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Coventry High School

COVENTRY

THE SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

April 7, 2006

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School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT)
The school accountability program of the Rhode Island Department of Education

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Purpose and Limits of This Report

This is the report of the SALT team that visited Coventry High School from April 3 - 7, 2006.

The SALT visit report makes every effort to provide your school with a valid, specific picture of how well your students are learning. The report also portrays how the teaching in your school affects learning and how the school supports learning and teaching. The purpose of developing this information is to help you make changes in teaching and the school that will improve the learning of your students. The report is valid because the team's inquiry is governed by a protocol that is designed to make it possible for visit team members to make careful judgments using accurate evidence. The exercise of professional judgment makes the findings useful for school improvement because these judgments identify where the visit team thinks the school is doing well and where it is doing less well.

The major questions the team addressed were:

How well do students learn at Coventry High School?

How well does the teaching at Coventry High School affect learning?

How well does Coventry High School support learning and teaching?

The following features of this visit are at the heart of the report:

Members of the visit team are primarily 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.

The team sought to capture what makes this school work, or not work, as a public institution of learning. Each school is unique, and the team has tried to capture what makes Coventry High School distinct.

The team did not compare this school to any other school.

When writing the report, the team deliberately chose words that it thought would best convey its message to the school, based on careful consideration of what it had learned about the school.

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

The team made its judgment explicit.

This report reflects only the week in the life of the school that was observed and considered by this team. The report is not based on what the school plans to do in the future or on what it has done in the past.

The team closely followed a rigorous protocol of inquiry that is rooted in Practice-Based Inquiry®¹ (Catalpa Ltd.). The detailed *Handbook for Chairs of the SALT School Visit, 2nd Edition* describes the theoretical constructs behind the SALT visit and stipulates the many details of the visit procedures. The *Handbook* and other relevant documents are available at www.Catalpa.org. Contact Rick Richards at (401) 222-8401 or rick.richards@ride.ri.gov for further information about the SALT visit protocol.

SALT visits undergo rigorous quality control. To gain the full advantages of a peer visiting system, RIDE did not participate in the editing of this SALT visit report. That was carried out by the team's chair with the support of Catalpa. Ltd. Catalpa Ltd. monitors each visit and determines whether the report can be endorsed. Endorsement assures the reader that the team and the school followed the visit protocol. It also ensures that the conclusions and the report meet specified standards.

Sources of Evidence

The Sources of Evidence that this team used to support its conclusions are listed in the appendix.

The team spent a total of over 254.5 hours in direct classroom observation. Most of this time was spent observing complete lessons or classes. Almost every classroom was visited at least once, and almost every teacher was observed more than once. The team spent a total of over 110.25 hours interviewing faculty, staff, and the administration.

The full visit team built the conclusions, commendations and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 30.25 hours in team meetings spanning the five days of the visit. This time does not include the time the team spent in classrooms, with teachers, and in meetings with students, parents, and school and district administrators.

The team did agree by consensus that every conclusion in this report is:

- Important enough to include in the report
- Supported by the evidence the team gathered during the visit
- Set in the present, and
- Contains the judgment of the team

Using the Report

This report is designed to have value to all audiences concerned with how Coventry High School can improve student learning. However, the most important audience is the school itself.

This report is a decisive component of the Rhode Island school accountability system. The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) expects that the school improvement team of this school will consider this report carefully and use it to review its current action plans and write new action plans based on the information it contains.

¹ Practice-Based Inquiry® is a registered trademark of Catalpa Ltd.

How your school improvement team reads and considers the report is the critical first step. RIDE will provide a SALT Fellow to lead a follow-up session with the school improvement team to help start the process. With support from the Coventry School Department School Improvement Coordinator and from SALT fellows, the school improvement team should carefully decide what changes it wants to make in learning, teaching and the school and how it can amend its School Improvement Plan to reflect these decisions.

The Coventry School Department, RIDE and the public should consider what the report says or implies about how they can best support Coventry High School as it works to strengthen its performance.

Any reader of this report should consider the report as a whole. A reader who only looks at recommendations misses important information.

2. PROFILE OF COVENTRY HIGH SCHOOL

Coventry High School, located in Coventry, Rhode Island, is the only high school in the district. Originally constructed in 1975, the school has undergone two major renovations. The first, in 1991, added twenty rooms including a writing and language lab. The second, in 2001, added art studios, a student management area, school-to-career conference area, environmental suites, a pre-school, a cafeteria, and the Regional Career and Technical Center.

Coventry High School currently educates 1919 students in grades nine through twelve. Of these students, 97% are white, 2% are Hispanic, .9% are African-American, .65% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and .3% are Native American. Seventy-two students receive free lunch, and 36 receive reduced price lunch. Two-hundred-and-eighty-two Coventry High School students (15%) participate in the Regional Career and Technical Center. Twenty-two percent of the students receive special needs services, and one student receives English as a Second Language services. Students in ninth grade are grouped according to a team strategy.

