



Hope Elementary School

Scituate

SALT Visit Team Report

December 1, 2000



School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)

The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

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This report is available at www.ridoe.net/schoolimprove/salt

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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 Hope Elementary School from November 28, 2000-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 Hope Elementary 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 Hope Elementary School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 68 full classroom observations and 34 partial classroom observations which totaled over 67 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. All classrooms were visited at least once. Most teachers were observed more than once.*
- ◆ *many observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- ◆ *following six 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 the following documents:*
 - *Hope Elementary School Improvement Plan*
 - *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*
 - *1998, 1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*

The full Team has built the conclusions, commendations and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussions. The visit team met for a total of 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 Hope Elementary 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 Scituate, 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 Hope Elementary School

Hope Elementary School is one of the three elementary schools for the town of Scituate. The present school first opened its doors to students in 1929. The school received major additions in 1972 and again in 1990. A five member elected school committee governs the Scituate School Department. The district administration includes a superintendent, assistant superintendent, and a regional director of special education.

Hope Elementary has a professional staff of one administrator, 24 full and part-time faculty, 10 aides and support personnel, and four custodians. Of the 292 students attending Hope Elementary School, 99 percent are white, less than one percent is black or Asian/Pacific Islander. Forty-seven students, 18 percent of the population receive special education services. Thirteen percent are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Two multi-age classrooms, one primary and one intermediate, service the resource and self-contained special education students. There are two full time special education teachers and a .6 speech therapist. There is a full-time Reading Recovery teacher, a part-time literacy specialist and remedial mathematics teacher. The school has been involved in the Working Wonders grant in the area of mathematics for three years. Two classrooms are Model Class Initiative (MCI) sites. A twenty-five station computer lab is housed in the library.

Hope Elementary School has shown growth in all subtests of the New Standards Reference Examinations over the past three years with the exception of Writing Conventions which has shown a decrease in scores. There has been a decrease in scores on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment with 30 percent of the third grade students meeting the standard on the 1999 scores and 12 percent on the 2000 scores.

Large equity gaps exist between the special education and general education students with general education students outperforming special education students in all areas of the 1999 New Standards Reference Examinations. On the Problem Solving subtest of the 1999 New Standards Reference Examination, no Special Education students met the standard.

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. 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report. *Information Works!* data for Hope Elementary School is available at www.ridoe.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF Hope Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Visitors are struck by the warm, nurturing environment of Hope Elementary School. As you move down the carpeted hall a quiet hum comes from the classrooms. Students move around these rooms actively involved in their daily tasks and learning activities. The students' day begins with the Radio Hope broadcast led by students. This gives the important news of the day, lunch choices, weather, and any special events

The building itself has a charming character, blending the older facility with new additions in a pleasant functional way. All areas of the building are maintained and kept impeccably clean. Student work is proudly displayed and reproductions of famous works of art adorn the hallways. An impressive computer lab is housed in the school library. Children have scheduled computer classes and availability to the computers during the day and recess times. They have daily access to computers in their classrooms.

Faculty members are collegial and dedicated professionals who take advantage of many professional development opportunities. This includes their participation in the Working Wonders Mathematics grant. They work as a team, happy to be in this school and with their students. They feel supported by the building and district administration.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *1998,1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *1998,1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *conversations with students*
- ◆ *school observations*
- ◆ *scheduled meeting with students*
- ◆ *scheduled meeting with parents*
- ◆ *conversations with teachers*
- ◆ *meeting with the Hope Elementary Action Team (HEAT)*
- ◆ *SALT Survey 2000*

Conclusions

Students at Hope Elementary School are excited about being part of this school community. They welcome visitors with smiles and kind words showing pride in their learning environment. The students feel safe and comfortable within their environment. They interact happily with their friends, showing mutual respect and acceptance of one another. They cooperate in the learning process and willingly share their knowledge. (*classroom and school observations, following students, conversations with students, Hope Elementary Action Team, scheduled meeting with students, scheduled meeting with parents*)

Fragmented use of the process writing strategies could account for the decrease in the scores on the third grade 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment. In some classrooms children engage in process writing:

brainstorming for topic and content, draft writing, revising, editing, conferencing, rewriting, and producing a final copy. Not all students participate in all of these important process writing steps. Although all children write rough drafts, the process of moving from a draft to a final copy varies. Some students revise and edit their own writing, some peer edit, and some students only copy teacher edited writing. *(2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, examination of student work, classroom observations, conversation with teachers and students, interviews with students)*

