



Sheffield Elementary School

Newport

SALT Visit Team Report

April 12, 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

1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS
2. PROFILE OF Sheffield Elementary School
3. PORTRAIT OF Sheffield Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

Conclusions

Commendations for Sheffield Elementary School

Recommendations for Sheffield Elementary School

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

Conclusions

Commendations for Sheffield Elementary School

Recommendations for Sheffield Elementary School

Recommendations for the Newport School District

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

Conclusions

Commendations for Sheffield Elementary School

Recommendations for Sheffield Elementary School

Recommendations for Sheffield School District

7. Final Advice to the School

Sheffield Elementary School Improvement Team

The SALT Visit Team

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

Endorsement of SALT 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 Sheffield Elementary School from April 9 through 12, 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 Sheffield Elementary 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 Sheffield Elementary School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of sixty-five full and partial classroom lessons, which totaled many hours, spent in direct classroom observation. Most classrooms were visited at least once. Most teachers were observed more than once*
- ◆ *observing the work of seven classroom teachers, various specialty teachers, and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *following seven students for a full day*
- ◆ *many observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with the following groups:*
 - *school and district administrators*

- *school improvement team*
- *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*
- ◆ *various curricula found in team room*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *review of classroom assessments*
- ◆ *review of the following documents:*
 - *School Improvement Plan for Sheffield Elementary School*
 - *Handbook of Information for Parents and Students, Sheffield Elementary School, 2000-2001*
 - *Sheffield School Profile, March, 2001*
 - *Sheffield Elementary School SALT Visit binder*
 - *Newport Public Schools Strategic Plan, 2001-2006*
 - *Developing a Standards-Based Curriculum, Newport Public Schools Curriculum Council Work Plan, 2000-2001*
 - *2000 SALT Survey*
 - *classroom textbooks*
 - *1998 Information Works!*
 - *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 twenty-five 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 Sheffield Elementary 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 Newport, 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 Sheffield Elementary School

Sheffield Elementary School serves students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Located in the northern portion of Newport, Rhode Island, it is one of the city's six elementary schools. It is part of the Newport School District. It was built in 1922 and has had various renovations over the years. The most recent improvements include a new roof, pointing of brick on the entire exterior of the building and new windows.

An eight-member elected school committee governs the school district. A superintendent and a district staff of three oversee the school, while a principal leads a professional staff of 30 teachers and ten support staff, one secretary, and one custodian within the school.

The school is organized with two regular all-day kindergarten classes, two each of regular classes in grades one through five and one self-contained special needs class/learning center for grades four and five. The total enrollment is 243 students who are culturally diverse. Sixty-four percent are White, 24 percent are African American, 11 percent are Hispanic and one percent are Asian/ Pacific Islanders. Forty-eight percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch and 21 percent receive special education services.

Sheffield Elementary School conducts many enrichment activities that meaningfully involve students as well as parents and the community. Some of these activities include 100 Day Creativity Celebration; Enrichment Fair Week Activities and Reception; Navy Band Newport Partnership; Family Math/Science Nights; Big Sisters/Big Brothers Program; "Book Buddies" Program; Terrific Kid Monthly Student Recognition Program; and the Student of the Month Recognition Program. Various VINE (Volunteers in Newport Education) activities are available to students as well. These include Books and Beyond Program, Bank on Books, and Speaker Program.

Using the New Standards Reference Exam data for the past three years, there is no clear trend in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the standard on six subtests of the seven subtests. There is a downward trend in Mathematics Skills (60 percent, 43 percent, and 30 percent.) The 1999 New Standards Reference Exam data shows that the percentage of Sheffield students who met or exceeded the standard on four of the seven subtests was comparable to similar students statewide, but below similar students on the remaining three subtests. The percentage of students meeting the standard on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment remained low over the three-year period (2 percent, 7 percent, and 8 percent.)

Equity gaps (a difference of 15 percent or more) exist in the percentage of students meeting the standard on two subtests of the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam. These include males outperforming females in Mathematics Problem-Solving and English Language Arts Reading Analysis and Interpretation. In all other categories of equity disaggregation there were fewer than ten test-takers or no test-takers compared to the White population and the General Education population.

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 Sheffield Elementary School is available at www.ridoe.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF Sheffield Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Sheffield Elementary School is a warm, friendly, safe environment filled with well-behaved students happily involved in their learning. The students understand the expectations of their teachers and are learning to be accountable for their work. Sheffield children are from diverse backgrounds—culturally, socially, and economically. This diversity is accepted and respected by all. Family Service, as well as other agencies, provides effective support for students and as well as their families.

