



# Potowomut Elementary School

Warwick

## The SALT Visit Team Report

March 15, 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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**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. THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS of this report

## Overview

This is the report of the SALT team that visited Potowomut Elementary School from March 11, 2002 through March 15, 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 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.

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 Potowomut Elementary 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 takes place at Potowomut Elementary School.

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

- ◆ *observing a total of 68 complete classes and 30 partial classes. The team spent a total of over 83 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 five 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*

*teachers' classroom schedules*  
*district curriculum materials*  
*student writing club*  
*writing mentors*  
*Potowomut self-study report*  
*records of professional development activities*  
*classroom assessments*  
*school improvement plan for Potowomut Elementary School*  
*district strategic plan*  
*Warwick Public Schools Professional Evaluation*  
*Potowomut School professional development activities*  
*District curriculum guides*  
*1999, 2000 SALT Survey report*  
*classroom textbooks*  
  
*Harcourt Brace Reading/Language Arts Program-Collections*  
  
*student portfolios*  
  
*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*

The full visit team built the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 23 hours in six separate meetings spanning the five 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 Potowomut Elementary School

### Background

Potowomut School, located in the southeastern corner of Warwick, Rhode Island, is the smallest of Warwick's 20 elementary schools. The 174 students in Kindergarten through Grade 6 are served by nine classroom teachers, two special education inclusion teachers, a principal, and thirty-one other classified and non-classified ancillary staff.

Less than four percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Ninety-nine percent of the students are white. Sixteen percent (27 students) receives special education services within a full inclusion program.

Initiatives and programs are in place to address the needs of learners. The *Enhanced Instructional Opportunities* (EIO) Program provides academic support for at-risk students and enrichment opportunities for advanced students. Students can join a Writers Club, as well as participate in a variety of after school programs. Parent volunteers have been trained as writing mentors to work one-on-one with students, who have been identified by teacher assessments and/or Grade 3 Writing results. The Foster Grandparent Program provides two trained senior citizens to work in classrooms.

### State Assessment Results for Potowomut Elementary School

On the subtests of the 2000-2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination four in five of the fourth graders (80%) met or exceeded the standard in basic skills; one in two of the fourth graders (55%) met or exceeded the standard in concepts; and one in four of the fourth graders (26%) met or exceeded the standard in problem solving. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist in Mathematics: Problem Solving for special education students. On the 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination students at the Potowomut Elementary School perform above the level of similar students in the state on the Mathematics: Basic Skills subtest, at the same level on Mathematics: Concepts subtest, and below similar students in the state on Mathematics: Problem Solving subtest.

On the reading subtests of the 2000-2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination nine in 10 fourth graders (88%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Basic Understanding, and seven in 10 fourth graders (68%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Analysis and Interpretation. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist in both reading subtests for special education students. On the 2000 New Standards English Arts Reference Examination students at the Potowomut Elementary School perform below the level of similar students in the state on both Reading: Basic Understanding and Reading: Analysis and Interpretation subtests.

On the writing subtests of the 2000-2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination six in 10 fourth graders (60%) met or exceeded the standard in Writing: Conventions; and seven in 10 fourth graders (70%) met or exceeded the standard in Writing: Effectiveness. On the Rhode Island Writing Assessment two in 10 third graders (19%) met or exceeded the standard. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist in both writing subtests of the New Standards Reference Examination for special education students. On the 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination students at the Potowomut Elementary School perform below the level as similar students in the state on Writing: Effectiveness and Writing: Conventions, subtests.

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

### 3. PORTRAIT OF Potowomut Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Tucked away in a small neighborhood in Warwick, Potowomut School is indeed a “Hidden Treasure.” The building is well maintained and organized. Through the cooperation of all school and ancillary staff, the culture is that of a close knit extended family. Its crown jewel is the caring support that teachers, support staff, administrators, parents, and the community provide for each student.

The veteran staff cooperates with one another. They value each other as professionals. They share a belief that all children can learn. New initiatives have created hurdles; however, through continued persistence and dedication, they will meet the challenges of academic rigor and differentiation of instruction.

The principal trusts the professionalism and competence of the staff. With the mutually developed relationship and the principal's continued encouragement and support, teachers will narrow their focus to improve the learning of all Potowomut students.

