



# Arlington School

Cranston

## SALT Visit Team Report

March 10, 2001



**School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)**

**The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education**

Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education

Peter McWalters, Commissioner

Regents

James A. DiPrete, Chairman

Robert J. Canavan, Vice Chair

Jo Eva Gaines, Secretary

Representative Paul W. Crowley

Elia Germani

Sue P. Duff

Gary E. Grove

Ms. Colleen Callahan

Senator Hanna M. Gallo

Mario A. Mancieri

Vidal P. Perez

The Board of Regents does not discriminate on the basis of age, color, sex, sexual orientation, race, religion, national origin, or disability.

**For information about SALT, please contact Ken Fish at 401-222-4600, x 2200 or [salt@rideo.net](mailto:salt@rideo.net).**

**This report is available at [www.rideo.net/schoolimprove/salt](http://www.rideo.net/schoolimprove/salt)**

1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS
2. PROFILE OF Arlington School
3. PORTRAIT OF Arlington School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT
4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

***Sources of Evidence***

***Conclusions***

***Commendations***

***Recommendations***

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

***Sources of Evidence***

***Conclusions***

***Commendations***

***Recommendations***

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

***Sources of Evidence***

***Conclusions***

***Commendations***

***Recommendations***

7. FINAL ADVICE TO THE SCHOOL

**Members of School Improvement Team**

**Members of SALT Visit Team**

**Code of Conduct for Members of Visit Team**

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

**Catalpa Ltd. Endorsement of Visit Team Report**

# 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 Arlington School from March 7<sup>th</sup> through March 10, 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 Arlington 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 Arlington School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 62 full classroom observations and 37 partial classroom observations which totaled over 76 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. All classrooms were visited at least once. Most 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/or interviews with 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 for Arlington School*
  - *district strategic plan*
  - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
  - *classroom textbooks*
  - *1998 Information Works!*
  - *1999 Information Works!*
  - *2000 Information Works!*
  - *1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
  - *1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment result*
  - *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 28 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 Arlington 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 Cranston, 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 on 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 Arlington School

Arlington Elementary School was built in 1957 in the Arlington section of Cranston, Rhode Island and is part of the Cranston School System. Arlington houses 140 students in kindergarten through grade five. Three ESL classrooms were transferred to another site beginning September 1998.

Of the 140 students, 68 percent are white, 13 percent Hispanic, 12 percent black, six percent Asian, and less than one percent Native American. Greater than 70 percent of the students receive free or reduced price lunch, and approximately 50 students participate in the daily free breakfast program.

The faculty consists of six full time classroom teachers, one class-reduction teacher in grade two, and a teacher assistant in grade one. Additionally, Arlington has two resource teachers covering four and one-half days a week, one full and one part-time reading teacher, a guidance teacher (three days a week), a Primary Enrichment teacher (PEP), and a two-day speech/language therapist.

Arlington as a Title I school serves all students. Project Ready (Reaching Early Achievement During the Younger Years) supports a summer school initiative that provides instruction for incoming and outgoing kindergarten student. The school also supports a summer literacy program for grades one and two, and a summer outreach program for grades three and four. Arlington is a COZ site that helps to connect parents with community agencies.

When comparing the 1999 New Standards Reference Examination scores with the 2000 New Standards Reference Examination scores the fourth grade students evidenced growth in all subtests. Gender gaps, a difference of 15 percent or more are evidenced in the 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results with females outperforming males in the Mathematics Skills, Reading Analysis and Interpretation and Writing Effectiveness 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 Arlington School is available at [www.rido.net](http://www.rido.net).

### 3. PORTRAIT OF Arlington School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Arlington School, nestled within a diverse neighborhood community, is a unique treasure embraced by all. Within this orderly, meticulously maintained facility, students, staff, and community are held in high regard and share mutual respect for each other. The staff is welcoming, knowledgeable, and cares deeply about their students. They are supported by a principal who is not only an instructional leader, but also one who has faith and trust in her staff knowing they are competent professionals. The students are happy, polite, and respectful of adults and peers. The Arlington parent community holds the school and its members in high regard feeling welcomed and supported by this “gold mine”.

The Arlington community has embraced literacy and focused their efforts on instruction in this area. The reward has been the students’ love of reading and demonstrated competency. The school is now faced with the challenge of embracing written expression, mathematical problem solving, and higher order thinking.

