



Greystone 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

Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education

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This report is available at www.ridoe.net/schoolimprove/salt

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1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) is Rhode Island's comprehensive school accountability system. SALT is based on using information to improve learning and teaching so that the learning of all students in the state dramatically improves. The SALT visit and other major SALT components are designed to aid schools in their ongoing development and implementation of effective School Improvement Plans.

The purpose of the visit to Greystone School from April 9-12, 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 Greystone 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 Greystone School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 105 classroom observations that totaled over 78 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. All classrooms were visited at least once. Most teachers were observed more than once.*
- ◆ *many observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- ◆ *following 7 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 interviews with many 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 Greystone School schedule*
- ◆ *review of curricula, classroom textbooks, and related documents provided by Greystone School.*
- ◆ *review of the following documents:*
 - *Greystone School Improvement Plan*
 - *North Providence District Strategic Plan*
 - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
 - *North Providence Teacher Evaluation forms: non-tenured and tenured evaluation checklists*
 - *Greystone School Social Work binder*
 - *North Providence School Department Curriculum Guide to English Language Arts and Mathematics*
 - *North Providence School Department Building Administrators Handbook*
 - *North Providence District Technology Plan*
 - *The North Providence Federation of Teachers Collective Bargaining Agreement: the School Committee and the Town of North Providence September 1, 2000- August 31, 2003*
 - *-Greystone School Program binder*

- *Greystone School Peer Mediation binder*
- *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*

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 27 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 Greystone 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 the school’s review of this report, the School Improvement Team considers what changes it needs to make in the School Improvement Plan. Once the team has revised the plan, this revised plan will be the basis for negotiating a Compact for Learning with the North Providence School District. The Compact’s purpose is to ensure that Greystone School and North Providence School District work out an agreement about the most important priorities for change at Greystone School and how the district can best target support to the school's efforts to implement its revised improvement plan. Greystone School’s 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 should be considered in context with the conclusions. That is the way they were written.

2. PROFILE OF Greystone School

Greystone School serves students from kindergarten through the eighth grade. It is located in the Centerdale neighborhood of North Providence, Rhode Island. It is one of three schools in the North Providence School System that serves k-8 students. Four elementary schools in the town serve k-6 students. The North Providence School system is governed by a superintendent and an elected school committee of seven members; each serve a four-year term .

Most students attending Greystone School come from the immediate neighborhood, although 38 are bused from other neighborhoods that have overcrowded schools. Greystone first opened in 1967. It serves 328 students in 17 classrooms.

Student scores on the New Standards Reference Exam and the Rhode Island Writing Assessment vary widely from the elementary grades (3 and 4) to the upper grades (7 and 8). Between 1997-2000, third grade student scores decreased on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment every year except 1999. Only 6 percent of students met the standard in 2000. Fourth grade students gained on the New Standards Reference Exam in all areas except writing, while their scores in mathematics concepts and problem solving were quite low. Fourth grade reading scores denote an area of strength, with 100 percent of students meeting the standard in basic understanding and 86 percent meeting the standard in problem solving. Seventh grade students' scores on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment declined steadily from a high of 64 percent meeting the standard in 1998 to a low of 24 percent meeting the standard in 2000. Seventh grade student scores on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment declined steadily from a high of 64 percent. They met the standard in 1998. In 2000 only 24 percent met the standard. Between 1998-2000 student scores in eighth grade improved steadily on the New Standards Reference Exam in mathematics skills and problem solving. However, these scores have declined in all reading and writing subtests.

Writing Assessment declined steadily from a high of 64 percent

. They met the standard in 1998. In 2000 only 24 percent met the standard.

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. The 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results are appended to this report. *Information Works!* data for Greystone School is available at www.rido.net.

Greystone students have extra-curricular opportunities—such as “Family Dance Night,” “Fine Arts Night,” and basketball— as well as opportunities related to academics—such as participation in the school “Science Fair,” school newspaper, and “Family Math Night.” Students also benefit from the school’s partnership with the School of Social Work at Rhode Island College, whose interns provide them with such services as individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, and classroom programs.

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

Greystone School is a traditional brick building tucked away from the bustle of Mineral Spring Avenue in the Centerdale neighborhood of North Providence, Rhode Island. Located at the top of a hill, it houses a community of enthusiastic and respectful learners. Teachers and students demonstrate great affection for one another. The desire to share knowledge is the foundational strength of this learning community.

