



# Forest Avenue Elementary School

Middletown

## SALT Visit Team Report

May 11, 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](http://www.ridoe.net/schoolimprove/salt)**

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# 1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

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

The purpose of the visit to Forest Avenue Elementary School from May 8 through May 11, 2001, was to draw conclusions about the School in the three focus areas of SALT:

- ◆ *Student Learning*
- ◆ *Teaching*
- ◆ *The School*

The design of the SALT visit ensures that accountability supports improvement of schools by directly connecting judgments of quality and recommendations for improvement to the actual life and work of a school.

This report is built upon the observations and conclusions of the visit team. The visit team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for Forest Avenue 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 Forest Avenue Elementary School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 57 full classroom observations and 27 partial classroom observations which totaled over 70 hours 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 five students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with the following groups:*
  - *school improvement team*

- *school and district administrators*
- *students*
- *parents*
- ◆ *conversations and/or interviews with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *examination of student work, including a selection of work collected by the school*
- ◆ *analysis of achievement and equity gaps based on Information Works! data*
- ◆ *review of district and school policies*
- ◆ *review of professional development activities*
- ◆ *review of classroom assessments.*
- ◆ *review of the following documents:*
  - *School Improvement Plan*
  - *district strategic plan*
  - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
  - *classroom textbooks*
  - *2000 Information Works!*
  - *1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination results*
  - *1998, 1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
  - *2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam results*
  - *2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam results*
  - *Working Wonders 2000-2001 Standards and Assessment Grant Work*
  - *Agreement Between the Middletown School Committee and the NEA Middletown*
  - *Middletown Public Schools Teacher Evaluation Handbook 2000-2001*

- *Middletown School District Technology Plan*

The full team has built the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussions. The visit team met for a total of 25 hours in six separate meetings spanning the four days of the visit. This time is exclusive of the time spent in classrooms, with teachers and in meetings with students, parents, and school and district administrators. The team sought to develop conclusions, commendations, and recommendations in the three focus areas that, in its judgment, would be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning.

**The team reached consensus agreement for each conclusion, each recommendation, and each commendation in this report.**

It is important to note that this report reflects a “moment” in the life of the school. The conclusions here are different from those that can be made from statewide assessment data or from information collected and analyzed by members of the school. This report is not intended to be prescriptive. Rather, it is a different lens, one not clouded by the daily life of the school. This new lens is one through which the school can look to help focus on important issues resulting in the development of strategies for overall improvement in the teaching and learning process.

The value of this report is not determined by the hard work of the team. The value will be determined by how Forest Avenue Elementary School responds to the report. At first, the critical criteria will be the thoughtfulness of that response and later it will be the school’s 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 Middletown School District, the citizens of Middletown, 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 Forest Avenue Elementary School

Forest Avenue Elementary School, a kindergarten through grade 4 school, was built in 1957 as an eight-room school with a two-classroom trailer. In 1994 a sixteen-room addition and gymnasium were added. It is presently one of four elementary schools in the town of Middletown, Rhode Island, on Aquidneck Island. A five-member elected school committee governs the Middletown School District. The administrators consist of a superintendent; an assistant superintendent, a variety of directors, and a business manager administer the school system. The staff of Forest Avenue Elementary School includes a principal, 38 full and part time faculty, one secretary, seven aides and support personnel, two cafeteria workers, and two custodians.

Forest Avenue Elementary School has received two ten thousand-dollar grants, one from the Bank of Newport for reading, the other from Working Wonders IV for writing. These grants have supported a variety of in-service opportunities for school personnel. There is a Reading Recovery Program for first grade students, as well as a Literacy Support Program for grades K-4. In 1998 the school introduced the Everyday Mathematics Program to kindergarten and first grades, which was expanded the following year to all grades. Forest Avenue Elementary School houses a COZ Family Center, a Head Start Program, and a variety of after- school programs for the community.

