



George J. West Elementary School

Providence

The SALT Visit Team Report

April 5, 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.rido.net/schoolimprove/salt/visits.htm>

1. THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS of this report

Overview

Sources of Evidence for This Report

Using the Report

2. PROFILE OF George J. West Elementary School

Background

State Assessment results for George J. West Elementary School

3. PORTRAIT OF George J. West Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

Conclusions

Commendations for George J. West Elementary School

Recommendations for George J. West Elementary School

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

Conclusions

Commendations for George J. West Elementary School

Recommendations for George J. West Elementary School

Recommendations for Providence School District

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

Conclusions

Commendations for George J. West Elementary School

Recommendations for George J. West Elementary School

Recommendations for Providence School District

Recommendations for Providence Teachers Union

7. Final Advice to the School

*The George J. West Elementary School Improvement Team
The SALT Visit Team
New Standards Reference Examination and RI Writing Assessment Results (2001)
Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report*

1. THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS of this report

Overview

This is the report of the SALT team that visited George J. West Elementary School from April 1, 2002 through April 5, 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.

It should be noted that at the time of the visit work-to-rule was in effect. This limited the opportunities for the SALT team to interact with the staff.

Sources of Evidence for This Report

In order to write this report the team examines test scores, student work, and other documents related to this school. The school improvement plan for George J. West 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 George J. West Elementary School.

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

- ◆ *observing a total of 106 complete classes and partial classes. The team spent a total of over 132 – 1/2 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 12 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

office personnel

school and district administrators

students

parents

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

reader response journals

classroom assignments

student folders

curricula documents

school improvement plan for George J. West Elementary School

district strategic plan

1999, 2000 SALT Survey report

classroom textbooks

documentation on the family center

Providence One Plan for George J. West Elementary School

Teacher Evaluation Handbook for Probationary and Tenured Teachers

Providence Public Schools Department K-12 Curriculum

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 29-1/2

[LOI] 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 George J. West Elementary School

Background

George J. West Elementary School is one of the elementary schools in the Providence School System. It serves students in kindergarten through grade 6 in the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood of Providence, Rhode Island. The present school first opened its doors as a grammar school in 1916. In 1929 the facility was expanded, and it became a junior high school. In 1981 it became an elementary school. An addition was added in 1992 in response to an increasing student population.

A nine-member school board, appointed by the mayor, governs the Providence Public School District—the largest in the state. The mayor and a fifteen-member city council govern the city. George J. West Elementary School students are served by a professional staff of two administrators, 59 full- and part-time faculty, 25 aides and support personnel, and five custodians.

George J. West Elementary School has an attendance rate of 92 percent. Of the approximately 781 students attending this school 47 percent are Hispanic, 25 percent are White, 21 percent are African-American, 6.6 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and .7 percent are Native American. One hundred and ten students totaling 14 percent receive special education services, 127 students totaling 16 percent are Limited English Proficient, and 95 percent applied for and receive free or reduced-price lunch.

George J. West completed its first School Improvement Plan in 1992. This plan was revised in 1996 and 1999. Since 1997 the school has been involved in the Seeds of Knowledge/Project Eco science program. Fourteen heavy-duty outdoor literacy benches provide an outdoor interdisciplinary classroom for many subject areas. The library/media center houses over 13,000 volumes and 300 computer programs.

In the last three years the school has focused on job-embedded professional development from the district, as well as from external partners such as the HELP Coalition Teaching for Tomorrow Program. Similarly, the integration of practicum and pre-service teachers is an integral part of George J. West Professional Development School's relationship with Rhode Island College.

State Assessment results for George J. West Elementary School

On the subtests of the 2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination (NSRE) one in four of the fourth graders (25%) met or exceeded the standard in basic skills; approximately one in 20 of the fourth graders (6%) met or exceeded the standard in concepts; and approximately one in 20 of the fourth graders (4%) met or exceeded the standard in problem solving. From 1998-2000 equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist in mathematics for Limited English Proficient students. On the 2000 NSRE students at George J. West Elementary School perform above similar students in the state on Basic Skills and at the same level on Concepts and Problem Solving.