A principal, a director of the Regional Career and Technical Center, four assistant principals—three who serve also as curriculum coordinators—lead this school. The faculty comprises 173 teachers—seven who serve also as curriculum coordinators—and 43 support staff. The support staff includes guidance and career counselors, reading specialists, librarians, a school nurse, a behavior specialist, a school psychologist, a school-based coordinator, an athletic director and assistant, and a school resource officer.

The school offers several academic programs in addition to a core curriculum. These include a literacy program, an early-enrollment program, Advanced Placement classes, a ROTC Program, a Certificate of Initial Mastery Program, a learning center for students with IEPs and 504 plans, the Coventry Learning Academy for Student Success, and an Alternative Learning Center. Coventry High School has concurrent enrollment agreements with Johnson & Wales University and the Community College of Rhode Island. The Regional Career and Technical Center has articulation agreements with Johnson & Wales University, the Community College of Rhode Island, the Culinary Institute of America, and the Culinary Institute of Florida.

There are extensive co-curricular programs and activities available to students at Coventry High School. These include 21 interscholastic sports programs and 27 extra-curricular activities. These programs serve approximately 20% of the school's students. Through district funding and supplemental grants, Coventry High School provides various professional development opportunities for its faculty and staff. These include curriculum revision, advisory training, direct classroom instruction, and programs for the Career and Technical Center.

3. PORTRAIT OF COVENTRY HIGH SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Coventry High School is a good school that aspires to become a great one. This *High Performing and Improving School* houses a large, caring community of administrators, teachers, staff, and students. The school mission statement clearly articulates its goals: to improve student learning so that all students will be able to use their acquired knowledge and skills to become productive members in society. Although the school has not yet fully met these goals, it is making a sincere, dedicated effort to fulfill this vision of excellence.

This massive school, one of the largest in Rhode Island, is home to more than 1,900 polite and respectful students. These students like their school, and they feel safe and respected within its walls. Students learn to read, write, and problem solve, though they do not all perform at equally high levels of quality and success. Similarly, student motivation for learning varies from students who are highly interested and engaged to those who see little purpose in their schoolwork and question the value of success in school.

Most teachers at Coventry High School are dedicated professionals who care deeply about their school and their students. Many are energetic, and they strive to design and deliver quality and innovative instruction. They bring many specialized talents to the instruction of their students. They accept and earnestly work to implement the many changes occurring at their school. They recognize that they need to continue their efforts and training to reach the level of success they expect of themselves and their school. Some design excellent lessons that support their students to learn at high levels and to become life-long learners, yet not everyone meets this standard. Too many teachers are impeded by their inconsistent expectations for student learning.

An administrative team that has established a safe and orderly environment in which to work and learn supports the students and faculty. District administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and students appreciate the recent improvements this group has produced, and everyone hopes for continued stability and success. The six administrators “have jelled” as a team and share a common vision for their school. This team recognizes that this vision has not yet been realized and advocate for continued work to improve learning, teaching, and the quality and success of the many programs and services here.

Commensurate with the size of Coventry High School are its many challenges and work that remains to be done. The technology available to students and teachers is “woefully inadequate.” Implementing proficiency-based graduation requirements and personalization programs at times overwhelms many teachers, staff, students, and parents. Coordinating the needs of the Career and Technical Center with the rest of the High School puts stresses on both programs. Ensuring consistent high expectations and quality instruction for all students remains a work in progress. The sheer size of the school makes certain tasks daunting—scheduling, the provision of services, and allowing students to have a voice. While there is much to celebrate here, difficult decisions and hard work lie ahead.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Conclusions

Students write on a wide array of levels that range in quality progressing from expressing vague ideas and using poor mechanics to developing concepts well and producing excellent written pieces. Some students write very well. This excellent student writing includes pieces that contain main ideas with well-organized supporting details. It also contains fluent sentences that have minimal mechanical errors. This writing typically shows students making effective connections between what they are learning in school and what is happening in the world around them. In contrast, many other students produce writing that lacks clarity, development of ideas, sophistication, content-specific vocabulary, proper grammar, and writing conventions. These students primarily write literal answers to questions or prompts on worksheets, but they struggle to develop more complex and coherent work. Their writing is choppy and employs simple vocabulary and sentence structure. These students say they do not like to write because writing is difficult, and they do not understand either the purpose or the need to write. This may help explain why 56% of the students achieved below standard on the writing effectiveness subtest of the 2005 New Standards Reference Exam. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, talking with students and teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, Coventry High School Self-Study)*

