



# Birchwood School

North Providence

## 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.rido.net/schoolimprove/salt](http://www.rido.net/schoolimprove/salt)

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# 1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

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 Birchwood School from April 9, 2001 through April 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 teachers and a school administrator. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for Birchwood 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 Birchwood School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 93 full and partial classroom observations which totaled over 62-1/2 hours spent in direct classroom observation. All classrooms were visited at least once. Most teachers were observed more than once.*
- ◆ *observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- ◆ *following 5 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 student portfolios*
  - ◆ *review of classroom assignments*
  - ◆ *review of district and school policies*
  - ◆ *review of professional development activities*
  - ◆ *review of classroom assessments.*
  - ◆ *review of the following documents:*
- *School Improvement Plan for Birchwood School*
- *district strategic plan*
- *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
- *classroom textbooks*
- *1998, 1999, 2000 Information Works!*
- *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *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*
- *review of the North Providence School Department Teacher Evaluation Form Tenured and Non-Tenured*

## *Teacher Checklists*

- *team minute binders from red, green, and blue teams*
- *district drafts for New Standards and Benchmarks K-12 and curricula frameworks*
- *proposed building plans*
- *North Providence District Technology Plan 2001-2006*
- *Professional Development 2000-2001 binder*
- *How to create a School Improvement Team Professional Development book*
- *Support Group binder*
- *School Improvement Team handbook*
- *North Providence district budget 2001-2002*
- *Birchwood budget 200-2001*
- *Peer Mediation Binder 2000-2001*

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 31 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 scheduled 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 Birchwood 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 North Providence, 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. Refer to the *SALT Guide: Using the SALT Visit Report* for guidance on considering the information presented in the various sections of this report and use this information to make modifications to your School Improvement Plan. The revised Plan will form the basis for negotiating a Compact for Learning with your district. The purpose of the Compact is to ensure that your school and your district work out an agreement about the most important priorities for your school and how best to target district support in reaching them. Your RIDE Field Service Team representative will offer some assistance in facilitating the preparation of the Compact.

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

## 2. PROFILE OF Birchwood School

Birchwood School is one of two middle schools in the North Providence Public School System. It serves students in grades 7-8 in the town of North Providence, Rhode Island. North Providence is a suburban town with a population of approximately 33,000. The present school first opened its doors to students in 1968.

A seven-member elected school board governs the North Providence Public School District. The mayor and an eight-member town council govern the town. Birchwood School students are served by a professional staff of two administrators, 26 full- and part-time faculty, four aides and support personnel, and two custodians.

Birchwood School has an attendance rate of 94 percent. Of the 342 students attending this school 89 percent are white, 6 percent are Hispanic, 1 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 4 percent are black. Sixty-five students totaling 19 percent receive special education services; no students are Limited English Proficient; and 21 percent applied for and receive free or reduced-price lunch.

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. Equity gaps, a difference of greater than fifteen percent, exist between male and females and between regular education and special education students on two subtests of the 1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam. 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results are appended to this report. Information Works! data for Birchwood School is available at [www.ridoenet.net](http://www.ridoenet.net).

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

Birchwood School is a welcoming, nurturing, child-orientated school. This school provides its students a safe and comfortable environment in which to learn, and its teachers a supportive environment in which to teach. This is a small, close-knit school in the midst of transition. A majority of the faculty earnestly strives to adopt an organizational structure, instructional practices, and supports that are conducive to middle school education.

Many of the students feel safe; they are confident in their abilities; they readily identify the staff and administrators as people they would approach if they were having a problem. The school focuses on the affective needs of its students by creating a supportive environment for children to learn and grow. Students are respectful, polite, and generally eager to learn. This is a reflection of the tone that the school administration, faculty, and support personnel have established.

The administrative team is visible and directly involved with the students, faculty, and staff of the school. Teachers feel supported by administrators. The faculty work well together and many engage students with a number of innovative techniques and strategies. Students feel respected and are encouraged to work to their maximum potential. Educational experiences extend beyond the school walls that provide students with opportunities for service learning projects.

