



Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School

Central Falls

SALT Visit Team Report

March 23, 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 Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School from March 20, 2001-March 23, 2001, was to draw conclusions about the School in the three focus areas of SALT:

- ◆ Student Learning
- ◆ Teaching
- ◆ The School

The design of the SALT visit ensures that accountability supports improvement of schools by directly connecting judgments of quality and recommendations for improvement to the actual life and work of a school.

This report is built upon the observations and conclusions of the visit team. The visit team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners and a parent. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School was the touchstone document for the team. However informative written reports may be, there is simply no substitute for being at the school while it is in session in the classroom, in the lunchroom, and in the hallways. The specific information generated by a team visit is about how the students, staff, and administrators go about their day. Thus, this visit allowed professional colleagues and stakeholders to build informed judgments about the teaching and learning that actually takes place at Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 132 full classroom observations and 11 partial classroom observations which totaled over 115 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 11 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*
- *teams*
- ◆ *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*
- ◆ *observation of truancy court*
- ◆ *observation of after school program*
- ◆ *review of classroom assessments.*
- ◆ *review of the following documents:*
 - *Calcutt Middle School Action Plan*
 - *Calcutt Middle School Self-Study Document*
 - *School and Community Organized to Promote Excellence in Schools—SCOPE*
 - *district strategic plan*
 - *2000 SALT Survey data*
 - *1999 Information Works!*
 - *2000 Information Works!*
 - *1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*

- *1998, 1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam School Summary*
- *2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam School Summary*

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 Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle 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 Central Falls, and the Rhode Island Department of Education will share that responsibility.

Following your school’s review of this report, consider what changes to make in your school improvement plan. The revised plan will form the basis for negotiating a Compact for Learning with your district. The Compact’s purpose is to ensure that your school and your district work out an agreement about the most important priorities for your school to work and how to best target district support in reaching them. Your RIDE Field Service Team representative will offer some assistance in facilitating the preparing of the Compact.

It is important to read and consider this report as a whole. Recommendations and commendations should be considered in context with the conclusions. That is the way they were written.

2. PROFILE OF Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School

Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School serves students in the sixth through eighth grades in the city of Central Falls, Rhode Island, and is part of the Central Falls School District. A Special State Administrator, Virginia DaMota, governs the Central Falls School District. Ms. DaMota functions as a school committee and is assisted by an appointed School District Advisory Board of eight members plus five ex-officio members. A superintendent and a district staff of five also administer the Central Falls School District.

Calcutt Middle School was built in 1975, and housed grades four through six. In the 1998-99 school year an addition to the school was constructed. During the construction period, students were housed in various sites including the Calcutt building. The 1999-2000 school year was the first year that all faculty and students were housed together in the Calcutt Middle School building. At that time approximately 700 students attended the school. This year over 800 students attend the school. Next year anticipated student enrollment will be over 900.

Of the 813 students who attend Calcutt Middle School 61.6 percent are Hispanic, 27.2 percent are White, 10.6 percent are Black, and fewer than one percent are Asian/Pacific Islander. Twenty-seven percent of Calcutt students receive ESL related services. Twenty-eight percent receive special education services. The school is a Title 1 school. One hundred percent of Calcutt Middle School students are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch. Calcutt students have a 92 percent attendance rate, but also experience a 38 percent mobility rate.

One principal and two assistant principals administer the school. Sixty-six full time teachers, thirty of whom are new teachers with fewer than two years experience, 16 teacher assistants, two guidance counselors, three secretaries, and a total of six custodians serve the students of Calcutt Middle School. All four of the seventh and eighth grade teams loop students and teachers.

The faculty and administration of Calcutt Middle School are part of the Standards Network initiative with Rhode Island Middle Level Educators (RIMLE). This project involves teachers in the school with the development and implementation of standards-based instruction in their classrooms through professional development and networking with other middle schools.

