



Frenchtown School

East Greenwich

SALT Visit Team Report

March 23, 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

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For information about SALT, please contact Ken Fish at 401-222-4600, x 2200 or salt@ridoe.net.

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 Frenchtown School from March 20 through 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 Frenchtown 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 Frenchtown School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 90 full and partial lesson observations that totaled over 74 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. Most classrooms were visited at least once. Most teachers were observed more than once.*
- ◆ *32 interviews with teachers, staff, and administrator*
- ◆ *many observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- ◆ *following seven 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 Frenchtown School*
 - *district strategic plan*
 - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
 - *classroom textbooks*
 - *1999 Information Works!*
 - *2000 Information Works!*
 - *1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results for Fourth Grade at Eldredge Elementary School*
 - *1998, 1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
 - *SALT Team Information Binder for the Frenchtown School*
 - *East Greenwich Public Schools English Language Arts Curriculum, Grades 1-3*
 - *Frenchtown School Handbook*

- *Frenchtown School Rules, Vision and Philosophy, and Curriculum Booklet 2000-2001*
- *Frenchtown Elementary School: Summary of Progress on School Improvement Initiatives, October 2000*
- *Frenchtown Elementary School Student Behavior Code*
- *Frenchtown Elementary School Self Study Summary to Date, February, 2001*

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 Frenchtown 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 East Greenwich, 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.

3. PORTRAIT OF Frenchtown School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Frenchtown School is a bustling and welcoming place to be. Faculty, staff, parents and children create an environment of warmth, caring and courtesy, and are proud of their school. The hallways and attractive classrooms show that learning is important, as children's work is openly displayed.

The principal and staff are developing a shared learning community where new teaching standards and methods are starting to take hold. The principal is an educational leader who is well thought of by parents and teachers alike. Parents are very interested in the success of the school and many volunteer their time and talents to support student learning. The students are eager, independent learners who genuinely like being in school.

There is much happening and much to do. The teachers are beginning to implement a standards-based curriculum in English Language Arts. The effective use of rubrics for assessment can be seen in most classes, some use of technology is evident, and problem solving is permeating the entire school program. There is a sense that the Frenchtown School community is a learning community not just for students, but for everyone.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

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

Conclusions

Students are enthusiastic, willing to learn, eager to participate, and attentive to following the teachers' directions. They are independent learners, as evident through their effective use of rubrics for peer and self-assessment. Respectful, courteous, and caring, they work effectively in cooperative groups. These qualities provide a solid foundation for the students to become life long learners. (*following students, classroom, cafeteria and playground observations, conversations with students*)

Many students are solving problems independently and effectively, using higher order thinking skills in a variety of situations. They demonstrate appropriate problem solving skills in social situations i.e. group discussions, sharing work, cafeteria and playground activities. Academically, students research, predict, sequence, reason, write number equations, and use prior knowledge to enhance exploration. (*classroom, cafeteria and playground observations, conversations and interviews with students and teachers, examination of student work*)

Students are writing in all aspects of the academic program. They write effectively when they respond to different genres, create stories, communicate through letter and journal writing, retell, sequence, compare, contrast and summarize, and organize facts from text. Problem solving explanations are written in many math classes as well. These activities are consistent with the increases in achievement on the 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment. In 1998, Frenchtown School's three-year target was set at 31% of third grade students meeting the standard or meeting the standard with honors for the 2001 Assessment. However, 37% of the third grade students met or exceeded the standard on the 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment. The school has already surpassed its initial goal. (*classroom observations, following students, examining student work, 2000 Information Works!*)

Students display a genuine love of reading. They read independently, in small groups, with a partner, in literature circles and book clubs. Cross grade reading buddies are evident in the kindergarten and first grade classes. Many of the students are aware of and have achieved the standard of reading 25 books per year. This is documented in reading logs kept in school and at home. Students choose to read before school and during indoor recess. Reading is an integral part of their total school experience. (*classroom observations, following students, conversation and interviews with teachers, meetings with parents and students*)

Commendations for Frenchtown School

Genuinely courteous, respectful, friendly and helpful students

Students who love to read!

Recommendations for Frenchtown School

Continue to encourage students to be avid and independent learners.

Continue to encourage the love of reading.

Continue having students write in all genres.

