Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
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Cranston Area Career and Technical Center

Cranston

The SALT Visit Team Report

January 31, 2003

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 of the 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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1. THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS of this report

Overview

This is the report of the SALT team that visited Cranston Area Career and Technical Center from January 27, 2003 through January 31, 2003. The following features are at the heart of the report:

The team seeks to capture what makes this school work, or not work, as a public institution of learning. Each school presents a unique picture.

The team does not compare this school to any other school.

When writing the report, the team deliberately chooses the words that best convey its message to the school, based on careful consideration of what it has learned about the school dynamics.

The team makes its judgment explicit.

The major questions the team addresses are:

How well do the students learn at this school?

How well does this school teach its students?

How well does this school support learning and teaching?

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

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

The team writes *Portrait* as an overview of what it thinks are the most important themes in the conclusions that follow.

While *Portrait* precedes the team's conclusions, it is written after they are complete.

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

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

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

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

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

The team closely follows the visit protocol in the *Handbook for Chairs of the SALT School Visit.* The Catalpa endorsement certifies that this team followed the visit protocol and that this report meets all criteria required for a legitimate SALT visit report.

Members of the visit team are primarily teachers and administrators from Rhode Island public schools. The majority of team members are teachers. The names and affiliations of the team members are listed at the end of the report.

Sources of Evidence for This Report

In order to write this report the team examines test scores, student work, and other documents related to this school. The school improvement plan for Cranston Area Career and Technical Center 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 Cranston Area Career and Technical Center.

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

♦ *observing a total of 117 complete and partial classes. The team spent a total of over 114 hours in direct classroom observation at Cranston High School West Cranston Area Career and Technical Center. At the CACTC every classroom was visited at least once, and almost every teacher was observed more than once.*

♦ *observing the school outside of the classroom*

♦ *following 7 students for a full day*

♦ *observing the work of teachers and staff for a full day*

♦ *meeting at scheduled times with the following groups:*

> *teachers*
> *school improvement team*
> *school and district administrators*
> *students*
> *parents*
> *the Cranston High School West SALT Team*

♦ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*

♦ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*

♦ *discussing student work with teachers*

♦ *analyzing five 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*
> *classroom textbooks*
> *student portfolios*
> *school improvement plan for Cranston Area Career and Technical Center*
> *district strategic plan*
> *2002 SALT Survey report*
> *2002 Information Works!*

2002 New Standards Reference Examination results

2002 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results

2002 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary

2002 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary

the school improvement plan for Cranston High School West

the teacher evaluation instrument for Cranston Public Schools

Cranston Area Career and Technical Center's completed and draft curricula

New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Public Secondary Schools, Report of the Visiting Committee, Cranston High School West Cranston, Rhode Island, March2-March 5, 1997

Cranston High School West, NEASC Five-Year Response Report to the NEASC Visiting Committee Recommendations, February, 2002

Cranston Area Career and Technical Center's budget

Cranston School District budget

Cranston School Department Professional Development Institute Information

the SALT Visit Team binder

Rhode Island Department of Education Office of Special Needs, School Support System Report and Support Plan for Cranston Public Schools October 21-November 1, 2002

Master Agreement between the Cranston School Committee and the Cranston Teachers' Alliance, Local 1704, AFT 200-2003

Cranston Area Career and Technical Center 2001-2002 Annual Report

Teacher Support Team meeting notes

Grant / Mini Grant applications

Student enrollment /tuition data

Student work from Aqua-Culture, Automotive Technology, Building / Construction, Business Technology, Child Development, CISCO Academy, CISCO On-line Web Page Design, Computer Technology, Culinary Arts, Drafting Technology, Electronics Technology, Finance Academy, Graphic Communications, Health Occupations, Marketing, Pre-engineering/Robotics, and Travel and Tourism, mathematics, science, English, social studies, foreign language, and the arts`

The full visit team built the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 32 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.

A SALT (School Accountability for Learning and Teaching) Visit, chaired by Margaret Della Bitta was conducted at Cranston High School West at the same time as this SALT Visit. While a separate team generated each visit report, these two teams followed an established protocol to conduct inquiry activities in both schools. Additionally, several joint team meetings were scheduled to facilitate the collection and sharing of information between and among the members of these two teams. By design, these SALT reports are built on evidence collected in both buildings. Consequently, it is important to consider both SALT reports when deciding on the most appropriate course of action for this learning community.

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 Cranston Area Career and Technical Center

Background

Cranston Area Career and Technical Center (CACTC) is one of 10 Career and Technical schools in the State of Rhode Island. It is located on the campus of Cranston High School West in the central part of the state. The center serves students in grades 10-12 for the towns of Cranston, Foster/Glocester, Johnston, and Scituate. The present school first opened its doors to students in 1976.

A regional committee governs the Cranston Area Career and Technical Center. Students are served by a professional staff of two administrators, 17 full- and part-time faculty, three guidance counselors, one school-to-career coordinator, one integrated standards specialist, eight technical assistants her assistants, one school-based facilitator, two full time and one part-time secretary and two custodians.

Of the 609 students attending this school 90.3 percent are White, 6.6 percent are Hispanic, 2.1 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent are Black. One hundred eight students (totaling 17.7 percent receive special education services, 0.1 percent are Limited English Proficiency, and 5.3 percent applied for and receive free or reduced-price lunch.

CACTC is situated on the same campus as Cranston High School West. Students enrolled in the CACTC take their academic courses in the high school and approximately one third of the students enrolled at the high school, representing a broad cross section of the student body, attend the CACTC.

Cranston Area Career and Technical Center offers programs in Aqua-Culture, Automotive Technology, Building/ Construction, Business Technology, Child Development, CISCO Academy, CISCO On-line Web Page Design, Computer Technology, Culinary Arts, Drafting Technology, Electronics Technology, Finance Academy, Graphic Communications, Health Occupations, Marketing, Pre-engineering/Robotics, and Travel and Tourism.