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

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

### Conclusions

Students in Arlington feel safe, happy and comfortable in their learning environment. They are well-behaved, polite, friendly and accepting of diversity. They are cognizant of the school and classroom rules and their corresponding consequences. Students work well in groups, have a sense of responsibility and feel accepted as individuals. The students hold the staff in high regard. These characteristics create a positive atmosphere for learning. (*observations of the school, conversations and interviews with students, teachers, parents, school administration, classroom observations*)

The majority of students at Arlington School read very well. They willingly engage in daily reading at their independent reading level. Students read with good expression and fluency. This is consistent with the exceptional results of the New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination results where Arlington students scored 95 percent in the Basic Understanding subtest. (*New Standards Reference Examination, classroom observation, following students, conversations and interviews with teachers, parents, district administration*)

Most students are not eager to write. Student writing is predominately teacher prompted with limited student choice. Students have few opportunities to revise or edit their own writing. They frequently write short answer responses on worksheets for limited purposes. Responses are concrete and factual with some opinion, but require very little integrative and critical thinking. Students are reading at a significantly higher level than their writing demonstrates. This is shown by the discrepancies between the exceptionally high scores on the reading subtests (95 percent for Basic Understanding and 84 percent for Analysis and Interpretation) and the surprisingly low scores on the writing subtests (47 percent for Effectiveness and 42 percent for Conventions). (*New Standards Reference Examination, following students, classroom observations,*

*conversations and interviews with students and teachers, examination of student work)*

Most students at Arlington are proficient in mathematical skills. They practice facts predominately using practice sheets. This could account for the impressive gains on the New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination results where 85 percent of the students ‘achieved the standard’, and 15 percent ‘nearly achieved the standard’ on the Mathematical Skills subtest. Although engaged in isolated skill activities, students are involved in limited activities requiring application of mathematical concepts, reasoning and problem solving. This is evidenced by the difference in the gains on Mathematical Concepts and Problem Solving subtests when compared to the Mathematical Skills scores on the New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination. *(classroom observations, following students, New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination, examination of student work, conversations and interviews with students, teachers, district administration)*

## Commendations for Arlington School

Positive student attitude

High achievement in reading comprehension

## Recommendations for Arlington School

Continue to nurture students love of reading.

Increase student opportunities for quality writing across the curriculum.

Engage students in real-life mathematical problem solving requiring written responses that explain the process for arriving at the solution.

## 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*
- ◆ 2000 Information Works!
- ◆ *Arlington School Standards Book*
- ◆ *Examination of student work*
- ◆ *Conversations and interviews with teachers, school and district administration*
- ◆ *1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment Results*

### Conclusions

Teachers celebrate reading at Arlington School. They provide significant time for students to read at independent levels. Homogeneous reading group instruction occurs for all students. A variety of opportunities for the students to read between and among grade levels are provided. Teachers are meeting the instructional needs of their students through frequent monitoring of progress and collaboration with Title I personnel. These factors account for the notable improvement in the New Standards Reference Examination reading subtest scores. (*classroom observations, conversations and interviews with students, school administration, and teachers, New Standards Reference Examination, observations of the school*)

Students are placed in instructional groupings based on individual assessments. While students are reading at their instructional level, the follow-up activities do not demand higher level reasoning skills. Many students are required to merely answer factual questions rather than analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information. Arlington School is commended for the outstanding percentage of students who ‘achieved the standard with honors’ on the Reading Basic Understanding subtest (37 percent). However, zero percent of the students ‘achieved the standard with honors’ in the Analysis and Interpretation subtest. An increased emphasis on higher level reasoning skills will further improve achievement in this area. (*classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations and interviews with students, teachers, New Standards Reference Examination results*)

While students are given opportunities to write, there is limited instruction in the writing process. Most students’ work progresses from a rough draft, to a teacher corrected draft, to a final copy. This leaves out the

valuable steps of prewriting, student, and peer editing and revising. This practice discourages student creativity and ownership, and limits meaningful practice in the use of conventions. Many teachers are not taking advantage of the student's love of reading to connect it to purposeful writing. Writing across the curriculum is frequently limited to short factual responses on worksheets. Higher-level thinking skills are not evidenced in student writing. A dramatic gap exists in the reading and writing connection. Instruction in these areas is isolated, therefore inhibiting the natural integration of language arts skills. (*classroom observations, examination of student work, New Standards Reference Examination, conversations and interviews with teachers, district administration, Rhode Island Writing Assessment, following students*)

Teachers provide many opportunities for students to practice basic mathematical skills including word problems. Although attempts are being made to teach problem solving strategies, students are not being provided the opportunities to make important decisions about the approach, materials, and strategies to use when solving real-life problems. This narrow focus does not provide sufficient development of math concepts and problem solving, resulting in low performance in these areas. (*Arlington School Standards Book, classroom observations, New Standards Reference Examination, following students, examination of student work, interview with district administration*)

Teachers care about all students and demonstrate a dedication to their profession. They work diligently to provide quality education, are committed to student learning, and show a willingness to vary their instructional practices. Teachers at Arlington School have learned the content standards. They are at different levels in their understanding and application of these standards. While it is necessary for students to be aware of standards, it is not a valuable use of time for them to reference them. (*classroom observations, conversations and interviews with students, following students*)

Rubrics are evident in all classrooms. The majority of teachers use rubrics to evaluate student work, however, students are not provided opportunities to use rubrics as a tool to improve their own work. Rubrics for evaluation purposes only do not allow for students to further their achievement. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, conversation and interviews with students, teachers*)

## Commendations for Arlington School

- Overall personal interest in the students
- Teachers' pride in their school and dedication to their profession
- Fostering the love of reading and outstanding student performance
- Individual reading assessment of all students

## Recommendations for Arlington School

- Engage in professional development in the writing process and writing across the curriculum.
- Provide teachers with professional development in the area of problem solving and the application of mathematical concepts in real life situations.
- Take the next step toward a standard based classroom consisting of both content and performance standards.
- Provide students the opportunity to use rubrics to revise and improve their work.

