

# HUGH COLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Warren, Rhode Island

Bristol Warren Regional School District

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

March 1999

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

## A Profile of the School

Hugh Cole Elementary School was opened in Warren in 1968. It is a spacious, well maintained, handicapped accessible facility operating under the authority of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee. It is a Pre K-5 school that currently houses 395 students. The school employs 39 certified and 20 non-certified personnel. Of the 20 non-certified personnel, 12 ½ are Special Education Assistants. The principal was hired from outside the Bristol Warren District and is new to the school this year.

There are six kindergarten sessions; one half day afternoon ESL Kindergarten class which includes children from a morning kindergarten; one each of pre-K, grade one, grade two, and grade three; five each of grades four and five. All Warren kindergarten, grade four, and grade five children attend Hugh Cole School. In addition, all physically handicapped fourth and fifth graders from Bristol and Warren attend Hugh Cole School.

Bristol Warren is best described as a working class community. Thirty percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. Twenty percent receive special education services and four percent receive bilingual or ESL instruction. Hugh Cole integrates K-5 students with special needs into regular education classes through some collaborative teaching.

Teachers at Hugh Cole are participants in the East Bay Education Collaborative KITES Project (Kits in Teaching Elementary Science.) Through East Bay they also receive training in the Chicago Math Program. All classrooms have direct connection to the Internet with at least one modern computer.

## 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 Hugh Cole School from March 2 to March 5, 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. Their affiliations are included in Appendix A.

Hugh Cole School's Self-Study Report 1999 served as the Visiting Team's first touchstone 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 playgrounds, 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 Hugh Cole Elementary School.

The Visiting Team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 96 hours of classroom observation. Every classroom was visited at least once. Many teachers were observed more than once.
- many informal observations in and around the school
- following eight students for a full day
- observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day
- meetings and conversations with students, parents, principal and head teacher, and the District Superintendent
- Hugh Cole School's Self-Study Report 1999
- *1998 Information Works!* (1997 State Assessment Results)
- 1998 State Assessment Results
- SALT Survey Report
- analysis of student work including a selection of work collected by the school
- analysis of the school's performance on state assessments of standards
- Site Based Plan (1998)
- Hugh Cole Yearbook
- *Warren Times*

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 23 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 Hugh Cole 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 Bristol and Warren, and the Rhode Island Department of Education will share that responsibility. The SALT Visit and this report are part of a pilot process for SALT. Hugh Cole Elementary School has served this year as a SALT pilot school and the school, its School Improvement Team and the Bristol- Warren School Department are to be commended for the leadership they have shown by their willingness to take part in this process.

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 report continues with the Team's most important commendations and recommendations and concludes with the Team's final advice to the school.

## **2. PORTRAIT OF THE CONDITION OF YOUR SCHOOL AT THE**

## TIME OF THE VISIT

Hugh Cole School welcomes the visitor with colorful displays of children's work in its wide spacious hallways. The classrooms are large with one wall of window creating natural light. The library is the physical center of the school. Classrooms are well equipped and many resources – both human and material- are available to assist in instruction. Unfortunately, the Visiting Team observed few activities in these rooms that stretched imaginations or challenged thinking. Learning seemed stifled by the lack of thought provoking questions and opportunities to explore the children's interests.

Children were generally well behaved, usually attentive, and were completing the tasks assigned to them. They were given few choices of activity or expression. Classrooms were teacher directed, not student centered.

Most teachers worked hard to meet a variety of needs, but many seemed unfocused in their attempts, unable to effectively use the resource people assigned to their classrooms, and reluctant to explore new strategies.

