



# Warwick Veterans Memorial High School

Warwick

## The SALT Visit Team Report

April 11, 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 Warwick Veterans Memorial High School from April 7 through April 11, 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 Warwick Veterans Memorial High 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 Warwick Veterans Memorial High School.

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

- ◆ *observing a total of 245 complete and partial classes. The team spent a total of over 181 hours in direct classroom observation. Almost every classroom was visited at least once, and almost every teacher was observed more than once.*

- ◆ *talking with teachers for over 50 hours*

- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*

- ◆ *following 16 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 five years of state assessment results as reported in Information Works!*

- ◆ *reviewing the following documents:*

  - district and school policies and practices*

  - Warwick Public Schools High School Program of Studies and Course Offerings, September 2001-August 2002*

  - Agreement Between the Warwick School Committee and the Warwick Teachers Union, September 1, 2000-August 31, 2003*

  - 1996-2003 Annual Update of Consolidated Resource Plan, 2002-2003 Amendment*

  - New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Public Secondary Schools, Report of the Visiting Committee, Warwick Veterans Memorial High School, 1998*

  - New England Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges, Warwick Veterans Memorial High School Two year Progress Report, 2000*

  - New England Association of Secondary Schools and Colleges, Warwick Veterans Memorial High School*

*Five year Progress Report, 2003*

*Rhode Island Department of Education Office of Special Needs, Warwick School Support System Review, 1998*

*Warwick Public Schools Strategic Plan, 2001-2005*

*Beyond 2000: A Three-Year Technology Plan, Warwick Public Schools, June 2000*

*Technology Directions, A Supplement to the Technology 2000 Report*

*Warwick Plan for Mainstreaming, A Partnership in Education, August 2000*

*Warwick teacher evaluation tool*

*Warwick Veterans Memorial High School Parent Handbook*

*Lessons from a High School Embedded Institute: Reading and Writing Strategies across Content Areas*

*Warwick Veterans Memorial High School, School Improvement Newsletter, March, 2002*

*Hurricane Herald, April, 2003*

*Departmental Reporting Forms binder*

*Constitution of Warwick Veterans Governance Organization*

*GAP, Special Education versus Regular Education folder*

*Self Study folder*

*Professional Development 2002-2003 binder*

*Art and Technology Education Department Background Information Video*

*samples of student work in the team room*

*various K-12 Curriculum Standards and Benchmarks*

*records of professional development activities*

*classroom assessments*

*classroom textbooks*

*School improvement plan for Warwick Veterans Memorial High School*

*2001-2002 SALT Survey report*

*2002-2003 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 full visit team built the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 30 hours in 9 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.

## 2. PROFILE OF Warwick Veterans Memorial High School

### Background

Warwick Veterans Memorial High School opened its doors in 1955 as a comprehensive high school for grades nine through twelve. Situated on 37 acres in the center of the city of Warwick, Rhode Island, the school has experienced a great deal of growth and change over the years. In 1963 the increase in the number of students to more than 4,600 forced the school to resort to two sessions. The city added 13-rooms and a language lab to the school to help ease the crowded conditions. Also, Pilgrim High School opened in 1963, easing the crowded conditions. However, this growth was repeated in the late sixties. In 1972, the city constructed an additional school, Toll Gate High School, to relieve overcrowding at Veterans. Since this time, the facility has undergone numerous upgrades in systems and safety.

Warwick Veterans Memorial students may also attend the Warwick Area Career and Technical Center located on the Toll Gate High School campus. Students receive core academic courses at their "home school" and are bussed to their vocational program at the Career Center. Vets currently offers two vocational programs--the marine trades program and the aquaculture program.

The staff includes a principal and two assistants, 106 full-time teachers, two librarians, six guidance counselors, a school nurse, a psychologist and a social worker. A student assistance counselor, an alternative counselor and three teacher assistants assist in school programs. The support staff includes two secretaries, five clerks, a science lab aide and a foreign language assistant. Five custodians work during school hours, supplemented by five who work after school hours.

