



Tiverton Middle School

Tiverton

SALT Visit Team Report

May 18, 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

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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 Tiverton Middle School from May 15 through May 18, 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 Tiverton Middle 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 Tiverton Middle School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 111 full and partial classroom observations which totaled over 91 hours spent in direct classroom observation. Most classrooms were visited at least once. Most teachers were observed more than once.*
- ◆ *many observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- ◆ *observation of common planning meetings*
- ◆ *following 8 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*
- ◆ *Knowledge Quest, Journal of the American Association of School Librarians, March/April, 2001*
- ◆ *Tiverton Middle School Happenings, March 15, 2001*
- ◆ *review of the following documents:*
 - *School Improvement Plan for Tiverton Middle School*
 - *Tiverton Middle School disciplinary report form*
 - *Tiverton Middle School Professional Development Plan*
 - *district strategic plan*
 - *review of Tiverton Middle School Budget, 2001-2002*
 - *Tiverton Middle School Happenings, October 12, 2000*
 - *Profile of Tiverton Middle School*
 - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*

- *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 result*
- *2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam School Summary*
- *2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam School Summary*

The full team has built the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussions. The visit team met for a total of 22 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 Tiverton Middle 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 Tiverton, 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 on 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 Tiverton Middle School

Tiverton Middle School serves students in the fifth through eighth grades in the Town of Tiverton, Rhode Island, and is part of the Tiverton School System. A superintendent, curriculum coordinator, and business manager administer the school system. The building that houses Tiverton Middle School opened in 1976.

Of the 786 students who attend Tiverton Middle School, ninety-eight percent are white, one percent is black, and less than one percent are Asian/Pacific Islanders. Seventeen percent of the students receive special education services. Eighteen percent of Tiverton Middle School students receive free or reduced price lunch.

One principal and one assistant principal administer the school. Seventy-one full- and part-time teachers, two guidance counselors, six full- and part-time teacher assistants, three secretaries, and four custodians serve the students in the school. Tiverton Middle School students are grouped into one of seven groups. Fifth and sixth grades are divided into four clusters of students. Seventh and eighth grade students are divided into three clusters of students. Each cluster of students represents a balance of members—boys and girls—and a range of ability levels.

Teachers at Tiverton Middle School participate in a wide range of professional activities and programs. The East Bay Collaborative has acknowledged this school as a focus school. Teachers have engaged in professional development activities in conjunction with the Collaborative and have made several presentations on various educational topics. Some faculty members have been recognized as authors and presenters in professional publications and workshops.

Test scores from the 1999 New Standards Reference Examinations in English Language Arts and Mathematics indicate that students at Tiverton Middle School performed the same as similar students statewide on all Mathematics subtests, and not as well as similar students statewide on all English Language Arts subtests. However, the 2000 test results showed substantial increases in those subtests in which the Tiverton Middle School students did not perform as well as similar students statewide in 1999.

Equity gaps, a difference of fifteen percent or greater, occur between special education and general education students on all of the New Standards Reference Examination subtests with general education students out-performing special education students. An equity gap exists between males and females on the Writing Effectiveness subtest with females out-performing males.

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 Tiverton Middle School is available at www.ridoe.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF Tiverton Middle School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

As visitors enter Tiverton Middle School they are treated to a colorful display of student work that decorates the lobby and hallways. A warm and friendly staff and student body are quick to make their guests welcome in this clean and safe learning environment.

Tiverton Middle School is a child-centered learning community composed of well-behaved, respectful students, who view their teachers, principal, and vice-principal as hardworking, dedicated adults whom they can trust. The collegial and cooperative atmosphere that all members of this school community help to create permeates throughout the building and ripples throughout the Tiverton community.

The culture of Tiverton Middle School supports the commitment of all stakeholders to high levels of academic achievement. A school-wide focus in writing has resulted in increased student performance on statewide assessments and a high quality of student work. Student achievement in mathematics is commendable, as is the school-wide effort to encourage and expand student reading.

While standards-based instruction and performance-based assessment takes place in some classrooms on a daily basis, all teachers at Tiverton Middle School have not had the type of professional development necessary to allow all students to consistently receive daily instruction that incorporates clear and high expectations.

Much of the success of this school can be attributed to the hard work of its faculty and staff that makes up for the serious understaffing that exists throughout the school. The lack of sufficient staffing has resulted in some inequalities in the level of service that some children receive and an inability to maximize the contributions of some exceptionally talented teacher leaders on this staff. Issues of funding have also had a limiting effect on the number of extracurricular and after-school programs that might be offered to the student body.

