



Dr. M. H. Sullivan School

Newport

SALT Visit Team Report

January 23, 2001



School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)

The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education

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

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1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) is Rhode Island's comprehensive school accountability system. SALT is based on using information to improve learning and teaching so that the learning of all students in the state dramatically improves. The SALT visit and other major SALT components are designed to aid schools in their ongoing development and implementation of effective School Improvement Plans.

The purpose of the visit to Dr. M. H. Sullivan School from January 23 through January 26, 2001 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 Dr. M. H. Sullivan 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 Dr. M. H. Sullivan School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 76 full classroom observations and 30 partial classroom observations which totaled over 91 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 seven 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! 2000 data (1999 scores)*
- ◆ *SALT Survey Data*
- ◆ *review of district and school policies*
- *review of professional development activities*
- Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) application and Year 1 Evaluation
- Newport Public Schools Teacher Evaluation Program

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 34 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 Dr. M. H. Sullivan 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 Newport, 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 Dr. M. H. Sullivan School

Dr. M. H. Sullivan School is one of six elementary schools for the city of Newport, Rhode Island. It is part of the Newport Public School District. An eight-member elected school committee governs the school district. The present school first opened its doors to students in 1955. In 1967 and 1969 additions were added to accommodate the growing student population.

Dr. M. H. Sullivan School serves students in pre-kindergarten through grade five. It serves most of the north end of Newport, including five neighborhood public housing projects. There is a professional staff of one administrator, 34 full and part time faculty, 15 aides and support personnel and three custodians.

Of the 318 students attending Sullivan School, 41 percent are black, 33 percent are white, 23 percent are Hispanic, less than one percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and less than one percent are Native American. Ninety-six percent are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch. One hundred twenty one students, 38 percent of the population, receive special education services.

As a Title I School, all students are eligible for literacy services. This program offers math support for grades 3-5. Reading Recovery service is available in grade one. A Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) Program began during the 1999-2000 school year using Everyday Mathematics as the vehicle for total school reform. A COZ (Child Opportunity Zone) Family Center provides a variety of services to parents in this community. An Early Childhood program including Head Start, regular and special education pre school programs, as well as one ½ day and two full day Kindergarten classes are housed at Sullivan School. A Working Wonders IV supported Professional Development School relationship with Salve Regina University is in its 12th year.

The team used the test score information found in 2000 *Information Works!* (1999 scores) and the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam School Summaries to determine the performance and equity gaps discussed in the student learning conclusions. With the exception of the Writing Effectiveness subtest, no subtests on the New Standards Reference Examination for English/Language Arts or Mathematics showed any growth when comparing the 1999 scores to the 2000 scores. Scores were static and writing conventions decreased from 21 percent in 1999 to zero percent in 2000. Rhode Island Writing scores and mathematics problem solving remained static at three percent over the past three years. Equity gaps, a difference of 15 percent or more, are evident in math skills and reading analysis and interpretation between black and white students with white students outperforming black. Gaps are present between general education and special education students in Reading Analysis and Interpretation, with general education students outperforming special education students. It was not possible to determine gaps in problem solving and writing effectiveness, as scores were too low for equity analysis. 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report. *Information Works!* data for Dr. M. H. Sullivan School is available at www.ridoe.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF Dr. M. H. Sullivan School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Dr. M. H. Sullivan School is a community-centered school that strives to meet the varied needs of its students. The diversity of the staff mirrors the student population. Cultural differences are valued and celebrated. Sullivan School reaches out to children and adults by providing an array of services for all through the Family Center and other site based agency programs.

The schools energy has been focused on meeting the social and emotional needs of the students. While students are respected as learners, high expectations for student achievement are lacking. There is a general absence of focus that is reflected in student performance, professional development, implementation of new programs, and building communication.

The building is old and in need of repair and improvement along with general housekeeping. Teachers have maximized their spaces by providing bright and cheerful classrooms.