On the reading subtests of the 2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination approximately one in two of the fourth graders (45%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Basic Understanding, and approximately one in four of the fourth graders (24%) met or exceeded the standard in Reading: Analysis and Interpretation. From 1998-2000 equity gaps exist in reading for Black, Hispanic, White, Male, Limited English Proficient, and Special Education students. On the 2000 NSRE students at George J. West Elementary School perform above similar students in the state on Reading: Basic Understanding and at the same level as similar students on Reading: Analysis and Interpretation.

On the writing subtests of the 2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination approximately one in three of the fourth graders (28%) met or exceeded the standard in Writing:

Conventions, and approximately three in 10 of the fourth graders (31%) met or exceeded the standard in Writing: Effectiveness. On the Rhode Island Writing Assessment one in 20 of the third graders (6%) met or exceeded the standard. From 1998-2000 equity gaps exist in writing for Special Education and Limited English Proficient students. On the 2000 NSRE students at George J. West Elementary School perform at the same level as similar students in the state on Writing: Effectiveness and above similar students on Writing: Conventions.

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

3. PORTRAIT OF George J. West Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

George J. West Elementary School is an urban school located in the Mt. Pleasant area of Providence. The community comprises families from diverse backgrounds. This is a school where students are nurtured and engaged. An open, welcome, and pleasant atmosphere permeates the school. The school administrators, faculty, and staff do a phenomenal job of creating a safe and dynamic learning environment. Adults and children alike work hard, interact well, and take pride in the school community.

Students enjoy coming to school, are eager learners, and are excited about learning. They are very proud of their school and take great pride in their work. The students have a great deal of respect for the efforts of their teachers to aid them in the learning process. The respect between and among the teachers and students exists in the classrooms, halls, and lunchroom and on the playground.

Staff members are dedicated, hard working, and proud of this school. Teachers are working diligently to educate their students and provide them with many learning experiences. They are eager to learn new research-based practices and show a willingness to improve, grow, and change. A number of exceptional instructional practices are evident in this school.

This school is striving to achieve a more collaborative, inclusive, supportive culture that improves teacher quality and practice, as well as the academic and social outcomes of students. The teachers, staff, and principal are creating a disciplined atmosphere for teaching and learning. Students are encouraged to work hard and practice good behavior.

This learning community strives to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of its students, to support its staff in their attempt to grow professionally, and to reach out to the families of the students. Achieving this goal will require ongoing and increased efforts to go deeper in their implementation of the Balanced Literacy program and mathematics instruction, to help students become self-motivated learners, to focus on developing higher order thinking skills, to target instruction purposefully to build on what students actually know and are able to, to link teaching and assessments explicitly to the standards, to increase the involvement of parents, and to engage in ongoing job-embedded professional development.

In essence, George J. West Elementary School meets the core social and emotional needs of its children; it is on the path of better meeting their academic needs as well, because of its incredibly committed and hard working faculty and staff.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *meeting with the school improvement team, students, office personnel, school and district administrators, and parents*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, and staff*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *reviewing reader response journals*
- ◆ *reviewing 2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary*
- ◆ *reviewing 2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary*

Conclusions

Students are friendly, well mannered, and appropriately inquisitive. They like and respect their teachers. Most play well with others, are patient, have a clear understanding of behavior expectations, and rise to these expectations. They are proud of the school, themselves, and their teachers. Most students report that they feel safe and happy at this school. Students often speak openly and with confidence, are excited to share their work, and interact well with adults. Most students clearly enjoy the tasks that are assigned in class and would like to continue them, if time permitted. (*observing classes, following students, talking with students, teachers and staff, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the office personnel, school administrators, and parents*)

When they are engaged in meaningful tasks, many students are disappointed when they have to transition to other activities; they wish they had more time to delve deeper into what they are learning. Students clearly enjoy their time spent in co-curricula activities outside of the regular classroom. They are curious about the world they live in and report wanting more hands-on activities, math manipulatives, and science experiences. A balance of group, individual, and independent work time is preferred by many students. Most students are inquisitive about other people's experiences and use these experiences to broaden their own backgrounds and base of knowledge. Students effectively employ a number of self-management tools such as criteria charts and rubrics to guide and shape their work. Nonetheless, many students report that they are not clear about the differences between these self-management tools and how they serve as teaching and learning tools.

