



# William L. Callahan School

Burrillville

## SALT Visit Team Report

April 6, 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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**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 William L. Callahan School from April 3-6, 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. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for William L. Callahan 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, in the hallways, and on the playground. 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 William L. Callahan School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 81 full and partial classroom observations which totaled over 62 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. Almost all classrooms were visited at least once. Many 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*
- *grade level teams*
- ◆ *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:*
  - *W. L. Callahan School Action Plan 2000-2003*
  - *Burrillville School Department Action Plan, 1999-2003*
  - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
  - *1998 Information Works!*
  - *1999 Information Works!*
  - *2000 Information Works!*
  - *1998, 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 25 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 William L. Callahan 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 Burrillville School Department, the citizens of Burrillville, and the Rhode Island Department of Education will share that responsibility.

Following your school’s review of this report, use the information provided in this report to 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 William L. Callahan School

The William L. Callahan School is located in the semi-rural town of Burrillville, Rhode Island. The school currently serves students in grades two through five from both the Harrisville and Pascoag villages. A superintendent and a district staff of five administer the district. An elected, non-partisan, seven-member school committee governs the Burrillville School District.

The building that houses Callahan School opened in 1929 as Burrillville High School. One addition was added in 1975, and the school then served students in grades four through six until 1989 when the sixth graders were moved into the new middle school. In 1996, when another elementary school opened, the school district was reorganized; and the William L. Callahan School assumed its current configuration.

One principal, 30 full and part-time faculty, and 12 non-certified personnel serve the 375 students of Callahan School. Ninety-seven percent of Callahan's students are white and 3 percent are black, Hispanic, or Asian/Pacific Islander. Twenty-five percent of the students receive special education services. Thirty percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch. Callahan students have a 92 percent attendance rate.

The William L. Callahan School has two on-going community partnerships: one with Providence College and a 10-year partnership with the Ocean State Power Company. These partnerships include mentoring, service, enrichment, technology, teacher training, and coursework in the school. Parents are involved at Callahan in volunteering, in fundraising, and in special events. Parents also serve on the School Improvement Team and a parent serves in the position of Parent Coordinator for the school. Callahan offers a variety of special clubs and groups for children with specific interests as well as a School-Wide Enrichment Program pilot, in which every child participates.

Last year the Burrillville School Department initiated the identification and use of Essential Learnings standards for every subject and every grade. The district is currently designing performance-based assessments and creating rubrics and other scoring tools to accompany these standards.

Between 1998 and 2000 student performance on state assessments shows steady increases on the Reading Basic Understanding subtest from 70 percent to 81 percent and on the Mathematics Skills subtest from 56 percent to 75 percent. During the same time period student performance on the other five subtests does not show clear trends. On the 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment 12 percent of Callahan third grade students achieve the standard.

Equity gaps of 30 percent or more exist on the 2000 state assessments between Special Education and General Education students. On all four subtests measured, General Education students outperform Special Education students. Equity gaps of 20 percent exist between Poverty and Non-poverty students with Non-poverty students outperforming Poverty students on two subtests. Gender gaps of 15 percent exist on the Mathematics Problem-Solving subtest with males outperforming females and on the Reading Analysis and Interpretation subtest with females outperforming males.

The team used the test score information found in *Information Works!* and the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam School Summaries to determine the equity and performance gaps discussed in the student learning conclusions. 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report. *Information Works!* data for William L. Callahan School is available at [www.ridoenet.net](http://www.ridoenet.net).

### 3. PORTRAIT OF William L. Callahan School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

William L. Callahan is a school of many contrasts, some of them extreme. The entire school community has created a wonderful place for students to be. Teachers, administrators, and students interact comfortably in a warm and open atmosphere. Parents and a very involved business partner actively contribute to this climate that benefits every student. At the same time, some students are not regarded as full members of their classes because their needs differ from the majority.

Teachers work very hard in their classrooms to help their students learn, and many have implemented effective strategies to increase learning. The walls of many classrooms are covered with student papers and posters of instructions to assist students as they work. Student papers, however, often mirror each other and reflect the common practice that all students should complete the same task in the same way at the same time. Teachers direct and control lessons, giving most students few choices as to how they learn and how they can show their understanding.

Administrators and most teachers in this school share a common interest in increasing their students' learning, and they continuously work towards that end. However, Callahan School has been thrust into tumultuous and confusing change as a result of several different district leaders in recent years and the different initiatives those changes have brought. The district's current focus is on the implementation of the brand new Essential Learnings objectives. The tasks and rubrics to implement the Essentials have not yet been developed, leaving teachers without a clear understanding of them. The resulting confusion hinders the good progress that the Callahan School is otherwise making towards improving student learning.