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*
- ◆ *SALT Survey Data*
- ◆ *observations of classroom*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with students, parents, teachers, support staff*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration(Year 1 assessment)*

Students at Sullivan School have internalized appropriate school behaviors and social skills. These behaviors promote receptiveness for greater learning challenges. Students are respectful and cooperative with adults and peers. They demonstrate self-control; feel safe, secure, and supported by the staff. They are happy to be members of the Sullivan School community. (*interviews and conversations with students, staff, parents, SALT Survey data, observation of classrooms, observation of students, following students*)

Most students are reading from a new literature based anthology however; its use is not meeting the needs of all learners. Many students exhibit poor oral fluency and accuracy. Although some primary students are reading leveled texts, they are not always reading at their appropriate level. Frequent use of round robin reading limits the use of effective reading strategies. Student responses to literature are literal and are often confined to fill in the blank or short answer comprehension responses. These practices contribute to the higher scores on Basic Understanding (65 percent) and much lower scores on Analysis and Interpretation (41 percent). In 1999, students at Sullivan School scored lower than similar students statewide in the Reading Analysis and Interpretation subtest. (*examination of student work, following students, New Standards Reference Examination, 2000 Information Works! data, classroom observations, conversations with students and teaches*)

Most students across all grade levels write below standard. Most are familiar with the writing process, yet the opportunities for students to write are inconsistent across grade levels and content areas. Students

predominately write on teacher-selected topics. These limited choices contribute to students' lack of motivation to write. Many students understand the use of a rubric as a scoring tool, but only some are using it as a tool to improve their writing. The low levels of performance are demonstrated in the Rhode Island Writing Assessment where only 3 percent met the standard for the past four years. On the 2000 New Standards Writing Effectiveness subtest only 28 percent of the students met the standard and 0 percent met the standard on Writing Conventions subtest. On 1999 subtest, Writing Effectiveness, Sullivan School students scored lower than similar students statewide. (*examination of student work, New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination results, Rhode Island Writing Assessment scores, classroom observations, conversations with students and teachers, following students, Information Works! 2000*)

Many students successfully engage in low-level mathematics activities requiring basic factual understanding. These activities provide little challenge. While students are learning basic problem solving strategies, they are not yet applying these skills at an independent level when solving problems. Written and oral responses lack depth of understanding. These factors contribute to the flat scores on the New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination scores in problem solving (3%) over the past three years. (*New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam, classroom observation, following students, examination of student work, Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (Sullivan authentic measures) Year 1 assessment*)

Commendation for Dr. M. H. Sullivan School

The students' appropriate school behavior and social skills

Recommendations for Dr. M. H. Sullivan School

Increase instructional and silent reading using appropriate level text

Provide reading incentive programs to assist in meeting the standard of reading at least 25 books each year

Engage students in the use of working portfolios, giving them the opportunities to review their work and assess their growth

Provide opportunities for students to engage in a variety of daily writing activities

Have students use, represent, and explain mathematics in a variety of ways

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff, district 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*
- ◆ *Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Year 1 evaluation document*
- ◆ *New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam*
- ◆ *district literacy assessments*

Conclusions

The staff at Sullivan School cares deeply about their students. They provide a nurturing environment that celebrates their diverse population. The teachers, staff, and school principal successfully direct their energies toward the social/emotional development of the students. While this has been effective, an equal emphasis and a unified effort have not been placed on high academic standards. This results in low academic expectations and lack of academic challenge for all learners. (*Examination of student work, interviews with students, teachers, staff, school and district administration, following students, scheduled meeting with the Sullivan School Improvement Team, classroom observations*)

Although some teachers are familiar with standards based learning and teaching, others have a limited understanding of how standards can be used to improve learning. As a result, expectations for student learning are consistently low. Student work is not used to plan instruction or provide for the variety of levels within the classroom. This results in the poor performance on the New Standards Reference Examinations and the Rhode Island State Writing Assessment. (*classroom observations, interviews with teachers, New Standards Reference Examinations results, Rhode Island Writing Assessment, Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Year 1 evaluation*)

While some components of a balanced literacy program are present, they are not always used effectively.