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

### Sources of Evidence

- 1998 *Information Works!* (1997 scores)
- 1998 State Assessment results
- SALT Survey data
- Examination of student work
- Classroom and school observations
- Meeting with district superintendent
- Conversations with teachers

### Conclusions

1. Students at Hugh Cole School performed below similar students in math, writing, health, and reading on 1997 State assessments. (1998 *Information Works*)
2. A performance gap between males and females on the math, writing, and health State Assessments is noted in *1998 Infoworks*.(1998 *Infoworks*)
3. Only 10% of the third graders scored in the proficient range on the 1998 state writing test and only 17% of fourth graders achieved the overall standard in writing on the 1998 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam.(1998 State Assessment results)
4. Although half of fourth grade students achieved the standard in math skills, only 5% achieved the standard in math concepts and 10% in math problem solving on the New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam. (1998 State Assessment results)
5. Although standards exist in language arts and math, the emphasis in classroom assessment is skills-based. This type of assessment contributes to high scores in basic skills and low scores in higher order thinking skills. (Examination of student work,1998 State Assessment results)
6. The District practice of clustering elementary grades disrupts the continuity of instruction and limits teachers' abilities to prepare students to meet standards.(Meeting with district superintendent, classroom observation, conversations with teachers)

**The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Hugh Cole School:**

Examine test results and student work to determine ways to improve instruction and close gaps

Implement Tactic Five of the Site Based Plan (1998) by establishing performance goals in math and language arts, assessing progress, and developing instruction to improve performance by students and staff

**The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Bristol Warren School District:**

Use assessments that are performance based to guide instruction in all grades

Support articulation between and among elementary teachers throughout the District

Provide an elementary organizational pattern that creates continuity of instruction for all students

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

### **Sources of Evidence**

- Classroom observations
- Examination of student work
- Conversations with teachers, specialists, students, parents and staff
- Student meeting
- Following students
- Parent meeting

### **Conclusions**

1. Collaboration and support services successfully enable the inclusion of diverse populations into the regular education program.(Classroom observations, following students, conversations with teachers)
2. The understanding and implementation of standards based instruction by teachers varies from classroom to classroom and grade to grade resulting in inconsistency of instruction.(Classroom observations, conversations with students, parents, and teachers)
3. Despite efforts to provide good instruction, teachers are not implementing research-based best practices that enable all students to attain standards and close gaps.(Classroom observation, conversations with teachers)
4. Students' opportunities to meet standards are limited because teachers do not consistently provide time for sustained reading and writing.(Following students, classroom observations, student meeting)
5. Although scoring guides are present in many classrooms, children do not understand how to use rubrics to evaluate and improve their work. (Classroom observation, following students, conversations with students)
6. Daily work does not provide Hugh Cole students with challenging, creative opportunities to learn, causing some children to be inattentive, restless, and off task.(Classroom observation, parent meeting, student meeting, examination of student work)
7. Available resources are not effectively used by teachers or children, which results in lost opportunities for teaching and learning. (Classroom observation, student meeting, conversations with teachers)

**The SALT Visiting Team commends Hugh Cole School for:**

Collaborative efforts among teachers

**The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Hugh Cole School:**

Provide extensive, ongoing professional development for faculty and staff in the areas of standards based instruction and assessment, portfolio development, and best practices

Put available resources into the hands of the children

Build a library of professional references

Provide time for sustained reading and writing

Develop and use rubrics to evaluate and improve student work

Continue to explore the effective use of collaboration in the classroom

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

### **Sources of Evidence**

- School and classroom observations
- Meeting with District Superintendent
- Meetings and conversations with administrators, school staff and faculty
- Parents meeting
- Following students
- *Warren Times*
- Site Based Plan (1998)
- Hugh Cole Self-Study 1999
- SALT Survey

### **Conclusions**

1. The respect and concern demonstrated by all children and staff at Hugh Cole promotes an atmosphere of genuine inclusion.(Classroom observations, following a student)
2. Hugh Cole School established a School Improvement Team for Excellence (SITE) in 1993 with a Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) grant. In 1995 and in 1997-98 RIDE grants provided additional assistance for planning, yet the Hugh Cole School Improvement Team has limited knowledge of the rules that govern the effective functioning of a SIT Team.(Site Based Plan 1998, Hugh Cole Self-Study 1999, conversations with teachers, parent meeting)
3. The emphasis on technology and family involvement in the Site Based Plan and the Hugh Cole Self Study diverts attention from the critical need to develop new teaching strategies and implement standards based instruction and assessment. (Site Based Plan 1998, Hugh Cole Self Study 1999, classroom observation)
4. There is little evidence of building and district educational leadership that values and supports professional growth and development of teachers. (Conversations with teachers, classroom observations)

