

CHARLES N. FORTES MAGNET ACADEMY

Providence, Rhode Island

A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

February 11, 2000

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1. THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS 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 Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy from February 8, 2000 to February 11, 2000 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 visiting team. The visiting team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners and a parent. Their affiliations are included in Appendix A.

The School Improvement Plan 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 playground, 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 Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy.

The visiting team collected its evidence from the following:

- a total of 116 hours of classroom observations. Classrooms were visited at least once. Most teachers were observed more than once.
- many observations of the school (outside of classroom)
- following 9 students for a full day
- observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day
- scheduled meetings with the following groups:
 - the school's Steering Committee
 - building and district administrators
 - students
 - parents
 - common planning time
- conversations and interviews with many staff, students, teachers, 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
- district and school policies
- review of professional development activities
- review of classroom assessments

- review of the following documents:
 - School Improvement Plan
 - District Strategic Plan
 - 1998, 1999 Rhode Island Writing Assessment
 - 1998,1999 New Standards Reference Exams
 - SALT Survey Report
 - curriculum documents
 - *1999 Information Works!* Data Book
 - teacher evaluation handbook

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 22 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 Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy 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 Providence, and the Rhode Island Department of Education will share that responsibility.

Following the Team's summary statement, Portrait of Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy 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 conclusions and concludes with the team's final advice to the school.

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

2. A PROFILE OF CHARLES N. FORTES MAGNET ACADEMY

The Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy, located in the West End of Providence, is one of two site-based schools in the Providence School district. A nine-member school committee whose members are appointed by the mayor governs the Providence Public School District. The Providence school district is the largest in the state.

The Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy, which opened in September 1997, serves students in grades PK-five. There are 12 regular education classes, six bilingual classes as well as a bilingual pre-K and a bilingual special education class for grades one and two.

A principal and magnet curriculum coordinator lead a staff of 41 teaching professionals, one part time teaching professional, 16 teacher assistants and two clerks. Ninety-eight percent of the 498 students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Sixty-seven percent of the students are Latino, 18% are Black, 8.5% are Asian/Pacific Islander, 5.5% are White and 1% are Native American. Nineteen percent of the students receive special education services that include pullout, inclusion as well as speech and language.

As a site-based school Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy is using the School as a Whole (SAW) as its decision making body. The SAW refers to all administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, students, central office and community representatives.

3. PORTRAIT OF CHARLES N. FORTES MAGNET ACADEMY AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy is a school that blends the lessons of the past with the excitement of the future. The happy, enthusiastic students are fortunate to be in a wonderful place that respects their individuality and values their diversity.

Led by a visionary administrator and supported by a dedicated, hardworking staff, the school provides positive educational opportunities grounded in high expectations. The teachers provide a safe, nurturing environment for learning. They are highly motivated and incorporate new teaching strategies and programs into their curriculum. All of the teachers demonstrate a genuine love of their profession and a desire to see their students reach their potential.

In a literature rich atmosphere, the students are encouraged to express their thoughts and ideas freely through writing and speaking. The abundance of technology and the ability of the staff to use it supports student learning and achievement.

The strong emphasis on literacy has limited the amount of time spent on developing a well-articulated math program.

Parents have a high level of satisfaction with their children's educational experiences and they have expressed interest in increasing their role at the school.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- *1998, 1999 State Writing Assessment results*
- *1998, 1999 New Standards Reference Exam results*
- *Student meeting*
- *Conversation with school administration*
- *Following students*
- *Classroom observations*
- *1999 Information Works! Data book*
- *Meeting with Steering Committee*

Conclusions

Students at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy love their school. The pride they show in their school and the respect for school staff is obvious. They are enthusiastic, independent learners who welcome the opportunity to learn. (following students, classroom observations, student meeting)

On the 1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam, the students at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy exceeded or met the standard in the following; Reading: *Basic Understanding* – 55%, and Reading: *Analysis & Interpretation* – 32%. Scores on the reading subtests show significant improvement but continue to be below state and district percentages. (1998,1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam results)

