



Springfield Middle School

Providence

The SALT Visit Team Report

February 14, 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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For information about SALT, please contact Rick Richards at 401-222-4600, x 2246 or salt@ridoe.net.

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1. THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS of this report

Overview

This is the report of the SALT team that visited Springfield Middle School from February 10, through February 14, 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 Springfield Middle 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 Springfield Middle School.

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

- ◆ *observing a total of 98 complete classes and 66 partial classes. The team spent a total of over 130 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 8 students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *meeting at scheduled times with the following groups:*
 - teachers*
 - school improvement team*
 - school and district administrators*
 - students*
 - parents*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *discussing student work with teachers*
- ◆ *analyzing one year 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*
 - Providence One Plan for Springfield Middle School*

Springfield/Del

Sesto Lead Team Professional Meetings 2002-03

Springfield Middle School SALT Visit Binder

Self-Study Student Shadowing January 15, 2003

Self-Study Examining Student Work

Self-Study Examining Student Data

Self-Study Examining Student Responses

School Improvement Team Minutes

City of Providence School Department Documents

Standards: Scope and Sequence

Lift Framework for Teaching and Learning

Teacher Evaluation Handbook for Probationary and Tenured Teachers

District Wide Code of Behavior: Grades 6-12

*Joint Proposal of the Providence Teachers Union and the Providence School Board
Negotiating Committees*

district strategic plan

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 Springfield Middle School

Background

Springfield Middle School, serving students in grades six through eight, is a part of the Senator Claiborne and Nuella Pell Educational Complex. This large complex, comprising one elementary and two middle schools, is located in the Silver Lake district of the City of Providence. While the Anthony Carnevale Elementary School resides at the eastern end of the complex, Springfield Middle School and its sister school, Del Sesto Middle School, share the second building. This presents a unique situation in which two separately functioning middle schools are housed under one roof.

Springfield Middle School opened its doors in 1999 to grades six and seven. The school was first housed in the Fogarty building in downtown Providence until it moved to its current location when the building was completed in December 1999. Del Sesto Middle School did not open until September 2000.

Springfield Middle School is organized around teams. Children are placed with teams of four content area teachers: English, math, science, and social studies. This includes a departmentalized special education team for grades six through eight and a departmentalized ESL team for grades seven and eight. Students travel among these four teachers for their content area subjects and, in some cases, for academic reinforcement. At the seventh and eighth grade levels, Springfield employs a looping model in which students and teachers remain together as partners for two years. A class of sixth grade ESL students and a multi-grade self-contained special education classroom are the only two classes that are not part of the academic team structure.

A professional staff of one administrator, one assistant principal, 30 full-time and 14 part-time faculty service Springfield Middle School. The Instructional Coach at Springfield Middle School and the Instructional Coach at Del Sesto Middle School work as a team with the goal of increasing student achievement in literacy and numeracy. Two full-time guidance counselors and a diagnostic prescriptive teacher serve Springfield Middle School. Some faculty members divide their time between the two middle schools. This includes elective teachers, the school psychologist, a social worker, and the student assistance counselor. Additionally, the seventh and eighth grade ESL team encompasses teachers from both Springfield and Del

Sesto Schools.

Springfield Middle School serves a diverse student population of 6th through 8th graders. Of the 402 students attending Springfield Middle School, 61 percent are Hispanic, 17 percent are black, 15 percent are white, and six percent are Asian. Ninety-five percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Fourteen percent receive ESL services. Twenty-seven percent of the students receive special education services.

The faculty, staff, and students at Springfield Middle School have a variety of technological tools at their disposal. Every classroom is equipped with a television, VCR, overhead projector, five computers, and a high speed Internet connection. The Del Sesto and Springfield Schools' media center contains 15 computers with an adjacent lab that contains an additional 30 computers. The whole middle school facility is equipped with a Windows NT network. More than 400 computers are placed throughout all of the instructional locations. This allows teachers and students access to documents from any location in the building.

