



# Hope Highlands Elementary School

Cranston

## The SALT Visit Team Report

November 2, 2001



**School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)**

## The accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

The findings of this report are those of this SALT visit team. The names and affiliations of the members of the team are in the appendix. The team follows the school visit protocol in the *Handbook for Chairs on Conducting a SALT School Visit*. The team is required to focus on what it observes at the time of the visit and is restricted from comparing the school with any other. This school visit was supported by the Rhode Island Department of Education as one component of its accountability system, School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT).

### Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education

James A. DiPrete, Chairman

Jo Eva Gaines, Vice Chair

Colleen Callahan, Secretary

Representative Paul W. Crowley

Sue P. Duff

Senator Hanna M. Gallo

Gary E. Grove

Patrick A. Guida

Mario A. Mancieri

Vidal P. Perez

-

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Peter McWalters, Commissioner

The Board of Regents does not discriminate on the basis of age, color, sex, sexual orientation, race, religion, national origin, or disability.

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

**This report is available at <http://www.ridoe.net/schoolimprove/salt/visits.htm>**

1. THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS OF THIS REPORT

*Overview*

*Sources of Evidence for This Report*

*Using the Report*

2. PROFILE OF Hope Highlands Elementary School

*Background*

*State Assessment Results for Hope Highlands Elementary School*

3. PORTRAIT OF Hope Highlands Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

*Sources of Evidence*

*Conclusions*

*Commendations for Hope Highlands Elementary School*

*Recommendations for Hope Highlands Elementary School*

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

***Sources of Evidence***

***Conclusions***

***Commendations for Hope Highlands Elementary School***

***Recommendations for Hope Highlands Elementary School***

***Recommendations for Cranston School District:***

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

***Sources of Evidence***

***Conclusions***

***Commendations for Hope Highland***

***Recommendations for Hope Highlands Elementary School***

***Recommendations for Cranston School District***

## 7. Final Advice to the School

*Hope Highlands Elementary School Improvement Team*

*The SALT Visit Team*

*New Standards Reference Examination and RI Writing Assessment Results (2001)*

*Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report*

# THE PURPOSE AND LIMITS OF THIS REPORT

## Overview

This is the report of the SALT team that visited Hope Highlands Elementary School from October 29, 2001 through November 2, 2001. The following features are at the heart of the report:

- ◆ The team seeks to capture what makes this school work, or not work, as a public institution of learning. Each school presents a unique picture.
- ◆ The team does not compare this school to any other school.
- ◆ When writing the report, the team chooses deliberately the words that convey its message best to the school, based on careful consideration of what it has learned about the school dynamics.
- ◆ The team makes its judgment explicit.

The major questions the team addresses are:

- ◆ How well do the students learn at this school?
- ◆ How well does this school teach its students?
- ◆ How well does this school support learning and teaching?

The SALT report creates accountability for improvement by directly connecting its judgments of quality and its recommendations for improvement to the actual work going on in this school at the time of the visit.

The team closely follows the visit protocol in the *Handbook for Chairs of the SALT School Visit*. The Catalpa endorsement certifies that this team followed the protocol and that this report meets all criteria required for a legitimate SALT visit report.

The visit team is made up primarily of teachers and administrators from Rhode Island public schools. The majority of team members are teachers. The names and affiliations of the team members are listed at the end of the report.

## Sources of Evidence for This Report

In order to write this report, the team examines test scores, student work, and other documents related to this school. The school improvement plan for Hope Highlands Elementary School was the touchstone document for the team. No matter how informative documents may be, however, there is no substitute for being at the school while it is in session—in the classrooms, in the lunchroom, and in the hallways. The team builds its conclusions primarily from information about what the students, staff, and administrators think and do during their day. Thus, the visit allows the team to build informed judgments about the teaching, learning, and support that actually takes place at Hope Highlands Elementary School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following sources of evidence:

observing a total of 112 complete classes and 95 partial classes. The team spent a total of over 160 hours in direct classroom observation. Every classroom was visited at least once, and almost every teacher was observed more than once.

observing the school outside of the classroom

following 11 students for a full day

observing the work of teachers and staff for a full day

meeting at scheduled times with the following groups:

teachers

school improvement team

school and district administrators

students

parents

talking with students, teachers, staff, and school administrators

- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their students*
- ◆ *analyzing three years of state assessment results as reported in Information Works!*
- ◆ *reviewing the following documents:*