State Assessment Results for Cranston Area Career and Technical Center

This section of the school profile shows results from the latest available state assessment program four different ways: against performance standards; compared to similar students in the state; across student groups within the school; and over time. Assessment results create pieces of evidence that the visit team uses as it conducts its inquiry. The team uses this evidence to shape its efforts to locate critical issues for the school. It also uses this evidence, along with other evidence, to draw conclusions about those issues.

Results in relation to performance standards

The first display shows how well the students do in relation to standards in English/Language Arts and mathematics. Student results are shown as the percentage of students taking the test whose score places them in the various categories at, above, or below the performance standard. Endorsed by the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education in 1998, the tested standards can be found in the publication *New Standards Performance Standards*.

*Table1. 2001-2002 Student Results on Rhode Island State Assessments*
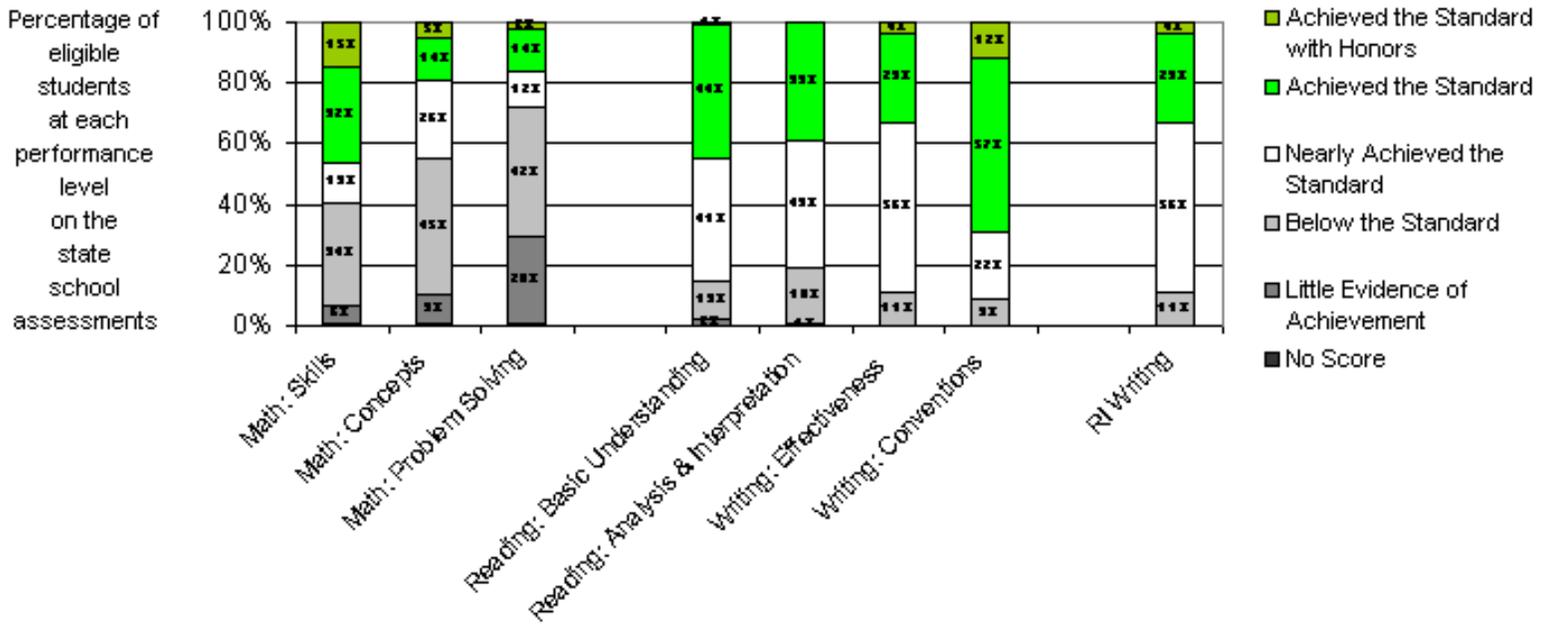
According to these subtests, the majority of tenth grade students at Cranston Area Career and Technical Center did not achieve the standard on six of seven subtests on the New Standards Reference Examinations and on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment. Overall students performed with less proficiency on subtests that require analysis, interpretation, and more complex applications of knowledge. The highest achievement occurred on the Writing: Conventions sub-test where slightly more than two in three students met or exceeded the performance standards. On the other subtests student achievement ranged from approximately one in two students achieving the standards on Reading: Basic Understanding and Math: Skills to approximately one in six students achieving the standard on Math: Problem Solving. Overall, these scores represent a noticeable improvement from previous years. The percentage of students meeting the standard in 2002 is higher on every subtest than it was in the previous two years.

Results compared to similar students in the state

This chart includes the performance levels of students with special education needs, students participating in ESL or bilingual programs, low socio-economic status (a composite of income level, racial background and parental education), as well as the performance of students with none of these characteristics. Taking all these characteristics into account, the graph displays the overall performance of students in this school compared to - a group of students from across the state whose characteristics match this school's students.

