



Cumberland Middle School

Cumberland

The SALT Visit Team Report

September 28, 2001



School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)

The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

The findings of this report are those of this SALT visit team. The names and affiliations of the members of the team are in the appendix. The team follows the school visit protocol in the *Handbook for Chairs on Conducting a SALT School Visit*. The team is required to focus on what it observes at the time of the visit and it is restricted from comparing the school with any other. This school visit was supported by the Rhode Island Department of Education as one component of SALT.

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This report is available at <http://www.rido.net/schoolimprove/salt/visits.htm>

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1. THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS of this report

Overview

This is the report of the SALT team that visited Cumberland Middle School from September 24-28, 2001. The following features are at the heart of the report:

- ◆ *The team seeks to capture what makes this school work, or not work, as a public institution of learning. Each school presents a unique picture.*
- ◆ The team does not compare this school to any other school.
- ◆ When writing the report, the team deliberately chooses the words that will best convey its message to the school, based on careful consideration of what it has learned about the school dynamics.
- ◆ The team makes its judgment explicit.

The major questions the team addresses are:

- ◆ How well do the students at this school learn?
- ◆ How well does this school teach its students?
- ◆ How well does this school support learning and teaching?

The SALT report creates accountability for improvement by directly connecting its judgments of quality and its recommendations for improvement to the actual work going on in this school at the time of the visit.

The team closely follows the visit protocol in the *Handbook for Chairs of the SALT School Visit*. The Catalpa endorsement certifies that this team followed the protocol and that this report meets all criteria required for a legitimate SALT visit report.

The visit team is made up primarily of teachers and administrators from Rhode Island public schools. The majority of team members are teachers. The names and affiliations of the team members are listed at the end of the report.

Sources of Evidence for This Report

In order to write this report, the team examined test scores, student work, and other documents related to this school. The school improvement plan for Cumberland Middle School was the touchstone document for the team. No matter how informative documents may be, however, there is no substitute for being at the school while it is in session—in the classrooms, in the lunchroom, and in the hallways. The team built its conclusions primarily from information about what the students, staff, and administrators think and do during their day. Thus, the visit allows the team to build informed judgments about the teaching, learning, and support that actually take place at Cumberland Middle School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following sources of evidence:

- ◆ *observing a total of 124 complete classes and 25 partial classes. The team spent a total of over 107 hours in direct classroom observation. Every classroom was visited at least once, and many teacher were observed three or more times.*

- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*

- ◆ *following 9 students for a full day*

- ◆ *observing the work of teachers and staff for a full day*

- ◆ *meeting at scheduled times with the following groups:*

 - teachers*

 - school improvement team*

 - school and district administrators*

 - students*

 - parents*

- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*

- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*

- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*

- ◆ *analyzing three years of state assessment results as reported in Information Works!*

- ◆ *reviewing the following documents:*

 - district and school policies and practices*

 - records of professional development activities*

 - classroom assessments*

 - Cumberland Middle School Improvement Plan 2001-2002*

 - Cumberland School Department Strategic Plan 1998-2003*

 - Cumberland School Department Mentoring Program*

 - Cumberland School Department Teacher Evaluation*

 - Cumberland Teachers' Association & Cumberland School Committee Agreement 2000-2003*

1999-2000 SALT Survey report

1998-2001 Information Works!

1998, 1999, and 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results

1998, 1999, and 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results

2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary

2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary

The full team built the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 25 hours in six separate meetings spanning the five 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 must agree that every conclusion in this report:

- ◆ *is important enough to include in the report.*
- ◆ *is supported by the evidence the team has gathered during the visit.*
- ◆ *is set in the present.*
- ◆ *contains the judgment of the team.*

Using the Report

The team deliberately chooses the words, phrases, and sentences it uses in its conclusions, as well as in the *Portrait* and *Final Advice*. Thus, this report is the team's best attempt to encourage and support the school's continued improvement in strengthening the learning of its students.

The team reached consensus on each conclusion, each recommendation, and each commendation in this report.

It is important to note that this report reflects only the week in the life of the school that was observed and considered by this team. The report does not cover what the school plans to do or what it has done in the past.

This report is not prescriptive. The value of this report will be determined by its effectiveness in improving teaching and learning. By considering what the team said, why it said what it said, and whether what it said is an important issue for the school, the school takes its first step in becoming accountable in a way that actually improves learning.

