



# Stephen Olney School

North Providence

## SALT Visit Team Report

February 9, 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](http://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 Stephen Olney School from February 6-9, 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 Stephen Olney 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 Stephen Olney School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 58 classroom observations which totaled over 51 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 6 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:*
  - *Stephen Olney School's "Action Plan for School Improvement" school improvement plan*
  - *North Providence School Department New Teacher Notebook*
  - *North Providence School Department Budget Report*
  - *North Providence Federation of Teachers Collective Bargaining Agreement*
  - *Stephen Olney School's Summer Reading Program*
  - *Professional Development Programs- North Providence*
  - *North Providence District Strategic plan*
  - *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 29 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. For example, during the past three years, Stephen Olney School’s students have made gains in all New Standards Reference Exam tests and the Rhode Island Writing Examination. These gains range from modest (33 percent meeting the standard-38 percent meeting the standard in writing conventions) to spectacular (43 percent –95 percent meeting the standard in reading interpretation). The visiting team did not observe the frequency or quality of reading and writing instruction they expected to see to explain these remarkable gains.

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 Stephen Olney 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 Providence, 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 Stephen Olney School

Stephen Olney School is one of eight public elementary schools in North Providence, Rhode Island and serves students in the kindergarten through the sixth grades. The school first opened in 1930. There were two major additions made to the school in 1953 and 1960, respectively.

The school system is governed by a superintendent and an elected school committee of seven members, serving four year terms.

Of the 316 students attending Stephen Olney School, 76% are white, 11% are hispanic, 9% are black, and 4% are Asian/Pacific Islander. Twenty-four percent receive special education services and 24% are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The students at Stephen Olney School are served by a professional staff of one administrator, 28 full and part time faculty, 10 aides and support personnel and two custodians.

Stephen Olney School's students benefit from several programs which are sustained by parental and community involvement such as V.A.U.L.T., (Volunteer Assistance Using Local Talent), After School Reading Hour, Homework Club, Chess Club, Junior Achievement for Kids, a School Chorus and a mandatory summer reading program.

From 1998-2000, Stephen Olney School's students made substantial gains in their scores on the New Standards Reference Exams. Students' scores in the Rhode Island Writing Assessment over the three years showed a twenty point gain in percent of students meeting the standard. There is an equity gap between poverty and non-poverty students in the mathematics/problem solving subtest and between male and female students in writing effectiveness.

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 Stephen Olney School is available at [www.ridoe.net](http://www.ridoe.net).

### 3. PORTRAIT OF Stephen Olney School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Stephen Olney School is a trusting and caring family of children and adults. There is a culture of respect, pride in accomplishments, and a strong sense of community. Students help each other willingly. Teachers work hard to give their students the tools necessary to meet the standard. In recent years, a number of school wide initiatives have been implemented, some without the preparation, training, and support necessary for success. Students know what is expected of them and make the effort required to meet these expectations. Stephen Olney School's students are ready to grow beyond the current expectations of performance and soar to new heights. They must be given the chance to try creative ways to demonstrate their understanding and to share it with each other. They patiently wait for the bar of expectations to be raised.

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *1999 Information Works!*
- ◆ *1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *1999-2000 SALT Survey Report*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *meeting with students*
- ◆ *conversations with students*

### Conclusions

Students at Stephen Olney care for each other as a family. Their respect for one another is evident in the way they work together and help each other. They welcome visitors warmly. They are friendly, engaging and eager to share what they know. Stephen Olney School's students demonstrate a strong sense of school pride. They want to please their teachers and their principal. (*classroom observations, following students, meeting with students, conversations with students*)

Most students are proficient at computational tasks. Although students are able to use manipulatives to complete computational tasks, most tasks are completed with paper and pencil. They work in a parallel fashion with classmates, but often do not use them as resources when in cooperative groups. They work on memorization of math facts, however there is little evidence that students are transferring these facts to problem solving endeavors. Some are aware of problem solving strategies but are unclear as to why they have selected a particular strategy. They do not work at problem solving; rather they seek the first and expected answer. They want to be correct, rather than to explore a variety of strategies to arrive at solutions. They lack confidence to create their own solutions to problems and have difficulty articulating their understanding of mathematical reasoning. This is substantiated by their scores on the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam problem solving subtest (28 percent meeting the standard). (*classroom observations, following students, looking at student work, meeting with students, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam*)