Most students are able to read a variety of texts to complete their class assignments and for their own enjoyment. Some students read very well including most students in Honors and Level 1 classes. These students skillfully use fluency, decoding, and comprehension strategies. They also have a clear understanding of why they read. They enjoy reading, discussing, and interpreting a variety of materials. They particularly like to choose their own reading materials based on their interests, and they know how to learn from both their chosen and assigned reading. Many students do not read as well. Some of these students struggle to decode words and read fluently. Most have difficulty comprehending, analyzing, and interpreting what they read. These students often do not understand why they read or enjoy what they read. Reading often appears too hard for them, and while they can answer factual questions, they have difficulty making inferences and drawing conclusions. This may explain why the 2005 New Standards Reference Exam data show that 52% of students achieve below standard on reading analysis and interpretation. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, Coventry High School Self-Study)*

Although they are not always aware that they are doing so, many students solve problems successfully. These students use higher-level thinking. They effectively and confidently apply their skills and prior knowledge and select appropriate strategies to solve problems in a variety of disciplines and settings. These students do this either independently or in groups and appreciate the opportunity to do hands-on work that interests and challenges them. This helps foster the skills necessary to become life-long learners. Some students do not problem solve as well. These students lack confidence and are not clear about how to solve problems. They struggle to understand the relevance and purpose of problem solving activities, and they fail to see the importance of completing these tasks. They rely on their teachers to direct and guide their work on problems and have had limited practice applying their own problem solving skills. This limits their ability to become independent, critical thinkers and problem solvers. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with students and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, Coventry High School Self-Study)*

Students like their school and most of their teachers. They generally respect each other and the adults in the school. They feel safe and are mostly well behaved. They have a positive attitude toward, take pride in, and have school spirit for Coventry High School. However, they are very concerned about the size of the school and how crowded it is. They feel the size of the school facility and its enrollment limits their course selections and access to guidance. Additionally, they say the size stifles their voice and reduces personalized and individual attention. They also express concerns about the many changes that are occurring. These include new graduation requirements, schedule changes that limit electives, personalization periods, graduation portfolios, and, despite numerous efforts by the school, the adults' inability to help them successfully navigate through many of these changes. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, 2005 Information Works!, 2005 SALT Survey report, Coventry High School Self-Study)*

Student learning varies. Some students take charge of their learning, take pride in their work, and take advantage of the variety of course options. These students are self-motivated and use the available resources. They recognize the value of learning and establish and meet their goals for future success and for becoming life-long learners. They welcome challenging assignments and successfully learn and achieve at high levels. Many students only do work that is less challenging or that is convenient or necessary to meet minimal standards of quality to meet graduation requirements. These students seldom participate actively in their learning. They rely on other students and/or their teachers to provide the answers, and they avoid doing work that requires them to make significant effort. A few students simply shut down, sleep in class, and do little work at all. These less successful learners say that their work is boring, lacks purpose, and is irrelevant to their lives. This apathy prevents these students from learning and achieving. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with students and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2005 SALT Survey report, 2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, Coventry High School Self-Study)*

Important Thematic Findings in Student Learning

Students:

- ◆ *Learn and achieve at varying degrees of proficiency.*
- ◆ *Learn best when they see purpose and relevance and when they can make connections between their education and their lives.*
- ◆ *Learn best when they are able to make choices in their learning.*
- ◆ *Are able to complete work that is fact-based and at a literal level.*
- ◆ *Have more difficulty completing work that requires critical thinking and complex skills.*
- ◆ *Like their school, have a positive attitude, but want to have a greater voice.*

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING FOR LEARNING

Conclusions

Most teachers provide a variety of opportunities for students to practice writing, and they believe this helps their students improve. Some teachers, primarily in the English Department, guide students well through the writing process. They effectively teach students to construct and draft their ideas, edit and revise their writing individually or in groups, and reflect on and publish their finished work. These teachers give students choices in their writing and connect their assignments to students' lives. Writing is a dynamic event in these classrooms in which teachers explicitly teach writing in different genres and formats. Teachers encourage students to share and discuss their ideas and guide them to use writing as a means to learn. These effective practices motivate and help students write well and learn more through writing. Many teachers assign writing tasks without instructing their students in how to write well. These teachers require students to write to complete tasks, simple projects, worksheets, and note taking. They use writing primarily as a tool to assess how well students understand the subject matter. However, this does not encourage students to improve their writing skills or help them to become better writers. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with students and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, Coventry High School Self-Study)*