It is important to read and consider this report as a whole. Recommendations and commendations should be considered in relation to the conclusions they follow.

After the school improvement team considers this report, it should make changes in the school improvement plan. The revised plan will form the basis for negotiating a Compact for Learning with the district. The purpose of the Compact is to ensure that the school and its district work out an agreement about the best way to improve the school and the best way to target district support for the school. A RIDE Field Service Team representative will offer assistance in preparing the Compact.

2. PROFILE OF Cumberland Middle School

Cumberland Middle School, located in the Valley Falls section of the town of Cumberland, Rhode Island, serves students in grades six through eight. It is part of the Cumberland School Department. It is administered by a superintendent, an assistant superintendent, and a deputy superintendent. An elected school committee of seven members governs the district. One school committee member is designated to serve as the district liaison to Cumberland Middle School.

The school building opened in 1969 as Cumberland's first middle school; however, soon after that time increases in the town population made it necessary for the town to construct a second middle school. The two schools work together to coordinate and articulate various programs and curricula efforts.

One principal, one assistant principal, 55 full- and part-time teachers, and 10 support personnel serve the 593 students of the school. Over 91 percent of the students are white, five percent are Hispanic, three percent are black, and one-half of one percent are Asian. Thirty-one percent of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunch. Over 24 percent receive Special Education services. Cumberland Middle School services all of the district's middle level English-as-a-Second-Language students, as well as some ESL students from adjacent communities. ESL students, who are predominantly Portuguese, make up seven percent of the student population.

This year the professional development opportunities for teachers in Cumberland Middle School include an on-site class taught by Rhode Island College staff for teachers seeking middle level certification. This past summer a Working Wonders Grant enabled 15 faculty members to be trained in the use of technology. The school received 15 new computers as a result of their participation in this program.

Last year a School Resource Officer position was established in the two Cumberland middle schools. As part of her work, the SRO worked with the assistant principal and several faculty members to organize a Students-as-Mediators program. Peer Helpers, a group organized to ease the transition of students into middle school, is in its third year. Peer responsibilities include outreach to Cumberland Middle School feeder schools, assisting in school tours for parents and new students, and helping grade six students and their homeroom teachers during the opening days of school. Also, an artist-in-residence program has been in place for several years in the school.

On the 2000 NSRE Mathematics subtests three in five of the eighth graders (59%) met or exceeded the standard in Basic Skills; one in five of the eighth graders (18%) met or exceeded the standard in Concepts, and one in four of the eighth graders (26%) met or exceeded the standard in Problem Solving. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist for Black, Hispanic, White, Multi-racial, Special Education, Limited English Proficient, and general education students on mathematics sub-tests. Students at the Cumberland Middle School perform at the same level as similar students in the state in mathematics.

On the 2000 NSRE English Language Arts subtests two in three of the eighth graders (65%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Basic Understanding; one in three of the eighth graders (36%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Analysis and Interpretation; and one in two of the eighth graders (51 %) met or exceeded the standard in Writing: Effectiveness, and one in two (47%) met or exceeded the standard in Writing: Conventions. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist for Black, Hispanic, White, Multi-racial, males, females, Special Education, Limited English Proficient, and general education students on English Language Arts sub-tests. Students at the Cumberland Middle School perform at the same level as or above the level of similar students in the state in English Language Arts.

On the Rhode Island Writing Assessment one in ten of the seventh graders (12 %) met or exceeded the standard.

At this point there are only three years of results in Cumberland Middle School, so rolling averages cannot be used to estimate changes in levels of achievement over time.

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

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

When visitors enter Cumberland Middle School, they are greeted by a bright, clean, and colorful facility whose floors gleam. In hallways and classrooms students, teachers, and administrators are friendly and polite. Classrooms hum with activity.

Faculty members strive to do a good job of teaching their students. Although they work hard, they often lack clear expectations and goals for either themselves or their students. Some teachers do challenge their students, but many teachers, administrators, and the wider community, as well, believe that many Cumberland Middle School students are not capable of reaching high levels of learning. This commonly held belief is a major block to the school's ability to move forward as a learning community.

Another block to improvement in the school is the widely held acceptance of the attitude, "We can't change that." This belief pervades much of the school atmosphere. A common vision and plan for Cumberland Middle School elude both administrators and teachers. Each group wants change, but waits for the other to initiate that effective change.