Students come to school ready and eager to learn. They love their teachers and their school. Students feel safe and nurtured within their learning environment. They value learning and its importance. They would welcome additional learning challenges.

Parental presence is felt at the school, not only through parents' volunteer efforts, but also through the values their children convey every day through their actions and deeds.

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2001 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2001 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *2001 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *following students,*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *student portfolios*
- ◆ *meeting with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students and parents*
- ◆ *talking to students, teachers, and staff*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *observing classes*

### Conclusions

Many students at Potowomut School read fluently. Many students automatically employ reading strategies when coming to an unknown word, however, some students remain unsure of how effectively to attack unknown words. Some students read supplemental texts from the anthology series at their instructional levels. With little excitement or enthusiasm, many often read from the same text, regardless of their reading level. However, students find pleasure in shared reading, independent reading, and partner reading. (*following students, observing classes, meeting with parents, school administrators, 2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary, talking to students and teachers*)

Students write well. Although they successfully complete worksheets on conventions, there is limited carry over to their independent writing in other subject areas. Students report that they engage in the writing process by brainstorming, writing drafts, peer editing, revising, writing final drafts, and sharing what they have written. Many students use rubrics to score their own work; some use rubrics to guide their writing, while a few even use rubrics to improve the quality of their writing. Students write in genres: narrative, persuasive, and expository. Students report that they would welcome more opportunities to write on self-selected topics. The quality of student writing makes the low scores on the 2000-2001 Rhode Island Writing Assessment surprising. (*talking to students, meeting with students and teachers, following students, reviewing completed an ongoing student work, observing classes, student portfolios, 2001 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*)

Students at Potowomut School effectively demonstrate their understanding of mathematical skills and concepts on worksheets they successfully complete. Students work well with partners or in groups to solve problems that reinforce skills and concepts. This supports their performance on the 2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination. While 80% of the students achieved the standard in mathematical skills, an impressive 35% of these students achieved the standard with honors. Additionally, 55% of the students met or exceeded the standard in mathematical concepts. *(2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary, observing classes, meeting with students, talking to students, following students)*

Students report frustration in understanding mathematics and their lack of success in mathematics problem solving. Some students solve problems by choosing appropriate problem solving strategies; a few apply mathematical problems to real world situations; and even fewer effectively communicate their thinking about the process of mathematics. This lack of understanding limits their ability to develop the higher order thinking skills that are critical for effective problem solving. *(meeting with students and parents, talking to students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, 2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary, following students, interviewing teachers about the work of their students)*

Students at Potowomut School radiate pride in their school. They respect one another and are eager to learn. As a family of learners, students demonstrate good manners, innate kindness, and acceptance of all their peers. These qualities enable students to focus on the tasks at hand and maximize meaningful learning opportunities with minimal distraction. *(meeting with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students and parents, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, talking with teachers, students, and staff)*

## Commendations for Potowomut Elementary School

Students' enjoyment of independent reading

Quality of student writing

Students' behavior and attitudes about learning

## Recommendations for Potowomut Elementary School

Maximize the use of reading materials at each student's instructional level.

Provide more opportunities for students to self-select their own topics for their writing.

Provide embedded instruction in writing conventions.

Provide opportunities for students to apply skills and concepts to real-life problem-solving situations.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *talking with teachers, students, and staff*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *meeting with parents, students, school improvement team, school and district administrators*
- ◆ *teachers' classroom schedules*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *2001 Information Works!*
- ◆ *SALT Survey 1999-2000*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *Harcourt Reading/Language Arts Program-Collections*
- ◆ *district curriculum materials*
- ◆ *student writing club*
- ◆ *writing mentors*
- ◆ *New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary*
- ◆ *school improvement plan*
- ◆ *student portfolios*