Table 2. 2000-2001 Student Results in Comparison to **Similar Students Statewide**
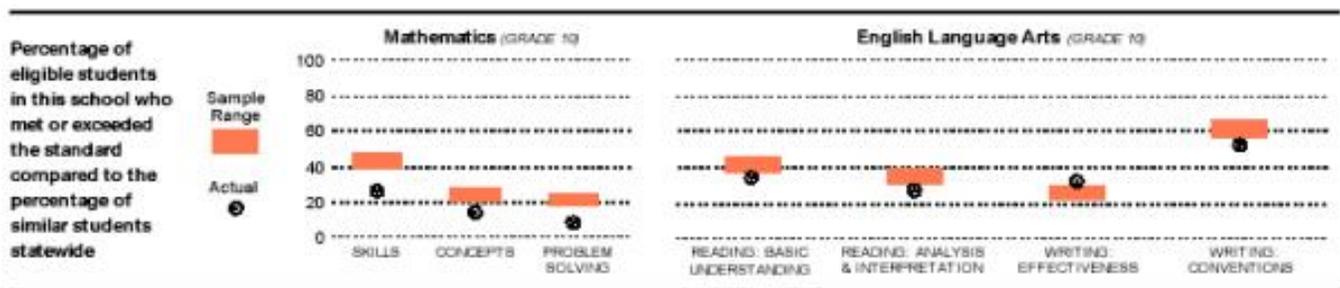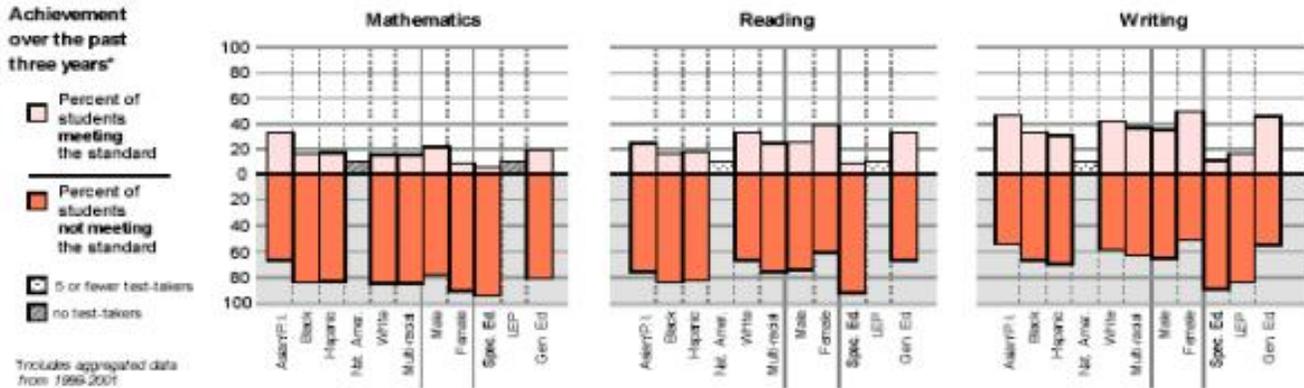

According to these subtests, which are almost two years old, the percentage of tenth grade students at Cranston Area Career and Technical Center who met or exceeded the standard in mathematics was below similar students in the state on all three subtests of the New Standards Reference Examination. Cranston Area Career and Technical Center students perform the same as similar students in the state on the reading and writing subtests.

Results across student groups within the school

An important way to display student results is across different groups of students with different characteristics who are in the school. This display creates information about how well the school meets the learning needs of its various students. Since breaking students into these smaller groups can result in groups becoming too small to show accurate results, this display shows the results based on three years of testing. The Department defines an important gap between different groups (an equity gap) to be a gap of 15% or more.

Table 3. 2000-2001 Student Results across Subgroups

According to these subtests, which are almost two years old, equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist in mathematics for black, Hispanic, white, multi-racial, and special education students. In reading equity gaps exist for black, Hispanic, and special education students. Equity gaps exist for special education and limited English proficient students in writing.

Results over time

Now that the state assessment program has been functioning for five years, it is possible to show results over meaningful periods of time. This display shows changes in the percentage of students the highest performance category representing at or above standard and the percentage of students in the lowest performance categories. These displays correspond to the targets the Department of Education asked schools to set four years ago and are the basis for the department categorizing schools as improving or non-improving.

Table 4. 2000-2001 Student Results Showing Change Over Time

The Cranston Area Career and Technical School has been categorized as a low performing, not improving school on the basis of its assessment results from 1998 to 2002. The following tables show the areas in which student performance improved.

Mathematics: Skills		Mathematics: Concepts		Mathematics: Problem Solving	
Increase in Percent Proficient	Decrease in Percent in Lowest Performance Levels	Increase in Percent Proficient	Decrease in Percent in Lowest Performance Levels	Increase in Percent Proficient	Decrease in Percent in Lowest Performance Levels
Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes

Reading: Basic Understanding		Reading: Analysis and Interpretation	
Increase in Percent Proficient	Decrease in Percent in Lowest Performance Levels	Increase in Percent Proficient	Decrease in Percent in Lowest Performance Levels

Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	

Writing: Effectiveness		Writing: Conventions		Rhode Island Writing	
Increase in Percent Proficient	*Decrease in Percent in Lowest Performance Levels*	*Increase in Percent Proficient*	*Decrease in Percent in Lowest Performance Levels*	*Increase in Percent Proficient*	*Decrease in Percent in Lowest Performance Levels*
Yes	No	No	No	No	No

Cranston Area Career and Technical Center reduced the number of students in the two lowest performance categories on four of the eight state assessments.

Information Works! data for Cranston Area Career and Technical Center is available at <http://www.ridoe.net>.

3. PORTRAIT OF Cranston Area Career and Technical Center AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Cranston Area Career and Technical Center (CACTC) is a safe and warm learning environment that is focused on meeting the academic and career needs of the students served by this regional center. The feeling of welcome that permeates this school is readily apparent to a visitor. The teachers, administrators, and staff are highly supportive of students and strive to provide a sound education, which involves rigorous technical course work that opens the doors to the world of work and concurrently prepares them for a post-secondary education.

Students that attend the CACTC report that they see themselves as an integral part of Cranston High School West (CHSW). They actively participate in a wide variety of extra curricula activities and have a strong school spirit. The students openly like, respect, and appreciate the staff, teachers, and administrative team. The pride students have for their area center programs and the larger CHSW community is as evident as the teachers' commitment to excellence.

The teachers, administrative team, and staff at CACTC are highly dedicated, caring professionals who genuinely desire to see their students succeed. They are willing to go the "extra mile" to meet the diverse learning needs of the students who attend this school. They are knowledgeable in their respective subject areas and serve as positive role models for their students. Most teachers willingly and adeptly alter their instructional strategies to meet student needs.