Children have multiple opportunities to actively engage in mathematical thinking and the exploration of mathematical ideas. Some students are challenged to use higher order thinking skills to solve problems. All students use paper and pencil for computation and problem solving, however, many do not know how to use manipulatives as a tool for representing and building on their mathematical knowledge. This may account in part for the lack of growth in the area of math concepts as measured by the 1998, 1999, and 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination *(classroom observations, student interviews, 1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination results, SALT Survey 2000, examination of student work)*

Students are literate. They participate in reading activities at their instructional level and use a variety of reading materials. They employ a variety of reading strategies. Students have the opportunity to discuss literature through group discussions, and written responses. A few students are actively engaged in and challenged by the effective use of literature circles. Very few students engage in self-selected independent reading activities. *(classroom observations, student interviews, conversations with students, examination of student work, New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination results)*

Commendations for Hope Elementary School

Positive interaction and respect for each other.

Recommendations for Hope Elementary School:

Involve all students in process writing.

Encourage students to use manipulatives to represent and build on mathematical understandings.

Provide daily opportunities for independent self-selected reading.

Recommendations for Scituate School District:

Provide adequate funding for math materials and support classroom libraries.

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*
- ◆ 2000 Information Works!
- ◆ *SALT Survey 2000*
- ◆ *Examination of student work*

Conclusions

The teachers at Hope Elementary School have a genuine concern for the learning of their students. They are open to new ideas and participate in a variety of professional development opportunities. The staff is supportive of one another in this collegial environment. (*observation of the school, classroom observation, school improvement team, conversations with teachers, interview with district and school administration*)

Teachers work vigorously in implementing a variety of strategies and approaches to the teaching of reading. Primary teachers are learning and utilizing strategies from Reading Recovery and Guided Reading to meet the learning needs of the individual students. Some intermediate teachers use literature circles to provide an excellent avenue for discussion, interpretation and analysis of literature. Many teachers are not providing enough opportunities or time for independent self-selected reading. (*classroom observations, student interviews, conversations with teachers, school improvement team, interviews with building and district administration, SALT Survey 2000*)

Although teachers provide opportunities for students to write on a daily basis for a variety of purposes, many do not provide their students the instruction or the opportunity to self-edit, peer-edit, and revise their own pieces of writing. (*examination of student work, classroom observations, conversations with teachers, conversations and interviews with students, SALT Survey 2000*)

Teachers devote a lot of time to mathematics instruction. Their major focus is on problem solving. Some teachers are challenging their students to expand their mathematical understanding. Manipulatives are being used in a limited way to develop conceptual knowledge. (*classroom observations, conversations and*

interviews with students, examination of student work, conversations with teachers)

Commendations for Hope Elementary School for:

100% attendance of K-2 teachers in primary literacy course.

Teachers spirit of professionalism and willingness to participate in new initiatives.

Genuine concern for their students.

Recommendations for Hope Elementary School:

Provide opportunities for teachers to share their expertise within and across grade levels in language arts and mathematics.

Provide instruction and opportunities for all students to develop writing skills in self editing and revising.

Provide instruction to help students understand how manipulatives may be used as a tool to enhance mathematical understanding.

Balance the mathematics instruction to develop deeper understanding of math concepts.

Offer time in the daily schedule for independent reading.

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, students, and parents*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *2000 Information Works! data*
- ◆ *Home and School Connection*
- ◆ *Hope School Highlights*
- ◆ *Student Parent Handbook*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*

Conclusions

The safe and orderly environment is seen and felt throughout the building and grounds. The use of walkie-talkie devices to enhance communication and ensure prompt response when necessary is evidence of the attention to safety. The interaction between students and adults is caring and respectful. An appreciation of the diverse learning styles of members of the school community is accepted. (*interview with school administration, conversations with staff, conversations and interview with students and parents, observation of the school, following students*)

The lack of common planning time for teachers inhibits their professional growth by limiting the time they have to share their expertise and to plan appropriately for all students at and across grade levels. (*interview with building and district administration, school improvement team, conversations with teachers, review of schedule*)

The inclusion of special education students in the regular education classrooms without adequate and consistent support hampers the learning opportunities for special needs students. Special education teachers are unable to work in the regular education classrooms due to scheduling, staffing, and student placement. This is one of the contributing factors for the large equity gap in student performance on the New Standard Reference Examinations. (*classroom observations, conversations with teachers, conversations with student,*

student work, 2000 Information Works! 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results)