Teachers require students to read in all content areas and in a variety of genres and formats. Some teachers teach reading well. They teach varied reading strategies, give students a choice in what they read, and connect reading to students and their lives. These teachers encourage students to interpret and analyze texts in and out of class. They use these practices daily. They use a variety of methods to help their students become better readers, and they effectively transmit the importance of reading. This helps students become better readers and learners. Many teachers teach reading less effectively. They require students to read for content knowledge and factual recall, but they expect their students already to know how to read and comprehend. They assume students understand their reading without checking to see whether this is true. They also do most of the analysis for students, rather than allowing students to develop their own understanding of what they read. Additionally, these teachers too often assign reading without considering their students' interests. These teachers believe that having students read more will help them become better readers. However, without active instruction in reading strategies, students fail to develop good reading skills and an appreciation for reading, and they miss opportunities to improve. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, classroom textbooks, 2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, Coventry High School Self-Study)*

While most teachers provide problem solving opportunities across all content areas, not all of them fully recognize or communicate to students how to solve problems or even what constitutes problem solving. Many teachers do teach problem solving well. They design projects that interest their students, offer hands-on activities that challenge them, and require their students to think critically and apply their skills and knowledge. They encourage students to discuss problems, develop and test a variety of solutions, present and evaluate their conclusions, and celebrate their work. Students not only learn in these settings, but enjoy these challenging learning experiences and develop confidence as learners. These effective practices are particularly evident in the Career and Technical Center and many of the Technical Education programs. Some teachers teach problem solving less effectively. They guide students through the problem solving process and are quick to give them the answers rather than allow them to think for themselves and find their own solutions. Often their instruction is highly regimented and disconnected from students' interests. These teachers lack confidence in their students' ability to learn and are more concerned with covering the material than engaging students in developing quality problem solving skills. This teaching limits students' ability to become independent, critical thinkers and life-long learners. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with students and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, Coventry High School Self-Study)*

Teachers at Coventry High School are dedicated, and they enjoy teaching here. They like and respect their students and want them to do well. Parents, students, teachers, and school and district administrators say that the teachers are the "greatest strength" of this school. They bring many skills from their diverse backgrounds that provide specialized expertise that is not always available in high schools. They work well together, freely exchange ideas, and generously volunteer their time and resources to help their students and the school. They take on new challenges to serve what they perceive to be their students' best interests and needs. Most teachers report that they are overwhelmed by the many changes, constant administrative turnover, scarcity of resources, and professional development relevant to the needs that affect their lives as teachers. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan, 2005 Information Works!)*

Teachers teach at many levels of effectiveness. Some provide excellent and varied instruction. They passionately engage all learners, challenge all students, and believe and expect both that all students are capable and that all can learn at high levels. They facilitate learning, allow students to develop and apply knowledge and skills, and connect what they learn in school to their lives. They focus on quality over quantity in their teaching, ensure students have a voice in their classrooms, and take seriously the school's mission to create life-long learners. However, other teachers do not teach as effectively. These less effective teachers do not design or expect rigorous work from all students. They also limit student choice and involvement in learning because they believe this suits "the students' ability levels." A primary cause of this is that their expectations for students diminish in accordance with the many levels in which they place their students. A few other teachers are even less effective. They rely on worksheets, notes, and lectures as their primary vehicle to teach. They fail to interest or engage their students or help them understand the value of education. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan, 2005 Information Works!, reviewing district and school policies and practices, Coventry High School Self-Study)*

Commendations for Coventry High School

- ◆ *Dedicated faculty who work well together*
- ◆ *Numerous opportunities for reading, writing, and problem solving*
- ◆ *Specialized expertise*

Recommendations for Coventry High School

- ◆ *Engage all learners, challenge all students, and believe and expect that every student is both capable and can learn at high levels.*
- ◆ *Provide explicit and quality instruction in how to read, write, and problem solve in all courses. Seek professional development to do this.*
- ◆ *Ensure that instruction is relevant and connected to students' lives. Facilitate learning to ensure this.*
- ◆ *Encourage, celebrate, and motivate every student to be a life-long learner.*
- ◆ *Seek professional development in differentiated instruction in how to engage all learners.*
- ◆ *Continue to provide a variety of opportunities for reading, writing, and problem solving.*
- ◆ *Continue to collaborate with your colleagues to share your expertise.*

Recommendations for Coventry School Department

- ◆ *Work with Coventry High School teachers to engage all learners, challenge all students, and believe and expect that every student is both capable of learning and can learn at high levels.*
- ◆ *Provide professional development in how to differentiate instruction and how to provide quality reading, writing, and problem solving instruction in all courses.*

6. FINDINGS ON SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

Conclusions

The Level system at Coventry High School profoundly impacts student learning. This system labels students and establishes pre-conceived expectations that become reality for the students, parents, and teachers. As a result, students do not work to their full potential, and teachers teach to these lower expectations. This also prevents teachers from being more effective and reaching their own potential in their practice. It produces a school-wide apathy and a lack of confidence in the quality of education that is intended to prepare students for the future. The Level system contributes and sustains the very culture the school complains about in which many students and parents have lowered aspirations for the future. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, classroom textbooks, 2005 Information Works!, reviewing district and school policies and practices, reviewing school improvement plan, Coventry High School Self-Study)*