Currently, Vets provides services for 1,286 students. Of these, 96% are white, 2.8% are black and Hispanic, 1% are Asian Pacific Islander, and less than 1% are Native American. Nineteen percent of the students receive special education services, and 18% receive free and reduced-price lunch. For the last three years the average daily student attendance rate has been stable at 92%.

Warwick Veterans is making progress in improving student learning. As a result of its continued improvement, it was recently named a Regents Commended High School. Faculty honors include the Rhode Island Biology Teacher of the Year Award. Four English teachers received National Board Certification, while several others are in the process of obtaining that certification. Through the school's strong partnership with Coastway Credit Union and other area businesses, some faculty serve in externships, and some students participate in internships. The Warwick Veterans High School Educational Foundation provides monetary grants directly to teachers to better support student learning. The United States Coast Guard provides an academic mentoring program for Vets students. This partnership earned the Coast Guard a unit citation. Dozens of students benefit from the expertise in math and science, which they gain from this program. The math support center provides additional student support before and after school each day.

Students participate in a wide range of extracurricular activities and take advantage of a variety of community service and student volunteer programs. The Auto Technology students were Rhode Island Finalists in the Ford Student Auto Skills competition. Three members of the boy's Varsity Basketball Team have been selected to play on the All Division Team for Division 1A for 2003. The Warwick Vets Junior Engineering Technology Society Team (JETS) placed 2<sup>nd</sup> on March 13, 2003 in the annual TEAMS competition at the University of Rhode Island. Students also participate in the Warwick Veterans Governance Organization. This democratic group, comprising students, administrators, faculty and staff, provides students with a vehicle for "student voice" in the workings of the school.

### State Assessment Results for Warwick Veterans Memorial High School

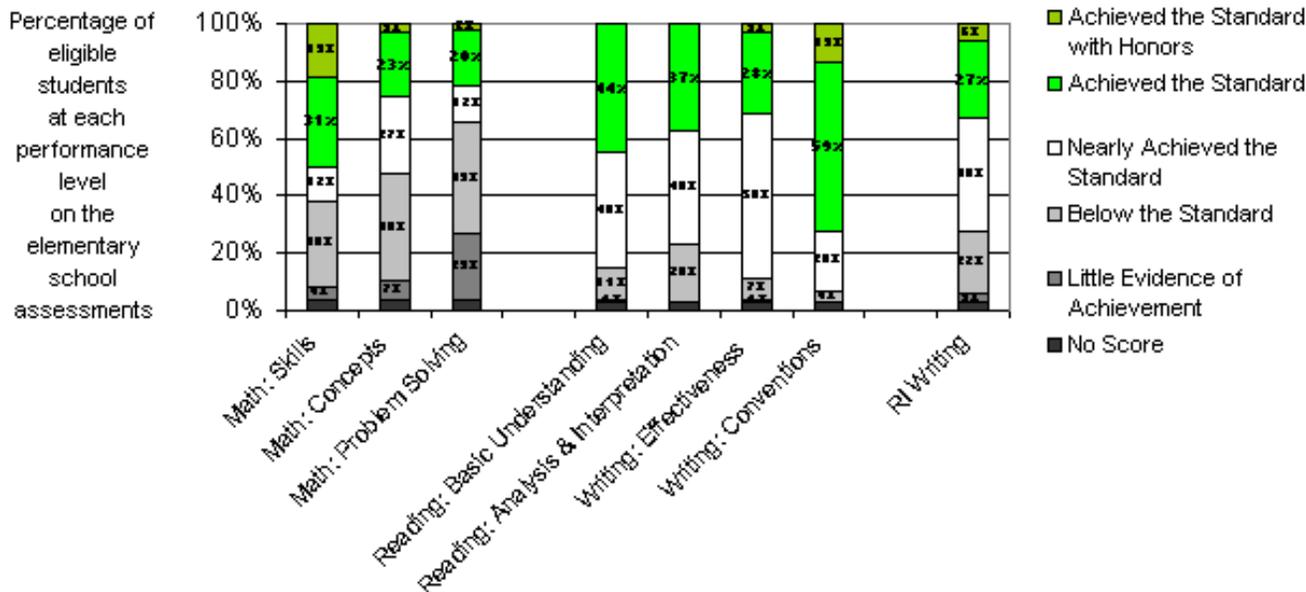
This section of the school profile shows results from the latest available state assessment program four different ways: against performance standards; compared to similar students in the state; across student groups within the school; and over time. Assessment results create pieces of evidence that 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*.

