



# George C. Calef Elementary School

Johnston

## The SALT Visit Team Report

December 4-7, 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 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 its accountability system, School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT).

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For information about SALT, please contact Ken Fish at 401-222-4600, x 2200 or [salt@ridoe.net](mailto:salt@ridoe.net).

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

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# 1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

## Overview

This is the report of the SALT team that visited George C. Calef Elementary School from December 4-December 7, 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 chooses deliberately the words that convey its message best 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 learn at this school?
- ◆ 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 examines test scores, student work, and other documents related to this school. The school improvement plan for George C. Calef Elementary School is 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 builds 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 takes place at George C. Calef Elementary School.

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

- ◆ *observing a total of 82 complete and partial classes. The team spent a total of over 58 hours in direct classroom observation. Almost every classroom was visited at least once, and almost every teacher was observed more than once.*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *following 5 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 four 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*
  - school improvement plan for George C. Calef Elementary School*
  - district strategic plan*
  - classroom textbooks*
  - 1998, 1999, 2000 2001 Information Works!*

*1998, 1999, 2000 2001 New Standards Reference Examination results*

*1999, 2000, and 2001 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*

*2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary*

*2001 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 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 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 chooses deliberately 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 the importance to the school of what the team said and why, 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 George C. Calef Elementary School

### Background

George C. Calef Elementary School was built in 1923 and serves 204 students in grades one through five. It is located in Johnston, Rhode Island. In 1926, six additional rooms were attached to the existing structure. A cafeteria and two additional classrooms were added during the 1968-1969 school year.

Calef is one of the smallest elementary schools in Johnston and is served by 16 full-time teachers, including a school nurse, speech/language pathologist, resource teacher, reading teacher, two special education teachers and ten classroom teachers. Non-certified staff members include three special education aides, one computer aide, one clerk and three teacher assistants. A part-time guidance counselor and a part-time social worker are on staff. One full time and one part-time custodian also service the building. Calef is a Title-One school and as such, offers special services to students in reading. Reading Recovery is available to qualified first grade students.

A Reading Excellence grant has provided numerous opportunities for teachers to engage in professional development activities. Other important initiatives Calef participates in are the Feinsein Good Deeds Program, which includes monthly community service projects and many Family Literacy activities. The implementation of an uninterrupted two-hour literacy block for students in grades one, two and three provides a balanced approach to literacy , including guided reading instruction for these students.

### State Assessment Results for George C. Calef Elementary School

On the 2000-2001 NSRE Mathematics subtests, eight in ten of the fourth graders (81%) met or exceeded the standard in basic skills; six in ten of the fourth graders (64%) met or exceeded the standard in concepts, and four in ten of the fourth graders (44%) met or exceeded the standard in problem solving. Students at the George C. Calef Elementary School perform slightly higher than similar students on the mathematics skills subtest, at the same level as similar students in the state in the concepts subtest, and slightly below similar students on the problem solving subtest.

On the 2000-2001 NSRE English Language Arts subtests, nine in ten of the fourth graders (94%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Basic Understanding; seven in ten of the fourth graders (72%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Analysis and Interpretation; and three in four of the fourth graders (75%) met or exceeded the standard in Writing: Effectiveness"; almost eight in ten of the fourth graders (78%) met the standard in Writing: Conventions. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist for special education students on the English Language Arts reading sub-test. Students at the George C. Calef Elementary School perform slightly higher than similar students on the basic understanding subtest, at the same level as similar students in the state on the analysis and interpretation subtest, higher than similar students in the state on the writing effectiveness subtest, and below similar students on the writing conventions subtest. There is an upward trend in student performance on the Reading: Analysis and Interpretation subtest.

On the Rhode Island Writing Assessment one in 30 of the third graders (3%) met or exceeded the standard.

The most recently available New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report. *Information Works!* data for George C. Calef Elementary School is available at [www.rido.net](http://www.rido.net).

### 3. PORTRAIT OF George C. Calef Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

From the booming, “Hello!” when you walk in the door, the tone has been set for the day. You are embraced as a member of their family. Beanie Babies welcome the child in all of us. It smells like home. There is a calm and serene atmosphere, which is conducive to learning. You know that children are safe to be children here. Student work is proudly showcased throughout the school and children are eager to share and explain it to visitors. Upon entering classrooms, books abound. The buzzing of children actively engaged in conversations about literature, math, and many other subjects permeates the air. The spirit of cooperation and collaboration is apparent in relationships between all members of this community. Up on the top floor, the school’s historian is eager to share and embellish all that he knows, using actual artifacts from the school’s past. Walking down the hall, the older children are reading to the younger ones with enthusiasm and kindness. Watch out for flying paper airplanes! A science experiment is taking place. No one is alone here. All adults work together for the children and learn from each other. Each child belongs to all adults and to each other. This is a place that all students are nurtured and included. At times, children are so protected that they are not pushed to grow to their potential. In order to keep “reaching for the stars”, some of Calef’s students need to be challenged to reach higher.