The Sheffield School community is truly a family. The principal, faculty, staff, and students respect and value each other. Parents are welcomed here and are committed to the educational program their children receive at Sheffield. The principal is a skilled communicator who encourages his teachers, students, and parents to be proud of their school and each other. He successfully involves the community within the school in meaningful ways.

The teachers are hardworking and dedicated. They take their teaching responsibilities seriously by examining their practices, which takes courage, concern for students, and hard work. There is a common sense of purpose in doing what is best for children. Despite this teacher enthusiasm and energy, a sharp focus and unified direction for all faculty is not evident within the school. All members of the learning community have yet to delineate a well-developed cohesive plan and set the course for improvements in teaching and learning so that substantive increases in learning will occur in all classrooms. Collaboration between the district administration and the instructional leadership from within the school is needed to reach this goal.

The Sheffield staff creatively utilizes every available space in the schoolhouse. The building is used to capacity as the professionals take steps to improve student learning. However, some of these spaces are not very conducive to effective learning. The building has undergone various renovations to its structure, but attention must be given to the various functions for student learning that the building must provide. Among these are adequate and appropriate library facilities for technology and books, space and utilities for art and music instruction, and a nurse's area that includes privacy.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

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

Conclusions

Students are enthusiastic, highly motivated, and eager to please. They are very comfortable and secure. The students work well together, accept one another, and are respectful of each other and adults. It is evident that students have embraced the positive school climate and culture. (*conversations and interviews with students, parents, teachers, following students, classroom observations*)

Many students are effectively using a variety of problem solving strategies across the curriculum. Some examples include predicting, estimating, brainstorming, graphing, tallying, drawing a diagram, making a table, justifying answers, writing number sentences using manipulatives and analyzing and interpreting data. Many of these experiences are hands-on and authentic. Examples include how to budget a family vacation, cereal analysis and survey, and colored egg/jelly bean counting, sorting, and graphing. Students are motivated and engaged while using these higher-order thinking skills. However, some students are not engaged and/or challenged in authentic, high quality problem-solving activities when limited to basic paper and pencil tasks. These activities alone will not result in increased performance on the New Standards Reference Exam Mathematics Problem-Solving subtest. During the 2000 testing, only two percent of the fourth graders met the standard. However, this low performance is inconsistent with the quality of student problem-solving observed in the classroom. (*classroom observations, examination of student work, following students, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam results*)

Children read many forms of literature throughout the day. In addition to Harcourt Brace *Signatures* reading components, students are self-selecting from classroom libraries of leveled and unleveled trade books. Students also read fables, biographies, fiction and non-fiction literature. They participate in shared, choral, partner, and independent reading. Students are mostly teacher-directed in their reading tasks with whole class learning being most prevalent. Students read but do not engage in meaningful discussion about literature, nor do they understand the rich context and deeper meanings within the text. The 2000 New Standards Reference

Exam results show that only fifty-six percent of the students met the standard in Reading Basic Understanding and forty-one percent met the standard in Reading Analysis and Interpretation. Too few students are practicing the skills and habits exemplified by good readers. (*classroom observations, following students, conversations and interviews with students, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam results*)

Students participate in a variety of writing activities throughout the day. Students use a common rubric to assess their writing capabilities. They are brainstorming, composing, editing, revising, and publishing their works. Students write in math, science, Feinstein journals, and reading journals. The children write in different genres, which include young authors books, poetry, letters, narratives, informational reports, biographies and responses to literature and art. Although the students are writing in a multitude of forms, many of their writing pieces lack voice, originality, and creativity. Students do not work for sustained periods of time to develop their writing abilities fully and therefore they do not fully experience the complete writing process. This coincides with the low student performance on the 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, where only 8 percent of third grade students met the standard. Student performance on the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam was also low. On the Writing Effectiveness subtest, 5 percent met the standard. Zero percent met the standard on the Writing Conventions subtest. (*following students, classroom observations, scheduled meeting with students, examination of student work, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam results, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*)

Commendations for Sheffield Elementary School

Well-behaved, courteous, respectful students

Work well cooperatively

Recommendations for Sheffield Elementary School

Keep current behavior management and incentives in place for students are responding in a positive fashion.

Continue to explore and increase authentic hands-on problem-solving activities used in the classroom.

Provide students time to participate in book talks, literature circles, author studies, and opportunities to reflect.

Provide students the opportunity to write every day on student generated topics.