Parents like the administrative team, teachers, and staff; they feel the school is meeting the needs of their children. While parents feel teachers and staff are accessible and the administrative team quickly resolves their concerns, many parents express a desire for greater home-school communication. Presently, parent involvement in the organization and operation of the school is limited.

The school has undergone significant change this year. It is piloting a middle school model that involves teaming, more heterogeneous grouping, grade-level meetings, as well as an advisor/advisory period, activity periods, new teaching assignments for some teachers, and changing the organizational structure of the school. Additionally, standards-based instruction and assessment practices are emerging in this school. Many teachers are working to incorporate these practices in their daily instruction with varying degrees of success.

Although recent results of state testing are less than ideal in certain areas, teachers recognize this and are actively making changes in their professional practices and teaching strategies, which are clearly designed to improve student performance. These changes have not taken root schoolwide. A number of assignments still focus on the acquisition and demonstration of lower level skills and factual information. In a number of places the quality of teaching and learning is stronger than the test scores indicate, most notably in math.

All of these changes are taking place in a school facility designed for elementary students, not middle school students who have significantly different space and instructional needs. Despite the limitations presented by this facility and the added difficulty of overcrowding, the faculty and staff continue their attempts to maintain momentum toward improving their students' achievement. They are, however, at the beginning of a long cycle of continuous improvement. These emerging changes will require an ongoing commitment of energy, training, resources, support, and greater collaboration among parents, staff, teachers, and school and district administrators if the school is to achieve its goal of becoming a middle school learning environment that effectively meets the needs of each child it serves.

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *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*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *review of student portfolios*
- ◆ *review of classroom assignments*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with students and parents*
- ◆ *conversations and/or interviews with teachers, staff, students, and school administrators*

### Conclusions

Most students are well mannered, well behaved, and respectful of each other. Students take pride in their school, participate in service learning projects, and willingly engage in challenging activities that are both minds-on and hands-on. Many rise to the level of expectations and challenges presented to them. (*scheduled meetings with students and parents, observations of the school, classroom observations, following students, conversations and/or interviews with teachers, students, staff, and school administrators*)

Most students are actively engaged in mathematics and enjoy the challenge of solving problems. Many students are effectively communicating the processes they use to solve problems in written form. Many students can recognize and verbalize patterns found in numbers. Fewer students can break a problem into simpler parts, integrate concepts and techniques, and formulate problems involving the use of data. Correspondingly, on the 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam the eighth grade students at Birchwood School met or exceeded the standard in the following: *Skills* – 61 percent, *Concepts* – 18 percent, *Problem Solving* – 20 percent. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam School Summary, review of student portfolios*)

Students read on a consistent basis and are cognizant of the importance of reading. Most students read a variety of genres. Students read aloud for their peers in large and small groups, and frequently complete

assignments that focus on recalling factual information. Students often generate pictures and collages to represent main topics and ideas from books and articles. Some students can effectively identify important information, relevant facts, and extrapolate them into additional, as well as alternative, interpretations. However, most students are better at recalling basic facts like plot, setting, and character, than offering an analysis that is both interpretative and inferential, as well as supported by textual references. Similarly, on the 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, the eighth grade students at Birchwood School met or exceeded the standard in the following: *Reading Basic Understanding* – 67 percent, *Reading Analysis and Interpretations* – 33 percent. (following students, classroom observations, conversations and/or interviews with teachers, staff, and students, 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam School Summary, examination of student work, review of student portfolios, review of classroom assessments)

Most students write well and spend a lot of time writing. They effectively elaborate on their writing by providing details that are sensory and descriptive. Evidence of their writing is found in journals, writers' notebooks, reports, essays, and other forms of writing. While most students have successfully developed a degree of proficiency in writing, a number of students still struggle with run-on sentences, sentence fragments, unparallel construction, incorrect grammar, and mechanics. On the 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, the eighth grade students at Birchwood School met or exceeded the standard in the following: *Writing Effectiveness* – 59 percent and *Writing Conventions* – 68 percent. On the 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment, 44 percent of the seventh grade students at Birchwood School met or exceeded the standard. (classroom observations, examination of student work, review of classroom assignments, following students, 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam School Summary, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results)

## Commendations for Birchwood School

Students' excitement about mathematics

The time and emphasis that students invest in writing

Students' participation in service learning

## Recommendations for Birchwood School

Examine the "What Students Need" section of the New Standards Reference Exam School Summary Reports for the past three years and recent classroom assessments. Use this information to make decisions about the focus and sequence of curriculum, assignments, and instructional practices.

