



# North Cumberland Middle School

CUMBERLAND

## THE SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

November 30, 2007



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 North Cumberland Middle School from November 26 – 30, 2007.

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 North Cumberland Middle School?

How well does the teaching at North Cumberland Middle School affect learning?

How well does North Cumberland Middle School 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 North Cumberland Middle School 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 the team observed and considered. It 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®<sup>1</sup> (Catalpa Ltd.). The detailed *Handbook for Chairs of the SALT School Visit, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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](http://www.Catalpa.org). Contact Rick Richards at (401) 222-8401 or [rick.richards@ride.ri.gov](mailto: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 more than 138 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. Team members had conversations with various teachers and staff for a total of 72 hours.

The full visit team built the conclusions, commendations and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 29.5 hours in team meetings spanning the five days of the visit. This 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 North Cumberland Middle School 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.*

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<sup>1</sup> 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 begin the process. With support from the Cumberland School Department School Improvement Coordinator and from SALT fellows, the school improvement team should carefully decide what changes it wants to make in learning and teaching and within the school and how it can amend its School Improvement Plan to reflect these decisions.

The Cumberland school district, RIDE and the public should consider what the report says or implies about how they can best support North Cumberland Middle School 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 NORTH CUMBERLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL

North Cumberland Middle School is one of two middle schools in the town of Cumberland, Rhode Island. The school first opened in 1971 to serve middle school students in the northern part of town. Due to increasing enrollment, an addition was constructed in 1994. There have not been any major upgrades to the school's infrastructure since that time.

The school currently serves 691 students in grades six through eight. The ethnic breakdown of the student body is: 96% White, 1% Hispanic, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% Black. Presently, 5% of the students receive free or reduced price lunch, and 17% are on Individualized Education or 504 Plans.

The faculty and staff currently consist of 50 full- and part-time teachers, two guidance counselors, a school nurse teacher, a part-time school psychologist, a part-time social worker, nine paraprofessional teaching assistants, five custodians, an administrative assistant, a principal, and an assistant principal. The school also shares the services of a part-time school resource officer.

The school's instructional program revolves around a teaming structure. Students in each grade are assigned to a team and share core academic teachers in the areas of Math, Science, English, and Social Studies. In addition, a special educator and at least one paraprofessional teaching assistant are attached to each team. These professionals have common planning time every other day. During their scheduled day, students also receive instruction in Reading or World Language, Physical Education/Health, and a Unified Arts offering that rotates through Art, Computer Applications, Family & Consumer Science, and Industrial Technology. All students have a period of Academic Enrichment during which time they have the opportunity to take Band or Chorus, General Music, and Library Skills. They may receive special services or remedial instruction at this time, or engage in academic self study or silent reading. Students have the opportunity to participate in various athletic and extra-curricular activities after the end of the regular school day.

North Cumberland Middle School is currently working to align its practices with the Board of Regents Regulations on Middle Level Reform. The school identifies that it follows state and district priorities and its analysis of data to pursue this reform. The school also identifies that it has been engaged in an on-going self study using professional development and best practice ideas promoted by the Rhode Island Middle Level Educators Association, New England League of Middle Schools, and National Middle School Association. The school regularly has been identified by the state of Rhode Island as a high performing school and was named a Regents Commended School in 2005.

### 3. PORTRAIT OF NORTH CUMBERLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

North Cumberland Middle School provides a strong and positive learning environment for the more than 700 students and adults who work, learn, and grow within its dynamic and emerging middle school community. The clean and well-maintained halls and classrooms, the orderly bustle of activity that begins early in the morning and lasts into the night, and the overwhelming air of comfort and security aptly characterize this school. Not surprisingly, there is obvious and justifiable pride among all stakeholders for this school and its tradition as a successful and high performing school.

The students form the heart of North Cumberland Middle School. They are polite and respectful, and most are ready and willing to learn. The faculty and staff are caring and dedicated to their students. They work hard to provide a safe and nurturing environment based upon solid education and supportive services. The equally caring and dedicated administrators share a passion for the progress of this school and work hard to fulfill their roles as instructional leaders. Finally, the supportive and often-highly involved families demonstrate their commitment to the success of their children through their active participation in many academic and extra-curricular activities and events.

In addition to the eager students, the hardworking faculty, staff, administrators, and the supportive families, three prominent, and at times competing and conflicting forces, further characterize North Cumberland Middle School—constancy, change, and consistency.

Constancy is evident in the deep-seated regard for students and their learning as the school's central mission. Yet, adherence to long-held instructional strategies and approaches interferes with the school-wide transition to research-based best practices. Change is apparent in the new structures that have recently been implemented such as heterogeneous grouping, advisory, and middle school teaming with common planning time. However, everyone does not appear to have accepted or appear to be open to these appropriate efforts at reform. Consistency is articulated in efforts to institute school-wide academic programs, expectations for reading, writing, and problem solving across content areas, and a focus on collaborative decision-making for agreed-upon school progress. Despite some successes, inconsistency in practice remains prominent.