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*
- ◆ *examination of textbooks*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- ◆ *2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 SALT Survey*

Conclusions

Teachers are enthusiastic, hard working, committed, and dedicated to their students and school. They are ready to move forward with professional development that supports technology-rich standards-based instruction. They are leaders within the district who seek out training opportunities and actively participate on district committees. With a strong sense of initiative, they are working to find a clear focus and direction that will address improving student achievement. Formal and informal collaboration is apparent among grades and between grades. A strong sense of collegiality prevails. (*classroom observations, conversations and interviews with students, teachers, scheduled meetings with district and school administrators and parents, school improvement team, following students, 2000 SALT Survey*)

Many teachers provide students with high quality problem-solving opportunities. Activities such as brainstorming, hands-on experiences, inquiry, manipulatives, and center activities are evident in their classrooms. Students are asked to justify their answers, graph data, perform Internet research, and compose rubrics and use them to self assess their work. The teachers are presenting meaningful opportunities for their students to practice skills such as observing, predicting, sequencing, comparing and contrasting, concluding, calculating, editing and revising and measuring and sorting. Teachers engage students in collaborative work in order to complete their problem-solving activities. Some teachers rely on traditional methods of instruction, leading students through the task step-by-step, thus not encouraging independent thinking skills. Students, therefore, are not challenged to perform higher order cognitive tasks. (*classroom observations, examination of student work, following students, conversations and interviews with teachers and students*)

Although teachers expose their students to many forms of literature, instruction is typically whole group, teacher-directed, and with limited differentiation. Few opportunities to discuss, analyze, interpret, and apply the knowledge gleaned from reading are afforded the students. Integration of reading and writing instruction throughout the content areas is limited. Also, the importance of the reading/writing connection has as yet to

be recognized by most teachers. Although teachers have embraced a school-wide writing rubric, a complete writing process cycle is not evident in most classrooms. Notably absent from the teachers' repertoire are peer and teacher conferencing, sharing, and student editing and revising. More writing time is required with an emphasis on student-driven topic selection. (*following students, classroom observations, conversation and interviews with teachers, scheduled meeting with students, examination of student work*)

When Sheffield teachers incorporate hands-on activities such as those found in KITES, Internet research, art, drama, music, and movement, the students are highly engaged and motivated to reach high expectations. Integrating activities such as these into daily lessons create student-centered classes that recognize multiple learning styles. These authentic experiences allow students to make connections with the real world and develop new knowledge with deeper personal meaning. However, teachers use these techniques on a limited basis. (*2000 SALT Survey, classroom observations, following students, conversations and interviews with teachers, scheduled meeting with students*)

Commendations for Sheffield Elementary School

Teachers who are highly professional, dedicated, and strong leaders

Hardworking, enthusiastic teachers

Teachers who respect diversity

Excellent rapport with parents and the community

Recommendations for Sheffield Elementary School

Raise the bar and have high expectations for all students. Hold students accountable to reach these high standards.

Involve your students in as many authentic hands-on activities as possible.

Continue to seek out focused professional development activities.

Work to integrate English Language Arts and math in all curricular areas. Develop a more effective writing process and utilize it to enable students to become proficient writers.

Continue your excellent efforts to reach out to your parents and community by including them in meaningful ways.

Recommendations for the Newport School District

Provide more literacy support in all classrooms, K-5, in order to facilitate small group and differentiated instruction.

Support teachers in their efforts to use best teaching practices.

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*
- ◆ *School Improvement Plan for Sheffield Elementary School*
- ◆ *SALT Visit binder*
- ◆ *Various curricula found in the team room*

Conclusions

The principal of Sheffield is loved and respected by all in the school community. Having excellent communication skills, he excels at building partnerships with parents and the business community. The list of community partnerships is extensive. Some partnerships include the Kiwanis Terrific Kids, Navy Band, VINE Bank on Books, and Christie's Restaurant. The principal is very supportive of his staff in their educational initiatives; he employs a shared leadership style, and maintains strong and effective parent involvement in the school. His rapport with students is excellent. He acknowledges and celebrates all good deeds and accomplishments. (*scheduled meetings with parents, students, district administrators, school improvement team, school administrator, conversations and interviews with staff*)

At the present time, the school does not use standards-based curricula in English Language Arts and math. The teachers are seeking direction to move toward more effective teaching practices. Teachers report that district level professional development opportunities have been minimal. They pursue staff development opportunities on their own through partnerships with East Bay Collaborative and elsewhere. District administrators report that curricula in English Language Arts and math are being developed. Benchmarks and outcomes will be complete in the near future. In preparation for utilizing these curricula the district is offering Course One to teachers in June and August. Math Investigations training will also occur this year. This is a good beginning; however sustained efforts to train staff in standards-based instruction must be established and ongoing. Moreover, staff development must extend to other areas of exemplary instruction and assessment as well. (*scheduled meetings with district administrators and school improvement team, conversations and interviews with teachers, School Improvement Plan for Sheffield Elementary School, various curricula found in the team room*)

