



John F. Horgan Elementary School

West Warwick, Rhode Island

SALT Visit Team Report

January 12, 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 John F. Horgan Elementary School from January 9, 2001, through January 12, 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. This visit team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners and a representative of higher education. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for John F. Horgan Elementary School was the touchstone document for the team. However informative written reports may be, though, 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 John F. Horgan Elementary School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *over 67 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 7 students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with the following groups:*

- *John F. Horgan 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:*
 - *John F. Horgan School Improvement Plan*
 - *district strategic plan*
 - *Contract Between West Warwick School Committee and West Warwick Teachers' Alliance, September 1, 1998 through August 31, 2001*
 - *West Warwick School Department Evaluation Process(es) Manual, 1996*
 - *West Warwick School Department Tenured/Non-Tenured Teacher Evaluation Report*
 - *John F. Horgan Professional Development Plan, 2000-2001*
 - *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 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 John F. Horgan 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 West Warwick School Department, the citizens of West Warwick, 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 John F. Horgan Elementary School

John F. Horgan Elementary School, one of four elementary schools in West Warwick, Rhode Island, serves students in the kindergarten through fifth grades. The school is located in the River Point neighborhood of the town and is part of the West Warwick School System. A superintendent and a district staff of five administer the school system. An elected school committee of five members governs it.

The building, which first opened in 1927 as a junior high school, became an elementary school in 1971.

Of the 510 students who attend John F. Horgan Elementary School, 80 percent are white, 12.6 percent are Hispanic, 2.9 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.6 percent are black, and 1.1 percent are American Indian/Alaskan. Thirteen percent of the students receive ESL services. All of West Warwick's kindergarten ESL students attend Horgan Elementary School. Fifteen percent of the students receive special education services. Fifty-nine percent of Horgan's students receive free or reduced price lunch. Horgan Elementary School is a Title I school, and all students receive Title I Reading Services as necessary.

One principal administers Horgan Elementary School. Forty-five full and part time teachers serve the students along with ten teacher assistants, one behavior assistant, one principal's secretary, one general clerk, two supervisory lunch aides, three custodians, and four food service workers.

Many initiatives that support students, teachers, and parents are in place in the Horgan Elementary School. Programs that support students include before and after school programs in reading, mathematics, physical education, and student leadership, as well as a homework club. Students also benefit through the efforts of the Foster Grandparent program. The school also regularly identifies and celebrates students who demonstrate positive and appropriate behaviors and achievement. The Horgan staff has initiated and participates in new practices to promote standards-based education through the "Reading Excellence" initiative, the "I Read" grant, and the Working Wonders III Elementary Instruction and Assessment Network. Parent needs are addressed through STEP and MEGA Skills Parenting Classes and a community mentoring program facilitated by the Parent Involvement Coordinator. Parents of kindergartners are also involved in specific reading support programs.

From 1998 to 2000, John F. Horgan Elementary School student performance on the New Standards Reference Examination shows increases in six of the seven subtests. Notable increases, ranging from 20 to 49 percentage points, occur in four of the seven subtests. In the Writing conventions subtest student performance has decreased over the same period. While student performance on the Concepts and Problem-Solving subtests of the Mathematics assessment meets the school's targets, student scores on those subtests are still low. From 1998 to 2000 third grade student performance on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment has increased.

Equity gaps of 15 percent or more occur between special education and general education students on all four of the subtests measured with general education students outperforming special education students. Equity gaps also occur between poverty and non-poverty students on two of the subtests measured with non-poverty students outperforming poverty students. Gender gaps occur between male and female students on three of the four subtests measured with males outperforming females in Math Problem Solving and females outperforming males in both Writing subtests.

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 John F. Horgan Elementary School is available at www.ridoe.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF John F. Horgan Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

The old structure that houses John F. Horgan Elementary School welcomes the visitor with its soaring ceilings, brightly-painted walls, polished oak panels, and colorful displays of children's work. Classrooms hum with purposeful activity as children and teachers work together.

In the past five years John F. Horgan Elementary School has grown into a uniquely supportive community of eager learners. An environment that nurtures them and fosters learning embraces all children in the school. Students read and read and read some more. They are eager to share their accomplishments and learn from their mistakes. Students succeed along with their peers, not in spite of them.

Teachers move around the room among clusters of students working in groups. They lean over the shoulders of individual students to answer questions and sit alongside others who struggle to decipher sentences.

The strong dedication and hard work of the principal, teachers, staff, and parents is obvious. When one parent declared, "Horgan is the best thing that ever happened to my kid," a room full of other parents burst into applause.

