



Aquidneck Elementary School

Middletown

The SALT Visit Team Report

March 22, 2002



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>

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1. THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS of this report

Overview

This is the report of the SALT team that visited Aquidneck Elementary School from March 18 through March 22, 2002. 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 Aquidneck 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 Aquidneck Elementary School.

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

- ◆ *observing a total of 102 complete and partial classes. The team spent a total of over 79 hours in direct classroom observation. Every classroom was visited at least once, and almost every teacher was observed more than once.*

- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *following 6 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

district Common Math assessments

records of professional development activities

classroom assessments

School Improvement Plan for Aquidneck 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

Aquidneck School Self-Study document

Aquidneck School Strategic Plan

update on Strategic Plan

Aquidneck School SALT binder

Middletown Teacher Evaluation binder

The full team built the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 26 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 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 Aquidneck Elementary School

Background

Aquidneck School serves students in kindergarten through grade four in the town of Middletown, Rhode Island. It is a part of the Middletown Public School system. The present school first opened its doors to students in 1950. In 1994 the library was renovated and an 18,000 square foot addition was added to house 10 classrooms, an art room, a music room, and a computer lab.

Of the 326 students attending Aquidneck School 96 percent are white, two percent are black, and the remaining two percent is comprised of Asian and Hispanic students. Eleven percent of students receive special education services, and six percent are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.

A total of 43 full- and part-time staff serve Aquidneck's thirteen regular classrooms, two multi-age classrooms (K-2), and two intensive special education classrooms. The principal, a guidance counselor, the school nurse, 15 classroom teachers, three special education teachers, two literacy support personnel, a clerk, a permanent substitute, two custodians, and two educational support staff members are included in the full-time personnel.

The Aquidneck School community has embarked on a number of initiatives over the last few years. Learning Walks have been implemented at the school and have provided insight about how well students understand the expectations set for them. An in-house professional development model, developed last year, focuses on the four-block literacy model (emphasizing a balance of reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and Six Traits writing (focusing on six traits common to good writing). Aquidneck teachers conducted monthly workshops for each other in which they shared their instructional practices. Additionally, the faculty has worked with consultants from the East Bay Educational Collaborative, who have assisted them with professional development in problem solving in mathematics, looking at student work, interpreting assessment results, and implementing the Chicago Math Program, currently in its third year. The Accelerated Reader program helped motivate students to read and report on nearly 20,000 books last year. This year the goal is 25,000.

Parents play an active role in daily activities at the school—volunteering in classrooms and the computer lab and organizing activities and events. Most teachers participated in a summer school improvement retreat to write the new strategic plan and action plans.

State Assessment Results for Aquidneck Elementary School

On the 2000-2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination subtests three out of four fourth grade students (75%) met or exceeded the standard in basic skills; more than three out of 10 fourth graders (35%) met or exceeded the standard in concepts; and almost two out of 10 fourth graders (19%) met or exceeded the standard in problem solving. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist for special education students on the mathematics subtests. Students at Aquidneck Elementary perform at a slightly higher level in Skills and Concepts and at the same level in Problem Solving as similar students in the state.

On the 2000-2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination subtests eight out of 10 fourth graders (80%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Basic Understanding; seven out of 10 fourth graders (71%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Analysis and Interpretation; slightly more than six out of 10 fourth grader (63 %) met or exceeded the standard in Writing: Effectiveness; and more than six out of 10 (67%) met the standard in Writing: Conventions. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist for special education students on the Reading subtests and for free and reduced-price lunch and special education students on the Writing subtests. Students at the Aquidneck Elementary School perform at a higher level than similar students on all of the English Language Arts subtests.

On the Rhode Island Writing Assessment three in 10 of the third graders (30%) met or exceeded the standard.

The most recently available New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report.

Information Works! data for Aquidneck Elementary School is available at www.rido.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF Aquidneck Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Aquidneck Elementary School is alive with enthusiastic learners. As you walk down the halls, you may hear the sounds of students making music in the keyboard lab or the silence of diligent readers delving into books. The community, staff, parents, and educational leader join together in a sincere effort to benefit their students. Classroom instruction is standards-driven, and teachers have embraced this initiative with enthusiasm. Aquidneck Elementary School is a high performing school that needs only higher expectations and increased differentiation in instruction in order to become an outstanding learning community.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2001 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2001 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *2001 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *servicing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers*
- ◆ *meeting with students, teachers, parents, school improvement team, school and district administrators*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *classroom textbooks*
- ◆ *district Common Math assessments*

Conclusions

Aquidneck Elementary School students embrace learning. They are eager to accept challenges and are proud of their accomplishments. Students are polite, friendly, and kind to one another. They are engaging and share their knowledge willingly with visitors and each other. Aquidneck Elementary School students are delightful. (*following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with students, talking with students*)