The culture at this school embodies a small learning community. Excellent relationships exist between and among the teachers and students. This is a school where the majority of teachers enjoy teaching and where students enjoy learning.

Utilizing technology, industry standards, technical curricula, and varied assessments, teachers impart challenging technical knowledge in a nurturing and professional manner. The availability of technology at this center enables students to acquire the practical experiences and skills necessary for their future academic and professional growth and success.

The majority of the 10th grade students at this school do not perform well on statewide tests. Nevertheless, Cranston Area Career and Technical Center is not functioning as a low performing school. The teaching, learning, and support occurring in this school, help students learn and grow in different ways than those measured by statewide assessments. Students learn industry-based, technical skills that mirror the skills, knowledge, and competencies required in the world of work. These are developed through a variety of high-quality assignments, projects, presentations, and school-based activities. The learning experiences extend to and from the community in a variety of ways, including students serving in internships, job shadowing, guest speakers, work-based placements, and state and regional competitions, among others.

This is a school that effectively serves a broad cross-section of students, who take varied paths after graduation, including joining the world of work or attending two-year colleges, technical colleges, and competitive four-year colleges and universities. To achieve the goals of full integration with Cranston High School West and to raise the academic achievement of all students attending the high school will require:

♦ continued efforts to integrate the curricula, organizational structures, and student supports of the HS and CACTC,

♦ a more purposeful focus on reading, writing, and mathematics instruction in certain instructional areas,

♦ additional job-embedded professional development, and

♦ the further refinement of assessment practices.

These changes are necessary if CACTC is to meet its chosen mission: "to empower and direct all students to become responsible for their learning, to help each student develop his or her full potential by providing opportunities to think critically, to solve problems, and to become a life-long learner and a quality citizen."

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, school administrators, and parents*

♦ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*

♦ *discussing student work with teachers*

♦ *reviewing student portfolios*

♦ *observing classes*

Conclusions

Students take pride in their school, in the work they do, and in the support of their teachers. Students feel respected and valued by the Cranston Area Career and Technical Center faculty and staff. The students have high regard, praise, and respect for the staff and teachers. Students report that the school environment is warm, relaxed, comfortable, and that it actively engages them in their learning. An excellent rapport exists between and among the students and the teachers and staff. Students enjoy attending CACTC; they enjoy strong personal relationships with their teachers and attribute much of their success to the dedication and caring of their teachers. Most students are highly motivated in their chosen technical fields, are eager to share their work with others, and have made personal commitments to graduating successfully and receiving industry certificates. *(following students, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, observing classes, meeting with students, parents, school and district administrators, and the school improvement team, observing the school outside of the classroom)*

Students at Cranston Area Career and Technical Center work cooperatively as part of a small learning community. They effectively reinforce each other's ability to acquire and use knowledge. Most students demonstrate responsibility to the learning community by working cooperatively with one another to assess and judge projects such as DECA (Distributive Education Courses of America) and VICA (Vocational Industrial Clubs of America). Many students successfully assist their classmates, when they are troubleshooting and brainstorming short and long-term projects and completing performance tasks throughout the school. When teaching each other, many students engage in accountable talk and freely discuss complex technical concepts and procedures. Some students also accurately discuss advanced mathematics and sophisticated scientific principles as they actively pursue solutions to problems. Students are less adept at explaining and justifying, in writing, their knowledge of underlying academic and technical concepts and procedures, as well as their decision-making processes. *(observing classes, following students, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, observing the school outside of the classroom, reviewing student portfolios)*

Most students are very adept at applying their technical knowledge meaningfully and contextually. When engaged in performance tasks, most students effectively draw on and use technical knowledge, skills, concepts, and underlying theories. Students report developing a deeper understanding of underlying theories and concepts, when they are immediately reinforced with concrete, tangible, and visual representations and with projects that represent learning in multiple ways. Most students see more relevance to mathematics, reading, and writing skills during their work in laboratory settings. They also are more successful at using these skills when completing tasks and projects that require

them to use both their hands and their minds. Students are less adept at using academic knowledge in the type of theoretical and abstract settings that occur more frequently in the high school. In essence, students have difficulty connecting the academic content acquired at Cranston High School West to the applications of technical and academic knowledge at the CACTC. *(meeting with teachers, students, parents, school and district administrators, and the school improvement team, observing classes, following students, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, discussing student work with teachers)*

Students successfully use a number of tools and methods to acquire and process knowledge. Many students are developing proficiency in their chosen core technical areas and have a strong grasp of technical facts and procedures. For example: they are creating complex electronic schematics, preparing and serving delicious meals, diagnosing and repairing automotive systems, routing computers in a network, creating web pages, and maintaining fisheries in aquaculture. Most students can formulate, analyze and process information derived from technical and competency-based manuals. While many can read expository text and successfully follow narrative procedures and directions, fewer students effectively use the structure of text—headings, tables, and graphs—to meaningfully extract information, make inferences, and connect related concepts. *(following students, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing student portfolios, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, observing classes, talking with students, teachers, and staff)*

Many students can effectively draw on their technical knowledge when they are performing tasks and solving problems that require them to apply mathematics, science, reading, and writing to authentic contexts. Some can capably solve multi-step problems that require them to formulate the problem, determine and test multiple solutions, select the most plausible solution and explain their reasoning. However, many students experience difficulty when they use similar strategies to complete paper and pencil tasks in the high school and the CACTC that require them to draw on concepts and knowledge from the academic core—math, science, reading, and writing. Often these students lack the conceptual understanding needed to solve pure mathematics problems, to read analytically and critically, and to write effectively. *(meeting with teachers, students, parents, school and district administrators, and the school improvement team, observing classes, following students, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, discussing student work with teachers)*

