



Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School

Exeter and West Greenwich, Rhode Island

SALT Visit Team Report

December 8, 2000



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 Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School from December 5 through December 8, 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 visit team. The visit team is composed of Rhode Island school practitioners. Their affiliations are included at the end of the report.

The School Improvement Plan for Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School was the touchstone document for the team. However informative written reports may be, though, 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 Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School.

The visit team collected its evidence from the following:

- ◆ *a total of 75 full classroom observations and 22 partial classroom observations. All classrooms were visited at least once. Most teachers were observed two or more times.*
- ◆ *many observations of the school (outside of classroom)*
- ◆ *following 7 students for a full day*
- ◆ *observing the work of teachers, specialty teachers and staff for a full day*
- ◆ *scheduled meetings with the following groups:*

- *Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Improvement Team*
- *school and district administrators*
- *students*
- *parents*
- *teams*
- *team leaders*
- ◆ *conversations and 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.*
- ◆ *review of the following documents:*
 - *Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Improvement Plan*
 - *district strategic plan*
 - *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
 - *1998 Information Works!*
 - *1999 Information Works!*
 - *2000 Information Works!*
 - *1998, 1999, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
 - *1998, 1999, 2000 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
 - *Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Mission Statement*

- *Student Work Assessment Report, October 26, 2000*
- *Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Self-Study results*
- *Teacher Evaluation Handbook Agreement Between Exeter-West Greenwich Regional District School Committee and Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District Teachers' Association*

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 26 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 Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior 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 Exeter-West Greenwich School Regional School District, the citizens of Exeter and West Greenwich, and the Rhode Island Department of Education will share that responsibility.

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 Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School

Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School serves students in the seventh and eighth grades from the rural towns of Exeter and West Greenwich. The school is part of Exeter and West Greenwich's regional school district and is administered by a superintendent and a district staff of five. It is governed by an elected school committee of seven members. Four members of the school committee are from Exeter and three members are from West Greenwich.

The present school, which is located in West Greenwich, opened in 1990. The building also houses the district's senior high school in a separate wing.

Of the 382 students who attend Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School, 95 percent are white, two percent are Hispanic, one percent are African-American, fewer than one percent are Native American and Asian/Pacific Islander. One percent of the students are identified as ESL learners. Twenty percent receive special education services. Thirteen percent of Exeter-West Greenwich's students qualify for the free lunch program.

One principal and one part time assistant principal (currently on maternity leave) administer Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School. Thirty-four full and part time teachers serve the students who are grouped into three academic teams.

From 1998 to 2000, Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School student performance on the New Standards Reference Examination shows decreases in all four of the Reading and Writing subtests. In the Mathematical Concepts subtest student performance has decreased one percent over the three-year period from 1997 to 2000, while their performance in both the Mathematical Skills and Problem Solving subtests has improved. Seventh grade student performance on the Rhode Island Writing Assessment has decreased three percent from 1998 to 2000.

Equity gaps (gaps of 15 percent or more) between special education students and general education students exist in all four subtests measured of the New Standards Reference Examination. General education students outperform special education students. Gaps also exist between males and females in the Reading and Writing subtests with females outperforming males.

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 Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School is available at www.ridoe.net.

3. PORTRAIT OF Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Everyone in the Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School community—teachers, the principal, staff, students, and parents—have worked hard to establish a respectful, nurturing, and safe environment for learning. Students really do love their school and teachers have the opportunity to make a real impact on their learning and, indeed, on their lives.

The school improvement plan is one that reflects a good self-study process and could provide the school with a clear direction for the improvement of the learning of every student. Yet, the faculty, administration, and staff are in a struggle to determine the future direction of this school. They lack a commonly held vision that would unify them around agreed upon goals for their students and themselves.

Poor communication at all levels in the school community threatens the good work being done here. Procedures for channeling information are often ignored. The dissemination of information is sometimes delayed. Confusion, frustration, and even anger result and thwart those efforts designed to improve student learning.

The Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School community is committed to effective middle school philosophy, but disconnects prevent the school from becoming a high performing middle school in practice. Teaming has been severely eroded by the current schedule and staffing practices. Students and teachers are not able to work together in a way that creates effective small communities of learning within the larger school structure.