Several other challenges confront North Cumberland Middle School. These include limited technology and insufficient resources, curriculum that does not reflect current standards, a daily schedule that does not reflect middle school priorities, and widespread faculty frustration with contract disagreements.

As a testament to all faculty, staff, and administrators, while these 'growing pains' exist, North Cumberland Middle School remains a place where everyone works together to focus on a central mission, to enrich the lives of the students of this school.

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Conclusions

Students write to varying degrees of quality across the content areas. The majority of students write well using fully developed details, figures of speech, and effective transitions. They write with strong voice and effectively use writing techniques such as imagery, strong word choice, and clear purpose. It is evident in their work that these students understand and constructively use a writing process, including graphic organizers, to develop, organize, and express their ideas. These students use their skills to write well-developed responses, paragraphs, reports, and essays. Some other students, however, primarily produce simplistic written pieces. They use only basic writing structures, and they do not develop their ideas well. They use simpler vocabulary and descriptive language avoiding “technical words pertinent to their content areas.” Further, their writing often contains many errors in mechanics. Some of these students write with limited commitment to the task; some wish for a greater choice and freedom in the kinds of writing they do, and others struggle to develop and use effective writing skills. The school’s self-study notes that student writing across the content areas needs improving and that “too many students are satisfied with writing to the minimum requirements.” The 2006-2007 NECAP writing scores, in which 50% of the students scored at the proficient or above levels, support the inconsistencies evidenced in student writing. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with students and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2007 NECAP Summary Reports, North Cumberland Middle School self-study)*

Most students read proficiently at or above grade level across the content areas. These students read a variety of texts for diverse purposes including building understanding, extracting information, conducting research, and enjoyment. They practice and improve their reading abilities by reading aloud with fluency and proper intonation. They also make predictions and connections with text, use text features, and summarize to understand new content. Students read independently, in small groups, and as whole classes to engage with text, discuss meaning, and build learning and social skills. Many students enjoy reading, particularly when the reading material is relevant to their lives, when its importance is clear to them, and/or they have a choice in the selections. While most students read fairly well, there is limited evidence that all students read deeply for analysis and interpretation. Additionally, some students read only what is required of them, show limited enthusiasm for reading, and as such do not practice or develop reading skills. Some other students struggle to read at grade level and receive specialized services in reading, and many work to improve. Students’ generally strong reading skills are corroborated by 2006-2007 NECAP reading scores in which 75% of the students were rated at the proficient or above levels. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with students and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2007 NECAP Summary Reports)*

Most students effectively solve problems of varying degrees of difficulty across the content areas. These students gather information from a variety of sources and test hypotheses and their initial solutions. Often they make revisions when their first efforts fail or when there may be additional strategies or multiple solutions. They deliberately solve problems to dissect and understand complex tasks and concepts, acquire new knowledge, determine patterns, and gain learning skills. These students work well with others in groups to solve problems, share their thinking, prove their choice of strategies, and build social skills. Students particularly enjoy this type of engaged learning in which they are the main actors, learning is hands on, the tasks are relevant, and they have been supported to be successful. While many students successfully solve problems independently, some are less effective. These students rely on their peers or their teachers to take the lead, or they simply disengage. These students either lack the skills to problem solve effectively, do not see relevance or purpose in the assigned tasks, or have limited opportunities and practice to become successful problem solvers. The school's self-study identifies the new math program as one action that has supported improvement in student problem solving skills. The SALT team observed this connection and consistently observed many students applying such skills in other content areas and in social situations. Further practice and support for problem solving are necessary for all students to grow in this area. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with students, parents, and school administrators, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2007 NECAP Summary Reports, North Cumberland Middle School self-study)*

Students are eager to learn and enjoy coming to this school. They are well-prepared, organized for learning, and enjoy participating actively in classes. They particularly appreciate hands on learning that is meaningful and relevant to them. They also enjoy working in groups to share information and learn from one another. Students report that they enjoy classes in which they have a voice and are able to have input into their learning, materials, activities, and tasks. They also report that neither all classes nor all school work is challenging and/or meaningful to them. Many students are bored when class time is not used to its fullest potential, work is rote and disconnected, and/or instruction is delivered primarily through teacher talk and direction. This dampens many students' enthusiasm and curiosity while also inhibiting all students from learning to their fullest potential. The school's self-study notes students' general satisfaction with their school, but it similarly identifies student concerns such as a desire to have a greater choice in their learning activities, and less repetition and review of topics. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with school improvement team, students, parents, and school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing classroom textbooks, 2007 InfoWorks!, 2007 SALT Survey report, reviewing district and school policies and practices, 2007 NECAP Summary Reports, North Cumberland Middle School self-study)*

