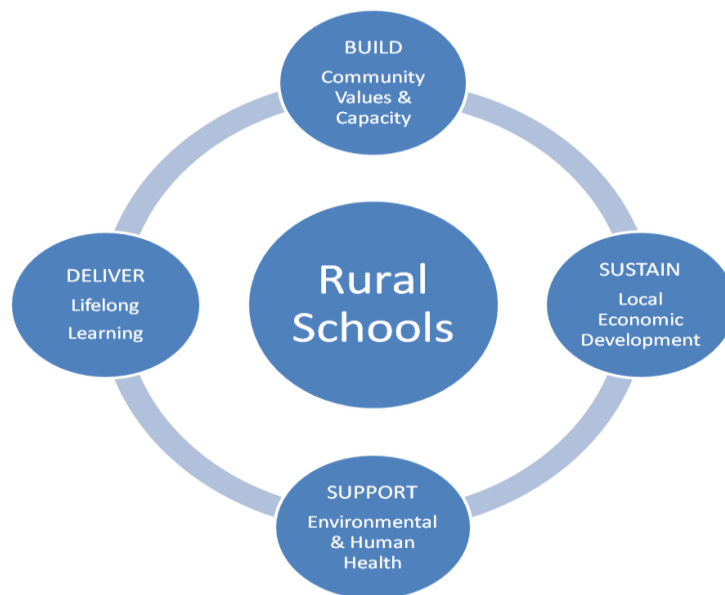


PATHWAY TO RURAL REGENERATION:

TRANSFORMING SMALL SCHOOLS INTO COMMUNITY HUBS



Presentation

Nova Scotia Commission on the New Economy

April 2, 2013

Paul W. Bennett, Randy Delorey, Kate Oland, and Cathrine Yuill

Nova Scotia Small Schools Initiative

Pathway to Rural Regeneration: Transforming Small Schools into Community Hubs

**Presentation to the Nova Scotia Commission on the New Economy
for the**

Nova Scotia Small Schools Initiative

CONTENTS

Introduction/ Signs of Rural Resilience/ 4

- 1. The Emerging Third Option – Community Hub Schools/ 5**
- 2. The Community Schools Continuum – Real and Imagined Community Hubs/ 5**
- 3. What Schools Mean to Small Rural Communities/ 7**
- 4. The Social Sustainability Framework– A New Approach / 8**
- 5. The Rise of the Nova Scotia Community Hub School Movement/ 11**
- 6. The Way Ahead – Save Small Schools, Revitalize Small Communities/ 15**

Key Recommendations/ 18

Nova Scotia Small Schools Initiative, Core Supporters, March 2013/20

References/21

Pathway to Rural Regeneration: Transforming Small Schools into Community Hubs

School closure battles continue to rage in Nova Scotia, repeating the same destructive School Review process, year after year. Throughout 2012-13, three school boards, Chignecto-Central Regional School Board, South Shore Regional School Board, and Tri-County Regional School Board, put 14 communities through another endurance test. Small villages like Petite Riviere, Maitland, River John, Wentworth, and Mill Village were thrown into crisis, forcing hundreds of rural and small town Nova Scotians to rally in defense of both their elementary schools and communities (Bennett, March 2013). Rural regeneration can --and should -- begin in Nova Scotia's villages and small towns, and there is enormous potential to be unlocked in the regions outside of Halifax and beyond the central corridor within a 90 minute drive of the provincial capital. Fully 45 per cent of Nova Scotia's citizenry live in communities of fewer than 5,000 people, and that is what makes this province truly unique. Rebuilding the faltering rural economy should start rather than end with the schools, providing children and families with a more secure future.



