



# Broad Rock Middle School

South Kingstown

## The SALT Visit Team Report

April 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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For information about SALT, please contact Ken Fish at 401-222-4600, x 2200 or 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 Broad Rock Middle School from April 22, 2002 through April 26, 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. This school is in its first year of operation and had no test scores.

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 student work, and other documents related to this school. The SALT team binder and school improvement plan for Broad Rock Middle School were the touchstone documents 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 Broad Rock Middle School.

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

- ◆ *observing a total of 159 complete classes and partial classes. The team spent a total of over 126 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 10 students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *meeting at scheduled times with the following groups:*
  - school improvement team*
  - school and district administrators*
  - teacher aides*
  - office staff*
  - support staff*

*grade level teams*

*students*

*parents*

- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, faculty, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *reviewing the following documents:*

*district and school policies and practices*

*records of professional development activities*

*classroom assessments*

*student folders*

*school improvement plan for Broad Rock Middle School*

*Broad Rock Middle School SALT Visit binder*

*district strategic plan*

*Teacher Evaluation tool for South Kingstown School District*

*South Kingstown Policy Manual*

*High School Curricula Guides*

*Middle School Course Syllabi*

*classroom textbooks*

*Report on Evaluation of Programs and Services of Students with Disabilities in the South Kingstown School District*

The full visit team built the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 29 hours in six separate meetings spanning the 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 Broad Rock Middle School

### Background

Broad Rock Middle School is one of two middle schools in the South Kingstown School System. It serves students in grades six through eight in South Kingstown, Rhode Island—a suburban town with a population of approximately 28,000. The present school first opened its doors in September 2001 in response to an increasing student population in the town.

A seven-member school committee, whose members are elected to staggered four-year terms, governs the South Kingstown Public School District. A town manager and a five-member town council govern the town. A professional staff of two administrators, 52 full- and part-time faculty, 14 aides and support personnel, and six custodians serves Broad Rock Middle School students.

Broad Rock Middle School has an attendance rate of 96.1 percent. Of the approximately 539 students attending this school 89.1 percent are White, 5 percent are Black, 3.9 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2 percent are Hispanic. One hundred and seventeen students totaling 21.7 percent receive special education services; nine students totaling 1.7 percent are Limited English Proficient; and 16.1 percent applied for and receive free or reduced-price lunch.

### State Assessment Results for Broad Rock Middle School

Since this school first opened its doors in September 2001, no state testing data is currently available. When the results of the state testing conducted during the Spring 2002 are compiled for Broad Rock Middle School, they will be available online at <<http://www.rido.net>>.

### 3. PORTRAIT OF Broad Rock Middle School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Broad Rock Middle School is a new building. Its orderly and clean facilities create a positive atmosphere for superior learning and effective teaching. The school is well situated in an open area with room for outside facilities and expansion. The school opened in September 2001 with two new administrators and a mix of new and experienced staff from several other schools, and it holds promise to become a high functioning middle school.

The students at Broad Rock are an energetic, dynamic group of adolescents who are eager and ready to learn. They exude pride in their schoolwork, which they are excited about sharing with others. The students respect their teachers, their fellow classmates, and their surroundings. Most students are happy and enthusiastic about school. This feeling is less prevalent among 8th grade students, many of whom are unhappy about having attended three different schools in the last three years as well as about some aspects of the current school.

Broad Rock has an engaging faculty that not only is full of ideas and enthusiasm, but that also has a steadfast commitment to the education of their students. The faculty is nurturing, caring, dedicated, and flexible. Teachers take great pride in their teaching. They are excited to share and talk about all the great things they are doing in their individual classes. Most teachers are willing and desire to improve their professional practice. The real strength of this faculty is their desire to meet the academic and emotional needs of their students.

Teachers at Broad Rock are hard working professionals who care for their students and who are committed to providing the best education that they can. This faculty is knowledgeable in their respective subject areas; however, their talents are not used as well as they could be. Many truly want to engage in proven and effective middle school practices, but they have not received the support and professional development they need to meet fully the needs of young adolescents in a middle school.