Similarly, many students have little awareness and understanding of the standards. (*meeting with students, talking with students, teachers, and staff, observing classes, following students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work*)

Students are motivated to write. Although they write often and enjoy doing so, their proficiency in writing varies widely. They have internalized a common language to describe the writing process and enthusiastically share their writing orally and visually. They are engaged actively in writing reader response journals and writer's notebooks. They create non-fiction and poetry and write memoirs. Students write at great length, consistently following the steps of a writing process. Additionally, they are writing about topics from science, social studies, art, and other subject areas. Nevertheless, many students are better at editing for spelling and punctuation than they are at revising their writing for audience, purpose, sentence fluency, style, and voice. Similarly, many have difficulty creating finished writing that hooks the reader, includes vivid language, conveys a well-organized purposeful message, and that is targeted to a particular audience. These findings coincide with their performance on the New Standards Reference Examination on which the fourth grade students at George J. West met or exceeded the standard in the following: *Writing Effectiveness* (31 percent) and *Writing Conventions* (28 percent). (*talking with students, teachers, and staff, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, observing classes, reviewing reader response journals, following students, meeting with the school improvement team, students, and parents, reviewing 2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary*)

Students at George J. West are enthusiastic about reading; they enjoy it when someone reads to them, and many comprehend well at a literal level. They read several times daily in a variety of genres both in and out of school. When reading their own writing students often read with a high level of fluency and expression. They willingly and eagerly engage in teacher-led text-based discussions. Students regularly use reader response journals to record their thinking and express their opinions about the story. While most students are competent word solvers, who effectively chunk words, stretch words, use context and picture clues, sound out words, and have an awareness of phonics, many struggle with reading for meaning and understanding. Most students can effectively identify story elements such as plot, setting, and character. Many students effectively use a number of strategies to develop their reading comprehension—drawing pictures, applying prior knowledge, summarizing their reactions and reflections, and making connections between text and the real world, among others. Students are less proficient in the more sophisticated reading skills such as paraphrasing, distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant detail in text, making inferences, and considering the techniques authors use. These findings coincide with their performance on the New Standards Reference Examination on which the fourth grade students at George J. West met or exceeded the standard in the following: *Reading Basic Understanding* (45 percent) and *Reading Analysis and Interpretations* (24 percent). (*following students, observing classes, meeting with students, talking with students, teachers, and staff, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing reader response journals, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, reviewing 2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary*)

Students at George J. West Elementary School have a stronger grasp of mathematical skills than an understanding of mathematics concepts and problem solving skills. Many students are proficient with basic skills such as computation, reading data, comparing numbers, and graphing. Some students are using manipulatives to further develop their understanding of math concepts. Although many students are actively completing simple math tasks, identifying their answers, and explaining their mathematical thinking, few students effectively use the language of mathematics to describe complex concepts and to solve problems. Similarly, many students have difficulty determining the important facts and strategies they need to solve problems effectively. Students are aware of multiple approaches to solving problems—diagramming, making tables, drawing pictures, and working backwards. While some students successfully use a high level of critical thinking and multiple strategies to solve problems, most students have substantial difficulty solving

complex multi-step problems and tend to use only one strategy. These findings coincide with their performance on the New Standards Reference Examination on which the fourth grade students at George J. West met or exceeded the standard in the following: *Skills* (25 percent), *Concepts* (6 percent) and *Problem Solving* (4 percent). (*following students, observing classes, talking with students, meeting with students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing 2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary*)

Commendations for George J. West Elementary School

- The pride students have for their school
- The friendly, well-mannered students
- Students' enthusiasm and willingness to participate in their own learning
- Students' motivation to write
- Students' enthusiasm for reading

Recommendations for George J. West Elementary School

Continue your success in fostering positive student behavior.

