



Times² Academy

Providence

The SALT Visit Team Report

November 30, 2001



School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)

The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

The findings of this report are those of this SALT visit team. The names and affiliations of the members of the team are in the appendix. The team follows the school visit protocol in the *Handbook for Chairs on Conducting a SALT School Visit*. The team is required to focus on what it observes at the time of the visit and is restricted from comparing the school with any other. This school visit was supported by the Rhode Island Department of Education as one component of its accountability system, School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT).

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This report is available at <http://www.ride.net/schoolimprove/salt/visits.htm>

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1. THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS of this report

Overview

This is the report of the SALT team that visited Times² Academy from November 27, 2001 through November 30, 2001. The following features are at the heart of the report:

- ◆ The team seeks to capture what makes this school work, or not work, as a public institution of learning. Each school presents a unique picture.
- ◆ The team does not compare this school to any other school.
- ◆ When writing the report, the team deliberately the words that will best convey its message best to the school, based on careful consideration of what it has learned about the school dynamics.
- ◆ The team makes its judgment explicit.

The major questions the team addresses are:

- ◆ How well do the students learn at this school?
- ◆ How well does this school teach its students?
- ◆ How well does this school support learning and teaching?

The SALT report creates accountability for improvement by connecting its judgments of quality and its recommendations for improvement directly to the actual work going on in this school at the time of the visit.

The team closely follows the visit protocol in the *Handbook for Chairs of the SALT School Visit*. The Catalpa endorsement certifies that this team followed the protocol and that this report meets all criteria required for a legitimate SALT visit report.

The visit team is made up primarily of teachers, administrators, and a parent from Rhode Island public schools. The majority of team members are teachers. The names and affiliations of the team members are listed at the end of the report.

Sources of Evidence for This Report

In order to write this report the team examines test scores, student work, and other documents related to this school. The school improvement plan for Times² Academy is the touchstone document for the team. No matter how informative documents may be, however, there is no substitute for being at the school while it is in session—in the classrooms, in the lunchroom, and in the hallways. The team builds its conclusions primarily from information about what the students, staff, and administrators think and do during their day. Thus, the visit allows the team to build informed judgments about the teaching, learning, and support that actually takes place at Times² Academy.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following sources of evidence:

- ◆ *observing a total of 102 full and partial classes. The team spent a total of over 94-1/2 hours in direct classroom observation. Every classroom was visited at least once, and almost every teacher was observed more than once.*

- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *following seven students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *meeting at scheduled times with the following groups:*
 - teachers*
 - school improvement team*
 - school and district administrators*
 - students*
 - parents*
 - Times² Academy Advisory Council*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *analyzing three years of state assessment results as reported in Information Works!*
- ◆ *reviewing the following documents:*
 - district and school policies and practices*
 - records of professional development activities*
 - classroom assignments*
 - classroom assessments*
 - school standards and proficiencies grade-by-grade document*
 - preliminary school improvement plan for Times² Academy*
 - district strategic plan*
 - 1999, 2000 SALT Survey report*
 - classroom textbooks*
 - 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 Information Works!*
 - 1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
 - 1999, 2000, and 2001 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
 - 2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary*
 - 2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary*

The full team built the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 30-1/2 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 must agree that every conclusion in this report:

- ◆ *is important enough to include in the report.*
- ◆ *is supported by the evidence the team has gathered during the visit.*
- ◆ *is set in the present.*
- ◆ *contains the judgment of the team.*

Using the Report

The team deliberately chooses the words, phrases, and sentences it uses in its conclusions, as well as in the *Portrait* and *Final Advice*. Thus, this report is the team's best attempt to encourage and support the school's continued improvement in strengthening the learning of its students.

The team reached consensus on each conclusion, each recommendation, and each commendation in this report.

It is important to note that this report reflects only the week in the life of the school that was observed and considered by this team. The report does not cover what the school plans to do, or what it has done in the past. This report is not prescriptive.