Springfield Middle School hosts programs targeting at-risk students. Amer-I-Can is a community-based program dedicated to reaching students who are at risk socially and emotionally. The school has also instituted an after school tutorial program focusing on literacy and numeracy. Each eight-week program targets students in grades six, seven, and eight, who have failed one or more classes the previous quarter. Springfield also provides space for the Crusaders, an after school tutorial program.

In addition to its at-risk programs, Springfield offers a variety of activities for children during and after school. The music program includes a chorus and string ensemble. Through Special Olympics, both special and regular

education students can take part in sports activities. Other clubs for children include dance, computers, and yearbook.

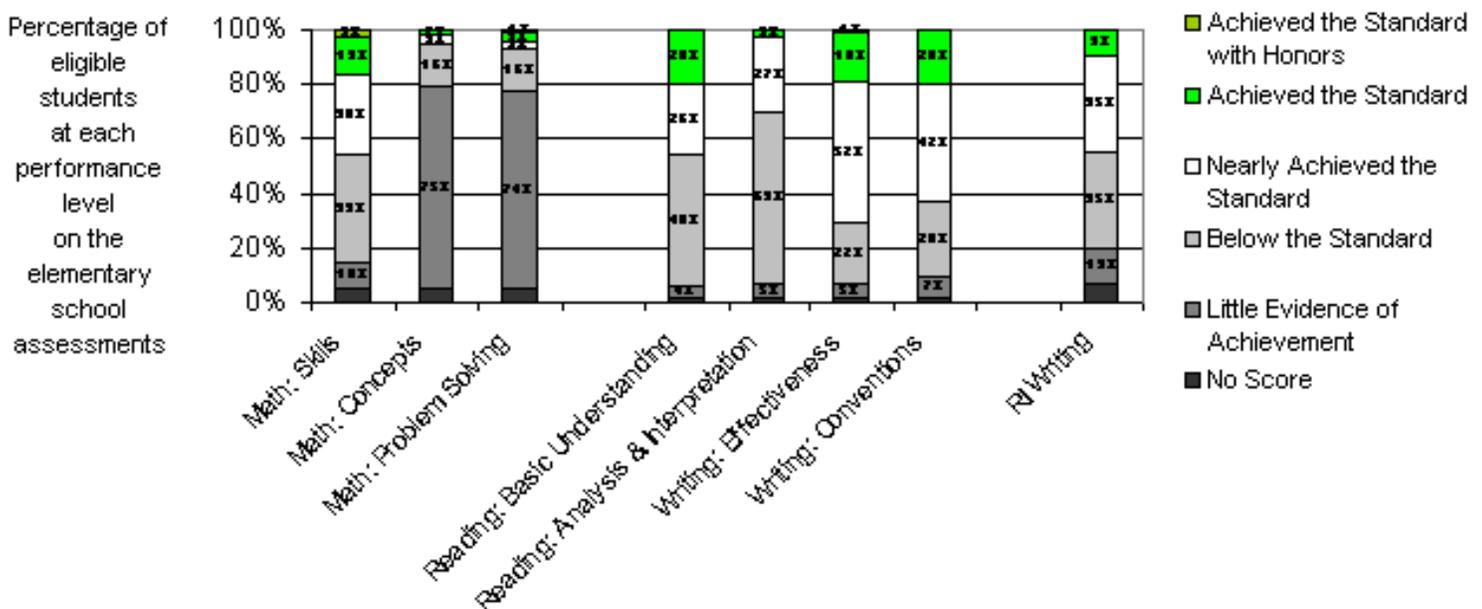
State Assessment Results for Springfield Middle School

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



Results on the 2002 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination show that more than 50 percent of eighth graders were in the two lowest reporting categories in both reading subtests. The results in writing were better with only 35 percent or fewer in the two lowest reporting categories. The results of the 2002 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination are of particular concern. Ninety percent of eighth graders were in the lowest two reported categories with 74 percent showing little evidence of achievement in both the mathematical concepts and problem solving subtests.

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*



On the 2001 state tests, students at Springfield Middle School scored above similar students statewide on the mathematics: skills, reading: basic understanding, and writing: conventions subtests. On all other tests, they scored the same as similar students statewide.