Aquidneck students are avid readers. They read and recognize a variety of genres and are reflective about what they read. They read at home and in their classrooms. They discuss their reading in literature circles. Students take the initiative to read by using the Accelerated Reader Program. They are highly motivated to complete the assessments that accompany these books. Students engage in self-selected reading, utilizing their classroom libraries, which contain student-authored books, as well as purchased literature. They are goal-oriented readers, who work hard to meet the standard of reading 25 books per year. Student scores on the 2001 *New Standards Reference Examination subtests in Basic Understanding* (80% meeting the standard) reflect their ability to read. However, student responses to literature vary in their detail and complexity. While most students demonstrate an ability to make purposeful connections to text, some students struggle with the skills and strategies that are necessary to understand, analyze and interpret what they read. (*following students, observing classes, talking with students, New Standards Reference Examination results, meeting with school improvement team, students, teachers, district and district administrators, interviewing teachers about the work of their students*)

Although students at Aquidneck Elementary School see themselves as writers, the quality of their writing is

inconsistent. They want to be wonderful writers, however, most do not have the necessary skills. They have many stories to share, but they often have difficulty with complete and coherent expression. Although teachers post strategies for high quality writing in their classrooms, most students do not apply them. Students do not connect the high quality literature they read and apply that author's craft to their own writing. (*observing classes, following students, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, talking with students, New Standards Reference Examination results, Rhode Island Writing Assessment results, meeting with school administrator*)

Students engage in math activities every day such as numeration, number sense, time concepts, money, and other necessary skills. They use manipulatives and multiple strategies such as mental math, number lines, grids, and fact families. They make real life connections using math. They practice their skills at home, both with their parents and on their own. Students are able to perform basic skills, but many are not able to apply these skills effectively to solve problems, although they work on problem solving as a supplemental activity. Students spend their time filling out Chicago Math Journals to practice basic mathematical applications. While some students do this successfully, others sit idly with little understanding. Still others practice mistakes. These students are missing opportunities for immediate success. (*observing classes, following students, meeting with students, parents, school administrator, talking with students, classroom textbooks, district Common Math Assessments*)

Commendations for Aquidneck Elementary School

The polite, friendly and kind students

The avid student readers

Recommendations for Aquidneck Elementary School

Provide opportunities for students to make purposeful connections to the text they read.

Provide students with the necessary skills and strategies to understand, analyze, and interpret what they write.

Stress complete and coherent expression in the development of student writing.

Have higher expectations for student writing.

Target specific writing skills by differentiating student instruction.

Model high quality writing through the use of student work.

Model high quality writing through the use of teacher-produced work and other literature.

Provide strategies to enable students independently and effectively to apply basic skills to solve problems.

Check for student understanding and use the results to guide instruction.

Provide individual and small group instruction in order to target specific needs.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *meeting with parents, school improvement team, school and district administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *New Standards Reference Examination results*

Conclusions

Teachers are energetic and nurturing. They model lifelong learning for their students. They demonstrate enthusiasm for new ideas, whether they are new to teaching or experienced teachers. They are compassionate with their students and are caring and respectful toward each other. (*observing classes, following students, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with school improvement team, school and district administrators*)

Teachers utilize standards to guide their daily instruction. Teachers are at various stages of implementing and understanding how to use standards to improve student achievement. Some receive additional support from the standards coach and literacy-support personnel. While few are truly proficient, many are working diligently toward this goal. (*observing classes, following students, meeting with parents, school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, interviewing teachers about the work of their students*)

Teachers at Aquidneck Elementary School do not have uniformly high expectations of their students. Although their students are capable, energetic, and eager to learn and to be challenged, too few ever exceed the standard. Many students report that their work is too easy and that they wish for additional challenges. Some parents report that their children are not being academically challenged. Some teachers keep all of the students focused on the same assignment at the same time, regardless of whether they have already mastered the concept the teacher is presenting. Although teachers report that individual students are above grade level in reading, in the classroom they are reading at or below grade level literature. This practice inhibits student growth. (*observing classes, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, following students, meeting with parents, students, talking with teachers*)

A few teachers report that they do not "believe" that state assessments are good tools for measuring their students' progress. Consequently, they do little focused preparation for testing and little discussion of its importance with their students. This disposition prevents their students from performing as well as they can. (*Rhode Island Writing Assessment results, New Standards Reference Examination results, interviewing teachers about the work of their students*)