**Table 1. 2001-02 Student Results on Rhode Island State Assessments**

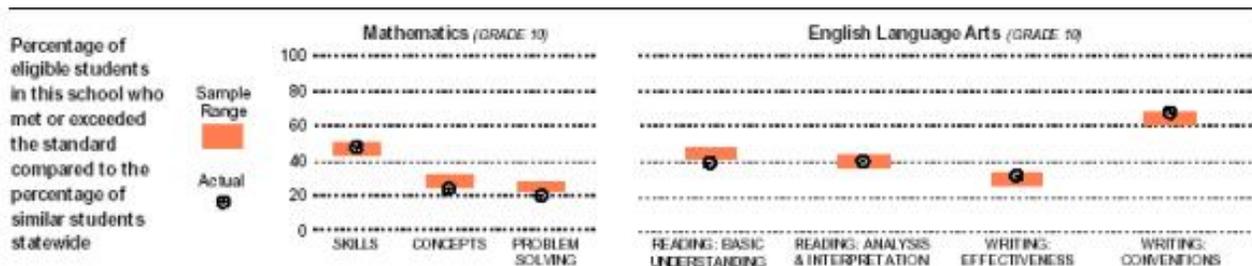


Student performance shows a marked contrast between a strong performance on basic mathematics skills and a weaker performance in the more difficult areas of mathematics, problem solving and concepts. The same contrast is apparent between a strong performance in writing conventions and much weaker performance in writing effectiveness. This contrast does not appear in the school’s reading results, but those results are not particularly strong, with less than half of the students achieving standard on either reading subtest.

**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**



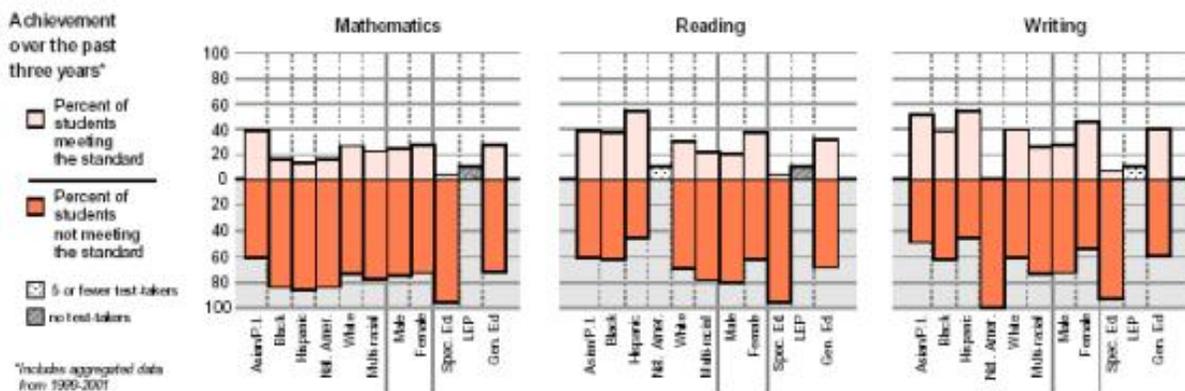
Warwick Veterans Memorial High School students performed as well as similar students on all seven subtests of the 2002 New Standards Reference Examination.

**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 exist for special education students in all subjects, as well as for males in reading and writing. While there is an equity gap for Hispanic students in mathematics, Hispanic students outperformed all other groups in reading and 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 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 Warwick Veterans High School is categorized as moderate performing, improving in Math and English Language Arts 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.)