There is a strong school spirit and sense of pride evident at Cranston High School West. Although students take their academic and technical courses in two separate facilities, they consistently report feeling like a part of one school and identify themselves as "west" students. Most students are responsible and take ownership for their own learning. Many students appreciate the career choices and technical rigor of the programs that are available to them. Through internships and other school-coordinated work-based experiences, students are acquiring an understanding of job-related expectations such as responsibility, punctuality, job performance, and the ability to read, write, and communicate on a professional level. Students realize that, if they are competent in their chosen fields, a successful job and post-secondary education will be within their grasp. As a result, they avail themselves of the many opportunities offered to them and work hard to achieve their full potential, since they see the benefits of learning in their chosen classes. *(talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators. meeting with teachers, students, parents, school and district administrators, and the school improvement team)*

Commendations for Cranston Area Career and Technical Center

The motivation and engagement of the students

The pride students have in their school and the work they do

The respect students have for peers, faculty, and staff

The students' participation in out-of-school-learning

The students' technical problem-solving skills

The students' operation as part of a learning community

Recommendations for Cranston Area Career and Technical Center

Further develop students' proficiency in mathematical skills, concepts, and problem solving and their ability to draw purposefully on that knowledge and apply it in authentic ways.

Further develop students' proficiency in explaining and justifying, in writing, their knowledge of underlying academic and technical concepts and procedures, as well as their decision-making processes, when they are performing tasks associated with their chosen career tracks.

Further develop students' proficiency in using the structure of text—headings, tables, and graphs—to meaningfully extract information, make inferences, and connect related concepts.

Further develop students' understanding of concepts from the academic core—math, science, reading, and writing, which they need to solve pure mathematics problems, read analytically and critically, and write effectively.

Further develop students' proficiency in connecting the academic content acquired at the high school to the applications of technical and academic knowledge they acquire at CACTC.

Recommendations for Cranston High School West

Further develop students' proficiency in connecting the academic content acquired at the high school to the applications of technical and academic knowledge they acquire at CACTC.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

♦   *observing classes*

♦   *observing the school outside of the classroom*

♦   *reviewing classroom assessments*

♦   *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*

♦   *discussing student work with teachers*

♦   *meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents*

♦   *following students*

♦   *reviewing student portfolios*

♦   *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*

♦   *reviewing classroom assignments*

♦   *reviewing curricula*

Conclusions

There is a sincere level of personal value and mutual respect found among all faculty, students, and staff throughout the Cranston Area Career and Technical Center. Teachers, by their actions and deeds, serve as role models and mentors for their students. They cultivate excellent relationships with their students and emit an aura of approachability and caring. Most teachers expect their students to achieve at high levels, and they set high expectations for their students; many demonstrate considerable expertise in delivering instruction that fosters technical concept development and critical thinking skills. An obvious effort to educate, guide, and nurture students permeates this school. It is very common for teachers to assist students outside of the classroom on issues that impact their educational environment and student success. *(observing classes, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, meeting with teachers, students, parents school and district administrators, and the school improvement team, observing the school outside of the classroom)*

Most teachers use a variety of assessments to determine student performance accurately and improve it. This balanced approach to assessment includes: paper and electronic tests and quizzes, oral presentations, exhibitions with internal and external judges, self- and peer-evaluation, teacher conferencing, performance tasks, and long-term in-depth projects. A few teachers extend these practices to teach and assess metacognitive skills through reflection, critical analysis, and deep level inquiries. Most teachers consistently use rubrics to guide their assessment of students. Moreover, school-wide rubrics are being used to promote consistency. While these rubrics are used to promote consistency and establish clear expectations, many of the performance indicators found in these rubrics are insufficiently descriptive to determine accurately the different levels of student performance. Additionally, some teachers work cooperatively with students to produce print and electronic student portfolios, which depict levels of student competency and which chart student growth over time. A few teachers adeptly design their long-term projects with a variety of checkpoints. This promotes on-task behavior and provides teachers with the information needed to shape their instruction and students with the feedback

they need to revise effectively. *(observing classes, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, talking with students and teachers, discussing student work with teachers)*

Most teachers skillfully use a variety of rigorous performance tasks and projects that effectively cultivate their students' active use of knowledge and higher order thinking skills. Many of these tasks intentionally build on students' prior knowledge; promote critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving; and target multiple intelligences—kinesthetic, visual, auditory, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. To complete these tasks, students often work in teams to demonstrate their knowledge of technical content and academic concepts; they diagnose and assess potential solutions. Some teachers challenge students to formulate and test their conjectures and hypotheses. Conversely, some projects focus too heavily on building basic skills and competencies. Likewise, in some classes too many projects are pre-packaged paper and/or computer-based assignments. Sometimes, this focus on skills and pre-packaged curricula results in missed opportunities to develop deliberately and reinforce students' understanding of the desired academic and technical knowledge and higher order thinking skills. *(observing classes, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, following students, reviewing classroom assignments, reviewing curricula)*

Teachers are beginning to make conscious efforts to expand and strengthen students' understanding of mathematics, science, and English Language Arts. All career areas incorporate basic core academic concepts at some level of intensity. Examples include students' writing and teaching a developmentally appropriate lesson, measure, designing a house, building physical structures, creating and testing sophisticated robots, creating and maintaining health records and financial books, conducting research and writing proposals for new products, and maintaining journals, logs, and portfolios in other areas in order to integrate writing skills in the technical areas. Teachers implement, and the principal corrects, a bi-weekly performance-based mathematics task derived from PSAT for all 10th grade students. Additionally, teachers are beginning to focus on reading in the content areas and to work on developing their student's ability to read text, articles, and manuals relating to their career clusters. While these efforts are noteworthy, the current focus on explicitly teaching reading, writing, and math is insufficient to sustain and improve student performance in the academic core. *(observing classes, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, meeting with teachers, students and school administrators, talking with students, teachers, and staff, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers)*

