



Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex

PROVIDENCE

THE SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

March 10, 2006



School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)

The school accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Purpose and Limits of This Report

This is the report of the SALT team that visited Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex from March 6 - 10, 2006.

The SALT visit report makes every effort to provide your school with a valid, specific picture of how well your students are learning. The report also portrays how the teaching in your school affects learning and how the school supports learning and teaching. The purpose of developing this information is to help you make changes in teaching and the school that will improve the learning of your students. The report is valid because the team's inquiry is governed by a protocol that is designed to make it possible for visit team members to make careful judgments using accurate evidence. The exercise of professional judgment makes the findings useful for school improvement because these judgments identify where the visit team thinks the school is doing well and where it is doing less well.

The major questions the team addressed were:

How well do students learn at Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex?

How well does the teaching at Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex affect learning?

How well does Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex support learning and teaching?

The following features of this visit are at the heart of the 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.

The team sought to capture what makes this school work, or not work, as a public institution of learning. Each school is unique, and the team has tried to capture what makes Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex distinct.

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

When writing the report, the team deliberately chose words that it thought would best convey its message to the school, based on careful consideration of what it had learned about the school.

The team reached consensus on each conclusion, each recommendation and each commendation in this report.

The team made its judgment explicit.

This report reflects only the week in the life of the school that was observed and considered by this team. The report is not based on what the school plans to do in the future or on what it has done in the past.

The team closely followed a rigorous protocol of inquiry that is rooted in Practice-Based Inquiry®¹ (Catalpa Ltd.). The detailed *Handbook for Chairs of the SALT School Visit, 2nd Edition* describes the theoretical constructs behind the SALT visit and stipulates the many details of the visit procedures. The *Handbook* and other relevant documents are available at www.Catalpa.org. Contact Rick Richards at (401) 222-8401 or rick.richards@ride.ri.gov for further information about the SALT visit protocol.

SALT visits undergo rigorous quality control. To gain the full advantages of a peer visiting system, RIDE did not participate in the editing of this SALT visit report. That was carried out by the team's chair with the support of Catalpa. Ltd. Catalpa Ltd. monitors each visit and determines whether the report can be endorsed. Endorsement assures the reader that the team and the school followed the visit protocol. It also ensures that the conclusions and the report meet specified standards.

Sources of Evidence

The Sources of Evidence that this team used to support its conclusions are listed in the appendix.

The team spent a total of over 102 hours in direct classroom observation. Most of this time was spent observing complete lessons or classes. Almost every classroom was visited at least once, and almost every teacher was observed more than once. The team also spent a total of over 26.5 hours interviewing faculty, administration, and staff.

The full visit team built the conclusions, commendations and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 26 hours in team meetings spanning the five days of the visit. This time does not include the time the team spent in classrooms, with teachers, and in meetings with students, parents, and school and district administrators.

The team did agree by consensus that every conclusion in this report is:

- Important enough to include in the report
- Supported by the evidence the team gathered during the visit
- Set in the present, and
- Contains the judgment of the team

Using the Report

This report is designed to have value to all audiences concerned with how Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex can improve student learning. However, the most important audience is the school itself.

This report is a decisive component of the Rhode Island school accountability system. The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) expects that the school improvement team of this school will consider this report carefully and use it to review its current action plans and write new action plans based on the information it contains.

¹ Practice-Based Inquiry® is a registered trademark of Catalpa Ltd.

How your school improvement team reads and considers the report is the critical first step. RIDE will provide a SALT Fellow to lead a follow-up session with the school improvement team to help start the process. With support from the Providence School Department School Improvement Coordinator and from SALT fellows, the school improvement team should carefully decide what changes it wants to make in learning, teaching and the school and how it can amend its School Improvement Plan to reflect these decisions.

The Providence School Department, RIDE and the public should consider what the report says or implies about how they can best support Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex as it works to strengthen its performance.

Any reader of this report should consider the report as a whole. A reader who only looks at recommendations misses important information.

2. PROFILE OF ASA MESSER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND ANNEX

Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex is an urban elementary school. This school houses a culturally diverse student body of 477 children between two buildings located in the West End of Providence, Rhode Island. The main building was constructed in 1891 and an addition was added in 1980. The Annex building, a short walk from the school, houses students in kindergarten and grade 1, while the main building houses students in grades 2-5. Asa Messer is organized in a kindergarten to grade 5 English as a second language (ESL) strand. There are three additional classrooms in grades kindergarten to grade 4 and four regular education classes in grade 5 to accommodate students exiting from the ESL classes.