Coventry High School is a good school in many respects. Students, teachers, staff, and administrators like learning and working here. This is a safe school; student discipline is under control, and the school is well managed. There is a culture of willingness to take on new initiatives and make sincere efforts to implement them. There are strong positive relationships among all members of this learning community. The school offers a variety of programs that extend learning opportunities beyond the classroom and the end of the school day. While this is a good school, several challenges prevent it from becoming a great school. The size of the school community prevents good communication and has a significant impact on learning and personalized education. Inconsistent expectations and quality of instruction across disciplines prevents all students from achieving at high levels. Not all teachers know how to teach reading, writing, and problem solving within their courses and across all disciplines. Inadequate resources and technology slow the pace of progress. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing school improvement plan, 2005 Information Works!, reviewing district and school policies and practices, New England Association of Schools and Colleges Report of the Visiting Committee, 2000, Coventry High School Self-Study)*

The new administrative team has established a clean, safe, and orderly environment. Students, parents, teachers, and district administrators all say that the school is well managed. Discipline, attendance, and safety have all improved. Most teachers appreciate the support they receive from the administrators and say this is a welcome change from the past. The administrators say they are overwhelmed by the large number of students they are responsible for and are frustrated by what they say is a culture that does not value education and academic success. Their greatest frustration lies in their lack of autonomy and decision-making power to implement the programs they feel would best serve the school and their students' needs. Other members of the school community corroborate this and say that efforts to move the school forward are constantly undermined by a central office that micromanages this school. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district and school policies and practices, 2005 Information Works!, Coventry High School Self-Study, New England Association of Schools and Colleges Report of the Visiting Committee, 2000)*

There are insufficient resources to operate and improve this school. Teachers in many disciplines report shortages of textbooks and classroom materials. There are also shortages of teachers and support staff. The athletic department is also concerned about the lack of basic equipment, facilities, and adequate leadership. Some programs at the Career and Technical Center report shortages in necessary equipment to stay current with industry standards or classroom demands. Most importantly, technology for the entire school is "woefully inadequate." There are not enough working computers, printers, copiers, digital projectors, accessible digital cameras, and scanners. Technology maintenance and support is also insufficient. The current level of available technology makes it impossible for this school to implement electronic portfolios and meet the proficiency-based graduation requirements. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing school improvement plan, Coventry High School Self-Study, New England Association of Schools and Colleges Report of the Visiting Committee, 2000)*

The Career and Technical Center is an asset and strength of this school. This program develops real-life problem solving skills and prepares students for an easy transition into the workforce and post-secondary opportunities. Students are excited by the hands-on learning opportunities and chances for immediate application of skills that these programs offer, and they say these programs help them understand and value their education. All programs meet industry standards, and the majority prepare their students for professional certification in their chosen fields. Many programs have partnerships with post-secondary institutions and industry. These programs develop teamwork between students and connect them to their communities. While the Career and Technical Center is well integrated with the rest of the High School, it is concerned about impending schedule changes, declining referrals, enrollments from within the High School and the feeder communities, and decreasing budgets. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, classroom textbooks, reviewing school improvement plan)*

Coventry High School has a vision for an integrated and effective special needs program, which it calls unified learning and support. While it has not fully met this vision, some students are well served. The Washington Annex provides a nurturing program that focuses on life skills, vocational training, and core academic subjects. Other special needs programs also provide services that support students' behavioral, vocational, and social needs. This includes attempts to integrate all students into at least one class. However, too many students receive most of their instruction in self-contained 'resource' classes. This does not correspond to the vision for integration articulated by the school community and district. The Learning Center is another attempt to provide support for special needs students; however, it does not always provide these services as efficiently or effectively as it might. Most teachers feel frustrated by the inconsistent availability and scheduling of staff, a lack of resources, and the inadequate professional development to support special needs students. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, classroom textbooks, reviewing school improvement plan, 2005 Information Works!, 2005 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, New England Association of Schools and Colleges Report of the Visiting Committee, 2000)*

The guidance department at Coventry High School does not fully meet and serve the needs of students and parents. Although it conducts a number of programs and sends parents a variety of information, students and parents report frustrations that they cannot always readily access counselors or receive the advice and information they need. Most students report, and parents agree, that they are discouraged from switching classes and from taking as wide a variety of courses and electives as they would like. They also report being inappropriately placed at times. Parents also say that the guidance department does not always treat them well. Counselors say they are overwhelmed by the number of students and limited in their ability to meet their needs due to the size and complexity of the school. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with students, district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing school improvement plan)*