On the 1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam the students at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy achieved the standard in the following: Writing: *Effectiveness* – 6% and Writing: *Conventions* – 15%. These scores not only are below the state and district percentages but also have not shown any improvement from the previous year. On the 1999 Grade 3 Rhode Island Writing Assessment 8% of the students achieved the standard. These scores do not yet reflect the efforts and focus on writing currently present in the school. (1998,1999 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Exam results, following students, classroom observations)

On the 1999 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam the students at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy met the standard in the following: *Skills* – 11%, *Concepts* – 1% and *Problem Solving* – 1%. The scores are below state and district percentages for the second year in a row. The necessary focus on literacy may be a contributing factor. (1998, 1999 New Standards Mathematics Reference Exam results, meeting with Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy steering committee, classroom observations)

Due to inaccurate data in the 1999 *Information Works!* Data book, equity gap analysis was not possible. (1999 *Information Works!* Data book, conversation with school administrators)

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy:

Attend to any possible equity gaps on state assessments that become apparent when accurate data are available and modify plans accordingly.

Analyze all school and state assessment data in order to identify students who performed significantly below standard and provide intense intervention to support classroom instruction.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- *Classroom observations*
- *Examination of student work*
- *Conversations and interviews with many staff, students, teachers, and school administrators*
- *SALT Survey 1999*
- *Following students*
- *Meetings with school administrators, district administrators, and students*
- *Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy School Improvement Plan*

Conclusions

High expectations are an integral part of daily instruction for **all** children at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy. Teachers set clear goals and students understand how to achieve them. Students are motivated to develop high expectations for themselves. (classroom observations, conversations with teachers and students, SALT survey)

Rubrics are displayed in all classrooms and understood by most students at Charles N. Fortes Magnet

Academy. Since students have been involved in the development of rubrics, they are able to use them effectively to judge and improve their work. (classroom observations, meetings and conversations with students, conversations with teachers)

The staff at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy provides a school-wide literature rich environment that fosters an appreciation of books and a love for reading. This atmosphere is supported by the adoption of the Literacy Collaborative in place in grades K-2. However, this instructional model does not presently extend to the upper grades. (following students, classroom observations, conversations with teachers and administration)

The amount of writing in the classrooms at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy is impressive. Teachers integrate writing across the curriculum and throughout the day. Students are engaged in many writing activities: journal writing, responses to literature, letter writing, poetry, personal narratives, and report writing. These activities should lead to improved student performance. (classroom observations, following students, examination of student work)

The availability and use of technology are extraordinary at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy. Teachers have successfully integrated technology into daily learning. This valuable teaching tool enhances learning and extends the classroom beyond the boundaries of the school. (classroom observations, conversations with teachers and staff, meeting with students, following students)

Math has not been a priority at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy until this year. Low test scores have spurred the development of an action plan in the area of math instruction which initially includes professional development and the purchase of materials. This is a first step but improvement in student achievement will be limited until a well-defined curriculum is developed and articulated across grade levels. (classroom observations, meetings with school and district administration, Charles N .Fortes Magnet Academy School Improvement Plan)

There is a diverse population with varying needs and abilities at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy. The staff shows a high level of sensitivity to the needs of individual students, which results in positive opportunities for learning. (classroom observations, following students)

The SALT Visiting Team Commends Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy for:

High expectations for **all** students.

The extensive, meaningful use of technology throughout the school.

Respect for the diversity of the student population.

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Charles N. Fortes Magnet

Academy:

Continue efforts to extend the Literacy Collaborative model into grades 3-5 and ensure that emphasis on high level comprehension skills is included.

Design and implement an action plan which addresses the development of a well-defined math curriculum and articulation across grade levels.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- *Classroom observations*
- *Conversations and interviews with many staff, students, teachers, and school administrators*
- *Meetings with School Improvement Team, school administrators, district administrators, students, and parents*
- *Meeting with Steering Committee*
- *School Improvement Plan*
- *Teacher Evaluation Handbook*
- *Observation of common planning meeting*

Conclusions

The Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy is a learning community committed to ongoing professional growth directly connected to daily classroom instruction. Staff actively participates in professional conversations, workshops, common planning, walkthroughs, faculty retreats, and course work. A strong sense of collegiality enables the staff to learn from each other and tap into each other's strengths. (conversations with teachers, meetings with Steering Committee and school administration, school observations, observation of common planning meetings)