Introduction/ Signs of Rural Resilience

Amidst the upheaval of School Reviews for closure, something is beginning to stir in rural and small town Nova Scotia. Isolated schools in rural communities like Bass River on the Fundy Shore essentially have already given up the fight after barely surviving a gruelling 2010 school closure process (Bennett, 2011, 148-149.). In spite of such setbacks, community resilience is beginning to emerge from the bottom up, as grassroots community groups, one after another, are rejecting the provincial closure agenda and embracing a Third Option – transforming their under-utilized small schools into “community hubs,” building around an “anchor tenant” – the P-6 population of students and teachers. Instead of accepting the law of demographic gravity, they are organizing to re-build their communities and looking to the school boards to join in that project.

The Small Schools Initiative campaign has found some unlikely champions. Halifax Chronicle Herald columnist Dan Leger jumped into the fray on February 4, 2013 with a very persuasive message: To save small communities, start by saving their schools. (Leger, *The Chronicle Herald*, 2013). Provincial business groups like the Nova Scotia Chamber of Commerce based in Truro and municipal leaders like Don Downe now speak out publicly in favour of a totally different approach, one that does not lead to abandoning schools and downloading the properties on local municipalities. The Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities issued a Demographic Outlook report in October 2012 that called for action to staunch the hemorrhage of people from rural communities outside of Halifax and the so-called central corridor of the province. (UNSM, 2012). The clear message, delivered at Public Hearings, at kitchen tables, and in general stores, is that plugging the rural population drain should be a much higher priority for the Nova Scotia NDP government (NSSI and OneNS, Facebook, 2013).

Looking around outside HRM and the central corridor, the realities are stark and almost impossible to ignore. School closures in small villages like Riverport, Heatherton, and Newport Station are leaving a bitter harvest of For Sale signs on front lawns and in the remaining shop windows. Big questions call for straight answers: Without rural schools, where will the children and families come from to re-generate the declining rural economy? Without them, how long do communities survive? Impact Assessment Reports, following the Department of Education

formula, direct school committees to choose between two losing propositions – the status quo or further consolidation. In a few cases, the second option is worse, splitting up school families and bussing them to scattered sites over poor country roads.

1. The Emerging Third Option – Community Hub Schools

The seeds of rural regeneration are beginning to sprout in the winter of 2012-13, even in the shadow of the provincially-mandated School Review process. Study Committees at Maitland, River John, and Petite Riviere rejected the “status quo trap,” declined to play the losing game, and generated their own community-based Third Options. Not content to seek a reprieve, they got busy and produced incredibly innovative, community-building activities to fill the empty spaces and ensure the long-term sustainability of their schools.

What was this new species known as a “Community Hub School?” “A community hub,” according to leading advocate Dr. David Clandfield, is “a central gathering place for people, their activities, and events. “ It’s more than just “a high-use multipurpose centre” and more of “a two-way hub” where “children’s learning activities within the school contribute to community development” and, in turn, “ community activities contribute to, and enrich, children’s learning within the school.” (Clandfield, 2010)

Community hub schools are also a useful way to break down the so-called educational silos and to advance “intergenerational learning.” In recasting children’s education with adult education providers and seniors groups as key partners, alongside public health and family services, the new model also provides fresh opportunities to more systematically alleviate poverty as well as offer a wider span of learning activities ranging from financial literacy to arts appreciation. Such full service schools also provide a place for immigrant and newcomer services as well as health prevention programs, and even a home for “community gardens,” once the cornerstone of outdoor activities for rural schoolchildren in both Ontario and Nova Scotia. (Clandfield, 2010, 33-58)

2. The Community Schools Continuum – Real and Imagined Community Hubs

The “community hub school” has the look of what Clandfield aptly describes as “a politician’s dream,” but it is also an elusive conception of schooling subject to ambiguity and

fuzziness. Here he is very helpful in situating true community hubs on a five-point continuum from the traditional “community use of schools” to a fully integrated school community relationship, considered a true hub. Transforming schools into community hubs means moving away from strict “community use of schools” practices to “co-location” of services and finally to the ideal of a “two-way” community hub school. In his formulation, granting access to schools after-hours is only an initial step on the path to cultural transformation in the school community. It’s “local” in an intentional way, and builds upon the sense of community found in a village, small town or city neighbourhood. (Clandfield, 2010, 19-21)

