Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
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Orlo Avenue School

EAST PROVIDENCE,

THE SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

October 10, 2003

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 Orlo Avenue School from October 6-10, 2003.

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 carefully designed to make it possible for visit team members to make careful judgments using accurate evidence. The careful 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.

It is important to note that this visit occurred after only three weeks of school because of a delayed opening due to construction. In fairness to the school, the team did not form conclusions about the quality of the special education program since the special education teacher was absent the week of the visit.

The major questions the team addressed were:

How well do students learn at Orlo Avenue School?

How well does the teaching at Orlo Avenue School affect learning?

How well does Orlo Avenue School support learning and teaching?

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

Members of this visit team were teachers and an administrator 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 schoolwork, or not work, as a public institution of learning. Each school is unique and the team has tried to capture what makes Orlo Avenue 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.

This school visit is supported by the Rhode Island Department of Education as a component of School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT). To gain the full advantages of a peer visiting system, RIDE deliberately did not participate in the active editing of this SALT visit report. That was carried out by the team's Chair with the support of Catalpa. Ltd.

The team closely followed a rigorous protocol of inquiry that is rooted in Practice-based Inquiry™ (Catalpa Ltd). The detailed *Handbook for Chairs of the SALT School Visit* describes the theoretical constructs behind the SALT visit and stipulates the many details of the visit procedures. Contact Rick Richards at (401) 222-4600 x 2194 or ride0782@ride.ri.net for further information about the *Handbook* or other SALT protocols. The *Handbook* and other relevant documents are also available at www.Catalpa.org.

SALT visits undergo rigorous quality control. 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 assures 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 141 hours in direct classroom observation. Most of this time was spent in observing complete lessons or classes. Almost every classroom was visited at least once, and almost every teacher was observed more than once.

The full visit team built the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations presented here through intense and thorough discussion. The team met for a total of 32 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 Orlo Avenue School can improve student learning. However, the most important audience is the school itself.

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 East Providence 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 amend its School Improvement Plan to reflect these decisions.

The East Providence School District, RIDE and the public should consider what the report says or implies about how they can best support Orlo Avenue 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 ORLO AVENUE SCHOOL

Orlo Avenue School, located in the center of East Providence, Rhode Island, is one of eight elementary schools in the East Providence School District. Constructed in 1968, the one story, flat-roofed building houses 300 students from kindergarten through grade five.

The learning community is a diverse blend of students from various cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Of the 299 students, 74% are white, 20% are black, 3% are Hispanic, 2% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% is Native American. Fifty-one percent of the students receive free or reduced-price lunches; 14% of the students receive special education services, and 15% receive English as a Second Language services.

The Orlo Avenue School faculty and staff consist of one principal and 52 part- and full-time employees. There are 12 regular education classroom teachers, three special education classroom teachers, two full-time ESL teachers, one full-time special education resource teacher, one Title 1 specialist, two full-time educational specialists and three full-time teacher assistants. The part-time staff consists of one nurse/teacher, one librarian, one art teacher, two physical education teachers, one music teacher, one communication specialist, and one band instructor, as well as a guidance counselor, an occupational therapist and a physical therapist. Students also receive services from a part-time teacher of the visually impaired, a talent development teacher, a social worker, and a school psychologist. Other members of the support staff include two custodians, one secretary, a MDT/DPT person, a Title I parent liaison, and two cafeteria workers.

Teachers have been trained in guided reading using the Fountas and Pinnell models and the "Six Traits of Writing." They are implementing phonemic awareness instruction and PALS in Kindergarten, first and second grade. Teachers are utilizing a new Harcourt Brace reading series in grades three through five and the KITES science kits in grades one through five. A major goal of the school improvement plan is to improve math achievement for grade 4 students. Teachers are using "Problem Solver" and "Problem of the Day" teaching strategies to supplement the University of Chicago math series.

3. PORTRAIT OF ORLO AVENUE SCHOOL AT THE TIME OF THE VISIT

Orlo Avenue is a small neighborhood school nestled in a multi-cultural community of East Providence. Despite its plain exterior, the school provides a safe, nurturing environment for children to learn. Colorful murals and flags line the main corridor and reflect a student body that is rich in diversity.

