



John F. Kennedy School

Middletown

The SALT Visit Team Report

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

1. THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS of this report

Overview

This is the report of the SALT team that visited John F. Kennedy School from December 4 through 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 deliberately chooses the words that 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 learn at this school?
- ◆ How well does this school teach its students?
- ◆ How well does this school support learning and teaching?

The findings of the SALT report are presented in six report sections:

Profile describes some of the key features of the school and sums up the school's results on state tests.

The team writes *Portrait* as an overview of what it thinks are the most important themes in the conclusions that follow. While *Portrait* precedes the team's conclusions, it is written after they are complete.

The team's conclusions are about how well the team thinks the school is performing in each of the three SALT focus areas: Learning, Teaching and The School.

The team may award commendations in each focus area for aspects of the school that it considers unusual and commendable. The team must make several recommendations to the school for each focus area, drawing on the conclusions for that area. The team may make recommendations to other agencies, e.g. the district.

The team provides the school with some brief comments about how it thinks the school should proceed, in the *Final Advice* section.

The Catalpa Ltd. endorsement of the legitimacy of the report and its conclusions appears on the final page.

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

During this visit, the John F. Kennedy teachers followed a “work to rule” action as the school district and NEA Middletown, the teachers’ union, continue to negotiate a new contract. This resulted in one modification to the Visit protocol. On Wednesday, teacher interviews about the work of their students occurred during the school day rather than after school hours. The entire staff maintained a highly professional and cooperative manner with the visiting team.

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 visit protocol and that this report meets all criteria required for a legitimate SALT visit report.

Members of the visit team are primarily 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 John F. Kennedy 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 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 take place at John F. Kennedy School.

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

- ◆ *observing a total of 71 complete and partial classes. The team spent many 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 six students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of six teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *interviewing many teachers and staff*
- ◆ *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 administrator*
- ◆ *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

school improvement plan for John F. Kennedy School

district strategic plan

2000 SALT Survey report

classroom textbooks

1998, 1999, 2000 2001 Information Works!

1998, 1999, 2000 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

Middletown Common Math Assessments for Grades K-4, Middletown Public Schools, 2001

Middletown Grades K-4 English Language Arts Mapping, Working Draft, November 2000

Middletown District Budget, 2001-2002

Middletown Public Schools, Teacher Evaluation Handbook

Middletown Public Schools Technology Training Guide

Middletown Public Schools Elementary Assessment Guidelines

John F. Kennedy Self-Study of Equity Gaps, October, 2001

John F. Kennedy Self-Study of State Assessments Results, November, 2001

John F. Kennedy Article 31 Professional Development Investment Fund Plan

John F. Kennedy Curriculum Guides

John F. Kennedy School Student Handbook Agenda, 2001-2002

East Bay Educational Collaborative Inquiry Science Resource Guide

Working Wonders Math Performance Assessment Project, 2001

Writing Prompts and Quick Writes, Kites Writing Team, 1999-2000

2001-2002 Schedules, Discipline Plans

John F. Kennedy School Parent Communication Binder

John F. Kennedy School Newsletters Binder

The full visit team built the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 29 hours in six separate meetings spanning the four days of the visit. This time is exclusive of the time the team 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 chose the words, phrases, and sentences it used 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 how important it considers what the team has said and why, the school will take its first step in becoming accountable in a way that actually improves learning.

It is important to read this report and consider it 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 school 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 John F. Kennedy School

Background

Located on Aquidneck Island in Middletown, Rhode Island, the John F. Kennedy School serves students in kindergarten through the fourth grade. Built in 1963, the school was formally known as the Anchorage School. It was renamed after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The school building is adjacent to the Newport Naval Base. Currently 52% of the students at Kennedy are from military families. The school serves the elementary ESL students of the district, who are mostly children of the foreign military officers who attend the Naval War College. The staff consists of one principal, 36 full- and part-time teachers, seven teacher assistants, one guidance counselor, one nurse, one secretary, two cafeteria staff, and two custodians.