John F. Horgan Elementary School is in the midst of exciting yet extremely difficult change. Many reform initiatives that promote standards-based instruction are underway, and many teachers have embraced those initiatives. However, not all teachers take part. Reform often occurs in separate pockets throughout the building. Those pockets have not yet been connected.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *1998, 1999, 2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with teachers and students*
- ◆ *meetings with students and parents*

Conclusions

Students at John F. Horgan Elementary School learn and thrive within a unique and nurturing community. They enable one another to take risks to freely express their ideas without fear of failure or ridicule. They demonstrate collaboration at its best, going beyond mutual support to teach one another. This contributes broadly not only to their increased performance on state assessments, but also to a general atmosphere of academic excellence. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, 1998, 1999, 2000 Information Works!*)

Students at John F. Horgan Elementary School read and it shows. They read to solve problems; they read for information; they read for pleasure; they read to each other. This multi-faceted engagement with reading contributes to their continued improvement in reading performance. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results, 1998, 1999, 2000 Information Works!, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, meetings with students and parents*)

Students write in a variety of genres and in different content areas. They write personal narratives, poetry, letters, responses to literature, reports, persuasive essays, newspaper articles, journals, and stories. Some students revise their work and the work of their peers to produce more effective writing. The volume and variety of student writing contributes to their increased performance on state assessments. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results, 1998, 1999, 2000 Information Works!, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results, conversations and interviews with teachers and students*)

Many students have developed basic mathematical skills. They frequently use manipulatives, rulers, calculators, number lines, multiplication tables, algorithms, and mathematical vocabulary lists. Far fewer

students use the higher order thinking skills necessary for problem-solving. Very few students can explain mathematical concepts. Low performance on state assessments reflects these findings. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, 1998, 1999, 2000 Information Works!, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results, conversations and interviews with teachers and students*)

Commendations for John F. Horgan Elementary School for:

the unique and nurturing learning community.

students' engagement with reading.

Recommendations for John F. Horgan Elementary School:

Continue to provide many and varied opportunities for students to read.

Extend effective writing strategies throughout the school.

Continue to engage in professional development in mathematical concepts and problem-solving teaching strategies.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many teachers and students*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school administrator, parents, and students*
- ◆ *2000 SALT Survey*
- ◆ *examination of student work*

Conclusions

All teachers at John F. Horgan Elementary School put children first and believe that they all can learn. Teachers create an atmosphere in which children are comfortable and safe. This enables children to take risks that allow them to learn and grow. (*following students, classroom observations, meetings with students, parents, and school administrator, conversations and interviews with teachers and students*)

Effective teaching occurs within the walls of many individual classrooms. Teachers work to improve their instruction, but efforts are largely individual. Despite their desire to do so, teachers infrequently share their expertise. As a result, teachers provide unequal learning opportunities for their students within and across grades. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, meeting with parents, conversations and interviews with teachers*)

Virtually all teachers are at different stages of implementing standards-based instruction. Most have begun to use standards in their classrooms. A handful of teachers weave standards-based instruction seamlessly into their everyday teaching practice. Their students know the work expectations; they reflect on and assess their own work and the work of others; they know how to improve their work. Most importantly, they know why they are doing the work they do. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations and interviews with students and teachers, meetings with students and parents, 2000 SALT Survey*)

Most teachers use effective strategies that promote engaged and active learners. They encourage their students to solve problems collaboratively in small groups, to help each other read and write, and to respond fearlessly to questions. Most students learn and thrive in this environment. However, some students fall through the cracks and do not thrive because these strategies alone cannot engage them. Some students finish their work quickly and sit ignored; others, unsure of what they have been asked to do, sit passively while students around them steam ahead. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with students and teachers*)

Most teachers use assessments as an end to evaluate their students' work rather than consistently using assessments as a means for improving instruction on a daily basis. This limits their ability to know and thus respond to the needs of all students. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student*

work, conversations and interviews with teachers and students)

Commendations for John F. Horgan Elementary School for:

caring, nurturing teachers

Recommendations for John F. Horgan Elementary School:

Plan and implement formal opportunities for teachers to share their expertise.

Continue to provide all teachers appropriate professional development in standards-based instruction and assessment. Implement those strategies in all classes within and across all grade levels.

Use the teaching expertise at John F. Horgan Elementary School. Provide opportunities for teachers to observe their peers in order to increase and vary their repertoire of teaching strategies.

Recommendations for the West Warwick School District:

Provide the resources necessary for John F. Horgan Elementary School teachers to share their expertise and visit each other's classrooms.