Parents and community members are invited and often come to lunch. When they do come, students join together to greet them and make them feel welcomed.

Students celebrate their achievements and assist each other in their learning. They are proud of their school, their teachers and their principal. Students with special needs, as well as ESL students, are serviced both inside and outside the regular education classrooms. All are treated with respect and dignity.

The hardworking and dedicated staff face many challenges in meeting the varying educational needs of their students. The principal and the teachers at Orlo Avenue School do whatever is necessary to help their students succeed. They work hard to fulfill the educational needs of their students and to provide them with the tools for success. They are true advocates for their students.

Although many new initiatives are underway in the classrooms, their implementation is fragmented. Scheduling of pullout programs and itinerants is a major issue. Instruction is inconsistent from room to room and grade to grade. Change is strongly resisted by some and embraced by others. The limited amount of opportunities available to teachers to share their expertise hinders student learning.

While the students are happy to be at school, undermining tensions exist within the faculty and staff. The breakdowns in the lines of communication undermine the effort and hard work of all parties and must be addressed for the school to best serve its students.

4. FINDINGS ON STUDENT LEARNING

Conclusions

Students at Orlo Avenue School are polite, respectful learners, who are eager to share their work. They are proud of their learning and their accomplishments. These diverse students help and support each other inside and outside of the classroom. *(following students, observing classes, meeting with students, talking with students, 2003 SALT Survey report)*

While students at Orlo Avenue School enjoy writing, many struggle to write well. Scores on the New Standards Reference Exam in writing have declined from 72% meeting or exceeding the standard in 2001 to 47% meeting or exceeding the standard in 2003. Students have difficulty expressing their ideas in an organized manner. They are beginning to learn to use word walls, rubrics and criteria charts, but few can use these tools effectively and independently to improve their writing. Students enjoy writing about topics that they choose, but they often have difficulty connecting their personal experiences to the writing prompts. They use a limited vocabulary and few details when they write. Numerous errors in punctuation, spelling and grammar are evident in their work. Scheduling of specialists and pullout programs frequently interrupts student writing, thus limiting the amount of uninterrupted time students have to develop their writing pieces. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, 2003 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries, 2003 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results.)*

Students in all classrooms read for pleasure, as well as to learn. They read independently, with partners, and in small groups and are beginning to use some of the tools of a balanced literacy program. Although many students can read the words, they too often don't understand what the words mean. Many students easily identify the main idea of a story, but they rarely use higher order thinking skills to deepen their understanding. When students write about what they read, their answers lack organization and details. Reading test scores over three years consistently show this disparity between basic understanding and analysis and interpretation. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing classroom assessments, discussing student work with teachers, 2003 Information Works!, 2003 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries*)

Although students say they like math, they find it difficult to understand. They enjoy using manipulatives and playing math games, but they struggle to complete basic computation and to problem solve. They do not effectively use the language of math to clearly explain their solutions. Since students are just beginning to learn multiple ways to solve problems, they are unable to select the appropriate strategy without support. Students have little time to explore and develop math concepts. It is not surprising that only 6% of the students met the standard on problem solving and that only 16% of the students met or exceeded the standard on mathematical concepts on the 2003 New Standards Reference Examination. *(following students, observing classes, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, discussing student work with teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, meeting with students, 2003 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries*)

Important Thematic Findings in Student Learning

- Students like school and are eager to learn.
- *Students use few strategies and tools to understand text and solve problems.*
- *Students have difficulty reading and writing throughout all curricula areas.*
- *Students have little uninterrupted time to practice their skills or to complete their classroom work.*

5. FINDINGS ON TEACHING FOR LEARNING

Conclusions

Teachers effectively use rubrics and criteria to define their expectations clearly for their students, when they teach writing. While they encourage students to write drafts and to edit the draft text, many more teachers need to teach students how to revise their drafts so that the new draft better says what they mean. This omission contributes to the lack of supporting details and organization in student writing. In addition, the limited amount of uninterrupted writing time in the classroom schedule limits students' ability to learn effective writing skills. While teachers provide opportunities for students to write in all areas of the curriculum, scheduling problems hamper this effort. *(Orlo Avenue School Binder: Self-Study/ Staff Survey, following students, observing classes, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, reviewing classroom assessments, discussing student work with teachers, talking with school administrator)*