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

This is a new school. There is insufficient prior achievement data available.

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 Springfield Middle School has been categorized as a low performing, not improving school on the basis of its assessment results from **2001 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	No	No	No	No

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>
No	No	No	No	No	No

There is no evidence of improvement on any of the New Standards Reference Examination subtests or on the Rhode Island Writing Test.

Information Works! data for Springfield Middle School is available at <http://www.rido.net>.

3. PORTRAIT OF Springfield Middle School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Springfield Middle School is a blank slate awaiting the imprint of many hands. The school entrance is spacious and open, but bare. It is no longer under construction, but it is awaiting completion. Although there are many loose ends, trials, and tests to overcome here, an underlying sense of excitement and an atmosphere of building prevail. The young staff identifies its imperfections and grows together in confidence as it creates a vision for this new school. All the parts are here; only the finish carpenter is needed to accomplish the fit.

Students like their teachers. They consider themselves lucky to be at this state-of-the-art school. Teachers clearly respect their students. They are highly trained in using standards, criteria, and rubrics to make the most of their classroom efforts. The implementation of the Principles of Learning is evident in every classroom. The overall atmosphere is conducive to learning. However, persistent discipline problems and a lack of consistency in the enforcement of the rules often impede teaching and learning.

The number of substitute teachers who daily cover classes at Springfield Middle School is detrimental to both teaching and learning. The structure of teams, the consistency of expectations, and the management of classrooms suffer when day-to-day classroom coverage is day-to-day, and sometimes lacking properly certified teachers. Better communication with parents and more after school activities for both students and families are needed to complete the picture of this school as a community resource.

Springfield Middle School is up and running. Training is ongoing. Students are ready. There are many talented educational leaders here. *Carpe diem!* (Seize the day.)

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *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*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *discussing student work with teachers*
- ◆ *self-study documents*
- ◆ *2002 SALT Survey report*
- ◆ *2002 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary*
- ◆ *2002 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary*

Conclusions

Students at Springfield Middle School are well on their way to becoming independent learners. Many can use rubrics effectively, access criteria charts, and participate in accountable talksm. They are comfortable and fluent with technology. The rich, culturally diverse environment creates a positive, energetic atmosphere for learning. Students are accepting of each other and clearly like their teachers. However, the persistent off-task behaviors of students negatively impact and impede the learning of others. (*following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, self-study documents*)

Many students are eager to participate in classroom projects and discussions. Students are engaged in a variety of interesting and relevant learning activities. Observed in roles as investigators, knowledge producers, and presenters, students genuinely relish success. There is accountable talksm, cooperative work, and questioning. However, student engagement in classroom learning varies greatly within classes and from class-to-class. Variations in students' basic skills have a negative impact on some students' abilities to complete classroom tasks. The students, who finish early, often sit with nothing to do. Others do not persevere or take the next steps without teacher direction. (*following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*)

Students at Springfield Middle School are proud of their school. They have an interest in assuming leadership roles, but there are no opportunities for them to do so. They love the availability of technology. They understand

that the use of this technology is a privilege that is not afforded all schools in the state. Despite their pride in their state-of-the-art school, some students surprisingly deface the bathrooms and locker rooms and exhibit inappropriate behavior in the cafeteria. Others expressed anger and concern about this. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, meeting with students, parents, school and district administrators, self*

study documents)

Few students at Springfield Middle School report that they like reading. Although they read in their language arts classes, they do not read daily for their own enjoyment. Many find reading a chore. There is little evidence that students are trying to meet the standard of reading 25 books on their own. State test scores indicate that their basic reading skills, analysis, and interpretation are very low. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with students and parents, 2002 SALT Survey report, 2002 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary, self study documents, talking with students)*

Students perform better on the state writing tests than they do in reading. They have many opportunities to write across the curriculum. Students regularly develop and use rubrics for writing. They edit and revise their work, and they sometimes share their writing. Their writing is purposeful. They write poems, explanations, songs, reports, bulletins, commercials, and presentations, but few students write about what they have read. *(following students, observing classes, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2002 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary)*

Students understand the importance of basic skills in mathematics. For example, they recognize the importance of learning their multiplication tables. They report that they like math. Students learn and use shortcuts, but they do not understand math concepts and the strategies for problem solving. They use graphic calculators with confidence but few other tools and manipulatives. Students have few opportunities to apply their skills in math and problem solving to their work in their other classes. *(following students, observing classes, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, talking with students, 2002 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary)*

Commendations for Springfield Middle School

Use of technology

Acceptance of diversity

Recommendations for Springfield Middle School

Build on the students' facility with technology by providing more classroom opportunities for students to use it.

