

# KICKEMUIT MIDDLE SCHOOL

Bristol/Warren, Rhode Island

## A REPORT TO THE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY THE SALT VISITING TEAM

January 30, 1998

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

The purpose of the visit to Kickemuit Middle School during the week of January 26, 1998, was to draw conclusions and make recommendations for the improvement of the school in the three focus areas of SALT: student learning, progress and achievement; teaching and learning; and the school as a teaching and learning organization. The collection of evidence, dialogue about the issues relevant to Kickemuit Middle School, and the resulting recommendations for improvement were done in an effort to ensure school accountability and improvement in student achievement.

Central to the SALT process is the involvement of practitioners in making informed judgments about school wide practices. Members of the visiting team, whose names and affiliations are included in Appendix A, are middle level teachers and administrators and staff members of the Rhode Island Department of Education.

For the team members, the visit began with the report prepared by the Kickemuit Self-Study Team in which the school team presented their own view of the strengths and weaknesses of their school. That two dimensional image of the school took on a life of its own as the team entered the school, allowing the team to collect their own evidence about the work of the school in the SALT focus areas. The visit included 134 classroom observations, "shadowing" ten individual students, attendance in six team planning meetings, formal meetings with building and district level administrators, specialists, parents, and students, as well as numerous informal conversations with many members of the school community. In addition to dialogue, the team spent a great deal of time looking at school documents outlining the "life of the school" including but not limited to the School Improvement Team Plan, school and team newsletters, school documents (student and teacher handbooks) and policies.

The team closely examined representative samples of student work. This opportunity to reflect on the work collectively gave the team sharper insight into student achievement and teacher expectations.

It is important to note that this report reflects a "moment" in the life of the school. It extends beyond the information which can be gathered through statewide assessment data or 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 already clouded from being immersed in 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.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF TEAM'S FINDINGS

### A Profile of the School

Kickemuit Middle School serves approximately 900 students in grades six, seven, and eight. The school is presently housed in two sites, Kickemuit Middle School in Warren and the Guiteras School in Bristol with plans to merge into one location in the Fall of 1998 (KMS, as used in this report, will refer to both sites). The school serves children from two towns, who attend elementary school in their own towns through grade five. The students attend the regional high school upon completion of the middle school program.

All students are arranged into core teaching teams consisting of 2 to 4 teachers. At this time, all placements in the sixth grade are heterogeneous, with students traveling with their homeroom classes. Students at the Kickemuit site are also arranged into heterogeneous groups with the exception of one accelerated math group on each team.

### Portrait of the Condition of Kickemuit Middle School at the Time of the Visit

It is evident that Kickemuit Middle School has a clear vision as evidenced by a thoughtful strategic plan guided by the Carnegie Turning Points. This school must continue to move in a forward direction in order to become a fully

actualized middle school focusing on achieving academic excellence. A core of teachers committed to this process is taking the initiative to forward their own personal development and are helping the school to move forward. However, the journey will be slow and difficult until the vision, as well as the work, is shared by all.

With the completion of the new addition at the Kickemuit site, the school will finally become one in the physical sense. However, a great deal of work needs to be done to create coherence in all aspects of the organization, with a focus on high academic standards and consistent behavioral expectations for all students.

The staff of Kickemuit Middle School must accept the challenges they face in teaching and learning. The school, families, and community must work together cooperatively to build a common understanding and vision and a shared set of expectations. Together they must ensure a high quality education for all Bristol-Warren students.

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

#### **Conclusions**

- Students at K.M.S. are inquisitive, energetic, enthusiastic, and friendly.
- Expectations for student achievement by the school community stated in the self-study are not being met as evidenced by MAT test scores that continue below the state averages and lack of quality in student work.
- More than 50% of Kickemuit students are not meeting the standard in the writing and math performance assessments.
- Many students are not invested in their own learning and do not have a voice in planning their own learning opportunities.
- Test scores and other assessments of student performance are not used systematically to design curriculum or modify teaching strategies to meet individual students' learning needs.
- Student learning is enhanced by co-teaching experiences with special education and LEP resource teachers.

#### **Commendation**

- The school recognizes that progress and achievement for all students is its first priority.

#### **Recommendations for Improvement**

- Provide more opportunities for students to make choices that will challenge them.
- Provide more challenging and diverse activities for students to engage in active learning.
- Require students to demonstrate and apply what they have learned.
- Use existing data on student performance to identify gaps in student learning so that curriculum and instruction can be modified effectively.

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

#### **Conclusions**

- High academic expectations are not shared and consistently applied throughout the school resulting in uneven quality in student performance.
- Stability and continuity is provided for students and parents as grade leaders and guidance counselors follow the students through a three-year cycle.
- Teachers do not consistently challenge their students in daily classroom work.
- Teachers are willing to accommodate diverse learners in their classrooms.
- Teachers do not use a wide range of instructional strategies. There is an overuse of worksheets, questions from the text and objective tests.
- Work has begun to align curriculum with standards.