Increase the emphasis on breaking problems into simpler parts and integrating concepts and techniques.

Increase the opportunities for students to analyze text in interpretative and inferential ways.

Place more emphasis on the mechanics of writing and the writing process.

## Recommendations for North Providence School District

Provide technical assistance to the school in analyzing and interpreting testing data from both state and classroom assessments.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and/or interviews with many students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- ◆ *review of student portfolios*
- ◆ *review of classroom assignments*
- ◆ *review of classroom assessments*
- ◆ *examination of student work*

### Conclusions

Teachers frequently provide feedback to their students to encourage and motivate them to strive for excellence. Many teachers are effectively providing written and oral feedback to increase student involvement in class and improve the quality of their work. However, some teachers primarily provide supportive comments that lack specific detailed feedback and suggestions for future improvement. (*classroom observations, examination of student work, following students, review of student portfolios*)

Teachers exhibit considerable effort to improve student literacy and numeracy abilities. Some teachers make connections to the real world through the use of authentic problems. Others use webbing and graphic organizers to facilitate the writing process. Additionally, some are successfully utilizing the available library media resources and computer technology to develop both the information and technological literacy of students. However, in all subjects there are insufficient opportunities to revise writing. A number of assignments lack integrated, innovative, and engaging approaches to learning. Moreover, on a school-wide basis more emphasis is placed on writing reports and the final product than on the writing process and writing in the different genres as reflected in the standards. Most classroom reading focuses more on basic understanding than on analysis and interpretation, which would result in a higher level of discourse between and among students and teachers. (*following students, classroom observations, review of classroom assignments, scheduled meetings with students, conversations and/or interviews with teachers and students, examination of student work*)

In response to student performance on state testing, many teachers are moving their practices towards assignments and assessments that require students to develop and demonstrate higher order thinking skills. A number of teachers require students to invoke problem-solving strategies, make reasonable and responsible interpretations, and use a variety of strategies to demonstrate their understanding. Nevertheless, too many

assignments and assessments concentrate on identifying facts and low-level skills. Students often are asked to recall basic factual information orally and on paper assessments. This limits the development of higher order thinking skills and provides both the teacher and student with insufficient information about students' ability to extend and refine their knowledge and to apply what they learn. (*classroom observations, following students, review of student portfolios, examination of student work, review of classroom assignments, review of classroom assessments*)

Standards-based practices are emerging throughout the school. Standards are posted on the walls, found in student notebooks/portfolios, and verbalized to students. Some teachers have students recognize and explain the meaning of the standard. Teachers demonstrate varying degrees of understanding and application of effective standards-based practices. Also, a lot of teachers combine projects and hands-on activities with teacher-directed lessons. While a number of exemplary practices are clearly evident within this school, many projects and assignments are only loosely linked to the performance indicators found under the standards. This limits the ability of teachers to develop and assess students' mastery of specific content and performance standards. (*classroom observations, examination of student work, following students, review of student portfolios, conversations and/or interviews with teachers, scheduled meetings with district administrators and students*)

Most teachers are using rubrics throughout the school to provide clear expectations to their students. A number of teachers are developing their own rubrics for individual projects. Unfortunately, some rubrics used in the school contain criteria that guide the form a final product should take more than the quality of the work. Holistic rubrics like the Rhode Island State Writing Rubric are used extensively to measure students' writing proficiency. Although this effectively assesses grammar and conventions, it limits teachers' knowledge about student performance in specific genres of writing. (*classroom observations, review of student portfolios, review of classroom assessments*)

## Commendations for Birchwood School

- The willingness of teachers to adapt to new and creative teaching strategies
- The innovative approaches used to connect learning to real life situations
- The emergent use of standards and performance-based assessments
- The provision of encouraging feedback that motivates students

## Recommendations for Birchwood School

Increase the amount of specific, detailed feedback and suggestions for future improvement. Consistently provide opportunities for students to revise their work based on this feedback.