Continue to provide the resources necessary for John F. Horgan Elementary School to further advance standards-based instruction and assessment within and across all grade levels.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, and teacher assistants*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *examination of John F. Horgan School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *Contract Between West Warwick School Committee and West Warwick Teachers' Alliance, September 1, 1998 through August 31, 2001*
- ◆ *West Warwick School Department Evaluation Process(es) Manual, 1996*
- ◆ *West Warwick School Department Tenured/Non-Tenured Teacher Evaluation Report*
- ◆ *John F. Horgan Professional Development Plan, 2000-2001*

Conclusions

The John F. Horgan Elementary School community genuinely values every child in the school. The Title I Home/School Compact commits the school and parents to work together to help all children succeed. Parents and Foster Grandparents work with children to help them improve academically, to provide love and wisdom, and to establish long-term relationships with children in the school. These and many other adults play vital roles in the life of the school, helping children to feel more comfortable and safe. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, meetings with school administrator, students, and parents*)

John F. Horgan Elementary School is home to several collaborative teaching projects. Many promote standards-based instruction, self-reflective teaching practices, and effective professional development, all of which lead to real student achievement. Teachers who volunteer to initiate these projects receive the encouragement of the principal to seek out and obtain necessary resources. These teachers implement these projects in their classrooms, yet their expertise is rarely shared throughout the school. Thus, despite its good intentions, the school also produces a significant equity problem: children taught by teachers in such projects receive instructional and curricular benefits that other children do not. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, meetings with school and district administrators*)

and parents, examination of student work)

The John F. Horgan Elementary School Improvement Plan does not reflect a clear understanding of what a school improvement plan is. Instead it is a working draft that is revised all too often. There is insufficient alignment among goals, tactics, and action plans. Two goals reflect the maintenance of existing programs rather than long-range goals. All of these characteristics produce a document that lacks a clear focus and will not guide the school as it moves forward. *(meetings with School Improvement Team and school administrator, examination of John F. Horgan Elementary School Improvement Plan)*

Despite the district's commitment to the NCEE standards, the teacher evaluation instrument is not aligned with those standards for instruction and assessment. It cannot aid the school in its reform efforts. *(Contract between West Warwick School Committee and West Warwick Teachers' Alliance, September 1, 1998 through August 31, 2001, West Warwick School Department Evaluation Process(es) Manual, 1996, West Warwick School Department Tenured/Non-Tenured Teacher Evaluation Report, meetings with school and district administrators)*

While teachers have begun to implement standards-based instruction in their classrooms, the school lacks a coherent standards-based reform initiative. Professional development opportunities are available in the district, but there is no comprehensive multi-year plan for consistent, total school-wide effort. It lacks a cohesive standards theme and a detailed timeline to implement reform at the John F. Horgan Elementary School. *(John F. Horgan Professional Development Plan, 2000-2001, John F. Horgan Elementary School Improvement Plan, meetings with School Improvement Team and school and district administrators, conversations and interviews with teachers)*

Most teachers have committed themselves to the inclusion model for children requiring special programs. This promotes the acceptance of differences throughout the school. Although students frequently leave their classrooms for special services, they rarely disrupt their peers. However, communication among the different adults responsible for these children is typically informal and hurried. As a result, those educators cannot fully serve the learning needs of their children. *(following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, teacher assistants, and students, meetings with parents and students)*

Commendations for John F. Horgan Elementary School for:

the genuinely supportive school community

Recommendations for John F. Horgan Elementary School:

Design effective ways to share school-wide the expertise gained through collaborative teaching projects. Ensure that all children in all classrooms benefit from this expertise.

Undertake a comprehensive multi-stage process to re-write the School Improvement Plan using the *SALT Guide: How to Design a School Improvement Plan*. Implement the new School Improvement Plan.

Develop a comprehensive, multi-year professional development plan in order to promote school reform.

Develop and implement a plan for school-wide standards-based reform.

Create and implement a formal mechanism for communication and collaboration among all educators working with children in special programs.

Recommendations for the West Warwick School District:

Provide the resources necessary for John F. Horgan Elementary School teachers to share their expertise.

Work with the school to develop a teacher evaluation instrument that better promotes teacher growth in the context of standards-based school-wide reform.

Support the school in its efforts to re-write its School Improvement Plan.

Support the school in its efforts to write a standards-based reform plan.

Work with the school as it creates and implements a formal mechanism for communication and collaboration among all educators working with children in special programs. Provide the necessary resources.

7. Final Advice to the School

Educators in John F. Horgan Elementary School are working hard to improve teaching and learning in their classrooms. The next step is to focus those efforts school-wide. The school improvement plan, the standards-based reform initiative, the professional development plan, and the teacher evaluation instrument all must be aligned. This will require negotiation and compromise.

Teachers take the “all kids agenda” seriously. They grapple daily with ways to address the challenges faced by their students. The school must give them regular opportunities to share their expertise and plan together.

Unlike their students, adults do not openly discuss their legitimate and sometimes substantial differences. This hampers effective school reform efforts. The school must ensure that all voices are heard and all perspectives are valued.

John F. Horgan Elementary School is a good school. Work together to make it better.

John F. Horgan Elementary School Improvement Team

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4th Grade Teacher

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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

John F. Horgan Elementary School

January 12, 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 6, 2001