Tiverton Middle School is on a path towards excellence. However, two distinct philosophies about the delivery of instruction and standards-based education exist at this time. While the teachers in the lower grades have more readily embraced the middle level concept, some upper-level classrooms more closely resemble a junior high school model.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *1999 Information Works!*
- ◆ *1998, 1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam results*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *observation of common planning meetings*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with students and teachers*
- ◆ *scheduled meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators*
- ◆ *Tiverton Middle School Happenings, October 12, 2000*
- ◆ *Profile of Tiverton Middle School*

Conclusions

The vast majority of students at Tiverton Middle School are well disciplined, cooperative, and respectful of staff and of each other. Most students arrive in class prepared to work and knowing what is expected of them. In many classes, especially in the lower grades, students exhibit a high level of energy and enthusiasm about their learning. Students function very well during transitions between classes, behave well in the corridors and in the cafeteria, and contribute to the safe and orderly environment that exists in this school. Students are comfortable in this environment, work well together in groups and pairs, freely ask for help when necessary, and support each other with positive reinforcement. This results in an overall climate and atmosphere that is conducive to a high level of learning. (*classroom observations, following students, observations of the school, conversations and interviews with students*)

Students at Tiverton Middle School respond well to the school-wide emphasis on writing. They are fully engaged in the writing process. Students write often and most students write well. They write effectively in a

variety of formats and for a variety of purposes. Students are able to analyze and evaluate their own writing and that of their peers. Students consistently write across the disciplines. These findings are consistent with the results on the 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examinations, on which 86% of eighth grade students tested achieved or exceeded the standard in Writing Effectiveness, and 74% achieved or exceeded the standard in Writing Conventions. (*classroom observations, 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam results, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, scheduled meetings with the school improvement team, school and district administrators, examination of student work*)

Students at Tiverton Middle School are consistently engaged in the challenging standards-based Chicago Math program. Students enjoy the hands-on, manipulatives-based instruction and the wide variety of creative classroom activities. Students are able to communicate in the language of mathematics, in both verbal and written form, the strategies and steps they use to solve problems. As a result, student performance—and the quality of student work in all grades and at all levels, including special education—is exceptional. These findings are consistent with the results on the 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination where 78% of eighth grade students tested achieved the standard in Mathematical Skills, with 44% of those students achieving the standard with honors. Additionally, 36% of the students met or exceeded the standard in Mathematical Concepts, and 41% met or exceeded the standard in Problem Solving. (*examination of student work, following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, scheduled meetings with students, 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam results*)

Students at Tiverton Middle School embrace reading as part of their school culture. Some students frequently access a large variety of reading materials that are readily available in the library/media center. Many students very enthusiastically and successfully participate in literature circles, “book talks,” and independent reading projects. Some students participate in after-school book clubs. Students often apply their reading skills to other disciplines. Some students work toward achieving the standard of reading twenty-five books; most keep annotated reading logs. However, results on the 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination indicate that 40% of the eighth grade students tested did not meet the standard in Reading, Basic Understanding, and 68% did not meet the standard in Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation. Additionally, no students achieved the standard with honors. This seems inconsistent with successful student performance and the high quality of student work exhibited, especially in the lower grades. (*New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam results, classroom observations, following students, scheduled meeting with the school improvement team, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, observations of the school, examination of student work*)

Participation in the orchestra, band, and chorus is very high and demonstration of skills in these performing arts has earned students much recognition. This recognition has resulted in a strong sense of school pride among the student body. (*classroom observations, Tiverton Middle School Happenings, October 12, 2000, Profile of Tiverton Middle School, conversations and interviews with teachers and students*)

Commendations for Tiverton Middle School

The well-disciplined, cooperative and respectful student body

Student performance on the New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination

High level of student engagement in the mathematics program

School-wide culture that embraces reading

Student achievement in the school music program

Recommendations for Tiverton Middle School

Use the data available to determine the discrepancies in the efforts placed on reading and the inconsistent test results.

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, and parents*
- ◆ 1999 Information Works!
- ◆ *observation of common planning meetings*
- ◆ *examination of student work*

Conclusions

Teachers at Tiverton Middle School are hardworking, dedicated professionals who want to provide the best possible education for their students. Teachers are committed to the educational process and deliver meaningful instruction. The value they place on the time spent with students is evident in the long range planning, coordination, and organization that takes place in spite of the absence of designated team or House leaders. Some teachers have gone beyond the contractual limits of the school day to collaborate, plan, and organize instruction and enrichment activities for their students. Teachers set very clear expectations for student behavior and provide a safe, well-ordered, and stable learning environment. (*classroom observations, following students, observations of the school, scheduled meetings with students, parents, and school administrators, conversations and interviews with students and teachers, observation of common planning meetings*)