On a school-wide basis place more emphasis on the writing process and writing in the different genres.

Foster a higher level of meaningful discourse between and among students and teachers that focuses on analysis, interpretation, and extending and refining knowledge.

Decrease the number of assignments and assessments that are focused on identifying facts and low-level skills.

Provide professional development focused on standards-based instruction, teaching strategies, alternative assessments, rubric design, integration of curriculum, and middle school philosophy and practices.

Link learning and assignments to standards more routinely and concretely.

Devise and utilize task-specific rubrics with a clear and definitive link to the performance indications (bullets) found under the standards.

## Recommendations for North Providence School District

Assist the school in providing high-quality professional development.

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and/or interviews with many students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *review of School Improvement Plan for Birchwood School*
  - ◆ *review of the North Providence School Department Teacher Evaluation Form Tenured and Non-Tenured Teacher Checklists*
  - ◆ *review of team minute binders from red, green, and blue teams*
  - ◆ *review of district draft for New Standards and Benchmarks K-12 and curricula frameworks*
  - ◆ *review of proposed building plans*
  - ◆ *review of North Providence District Technology Plan 2001-2006*
  - ◆ *review of Professional Development 2000-2001 Binder*

### Conclusions

Birchwood School has undergone a tremendous number of changes this year as it pilots a middle school model. In order to meet more effectively the needs of the adolescents served by this school, teachers are willingly making a number of changes to both the organization of this school and their own professional practices. The addition of an assistant principal, the adoption of a teaming structure, and the reassignment of teaching schedules are examples of their efforts to facilitate this transition. These emerging teams focus on discussing the progress of their students and conferencing with parents. A few team teachers expand on these initial practices to integrate and weave projects across subjects to make learning more meaningful. These efforts are hindered by the lack of fully developed standards-based K-12 curricula. (*meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, students and parents, conversations and/or interviews with teachers, staff, and team [\[LO1\]](#) members, review of district draft for New Standards and Benchmarks K-12 and curricula frameworks, classroom observations, following students*)

The present school facility at Birchwood School is woefully inadequate to provide the educational program required by middle level students. Teachers and staff work valiantly to compensate for the constricting issues resulting from this converted elementary school. The present facilities lack science labs for experimentation, adequate phone lines for confidential and emergency communication, changing/shower facilities for physical education, hall lockers, private rooms for social services, a disciplinary referral area, facilities for a comprehensive unified arts program, a separate gym and a cafeteria area. These inadequate facilities force teachers and staff to make curricula decisions based on the available space, rather than on the academic needs of students. The proposed building program addresses many of these concerns. *(classroom observations, observations of the school, conversations and/or interviews with teachers, staff, students, and school administrators, review of proposed building plans, following students, scheduled meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, students and parents)*

The current teacher evaluation system is an insufficient tool for improving professional practice. This instrument is a checklist with a nominal narrative. It lacks clear indicators of performance; it is not linked to commonly accepted standards of effective teaching practice; and it provides teachers with minimal information they can use for continuous growth. The North Providence Public School District has a mentoring program to assist all new teachers in the district. As the outcomes of this program are not clearly aligned with those of the teacher evaluation instrument, this limits the opportunities of teachers to improve their professional practice. *(scheduled meetings with school and district administrators, conversations and/or interviews with teachers, review of the North Providence School Department Teacher Evaluation Form Tenured and Non-Tenured Teacher Checklists)*

This school has made a number of efforts to communicate with parents and involve them. Interim reports, homework logs, school report night, and the Birchwood Bobcat are all forms of communication. Despite these efforts, many parents feel uninformed about the academic progress of their children and too few are active partners with the school in their children's education. Many parents want more timely information about academic progress and current school activities. Both teachers and parents desire more parental involvement. Most parents are unfortunately not aware of, or do not effectively use, the avenues available to become partners in the education of their children. *(scheduled meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, and parents, conversations and/or interviews with teachers and staff, team minute binders from red, green, and blue teams)*

