



Barrington Middle School

BARRINGTON

SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

February 9, 2001



School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)

The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education

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For information about SALT, please contact Ken Fish at 401-222-4600, x 2200 or salt@ridoe.net.

This report is available at www.ridoe.net/schoolimprove/salt

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1. THIS REPORT'S PURPOSE AND LIMITS

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 Middle School from February 5, 2001-February 9, 2001, was to draw conclusions about the School in the three focus areas of SALT:

- ◆ Student Learning
- ◆ Teaching
- ◆ The School

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 visit team. The visit team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners and a parent. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for Barrington Middle School was the touchstone document for the team. 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, 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 Middle School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 119 full classroom observations and 37 partial classroom observations which totaled over 106 hours of time spent in direct classroom observation. Most classrooms were visited at least once. Most teachers were observed more than once.*
- ◆ *many observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- ◆ *following 10 students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with the following groups:*
 - *School Improvement Team*
 - *school and district administrators*
 - *students*
 - *parents*
 - *clusters*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *examination of student work, including a selection of work collected by the school*
- ◆ *analysis of achievement and equity gaps based on Information Works! data*
- ◆ *review of district and school policies*
- ◆ *review of professional development activities*
- ◆ *review of classroom assessments.*
- ◆ *review of the following documents:*
 - *Barrington Middle School Learner Centered School Action Plan*
 - *Barrington Middle School Safe and Caring Action Plan*
 - *Barrington Middle School Staff Development*
 - *Barrington Middle School Communication Action Plan*
 - *Barrington Middle School Technology Action Plan*
 - *district strategic plan*

- *Barrington Middle School Beliefs*
- *Barrington Public Schools Curriculum Frameworks, 1997*
- *Teachers Appraisal Manual for Barrington Public Schools*
- *Agreement Between The Barrington School Committee and NEA Barrington, covering the period September 1, 2000 to August 31, 2003*
- *Letter from State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Department of Labor and Training, Division of Occupational Safety, May 02, 2000*
- *2000 SALT Survey data*
- *1999 Information Works!*
- *2000 Information Works!*
- *1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *1998, 1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- *Turning Points*
- *Turning Points 2000*

The full Team has built the conclusions, commendations and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussions. The visit team met for a total of 27 hours in six separate meetings spanning the five 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 reached consensus agreement for each conclusion, each recommendation, and each commendation 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 Middle 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.

It is important to read and consider this report as a whole. Recommendations and commendations should be considered in context with the conclusions. That is the way they were written.

2. PROFILE OF BARRINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL

Barrington Middle School serves students in the sixth through eighth grades in the town of Barrington, Rhode Island. The school is located in the western area of this town on Narragansett Bay and is part of Barrington's school system. A superintendent and an assistant superintendent administer the school system. A second assistant superintendent was recently hired. An elected school committee of five members governs the Barrington school system.

The building that houses Barrington Middle School opened in 1957. An addition was constructed in 1967.

Of the 755 students who attend Barrington Middle School 97 percent are white, two percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, fewer than one percent are Hispanic, and fewer than one percent are black. Fifteen percent of the students receive special education services. Fewer than one percent, receive ESL related services. Five percent of Barrington Middle School's students receive free or reduced price lunch.

One principal and one assistant principal administer the school. Sixty full and part time teachers and three guidance counselors serve the students in the school. Barrington Middle School students are grouped into one of nine clusters. Each grade is divided into three clusters of students who represent a balance of numbers, boys and girls, and range of ability levels. Four of the clusters are involved with a looping program that groups students and teacher teams together for two years. Teachers of all the allied and unified arts classes make up a tenth cluster.

This year students in grade six receive instruction in Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies, as well as the allied and unified arts. Seventh and eighth grade students receive instruction in Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Skills, as well as the allied and unified arts.

Between 1997 and 2001 Barrington Middle School students and teachers have received many awards and recognitions. The school has hosted more than 300 visiting schools from around the world during the last three years as well, and has been recognized by the New England League of Middle Schools as one of the six most exemplary middle schools in New England. Individual faculty members have presented at more than 1000 middle level workshops/conferences since 1997.