Coventry High School is working hard to implement proficiency-based graduation requirements. This is a major focus of the reform efforts at this school, and it is making good progress to redesign its educational program, course content, and instructional focus. It does so in spite of the insufficient supportive technology and lack of time to meet and complete this work. Despite numerous ongoing efforts to communicate the purposes and progress of this work, students, parents, and teachers express frustration and a lack of a clear understanding of this effort. As such, this remains a work in progress. However, the personalization period designed to support proficiency-based graduation requirements that is in the initial stages of implementation is not effective and lacks focus. *(following students, observing classes, observing the school outside of the classroom, meeting with the school improvement team, students, school and district administrators, and parents, talking with students, teachers, and school administrators, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district and school policies and practices)*

Commendations for Coventry High School

- ◆ *Dedicated staff with a culture of willingness*
- ◆ *Clean, safe, and orderly environment*
- ◆ *Valuable Career and Technical Center programs*
- ◆ *Strong and supportive administrative team*

Recommendations for Coventry High School

- ◆ *Eliminate the Level system to ensure that all students receive equitable instruction and are held to high expectations.*
- ◆ *Find ways to minimize the disadvantages associated with the size of this facility.*
- ◆ *Maintain and enhance a safe, orderly, and well-managed environment.*
- ◆ *Work with the School Department to secure sufficient and necessary resources, especially technology.*
- ◆ *Continue to value and support the Career and Technical Center as an integral part of Coventry High School.*
- ◆ *Complete implementation of the vision for unified learning and support for all students with special needs.*
- ◆ *Improve the guidance system to better serve needs of both students and parents.*
- ◆ *Continue your work to fully define and implement the proficiency-based graduation requirements and the personalization program.*
- ◆ *Improve communication with families and the community, particularly in regard to the proficiency-based graduation requirements.*

Recommendations for Coventry School Department

- ◆ *Allow Coventry High School the autonomy and decision-making power it needs to implement programs to best serve its students' needs.*
- ◆ *Support the Coventry High School administration and staff to eliminate the Level system to ensure that all students receive equitable instruction and are held to high expectations.*
- ◆ *Support Coventry High School to secure and provide sufficient and necessary resources, especially technology.*
- ◆ *Increase support for the Career and Technical Center as an integral part of Coventry High School.*
- ◆ *Support Coventry High School to complete the implementation of its vision for unified learning and support for all students with special needs.*

7. FINAL ADVICE TO COVENTRY HIGH SCHOOL

Build on the strengths of your faculty and students and their love for this school to collectively address the recommendations contained in this report. Provide the support and resources necessary to meet the ever-growing needs of your students and their educators. The administrators, teachers, staff, and students need to strive for excellence in order to help one another reach their fullest potential.

Coventry High School must establish high standards for every student. Trust that your students are ready for greater challenge. Work as one entity towards improving reading, writing, and problem solving. Raise your expectations for every learner. Develop ways to integrate all students. Utilize the expert resources that are in place to assist both teachers and students to grow and develop into a community of life long learners.

Work together to provide excellent instruction in every classroom. Design and deliver lessons that are challenging, rigorous, and relevant for all students. Provide this quality instruction so that all students can become successful critical readers, writers, and problem solvers.

Clearly articulate your vision for the future, and specifically prioritize your goals. Seriously consider this report, and continue your efforts to transform Coventry High School from a good school to a great school.

ENDORSEMENT OF SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

Coventry High School

April 7, 2006

How SALT visit reports are endorsed

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) contracts with Catalpa Ltd. to monitor all SALT school visits and to examine each SALT visit team report to determine whether it should be endorsed as a legitimate SALT school visit report. Catalpa Ltd. monitors the preparations for the visit, the actual conduct of the visit and the post-visit preparation of the final report. This includes observing the team at work, maintaining close contact with the chair during the visit and archiving all of the documents associated with a visit. Catalpa Ltd. carefully reviews the text of the final report to make sure that the conclusions and the report itself meet their respective tests at a satisfactory level. The endorsement decision is based on the procedures and criteria specified in *Protocol for Catalpa Ltd. Endorsement of SALT School Visit Reports*².

The *SALT Visit Protocol*, which describes the purposes, procedures and standards for the conduct of the SALT school visit, is the basis for report endorsement. The SALT visit protocol is based upon the principles and procedures of *Practice-based Inquiry*^{®3} that are based on a 160-year-old tradition of peer visits that governments and accreditation agencies continue to use to assess the performance of schools.

The *SALT Visit Protocol*⁴ requires that all SALT visits be conducted at an exceptionally high standard of rigor. Yet, because visits are “real-life” interactive events, it is impossible to control all of the unexpected circumstances that might arise. Nevertheless most of the unexpected things that happen do not challenge the legitimacy of the visit. Teams and schools adapt well to most surprises and maintain the rigor of the visit inquiry.