Many extended school programs, the majority of which are taught by faculty and staff, support students at Calcutt. School and Community Organized to Promote Excellence in Schools (SCOPE) offers students activities that include homework clubs, instrumental music classes, various sports groups, a publicly recognized fencing group, and activities involving specific student interests such as chess and arts and crafts. The Calcutt Learning Academy for Student Success (CLASS) is a unique seven-week summer program designed to help students improve in the areas of reading, writing, math, and problem solving. As part of this program some parents are required to attend workshops dealing with effective ways to assist their children with their schoolwork. In its School Improvement Plan Calcutt recognized the need for a full time home-school liaison. Recently, a liaison was assigned to the school to work with families and provide assistance and communication between the school and the community. In February, 2001, a truancy court was established at Calcutt Middle School to reinforce student attendance and parental responsibility. Positive results on attendance rates have begun to occur.

Between 1998 and 2000 student performance on the New Standards Reference Exam as well as the Rhode Island Writing Assessment shows no clear trends, but is low. On the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam student performance at Calcutt Middle School falls below the state average on all seven subtests. On each of those subtests the number of students who score below the standard ranges from 59 percent to 98 percent. Ninety-four percent of seventh grade students scored below the standard on the 2000 Rhode Island Writing

Assessment.

Equity gaps of 15 percent or more exist between Special Education and General Education students on the New Standards Reference Exam with General Education students outperforming Special Education students on all four subtests measured. Gaps on the subtests also exist among the different ethnic groups, but show no clear trend. Finally, on the Mathematics Problem Solving subtest a gap shows 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 Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School is available at www.ridoenet.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

As one enters Calcutt Middle School, the visitor encounters a rich and culturally diverse population that includes over 50 percent native Spanish speakers. Students at Calcutt are comfortable with themselves and they respect their teachers. Genuinely caring teachers and administrators place their students' well being at the very top of their priority lists. They have created a positive atmosphere within this school. The commitment and compassion of the entire staff provide a safe and nurturing haven for students.

Some teachers build on the nurturing community within the school and guide their students towards achieving high standards. They engage their students in active and challenging learning.

However, most teachers do not challenge their students, and student performance on state assessments is dismal. Low expectations are too often the norm in classrooms. Teachers generally feed information to their students. Most students develop few skills that could help them to achieve high standards. Most teachers, staff, and administrators believe that their students will not learn at a high level. This perception does not allow students to remove their "training wheels" and ride independently towards achievement and success.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam School Summary*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam School Summary*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *meetings with students and district administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *Calcutt Middle School Self-Study Document*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with teachers*

Conclusions

Students are friendly and respectful to adults and address them all as “Miss” or “Mr.” Most students adhere willingly to the rules of the school. These behaviors help to create a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere within the halls and classrooms. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, meetings with students and district administrators*)

Most students at Calcutt Middle School do not write well. Writing for them is far too often reduced to responding to factual recall questions. While a few students produce examples of journal writing, reports, autobiographical accounts, stories and poetry, most do not. Most students do not use the strategies necessary to write effectively. Writing for them is an isolated exercise rather than a process. This results in poor student performance on state assessments. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, Calcutt Middle School Self-Study Document, 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam School Summary, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*)

Students do not read well. While some decode words adequately, most struggle. Few students comprehend what they read. They lack ownership of their reading and are not excited about what they read. Students seldom read for enjoyment. They do not make connections between their reading and their lives. This is reflected in their low performance on state assessments in reading with 32 percent achieving the standard on the Basic Understanding subtest and 13 percent achieving the standard on the Analysis and Interpretation subtest. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam School Summary*)

Some students successfully use manipulatives in math class to solve simple equations and measure angles. However, most students review math skills at a slow pace, on a daily basis. They function at a very low level in concepts and problem solving. Most practice basic skills with too few problems completed in a class period. Very little new learning takes place. These activities are insufficient to help increase student performance. (*following students, classroom observations, 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam School Summary, examination of student work*)

Commendations for Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School

The friendly and respectful students

Recommendations for Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School

Continue to engage in professional development around the new math program. Implement all the learned strategies in all math classes. Spend more time on problem solving and conceptual learning in all math classes.