<b>Mathematics: Skills</b>		<b>Mathematics: Concepts</b>		<b>Mathematics: Problem Solving</b>	
<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>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

<b>Reading: Basic Understanding</b>		<b>Reading: Analysis and Interpretation</b>	
<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>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

<b>Writing: Effectiveness</b>	<b>Writing: Conventions</b>	<b>Rhode Island Writing</b>
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<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>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>

The results show this school has made very successful efforts to improve student learning in literacy and numeracy. Because of this improvement, Warwick Veterans Memorial High School attained the Regents Commended High School designation.

Information Works! data for Warwick Veterans Memorial High School is available at <<http://www.rido.net>>www.rido.net.

### 3. PORTRAIT OF Warwick Veterans Memorial High School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Located on a main street in a business and residential neighborhood, Warwick Veterans Memorial High School provides a climate that is congenial, supportive and secure. It is obvious that a strong, friendly rapport is in place among administrators, teachers, staff and students. The tone established here is one of cooperation and care. Teachers have a deep passion for their students and their profession. The students are proud of their school. They “have a place” here; they belong. They generously volunteer their time to help their school and community.

Warwick Vets teachers present an array of teaching styles in their classrooms in order to involve their students fully. Even so, many teachers primarily use the teacher-directed style, which encourages students to be passive learners. Reading, writing and problem solving activities permeate the coursework across the curriculum. However, what teachers expect of their students and how their students perform often match the predetermined “labels” placed on them, when they enter the high school as freshmen.

With the help of his assistant principals and department chairs, the principal is setting the course for the school to use the standard-based curricula and instruction successfully to improve student learning. They work collaboratively to implement the various reform initiatives that this high school must adopt.

Issues that need attention include: guidance policies and procedures, the need for more technology in the classrooms, the minimal time teachers have to collaborate, and the constraints placed on forward movement of student learning by a few specific district policies and a few specific conditions of the teachers’ contract.

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2002 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *2002 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary*
- ◆ *2002 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary*
- ◆ *reviewing school improvement plan*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside the classroom*
- ◆ *discussing student work with teachers*
- ◆ *meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents*
- ◆ *reviewing classroom assessments*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*

### Conclusions

Students are ready, willing, and eager to learn. They love their school their teachers and staff. They participate in a variety of extracurricular activities, sports and clubs, and they generously give their time and money to worthy causes in the community. They are tolerant and respectful of diversity, applaud one another's successes and boost each other's esteem. Students voice a strong respect and appreciation for the adults in their school. They know they can find all the help they need in this learning community. Students are willing to accept meaningful and rigorous work; their performance depends on how hard teachers push them. They feel safe and nurtured. Students state they have a place here, and they belong. This provides a fertile ground for learning. (*following students, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school administrators, parents, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, observing classes, observing the school outside the classroom*)

Students write in various curricular areas for different purposes and at different levels of quality. Students are excited about their writing. In the AP and honors classes, many students write high quality, very sophisticated pieces. The writing engages the reader and cites text or makes personal connections. It also has structure and purpose, and it draws conclusions. These students are good at assessing and improving their work. Student writing is not consistent at the lower levels. These students generally write short answers and one-paragraph pieces, some at a basic level of competency. They often complete assignments just to "get them done" or to fulfill a teacher's requirement. Students rarely collaborate with other students to improve their writing. They rewrite to correct their grammar, not to improve their writing effectiveness. Most students do not internalize the purpose and use of rubrics to improve their writing. Many students do not practice the skills that are necessary to become effective writers. Only 31% of the tenth graders achieved the standard in writing effectiveness on the 2002 New Standards Reference Examination. (*observing classes, observing the school outside the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents, reviewing school improvement plan, 2002 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary, following students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments*)