The value of this report will be determined by its effectiveness in improving teaching and learning. By considering the importance to the school of what the team said and why, the school takes its first step in becoming accountable in a way that actually improves learning.

It is important to read and consider this report as a whole. Recommendations and commendations should be considered in relation to the conclusions they follow.

After the school improvement team considers this report, it should make changes in the school improvement plan. The revised plan will form the basis for negotiating a Compact for Learning with the district. The purpose of the Compact is to ensure that the school and its district work out an agreement about the best way to improve the school and the best way to target district support for the school. A RIDE Field Service Team representative will offer assistance in preparing the compact.

2. PROFILE OF Times² Academy

Background

Times² Academy is a charter school in the Providence Public School System. The school is designed for students in grades 6-12. The school presently enrolls students in grades 6-10 and is adding one grade each year. The school first opened its doors to students in 1998 under a charter submitted by Times² Incorporated, a non-profit corporation that offers enrichment programs, Saturday academies, and summer programs in Providence and Newport, Rhode Island. The school currently operates under a management agreement with the Providence School Department.

The school is site-based managed; teachers are ratified by the Providence School Department and represented by the Providence Teachers Association. Since its creation in 1998, the school has been located in two different places. It moved into its present building, a newly constructed facility, in the Fall, 2001. The school draws students from elementary schools throughout Providence, and students reside in all neighborhoods of the city.

A 15 member Times² Academy Advisory Council governs Times² Academy. The Board is comprised of three students, three parents, three teachers and/or staff, three community members, and three corporate/business representatives. Times² Academy students are served by a professional staff of five administrators, 24 full and part-time faculty, three support personnel, and two custodians.

Times² Academy has an attendance rate of 94 percent. Of the 320 students attending this school 38 percent are Black, 50 percent are Hispanic, 4 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, 6 percent are White, and 2 percent are classified as other. Five students totaling 1.5 percent receive special education services, no students are identified as Limited English Proficient, and 79 percent applied for and receive free or reduced-price lunch.

State Assessment Results for Times² Academy

On the 2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination subtests, approximately one in six of the 8th graders (16%) met or exceeded the standard in basic skills; one in 100 of the 8th graders (1%) met or exceeded the standard in concepts, and approximately one in 33 of the 8th graders (3%) met or exceeded the standard in problem solving. On the 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination the 8th grade students at Times² Academy perform at the same level as similar students in the state on the concepts and problem solving subtests; they perform above similar students on the skills subtest.

On the 2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination Reading subtests, approximately two in five of the 8th graders (38%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Basic Understanding; approximately one in 33 of the 8th graders (3%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Analysis and Interpretation. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist for multiracial students on the English Language Arts Reading sub-tests. On the 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination the 8th grade students at Times² Academy perform above similar students in Reading: Basic Understanding; they perform at the same level as similar students in the state on Reading: Analysis and Interpretation.

On the 2001 New Standards Reference Examination English Language Arts Writing subtests, three in 10

of the 8th graders (30%) met or exceeded the standard in Writing: Effectiveness; approximately two in five of the 8th graders (38%) met or exceeded the standard in Writing: Conventions. Equity gaps exist for White, Hispanic, and Multi-racial students on English Language Arts sub-tests. On the 2000 New Standards Reference Examination the 8th grade students at Times² Academy perform at the same level as similar students in the state on the writing effectiveness subtest; they perform above similar students on the conventions subtest.

On the 2001 Rhode Island Writing Assessment approximately one in 33 of the 7th graders (3%) met or exceeded the standard.

The most recently available New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report. *Information Works!* data for Times² Academy is available at www.ridoe.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF Times² Academy AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Times² Academy is a school where the dreams and aspirations of urban youth can be realized. What began as an enrichment program is now a four-year young public charter school. The school has at its core a steadfast desire to improve engineering, math, and science education for children, particularly children of color, as well as to accelerate the learning of children who are often unchallenged and unrecognized. This school offers children a sense of promise, high hopes, and dreams of a new beginning.

