



Tower Street School

Westerly, Rhode Island

SALT Visit Team Report

January 19, 2001



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 Tower Street School from January 16, 2001, through January 19, 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 Tower Street 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, in the hallways, and on the playground. 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 Tower Street School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *over 69 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. All classrooms were visited at least once. Many 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:*
 - *School Improvement Plan, 2000-2001, for Tower Street School, Westerly, Rhode Island*
 - *Tower Street School SALT Visit binder*
 - *Report of the Joint Committee of Evaluation for the Westerly School District, Pilot Evaluation Program, 1999-2000*
 - *District Reading Curriculum Draft*
 - *district strategic plan*
 - *2000 SALT Survey report*
 - *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 24 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 Tower Street 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 Westerly, Rhode Island, 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 Tower Street School

Tower Street School, one of five elementary schools in the seaside town of Westerly, Rhode Island, serves students in pre-school through grade five. It is located on the outskirts of Westerly's Victorian downtown shopping, art, and business district and is part of the Westerly School System.

The school system is administered by a superintendent and a district staff of four. It is governed by an elected school committee of seven members .

Tower Street School was built in 1955 and expanded in 1994. The school now includes 22 classrooms, an art room, a music room, six small instructional areas, a cafeteria, and a gym.

Of the 359 students who attend Tower Street School, 95 percent are White, three percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, one percent are Black, and one percent are Hispanic. Twenty percent of the students receive special education services. Thirty-two percent of Tower Street's students receive free or reduced priced lunch.

One principal and one principal intern administer Tower Street School. Thirty-one full and part-time teachers serve the students along with 10 teacher assistants. Of the 18 classroom teachers seven are first-year classroom teachers. Grades one through five include three classes each, and kindergarten includes one full day and three half-day classes. The school also houses three district programs: a pre-school class, two half-day special education kindergarten classes, and the primary grades STAR program. Tower Street School is a Title I school.

Twenty-three students who receive special education services take part in the school's early start program. These students and the special education teaching staff arrive at school one hour early each day. These students receive special education services during this time, enabling them to receive more direct instruction during the rest of the school day. In addition to this program, the special education staff, the literacy assistants, and the reading teacher are involved in a language intervention program for kindergarten students.

Teachers, students, and parents of Tower Street School are involved in several initiatives that all support students. In addition to being a Feinsein School, Tower Street has a partnership with the YMCA and its Character First Program. Also, a cadre of teachers has been trained in the Responsive Classroom program. One class works with the University of Rhode Island's School of Oceanography. One hundred and fifty students have taken part in the Fall/Winter after-school program. Currently, 45 parents volunteer in classrooms.

From 1998 to 2000, Tower Street School student performance on the New Standards Reference Examination shows little change except for a decline in the Reading Basic Understanding subtest. For the same time period, third grade student performance on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment has increased.

Equity gaps of 15 percent or more occur between poverty and non-poverty students on three of the four subtests measured. While non-poverty students outperform poverty students on the Reading Analysis and Interpretation subtest, it is poverty students who outperform non-poverty students on the Mathematics Skills and Writing Effectiveness subtests. One equity gap between male and female students occurs on the Mathematics Problem-Solving subtest with males outperforming females.

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 Tower Street School is available at www.ridoe.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF Tower Street School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Tower Street School is a strongly supportive community where everyone feels welcomed and valued. Support for all is a central belief. Administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents form a complex network whose goal is to guide all students to “academic excellence ...one child at a time”.

Teachers work hard here. They continually participate in professional development activities that assist them in addressing the needs of their students. School administrators support teachers in implementing innovative strategies and programs to increase student learning.

Yet, effective strategies are not embedded in all instruction. Teachers have different levels of understanding of effective practices. In addition, the lack of comprehensive curricula in all areas has created pockets of uneven teaching and learning throughout the building. This results in fragmented student learning.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with students and teachers*
- ◆ *meetings with school administrators, students, and parents*

Conclusions

Students at Tower Street School have many opportunities to read both orally and silently in class. Some successfully read for enjoyment, to gather information, solve problems, draw conclusions, and make predictions. This is reflected in their performance on state assessments. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*)

Most students enjoy Writing Workshop and look forward to publishing and sharing their work. They write extensively throughout the school day, for a variety of purposes, and in many formats. Examples of daily writing include journals, notebooks, reports, responses to literature, problem solving, self-reflections, stories, research reports, and poetry. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations and interviews with students and teachers*)