Unfortunately this school opened its doors to students without the requisite planning, supports, and organizational structure needed to facilitate the smooth operation of a high-quality middle school. A scaled back facility, limited space in a number of areas, the arrival of instructional supplies late in the year, several changes in student schedules, insufficient planning, and far too little professional development for faculty on team building, differentiation of instruction, and other practices essential for the operation of a middle school have all exacerbated these difficulties. Addressing these issues, along with all of the accompanying difficulties of opening a new school, has occupied a tremendous amount of the school administrator's time.

At this time all parties in the school do not have a shared vision of this school or a common agreement about the direction they need to move. Additionally, the role of the SIT has not been clearly defined. Consequently, the necessary strategies that need to be developed to improve student achievement are lacking.

The hard work of building the Broad Rock Middle School facility is completed. Now the school community needs to focus on the implementation of a school design that supports effective middle school practices. Achieving this goal requires an immediate focus on team building and significantly more commitment, leadership, and support on the part of the district and school administrators, as well as the community-at-large. Moreover, it is essential to meld faculty from several schools into one harmonious team, establish a commonly shared vision of what this middle school should look like, and institute clear

and effective communication among all members of this learning community. Other areas that need considerable attention are: job-embedded professional development that supports the instructional and organizational tenets of an effective middle school, a school-wide self-study of learning, teaching, and the school, and coming to agreement on the protocols of shared decision-making.

Despite the difficulties noted above, the students at Broad Rock Middle School are generally happy and excited about coming to school, where most receive a solid education. The current quality of education is a direct result of the commitment of faculty, staff, and administrators. In essence, when all parties come together under a common vision with appropriate leadership and supports and when they work together to implement an effective middle level program, this school will achieve its tremendous potential.

## 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 staff, teacher aides, support staff, school and district administrators, and parents*
- ◆ *talking with students, faculty, teachers, and staff*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *reviewing student folders*

### Conclusions

Broad Rock Middle School students are very happy and feel safe in this school. They are responsive, friendly, candid, perceptive, and ready to learn. Most students are eager and willing to share their honest opinions with adults. Generally, students are enthusiastic and satisfied with the social and academic environment of their school. Most students are serious about school and are articulate when they speak. While students interact well and willingly assist each other, many report that they don't like working in groups and would prefer to work alone, because they feel that not all group members contribute equally. Students are very respectful of adults and each other and feel very comfortable turning to support staff, faculty, and the administrators for help. (*meeting with students, parents, school administrators, teachers aides, support staff, office staff, and school improvement team, observing classes, following students, observing the school outside of the classroom, talking with students and faculty*)

Most students are comfortable with the process of writing, are proud of their writing, and are excited to share their work. Many students are talented and proficient writers. Students are writing extensively in multiple subjects and a variety of genres, and many are adept at crafting their writing in multiple forms that engage the reader. They are creating many kinds of writing such as: expository writing, narrative procedures, and responses to literature, poetry, informational reports, book blurbs, and essays. Students are also responding to writing prompts in their journals and recording their learning. Students are peer and self-editing and making judgments about each other's work. Often their peer editing is very focused and provides specific advice that the original writers can use to improve their work. Additionally, a number of students are able to identify the strengths and weaknesses within their own work through the use of rubrics and self-assessment checklists. Most students are incorporating powerful words that convey vivid details and clear writing. Some students are successfully targeting their writing to a particular audience.

Nevertheless, a number of students have difficulty with punctuation, sentence structure, paragraph structure, adding supporting details, establishing engaging leads, varying the length and structure of sentences, and reflecting their voice within their work. Often these students do not successfully edit for conventions or revise for effectiveness. *(reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing student folders, talking with students and teachers, observing classes, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, following students, meeting with students and parents)*

Most students read fluently and accurately. They read a variety of materials like informational texts, fiction, non-fiction, plays, poetry, newspapers, primary source documents, and other literary forms across the curriculum. Most students can successfully interpret directions as well as extract information from text, graphs, tables, and other documents at a literal level. Students read fiction and non-fiction with appropriate expression in their voice. Similarly, a number of students effectively read poetry and analyze the poems in order to identify alliteration and other literary devices like similes, metaphors, and onomatopoeia. They thoughtfully discuss what they read to make connections among ideas, to compare and contrast ideas and themes, and to relate what they read to their own real life experiences. Many read and analyze text well and are able to determine the author's purpose. Additionally, to improve their reading comprehension students make predictions, confirm their predictions, and then add supporting details from text that relates to their original predictions. While most students stay on task when reading and most volunteer to read, some are reluctant to read orally, experience difficulty trying to decode words, and avoid reading independently. Additionally, while the basic comprehension of most students is good, some have difficulty ascertaining the underlying concepts found in informational text, making inferences, paraphrasing, and understanding how the story elements interrelate. *(interviewing teachers about the work of their students, reviewing student portfolios, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, talking with students, teachers, and staff)*

