



Roger Williams Middle School

Providence

SALT Visit Team Report

November 17, 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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This report is available at 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 Roger Williams Middle School from November 14 through November 17, 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 Roger Williams Middle School-Providence One Plan was the touchstone document for the team. However informative written reports may be, though, 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 Roger Williams Middle School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *over 70 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. All classrooms were visited at least once. Many teachers were observed more than once.*
- ◆ *many observations of the school (outside of classroom), the Power Lunch program, and displays of student work*
- ◆ *following 9 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 substitute teachers 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:*
 - *Roger Williams Middle School Improvement Plan-Providence One Plan*
 - *Providence District Improvement Plan*
 - *Roger Williams Middle School Book of Rubrics*
 - *Teacher Evaluation Handbook*
 - *Providence Teachers Union New Teacher Induction Program*
 - *The Mentor Program*
 - *SALT Survey 1999-2000*
 - *1998 Information Works!*
 - *1999 Information Works!*
 - *2000 Information Works!*
 - *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*

- *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 27 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 Roger Williams 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 Providence School Department, the citizens of 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 Roger Williams Middle School

Roger Williams Middle School, one of nine middle schools in Providence, serves students in the sixth through eighth grades. It is located in the south side of the capitol city of Rhode Island and is part of Providence's school system. The school system is administered by a superintendent and a district staff of twelve. The Providence school system is governed by an appointed school board of nine members.

Roger Williams Middle School was constructed in 1932 with funds from the WPA and was originally named the Thurbers Avenue School. That name was later changed to Roger Williams in honor of the founder of Rhode Island. No major renovations have been made to the physical plant, but several rooms have been divided to accommodate increasing student enrollment over the years. Today all space within the building is utilized as either a core classroom or resource room.

Of the approximately 900 students who attend Roger Williams Middle School, 57 percent are Hispanic, 27 percent are African American, eight percent are white, seven percent are Asian, and one percent are Native American. Eighteen percent of the students are identified as bilingual/ESL learners. Fourteen percent of the students receive special education services in one of the 10 special education programs in the school. Ninety-one percent of Roger Williams students qualify for the free lunch program and another four percent qualify for reduced price lunch. Students have an 88.5 percent attendance rate. Twelve percent of the students were retained last year.

One principal and two assistant principals administer Roger Williams Middle School. Approximately 75 teachers serve the students who are grouped into ten academic teams.

From 1998 to 2000, Roger Williams Middle School student performance on the New Standards Reference Examination shows little change in the reading subtests, while student performance on the writing subtests has decreased. Math scores for the same period show little change in Concepts and Problem Solving, but performance in the Skills subtest has nearly doubled. The 2000 *Information Works!* data shows that equity gaps (gaps of 15% or more) exist between special education students and general education students in two of the four subtests of the New Standards Reference Examination that are measured. General education students outperform special education students. Gaps also exist among different ethnic groups on three of the four subtests measured.

The SALT visit team used the test score information found in *Information Works!* and the 2000 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries to determine the performance and equity gaps discussed in the student learning conclusions. 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report. *Information Works!* data for Roger Williams Middle School is available at www.ridoe.net.

In addition to the New Standards Reference Examination given to students in grade eight, the Stanford 9 assessments are administered to students in grades six and seven at Roger Williams Middle School.

The many initiatives and special programs at Roger Williams include a dance program that involves almost one-half of the student population. As part of this program, students perform at various functions around the state. The school earned the runner-up middle school achievement award in 1999 for its participation in the state sponsored National Energy Education Development Project. Roger Williams Middle School was also active as one of the eighteen Carnegie middle schools in Rhode Island. The school currently has working relationships with many community organizations and agencies that provide social as well as educational services to Roger Williams students. The school's active business partners include Rhode Island and Hasbro Children's Hospitals and Roger Williams Park Zoo. With these partners Roger Williams Middle School has

planned several programs for its students. One program that has already been implemented is Power Lunch, a program that pairs sixth grade students and employees from Hasbro Children's and Rhode Island Hospitals to focus on reading. The partnership with Roger Williams Park has recently involved teachers in curriculum development on a wetlands exhibit scheduled to open next summer at the park. Teachers plan to integrate this unit into the school's curriculum.