Students are incredibly polite, friendly, and happy. They are well-behaved in classrooms and throughout the school. They are self-directed and respond to redirection when necessary. They feel very safe and are respectful of adults, their peers, themselves, and their school. The school's self-study simply states that "all students feel respected by the peers and school personnel." Students have pride in North Cumberland Middle School and show this pride by their proper behavior, positive demeanor, and their regular wearing of North Cumberland Middle School attire. Despite this, some students do not enjoy school as much as others. Some feel limited by tracked classes that articulate lower behavioral and academic expectations, and they regularly feature disruptive and disengaged behaviors that interfere with learning. The self-study also communicates parental concerns about tracked classes: "parents like having their children in honors classes, don't like having their child in the fundamental classes." Some other students feel that some of their teachers are not responsive to their individual questions and needs. Due to these different views, while most students feel connected and well-served, some others fall between the cracks of this otherwise caring community. (*following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with school improvement team, students, parents, and school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, 2007 InfoWorks!, 2007 SALT Survey report, reviewing district and school policies and practices, North Cumberland Middle School self-study*)

### Important Thematic Findings in Student Learning

Students:

- ◆ *Enjoy coming to school, and are eager and prepared to learn*
- ◆ *Read, write, and problem solve to varying degrees of proficiency*
- ◆ *Work well in groups, and take advantage of opportunities to learn from one another*
- ◆ *Enjoy hands on learning that is authentic and relevant and that has purpose*
- ◆ *Appreciate having a choice in their learning activities and wish for more*
- ◆ *Are limited by inconsistent levels of expectations and opportunities to do challenging work*

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING FOR LEARNING

### Conclusions

While all teachers require students to write, they inconsistently prioritize and teach writing. Some teachers specifically and successfully teach their students how to write well within their content areas and through a variety of genres. They model good writing, utilize graphic organizers, provide multiple practice opportunities, teach and require editing and revisions, and offer students helpful feedback. These teachers often inspire their students to write by providing visual prompts, real-life connections, and/or choice in topics or assignments. With enthusiasm, these teachers encourage students to share their writing, improve over time, and develop reflective and critical thinking through written work. However, the majority of teachers provide little or no direct instruction of writing within their content areas. They also tend to assign writing tasks that emphasize basic understanding and factual recall and focus on grammar and mechanics, rather than on developing deep understanding and critical analysis. Due to these inconsistencies, some teachers expect, require, and support students to produce strong writing that contains developed ideas and creative, analytical, or reflective writing. Others expect and accept much less. The school self-study notes that writing is “the area with the least proficient students” and offers several appropriate suggestions for ongoing improvement. These include increasing the expectations for writing across the content areas and at all grade levels, expanded and consistent integrated writing tasks, greater alignment with the GLEs, increased models of quality writing, effective feedback, and peer editing. Each of these holds promise for progress in this area. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with students and parents, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, North Cumberland Middle School self-study)*

Almost all teachers articulate the importance of reading to their students and require them to read in all content areas. Due in part to this, reading is a common practice for most students, and most read fairly well. Only some teachers across content areas, however, explicitly teach students how to improve their reading skills and deepen their understanding through reading. These teachers deliberately teach students how to dissect text using before, during, and post-reading strategies or other content-specific approaches. They effectively teach and support students to develop their reading skills by using text and picture clues, by making predictions and connections, and by summarizing, and extracting pertinent information. Most teachers, however, assign reading to students primarily assuming that they already have adequate reading skills. Further, some teachers teach reading through ineffective, teacher-directed instructional strategies. They emphasize basic recall and comprehension over analysis and interpretation. These teachers also provide students with limited opportunities for meaningful and engaged discussion and analysis of text. As such, many students miss opportunities to improve, become more critical readers, and develop greater enthusiasm for reading. The school's self-study identifies an important area of concern that may merit action in order to support all students to become more accomplished readers: "They (students) reported that they do not read newspapers, magazines, or books outside of school." (*following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with school improvement team, students, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing classroom textbooks, reviewing district and school policies and practices, North Cumberland Middle School self-study*)

Most teachers teach problem solving well in all content areas and provide students with many opportunities to practice and improve. They effectively model strategies to solve problems such as solving simpler problems, brainstorming, looking for patterns, role playing, using manipulatives, acting it out, and developing formulas. They encourage and often require students to think independently and creatively to find solutions to problems. These teachers intentionally act as facilitators and carefully guide their students through questioning to learn through inquiry and investigation. To promote collaborative learning, they structure activities so that students share multiple strategies and solutions to expand and develop their understanding. However, some teachers do not emphasize problem solving or teach in a way that promotes these skills. They tend to over-rely on teacher directed instruction that does not require, promote, or allow students to problem solve and critically think. At times, some teachers, including those who teach problem solving well, also lack confidence and expect less of students in the lower tracked classes, and provide them with limited opportunities to problem solve. As such, not all students have access to rich opportunities to grow as problem solvers through active and engaged learning. (*following students, observing classes, meeting with students and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing classroom textbooks, reviewing records of professional development, reviewing district and school policies and practices*)

