



# Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School

## PROVIDENCE

### SALT Visit Team Report

December 1, 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](http://www.ridoe.net/schoolimprove/salt)**

1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS
2. PROFILE OF Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School
3. PORTRAIT OF Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT
4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

***Sources of Evidence***

***Conclusions***

***Commendations for Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School***

***Recommendations for Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School:***

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

***Sources of Evidence***

***Conclusions***

***Commendations for Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School for:***

***Recommendations for Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School:***

***Recommendations for the Providence School District:***

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

***Sources of Evidence***

***Conclusions***

***Recommendations for Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School:***

***Recommendations for the Providence School District:***

***Recommendations to the City of Providence:***

7. Final Advice to the School

*SAMUEL W. BRIDGHAM MIDDLE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM*

*THE SALT VISIT TEAM*

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

*Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report*

# 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 Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School from November 28, 2000 to December 1, 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 Samuel W. Bridgham Middle 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 Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 131 full and partial classroom observations which totaled over 111 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 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 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 teacher schedules*
- ◆ *review of the following documents:*
  - *Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School ProvidenceOnePlan (POP) 2000-2001*
  - *Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School, School Profile*
  - *Agreement between the Providence Teachers Union, AFT Local 958 and the Providence School Board*
  - *The GTECH Progress Report, 1998-1999 School Year/Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School*
  - *Providence School District, Districtwide Code of Behavior*
  - *Providence School District, Teacher Evaluation Instrument*
  - *district strategic plan*
  - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
  - *classroom textbooks*
  - **1998 Information Works!**
  - **1999 Information Works!**

- 2000 Information Works!
- *1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *Stanford 9 Content Clusters Data*

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 22 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 Samuel W. Bridgham 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 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 Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School

Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School, which serves students in grades 6 through 8, is located on Westminster Street in Providence, Rhode Island and is one of nine middle schools in the Providence School System. Providence is an urban city with a population of approximately 158,000. The present school first opened its doors to students in 1977, and an addition was completed in 1996. The student population of 650 students is ethnically diverse, consisting of 51% Hispanic, 21% African American, 18% Asian, 9% White, and 1% Native American students. 70 students totaling 11% receive special education services. Approximately 88% of its students qualify for free or reduced price lunch. 70 full and part time faculty members service the students in addition to 16 aides and support personnel, and 6 custodians. 25% of the teachers at Bridgham are new to the faculty this year. Administrative staff consists of one principal and two assistance principals. The Providence school system is governed by an appointed school board of nine members.

In September of 1999 the faculty of Bridgham Middle School elected the School Improvement Team which revised the School Improvement Plan, created SIT Guidelines, and wrote a ProvidenceOnePlan for school improvement. Special programs that have been implemented and have received recognition are the ITV(I'm Tired of Violence) program, the "I Can Make A Difference" program, the FCCLA Club Program, Greenhouse Club, a Bridgham basketball team, and a special art program. Bridgham also has a tutoring/mentoring program in partnership with Sovereign Bank New England.

The team used the test score information found in *Information Works!* and the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam School Summaries to determine the performance and equity gaps discussed in the student learning conclusions. The team found that an equity gap (a difference of more than 15 percentage points) exists in the Mathematics Skills subtest with Asian/Pacific Islander students scoring higher than other groups tested, and black students scoring at least 15% lower than other groups tested. An equity gap also exists in the English Language Arts Writing Effectiveness subtest between Special Education and General Education Students. 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report. *Information Works!* data for Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School is available at [www.rido.net](http://www.rido.net).

### 3. PORTRAIT OF Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Upon entering Bridgham Middle School visitors are impressed by the lovely garden that welcomes them. Like gardens, middle schools are growing environments where students enter as children and emerge as young adults. Bridgham Middle School is certainly such a place. The soil here might be rocky and lacking a few basics, but the care given each child is generous and loving. The sun shines brightly on Bridgham and the nurturing is sincere and heartfelt.

This diverse community houses over six hundred energetic students and a dedicated staff that have chosen this place to be their “home away from home.” The school is a safe haven for these children. Teachers completely dedicate themselves to meeting the physical, emotional, social, and educational needs of their students and each other. This miraculously takes place in spite of the enormous challenges they face. Their heroic efforts have resulted in a school atmosphere of trust and respect. Bridgham is more than a school; it is a family.