Cumberland Middle School has not yet become a true middle school. Although teams have been established and team teacher planning time is provided within the schedule, a clear sense of the functions of a team does not exist in this school. Several teams of teachers are comprised of members who do not share the same areas of the building. The way students are grouped into classes of perceived ability levels greatly limits their access to equal opportunities for learning. Team time is not used to strengthen teams, to plan for integrated student learning, or to assess how teachers and their students are progressing.

Overcrowding at Cumberland Middle School results in many Special Education classes being held in converted closets and offices. Free space for students in the computer lab is limited. Even the stage in the cafeteria is utilized as classroom space.

Administrators and teachers all want change and are frustrated that it does not happen. They have not yet established increased student learning as the central goal of the school, nor have they empowered themselves to make the changes necessary to achieve that goal. Cumberland Middle School continues to experience frustration; students, teachers, and administrators continue to circle in place.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2001 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *talking with students and teachers*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *meeting with students*
- ◆ *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
- ◆ *Cumberland Middle School Self Study Activity: Equity Gaps*

Conclusions

Students do read at Cumberland Middle School. Throughout the school day, volunteers take turns reading out loud in classes. In class assignments, though, many students read simply because they are required to do so. Most students answer only questions from their reading assignments that require the recall of facts. Some students, with prompts from teachers, summarize, interpret, and analyze their reading assignments and make predictions based on what they have read. They use reading for purposes that include solving math problems, completing lab reports in science, and following instructions. Some students talk informally among themselves about their independent reading. These reading activities are reflected in student achievement on state assessments. (*following students, observing classes, 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work*)

Students write in many formats such as reports, journals, letters, poetry, experiment results, and essays. Some students brainstorm, draft, edit, and revise their writing. Unfortunately, many students feel that sloppy mechanics, misspellings, and poor organization and development of ideas are acceptable writing practices. In place of meaningful writing, students too often copy step-by-step directions, notes, words, and definitions, and the answers to fill-in-the-blank worksheets. (*following students, observing classes, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing*)

student work, 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary)

Many students demonstrate the ability to complete problems requiring basic math skills. Some students are able to apply their skills to perform problem solving, sequencing, graphing, using manipulatives, and using logic in solving challenging conflict problems. Students are working to achieve specific mathematical goals, but only a few actually know what those goals are. Students do use a variety of mathematical skills; however, these skills are not consistently demonstrated within and across the grades. Many students do not display the ability to integrate basic skills into higher order concepts and problem solving. *(following students, observing classes, 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work)*

Students are eager to please; they are friendly, and well mannered. This contributes to a positive school environment. Students stay on task, are patient, and are prepared to learn. However, many students, accustomed to the routine of the school, simply go through the motions of the daily schedule, completing similar activities day-after-day. Many students lack a clear understanding of the purpose of their learning. They often do not know what their teachers expect on specific assignments, and some experience frustration and confusion. Too many students passively opt out of participating in class. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students, meeting with students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, 1999-2000 SALT Survey report)*

As part of its self-study Cumberland Middle School recognizes that equity gaps exist in the performance of students on state assessments. In fact, substantial equity gaps exist among all subgroups of students identified on all subtests of those assessments. Overall student performance on the 2000 New Standards Reference Examination is similar to that of students statewide on five of the subtests measured and exceeds that of similar students statewide on two of those subtests. *(Cumberland Middle School Self Study Activity: Equity Gaps, 2001 Information Works!)*

Commendations for Cumberland Middle School

Student contributions to the positive climate of the school

Recommendations for Cumberland Middle School

Build on student readiness and eagerness to learn. Involve your middle school learners to a greater degree in their own learning.

Establish clear criteria for good writing that includes correct mechanics and spelling, as well as the clear organization and development of ideas. Implement these criteria in all classes throughout the school.

Move students beyond daily routines. Engage all of them in more varied activities with clear expectations that address all learning styles.

Engage in professional development in the areas of teaching reading and writing across the entire curriculum and addressing different learning styles. Implement these strategies throughout the school.

Examine inconsistencies in opportunities for students to learn mathematics. Investigate the progress of students in the new math program and determine the most effective components that should be adopted school-wide. Adopt and implement a logical progression of mathematical instruction for all students in grades six through eight.