The school classrooms are alive with student work, although much of the display is uniform. Art and work samples transform the walls into brightly colored palettes. In a few classrooms, student work is differentiated to promote creative expression and to meet individual learning needs.

Teachers work hard to meet the educational and emotional needs of their students, despite minimal professional development in standards-based instruction, out-dated textbooks that are in deplorable condition, shortages of instructional materials, and a building that needs attention to issues as basic as cleanliness.

Greystone is poised for its promised transition to a k-5 school. However, its present sixth, seventh, and eighth graders are inequitably served by a lack of current materials and technology as they wait for the promised middle school to become a reality.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *1999, 2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *1998,1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *1998,1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *SALT Survey report*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *scheduled meeting with students*
- ◆ *conversations with students, teachers*

Conclusions

Students are enthusiastic and cooperative learners. They are respectful and courteous to adults and each other. They are genuinely fond of their teachers. In class, they are attentive to instruction and to the ideas of their peers. The children take their education very seriously and recognize its importance. (*following students, classroom observations, scheduled meeting with students*)

The majority of students at Greystone School like to write. All students are writing for multiple purposes in many areas of the curriculum. They share their personal experiences in journals, compose books, write poetry, and respond to literature. Many students write to demonstrate knowledge gained through research. They effectively use the elements of high quality writing and some are able to assess and improve their work using a rubric. Students enjoy sharing their writing with each other, with younger students in other classrooms, and with visitors. Unfortunately, during the past four years third grade student test scores have not improved on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment. Additionally, fourth grade student scores on the New Standards Reference Exam show an uneven pattern of improvement in effectiveness and a decline in conventions. During the past three years the writing scores for students in grade 8 on the New Standards Reference Exam and grade 7 on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment have demonstrated sharp downward trend. Students currently are engaged in writing activities that will help them reverse this trend. (*classroom observations, following students, conversations with students, examination of student work, New Standards Reference Exam, Rhode Island Writing Assessment*)

Many students are enthusiastic readers. They are eager to read a variety of materials; they read often and understand the importance of reading in their environment. Students eagerly share their reading skills with listeners and each other. Some students comprehend a variety of genres and show their understanding using

artistic, verbal, and written expression. All students are working toward the standard of reading at least 25 books per year. However, some students are reading stories from a fifteen-year-old, outdated basal series. These students are unengaged by these stories and do not enjoy them. Far too often, students describe them as “boring and very long”. These students do enjoy reading from novels, purchased by their teachers. This rich, high quality literature holds the high interest of students. On the New Standards Reference Exam in reading/basic understanding 100 percent of the fourth grade student and 49 percent of the eighth graders meet the standard. In reading comprehension/analysis and interpretation, between 86 to 21 percent of student scores meet the standard. This wide range in performance reflects the inequity in material available to students across grade levels. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations with students, meeting with students, conversations with teachers, SALT Survey*)

Students love math and enjoy the investigation that comes with mathematical thought. In many classrooms students frequently write their own problems, predict outcomes, use manipulatives, work cooperatively, and graph to demonstrate and explain their answers. Students in the first, second, and third grades are provided with an additional instructor as a result of a Math Reduction grant. In other classrooms, however, students rarely have these opportunities. These students get the correct answers much of the time, but are not able to make their own meaning and draw their own conclusions. They are not able to solve complex problems that require higher order thinking. Few use the language of mathematics to describe concepts and explain reasoning and results. Students need more experiences in higher level problem solving to improve their test scores on the New Standards Reference Exam. (*New Standards Reference Exam, following students, classroom observations, conversations with students*)

Commendations for Greystone School

Enthusiastic and cooperative students

Student scores on the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam Reading/Basic Understanding subtest

Recommendations for Greystone School

Provide more professional development in the area of process writing.

Continue to provide students with numerous opportunities to use writing across the curriculum, especially in math.

Continue to display student writing for mutual sharing.

Expand opportunities for students to publish what they write.

Address the inequity in reading resources.

Provide more opportunities for students to analyze and interpret what they read.

Provide greater opportunities for students to use mathematical language to make meaning, draw conclusions, and explain their reasoning and results.