Make reading and writing achievement a priority for all students in all classes.

Engage all teachers in professional development in direct instructional strategies around a balanced literacy approach to reading and writing. Implement those strategies in reading and writing instruction in all classes and across the curriculum.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with students and teachers*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, students, parents, and teams*
- ◆ 2000 Information Works!
- ◆ 2000 SALT Survey data

Conclusions

Teachers provide a tremendous amount of emotional support for their students. They create a nurturing and safe environment for them. All staff know their students well and have established an excellent rapport. This level of mutual respect has fostered a well-behaved student body. However, most teachers do not use this safe haven that they have created as a springboard to academic excellence. Rather, they continue to hold low academic expectations for students. They do not empower students to take risks, make mistakes, learn by doing, and think for themselves. Most teachers do not challenge their students who repeatedly express the desire to be challenged. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, meetings with students, parents, team meetings, and school and district administrators, 2000 SALT Survey data*)

Instructional time is wasted far too often and is, therefore, not used efficiently. Teachers often begin classes late and end them early. They are not ready when students enter the classroom. Throughout the day they are distracted by numerous and varied interruptions. This deprives students of learning opportunities. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, meeting with students*)

A few teachers at Calcutt use solid, research based reading instructional strategies that increase student literacy. Most do not. Most teachers rely on whole class round robin reading and silent reading sessions. This practice results only in highlighting student decoding skill difficulties. It does not teach them effective reading strategies, nor does it provide students with the skills necessary to analyze and interpret what they read. Furthermore, most teachers limit students' opportunities to deepen their understanding and interpretation of text because teachers pose and answer their own questions. Therefore, student growth is inhibited. (*following students, classroom observations, 2000 SALT Survey data, conversations and interviews with teachers*)

A few teachers teach effective writing strategies. Their students routinely use graphic organizers, brainstorm, draft, peer edit, and revise their work. They produce writing in different formats that includes narratives,

expository, creative, responses to literature, and summaries. Unfortunately, the majority of teachers fail to engage their students in these kinds of activities. Instead, they require their students to write fill-in the blanks and short answer responses. These practices do not develop higher level thinking skills. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, 2000 SALT Survey data, meeting with parents*)

Most teachers at Calcutt Middle School use a limited number of strategies in their instruction. Commonly used practices include whole group instruction and lecture. The dependence on these teaching tools is inadequate because they simply transmit information to learners. In addition, most teachers do not accommodate the various learning styles of their students, nor do they differentiate their instruction to meet the varied learning needs of their students. These strategies are necessary to improve student learning. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations with students, 2000 SALT Survey data*)

Although some of the faculty are in the beginning stages of the implementation of standards-based instruction, most teachers lack the confidence and a clear understanding about the purpose and use of standards. (*conversations and interviews with teachers, meetings with school and district administrators, examination of student work, following students, classroom observations*)

Commendations for Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School

Those teachers who employ effective, research-based instructional strategies

The supportive and nurturing teachers who provide a family-like environment

Recommendations for Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School

Raise the level of academic expectations for all students. Challenge all students.

Empower students to make choices for their learning.

Use the expertise within the building as well as external sources for professional development in literacy and numeracy development, standards-based instruction, differentiation of instruction, and different learning styles. Implement the strategies learned throughout the school.

Maximize instructional time by implementing more efficient techniques. Eliminate wasted time.

Eliminate external interruptions in order to maximize instructional time.