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2001 Information Works!*
- ◆ *1999, 2000, 2001 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *observing classrooms*
- ◆ *conversations with students*
- ◆ *meeting with students*
- ◆ *meeting with parents*
- ◆ *meeting with School Improvement Team*
- ◆ *conversations with teachers*
- ◆ *interviews with teachers about student work*
- ◆ *conversations with school personnel*
- ◆ *reading logs*
- ◆ *portfolios*
- ◆ *Calef self-study documents*

### Conclusions

Students at Calef embody a spirit and energy that is respectful, cooperative, loving and kind. They genuinely care for one another and see themselves as an integral part of the learning and teaching process. Students celebrate each other's accomplishments and comfort one another in times of need. Knowing what is expected of them, they meet that challenge. Additionally, students at Calef have high expectations of themselves. They reflect on their work and continually seek to improve. All are citizens who are eager to share their knowledge

with the school community. Calef students demonstrate a pride in their school, themselves and their obligation to be lifelong learners. (*classroom observations, following students, conversations with students, meeting with students, meeting with parents, meeting with School Improvement Team, conversations with teachers, conversations with school personnel*)

Students at Calef School love to read. This is demonstrated by their *New Standards Reference Exam Reading Basic Understanding* test scores, which increased from 74% meeting the standard in 1998 to 95 percent meeting the standard in 2001 and by their *Reading/Analysis and Interpretation subtests* scores, in which 44 percent of the students meeting the standard in 1998 to 73 percent meeting the standard in 2001. Students read in a wide variety of genres and situations. They read in literature circles, in direct response to writing, for pure enjoyment and to gain understanding of their own world. Calef students know what appeals to them and are able to select books appropriate to their levels and interests. Regardless of their reading ability, they all demonstrate the same keen interest in literature. They are comfortable with their own reading ability and fluency as demonstrated by their willingness to read aloud to others, as well as independently. Students read in every subject, to solve problems, to gain evidence, as well as to share with peers. They read selections from trade books and read in order to make meaningful connections to their own lives. They read in guided reading groups and to research on the internet. Books are frequently written and read by the students, who see themselves as authors. Calef students are hungry and eager readers, who value the written word. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations with students, reading logs, student work, portfolios*)

Calef's students are writing with the same frequency, enthusiasm and motivation that they display in reading. They understand the connections between reading and writing. Students in every grade write in every subject area, including math, science, and social studies. Most students write in journals and describe their lives. They write for a variety of purposes; to display their knowledge, to share their feelings and experiences, to communicate with one another and with the outside world. However, some students miss the connections between their writing and the use of conventions. While there have been substantial gains made by students on the fourth grade writing assessments over the past four years, third graders' scores on the *Rhode Island Writing Examination* show little improvement. Although they write vibrantly and expressively, they have a less effective grasp of basic skills and how to incorporate logical details, which are needed to be proficient communicators. (*following students, student work, portfolios, classroom observations, Calef self-study documents, conversations with students, interviews with teachers*)

Students relate math to everyday problem solving. They have less proficiency in the application of math skills and concepts to solve problems successfully. Additionally, students experience a plethora of strategies and materials while engaging in mathematics, but the variety of processes and approaches leaves them sometimes frustrated and confused. (*classroom observations, following students, conversations with students, interviews with teachers, conversations with teachers, meeting with School Improvement Team, meeting with parents*)

## Commendations for George C. Calef Elementary School

The respectful, reflective students.

Students' love of literature.

## Recommendations for George C. Calef Elementary School

Emphasize basic skills and conventions in all student writing.

Provide additional opportunities for students to apply concepts and skills in mathematics.

## Recommendations to the Johnston School District

Provide teachers with a sequential, standards-based curriculum and materials to aid in implementation in mathematics.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school*
- ◆ *meeting with students*
- ◆ *conversations with students*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *meeting with parents*
- ◆ *meeting with district*
- ◆ *meeting with principal*
- ◆ *conversations with teachers*
- ◆ *interviews with teachers about student work*
- ◆ *meeting with School Improvement Team*
- ◆ *School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *2001 Information Works!*
- ◆ *student work*

### Conclusions

Teachers at Calef School are dedicated and honorable. They exude a love of learning and model it for their students. Extraordinary involvement in professional development is the norm for all teachers. Many hours before and after school are regularly spent in professional conversation, tutoring of students and conversations with parents. They are respectful of all members of the school community, no matter their role. They participate joyfully in their students' lives and treat each other with collegial spirit at all times. Teachers' devotion and love of their vocation is mirrored in the love their students have for them. (*following students, classroom observations, meeting with students, conversations with students, meeting with parents, meeting with district, meeting with principal, conversations with teachers, observing the school, meeting with School Improvement Team*)