Most teachers do not differentiate their instruction or facilitate their students' learning. Some teachers deliver

information in a whole-group format with few opportunities for student discovery. Instruction is often teacher-directed, rather than student-centered. Through an effort to conference verbally, some effective feedback is provided. Teachers seldom provide students with constructive and effective written feedback. Students in these classrooms rarely work collaboratively with their peers outside of their literature circles, and they are seldom given choices in their learning. Risk taking is not encouraged. Since teachers are not integrating the curriculum, students have few opportunities to make connections. There are inadequate accommodations in many classrooms to meet individual students' needs, abilities, and interests. Although teachers meet students in weekly conferences, it is unusual for them to arrange for peer instruction or ad-hoc groupings to target particular student needs. While some teachers use daily and authentic assessment and reflective practice as a way to check student understanding, others are just beginning to use these practices. *(following students, observing classes, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, meeting with students, parents, talking with teachers)*

Commendations for Aquidneck Elementary School

The enthusiasm that teachers display for lifelong learning

Recommendations for Aquidneck Elementary School

Have high expectations for all students.

Assess all students in an ongoing and systematic fashion to differentiate instruction.

Encourage students to exceed the standard.

Recognize the value of state assessments as a means of informing instruction.

Provide appropriate challenges for all students.

Provide students with constructive and useful feedback.

Use flexible grouping to meet student needs.

Take advantage of the opportunities to integrate the curriculum in order to deepen student understanding.

Recommendations for Middletown School District

Provide ongoing professional development in differentiated instruction for teachers.

Provide ongoing professional development in curricular integration for teachers.

Provide ongoing professional development in authentic assessment.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *meeting with students, parents, school improvement team, school and district administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *school improvement plan*
- ◆ *Aquidneck School Self-Study document*
- ◆ *Strategic Plan*
- ◆ *update on Strategic Plan,*
- ◆ *Aquidneck School SALT binder*
- ◆ *Middletown Teacher Evaluation binder*

Conclusions

Aquidneck Elementary School is a place where everyone is made to feel welcome and respected. The staff is truly supportive of one another, and students feel safe and comfortable. There is a palpable feeling of warmth within the school, contributing to an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. (*observing classes, following students, meeting with students, parents, school improvement team, school and district administrators, observing the school outside of the classroom*)

Aquidneck Elementary School enjoys the support, leadership, and dedication of their principal. As an organized instructional leader who is well respected by all, she provides constant and effective feedback to students, staff, parents, and the community. She is highly visible throughout the school on a daily basis, continuously working to improve student achievement. Always accessible to her staff and students, she models an open door policy. She is an efficient and enthusiastic educational leader. (*observing classes, following students, meeting with students, parents, school improvement team, school and district administrators, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, observing the school outside of the classroom*)

Aquidneck Elementary School has taken the initiative to conduct its self-study focusing on the quality of teaching and learning. After engaging in data analysis, following students, and mirroring the SALT Visit process, the school revised its School Improvement Plan. These findings are presented in a clear, extensive, and useful document. (*Aquidneck School Self-Study document, Strategic Plan, update on Strategic Plan, meeting with school improvement team*)

The Middletown School District has provided Aquidneck Elementary School teachers with extensive and ongoing professional development in standards-based instruction. They have added a part-time standards coach to the faculty. In addition, the district provided Aquidneck teachers with assistance to implement child-friendly criteria about standards, which their students can understand and use. Although the school has made great efforts thus far, through principal-led workshops, many parents report that there is a lack of clear communication between home and the classroom regarding the understanding, purpose, and use of standards. *(meeting with parents, school improvement team, school and district administrators)*

The Middletown School District and the Aquidneck Elementary School support teacher development by providing mentoring, extensive professional development for all teachers, and a standards-based teacher evaluation tool. The evaluation process is limited in scope. Although it is a simple checklist in some areas, in others it is a useful tool. Although a mentoring program is in place, this is not fully implemented at present. *(meeting with school improvement team, school and district administrators, Aquidneck School SALT binder, Middletown Teacher Evaluation binder)*

Commendations for Aquidneck Elementary School

Aquidneck's welcoming atmosphere

The efficient and enthusiastic educational leader

The extensive and useful self-study

Commendations for the Middletown School District

The provision of a standards coach for teachers

Recommendations for Aquidneck Elementary School

Improve communication between teachers and parents regarding standards-based instruction.

Final Advice to the School

Continue to grow together as you strive to improve student learning. Celebrate your successes and work to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students. Continue to reflect on your practice, and strive to provide students with meaningful feedback. Expect the best from each student, and each one will meet your challenge.