Most students are excited about math and show evidence of learning through their written applications, verbal explanations, and demonstrations of concepts and mathematical relationships. Most students are proficient in basic mathematics skills like numeration, ratios, proportions, and probability. Many students are successful working with hands-on manipulatives like dice, protractors, calculators, compasses, rulers, and spinners, among others. Many students are writing in math journals, and some are even creating portfolios for use next year. There is a lot of problem solving taking place. In some classrooms students are engaging in original data studies and performing authentic investigations like integrating sports and math, conducting surveys, analyzing data, and presenting their findings using charts, graphs, and written explanations, as well as writing interdisciplinary research papers. Many students use the language and terms of mathematics when speaking about mathematics—circumference, diameter, midpoint, ratio, and square root. Fewer students write effective detailed explanations of their mathematical thinking and approaches to solving problems or intuitively understand the connections among concepts and skills, and fewer effectively draw upon these concepts when engaged in mathematics. Additionally, some students have difficulty extracting the important information from mathematical problems and organizing a strategy and approach for solving mathematical problems. *(following students, observing classes, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, talking with students and teachers)*

## Commendations for Broad Rock Middle School

The positive and friendly attitudes exhibited by the students

The students' polite and respectful manner

The students' willingness to speak honestly with adults and to share their work

The maturity and responsibility of the students

The students' willingness to help each other

## Recommendations for Broad Rock Middle School

Increase students' proficiency in conventions and grammar with an emphasis on punctuation, sentence and paragraph structure, adding supporting details, and varying the length of sentences.

Increase students' proficiency in revising their own writing to establish engaging leads and reflect their voice in all subject areas.

Increase students' proficiency with ascertaining the underlying concepts found in informational text, making inferences, paraphrasing, and understanding how story elements interrelate.

Increase students' proficiency in extracting the important information from mathematical problems and organizing a strategy and approach for solving multi-step mathematical problems.

Increase the students' understanding of the connections between concepts and skills, as well as their ability to draw effectively upon these concepts when they are engaged in mathematics.

## Recommendations for South Kingstown School District:

Provide the resources and instructional materials needed to maximize students learning

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

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

### Conclusions

Teachers take great pride in their work and are eager to share their work and ideas with others. Most teachers are engaging their students and do a good job of extracting creativity, implanting knowledge, and nurturing and challenging their students in the classroom, as well as in their extracurricular offerings. Most teachers collaborate and work well within their independent teams and are working to integrate across the content areas. A number of teachers willingly seek out training and professional development in order to hone their craft. Most teachers have a good rapport with their students and exhibit a genuine concern for their academic and social development. (*meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents, and grade level teams, observing classes, talking with students, faculty, and staff, following students*)

Most teachers are making a conscious effort to incorporate standards-based instructional practices into their teaching and exert sincere efforts to improve student literacy and numeracy skills. Within their respective teams teachers are developing some creative and relevant projects—incorporating real world experiences—that are of interest to their students. Some teachers are consistently linking their lessons to the standards and providing models and exemplars of work that meets the standards. A few teachers are even rewriting standards in student language to make them more student-friendly. Most teachers are effectively communicating their expectations and developing the learning represented by the standards in

their students and helping students make connections among complex concepts and ideas. In contrast, a number of assignments focus primarily on the acquisition of facts and basic skills with less concentration on higher order thinking skills. (*observing classes, following students, talking with students and teachers, reviewing classroom assignments, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, meeting with parents, school and district administrators*)

Most teachers do an effective job of providing feedback that students can use to improve their work. Most teachers circulate around the room checking for understanding. They conference with students, coach them, and facilitate their learning. Many teachers often design lessons to build on students' prior knowledge and reinforce concepts over time. Many teachers use open-ended questions that involve understanding cause and effect, inferring, and analyzing to foster higher-level thinking. Conversely, in some classrooms teachers ask questions that primarily focus on low-level skills and the factual recall of information. While a number of teachers provide detailed diagnostic written comments that students are able to use to revise and improve their work, this practice is not occurring consistently school wide. (*observing classes, following students, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, meeting with parents, school and district administrators*)