A number of effective standards-based teaching and assessment practices are clearly evident at CACTC. Most teachers adeptly use both content standards and industry standards to develop project-based activities that develop their students' ability to reason, write, and apply concepts. Many teachers effectively combine these two sources of standards and use a variety of authentic tasks to expand student knowledge and thinking. Competency-based industry standards are consistently used to assess student work. Some teachers extend this focus on industry standards and purposefully challenge students to achieve exemplary academic standards. Moreover, a number of teachers willingly collaborate to provide opportunities for students to engage in interdisciplinary real-world projects, which integrate several career and academic areas within and between CACTC and CHSW. These high-quality learning experiences concurrently develop students' knowledge of course content and the generic employability skills delineated in the SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) Competencies. *(observing classes, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing student portfolios)*

Most teachers competently design learning experiences that scaffold student learning. Models of student work that meet standards are publicly displayed with visible accomplishment targets. Also offered are technical-based lessons, methodically planned to assist in step-by-step instruction to formulate critical thinking skills and develop self-assessment techniques. One may see these in the Meshanticut Lake Mud Project, Aqua S.P.L.A.S.H. project, marketing Internet sales projects, Spice for Life, and X shoe sneaker design project—to name a few. Many teachers model desired procedures and gradually reduce the amount of their direct instruction so that students can begin to manage their own learning. A few teachers even consciously focus on making their own thinking and decision-making processes public. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students and teachers, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assignments)*

Commendations for Cranston Area Career and Technical Center

The active use of knowledge and higher order thinking skills

The balanced approach to assessment and the use of rubrics

The dedication and professionalism of teachers

The strong relationships that exist among faculty, staff, and students

The emerging focus on explicitly teaching reading, writing, and math

Recommendations for Cranston Area Career and Technical Center

Maintain and expand the existing practice of challenging students to use diverse problem-solving strategies and to develop higher-order thinking skills in all content areas.

Expand the process, school-wide, of designing long-term projects with multiple pre-determined checkpoints that promote on-task behavior, as well as provide teachers with the information they need to re-teach students and to provide feedback their students need to revise their work effectively.

Maintain the focus on industry standards, and increase the focus on content and performance standards from the academic core when designing and implementing projects and performance tasks.

Review the performance indicators found in the existing rubrics to ensure that the language used is sufficiently descriptive to determine accurately the different levels of student performance and to guarantee that it is aligned consistently with the performance criteria "bullets" found under the standards.

Maintain and expand the skillful use of rigorous performance tasks and projects that effectively cultivate higher order thinking skills and the active use of knowledge. Reduce, where appropriate, the use of pre-packaged handouts and disproportionately skills-based projects.

Continue and expand the use of varied assessments and instructional approaches to improve student learning, and provide additional opportunities for students to revise their work to performance and industry standards.

Strengthen, schoolwide, the efforts to explicitly teach and assess the underlying reading, writing, mathematics, and science skills and concepts embedded in daily assignments.

Expand the current instruction and modeling procedures to include a more conscious focus on making public the thinking and the decision-making processes needed to analyze and solve problems.

Recommendations for Cranston High School West

Expand the opportunities for students in all classes to apply academic knowledge, concepts, skills, and procedures in meaningful and contextual ways.

Increase the emphasis placed on applied learning and solving real world problems.

Recommendations for Cranston School District

Create and support structures that foster the integration of instructional practices and purposeful reinforcement of learning that occurs in each building.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

♦   *observing classes*

♦   *observing the school outside of the classroom*

♦   *following students*

♦   *talking with many students, teachers, and staff*

♦   *meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents, and the Cranston High School West SALT Team*

♦   *reviewing the school improvement plan for Cranston High School West*

♦   *reviewing the teacher evaluation instrument for Cranston Public Schools*

♦   *reviewing Cranston Area Career and Technical Center's completed and draft curricula*

♦   *reviewing Cranston Area Career and Technical Center's budget*

♦   *reviewing Cranston School Department Professional Development Institute Information*

♦   *reviewing the SALT Team binder*

♦   *reviewing Rhode Island Department of Education School Support Visit Report 2002*

♦   *reviewing the Cranston School District budget*

♦   *reviewing the Master Agreement between the Cranston School Committee and The Cranston Teachers' Alliance, Local 1704, AFT 2000-2003*

Conclusions

A sense of belonging and community permeates the Cranston Area Career and Technical Center. The adults who work at this school are sincerely committed to and invested in efforts to provide students with a rigorous and relevant education. The commitment of teachers and staff and the small size of this school both contribute to the personalized learning that the students here enjoy. This sense of family supports student growth as skilled workers, business leaders, professionals, and life-long learners. This school serves a varied population, and it provides an educational environment that encourages and provides educational opportunities for all students. The dedicated administrative team, faculty, teaching assistants, and staff model tolerance and mutual respect. This culture of mutual respect contributes positively to the students' attitudes, behavior, and educational experiences. Moreover, the facility is clean, bright, and conducive to learning. This is a school and faculty that, through dedication and hard work, continues to provide a high quality education to the students it serves despite the financial constraints of the city. Unfortunately, it is highly unlikely that this high quality education will continue to be sustainable at current or reduced funding levels. *(meeting with teachers, students, parents, school and district administrators, and the school improvement team, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, reviewing CACTC and district budgets)*

Cranston Area Career and Technical Center provides a variety of resources for students that are designed to help them learn and achieve at high levels. These include a highly student-centered and effective skills lab, centrally located in the tech center, which reinforces reading, writing, and math; a special education teacher with a broad range of responsibilities, who is specifically assigned to the center; and technical assistants in the labs. Similarly, the high school offers an academic resource lab, staffed by five teachers, for scheduled and drop-in services, and four sections of a second mathematics course that is team taught for students with identified skills gaps in mathematics. Nevertheless, a number of teachers report that the services provided to students in the CACTC are insufficient to meet their diverse learning needs. Although many of the Center's teachers frequently differentiate their instruction and CACTC students can receive support services for their technical courses back in the high school, there are times when students need and would benefit from additional services from their resource teachers within their technical center classes. *(meeting with teachers, students, parents, school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, and the Cranston High School West SALT Team, reviewing Rhode Island Department of Education School Support Visit Report 2002)*