Students read for various purposes across the curriculum. However, on the 2002 New Standards Reference Examination fewer than 50% of the students achieved the standard in basic understanding and fewer than 40% in analysis and interpretation. While students develop comprehension strategies in some classes, more typically they read only to obtain information from reference materials, the Internet and textbooks. Some students paraphrase and summarize, but they rarely dig deeper to make connections and develop thoughtful interpretations of text. Many students can read fluently, but they often do not comprehend what they read. They are able to understand the main ideas but have difficulty grasping details. Although student performance on the reading portion of the New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination shows improvement over time, 56% of the students did not meet the standard in Reading: Basic Understanding and 64% did not meet the standard in Reading: Analysis and Interpretation. *(2002 New Standards Reference Examination results, following students, observing classes, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, talking with students and teachers)*

Students proficiently problem solve throughout the curriculum and at all ability levels. They can identify problems, apply concepts, and implement creative strategies to justify their conclusions. They show competence and enthusiasm, as they work to find solutions in various authentic contexts. Students' performance on the New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination has steadily improved over time. *(following students, observing classes, 2000-2002 New Standards Math Reference Examination School Summary, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, talking with students and teachers)*

## Commendations for Warwick Veterans Memorial High School

Students' school pride

Community involvement

Acceptance and support of individual differences

## Recommendations for Warwick Veterans Memorial High School

Provide students with additional instruction to develop their effective writing skills. Use the 2002 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary to guide you in this work.

Teach students to use rubrics effectively to improve their writing.

Increase student collaboration to improve their writing.

Expect all students to produce high quality work.

Teach reading strategies throughout the curriculum to help students develop their basic skills, as well as their higher-level thinking abilities.

Encourage students to read.

Continue your problem solving instruction across the curriculum.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *reviewing Professional Development binder*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, and school administrators*
- ◆ *discussing student work with teachers*
- ◆ *meeting with students, parents, teachers, school and district administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *reviewing 2002 SALT Survey report*
- ◆ *reviewing classroom assessments*
- ◆ *2002 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *reviewing records of professional development activities*
- ◆ *reviewing district and school policies and practices*
- ◆ *reviewing school improvement plan*

### Conclusions

Most teachers successfully include a variety of activities that stress student learning in reading, writing, math, and problem solving in their content instruction. Some teachers do this effortlessly, while others are at the beginning stages. Those teachers who are comfortable with this process informally share their experiences and resources with their colleagues. This sharing practice is an excellent process for moving the reform agenda that the federal and state regulations require. The students are receptive to their teachers' use of new techniques and benefit from the integration of reading, writing and math in all classes. (*following students, observing classes, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing classroom assessments, 2002 New Standards Reference Examination results, reviewing records of professional development activities*)

The "stanine" rating system imposed by the district is so ingrained it defines what many teachers expect of their students, as well as their attitudes toward them. This affects the amount of exposure teachers give students to rigorous, higher-level materials, concepts and curricula. Not all students are equally challenged or expected to produce high quality work. On the other hand, some teachers are purposeful and persistent in their attempts to assist and scaffold student learning so that all students reach the standard. While reading, writing and problem solving are honored across the curriculum, this labeling by "stanine" negatively shapes the attitudes of some teachers and students about what students know and are able to do. (*following students, observing classes, talking with students and teachers, reviewing district and school policies and practices, discussing student work with teachers*)

Teachers participate in a variety of professional development activities across the content areas. These include the "Best Practices" monthly work and the Embedded Writing Institute. Most professional development activities stress reading, writing, and math. Unfortunately, participation in professional development is limited, and the information rarely is disseminated and formally shared by the faculty as a whole. Teachers report that they want additional experiences in standards-based instruction. In the 2002 SALT Survey, teachers ranked connecting the standard-based curricula and assessment and teaching to the new national standards, as their two top priorities for staff development. (*meeting with the school improvement team, school and*

*district administrators, parents, reviewing 2002 SALT Survey report, reviewing records of professional development activities, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing Professional Development binder)*

Some teachers use a variety of teaching strategies including modeling, cooperative learning, and “teacher as facilitator.” Teachers engage students by connecting their content to meaningful real life situations. Teachers are excited about the content of what they teach and bring their enthusiasm to their instruction. However, in too many classes, teachers still rely heavily on a teacher-centered format. In addition, some teachers do not clearly articulate their objectives and expectations. This confuses students about the purpose of the lesson, which results in their not being clear about how to improve their work. Students are not always active participants in their learning. *(observing classes, talking with students, and teachers, following students, meeting with students and parents)*

## Commendations for Warwick Veterans Memorial High School

Teachers’ efforts in literacy and problem solving across the curriculum

## Recommendations for Warwick Veterans Memorial High School

Increase the formal and informal opportunities for staff to share their new practices.