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*
- ◆ 1999, 2000 Information Works!
- ◆ *SALT Survey 2000*
- ◆ *meetings with students, parents, and teachers*
- ◆ *examination of student work in team room and throughout the building*
- ◆ *English Language Arts Curriculum Guides*
- ◆ *Frenchtown School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *Math Curriculum Guides*
- ◆ *student portfolios*

Conclusions

The atmosphere in most classrooms is very conducive to optimal learning. Teachers are respectful, supportive, warm and friendly throughout the school community. Teachers are successfully meeting the individual needs of their students. Positive reinforcements, complimentary dialogue, hugs and other appropriate interactions are just some of the strategies teachers utilize to personalize the learning environment for all students. (*classroom and school observations, meetings with students, parents, and teachers, following students, interviews with teachers and students*)

Most teachers have high expectations for their students. They use techniques and materials that challenge the students to use their higher order reasoning skills. Lessons encourage students to exceed the normal expectations. Many lessons afford the opportunity for all students to develop enrichment skills. The effective use of cooperative groups to delve into the work is evident. Transitions between activities are smooth and seamless, allowing for the optimal use of time on task. (*classroom observations, examination of student*

work, following students, conversations and interviews with teachers and students)

Professional development activities are important to most teachers. Currently, teachers are involved in action research by piloting two standards-based reading programs. The use of rubrics across the curriculum, performance assessments, portfolios, phonemic awareness activities, and process writing are exemplary in many instances. The use of standards and the children's understanding thereof are in the emergent stage. However, there are gaps and inconsistencies in teacher knowledge and application of these techniques. All teachers require more common planning time to work cooperatively to implement changes. Some teachers need more peer observation experiences to make the professional development translate into productive teaching practices in the classroom. *(classroom observations, following students, English Language Arts Curriculum Guides, examination of student work, conversations and interviews with students, parents, teachers, school and district administrators, Frenchtown School Improvement Plan)*

Teachers devote much instruction time to daily problem solving. How to solve word problems in mathematics, interpersonal issues throughout the school day, and in science labs, are just a few examples. Teachers effectively make problem solving strategies an integral part of the school experience. As noted in the School Improvement Plan, this emphasis is part of a concerted effort to improve student achievement on the fourth grade New Standards Reference Examination Mathematics Problem Solving subtest. *(classroom and school observations, following students, Frenchtown School Improvement Plan, 1999, 2000 Information Works!, Math Curriculum Guides, examining student work, student portfolios, Salt Survey 2000)*

Effective classroom management techniques are evident in almost all classes. Teachers are well prepared and students are attentive to the lesson. Teachers have clear and high expectations for appropriate student behavior and student learning. Students are asked to reflect on their learning at the end of many lessons. Students have a clear understanding and adhere to these high expectations. However, in some classes, these high expectations and high levels of preparedness are lacking. *(classroom observations, following students, conversations and interviews with teachers, meetings with students and parents)*

Most teachers are effectively modeling good reading and writing practices. Teachers take the time to ensure that comprehension, inflection, vocabulary development and fluency are emphasized. They incorporate literature circles, book clubs, reading logs, word walls, guided, partnered and independent reading into their instructional repertoire. Most teachers provide children many opportunities to respond in writing to their reading and mathematical experiences. Evidence of this is found in daily journal writing, reflecting on reading, book reporting, explaining problem solving steps, and authoring books. *(classroom and school observations, examination of student work in the team room and throughout the building, meetings with parents and students, conversations and interviews with teachers, following students)*

Commendations for Frenchtown School

Caring, dedicated, committed teachers

Teachers open to change

Recommendations for Frenchtown School

Set a schedule that includes common planning time for teachers.

Devise and implement a plan to address inconsistencies in teaching strategies across all grade levels.

Recommendations for the East Greenwich School District

Provide professional development to effectively implement the new standards-based curriculum in English Language Arts and the new standards-based curriculum in Math when it is completed.

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*
- ◆ *Frenchtown School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations with staff and students*
- ◆ *the school report card*
- ◆ *review of communication documents in the team room*
- ◆ *PTG Informational Package*

Conclusions

The new principal has established herself as a positive force within the school. She is welcoming, supportive, and innovative. Parents, teachers and children note that she has good people skills and has established positive relationships with the educational community. She has the skills and the vision to move the school toward achieving its goals. (*observations of the school, parent, teacher, staff and student interviews*)

Home/school communication is accomplished in a variety of ways including PTG newsletters, requested parent-teacher conferences, report cards, monthly calendars, student homework planners, and teacher/classroom newsletters and notes. Teachers and parents report that the consistency and quality of these communications vary greatly across the grades. Also, parents report that they would like more information regarding the initiatives occurring in the school. These initiatives include standards-based education, rubrics, reading pilots, and the new English Language Arts curriculum. Informing and educating the parents about K-3 curriculum and instruction is one of the target objectives of the Frenchtown School Improvement Plan. Both teachers and parents note that the present report card does not align with the current instructional practices. Additional narratives are often necessary to provide accurate assessment of students. All of this leads to frustration and lack of clarity around school and educational issues for the parents. (*school observations, review of communication documents in the team room, meetings with parents, conversations*)

and interviews with teachers, the school report card, Frenchtown School Improvement Plan)

Parental involvement in the school is a definite strength. After school activities, classroom support, fundraising, and social events are a few examples of parental school participation. Some parents are trained to work with students in literacy skills, some run the publishing center, while others work in the Parent Teacher Resource Center (PTRC) producing classroom materials. While this participation in school events is laudable, some parents and teachers express a concern that a protocol for confidentiality regarding students is not in place at this time. Also, parents express a desire for greater teacher involvement in the Parent Teacher Group-sponsored events. *(meeting with parents, conversations and interviews with teachers, meeting with the administrator, PTG Informational Package)*