School climate is excellent. An exceptional staff empowered by visionary leadership share a common mission, high expectations, and a willingness to go the extra mile. The site based model enables the school to select staff who share this commitment. (classroom observations, conversations with teachers, meeting with parents and students)

The school has recognized the need for parental involvement by including it as a priority in the School Improvement Plan. Organized parental involvement at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy is absent and many parents are left out. Parents and staff have not yet developed a common understanding of the role of parents in the school. (meeting with parents, meeting with Steering Committee, conversation with school administration)

The school has done an excellent job of seeking and acquiring additional resources which provide other opportunities for academic and social growth, such as the Mill Project, conflict resolution and technology. While these programs have enhanced the educational experience, they fragment the day and tend to reduce instructional time. (school and classroom observations, meeting with Steering Committee, conversations with teachers)

The Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy has developed a good School Improvement Plan that revolves around five cadres: curriculum, technology, parent/family involvement, discipline/ morale, and communication. The plan is reviewed and revised on a regular basis using data and faculty input, however parental involvement is noticeably absent. Final decisions about the plan are reached through consensus in monthly School as Whole (SAW) meetings. (meeting with Steering Committee, Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy School Improvement Plan, meetings with administrators)

The current teacher evaluation process at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy is based on the five dimensions of teaching. It is a useful tool that promotes reflective practice. However, the present system does not correlate with the district's movement towards the 9 Principles of Learning. (Teacher Evaluation Handbook, conversation with school administrators)

The SALT Visiting Team Commends Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy for:

Collegial decision making.

Commitment of staff to their profession and the children.

Excellent leadership.

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy:

Increase efforts to include parents in the planning and decision making process.

Focus the work of the parent/family cadre to reduce barriers to parent involvement.

Examine the daily schedule to assess the most efficient use of instructional time.

The SALT Visiting Team Recommends that the Providence School District:

Support the continuance of the site-based model at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy.

7. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Most Important Conclusions

Students at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy love their school. The pride they show in their school and the respect for school staff is obvious. They are enthusiastic, independent learners who welcome the opportunity to learn. (following students, classroom observations, student meeting)

High expectations are an integral part of daily instruction for **all** children at Charles N. Fortes Magnet Academy. Teachers set clear goals and students understand how to achieve them. Students are motivated to develop high expectations for themselves. (classroom observations, conversations with teachers and students, SALT survey)

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Final Advice to the School

After only three years, your school is well on its way to providing a solid educational program. The high expectations you have set for your students and yourselves, together with a genuine caring for each other and your students, have become the foundation for success.

You have established a literacy program in the early grades but you need to continue these efforts into the upper grades. We know you will continue to use technology as a tool for learning.

Now is also the time to move forward with your plans for improving math instruction since you recognize that this is a real need.

Come to an understanding on how best to involve families in your school community.

Continue to have those professional conversations, collaborate with each other in decision making and remain confident in your abilities to make choices for students. This is clearly a strength in your school.

We applaud your energy and dedication.

APPENDIX TO THE VISITING TEAM'S REPORT

MEMBERS OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

Nancy Owen, Principal

Lori Hughes, Curriculum Coordinator

Sandra Rainone, Literacy Coordinator

Joyce Fitzpatrick, Reading Recovery Teacher

John Marsula, Technology Specialist

Scott Beauregard, Music Teacher

Barbara Witbeck, Social Worker

Gail Mastropietro, School Psychologist

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Patricia K. Ribeiro, Grade 2 Teacher
Providence Street School, West Warwick
(on leave to Rhode Island Department of Education to serve as SALT Fellow)
Chair of the Team

Patricia Blackburn, Grade 2 Teacher
Hope Highlands School, Cranston

Kathleen Cook, Grade 5 Teacher
Oak Lawn School, Cranston

Diane Devine, Office of School Improvement
Rhode Island Department of Education

David Flynn, Director
New England Association of Schools & Colleges Elementary Commission

Miriam Hernandez, Parent
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Carol Hoppe, ESL Teacher
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