Challenge all students to reach the standard. Provide additional instruction and opportunities for students to revise their work so that every student can create work that meets the standard.

Differentiate instruction, and use students’ passions, talents and learning styles to promote learning in reading, writing and math.

Provide professional development in differentiated instruction, and move toward student-centered instruction.

Provide all staff with instruction in standards-based curriculum and assessment.

## Recommendations the Warwick School District

Eliminate “stanines” and the stigma of that label to determine course placement, and develop a process that allows students to have a choice in the selection of their courses.

Provide resources and support to Warwick Vets in its efforts to obtain appropriate and widespread professional development.

Support this school’s vision and its individuality as it continues to implement “best practices” and standards-based instruction, curricula, and assessment.

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *talking with many students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *reviewing teachers' contract*
- ◆ *meeting with students, parents, department heads, school and district administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *reviewing school improvement plan*
- ◆ *reviewing district and school policies and practices*
- ◆ *reviewing teacher evaluation tool*
- ◆ *reviewing 2002 SALT Survey report*
- ◆ *reviewing records of professional development activities*
- ◆ *reviewing 2000 and 2003 NEASC Report Updates*
- ◆ *reviewing Technology 2000 Report*
- ◆ *reviewing Technology Directions*
- ◆ *reviewing classroom assessments*

### Conclusions

Often, communities hope that their schools are homes away from home for their students. This is not always true. Fortunately, at Warwick Veterans Memorial High School, the adults and students do consider the school as their home away from home. Students come to school with social, economic, and ethnic differences. However, when they close the doors behind them, they all say this is the place where they feel safe and welcomed. Many of the staff have had experiences teaching in other schools throughout the state. Yet they say they are drawn to Vets and stay here because of the family-like attitude that everyone displays in the classrooms and hallways. Many of the faculty demonstrate high expectations that their students will respect and support one another and celebrate their differences, as siblings do. (*following students, observing classes, observing the school outside the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school administrators, and parents*)

Teachers are beginning to modify their educational strategies in an effort to stimulate student learning. The faculty does not have the adequate support and guidance it needs to make their changes systematic and effective. One activity that is minimal is the use of scheduled time for teacher collaboration about new classroom practices. Another activity that could be supportive and provide guidance is the teacher evaluation process. The department heads evaluate the classroom teachers, while the principal has an informal role in this process. The teacher evaluation tool, a checklist that is not standards-based, does not allow for in-depth feedback and does not encourage the professional growth of teachers. Therefore, this tool, which could be

an important tool for teacher growth and change, is only minimally effective. (*reviewing teacher contract, meeting with department heads, school and district administrators, reviewing teacher evaluation tool, reviewing district and school policies and practices*)

Warwick Veterans Memorial High School provides special education students with the opportunity to be included in mainstream classes. However, their individual needs are not adequately met. Resource teachers service their student caseloads according to a weighted system and the allocation of contact hours as outlined in the teachers' contract. This ultimately restricts both teachers and students by limiting the contact hours spent in those classes with large numbers of students. Also, students are placed randomly in classes with little regard to the specific needs outlined in their IEP's. This makes the regular education teacher's job more difficult when working with them. In general, insufficient support for special education students and services exists at this time. (*observing classes, meeting with students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, reviewing district and school policies and practices, reviewing teacher contract*)