Most teachers are hard working, dedicated, and caring professionals. They have the students' best interests in mind. The school's self-study team similarly notes that "educators are very caring and supportive of students' needs and concerns." They enjoy teaching at this school and are proud of the safe and supportive learning environment they have helped to create. They are mostly positive and respectful of students, their families, one another, and the school administrators. They are highly invested in their school and feel ownership for its success. Despite these positive feelings, some teachers have concerns, apprehensions, and doubts about change or the need for change, district support, communication, voice, and the evolving direction of this school. Overall, the teachers are a constant strength of North Cumberland Middle School, as it moves forward through making the numerous changes necessary to better educate all students. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with school improvement team, students, parents, and school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, 2007 InfoWorks!, North Cumberland Middle School self-study)*

While most teachers work hard at this school, there are inconsistencies in teaching, planning for instruction, expectations, and classroom management. Many teachers plan and implement effective lessons that support student learning. These teachers encourage all students to engage actively, and they communicate and hold all students to high academic and behavioral expectations. They recognize the importance of teaching their content areas, as well as skill development, problem solving, and critical thinking. Importantly, these teachers consistently design and deliver instruction that respects the varied learning styles of their students, and they work hard to challenge and engage all learners. Many other teachers, however, deliver traditional instruction that is primarily teacher-directed and based on singular instructional strategies. They frequently do not maximize their available instructional time. They also have inconsistent and at times lower academic and behavioral expectations of some students. Many of these teachers focus almost exclusively on content knowledge and disregard higher order thinking and varied student learning styles. As such, these teachers miss opportunities to challenge all students and engage and interest them in learning. The school's self-study clearly articulates that the immediate work ahead of this school is to provide more effective instruction for all students: "21<sup>st</sup> century teaching calls for a shift in instructional practices." While this work has begun, it remains incomplete. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with school improvement team, students, parents, and school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district and school policies and practices, reviewing records of professional development, North Cumberland Middle School self-study)*

### Commendations for North Cumberland Middle School

- ◆ *Hardworking, dedicated professionals who care for their students and the school*
- ◆ *Teachers who create welcoming, caring, and supportive learning environments*
- ◆ *Effective teaching and the application of problem solving across the content areas*

### Recommendations for North Cumberland Middle School

- ◆ *Continue to be hardworking, caring, and dedicated professionals to provide a safe and supportive learning environment.*
- ◆ *Continue to participate in on-going and job-embedded professional development that is already occurring within your school and your professional learning communities. Work with the school and district to determine any additional needs to improve the quality and consistency of instruction.*
- ◆ *Recognize that the teaching of reading, writing, and problem solving is a shared responsibility across all content areas. Identify and expand upon the best practices that are already happening within the school, and use these as a model and guide for necessary improvement.*
- ◆ *Increase academic rigor, promote higher-order thinking skills, prioritize student-centered learning, and ensure that all students have access to the same challenging and meaningful curriculum.*
- ◆ *Increase the use of varied instructional strategies to actively engage and successfully teach students with varied learning styles and needs.*
- ◆ *Ensure that consistently high academic and behavioral expectations are embraced by all faculty and clearly communicated to the entire the entire school community.*
- ◆ *Examine current practices of planning, instruction, classroom time use, and student engagement to maximize the effectiveness of lessons and teaching opportunities.*

### Recommendations for Cumberland School District

- ◆ *Continue to support on-going and job-embedded professional development and the professional learning communities at this school. Work with the faculty and staff to determine and provide any additional professional development necessary to improve the quality and consistency of instruction.*
- ◆ *Continue to work with the faculty and staff to promote the teaching of reading, writing, and problem solving across the content areas and to ensure high academic and behavioral expectations for all students.*

## 6. FINDINGS ON SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

### Conclusions

This is a proud, caring, and positive learning community. The building is impeccably clean, orderly, and well-maintained. Through the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders, North Cumberland Middle School is a good school and appropriately identified as high performing. Recognizing that work is never finished, this school community is striving to reform and improve itself. As the work of change is often not easy or well-received, reform has at times stressed relationships, trust, and commitment to the vision and mission of this school. Additionally, concerns with contractual issues and trust in the central office have negatively impacted morale. The commitment, perseverance and continuing effort of all stakeholders toward achieving the common goal of all students meeting proficiency is necessary to ensure the school's status as a high performing school. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with school improvement team, students, parents, and school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, and school district administrators, reviewing school improvement plan, 2007 InfoWorks!, reviewing district and school policies and practices, 2007 NECAP Summary Reports, reviewing records of professional development)*