Teachers at Calef School are risk takers for the benefit of their students. Although the use of standards and rubrics are relatively new to Calef teachers, they have wholeheartedly embraced them. Standards based instruction has impacted all levels of practice. Their competence in and utilization of standards-based instruction is evident. More importantly, their students understand the purpose for their learning and how to achieve their goals.*(classroom observations, meeting with students, meeting with parents, interviews with teachers, meeting with principal, following students, conversations with students, meeting with School Improvement Team, School Improvement Plan)*

In most classrooms, teachers have high expectations for their students. They accommodate all of their students' needs masterfully. They ask probing questions, allow their students the gift of thinking time, and provide them with the opportunity to make mistakes without repercussions. However, in a few classrooms, teachers' expectations are not high enough. The opportunities afforded individual students to extend their learning are limited. Challenge, rigor, and independence in learning are not regularly offered. As a result, some students are patiently waiting to use their talents.*(following students, classroom observations, interviews with teachers, student work, meeting with students, conversations with teachers, conversations with students, meeting with parents)*

Student assessment drives instruction for Calef's teachers. They collaborate together before, after, and during school to discuss the work of not only the students in their own classes but the students in every class in the school. They are consummate professionals who devote themselves totally to the learning and development of their students and to the improvement of their practice. Teachers use many layers and types of assessments to inform their instruction. Portfolios of student work, both in English Language Arts and in mathematics are assessed by students and teachers as a reflective tool. They are used by students to set goals and celebrate their achievements and by teachers to monitor student accomplishments. Student journals are used by teachers, not only for their students' practice, but to track their development as writers, to see how they are employing skills and strategies, and finally, as teaching tools for whole class editing. They often revisit many forms of student writing on an overhead to assist students in self-assessment and to improve their work. Additionally, teachers have made great efforts to address concerns as a result of student performance on standardized tests. Running records are effectively used by many teachers to gauge the reading development of their students. Teachers' vigilance in the assessment of student work helps their students to "reach for the stars".*(student work, following students, interviews with teachers, classroom observations, meeting with students, meeting with parents, meeting with principal, conversations with students, conversations with teachers)*

## Commendations for George C. Calef Elementary School

The honorable and dedicated teachers.

Teachers' devotion to improving the craft of teaching.

Teachers' risk taking for the benefit of their students.

Teachers' embrace of standards-based instruction.

The skillful use of assessment to inform instruction by teachers.

## Recommendations for George C. Calef Elementary School

Consider additional self-study activities, such as following students in order to improve student learning.

Have high expectations of all your students.

## Recommendations for the Johnston School District

Recognize the dedication and accomplishments of Calef's teachers.

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school*
- ◆ *conversations with students*
- ◆ *conversations with teachers*
- ◆ *interviews with teachers*
- ◆ *meeting with students*
- ◆ *meeting with parents*
- ◆ *meeting with principal*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *meeting with School Improvement Team*
- ◆ *School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *Meeting with district*
- ◆ *Calef Happenings binder*
- ◆ *Calef self-study documents*
- ◆ *Calef self-study power point*
- ◆ *Johnston Teacher Evaluation Tool*
- ◆ *Teacher contract*
- ◆ *Johnston Public Schools Strategic Plan*
- ◆ *curricula draft documents*

## Conclusions

The culture at Calef School is highly conducive to learning. It truly promotes “reaching for the stars” and that these stars are indeed reachable by all students. *(meeting with parents, conversations with students, following students, conversations with teachers, meeting with School Improvement Team, meeting with district, meeting with students, observations of the school, meeting with principal, Calef Happenings binder)*

At Calef School all see themselves and each other as leaders. This role of leadership is embraced and nurtured to elevate the learning experience for both teachers and students. The principal’s visionary leadership facilitates this. She is in the classrooms daily as a teacher, mentor, and coach. Her participation in literature circles even requires her to do homework! As one staff member said, “She does so much she makes us want to do it too.” *(classroom observations, following students, observations of the school, meeting with parents, conversations with teachers, conversations with students, meeting with students, meeting with School Improvement Team, meeting with district, meeting with principal)*

Calef Elementary School has engaged in extensive self-study activities, such as regular examination of student work using a tuning protocol, thorough analysis of assessment results with the involvement of the entire school community, who serve on the school improvement team. They have taken an extensive look at all information that impacts student learning. Although the Calef School Improvement Plan is a work in progress, action plans have been drafted for implementation. The Staff is working diligently to improve student achievement by adjusting instruction based on insights gained through self-study. *(self-study documents, power point, School Improvement Plan, meeting with School Improvement Team, conversations with teachers, meeting with principal)*