Of the 311 students attending Forest Avenue Elementary School, 78 percent are white, 16 percent are black, five percent are Hispanic, and less than one percent are Asian Pacific Islander or Native American.

A total of 24 percent of the population receives some form of special education services. Thirty-two percent are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Twenty-three students are served in special needs classrooms, 21 receive resource services, and 26 receive speech and language services. Five students have 504 Plans.

The New Standards Reference Examination results indicate that growth over the past two years has been static. The exception is a decrease in scores of those meeting the standard in Writing Conventions (1999-69 percent and 2000-26 percent) and Mathematics Problem Solving (1999-39 percent and 2000-26 percent). Of the 74 percent of the students not meeting the standard in 2000 on the Mathematics Problem-solving subtest, 25 percent showed little evidence of achievement. An impressive 30 percent of the students achieved the standard with honors on the Mathematics Skills subtest. Equity gaps, a difference of 15 percent or more, exist between poverty and non-poverty students in mathematics skills and problem solving, with a lower percentage of poverty students meeting the standards. Surprisingly, fewer than 10 poverty students took the 1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination.

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 Forest Avenue Elementary School is available at [www.ridoe.net](http://www.ridoe.net).

### 3. PORTRAIT OF Forest Avenue Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Forest Avenue Elementary School, a neighborhood school, boasts a learning community defined by professionalism and pride. The principal and his staff are committed to providing a quality education for all students. The students embrace their school feeling safe, supported, and nurtured within their learning environment. Parents feel welcome at the school; they are involved in numerous programs and activities to support the education of their children. The custodial staff maintains their school meticulously.

Forest Avenue Elementary School has embarked on a journey to move toward excellence. The collegial staff is involved in a myriad school improvement initiatives and professional development activities to refine their crafts, while at the same time promoting higher student achievement. They are at the beginning of their understanding of standards and standards-based instruction. Their students are also beginning to grasp how to use rubrics to score their work and to improve the quality of their products. As students take greater ownership of their learning, they will be empowered to be more reflective and use the tools necessary to become independent learners.

Pockets of leveled reading instruction are evident in classrooms; however, the preponderance of reading instruction is whole class utilizing a grade level text. This approach alone will not address the variety of instructional levels in the classroom and it does not meet the needs of all learners.

The staff clearly is focusing its attention on writing and has made many positive strides in this direction. From various in-service opportunities, teachers understand a variety of approaches to improve student writing. Additional opportunities to share knowledge and develop a school-wide approach will enhance the learning for all students and develop continuity of program.

Forest Avenue Elementary School now faces the challenge of narrowing its focus and weaving together a variety of components to develop a unified, comprehensive school program.



## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *1998,1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *1998,1999 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *1998,1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and/or interviews with students and staff*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, students, school, district administrators, and parents*
- ◆ *following students*

### Conclusions

Forest Avenue Elementary School students are joyful, welcoming, and proud of their school. They demonstrate extreme politeness and positive peer and adult interactions. In the classroom they focus and engage eagerly in learning. Students respond well to school routines and expectations. (*classroom observations, observations of the school, conversations and/or interviews with students, staff, and parents*)

The majority of students at Forest Avenue Elementary School are fluent readers and value the importance of reading. Many use strategies for self-corrections to enhance understanding and improve fluency. They engage in paired, oral, and independent reading. Most student's self-select books for sustained silent reading. Students use graphic organizers, reading response journals, text comparisons, and oral and written responses to summarize their learning. These practices contribute to the fact that 88 percent of the students achieved the standard in the Basic Understanding subtest on the 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination (*New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination, following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations and/or interviews with teachers and students, scheduled meetings with students*)