*district and school policies and practices*

*records of professional development activities*

*classroom assessments*

*school improvement plan for Hope Highlands Elementary School*

*district strategic plan*

*1999, 2000 SALT Survey report*

*classroom textbooks*

*1998, 1999, 2000 2001 Information Works!*

*1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*

*1999, 2000, and 2001 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*

*2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination School Summary*

*2001 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination School Summary*

The full team built the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 24 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 must agree that every conclusion in this report:

- ◆ *is important enough to include in the report.*
- ◆ *is supported by the evidence the team has gathered during the visit.*
- ◆ *is set in the present.*
- ◆ *contains the judgment of the team.*

## Using the Report

The team chooses deliberately the words, phrases, and sentences it uses in its conclusions, as well as in the *Portrait* and *Final Advice*. Thus, this report is the team's best attempt to encourage and support the school's continued improvement in strengthening the learning of its students.

**The team reached consensus on each conclusion, each recommendation, and each commendation in this report.**

It is important to note that this report reflects only the week in the life of the school that was observed and considered by this team. The report does not cover what the school plans to do, or what it has done in the past. This report is not prescriptive.

The value of this report will be determined by its effectiveness in improving teaching and learning. By considering the importance to the school of what the team said and why, the school takes its first step in becoming accountable in a way that actually improves learning.

It is important to read and consider this report as a whole. Recommendations and commendations should be considered in relation to the conclusions they follow.

After the school improvement team considers this report, it should make changes in the school improvement plan. The revised plan will form the basis for negotiating a Compact for Learning with the district. The purpose of the Compact is to ensure that the school and its district work out an agreement about the best way to improve the school and the best way to target district support for the school. A RIDE Field Service Team representative will offer assistance in preparing the compact.

## 2. PROFILE OF Hope Highlands Elementary School

### Background

Built in 1991 and located in the western section of Cranston, Hope Highlands is the newest school in the city. Serving 640 students in grades K-5, there are four kindergarten sessions, five classes of grades one, two, and four, four classes of grade three and five, and two special needs classes. The administrative team is comprised of a principal, a part-time assistant to the principal, and an aspiring principal. There are twenty-eight classroom teachers and forty other staff members. An elected seven-member school committee, a superintendent and an assistant superintendent oversee the school district.

Of the 640 students, 98 percent are white. Eight percent of the students receive special education services and two percent receive free or reduced-priced lunch.

### State Assessment Results for Hope Highlands Elementary School

On the 2000-01 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination subtests, three in four of the fourth graders (77%) met or exceeded the standard in basic skills; one in two of the fourth graders (49%) met or exceeded the standard in concepts, and one in three of the fourth graders (36%) met or exceeded the standard in problem solving. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist for fourth grade special education students on mathematics tests. Students at the Hope Highlands Elementary School perform below level as similar students statewide on basic skills but above in concepts.

On the 2000-2001 New Standards English Language Arts Examination subtests, four in five of the fourth graders (85%) met or exceeded the standard in reading: basic understanding; three in four of the fourth graders (75%) met or exceeded the standard in reading: analysis and interpretation; and four in five of the fourth graders (80%) met or exceeded the standard in writing: effectiveness; and four in five of the fourth graders (78%) met or exceeded the standard in writing: conventions. These scores may be adjusted, as 14 scores are under review. Equity gaps (a difference of more than 15%) exist for fourth grade poverty and special education students for reading and writing. Students at the Hope Highlands Elementary School perform at the same level or below the level of similar students in the state

On the Rhode Island Writing Assessment one in three of the third graders (35%) met or exceeded the standard.

When comparing the last four years of test data, Hope Highlands School scores in the areas of language arts and mathematics do not indicate consistent upward growth trends.

The most recently available New Standards Reference Examination results have been appended to this report. *Information Works!* data for Hope Highlands Elementary School is available at [www.rido.net](http://www.rido.net).

### 3. PORTRAIT OF Hope Highlands Elementary School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Hope Highlands Elementary School possesses a physical beauty that catches the eye of all that pass by. Upon entering, you are surrounded by a clean, meticulously maintained school and hallways that showcase student work. Parents, busy with tasks that support this school community, comfortably travel throughout the school. Polite, respectful students greet staff and visitors with a smile. Laughter sounds as students, teachers, and staff move about their learning environment. Teachers are committed to the school improvement process and provide a safe, nurturing learning environment.