Response to literature is limited to simple comprehension questions. Students are often not placed at their instructional reading level, resulting in poor fluency and comprehension as evidenced by low performance on the New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination. Only 41 percent of the students met the standard on the Analysis and Interpretation subtest. In 1999 testing, scores were below similar students statewide in this area. (*2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, observation of classrooms, following students, examination of student work, district literacy assessments, 2000 Information Works!*)

The approach to teaching mathematics at Sullivan School is not consistent between or among grade levels. Although the school has been awarded a CSRD grant to implement performance based strategies in mathematics; teachers rely on a variety of methods and materials. only some of which are standards based. Teachers are using district quarterly performance tasks to evaluate their students' progress but not always to inform instruction. Teachers give students few opportunities to make independent decisions regarding the application of problem solving strategies. This accounts for the poor performance on all subtest of New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam. (*New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination, Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration evaluation document, observations in classrooms, evaluation of student work, following students, meeting with district and school administration, district assessments, interviews and conversations with students*)

Most teachers engage students in the writing process. Rubrics are used to assess students' work and in some cases to help students improve their writing. Teachers frequently conference with students to edit and revise their writing. Some peer editing is also practiced. Teachers are not requiring students to bring a sufficient amount of work to standards level. (*conversations with teachers, classroom observation, examination of student work, conversations with students*)

Commendations for Dr. M. H. Sullivan School

Nurturing and caring environment provided for students

Recommendations for Dr. M. H. Sullivan School

Participate in standards based instruction training

Support the Harcourt-Brace *Signatures* program with a balanced literacy approach through a professional development program

Assure that all teachers implement the district mathematics program when selected

Identify anchor papers that align with the writing papers standards

Use working portfolios for planning instruction

Recommendations for Newport School District

Adopt and implement a comprehensive standards based curriculum

Purchase *New Standards Performance Standards* books for all teachers

Provide training in standards instruction for all teachers

Assure that all teachers are provided with training and materials when a district mathematics program is selected

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, parents, teachers, staff and school administrators*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *Sullivan School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *Sullivan School Mission Statement*
- ◆ *Newport Public Teacher Evaluation Program*
- ◆ *New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Year 1 evaluation document*

Conclusions

The staff is allowing its overwhelming desire to nurture students and address their social and emotional needs to interfere with high expectations for student performance. A cycle of low expectations, inconsistent quality of teaching practices, lack of focused direction, and absence of a challenging academic environment results in poor performance, and this cycle perpetuates itself. As a result, school reform is compromised. (*New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, classroom observations, interviews with staff, students, parents, administration, Sullivan School Improvement Team, Sullivan School mission statement*)

In response to very low math scores, Sullivan School applied for and was awarded a Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration grant to implement strategies from *Everyday Mathematics*, a standards based curriculum. These strategies are being phased in over a three-year period that will conclude with the fourth and fifth grades in 2001-2. There is confusion about what this grant requires of teachers. The use and acceptance of *Everyday Mathematics* is fragmented, resulting in inequities between and among grade levels and creating learning gaps. (*meeting with school and district administration, Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration document, conversations with teachers, New Standards Reference Exam results*)

While instructional support services are available to Sullivan School students, the current structure of these services does not maximize student learning. As a result there are many missed learning opportunities. Special education services are not being provided in the most effective and appropriate manner to support inclusion efforts, successful student transition, and academic growth. School-wide Title I literacy services are concentrated in grade k-3, leaving grades 4 and 5 inadequately serviced. ESL support services are limited to a pull out model and frequently do not meet the needs of students. Additionally, kindergarten students are not provided ESL services. Lack of ESL services at this level impacts all areas of learning. A part time school nurse/teacher is assigned to Sullivan School. This is inadequate to meet the health demands of this school. *(following students, conversations and interviews with teachers and staff, Sullivan School Improvement Team, classroom observation, interview with school administration)*