Aquidneck Elementary School Improvement Team

Pamela Alexander
Multiage Teacher

Fran Blaess
Grade 2 Teacher

Donna Byron
Nurse

Mary Alice Charabasz
Grade 3 Teacher

Nancy Connell
Grade 3 Teacher

Mary Connor
Grade 3 Teacher

Anne Coogan, Co-Chair
Literacy Support Teacher

Shannon Dugan
Resource Teacher

Amy Dunn
Grade 4 Teacher

Marie Eckler
Kindergarten Teacher

Johanna Filippo
Multiage Teacher

Carol Formica
Permanent Substitute

Jaqueline Gorman
Speech Teacher

Sue Ann Gale
Grade 1 Teacher

Amy Hines
Intensive Resource Teacher

Jennifer Holubesko
Grade 4 Teacher

Bethany Hokanson
Grade 2 Teacher

Renee Kaminitz
Librarian

Patricia King
Guidance

Janice McHenry
Resource Teacher

Jeanine Magliocco
Grade 4 Teacher

Dr. David Mitchell
Parent

Susan O'Connor
Grade 1 Teacher

Roberta Schwartz, Co-Chair
Grade 2 Teacher and Head Teacher

Barbara Sirois Hanson
Parent

Diana Stamp
Special Needs Teacher

Michelle Theberge

Principal

Beth Ward
Enrichment Teacher

Joan Whitty
Literacy Support Teacher

The SALT Visit Team

Elisabeth Newman, Chair
(On loan to the Rhode Island Department of Education from Bristol Warren Regional School District)
to serve as a SALT Regents Fellow

Louise Denette, Principal
Quidnessett Elementary School
North Kingstown, Rhode Island

Suzanne Platt
Grade Four Teacher
Coggeshall School
Newport, Rhode Island

Carol Reppucci
Reading Fellow
Rhode Island Department of Education

Linda Rezendes
Grade Two Teacher
Jamestown School-Melrose
Jamestown, Rhode Island

Kevin Weaver
Grade Three and Four Looping Teacher
Elmhurst Elementary School
Portsmouth, Rhode Island

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

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Aquidneck Elementary School

March 22, 2002

Catalpa Ltd. monitors all SALT visits and examines each SALT visit team report to determine whether it should be endorsed as a legitimate SALT report. The endorsement decision is based on procedures and criteria specified in *Endorsing SALT Visit Team Reports*. (available on Catalpa website). Catalpa Ltd. bases its judgment about the legitimacy of a report on these three questions:

Did the SALT visit team and the host school conduct the visit in a manner that is reasonably consistent with the protocol for the visit?

Do the conclusions of the report meet the tests for conclusions specified in the visit protocol (important, accurate, set in present, shows the team's judgment)?

Does the report meet the tests for a report as specified in the visit protocol (fair, useful, and persuasive of productive action)?

Using the answers to these questions, the final decision to endorse the report answers the overall endorsement question: Is this a legitimate SALT team visit report? In order to make this determination, Catalpa weighs all the questions and issues that have been raised to decide whether a report is legitimate or not. While it is possible that a challenge related to one of the three questions listed above would be serious enough to withhold or condition the endorsement, it is more likely that issues serious enough to challenge a report's legitimacy will cut across the three questions.

The perfect visit is an ideal and not the standard by which SALT visits are judged; it is likely that each visit will raise some issues about its conduct. For this reason Catalpa monitors each visit in order to identify any issues that might challenge the legitimacy of the report. The protocol for the conduct of the visit is spelled out in the *Handbook for SALT Visit Chairs, 1st edition*. Most often visit events or issues do not challenge a report's legitimacy and Catalpa's monitoring and endorsement is routine.

Since either the team or the school can stray from the protocol for a visit, Catalpa monitors both the school and the team during a visit regarding the conduct of the visit. The fact that a principal or a faculty member does not like the report, or thinks it is too negative, or does not understand how the visit was conducted does **not** represent a challenge to a report's legitimacy.

The Catalpa review of this visit and this report was not routine. The factual review was not completed according to

protocol and this raised endorsement questions. Other endorsement issues were raised by the principal in discussions begun by the factual review. These discussions became more complex because the Chair who conducted this visit had resigned as a SALT Fellow at the time of the endorsement.

The steps Catalpa completed for this review were:

- discussions about how the visit was progressing with the visit chair before and during the visit,
- thorough review of the report in both its pre-release and final version form,
- discussion with the principal regarding the factual review and other issues in the conduct of the visit.

The findings from the review are:

1. The factual review was not conducted according to protocol. Nevertheless, the changes that resulted in the report were appropriate. Factual errors were fixed and other minor modifications to conclusions did not alter the team's intent.
2. The principal did a good job of managing other issues in the conduct of the visit so that they did not challenge the report's legitimacy. It also seems likely that the school will manage the follow up work from the report in a productive way.
3. While the conduct of the visit raised some issues of concern, it was conducted in reasonable accord with the visit protocol. The conclusions and the report meet their respective tests at the level that makes them legitimate.

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



Thomas A. Wilson, Ed.D.
Catalpa Ltd.
May 29, 2002