## **Commendation**

- The implementation of the co-teaching model (ESL, special education) benefits the learning of all students in those teaching situations.

## **Recommendations for Improvement**

- Express expectations more clearly. Students need to understand why they are doing activities and assignments. Learning needs to be valued for reasons other than taking "the test".
- Professional development is needed to support teachers in meeting the instructional needs of diverse learners and in developing rigorous curriculum based on standards.
- Take advantage of the school's block scheduling to help students better meet instructional outcomes.
- Use fewer work sheets.

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

## **Conclusions**

- Communication among teams, grade levels, teachers, administrators and parents is not clear, consistent and effective.
- There are no consistent behavior standards across the school. Discipline is too often handled in an inconsistent manner at all levels resulting in decisions that appear arbitrary to students, staff, and families.
- Leadership roles of the school are not clearly defined so as to provide focus and coordination that will further teaching and learning at Kickemuit
- The school does not use all of the assessment data collected to help -decide how to reduce the gaps in student learning.
- The specialists feel isolated from the rest of the faculty and this affects the school climate negatively.
- The existing structure for providing student support services can not adequately meet the more serious emotional, social and academic needs of students.
- The school community's expectations for high student achievement are impeded by blaming poor performance on socio-economic status.
- The mission, vision and beliefs of the strategic plan are commendable but the low goals for student performance are not.

## **Commendations**

- Teams of teachers and students
- The availability of common planning time
- The care and concern that faculty and staff show for students
- The broad-based, active, school-improvement team

## Recommendations for Improvement

- Redefine leadership roles in the school to provide more guidance and support to teachers in the areas of student achievement, instruction, and assessment.
- Set higher goals for student performance in the school's strategic plan.
- Define a clear policy for discipline and behavior that will be consistently enforced throughout the school.
- Build a deliberate process to merge Kickemuit and Guiteras into one cohesive school community.
- Establish additional support services which fit the school and the needs of its students and families.
- Build habits of talking about students and their learning that do not use existing labels.
- Simplify and clarify how information is communicated to all.

## 6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### Most Important Commendations

- The school recognizes that progress and achievement for all students is its first priority.
- The implementation of the co-teaching model (ESL, special education) benefits the learning of all students in those teaching situations.
- Teams of teachers and students
- The availability of common planning time
- The care and concern that faculty and staff show for students
- The broad-based, active, school-improvement team

### Most Important Recommendations

- Provide more challenging and diverse activities for students to engage in active learning.
- Use existing data on student performance to identify gaps in student learning so that curriculum and instruction can be modified effectively.
- Express expectations more clearly. Students need to understand why they are doing activities and assignments. Learning needs to be valued for reasons other than taking "the test".
- Professional development is needed to support teachers in meeting the instructional needs of diverse learners and in developing rigorous curriculum based on standards.
- Define a clear policy for discipline and behavior that will be consistently enforced throughout the school.
- Redefine leadership roles in the school to provide more guidance and support to teachers in the areas of student achievement, instruction, and assessment.

### Final Advice to Kickemuit Middle School

As the visiting team concludes this report, there is one final thought we would like to leave you with. You have a great many members of your school willing to focus on school reform. Remember that this report represents an external viewpoint of the work presently being done at KMS. In our short time spent in your school, we collected a great deal of evidence and engaged in lengthy dialogue around the specific issues facing KMS. Please take the time to seriously reflect on our conclusions, commendations, and recommendations. The "snapshot" we took of the school is meant to help you to reflect during this time of transition on your present condition, and to assist you as you become one unified middle school where all students are achieving at high levels. We are wishing you the best of luck on your journey.

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## APPENDIX A: ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL'S SELF-STUDY TEAM**

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**APPENDIX B: PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHING  
AND LEARNING SECTION (GAP ANALYSIS COMMITTEE)**

Use existing information about student performance (including Kickemuit's MAT score history) to identify possible trends and gaps in student performance that might inform curriculum design and instructional practices.

The purpose is not to compare Kickemuit with other schools, but to learn how Kickemuit can do its job better.

Based on an examination of all MAT scores for Grades 4, 6 and 8, the Team saw these questions about trends and gaps as potentially productive for the school faculty to ask itself:

- Does the upward movement in 8th grade math scores from 95-97 correspond to any change in how math was taught? If so this upward trend in scores would support the idea that it was having a positive effect.
- Is there any explanation for the dip in 8th grade reading and math scores?
- Is the decline in scores from 4th, grade to 6th grade to 8th grade higher than state and national trends?
- Does the gap between the 4th grade math scores in Bristol and Warren suggest an important gap between the schools that Kickemuit should take into account as it plans for the entry of new students from those schools?
- Organize files of data that report on student progress so that it is possible to use it as a tool for improving teaching and learning in the school.