Students are aware of the importance of writing. They frequently write in a variety of contexts: such as responding to teacher directed prompts, quick writes, journals, and math and science observations. Students share their writing with excitement. Although the quality of student writing varies, it is stronger than indicated on the 2000 Third Grade Rhode Island Writing Assessment, where only 18 percent of the students achieved the standard. The students currently are not secure enough in their skills to be independent in the writing process. They edit to correct some errors in convention, but few revise their writing on their own to

improve its quality. Their attention to detail in order to communicate effectively and their use of rich language are skills that are emerging. *(2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results, following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, conversations and/or interviews with students and teachers, scheduled meeting with students)*

Most students are eager, engaged, and excited to participate in mathematics activities. They work effectively in pairs and groups and take initiative to assist their peers. Students have a grasp of basic mathematical skills; however, most have not developed the deeper conceptual understanding needed to apply a variety of strategies to problem solve. Most are unable to ask probing questions or explain their thinking processes. On the 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination a surprising 25 percent of students showed little or no evidence of achievement on the Problem Solving subtest, with an additional 49 percent below or nearly achieving that standard. *(New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination results, classroom observations, following students, examination of student work, conversations and/or interviews with students)*

Students are aware of rubrics and standards. However, they do not typically take an active role in setting and using criteria to self-correct or improve their work. Most students are satisfied merely with meeting the standard; they do not strive for higher levels of performance. *(conversations and/or interviews of students, scheduled meetings with students, classroom observations, examination of student work)*

## Commendations for Forest Avenue Elementary School

Happy, polite, enthusiastic learners

## Recommendations for Forest Avenue Elementary School

Adopt a consistent school-wide writing process, techniques, and terminology.

Balance the students' focus on writing to enrich content, while continuing to strengthen their skills and conventions.

Develop a deeper conceptual understanding in mathematics by encouraging higher level thinking and questioning skills.

Increase opportunities for problem solving.

Challenge all students to reach for a higher standard.

Provide opportunity for students to actively set and use criteria

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff and school administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students*
- ◆ *School Improvement Plan*

### Conclusions

The dedicated, hard working teachers and staff at Forest Avenue Elementary School provide a nurturing, kind, and respectful school environment. They are involved in varied initiatives to improve their practice to raise student achievement. As a developing community of learners, further collaboration among all colleagues will strengthen and foster a more unified program. (*classroom observations, observations of the school, following students, conversations and/or interviews with staff, students, scheduled meetings with school and district administrators, and parents, school improvement team, School Improvement Plan*)

Utilizing an anthology series, reading is taught primarily through a whole group approach. Most students are being taught at the same instructional reading level. There is little evidence of differentiation of instruction to meet the individual learning needs of all students. The sole use of this approach does not provide all students with the necessary opportunities to achieve success. (*classroom observations, conversations and interviews with students, teachers, and staff, scheduled meeting with district and school administrators, parents, and students*)

Teachers are committed to the improvement of writing instruction for all students. Although they incorporate a wide variety of approaches in their writing instruction, these are not necessarily consistent or connected within or across grade level practice. This fragmented approach does not allow for a defined and focused school-wide writing initiative. (*classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, scheduled meetings with school improvement team, district and school administrators*)

While all teachers instruct their students in Everyday Mathematics, most teachers do not allot sufficient time on a daily basis for its full implementation. Many express a lack of confidence in the program to adequately address skill development and problem solving. Critical thinking and probing questioning are not modeled consistently nor encouraged frequently enough to allow for development of higher level thinking. (*classroom schedules, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers*)

The understanding and implementation of standards-based instruction among the teachers is developing. As they move away from teacher-directed instruction, students will assume more responsibility and ownership for their own learning. The students' ability to improve their own work is limited by the lack of constructive oral and written descriptive feedback and by their lack of self-reflection. (*observations of classrooms,*

*scheduled meeting with district administrators, school improvement team, conversations and interviews with teachers)*

## Commendations for Forest Avenue Elementary School

Dedicated, hardworking faculty and staff committed to excellence

Willingness and initiative of staff to understand and implement standards-based instruction

## Recommendations for Forest Avenue Elementary School

Define and focus Forest Avenue Elementary School's writing initiative.