The ideal full service community hub builds upon a local community base, drawing local parents, businesses, and groups into the school community. Here community efforts in preventative health care, recreation, poverty reduction, cultural expression and celebration, and environmental responsibility can all come together. It is here, Clandfield believes, that a sense of community flourishes forged on “principles of citizenship, co-operation and social justice.” (Clandfield, 2010, 21) In rural Nova Scotia, where most schools offer remarkably standardized programs, the Hub School has considerable appeal as an alternative taking fuller advantage of the enormous potential for place-based, community-initiated curriculum enhancements that will strengthen community attachments, so vital in stemming the out-migration of rural youth. (Corbett, *Learning to Leave*, 2007)

Nova Scotia’s Education Minister Ramona Jennex is fond of describing the Nova Scotia *SchoolsPlus* model as a provincial community school initiative. The *SP* model, in theory and in practice, is actually designed to serve a specific student population and definitely falls far short of Clandfield’s definition of a true community hub school concept. On his five point continuum, it would fall into the second category representing a modest variation on traditional community use of school practices. A recent independent research report on Nova Scotia’s *SchoolsPlus* from 2008 to 2013 demonstrates that it has become essentially a means of bringing centralized, regional services into the schools, at limited times under controlled conditions. (Bennett, AIMS, April 2013). Integrating centralized child, youth, and family services into the schools (as is the case with the Nova Scotia *SchoolsPlus* model) is only a small part of the total equation. A true community hub is a genuine partnership, building around the schools and drawing far more

upon local, volunteer, and community enterprise. Furthermore, the vast majority of schools do not have SP programs and many communities that do report that the much-touted “community use of schools” remains non-existent in practice.

3. What Schools Mean to Small Rural Communities

Schools research is beginning to address the fundamental challenges posed by rural school closures and the enormous potential of transforming schools into “community hubs.” A team of Australian researchers, sponsored by Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, and based at the University of Tasmania, laid the groundwork with a June 2002 report focusing on the development of “social capital” in Australia’s declining rural areas (RIRDC, *More than an Education*, 2002). Based upon case studies of five different rural communities, the researchers discovered the critical importance of effective leadership, particularly in cementing the school-community partnerships so instrumental in “building community social capital.” Faced with an external threat, marked by the closure of rural banks and other services, community leaders surfaced both in the school and outside to forge new partnerships across traditional functional lines and then develop shared visions that met their collective needs and goals.

School and community leadership made the difference and, in its absence, schools and villages perish, in rural areas. Driven by self-preservation, but committed to changing the trend lines, community leaders transformed a dire threat into a fleeting opportunity. Five stages of initiation were identified, namely trigger, initiation, development, maintenance, and sustainability. Schools in this study survived because they successfully generated school-community partnerships and came to offer “more than an education.” A different kind of school leadership was required well beyond the traditional role of “maintaining boundaries” around the school. Joint leadership and power-sharing proved crucial for the “development, maintenance, and sustainability stages of the partnership” as the initiative gradually comes to be “owned by the community.” (RIRDC, *More than an Education*, 2002, ix-xii, 122-130).

Failing to intervene in defence of threatened rural schools can have devastating consequences for those communities. Closer to home, Dr. Thomas A. Lyson, a Cornell University

sociologist, has provided disturbing evidence of that impact, based upon his studies in upstate New York of rural communities with populations of 500 or less and towns with between 501 and 2,500 inhabitants. As a leading expert on American school consolidation, he was clearly aware of the larger trends and profoundly influenced by the earlier work of Alan Peshkin in the late 1970s and early 1980s. “Viable villages generally contain schools; dying and dead ones either lack them or do not have them for long,” Peshkin observed over 25 years ago. “The capacity to maintain a school is a continuing indicator of a community’s well-being.” That finding is what prompted Lyson to dig a little deeper and to determine what having a school actually means to a rural village and small town (Lyson, *JRRE*, 2002, 131) .