3. PORTRAIT OF Roger Williams Middle School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Roger Williams Middle School is a safe and welcoming haven for a culturally rich and diverse student population. The strong, compassionate leadership of both the administrators and faculty creates a caring environment—a community in which respect and concern for others are shared responsibilities. Many students come to school prepared and eager to learn. The wider Roger Williams community includes family and business partners who effectively support students and teachers in their work here.

An important commitment the school has made to raise student performance is to implement standards-based instruction. While many teachers are at the beginning stages of understanding and implementing standards-based instruction in their classrooms, throughout the school many other teachers and students have begun to use rubrics to guide and evaluate their work. Additionally, some teachers in the school have fully integrated standards into their classes and provide instruction that is rich with opportunities for their students to achieve high levels of learning and enrichment.

Most teachers, however, do not address the differing needs of their students. They do not differentiate their instructional strategies to meet individual students' learning styles. Rather, they provide “one size fits all” lessons.

All teachers work towards goals, but those goals vary from class to class. The lack of common team planning time in every teacher's day and the absence of district-wide curricula severely limit Roger Williams Middle School's ability to become the school that it works so hard to be. Teaching and learning experiences are disjointed and disconnected, often overlapping from class to class and grade to grade. The resulting gaps and overlaps frustrate teachers and give students unequal opportunities for learning.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *SALT Survey 1999-2000*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *displays of student work*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with students and teachers*
- ◆ *meetings with parents and students*

Conclusions

Many students at Roger Williams Middle School are enthusiastic, respectful, and eager to learn. They like their school and their teachers and most feel comfortable here. They know classroom procedures and come prepared with the necessary materials: They are ready to learn. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with students and teachers, SALT Survey 1999-2000*)

Many students spend much time practicing basic math skills and algorithms. They participate in mathematical activities that include measuring length, depth, volume, and making comparisons and conversions. Some use calculators to complete mathematical computations. Too few engage in real world problem solving applications that will enable them to demonstrate strong mathematical skills, deepen their conceptual understanding, and to problem solve effectively. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, meeting with parents, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results, SALT Survey 1999-2000*)

Students write across the curriculum. They demonstrate many forms of writing which include responses to literature, reports, poetry, informational writing, persuasive writing, and journal entries. They feel successful as writers; this confidence will enable students to achieve higher levels of writing. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, meeting with students, SALT Survey 1999-2000, displays of student work, 2000 Information Works!, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*)

Students read a variety of materials for different purposes. They read for information, for pleasure, and for understanding. Students read across the curriculum. Most read aloud in class. Some spend time reading silently. Nevertheless, on state assessments, student reading achievement is still low (Reading Basic

Understanding—27 percent achieve the standard and Reading Analysis and Interpretation—11 percent achieve the standard). (*following students, classroom observations, SALT Survey 1999-2000, examination of student work, meeting with students, displays of student work, 2000 Information Works!, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*)

Recommendations for Roger Williams Middle School:

Provide more opportunities for students to engage in real world problem-solving applications.

Continue and expand writing opportunities and instruction for students.