School counselors are an integral part of each student's academic, career, and personal/social development. Although members of the department are relatively new to their positions, there is a strong rapport among the staff. A resource center in the department is available for counselors to work with individual students. Although the staff has knowledge of the national counseling standards, they have done little to integrate the guidance curriculum into the mission of the school. Students and parents both report that placement in classes is often rigidly dependent on "stanine groupings." These groupings are used as indicators of student success in school, as well as for post high school placement. Students say that this practice limits their course selections, when they cannot choose "above or below" their designated groupings. Further, the inability of counselors to see individual students during the school day hinders equity and access for all students. According to the 2002-2003 SALT Survey, 25-30% of students receiving free/paid or reduced-price lunch report that they never meet alone with a guidance counselor or a social worker. Additionally, 36% of juniors and seniors did not talk with a guidance counselor during this last school year regarding college or jobs. Of the 64% who did, 69% received firm encouragement to attend college. While counselors attend informational sessions offered by local colleges, there is no evidence of the professional development activities necessary to incorporate K-12, comprehensive and developmental school counseling programs for the department. (*reviewing 2002 SALT Survey report, talking with students, meeting with students and parents, reviewing records of professional development activities, reviewing 2000 and 2003 NEASC Report Updates*)

Throughout the curriculum, teachers use a variety of technology as instruction tools; however, computers are not available or used in most classrooms. Internet use is limited to certain parts of the building. Some departments underutilize technology to direct student learning and do not integrate it into the daily lessons. In addition, some technology is antiquated, and the software needs upgrading. Some computer labs are not used to capacity because teachers do not make an effort and/or because they lack sufficient training. In these instances, students are forced to find alternate means of gathering information to produce their written work. In addition, the absence of in-house technical support to troubleshoot daily problems and repairs interrupts students' learning. (*talking with students, parent, teachers, observing classes, reviewing Technology 2000 Report, reviewing Technology Directions*)

The principal at Warwick Vets HS is a true instructional leader, who firmly believes that every child is an individual who can achieve the standard. His clear vision for this school incorporates the state's reform initiatives. The assistant principals share this vision. The principal promotes participation in the Embedded Institute and the use of protocols for looking at student work. In turn, the leadership team, which includes department heads, has started to address the need to improve literacy and revise the midterm assessments. While the leadership has started to lay the groundwork for reform, this work has been hindered by district policies and the teacher contract. As the district works to coordinate programs among the three Warwick high schools, the initiatives at Vets are sometimes pulled back, because the other two Warwick high schools do not agree with the initiative. Also, district programs, such as the integrated math program, are imposed without the school thoroughly understanding what is it or knowing its implications for instruction and planning. This compromises the ability of the school leadership' to move the school forward on its own timetable and to meet the unique needs of its students. (*observing the school outside the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, parents, talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators, reviewing district and school policies and practices, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing teachers' contract*)

## Commendations for Warwick Veterans Memorial High School

Forward-looking leadership team

Sense of community

## Recommendations for Warwick Veterans Memorial High School

Continue to promote the community spirit that exists here.

Support the principal's vision that all students can achieve the standard.

Support a change in the teacher evaluation tool.

When scheduling IEP students, maximize instructional opportunities in the regular classroom by providing required services to students.

Develop and implement an action plan that provides professional development to guidance counselors.

Increase guidance accessibility to students, and involve counselors in the personalization of the high school.

Eliminate stanines to determine course placement, and develop a process that gives students a choice in the selection of their courses.

Provide in-house technical support. Upgrade technology software to support student work. Increase the use of Internet access on all computers throughout the building.

Train teachers in all technologies.

## Recommendations for Warwick School District

Negotiate the necessary changes in the teacher's contract, so that the teacher evaluation instrument and process promotes standards-based instruction, professional growth of teachers, and the principal's involvement in the process.

Find ways to reduce the time teachers spend on non-instructional duty, and use that time for common planning. Expand embedded professional development opportunities for teachers and staff.

Implement the necessary guidance procedures to allow for greater contact with individual students to meet their needs for course selection and post high school planning.

Provide additional technicians to maintain and upgrade existing computers and software.