Energetic and dedicated teachers, driven to improve their craft and student learning, attend myriad professional development workshops. Due to the lack of scheduled common planning time, teachers are creative in meeting with their grade level colleagues and specialists.

Students come to school ready to learn. Within teacher directed classrooms, many students are unable to make choices or to be involved in higher-level learning tasks. Insufficient classroom libraries further hinder students by limiting their opportunities to choose books for independent reading.

Under the direction of a new leadership team and with additional support personnel, you are united as a community of learners. Individual parents and parent groups actively support the school. Parents are committed to and encouraged to engage in school and classroom initiatives. Together you are working as a partnership to improve the learning of all your students.

## 4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *2001 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2001 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
- ◆ *2001 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*
- ◆ *1999, 2000, 2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with students, parents, staff, and school administrators*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, and staff*

### Conclusions

Hope Highlands Elementary School students are successful learners, but many appear to be passive participants in teacher-centered environments. Students are confident of their ability to respond or replicate the skills in specifically directed lessons. Most students feel challenged and produce quality work within the confines of their assignments; however, their products exhibit limited choice and remain at a factual recall level. (*talking with students, scheduled meetings with students, observing classes, following students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work*)

Students read throughout their day in all content areas, but many do not demonstrate comprehension through discussing or sharing with peers. Using workbook pages and dittoes, they effectively complete written and oral responses. The lack of opportunities for higher level thinking skills impacts students' ability to problem solve, inhibits deeper understanding, and affects the quality of written expression. Reading scores on the New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination are quite high; however, over the past three years there has been a steady decrease in the number of students achieving the standard. (*1999, 2000, 2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination results, observing classes, scheduled meetings with students, talking to students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, 2001 Information Works!*)

Hope Highland students effectively summarize and respond to factual questions and text in written form. Primary students also respond to literature, and writing prompts, as well as write in journals. Students use graphic organizers, story maps, checklists, and rubrics when writing. They have limited opportunities to select topics and collaborate with peers. Students readily edit their own work, but focus exclusively on capitalization, punctuation, and spelling, paying little attention to revising for quality of content. If students are further involved in the writing process, they will continue their

impressive rise in performance, as indicated by results of the 2001 New Standards English Arts Reference Examination in writing conventions and effectiveness and the 2001 Third Grade Rhode Island Writing Assessment. (*following students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work,, 2001 New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination results, 2001 Third Grade Rhode Island Writing Assessment, talking with students and teachers, observing classes, 2001 Information Works!*)

Students demonstrate a sense of ownership and pride in their school community by their active involvement in school routines. They announce the events of the day, lead the Pledge of Allegiance, and call students to board the buses. Safety patrol members politely guide their peers in the hallways. Students demonstrate respect and responsibility by their positive behavior in the hallways and classrooms and on the playground. (*observing the school outside of the classroom, following students, talking with students and teachers, scheduled meetings with students, parents, and school administrators, observing classes*)

## Commendations for Hope Highlands Elementary School

The well-mannered cooperative students

The student sense of commitment to their school

Confidence of students, as learners

## Recommendations for Hope Highlands Elementary School

Encourage students to become active participants in their own learning by engaging them in student-generated interest-based activities.

Allow students to make choices regarding writing topics, book selection, products, and learning tools.

Provide students with opportunities for more collaboration and discussion with their peers.

## 5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *talking with students, teachers, school administrators, staff and school improvement team*
- ◆ *interviewing teachers about the work of their, students*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with students, parents, district and school administrators, school improvement team*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *2001 Information Works!*
- ◆ *SALT Survey 1999-2000*
- ◆ *New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *teacher schedules*
- ◆ *reviewing completed and ongoing student work*

### Conclusions

The teachers of Hope Highlands Elementary School are vested in their students and genuinely care about their achievement. They work very hard, care about their colleagues, and willingly share materials, ideas, and resources. Although there is a lack of common planning time, teachers collaborate in creative ways. This has provided opportunities for grade level coordination; however, this does not address the need for cross-grade articulation or planning with support staff and special subject area teachers. (*talking with teachers, interviewing teachers, scheduled meeting with school and district administrators, school improvement team, meetings with parents, observing the school outside of the classroom, SALT Survey 1999-2000, teacher schedules*)