Engage all teachers in professional development centered on reading strategies to develop higher level reading skills. Implement those strategies in all classrooms across the curriculum.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with teachers*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school administrators, students, parents*
- ◆ 2000 Information Works!
- ◆ *SALT Survey 1999-2000*
- ◆ *Roger Williams Middle School Book of Rubrics*

Conclusions

Many teachers in this school are working towards creating classrooms that reflect standards-based education. Although many teachers have been trained, they are at different levels of understanding standards-based instruction and its implementation. Some are still at the awareness stage and display standards, rubrics, and student work in the classroom. Some set clear expectations, provide benchmark examples, create rubrics, and use those rubrics to evaluate student performance. A few teachers engage their students in active hands-on learning that is student-centered; these teachers set high standards with clear expectations. Their students are empowered to use critical thinking skills to determine how they will demonstrate their knowledge, assess their progress, and reflect upon their learning to assure their continuous improvement. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations and interviews with teachers, SALT Survey 1999-2000, meetings with students, parents, school improvement team, and school administrators, Roger Williams Middle School Book of Rubrics*)

Many teachers do not use instructional strategies that accommodate the varied learning styles and ability levels of all their students. Thus, students have limited opportunities for successful learning. (*classroom observations, following students, conversations and interviews with teachers, examination of student work, meetings with parents and students*)

Teachers provide students with necessary basic skills development opportunities, but not enough take the next step to provide sufficient opportunities for students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize. This focus on basic skills limits teacher expectations for student performance and denies students who have not yet mastered the basic skills the opportunities to develop critical thinking skills. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, meetings with students and parents, SALT Survey 1999-2000, 2000 Information Works!*)

Commendations for Roger Williams Middle School for:

those teachers who empower their students to use critical thinking skills to determine how they will demonstrate their knowledge, assess their progress, and reflect upon their learning to assure their continuous improvement

Recommendations for Roger Williams Middle School:

Provide teachers with professional development in differentiated instruction and support its implementation in all classrooms.

Continue to develop and implement standards-based instructional strategies. Provide ongoing professional development that will enable teachers to use those strategies more effectively.

Provide support to teachers in the design and application of rubrics.

Challenge your students by providing more opportunities for them to increase their critical thinking skills.

Give students more opportunities “to assume responsibility for their own learning”.

Recommendations for the Providence School District:

Provide the resources that the school needs for professional development in standards-based instruction, differentiated instruction, and rubric design.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school and the Power Lunch program*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, and substitute teachers*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students, parents*
- ◆ *Following students*
- ◆ *Roger Williams Middle School Improvement Plan-Providence One Plan*
- ◆ *Providence District Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *Teacher Evaluation Handbook*
- ◆ *Providence Teachers Union New Teacher Induction Program*
- ◆ *The Mentor Program*
- ◆ *2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*

Conclusions

Roger Williams Middle School has a very aggressive school improvement plan designed to raise student performance by ten percent in math, reading, and writing on state assessments. The Action Steps/Activities of the plan effectively address the important issues facing Roger Williams Middle School. If the school is able to implement the action steps as intended, the plan should increase student performance. (*Roger Williams Middle School Improvement Plan-Providence One Plan, meetings with school improvement team, and school administrators*)

Teacher evaluations include teacher portfolios and classroom observations by, and conferences with, either the principal or an assistant principal. First year teachers are observed two times per year; second and third year teachers are observed once per year; tenured teachers are observed every five years. Evaluators score the observations holistically, while looking at five areas of knowledge and learning. Evaluators also prepare a reflective narrative about the teacher. For the teachers who are evaluated every year, this process provides the opportunity for professional growth. (*Teacher Evaluation Handbook, meetings with school and district administrators, conversations and interviews with teachers*)

While there is a mentoring program at Roger Williams Middle School for new teachers, it may not provide sufficient support for all new teachers and certified substitute teachers. Both teachers and substitutes express frustration and concerns about classroom management and delivery of instruction. (*Providence Teachers Union New Teacher Induction Program, The Mentor Program, conversations and interviews with teachers and substitute teachers, Roger Williams Middle School Improvement Plan-Providence One Plan*)

This year, in response to low reading scores, the school has attempted to implement a much-needed reading program for grades seven and eight. However, the lack of certified reading teachers has resulted in a disjointed, possibly negative, reading experience for students. Many students do not have exposure to a well-structured, developmental reading program, conducted by a staff of well-trained professionals with access to proper materials. In its present state, this program will not increase reading performance on state assessments. (*following students, classroom observations, meetings with students and parents, conversations and interviews with teachers, 2000 Information Works!, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*)