## 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*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with district administrators, students, and parents*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with teachers and staff*
- ◆ *observations throughout the school*

### Conclusions

Most students comprehend a variety of reading materials. They read with a partner, read both silently and orally in class, can recall factual information, and can answer teacher questions about what they read. However, fewer students successfully analyze and interpret what they read. These skills are reflected in student performance on state assessments in reading: 81 percent achieve or exceed the standard on the Basic Understanding subtest and 69 percent achieve the standard on the Analysis and Interpretation subtest. (*following students, classroom observations, 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam School Summary*)

Students write for a variety of purposes. They write original stories, poetry, responses to literature, journal entries, book reports, letters, and reflections. A few students' writing demonstrates brainstorming, drafting, editing, and revising. However, most final copies of written work lack a beginning, middle, and end and show spelling, punctuation, and other errors of convention. Most students regularly complete exercises in grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. However, much of their writing reveals a lack of competency in these areas. This is consistent with their performance on state assessments. On the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam 49 percent of the students meet the standard in Writing Effectiveness and 27 percent in Writing Conventions. Only 12 percent of third graders meet the standard on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment. (*following students, classroom observations, 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam School Summary, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results, examination of student work, observations throughout the school*)

Most students perform basic mathematical skills well. They practice problem solving, sometimes reflect on the strategies they choose, and at times use manipulatives. Some use rubrics to self assess their performance. Their emerging problem-solving skills may result in improved performance on state assessments. *(following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam School Summary)*

Substantial equity gaps exist between Special Education students and General Education students on the New Standards Reference Exam. General Education students outperform Special Education students on all four subtests measured. *(2000 Information Works!, scheduled meeting with district administrators)*

Students at Callahan feel safe in school. They are friendly and kind to each other. These qualities contribute to the relaxed, comfortable atmosphere in the school that can enable students to focus on learning. *(following students, classroom observations, scheduled meetings with students and parents, conversations and interviews with teachers and staff)*

## Commendations for William L. Callahan School

The friendly and kind students

## Recommendations for William L. Callahan School

Ensure that all teachers continue to develop the capacity to increase children's problem solving skills. Implement the strategies learned in all classes.

Engage all students in all the processes of good writing. Set high expectations for the final products of their writing.

Provide more opportunities for students to develop and use higher order thinking skills in all classes.

Continue to increase the full incorporation of students with disabilities within the school. Develop the expectation and capacity of all staff to provide supports and services within regular classrooms that increase students' levels of performance. This will narrow equity gaps.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with staff*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school and district administrators, students, parents, and grade level teams*
- ◆ 2000 Information Works!
- ◆ 1999-2000 SALT Survey
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam School Summary*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam School Summary*

### Conclusions

Teachers care about what they do and work hard on behalf of their students. Also, teachers contribute to creating an atmosphere in which their students feel cared for and safe. They make students feel comfortable in approaching them with questions and concerns. This increases the potential for student learning, especially during this time of great change in the school and district. (*following students, classroom observations, scheduled meetings with school and district administrators, students, parents, and grade level teams, 1999-2000 SALT Survey, conversations and interviews with staff*)

Most instruction at Callahan is still teacher-centered. Teachers stand in front of students and lecture, ask questions, and generally do most of the talking. Students respond to direct questions. Even when students work independently or in pairs, they are completing teacher-directed activities. (*following students, classroom observations*)

Too much instructional time at Callahan is wasted when students or teachers are off task. For example, students frequently wait for the entire class to be ready for the next activity, for teachers to deal with interruptions and distractions, or for directions to be repeated for others who were not listening or not in the room. (*following students, classroom observations*)

Instruction seldom responds to student differences at Callahan. Teachers do not offer students various ways of learning and of demonstrating that learning, and students are not continuously and appropriately challenged. Rather, most instructional activities are the same for all students, done at the same time, and result in multiple versions of the same product. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work*)

A few teachers engage their students in hands on activities, in higher level thinking, and in work that crosses different curriculum areas. These kinds of teaching strategies challenge students to higher levels of learning. Most teachers, however, focus on basic skills, frequently in isolation and unrelated to real life situations. These practices are reflected in student performance on state assessments. (*following students, classroom observations, 2000 Information Works, 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam School Summary, 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam School Summary, scheduled meetings with students and parents, 1999-2000 Salt Survey*)

One element of a planned Schoolwide Enrichment Model is being piloted at Callahan School. Students, teachers, and community members have already begun to explore areas of special interest that can lead to longer-term development of student abilities and mentoring relationships. (*classroom observations, Callahan Action Plan, meetings with School Improvement Team and school administrator, Burrillville School Department Action Plan*)

## Commendations for William L. Callahan School

The caring and dedicated teachers

The Schoolwide Enrichment Model pilot

## Recommendations for William L. Callahan School

Engage all teachers in sustained and on-going professional development in differentiated instruction. Ensure teacher understanding and incorporation of differentiated instruction in all classes for all students. This will effectively respond to student differences, enable the school to become student-centered, and will challenge all students to higher levels of learning.

Analyze the types and frequency of classroom interruptions and the amount of instructional time students spend waiting. Use the data to maximize instructional time.

Create more student-centered instruction.

Move students beyond the basic skills level in all subject areas.

## Recommendations for Burrillville School District

Provide the resources and support necessary for William L. Callahan School to engage in meaningful professional development that will result in higher levels of learning for all of Callahan's students.