The hard work of implementing standards has just begun at Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School. Teachers have been trained in the development of standards-based instructional units and have begun to implement the use of rubrics in their classes. Some students are able to use rubrics to guide themselves in the completion of their work. However, students and teachers have not yet developed a clear understanding of the standards. Moreover, the school can not complete the work of aligning curriculum with those standards because the school has not yet developed curricula for every area.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *1999 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 Information Works!*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *1999-2000 SALT Survey report*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Mission Statement*
- ◆ *Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with teachers and students*
- ◆ *meeting with students*

Conclusions

Students are ready and willing to learn. They like their teachers and principal. They are cooperative, respectful of others, and feel they are respected, supported, safe, and nurtured. (*Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Mission Statement, following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers and students, meeting with students*)

Most students can read and comprehend literal meaning. Few students demonstrate analysis and interpretation skills in their classwork. This finding is consistent with student performance on state assessments which show 53 percent of students achieving the standard in Basic Understanding and only 16 percent of students achieving the standard in Analysis and Interpretation. (*following students, classroom observations, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results, examination of student work*)

Students effectively use basic skills in mathematics. This is consistent with their good performance in Mathematical Skills on state assessments. Few students demonstrate complex problem-solving techniques that include formulating problems, implementing solutions, and justifying conclusions in their work. The increase in student performance on state assessments in Problem Solving is puzzling. (*following students, classroom observations, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results, examination of student work*)

Many students have developed an understanding of writing as process. They successfully employ

brainstorming, drafting, revising, and publishing in their Language Arts and Literary Development classes. The successful use of these skills is consistent with the increase in student performance on the Writing Effectiveness subtest of the New Standards Reference Examination. Students are beginning to use these strategies in other subject area classes that should contribute to further increases in their performance. *(following students, classroom observations, 1999, 2000 Information Works!, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results, conversations and interviews with teachers and students)*

Equity gaps (gaps of 15 percent or more) exist between special education and general education students on all four of the reported subtests measured by the New Standards Reference Examination. General education students outperform special education students. Gender gaps exist on the Reading Analysis and Interpretation and Writing Effectiveness subtests with females outperforming males. The school recognizes the gender gaps and has developed an action plan that includes a study of the issue and professional development that could help to close those gaps. Unfortunately, the plan does not address the gaps between special education and general education students. The proposed professional development in the areas of differentiated instruction, multiple intelligences, and cooperative learning strategies would narrow the gaps for both groups of students. *(2000 Information Works!, 1999-2000 SALT Survey report, Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Improvement Plan)*

Commendations for Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School for:

Students who contribute to the cooperative and respectful learning environment

Recommendations for Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School:

Develop a clear understanding of what students need to be able to do to analyze and interpret written information. Develop a comprehensive plan for improving reading analysis and interpretation. Implement that plan across the entire curriculum.

Continue to provide professional development for all teachers in integrating writing across the curriculum.

Revise Tactic H of the school improvement plan to also address the gaps between special education and general education students.

Engage math teachers in professional development around mathematical problem solving. Integrate more problem solving opportunities in everyday mathematics instruction.

Continue to implement writing skills across the curriculum.

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with teachers, students, and parents*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ *meeting with students*
- ◆ *examination of student work*
- ◆ *Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Improvement Plan*
- ◆ *Student Work Assessment Report, October 26, 2000*

Conclusions

Most teachers use a variety of instructional strategies that include hands-on learning, group work, cooperative learning groups, and projects. These activities do help to engage students in learning. However, few teachers use these strategies to challenge their students to integrate concepts, build on acquired skills, and extend their learning to solve complex, real world problems. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work*)

The emerging use of rubrics has helped some teachers to articulate clear expectations. The continued development of standards-based rubrics will help students take more responsibility for their own learning. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, meeting with students, conversations and interviews with students*)

In addition to Language Arts teachers, many other teachers in the school are beginning to integrate writing into their subject areas to improve the quality of student writing. They ask students to complete research reports and essays that include evidence of brainstorming, drafting, and revising. This emphasis on writing across the curriculum will contribute to increased student performance. (*following students, classroom observations, examination of student work, Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Improvement Plan*)

