



Stony Lane Elementary School

North Kingstown

SALT Visit Team Report

January 26, 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 Stony Lane Elementary School from January 23, 2001 to 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 Stony Lane 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 Stony Lane Elementary School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of seven all day classroom observations, 43 full and 23 partial lesson observations which totaled over 97 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 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*
- ◆ *Spectra team meeting*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, specialists, 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:*
 - *Stony Lane School Improvement Plan, 2000-2001*
 - *North Kingstown School Department Mission Statements*
 - *Stony Lane School Parent-Student Guide*
 - *Stony Lane Professional Development Log*
 - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
 - *classroom textbooks*
 - *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 26 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 Stony Lane 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 North Kingstown, 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 Stony Lane Elementary School

Stony Lane Elementary School serves students in the first through fifth grades and is part of the North Kingstown School System. The building opened in 1971 and is constructed with an open classroom design. Partitions are used to vary the “classroom” sizes. One major addition to the building occurred in 1996 consisting of a new grade one area, a gymnasium, art and music rooms and small group rooms.

A superintendent, a district staff of four directors and a transportation supervisor administer the school system. An elected school committee of seven members governs it. The Stony Lane School students are served by a professional staff of one administrator, 25 full time teachers, ten itinerate teachers, 12 support staff, five paraprofessionals, three custodians and two cafeteria servers. The teaming approach is used throughout the building with one team for each grade level. There are four classes first grade, three classes of second grade, three classes of third grade, four classes of fourth grade, and three classes of fifth grade.

Of the 377 students attending Stony Lane School, 97 percent are white, 1.5 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander and 1.5 percent are black. Fifty students totaling 13 percent receive special education services, two students receive ESL support and approximately ten percent of the student body are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Stony Lane School is involved in several school wide programs and initiatives including the Spectra Program for integrating the arts into the core curricular areas, and problem solving across the curriculum.

Student scores on several subtests of the fourth grade New Standards Reference Exam show improvement over the last three school years. The performance percentages increased (58%-70%) on the English Language Arts: Reading Analysis and Interpretation subtest, and (46%-57%) on the Writing Effectiveness subtest. During the same time period, the percentage of students achieving the standard on the Writing Conventions subtest decreased (57%-35%). Also, the percentage of students achieving the standard on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment for third graders decreased (30%-19%). The percentage of students at Stony Lane who met or exceeded the standard on five of the seven subtests of the NSRE is greater than or equal to the percentage of similar students statewide.

Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15% in achievement) are not found for any student subgroups on the New Standards Reference Exam subtests for fourth graders during school year 1998-1999.

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 Stony Lane Elementary School is available at www.rido.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF Stony Lane Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Stony Lane School is a warm, friendly, clean, and safe place for students to learn and grow. It sits on a beautiful open lot of tree-fringed land that offers ample play space for children and contains multiple gardens and a nature trail. This is home to an energetic, polite, respectful, well-behaved student body. They find school life exciting and arrive everyday eager to learn.

Stony Lane School is an open school in more ways than one. The “open space” classrooms are brightly colored, aesthetically pleasing with much student work on display. This sets the tone for a friendly openness among those who enter. The warm, enthusiastic staff is experienced, professional, and dedicated to their students and each other. The entire school community is open to integrating and infusing the arts in all curricular areas. This approach is intellectually stimulating and creates an exciting learning environment where all students can flourish.

Teachers are dedicated and industrious. They cooperatively work in teams to develop and deliver an integrated curriculum. They spend time coordinating teaching efforts across grades as well. This brings great unity to the implementation of effective practices and the sequencing of skills across the grades. Teachers are generous with their time in preparing lessons and sharing their expertise with others. The principal, in turn, is supportive of her staff, treating them respectfully and professionally.

Parents are proud of their school, the teachers and the programs offered to their children. They are eager to help in any way possible. The home/school connection is strengthening this year with additional periodic evaluation reports, homework check signatures, an active PTO, and LINKS volunteers in the school.