Provide more opportunities for students to solve complex problems that require higher order thinking.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

- ◆ *Sources of Evidence*
- ◆ *Greystone School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *North Providence Teacher Evaluation forms: non-tenured and tenured evaluation checklists*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *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*
- ◆ *1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam*
- ◆ *examination of student work*

Conclusions

The teachers at Greystone School love their students. Mutual respect between teachers and students is evident throughout the school. Teachers are superb role models for their students, as they demonstrate mutual cooperation and model a love of learning. Many teachers have high expectations for the students and are proud of their students' achievements. (*classroom observations, scheduled meeting with parents, scheduled meeting with students, following students, scheduled meeting with School Improvement Team*)

Recognizing there has been little professional development in how to use rubrics, it is noteworthy that all teachers have taken the initiative to incorporate rubrics into their instruction and assessment. Teachers are in the emergent stage of using rubrics, most commonly as a final grading tool. Some rubrics are not child-friendly, not specific to the tasks assigned, and not as effective as they could be in helping students improve their work. Teachers also use other forms of assessment, such as peer editing, projects, artwork, and group presentations. These are effective means for allowing students to use multiple intelligences, thereby improving student learning. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, scheduled meeting with district, scheduled meeting with principal, interviews with teachers*)

Teachers are at the emergent stage of implementing standards-based instruction. Many are hampered by the lack of an established curriculum, related materials, and effective, comprehensive professional development. (*classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, Greystone School Improvement Plan, scheduled meeting with School Improvement Team, interviews with teachers, scheduled meeting with district*)

Most teachers encourage students to improve and extend their thinking. They ask questions, such as “Why

do you think...?”, “Can you explain...?”, and “ Can you tell me more about...?”. They meet with parents and make themselves frequently available for phone conversations. Teachers also offer specific and useful praise and give their students motivation to improve. Additionally, their students often replicate such feedback with their peers and encourage each other to do their best. However, there is a discrepancy between oral and written feedback. Written feedback offered to students is superficial in quality and has limited usefulness in helping them to improve their work. (*examination of student work, classroom observations, following students, conversations with students*)

The North Providence Teacher Evaluation Tool (checklist) does not include feedback that addresses skillful, standards-based teaching. It does not provide for the development of goals or objectives necessary for short or long term individual improvement. (*North Providence Teacher Evaluation forms: non- tenured and tenured checklists, scheduled meeting with district, scheduled meeting with principal*)

Teachers use various instructional approaches, such as whole class, cooperative group, direct, and individualized instruction. These are effective in helping students develop basic skills. Teachers often read to their students and engage them in the joy of good literature. This leads some students to learning as discovery. Teachers take the time to know their students and understand their needs. However, teachers

are less effective at developing higher order thinking skills, such as problem solving, analysis, and interpretation. Some teachers are not providing enrichment activities for students who complete their assigned work. As a result, students often use their instructional time to do their homework, rather than to engage in higher-level learning. (*classroom observations, following students, interviews with teachers, New Standards Reference Exam, scheduled meeting with students, scheduled meeting with parents*)

Commendations for Greystone School for

The respect and encouragement of teachers for their students

The initiative of teachers to improve instruction

Recommendations for Greystone School

Provide in-depth and school-wide training in the development and use of standards-based instruction and rubrics.

Utilize the high quality oral feedback to model written feedback.

Explore ways to challenge students who complete their work early.

Recommendations for The North Providence School District

Develop a professional evaluation process and instrument that fosters professional growth.

Support Greystone School in its efforts to provide in-depth and school-wide training in the use of standards-based instruction and rubrics.

Provide adequate materials and support for the implementation of curricula.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *Greystone School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *Curricula and related documents provided by Greystone School*
- ◆ *Greystone School Program binder*
- ◆ *Greystone School Peer Mediation binder*
- ◆ *Greystone School Social Work Services binder*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *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*
- ◆ *Greystone school schedule*

Conclusions

The leadership at Greystone School is resourceful and effective. She has united the faculty and staff. Additionally, she has raised expectations for student behavior and earned the respect of the parents. She has been proactive in publicizing student accomplishments and school activities. (*scheduled meeting with principal, scheduled meeting with School Improvement Team, School Improvement Plan, interviews with teachers, scheduled meeting with district, scheduled meeting with parents*)

There is an inequity in the treatment of middle school (Grades 6-8) students and elementary (Grades 1-5) students at Greystone School. Students in Grades 6-8 are using outdated textbooks, inadequate science materials, and have less technology available in their classrooms. Additionally, developmentally appropriate literature is needed. The district-wide attitude of viewing Greystone School as two schools is divisive and unsettling. While it may be true two years from now that Grades 6-8 will be housed in a middle school, the current inadequacies must be addressed immediately. (*classroom observations, following students, conversations with students, scheduled meeting with the district*)