The Johnston School District supports teachers and their professional development through a useful Professional Development Institute, which offers many self-selected programs to address their professional needs. Additionally, teachers are reimbursed for any coursework taken over the required fifteen hours. Also offered to new teachers and those who have changed positions, is a mentoring program. However, this program is optional, inadequately staffed, and lacks a supportive structure. The format offered consists of workshops rather than a required number of meetings between mentors and mentees, who should share the same building and discipline but most often, do not. Teachers are also ineffectively supported by the Johnston Teacher Evaluation Tool. It is simply a checklist, which does not include substantive analysis and useful information to improve teacher practice. It contains no goal setting, no pre-conference requirement and is focused on student behavior at the expense of a needed emphasis on student learning and how teaching supports that learning. *(meeting with district, Johnston Teacher Evaluation Tool, conversations with teachers, meeting with principal, teacher contract, Johnston Public Schools strategic plan)*

Curricula documents are not in place that are formalized, adopted, or aligned with standards. As a result, there are inconsistencies in vertical articulation, especially in mathematics. This lessens the degree of rigor and challenge that should be inherent in learning. *(meeting with district, meeting with principal, classroom observations, following students, curricula draft documents, interviews with teachers, conversations with teachers)*

The Johnston School District supports Calef School by offering a special program for at-risk students, called “Safety Net”. While this is laudable, much of the support Calef has received to improve learning has been through the efforts of the principal and teacher-leaders. In addressing students’ educational needs, they have reached outside their district to apply and receive numerous grants, targeted to directly impact student learning. As a result, student achievement has dramatically improved. However, there are insufficient personnel to afford common planning time to those teachers who work together to serve student needs across disciplines and grade levels such as speech, resource, and special education teachers. Additionally, guidance and social work services are insufficient, even according to the district itself. This impedes teachers from giving all children the thorough supports that they need to meet the standards. *(meeting with district,*

*observations of the school, conversations with teachers, following students, classroom observations)*

## Commendations for George C. Calef Elementary School

The extraordinary culture.

The visionary and exceptional leadership provided by the principal.

The leadership of ALL members of the Calef community.

The extensive involvement in self-study activities.

## Commendations for the Johnston School District

The commitment to professional development demonstrated by the Professional Development Institute.

## Recommendations for the Johnston School District

Examine successful models for mentoring programs, which contain meaningful opportunities for program participants to develop relationships that will result in improved practice.

Re-write the teacher evaluation tool in order to support professional growth and development.

Provide standards-based, well-articulated and sequential curricula documents in all subject areas.

Provide adequate staffing in order to meet student needs and to provide common planning time for all teachers who work together.

## 7. Final Advice to the School

You have integrity and honesty in your reflections about the work of education. The SALT Visit Team has been greatly impressed by your openness to change, to grow, and to improve your practice. It is obvious that children come first in all that you do. Keep “reaching for the stars” and seeing their light in every child’s eyes.

# George C. Calef Elementary School Improvement Team

Cheryl Arnold  
Parent/Computer Assistant

Lori Autiello  
School Nurse

Jay Bianco  
Community Member

Albert Cournoyer  
Grade 4 Teacher

Holly Dearborn  
Grade 3 Teacher

Louise Denham  
Grade 3 Teacher

Diane DeRaimo  
Grade 1 Teacher

Patricia Diorio  
Speech Pathologist

Lori Facha  
Special Education Teacher

Alicia Garneau  
Parent

Alan Iemma  
Custodian

Debbie Licciardi  
Grade 2 Teacher

Sheri McCue  
Parent

Ann Marie McMahon  
Principal

Cheryl Medieros  
Parent

Janis Mousseau  
Clerk

Lisa Russo  
Resource Teacher

Debby Sambuco  
Grade 2 Teacher

David Santilli  
School Committee Chairman

Eileen Schindler  
Reading Teacher

Lee Silverman  
Grade 4 Teacher

Beverly Skitt  
Grade 5 Teacher

Ken Skitt  
Grade 5 Teacher

Joan Stott  
Special Education Teacher

Lisa Valeriana  
Parent

David Vittorio  
Parent

Denise Zarcaro  
Special Education Teacher

## The SALT Visit Team

Elisabeth Newman, Chair  
SALT Visit Team

On loan to the Rhode Island Department of Education  
from the Bristol Warren Arts Magnet Program at Reynolds School

Mary Renee Doelling  
Fifth Grade Teacher  
Hope Highlands School  
Cranston, Rhode Island

Rosemary Hunter  
Principal  
Greenwood Elementary School  
Warwick, Rhode Island

Mary Leyden  
Kindergarten Teacher  
Blackrock Elementary School  
Coventry, Rhode Island

Erin Taylor  
Intensive Resource Teacher  
Sherman Elementary School  
Warwick, Rhode Island

# New Standards Reference Examination and RI Writing Assessment Results (2001)

## Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

### **George C. Calef Elementary School**

December 4-7, 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, 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.  
December 28, 2001