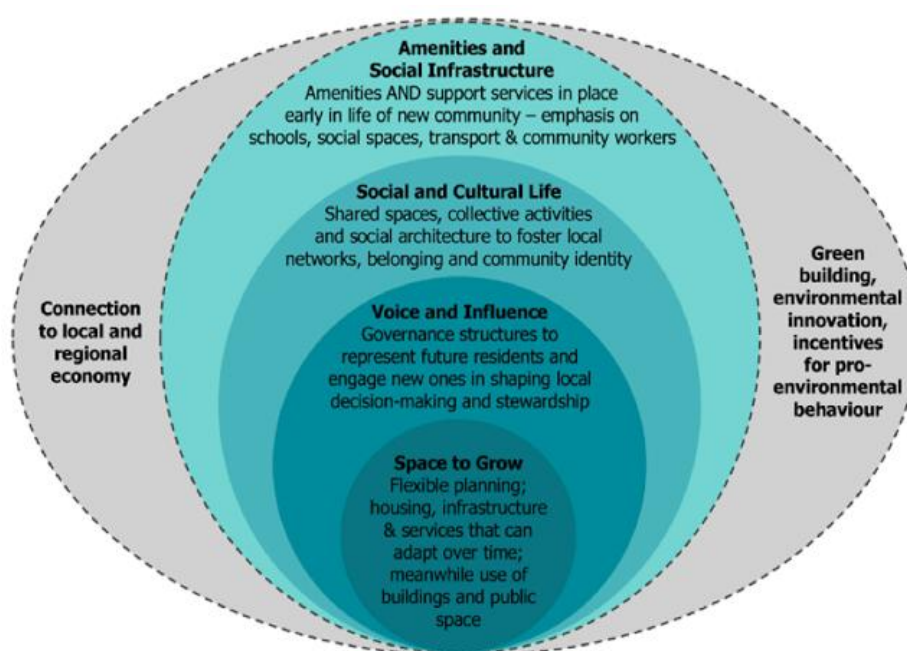
Lyson’s research makes a convincing case that school consolidation has been, and continues to be, a detriment to the viability and quality of rural education. The reputed advantages of consolidation on student academic performance, he insisted, are “greatly outweighed by the disadvantages,” including the “deleterious effects “on educational quality, student performance, and the economic viability of small rural communities. Schools proved to be absolutely essential social anchors in the rural New York villages and any reported savings through consolidation were “forfeited in lost taxes, declining property values, and lost businesses.” Villages retaining schools also showed higher rates of “civic engagement,” less income inequality, and fewer cases of welfare dependence. Such findings even prompted the New York State government, following a State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR), to financially compensate villages for suffering a loss of their school. Rural communities that were thriving were the ones with schools and they also were found to be places where “the citizenry is civically engaged, local businesses prosper, and those factors anchor populations in place.” In the case of New York’s smallest rural villages, Lyson found that “schools serve as important markers of social and economic viability and vitality.” (Lyson, *JRRE*, 2002, 135-136).

4. The Social Sustainability Model – A New Approach to Rural and Urban Community Planning

Community sustainability is no longer considered simply a matter of geographic location, demographic trends, and the dictates of the market. City and town planners in Britain, the United States and Western Canada are actually beginning to design communities with a

consistent, coherent approach rooted in a philosophy of “social sustainability” and a set of design principles at odds with the “bigger is better” mindset and framework of private developers and school facilities planners. Learning from their past mistakes, British town planners are gradually adopting a new planning framework and “designing in” the latest ideas aimed at transforming dormitory suburbs and townscapes, enabling them to become more socially sustainable as well as economically viable.