This school is engaged in a variety of efforts to implement middle school reform. These reform efforts include heterogeneous grouping, middle school teaming with common planning time, and advisory. Collectively, these efforts represent necessary changes to advance learning and teaching. Each of these efforts is a work in progress and meets with varied support, success, and acceptance. Heterogeneous grouping in the sixth grade, to be rolled out into the seventh and eighth grades in successive years, allows equal access for all students to a rigorous curriculum and high expectations. Middle school teaming with common planning time, when utilized effectively, provides an effective means for faculty and staff to coordinate and plan instruction and student support. Advisory that matches all students with one adult to build personal connections is helping to build upon this already strong and caring community. The current inflexible junior-high model schedule, faculty and staff 'buy-in' and the absence of school-wide belief in differentiation practices and professional development opportunities further delays success. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with school improvement team, students, parents, and school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing district and school policies and practices, reviewing records of professional development, 2007 SALT Survey report, 2007 InfoWorks!, reviewing school improvement plan)*

North Cumberland Middle School is led by a dedicated and strong leadership team. The principal and assistant principal share a vision to move this school toward a fully implemented middle school model. They are highly visible and accessible, and they work well together to provide necessary, stable leadership. Under the principal's tenure and with the recent addition of the current assistant principal, substantial changes and reform have occurred, and continue to occur, such as heterogeneous grouping, middle-school teaming with common planning time, and advisory. Families highly value and appreciate the efforts of the leadership team to increase their accessibility and communication between school and home. While most faculty and staff respect and appreciate the leadership team, they also have several concerns such as communication, voice in decision making, and consistent support for classroom behavioral issues. Conversely, the administrators have invited and responded to faculty input on several issues. This discrepancy of views inhibits the important progress this school is making. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with school improvement team, students, parents, and school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing records of professional development, reviewing district and school policies and practices, 2007 InfoWorks!)*

The curriculum binders presented to the SALT visiting team do not represent a coherent and well-sequenced curriculum. Although copies of the GLEs and GSE were included in some of the binders, most curricula appear out-dated and do not reference or integrate current GLE and GSE standards. As these documents do not provide clear curricula direction, classroom instruction is often inconsistent, at times redundant, and driven primarily by textbooks. Due in part to the insufficient curriculum, there is an absence of clear, consistent, and high valid teaching and learning targets defined by standards to coordinate instruction. This insufficient curriculum may also inhibit meaningful and integrated thematic units that are consistent with best middle school practices. Several instructional areas of concern identified in the self-study connect to the limited curriculum including inconsistent integration of GLEs, coordinated reading assessments, and problem solving across the curriculum. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with school improvement team, students, parents, and school and district administrators, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing classroom textbooks, reviewing district and school policies and practices, reviewing records of professional development, North Cumberland Middle School self-study)*

Most students are very well-behaved. The faculty, staff, and administrators create an environment that is caring and nurturing. Collectively, they establish expectations for proper behavior and hold students accountable for their actions. The school articulates and enforces a common school-wide discipline policy that includes positive reinforcement, as well as consequences such as after school detention and in and out of school suspensions. Most teachers and staff also establish and enforce clear behavioral expectations. The visible and caring presence of all adults creates a safe and orderly learning environment. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with students, parents, and school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, and school and district administrators, 2007 InfoWorks!, 2007 SALT Survey report, reviewing district and school policies and practices)*

This school provides a variety of services for special needs students. Most students receive instruction in inclusive settings. They also receive some pull out services in resource, speech and language, and reading. The quality of these services varies. The resource classes and pull out learning environments that provide additional supports tailored to individual needs, when effectively implemented, appropriately reinforce the knowledge and skills that are taught in general education settings and serve their students well. While some meet or exceed these expectations, not all fully meet the students' needs or fulfill their intended purposes. Classrooms in which students are fully included and are equally served by general and special education teachers and where they are held to similar expectations, students flourish, are accepted and learn alongside their peers. However, in most of the tracked classes, most special needs students tend to be isolated and serviced primarily, if not exclusively, by special educators and/or paraprofessionals. While co-teaching is the intended model, special education staff is not fully or appropriately utilized in all inclusive classrooms to support student learning needs. The self-study accurately confirms that there is need for more professional development on the co-teaching model. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with school improvement team, students, parents, and school and district administrators, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2007 NECAP Summary Reports, 2007 InfoWorks!, reviewing district and school policies and practices, reviewing records of professional development, North Cumberland Middle School self-study)*