The teaching of reading is a top priority in all classrooms. Teachers create inviting centers for students to browse and select books to read independently. Teachers effectively use a number of instructional strategies to increase students' love of and proficiency in reading. They successfully use whole class and small group guided reading instruction, as well as word walls, read alouds, and choral reading, to broaden vocabulary and knowledge of language. However, they do not consistently ask questions that require students to discuss, analyze or interpret text. Too few teachers use the tools the school provides to teach students what to do when they don't understand what they read. These practices hinder students from becoming critical readers. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students, teachers, reviewing completed and ongoing student work, Orlo Avenue School Binder: Self Study, reviewing classroom assessments, meeting with school improvement team)*

Math instruction is not consistent throughout the school. While all teachers use rubrics and criteria charts, they have differing expectations of student performance. The amount of instructional time, math language, and use of manipulatives vary greatly from class-to-class. Teachers supplement the curriculum to reinforce the learning of problem-solving skills, but they struggle to differentiate instruction consistently to meet the needs of all students. Teachers report that they need training in developmentally appropriate instructional methods and strategies for teaching a broad range of ability levels in their classrooms. In addition, the daily schedule does not allow sufficient time either for teachers to effectively deliver math instruction or for students to practice and apply what they have learned. These inconsistent teaching practices could result in low student performance in class as well as on the 2003 New Standards Mathematics Reference Examination. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students, teachers, reviewing classroom assessments, discussing student work with teachers, Orlo Avenue School Binder: Self-Study, 2003 SALT Survey report, reviewing records of professional development activities)*

Teachers work hard to help their students succeed. They set clear expectations for student learning and behavior. They create a safe, stimulating, nurturing environment to meet the varied academic and emotional needs of their students. Parents report that teachers communicate frequently and effectively regarding student progress. While most teachers demonstrate a variety of expertise, they do not share this expertise with the entire staff. They do not use their mutual planning time to collaborate and share their expertise to improve learning. *(following students, observing classes, talking with students, teachers, staff, school administrator, 2003 SALT Survey report, meeting with parents, Binder of Notices and Bulletins)*

Commendations for Orlo Avenue School

Consistent use of criteria and rubrics

Nurturing learning environment

Recommendations for Orlo Avenue School

Expand the amount of instructional time for math and writing.

Decrease interruptions in existing instructional time.

Provide frequent opportunities for students to revise their writing, to use and improve their oral language and to develop their critical thinking skills.

Use weekly mutual planning time to increase collaboration and consistency among teachers in their instructional practices.

Continue and increase opportunities for teachers to differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of all students.

Identify and use colleagues as resources for new initiatives.

Recommendations for East Providence School District

Provide resources to support the development of a collegial school culture that will improve student learning.

6. FINDINGS ON SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING

Conclusions

A communication breakdown is undermining the work and morale of the faculty and staff at Orlo Avenue School. A lack of reciprocal respect and trust exists throughout the school. Too many teachers are not comfortable contributing their ideas and do not feel included in the decision-making process. Tensions negatively impact the climate of the school. The faculty and staff want help to overcome this major obstacle so that more effective student learning can occur. *(observing the school outside of the classroom, 2003 SALT Survey report, meeting with the school improvement team, talking with teachers, staff, and school administrator)*

Scheduling issues seriously compromise instruction. Teachers report frustration with insufficient blocks of teaching time. Because of a number of pullout programs, students come and go throughout the day, missing valuable learning opportunities in the regular classroom. Students say it is difficult to catch on to what they have missed. The current schedule fragments instruction, decreases communication and limits effective student learning. *(following students, talking with students, teachers, and school administrator, observing the school outside of the classroom, observing classes, Orlo School Binder: Self-Study)*