While school and district administrators and teachers all have committed to professional development during the course of the school year, the quantity, and occasionally the relevance, of some offerings are insufficient to support the plethora of changes being implemented at Birchwood School. Most teachers participate in ongoing professional development and are actively pursuing opportunities beyond their contractual requirements. Despite the availability of funds for allocation by the Professional Development Committee, a moratorium by the district on professional development during the school day [\[LO2\]](#) and the limited training that occurs on a schoolwide basis are hindering the school's attempts to move forward in a unified manner. *(scheduled meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, review of Professional Development 2000-2001 Binder, conversations and/or interviews with teachers)*

Although all classrooms are wired to the Internet, Birchwood School lacks sufficient technology—computers, video cassette recorders (VCR's) calculators, scientific probes, overhead projectors—to allow teachers to develop the technological literacy students require to function in our high-tech global society. While teachers effectively use the media center for research and other technological pursuits, student access to technology is limited. *(observations of the school, classroom observations, scheduled meetings with School Improvement Team, district administrators, and parents, review of North Providence District Technology Plan 2001-2006, conversations and/or interviews with teachers)*

Birchwood School places a considerable focus on improving student performance. The school is implementing a number of structures and practices to develop both the affective and academic talents of its

students. A noteworthy development is the recent addition of a second English Language Arts class that focuses on literacy. Other effective practices include direct reading instruction during study hall, the skills class, advisor/advisee program, peer mediation, and the inclusion program, among others. These efforts, coupled with changes in instructional practice, contribute to the positive atmosphere and culture of the school. (*following students, conversations and/or interviews with teachers, classroom observations, scheduled meetings with school administrators and parents, review of School Improvement Plan for Birchwood School*)

## Commendations for Birchwood School

The use of two English Language Arts periods each day to improve students' literacy skills

The adaptability and effort of administration, faculty, and staff to compensate for the limitations of the physical plant

The school-wide efforts to embrace the middle school model

## Recommendations for Birchwood School

Continue to foster a supportive school environment.

Continue the implementation of the middle school model with a focus on an integrated thematic approach to learning, full inclusion of the Unified Arts, and other tenets of the newly revised *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*.

Continue and expand the efforts to communicate student progress effectively to parents and involve them in the School Improvement Team and a Parent Teachers Organization.

Formalize the practice of sharing effective teaching strategies that exist within this school.

Provide structures and incentives that ensure schoolwide participation, when appropriate, in common professional development experiences required to implement effectively the changes in professional practice required by a standards-based middle school.

Continue to actively pursue, through the district, the supports and resources necessary for the proposed facility renovations at Birchwood School.

Purchase additional technology, as outlined above, to allow teachers to further develop the technological literacy of their students.

## Recommendations for North Providence School District

Continue to work with the mayor, town council, school committee, and community to ensure that the proposed facility renovations required to rectify the current impediments to a high quality education become a reality.

Persist in your efforts to pursue alternatives that would reduce or remove the moratorium on professional development requiring substitute coverage.

Maintain the efforts to align the curricula to standards in grades K-12 curricula with a scope and sequence to increase uniformity between and among grades and schools. Establish grade level benchmarks with supporting anchor papers and exemplars.

Work with the North Providence Teachers' Union to revise the teacher evaluation system to include clear

indicators of performance and align the teacher evaluation system and mentoring program with the Rhode Island Beginning Teacher Standards.

Provide the resources and technical assistance needed to purchase and install the technology outlined above.

### Recommendations for North Providence Teachers Union

Work with the designee of the school committee to revise the teacher evaluation system to include clear indicators of performance and align the teacher evaluation system and mentoring program with the Rhode Island Beginning Teacher Standards.

### Recommendations for North Providence Town Council

Obtain the financial resources needed from the citizens of North Providence to support the current proposal for facility renovations and programmatic changes at Birchwood School.

## 7. Final Advice to the School

A great number of positive changes have occurred at Birchwood in the past year. Adopting a middle school model and incorporating standards-based practices on a schoolwide basis will take ongoing effort and commitment. Take time to celebrate your successes and then focus your energies on the next steps in this journey. As you use the information found in this report to make changes to your School Improvement Plan, also review the principles found in *Turning Points 2000* to ensure that your future plan guides and supports your evolution to a standards-based middle school. Forge a stronger role for all members of the Birchwood learning community—district, parents, teachers, and staff—in the design, review, and implementation of your SIP. Increasing their involvement in, and awareness of, your reform efforts will help you achieve your goals.