Families in this community actively support this school and are proud of its success. The school works hard to engage them in the life of the school and its many activities. These include monthly coffee hours, a strong parent teacher organization, two parent visitation nights, and welcome-back orientations. The school provides professional development to parents and encourages them to conduct walk-throughs to observe reform initiatives. The school's self-study notes that "parental contact is also a strong area for the school and a strength that was seen among the teachers." Parents also serve the school by participating on the school improvement team, assisting in grant-writing support, and attending teacher appreciation events. The current school leadership and the faculty and staff have greatly improved communication with the parents through student agendas, newsletters, emails, the school website, phone calls, SchoolNotes.com, and various other means. As a result, families are a strong and vital component of this school community. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with school improvement team, students, parents, and school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing district and school policies and practices, 2007 InfoWorks!, 2007 SALT Survey report, North Cumberland Middle School self-study)*

North Cumberland Middle School makes the most of its limited resources. Material resources such as books, paper, and supplies appear to be adequate throughout the school for teachers, staff, and students. Four new paraprofessionals were added to better support student learning for the 2007-2008 school year. However, in other areas, limited resources negatively impact this school. The lack of clerical staff, one administrative assistant for the entire school, puts a tremendous strain on the entire school community. This causes an inefficient use of professional staff time and responsibilities and negatively impacts student learning. Additionally, current technology and technological maintenance does not provide the necessary support of faculty, staff, and students to allow for an authentic real world educational experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is also not clear if current district plans for technology upgrades and hardware purchases are sufficient to remedy the current limited level of available and working technology. Insufficient resources also may contribute to conflicting reports about available and accessible professional development. While some teachers participate in professional development and speak positively about its benefits, others report that their requests for professional development are regularly denied. All together, limited resources serve as an impediment to progress. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with school improvement team, parents, and school and district administrators, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district strategic plan, reviewing records of professional development)*

### Commendations for North Cumberland Middle School

- ◆ *Proud, caring, and positive learning community*
- ◆ *Continuing efforts to implement necessary reforms such as inclusive practices, heterogeneous grouping, middle school teaming with common planning time, and advisory*
- ◆ *Dedicated and strong leadership team with a clear vision for middle school reform*
- ◆ *Effective and robust communication with families that produces wide-spread community involvement*
- ◆ *Families as a strong and vital part of the school community*

### Recommendations for North Cumberland Middle School

- ◆ *Recognize your accomplishments; acknowledge that work remains to be done and that your collaborative efforts are necessary to ensure your continued success.*
- ◆ *Continue your efforts to successfully and fully implement necessary middle school reform including heterogeneous grouping, middle school teaming with common planning time, and advisory. Continue to work towards a middle school schedule that supports the needs of all middle school students.*
- ◆ *Continue to provide the dedicated and strong leadership necessary to advance reform and improvement. Continue to work with all stakeholders to promote collaborative decision-making. Examine additional means and strategies to improve communication and engage all voices.*
- ◆ *Work with all stakeholders including central office staff to develop and implement a coherent curriculum appropriate for middle level education in all content areas aligned with current GLEs and GSEs and other necessary standards.*
- ◆ *Continue to provide services to students with special needs in inclusive environments that are well-targeted to students' individual needs. Work together through professional development and other means to implement an effective co-teaching model.*
- ◆ *Continue to work with the central office staff and other funding sources to secure the necessary resources to operate the school effectively and serve student learning needs.*

### Recommendations for Cumberland School District

- ◆ *Continue to work with the school administrators, faculty, and staff to secure and provide adequate funding sources to operate this school effectively and serve student learning needs.*
- ◆ *Continue to support the ongoing efforts of North Cumberland Middle School to become a true middle school based on middle school best practices*
- ◆ *Work with the school community to develop and implement a coherent curriculum appropriate for middle level education in all content areas aligned with current GLEs and GSEs and other necessary standards.*

## 7. FINAL ADVICE TO NORTH CUMBERLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL

This report acknowledges that you are a good school. Build upon this, and challenge all students to achieve higher levels of thinking and learning. Engage all students in meaningful opportunities to develop and grow as learners. Incorporate student centered teaching, differentiated instruction, and hands-on learning as the foundations of all teaching and learning.

Embrace middle level philosophy and practices as your guiding vision. Focus on the importance of teaching reading, writing, and problem solving across all content areas. Do this to ensure that all students will be able to communicate and problem solve effectively as they prepare for high school.

While you face many challenges, you have many resources right here at North Cumberland Middle School. Band together as you engage in this hard work. Seek out teachers who successfully implement best practices. Use them as your model to improve. Ultimately, put your few differences aside, establish guidelines for effective communication, and then dig in and do the work.

## ENDORSEMENT OF SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

### North Cumberland Middle School

November 30, 2007

#### 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*<sup>2</sup>.

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*<sup>®3</sup> 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*<sup>4</sup> 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?)