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with teachers*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, and parents*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *W. L. Callahan School Action Plan 2000-2003*
- ◆ *2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *William L. Callahan Mission Statement*

### Conclusions

The William L. Callahan School Improvement Plan includes goals, objectives, and activities that will help the school to improve student achievement. Examples include parent involvement, technology, and professional development in the areas of diversified instruction, alternative assessment, Essential Learnings, and high expectations for all students. (*W. L. Callahan School Action Plan 2000-2003, scheduled meeting with School Improvement Team*)

The history of the way special education services have been delivered in this school, still influences the way some teachers view students with disabilities. The educational program for students with disabilities is viewed as largely “inclusive,” and these students do spend much of their time in general education settings. However, they are usually grouped together with the lowest performing group of students, often with a scaled down or different curriculum, and often taught by a special educator. They are frequently served outside the general education classroom for academic subjects. Too many of these students are served in a noisy, crowded, basement room shared by two teachers at the same time. Some general education teachers have lower expectations for these students. (*classroom observations, following students, conversations and interviews with teachers, scheduled meetings with school and district administrators*)

Many students are grouped by ability level in this school. This practice limits all students’ growth and will not contribute to fulfilling the school’s mission. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, William L. Callahan Mission Statement*)

Frequent district level changes of considerable magnitude in recent years have affected William L. Callahan School. Reconfiguration of the schools, the reassignment of teachers, the changes in district leadership, and the rapid shift in the direction of standards-based instruction all have greatly impacted this school. Teachers, administrators, staff, and students have had to continue to do their work throughout all these changes. Most teachers are struggling to cope with the recent focus on Essential Learnings. They have different understandings of the status of Essential Learnings and how they are to be implemented. (*scheduled meetings with school and district administrators, following students, classroom observations, 2000 Information*

*Works!)*

Callahan is a friendly school with a dedicated and caring faculty and staff who, together with a strong, positive, and supportive principal, create an environment that is conducive to learning. Parent involvement is also a key factor in Callahan student achievement. Funding is allocated for a parent coordinator who “encourages home school communication, parental involvement, and family-school-community partnership.” They volunteer in the school, attend student performances, and participate on the School Improvement Team. The school enjoys a very successful business partnership with Ocean State Power Company. This ten-year association has resulted in long-term mentors for students, participation on the School Improvement Team, special programs and celebrations, and financial support. *(following students, classroom observations, scheduled meetings with parents and School Improvement Team)*

## Commendations for William L. Callahan School

The multiple home, school, and community partnerships that contribute to the environment that supports student learning

## Recommendations for William L. Callahan School

Phase out ability grouping. Use a variety of strategies that differentiate instruction to meet the individual needs of students.

Continue the successful partnerships that contribute to the environment that supports student learning at Callahan School.

Work together to analyze the current provision of supports and services for students with disabilities. Study ways to continue improvement of service provision and shared responsibility in order to put in place truly inclusive models.

## Recommendations for Burrillville School District

Provide clear, consistent guidelines and support for the implementation of the Essential Learnings. Develop sample performances, rubrics, and vignettes for several Essential Learnings as soon as possible. Teachers, students, and parents need to understand how successful knowledge and application of each concept will be evaluated, especially since teachers are already expected to implement them.

Continue to work with Callahan School to put in place truly inclusive models of service provision.

## 7. Final Advice to the School

Callahan is a good school that finds itself in the midst of a plethora of difficult and, at times, rapid and confusing changes. However, you have continued to make your students feel welcomed and valued. Do not lose site of this strength. Build on this great foundation, a solid educational platform of student-centered instruction that will lead all of your students toward higher level thinking. As a vital part of the platform, implement strategies that engage your students in real world problem-solving activities.

Many Callahan colleagues enjoy strong working relationships that benefit students. Use that collegiality. Keep your doors open while you support and learn from each other. Become one of the risk-takers of Callahan School. Set high expectations for all students. Do not settle for less!

Fulfill the promise of your mission: Empower all students to take responsibility for their learning as you guide them towards becoming life-long learners who will effectively contribute to society. Celebrate the commendations in this SALT visit report and consider carefully the recommendations in your ongoing work here at Callahan.

## William L. Callahan School Improvement Team

Dick Aubin

4<sup>th</sup> grade Teacher/Administrative Assistant

Rachel Auclair

Special Education Teacher

Brenda Costa

Special Education Teacher

John DeMelim

Parent

Pam DeMelim

Parent

Cynthia Leoncavallo

Parent

Tracy Mararian

Parent

Judy McLaren

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Ocean State Power Company

Elaine Mulligan

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Principal

Liz Saperstein

School Psychologist

Carrie Stone

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Gail Townsend

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Sue Trinke

Parent

## The SALT Visit Team

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Ina Woolman  
Field Service Representative, RIDE  
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# New Standards Reference Examination and RI Writing Assessment Results (2000)

## Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

### William L. Callahan School

April 6, 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.  
May 8, 2001