Students at Barrington Middle School have also earned special recognition. These recognitions include the members of the Geography Club who were selected to present at the National Geography Conference in California in 2000, six students who have represented Rhode Island in the national Math Olympiad within the last three years, the Chess Team who have been state champions for two consecutive years in the High School/Middle School Division, and one student whose community service project for 2000 drew attention from the governor and the President.

Student performance on the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam is generally good with scores ranging between 61 and 90 percent of students achieving or exceeding the standard on five of the seven subtests. Additionally, between 1998 and 2000 student performance in the Mathematics Skills and Problem-Solving subtests shows steady improvement. Seventh grade student performance on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment has increased steadily also.

Between 1998 and 2000 student performance on the Mathematics Concepts subtest, both of the Reading subtests and the Writing Effectiveness subtest of the New Standards Reference Exam show no clear trend. Scores for 2000 of students who meet or exceed the standard are 47 percent in Mathematics Concepts, 65 percent in Reading Basic Understanding, 25 percent in Reading Analysis and Interpretation, and 71 percent in Writing Effectiveness. While 65 percent of students meet or exceed the standard in Writing Conventions, their performance has declined steadily since 1998.

Equity gaps of more than 30 percent occur between special education and general education students on all four of the New Standards Reference Exam subtests measured with general education students outperforming special education students. Gender gaps of more than 20 percent exist between males and females on the Reading Analysis and Interpretation and Writing Effectiveness subtests with females outperforming males on both.

The team used the test score information found in *Information Works!* and the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam School Summaries to determine the performance and equity gaps. 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report. *Information Works!* data for Barrington Middle School is available at www.ridoenet.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF BARRINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

As soon as visitors enter Barrington Middle School, they are struck with the impression that this is no ordinary school. They move through brightly lighted hallways with colorful displays of student work.

A visionary leadership and dedicated teachers care for and support their students. Teachers are enthusiastic and dynamic in their approaches to providing their students with a hands-on, interactive, and stimulating environment. Most of Barrington Middle School's students come prepared and motivated to learn. Their performance on state assessments is good and shows a steady increase in several areas.

This is, in fact, a very good school. However, the lack of structure in the school improvement plan that has no specific classroom strategies for improving student performance, the absence of unified standards-based curricula for all subject areas, and the under-utilization of existing facilities all hinder Barrington Middle School from becoming a truly great school.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *1999 and 2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination School Summary*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *meetings with school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with students and teachers*

Conclusions

Students like it here at Barrington Middle School. Most are motivated, responsible learners. They are focused, stay on task, and follow through on their assignments. They come prepared to class with the appropriate materials, homework, and are ready to learn. (*following students, classroom observations, meetings with students and parents, conversations and interviews with students and teachers*)

In mathematics, students demonstrate a mastery of basic skills. They are developing problem-solving skills by completing complex performance tasks and explaining both orally and in writing how they arrive at their answers. In addition, students apply these skills in other subject areas. The results on the Mathematical Skills (90 percent achieve or exceed the standard) and Problem Solving (61 percent achieve or exceed the standard) subtests of the New Standards Reference Exam have steadily increased since 1998. This same trend is not evident in the area of mathematical concepts. (*following students, classroom observations, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam School Summary, examination of student work, conversations and interviews with teachers and students*)

Students read an array of materials including books, newspapers, magazines, and information from the Internet. They read for a variety of purposes such as enjoyment, gathering information, and research. However, over one-third of the students do not achieve the standard on the Reading Basic Understanding subtest of the 2000 New Standards Reference Exam. Furthermore, 75 percent of the students do not achieve the standard on the Analysis and Interpretation subtest. (*following students, classroom observations, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam School Summary, meetings with school and district administrators*)

Students engage in an abundance of writing activities throughout the day. In their writing, many students provide complete responses, stay on topic, identify the main idea, and use vocabulary effectively. These skills contribute to their performance on state assessments. On the Writing Effectiveness subtest of the 2000 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, 71 percent of Barrington Middle School students meet or exceed the standard. Also, seventh grade performance on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment shows a steady increase. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam School Summary, 1999 and 2000 Information Works!, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment*)

