responsibility for the quality of education their children receive. The active PTO provides substantial funding for programs that enrich and enhance the educational, recreational, and artistic opportunities offered to students. In order to strengthen the home/school connection, the principal and most teachers have made sincere ongoing efforts to increase the frequency and quantity of communications. Some parents are active and involved in their children's classrooms. However, parental involvement needs to be balanced with respect to the comfort level of teachers and the educational environment for students in their classrooms. (*Meetings with parents and school administration, samples of classroom and grade level newsletters to homes, Site Council Newsletter*)

Draft curricula have been developed in language arts and mathematics. These curricula have content standards, instructional strategies to help students meet the standards, and performance/product assessments to determine how well the students have learned the desired information. However, the lack of good, solid benchmarks for student work at each grade level are hindering the school's attempt to progressively deepen student understanding from year to year. (*Review of the Drafts, September, 1998, Westerly Public Schools Curriculum, conversations and interviews with teachers, meetings with parents and district administrators, meeting with the School Improvement Team*)

Computer technology in this school is not adequate to meet the needs of all students. While some technology (computers, software, calculators, and other electronic equipment) is presently in this building, the quantity is woefully insufficient to meet the needs of today's students. This does not provide students with opportunities necessary to develop their technological literacy, nor can technology be used as a tool to acquire, organize, analyze, and interpret information. It has not been fully incorporated into the curriculum. (*Classroom observations, observations of the school, meeting with the School Improvement Team, meetings with district administrators, parents, and students, conversations and interviews with teachers*)

While the school cafeteria is clean, the delivery, quality, and presentation of food that is provided by the district's vendor are unacceptable, and the method of serving the food is unsanitary. Students do not have nearly enough time to eat the food they buy or bring from home. In order to enable students to purchase ice cream, eating time is often cut short, and food is wasted. At some lunches the number of support staff on

duty is not sufficient to provide adequate supervision. (*Observations made in the cafeteria, meetings with students, parents, and school administration*)

## Commendations for Dunn's Corners School

Strong and effective educational leadership at the building and district levels

Efforts to provided common planning time, collaborative time, and professional development opportunities

Active and supportive parent organization

Efforts at improved communication

## Recommendations for Dunn's Corners School:

Continue to analyze and disaggregate data to improve instruction.

Provide an opportunity for grade level teachers to meet and examine student work in order to establish grade level benchmarks for student performance.

Enlist a parent volunteer who can coordinate parent involvement within the school and establish a clear protocol for their involvement.

Increase the number of computers, software and related peripherals necessary to support the delivery of instruction and improve student learning. Provide the training for teachers and staff to incorporate the use of technology into all facets of the curriculum.

Review the lunch program to improve the quality of the food, delivery of service to students, and cleanliness. Increase the amount of time allotted for eating lunch and increase cafeteria supervision.

## Recommendations for the Westerly School District:

Provide an opportunity for grade level teachers to meet and examine student work in order to establish grade level benchmarks for student performance.

Provide the necessary resources and supports to increase the number of computers, software and related peripherals necessary to support the delivery of instruction and improve student learning. Provide the training for teachers and staff to incorporate the use of technology into all facets of the curriculum.

Review the districts' contract with the current lunch vendor.

## 7. Final Advice to the School

The conclusions and recommendations of this SALT visit team are sincere. We entered your school on Tuesday with little knowledge of how your school operates on a daily basis. By Thursday evening we were filled to capacity with information that identified your strengths and recognized some areas for improvement. This school has made a concerted effort to engage in a cycle of improvement. This learning community is composed of adults, both in and out of the building, who clearly have the best interests of all students at heart. You have fostered a collegial, supportive, and cooperative atmosphere.

As you consider our recommendations, be certain to maintain those qualities that make your school so effective. In your quest to provide better instruction, improve student learning, and seek further professional development, maintain your focus on your mission to create “a place where learning has no limits and academic excellence is measured one child at a time.”

Recognizing the many assets this school possesses, we urge you to use this report to celebrate your strengths and guide you on your journey to become an even better school for, undoubtedly, that has been the purpose of our visit.

### Dunn's Corners School Improvement Team

Joseph Celico  
Principal

Kathy Colosi  
Parent

Mary Cooper  
Parent

Scott Jablonski  
Grade 4 Teacher

Mary Beth Keefe  
Parent

Gail McLeod  
Parent

Kerry Powers  
Grade 5 Teacher

Diane Prete  
Grade 3 Teacher

Dawn Quadrini  
Parent

Sarah Terranova  
Grade 1 Teacher

Chair

Cheryl Watson

Parent

Barbara Woycik

Grade 2 Teacher

## THE SALT VISIT TEAM

JoAnn LaBranche

Social Studies Teacher

Lincoln Senior High School

Lincoln, Rhode Island

(on leave to the Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)

Chair of the Team

Priscilla Bailey

ESL Resource Elementary Teacher

West Broadway Elementary School

Providence, Rhode Island

Dr. Michael Barnes

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Debbi Miceli

Grade 1 Teacher

Charlestown Elementary School

Charlestown, Rhode Island

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

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## Catalpa Ltd. Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

### Dunn's Corner Elementary

October 20, 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.  
November 7, 2000



*Actual endorsement completed when report is reviewed.*