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<sup>2</sup> See *The Handbook for Chairs of the SALT School Visit, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Practice-Based Inquiry<sup>®</sup> is a registered trademark of Catalpa Ltd.

<sup>4</sup> See *The Foundations of Practice-Based Inquiry*<sup>®</sup> (2006, Catalpa Ltd.) and *Practice-based Inquiry*<sup>®</sup> *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.

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 North Cumberland 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.**  
**December 19, 2007**

## 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 North Cumberland Middle School was the touchstone document for the team. No matter how informative documents may be, however, there is no substitute for being at the school while it is in session—in the classrooms, in the lunchroom and in the hallways. The team 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 North Cumberland Middle School.

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

- ◆ *observing classes directly*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *following 10 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 North Cumberland Middle School
  - district strategic plan
  - 2007 SALT Survey report
  - classroom textbooks
  - 2007 Information Works!
  - 2007 NECAP Results

School and District Report Cards  
North Cumberland Middle School  
Music Curriculum Binder  
Social Studies Curriculum Binder  
Science Curriculum Binder  
English Curriculum Binder  
Staff Handbook Binder  
Communication Binder  
Advisory Resource Binder  
Mathematics Curriculum Binder

### **State Assessment Results for North Cumberland Middle School**

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 four different ways:

against performance standards,  
across student groups within the school, and  
in relation to the school's district and to the state (NECAP results).

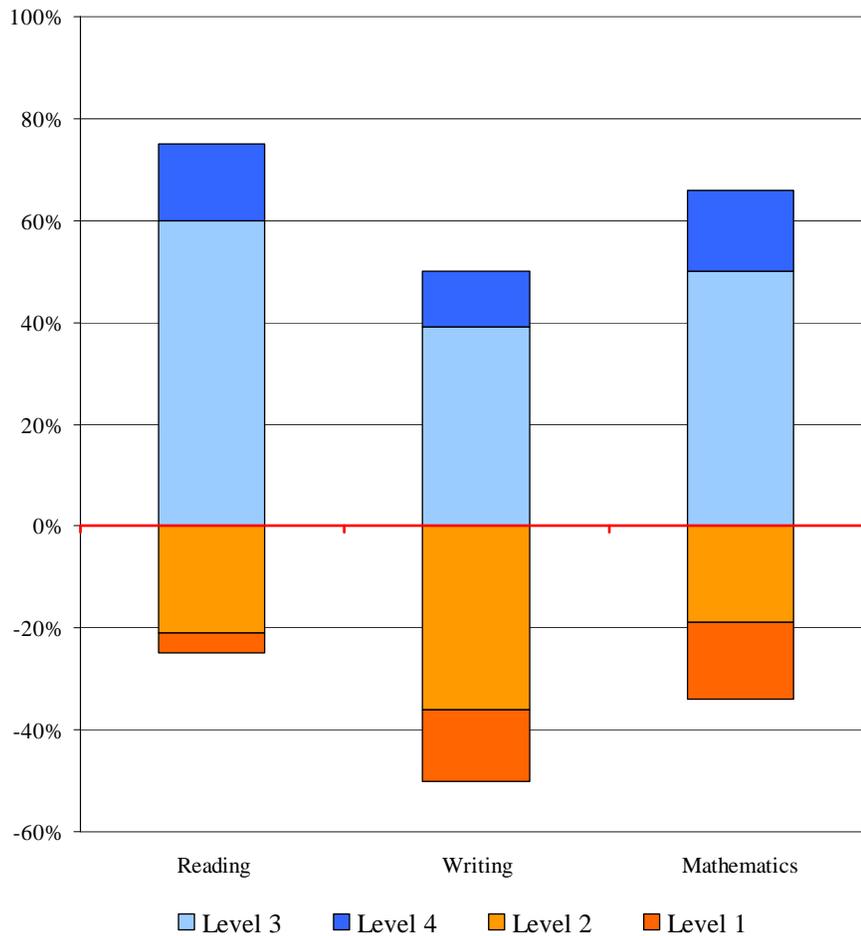
Information Works! data for North Cumberland Middle School is available at [/www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu/2005/default.asp](http://www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu/2005/default.asp).

**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.

*Table 1. 2006-07 Student Results on Rhode Island State Assessments*

Achievement Levels by Subject



**Results across student groups within the school**

An important way to display student results is across different groups of students in this school who have different characteristics. This display creates information about how well the school meets the learning needs of its various students, in accord with the federal No Child Left Behind legislation. To ensure that these smaller groups of students contain enough data to make results accurate, results are based on three years of testing. Any student groups, whose index scores do not meet targets set by RIDE, require additional attention to close its performance gap.