Of the 377 students who attend the school, 77% are white, 12% are black, 4% are Hispanic, 6% are Pacific Islanders and 1% is Native American. Approximately 102 students (totaling 27%) are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, approximately 49 students (totaling 13%) receive special education services, and 23 students (totaling 6%) receive ESL support. These students represent 14 foreign countries.

The John F. Kennedy School is unique in several ways. At present an all-day kindergarten class and two multi-age classes serve grades K-1 and grades 1-2 students. Two standards coaches (literacy and math) provide job-embedded professional development to support staff in implementing standards-based instruction and assessment. The school currently is involved in the IREAD Grant initiative, and it is the beneficiary of a Rhode Island Foundation Leadership Grant, which provides a full-time building-based substitute who supports leadership opportunities and activities among the staff.

Parent involvement is also notable. Successful family events include the Fall Festival, Winterfest, Field Day, and the Fourth Grade Farewell. Parent volunteers provide teacher, tutorial, and library support; they participate in class read-alouds, the Sunshine Family Math Program, and the Hands-On Science Program. Parents also conduct several fundraising programs throughout the year. School partnerships in the community have been established with the Middletown Public Library, Kiwanis in their Terrific Kids Program, and BJ's Wholesale Club in its "Adopt a School" Program, to name just a few. The school district recently adopted the Everyday Math series and is implementing it in all classes.

State Assessment Results for John F. Kennedy School

On the subtests of the 2000-2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination, one in two fourth graders (54%) met or exceeded the standard in basic skills; one in five fourth graders (21%) met or exceeded the standard in concepts; and one in twelve fourth graders (8%) met or exceeded the standard in problem solving. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist in mathematics for the following groups of students: special education students and poverty students. Students at the John F. Kennedy School perform below the level of similar students in the state on the Basic Skills, Concepts, and Problem Solving mathematics subtests.

On the reading subtests of the 2000-2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination, three in four fourth graders (76%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Basic Understanding, and two in three fourth graders (66%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Analysis and Interpretation. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist in reading for the

following groups of students: special education and male students. Students at the John F. Kennedy School perform at the same level as similar students in the state on the Reading: Basic Understanding subtest and below similar students in the state on the Reading: Analysis and Interpretation subtest.

On the writing subtests of the 2000-2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination, one in two fourth graders (45%) met or exceeded the standard in Writing: Conventions, and six in ten fourth graders (56%) met or exceeded the standard in Writing: Effectiveness. On the Rhode Island Writing Assessment one in five third graders (22%) met or exceeded the standard. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist on the fourth grade testing results in writing for the following groups of students: special education, poverty, and male students. Students at the John F. Kennedy School perform at the same level as similar students in the state on Writing: Effectiveness and Writing: Conventions.

The most recently available New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report. Information Works! data for John F. Kennedy School is available at <<http://www.ridoe.net>>

3. PORTRAIT OF John F. Kennedy School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

John F. Kennedy School is a large rambling building located on a busy main road in Middletown. The town library, small businesses, and military housing form the school neighborhood. The tranquil environment within the school quietly surrounds and welcomes the students, when they enter the building. They enjoy school and are eager to attend. These children are polite, respectful, and bright. They express a love for their teachers who, they say, are the “best part” of coming to school.

The teachers, principal, and staff are hard working, talented, and dedicated professionals. Teachers strive to improve student learning by perfecting their skills and knowledge to implement a standards-based curriculum. They are creative and engaging, and they clearly know how to involve the students in their daily work. Two standards coaches are available to assist teachers in these endeavors.

There is great diversity among the students, due in great part to the military presence in Middletown. The children represent many cultures from around the world, and they speak various languages. This diversity is acknowledged and celebrated as a distinct school strength. However, the transience of these students creates certain challenges in the delivery of a coherent program. The ESL students receive services on a limited basis. Support for these students in the classroom is also limited. Some students form bonds with other students, only to have them broken when transitions occur.