Catalpa Ltd. made its judgment decision about the legitimacy of this report by collecting evidence from the conduct of this visit to answer three questions:

Did the SALT visit team and the host school conduct the visit in a manner that is reasonably consistent with the protocol for the visit?

Do the conclusions of the report meet the tests for conclusions that are specified in the visit protocol? (Are the conclusions important, accurate and set in present, do they show the team’s judgment?)

Does the report meet the tests for a report that are specified in the visit protocol? (Is the report fair, useful, and persuasive of productive action?)

² See *The Handbook for Chairs of the SALT School Visit, 2nd Edition*. This handbook includes the SALT Visit Protocol and many guidance documents for chairs, schools and RIDE. It is available from the SALT Project Office and Catalpa.

³ Practice-Based Inquiry[®] is a registered trademark of Catalpa Ltd.

⁴ See *The Foundations of Practice-Based Inquiry*[®] (2006, Catalpa Ltd.) and *Practice-based Inquiry*[®] *Guide to protocol design*. (2006, Catalpa Ltd.)

The sources of evidence that Catalpa used for this review were: (These are the steps tailored for each visit.)

Discussion with the chair, the school and the RIDE project director about issues related to the visit before it began.

Daily discussion with the visit chair about possible endorsement issues as they arose during the visit.

Observation of two portions of this visit.

Discussion with the principal and vice-principal at the end of the visit regarding any concerns they had about the visit.

Thorough review of the report in both its pre-release and final forms.

The Endorsement Decision

The Coventry School visit was conducted by the team and the school in a manner that is consistent with the SALT visit protocol.

Catalpa Ltd. fully endorses the legitimacy of this report and its conclusions.

The points that support this are compelling:

1. RIDE has certified that this team meets the RIDE requirements for team membership.
2. The conduct of the visit by both team and school was in reasonable accord with the SALT School Visit Protocol.
3. There is no methodological or other, reason to believe that the findings of this report do not represent the full corporate judgment of a trained team of peers led by a certified chair.
4. The conclusions meet the established tests for conclusions. They are important, supported by evidence from practice, set in the present, and they show the team's judgment.
5. The report meets the criteria for a report. It is fair, persuasive and potentially useful to the school.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Wilson".

Thomas A. Wilson, Ed.D.

Catalpa Ltd.

May 5, 2006

REPORT APPENDIX

Sources of Evidence for This Report

In order to write this report the team examined test scores, student work, and other documents related to this school. The school improvement plan for Coventry High 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 built its conclusions primarily from information about what the students, staff, and administrators think and do during their day. Thus, this visit allowed the team to build informed judgments about the teaching, learning and support that actually takes place at Coventry High School.

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

- ◆ *observing classes directly*
- ◆ *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- ◆ *following 20 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 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 Coventry High School
 - district strategic plan
 - 2005 SALT Survey report
 - classroom textbooks
 - 2005 Information Works!
 - 2005, 2004, and 2003 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries

School and District Report Cards
Coventry High School Curricula Binders
Coventry High School Best Practices Binder
Coventry High School Departmental Tasks Binders
Coventry High School Proficiency Based Graduation Requirement
Peer Review Binder
Coventry High School Graduation by Portfolio and Capstone
Handbook
Coventry High School parent Newsletters
Coventry High School Looking at Student Work Binder
Coventry High School Personalization Binder
Coventry High School SALT Visit Binder
Coventry Public Schools Policy Manual
Coventry High School Self-Study
Coventry Public School Teacher Evaluation Handbook
Coventry Public School Mentoring Program Binder
Agreement between the Coventry Teachers' Alliance and the
Coventry School Committee, 2003 - 2006
New England Association of Schools and Colleges Report of the
Visiting Committee, 2000

State Assessment Results for Coventry High School

Assessment results create sources of evidence that the visit team uses as it conducts its inquiry. The team uses this evidence to shape its efforts to locate critical issues about the school. It also uses this evidence, along with other evidence, to draw conclusions about those issues.

This school's results are from the latest available state assessment information. It is presented here in three different ways:

against performance standards,
across student groups within the school, and
over time.

