

# BARRINGTON HIGH SCHOOL

Barrington, Rhode Island

## A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

April 1999

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# 1. INTRODUCTION: THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

## A Profile of the School

Barrington High School is located in a suburban community with a population of approximately 15,800. Barrington is one of the more affluent communities in Rhode Island with a median family income of \$59,483. The community is overwhelmingly residential in nature. The Barrington School District serves 3,028 students in four elementary, one middle and one high school.

The school community of Barrington High School is composed of 806 students and 82 certified faculty. The student population is 1% minority with approximately 15% of the students receiving some form of special education services. Nearly 90% of the school's graduates continue on to post-secondary education.

The original Barrington High School building was constructed in 1952. A major addition was completed in 1964. As a result of a 1998 bond referendum, major additions to the building are nearing completion. Renovations to the remainder of the building are expected to be completed by September 1999.

The administrative structure of Barrington High School consists of a principal and assistant principal. Teachers are organized into 14 academic departments, most led by a departmental chairperson. The average class size is 19, and the student-staff ratio is 10-1.

Barrington High School offers students a comprehensive program of student activities including interscholastic athletics, clubs and other organized activities. A full time Director of Athletics and Student Activities administers these programs.

Barrington High School has a comprehensive school improvement plan. The school is piloting a Senior Project that challenges students to demonstrate a mastery of three of the four Barrington High School graduation outcomes. It is expected that this project will be expanded to all seniors in 2000 and become a graduation requirement for the class of 2003.

## The Nature of this Report

School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT) is Rhode Island's comprehensive school accountability system. SALT is based on using information to improve learning and teaching so that the learning of all students in the state dramatically improves. The SALT Visit and other major SALT components are designed to aid schools in their ongoing development and implementation of effective School Improvement Plans.

The purpose of the Visit to Barrington High School from April 27 to April 30, 1999 was to draw conclusions about the School in the three focus areas of SALT:

- Student Learning, Progress and Achievement
- Teaching and Learning
- The School as a Teaching and Learning Community

The design of the SALT Visit ensures that accountability supports improvement of schools by directly connecting judgments of quality and recommendations for improvement to the actual life and work of a school.

This report is built upon the observations and conclusions of the Visiting Team. The Visiting Team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners and other Rhode Island educators. Their affiliations are included in Appendix A.

Barrington High School's Self Study (1999) prepared by the school's SALT Self Study Committee (See Appendix A) and the School Improvement Plan served as the Visiting Team's first touchstones in coming to an understanding of the

School.

However informative written reports may be, there is simply no substitute for being at the school while it is in session - in the classroom, in the lunchroom, on the fields, and in the hallways. The specific information generated by a Team Visit is about how the students, staff and administrators go about their day. Thus, this Visit allowed professional colleagues and stakeholders to build informed judgments about the teaching and learning that actually takes place at Barrington High School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 142 classes were observed, including 124 full period classes. Most classrooms were visited at least once.
- following 11 students for a full day
- many informal observations in and around the school
- observing the work of teachers, and staff for a full day
- conversations with students, teachers, staff,
- meetings with SALT Self Study Team, students, parents, guidance staff, school administrators, union president, and school district officials,
- Barrington High School Self-Study (April 99)
- Other School Documents: Report on District Testing, Barrington School Performance Targets, Barrington Teacher Handbook, Teacher Appraisal Manual, School Improvement Team Book, Barrington Curriculum Frameworks Book (1997), Barrington High School Program of Study, *Missions, Objectives and Tactics of the Barrington Public Schools* and the Athletic Handbook.
- District and school policies, union contract
- *1998 Information Works!* (1997 scores); *1999 Information Works!* (1998 scores)
- SALT Survey Report
- analysis of student work including a limited selection collected by the school
- analysis of the school's performance on state assessments of standards

The full Team has built the conclusions, commendations and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussions. The Visiting Team met for a total of 25.5 hours in six separate meetings spanning the four days of the visit. This time is exclusive of the time spent in classrooms, with teachers and in meetings with students, parents, and school and district administrators. The Team sought to develop conclusions, commendations and recommendations in the three focus areas that, in its judgment, would be helpful to the school as it works to improve teaching and learning.