Of the students who attend this school, 53% are Hispanic, 23.7% are Asian, 17.2% are African-American, and 5.2% are white. Ninety-five percent of the students qualify for free lunch. Twenty-nine percent of the students receive ESL instruction. Nearly 8% of students receive special needs services.

The school faculty comprises nineteen classroom teachers in kindergarten through grade 5. Additional faculty members include one special education intensive resource teacher, one special education resource teacher, one full-time and one part-time physical education teacher, one part-time music teacher, a librarian, and an art teacher. A literacy and a mathematics coach also work at this school to support the teachers. Nearly half of the teachers are new to the school this year, serving one-year positions. A principal and an assistant principal lead this school.

Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex provide several after school activities funded by a Gates Foundation grant. These activities include partnerships with Trinity Repertory Drama; Brown University; The Everett Dance Company; Eric Buhlmer, a science consultant; the Girl Scouts, and the Boy Scouts. A partnership with Mental Health and Retardation Hospital supports a student of the month program. Several groups including Volunteers in Providence Schools, Brown University, Citizens Bank, and the University of Rhode Island provide volunteers to mentor and tutor students and offer classroom assistance to teachers.

3. PORTRAIT OF ASA MESSER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND ANNEX AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

The Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex pledge, repeated each morning by faculty and students, “many cultures, one school; many students big and small; many cultures, one school; we’re together, one and all,” truly captures the fabric and spirit of the school. This inviting and caring community welcomes more than 450 culturally diverse, but common-minded, students each day. They come here eager to learn, grow, and achieve.

Students like their school and feel safe and supported. They appreciate their teachers and administrators. While most students work hard to learn to read, write, and problem solve, only some consistently meet or exceed the grade level standards in their schoolwork. Many students achieve just below this level. They read, write, and problem solve successfully at basic levels, but they struggle when their work is more complex. Still, a third group, due to a lack of basic skills and other challenges, lags further behind.

Teachers care for their students. They appreciate Asa Messer’s collaborative culture and the support they receive from their colleagues, the administrators, and the support staff. Some teachers plan for and provide excellent quality instruction that fosters notable student learning. Many others are moving in that direction and already have many of the pieces in place to teach students effectively to read, write, and problem solve well. Some other teachers, however, are not as effective; they struggle to implement the curriculum, manage their classrooms, and help their students learn.

An administrative team that has a clear vision and passion for student achievement anchors this school. The two administrators are highly respected, and most teachers appreciate the positive and professional working relationship they engender and the high standards they expect. They establish a focus on instructional quality and accountability and work to connect teachers, professional development, and support services for continued growth.

In addition to many cultures, there are many changes occurring at this school. These include a large turnover in staff, a shifting student population, ongoing revisions in the curriculum and programs, and ever-increasing expectations for student learning and quality teaching. Despite these changes, Asa Messer seems to be well on its way toward redefining the fabric of this proud school community.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Conclusions

Students read at varying levels of success—some read well, while others do not. Some students have a repertoire of strategies that they can use independently and successfully to decode, comprehend, and discuss texts. These students enjoy reading and are eager to share and explain their understanding. Others lack these skills that will help them improve or do not apply the skills and strategies they are learning. Some other students do not read well due to their limited exposure to varied texts, a lack of background knowledge, or insufficient structured and independent practice in reading. All students throughout the school practice reading skills during word work, read alouds, and guided and independent reading. Most students say they like to read and think they read well. They say reading more helps them read better. As a result, most students are improving in their ability to read; however, these gains are not sufficient to close the gap between their independent reading levels and their grade level standards. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom textbooks, reviewing school improvement plan, 2004 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries.)*

Students write with varying levels of proficiency. Some write well and create organized, focused, and well-developed pieces that incorporate detail and address the prompt or task. These students know how to follow rules of the genre, apply skills they are learning in units of study, and use the strategies they have effectively learned. Many others write fairly well and produce pieces with many of these elements; however, they do so inconsistently or ineffectively. Still others lack the necessary basic writing skills and struggle to apply the skills they are learning in their classes. They also have difficulty transferring their thinking to writing and successfully using writing strategies or class resources to help them develop their writing. These students say they like to write, know what good writing is, but they lack the knowledge and skills of writing to produce such work. Students throughout the school struggle to use proper conventions consistently. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students and teachers, meeting with students, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing classroom assessments, 2004 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries)*