Broad Rock Middle School teachers design and use a wide variety of assessments to ascertain the quality of student work. These include tests, quizzes, journals, presentations, performance tasks, and integrated projects. Teachers and students use rubrics extensively throughout the school. A few teachers create rubrics with their students. Most teachers use rubrics as an instructional tool to provide clear expectations and to guide the development of student work. A number of students are taught to use rubrics to identify the strengths and weaknesses within their own work. Occasionally, however, students in some classes do not see the rubric until their graded work is returned to them. In addition, there is some confusion between what constitutes a rubric and what constitutes a checklist. Sometimes a checklist is used, when it would be more appropriate to use a rubric with delineated levels of performance that are clearly linked to the standards. (*reviewing classroom assessments, following students, observing classes, talking with students and teachers, interviewing teachers about the work of their students*)

Most teachers have clear and high expectations for the academic performance of their students. They expect students to provide supporting evidence for their written and oral assertions when speaking and writing. Many teachers purposefully model for students the writing process and strategies for performing mathematics and solving problems. Outside of the reading class, however, there is little teaching and modeling of techniques associated with reading in other content areas. Most teachers are using a good mix of multi-modal teaching strategies like teacher-directed group activities, independent activities, teacher-directed lessons, and student-centered activities. Conversely, fewer teachers consistently and effectively differentiate instruction. In some classes teachers too frequently use skills-based worksheets and lectures that involve limited student participation or higher order thinking. Generally, however, there is an appropriate balance between traditional teacher led- and inquiry-based approaches. While teachers frequently place students in groups, some teachers have not established routines in the classroom that keep students actively engaged and on task. Often when students are working in groups and occasionally when teachers are directing instruction, students engage in off-task behavior like talking and doodling. (*following students, observing classes, meeting with students and parents*)

## Commendations for Broad Rock Middle School

The conscientious efforts of teachers to provide a high quality education

The pride teachers take in their work and their eagerness to share their work with others

Teachers' collaboration within their own individual teams

The good rapport teachers have with their students

Teachers' genuine concern for the academic and social development of their students

## Recommendations for Broad Rock Middle School

Increase the emphasis placed on linking lessons, tasks, and assessments purposefully to the performance indicators (bullets) in the standards, as well as on the practice of providing models and exemplars of work that meets the standard.

Expand the current use of open-ended questions that involve understanding cause and effect, inferring, and analyzing, as well as inquiry-based experiences that foster higher-level thinking. Reduce the amount of teacher questions and worksheets that focus primarily on low level skills and the recall of factual information.

Expand the current practice of providing detailed diagnostic written comments that students are able to use to revise and improve their work school wide.

Examine and refine the current use of rubrics and checklists to ensure the appropriate use of each assessment tool.

Increase the focus on differentiated instruction. Work to develop strategies that foster the active participation and equitable contribution of students, as well as those that minimize off task behaviors when students work collaboratively.

Provide "job-embedded" professional development that focuses on differentiated instruction, teaming practices, establishing routines in the classroom that support cooperative learning, teaching reading in all subject areas within a balanced literacy framework, creating analytical rubrics, and standards-based instructional practices. When appropriate, capitalize on the talents that exist in this building for in-class modeling and sharing.

## Recommendations for South Kingstown School District:

Provide sufficient resources and the technical assistance that is needed for Broad Rock School to make the changes in professional practice that are recommended in this report.

