



Bernon Heights Elementary School

Woonsocket

The SALT Visit Team Report

January 17, 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 Bernon Heights Elementary School from January 13- January 17, 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 Bernon Heights Elementary School was the touchstone document for the team. No matter how informative documents may be, however, there is no substitute for being at the school while it is in session—in the classrooms, in the lunchroom, and in the hallways. The team builds its conclusions primarily from information about what the students, staff, and administrators think and do during their day. Thus, the visit allows the team to build informed judgments about the teaching, learning, and support that actually takes place at Bernon Heights Elementary School.

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

- ◆ *The team spent over 90 hours in direct classroom observation. Almost 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*

- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school and district 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*

 - school improvement plan for Bernon Heights Elementary School 2002-2003*

 - district strategic plan*

 - district curriculum documents*

 - district elementary progress reports*

 - Bernon Heights Elementary School binder of information*

 - Bernon Heights Elementary School self-study*

 - 2002 SALT Survey report*

 - classroom textbooks*

 - 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 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.*

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 representative will offer assistance in preparing the compact.

2. PROFILE OF Bernon Heights Elementary School

Background

Beron Heights Elementary School is a kindergarten through grade five school located in the Bernon section of Woonsocket, Rhode Island. The original building, consisting of 17 classrooms, a cafeteria, and a gymnasium, was constructed in 1960. A major two-story addition was built in 1971. The first story holds a library, boys' and girls' bathrooms, and three classrooms. The second story contains six classrooms. The 10.4 acres surrounding the school include a newly marked two-and-a-half-mile nature trail created by parents, principal, teachers, and students.

Beron Heights Elementary School and the Woonsocket School District are in their second year of training in the *Principles of Learning* through the Institute for Learning (IFL) at the University of Pittsburgh. The principal, part-time assistant principal, and literacy coach attend the sessions and have begun to institute learning walksSM in the school.

Six integrated classrooms, with reduced class size and an assistant, provide services to special needs children in a general education setting. The district and the PTO support a computer lab with 26 Macintosh computers. A full-time technology teacher oversees school-wide technology instruction for students and teachers, as well as general computer maintenance needs. Local artist Ron Deziel and students, through a Council of Arts Grant obtained by the PTO, created the artwork for the Computer Lab. In addition, two teachers participated in the RITTI Model Classroom Initiative (2000), funded by a grant from the Rhode Island Department of Education and supported by the Rhode Island Foundation and the University of Rhode Island.

A professional staff of one administrator, one part-time assistant principal, one full-time secretary, one full-time nurse-teacher, 40 full- and part-time faculty, 11 paraprofessionals, and two custodians service Bernon Heights Elementary School. Of the 546 students attending Bernon Heights Elementary School, 73 percent are white, 12 percent are Hispanic, seven percent are black, seven percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and one percent is American Indian. Forty-eight percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Twenty-two percent receive special education services, and three percent receive ESL services. The school provides a daily before-school and after-school program, each with an educational component.

Fifth grade students have an opportunity to become members of a newly instituted student council. They meet before school on a volunteer basis.

The self-contained special education class contributes a useful service to the school through its involvement in the "Wee Deliver Program."