Provide increased opportunities for students to be challenged in math problem solving across the curriculum.

Provide more challenges for disengaged and disruptive students through differentiated instruction and alternative assessment.

Help students to make good choices by consistently enforcing the classroom rules.

Create a more cooperative, self-disciplined atmosphere in the cafeteria.

Create opportunities for student leadership.

Recommendations for Students at Springfield Middle School

Understand that self-discipline and self-motivation are necessary components of learning.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *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*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *discussing student work with teachers*
- ◆ *self-study documents*
- ◆ *Providence Schools Scope and Sequence*
- ◆ *reviewing textbooks*
- ◆ *classroom assessments*
- ◆ *2002 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary*
- ◆ *2002 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary*

Conclusions

Teachers at Springfield Middle School are enthusiastic teachers and learners. They are committed to their students and respect them. They are well on their way to incorporating the Principles of Learning into their daily practice.

The use of rubrics and criteria, the display of student work, the encouragement of accountable talksm, and other forms of effort-based education are clearly evident in all classrooms. Expectations, though clear, are not always high. Academic rigor is a concern that presents many challenges. Teachers are working with the new *Providence Schools Scope and Sequence*. They express frustration that the *Scope and Sequence* limits their ability to integrate instruction, but they are optimistic that they will find a way to do this. (*following students, observing classes, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, Providence Schools Scope and Sequence, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, meeting with the school improvement team, students, parents, school and district administrators*)

Teachers focus on writing in every classroom. Students regularly write across the curriculum for a variety of

purposes. Teachers use the writing process effectively with students. Although a literacy coach is available to assist and train teachers to improve their writing instruction, teachers do not capitalize on this resource. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with the school improvement team and school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers)*

Teachers seldom teach reading strategies. They read texts aloud to students to help them with their understanding. However, they do not spend enough time activating students' prior knowledge. Few teachers take advantage of the services of the literacy coach to improve student reading. Although the 25-book standard is posted in the classrooms, there is no evidence that teachers require students to meet that standard. Students have few opportunities for self-selected reading during the school day. Academic Reinforcement Class (ARC) and reading classes for students below grade level do not address the basic reading skills and strategies required to produce successful readers. As implemented, ARC is not a sufficient intervention to improve student performance on state tests. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with the school improvement team and school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, 2002 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary)*

Teachers use some components of the *Connected Math Program (CMP)* at all levels. The district continues to offer training and support in implementing this program. Because this program is new, teachers feel a need to fill in the gaps of knowledge by utilizing a traditional approach that emphasizes skill building but that hinders concept development. Teachers post rubrics and problem solving guides, but few assign problem-solving activities. Additionally, there is little evidence of math problem solving across the curriculum. This contributes to low performance on state tests. Springfield Middle School has an appropriate tool in the *Connected Math Program* to address the students' needs and to close the gaps in math problem solving and concepts. *(following students, observing classes, reviewing textbooks, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, talking with students and teachers, 2002 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary)*

The lack of differentiation and the lack of alternative strategies to meet differing learning styles impedes instruction and hampers effective learning. Students lose the time they spend on tasks and they do not complete their work in the classroom, when their

motivation is lacking and their concentration is not required. Instruction that lacks academic rigor leaves some students with time on their hands. Instruction that is not differentiated to meet the different learning capabilities causes some students to misbehave, lose interest, or act out. In addition to these discipline issues, teachers tolerate numerous interruptions such as phone calls and tardy students. Valuable instruction time is lost when teachers and students do not use class time effectively. *(following students, observing classes, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, self-study documents, meeting with the school improvement team, students, parents)*