## Recommendations for Cranston School District

Provide the necessary professional development opportunities for the staff of Arlington School.

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, COZ, teachers, staff and school administrators*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators,*
- ◆ *students*
- ◆ *Following students*
- ◆ *Arlington School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *Home School Connection*
- ◆ *2000 SALT Survey data*

### Conclusions

Arlington is a neighborhood school with a friendly, welcoming environment. People are proud to belong to this learning community. Parents are fiercely loyal to their school and view it as an extension of their home. The services provided by COZ and Project Ready strengthens the home-school link. The monthly newsletters, the book-bag program, and the homework club strengthen lines of communication and emphasize the importance of learning. These factors promote the value of education. (*conversation and interviews with students, parents, COZ, and teachers, following students, classroom observation, Home School Connection, 2000 SALT Survey Data*)

The low class size of the kindergarten best meets the educational needs of the students of Arlington School. Speech and language services are critical to the oral language and vocabulary development of the primary students. The continuation of small class size and increase of speech and language services will positively impact student readiness and achievement. (*following students, classroom observations, conversation and interviews with teachers, parents, school and district administration*)

Arlington has a school-wide Title I Program serving every student. As part of the Language Arts block, both Title I and Resource use a predominately pullout model. Daily integration of these exemplary programs occurring within all classrooms would benefit a wider audience. This would increase whole class instructional time and enhance learning for all students in English/Language Arts. (*classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, observation of the school, New Standards Reference Examination*)

Arlington has developed an extensive School Improvement Plan. The desire to improve instructional programs and practices led to this ambitious undertaking. While commendable, this could potentially lead to frustration and disappointment if the goals are not met within the established timeline. *(scheduled meeting with the school improvement team, Arlington School Improvement Plan)*

The Cranston Public School Teacher Evaluation instrument provides sufficient data and documentation to evidence professional growth and self-evaluation by teachers. Mentoring is mandatory for all first year teachers in Cranston Public Schools. *(Cranston Public School Teacher Evaluation instrument, conversations and interviews with teachers, school administration, district administration)*

## Commendations for Arlington School

Outreach to parents and community

Small class size in kindergarten

Quality of the Title I, Resource, and Speech and Language Programs

## Recommendations for Arlington School

Increase the use of in-class modeling and instruction by Title I and Resource personnel.

Increase Speech and Language services to a full time position.

## Recommendations for Cranston Public School

Increase Speech and Language services to a full time position in Arlington School.

Maintain small class size in the kindergarten.

## 7. Final Advice to the School

The Arlington Community should be extremely proud of its school. You are taking positive steps in the right directions. Continue your momentum towards standards based classrooms.

You have expertise within your building. Harness this knowledge and energy to enhance and enrich classroom instruction and student learning.

As your students continue to achieve, challenge and enrich them to new heights. Provide all students opportunities to engage in higher level thinking activities across all curricula.

Provide a variety of opportunities for students to improve their work. Utilize peer and teacher conferencing, written feedback, and rubrics to encourage students to become more responsible for their learning and bring their work to a higher level.

You have begun your journey toward excellence and we applaud your progress. It is our hope that this report will provide you with information that will assist you as you move toward high achievement for all students.

## Arlington School Improvement Team

Carolyn Wentworth, Chairperson  
Title I Reading Specialist

Sandra Jennings  
Principal

Evelyn Baker  
Reading Consultant

Michelle Bonaventure  
Fifth Grade

Clara Costa  
Third Grade

Joseph DeLellis  
Guidance

Kimberly Fera  
Second Grade

Heidi Gaffney  
Art Teacher

Maureen Greaves  
COZ Coordinator

Joy Helmold  
Librarian

Melissa Kirrane  
Fourth Grade

Jan Lisnoff  
Speech Language

Susan Marshall  
Kindergarten

Linda Morales  
First Grade

### **Kids' Kingdom and Sunshine Pre-School Representatives**

Patricia Rock  
Resource Teacher

Melody Salisbury  
PTG President

Deb Salone  
Director, Project Ready

Peter Worthington  
Business Representative

## The SALT Visit Team

Donna H. Reinalda  
Multi-age Teacher-Grades 1-3  
Sowa's Elementary School  
Barrington, Rhode Island  
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)  
Chair

Patricia E. Angilly  
Grade One Teacher  
Norwood Elementary School  
Warwick, Rhode Island

Virginia Bolano  
Principal  
Harold F. Scott School  
Warwick, Rhode Island

Audrey A. Faubert  
Grade One Teacher  
State Street Elementary School  
Westerly, Rhode Island

Connie McCarthy  
Grade One Teacher  
Myron J. Francis School  
East Providence, Rhode Island

J. Carol Palmer  
Parent  
North Kingstown, Rhode Island

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

## Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

### **Arlington School**

March 10, 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.  
April 4, 2001