5. The school's involvement with the Warren Times, Crestwood Nursing Home, yearbooks, and family activities at the school allows the children and teachers to foster community connections.(Hugh Cole Yearbooks, Warren Times, conversations with students and teachers, Site Based Plan 1998)
6. Hugh Cole School provides services for most of the physically handicapped children in the District. The lack of a full time nurse-teacher causes concern for the safety of all children.(Conversations with teachers, following a student)
7. Even though parents are included in many school activities, they do not have a clear understanding of standards, assessment, and expectations.(Parent meeting, SALT Survey)
8. At present the Bristol Warren School District has no central office personnel for instruction and assessment to provide guidance to schools on the implementation of standards based instruction.(Meeting with district superintendent, meetings with teachers, Hugh Cole Self-Study 1999)

### **The SALT Visiting Team commends Hugh Cole School for:**

Acceptance of diversity

Relationship with the *Warren Times*

### **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that Hugh Cole School:**

Empower a representative School Improvement Team to make decisions about teaching and learning, establish effective communication with the school community, and provide the leadership necessary for effective use of resources in the implementation of standards based instruction

Maximize the educational leadership of the principal during this time of transition

Concentrate on the critical need to develop new teaching strategies and implement standards based instruction and assessment

Develop ways to inform parents of standards, state and local assessments, and expectations

Employ a full time nurse teacher

### **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that the Bristol Warren School District:**

Employ a central office administrator to provide guidance to schools on the implementation of standards based instruction

### **The SALT Visiting Team recommends that RIDE, through the East Bay Field Service Team:**

Work with the School Improvement Team for Excellence (SITE) to revise the Site Plan

## **6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

### **Most Important Commendations**

Collaborative efforts among teachers

Acceptance of diversity

## **Most Important Recommendations**

Concentrate on the critical need to develop new teaching strategies and implement standards based instruction and assessment.

Provide extensive, ongoing professional development for faculty and staff in the areas of standards based instruction and assessment, portfolio development, and best practices

Empower a representative School Improvement Team to make decisions about teaching and learning, establish effective communication with the school community, and provide the leadership necessary for effective use of resources in the implementation of standards based instruction.

Examine test results and student work to determine ways to improve instruction and close gaps

Develop ways to inform parents of standards, state and local assessments, and expectations

## **Final Advice to the School**

The Visiting Team congratulates Hugh Cole School for the development of a genuine inclusive community that supports all of its members. Teachers and children feel comfortable and safe in its bright, clean facility. Parents feel welcome and participate in many school activities.

Much good work has been done in many areas. You have developed an inclusive school with scheduled planning time for collaboration and support for all its members. You have forged strong ties to your community.

Now it is time to turn your attention to developing new ways to help your children attain the high standards that will be needed for success in the 21st century. Do not be afraid to experiment with new methods and materials. Support each other in these efforts and share both successes and failures. Join your new principal and support her efforts to create a school where everyone is a learner and a teacher. Develop a media center that makes your library truly the heart of the building. Advocate for District change that will support the needs of all the children in Bristol and Warren.

We hope you will use this report to guide you as you embark on an exciting journey that will bring untold rewards to both you and the children.

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# **APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT**

## **MEMBERS OF HUGH COLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SELF-STUDY COMMITTEE**

Dr. Karen Annotti, Principal  
Mary Frances Perella  
Betty Ose  
John Raposa  
Jan Johnson  
Terry Craig  
Martha Genovesi  
Mary Ann Palazio  
Judy Colaluca  
Cheryl Lagor

Barbara Betres  
Helen Albernaz  
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### **MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM**

Carol Belair, Teacher, Grade 4  
Wilbur McMahon School, Little Compton  
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as SALT Fellow)  
Chair of the Team

Paula Milano  
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Gayle Raposa, Teacher, Grade 3  
Ranger School, Tiverton

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Sue Roklan, Teacher, Grade 1  
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