Many teachers are at an emerging stage in understanding of standards to guide their instruction and the use of rubrics to evaluate student work. Inconsistent use and application of rubrics hinders the teachers use of them as an evaluative tool. For example, the assignment of percentile grades, the use of numbers not included in the rubric, the lack of teacher feedback that enable student revisions, all interfere with the effective use of rubrics and provide insufficient feedback to students and parents. *(classroom observations, conversations with teachers, examination of student work, following students, conversations and interviews with students)*

The Parent Teacher Association supports the school in a variety of ways. The communication between home and school is accomplished through conferencing and newsletters. Parents express a desire to be more actively involved in the learning activities during the course of the school day. *(Home and School Connection Newsletter, Hope School Highlights, Student Parent Handbook, scheduled interviews with parents)*

The Hope Elementary School Improvement Planning Status Report is vague, lacks detail, and clarity. It does not include action steps to implement goals or established targets for improving student performance. *(scheduled meeting with school improvement team, school improvement plan)*

The school is attempting to make many important changes within a short period of time. The staff has been cooperative and willing to take on all of these initiatives at one time. *(scheduled meeting with school improvement team, conversations with teachers, school observation)*

Commendations for Hope Elementary School for:

Nurturing and safe school environment.

Recommendations for Hope Elementary School:

Schedule common planning time for teachers

Provide in-service opportunities for teacher effective use of rubrics

Design a schedule that allows special education teachers the opportunity to work with students in the regular education classrooms

Design a schedule that will allow for students with special needs to have the same teacher assistant each day.

Review the school improvement plan to include action steps and targets.

Recommendations for Scituate District:

Review the number and placement of special education students in the multi-age classrooms to ensure that meaningful education is provided and state guidelines are followed.

7. Final Advice to the School

Members of the Hope Elementary School community are involved in actions to improve student achievement. Teachers have enthusiastically embraced initiatives in writing, mathematics and language arts. Participate in focused professional development activities that will develop greater depth, allowing instructional practice to become deeply rooted.

While students participate in daily writing activities, give them the opportunity to participate in all the steps of process writing so they can develop a stronger understanding of how to edit and revise their work. The literacy initiatives at the primary level are providing consistency of instruction between and among grade levels. Furthermore, there are pockets of excellence among upper grade teachers. Schedule time for the primary and upper grade teachers to share initiatives already in place and develop consistency within their programs. Provide time in your daily schedule for all students to engage in self-selected reading in order to practice the reading skills and strategies they have learned in self-selected genres of high student interest.

Members of the staff have expertise in a variety of curricula areas and instructional practices. Build on the strengths that exist among the professional staff when planning and implementing professional development.

Revise the school schedule to provide common planning time for all teachers—regular and special education—to meet, plan, and share not only between grade levels but also across grade levels. Include in this schedule time for special education teachers to plan with regular education teachers and to be actively involved in classroom instruction.

Research has shown that a strong home-school connection can yield positive results in student performance. The parents at Hope Elementary School are a valuable resource. Work to expand current parental involvement in co-curricula and fundraising activities to include academic support and participation in classrooms.

Examine the 2001 Information Works! data when it becomes available for equity gaps between special education and general education. Review the effectiveness of the schedule of the current multi-age program to support inclusion.

Our visit team conclusions, commendations, and recommendations are designed to help you continue on your journey to raise the level of student learning.

Hope Elementary School Improvement Team

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Grade 5 Teacher

Robert Brockway
Principal
Chairperson

Deborah Gamelin
Grade 1 Teacher

Kimberly McKiernan
Parent

Wilma Napolitano
Grade 4 Teacher
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Mary Jean Roche
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The SALT Visit Team

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Darlene Walsh
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Glen Hills Elementary School
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New Standards Reference Examination and RI Writing Assessment Results (2000)

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Hope Elementary 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, 1st edition*), I conclude that:

1. This report was produced by a legitimate SALT Visit. It was led by a trained SALT Visit Chair and conducted in a manner that is consistent with SALT Visit procedures.
2. Some of the conclusions do not contain the professional judgment required by the SALT protocol. This probably curtails their usefulness to Hope Elementary School.

Nevertheless, since this report meets all other criteria for a SALT report, Catalpa Ltd. endorses this report as a legitimate SALT Visit Report.



Thomas A. Wilson, EdD
Catalpa Ltd.
1/1/01