Examine the impact of the weighted system and contact hours for special education students' learning, especially in larger classes. Make necessary changes to optimize services and support for these students.

Provide more autonomy to the Warwick Vets leadership team.

## Recommendations for Warwick Teachers' Union

Negotiate the necessary changes in the teacher's contract, so that the teacher evaluation instrument and process promote standards-based instruction, professional growth of teachers, and the principal's involvement in the process.

Find ways to reduce the time teachers spend on non-instructional duty, and use that time for common planning. Expand embedded professional development opportunities for teachers and staff.

## 7. Final Advice to the School

Warwick Vets is on the move and heading in the right direction. Due to the hard work of a dedicated leader and a committed staff, there are several educational and social aspects firmly in place that are indicative of positive growth. Because of the continuous improvements in student performance on state assessments, the school is identified as a Regents Commended High School this year. This is no small feat.

Follow the lead of the principal, who has established himself as an educational leader. His vision that all students can reach the standard leads you toward establishing personalization, increasing academic rigor, and expanding educational opportunities for all students, the norm. Continue and expand your good work to create additional student-centered learning environments; make your expectations clear to students; encourage them to revise and improve their work. Continue the integration of reading, writing and problem solving across the curriculum.

The district must re-evaluate its current practices in mainstreaming students with IEP's. It must encourage the use of national curriculum standards for guidance that will improve delivery of services for all students, as well as improve the attitudes about student-ability labeling and placement. Increase the professional development opportunities for all faculty members in order to provide for the changing and unique learning requirements of all Vets students. Work cooperatively to make the needed changes in the new teacher contract in order to provide additional support for teachers in this work.

It is important that the Warwick district recognizes and honors the courageous efforts put forth by the committed school administration and staff here. Warwick Vets requires autonomy to develop, pilot, and implement the innovative projects, programs and ideas that can keep the forward momentum underway here which will move the school toward an even brighter tomorrow. Good luck to you all in this work. You have what it takes to get the job done.

## The Warwick Veterans Memorial High School Improvement Team

Donald Brown, Principal

Ann Baynes, Business Teacher

Cathy Bonang, Clerk

Greg Bonetti, Student

Nancy Bucci, Parent

Gwenn Carbone, Parent

Bill Cilli, Automotive Teacher

Lisa Davis, Parent

Joann Fielding, Assistant Principal

Margaret Johnson, Science Department Head

Sue Kelliher, Parent

Arlene Kennelly, Parent

Amanda McGurrin, Student

Fred Mossberg, English Teacher

Janet Wagner, Parent

Lynn Watterson, Parent

## The SALT Visit Team

Margaret M. Della Bitta  
Science Teacher  
South Kingstown High School  
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Office of School Improvement  
as a Regents SALT Fellow  
Visit Chair

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Hannah Goodman

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Middletown, Rhode Island

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Assistant Principal  
Smithfield High School  
Smithfield, Rhode Island

Carnell Henderson  
Aspiring Principal  
Johnston High School  
Johnston, Rhode Island

Kim Homer  
Science Coordinator, Grade Leader, Grade 7  
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Middletown, Rhode Island

George Kilsey  
Social Studies Teacher  
Lincoln High School  
Lincoln, Rhode Island

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Culinary Arts Teacher  
Newport Area Career & Technical Center  
Newport, Rhode Island

Marcia McGovern  
Assistant Principal  
Lincoln Senior High School  
Lincoln, Rhode Island

Belinda Wilkerson  
School Counselor  
East Providence High School  
East Providence, Rhode Island

## Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

### **Warwick Veterans Memorial High School**

April 11, 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, 1<sup>st</sup> 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:

1. This team was certified to meet team membership requirements by RIDE staff with the exception that the team had one fewer members than is required by RIDE standards.

The evidence is clear that this team did put in the extra work and attention required to ameliorate any potential difficulty. Neither the conduct of the visit nor the validity and strength of the conclusions were compromised by the too small team.

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.



**CATALPA LTD.**

Thomas A. Wilson, EdD

Catalpa Ltd.

DATE: May 7, 2003