It is puzzling that equity gaps of more than 30 percent exist between general education and special education students on all four subtests measured by the New Standards Reference Exam. General education students outperform special education students. (*following students, classroom observations, 2000 Information Works!*)

Commendations for Barrington Middle School

students who come to school ready to learn

the steady increase of student performance on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment and the New Standards Reference Exam in Mathematical Skills and Problem Solving that results in 61 percent, 90 percent, and 61 percent respectively, of students achieving or exceeding the standard

Recommendations for Barrington Middle School

Continue teaching practices that raise student performance in math and seventh grade writing.

Develop and implement an action plan to improve student performance in reading. Include this action plan in the Barrington Middle School Improvement Plan.

Develop and implement an action plan to improve student performance in writing. Include this action plan in the Barrington Middle School Improvement Plan.

Examine the existing equity gaps between general education and special education students. Develop and implement an action plan that will narrow those gaps. Include this action plan in the Barrington Middle School Improvement Plan.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with students and teachers*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *meetings with school and district administrators, students, parents, and clusters*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Exam School Summary*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *Barrington Middle School Beliefs*
- ◆ *Barrington Public Schools Curriculum Frameworks, 1997*
- ◆ *2000 SALT Survey data*

Conclusions

Most teachers effectively use a combination of large and small group instructional strategies that actively engage their students. They circulate about the room from group to group to assess individual student understanding, monitor their progress, provide immediate feedback, and assist individual students. However, few teachers use cooperative learning groups in which students each have a designated role and responsibility so that all students are accountable. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with students*)

Teachers here are dedicated to their students. Their commitment to the middle school concept fosters an environment conducive to learning. They welcome students and make themselves available to them before, during, and after school. Some teachers invite students to have lunch in their rooms to chat, listen to music, receive help, and complete assignments. Teachers and students share a mutual respect. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with students and teachers, meetings with parents and school administrators, 2000 SALT Survey data*)

Teachers involve students in a variety of assignments across the curriculum. These provide students with opportunities to conduct research, utilize technology, carry out hands-on activities and experiments, and improve their reading, writing, and math skills. However, many of these assignments do not accommodate individual learning styles and student interest. Often, they are prescribed, resulting in limited opportunities for student choice. This limits some students' chances for success. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, Barrington Middle School Beliefs*)

While teachers are encouraged and supported to be innovative and creative, they lack a common understanding of what to teach in most curriculum areas. Without clear and grade-specific curricula, they often fill in the void by teaching to their own expertise and interests. While some teachers have even taken the initiative to begin to develop standards-based curriculum guidelines for their subject areas, the present void creates inconsistencies across clusters and grades that can lead to gaps and overlaps in student learning. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, examination of student work, meetings with clusters, district administrator, and parents, Barrington Public Schools Curriculum Frameworks, 1997*)

Most teachers set clear expectations for their students. Students know what those expectations are and work to meet them. However, too often, assignments and expectations do not challenge all students to more complex levels of thinking, analyzing, and interpreting. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, examination of student work, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam School Summary*)

Commendations for Barrington Middle School

teachers' commitment to students

teachers' initiative to begin to develop standards-based curriculum guidelines

Recommendations for Barrington Middle School

Work with the district to develop clear, grade-specific, standards-based curricula for all disciplines. Implement those curricula throughout the school.

Continue the teaching strategies that enable teachers to work one-on-one with individual students.

Engage in professional development around cooperative learning groups. Implement those strategies in all classrooms.

Expand the use of effective teaching strategies that address individual student learning styles.

Challenge all students to more complex levels of thinking, analyzing, and interpreting.

Recommendations for the Barrington School District

Work with the school to develop clear, grade-specific, standards-based curricula for all disciplines. Support Barrington Middle School in the implementation of those curricula.