**The Team by consensus agreed to each conclusion, each commendation and each recommendation in this report.**

It is important to note that this report reflects a “moment” in the life of the school. The conclusions here are different from those that can be made from statewide assessment data or from information collected and analyzed by members of the school. This report is not intended to be prescriptive. Rather, it is a different lens, one not clouded by the daily life of the school. This new lens is one through which the school can look to help focus on important issues resulting in the development of strategies for overall improvement in the teaching and learning process.

The value of this report is not determined by the hard work of the Team. The value will be determined by how Barrington High School responds to the report. At first, the critical criteria will be the thoughtfulness of that response and later it will be its actual effectiveness in improving teaching and learning. The response of the faculty and staff will be most critical early on but later there is a shared responsibility to support the school in making progress. The School Department, the citizens of Barrington, and the Rhode Island Department of Education will share that responsibility.

Following the Team’s summary statement, "Portrait of the Condition of Your School at the Time of the Visit," Team conclusions, commendations and recommendations are presented for each of the SALT focus areas. The Team indicates the most important conclusions and ends with the Team’s final advice to the school.

This report should be disseminated and discussed as a total document. The recommendations and commendations can

only be understood when presented with the conclusions, since that is the way they are written by the team.

## 2. PORTRAIT OF THE CONDITION OF YOUR SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Barrington High School provides its students with a good education as is readily apparent in the excellent testing results of its students and the high percentage of them who go on to further education. The new building is a triumph of the persistence and concern of the educational leaders of Barrington and offers a new beginning. Its faculty and staff do solid work and have many talents.

We were impressed by the incredible performance of Barrington students on state assessments and SATs. However, as we built conclusions based on professional judgements that are broader than test scores, we found some classroom teaching and learning that too frequently lacked rigor and challenge.

The school has enormous potential to lead the way as a Rhode Island high school of excellence. We saw that potential in the students, faculty and new building.

## 3. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING, PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

### Sources of Evidence

- *1998 Information Works!* (1997 scores)
- *1999 Information Works!* (1998 scores)
- SALT Survey data
- Examination of student work
- Classroom and school observations
- Following a student
- Student meeting

### Conclusions

1. The vast majority of Barrington High School students are self-motivated and willing learners. Students are polite, insightful, and have a great deal to offer Barrington High School and the community at large. Students are well rounded and highly successful in a wide variety of academic and extracurricular activities. (following students, classroom observations, conversations and meeting with students)
2. Barrington High School's pride in high student achievement is supported by student performance on Rhode Island assessments and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). This achievement is highlighted by notable improvement between 1997 and 1998 results. (Information Works! 1998, Information Works 1999)
3. The much larger, though diminishing gap to standards in math problem solving and math concepts compared to the gap in math skills warrants continued school attention. (Information Works! 1998, Information Works 1999)
4. Examination of the disaggregated scores in 1997 and 1998 Rhode Island test results reveals that the equity gap between male and female students has been greatly reduced. However, the growth over that same time in the equity gap between special education and general education students in writing and math problem solving is troubling. (Information Works! 1998, Information Works 1999)
5. It is evident that the school has high academic standards for many students. However, standards and expectations are not **yet** uniform across levels of the same course. (following students, classroom observations, conversations with teachers and students, examination of student work)

### The SALT Visiting Team commends Barrington High School for:

Strong student performance on the Rhode Island State Assessments

## **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Barrington High School:**

Conduct self-study activities to learn the reasons why student assessment results so dramatically from 1997 to 1998 in order to sustain the positive momentum.

Conduct self-study activities aimed at finding ways to mirror the test score improvement of the regular education population in the special education population.

Insure that course expectations for student performance are uniform for all students regardless of the level in which the student is placed in light of the new graduation expectations.