### Conclusions

Teachers demonstrate and voice differing levels of acceptance and implementation of the district selected Harcourt Reading series. All teachers are effectively using some components of this new series. While some teachers remain skeptical of certain aspects of the program, others embrace elements that include: anthology reading, vocabulary development, basic comprehension skills, guided groups, and spelling. However, the inconsistent use and understanding of elements in the Harcourt Program create a disparity in meeting the needs of all students at their instructional levels. Several teachers use the Harcourt assessment and other informal assessments effectively to determine student reading levels. A few teachers use assessments to guide their instruction to meet the individual needs of their students. Many students are given limited opportunities to read independently from self-selected

literature. This does not offer students the critical time they need to practice reading, develop fluency, or solidify other reading skills at their own independent reading levels. *(following students, talking with students and teachers, observing classes, meeting with students, district and school administrators, Harcourt Reading Language Arts Program-Collections, teachers' classroom schedules, reviewing completed and ongoing student work)*

Potowomut teachers demonstrate a genuine commitment to working with students to improve their writing. Within classrooms teachers guide process writing with teacher-selected prompts. All teachers consistently use district created rubrics to provide students with a measure against which to evaluate their work; some have gone the extra step to put these rubrics in a "kid-friendly" language. This evaluative practice provides students with a clear understanding of stated expectations. *(observing classes, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, district curriculum materials, meeting with students, parents, school improvement team, district and school administrators, school improvement plan, student writing club, student portfolios, following students, writing mentors)*

Mathematics instruction at Potowomut School focuses on skills and concepts. Teachers have identified a school wide need to improve the students' ability to problem solve. Most are at the emerging stage of understanding problem solving strategies and incorporating them into their daily classroom activities. Many teachers focus their attention on the right answers to word problems, rather than on the process of problem solving. They do not encourage students to seek creative solutions or to communicate their thinking. Many students have limited occasions to choose appropriate strategies to solve math problems, and some teachers provide them with infrequent opportunities to communicate their solutions. The current focus on teaching problem solving as mere computation does not address students' ability to think critically when they are solving math problems. *(observing classes, following students, New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary, school improvement plan, meeting with student, school and district administrators, school improvement team, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, student portfolios)*

At Potowomut School teachers create a synergy of clear expectation and a sense of purpose that result in a nurturing, productive, and accepting environment for all students. Teachers build a strong learning community in which they give care and attention to each student. Teachers predominately believe in a "power of possibility" for all students, as they guide each student toward achieving his or her potential. Teachers, teacher assistants, and volunteers enhance student learning through their seamless collaboration. While appropriate accommodations are in place for many students, there is an apparent lack of differentiation in academic content, process, and/or product. This deprives some students of the opportunity to achieve their potential. *(observing classes, following students, meeting with parents, teachers, district and school administrators school improvement team, talking to students, teachers and staff)*

## Commendations for Potowomut Elementary School

- Consistent use of rubrics for student writing
- Commitment to the process of writing
- Strong learning community and environment
- Commitment of staff to students and each other

## Recommendations for Potowomut Elementary School

Continue to develop a familiarity with and utilization of the total Harcourt Program to meet the needs of all readers, including those who are above and below grade level.

Engage in dialogue about effective strategies for using components of the Harcourt Program to support consistency of reading practice.

Allocate more time in daily classroom schedules for students to engage in independent self-selected reading.

Provide students with an opportunity to self-select topics for writing.

Increase teacher understanding of instructional practices for problem solving with a focus on student communication.

Provide opportunities for students to apply skills and concepts to real-life mathematical problem solving situations.

## Recommendations for Warwick School District

Provide teachers with ongoing professional development and support in the Harcourt Program at both the school and district level.

Provide teachers with the necessary professional development at both district and school level to support student improvement in mathematical problem solving.

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *talking with many students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *meeting with parents, students, school improvement team, district and school administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *school improvement plan for Potowomut School*
- ◆ *Potowomut School self-study document*
- ◆ *1999-2000 SALT Survey data*
- ◆ *teachers' classroom schedules*
- ◆ *Warwick Public Schools Professional Evaluation*
- ◆ *Potowomut School Professional Development Activities*
- ◆ *district curriculum guide*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*

### Conclusions

The culture of Potowomut School is that of a close knit, extended family; this builds a strong sense of community. The special education and regular education teachers work in harmony to support the learning needs of all students educationally and socially. The inclusion program and the EIO (Enhanced Instructional Opportunity) program effectively benefit all students; however, the ALAP (Accelerated Learning Activities Program) is exclusive with no coordination or carry over to the total school population. Additionally, the patchwork of itinerant scheduling hampers collaboration and consistency and limits integration of the arts and technology for students. This limited and exclusive use of some resources does not allow for optimal learning and enrichment for all students. (*observing classes, following students, teachers' classroom schedules, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with parents, school improvement team, school and district administrators, 1999-2000 SALT Survey data*)