The CACTC and Cranston High School West share a common school improvement team consisting of an impressive number of stakeholders, who represent administrators, parents, faculty, staff, and students. This decision to formulate one team and write one plan promotes and strengthens the single school concept. The school improvement team meets on a regular basis to discuss strategies needed to increase student performance, to establish high expectations, to promote integrated standards-based practices and to improve the overall educational environment. The school improvement plan is the result of significant time and effort by a dedicated team. The current plan and the accompanying addendum address much of the work currently underway in the respective schools, and guide the current direction of the school. Nevertheless, the absence of measurable criteria, timelines, and personnel responsible for implementation makes it difficult for the schools to monitor the extent to which the established objectives have been met and to coordinate efforts among all parties. *(reviewing Cranston High School West School Improvement Plan, meeting with the school improvement team and parents, talking with teachers and school administrators)*

The CACTC benefits from the strong and effective leadership of the administrative team. They are effective advocates for their school, the faculty, and students. Their efforts, coupled with those of the dedicated high school administrative team, have contributed to the substantial strides toward melding two schools into one. Similarly, faculty and staff are committed to and working toward this same goal. This has resulted in a nearly seamless integration for the students, who offer no distinction between the schools and repeatedly identify themselves as Cranston High School West students. Despite these strides, there is a separation between the high school and CACTC at the programmatic and organizational levels. For example, there is little integration or purposeful reinforcement of the curricula taught in both buildings. It is often difficult to see the connections in curricula between the learning that takes place in each of the respective schools. To varying degrees this separation also exists in the implementation of counseling, resource, and other student services; adherence to discipline policies; and the expectations and challenges found among the different core academic tracks. Additionally, CACTC and CHSW use a modified block schedule. Currently, this schedule does not adequately meet the needs of many students and often impacts negatively on the community/work-based learning experiences of students. This separation limits the ability of both learning communities to integrate academic and technical knowledge, coordinate course offerings, and keeps them from building an infrastructure that seamlessly supports students' learning needs. *(meeting with teachers, students, parents, school and district administrators, and the school improvement team, and the Cranston High School West SALT Team, talking with students, teachers, and staff, observing the school outside of the classroom, observing classes, following students)*

Cranston Public Schools provides a number of effective supports to teachers designed to enhance their professional practice. A range of opportunities exists through the Cranston Professional Development Institute. Many CACTC teachers consistently go beyond this contractual obligation to keep abreast in their chosen fields and hone their teaching craft by participating in workshops, seminars, and externships on their own time. Sometimes the professional development choices made by teachers are only loosely aligned with the chosen reforms of the school. Other effective supports include the teacher evaluation instrument and district mentoring program, which are both effective mechanisms for supporting and promoting the professional growth of teachers. Additionally, many teachers choose to mentor and support each other informally. Conversely, although individual teachers are developing curricula and working on statewide curricula to that end, in a number of areas formal, standards-based curricula are not fully developed at this time. This hampers the school's attempts to deepen student understanding from year-to-year. *(talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, reviewing SALT Team binder, reviewing Master Agreement between the Cranston School Committee and the Cranston Teachers' Alliance Local 1704, AFT 2000-2003, reviewing Cranston*

Public Schools Teacher Evaluation Instrument 2000 - Version 1.1, reviewing Cranston School Department Professional Development Institute Information, reviewing CACTC completed and draft curricula, meeting with teachers, school and district administrators, and the school improvement team)

The CACTC teachers make conscious efforts to add relevance to the learning that occurs in school by connecting it to the community. Teachers and the Center act as portals through which partnerships are formed with business, industry, colleges, and community groups throughout the state, designed to ensure that students meet industry standards and that they gain first-hand, meaningful, real-world experiences aligned with the SCANS competencies. Many career cluster areas offer opportunities for students to obtain both mandatory and optional industry certifications. Examples include: The Academy of Finance, Child Development, A+ Certification, and Cisco Academy. However, a few cluster areas offer no industry certification at this time. School-based learning is reinforced with work-based learning through job-shadowing, co-ops, internships, and externships. Most students benefit from their interaction with professional and trade groups, which assist in the planning and implementation of work-based learning experiences. These include school-to-work, cluster advisory and regional planning committees. Likewise, teachers spend considerable time preparing students for local, state, and national competitions in a variety of career clusters. This focus on real-world projects and connections increases student motivation, adds rigor and relevance to the taught curricula, and raises the overall level of student performance. *(observing classes, talking with students, teachers, and staff, meeting with teachers, students, parents and school administrators)*

Commendations for Cranston Area Career and Technical Center

Teachers and administrator's support of student learning

Outstanding rapport between faculty and students

The effective leadership and support of the administrative team

The contributions made by teachers, teacher assistants, and staff

The informal mentoring and supports faculty provide each other

The supportive, student-centered, personalized learning environment

Recommendations for Cranston Area Career and Technical Center

Continue the efforts to meld the high school and CACTC into one school with a focus on the management and organizational levels. Work to support integration and purposeful reinforcement of the curricula taught in both settings.

Continue to write, integrate, and align curricula to New Standards Performance Standards in English language arts and math, as well as to industry standards.

Maintain the highly effective skills lab, and increase the number of special education/resource teachers assigned to the CACTC.

Maintain and expand the partnerships, which ensure that students meet industry standards and gain experience with the SCANS competencies.

Continue to work through your school improvement team to develop a common vision for Cranston High School West and Career Center, which includes a melding of educational philosophies that positively connects and reinforces the learning occurring in each setting.

Provide job-embedded professional development that focus on designing tasks and assessments directly linked to the academic and industry performance indicators outlined in the standards; on explicitly teaching and assessing academic content and higher order thinking processes; and on developing task-specific, analytical rubrics with measurable performance criteria.