Most students problem solve well during structured activities and when they are engaged in uncomplicated and simpler tasks throughout all content areas and social situations. They know how to access resources, follow steps and procedures, use their prior knowledge and skills, and apply this knowledge to similar problems. These students work cooperatively and successfully with their peers and teachers to solve problems. However, when many students encounter unfamiliar problems or higher level or more complex challenges or when they have to approach tasks independently, they are not as successful. At times, they cannot even begin. These students are unable to apply strategies and often wait for help. They lose their focus and go off task. Students say that they know the basic strategies for solving problems like sounding it out, looking at the pictures, or referring to their math notebooks, but many rely primarily on the teacher to guide and help them solve the problem. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with students and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2004 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries)*

Students like this school. They say the “school is a loving and caring place.” They feel safe coming here, and it is apparent that their teachers care for them well and that they are the focus of the school. Students like their teachers and feel their teachers are always there to help. They also say the principal treats them with respect and “is great.” Despite these positive feelings, students report concerns about the inadequate number of books available to read in and out of school and the limited access they have to the specialist teachers and technology. Some also wish for more challenging and engaging schoolwork. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with students and parents, talking with students and teachers, 2005 SALT Survey report, Asa Messer SALT Self-Study)*

Most students are excited about school, like to learn, and want to do well in school. These students say that they are good readers, writers, and problem solvers. Yet not all of them achieve at grade level proficiencies. Some learners are successful and apply what they are learning to their work. They focus on and engage in all activities and use strategies, tools, and resources to improve and achieve. These students self-assess and take responsibility for and ownership of their learning. However, many others are not as successful. Some of these students lack basic skills, while others lack language proficiency, motivation, and the ability to monitor their academic progress, or they lack the self-control necessary to perform and succeed at their grade levels. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2004 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, 2005 SALT Survey report)*

Throughout the school, most students are polite and make an effort to use good manners and common courtesies. In structured environments, most students behave well and follow school and classroom rules. Students do not behave as well in settings with less structure such as classrooms that lack clear expectations and good management practices, in the halls with inconsistent or inadequate supervision, and at times in the cafeteria. This misbehavior creates a disruptive environment that takes time away from learning. Further, parents, students, teachers, and school administrators all express concern about safety on the playground before and after school due to inadequate supervision and inappropriate student behavior. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, 2005 SALT Survey report)*

Important Thematic Findings in Student Learning

Students:

- ◆ *Like school and are learning and improving*
- ◆ *Learn well in structured environments*
- ◆ *Read, write, and problem solve at varying levels of proficiency*
- ◆ *Learn strategies, skills, and knowledge, but not all can apply these independently*

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING FOR LEARNING

Conclusions

A few teachers excel at teaching children to read. These teachers teach basic skills well. They also inspire and excite students to read and challenge them so they come to understand a variety of texts at both basic and higher levels. They help students apply reading skills across the content areas and tasks; they require students to think and discuss their reading; and they help them to become better readers. Many other teachers effectively teach students to decode and understand text at a basic level. While these teachers teach students strategies to read words and understand basic story elements and text features, as well as other foundational skills, their instruction does not encourage or allow all students to read, think, and comprehend at higher levels. Still a few other teachers struggle to deliver quality reading instruction. These teachers use many of the reading program elements, but they do so either ineffectively and inconsistently or they fail to engage their students. Most teachers say they like the components of the reading program and appreciate the professional development and support they receive to implement it. Some wish for more time, resources, and further training in differentiated instruction. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with students and school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan)*

Many teachers teach students to write well. These teachers provide clear expectations for writing through structured lessons, the use of models, and agreed-upon criteria. They effectively guide students through the entire writing process, conference with them, provide them with timely and ongoing feedback, and encourage them to improve their work. Some teachers teach writing fairly well. These teachers use many of these good practices, but not as effectively; therefore, the results are not as good. They struggle to connect all the components of the writing process or provide enough ongoing support and feedback. Some other teachers provide ineffective writing instruction, supply insufficient opportunities for students to write, grade writing inconsistently, and assign writing assignments, rather than teach their students how to write well. Most teachers do not effectively teach students to use or apply proper writing conventions independently and consistently. Teachers like the clarity of the writing curriculum and the training provided to implement it, but they express concerns about its rigidity and pace. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan)*