Examine closely state assessment results for Cumberland Middle School in order to determine where the gaps in learning occur. Use your findings to craft a specific school improvement plan to address the shortcomings in student achievement.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, and school administrators*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *meeting with the school improvement team*
- ◆ *following students*

Conclusions

At first glance most teachers appear comfortable with their teaching practices and think they are meeting the needs of their students. However, many teachers recognize that their teaching practices do not reflect good middle school practice. They are frustrated that they cannot move forward, yet they do not unite in their effort to improve student learning. Lacking the initiative to empower themselves, they wait for administrative direction. Inertia results. (*talking with teachers and school administrators, meeting with the school improvement team, observing classes, following students, interviewing teachers about the work of their students*)

Some teachers succeed in guiding their students to excel. However, many teachers believe that a significant number of their students cannot achieve at high levels and, therefore, do not hold high expectations for all students. Thus, the teaching practices that result from these low expectations prevent all students from achieving high levels of learning. (*following students, observing classes, talking with teachers, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work*)

Some teachers successfully tie posted classroom standards to their lessons and routinely use rubrics to assess student work. Other teachers lack clarity in the use of standards-based instruction and the use of rubrics. Standards are posted in most classrooms, but few teachers understand or integrate standards-based practices into their daily instruction. This unclear understanding and sporadic implementation of standards and rubrics leads to student confusion and frustration. It provides students with inconsistent chances to succeed. (*following students, observing classes, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, talking with students and teachers*)

Some teachers routinely construct lessons for students in clear and logical ways. They use time efficiently. Their classes are well paced as teachers effectively explain lessons, periodically check for understanding, and applaud their students for doing good work. These teachers keep students engaged in active learning throughout the class period. Their students know what is expected and how to proceed. These teachers encourage student-directed activities in which students choose the activities to demonstrate their knowledge. Students also share their work; they make inferences and predictions and connections to their own lives outside of school. (*observing classes, following students, interviewing teachers about the work of their*

students, talking with teachers and students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work)

Unfortunately, in too many classrooms ineffective teaching strategies are the norm. Often there is no introduction to the lesson or connections made to the previous day's work. Teachers give students unclear instructions and set low and vague expectations for student performance. They assign projects without conveying a purpose. The way most teachers manage their class time is an issue. Excessive homework review and allowing students to do homework in class erode instruction time. Closure of the lesson is often rushed or nonexistent. Teachers' rudimentary understanding of the construction and use of rubrics results in disconnected learning and frustrates some students. Many teachers frequently expect their students to absorb information passively through taking notes, copying material from a book or the board, and answering questions by rote memory. Teachers take the lead role in delivering instruction, denying students the opportunity for self-directed, active learning. Many teachers interact solely with students who volunteer to participate, while the remaining students sit disengaged at their desks. As a result, students are not challenged equally and expectations remain low. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students and teachers)*

Commendations for Cumberland Middle School

Those teachers who routinely keep students engaged in active learning throughout the class period

Recommendations for Cumberland Middle School

Engage in sustained and ongoing professional development in the implementation of standards-based instruction. Expand the integration of standards-based instruction within all classrooms, across all teams, and in all subject areas.

Move the focus of instruction from that of teacher-directed approaches to those that are student-centered. Collectively embrace methods of instruction that differentiate for individual students, recognize different learning styles, and foster student ownership of learning. Participate in professional development around differentiated instruction, balanced literacy, and learning styles.

Organize classes so they are centered around student learning. Ensure that every lesson includes clear expectations and objectives, purpose, continuity, and closure.

Recommendations for the Cumberland School District

Support Cumberland Middle School with the resources necessary for the school to move the focus of instruction from that of teacher-directed approaches to those that are student-centered.

Continue and complete the work to align curricula with standards.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *meetings with the school improvement team, students, and school and district administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ reviewing Cumberland Middle School Improvement Plan 2001-2002
- ◆ reviewing Cumberland School Department Strategic Plan 1998-2003
- ◆ reviewing Cumberland School Department Mentoring Program
- ◆ reviewing Cumberland School Department Teacher Evaluation
- ◆ Cumberland Teachers' Association & Cumberland School Committee Agreement 2000-2003