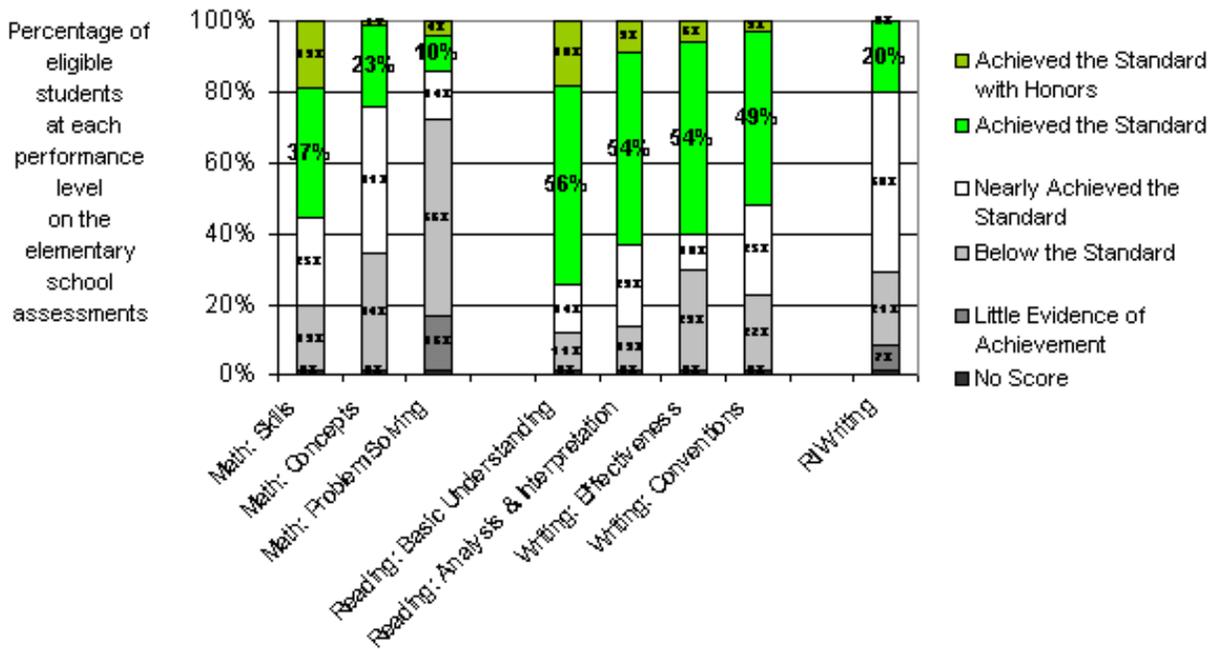
State Assessment Results for Bernon Heights Elementary School

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. 2001-02 Student Results on Rhode Island State Assessments



More than half of the students at Bernon Heights Elementary School achieved the standard in all four subtests of the 2002 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination. Of concern, however, is the high percentage of students (86%) below the standard in the area of mathematics: problem solving.

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

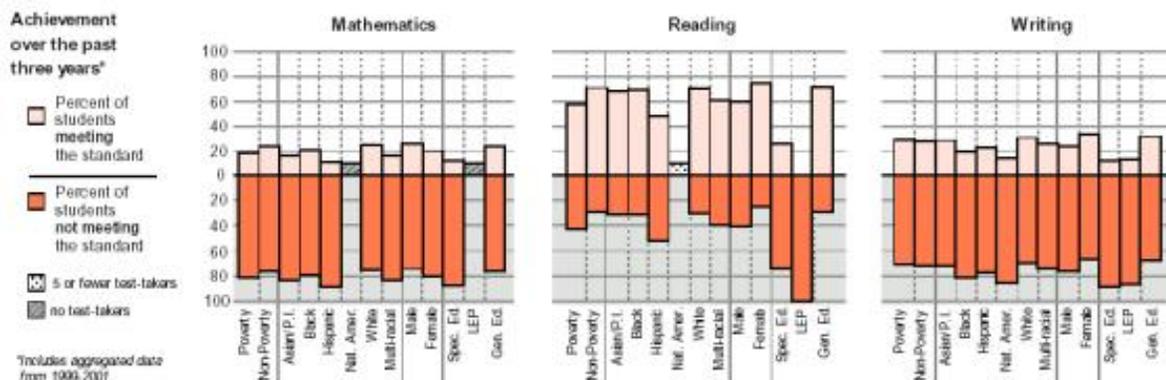


Bernon Heights students scored below similar students statewide on all subtests of the 2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination. They also scored below similar students on the reading: analysis and interpretation and writing: conventions subtests of the 2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination.

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



Equity gaps in reading exist for Hispanic students, for students participating in special education, for students with limited English proficiency, and between male and female students. Equity gaps in writing exist for students participating in special education and for students with limited English proficiency. Mathematics scores reported over the years 1999-2001 were too low to identify gaps.

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 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. 2002 Student Results Showing Change Over Time

The Bernon Heights School has been categorized as a low performing school, improving in math, on the basis of its assessment results from 1998 to 2002. The following tables show if the school improved or not in each area that defines improvement (*Yes* denotes improvement and *No* denotes no improvement.)

