

## **The Taste of SALT in RI News Summary.docx**

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Two thousand years ago, if SALT lost its taste, it was thrown out on the public walkways. If it kept its taste, it was prized as essential to life. While the findings of a recent survey show that the SALT visit has retained—and most say even improved—its taste, the SALT visit faces several circumstances that may curtail or even kill it.

Since SALT is a Rhode Island program, and not part of any federal mandate, it has been supported only by state money. The state's serious budget deficits now make it vulnerable. The SALT visit faces the arrival of a new State Commissioner of Education in June 2009. Since the SALT visit is somewhat outside of the conventional thinking about accountability, it needs the continued support of the Commissioner. SALT staff worries that the SALT visit, which has proved itself, could become a target of tinkering or even elimination.

One senior state education official noted, "It would be ironic if we must eliminate the SALT visit, just when it has become a valued part of our accountability system. Rhode Island provided the leadership and initial investment, and it could be that only the rest of the country will reap the rewards."

### **THE STRENGTH OF SALT**

The SALT visit began as a pilot in 1996 and matured into an institutionalized part of the state's school accountability system.

Rhode Island legislators, university educators and newspapers, as well as national and international observers agree with a principal who described the SALT visit, "as one of the best things the state department has done to improve learning in the state."

This year the SALT leadership at RIDE is examining what it has learned since the SALT visit began, and it is expanding the types

of visits it conducts. While it has reduced the number of traditional 5-day visits, it has not eliminated them. Instead, it has begun to pilot new forms of the visit.

The SALT chairs are seeking to design a four-day visit that maintains the same high standards as the traditional five-day visit. They and the RIDE staff are working closely with Catalpa and several school districts to build visit protocols that will support both the schools and the district in developing and implementing more effective policies and practices that are based on actual school practice and that would have even greater promise for improving learning.

Catalpa Ltd. has provided RIDE with services for design, training, coaching and quality control since the SALT visit began. RIDE asked Catalpa for descriptive information and research findings about the effectiveness of the visit, which Catalpa recently published on its web site to both inform educators and the public and to stimulate responses about the perceived value of the SALT visit.