Conclusions

Many within the school community state that Cumberland Middle School is a middle school in name only. Unfavorable conditions such as inadequate space, minimal communication, the absence of sustained technology personnel, and the lack of direction are perceived as insurmountable obstacles to the successful implementation of desired middle school practices. Also, the acceptance of the misconception that student ability is associated with socio-economic status permeates the entire school community. In its attempts to create a middle school, the school has scheduled groups of students and teachers within the building and labeled them teams. Time has been included within the schedule for teams to meet on a regular basis. Some of the classes within teams are located in proximity to one another. Some teachers on teams do meet together occasionally to coordinate planning and to discuss concerns about students. Regrettably, teams in the school often cannot function as teams because teachers teach on more than one team and so cannot meet with other team members. Daily, teachers constantly shuffle from one room to another. Teams have no team leaders to organize their meetings and provide a connection to administrators. There is little communication within and across teams. Students are grouped by perceived ability levels and stay together in the same group all day. Students in this school have little understanding of the concept of team. Their instruction and learning is not integrated. All of these create unequal opportunities for students to learn. (*observing classes, following students, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, meetings with the school improvement team, students, and school administrators*)

The shortage of resources in the Cumberland Middle School impedes the delivery of services to students, and the school lacks the space to meet effectively the needs of middle school learners. Over-extended and unclearly defined roles for guidance counselors limit guidance counselors to responses to crises and prevents them from working proactively with all students. The presence of only one secretary and the lack of administrative support personnel inhibit the efficient delivery of school-wide services. Similarly, the librarian's role is so overextended that she cannot fully serve students or teachers. Her position is negatively impacted by her responsibility to maintain and distribute all audio-visual equipment and to administer and maintain the library without a clerk or an adequate library budget. In addition, the lack of technological support results in broken classroom computer equipment and unconnected machines. This prevents the staff from using technology training to support their classroom instruction. Students have classes on the stage and in cramped and poorly ventilated converted closets and offices; the library also is used inappropriately for classes. Many teachers are forced to carry their materials with them from room to room. This robs them of class time and forces them to modify what they can actually do during class. Large numbers of students are warehoused in Remedial because they have no other place to go. This limits the amount of time that learning can take place during the school day. *(talking with teachers, staff, and school administrators, meetings with school and district administrators, observing the school, observing classes)*

The school is not moving forward according to its mission statement. Given its available resources, the school is adequately managed, but leadership is weak at all levels. The absence of a common leadership vision throughout the school and the inability to communicate roles and responsibilities perpetuate finger pointing and allow a climate of complacency to permeate this school. Although teachers like the school administrators, many lack confidence in their ability to move the school forward. The administrators feel that both external and internal forces inhibit their ability, and therefore the school's ability, to change and improve. Administrators believe that issues involving the teacher contract, approaches to teaching, the building configuration, and the lack of resources are out of their purview. Central office administrators feel that the school administration is functioning adequately and that budgetary and political constraints prevent Cumberland Middle School from achieving true middle school status. However, they also recognize that teacher empowerment would move the school toward higher student achievement. *(meetings with the school improvement team, school and district administrators, talking with teachers and school administrators)*

The district and school do provide opportunities for professional growth in classroom instruction and technology, but the school does not have its own comprehensive professional development plan. Teachers select their individual professional development opportunities and sometimes share informally the knowledge they gain. The Mentoring Program is helping some new teachers. The school has implemented a program of professional partners for veteran teachers who move into the school. However, the delivery of that help is not consistent across grades and subject areas for all new teachers. The teacher evaluation instrument, currently under revision, is not a helpful tool. It does not give adequate and timely feedback, and it is not designed to improve the quality of teaching. The administration waits for teacher initiative in not only the process of acquiring skills, but also in the implementation and application of those skills. Without a comprehensive professional development plan that is based on the school improvement plan and without specific accountability procedures for professional development, the mentoring program, and the teacher evaluation instrument, improvement is limited in the school. *(meetings with the school improvement team and school and district administrators, talking with teachers and school administrators, reviewing Cumberland Middle School Improvement Plan 2001-2002, reviewing Cumberland School Department Strategic Plan 1998-2003, reviewing Cumberland School Department Mentoring Program, reviewing Cumberland School Department Teacher Evaluation, Cumberland Teachers' Association & Cumberland School Committee Agreement 2000-2003)*

Cumberland Middle School has begun to look at standards. Training has been offered at the district level and in the school, and a few teachers have begun to use standards in their classrooms. Most teachers have

standards posted on their classroom walls, but they have not yet been adopted, understood, or integrated across the curriculum. (*observing classes, following students, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, talking with teachers and school administrators, meetings with school and district administrators*)

The school improvement team conducted a multi-faceted self-study in order to prepare for the SALT school visit. However, the Strategic Plan Improvement Areas 2001-2002, as currently written, does not include the findings of the self-study. It cannot, then, serve as the foundation document for the improvement of student learning at Cumberland Middle School. The plan is incomplete; it is not focused on student learning; it lacks clearly stated goals; and it does not yet contain action plans, timelines, and defined responsibilities. (*meeting with school improvement team, reviewing Cumberland Middle School Improvement Plan 2001-2002, talking with teachers*)

Commendations for Cumberland Middle School

The multi-faceted self-study conducted by the school

Recommendations for Cumberland Middle School

Form a committee to visit other middle schools in Rhode Island that have successfully adopted teaming practices. Adopt those practices in Cumberland Middle School.