Work to clarify for students the inter-relatedness between criteria charts and rubrics. Increase student proficiency in using these tools to guide and shape their learning.

Increase student proficiency in editing what they write for conventions and revising it for audience, purpose, sentence fluency, style, and voice, as well as to finish their writing so that it hooks the reader, includes vivid language, conveys a purposeful message, and is targeted to a particular audience.

Increase student proficiency in more sophisticated reading skills such as paraphrasing, distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant details in text, making inferences, and considering techniques authors use.

Increase student proficiency in determining the important facts and strategies they need to solve problems effectively and to use the language of mathematics to describe complex concepts and solve problems.

Increase student ability to select and effectively use multiple strategies—both independently and collectively—to solve complex multi-step problems. Increase how frequently they share their own thinking and strategies with their peers.

Provide additional opportunities for students to engage in accountable talk through open-ended discussions about text.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, and staff*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *reviewing classroom assignments*
- ◆ *reviewing classroom assessments*
- ◆ *reviewing student folders*

Conclusions

George J. West Elementary School teachers are genuinely concerned about the academic, social, and emotional development of their students. They have successfully established rituals and routines in their classrooms that foster positive student behavior and facilitate the smooth movement of students from one learning activity to another. Most teachers respect students and are generous with their praise. Teachers are willing to adopt new programs and methods of instruction; they are working to adopt a wide variety of new instructional practices. Many strive to set clear expectations and to foster evidence-based talk and writing. Most have positive attitudes and are working actively to move forward, despite the barriers and obstacles they face. It is evident that they have tremendous pride in their accomplishments and their successes. They are supportive of one another—particularly within teams and among academic and special subject area teachers. They are appreciative of the increasing unified school culture and feel that the new administrative team supports them. (*meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents, observing classes, following students, observing the school outside of the classroom, talking with students, teachers, and staff*)

Teachers are conscientiously and cohesively working toward developing their students' proficiency in writing. Most are successfully instructing their students in the basic steps of the writing process. While the overall framework for teaching writing is cohesive, how it is implemented varies widely from teacher to teacher. Teachers provide ample time and opportunity for their students to write, brainstorm ideas, pre-write, and draft in multiple genres. Many are competently teaching their students to use graphic organizers and

criteria charts and to organize their personal learning space to support their writing. While considerable attention is placed on editing for capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure, and grammar, less emphasis is placed on consistently modeling high quality writing strategies that enable students to revise effectively for style, substance, quality of the ideas, word choice, and purpose in order to produce high quality final copy. Additionally, in some classes insufficient time is allocated for peer and teacher conferencing. This restricts teachers' ability to effectively coach and facilitate students through the writing process. (*observing classes, following students, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing student folders*)

Teachers at George J. West Elementary School knowledgeably provide literature-rich classroom environments, varied reading opportunities, and appropriately leveled reading materials in order to encourage frequent, successful reading experiences for students. Teachers are exerting considerable effort to teach students to comprehend and analyze text in a Balanced Literacy framework that includes word work, independent reading, shared reading, guided reading, and read alouds. Teachers conscientiously teach students to respond to literature by activating their prior knowledge, identifying the purpose of their reading, predicting, confirming, revising their predictions, and making text-to-text and text-to-self connections. Less emphasis is placed on helping students demonstrate their understanding of text in multiple ways—oral, visual, kinesthetic—and on encouraging conversations about different text. They skillfully teach students in a guided reading format; however, the augmentation of leveled books with rich literature for read alouds, discussion, and independent reading receives insufficient attention in a few classes. Teachers are collecting considerable evidence to determine their students' reading levels, to identify their reading needs, and to match students to appropriate books. They are less practiced at crafting standards-based lessons that generate evidence of students' ability to make inferences, compare and contrast, thoughtfully interpret text, extend ideas, and draw [LO2](#) conclusions. (*following students, observing classes, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing classroom assignments*)