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

Reading: Basic Understanding		Reading: Analysis and Interpretation	
<i>Increase in Percent Proficient</i>	<i>Decrease in Percent in Lowest Performance Levels</i>	<i>Increase in Percent Proficient</i>	<i>Decrease in Percent in Lowest Performance Levels</i>
No	No	No	No

Writing: Effectiveness		Writing: Conventions		Rhode Island Writing	
<i>Increase in Percent Proficient</i>	<i>Decrease in Percent in Lowest Performance Levels</i>	<i>Increase in Percent Proficient</i>	<i>Decrease in Percent in Lowest Performance Levels</i>	<i>Increase in Percent Proficient</i>	<i>Decrease in Percent in Lowest Performance Levels</i>
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Bernon Heights assessment results show improvement in math because the percent of students proficient has increased and the percent in lowest performance levels has decreased in two subtests of the 2002 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination. The only other area in which this school showed evidence of improvement was Rhode Island Writing.

Information Works! data for Bernon Heights Elementary School is available at <<http://www.ridoe.net>.

3. PORTRAIT OF Bernon Heights Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Bernon Heights Elementary School is a large urban school in Woonsocket. The school secretary's warm welcome to visitors and students alike and the busy, colorful foyer set the tone for the day, as one enters the school. The principal greets students by name, and her open door policy invites both staff and students to stop by her office to chat. The lunch ladies greet the children in the dining room, help them with their lunches, and ask about their families. Children feel warm and safe in this place.

Hallways are decorated with colorful displays on new bulletin boards. Overcrowding has resulted in some grades being separated on different levels or wings of the building. The building layout makes it difficult for staff to meet and work together in a collegial fashion. Some special education students receive services in two shabby trailers behind the school. The stage in the dining room serves as a classroom for ESL students for part of the day.

Some classrooms are inviting, while others are not. Store bought posters and lists of standards and rubrics, written in the language of an adult, paper the walls. Books and manipulatives often are packed away on shelves and do not promote student access or interest in using them.

Instruction here is very traditional. Although it is comfortable and familiar to parents, it is not challenging students. The clear expectations, accountable talksm, and academic rigor espoused in the IFL training are goals that this school has not yet reached. Teachers are overwhelmed by the state's requirements of accountability and new initiatives required by the district. Too many of these initiatives are in the planning stages. Although the principal is skilled at managing numerous administrative details, she has not provided the instructional leadership necessary to move this faculty forward.

The limited access for cars and school buses compromises the safety of the children at arrival and dismissal times. These times pose real dangers for students, as well as inconvenience for parents. The sign on Logee Street and the safety cone at the crossing are the only signs that warn drivers that a school is in the neighborhood. The school places too much responsibility on students and the teacher crossing guards, and no one is watching the parking lot. Supervision at this time does not allow for orderly drop off and pick up, nor is it sufficient to protect children from harm.

Parents are happy here and contribute to the school in many ways. They volunteer in classrooms, raise funds to support activities, and produce an annual play.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2002 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2002 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *discussing student work with teachers*
- ◆ *reviewing classroom assessments*
- ◆ *talking with students and teachers*
- ◆ *meeting with students*
- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *following students*

Conclusions

Most students like to read and enjoy independent reading in their classrooms. However, few share their reflections about what they have read with their teachers or their peers. Children in some rooms read and enthusiastically share with others in their literature circles. During round robin reading from an anthology or textbook, however, some students are easily distracted and not engaged. Many are able to respond to concrete questions about what they have read and make predictions about it, but they have few opportunities to explore what they think at higher levels. Although kindergarten students work hard on their reading skills, many beginning readers in the early grades are struggling to master the basic skills necessary to build a strong foundation for reading. The lack of a comprehensive reading program throughout the school inhibits the development of the higher order thinking skills that are necessary for students to become successful life long readers. (*following students, observing classes, meeting with students, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments*)