Most teachers effectively teach and provide opportunities for students successfully to solve basic problems in all content areas. These teachers create structured environments, teach strategies to solve basic problems, and guide students to solve them successfully. They also encourage students to use various resources including manipulatives, class charts and materials, and peers. However, most teachers are not as successful at teaching students how to solve more complex problems, or they do not provide students with strategies to solve them independently. They do not challenge all students beyond the level of solving basic problems, require them to think deeply, or create structures to ensure that students can solve challenging problems or do so without assistance. When they provide students with challenging tasks, these teachers lead students through the process without giving them the experience or strategies necessary to succeed on their own. When students become stuck or ask for help, these teachers intervene too quickly and solve the problems for the students, thus preventing them from learning on their own. At other times, they do not redirect students to continue working successfully or provide prompts for students to move forward. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, meeting with students, school administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2005 SALT Survey report)*

Teachers care about their students, their well-being, and their learning. They like to teach here, and most say they value the collaboration and support they receive from their colleagues, the administrators, the coaches, and other support staff. Teachers express concerns about student preparedness for learning and support for school in their homes. Most say they have the resources they need to do their job and appreciate and take advantage of the training they receive to implement school and district programs. However, a few teachers work against or ignore the administrative, school, and district initiatives and policies, or their opportunities to improve. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, 2005 SALT Survey report, Asa Messer Self-Study Report)*

Some teachers provide excellent instruction; many provide fairly effective instruction, and some provide inadequate instruction. Teachers who provide excellent instruction have high expectations for student learning and provide a rigorous program. These teachers build upon students' prior knowledge while supporting them to think and learn at high levels. They have strong behavior management practices that appear effortless and are internalized by their students. Many other teachers effectively utilize many of these good practices, but they are not yet as expert in implementing them. Rather than facilitate independent inquiry and exploration, these teachers direct most of student learning. They recognize their strengths and challenges and are working to improve their teaching so that they can better serve their students. Some other teachers provide ineffective instruction. They continue to teach without regard for whether their students are involved or learning. They implement elements of the curriculum; however, their execution of instruction, behavior management, and assessment of student learning is poor. Subsequently, students in their classrooms are not well served. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan, 2005 SALT Survey report, Asa Messer SALT Self-Study)*

A few teachers create highly effective and productive learning environments where students thrive and excel. These teachers have clear and consistent rules and expectations for proper behavior that students follow independently. They continually monitor students in their classes and ensure that everyone is on task at all times with a variety of strategies. Many other teachers also effectively manage their classes and use these practices, but they sometimes are inconsistent and do not always ensure that their students remain on task at all times. Some teachers do not manage their classrooms well. These teachers ignore off-task behavior. Rather than address misbehavior, they remove children from the activity or the class. They also issue empty threats, ineffectively implement behavior management practices, or depend on the administrators and support staff to deal with behavior issues. Teachers and administrators say they are aware of these classrooms and how it detracts from learning. (*following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, 2005 SALT Survey report, Asa Messer SALT Self-Study*)

Commendations for Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex

- ◆ *Caring, committed, and collaborative teachers*
- ◆ *Recognition of strengths and challenges*
- ◆ *Involvement in professional development*

Recommendations for Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex

- ◆ *Establish high and consistent academic and behavioral expectations for all students.*
- ◆ *Work to provide high quality and consistent reading, writing, and problem solving instruction in all classrooms.*
- ◆ *Promote independent and higher level learning.*
- ◆ *Ensure clear and consistent behavior management in all classrooms.*
- ◆ *Implement all components of the literacy and numeracy curriculum, and continually monitor the effectiveness of instruction and student learning.*
- ◆ *Improve the teaching of writing conventions.*
- ◆ *Continue to participate in quality and appropriate professional development to maximize instruction and classroom management.*
- ◆ *Continue to collaborate, and improve collaboration, with colleagues, the administration, the coaches, and support staff to improve teaching for learning.*