## **4. FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING**

### **Sources of Evidence**

- Classroom observations
- Examination of student work
- Conversations with teachers, specialists, students and staff
- Student meeting
- School Improvement Plan
- Following students
- Parent meeting
- Meeting with District Administrators, and school administrators
- *Missions, Objectives, and Tactics of the Barrington Public Schools*
- *Information Works!* 1997, 1998
- Barrington Public Schools Curriculum Frameworks

### **Conclusions**

1. Many teachers do not listen to what students are saying in classrooms and therefore miss many learning opportunities (classroom observations, meeting and conversations with students)
2. Teachers and students too often fail to see students as resources for learning. Therefore, what students bring to the classroom is not used to further their growth and the growth of their peers. (following students, classroom observations, conversations with teachers and students)
3. An over reliance on teacher-centered, test-driven and textbook-anchored instruction that is insufficient for the teaching that is necessary for students to meet Barrington High School's graduation outcomes. (following students, classroom observations, *Missions, Objectives and Tactics of the Barrington Public Schools*)
4. A narrow repertoire of teaching and assessment strategies, limited connections to real world learning and some inexpert use of grouping practices in classrooms do not provide the rigor necessary to challenge all students to achieve excellence and leave some students behind. (following students, classroom observations, *Information Works!* 1997, 1998)
5. Classroom practices do not consistently challenge students despite the serious efforts underway to map curriculum to standards. (Barrington Public Schools Curriculum Frameworks (1997), classroom observations, conversations with teachers, meetings with school administrators and students, examination of student work)

## **The SALT Visiting Team commends Barrington High School for:**

Teacher availability to students outside the school day

Published graduation outcomes

## **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Barrington High School:**

Incorporate student ideas as resources for learning.

Implement the student-centered, performance based, innovative teaching strategies used in Tech Prep and some other courses throughout the school.

Expand repertoire of teaching and assessment strategies to provide the rigor necessary to challenge Barrington students to meet the graduation outcomes.

Link the current curriculum mapping work directly to classroom practice.

## **5. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING ORGANIZATION**

### **Sources of Evidence**

- School and classroom observations
- Meeting with district superintendent
- Meetings and conversations with administrators, school staff and faculty
- Meeting with parents
- Following students
- School Improvement Team Minutes (1993 - Present)
- School Improvement Plan
- Teacher Appraisal Manual
- SALT Survey Report

### **Conclusions**

1. The school's decision-making processes needs to include a wider and more purposeful involvement of students, faculty, parents and community. (meetings with parents, school and district administrators; conversations with teachers and students, review of School Improvement Team minutes (1993-present))
2. The school has not yet effectively used the pertinent information available about students and the community to update and revise the School Improvement Plan. (School Improvement Plan, meeting with system and district administrators, meeting with parents)
3. While the School Improvement Plan reflects knowledge of good secondary school practices, the tactics and action plans it contains have not moved forward in all areas. The School Improvement Plan has led to some changes, notably the Senior Project. However the School Improvement Plan is not a driving force to implement the school's mission. (review of the School Improvement Plan, meetings with school and district administrators, meeting with Self Study Team)
4. Professional development at Barrington High School provides opportunities for individual growth. However, there is no comprehensive professional development plan designed to build teacher capacity to accomplish all the goals of the School Improvement Plan. (review of School Improvement Plan, meetings with school administrators, conversations with teachers)
5. The standard of success at Barrington High School is too often perceived to be narrowly defined by performance on standardized tests. (classroom observations, conversations with students, teachers, parents and school administrators)
6. The competency form of teacher evaluation does not support teacher growth and development particularly for new teachers. (Teacher Appraisal Manual (1994), meeting with district and school administrators)
7. The current school schedule inhibits the implementation of the innovative tactics included in the School Improvement Plan. (school and classroom observations, conversations with teachers, meeting with parents and school administrators, SALT Survey Report)

### **The SALT Visiting Team commends Barrington High School for:**

Piloting the Senior Project

Extensive student involvement in extra curricular offerings

**The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Barrington High School:**

Use all pertinent information to annually review, update and implement the School Improvement Plan  
Review the process of membership selection for the School Improvement Team to insure that all stakeholders are purposefully represented. Elicit input from all stakeholders on a regular basis. Disseminate information about decisions and the status of the plan to them.

Ensure that the School Improvement Plan becomes the driving force in the implementation of the school's mission.

Develop a school wide professional development plan for all faculty that is strategically connected to the School Improvement Plan.

Increase professional conversations between and among teachers within and across departments to improve classroom practice.

Move the discussion of alternative scheduling forward to implementation.

Encourage students, families and teachers to see educational success as more than high test scores.

Ensure wide input from students and community into the evaluation and modification of the Senior Project pilot.