This school has concerns about student achievement in problem solving and writing. However, the staff is aggressively attacking these challenges and proactively implementing effective strategies and rubrics to increase student performance.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *1999, 2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *1999, 2000, 2001 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *1999, 2000, 2001 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with students, teachers, parents, school and district administrators*
- ◆ *meeting with SIT*
- ◆ *Spectra team meeting*

Conclusions

Students successfully use a variety of strategies for solving problems quickly, creatively and enthusiastically. Children across all grade levels are involved in problem solving activities in a variety of subject areas throughout the day. Role playing, science experimenting, working in teams, playing games related to grammar skills, using math clues, and utilizing technology are some examples of problem solving. Students also use rubrics to evaluate their own work. This is consistent with the increase in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the standard on the New Standards Reference Exam Mathematics Problem Solving subtest (15%-23%) between 1998 and 2000. These percentages are low, however the scores at Stony Lane are higher than those of similar students statewide. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, New Standards Reference Exam, conversations and interviews with teachers, students, school and district administrators*)

Students are writing very effectively across the curriculum using editing prompts and writing rubrics in all classrooms. Responding to visual prompts and pieces of literature, keeping journals and portfolios, writing cooperatively, peer editing, story mapping, reflecting and word splashing are some examples of student writing in all subjects. Students, independently, use writing strategies that follow the writing process. These findings correlate positively with the increase in writing effectiveness scores on the New Standards Reference Exam subtest (46%-57%) between school years 1998 and 2000. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, New Standards Reference Exam*)

Children at Stony Lane are excited about reading. Meaningful reading takes place in many ways throughout the school day, but especially after lunch during school-wide D.E.A.R. time. Children read proficiently

across the curriculum using basal readers, leveled reading books, and self-selected trade books. Students made notable gains on the New Standards English/Language Arts Reference Examination in the Analysis and Interpretation subtest (58%- 70%) between 1998 and 2000. Also, students score consistently high on the Basic Understanding subtest (87%-86%). (*classroom observations, following students, New Standards Reference Exam, conversations and interviews with teachers*)

Students are enthusiastic and engaged in learning activities that combine dance, drama, music, physical education and art with higher level thinking skills in core curricula areas. These activities promote growth by addressing various learning styles. Participating in activities such as: dramatizing verbs and adverbs, using rhythm with literature, designing blue prints of homes and museums, then constructing them, and using physical education exercises in response to addition and subtraction result in complete immersion and deeper understanding of subject matter. (*classroom observations, following students, Spectra team meeting, meeting with SIT, conversations and interviews with parents, students, teachers, school administrator, district administrators*)

Students use teamwork successfully in various daily school projects. They are involved in peer editing, cross-age tutoring, multi-class graphing, small group collaborating, group writing, and group dramatizing. This skill prepares students for school to career success. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work*)

Students are eager learners and active participants in classroom activities. Coming to Stony Lane School is a joy for these children. They feel safe, encouraged, and are respectful toward other students and teachers. They utilize strategies in making informed choices in regard to their behavior. (*classroom observations, following students, meeting with SIT, conversations and interviews with students, teachers and administrators*)

Commendations for Stony Lane Elementary School

The confident, courteous, friendly, respectful students

Excellent teamwork skills among the students

High level of performance on the Reading Basic Understanding subtest of the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam

Recommendations for Stony Lane Elementary School:

Continue the efforts begun in strengthening problem solving strategies and the writing process across the curriculum.

Continue to foster a nurturing and challenging environment for students.