A good number of teachers are RITTI trained and technology literate. Teachers use Jump Start, Math Blaster, word processing, and the Internet, among others, on the classroom computers. Some students use computers during center time and for limited specific assignments. These teachers are ready and willing to implement technology within their daily instruction. However, the School Improvement Plan does not include a technology action plan, nor is there money budgeted to fully equip the school with up-to-date, appropriate technology. In today's global society, every student must be computer literate. Internet research, word processing, electronic mailing, simulations, and tutorials are just a few applications necessary for student success. Yet, they are occurring minimally here at this time. *(conversations and interviews with teachers and parents, meetings with School Improvement Team, district administration, classroom and school observations)*

The present Frenchtown School Improvement Plan is not fully implemented. As noted in a previous conclusion, parent education in the K-3 curriculum and instruction is lacking. The Professional Development Plan does not effectively involve all teachers. Also, the full implementation of this Plan requires time allotted in the schedule so that it can be fully realized. The components missing in the Plan include the development and implementation of an updated standards-based math curriculum and a technology plan. These are necessary to enhance student learning. *(Frenchtown School Improvement Plan, conversations and interviews with teachers, meeting with administrator)*

While adequate staffing of teachers and aides in the classrooms is evident, some positions are not fully staffed. Concerns are noted in the area of nursing, school psychologist and special education. The use of uncertified/untrained personnel to fulfill the school's responsibilities puts the school community at risk and reduces the effectiveness of the school program. *(meetings with parents, district administration, and Frenchtown School Improvement Team, conversations and interviews with teachers)*

Commendations for Frenchtown School

Principal as educational leader

Excellent parental involvement

Recommendations for Frenchtown School

Improve the consistency of home/school communication.

Schedule more common planning time to allow teachers to collaborate and develop professionally.

Establish a protocol for parents to maintain confidentiality when working in the school.

Develop and implement a Technology Plan

Revise the School Improvement Plan and implement it in a timely fashion

Revisit the staffing needs for the buildings

Recommendation for East Greenwich School District

Support the school in its efforts to implement a technology plan in a timely fashion.

Fully support the new principal in her efforts to move the school forward in standards-based education.

Support adequate staffing needs as noted above.

7. Final Advice to the School

Frenchtown School is a safe, orderly, and good place to be. There is a joy and enthusiasm present in the children's behavior as they arrive in the morning and throughout the school day. The faculty and staff are caring in their relationships with students. The principal, teachers and staff are actively seeking new ways to improve student learning. Parent involvement in the school is excellent.

With the introduction of standards-based curricula in the next school year, all teachers will need training to fully understand the depth of instruction that this initiative requires. Professional development activities should be built into the school calendar next year as teachers need time to examine student work, collaborate in developing lessons, and work across grade levels to ensure appropriate curriculum sequencing. The excellent practice of meeting with Eldredge School faculty to coordinate efforts should continue.

The technology needs of your students must be addressed as well. Follow through on your plans to re-establish your Technology Action Plan so that all segments of your student population will become computer literate.

Look to fully staff your school so students receive optimum benefits in special education, social work, nursing, and guidance. The PTG is an exceptional volunteer group. Maintain their level of involvement, while also developing more effective communications with your parents, in general, about the education of their children. Teachers, students need to see you at extracurricular activities. Attend those functions of most interest to you and share this responsibility equitably.

You are a school community on its way to reaching high levels of excellence. With your new educational leader, your proven commitment to hard work and your love of children, you can only succeed to accomplish this goal. Read our report carefully for every word was chosen with much deliberation and care. Good luck to you in your endeavor to learn and grow.

Frenchtown School Improvement Team

Mrs. Cammuso
Parent

Nancy Carty
Grade 1 Teacher

Ann Marie Cole
Reading Teacher

Edie Dunn
Principal

Sue Elson
Kindergarten Teacher

Mrs. Gifford
Parent

Rita McGoff
Grade 2 Teacher

Mrs. Ordog
Parent

Mrs. Serby
Parent

Janet Volpe
Grade 3 Teacher

The SALT Visit Team

Margaret M. Della Bitta
Science Teacher
South Kingstown High School
South Kingstown, Rhode Island
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)
Chair

Kristin B. Auger
Parent
North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Dawn M. Florenz
Grade 2 Teacher
Edward S. Rhodes School
Cranston, Rhode Island

Sandra B. Koehler
Grade 2 Teacher
Hamilton Elementary School
North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Eleanor T. McSally
Reading Consultant
Harold F. Scott School
Warwick, Rhode Island

Stephen C. Ponte
Principal
Forest Avenue School
Middletown, Rhode Island

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

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Frenchtown 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 26, 2001