Exemplary teaching is evident. Most teachers strive to achieve the best instructional practice. However, instruction is predominately teacher-directed and whole-group, lacking in differentiation for diverse learning styles and levels. A limited number of students are provided opportunities to work cooperatively or in small groups so they can learn from each other. In many cases, teachers do not provide students with meaningful, immediate teacher feedback to enable them to reflect, revise, or improve their work. The over reliance on dittoes and worksheets, along with the lack of open-ended questioning, does not foster critical thinking. In addition, the absence of student choice inhibits creativity and student ownership for their learning. (*scheduled meetings with students, teachers, observing classes, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, following students*)

While standards are visibly posted throughout the school, teachers are at various stages in their understanding of standards-based instruction. Classroom lessons and student work do not consistently reflect purposeful use of standards and rubrics. Teachers are limiting students by using the standard as the maximum level for performance, rather than as the foundation for expansion of concepts and student learning. (*observing classes, following students, talking with teachers and school administrators, interviews with teachers about the work of their students*)

Reading instruction is predominately based on the anthology series, with limited opportunities for instructional level reading or small group instruction. Some teachers use reading response journals, which allow students to reflect on their reading, while others use mostly worksheets. Reading strategies are not consistently modeled or encouraged throughout the school. In many cases reading fluency and ultimately comprehension is impacted because students are not practicing the application of these strategies. These practices, in conjunction with limited classroom libraries, hinder students in developing a lifelong love of reading. (*following students, observing classes, interviewing teachers about the work of their students, talking with students, SALT Survey 1999-2000*)

In mathematics, there is clear focus on improving student ability to problem solve. Teachers are instructing students in the strategies and, as a result, students are demonstrating success in communicating their solutions. This focus should improve student performance on the New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination in the area of problem solving. (*reviewing completed and ongoing student work, conversation and interviews with students, teachers, school improvement team, New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination*)

Teachers incorporate writing throughout the curriculum. Instruction focuses primarily on writing conventions, often at the exclusion of genre, style, voice, sentence fluency, word choice, and ideas. This isolated concentration may improve the scores on the writing conventions on the New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination; however, it will not awaken the writer within the student. (*New Standards English Language Arts Reference Examination, following students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, talking with students*)

## Commendations for Hope Highlands Elementary School

Commitment, dedication, and collaboration of staff to improve the student learning

Working toward standards-based instruction in all areas

## Recommendations for Hope Highlands Elementary School

Implement a sequential, consistent writing program with a focus beyond conventions.

Vary instructional strategies, tasks, and grouping to meet the needs of all students.

Allow student choice in all areas of the curriculum.

Provide additional opportunities for higher-level thinking and student self-evaluation.

Make available consistently scheduled common planning time for teachers to collaborate.

Continue to use standards, set high expectations, and hold all students accountable for reaching them.

Surround students with a print rich environment by improving classroom libraries.

Attend professional inservice opportunities for differentiated-teaching strategies to meet the needs of all learners.

#### Recommendations for Cranston School District:

Provide resources for Hope Highlands Elementary School for common planning time.

Surround students with a print rich environment by improving classroom libraries.

Provide inservice opportunities for differential teaching strategies to meet the needs of all learners.

## 6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

### Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *observing classes*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *talking with many students, teachers, staff,*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *Hope Highlands School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with students, parents, district and school administrators and school improvement team*
- ◆ *SALT Survey 1999-2000*
- ◆ *classroom textbooks*
- ◆ *Teacher Evaluation Handbook*

### Conclusions

Hope Highlands Elementary School involved all stakeholders in an extensive self-study and the development of an exemplary, realistic school improvement plan. As a result, action steps are currently being implemented. (*Hope Highlands School Improvement Plan, scheduled meetings with parents, school administrators and school improvement team*),

At Hope Highlands Elementary School the use of classroom computers is inconsistent and the computer lab is underutilized. Problems with Internet and Network access and printer problems discourage students and teachers from using this valuable instructional tool. (*scheduled meetings with students, teachers, parents, district and school administrators, and school improvement team, Hope Highlands School Improvement Plan, following students, observing the school outside of the classroom*)

Hope Highlands School has programs that attempt to meet the needs of diverse learners. Within the limited time constraints, the Primary Enrichment Program teacher works with both whole-class and small pull-out groups, as well as provides enrichment materials for the classroom teachers. However, this is insufficient to meet the needs of this school's learners. (*observing classes, SALT Survey 1999-2000, talking with teachers and school administrators, scheduled meetings with parents*)

The March 1999 Draft of the Cranston Public Schools Teacher Evaluation is comprised of five domains that clearly define criteria for each level of performance. In the area of Content and Pedagogy expectations for teacher performance are surprisingly low. (*Teacher Evaluation Handbook, scheduled meetings with district and school administrators*)