Teachers' approach to teaching mathematics varies greatly between and among grades. Teachers are using a myriad of approaches to teaching math concepts, skills, and problem solving. Although most teachers have not received formal training in the new math *Investigations* program, some are beginning to incorporate the manipulatives and instructional tasks from this program into their mathematics instruction. A few are using manipulatives to teach and reinforce students' understanding of mathematical concepts, and they are integrating math in other disciplines. However, in general the use of manipulatives, hands-on instruction, the integration of mathematics, and the teaching of explicit strategies around problem solving are limited. Most teachers are teaching students multiple strategies to solve problems on paper. A few are extending these practices to create authentic, inquiry-based lessons designed to scaffold student understanding, to develop their higher order thinking skills, as well as their understanding of the relationship between skills, concepts, and problems-solving strategies. School wide, this occurs infrequently. Furthermore, the time of the day mathematics often is taught and the limited time allocated to teaching mathematics is impeding the effectiveness of mathematics instruction. (*observing classes, talking with students and teachers, following students, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, reviewing completed and ongoing student work*)

The faculty at George J. West Elementary School obtains and uses assessment data in diverse ways. Teachers are collecting considerable evidence through DRA and Flynt Cooter to determine the students' reading levels and identify the learning needs of their students. They are conferencing with their students during guided reading, independent reading, and Writers Workshop. Teachers have done an outstanding job of creating common lessons and goals regarding student work. However, school wide, the evidence that is collected about student learning as it relates to the standards and that is then analyzed and documented is elusive. (*talking with teachers, observing classes, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing student folders*)

At George J. West Elementary School knowledge and understanding of standards-based practices is emerging among teachers. Some teachers are attempting to make connections between classroom instruction and standards. A number of effective practices are occurring—such as character studies, author studies, graphic organizers, identifying great leads in writing that need to be continued and expanded school wide. However, there is a misconception among many teachers regarding the degree to which their classroom tasks and assessments are aligned to standards. Most tasks and assignments are not linked explicitly to standards. Many tasks frequently address only parts of the standard, rather than the whole. The limited focus on performance indicators (bullets) found under the standards obscures the intended goal of the learning both for the teacher and the students. Additionally, in a few classrooms the short wait time after asking questions and the questions asked results in missed opportunities to foster deeper understanding in the students. Similarly, some teachers are not consistently using modeling and exemplars to clarify for students the expected quality of finished products. This limits the teachers' ability to target their instruction purposefully to help students delve more deeply and explicitly into the learning that is represented by the standards. *(following students, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, observing classes, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, talking with students, teachers, and staff, meeting with students, reviewing classroom assignments)*

Teachers are effectively creating criteria charts with students and using these to guide the creation of student work. Teachers exert exemplary time and effort creating and using criteria charts and are effectively and extensively using these charts to establish clear expectations for students and their finished products. Some teachers are using these criteria charts as the basis for designing holistic rubrics. A few teachers are even developing rubrics in conjunction with their students, thus clarifying the level and quality of work that they expect students to produce. While a large number of holistic and general rubrics are visible in classrooms, these rubrics often are used to assign grades, rather than to guide student work and teacher planning or to direct instruction. Much less emphasis is placed on analytical task-specific rubrics, with criteria explicitly linked to the desired learner outcomes of the standards. Additionally, many rubrics are written independently without regard for consistency from grade-to-grade and class-to-class. The limited use of assessment tools with detailed performance indicators that are linked directly to the standards confines teachers, students, and parents in their ability to determine the quality of students' work. *(observing classes, following students, talking with students and teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, meeting with the students, and school and district administrators)*

Commendations for George J. West Elementary School

- Teachers' excellent classroom and school wide management
- Teachers' genuine concern for the academic and social development of their students
- Teachers' willingness to adopt new programs and methods of instruction
- Teachers' exerting conscientious efforts to foster student writing
- Teachers creating literature-rich classroom environments
- Teachers' providing frequent and varied reading opportunities

Recommendations for George J. West Elementary School

Maintain the use of peer and teacher conferencing, and increase the frequency of and time allocated to coach and facilitate students through the writing process.