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *talking with many students, faculty, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, grade level teams, office staff, support staff, teacher aides, and parents*
- ◆ *reviewing School Improvement Plan for Broad Rock Middle School*
- ◆ *reviewing self-study documents Broad Rock Middle School*
- ◆ *reviewing South Kingstown School Department High School Curriculum Guides*
- ◆ *reviewing Broad Rock Middle School Course Syllabi*
- ◆ *reviewing Broad Rock Middle School SALT Binder*
- ◆ *reviewing Report on Evaluation of Programs and Services of Students with Disabilities in the South Kingstown School District*
- ◆ *reviewing South Kingstown School Department policy manual*

### Conclusions

The faculty, staff, and administrators at Broad Rock Middle School are energetic, enthusiastic, caring, and dedicated professionals who are committed to the positive social development and academic success of the students they serve. While teaching in a middle school is new for many of the faculty, most work hard to try to function in a team setting—coordinating their instruction, integrating their lessons, and sharing a solid standards-based methodology. Most teachers provide an inviting, stimulating, and challenging learning environment, and most facilitate student learning creatively within their individual teams and classrooms. Nevertheless, the current school community is fractured. In essence, the school is a collection of individual grade-level teams that operate mostly autonomously in the absence of a unifying philosophy and structure. A common set of goals and objectives is not shared from team to team. Teachers are desperately seeking and genuinely desire leadership that is focused on melding them into one cohesive faculty. This problem requires immediate and focused attention. (*meeting with school improvement team,*

*students, school and district administrators, teacher aides, office staff, support staff, parents, and grade level teams, talking with faculty, teachers, and staff, observing classes, following students, observing the school outside of the classroom)*

The planning, resources, supports, and professional development that are essential for the successful creation and operation of a new middle school are unmistakably inadequate. Consequently, the effectiveness of school improvement initiatives, the implementation of middle level practices, and the educational development of all students are limited. Although staff, faculty, and administration uniformly express the need for professional development focused on teaming and differentiated instructional practices, to-date the district leadership and school committee have not made this a priority. This has resulted in providing the faculty with far too few opportunities to receive the training they need to meet fully the diverse learning needs of their students. Moreover, the absence of K-12 standards-based curricula hinders the school's ability to build student understanding sequentially from grade to grade. There are insufficient instructional materials and supplies necessary to maximize student learning. Similarly the lack of computer labs and the inadequate technology available in classrooms limit teachers from maximizing their teaching and student learning. Although no written documentation of a formal mentoring program was provided, some teachers are informally advising and assisting each other. *(meeting with school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents, and grade level teams, talking with faculty, and staff, reviewing South Kingstown School Department High School Curriculum Guides, reviewing Broad Rock Middle School Course Syllabi)*

A unified atmosphere of trust and collegiality between and among district and school administration, faculty, staff, and parents has not been fostered. At this time the school community has not developed a shared common vision for this school and or the role of its school improvement team. The roles and responsibilities of the SIT are not clearly defined; the current membership does not represent a broad cross-section of the school community; and faculty report that their voice is not strongly heard on the team. Consequently, the SIT currently is not respected as an effective body for fostering shared decision-making, and a number of faculty have chosen not to participate on this team. The School Improvement Team reports this year that it has focused primarily on preparation for a SALT visit and conducting some self-study activities such as following students, looking at student work, and an analysis of self-study survey data. Currently, due in part to the absence of state-testing data, a fully developed school improvement plan with a common mission, objectives, and tactics is not in place. Teachers, administrators, parents, and the SIT report that the district policy of maintaining parity between the two middle schools is impeding the development and improvement of the educational program at this school. *(meeting with school improvement team, school and district administrators, grade level teams, and parents, talking with students, faculty, and staff, reviewing Broad Rock Middle School SALT Visit binder, reviewing School Improvement Plan for Broad Rock Middle School, reviewing self-study documents Broad Rock Middle School)*

There is a strong desire by most of the faculty, staff, administrators, and members of the community for Broad Rock to function as an effective middle school. Regrettably, no one has sufficiently planned, fostered, or supported the implementation of a middle school from grade-to-grade and team-to-team. This school opened its doors to students without the requisite planning, supports, and organizational structure that are essential for the successful operation of a high-quality middle school. To date, the school administrators have not been able to elicit the broad based participation and commitment necessary to establish a commonly shared vision of what Broad Rock Middle School should be. Correspondingly, district administrators, school administrators, and the school committee have not effectively established and communicated an overarching organizational structure or the policies and procedures for how Broad Rock should function as a middle school and a learning community. Moreover, some parents voiced concerns about the lack of communication among teachers, parents, and administrators; they desire more

timely and frequent notification of the educational progress of their children. Inconsistent lines of communication throughout all facets of the educational community have resulted in a lack of information, as well as the conveyance of misinformation. Coupled with very unclear expectations, this poor communication at the school and district levels causes frustration, uncertainty, and the unnecessary expenditures of time and energy by all parties, which hinders the development and operation of this school. *(meeting with school improvement team, school and district administrators, parents, grade level teams, and teacher aides, reviewing South Kingstown School Department policy manual, talking with faculty, staff, and school administrators)*