The board of directors, advisory council, administrative team, teachers, staff, and parents create a unique opportunity for urban youth to advance in the areas of engineering, mathematics, and science. Through the vision, hard work, and perseverance of truly dedicated people, the students served by this school are educated in a new building that opened its doors in September 2001. Building this school was a daunting undertaking and a noteworthy accomplishment.

The students are appreciative and respectful of their new school facility. Their pride for this school is evident in the respect and caring they show for the building.

A faculty of mutually respectful teachers supports one another in their efforts to recognize the promise within their students. The teachers, staff, and administrative team are dedicated and welcoming. They create a palpable sense of warmth, as well as a safe learning environment where children are known well. It is clear that they have the best interest of children at heart and that they share a common desire to see these children succeed in an environment of high academic standards.

The hard work of designing and building a school is behind Times² Academy. This young school is beginning to take the steps necessary to establish an organizational structure and to align its instruction with its mission and vision. Achieving the stated mission and desired outcomes of this school will require a clear and concentrated focus on documenting and coordinating the educational program. Additional areas of focus are: job-embedded professional development, increasing concentration on standards and performance assessments, engaging students in learning, minimizing wasted time and off-task student behavior, collegially examining student work, structuring opportunities for teachers to learn from each other, conducting a school wide self-study, strategic planning, and developing shared decision making, among others.

With the completion of a new school building all parties associated with Times² Academy are beginning to recognize that they must coordinate the focus of their pioneering spirit, considerable talents, and energy on refining and supporting high-quality instruction with a bottom-line focus on student learning. If the dreams of the children served by this school are to be fully realized, the educational leadership must focus on harnessing its noteworthy commitment to children and institutionalize sound educational practices.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2001 New Standards Reference Examination School Summary Report*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *reviewing classroom assignments*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about student work*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, and staff*
- ◆ *reviewing portfolios*
- ◆ *reviewing the Preliminary School Improvement Plan for Times² Academy*

Conclusions

Most students at Times² Academy take math seriously and are working to become proficient in advanced mathematics. They take pride in their accelerated program of mathematics study. Many students can apply basic mathematical skills and effectively plug numbers into formulas. A number of them can effectively use their knowledge of mathematics in other disciplines like science, English, and Social Studies. Although they are engaged in an advanced sequence of mathematics study, many students have not internalized a deep understanding of number sense such as comprehending place-value, recognizing equivalent quantities with different dimensions (units), and evaluating the reasonableness of a numeric response. While some students demonstrate a grasp of higher-level mathematics, many still have difficulty communicating mathematically, drawing simple conclusions from the analysis of data, and independently selecting and applying various problem-solving strategies. (*following students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing portfolios, reviewing classroom assignments, interviewing teachers about student work, observing classes, talking with students and teachers, 2001 New Standards Reference Exam School Summary Report*)

Students' knowledge of the writing process and their proficiency in creating high quality finished pieces of writing varies widely at this school. Some students have internalized the writing process and can self-edit their work for style, voice, and the conventions of grammar. Many students can express themselves creatively and can generate initial drafts of writing, but they are less adept at editing and revising their work to communicate their intent effectively. Students are writing research papers, keeping journals, analyzing quotes, using double entry journals, and working on sentence and paragraph structure. Nevertheless, many children have difficulty writing to a particular audience; offering reasons, evidence and explanations purposefully through a variety of strategies; and effectively using words, sentence structure, and paragraphs to organize their writing. (*reviewing completed and ongoing student work, talking with students and teachers, following students, interviewing teachers about student work,*

observing classes, 2001 New Standards Reference Exam School Summary Report)