Expand the current use of exemplars, and focus on modeling and revision to enable students to effectively revise for style, substance, word choice, quality of ideas, and purpose in order to produce high quality final

products.

Continue and expand the use of tasks designed to generate and assess evidence of students' ability to make inferences, compare and contrast, interpret text thoughtfully, extend ideas, and draw conclusions.

Increase and institutionalize the time allocated to mathematics, and re-examine the time of day that mathematics is often taught.

Expand the collection, analysis, and documentation of evidence about student thinking and learning in all subject areas.

When designing instructional tasks and assessment tools, ensure that these clearly and explicitly develop student mastery of the learning represented by the performance indicators (bullets) found under the standards.

Use the exemplars—rubrics, writing samples, mathematics problems—found in the National Center on Education and the Economy standards and state assessment books as models to help your students guide and shape their work.

Examine the current use of wait time and the art of questioning to reduce the amount of teacher prompts and increase the frequency of inquiry-based open-ended problems that allow students to grapple with complex ideas.

Recommendations for Providence School District

Provide the resources and technical assistance necessary to implement the recommendations of this report.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *talking with many students, teachers, staff, and family center staff*
- ◆ *meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents*
- ◆ *reviewing Providence One Plan for George J. West Elementary School*
- ◆ *reviewing Teacher Evaluation Handbook for Probationary and Tenured Teachers*
- ◆ *reviewing Providence Public Schools' Teacher Evaluation Handbook 1995-1996*
- ◆ *reviewing Providence School Department curriculum guides*

Conclusions

Teachers at George J. West School are eager learners. They are conscientiously grappling with the complex and messy issues of learning and implementing new programs while identifying and cherishing those practices that already exist. Most teachers continuously try to improve their professional practices in order to meet the needs of their students effectively. They are competent professionals who willingly work with and learn from each other and who teach others. In the last three years the school has focused on job-embedded professional development offered by the district and has benefited significantly from external partners such as the HELP Coalition Teaching for Tomorrow Program. Similarly, the integration of practicum and pre-service teachers is an integral part of the George J. West Professional Development School's relationship with Rhode Island College. A number of additional structures are in place to support the collaborative work of teachers and their practice. These include common planning time, as well as literacy coaches, lead teachers, and other professionals for in-class modeling and lesson design. In addition, useful and meaningful articulation occurs between special subject teachers, special education teachers, and regular education teachers, which reinforces the learning that takes place in those classrooms. Although these structures exist, the level of collaboration and communication varies widely schoolwide—especially vertically among different grade levels. This affects the sequential development of student learning from grade to grade and the quality and continuity of the instruction within and among grade levels. (*talking with students and staff, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents, observing classes*)

The LIFT Program provides English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers with a comprehensive framework for teaching the English Language Learners with an equitable education based on the standards. This program provides instruction, training, and modeling for the classroom teacher and sustained individual student assessment. On an extremely positive note, it is difficult to distinguish an ESL class from a regular education class, because both follow the same balanced literacy framework and pursue the same type of

work. Similarly, the resource program and the intensive resource (self-contained) program provide most special needs students with the individualized attention and time-on task that they need in order to succeed. The in-class supports are particularly helpful to students who need assistance with specific assignments during the regular class time. Conversely, there are few academic support programs for students before and after school. Although a number of effective supports are in place during the day, many students are having considerable difficulty in mastering the learning represented by the standards. (*observing classes, following students, talking with students, teachers, and staff, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, observing the school outside of the classroom*)