Parental involvement is high at John F. Kennedy School. Many parents volunteer their time to assist teachers, run after-school programs, and plan and run school events at night for the entire community. A very active Parent Teacher Organization contributes to the educational program for Kennedy students. However, some military families express that it is difficult, by the very nature of their mobility, to blend into the school fabric. Also, effective communication among all parties within the school community is a challenge; partly due to the building layout, the turnover in the faculty, and the teachers’ desire for more input in school governance.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2001 Information Works!*
- ◆ *1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrator*
- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *analyzing 3 years of state assessment results as reported in Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary*

Conclusions

Students at John F. Kennedy School are friendly and well behaved. They enjoy learning. In this diverse population, students accept and respect each other's uniqueness. In many classes students cooperatively help their classmates to learn. Students demonstrate a strong pride in their school, which is confirmed by the cleanliness of the building and its many neat and organized workspaces. Students are willing and eager to share their work and celebrate their successes. They are enthusiastic and motivated to learn. (*following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrator*)

Writing is an important part of the day for students. Many students write extemporaneously in journals, respond effectively to literature, and write creatively. Additionally, students summarize current events and write accurate scientific observations and mathematical explanations. They proofread and correct their own work, as well as edit each other's writing. They eagerly share their finished products. Students effectively use rubrics and checklists to guide and improve their writing. The successful practice of these skills contributes to students' performance in meeting or exceeding the standard at the same level as similar students statewide on the New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination subtests: Writing: Conventions and Writing: Effectiveness. However, some students are involved in simplistic writing activities, such as completing fill-in-the-blank worksheets and copying

material from the board. When used as the main modes of teaching student writing, these activities do not contribute to increased student learning or writing performance. *(following students, observing classes, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, interviewing teachers about the work of their students)*

Students are heavily invested in reading. Students spend a great portion of each day reading. Students read independently, as well as in small groups, and with partners. Additionally, some are involved in reading across grade levels. Students support and challenge each other when they have the opportunity to read with students at different levels. Students enjoy reading, because they can choose the books that interest them. They share their thoughts and predictions and discuss book elements with their classmates. Some successfully choose books at their own independent reading levels. Students take pride in reading various books and enjoy monitoring their progress by using reading logs. As teachers read aloud to them, students improve their retelling and listening skills. They effectively respond to what they hear. They read from anthologies, trade books, and textbooks. They enthusiastically share their creative writing and reflections, based on their reading with others. Students intently read orally to practice fluency, pronunciation, and decoding strategies. Some students choose to spend their free time reading. Students are developing the skills and confidence to begin a life-long love of reading. These increasing competencies contribute to the three-year steady rise in the percentage of students meeting and exceeding the standard on the Reading: Analysis and Interpretation subtest for fourth graders. With 66% of these students achieving the standard, the school not only reached, but also surpassed, its target of 58% for 2001. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrator, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, analyzing 3 years of state assessment results as reported in Information Works!)*

Students at John F. Kennedy School participate in a variety of problem-solving strategies across the curriculum. They brainstorm strategies and ideas and explain their thinking orally, as well as in journals. Some students solve high level/multi-step problems, such as changing setting and character to create new endings to a story. Many students work independently or cooperatively to solve a “problem of the day,” to share strategies with partners, and to transfer this knowledge to real life situations. Additionally, they actively research, sort and classify information, and identify patterns. Many students comfortably use tools, such as number grids, manipulatives, calculators, student-generated rubrics, and multiplication charts to solve problems. Some students are not as effectively engaged in these types of activities as others. They are not problem-solving in their classes and, therefore, they are not developing the skills needed to be successful problem solvers. This deficiency is reflected in the very low percentage of students (8%) meeting the standard in problem solving. *(following students, observing classes, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 New Standards Reference Examination results, 2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary, reviewing completed and ongoing student work)*

Commendations for John F. Kennedy School

Friendly, enthusiastic and respectful students

Hard working and motivated to learn

High student involvement in reading

Recommendations for John F. Kennedy School

Increase student involvement in higher level problem-solving as well as in the development of math skills and concepts.