Some students are confident writers and enjoy expressing themselves through their writing. They are using the steps of process writing effectively to develop their writing skills. They respond to literature and write informational reports. However, most students' responses are limited in genre and are focused on mechanics and conventions, rather than self-expression and creativity. Students are concentrating on their rubric score,

rather than focusing on improving their writing. This does not correlate with their writing effectiveness subtest scores on the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam. (*looking at student work, classroom observations, following students, meeting with students, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam*)

Few students read challenging, quality literature and participate in literature circles. Some students respond to what they are reading in their journals and read from their journals to each other. Most students are reading at home and documenting their reading selections. In the classroom, most students read from selections in their literature- based series, using the same books and materials regardless of their interests and abilities. (*classroom observations, following students, conversations with students, SALT Survey*)

## Commendations for Stephen Olney School

The wonderful, engaging students

Stephen Olney School's students' performance on the New Standards Reference Exams.

## Recommendations for Stephen Olney School

Increase students' opportunities to engage in problem solving practice using applied learning standards to improve their understanding of mathematical reasoning.

Allow students more choice and increased opportunities to write for authentic purposes. Encourage their development of self-assessment and peer editing skills.

Provide students opportunities to read high quality literature at their instructional level and pace.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff and school administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students and parents*
- ◆ *Stephen Olney School's "Action Plan for School Improvement"*
- ◆ *1999 Information Works!*
- ◆ *SALT Survey Report 1999-2000*
- ◆ *Examination of Student Work*

### Conclusions

Most assessment of student work neither challenges students to develop higher order thinking skills, nor helps teachers to inform instruction. Detailed, immediate feedback is lacking. Student responses are graded as correct or incorrect, rather than serving as anchors for deeper understanding of concepts. Opportunities to demonstrate higher order thinking skills, open-ended questions, expression of personal opinion, and critical thinking opportunities are missed. Some teachers encouraged students to self-assess, promoting students' understanding of how to improve their work. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, SALT Survey, conversations with students*)

Teachers are using rubrics as formal assessment tools attached to student work and as a comparison to letter grades or numerical grades. They have made great efforts to include them in much of their practice and willingly use them as a means to improve their students' performance; however, as they are used, they provide ineffective feedback to students. Their purpose is not well understood by most teachers and their use is a source of concern to parents and students. (*Stephen Olney School's "Action Plan for School Improvement" examination of student work, classroom observations, following students, meeting with parents*)

In a few classrooms, instruction is tailored to meet individual needs of students, utilizing a variety of rich literature and developmentally appropriate materials. However, most teachers do not differentiate instruction to meet their students' needs. They fail to provide a rigorous learning environment. In fact, most students perceive that their teachers have low expectations for them. Whole class instruction and using the same instructional materials for all students does not meet all learners' needs. This results in learner disengagement, and lost opportunities for learning. (*Stephen Olney School's "Action Plan for School*

*Improvement”, SALT Survey Results, classroom observations, meeting with students)*

Instruction of students is primarily teacher directed with little student input, feedback or participation allowed. There is a focus on receiving short answers, rather than exchanges between teachers and students. A high value is placed on maintaining order, rather than on the busy hum of students engaged in learning activities. Most teachers lecture constantly when instructing, rather than allowing students to equally participate in sharing their ideas. Students demonstrate a strong desire to have a more active role in responding to teacher queries. They want to engage in creative writing, project based learning, using technology, and more open-ended assignments. Regrettably, this is not allowed in most classrooms. (*classroom observations, School Improvement Plan, meeting with students, following students, SALT Survey*).

## Recommendations for Stephen Olney School

Implement school based intensive professional development in standards based instruction and ongoing assessment.

Implement school based intensive professional development in differentiated instruction and utilize the expertise present in your building as support.

Engage your students often as active participants in their own learning. Investigate ways to incorporate technology in classroom instruction.

## Recommendations for The North Providence School District

Support the implementation of intensive professional development in standards based instruction and ongoing assessment.

Support professional development to enable staff to differentiate instruction.