Recommendations for Providence School Department

- ◆ *Support teachers to establish high and consistent academic and behavioral expectations for all students.*
- ◆ *Continue to provide professional development to implement and assess all components of the literacy and numeracy curriculum, as well in differentiated instruction.*

6. FINDINGS ON SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

Conclusions

This is a good school. The administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and students all speak positively about it. The school embraces its diversity, has pride in its identity, celebrates its accomplishments, and is working to establish a positive learning community. However, the students, parents, teachers, and school administrators in each building are disconnected from those in the other. The large turnover in staff further challenges this cohesive culture, as it takes time to integrate new teachers and staff into the Asa Messer family. Another challenge is the need to guide ineffective veteran and newcomer teachers to elevate their practice to expected levels. These challenges take time and energy from other priorities. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, 2005 SALT Survey report, reviewing school improvement plan, Asa Messer SALT Self-Study)*

The instructional leadership of the administrative team anchors this school. District administrators, parents, students, and most faculty say the administrators are effective, approachable, and supportive. This team works well together and shares a common vision for accomplished learning and teaching. It recognizes the strengths and challenges of students and teachers and works to create a school-wide environment for improvement. Though this team has made efforts to work with ineffective teachers, substandard teaching continues, and its actions are insufficient to remediate the situation. The administrative team says they do not have the “tools and resources” they need to choose their own staff and hire sufficient personnel to ensure consistent quality and adequate instruction. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, 2005 SALT Survey report, reviewing Asa Messer SALT Self-Study, reviewing school improvement plan)*

Behavior throughout the school is not consistent. Where there are clear expectations and rules, students behave well and learn. Where there is less structure and ineffective supervision, student behavior deteriorates. The school reports that it does not have a school-wide behavior policy, because previously there was no need. However, it is apparent that students do not display appropriate behavior in all areas of the school. The lack of adequate adult supervision and consistent rules in the recess yard before, during, and after school creates safety and behavior issues. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, 2005 SALT Survey report, reviewing Asa Messer SALT Self-Study)*

The literacy and numeracy curricula are well balanced and appear to provide a framework for sound instruction. The literacy curriculum and the units of study are an effective means to address the reading and writing needs of all students. The numeracy curriculum combines several programs that help students learn math skills, concepts, and problem solving. In classrooms where these are implemented well, students learn and achieve at proficient levels; however, this does not happen in all classrooms all the time. A weakness in the literacy curricula, as implemented in the school, seems to be the inadequate focus on or implementation of the teaching of writing conventions. Teachers also report a limited focus on mathematics skills in the mathematics curriculum. Only students in grades 4 and 5 receive science instruction, and no students receive explicit social studies instruction. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team and school and district administrators, talking with teachers and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing classroom textbooks, reviewing district and school policies and practices, reviewing school improvement plan)*

The school and the district provide a comprehensive professional development program. This helps teachers improve their teaching and effectively implement the curriculum. The built-in common planning time is an important professional development tool used by teachers, administrators, and coaches to collaborate and share and develop their practice. While there is sufficient professional development available, some teachers do not participate in areas of personal need, and others participate but do not apply what they learn. *(observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team and school and district administrators, talking with teachers and school administrators, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district and school policies and practices, reviewing records of professional development)*

Parents like this school and say their children are happy and that they learn here. They feel their children are safe in school, but they have serious concerns about safety during arrival and dismissal. They like the teachers and the principal and feel they can approach them at any time. Parents enjoy family events held at the school to promote and involve the entire school community. They would like more frequent communication with their children's teachers, as well as opportunities to volunteer in classrooms. Teachers and school administrators also express the need for improved communication with parents and their increased involvement. The absence of a PTO, inconvenient scheduling of conferences, a report card that is difficult for families to read and understand, and the many languages in the school community further inhibit parent involvement. *(following students, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, 2005 SALT Survey report, reviewing school improvement plan)*

Commendations for Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex

- ◆ *A positive learning community*
- ◆ *Strong instructional leadership*
- ◆ *Comprehensive professional development*
- ◆ *Well-balanced literacy and numeracy curricula*