Some students at Tower Street School successfully practice basic math skills and strategies to solve problems. Some students use manipulatives to develop an understanding of math concepts. This is reflected in their performance on state assessments. (*following students, classroom observations, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results, meetings with school administrators and students*)

Most students enjoy their day at Tower Street School and feel safe here. They respect, cooperate with, and care for each other and everyone else in the school community. These traits make it easier for students to learn. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with students, meetings with parents and students*)

Commendations for Tower Street School

the respectful, cooperative, and caring students

Recommendations for Tower Street School

Continue to practice basic math skills and problem-solving strategies. Expand the use of manipulatives and

problem-solving across all grade levels and in all classrooms. Provide opportunities for students to apply math skills to real life problems.

Engage in those professional development programs that address the application of problem-solving strategies to real world problems. Implement those strategies in all classrooms.

Build on student interest in writing. Provide instruction for all students to become proficient writers.

Continue to provide many opportunities for students to read. Provide direct reading instruction to all students in all classes.

Engage in professional development programs that address the instruction of reading. Implement these strategies in every classroom.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with students and teachers*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- ◆ *2000 SALT Survey*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*

Conclusions

Teachers at Tower Street School truly care about their students and work hard to support them. To provide more opportunities for small group instruction, many teachers engage in flexible scheduling. To provide additional time to learn, some teachers have initiated a before school program. To address student needs for differentiation of instruction, teachers use Individual Academic Plans (IAP) This strong teacher support contributes to a climate in which all students can learn. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, meetings with school and district administrators, School Improvement Team, and parents*)

Most teachers use rubrics ineffectively. What constitutes quality work varies within classrooms and within and across grade levels. Teachers use rubrics in various ways such as grading spelling sentences, evaluating writing, and as checklists for project requirements. Too few teachers use rubrics to set goals with students so that progress and self-reflection occur. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, meeting with students, conversations and interviews with students*)

A few teachers in Tower Street School have high expectations for all their students. Their classrooms are student-centered. They empower their students to be responsible for their own learning. Most teachers, however, have low expectations for their students. This severely limits students reaching higher levels of achievement. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, meetings with students, parents, and school administrators, 2000 SALT Survey*)

Some teachers use daily assessments to guide their instruction. They examine student work, give pre- and post-tests, and observe student performance to determine what a student knows and can do. These practices enable these teachers to better meet the learning needs of each student. (*classroom observations, following students, conversations and interviews with teachers, examination of student work*)

Many teachers successfully engage students through the use of a wide variety of instructional strategies that include a combination of large and small group activities, modeling, centers, literature circles, hands-on learning, journals, and Writing Workshop. However, far too many of these classrooms are teacher-directed. Too many students are not

engaged, accountable, nor responsible for their own learning. (*following students, classroom observations, meeting with students*)

Teachers provide many opportunities for students to read; yet they provide little direct instruction in reading strategies. This limits students' ability to analyze and interpret what they read. (*following students, classroom observations, meeting with students*)

Most teachers spend far too much time on the review and practice of basic math skills. They do not spend enough time with the application of these skills to real world problems. In addition, students are not given opportunities to develop an understanding of mathematical concepts. This contributes to poor student performance and little interest in math. (*following students, classroom observations, meeting with students, examination of student work, New Standards Reference Examination results*)

Many teachers successfully collaborate to help children learn. They collaborate to provide consistency across grade levels, to share resources, to integrate different disciplines, to develop flexible grouping within and across grade levels, and to share professional knowledge and ideas. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, meeting with school administrators*)

Commendations for Tower Street School

those teachers who provide students with increased time and opportunities to learn such as the before school program

supportive and caring teachers

teachers who successfully collaborate

Recommendations for Tower Street School

Continue to engage in professional development around the use of rubrics. Effectively use them in all classrooms.

Use and share the expertise of the teachers in the school who have high expectations for all their students.

Engage in professional development in the use of daily assessments to guide instruction, in mathematical concepts and problem-solving, in direct instruction in reading strategies, and in student-centered learning. Implement those strategies in daily classroom practice.