The district is providing extensive resources to support the development of literacy and the Principles of Learning. Using mostly grant money, the district and school purchase a wide variety of rich literature, leveled books, and hands-on math materials to support the teaching of literacy and numeracy. Conversely, no formal standards-based curriculum has been developed for elementary grades to support and articulate a sequential program of studies from K-6. Moreover, while teachers are collaborating with each other and modeling lessons, additional supports and mentoring are needed to assist teachers in enhancing student learning. Likewise, the current teacher evaluation instrument is not an effective tool for improving the professional practices of teachers. Tenured teachers are evaluated in years eight, 13, 18, and 23. The knowledge of subject, knowledge of pedagogy, and the learning environment portions of this instrument do not reflect the sophisticated teaching practices emerging at this school as part of the ongoing reforms in student learning, literacy and numeracy instruction. (*review of Teacher Evaluation Handbook for Probationary and Tenured Teachers revised 8-16-98, review of Providence Public Schools' Teacher Evaluation Handbook 1995-1996, meetings with school and district administrators, talking with teachers, reviewing Providence School Department curriculum guides*)

The administrative team, teachers, staff, and parents at George J. West Elementary School share a common desire to strengthen the home-school connection. A family center is available to provide translation services for newsletters, PTO meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and open houses. Unfortunately, these services do not occur frequently enough. The family center, as presently used by the school and its families, is ineffectively assisting families in becoming more active members in their children's schooling. Additionally, parents report that they are unclear about how well their students are doing, about what rubrics and standards are, and about some of the functions of the school and the services it offers. Moreover, parents, students, and teachers express concern about the time allotted to teaching science, art, and music, the time available for students to get and eat lunch, and the limited academic and enrichment supports available to students before and after school. (*meeting with parents, talking with teachers and family center staff, reviewing Providence One Plan reviewing documentation on the family center*)

The School Improvement Team at George J. West has been conscientiously developing school improvement plans for almost 10 years. They report that they have been much less active this year than in previous years. The current Providence One Plan contains extensive analysis of testing data about student performance. It is less clear how some of the tactics and strategies purposefully link to the analysis of this data or are how they are designed to close gaps in student performance. To date, this plan does not reflect an analysis of student learning that combines test score analysis with data that is collected from classroom assessments, student work across grade levels, and other school-based self-study activities focused on teaching and the organization of the school. Furthermore, a few action plans set far-reaching goals, given the realities of time and the budget constraints. (*reviewing Providence One Plan for George J. West Elementary School, talking with teachers, meeting with the school improvement team*)

Commendations for George J. West Elementary School

The equitable education provided to English Language Learners.

Working to reach students in various ways

The leadership of the administrative team and teacher leaders

The extremely positive school culture

The willingness of teachers to learn from others and to teach themselves and others through community partnerships

The collegiality among pre-service teachers, staff, regular teachers, and the administrative team

Recommendations for George J. West Elementary School

Continue to work towards and expand the communication and collaboration between and among all teachers, in all subjects, and in all grades.

Provide additional job-embedded professional development that is focused on rubric design, on learning from looking at student work, on mathematics instruction, on developing standards-based instructional practices, and on differentiating instruction.

Examine the current modifications provided to students to ensure that they are specifically designed to help each child meet and/or exceed the standards.

Expand the efforts to reach out to the community and families and aggressively initiate opportunities for them to become more active participants in their child's education. Increase the use of the family center by staff and parents and the translation of written school correspondence and other services.

Conduct a needs assessment of all stakeholders to determine how the school and the family center can more effectively communicate with and involve all families, as well as how they can strengthen the home-school connection.

Explore ways to expand instruction in science and the humanities.

Analyze student work across grade levels on a regular basis to increase the consistency with how finished products are scored, to gain a better understanding of student learning needs, as well as to strengthen the academic rigor of assigned tasks and finished work.

Conduct a thorough self-study focused on student learning that includes an analysis of student work across grade levels. Use this information in conjunction with this SALT report to streamline your existing Providence One Plan and to create a Compact for Learning.

Recommendations for Providence School District

Devise a formal standards-based curriculum for English Language Arts and Mathematics in grades K-6 with a scope and sequence to support the sequential development of student learning from grade-to-grade.