As in most gardens the soil must constantly be replenished with nutrients, and the techniques used to further stimulate growth must be adjusted. Master gardeners must guide and plan for the future of their garden. The growth of Bridgham Middle School is hampered by too few resources, the absence of school and district-wide curricula, and a lack of adequate support and professional development for its faculty. These difficult circumstances can be overcome. This school can attain success in all areas. This visiting team has the utmost respect and admiration for this dedicated staff and exuberant student body. We are confident that this school will move forward. What is seen here is not “typical,” but rather very special. The potential is here, because as the teachers say, at Bridgham, “it is all about the kids.”

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *Following 9 students for a day*
- ◆ *1999 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *many observations of the school(outside of the classrooms)*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with the School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, staff, teachers, and school administrators*

### Conclusions

The diverse population of students at Samuel Bridgham Middle School embraces its cultural differences. Many students connect well with their teachers and express a genuine admiration and fondness for them. Students at Bridgham Middle School trust the adults in this school and feel safe and secure within their classrooms. As a result a sense of community has emerged at Bridgham and students enjoy being a part of it. (*Classroom observations, following students, observations of the school, conversations and interviews with teachers, support staff, and students, and scheduled meetings with parents, students, school administrators, School Improvement Team*)

Students at Bridgham exhibit a wide range of involvement in their learning. While some participate in class discussions, interact with teachers and peers, ask challenging questions and fully engage themselves in their learning, others are passive, complacent, and even disengaged. In some classrooms inappropriate behavior interferes with student learning. These findings help to explain the low number of students who are able to achieve the standards being set for them. (*Following students, classroom observations, conversations with teachers, examining student work, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination Results, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*)

Some students at Bridgham Middle School are able to perform basic mathematical skills, but few demonstrate knowledge of mathematical concepts in their classwork, or use the language of mathematics effectively. Most students are unable to communicate an understanding of mathematical reasoning as they

solve problems. This may help to explain why only 29% of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students tested met or exceeded the standard on the Mathematical Skills Subtest of the 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam. Additionally, only 4% met or exceeded the standard in the Mathematical Concepts Subtest, and only 8% met or exceeded the standard in Problem Solving. (*Examining student work, following students, classroom observations, conversations with teachers, 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam Result, Stanford 9*)

Few students at Bridgham Middle School are able to read at grade level. Many students know how to read words, but too many cannot understand, analyze or interpret what they read. These students cannot engage in meaningful discussions about literature, or communicate the essence of the texts used in their classrooms. This inability negatively impacts student learning across the content areas. This finding is quite consistent with the results on the 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam that shows that 62% of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students tested did not meet the standard in Reading: Basic Understanding, and 88% did not meet the standard in Reading: Analysis and Interpretation. (*2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers, examining student work, Stanford Achievement Test 9, scheduled meeting with parents and district administrator*)

Students have limited opportunities to practice the art of writing at Bridgham Middle School. While some students are engaged in the writing process, too many students do not write to explain, persuade, analyze, respond to literature, or narrate. They are not consistently writing across content areas. In general, students do not get opportunities to self-correct, peer edit, or create polished products. This may contribute to the low scores on the Writing Effectiveness Subtest of the New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam with 61% of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students not meeting the standard on the Writing Effectiveness Subtest, and 67% not meeting the standard on the Writing Conventions subtest. On the 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment 94% of seventh grade students tested did not achieve the standard. (*2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, following students, examining student work, classroom observations, conversations with teachers and students.*)

## Commendations for Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School

The manner in which the students embrace this school's cultural diversity

The friendly nature of the student body

## Recommendations for Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School:

Continue to foster an accepting environment.

Make efforts to improve student learning in the areas of reading, 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 create a curriculum, and improve instruction and assessment.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

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

### Conclusions

The teachers at Samuel Bridgham Middle School love their students. Serving as role models and caretakers, they provide emotional, physical, and moral support. In spite of the tremendous obstacles and challenges they face on a daily basis they dedicate themselves to the well-being of each and every child. Some teachers are heroes. The personal sacrifices they have made, both financial and emotional, have earned them the respect and trust of their students. (*Following students, classroom observations, observations of the school, conversations with teachers and students, scheduled meetings with teachers, administrators and School Improvement Team*)

Teachers genuinely respect and care for one another. They have established a network of communication and collegiality that supports them personally and professionally. Some teachers voluntarily step forward to mentor new teachers and offer them their guidance and expertise. This creates an environment that enables all teachers to meet the considerable challenges that confront them each and every day. (*conversations and interviews with teachers, scheduled meeting with the School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, observations of the school*)