Focus on the "What Students Need" section of the New Standards Reference Exam School Summary Reports for the last three years and use that information to make changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, parents, school and district administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students*
- ◆ *SALT Survey 2000*
- ◆ *“Professional Development Log”*

Conclusions

Through the Spectra Program, teachers successfully integrate the arts (music, art, dance, drama, and physical education) with core curricular areas. Weekly collaborative planning times allow classroom teachers and specialists to brainstorm multidisciplinary connections for thematic units. Teachers are generous in sharing and supporting one another with their ideas, materials, and experiences, resulting in creative ideas and plans for teaching. These ideas and plans carry the electricity and enthusiasm from the meeting into the classroom. This system also creates the opportunity for quality co-teaching. (*meetings with teachers and specialists, conversations and interviews with students, teachers, and parents*)

Teachers work effectively to be “on the same page”. They meet weekly both at and across grade levels to achieve this common vision. This ensures consistency in developing a continuum of standardized expectations and practices for each new grade level. Various learning strategy protocols in reading, writing, and problem solving, writing rubrics, and editing symbols are examples of this consistency. (*conversations and interviews with teachers, school administrator, and district administrators*)

Teachers actively participate in meaningful professional development that aligns directly with the goals of the School Improvement Plan. Expertise has grown among the staff to the extent that they are training each other as well as consulting for other schools. Examples include: RITTI training, presenting at faculty meetings, looking at student work using the “tuning protocol”, changing school culture, using portfolio assessment, piloting new reading and mathematics texts, conducting action research, attending writing process workshops and Spectra training. Implementation of all this training and knowledge is strongly evident throughout the school. (*classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, school administrator, “Professional Development Log”, meeting with SIT, SALT Survey, 2000*)

High expectations for students are firmly established in classroom instruction. Students know what is expected of them. Clearly established standards and rubrics in student friendly language are present in all classrooms. Teachers effectively model high quality standards for students in daily lessons that include reading, writing, speaking, listening, problem solving, behavior, cooperative learning, and presentation skills.

(classroom observations, conversations and interviews with parents, students, and teachers, meeting with SIT)

Improving home/school communication is one of the goals teachers specified in the School Improvement Plan. Although practices vary among grade levels, teachers communicate effectively, and often, with parents in many ways. Weekly summary outlines, daily planners, newsletters, homework logs, notebooks, portfolios, rubrics, personal notes, and phone calls (when necessary) are among the means frequently used to communicate. A school website is presently under construction and will add a valuable dimension to teacher/parent communications when it is up and running. *(conversations and interviews with teachers and parents, classroom observations, School Improvement Plan)*

Commendations for Stony Lane Elementary School for:

A strong sense of collegiality and collaboration among teachers

Dedication to professional growth and openness to change

Genuine efforts to improve communication

Recommendations for Stony Lane Elementary School:

Continue to reach out to all parents for meaningful involvement in the school

Continue to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of recently implemented problem solving and writing strategies

Persist in your efforts to implement the Everyday Math program

Recommendations for the North Kingstown School District:

Continue to support teachers in their implementation of technology integration and the Spectra Program

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*
- ◆ *Following students*
- ◆ *Stony Lane School Improvement Plan*

Conclusions

Both students and teachers benefit from the open space concept. This physical environment is conducive to the collaborative planning style the teachers have developed. It also exposes students to real world work settings and offers the opportunity to develop an increased focus to remain on task amidst distractions. Students display smooth transitions when passing between classes in close proximity. Students learn at an early age the importance of appropriate noise levels required for successful learning in this environment. Additionally, parents report that this arrangement is advantageous. Their children demonstrate the ability to focus at home in spite of the various distractions that arise. However, one disadvantage to this set-up is the significant lack of storage space for student and teacher materials. Teachers, students, and parents report a high level of frustration with this situation. Some money is allocated to begin addressing this need but more will be needed. (*School Improvement Plan, following students, conversations and interviews with students, teachers, parents, school administrator, classroom observations*)

The present schedule facilitates the various productive collaborations taking place here. The combining of recess and lunchtime in the middle of the day provides for daily meetings. Meetings that occur at grade level, cross grade level, and with specialists in the Spectra Program are well accommodated by this schedule. This is a unique and highly desirable situation. (*classroom observations, conversations and interviews students, parents, teachers, and school administrator, meeting with SIT*)