**The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Barrington NEA and the Barrington School Department:**

Develop a more progressive and comprehensive evaluation procedure for teachers.

## 6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### Most Important Conclusions

In the Team's judgment, the following five conclusions are the most important for the school to consider.

1. The vast majority of Barrington High School students are self-motivated and willing learners. Students are polite, insightful, and have a great deal to offer Barrington High School and the community at large. Students are well rounded and highly successful in a wide variety of academic and extracurricular activities.
2. Many teachers do not listen to what students are saying in classrooms and therefore miss many learning opportunities.
3. It is evident that the school has high academic standards for many students. However, standards and expectations are not yet uniform across levels of the same course.
4. An over reliance on teacher-centered, test-driven and textbook-anchored instruction that is insufficient for the teaching that is necessary for students to meet Barrington High School's graduation outcomes.
5. While the School Improvement Plan reflects knowledge of good secondary school practices, the tactics and action plans it contains have not moved forward in all areas. The School Improvement Plan has led to some changes, notably the Senior Project. However the School Improvement Plan is not a driving force to implement the school's mission.

### Final Advice to the School

It was necessary for Barrington to tear out and redesign the building of Barrington High School for the 21st century. So too is it necessary to complete a major renovation in the instruction of the school. Even when the building construction is finished, it will mark more a beginning than an end.

While strong efforts are being made to build high standards into the curriculum, the critical issue for you is how to use

those standards to raise the rigor and challenge of the teaching and learning that actually takes place in classrooms so that teaching is at the highest possible level.

Just as the new wing of the school represents modern school design, so too does the Senior Project represent an effort to provide students with a new educational challenge. But it is not enough by itself. Teacher practices, like the older portions of the building, must also change. Your students are highly motivated and eager to learn. Your challenge is to develop learning experiences that will provide them with the rigor needed to achieve the Barrington Graduation Outcomes. The voices of your students and families are a valuable tool in that effort. You need to listen to them and reflect on what they are telling you.

We found the school and its instructional program in the midst of a transformation. Some of the structural elements are in place, or nearly so, but others are not yet visible to the visitor of Barrington High School. Just as the "old" building and the "old instructional program have served the community and its children well for a long period of time, the future will demand more. You have an unusual moment to build an excellent educational program for all Barrington students. We trust that you will find this report helpful to those efforts.

We suggest that you first carefully consider the purpose and limits of this SALT Visiting Team report. As you will see, the point of our Report is not that Barrington adopts our recommendations, although you might. Rather, it is that you should use the Report to come to your own recommendations about what should take place. We suggest that you discuss what we found, try to understand why we found what we did and then come to your own conclusions about what needs to change to improve the teaching and learning at Barrington High School. In that way you will build the underlying substance that is necessary to carry your excellent reputation forward. Your faculty, students and town deserve no less.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **MEMBERS OF BARRINGTON HIGH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM**

John Gray, Principal  
Priscilla Abrahamson, English Teacher  
Charles Capizano, Social Studies Teacher  
Gary Eddins, Social Studies Teacher  
Lou Gerbi, Science Teacher  
Rose Mary Grant, Special Education Teacher  
Paul Osmon, Assistant Superintendent  
Mary Warlop, Business Teacher

### **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Charles Sweeney, Special Education,  
Kickemuit Middle School, Bristol Warren  
Chair of the Team

A.W. Beaton, Special Education,  
Hope High School, Providence

Leslie Bettencourt, Director of Guidance,  
Lincoln High School, Lincoln

Liana Ferreira - Fenton, Parent / Business owner,  
Member of School Committee,

Middletown

Ken Fish, Director  
Office of School Improvement and Accountability,  
Rhode Island Department of Education

Judy McGowan, Science Teacher,  
Mt. Pleasant High School, Providence

Gwynne Millar, Executive Director,  
Breaking Ranks in the Ocean State

Arthur Petrosinelli, Assistant Principal,  
Mt. Pleasant High School, Providence

Susan Roblat-Walker, SALT Visit Coordinator,  
Rhode Island Department of Education

Barbara Zirolì, Math Chair,  
Central High School, Providence

Thomas A. Wilson, Senior Research Fellow  
Brown University  
Coach to the Team