



Mt. Hope High School

BRISTOL-WARREN REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

April 6, 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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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 Mt. Hope High School from April 2 to April 6, 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. Mt. Hope High School also hosted a School Support Visit during the week of April 2. The SALT Visit Team and the School Support Team shared evidence.

The School Improvement Plan for Mt. Hope High 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 Mt. Hope High School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 114 full and partial classroom observations which totaled over 100 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 11 students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *conversations with the visiting School Support Team*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with the following groups:*
 - *School Improvement Team*
 - *school and district administrators*
 - *students*
 - *parents*
- ◆ *conversations and/or interviews with 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*
- ◆ *visits to the Home Building Project*
- ◆ *review of the following documents:*
 - *School Improvement Plan for Mt. Hope High School*
 - *Bristol and Warren Regional School District Strategic Plan*
 - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
 - *classroom textbooks*
 - *1998 Information Works!*

- 1999 Information Works!
- 2000 Information Works!
- *1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- *1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment result*
- *Mt. Hope High School and Community Profile Report*
- *1996 NEASC Report to Mt. Hope High School*

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 25 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 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 Mt. Hope 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 Bristol/Warren, and the Rhode Island Department of Education will share that responsibility.

Following your school’s review of this report, consider what changes to make in your school improvement plan. The revised plan will form the basis for negotiating a Compact for Learning with your district. The Compact’s purpose is to ensure that your school and your district work out an agreement about the most important priorities for your school to work and how to best target district support in reaching them. Your RIDE Field Service Team representative will offer some assistance in facilitating the preparing of the Compact.

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 MT. HOPE HIGH SCHOOL

Mt. Hope High School serves students in grades 9 through 12 for the towns of Bristol and Warren, Rhode Island, and is part of the Bristol Warren Regional School District. These two towns are suburban towns with a population of approximately 12,000 in Warren and 24,000 in Bristol. The present school first opened its doors to students as the old Bristol High School in 1966 and reopened as Mt. Hope High School in 1993. Additions were added in 1993.

A nine-member school committee composed of six Bristol residents and three Warren residents are elected to four-year terms and govern the regional public school district. The school committee appoints the superintendent. A professional staff of 4 administrators, 95 full and part time faculty, 13 aides and support personnel, and 8 custodians service students at Mt. Hope High School.

Of the 1,124 students attending Mt. Hope High School, 96.5% are white, 1% are Hispanic, 1% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1.5% are black. 183 students, totaling 16.3%, receive special education services, 5 students are limited English proficient, and 21.5% are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch.

Mt. Hope High School is in the process of aligning curriculum to standards. As a school it is moving toward block scheduling and plans to introduce a ninth grade academy in the next school year. A Perkins grant has been awarded for the creation of a travel and tourism and finance academy. Special programs and activities that are presently in place include the Home Building Project, Purple Play School, Thursday's Café, Senior Citizens' Dinner, the Greenhouse Project – Life Skills, and the Master Gardener Project. Mt. Hope High School has a partnership program with Roger Williams University in chemistry and marine biology.

Based on 1999 statewide testing results *Information Works!* indicates that students tested at Mt. Hope High School performed about the same as similar students statewide in all of the Mathematics subtests, and somewhat better than similar students statewide in the English Language Arts subtests. Mt. Hope students performed the same as similar students statewide on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment. Equity gaps, a difference of 15 % or greater, exists between general education students and special education students on all subtests, with no special education students reported to be proficient on the Mathematics Problem Solving subtest or the English Language Arts subtests.

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 discussed in the student learning conclusions. 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report. *Information Works!* data for Mt. Hope High School is available at www.ridoenet.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF MT. HOPE HIGH SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

On the outside, Mt. Hope High School is a sprawling building attractively surrounded by spacious fields and a gently streaming brook. Inside there are newly painted corridors and a clean and safe environment. Unfortunately, the numerous “buildings” that house the various content areas contribute to a sense of fragmentation that exists in this school.

While district and building administrators strive to make the numerous changes to move this school forward, teachers are also working hard to provide meaningful instruction to their students. However, a failure to clearly communicate these goals and objectives to one another and to their students leaves many students and teachers feeling disconnected and disenfranchised. Students rarely experience learning as an adventure. To many of them, school is something they endure. In spite of some very impressive accomplishments, too many students do not have an appreciation of their own talents and inherent value.