Although all students write daily – explaining how they solve math problems, using spelling words in sentences, practicing their handwriting, answering questions in textbooks and workbooks – only some regularly write about their responses to literature or write narratives, poetry, journal entries, and reports. Students spend too much time drilling and practicing the mechanics and conventions of writing, instead of focusing on the writing process. Most students have writing folders, which include rubrics, standards, and word lists. Some use these for reference as they write. They understand that a rubric is a scoring tool, but they are less clear about the meaning of “standard.” Many students do not have a clear understanding about how to revise their writing independently to make it better so that it will meet the standard. Students participate in a computer class, where they do research, create PowerPoint presentations, and use word processing. They wish they had more opportunities to use the classroom and lab computers. (*following students, observing classes, meeting with students, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments*)

Students at all grade levels are learning strategies to solve math problems. They solve word problems and explain their work well with pictures or in writing. Many enjoy working with partners and groups to solve problems. All students demonstrate tenacity as they attempt to solve difficult problems. In addition, students practice computation skills, using worksheets much of the time. Although they are available in some classrooms, most students do not use manipulatives and tools, because they are not readily accessible for student use. This emphasis on problem solving contributes to students’ improvement on the 2002 state mathematics assessments. (*following students, observing classes, meeting with students, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, 2002 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary, 2002 Information Works!, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments*)

Commendations for Bernon Heights Elementary School

Computer lab equipped for 26 students

Recommendations for Bernon Heights Elementary School

Implement more comprehensive literacy practices in your classrooms.

Use the computers for process writing in all classrooms.

Allow children to use manipulatives and calculators on a regular basis to solve problems.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *meeting with the school improvement team, students, parents, school and district administrators*
- ◆ *discussing student work with teachers,*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *reviewing classroom assessments*
- ◆ 2002 Information Works!
- ◆ *SALT Survey 2002*
- ◆ *2002 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary*

Conclusions

Teachers at Bernon Heights Elementary School are deeply rooted in traditional teaching practices. Instruction is primarily whole-class and teacher-directed. There is little evidence that teachers differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of individual students. A few teachers are experimenting with newer methods of instruction, but this has not yet become a school-wide effort. Many teachers want more professional development to improve their teaching practices. Some teachers feel isolated from their peers and their grade level colleagues. Teachers control student behavior. In some classrooms teachers isolate one or two students for misbehavior or the inability to complete their work. These students often miss instruction, because of where they sit in the classroom. (*following students, observing classes, meeting with the school improvement team, students, and district administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments*)

Teachers say they are using standards in their classrooms. They refer to “the standard” often in their classrooms, but students do not have a clear understanding of what it means. The standards that are widely displayed in every classroom and in most student work folders generally are not written in kid-friendly language. Teachers rarely use criteria charts to set clear expectations and define the standard. They use general rubrics for grading, in lieu of criteria charts. Without benchmark papers, teachers sometimes score student work too generously and/or inconsistently between and among grade levels. Without criteria or task specific rubrics, they convey neither clear expectations for student performance nor incentives for students to exceed the standard. (*following students, observing classes, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, meeting with students, school and district administrators*)

Reading instruction at Bernon Heights Elementary School usually consists of whole-class instruction with teachers reading aloud from an anthology or students participating in round robin reading. Then students answer questions, both orally and in writing. Teachers do regularly read aloud to students

, and give students daily opportunities for independent reading. A Reading Recovery teacher works with four first graders at a time over a 20-week period. A literacy coach, who is new this year, provides embedded professional development for teachers. She models lessons in the classrooms and provides follow-up for teachers. Although leveled texts are available in most classrooms, teachers

seldom use them. Students are encouraged to meet the standard of reading 25 books on their own. However, most classroom libraries are insufficiently stocked to motivate children to read. Teachers do not consistently teach reading strategies, and flexible guided reading groups are rare. The lack of guided reading groups makes it difficult for teachers to engage all readers in a classroom. *(following students, observing classes, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, talking with students, meeting with students, school and district administrators)*

Teachers require students to write daily across the curriculum and for a variety of purposes. While teachers teach the writing process, they often rush steps, omit them, or do not fully develop them. Students do not clearly understand the difference between editing and revising. As a result, they place too much emphasis on editing at the expense of revising. Although a proofreading chart often is available, neither teachers nor students consistently use basic proofreading marks. A literacy coach is now available to model writing to both teachers and students. The technology specialist provides students the opportunity to produce polished, final products on the computer. However, students infrequently use the classroom computer as a writing tool. *(following students, observing classes, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, meeting with students, parents, school and district administrators)*