A number of parents view co-curricula programs—art, music, foreign language, technology, among others—as important components of their children’s education and desire to see both the quantity and quality of these programs further developed. As you continue to modify the organizational structure of your school and curricula offerings to address the tenets of a middle school, focus on all disciplines within the school. Every teacher can and should play a role in developing reading, writing, mathematics, higher order thinking skills, and applications of knowledge. Developing the high level of literacy and numeracy you are striving to achieve will require a concerted schoolwide effort to ensure all teachers have high quality curricula, adequate resources, and the proper training to successfully implement standards-based instructional practices.

Your common planning time for teams promotes “personal and social development in a safe learning environment.” Expand on this strong foundation and series of supports to include a stronger focus on “academic excellence” through the design of integrated curricula experiences, and the examination of student work. On a school-wide basis, examine and reflect on the assignments, drawings, mobiles, and assessments that students complete to ensure that they provide a clear and definitive link to the learning represented by the standards. Make sure the projects, classroom assignments, and assessments generate the evidence you need to determine the knowledge and understanding of your students. Hands-on activities do not always equal minds-on learning.

Expand your efforts to involve families in the education of their children. Concentrate on increasing the amount of communication between home and school. Even little things, like sharing the contents of students’ portfolios more frequently, allow parents to be more informed about the academic progress of their children. Increasing the opportunities parents have to support the learning process at home and to be involved in the school will yield its own results in improved student performance and lend valuable support to your ongoing reform efforts.

You have made a number of positive changes to the organizational structure of the school, classroom instruction, and assessment practices to more effectively meet the needs of your students. Build on the sense of community and sharing that exists in this school as you continue to strive toward becoming the best school you can be. It is through your hard work and willingness to change that students are learning and growing. During the course of our visit, we have seen a staff that is willing to support each other. Hold on to that in the years to come. It will be your most valuable asset. The struggle toward adopting a middle school model is a long journey. Have faith, as a school, that you are clearly moving in the right direction and on a path that will clearly assist you in implementing the mission of this school.

When working with this SALT report we hope you realize our conclusions, commendations, and recommendations are designed to help you make this learning community better meet the needs of your students. For that is, unquestionably, the intent of our team.



## Birchwood School Improvement Team

Lisa Aceto  
Parent

Shari Capozza  
English Teacher

Lisa Ciampi  
Science Teacher

Kenny Ferrara  
Principal

Donna Fishback  
Parent

Barbara Fox  
Math Teacher

Maureen Girard  
Parent

Brenda Grundy  
School Nurse

Susan Hanoian  
Parent

Marie Lagasse  
Social Studies Teacher

JoAnn O'Connor  
Resource Teacher

Laurie Payne  
Science Teacher

Sheila Pilla  
Math Teacher

Aimee Morel Robinson  
Parent

Kim Savastano  
Assistant Principal

Angela Somatis  
Parent

Sandra Srom  
Parent

Kim Tucci  
Skills Teacher

Elizabeth Vachon  
Social Worker

Jill Vincent

## Math Teacher

## The SALT Visit Team

Dr. Michael S. Barnes  
Technology Education Department Chairperson  
Ponaganset Middle / Senior High School  
Foster-Glocester, Rhode Island  
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)  
Chair of the Team

Julie Blanchard  
Social Studies Teacher  
Coventry Middle School  
Coventry, Rhode Island

Nancy P. Garnett-Thomas,  
Family and Consumer Science Teacher  
Western Hills Middle School  
Cranston, Rhode Island

David A. Geraghty  
Assistant Principal  
Tiverton Middle School  
Tiverton, Rhode Island

Lisa A. Harrold  
Guidance Counselor  
Cumberland Middle School  
Cumberland, Rhode Island

Georgette A. Jackson  
French / English Teacher  
Gorton Junior High School  
Warwick, Rhode Island

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

## Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

### **Birchwood 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, 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.  
June 8, 2001

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[\[LO1\]](#) Who is this and Team? Not listed in evidence above.

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[\[LO2\]](#) I moved by the district. It was after during the school day before.