The present distribution of staff and the reported rigidity of the current schedule prevent this school from equitably delivering a program of studies that effectively meets the special learning needs of all its students. Special education students are serviced predominantly through a resource pullout model, and teachers report an imbalance in the number of special education students on each team. Furthermore, resource teachers are assigned to service students simultaneously on more than one team, which contributes to the difficulty of providing instructional supports in a collaborative class setting. Similarly, there is a uniformly voiced complaint about the scheduling of the students and the staff—regular education, special education, unified arts, and reading teachers, as well as students—and how it adversely impacts the education of the students. The parents and students report that the unified arts program is a powerful and positive part of this school. Sometimes these teachers integrate their work with that of the content area teachers. Unfortunately, the present staffing and scheduling precludes the full participation of these teachers on the regular teaching teams. This concern was strongly voiced by parents. Nevertheless, parents are generally pleased with the school, faculty, and the administration. They report that their children are happy and feel that the quality of their education is good. *(meeting with school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents, talking with students, teachers, and staff, reviewing Report on Evaluation of Programs and Services of Students with Disabilities in the South Kingstown School District, talking with students, teachers, and staff)*

## Commendations for Broad Rock Middle School

The desire by faculty, staff, administrators, and members of the community to establish a middle school model

Providing a safe and secure atmosphere where students feel comfortable with adults and each other

The strength of the unified arts programs

The efforts of the faculty to collaborate with each other in teams

## Recommendations for Broad Rock Middle School

Immediately focus on teaming issues and melding teachers from several schools with disparate philosophies and beliefs into one cohesive faculty.

Reconstitute the school improvement team to reflect the school community fully and to serve as an effective body for shared decision making in the school.

Through the development of a school improvement plan establish a common mission, objectives, and tactics that focus squarely on improving student achievement and performance.

When scheduling the school for next year, reexamine the current criteria for assigning students to reading,

special education, unified arts, and grade level teams.

Strive to organize the staff so that special education teachers each serve on one team, so that unified arts teachers are included on teams, and so that flexible blocks of time are available within teams in order to better meet the needs of students.

Establish clear and direct lines of communication between and among school administrators, faculty, staff, and parents.

Continue to build on the spirit of the student body to foster life-long learners.

### Recommendations for South Kingstown School District:

Establish clear and direct lines of communication between and among the district administrators, school administrators, and the school community.

Allow Broad Rock Middle School to establish its own identity and its own program of studies that reflect its strengths without being tied to another school.

Develop K-12 standards-based curricula with grade level benchmarks of performance to facilitate student growth and student development from year to year.

Clarify the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for all School Improvement Teams in the district and their School Improvement Plans to ensure continuity for all schools in the district.

Provide the appropriate resources and training needed to foster team building at Broad Rock Middle School.

### Recommendations for South Kingstown School Committee:

Empower and support the district administrative team and the administrators of Broad Rock Middle School in their efforts to establish a fully functioning middle school.

## 7. Final Advice to the School

Your central challenge is to unify a faculty that comes from several schools into one cohesive team. As you move forward in your efforts to implement an effective middle school model, ensure that everyone in the Broad Rock community has a voice in guiding and shaping the development and operation of this school. Genuine discourse and debate are necessary if all parties are to establish a commonly held vision and direction for this school. You have a powerful opportunity to fix the problem, not the blame. Let this visit and this resulting report serve as a springboard that brings this learning community together in a focused dialogue.

Establishing Broad Rock as a functioning middle school is the shared responsibility of the district, the school administrators, and the faculty of this school. As you know, opening a new school presents many challenges. However, it also presents a very unique opportunity to design an organizational structure, programmatic offerings, and an instructional program that is effective in meeting the needs of both children and adults. As a brand new school, you are not bound by any historically “right” way to do things. Work together as a team to create the routines and practices that will symbolize this learning community. Establishing broad-based involvement, commitment, and representation from all parties is essential to the success of your efforts.