Focus on the “What Students Need” section of the 2001 New Standards Reference Examination results to make changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Continue to immerse students in reading and writing across the curriculum.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrator*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *meeting with the school improvement team, students, school, and district administrators, and parents*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *John F. Kennedy School Self-Study of Equity Gaps, October 2001*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *reviewing classroom assessments*
- ◆ *SALT Survey*

Conclusions

Teachers at John F. Kennedy School are dedicated to their profession and care deeply for their students. Most are enthusiastic and creative in planning and implementing lessons that engage their students in lively, challenging learning. They work hard to align their instruction to the national standards. Teachers use their professional development training to improve instruction. Most classrooms and lessons are student-centered and demonstrate a respect for the student-as-learner. The support teachers play an integral part in the daily success of student learning. Many students and parents express that the teaching staff is the school's greatest asset. However, a few teachers keep their students "busy" doing tasks that require rote, repetitive action, and low level intellectual involvement. (*following students, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrator, interviewing teachers about the work of their students*)

Many teachers see the importance of writing daily and integrating writing throughout the curriculum. Teachers effectively and enthusiastically model the writing process for their students by using personal experiences, picture books, and student work. They provide the children many opportunities to practice

their craft. Students learn to use helpful tools, such as word walls, rubrics, dictionaries, webbing, and story mapping to enrich their writing. Various student writings are displayed in many classrooms and hallways. These writings are scored with rubrics to indicate whether the work has been completed or whether it is in progress toward meeting the standard. Some teachers help students develop their problem-solving skills by providing opportunities for them to write down their thought processes. Literature and life experiences are often the prompts that guide the student writing. These practices reinforce successful writing as an essential life skill. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrator, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing classroom assessments)*

Teachers totally immerse students in reading. This successful practice promotes the enthusiasm students demonstrate for reading. The teachers create this positive atmosphere by providing students with opportunities to engage in read alouds, partner reading, guided reading, book clubs, literature circles, round robin reading, and self-selected independent reading. Teachers are often heard reading aloud to students from books containing rich language. In some classrooms this reading is followed by lively discussions. Many teachers use running records to assess the reading progress of their students. They use this information carefully to select books on appropriate instructional levels that will support students in their early reading success. These activities encourage students to select books that challenge them to be independent, critical readers. The emphasis on reading, which begins in kindergarten and continues throughout the grades, contributes to a steady rise over the last three years in the number of students meeting or exceeding the standard on the New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination subtest in Reading: Analysis and Interpretation. *(observing classes, following students, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001 New Standards Reference Examination results, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school administrator, and parents, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work)*

Teachers involve their students in various problem-solving activities throughout the school day. The staff recognizes the need to improve student skills in this area. Teachers address real-life problem solving, such as conflict management and appropriate time management. They model and convey organizational skills students need to complete assignments and foster a sense of responsibility among students for school materials. Students amend story endings, to “what if?” questions the teachers pose. They also have the opportunity to revise their thinking through teacher and peer conferencing. Teachers provide students with tools, such as manipulatives, calculators, grids, charts, and slates to solve math and science problems. In some classes students utilize Problem Solver materials. Nevertheless, most teachers engage students in simplistic problem-solving activities without advancing them to the next level of complexity. Few teachers ask students to write complete explanations of their mathematical solutions. Therefore, very few students solve multi-step problems or successfully apply critical thinking skills. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrator, John F. Kennedy School Self-Study Of Equity Gaps, October 2001, 2000 SALT Survey, Staff Chart D.1.17)*

Teachers successfully align their curriculum, instruction, and assessments to NCEE New Standards, Performance Standards. However, there is little evidence of differentiated instruction in the classroom. The instruction generally is geared for the average, middle level English-speaking student. Special education and ESL students are not receiving adequate support for classroom activities. ESL students, who often are not able to participate in the classroom activities, sit quietly or actively engage in off-task behavior. Therefore, the needs of all students in the classroom are not met at this time. *(following students, observing classes, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, observing classes,*

talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, interviewing teachers about the work of their students)

Commendations for John F. Kennedy School

Dedicated and caring professionals

Teachers who embrace change

Commitment to quality education

Recommendations for John F. Kennedy School

Strengthen effective communication between and among teachers at various grade levels and support teachers, especially in the areas of special education and ESL.

Increase higher-level multi-step problem-solving activities in all classes. Increase the use of the Working Wonders initiative in problem solving with higher expectations for students, particularly their written responses.