Recommendations for Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex

- ◆ *Continue to embrace your diversity and maintain your strong culture.*
- ◆ *Continue to provide professional development and support so that all teachers can provide quality instruction and effective management.*
- ◆ *Ensure consistent academic rigor in all classrooms.*
- ◆ *Devise means and interventions to address and improve ineffective teaching and classroom management.*
- ◆ *Implement positive and consistent school-wide behavior management practices.*
- ◆ *Resolve safety concerns during student arrival and dismissal.*
- ◆ *Work to unify the two school buildings.*
- ◆ *Work with the Providence School Department to gain authority to make personnel decisions.*
- ◆ *Work with the Providence School Department to deliver science and social studies instruction for all students.*
- ◆ *Improve communication and involvement with families and the community.*

Recommendations for Providence School Department

- ◆ *Work with the Asa Messer administrators to provide authority to make personnel decisions.*
- ◆ *Work with the Asa Messer administrators to devise means and interventions to address and improve ineffective teaching and classroom management.*
- ◆ *Work with the Asa Messer School to deliver science and social studies instruction for all students.*
- ◆ *Continue to provide professional development and support so that all teachers can provide quality instruction and effective management.*

7. FINAL ADVICE TO ASA MESSER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND ANNEX

Accept this report as being a true and fair representation of your school. Use this report to write a school improvement plan that accurately addresses the needs of your school community. Use this as an opportunity to strengthen your already strong school culture.

Have the expectation that every student at Asa Messer can learn, think, read, write, and problem solve at high levels. Provide all students with a quality education that allows them to grow and achieve at these high levels.

Work together to set high and consistent expectations for both learning and behavior. Work together to provide quality instruction in safe, challenging, and structured environments. Be truly reflective on your own teaching and classroom management, and be willing to build on your strengths.

A community of learners requires growth and, at times, change. You already have many of the pieces in place. Unite as a team to continue to put it all together. Your students deserve no less.

ENDORSEMENT OF SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex

March 10, 2006

How SALT visit reports are endorsed

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) contracts with Catalpa Ltd. to monitor all SALT school visits and to examine each SALT visit team report to determine whether it should be endorsed as a legitimate SALT school visit report. Catalpa Ltd. monitors the preparations for the visit, the actual conduct of the visit and the post-visit preparation of the final report. This includes observing the team at work, maintaining close contact with the chair during the visit and archiving all of the documents associated with a visit. Catalpa Ltd. carefully reviews the text of the final report to make sure that the conclusions and the report itself meet their respective tests at a satisfactory level. The endorsement decision is based on the procedures and criteria specified in *Protocol for Catalpa Ltd. Endorsement of SALT School Visit Reports*².

The *SALT Visit Protocol*, which describes the purposes, procedures and standards for the conduct of the SALT school visit, is the basis for report endorsement. The SALT visit protocol is based upon the principles and procedures of *Practice-based Inquiry*^{®3} that are based on a 160-year-old tradition of peer visits that governments and accreditation agencies continue to use to assess the performance of schools.

The *SALT Visit Protocol*⁴ requires that all SALT visits be conducted at an exceptionally high standard of rigor. Yet, because visits are “real-life” interactive events, it is impossible to control all of the unexpected circumstances that might arise. Nevertheless most of the unexpected things that happen do not challenge the legitimacy of the visit. Teams and schools adapt well to most surprises and maintain the rigor of the visit inquiry.

Catalpa Ltd. made its judgment decision about the legitimacy of this report by collecting evidence from the conduct of this visit to answer 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 that are specified in the visit protocol? (Are the conclusions important, accurate and set in present, do they show the team’s judgment?)

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

² See *The Handbook for Chairs of the SALT School Visit, 2nd Edition*. This handbook includes the SALT Visit Protocol and many guidance documents for chairs, schools and RIDE. It is available from the SALT Project Office and Catalpa.

³ Practice-Based Inquiry[®] is a registered trademark of Catalpa Ltd.

⁴ See *The Foundations of Practice-Based Inquiry*[®] (2006, Catalpa Ltd.) and *Practice-based Inquiry*[®] *Guide to protocol design*. (2006, Catalpa Ltd.)

The sources of evidence that Catalpa used for this review were: (These are the steps tailored for each visit.)

Discussion with the chair, the school and the RIDE project director about issues related to the visit before it began.

Daily discussion with the visit chair about possible endorsement issues as they arose during the visit.

Observation of a portion of this visit.

Discussion with the principal at the end of the visit regarding any concerns he/she had about the visit.

Thorough review of the report in both its pre-release and final forms.

The Endorsement Decision

The conduct of the Asa Messer School visit did not raise any issues of note.