Revisit the existing school improvement plan, and add measurable criteria and timelines in order to monitor effectively the extent to which the established objectives have been met.

Maintain the efforts to connect school-based and work-based learning though partnerships in community

Recommendations for Cranston High School West

Continue the efforts to meld the High School and CACTC into one school with a focus on the management and organizational levels. Work to support integration and purposeful reinforcement of the curricula taught in both settings.

Re-examine the existing schedule to ensure that it appropriately addresses the needs of all students attending the High School and CACTC with a focus on reducing the impact on the learning experiences that the school is coordinating in the community.

Continue to work through your school improvement team to develop a common vision for Cranston High School West and Career Center that includes a melding of educational philosophies that positively connects and reinforces the learning occurring in each setting.

Revisit the existing school improvement plan and add measurable criteria and timelines in order to monitor effectively the extent to which the established objectives have been met.

Recommendations for Cranston School District

Reexamine the current special education delivery service model and, when appropriate, provide additional opportunities for students to receive services within their technical center classes.

Continue to provide the resources and budgetary support necessary to maintain the quality of education occurring at the Cranston Area Career and Technical Center.

7. Final Advice to the School

The Cranston Area Career and Technical Center's greatest strengths are its students, staff, teachers, and administrative team. Together, you are creating an educational environment that serves a diverse group of students through varied and challenging technical subjects. It is clear that you are hard working, dedicated, and genuinely committed to the students in this school. Your efforts contribute greatly to their young lives, and you provide successful and positive learning experiences for a number of students, who often experience difficulty in more traditional school settings.

Continue with your efforts to adopt standards-based practices that reflect a commitment to both an industry and academic knowledge core. Expand the focus on the Principles of Learning: clear expectations, accountable talk and writing; socializing intelligence, and academic rigor in a thinking curriculum. Review existing student assignments and instructional practices to ensure that they purposefully and explicitly teach and reinforce the knowledge from the academic core. In essence, as you continue your efforts to improve student proficiency with the technical skills, knowledge, and abilities needed to function in their chosen career fields, maintain a comparable focus on the academic core.

Take pride in your personal accomplishments, those of the school, and your student successes—for they are many. As you move forward and continue to implement reforms, keep in mind the human side of change. Sustain a focus on relationships to ensure that everyone feels an integral part of this learning community so that you maintain the camaraderie, respect, and focus on children that are fundamental components of this school. Continue to foster positive relationships with your students. Maintain the high standards you have established for student learning and your strong efforts to ensure that your students have opportunities to learn in school and the community.

Continue to work in conjunction with the high school faculty, staff, administrative team, and community to select and chart a course for reform. Your decisions to form one school improvement team and write one plan for CHSW and CACTC, and the broad-based representation on this uncommonly large team offer a powerful vehicle to integrate more fully the learning, teaching, and organizational structure found in both schools. Let this team be the means for melding the two schools at the curricula, organizational, and programmatic levels, for ensuring consistent implementation of established policies, and for positively connecting and reinforcing the learning and teaching occurring in each setting.

The recently released regulations of the Board of Regents regarding public high schools and two simultaneous SALT Visit reports provide you with a unique opportunity to 1) thoughtfully reflect on your school and develop a shared vision of this learning community, and 2) determine in what ways and to what extent career and technical education and applied learning will be a part of the education of all Cranston West students. As you revise that plan to reflect the findings from these two Visit Reports and your own self-study, consider adding measurable objectives and tactics designed specifically to reflect an overall vision for your school, as well as strategies specifically focused on career and technical education and on further melding these schools into one learning community.

Each faculty has something to learn from the other. The CACTC faculty would benefit from a better understanding of the strategies used by the academic teachers to teach explicitly, and assess content and concepts from the academic core. Similarly, the CHSW teachers would benefit from a better understanding of the CACTC's real-world applications of academic and technical knowledge, the powerful examples of work-based learning, and the personalization that results from the size and structures of this center.

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 CACTC. It is also a presentation of those items that, in the visiting team's judgment, must become the focus of CACTC and CHSW, 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 will realize that our conclusions, commendations, and recommendations are designed to recognize your efforts and empower you to make this outstanding learning community better meet the needs of all of your students. For that is, unquestionably, the intent of our team.

The Cranston Area Career and Technical Center Improvement Team

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Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Cranston Area Career and Technical Center

January 31, 2003

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

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

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

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

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

While the SALT visit protocol requires that all SALT visits are conducted to an exceptionally high standard of rigor, visits are "real-life" events; it is impossible to control for all unexpected circumstances that might arise. The protocol for the conduct of the visit is spelled out in the *Handbook for SALT Visit Chairs, 1st edition.*

Since unexpected circumstances might result in either the team or the school straying too far from the protocol for a visit, Catalpa monitors both the school and the team during a visit regarding the conduct of the visit.

Most often actual visit events or issues do not challenge a report's legitimacy and Catalpa's monitoring and endorsement is routine. A district administrator, principal, faculty member or parent may not like a report, or think it is too negative, or think the visit should have been conducted in a manner that is not consistent with the protocol. None of these represent a challenge to a report's legitimacy; concerns that might challenge an endorsement are based on events that stray too far from the protocol.

The Catalpa review of this visit and this report was routine.

The steps Catalpa completed for this review were:

discussion with the chair about any issues related to the visit before it began

daily discussion of any issues with the visit chair during the visit

observation of a portion of the visit

discussion with the principal regarding any concerns about the visit at the time of the visit

thorough review of the report in both its pre-release and final version form

The findings from the review are:

This team was certified to meet team membership requirements by RIDE staff.

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.

The conclusions are legitimate SALT visit conclusions.

The report is a legitimate SALT visit report.

Accordingly, Catalpa Ltd. endorses this report.

Thomas A. Wilson, EdD
Catalpa Ltd.
DATE: March 14, 2003