Create a council that is representative of all teams to study team structures, overcome building constraints, and schedule and integrate team strategies to better deliver instruction to students.

Establish a leadership council comprised of teachers, staff, and school administrators to discuss and resolve issues in the school in order to provide maximum learning opportunities for all students.

Recognize the strength of the school improvement team and a newly created leadership council and craft a plan that addresses the deficiencies of the faculty, student services, and staffing needs.

Use your SALT Report as you revisit your school improvement plan. Reassess your self-study in order to redesign your school improvement plan. Focus that plan on increasing student learning. Use the revised school improvement plan to create a comprehensive professional development plan that includes specific accountability procedures. Implement the plan school-wide.

Send teams of teachers to visit successful standards-based middle schools. Adopt standards consistent with the school improvement plan, engage in sustained and ongoing professional development, and integrate standards-based instruction across the curriculum.

Recommendations for the Cumberland School District

Support the school in establishing internal initiatives. Provide the external resources necessary for Cumberland Middle School to become a successful middle school.

Move quickly to adopt an effective teacher evaluation instrument that includes provision for teacher growth. Reevaluate also the Mentoring Program to ensure that mentors and mentees have the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Garner community support for the school in order to secure the funds necessary for the adequate expansion of the facility to address the specific needs of a middle school.

7. Final Advice to the School

Cumberland Middle School already has in place much of the needed scaffolding on which to establish a real middle school. Use your teams of teachers to work together and use the time provided within the schedule for teachers to meet, plan, and evaluate their progress. Capitalize on your students' readiness to learn. You say you want change. Stop holding back. Do not allow longstanding notions to keep you from acting.

Leadership that works together must come from all corners of the school. Take risks and summon the courage to forge ahead in the establishment of leadership and advisory councils of teachers, administrators, and parents that will tackle the challenges you face. Seize the opportunity to formulate proactive action plans that address all the issues that you now accept as established ideas that cannot be changed. Leave behind you the inertia that has kept you circling in place. Empower yourselves to reshape this school.

Make the foundation of your school improvement plan the development of the commonly shared vision that all students can reach high levels of learning. Discard all the long-held misconceptions regarding socio-economic status and student achievement. They deprive too many of your students equal opportunities for learning.

You have made an honest attempt at self-study in order to improve the quality of education for your students. Use your self-study along with this SALT report to help you refocus your school improvement plan on learning. Develop a sustained commitment among all the staff to continue professional development in the implementation of standards-based instruction, the construction and use of rubrics, and the development and implementation of good middle school practices.

With the involvement of everyone school-wide, the encouraging welcome of parents as valuable members of the school community, and the focus on a common learning centered vision, Cumberland Middle School can work towards becoming a middle school in which excellence is expected and achieved.

Cumberland Middle School Improvement Team

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Nancy Ferreira
Parent

Robbin Freeman-Labonte
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The SALT Visit Team

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English Language Arts Teacher/Team Leader
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Gail R. Mathews
Grades 6-8 Special Education Teacher
Esek Hopkins Middle School
Providence, Rhode Island

William P. Morris
Grade 7 Social Studies Teacher/Team Leader
Park View Middle School
Cranston, Rhode Island

W. Tyler Page
Principal
Wickford Middle School
North Kingstown, Rhode Island

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

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Cumberland Middle School

September 28, 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 carefully reviewed the conclusions and the other sections of this report. IN addition, I also completed an extensive review of the memos submitted to RIDE by the Cumberland School District and by some teachers at Cumberland Middle School that raised questions about this report's legitimacy. (Catalpa's analysis of these documents is presented in a separate Technical Memo to RIDE.)

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. fully endorses this report as a legitimate SALT Visit Report.



Thomas A. Wilson, EdD
Catalpa Ltd.
November 25, 2001