Catalpa Ltd. fully endorses the legitimacy of this report and its conclusions.

The points that support this are compelling:

1. RIDE has certified that this team meets the RIDE requirements for team membership.
2. The conduct of the visit by both team and school was in reasonable accord with the SALT School Visit Protocol.
3. There is no methodological or other, reason to believe that the findings of this report do not represent the full corporate judgment of a trained team of peers led by a certified chair.
4. The conclusions meet the established tests for conclusions. They are important, supported by evidence from practice, set in the present, and they show the team's judgment.
5. The report meets the criteria for a report. It is fair, persuasive and potentially useful to the school.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Wilson".

Thomas A. Wilson, Ed.D.

Catalpa Ltd.

March 30, 2006

REPORT APPENDIX

Sources of Evidence for This Report

In order to write this report the team examined test scores, student work, and other documents related to this school. The school improvement plan for Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex 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 built its conclusions primarily from information about what the students, staff, and administrators think and do during their day. Thus, this visit allowed the team to build informed judgments about the teaching, learning and support that actually takes place at Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex.

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

- ◆ *observing classes directly*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *following 7 students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *meeting at scheduled times with the following groups:*
 - teachers*
 - school improvement team*
 - school and district administrators*
 - students*
 - parents*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *analyzing state assessment results as reported in Information Works!*
- ◆ *reviewing the following documents:*
 - district and school policies and practices
 - records of professional development activities
 - classroom assessments
 - school improvement plan for Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex
 - district strategic plan
 - 2004 SALT Survey report
 - classroom textbooks
 - 2004 Information Works!
 - 2004 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries

School and District Report Cards
Providence Schools, Student Success Resource Guide
Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening Binder
READ 180 Binder
Asa Messer Professional Development Binder
Asa Messer SALT Self-Study Binder
All About Asa Messer Binder

State Assessment Results for Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex

Assessment results create sources 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 about the school. It also uses this evidence, along with other evidence, to draw conclusions about those issues.

This school's results are from the latest available state assessment information. It is presented here in three different ways:

- against performance standards,
- across student groups within the school, and
- over time.

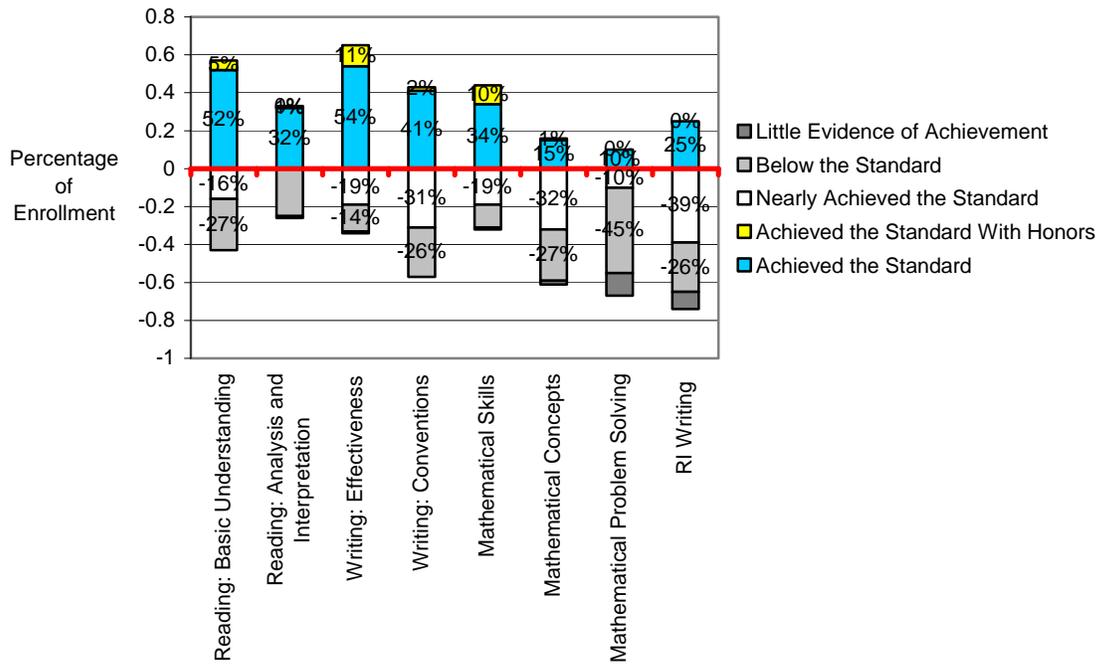
Information Works! data for Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex is available at [/www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu/2005/default.asp](http://www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu/2005/default.asp).