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff and school administrators*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students , and parents*
- ◆ *Following students*
- ◆ *Stephen Olney School's " Action Plan for School Improvement"*
- ◆ *1999-2000 SALT Survey Report*

### Conclusions

Stephen Olney School is a safe, welcoming and caring community. Its members are proud of their accomplishments and are happy to share them with visitors. There is a school wide effort to recognize the importance of students' social and emotional development. (*classroom observations, following students, SALT survey, meeting with students, meeting with parents, meeting with District, meeting with School Improvement Team, meeting with school administrator*)

Stephen Olney's mission statement, which emphasizes a challenging learning environment with high expectations for students, has not been fully realized. Although many of the action plans in Stephen Olney School's "Action Plan for School Improvement" have been implemented, the area of professional development is not a clear goal. (*Stephen Olney School's "Action Plan for School Improvement" School Improvement Team Meeting, classroom observations, following students, meeting with students, conversations with students, SALT Survey*)

The school leadership supports a climate that is friendly, structured, and orderly. The school principal greets students and staff each day in a welcoming manner. His relationships with families and community members is exceptional. However, not enough time is dedicated to instructional leadership. There is a limited emphasis on classroom observations for the purpose of educational supervision. (*Meeting with the school administrator, classroom observations, following students, School Improvement Team meeting, meeting with parents*)

Although family involvement is encouraged and extensive, some parents feel that it is limited in scope. Some parents indicate a desire to learn more about instructional expectations and ways to help their children. The present lack of understanding about the curriculum creates frustration and anxiety on the part of some students and parents. (*Meeting with parents, SALT Survey*)

The North Providence School District has recently adopted new English Language Arts and Mathematics standards-referenced curriculum guide for all grades, with benchmarks and performance- based assessments

provided. The principal is charged with the responsibility of supporting teachers through this instructional transition. School based professional development funds are inadequate to enable principals to meet this challenge. Furthermore, there are no curriculum guides currently available for a majority of the remaining subjects such as science, social studies, technology, physical education, art, music, and health. This is unacceptable.

## Commendations for Stephen Olney School

The safe, welcoming, and caring school community.

## Recommendations for Stephen Olney School

Fully implement your school's "Action Plan for School Improvement" and begin the process of forming a comprehensive professional development plan.

Consider ways to balance instructional leadership in your school.

Explore additional ways to educate families about learning.

## Final Advice to the School Recommendations for the North Providence School District

Develop standards-based curricular guides in areas not currently addressed in a timely fashion.

Provide sufficient fiscal support to implement building level professional development for the transition to standards based instruction.

## 7. Final Advice

Stephen Olney School has a strong foundation upon which to build future success: incredible students! Listen to your students and value them by giving them “voice” in their learning. They have unlimited potential for learning and a strong desire to show you what they can do. Set high expectations for all students and encourage risk taking for them and for yourselves. Seek and find the needed resources and support that will make this a reality.

## Stephen Olney School Improvement Team

Mr. Arthur Corsini  
Principal

Mrs. Kathy Anzeveno  
2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher

Mrs. Demetra Bianchi  
5<sup>th</sup> grade Teacher

Mrs. Cheryl Cicerone  
6<sup>th</sup> grade Teacher

Mrs. Shiela Coates  
Special Needs Teacher

Mrs. Susan Hanoin  
Parent

Mrs. Judith Maxham  
Reading Teacher

Mrs. Karen O' Donnell  
Parent

Mrs. Norma Phillips  
2<sup>nd</sup> grade Teacher

## The SALT Visit Team

Elisabeth Newman  
Chair  
Bristol Warren Arts Magnet Program at Reynolds School  
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)

Eddie Dunn,  
Principal  
Frenchtown Elementary School  
East Greenwich, Rhode Island

Kathy Rainone,  
Teacher, Mentoring Fellow  
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Nancy Seadale  
Multi-Age Teacher  
Nayatt Elementary School  
Barrington, Rhode Island

Alba Steiner  
Parent  
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Gail Townsend  
Social Worker  
William L. Callahan Elementary School  
Harrisville, Rhode Island

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## Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

**Stephen Olney School**

February 9, 2001

To complete the Catalpa Ltd. report endorsement, I discussed the conduct of the visit with the Visit Chair while it was in process, I observed a portion of the visit and I have reviewed this report. 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, 1<sup>st</sup> 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.  
March 2, 2001