The school improvement plan focuses on improving math scores, parent involvement and school climate. All three areas are identified in the school's self-study and the 2003 SALT Survey as areas in need of improvement. As currently written, the school improvement plan does not include crucial components that would enhance its effectiveness to improve student learning: clear action plans, steps for monitoring progress and time for teacher collaboration. The faculty is not highly invested in the plan because they had little input into the process. *(reviewing school improvement plan, reviewing district strategic plan, meeting with the school improvement team, talking with teachers, staff, and school administrator, 2003 SALT Survey report, Orlo Avenue School Binder: self-study*)

Recommendations for Orlo Avenue School

Engage an outside facilitator to help the faculty and staff create a positive work environment.

Implement scheduling changes that create longer blocks of uninterrupted teaching time and mutual planning time.

Use one faculty meeting per month as a forum where teachers can collaborate and share their school-wide expertise.

Formulate action steps for the school improvement plan that clearly describes what teachers, parents, and students will do to improve student learning. Designate timelines, responsible parties and benchmarks to monitor progress.

Recommendations for East Providence School District

Provide resources and professional development for building the capacity of the school improvement team to support the needs of the school.

7. FINAL ADVICE TO ORLO AVENUE SCHOOL

Within these walls lies a wealth of knowledge and expertise. It is time to resolve your conflicts and share your gifts. Your greatest challenge is to open the lines of communication and build reciprocal respect and trust. Once you begin working together, you will develop the tools you need to help your students reach the goals that you all hold for them. Capitalize on your students' eagerness to learn. Use your own self-study and our report to build a school improvement plan that sets priorities, develops consistent teaching practices, creates ownership and develops a unified learning community.

ENDORSEMENT OF SALT VISIT TEAM REPORT

Orlo Avenue School

October 10, 2003

Catalpa Ltd. monitors all SALT visits and examines each SALT visit team report to determine whether it should be endorsed as a legitimate SALT report. The endorsement decision is based on procedures and criteria specified in *Endorsing SALT Visit Team Reports* (available www.Catalpa.org). Catalpa Ltd. bases its judgment about the legitimacy of a report on these 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 specified in the visit protocol (important, accurate, set in present, shows the team's judgment)?
>
> Does the report meet the tests for a report as specified in the visit protocol (fair, useful, and persuasive of productive action)?

Using the answers to these questions, the final decision to endorse the report answers the overall endorsement question: Is this a legitimate SALT team visit report? In order to make this determination, Catalpa Ltd. weighs all the questions and issues that have been raised to decide whether a report is legitimate or not. While it is possible that a challenge related to one of the three questions listed above would be serious enough to withhold or condition the endorsement, it is more likely that issues serious enough to challenge a report's legitimacy will cut across the three questions.

While the SALT visit protocol requires that all SALT visits be conducted to an exceptionally high standard of rigor, visits are "real-life" events; it is impossible to control for all unexpected circumstances that might arise. The protocol for the conduct of the visit is spelled out in the *Handbook for SALT Visit Chairs, 1st edition* (available at www.Catalpa.org).

Since unexpected circumstances might result in either the team or the school straying too far from the protocol for a visit, Catalpa Ltd. monitors both the school and the team during a visit regarding the conduct of the visit.

Most often actual visit events or issues do not challenge a report's legitimacy and Catalpa Ltd.'s monitoring and endorsement is routine. A district administrator, principal, faculty member or parent may not like a report, or think it is too negative, or think the visit should have been conducted in a manner that is not consistent with the protocol. None of these represent a challenge to a report's legitimacy; concerns that might challenge an endorsement are based on events that stray too far from the protocol.

The routine steps that Catalpa Ltd. completed for this review were:

1. discussion with the chair about any issues related to the visit before it began
2. daily discussion of any issues with the visit chair during the visit

3. observation of two portions of the visit
4. discussion with the principal at the end of the visit week regarding any concerns about the visit at the time of the visit
5. thorough review of the report in both its pre-release and final version form

The Catalpa Ltd. review of this visit and this report was not routine. The actual conduct of the visit did not raise any endorsement issues. On October 17, (the day after the report was read to the faculty) the principal of the school called raising a number of issues about the tone and content of the report. This resulted in the following unusual steps:

1. Phone discussion with the principal.
2. Meeting with the district superintendent.
3. Extended review session with Chair following factual review meeting.