Students are reading for a variety of purposes in a variety of genres. Many children read independently for pleasure. Children read textbooks, novels, non-fiction, informational writing, and poetry. Most children can successfully use a variety of reading strategies to decode words. Most can extract literal information—facts, figures, plot, setting, and character—from their readings. Nevertheless, many students struggle with sophisticated analysis and interpretations such as making clear claims about text, developing thoughtful interpretations, and extending ideas presented in the text. Additionally, only some students demonstrate document literacy—the ability to read and understand information in charts, tables, graphs, maps, and web pages. This finding coincides with student performance on the 2001 New Standards Reference Exam. *(following students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, interviewing teachers about student work, talking with students, teachers, and staff, 2001 New Standards Reference Exam School Summary Report, observing classes)*

Most students interact well with each other and with adults during social and academic encounters. They are proud of their new facility and the unique learning opportunities that exist at this school. There is a sense of community and belonging among many of the students, teachers, and staff. As students mature, their relationships and respect for one another often strengthen. While most students exhibit a culture of respect and caring, some occasionally act disrespectful toward teachers and peers. For example, when students and/or teachers are presenting to the class, some students talk among themselves about non-school related experiences and engage in other off-task behaviors such as doodling, daydreaming, sleeping, and writing personal notes. These off-task behaviors inhibit the nature and quality of intellectual discourse and engagement in the classroom. Additionally, this lack of engagement by some students during instruction times impedes their learning and understanding of course content. *(observing the school outside of the classroom, following students, observing classes, talking with students, teachers, and staff, reviewing preliminary school improvement plan)*

Commendations for Times² Academy

The respect students have for the school facility

Students' pursuit of an accelerated mathematics program of study

The freedom of expression and creativity of the students in writing and visual displays

Recommendations for Times² Academy

Help students develop a deep understanding of number sense.

Increase students' proficiency in communicating mathematically, drawing conclusions from the analysis of data, and independently selecting and applying various problem-solving strategies.

Further develop students' knowledge of the writing process with an emphasis on self- and peer-editing for style, voice, quality, and the conventions of grammar.

Increase students' proficiency with writing to a particular audience, offering reasons, evidence, and explanations purposefully through a variety of strategies, as well as effectively using words, sentence structure, and paragraphs to organize their writing.

Increase students' proficiency with analyzing and interpreting, making clear claims about text,

developing thoughtful interpretations, and extending ideas presented in the text.

Maximize learning opportunities by minimizing off task behaviors exhibited by students in class.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, and staff*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about student work*
- ◆ *meeting with the school improvement team, students, and school administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *reviewing classroom assessments*
- ◆ *reviewing classroom assignments*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*

Conclusions

The unique classroom cultures created by teachers have a strong and direct impact on the educational development and involvement of children. The capacity to establish a classroom culture that maximizes learning opportunities varies widely from teacher to teacher. Many teachers have created an atmosphere of mutual respect by setting clear expectations for behavior and performance, by nurturing strong interpersonal relationships with students, and by designing learning experiences that require students to be actively engaged. These teachers reflect on their teaching practices and purposefully select classroom tasks and assessments designed to foster student interaction with the desired course content. Other teachers have difficulty with establishing rituals and routines in the classroom that maximize learning opportunities. They struggle with engaging students in the lesson at hand, maximizing the use of classroom time, and addressing inappropriate off-task behaviors. The lack of clarity and consistency in the school wide approach to discipline and off-task student behaviors has contributed to the off-task student behavior observed in classes. This inconsistency contributes to, but does not fully explain, the off-task behavior. (*talking with students, teachers, and staff, observing classes, following students, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the students, and parents*)

The faculty at Times² Academy obtains and uses assessment data in diverse ways. The use of rubrics and performance-based assessments is emerging at this school. A few teachers develop rubrics in conjunction with children, thus clarifying the level and quality of work that is expected to be produced. A number of teachers conference with students and write detailed diagnostic comments to provide the students with the feedback they need to improve the quality of their work. However, school wide there is inconsistency in the nature and quality of feedback teachers provide their students. In some classrooms assessment is used just to assign a grade to existing work, rather than to revise and shape future instruction. Additionally, too many tasks and assessments measure skills and declarative knowledge (facts, figures, and details) rather than meaning and understanding. This fails to provide either the teacher or the students with a clear picture of the students' understanding of sophisticated concepts and problem-solving strategies. (*reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing classroom assessments, talking with students and teachers, observing classes, following students, reviewing classroom assignments,*

meeting with students)