Spectra is an exemplary program which has been an excellent agent for positive change at Stony Lane School. The introduction of this new approach to integrating the arts into the core curriculum has created enthusiasm for learning and teaching. Addressing different modalities and increasing depth of student understanding provides for quality learning and natural connections to many content areas. However, there is a trade-off. As currently implemented, some school days are fragmented with work interruptions, resulting in a degree of frustration among teachers and students. (*classroom observations, conversations and interviews with students, teachers, school administrator, and parent, following students*)

Parent involvement is extensive and is a great asset to the school. They supervise the publication of the yearbook, maintain the nature trail and gardens, volunteer in the library, computer room, and classrooms. The excellent playground is the result of their efforts. They publish the school newsletter, sponsor after

school enrichment programs, and participate in School Improvement Team, PTO, and the School Advisory Committee. Parents want to be involved in the school and are eager to be part of their child's learning experience. (*conversations and interviews with parents, teachers, school administrator, meeting with SIT*)

Commendations for Stony Lane Elementary School:

The professional, respectful, and supportive principal

The thoughtful and thorough development and implementation of the School Improvement Plan

The Spectra Program

Productive collaborative meetings

Recommendations for Stony Lane Elementary School:

Continue to refine the schedule to maximize learning time.

Provide additional educational opportunities for all students to reach their full potential.

Continue to voice your needs to the central office.

Recommendations for North Kingstown School District

Continue to support storage improvements at Stony Lane School.

Continue to support technology resources.

7. Final Advice to the School

Upon entering Stony Lane School, one walks into its “open spaces” and realizes that this school is unique. There is an atmosphere of excitement in learning as the children arrive and the classroom routines begin. Over the course of three very busy days of observation and evidence gathering we realize that this is truly an exemplary school. So many of the educational “best practices” are in evidence here – standards-based education, collaborative planning, co-teaching, arts integration, and examination of student work, to name just a few. The teachers are very professional, hardworking, warm and open. There is an expectation that all will work hard to improve teaching so that high standards and expectations for student learning are uniformly maintained.

Spectra is truly a wonderful agent for change. Be patient with the scheduling fragmentation it creates. The teacher collaboration, curriculum integration and increased student learning far outweigh any inconvenience. Continue to work on technology integration while working out the “bugs” in your new technology center. Support each other while implementing the new Math series. Maintain the “best practice” tools you have established. Address the storage problems for both students and teachers. Most importantly, read our report carefully and study our recommendations so they may guide you toward greater student learning. Maintain your enthusiasm and optimism. You have the determination and the inner resources to tackle almost any issue as a group. You are truly a team on a quest for excellence.

Stony Lane Elementary School IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Denise Braum
3rd Grade Teacher

Rosemary Cameron
3rd Grade Teacher

Marilyn Cushman
4th Grade Teacher

Ellen D'Agnenica
Principal

Pam Ellis
1st Grade Teacher

Judy Enos
2nd Grade Teacher

Diane Harvey
Librarian

Kim Johnson
5th Grade Teacher

Rosemary Lenahan
1st Grade Teacher

Lois May
Resource Teacher

Candy Ohanian
Parent

Heather Perkins
Physical Education Teacher

Lisa Quigley
Music Teacher

Donna Simon
2nd Grade Teacher

Ann Sullivan
1st Grade Teacher

THE SALT VISIT TEAM

Margaret Della Bitta, Science Teacher
South Kingstown High School
South Kingstown, Rhode Island
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)
Chair

Arlene Daley, Teacher
Glen Hills Elementary School
Cranston, Rhode Island

Scott Jablonski, Teacher
Dunns Corner Elementary School
Westerly, Rhode Island

Linda Perra, Principal
Ashaway Elementary School
Ashaway, Rhode Island

Gloria Schmidt, Library Media Specialist
Elmhurst School
Portsmouth, Rhode Island

Meredith Whittaker, Reading Specialist
Woodridge School
Cranston, Rhode Island

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

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Stony Lane Elementary School

January 26, 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 15, 2001