Provide the resources necessary for Barrington Middle School to engage in professional development around cooperative learning groups.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations throughout the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with students and teachers*
- ◆ *meetings with School Improvement Team, school and district administrators, students, and parents*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Exam School Summary*
- ◆ *2000 SALT Survey data*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *Barrington Middle School Learner Centered School Action Plan*
- ◆ *Barrington Middle School Safe and Caring Action Plan*
- ◆ *Barrington Middle School Staff Development*
- ◆ *Barrington Middle School Communication Action Plan*
- ◆ *Barrington Middle School Technology Action Plan*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *Teachers Appraisal Manual for Barrington Public Schools*
- ◆ *Agreement Between The Barrington School Committee and NEA Barrington, covering the period September 1, 2000 to August 31, 2003*
- ◆ *Letter from State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Department of Labor and Training, Division of Occupational Safety, May 02, 2000*
- ◆ *Turning Points*
- ◆ *Turning Points 2000*

Conclusions

The school building has the potential to maximize the cluster effectiveness. However, over 7,000 square feet (lower gym, lecture hall, and storage areas) cannot be used due to water drainage and related problems. As a result, there is unequal allocation of instructional space apportioned to each of the 10 clusters. (*observations throughout the school, meetings with students, parents, school and district administrators, conversations and/or interviews with teachers, letter from State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Department of Labor and Training, Division of Occupational Safety, May 02, 2000*)

The Teacher Appraisal Manual for Barrington Public Schools is a cumbersome, multi-paged document that includes a three-page checklist. It is not aligned with standards, nor does it provide for professional growth. The manual does include a new section entitled Working Draft for Goal Setting that is only an option for tenured teachers in lieu of formal classroom observations. This part of the instrument is a good beginning point to address teacher professional growth. (*Teacher Appraisal Manual for Barrington Public Schools, meetings with school and district administrators, conversations and interviews with teachers, Agreement Between The Barrington School Committee and NEA Barrington, covering the period September 1, 2000 to August 31, 2003*)

The Barrington Middle School Improvement Plan includes specific plans for technology, communication, a learner-centered school, a safe and caring environment, and staff development. Yet, it is a vague plan. It does not include specific action plans for how the school will raise student performance, timelines, and person/persons responsible for the implementation of the plan for all areas. (*Barrington Middle School Learner Centered School Action Plan, Barrington Middle School Safe and Caring Action Plan, Barrington Middle School Staff Development, Barrington Middle School Communication Action Plan, Barrington Middle School Technology Action Plan, meetings with School Improvement Team and district administrator, conversations and interview with teachers*)

The Barrington School District does have curriculum frameworks for most disciplines. However, clear, grade-specific, standards-based curricula for all disciplines are lacking. This results in inequities in teaching and learning. (*Barrington Public Schools Curriculum Frameworks, 1997, conversations and interviews with teachers, following students, classroom observations*)

The leadership in this school embraces middle level practices as outlined in *Turning Points* and *Turning Points 2000*. Practices that include looping, flexible scheduling within the clusters, advisory groups, and many after-school activities are in place. The

leadership provides a supportive climate that enables teachers to be innovative in their classrooms. (*observations throughout the school, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, Turning Points, Turning Points 2000*)

A sequentially balanced literacy program for grades six through eight that has an explicit goal of reading and writing achievement for all students at Barrington Middle School is lacking. Without this program, reading and writing instruction, learning, and achievement are inconsistent throughout the school. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, Barrington Public Schools Curriculum Frameworks, 1997, examination of student work, 2000 SALT Survey data, 2000 New Standards Reference Exam*)

Commendations for Barrington Middle School

the leadership in Barrington Middle School

Recommendations for Barrington Middle School

Adopt a balanced approach to literacy that has an explicit goal of reading and writing achievement for all students.

Engage in professional development around balanced literacy. Implement those strategies in every classroom.

Review and revise the School Improvement Plan to include action plans for raising student performance in each of the subtest areas, timelines, and personnel responsible for monitoring.

Work with the district to develop clear, grade specific, standards-based curricula for all disciplines. Implement those curricula throughout the school.