Teachers are working to incorporate standards-based lessons and tasks into their daily teaching. Their knowledge and understanding of effective standards-based practices are still evolving. Some teachers effectively use standards and rubrics in their daily instruction to create clear expectations of performance that help focus both the teacher and student on the desired outcomes. Other effective practices include fostering dialogue between and among the teacher and students to develop higher-order thinking skills and cultivating effective inquiry skills that deepen student understanding. Although many teachers are using projects and other performance-based tasks, these projects often result in superficial reporting of secondary source information rather than the development of original work. Many classroom activities are lecture and worksheet-based activities that teach and assess the recollection of facts and the student's ability to follow repetitive procedures. Too few tasks are both hands-on and minds-on, which would allow students to interact meaningfully with the learning represented by the standards. *(reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing classroom assessments, interviewing teachers about student work, reviewing classroom assignments, meeting with the students, talking with students, teachers, and staff)*

Developing students' proficiency in reading, writing, mathematics, and science is a stated focus of this school. Many teachers share the responsibility for improving student performance in these areas. There are some extremely effective instructional practices occurring in this school. Some examples of these practices are: asking children to "prove it" by referring to the text, having students generate and analyze experiential data sets; integrating multiple disciplines into a standards-based project; engaging students in debates, modeling and deconstructing effective writing and problem solving processes; enthusiastically reading aloud and discussing text for meaning and understanding; and creating a response to literature that makes a connection between the text and their lives. These practices all help the teacher to "see" the students thinking. On the other hand, some less effective practices are: projects that are hands-on rather than minds-on, excessive review of skills-based homework, an overemphasis on visual displays instead of writing, non-interactive direct teaching, rote copying of information, and questioning techniques that focus only on factual recall and yes or no answers. *(observing classes, following students, talking with students and teachers, reviewing classroom assignments, interviewing teachers about student work, reviewing completed and ongoing student work)*

Commendations for Times² Academy

Beginning to incorporate standards and rubrics into the classroom

Beginning to create interdisciplinary units

The genuine concern for students shown by dedicated and nurturing teachers

Project-based learning

Recommendations for Times² Academy

Establish school wide expectations for student behavior and engagement in classroom activities. Embed these expectations in the discipline policies and consistently enforce these expectations and their corresponding policies.

Provide students with additional feedback that includes diagnostic comments designed to improve the quality of their work. Establish consistent, authentic assessment practices that assess for meaning and understanding, and use the information obtained from these assessments to guide future instruction.

Increase the connections of student learning to the real world through the use of meaningful hands-on and minds-on learning.

Ensure that class projects and problems allow student to use knowledge meaningfully and be producers rather than consumers of the knowledge/learning represented by the standards.

Reduce the amount of lecture and worksheet-based activities that teach and assess the recollection of facts and the ability to follow repetitive procedures.

Increase school wide the focus on literacy and numeracy with an emphasis on extracting and developing sophisticated levels of knowledge and understanding.

Expand the use of classroom tasks and assessments that generate evidence that teachers can use to “see” students thinking and learning.

Provide additional opportunities for children to create, organize, and analyze information in charts, tables, graphs, maps, and web pages, etc.

Recommendations for Times² Academy Advisory Council

Continue to be a visible presence in this school.