The Potowomut School self study focused on investigating the analysis of *Information Works!* data, the Rhode Island Writing Assessment results, and the New Standards Reference Examination results. From this, it created action plans for improvement. This predominately data-driven approach is quantitative, rather than qualitative. This narrow focus does not capitalize on the expertise of the staff, and it does not accurately inform the school about the connections between student learning and instructional practices. (*meeting with school improvement team, self*

*study document, school improvement plan, observing classes, following students, talking to teachers)*

Potowomut School has implemented and embraced many programs and initiatives. While many of these have focused on the needs of specific grade levels, there is a lack of continuity across grade levels and curricula areas within the school. Individual teachers attend a myriad of professional activities. While celebrating teacher commitment, this does not foster a continuous school wide improvement process or a school wide focus on school improvement. *(following students, observing classes, Potowomut School Professional Development Activities, talking with teachers, school improvement plan, meeting with school administrator)*

Potowomut School adheres to the district standards for curriculum. Throughout all grades teachers consistently implement the district rubrics for written and oral language. Most teachers and students predominately use rubrics to evaluate completed student work. Teachers use a variety of assessments to evaluate student learning. Some assessments are used to guide students through the process of learning, others to inform instruction. *(observing classes, district curriculum guides, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work)*

The Warwick Public Schools Professional Evaluation document was last revised in 1991, and it does not address student learning, teaching practices, or the curriculum. It is not a constructive tool to guide teachers in their efforts for ongoing professional development. *(Warwick Public Schools Professional Evaluation, meeting with school and district administration, talking with teachers)*

The Potowomut School principal is an instructional leader, who trusts the faculty to make the best decisions about their practice in curriculum and instruction. He projects a strong, positive presence within the school. The mutually developed trust between teachers and administration provides a foundation to narrow the school's focus of instruction and professional development. *(talking with teachers and staff, meeting with school and district administration, and parents, observing the school outside of the classroom, observing classes)*

## Commendations for Potowomut Elementary School

Implementation of the full inclusion model

Special programs, which include: EIO, Foster Grandparent Program, Mentor Programs, and Writers' Club

Leadership and positive visible presence of the principal

## Recommendations for Potowomut Elementary School

Differentiate instruction in all classrooms in order to have a greater impact on the total school population.

Revisit self-study to focus on classroom practices and student learning.

Concentrate and focus professional development in one area to unify instructional practices in all classrooms.

Expand the use of technology as a teaching and learning tool.

## Recommendations for Warwick School District

Assign one itinerant from each special subject area to service Potowomut School. This will provide for collaboration among itinerants and between classroom teachers and itinerants.

Foster a commitment between the Warwick Public Schools and the Warwick Teachers' Union to explore, design, and implement a useful teacher evaluation document.

## 7. Final Advice to the School

Celebrate your many achievements. Continue to fulfill your school mission through your unique partnerships of students, staff, and the community. Potowomut School provides a secure, nurturing learning environment, which is developing productive and community-oriented citizens.

Expand on your successes and build on your accomplishments to provide a school wide focus that fosters continuity of instructional practices. Encourage your students to expand their unique abilities.

Increase the use of technology to prepare students better for their constantly changing world.

Continue your work on your school improvement plan, using it as a guide to tailor your learning objectives.

Let the thorough examination of assessment and student work drive your instruction. You will certainly achieve the goal of high quality education for all students. You have the “power of possibility.”

## The Potowomut Elementary School Improvement Team

Susan Abramson  
Parent

Monica Anderson  
Parent

Ronald Areglado  
Principal, Chair

Noreen Bamford  
Teacher

Diane Cedrone  
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Jan Clarke  
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Lauren Cole  
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Mary Lee Dickson  
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Elizabeth Tierney  
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Laura Wilkinson  
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## The SALT Visit Team

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

## Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

### **Potowomut Elementary School**

March 15, 2002

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.  
April 24, 2002