Provide more opportunities for students to analyze and interpret text.

Strengthen the reading and writing connection.

Differentiate reading instruction, using a wide variety of materials, strategies, and leveled text to meet the needs of all students.

Analyze schedule to accommodate all components of the Everyday Mathematics Program.

Foster an environment that enhances student ownership of their learning.

## Recommendations to the Middletown School District

Provide financial resources for leveled text

## 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*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *Working Wonders 2000-2001 Standards and Assessment Grant Work*
- ◆ *classroom schedules*
- ◆ *Agreement Between the Middletown School Committee and the NEA Middletown*
- ◆ *Middletown Public Schools Teacher Evaluation Handbook 2000-2001*
- ◆ *Middletown School District Technology Plan*

### Conclusion

Forest Avenue Elementary School fosters a welcoming sense of community. The principal encourages community members to be active participants in the daily functioning of the school. The Parent Teacher Group sends monthly newsletters, sponsors school-wide activities, and supports school programs. The COZ, Head Start, and after school programs also strengthen the community connection. (*following students, scheduled meetings with school and district administrators, parents, and students, conversations with staff*)

The school improvement team and the Middletown School District have afforded Forest Avenue Elementary School staff with an ambitious array of professional development opportunities. Participation of Forest Avenue Elementary School professionals has been exceptional. The demands of the simultaneous implementation of a wide range of initiatives in addition to established programs are overwhelming. A narrower focus will enable a more unified and developed instructional program. (*scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, Working Wonders 2000-2001 Standards and Assessment Grant Work*)

The Elementary School Improvement Plan 2000-2001 has set forth a lofty objective to create proficient

writers within a one-year period. The goal of providing professional development opportunities has given the teachers a myriad of tools and strategies from which to choose to improve student writing performance. However, these goals are a work in progress; they require more time and a narrower focus in order to improve the teaching and learning for all students. *School Improvement Plan 2000-2001, scheduled meetings with school administrators and school improvement team*)

The high mobility rate of the student population (21percent) presents a particular challenge to teachers, students, and parents in the area of mathematics. The spiraling pattern of the Everyday Mathematics Program fosters skill and concept development built over time within and across grades. The thinking process and language of the Everyday Mathematics Program is unique and therefore causes frustration for many new students and parents entering the school. *(scheduled meetings with parents, district and school administrators, conversations with teachers, 2000 Information Works! data)*

As part of their planning preparation time, teachers are provided with scheduled opportunities to meet with their grade level colleagues. The use of this time is not formally defined and is not consistently utilized throughout the school. Presently, the professional communication between and among the staff is fragmented, causing a disjointed delivery of instruction. A unified school-wide direction and implementation is necessary to raise student achievement and support best practice in teaching and learning. *(classroom schedules, conversations and interviews with teachers, scheduled meetings with district and school administrators, school improvement team, Agreement Between the Middletown School Committee and the NEA Middletown)*

Safety limitations of the physical plant include: a lack of a defined playground perimeter, an inadequate blacktop play area, and poor drainage problems that prohibit full utilization of the playground. In addition, unlocked main doors and insufficient outdoor lighting present security and safety concerns for the school community. *(following students, observation of the school, scheduled meetings with school administrators, parents, and students)*

The newly developed Middletown Public School Teacher Evaluation Process is a well-developed standards-based tool designed to enhance the growth of the teacher as a professional. Its primary focus is to ensure high student achievement. Presently in its pilot year, full implementation is scheduled in the 2001-2 school year. *(scheduled meeting with school and district administrators, Middletown Public Schools Teacher Evaluation Handbook 2000-2001)*

Technology integration at Forest Avenue Elementary School is inadequate and Internet access is confined to certain classrooms and areas. This is insufficient to support student learning, to develop the acquisition of information literacy skills, and to prepare students in 21st century. *(classroom observations, interviews with students, teachers, scheduled meetings with district and building administrators, parents, students, and school improvement team, following students, Middletown District Technology Plan)*

## Commendations for Forest Avenue Elementary School

Welcoming school environment

## Recommendations for Forest Avenue Elementary School

Narrow and define the focus of school initiatives and professional development.