Many teachers at Tiverton Middle School are delivering a very high quality of standards-based instruction every day. These teachers are highly skilled and committed to providing students with a variety of learning experiences, including performance-based assessments. These teachers establish clear and high expectations for their students. Others demonstrate a sincere willingness to improve their instructional practices and incorporate standards-based instruction in their classrooms, but they have not yet been given the training, coaching, or modeling needed to accomplish these goals. The quality of daily instruction is not consistent within grades or among grades and Houses; this creates inequities in student learning. (*classroom observations, examination of student work, following students, scheduled meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, the school improvement team, observations of the school*)

Teachers at Tiverton Middle School use a variety of assessment tools but have not yet been fully trained in the application of performance-based assessment. In many cases the misunderstanding about the development, purpose, and use of rubrics and portfolios leads to inconsistent evaluation of student work and

confusion among students and parents about the evaluation process. In some cases the amount, quality, and nature of teacher feedback on student work is inconsistent, making it difficult for students to understand how to improve their work or to complete high-quality finished products. (*examination of student work, following students, classroom observations, observations made in the school, scheduled meetings with parents, school and district administrators*)

Commendations for Tiverton Middle School

The hardworking, dedicated, and committed teachers

The consistent and clear expectations teachers set for student behavior

Teachers' effective use of time in planning, coordinating, and organizing instruction

The efforts of those teachers who have incorporated standards-based instruction and performance-based assessments into their classrooms

Recommendations for Tiverton Middle School

Participate in school-wide professional development in the areas of middle school philosophy, standards-based instruction, rubric construction, and performance-based assessments.

Better inform parents about the nature of standards-based instruction and performance-based assessment.

Recommendations for the Tiverton School District

Provide needed professional development for teachers.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *School Improvement Plan for Tiverton Middle School*
- ◆ *Tiverton Middle School disciplinary report form*
- ◆ *observations of common planning meetings*
- ◆ *review of the Tiverton Middle School Budget, 2001-2002*
- ◆ *Knowledge Quest, Journal of the American Association of School Librarians, March/April, 2001*
- ◆ *Tiverton Middle School Happenings, March 15, 2001*
- ◆ *Tiverton Middle School Professional Development Plan, 2000-2001*

Conclusions

Tiverton Middle School is on the verge of becoming an exceptional middle school, but it has not yet accepted and implemented all components of the middle school philosophy. All stakeholders at Tiverton Middle School have not fully embraced the philosophy of middle level education. While many teachers, especially those in the lower grades, willingly function within the parameters of this model, not all teachers are eager to make changes in their approach to student learning. The education of the whole child is not currently a reality because opportunities for extracurricular activities and programs are severely lacking. Additionally, district support for these initiatives has not been forthcoming. As a result, this school community is restrained from fully realizing its true mission and potential in becoming an exceptional middle school. (*scheduled meetings with school and district administrators, parents, and students, conversations and interviews with teachers, School Improvement Plan, review of the Tiverton Middle School Budget, 2001-2002*)

The principal of Tiverton Middle School is an exemplary leader. He is the driving force in the school's journey towards excellence. Members of the faculty and staff, students, and parents have tremendous respect for his abilities. He is the glue that holds this school together, providing support, encouragement, and

stability to everyone in this school community. Many teachers and staff have indicated that his leadership was a strong factor in their decision to work at this school. District administrators also recognize his accomplishments and the value of his leadership. (*conversations and interviews with teachers and school staff, scheduled meetings with the school improvement team, students, parents, school and district administrators, observations of the school, observations of common planning meetings*)

Tiverton Middle School is a safe, nurturing, and stable learning environment. Students feel comfortable and secure in this clean and orderly atmosphere and take pride in it. This contributes to their willingness and commitment to engage fully in learning. Effective disciplinary practices and procedures implemented by the assistant principal and a concerted effort by the teachers to provide consistent behavioral expectations have resulted in a school climate that is very conducive to learning. However, in the physical education areas the same secure, structured environment does not exist. This results in an unsafe atmosphere for student participation. (*observations of the school, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers and school staff, scheduled meetings with parents, students, and district administrators, following students, review of the Tiverton Middle School disciplinary report form*)

The library/media center at Tiverton Middle School is a positive and supportive environment that promotes a culture of reading in this school. Students are welcomed and valued as individuals. Book clubs, acknowledged by a national professional publication and funded by a Sizer Fellowship accessed by the library/media specialist and an English Language Arts teacher, are well attended by teachers, students, and parents. (*conversations and interviews with teachers and students, scheduled meetings with students and parents, observations of the school, Knowledge Quest, Journal of the American Association of School Librarians, March/April, 2001, Tiverton Middle School Happenings, March, 15, 2001*)