Teachers' classroom management techniques are inconsistent from team to team and vary from room to room, even within the same team. While teachers recognize in their self-study the challenges concerning student misbehavior, they ignore or do not effectively address persistent behaviors that disrupt learning such as writing notes, sleeping, talking, grooming, arguing, and showing lack of respect for the learning process. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, talking with students, meeting with students, parents, and district administrators, self-study documents)*

Commendations for Springfield Middle School

Respect of teachers for their students

Use of rubrics, criteria charts, accountable talksm and other embedded elements of the Principles of Learning

Recommendations for Springfield Middle School

Use the *Connected Math Program* more often in all math classes.

Increase both reading and math problem solving across the curriculum.

Work with the literacy coach to improve reading instruction in the *Academic Reinforcement Class*.

Utilize the services of the literacy coach.

Allow time for self-selected reading on a daily basis.

Take advantage of the opportunities for professional development in the *Connected Math Program*, classroom management, differentiated instruction, and *Disciplinary Literacy*.

Raise the level of expectation for student work and behavior.

Increase time students spend on task by using differentiated instruction.

Continue your efforts to integrate instruction.

Limit classroom interruptions.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *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*
- ◆ *Springfield Middle School Providence One Plan*
- ◆ *self-study documents*
- ◆ *Springfield Middle School Handbook*
- ◆ *school improvement team minutes*
- ◆ *SALT binder*
- ◆ *2002 SALT Survey report*
- ◆ *reviewing district and school policies and practices*
- ◆ *reviewing records of professional development activities*

Conclusions

The Springfield Middle School Improvement Team and teachers developed an honest, insightful, and exceptional self-study. The quality and depth of the report reflect a commitment to, and an understanding of, the school improvement process. This SALT visit report supports many of the school improvement team's findings. Although the present Providence One Plan does not address many of the findings, the school improvement team is working on revisions to update the plan. (*Springfield Middle School Providence One Plan, self-study documents, school improvement team minutes, meeting with the school improvement team and school and district administrators, talking with teachers and staff*)

A lead team has the responsibility to train teachers and showcase teaching strategies for *the Providence Schools Scope and Sequence*, the *Connected Math Program*, the *Institute for Learning's Principles of Learning*, and *Disciplinary Learning*. This process is designed to provide teachers with the skills they need to improve teaching and learning. The lack of both substitute teachers and common planning time limits the potential of this model. Literacy coaches are also charged with the responsibility for professional development at Springfield Middle School and Del Sesto Middle School. However, to-date, they have not fulfilled their potential. (*meeting with the school improvement team, school and district administrators, talking with teachers, staff, and school*)

administrators, reviewing records of professional development activities, reviewing district and school policies and practices)

The Springfield Middle School Handbook addresses severe behavior issues by requiring appropriate consequences. Parents and some teachers report that severe behavior is handled more effectively now than it was earlier this year, but they say there is still room for growth. Although some teachers post classroom rules that deal with infractions in behavior, there is little consistency among classrooms within the same team or between teams. Few teachers consistently apply consequences for problem behavior. Unaddressed behaviors too often adversely impact classroom learning. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, Springfield Middle School Handbook, reviewing district and school policies and practices, meeting with the students, parents, and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, and staff)*

Although the departmentalized special education team provides exceptional service to its population, these students are excluded from the mainstream for a significant portion of the day. ESL students also have few opportunities to interact with their peers. This lack of inclusion limits the opportunities for students at Springfield Middle School to learn from each other. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, school and district administrators, talking with teachers and staff)*

Springfield Middle School and Del Sesto Middle School are housed in the same building. This proximity, along with the sharing of personnel and other resources, creates confusion about identity and sets up a competition between the schools that is not healthy. *(observing the school outside of the classroom, talking with students, teachers, and staff, meeting with the school improvement team, students, parents, school and district administrators, self study documents)*

Looping has a positive effect on teaching and learning at Springfield Middle School. Both teachers and students report that it provides a quick start to a new school year because they know each other and share common expectations. The guidance staff reports that looping teachers effectively place their students prior to the start of school, thus minimizing disruptions to student schedules. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, discussing student work with teachers)*

The benefits of teaming are uneven in the school. The strong teams have a common purpose and vision. They have consistent expectations that challenge students. They work together and mentor each other to create a positive, respectful learning environment. Although there are many potential teacher leaders at Springfield Middle School, they are not used effectively to develop strong teams. The lack of team leadership makes it difficult to organize instruction and to develop a common vision and comprehensive direction so teams can share their ideas and knowledge and grow together.