Most teachers are teamed and assigned a group of students, but the team members are denied common team planning time. Teachers are not able to work together to design integrated units and to coordinate assignments and evaluations, to meet with parents as a team, and to hold meetings to discuss student needs and behavior. Teachers cannot meet to create and assess their standards-based activities. Their isolation severely inhibits effective middle school practice. (*conversations and interviews with teachers and students, meetings with school and district administrators, classroom observations, following students*)

Roger Williams Middle School has no established curriculum in any academic area. Teachers are forced to create their own. This causes overlaps and gaps in teaching and learning. This lack of continuity within and across grade levels prohibits sequential learning and skill development and does not promote high levels of achievement. (*conversations and interviews with teachers, meetings with students, school and district administrators, Providence District Improvement Plan*)

The school has embraced active business partnerships that “are dedicated to improving the educational experience of the school children”. One example of successful collaboration is the sixth grade Power Lunch program that pairs adult volunteers as mentors with students. (*meetings with school improvement team, students, and school administrators, observation of the Power Lunch program*)

For an old building Roger Williams Middle School is clean and attractive. However, the building is in need of some physical repairs. For example, some lights are nonfunctioning; peeling paint, broken doors, and moldy floors and walls create unhealthy locker rooms; and exposed radiators present a burn hazard. (*observations of the school, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, meeting with students*)

Commendations for Roger Williams Middle School for:

the active business partnerships

Recommendations for Roger Williams Middle School:

Observe tenured teachers more often. Provide ways for these teachers to share their professional expertise.

Look into creative ways to encourage certified reading teachers to staff the reading program. Provide extensive training and support for any teachers who teach reading.

Restructure the school day to include common team planning time.

Provide specifically trained teacher mentors for new teachers and substitute teachers.

Recommendations for Providence School District:

Move quickly to develop curricula for all areas and provide the resources necessary for Roger Williams Middle School to implement them.

Support the school in its efforts to implement and staff its new reading program.

Help this school to become a true middle school; enable the school to restructure the school day and create common team planning time.

Make appropriate renovations to the building.

7. Final Advice to the School

While Roger Williams Middle School has begun the hard work to become a true middle school whose students achieve high standards, substantial obstacles remain and must be addressed by all in the school community. To further the work of implementing standards-based instruction in their classrooms, teachers must continue their training and implement those strategies that will increase student learning. Teachers in the school, who have developed expertise in standards-based instruction and effectively utilize those strategies with their students, need to share with their colleagues through modeling and discussion.

In order to meet the differing needs of all students, differentiation of instruction training is a necessity for teachers. Reliance on large group instruction geared towards one learning style denies far too many students opportunities for learning.

The school's business partners afford an excellent opportunity for student success. The school must continue to work with them and expand on the one-to-one working teams such as the Power Lunch program to help raise the level of student reading. The new reading program has the potential to increase student skills and performance also. However, limiting reading instruction in grades seven and eight to students who perform below grade level will not address the reading proficiency of all students. All teachers must be empowered to become teachers of effective reading strategies if all students are to become better readers. Writing instruction, too, must be continued and expanded throughout the school. Teachers need to capitalize on student confidence as writers to increase their skills in writing. Students need many problem-solving experiences that involve real world situations if they are to become good problem solvers. All students must be challenged and empowered to be responsible for their own learning.

Roger Williams Middle School will not be able to achieve its goals without comprehensive curricula and common team planning time to integrate them. The school must work with the Providence School District in developing those curricula, and the district must support the school in its efforts to restructure its schedule to integrate common team planning time for its teachers. Gaps and overlaps in student learning will continue so long as teachers work in isolation.

Roger Williams Middle School IMPROVEMENT TEAM

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THE SALT VISIT TEAM

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

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Roger Williams Middle School

November 17,2000

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, 1st 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.
January 3, 2001