Continue to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment to standards and expand the development of both teacher- and student-generated rubrics.

Continue student immersion in reading and writing in all grades and throughout all curricula.

Collaborate and share best practices to increase teacher strengths and improve classroom instruction and student learning.

Recommendations for Middletown School District

Continue professional development activities that focus on problem solving.

Provide training in differentiated instruction, especially targeting high achieving students, special education students, and ESL students.

Find ways to support ESL students in the classroom so they may more fully participate and receive increased benefit from the classroom experience.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school and district administrators*
- ◆ *reviewing school improvement plan*
- ◆ *meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents*
- ◆ *reviewing district and school policies and practices*
- ◆ *reviewing district strategic plan*
- ◆ *reviewing records of professional development activities*
- ◆ *Middletown Public Schools Teacher Evaluation Handbook*
- ◆ *Middletown Public Schools Technology Training Guide*
- ◆ *2000 SALT Survey*

Conclusions

Teachers have a wealth of professional development opportunities provided by the district and the East Bay Collaborative. All teachers are trained in Course 1, KITES, and Everyday Math. Some teachers have training in Four Block Method, Write Traits, and Kid Writing. They participate in the Working Wonders Elementary Network, the Rhode Island Foundation Leadership Grant, and IREAD initiatives. The Great Body Shop, a curriculum aligned with the state's health standards, is in operation in all grades. The two Standards Coaches, who are available to model standards-based lessons in all classrooms, are excellent resources for teachers who are revising their curriculum, instruction, and assessment to meet standards. They also support teachers as they implement these changes. These staff members work with teachers on a teacher-request basis. Unfortunately, some faculty members do not seek out this vital resource. Numerous professional development opportunities are planned for this school year. Teachers are working to implement the International Standards for Technology Education across the curriculum and school-wide. However, most classroom computers are not Internet-connected and hardware maintenance is sporadic. Although a mentoring program for new teachers is established, it is not operational at present due to the "work to rule" situation that is ongoing at this time. The newly adopted district Teacher Evaluation tool is aligned with standards and will support the professional growth of teachers. These are numerous, rich, and beneficial professional development opportunities for the staff to learn and grow. *(reviewing school improvement plan, talking with teachers, staff and school administrator, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents, reviewing records of professional development activities, reviewing district and school policies*

and practices, Middletown Public Schools Teacher Evaluation Handbook, Middletown Public Schools Technology Training Guide)

The school improvement plan is a fairly comprehensive document that includes the necessary steps to move the school forward to improve student learning. Accepted by the faculty-at-large, the plan is aligned with the district strategic plan. Although the school mission statement is written and the targets have been identified, they are not found within the plan. The important components found in the plan include: tactics, action plans, responsibility for implementation assigned to groups or individuals, and timelines for completion. The plan also spells out the evidence the school will seek to ensure that the plan is a “living blueprint” for school change and growth. *(reviewing school improvement plan, meeting with the school improvement team and school administrator)*

The principal encourages her teachers to assume leadership roles within the school. She facilitates the professional growth of her faculty and chooses to move teachers gently toward adopting new initiatives and ways of teaching. District administrators indicate that she is knowledgeable and comfortable with the school’s reform initiatives. The relatively large turnover in faculty in the past several years has hampered this push toward whole-school improvement and the implementation of new initiatives, instruction techniques, and curriculum development. Even so, most teachers express that they feel supported by leadership and are enthusiastic to change and grow. *(talking with teachers, staff, and school and district administrators, reviewing records of professional development activities)*