Research ways to reduce the frustration level of new parents and students as they transition into Everyday Mathematics.

Evaluate building security and safety concerns.

Review the schedule to include common planning time between and among grade level teachers and specialists.

Continue to foster teacher leadership in Forest Avenue Elementary School.

## Recommendations for Middletown School District

Support the recommendations for building safety and security

Develop a clear school technology plan

## 7. Final Advice to the School

The Forest Avenue Elementary School has taken significant strides to become a progressive professional learning community. The momentum of your efforts is evident. Through your professional development experiences you have had many opportunities to explore a variety of initiatives. At this point it is essential to construct a school-wide structure that encourages teacher leadership and exchange of information in order to build a cohesive, seamless program. Focus your attention and direction now, and prioritize goals to create this unified program that will support your students as they reach higher levels of performance.

Empower your students to take ownership of their learning and assume responsibility for it. Provide constructive feedback and opportunities for students to evaluate, reflect, and improve upon their work.

Connect your reading, writing, and content areas. Integration of curricula will provide depth and meaning for purposeful student learning. Meet the needs of all learners in reading by providing a variety of instructional opportunities and materials at their instructional level. Not only will this add rigor to your curricula, but also it will also further develop students' ability to analyze and interpret text.

Be proud of all of your accomplishments. Celebrate your successes. We congratulate your efforts. Most of all believe in yourselves and believe in each other. You are doing great things at Forest Avenue Elementary School. Good luck as you continue on your journey.



# Forest Avenue Elementary Forest Avenue School Improvement Team

Jeanne Dallaire, Co-chairperson  
Grade 3

Betsy Colaneri, Co-chairperson  
Grade 3

Steve Ponte  
Principal

## Teachers

Colleen Martin, Grade 1

Deanne Reilly, Grade 3

Margaret Sullivan, Grade 4

Beth Spooner-Willis, Guidance

Maryanne Miller-Allan, Speech/Language

Liz Fontaine, Respource

Linda Welch, Special Education

Shirley Saulnier, Grade 2

Josie Brennan-Corey, Multiage

Maureen Sullivan, Multiage

Lori Call, Grade 2

Gail O'Connor, LSP/Reading Recovery

Keri McLaughlin, Grade 2

Mary Clark, Grade 1

Betty Hughes, Grade 1

Karen Weikert, Grade 3

Carol Hutchinson, Grade 4

Karen Miller, Kindergarten

Karen Goulart, Special Education

Margaret Sullivan, Grade 4

Renee Kaminitz, Librarian

Claire Johnson, Music

Elizabeth Paiva, LSP/Reading Recovery

## Parents

Neil Lewis

Heidi Rothermel

Katie Jones

Rachel Wang

Shelly Delaney

Patricia Vargas

Representative Bruce Long

Michelle Banks

Susan Eng

Patricia Brewis

Robin Williamson

Holly Garvey

Chris Costello

## The SALT Visit Team

Donna H. Reinalda  
Multi-age Teacher Grades 1-3  
Sowams Elementary School  
Barrington, Rhode Island  
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)  
Chair

Kerry Duxbury  
5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher  
Ashaway Elementary School  
Chariho, Rhode Island

Lisa Freeman  
Mathematics Facilitator  
East Bay Educational Collaborative  
Portsmouth, Rhode Island

Judith LaCross  
3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher  
Oldham Elementary School  
East Providence, Rhode Island

Patricia Myers  
Principal  
Meadowbrook Farms School  
East Greenwich, Rhode Island

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

## Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

### Forest Avenue Elementary School

May 11, 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 4, 2001