Reconstitute your school improvement team to serve as the vehicle that fosters shared decision-making. Your school improvement team can be a powerful tool for focusing the energy, efforts, and expertise of the entire learning community on improving the quality of education children receive. Use the information found in this report, coupled with self-study activities that are focused squarely on student learning, teaching, and the organizational structure of the school. (Use your classroom assessments until state test scores can augment them.) Then devise a mission statement that incorporates your beliefs, objectives, and your tactics for improvement that all members of the school community support. Communicate this vision, which includes the underlying philosophy of a middle school and the organizational structure that is required, to all stakeholders in and out of the school. Your plans for continuous improvement and your efforts to bring that improvement about will benefit from the support of the larger community.

Getting to know each other as individuals and professionals will support your efforts to function as a unified team. Even simple routines like a monthly faculty breakfast, periodic whole school assemblies, and off-campus activities with or without the students can cultivate a sense of community. Work to harvest the talents that exist in this building. Teachers who were originally in the elementary schools and those who originally were in junior high schools each have unique backgrounds, talents, and educational practices that should be shared schoolwide. Investigate other ways to provide professional development that enables the faculty to learn from each other and to come together to meet, share, bond, and grow and work collaboratively to meet student needs from grades 6-8.

Regarding the academic program, most of you exhibit a number of practices that teach, model, and reinforce the proficiency of student writing in virtually all subjects. Outside of reading classes, however, less emphasis is placed on the direct teaching of strategies for comprehension and analysis. Ensuring that all students are proficient readers will require greater focus on teaching reading than on assigning reading; it will require teaching and reinforcing reading strategies in all subject areas. Additionally, it is unclear how the current scheduling of reading classes is optimized to meet the needs of students. Re-examine the current approaches to teaching reading and, when appropriate, make changes in the schedule of reading classes and the instructional practices in content area classes in order to support struggling readers, as well as to enhance the proficiency of all students within a balanced literacy framework.

As a direct result of your hard work many of the children who attend Broad Rock Middle School are being served within the individual teams. There is tremendous talent and potential in this school. Foster this talent and foster the justifiable pride you have in your work to provide a high quality education for each student that attends this school. Similarly, build on the spirit of your student body to create a school that cultivates student confidence and pride.

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 Broad Rock Middle 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 at 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 all of your students. For that is, unquestionably, the intent of our team.

## The Broad Rock Middle School Improvement Team

Sue Burman  
Parent

Merry Caswell  
Parent

Sarah Dinklage  
Parent

Steven Enright  
Parent

Dr. James Findlay  
Parent

Rozanne Fuller  
Teacher

Brian Kelly  
Principal

Jane Northup  
Parent

Tom Tetzner  
Parent

John Whitford  
Teacher

## The SALT Visit Team

Dr. Michael S. Barnes  
Technology Education Department Chairperson  
Ponaganset Middle/Senior High School, Foster-Glocester, Rhode Island  
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)  
Chair of the Team

Susan Cardente  
Science Grade 8  
Kickemuit Middle School  
Warren, Rhode Island

Beverly A. Deware  
Social Studies Grade 6  
Governor Christopher DelSesto and Lola DelSesto Middle School  
Providence, Rhode Island

John W. Kennedy  
Associate Principal  
Narragansett High School  
Narragansett, Rhode Island

Richard D. Latham  
School Improvement Specialist  
Rhode Island Department of Education  
Providence, Rhode Island

Suzanne C. Laven  
English Teacher Grade 8  
Park View Middle School  
Cranston, Rhode Island

Dennis B. McNamara  
Principal  
Lincoln Middle School  
Lincoln, Rhode Island

Janice L. O'Donnell  
Technology Integration Teacher Grades 7 and 8  
Gaudet Middle School  
Middletown, Rhode Island

Raechel M. Robidoux  
Choral Director Grades 6-8  
Nicholas A. Ferri Middle School  
Johnston, Rhode Island

Ann M. Sullivan

Guidance Counselor Grades 6 and 7  
Davisville Middle School  
North Kingstown, Rhode Island

## Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

### **Broad Rock Middle School**

April 26, 2002

To complete the Catalpa Ltd. report endorsement, I discussed the conduct of the visit with the Visit Chair while it was in process, I observed a portion of the visit, I discussed with the principal any concerns that he had about the visit 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.  
May 22, 2002