Teachers at Bridgham Middle School strive to provide their students with the best possible learning environment. At times exemplary teaching occurs at this school. Some teachers create integrated units, utilize cooperative learning techniques, develop rubrics for and with their students, and foster active learning. However, many teachers do not employ the strategies and techniques that would lead to improved student learning. They focus on teacher-centered rather than student-centered instruction. They make few accommodations within their classrooms to meet the needs of heterogeneously grouped students who perform at many different levels. Students who excel often finish lessons quickly and spend valuable classroom time waiting for their peers to catch up. As a result some students are not fully challenged while others struggle to achieve proficiency in basic skills. (*Classroom observations, following students,*

*conversations and interviews with teachers, scheduled meetings with parents, students, and district administration, examination of student work)*

While performance and content standards are predominantly displayed in classrooms, and teachers speak of teaching “to the standards,” standards-based instruction and performance based assessments are not evident in many classrooms. The excessive use of commercially produced worksheets and assessments contradicts good standards-based instructional practices. This limits differentiation of instruction, stifles creativity, inhibits higher order thinking skills, and results in poor student performance. *(Following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, examination of student work)*

Many teachers are not using prescriptive feedback as a teaching tool. While they are assessing student work, their feedback is not detailed enough to allow students to make the necessary improvements to their work. Comments and recommendations are often missing. In some cases the grades students receive seem inconsistent with the quality of their work. This inconsistency may lead to the perception that below standard work is acceptable. *(Examination of student work, following students, classroom observations.)*

Commendations for Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School for:

Teachers’ collegial and collaborative relationships

The caring, supportive faculty which is fully committed to their students’ well-being

Examples of excellent teaching in spite of substantial challenges

Recommendations for Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School:

Engage in meaningful professional development in the areas of:

- differentiation of instruction
- standards-based instruction and performance based assessment
- cooperative learning
- curriculum development in reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies

Continue to communicate and share professional expertise with all members of the faculty, team and department members to improve instructional strategies and techniques.

Continue to foster an environment of mutual cooperation and respect.

Recommendations for the Providence School District:

Provide leadership and resources for needed professional development

Acknowledge your excellent teachers

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff and school administrators*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, parents, and students*
- ◆ *Following students*
- ◆ *School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *review of teacher schedules*
- ◆ *Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School School Profile*
- ◆ *Agreement between the Providence Teachers Union, AFT Local 958 and the Providence School Board*
- ◆ *Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School ProvidenceOnePlan (POP) 2000-2001*
- ◆ *review of Providence School District teacher evaluation instrument*
- ◆ *Providence School District, Districtwide Code of Behavior*

### Conclusions

The building administrators at Bridgham Middle School view themselves as “managers” who are in the process of becoming “educational leaders.” Professional support and visible leadership in the areas of curriculum development, standards based instruction, performance based assessment, flexible scheduling, special education services and regulations, and exemplary middle level practices, are currently unavailable to teachers. Teachers are not given opportunities to collectively impact the direction of this school. The absence of regularly scheduled faculty, department and team meetings prevents meaningful professional communication. The lack of common planning time prevents teaching teams from performing at an optimal level. (*Scheduled meetings with building and district administrators, conversations and interviews with teachers*)

The professional staff at Bridgham is not always properly utilized. Classes are staffed by teachers who do not have the appropriate certification, while those who do are assigned to administrative duties. While the

*Agreement between the Providence Teachers Union, AFT Local 958 and the Providence School Board is somewhat restrictive in its language, opportunities to solve this problem existed but were lost. Instead of using contractual indicators to avoid addressing issues, more collaborative efforts need to be made in the best interest of all students. (Conversations and interviews with teachers and parents, scheduled meetings with school and district administrators, review of teacher schedules, Agreement between the Providence Teachers Union, AFT Local 958 and the Providence School Board)*

Discipline at Bridgham Middle School is inconsistently applied by both teachers and administrators. While a *Districtwide Code of Behavior* exists, it is not always followed. Teachers exercise their own judgement in disciplinary matters, but it is not always valued by building administrators. This results in ambiguous expectations for student behavior and undermines the morale of the classroom teacher. Additionally, while all students feel safe and secure within the walls of their classrooms, the same level of comfort does not exist in the halls and especially on school grounds outside of the building. *(Following students, classroom observations, observations of the school, scheduled meeting with school administrators, parents and students, conversations with teachers and students, Providence School District Districtwide Code of Behavior)*