Ensure that programmatic, instructional, and budgetary decisions are designed to improve student learning and performance.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *talking with many students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents, and members of the Times² Academy Advisory Council*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *reviewing the Preliminary School Improvement Plan for Times² Academy*
- ◆ *reviewing school standards and proficiencies grade-by-grade document*

Conclusions

The board of directors, advisory council, administrative team, teachers, staff, and parents create a unique opportunity for urban youth, particularly minority students, to advance in the areas of engineering, mathematics, and science. The administrative team, teachers, and staff at Times2 Academy are social agents and role models for the children and the community they serve; they are caring and nurturing, and they show genuine concern for students and their well being. Their hard work, dedication, and commitment to building a school offer children a sense of promise, high hopes, and dreams of a new beginning. Strong ties to the community, local industries, and educational facilities have been established which augment and support the learning of children. Times2 Academy has developed an innovative school model designed to provide tremendous opportunities for students. (meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, members of the Times2 Academy Advisory Council, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and staff, following students, observing the school outside of the classroom, observing classes)

Bringing the vision of Times2 Academy into reality has resulted in a school that educates students in a safe and nurturing environment. The laudable mission of this school could not become a reality without a facility in which to deliver the desired educational program. The commitment that transformed an after-hours enrichment program into an actual school continues to be essential to the success of Times2 Academy. However, functions of educational leadership needed to make the school mission a reality are not fully developed. Many faculty members express a desire for clearer direction, stronger educational leadership, additional support for improving professional practice, and more voice in shared decision making. Additional functions of educational leadership that need further development are a strong system of two-way communication; establishing and documenting a strategic direction for the school; the evaluation and improvement of instruction; a clearly defined program of studies; building a professional learning community; clarifying the divisional structure of the school; the use of assessment data; and establishing school wide academic and behavioral expectations, among others. (meeting with the school improvement team, students, school, parents, and members of the Times2 Academy Advisory Council, talking with students, teachers, and staff, observing the school outside of the classroom, reviewing preliminary school improvement plan, observing classes)

The mission of Times² Academy is to expose students to challenging and rigorous real world applications of engineering, mathematics, science, and technology. The academy is visibly moving toward that goal. The school has established an ambitious program of studies that demands students successfully complete Algebra I before going on to Division II—generally after completing the eighth grade. Although there are high expectations for student learning, the lack of a formal curriculum with clearly delineated grade-level benchmarks for performance is impeding the educational development of children. The current documents on standards and proficiencies are insufficient tools to guide and shape the delivery of instruction on a school wide basis. This often results in disconnected and isolated experiences that vary from classroom to classroom, ultimately hindering the school's ability to sequentially develop students' understanding from grade-to-grade. *(meeting with the school improvement team, students and members of the Times² Academy Advisory Council, talking with teachers and staff, reviewing school standards and proficiencies grade-by-grade document)*

Parents display confidence in the vision of this school by entrusting the education of their children to a still developing dream. Parents express a desire for increased communication regarding the academic and social progress of their children, as well as their school activities. Parents are unclear about the organizational structure (Division I, Division II) of the school, standards, rubrics, and they have questions about what their children are suppose to know and be able to do in each class and grade. While the school desires parents to be involved, it has not fully capitalized on the vital role parents play in the education of children. Presently, some parents are not active partners in the education of their children. *(meeting with the parents, members of the Times² Academy Advisory Council, reviewing preliminary school improvement plan, talking with students and teachers)*

Times² Academy is growing and changing from year-to-year. The teachers and administrative team are risk-takers who are willing to experiment and change to meet the evolving needs of their students. Rather than adopt an existing program, this school is implementing a unique model of education to meet its mission and vision. This is a school willing to learn and to grow from trial and error. This boldness and willingness to act is admirable. Presently, there are general, rather than specific, expectations for students and teachers. Ongoing, systematic efforts to pause, reflect, and then document and institutionalize successful practices and procedures occur infrequently. This results in confusion among many teachers, parents, and students, who often do not understand how they can impact and contribute to the overall school mission. Similarly, there is inconsistency in the application of school policies, procedures, and behavioral norms. This lack of clarity and documentation results in ambiguous roles and prevents all stakeholders from working together in a coordinated manner to develop and improve the teaching and learning within Times² Academy. Similarly, this factor contributes to the attrition of both teachers and students. *(meeting with the school improvement team, students, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and staff, following students, reviewing preliminary school improvement plan)*