Sullivan School has an array of social services that support students, families and the community. Activities extend from early morning to late night, weekdays, weekends, and vacations. All community members are welcome. The COZ Family Center along with other agency services develops an active partnership between the school and the community. *(Sullivan School Improvement Plan, interviews with parents and staff, observations of the school)*

The Sullivan School Improvement Plan lists tactics and action plans without defining concrete measurable steps to attain stated objectives. This plan does not provide a clear course of action for implementation and evaluation. *(Sullivan School Improvement Plan, Meeting with Sullivan School Improvement Team, meeting with school administration)*

Efforts have been made to restructure the Newport Teacher Evaluation Program. The evaluation criteria, while aligned with the R.I. Beginning Teaching Standards, do not include objective criteria for meeting the standards. *(Newport Public Schools Teacher Evaluation Program, interview with building administration)*

Commendations for Dr. M. H. Sullivan School

The social service programs

Recommendations for Dr. M. H. Sullivan School

Clarify expectations of CSRD grant

Revise the Sullivan School Improvement Plan to include targets, responsible parties, measurable outcomes, resources, and timelines

Expect all students to reach high standards

Maximize the use of support personnel

Recommendations for Newport School District

Extend ESL services to meet the growing need at Sullivan School

Extend the services of the part time nurse/teacher to full time

7. Final Advice to the School

Sullivan School clearly demonstrates a profound sense of dedication to the students and families of this community. This dedication is apparent in the care taken to support all students. The talent and resourcefulness, which has fueled this effort, must now be turned toward helping students participate in the very highest academic experience possible.

Raise your expectations, focus your direction, and move forward as a unified group of capable professionals to bring your students to higher levels. Improve communication and work together to build academic rigor and challenge. Take advantage of the academic leadership in your building to develop teachers as leaders.

We intend that our conclusions, commendations, and recommendations will assist you as you embark on your journey toward standards-based learning and teaching. We hope that this report will help you as you move forward to improve the learning for all students.

Dr. M. H. Sullivan School Improvement Team

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Family Center Director

Vale Banks
Teacher

Leland Brown
Music Chairperson for Newport School District

Emily Carr
Teacher

Charlotte Diffendale
RIDE Facilitator

Nancy Folcarelli
Teacher

Amanda Frye
Director of Martin Luther King Center

Samantha Kilroy
21st Century Community Learning Center

Kate Kosianowski
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Elizabeth Liptak
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Cindy Lombardi
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Mark McKenna
New Visions

Kathy Nickerson
Salve Regina University

Sandra Parsons
City Year

Audrey Stanwood-Ford
Parent

Helen Toohey
Parent

Helen Toohey
Providence Gas Company

Vicki Vaillancourt
Teacher

Maria Van Anglen
Principal

Janet Watkinson
Nurse-Teacher

Kristin Woodmansee
B.J.'s Wholesale

Dr. Ann Zartler
Psychologist for Newport School District

The SALT Visit Team

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

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Dr. M. H. Sullivan School

January 23, 2001

To complete the Catalpa Ltd. report endorsement, I have reviewed this report, observed a portion of the visit, and discussed the conduct of the full visit with the Visit Chair. Based on my knowledge derived from these sources of evidence, using the criteria specified in the *Endorsing SALT Visit team Reports by Catalpa Ltd.*, and using the methodology and procedures specified in the *Handbook for SALT Visit Chairs, 1st edition*), I conclude that:

1. This report was produced by a legitimate SALT Visit that was led by a trained SALT Visit Chair and conducted in a manner that is consistent with SALT Visit procedures.
2. The conclusions and all other content of this report meet the criteria specified for a SALT Visit report.

Accordingly, Catalpa Ltd. endorses this report as a legitimate SALT Visit Report.



Thomas A. Wilson, EdD
Catalpa Ltd.
February 10, 2001