The School Improvement Plan is extensive and shows much thought and consideration to the needs of the school. The adoption of the math rubric, working with East Bay Educational Collaborative as a Working

Wonders IV Math Focus School, Early Start program, and the “after school” book club, and others, have already been implemented. The action plans address much research and analysis of data, but lack focus and do not identify specific areas for improvement of student achievement. These areas include: revising school schedules to allow for larger blocks of teaching time for English Language Arts and teacher collaboration; professional development for teachers in the areas of English Language Arts, technology, standards-based instruction and assessment, and differentiated instruction; and utilizing specialist/support personnel in creative ways to expand services in the classroom. These additional components will allow for a plan that will more directly impact student learning. (*School Improvement Plan for Sheffield Elementary School, classroom observations, scheduled meeting with school improvement team, and district administrators, SALT Visit binder*)

Sheffield School is filled and utilized to capacity. Portions of the facility do not foster a healthy learning environment. The basement is home to specialty classes and houses the school’s lunchroom, library and computer lab. These rooms have inadequate ventilation, limited natural light, and damp odors. The library size, as well as the collection and quality of volumes, is inadequate to support literacy in the school. There is a lack of sinks in classrooms and in the art room. Sick children rest on cots in the hallway. An inadequate amount of storage area results in clutter in corridors and classrooms. Clerical and audiovisual equipment are set up, used, and stored in the hallways. Exposed radiators and pipes present a hazard in many areas of the school. The electrical wiring is inadequate for the needs of the facility. The parents expressed concern that the building is not handicapped accessible, paint is chipping in various areas; the school lacks an appropriate playground. These unacceptable conditions create a challenge to an effective educational program. (*scheduled meetings with parents, students, district administrators, school improvement team, conversations and interviews with staff, classroom observations, following students, School Improvement Plan for Sheffield Elementary School*)

Commendations for Sheffield Elementary School

- Principal as strong educational facilitator
- Principal who welcomes and nurtures parents and community connections
- Teachers eager for staff development
- Clean facility

Recommendations for Sheffield Elementary School

- Continue to participate in specific professional staff development that improves instruction and supports student achievement.
- Seek out and participate in all appropriate professional development to successfully implement standards-based curricula and technology integration.
- Include revisions to the School Improvement Plan, which target the areas of scheduling, professional development and utilizing personnel. Implement these revisions in a timely fashion.
- Continue to work with district administration to maintain and improve the facilities at Sheffield.

Recommendations for Sheffield School District

- Support teachers with resources and training as they implement the new reading and math series.

Provide Course One training for all teachers.

Work closely with the Sheffield community to improve the quality and condition of the school facility to support student learning. Make the school handicap accessible. Develop a plan for future renovation and expansion.

Increase the number of trained literacy support personnel in the classrooms at Sheffield.

7. Final Advice to the School

Students at Sheffield Elementary School are well behaved, respectful and motivated to learn. Diversity is embraced and celebrated here. Teachers are hard working, dedicated and excited to try innovative teaching strategies and practices so as to promote academic excellence among all students.

In order to reach this goal of academic excellence, the faculty must focus on staff development and, in the light of new learning, reflect on how to incorporate best practices to include an emphasis on standards-based instruction and assessment. Hold students to high standards. Revisit the current schedule and utilize staff in different ways to support this transition and to help your students meet the new expectations set for them. Continue to have meaningful dialogue about the issues that are important to you; work with your administrator to develop a focused vision for Sheffield and draw a new road map to lead you toward that vision.

Focus on your many strengths. Continue to embrace the educational support and enrichment provided by your Sheffield parents and the Newport community. You provide a warm, nurturing, positive environment for your students. Capitalize on that and continue to push your new agenda forward. Remain focused and driven, while continuing to support the total development of every child. Your students and community deserve nothing less.

Sheffield Elementary School Improvement Team

Kevin Dillon
Principal/Facilitator

Karen Day
Enrichment Teacher/Internal Facilitator

Mary Johann
Grade 2 Teacher

Elsa Lenrum
Grade 3 Teacher

Christina Rose
Grade 3 Teacher

Diane Chambers
Grade 4 Teacher

Colleen Fitzgerald
Special Education Teacher

June McGreavy
Librarian

Donna Kelly
Family Service Coordinator

Peter Belhouse
Custodian

John O'Donnell
Community

Marie Twomey
Community

Miriam Smith
Community

Pat Beede
Parent

Timothy Wygant
Parent

The SALT Visit Team

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

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Sheffield Elementary School

April 12, 2001

To complete the Catalpa Ltd. report endorsement, I discussed the conduct of the visit with the Visit Chair while it was in process, 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.
June 8, 2001