Times² Academy recently completed a preliminary self-study and school improvement plan, which draws conclusions about the current status of the school and establishes some goals for improvement. The school improvement team has not yet had the opportunity to become an effective, shared decision-making body that represents all stakeholders and that sets the strategic direction for this school. To date, this school has not conducted an in-depth school wide self-study process to: 1) determine the current level of student performance, 2) use that information to decide on the nature and type of instruction that is needed, and 3) determine the best way to organize the school to support the teachers and students in their work. Inattention to systematic self-study and planning contributes to the inconsistencies observed, as well as to a disproportionately reactive, rather than proactive, approach to decision making. *(talking with teachers, meeting with the school improvement team, school and district administrators, and members of the Times² Academy Advisory Council, reviewing preliminary school improvement plan)*

Times² Academy has a number of characteristics that are necessary to become an effective learning community that supports the growth and development of teachers and students: its small size, its available meeting spaces, its ability to extend the learning beyond the building, and its teachers' willingness to improve their professional practice. Examples of this are beginning to emerge in the team teaching; the grouping of math/science and English/social studies; and an introduction to looking at student work. Nevertheless, structurally the school is ineffectively supporting and nurturing the professional growth of teachers. Professional development is often left to individual initiative, rather than being part of a formal plan designed to support the chosen reforms of this school and the needs of teachers and administrators. Few regular and systematic opportunities exist for teachers to collaborate professionally, to look at student work, to model and reflect on effective practices, and to develop the practice of speaking openly and honestly about their work in a professional manner. Some teachers desire a mentor and additional guidance in developing their craft. Additionally, the teacher evaluation instrument is an ineffective tool for improving professional practice. These factors, coupled with the unclear roles, also impede the ability of the school to involve and retain teachers. (*talking with teachers and staff, meeting with the school improvement team, school and district administrators, reviewing preliminary school improvement plan*)

Commendations for Times² Academy

The passion, dedication, and commitment of the Times² Incorporated Board of Directors, Advisory Council, community partners, administrative team, teachers, staff, parents, and students involved in making the plan and facility for this charter school a reality

Creating a unique opportunity for urban youth to advance in the areas of engineering, mathematics, and science

Designing an accelerated program of study

The innovative school design model

The safe and nurturing environment

Recommendations for Times² Academy

Strengthen the concentration on educational leadership. Anchor the school's work in a definitive focus on improving student learning and the support of professional practice.

Clearly define and document the organizational structure of this school and its practices and procedures, as well as the roles and responsibilities of all parties who contribute to the educational program at this school. Share this information, as appropriate, with parents, teachers, and other stakeholders.

Establish a strong system of two-way communication between and among all stakeholders that fosters shared decision-making.

Increase the quality and frequency of communication with parents regarding the academic and social development of their children, standards and rubrics, and the organizational structure (Division I, Division II) of the school. Devise protocols to teach and inform parents how to become active partners in the education of their child and clearly define the school's mechanisms to obtain their input.

Develop standards-based curricula with indicators for performance at each grade level, and a scope and sequence. Include annotated work samples that are benchmarked to each grade level. Ensure this

curriculum forms the basis for instruction in each grade.

Establish a school improvement team that meets the legislative and contractual requirements and serves as the vehicle for promoting the involvement of teachers, staff, and the community in shared decision-making.

Conduct a thorough self-study of the learning needs of your children, the nature and quality of teaching, and the ways in which the school supports teaching and learning. Use the information from this self-study and this SALT report to devise an updated school improvement plan.

Develop a professional development plan that ensures all professional learning supports the chosen direction of the school. Include school wide job-embedded professional development that focuses on collaboratively looking at student work, teaching and assessing the learning represented by the standards, in-class modeling, team teaching, writer's workshop, reader's workshop, and differentiating instruction.

Nurture and sustain a professional learning community that supports an instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Establish a formal mentoring program.