High expectations do not exist for all students at Mt. Hope High School. Teacher and student morale is low. Administrators are anxious to make sweeping changes, but teacher and student anxiety about these changes frustrates them. Still, the school’s potential for success is great. Every stakeholder longs for a school where teachers love to teach and students love to learn, but this vision has been clouded by a lack of trust. This trust must be repaired. The common desire and commitment to provide the learning experience these students so richly deserve create hope that this situation will soon be resolved by the caring professionals charged with this task.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *1999 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *conversations and/or interviews with teachers, students, administrators, and staff*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *scheduled meeting with the students, parents, district and building administration*
- ◆ *Mt. Hope High School and Community Profile Report*

Conclusions

Students at Mt. Hope High School exhibit a wide range of involvement in their learning. In some classes students are actively engaged and take responsibility for their learning. This is most evident in classes where student performance is emphasized, such as Industrial Technology, Visual and Performing Arts, Family and Consumer Science, and content area classes where students are engaged in performance based assessment. In these classes students participate, are attentive, respectful, and excited about their learning. In too many classes, at least some students are bored, disengaged, or disruptive. These students do not value the process of learning or the quality of their work. This makes it hard for them to learn, and contributes to an environment that undermines learning. (*following students, classroom observation, conversations and/or interviews with teachers, students, administrators, and staff, observations of the school, scheduled meeting with the students*)

Some students arrive at Mt. Hope High School confident, poised, motivated, courteous, and articulate. These students involve themselves in their courses and extracurricular activities. They volunteer their time and talents to worthwhile projects in and out of school. Unfortunately, the effect of their enthusiasm and optimism is diminished by the sense of discontent that exists among many students. These unhappy students express disappointment and resentment. There is too little in the culture of this school that recognizes and celebrates their efforts and successes, and as a result, some students are disengaged and do not value the process of learning or the quality of their work. They do not trust that some of the adults responsible for their learning respect or value them and as a result develop low expectations for personal growth. A high degree of rapid administrative and staff turnover has left them feeling abandoned, confused, and angry. As a result many students are not focused on learning. They have lost confidence in the school's ability to meet their educational needs. Thus, they view changes in curriculum and discipline policies as punitive. (*observations in the school, classroom observations, following students, examining student work, scheduled meetings with students and building administration*)

Many students at Mt. Hope High School have responded well to the district wide efforts to improve students' skills in writing. These students are analyzing samples of student work, peer editing, self-evaluating using a rubric, revising, and fully engaged in the writing process. These efforts are reflected in the recent success of Mt. Hope High School students on the statewide writing assessment. The percentages of students who achieved the standard, or achieved the standard with honors, has risen from 18 to 54% in the last four years. (*RI Writing Assessment School Summary Report – March, 2000, Mt. Hope High School and Community Profile Report, examining student work, classroom observations, following students, conversations and interviews with teachers, building and district administrators*)

Few students at Mt. Hope High School are engaged in activities that require them to utilize higher order thinking skills in mathematics. Their learning redundantly focuses on basic skill development rather than applying and integrating those skills. Students do very little writing in math and do not spend time articulating problem solving strategies. They express concern about this. This explains the results on the 2000 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination where 63% of the students tested did not meet the standard in Mathematical Skills. The likelihood that these students will be able to successfully apply mathematical skills to solve problems, or to engage in higher order thinking in mathematics, is severely compromised. It also explains why 80 % of students tested did not meet the standard on the Mathematical Concepts subtest, and 84% did not meet the standard on the Problem Solving subtest. (*2000 New Standards Reference Examination results, classroom observations, looking at student work, conversations with district and building administrators, conversations and interviews with students and teachers*)

Commendations for Mt. Hope High School

Improved student performance on the statewide writing assessment.

The active learning, positive behavior, and high quality of student work in Industrial Technology, Visual and Performing Arts, Family and Consumer Science, and content area classes with performance based assessments.

Recommendations for Mt. Hope High School

Engage students more actively in their work and do not accept inappropriate classroom behavior.

Increase emphasis on performance based assessments.

Celebrate student success and recognize the quality of their work.

Build meaningful connections between students and adults.

Continue the focus on improved writing, and expand it to all content areas.