In response to low test scores, teachers emphasize problem solving in their math classes. All students are solving word problems daily, identifying problem-solving strategies, and explaining their work. Sometimes students spend too much time on format, at the expense of understanding the process. Teachers provide some opportunities for students to talk about math and share their different ways of solving problems. This school-wide emphasis on problem solving should continue to improve student performance on the state tests. However, teachers primarily teach math skills by asking students to practice repeatedly on worksheets and to solve the problems in their books. Children seldom use manipulatives to understand math. Students use calculators to check their answers for accuracy, to practice math drills, and, occasionally, to solve problems. *(following students, observing classes, 2002 Information Works!, 2002 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, meeting with students, school and district administrators)*

Commendations for Bernon Heights Elementary School

Efforts of the literacy coach to model comprehensive literacy components

Math problem solving at all grade levels

Recommendations for Bernon Heights Elementary School

Immediately implement a comprehensive approach to teaching literacy at all grade levels, especially in the primary grades.

Take advantage of opportunities for team teaching by inviting the literacy coach into your classrooms.

Arrange books attractively in your classrooms so that children can browse and enjoy them.

Put away the English texts and incorporate the teaching of conventions into the writing process.

Use math manipulatives regularly. Place them where children can easily have access to them.

Differentiate classroom instruction to meet the needs of all students.

Select a focus for in-depth professional development, and insist that your needs are met.

Share student work within your grade level, within your building and with the district.

Recommendations for Woonsocket School District

Determine a focus for the professional development opportunities that the district offers to Bernon Heights Elementary School teachers.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *meeting with the school improvement team, students, parents, school and district administrators*
- ◆ *reviewing school improvement plan*
- ◆ *reviewing district strategic plan*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *reviewing district and school policies and practices*
- ◆ *reviewing records of professional development activities*

Conclusions

The principal at Bernon Heights Elementary School is warm, caring, and easily accessible. She is visible in the building, and she knows students by name. Children like her and feel they can approach her anytime. Parents recognize her successful efforts to improve the physical environment and climate of the school. However, she has not communicated to faculty, students, and parents a clear academic vision for Bernon Heights Elementary School. (*following students, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, parents, school and district administrators; talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*)

Bernon Heights Elementary School is bursting at the seams. The promise of reduced enrollment has allowed the district to continue the objectionable and discriminatory practice of providing services to special needs students in a dilapidated truck and trailer behind the school building. Some ESL services are provided on the dining room stage, which also serves as a storage space for the school. Some instructors must travel from classroom to classroom, carrying their materials on a moveable cart, while others are observed working with individual students, using a spot in the hallway. Specialists and support staff either share limited space or have very small spaces of their own. The lack of space at this school impedes the ability of teachers to deliver services and instruct children. (*following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, talking with parents and teachers, meeting with the school improvement team, parents, school and district administrators*)

The school improvement plan for Bernon Heights Elementary School mirrors the district's strategic plan and does not include action steps that specifically address this school's particular needs. Strategies are vague; timelines are not defined; and the evaluation criteria are not measurable. This plan is not sufficient to improve teaching and learning at Bernon Heights Elementary School. (*reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district strategic plan, meeting with the school improvement team and school and district administrators*)

Bernon Heights Elementary School is not visible from Logee Street or from the parent parking lot that is some distance from the school. The school zone is not marked with posted speed limits or flashing lights. Students coming early for breakfast arrive at school before the faculty report to their assigned duty stations. Both drop off and pick up of children are safety concerns, but the afternoon dismissal is the bigger problem because of insufficient parking. Children run to meet the cars, that come and go, or they run through the moving cars to the street. Walkers must cross a busy street, marked only by safety cones purchased by the PTO. Teachers are placed in harm's way as they try to direct oncoming traffic, supervise the children, and manage some aggressive drivers. Additional concerns include the use of the school safety patrol as crossing guards and the practice of allowing young children to walk long distances unsupervised. (*observing the school outside of the classroom, talking with parents, meeting with the school improvement team, parents, school and district administrators*)