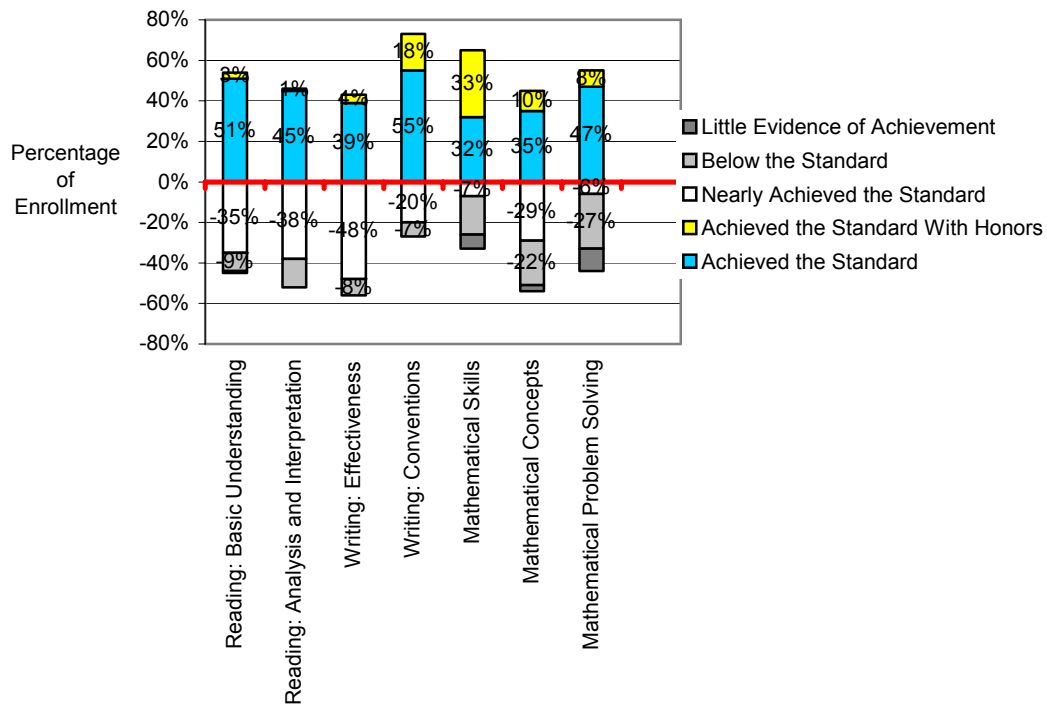
Information Works! data for Coventry High School is available at
[/www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu/2005/default.asp](http://www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu/2005/default.asp).

Results in relation to performance standards

The first display shows how well the students do in relation to standards in English/Language Arts and mathematics. Student results are shown as the percentage of students taking the test whose score places them in the various categories at, above, or below the performance standard. Endorsed by the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education in 1998, the tested standards can be found in the publication *New Standards Performance Standards*.

Table1. 2004-05 Student Results on Rhode Island State Assessments

Coventry High School State Assessment Results of 2005



REPORT CARD FOR COVENTRY HIGH SCHOOL

The 2005 Report Card shows the performance of Coventry High School compared to the school’s annual measurable objectives (AMO). This report card describes Coventry High School as a *High Performing and Improving School*.

Index Proficiency Score, 2003-05	English Language Arts Target score: 68.8				MATHEMATICS Target score: 54			
Student Group	this School	Target Met?	this District	the State	this School	Target Met?	this District	the State
All Students	84.2	YES	84.2	81.5	79.2	YES	79.5	79.5
African Americans	*	YES	*	71.3	*	YES	*	71.3
Asian	*	YES	*	78.9	*	YES	*	78.9
Hispanic	*	YES	*	69.4	*	YES	*	69.4
Native Americans	*	YES	*	73	*	YES	*	73
White	84.7	YES	84.7	84.6	80	YES	80.2	80.2
Students with Disabilities	66.5	YES††	66.3	63.2	53.8	YES††	54	54
Students with Limited English Proficiency	*	YES	*	56.2	*	YES	*	56.2
Students who are Economically Disadvantaged	73.2	YES	72.8	71.1	65.5	YES	65.5	65.5

PERCENT of students tested, 2003-05	Target: 95%			
	this school	target met?	THIS DISTRICT	the state
English Language Arts	98.1	YES	97.9	97.1
Mathematics	98.1	YES	97.8	97.3

Graduation Rate	Target: 75.3%			
	this school	target met?	THIS DISTRICT	the state
	89	YES	89	85

TARGETS MET/MISSED, THIS SCHOOL		
	TARGETS MET	TARGETS MISSED
English Language Arts Index Score	9	0
Mathematics Index Score	9	0
Percent Tested	2	0
Graduation Rate	1	0

this school is classified as:

High Performing and Improving

KEY: * Student group has too few students to calculate results.
 † “Safe Harbor” - Student group has fallen short of the target but has made sufficient improvement over last year’s score.
 †† Student group has met the target based only on the most recent year of test results.
 Δ Graduation rate based on fewer than four years of data. NOTE: For information on targets and classifications, please see Quick Guide .

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CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS OF VISIT TEAM

INSERT HERE