Recommendations for Central Falls School District

Increase the support and resources to Calcutt Middle School in its efforts to raise student achievement.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with students and teachers*
- ◆ *meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, students*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *Calcutt Middle School Self-Study Document*
- ◆ *Calcutt Middle School Action Plan*
- ◆ *Calcutt Middle School SALT visit team*
- ◆ *observations of after school program: School and Community Organized to Promote Excellence in Schools—SCOPE*
- ◆ *observation of truancy court*

Conclusions

The Calcutt Middle School Action Plan reflects a remarkably honest and thorough self-study. This plan is a revealing tool that will guide the school in its work to improve student achievement. (*Calcutt Middle School Self Study Document, Calcutt Middle School Action Plan, meetings with school and district administrators, School Improvement Team, conversations and interviews with teachers*)

The overuse of the public address system and the inordinate number of other classroom interruptions show a disregard for instruction and learning in this school. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, Calcutt Middle School SALT visit team*)

The Enrichment period is a waste of time for the vast majority of students. They have free time, play games, watch movies, engage in arts and crafts activities, finish homework, and socialize. These activities will not help to raise student achievement. (*following students, classroom observations*)

Most areas lack formal curricula that is aligned with standards. Teachers are left to teach whatever they choose. Curriculum mapping is taking place this year, but presently few curricular connections exist. The few that do exist are superficial in nature. This results in educational gaps and overlaps for students. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, meetings with school and district administrators*)

Technology is outdated and obsolete in this school. Computer literacy is an essential requirement for today's students to become tomorrow's productive citizens. The Library Media Center is an underutilized resource

due to outdated and insufficient materials and misconceptions about its purpose and use. Calcutt Middle School students deserve equitable opportunities like their peers in other communities. *(following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, meetings with school administrators, School Improvement Team)*

Calcutt Middle School offers a wide variety of extra-curricular activities that help to meet the diverse needs of its students. These activities provide students productive and useful connections with teachers and members of the community. In addition, the Calcutt Learning Academy for Student Success (CLASS) provides students with intense academic development during the summer months. Also, the existence of the newly formed truancy court at Calcutt Middle School is improving student attendance. *(observations of after-school program: School and Community Organized to Promote Excellence in Schools—SCOPE, meetings with School Improvement Team and school administrators, conversations with students and teachers, observation of truancy court)*

Commendations for Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School

The remarkably honest and thorough self-study

The variety of programs offered at Calcutt Middle School that benefit students

Recommendations for Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School

Confine announcements and interruptions to the beginning and end of the school day.

Utilize the Enrichment period for direct instruction in literacy and numeracy.

Complete curricula mapping. Develop and implement formal curricula that is aligned with standards in all subjects.

Engage faculty and staff in discussions as to how to best use the library as a resource.

Extend the after-school program to welcome and engage parent involvement.

Recommendations for Central Falls School District

Implement the district plan to provide Calcutt Middle School with useful and current technology that gives all students equitable opportunities that will enable them to become successful in an information based society.

Provide the resources necessary for the Calcutt Middle School library to purchase current and adequate print and non-print resources that support the mission of the school.

Continue the work you have begun with Calcutt Middle School on the development and implementation of curricula that is aligned with standards.

7. Final Advice to the School

An obvious strength of Calcutt Middle School lies in your compassionate, caring, dedicated, nurturing staff, and your wonderful students. Although you face many obstacles, they are not insurmountable. Capitalize on the solid foundation that you have worked so hard to construct and raise your expectations for all students. Continue to develop and improve your own knowledge and professional skills to model lifelong learning. Become a community of risk takers by allowing yourselves to experiment, to make mistakes, and to learn from them. Together, you and your students will be empowered to succeed.

Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Kim Alix
Split Team (7-8)

Renee Beaulieu
Teacher Assistant

Alan Cabral
Title 1

Karen Cardoza
Special Education

Kathy DeAndrade
8th grade Student

Frank DelBonis
7th and 8th grade Social Studies Teacher

Amber Deslauriers
8th grade Student

Christine Gingerella
SCOPE Director of Programming

Penny Letendre
Parent

Bruce Macksoud
Principal

Ross Martin
Spanish Teacher

Candace Mendes
6th grade Special Needs Teacher

Paulo Silva
Assistant Principal

Ron Trahan
Split Team (7-8)

Pat Weiffenbach
Parent

THE SALT VISIT TEAM

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

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Dr. Earl F. Calcutt Middle School

March 23, 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, 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.
April 4, 2001