Recommendations for Times² Academy Advisory Council

Provide the resources and technical support necessary to implement the recommendations of this report.

Ensure that the school takes the recommendations of this report on board and actively works to improve the educational program of Times² Academy.

7. Final Advice to the School

The receptivity of the members of this school to your SALT visit is evidence of your commitment to improving the quality of education provided to children. While your desire to look to an outside group for direction is noteworthy, do not overlook the collective wisdom that currently exists within this school regarding the refinements that need to be made to Times² Academy. You have accomplished much to date. Focusing on the design and construction of a new facility was a necessary step in the evolution of this school. With that daunting task behind you, the time and energy of all involved must now be spent on refining and incorporating into a system the desired educational program of this school.

Being a new teacher, whether new to the profession or just new to a school, can be a difficult task. Working in an ever-changing environment with unclear, evolving, and undocumented expectations exacerbates the challenges faced by the teachers educating children at Times² Academy. The next essential steps for this school are further developing a system of shared decision making, increasing the coordination of the educational program within and among the classes, and thoughtfully looking at the strengths and challenges of this school through the lenses of student learning, teaching, and the school.

As you consider the next steps in your journey, remember that it is people who make a school great, not buildings, programs, supplies, or equipment. It is the experiences with other faculty members, with the school leaders, and with the organizational structure of the school that result in satisfaction or frustration. Identify and mine the gifts, talents, and wisdom embedded in the human capital of this school. Provide opportunities for faculty members to learn from each other by looking at student work, visiting classes, modeling effective practices, and by immersing themselves in collaborative study and reflection. There are a number of very sound instructional practices that foster the development of higher order thinking skills that should be shared schoolwide. Fostering a reflective learning community that enables people to communicate openly with each other about their professional practices will yield its own rewards in student achievement and faculty involvement, as well as in the retention of both students and teachers.

Times² Academy, like many schools, has entering students who are not reading, writing, or performing mathematics at their expected grade level. As you continue your efforts to close these gaps in performance, design standards-based tasks and assessments that balance the acquisition of basic skills with the development of higher order thinking skills and increase opportunities for students to use knowledge meaningfully. For example, while focusing on phonics will help students become fast active decoders of words, it is only one part of a balanced literacy program. Successfully closing gaps in your students' reading proficiency will require direct instruction to refine the array of strategies students need to improve their reading fluency and comprehension. Reading engaging literature to build knowledge of vocabulary and sentence structure and engaging in classroom discourse focused on interpretation, summarization, and making connections are some of the practices that need more school wide emphasis. Similarly, while learning sentence structure and grammar are important, to be effective writers your students must also become more adept at self-editing for ideas, organization, voice, word choice, fluency, and conventions. They need rituals and routines in the classroom that enable them to self- and peer-edit, and continuously employ the various stages of the writing process.

Let your school improvement team serve as the vehicle for shared decision-making. Conduct a thorough self-study of the learning, teaching, and organizational structure of this school. Use this self-study information, along with the information contained in this SALT report, to devise a school improvement plan with a clear bottom-line focus on improving student performance that accurately reflects the major initiatives and reforms this school is undertaking. Include detailed tactics and action plans with

measurable goals.

Take time to recognize the opportunities that the efforts of everyone involved in building an institution for academic excellence are helping to create for children. Much is in place that will provide a strong foundation on which to build. Make sure that your ongoing changes are based on thoughtful reflection of what has worked well before and what needs to be approached in a different manner.

As you work with this SALT report, we hope you realize that our conclusions and recommendations are designed to assist you in your efforts to provide a high-quality education and make the dreams of your students a reality. For assisting this school in achieving its mission is unquestionably the intent of our team.

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Parent / Times² Advisory Council Member

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New Standards Reference Examination and RI Writing Assessment Results (2001)

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Times² Academy

November 30, 2001

To complete the Catalpa Ltd. report endorsement, I discussed the conduct of the visit with the Visit Chair while it was in process, and I have reviewed this report. 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.
December 23, 2001