John F. Kennedy School uses many forms of communication. The staff meets at least once a month. Numerous memos circulate between principal and staff. Teachers send letters home to inform parents about school happenings, as well as to provide specific information about their children. There are three report cards and two interim reports, as well as a parent conference scheduled to inform parents about student progress. Parents report they are well informed about student progress and school activities. However, there is a need to improve overall communications with various constituencies of the school. Some parents report that they are not clear about the homework policies and what teachers expect at each grade level. A major concern, unique to this school, is the apparent need for more communication between the school and the military families, especially during the two transition periods each year. These families report that a sense of belonging or community is hard to establish and maintain. Parents articulate a need for a stronger orientation program for new families. The principal and staff are aware of the need to work on overall communication, but more specifically, to build a more cohesive administrator/staff relationship. All are concerned about good communication across the grades and between support and classroom teachers. Some staff are frustrated with the present level of communication in the building due, in part, to the constraints of the schedule and the building layout. Teachers in the grade K-2 wing have limited interactions with teachers in the grades 3-4 wing. Also, some teachers express a desire to have more input in school-wide decision-making. A strong, clear, and viable system of open communication between and among all members of the school community has yet to be realized. *(meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrator, reviewing school improvement plan)*

Parent and community involvement in the school is quite extensive. The PTO is a supportive group of parents, who work hard to bring a sense of family to the school. Teachers and parents indicate that approximately one third of families are involved in some aspect of school-based activities. Many parents serve the school in a variety of ways: as weekly guest readers and as classroom, writing, and Sunshine Math volunteers. Some parents act as cafeteria and recess support staff. Students report that they enjoy the parent-run after-school science program. Also, a strong relationship exists between John

F. Kennedy School and the Middletown Public Library. Both are working toward Internet access for the children of the school. Community/school partnerships are established with Kiwanis and Feinstein Good Deeds Program. Although some parents are willing to participate within the school, they are not sure how to accomplish this. Additionally, parents indicate that a wealth of resources in the military community is untapped. *(2000 SALT Survey, reviewing district strategic plan, reviewing school improvement plan, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents)*

Commendations for John F. Kennedy School

The plethora of professional development opportunities

The PTO sponsored activities

Recommendations for John F. Kennedy School

Make full use of the Standards Coaches at all grade levels.

Investigate various ESL and Special Education models for in-classroom support and teacher consultation. Implement an effective model.

Use this report to revise and add to your existing school improvement plan. Fully implement the revised action plans. Consolidate your mission and targets within the plan. Update your targets.

Collaborate to develop and implement a plan to improve communication between and among all elements of the school community.

Investigate various strategies to develop connections between and among classroom teachers, across grades, and with support teachers.

Make additional efforts to draw your military families into the school community. Maintain open lines of communication with these families. Support the military children as they integrate into your school and support their friends, who remain behind when they transition out of the area.

Establish a vehicle to access the rich resources found in the military community and to benefit from them.

Recommendations for Middletown School District

Keep Standards Coaches at John F. Kennedy so that all teachers will align their instruction to the standards.

Provide additional ESL support generally, but specifically in the classroom, to ensure optimal learning for these students.

Implement the district plan for technology to ensure Internet connectivity and hardware maintenance at John F. Kennedy School. Consider a technology support person for teaching and consultation.

7. Final Advice to the School

All at John F. Kennedy should be very proud of the educational experience you provide your children. Your students work energetically and enthusiastically throughout the day and show immense respect for everything you provide. Their love for this school is palpable.

Persist in your efforts to align your curriculum, instruction, and assessment to standards. Expand your practice of looking at student work to gain additional insight on what students know and are able to do. In this way, also, determine what they need to move along. Based on this analysis, change instructional practice so that your students' learning continues to increase in both English Language Arts and math. Place more emphasis on complex and multi-step problem solving across the curriculum, and especially require students to explain their thinking in writing. Seek ways to support your diverse population, both outside of the classroom and within. Celebrate student diversity as often as you can. These students have much richness and opportunity to offer the entire school.

The contributions of your parents are laudable. It is important that you, as a school, continue to support their efforts in every way. Draw the military families into the school more deliberately now and investigate the potential resources they may bring to this learning community.

As professionals, you must work together to improve communication between and among all staff and parents. It takes concerted effort from everyone in the community working together to make great education happen for children. Invite everyone to participate in this difficult, but necessary, task. You are a school with a vision. Continue the hard work that is underway and you will surely increase your students' learning as you move toward becoming an exemplary school in every way. Good luck as you continue on that path. Your students will reap the benefits of your hard work.

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

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

John F. Kennedy School

December 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, 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.
December 28 2001