Recommendations for Barrington School District

Immediately address, develop, and implement an action plan to reclaim the 7,000 square feet of unusable building space in Barrington Middle School.

Review and revise the Teacher Appraisal Manual for Barrington Public Schools to align it with standards. Include both evaluation and goal setting for all teachers.

Work with the school to develop clear, grade specific, standards-based curricula for all disciplines. Support Barrington Middle School in the implementation of those curricula.

Recommendations for the town of Barrington

Appropriate the necessary resources to the Barrington School Department to immediately address, develop, and implement an action plan to reclaim the 7,000 square feet of unusable building space in Barrington Middle School.

7. FINAL ADVICE TO THE SCHOOL

Many wonderful things happen here at Barrington Middle School. Students, teachers, administrators, and parents are involved from morning 'til night. Students are engaged and are learning.

The entire Barrington Middle School community must continue to work together to support this school in fulfilling its mission. You will continue to move forward if you:

- develop and implement a sequential reading and writing program
- implement standards-based curricula
- implement a school improvement plan that addresses student performance
- reclaim the 7,000 square feet of unusable space to better serve the students and the community.

Finally, capitalize on your students' eagerness to learn. Build on the mutual respect and professionalism already in place to move Barrington Middle School to the next level of excellence.

BARRINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Jan Shedd
Parent/ Team Chair

Brian Delaire
Materials Lab. Teacher
Ad Hoc Member representing Rainbow Teachers

Rob Lloyd
Math Teacher
grades 7/8 loop

Jim Kaczynski
Science Teacher
grades 7/8 loop

Nancy Maddocks
Parent

Val Partidge
Math/Reading Teacher
grade 6

Peggy Rugeiri
Parent

Althea Telford
Language Arts Teacher
grades 7/8 loop

THE SALT VISIT TEAM

Sandra L. Olson
7th grade English Language Arts teacher/team leader
Ponaganset Middle School
Foster-Glocester, Rhode Island
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as a SALT Fellow)
Chair

Laurie E. Beauvais
Assistant Principal
Gallagher Middle School
Smithfield, Rhode Island

Valerie A. Canady
Parent
Johnston, Rhode Island

Kim D. Field
6th grade Language Arts/Reading/Social Studies Teacher
Tiverton Middle School
Tiverton, Rhode Island

Robbin Freeman-LaBonte
6th, 7th, and 8th grades Resource Teacher
Cumberland Middle School
Cumberland, Rhode Island

Vincent Giuliano
Principal
Gaudet Middle School
Middletown, Rhode Island

Anna L. Ledoux
7th and 8th grades Science Teacher
Chariho Middle School
Wood River Junction, Rhode Island

Teresa Medeiros
8th grade Science Teacher
Riverside Middle School
East Providence, Rhode Island

Robert Terrill
Superintendent
Tiverton School Department
Tiverton, Rhode Island

Michaela J. Wilmarth
6th, 7th, and 8th grades Special Education Teacher
Esek Hopkins Middle School
Providence, Rhode Island

**NEW STANDARDS REFERENCE EXAMINATION AND RI WRITING
ASSESSMENT RESULTS (2000)**

ENDORSEMENT OF SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

Barrington Middle School

February 9, 2001

To complete the Catalpa Ltd. report endorsement, I discussed the conduct of the visit with the Visit Chair while it was in process and I have reviewed this report. Based on my knowledge derived from these sources of evidence, using the criteria specified in the *Endorsing SALT Visit team Reports by Catalpa Ltd.*, and using the methodology and procedures specified in the *Handbook for SALT Visit Chairs, 1st edition*, I conclude that:

1. This report was produced by a legitimate SALT Visit that was led by a trained SALT Visit Chair and conducted in a manner that is consistent with SALT Visit procedures.
2. The conclusions and all other content of this report meet the criteria specified for a SALT Visit report.

Accordingly, Catalpa Ltd. endorses this report as a legitimate SALT Visit Report.



Thomas A. Wilson, EdD
Catalpa Ltd.
March 1, 2001