Considering the limited materials available in the school library, teachers respect the services the librarian provides. Although automated, the collection remains cramped, cluttered, and outdated. Books are old, worn, and uninviting. Most are useless for research. Students may use library computers only to select books. The existing space in the library is not used productively. Students who sit behind the tall bookcases are not visible. Younger children find some books are out of their reach. The school budget does not adequately support the library program by allowing for the purchase of current books or providing clerical assistance to the librarian. Therefore, this library cannot meet the information needs of this large population. *(observing the school outside of the classroom, talking with students and teachers, meeting with the school improvement team, students, parents, school and district administrators)*

The Woonsocket School District provides contractual professional development opportunities for teachers. In addition, there are three one-hour long mandated faculty meetings a month at the school, which are usually used for professional development. The district participates in the Institute for Learning, and the principal shares the *Principles of Learning* with teachers. Literacy and best practices are also addressed at faculty meetings. Using the faculty meeting time for professional development does not provide teachers with sufficient time for them to learn, discuss, and share their best practices around the new initiatives. The district provides teachers with additional opportunities through its summer academies. These district and school practices alone are insufficient to move this school forward. The school improvement plan has not identified a focus for professional development, so efforts in the school are scattered and not integrated, and they have only a limited impact on instruction. *(reviewing district strategic plan, talking with teachers, reviewing records of professional development activities, meeting with the school improvement team, school and district administrators)*

The Woonsocket School District has developed standards-based trimester progress reports to replace quarterly report cards at the elementary level. It introduced these to teachers this year as a pilot program. However, Bernon teachers received them only two weeks prior to the end of the first trimester. Teachers say they were not trained to implement this new system of grading, and parents say they were not informed and that they have many questions about this progressive reporting method. *(talking with teachers, meeting with parents, reviewing district and school policies and practices)*

Commendations for the Woonsocket School District

Movement towards standards-based education, as evidenced by the introduction of standards-based progress reports

Recommendations for Bernon Heights Elementary School

Purge the library of outdated books and materials (old magazines, records, filmstrips, and teacher kits).

Provide clerical support to the librarian.

Focus your school improvement plan on teaching and learning.

Develop specific action plans with clear timelines and measurable criteria to advance teaching and learning.

Focus your professional development activities around one initiative at a time.

Provide information to parents about the new standards-based progress reports.

Recommendations for Woonsocket School District

Solve the parking and dismissal problems to ensure the safety of the students at Bernon Heights Elementary School.

Break ground for the new additions to other schools, and provide adequate space within this building.

7. Final Advice to the School

The SALT visit team enjoyed its stay at Bernon Heights Elementary School. Some of the conclusions in this report recognize the work you have begun to improve teaching and learning. Other conclusions are difficult to hear. Take time to read, study, and reflect on this report. Then use it to help you plan for the future.

It is our hope that you will soon realize the promises made for physical improvements to this facility. Now is the time to focus all your efforts on teaching and learning. The district has hired a new director for professional development and a literacy coach for this school. The seeds of potential have been sown. It is your task and your responsibility to nurture this opportunity, create a vision, and come together for the benefit of your students.

Hold your students to a higher standard. They can do the work. Do not be satisfied with a three percent increase in test scores. You can do better! Insist on a better library and books for your students, and on on-going training in current research-based practices.

Our children are the future. Woonsocket cannot be a “City on the Move” unless its schools are also on the move!

The Bernon Heights Elementary School Improvement Team

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The SALT Visit Team

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Hope Valley Elementary School
Hope Valley, Rhode Island

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Bernon Heights Elementary School

January 17, 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 **were** not routine. During the review period the principal of the school raised three issues that could be construed as challenges to the legitimacy of this report. As a result I conducted an "endorsement investigation" into the challenges. My memo to RIDE of February 17, 2003 details the charges and my findings.

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:

1. This team was certified to meet team membership requirements by RIDE staff.
2. 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.
3. The conclusions are legitimate SALT visit conclusions.
4. During the endorsement period, the principal of the school raised three issues about the conduct of the report. As detailed in the Catalpa memo to RIDE, none of these rose to the level of a challenge of the legitimacy of this report.
5. The report is a legitimate SALT visit report.

Accordingly, Catalpa Ltd. endorses this report.



Thomas A. Wilson, EdD
Catalpa Ltd.
DATE: February 17, 2003