The findings from the review are:

1. The agenda, participants and length of the factual review meeting departed markedly from the norm for the factual review in order to address the concerns of the principal and the district about the report. This led to changes in wording of conclusions that were beyond the norm. The time taken coupled with the responsible approach of the participants does appear successful in working through at least some of the concerns of the principal and district.
2. The Chair always reviews with Catalpa Ltd. any changes the chair has made in the pre-release report as a result of the factual review. This review was also extended far beyond the usual norm in order to assure that all changes from the factual review were changes that the chair saw as clarifying what the team had concluded consistent with the team's intent. The chair was particularly conscientious throughout this review, taking extra time to be certain that she was representing the team. When the review was complete, Catalpa Ltd. had no doubts that all of the conclusions in the report met this test.
3. Thus, the conclusions are legitimate SALT visit conclusions.
4. This team was certified to meet team membership requirements by RIDE staff.
5. This report was produced by a legitimate SALT Visit that was led by a trained SALT Visit Chair and conducted in a manner that was consistent with SALT Visit procedures.
6. The report is a legitimate SALT visit report.

Accordingly, Catalpa Ltd. endorses this report.

Thomas A. Wilson, Ed.D.
Catalpa Ltd.
November 7, 2003

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 Orlo Avenue 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 Orlo Avenue School.

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

- *Observing classes*
- *observing the school outside of the classroom*
- *following 8 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*
- *discussing student work with teachers*
- *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 Orlo Avenue School*
  - *district strategic plan*
  - *2002 and 2003 SALT Survey report*
  - *classroom textbooks*
  - *2003 Information Works!*
  - *2003 New Standards Reference Examination School Summaries*
  - *2003 Rhode Island Writing Assessment results*
  - *Orlo Avenue School Binder: Self-Study; Staff Surveys*
  - *Orlo Avenue Binder of Notices and Bulletins*

Professional Development Binders
Focus: School Portfolio
Playground Committee Binder
PTA Binder
Writing and Math Performance Assessment Binder
East Providence School Department Policy Book
Administrative Team Reference Binder

State Assessment Results for Orlo Avenue School

Assessment results create pieces 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 for 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 four different ways:

- *2003 Performance Classification*
- *against performance standards;*
- *compared to similar students in the state;*
- *across student groups within the school;*