Negotiate with the Providence Teachers Union to devise a standards-based teacher evaluation instrument that provides a maximum three-year cycle for formal evaluation and that includes performance criteria aligned with the Principles of Learning and the Rhode Island Beginning Teachers Standards.

Align this instrument to support programs that are designed to improve the performance of teachers.

Recommendations for Providence Teachers Union

Negotiate with the Providence School Committee, or their designee, to devise a standards-based teacher evaluation instrument that provides a maximum three-year cycle for formal evaluation and that includes

performance criteria aligned with the Principles of Learning and the Rhode Island Beginning Teachers Standards.

Align this instrument to support programs that are designed to improve the performance of teachers.

7. Final Advice to the School

George J. West Elementary School is vibrant and exudes an aura of excitement. You are developing an institution of learners who are immersed in reading and writing. You have built a safe environment that nurtures and supports your students. Your care, love, and enthusiasm are evident in the faces of your students.

A great deal of change has occurred at George J. West School in the past few years. The recent focus on Writers Workshop, read alouds, guided reading, shared reading, independent reading, word work, and criteria charts, among others, provides a powerful instructional framework. The foundation building blocks are in place. You obviously have the talent and desire necessary to build success upon these blocks. As you become more practiced with the Principles of Learning and the new approaches to literacy, trust your individual and collective professional judgment to draw upon this framework purposefully. Use this judgment to create classroom tasks and assessments that delve more deeply into rigorous inquiry, analysis, and higher order thinking.

A number of outstanding instructional practices are clearly evident at George J. West Elementary School. A central challenge for your school, as for all schools, will be ensuring that the outstanding practices evident in your school are fully implemented in each classroom. The education a child receives is only as good as the weakest link in his or her chain of experiences. Your spirit of collegiality, your willingness to share with each other and learn from each other, coupled with the structured time you have to meet and plan together, are essential components for improving the quality of teaching and learning in every classroom.

Now that you have the various facets of the Balanced Literacy program in place, deepen the implementation of this program school wide. Maintain your energy and commitment to learn and grow, as you further develop various curricula areas—especially mathematics. Build on your current emphasis on clear expectations; foster additional accountable talk and writing among students; and increase the academic rigor in the school and its individual classrooms.

You have clearly begun to develop your students' higher order thinking skills and to enable your students to become capable, independent, life-long learners. Work to institutionalize the effective practices that exist in this school. Continue to allow the enthusiasm of your students to infect your practice. There is a great capacity and potential for growth within the faculty and staff at this school. Your perseverance and dedication will be needed to help all of your students attain the high academic, behavioral, and social expectations that you have set.

As a school, place additional emphasis on collecting, documenting, and analyzing student work. Maximizing the effectiveness of your efforts to improve student learning will require you to systematically generate, collect, analyze, and synthesize evidence of learning from student work in each and every classroom across all grade levels. Use this documentation and analysis in conjunction with your synthesis of state testing data to determine the current strengths and learning needs of your students. Then purposefully target your instructional strategies in order to improve your students' performance.

It is clear that you are motivated and inspired to educate the diverse students well. The school culture, collegiality, and the hard work of members of this learning community bode well for on-going growth and improved student outcomes. Continue your journey of learning through the good practices and nurturing qualities you provide your students. Take time to celebrate your successes and the progress you have made. You have much to be proud about.

When reading and reflecting upon this report, the school and its community should bear in mind that, by design, this SALT report is not only a celebration of all the wonderful things taking place at George J. West

Elementary School. It is also a presentation of those items that, in the visiting team's judgment, must become the school's focus if it is to help all students of all achievement levels perform at higher levels.

As you work with this SALT report, we hope you realize our conclusions, commendations, and recommendations are designed to help you make this good learning community better meet the needs of your students. For that is, unquestionably, the intent of our team.

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

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

George J. West Elementary School

April 5, 2002

To complete the Catalpa Ltd. report endorsement, I observed a portion of this visit, 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.
May 15, 2002

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[\[LO2\]](#)How can text converse? Jargon!