Emphasize the application of Mathematical Skills as tools for investigation and problem solving.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff and school administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students*
- ◆ *1999 Information Works!*
- ◆ *review of Mt. Hope High School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*

Conclusions

Many teachers at Mt. Hope High School perceive that they are not valued. In spite of the hard work and commitment they exhibit, many teachers do not receive positive support for their efforts. They do not feel their input is sought, valued, or considered. Some feel that their voices have been silenced and they lack a vehicle to express their concerns. While most teachers sincerely desire to improve their practice, they are anxious and confused about the impact that proposed changes to curriculum and scheduling will have on their teaching. There is no systemic professional development to help them prepare for these changes. This detracts from their ability to focus on the challenges of teaching or build their teaching skills. (*conversations and interviews with teachers, staff, and building administrator, scheduled meeting with the School Improvement Team, parents, building and district administrators, review of Mt. Hope High School Improvement Plan*)

Most teachers at Mt. Hope High School work hard to deliver quality instruction to their students. While some possess the tools and methods for effective teaching, others rely too heavily on outdated practices, teacher directed activities, textbook driven lessons and worksheets. Too often instruction is not responsive to the individual learner. As a result student learning is often restricted to the basic skills level. (*examining student work, conversations and interviews with teachers, students and building administrators, classroom observations, following students, 2000 New Standards Reference Results*)

Standards based instruction is emerging in several content areas but all departments have not embraced this approach. Not all teachers have high or clear expectations for their students. Currently some teachers are successfully implementing performance-based assessments and using them to guide instruction. Others do not use a variety of assessments to evaluate student work. Nor do their assessments provide ample and appropriate feedback to improve student work. Consequently only a small percentage of students are meeting or exceeding high standards. (*examining student work, conversations and interviews with teachers, students and building administrators, classroom observations, following students, scheduled meetings with building and district administrators*)

Classroom management at Mt. Hope High School is too often a problem in some academic classrooms. Some teachers are frustrated in their attempts to involve their students in classroom activities and even accept disruptive and disengaged behavior. They seem resigned to accept this behavior, and in doing so, diminish the value of their teaching and their students' learning. When teachers give students the opportunity to actively participate in their learning, these problems are minimized. (*classroom observations, following students, observations made in the school, scheduled meetings with students and building administrators, conversations and interviews with students and teachers*)

Commendations for Mt. Hope High School

The hard work and dedication of those teachers who are committed to rigorous instruction and have high expectations for quality student work.

Recommendations for Mt. Hope High School

Develop a school-based and school wide professional development plan to support proposed changes to curriculum, scheduling, and program of studies.

Expand opportunities for the faculty to participate in local, regional, and national professional development opportunities.

Develop faculty and administrative consensus regarding discipline issues.

Recommendations for Bristol Warren Regional School District

Develop and fund a district wide professional development plan based on the needs of this school.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *observations of the school*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with many students, teachers, staff and school administrators*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students*
- ◆ *Following students*
- ◆ *Mt. Hope High School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *1996 NEASC Report to Mt. Hope High School*
- ◆ *review of the Bristol Warren Regional School District Strategic Plan*
- ◆ *visits to the Home Building Project*
- ◆ *examining student work*

Conclusions

The style of communication at Mt. Hope High School presents a serious impediment to the creation of a healthy school environment. In a school community that has recently experienced significant turmoil, a “healing process” is needed. This community needs to build an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust before moving ahead. Effective communication is critical to overall school improvement. The current administrative leader has not yet effectively developed a mechanism that would allow for dialogue between and among administration, faculty, staff, parents, and students. Students, faculty, and staff are frustrated, and sometimes angry that they have no meaningful input. Important changes to the schedule, curriculum, and program of studies have been made with little regard for the expertise and experience of staff members and students, or with concern for their readiness. Although administrators, faculty, and students all want this school to move forward, they are not currently sharing a common vision or working together to reach their common goal. (*observations of the school, conversations and interviews with students, parents, teachers, staff, and administrators, scheduled meetings with district and building administrators, parents, students, and the School Improvement Team, Mt. Hope High School Improvement Plan, 1996 NEASC Report to Mt. Hope High School*)

The district and school administration at Mt. Hope High School have acknowledged the need for change and are wholeheartedly committed to substantial school improvement. They have proposed, and are engaged in, a sweeping set of changes that reflect current trends in educational reform, but they have done this without a solid self-study to inform them of the school's real needs. The proposed changes, which would substantially impact teaching and learning at Mt. Hope High School, are not yet addressed or published in the school's improvement plan or the district strategic plan. There are no action plans with a level of detail that would allow stakeholders to understand or participate in the change process. Also lacking is a clearly articulated, systematic professional development plan to prepare the staff for these changes. *(scheduled meetings with district and school administrators, School Improvement Team, and parents, conversations and interviews with teachers, review of 1996 NEASC Report to Mt. Hope High School, review of Mt. Hope High School Improvement Plan, and review of the Bristol Warren Regional School District Strategic Plan)*