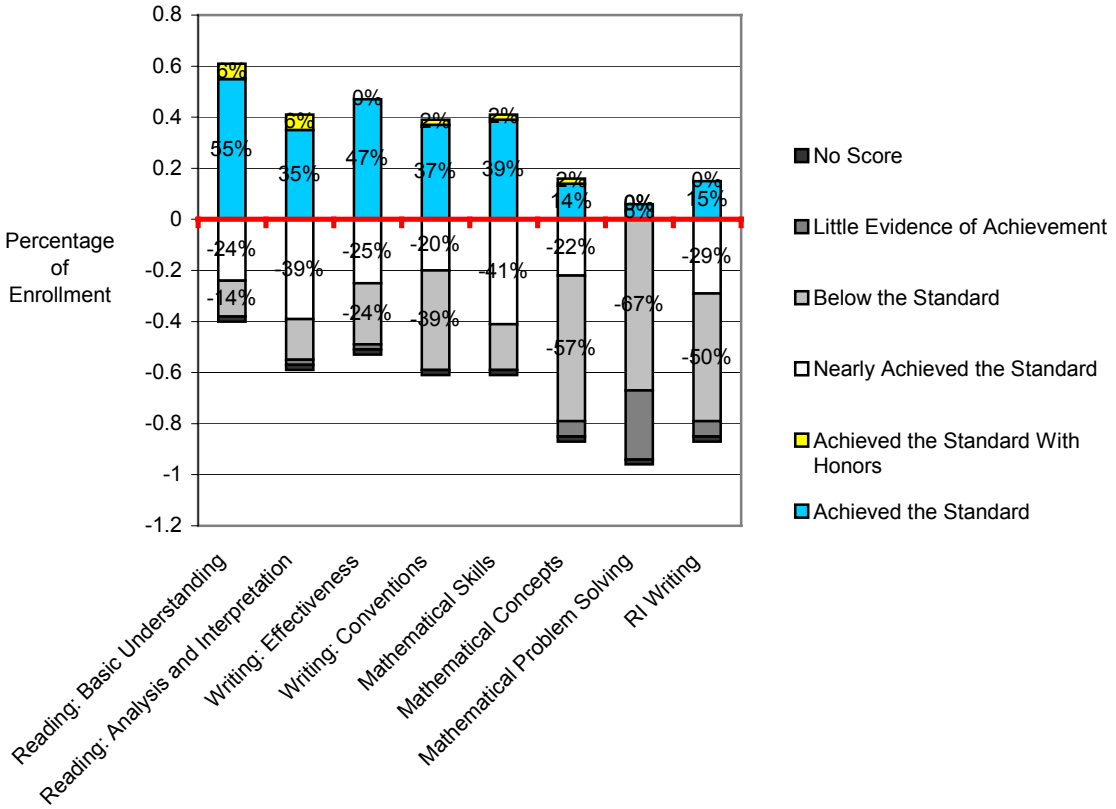
SCHOOL PERFORMANCE CLASSIFICATION

Based on 2003 scores Orlo Avenue School's performance on state tests is classified by RIDE as a moderately performing*,* sustaining *school.*

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. 2002-03 Orlo Avenue School Results on Rhode Island State Assessments



RESULTS COMPARED TO SIMILAR STUDENTS IN THE STATE

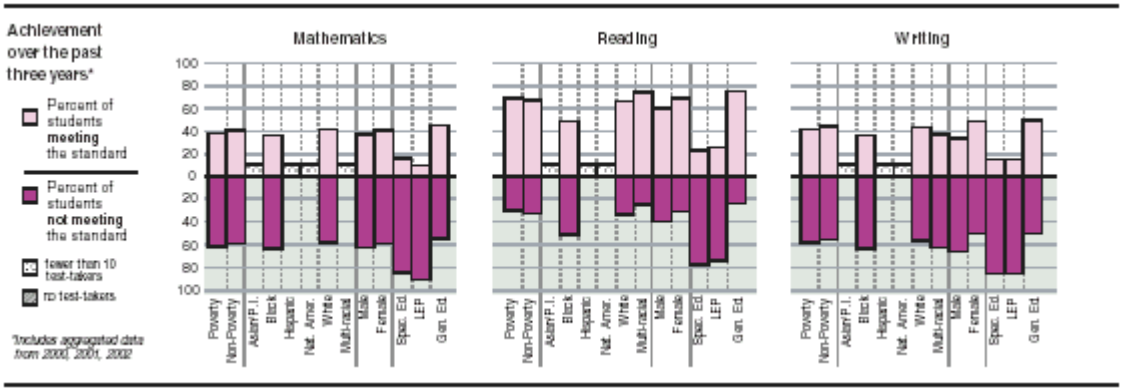
This chart includes the performance levels of students with special education needs, students participating in ESL or bilingual programs, low socio-economic status (a composite of income level, racial background and parental education), as well as the performance of students with none of these characteristics. Taking all these characteristics into account, the graph displays the overall performance of students in this school compared to - a group of students from across the state whose characteristics match this school's students.

Table 2. 2001-2002 Student Results in Comparison to Similar Students Statewide

RESULTS ACROSS STUDENT GROUPS WITHIN THE SCHOOL

An important way to display student results is across different groups of students with different characteristics who are in the school. This display creates information about how well the school meets the learning needs of its various students. Since breaking students into these smaller groups can result in groups becoming too small to show accurate results, this display shows the results based on three years of testing. The Department defines an important gap between different groups (an equity gap) to be a gap of 15% or more.

Table 3. 2001-2002 Student Results across Subgroups



Information Works! data for Orlo Avenue School is available at http://www.ridoe.net.

THE ORLO AVENUE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT TEAM

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