The allocation and distribution of budgeted funds at Bridgham Middle School has resulted in classrooms without textbooks, teachers without adequate instructional materials, and the absence of sufficient professional development opportunities. While grant monies have been sought and awarded, and teachers have personally invested in their own classrooms, all students have not been provided with the necessary tools for learning. *(Classroom observations, following students, conversations and interviews with teachers, Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School School Profile, scheduled meeting with School Improvement Team)*

Bridgham Middle School and the Providence School District do not interpret available data to effectively improve instructional practices. This is indicated by the absence of an effective reading program, development of curricula, and insufficient professional development in the areas of standards-based teaching, authentic assessments, differentiation of instruction, and teaching strategies for mathematics, reading, and writing. *(Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School ProvidenceOnePlan (POP) 2000-2001, The GTECH Progress Report, 1998-1999 School Year/Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, scheduled meetings with district administrator)*

The current teacher evaluation process is not adequate to examine and improve the quality of instruction or teacher accountability at Bridgham Middle School. Some teachers have chosen the opportunity to create professional portfolios and reflect on their teaching practices; many other teachers have indicated a desire for professional feedback. However, in some cases years pass without formal or informal observation of experienced teachers. This results in inconsistent teaching practices. *(Conversations and interviews with teachers, scheduled meetings with school and district administrators, review of Providence School District teacher evaluation instrument)*

## Recommendations for Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School:

Coordinate curriculum by subject and grade level

Provide opportunities for teachers to have common planning time

Provide ongoing professional development for teachers

Communicate clear expectations for student behavior and consistently apply consequences

Provide meaningful feedback to all teachers

Allow for more direct teacher involvement in the budget process

Utilize staff appropriately and effectively

Recommendations for the Providence School District:

Engage in curriculum revision and development.

Support the school in the implementation of common planning time

Support the school's efforts to provide ongoing professional development for teachers and administrators.

Recommendations to the City of Providence:

Secure the necessary funds to provide the high quality of education that your students deserve.

## 7. Final Advice to the School

Administrators and teachers at Samuel W. Bridgham School must join forces to evaluate the current needs of its students and their families and work to improve communication among all stakeholders. This school and the Providence School District must find a way to address the many recommendations made in this report to ensure that each and every student is fully served.

This team believes that many of the obstacles that hinder this school's success can be remedied by addressing curriculum issues and strengthening instructional leadership. Students at Bridgham would also benefit from after school programs that provide academic, artistic, physical and social enrichment.

Many of the components for Bridgham Middle School to be successful are already in place and some are easily corrected. Use this report to celebrate your considerable strengths. Continue to care for each other and your students in the loving and supportive environment you have created. Do not be discouraged by the obstacles that will inevitably be placed in your path. This visiting team knows you have the courage, strength, wisdom, and determination to move Samuel W. Bridgham School forward.

## SAMUEL W. BRIDGHAM MIDDLE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Sharyn Fuller, Co-Chairperson

Karleen Polak, Co-Chairperson

Robert E. Lee, Principal

AnnMarie D'Ambrosio, Science

Marie Campopiano, Secretary

Christopher Kite, Union Delegate

Jane Shagrue, Math

Michelle Pistocco, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Math/Reading/Science

Ellen Shaw, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies/Reading/Science

William Wiedman, Guidance

Maria Morales, Parent

Ligia Rojas, Parent

Bethany Smith, Sovereign Bank/partnership

Lt. Paul Kennedy/Police Department/partnership

## THE SALT VISIT TEAM

JoAnn LaBranche, Social Studies Teacher  
Lincoln Senior High School, Lincoln, Rhode Island  
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)  
Chair of the Team

Sally K. Caruso  
8<sup>th</sup> Grade Language Arts Teacher  
Kickemuit Middle School  
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Mary Agnes Fennessey  
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Sandra Gasbarro  
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Woonsocket Middle School  
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Thomas Hewes  
8<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies Teacher  
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7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Title I Reading Specialist  
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James Tidswell  
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Richard K. Wheeler, Jr.  
Principal, Barrington Middle School  
Barrington, RI

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

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## Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

### **Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School**

**December 1, 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.

1/10/01