(following students, observing classes, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing district and school policies and practices)

The lack of qualified substitute teachers adversely affects the teaching and learning environment. Day-to-day substitute use and/or teachers covering classes outside of their assigned subject areas destroy the continuity of instruction and contribute to the inconsistency of disciplinary practices. *(following students, observing classes, 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, reviewing district and school policies and practices)*

Parents do not have a voice at Springfield Middle School. They are not represented on the school improvement team. The school makes little effort to communicate with parents. Some parents feel that the school does not view them as partners. There is no answering machine, no website, no hotline to provide them with access to information. A PTO is only in the early stages of its development. The SALT Survey results show that many positive parent responses have decreased over the period from 2000-02. Springfield Middle School cannot be a true community without its parents. *(SALT binder, 2002 SALT Survey report, meeting with parents, talking with*

district administrators)

Commendations for Springfield Middle School

Springfield Middle School Self-Study

Recommendations for Springfield Middle School

Clearly articulate and enforce classroom rules and expectations.

Restructure student and teacher team assignments to include all students in the mainstream of the school.

Develop team consistency on classroom management strategies

, and determine and enforce appropriate consequences for inappropriate behavior.

Develop a web page to inform the community about the school's activities, expectations, homework, and events.

Use literacy coaches to strengthen classroom performance.

Include parents on the school improvement team and at meetings about parent involvement, and events around student performance (student led conferences, standards nights, family math activities.)

Recommendations for Providence School Department

Actively recruit a pool of qualified substitutes.

Identify a cadre of experienced substitutes to cover the absences of teachers participating in the Aspiring Principals internship program.

7. Final Advice to the School

Write thoughtfully on the blank slate that is Springfield Middle School. Build on your strengths as teachers who like each other and who like children. You have looked carefully at your own practice. Now you must develop a school plan to improve it. Discipline and a clear purpose will provide unity and cohesive direction.

Find new ways to employ the wonderful technology in your building. Demand books for your library. As a school, expand the concept of clear expectations within and beyond the academic. Behavioral expectations must also be clear and consistent. Use your literacy coaches to intervene with struggling teachers and to support successful ones.

Consider inclusive practices for your special populations in order to enrich all students.

Work harder to involve parents in your work. Improve and expand after school offerings. Transform this complex into a community of learners.

It is your school, your time. Create the legends, create the culture.

The Springfield Middle School Improvement Team

Jeremy Sencer

Beth Chambers

Dorie Ellison

Julie Lombardi

Kimberlee Miller

Arthur Norman

Kerrylin Regan

Maureen Salzillo

The SALT Visit Team

Carol A. Belair
Wilbur and McMahon Schools
Little Compton, Rhode Island
On leave to the Rhode Island Department of Education
To serve as a SALT Fellow

Ann Marie Borges
Science/ESL Teacher
Jenks Junior High School
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Cheryl Comley
Teacher
Martin Middle School
East Providence, Rhode Island

Patrick Hannigan
Director of School Improvement
West Warwick, Rhode Island

Patricia Wong
Special Education Teacher
Jenks Junior High School
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Michelle Diaz
English Teacher
Babcock Middle School
Westerly, Rhode Island

Barbara Roth
French Teacher
Barrington Middle School
Barrington, Rhode Island

Alan Yanku
Assistant Principal
Coventry Middle School
Coventry, Rhode Island

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Springfield Middle School

February 14, 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 three portions 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. The report is a legitimate SALT visit report.

Accordingly, Catalpa Ltd. endorses this report.



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