Recommendations for the Westerly School District

Provide the resources necessary for Tower Street School teachers to participate in professional development around the use of daily assessment, rubrics, student-centered learning, direct instruction in reading strategies, and mathematical concepts and problem-solving.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with teachers*
- ◆ *meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, and parents*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ School Improvement Plan, 2000-2001, for Tower Street School, Westerly, Rhode Island
- ◆ *Tower Street School SALT Visit binder*
- ◆ *Report of the Joint Committee of Evaluation for the Westerly School District, Pilot Evaluation Program, 1999-2000*
- ◆ *review of district Reading Curriculum Draft*

Conclusions

Tower Street School enjoys strong, innovative educational leaders who support and facilitate student learning, encourage and support teacher growth and development, engage families, and collaborate with local agencies and organizations to provide a healthy learning community for students. (*conversations and interviews with teachers, meetings with district administrators and parents*)

Tower Street's School Improvement Plan is a good plan that clearly focuses on home school relations, fostering high expectations for success, and creating a safe and orderly environment. It reflects self-study, has clear goals, reasonable timelines, and specific action plans. This plan will help the school move forward. (*School Improvement Plan, 2000-2001, for Tower Street School, Westerly, Rhode Island, meetings with school improvement team and parents*)

Tower Street School has initiated many highly successful programs that support teachers and parents in their effort to meet the instructional, social, and developmental needs of Tower Street students. These include the extended day program, the Planning Center, Sensory Zone, STAR Program, Responsive Classroom, Character First, Family Engagement, and Individual Academic Plans. (*classroom observations, Tower Street School SALT Visit binder, conversations and interviews with teachers, meetings with parents, school administrators, and school improvement team*)

The Westerly Public Schools teacher evaluation instrument is based on how teachers teach, but not on how well students learn. It provides a limited snapshot of those teaching skills observed. This instrument does not recognize nor foster the development of excellence in teaching. Furthermore, it does not provide opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practice and grow as professionals. (*Report of the Joint Committee of Evaluation for the Westerly School District, Pilot Evaluation Program, 1999-2000, meetings with school and district administrators, conversations and interviews with teachers*)

Without adopted curricula in the areas of math and reading, instruction is piecemeal within and across grade levels. In addition, the piloting of three different math series in the third and fourth grades prohibits consistent math instruction within and across these grade levels. This adversely affects learning opportunities for all students. *(meetings with school and district administrators and parents, conversations and interviews with teachers, review of district Reading Curriculum Draft, following students, classroom observations)*

Commendations for Tower Street School

its strong, innovative educational leaders

the highly successful programs that support teachers, parents, and students

Recommendations for Tower Street School

Continue the highly successful programs that support students, teachers, and parents.

Work with the district to develop and adopt a teacher evaluation instrument based on learning.

Work with the district to develop and adopt comprehensive curricula for all subject areas. Implement those curricula throughout the school.

Recommendations for the Westerly School District

Work with Tower Street School to develop and adopt a teacher evaluation instrument based on learning.

Work with the school to develop and adopt comprehensive curricula for all subject areas.

7. Final Advice to the School

Teachers and administrators at Tower Street School have focused their abundant energy and enthusiasm on increasing student learning and must continue to do so. The exceptional support network and the strong lines of communication that the school has developed enhance that learning. They are vital to the work of the school and should also continue. The school-wide celebrations of students need to be carried into every classroom so that all students develop pride in their work and in themselves.

Informal teacher mentoring occurs at Tower Street School. A formal structure for mentoring has been adopted by the district, but is not being implemented at this time. The school needs to work with the district to implement a formal mentor program that will provide support, guidance, instruction in effective teaching strategies, and reflection for teachers in the school.

It is vital that the school works with the district also to adopt and implement curricula in every area that is aligned with standards so that all students have equal opportunities for learning.

Teachers are involved with many innovative programs in this school including looping, collaboration, and a before school special needs class. These initiatives, added to the piloting of three math programs in grades three and four, may become overwhelming. Tower Street School must be realistic as to the number of projects it undertakes at one time. Tackling all issues at once could become self-defeating.

A few teachers at Tower Street School hold high expectations for all of their students. The expertise of these teachers must be shared with their colleagues so that all students can be held to high expectations in student-centered classes.

The SALT Visit Team urges Tower Street School to use this SALT Visit Report to refine its school improvement plan and classroom practices so that the level of learning for all its students increases.

Tower Street School IMPROVEMENT TEAM

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THE SALT VISIT TEAM

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

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Tower Street School

January 19, 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