The present situation of sharing co-curricular teachers throughout the district does not allow for the development of an integrated curriculum. Such a schedule limits the opportunity for common planning time among all teachers, the sharing of effective teaching practices, and a comprehensive understanding and

delivery of the curriculum. Using teachers in this manner does not contribute to their developing a strong school program. *(following students, classroom observations, Greystone School schedule, meeting with district, scheduled meeting with principal, interviews with teachers, conversations with students)*

The Greystone School Improvement Plan is a work in progress. It reflects an analysis of student performance in math, writing, and reading. The plan delineates strategies for closing achievement gaps in areas such as problem solving and writing. The plan includes recommendations for professional development workshops with a focus on decreasing student performance gaps in language arts, health, and math. The effectiveness of the plan will greatly be enhanced by specifying the people who are responsible for carrying out action plans and the target dates for completion. *(Greystone School Improvement Plan, scheduled meeting with School Improvement Team)*

The announcements over the public address system of detentions and required study group for those who have not done their homework on a daily basis erode student privacy and are an unnecessary reprimand. *(classroom observations, following students, observations of the school)*

It is unacceptable that Greystone School lacks formal curricula in so many areas. Social Studies, Science, Music, Art, and Physical Education are important subjects and the lack of curricula in these subjects makes instruction inequitable. *(classroom observations, following students, interviews with teachers, curricula and related documents provided by Greystone School)*

The North Providence School District has a philosophy regarding special education that is inclusive and serves students well. The district has made great efforts to provide students at Greystone School with an effective number of special education teachers, teacher assistants, and special education assistants. *(scheduled meeting with district, classroom observations, interviews with teachers)*

The condition of the Greystone School environment has undergone marked improvement, such as landscaping, redesign of traffic flow and the parking lot, and the overall appearance of the school. However, areas of the school need attention, including the cleanliness and condition of the bathrooms, chalkboards, and furniture. *(observations of the school, conversations with students, scheduled meeting with parents)*

Although the professional development efforts at Greystone School have included workshops in math and writing assessment, none of these has been universally attended. The day-long workshop on standards-based instruction prior to the start of the school year is a beginning. However, one day is insufficient for staff to gain the knowledge and confidence necessary to fully implement standards-based instruction. *(interviews with teachers, scheduled meeting with district, scheduled meeting with principal, School Improvement Plan)*

Greystone School is employing a variety of programs to address individual and group needs. Peer mediation, safety patrol, student council, conflict resolution, and increased social work services (through the use of interns) are successful in reducing the number and severity of disciplinary problems. More importantly, these programs are positive beginning steps to student empowerment. *(following students, conversations with students, scheduled meeting with principal, scheduled meeting with district, school program binder, Greystone School Peer Mediation Binder, Greystone School Social Work Services Binder)*

Commendations for Greystone School for

The educational and unifying leadership of the principal

The inclusive and exceptional special education program

The variety of programs that address student needs

Commendations for the North Providence School District:

The inclusive and exceptional special education program

Recommendations for Greystone School:

Address and eliminate the inequitable educational opportunities.

Re-examine the schedule and work towards building based co-curricular teachers.

Provide increased common planning time for all teachers.

Refer to the *SALT School Guide on Writing a School Improvement Plan* to improve the specificity and usefulness of the current plan.

Explore an alternate means of assigning students to after school detention and study groups.

Address the hygiene issues in the building.

Provide comprehensive professional development for all teachers in standards-based instruction.

Recommendations for the North Providence School District

Eliminate the educational inequities at Greystone School.

Re-examine the assignment of co-curricular teachers and work toward assigning them on a per building basis.

Support Greystone School with the necessary resources for increased common planning time.

Provide staff with the time and resources to write and implement comprehensive and standards-based curricula in all subject areas.

Support Greystone School in its efforts to provide comprehensive professional development for all teachers in standards-based instruction.

7. Final Advice to the School

There are many hidden treasures within Greystone School. Continue your journey as a community of learners by sharing your knowledge and expertise with each other to improve student learning. Envision yourselves as one school. Provide all of your students with an equitable educational experience. Continue to model your love of learning and challenge your students to set and achieve high goals.

Greystone School IMPROVEMENT TEAM

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

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Greystone 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, 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.
May 9, 2001