*Table 2 2006-2007 Student Results across Subgroups*

SCHOOL: **North Cumberland Middle School**  
 DISTRICT: **Cumberland**

2007 Rhode Island School Report Card  
[PRINT](#) | [PRINTING INSTRUCTIONS](#) | [READ QUICK GUIDE](#) | [FOR TEST RESULTS...](#)

Student Group	Index Proficiency Score, 2006-07								Percent of Students Tested, 2006-07							
	ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS				MATHEMATICS				ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS				MATHEMATICS			
	THIS SCHOOL	TARGET MET?	THIS DISTRICT	THE STATE	THIS SCHOOL	TARGET MET?	THIS DISTRICT	THE STATE	THIS SCHOOL	TARGET MET?	THIS DISTRICT	THE STATE	THIS SCHOOL	TARGET MET?	THIS DISTRICT	THE STATE
	<b>Target Score: 73.3</b>				<b>Target Score: 55.1</b>				<b>Target Rate: 95.0%</b>				<b>Target Rate: 95.0%</b>			
<b>All Students</b>	<b>90.3</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>87.7</b>	<b>84.7</b>	<b>86.8</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>82.1</b>	<b>79.3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>99.8</b>	<b>99.2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>99.8</b>	<b>99.3</b>
African-American	*	*	*	75.4	*	*	*	66.9	*	*	*	98.8	*	*	*	98.9
Asian	*	*	*	84.1	*	*	*	80.8	*	*	*	98.8	*	*	*	99.4
Hispanic	*	*	*	74.1	*	*	*	66.7	*	*	100	98.6	*	*	100	98.9
Native American	*	*	*	78.5	*	*	*	72.4	*	*	*	98.3	*	*	*	97.8
White	<b>90.4</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>88.0</b>	<b>88.3</b>	<b>86.8</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>82.9</b>	<b>83.7</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>99.7</b>	<b>99.4</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>99.7</b>	<b>99.4</b>
Students with Disabilities	<b>74.9</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>72.6</b>	<b>65.8</b>	<b>66.3</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>62.6</b>	<b>58.0</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>99.4</b>	<b>97.9</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>99.6</b>	<b>98.0</b>
English-Language Learners	*	*	*	63.2	*	*	*	56.8	*	*	*	98.4	*	*	*	99.2
Economically Disadvantaged Students	*	*	79.6	76.8	*	*	71.5	70.0	*	*	100	99.0	*	*	100	99.2

Attendance Rate, 2005-06			
<b>Target: 90.0%</b>			
THIS SCHOOL	TARGET MET?	THIS DISTRICT	THE STATE
96.4	YES	95.9	93.8

This School Is Classified As:	
<b>High Performing</b>	
TARGETS MET	TARGETS EVALUATED
13	13

KEY: \* Student group has too few students for evaluation.  
 † Student group has fallen short of the target but has made sufficient progress.  
 NOTE: For information on targets and classifications, please see Quick Guide.





## THE NORTH CUMBERLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Thomas Kenworthy  
Principal

Peter Conway  
Family and Community Member

Pam Costa  
Family and Community Member

Rich Drolet  
Assistant Principal

Linda Lussier  
Paraprofesional

Jason Masterson  
Teacher

Rosemary Reilly-Chammat  
Family and Community Member

Diana Seaver  
Family and Community Member

Jean Therien  
Teacher

Ginny Vachon  
Teacher

Paula Vadenais  
Teacher

## MEMBERS OF THE SALT VISIT TEAM

Andre Audette NBCT, Ed. D.  
Standards Coach  
Pawtucket School Department  
Rhode Island Department of Education  
Office of Progressive Support and Intervention  
Regents Educator Quality and Certification Fellow  
Team Chair

Nicholas Alfred  
Mathematics Teacher  
Jamestown School  
Jamestown School Department  
Jamestown, Rhode Island

Sherri Boisvert  
Mathematics Teacher  
Winman Junior High School  
Warwick School Department  
Warwick, Rhode Island

Christine Cuthbertson  
Aspiring Principal  
Urban Collaborative Accelerated  
Program  
Providence, Rhode Island

Sheila Grace  
English Language Arts Teacher  
Cranston School Department  
Cranston, Rhode Island

Christopher R. Hoard  
Special Needs Teacher  
Woonsocket Middle School  
Woonsocket School Department  
Woonsocket, Rhode Island

Stephanie Petricone  
Reading Specialist/ Literacy Teacher  
Ponaganset Middle School  
Foster-Glocester School Department  
Glocester, Rhode Island

Jennifer Renigaldo  
Social Studies Teacher  
Woonsocket Middle School  
Woonsocket School Department  
Woonsocket, Rhode Island

Mark A. Thompson  
Principal  
Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High  
School  
Exeter-West Greenwich School  
Department  
West Greenwich, Rhode Island

Diana Tucker  
Mathematics/Science Teacher  
Ponaganset Middle School  
Foster-Glocester School Department  
Glocester, Rhode Island

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS OF VISIT TEAM

INSERT HERE