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. 2003-04 Student Results on Rhode Island State Assessments

Asa Messer Elementary School State Assessment Results of 2004



Report Card for Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex

In 2005, schools were classified by their attendance rate. Using this measure, this report card describes Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex as *Made Adequate Yearly Progress*.

The 2004 Report Card shows the performance of Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex compared to the school’s annual measurable objectives (AMO). This report card describes Asa Messer Elementary School and Annex as a *School in Need of Improvement/Making Progress*.

Index Proficiency Score, 2002-04	English Language Arts Target score: 76.1				MATHEMATICS Target score: 61.7			
	this School	Target Met?	this District	the State	this School	Target Met?	this District	the State
All Students	76.9	YES	74.4	86.1	66	YES	63.4	77.5
African Americans	*	YES	74.5	77.8	*	YES	61	65.9
Asian	82.8	YES	78.8	84.5	71.2	YES	69.4	77.1
Hispanic	77.2	YES	73.7	75.8	65.7	YES	63.5	65.8
Native Americans	*	YES	73.9	83.9	*	YES	61.3	73
White	*	YES	78.6	88.5	*	YES	68.1	82
Students with Disabilities	*	YES	56.5	69.5	*	YES	54.8	66.4
Students with Limited English Proficiency	71	YES†	67.6	68.9	60.9	YES††	59.4	61
Students who are Economically Disadvantaged	76.9	YES	74.1	77.8	65.8	YES	63.2	68.4

PERCENT of students tested, 2002-04	Target: 95%			
	this school	target met?	THIS DISTRICT	the state
English Language Arts	99.7	YES	98.3	99.1
Mathematics	99.6	YES	98.9	99.4

Attendance Rate	Target: 90%			
	this school	target met?	THIS DISTRICT	the state
	93.1	YES	92.5	94.8

TARGETS MET/ MISSED, THIS SCHOOL		
	TARGETS MET	TARGETS MISSED
English Language Arts Index Score	9	0
Mathematics Index Score	9	0
Percent Tested	2	0
Attendance Rate	1	0

this school is classified as:

**School in Need of Improvement/
Making Progress**

KEY: * Student group has too few students to calculate results.
† “Safe Harbor” - Student group has fallen short of the target but has made sufficient improvement over last year’s score.

†† Student group has met the target based only on the most recent year of test results. NOTE:

For information on targets and classifications, please see Quick Guide .

THE ASA MESSER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND ANNEX IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Linda Leach
Chairperson
Grade 4 Teacher

Denise Missry
Principal

Alicia Jones
Assistant Principal

Lisa Bianco
Mathematics Coach

Jennifer D'Artista
Psychologist

Nikki Karon
Grade 5 Teacher

Colleen Kelly
Grade 5 Teacher

Kimberly Kirtlink
Grade 3 ESL Teacher

Kimberly Villafane
Grade 4 Teacher

Lisa Vincent
Literacy Coach

MEMBERS OF THE SALT VISIT TEAM

Andre Audette
Standards Coach
Pawtucket School Department
Rhode Island Department of Education
Office of Progressive Support and Intervention
Regents SALT Fellow
Team Chair

Don Cowart
Principal
Daniel D. Waterman Elementary School
Cranston School Department
Cranston, Rhode Island

Kari-Ann Cute
Grade 3 Teacher
Agnes E. Little Elementary School
Pawtucket School Department
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Cheryl Degnan
Library Media Specialist
Ella Risk Elementary School
Central Falls School Department
Central Falls, Rhode Island

Jessica Donato
Grade 3 Inclusion Teacher
Social Street Elementary School
Woonsocket School Department
Woonsocket, Rhode Island

Shelly Allard Greco
Grade 3 Teacher
Lonsdale Elementary School
Lincoln School Department
Lincoln, Rhode Island

Linda Rivelli
Grade 4 Inclusion Teacher
Fallon Memorial School
Pawtucket School Department
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS OF VISIT TEAM

INSERT HERE