Most teachers have completed Course I for standards-based instruction, but few have incorporated standards into their classroom practice. Teachers miss opportunities to consistently challenge their students and hold them to high expectations by not following through on this commitment to implement standards-based instruction. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with teachers and parents, Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Improvement Plan, Student Work Assessment Report, October 26, 2000*)

Most teachers use assessments for grading only. They do not use assessments as tools to identify individual student needs and progress, nor do they use assessments to make decisions about their daily instruction. This limits students' chances for success. (*following students, classroom observations, conversations and*

interviews with teachers, examination of student work)

Commendations for Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School for:

the high number of teachers who have participated in the Course I standards-based instruction training

Recommendations for Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School:

Expand opportunities for students to solve complex, real world problems.

Continue and expand efforts to integrate writing across the curriculum.

Implement the extended work units developed as part of the Course I training.

Develop and implement a cohesive plan to provide ongoing professional development and support for teachers as they implement standards-based instruction and assessment.

Continue to develop and evaluate the use of rubrics.

Recommendations for Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District:

Provide the direction, support, and resources necessary for Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School to fully implement standards.

6. FINDINGS ON THE SCHOOL

Sources of Evidence

- ◆ *classroom observations*
- ◆ *conversations and interviews with teachers, students, and school administrators*
- ◆ *meetings with school improvement team, school and district administrators, students, parents, teams, and team leaders*
- ◆ *following students*
- ◆ Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Improvement Plan
- ◆ *Agreement Between Exeter-West Greenwich Regional District School Committee and Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District Teachers' Association*
- ◆ *2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*
- ◆ *Teacher Evaluation Handbook*
- ◆ *Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Self-Study results*

Conclusions

Efforts have been made to increase the level of student performance in reading by including a period of literary development at the seventh grade level. In addition, the action steps in Tactic A of the school improvement plan constitute a beginning effort, but may not be adequate to improve student learning in reading analysis and interpretation. (*following students, classroom observations, Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Improvement Plan, 2000 New Standards Reference Examination results*)

The district is in the second year of implementing the new teacher evaluation process. The plan is a good one. It provides for teacher goal setting, job-embedded learning, and improvement options. The plan requires teachers and administrators to collaboratively assess teachers' strengths and develop a plan for improvement. For teachers identified as needing improvement, assistance (TAP) is provided. However, in Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School, implementation of the evaluation process has been limited. The full implementation of the teacher evaluation process, along with the mentoring program and peer coaching efforts, will improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning here. (*Teacher Evaluation Handbook, Agreement Between the Exeter-West Greenwich Regional District School Committee and the Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District Teachers' Association, meetings with school and district administrators, conversations and interviews with teachers*)

The current Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Improvement Plan reflects a good self-study process. It could provide a clear direction for effective change to occur. However, a shared vision, as well as a clearly defined school improvement team that communicates and oversees the implementation of the plan,

is not in place. Without these essential components the school's improvement plan will not be accomplished. *(Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School Improvement Plan, meetings with school improvement team and school and district administrators, conversations and interviews with teachers and teams)*

While curriculum work has been initiated in some content areas, the lack of a cohesive plan for developing and implementing curriculum aligned with standards impedes the school's efforts to improve teaching and learning. *(conversations and interviews with teachers and teams, meetings with school and district administrators)*

A strong sense of community and a school climate that respects and supports students have been created by teachers, principal, staff, students, and parents. Students work in a fun, safe, and caring environment. They have opportunities to remain after school for extra help and academic support. They benefit from various social activities, counseling, and extended library hours. An effective environment for learning has been created. *(following students, classroom observations, conversations and interviews with students and teachers, meetings with parents, school administrators, students, and teams)*

Poor communication at all levels prohibits the school community from operating in a smooth, effective, and cohesive manner. Procedures are not followed; information is not disseminated in a timely manner; the leadership structure is ignored. These deficiencies in turn lead to perceived inequities, confusion, frustration, and anger. Poor communication threatens the good work being done to improve the teaching and learning at Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School. *(conversations and interviews with students and teachers, meetings with parents, school and district administrators, team leaders, and teams, Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School self-study results)*