The adopted programs in place at Hope Highlands (e.g. the Anthology series, Social Studies

program, and Science Program) drive instruction. This has resulted in whole-group teacher-directed activities and a reliance on worksheets. In addition, the lack of scheduled common planning time does not allow teachers to communicate regularly with each other or to develop a rigorous, continuous program in K-5 for all learners. (*following students, talking with many students and teachers, classroom textbooks,, observing classes*)

Hope Highlands parents and staff are a true partnership. Parents are involved in all aspects of student education and are welcomed by the school community. They are very visible in the school and the classrooms, where they support teachers and school programs, as well as serve as vocal advocates for all children. Parents are well informed about students' quarterly goals and expectations; however they are not as thoroughly informed about the selection process for specialized programs. (*scheduled meetings with parents and school administrators, and school improvement team, observing the school outside of the classroom*)

## Commendations for Hope Highland

Quality of self-study and the resulting School Improvement Plan

Willingness of the school community to work together for the good of its students

## Recommendations for Hope Highlands Elementary School

Set clear criteria for PEP/Gifted selection and communicate the selection process to parents.

Provide scheduled opportunities for vertical and horizontal discussion across grade levels to develop a rigorous, continuous program.

Increase the use of building technology.

## Recommendations for Cranston School District

Increase the rigor of the standards in the Teacher Evaluation Handbook in the Domain 1 Planning and Preparation Component: 1a Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy.

Provide training for teachers in the instructional integration of technology.

Expand the Pep/Enrichment Program at Hope Highland.

## 7. Final Advice to the School

You have begun your journey toward a standards-based learning environment for your school. With your commitment to quality education you embrace your students as the heart of your program.

Teachers and administrators should continue to develop a rigorous, continuous program for all students in Kindergarten through grade five. Provide scheduled opportunities for teachers to collaborate. Use your thoroughly developed action plan to guide you. Take advantage of professional development and the pooled resources of your talented teachers to achieve your goals.

Be selective within your programs and choose the best of what each has to offer as dictated by student need.

Celebrate the willingness of your academically competent students by offering them a variety of choices. Within the framework of your students' exemplary behavior, encourage them to become self-seeking, independent learners.

With your guidance and support your students will become successful lifelong learners.

We hope that this report will provide you with further insight and be instrumental as you continue toward excellence.

# Hope Highlands Elementary School Improvement Team

Patsy Blackburn  
Teacher

Ameila Chouinard  
Teacher

Carol Cornell  
Teacher

Dr. Marcia Harrop  
Teacher

Cheryl Knee  
Retired Teacher

Hannah Lombardo  
Parent

Joyce McGuire  
Parent

Cheri Sacco  
Teacher

Donna Vasconcellos  
Parent

Mary Beth Young  
Parent

Nancy DaPonte-Easter  
Former Principal

Joseph Pasonelli  
Principal

Joanne Valk  
Administrative Intern

## The SALT Visit Team

Donna H. Reinalda  
Multi-Aged Teacher (1-3)  
Sowams School  
Barrington, Rhode Island  
on leave to the Rhode Island Department of Education  
to serve as a SALT Chair  
Team Chair

Deborah Capuano  
Principal  
Marieville School  
North Providence, Rhode Island

Lois Conway  
Grade 2 Teacher  
John Wickes Elementary School  
Warwick, Rhode Island

Carroll Garland  
Enrichment Specialist  
Sowams School  
Barrington, Rhode Island

Chad Lenihan  
Grade 4 Teacher  
Dunns Corners School  
Westerly, Rhode Island

Kimberly Lisi  
Grade 3 Teacher  
Anna McCabe Elementary School  
Smithfield, Rhode Island

Karen Matoian  
Community Member  
Lincoln, Rhode Island

Charlee McElroy  
Grade 3 Teacher  
Sherman School

Warwick, Rhode Island

Eileen Rocchio

Library Media Specialist

Warwick Neck Elementary School

Warwick, Rhode Island

Phyllis Sale

Grade 1 Teacher

Ashton School

Cumberland, Rhode Island

Debra Turchetti

Grade 4 Teacher

Graniteville Elementary School

Graniteville, Rhode Island

# New Standards Reference Examination and RI Writing Assessment Results (2001)

## Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

### Hope Highlands Elementary School

November 2, 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, 1<sup>st</sup> 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.  
November 30, 2001