Currently, Mt. Hope High School is not serving the needs of all of its students in an equitable manner. Some students have been negatively impacted by the school's inability to find and retain qualified staff to fill vacancies and long term absences. The perception that the needs of the non-college bound students have less immediacy and importance contributes to a lower set of expectations for their achievement, and a lower quality of supports and services. This is particularly evident for Special Education students, English Language Learners, and other special populations. The social, emotional, and academic needs of these students are not being met, creating an environment of apathy and resentment in some classrooms, and throughout the school. *(observations of the school, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers, students, and staff, scheduled meetings with the School Improvement Team, building administrators and students, following students)*

With notable exceptions the physical design of Mt. Hope High School is working to reinforce the sense of departmental isolation and fragmentation instead of being used as a tool to create a sense of community and personalization between students and staff. The current use of space does not easily lend itself to interdepartmental cooperation, convenient communication between the principal and assistant principals, and even the efficient movement of students in the allotted passing time. The current use of space in the Assistant Principals' offices leads to secretarial staff's supervision of students. Additionally, the communication technology is not sufficient to ensure a safe and secure environment. *(observations in the school, classroom observations, following students, scheduled meetings with students, parents and building administrators, conversations and interviews with teachers, students, and staff)*

The Student Activities program at Mt. Hope High School nurtures a sense of belonging and school pride that these students desperately need. The Student Activities Director is successfully celebrating the history and past accomplishments of the Bristol and Warren School Districts, while creating an inclusive identity for the regionalized Mt. Hope High School. Similarly, school programs such as the Home Building Project and the Visual and Performing Arts departments provide outstanding opportunities for students to demonstrate their considerable talents and build pride in this school. *(conversations and interviews with teachers, staff, and students, observations made in the school, visits to the Home Building Project, following students, classroom observations, and examining student work)*

Commendations for Mt. Hope High School

The Home Building Project

The Student Activities Program

The Visual and Performing Arts Programs

The high quality of the well-utilized library and media center

Recommendations for Mt. Hope High School

Create a mechanism for meaningful and active dialogue to share, learn, and support each other's efforts.

Develop action plans with the level of detail necessary to allow all stakeholders to be informed and participate in the change process.

Investigate the issues of equity in Special Education, English Language Learners, and other special populations.

Study the social, emotional, and academic needs of the non-college bound students and identify ways to make teaching more responsive to those needs.

Develop a comprehensive developmental Guidance Curriculum that reflects current standards to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of all students.

Reorganize the school's physical environment and reallocate the available space.

Recommendations for the Bristol Warren School District

Develop a system wide professional development plan that is also responsive to the needs of Mt. Hope High School.

Identify and budget resources to support professional development necessary to accomplish proposed schoolwide changes.

Clearly articulate a comprehensive and coherent vision to inspire and support your efforts for school improvement.

Recommendations for the Bristol Warren Education Association

Advocate for the professional development of your members.

Support your members' efforts to establish dialogue with the district and building administration.

7. FINAL ADVICE TO THE SCHOOL

This SALT Visit team recognizes the struggles of this school. We have been deeply affected by the voices of your students and staff as they relayed their concerns, disappointments, and hopes. We understand and appreciate the effects of recent turmoil on your school. Now you are faced with yet another transition. We urge you to be patient with one another as you seek solutions to improve the school's climate and your students' learning. Be sure that no student is left behind.

Use this report to create an opportunity to establish meaningful dialogue about the needs of this school and its future. Include teachers, parents, and students in this dialogue as you consider the conclusions and recommendations made here. Ensure that this participation is meaningful and will result in shared decision making.

MT. HOPE HIGH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

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Greg Arruda
Social Studies Department Chair

Robert Arsenault
Music Department Chair

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

ENDORSEMENT OF SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

Mt. Hope High School

April 6, 2001

To complete the Catalpa Ltd. report endorsement, I discussed the conduct of the visit with the Visit Chair while it was in process, I observed a portion of the visit 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.
May 12, 2001