For many years teaming in this school has provided students with a supportive environment for learning. Common planning time affords teachers opportunities to address student issues, plan integrated and thematic units, engage in professional development, and collaborate in their instruction. However, the use of shared staff with other teams and district schools has led to a schedule that prohibits some students and teachers from participating in team activities. This situation has eroded the effectiveness of teaming in this school. *(meetings with teams, team leaders, and parents, conversations and interviews with teachers)*

Commendations for Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School for:

the strong sense of community and a school climate that respects and supports students

Recommendations for Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School:

Examine the communication breakdown in the school community. Determine its causes. Strengthen all lines of communication. Clarify all leadership roles.

Evaluate the literary development class as the first step to improve reading instruction. Develop and implement strategies for integrating reading across the curriculum.

Institute a developmental reading program for students reading below standard.

Implement the teacher evaluation process.

Expand the use of the mentor and peer coaching programs.

Establish a school improvement team that includes a clearly defined membership with specific roles and responsibilities. Develop a shared vision.

Ensure adequate staff and an accommodating schedule that support effective middle school teaming.

Recommendations for Exeter-West Greenwich Regional School District:

Provide leadership, support, and resources to Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School to develop curricula that are aligned with standards for all subjects.

Provide adequate resources to assist the school in implementing effective middle school teaming.

Support the school's efforts to address the gaps in reading.

7. Final Advice to the School

The difficult issues that face this school must be confronted and resolved. All the stakeholders are sincere in their desire to help Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School students move forward. Yet they lack a unifying vision around which they can work collaboratively to lead all students to higher levels of learning. Everyone in the school community must work together to develop that common vision.

At the same time, administrators, teachers, and parents must repair the fragmented lines of communication so that everyone is included and can work as a cohesive group. The circumvention of established channels of communication have caused feelings of isolation and perceptions of inequities throughout the entire school community. Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School must learn to work as a team with common goals and direction for its students.

Students, while engaged in classroom activities, are not sufficiently challenged. Rather, they complete predetermined activities already set up for them. Through ongoing professional development teachers can further develop the skills that will enable them to guide their students to a deeper level of understanding. All students must become accomplished, independent learners and problem solvers. Teachers must challenge every student to think. They must empower all students to take more responsibility for their own learning.

You have a good student body and hard working teachers. Capitalize on the wonderful climate that values everyone in the school community. It is a great strength that can help this school in its difficult work. The willing students, the respectful attitudes, and the feelings of safety and fun can all be utilized to make this school an exceptional one in which students achieve high levels of learning.

Use this report to guide your efforts. You can become a high-functioning middle school in which all individuals are regarded highly and all students learn and perform at high standards.

Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School Improvement Team

Steve Anderson
Teacher

Kathy Egan
Assistant Principal/Teacher

Brian Ackerman
Teacher

Gail Bender
Teacher

Will Blake
Teacher

Beth Brocato
Teacher

Karen Callanan
Teacher

Lynn Chase
Parent

Louise Dias
Parent

Katie Franklin
Teacher

Dan Gaudio
Teacher

Deb Guglielmo
Teacher

Sheila Harvey
Teacher

Robert Johnson
Student

Michelle Livsey
Teacher

Linda Luther
Teacher

Melissa Marino
Teacher

Mrs. Mattison
Parent

Sharon Pelsner

Parent

Joe Pfeil
Principal

Pat Rheinbergen
Teacher

Lisa Ross
Teacher

Anthony Saccoccia
Student

Gene Santos
Teacher

Leslie Sawicki
Teacher

Maura Skahan
Teacher

Steve Sposato
Teacher

Bonnie Ulm
Teacher

Joyce Wadbrook
Teacher

Andy Wallace
Teacher

Joe Walsh
Parent

The SALT Visit Team

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New Standards Reference Examination and RI Writing Assessment Results (2000)

Endorsement of SALT Visit Team Report

Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Junior High School

December 8, 2000

To complete the Catalpa Ltd. report endorsement, I have reviewed this report, observed a portion of the visit, and discussed the conduct of the full visit with the Visit Chair. 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.
1/10/01