There are some inconsistencies and inequities in the level of service provided to some students at Tiverton Middle School. The pullout models used to accommodate students in special education, Title I programs and the gifted and talented program, severely limits student access to the full range of services and opportunities needed for the education of the whole child. A lack of any type of inclusion model also severely limits the service of some students in a least restrictive environment. Unified Arts classes are disproportionately sacrificed. This communicates an attitude that these areas are less important to the development of the intellectual, social, and emotional needs of the student. This also leads to an overall perception that the Unified Arts program is not valued. (*classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, following students, scheduled meetings with the school administrators, school improvement team, students, and parents*)

The professional and support staff at Tiverton Middle School work exceptionally hard, but the school is impacted negatively by a shortage of personnel. Staffing shortages most seriously impact and create inequities in those instructional areas where students are serviced by teachers whose part-time status prohibits them from being fully involved in the interdisciplinary planning and coordination of student learning. Social Studies instruction is also compromised in the lower grades. Student support services are hindered by the small number of guidance counselors and by the limited access to special education support services. Additionally, the large numbers of students assigned to some physical education classes results in an unsafe environment and compromised educational practices. Unwillingness on the part of the district to fund adequate staffing in custodial and clerical positions places a strain on the current staff. (*conversations and interviews with teachers, classroom observations, observations of the school, following students, scheduled meetings with school and district administrators, review of the Tiverton Middle School Budget, 2001-2002*)

Full integration of technology into the school's curriculum is hampered by a shortage of on-line, internet-accessible computers. Teacher support equipment, such as copy machines and library print and media resources, cannot be adequately provided within the constraints of the current budget. This hinders student access to materials that would enhance their educational opportunities. (*classroom observations, following*

students, conversations and interviews with teachers and staff, scheduled meetings with parents, school and district administrators, Tiverton Middle School Budget, 2001-2002)

Professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators in the areas of standards-based instruction, rubric construction, and performance-based assessment have not been widely provided or accessed. The current professional development plan does not adequately address these areas. As a result, implementation of a standards-based curriculum with high and clear expectations is limited. *(Tiverton Middle School Professional Development Plan, 2000-2001, scheduled meetings with the school improvement team, school and district administrators, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers)*

Commendations for Tiverton Middle School

The strong leadership provided by the school principal

The safe, nurturing, and stable learning environment

The library/media center program

Recommendations for Tiverton Middle School

Reevaluate special education services, the gifted and talented programs, and those models used to accommodate these programs.

Reexamine the current scheduling procedures to minimize the negative impact on the Unified Arts programs.

Provide opportunities for students to engage in extracurricular activities and programs.

Recommendations for Tiverton School District

Reevaluate your decision to employ part-time, rather than full-time, personnel.

Allocate resources to address the understaffing in relation to the teaching staff, counseling staff, and support staff.

Fully embrace all components of the middle school philosophy and fund those programs that will help this school achieve this goal.

Provide the necessary infrastructure and components for an expanded classroom technology program.

7. Final Advice to the School

Tiverton Middle School is clearly on a path towards excellence. There is very little in the way of achieving the status of a model middle school, but care must be taken not to lose your momentum or focus in the face of pockets of school-wide resistance and lack of district support. Do not be satisfied with the current level of student achievement and success. Seek appropriate professional development and train your already extraordinarily talented teachers to lead you in your professional growth.

In your quest to make your students life-long learners be certain to reevaluate the current schedule and the models for servicing your special populations. Consider the importance of the education of the whole child and your stated belief “that all students can learn, should be challenged, and be given the opportunity to achieve their highest potential.”

Tiverton Middle School Improvement Team

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Susan Perella
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Grade 7 Special Education Teacher

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The SALT Visit Team

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

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Tiverton Middle School

May 18, 2001

To complete the Catalpa Ltd. report endorsement, I discussed the conduct of the visit with the Visit Chair while it was in process, and I have reviewed this report. Based on my knowledge derived from these sources of evidence, using the criteria specified in the *Endorsing SALT Visit team Reports by Catalpa Ltd.*, and using the methodology and procedures specified in the *Handbook for SALT Visit Chairs, 1st edition*), I conclude that:

1. This report was produced by a legitimate SALT Visit that was led by a trained SALT Visit Chair and conducted in a manner that is consistent with SALT Visit procedures.
2. The conclusions and all other content of this report meet the criteria specified for a SALT Visit report.

Accordingly, Catalpa Ltd. endorses this report as a legitimate SALT Visit Report.



Thomas A. Wilson, EdD
Catalpa Ltd.
June 4, 2001