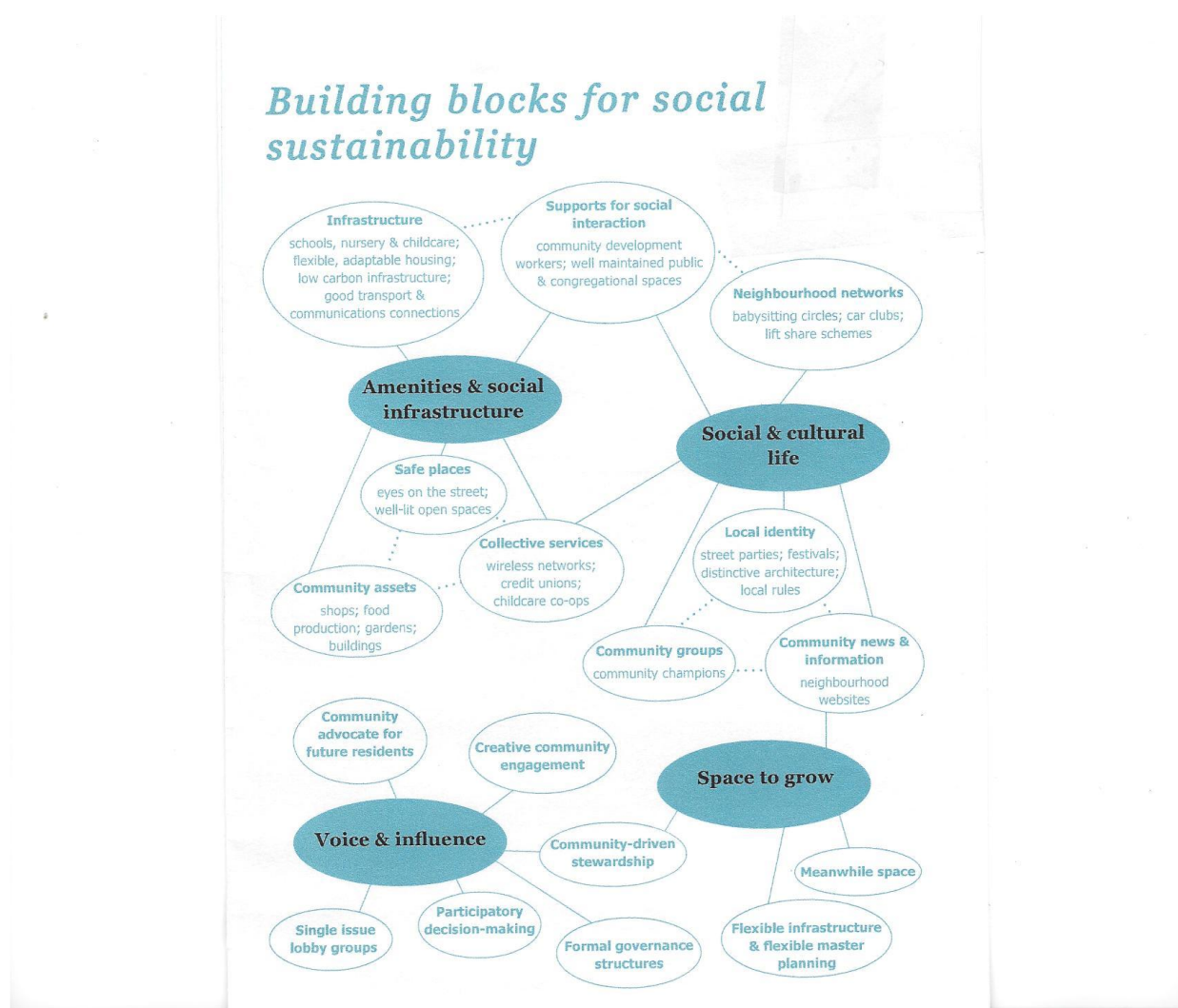
Figure: Conceptual Design for Social Sustainability Framework, Young Foundation, 2011.



Designing in social sustainability is gaining acceptance among city and town planners, but remains, for the most part, unknown among provincial school planners and school board facilities managers. Designing smaller schools better suited to smaller communities makes perfect sense, and so does adopting the approach and practices of leading building design and home building firms now far more sensitive to what it takes to build and sustain more healthy, socially responsible, economically thriving communities. The Social Sustainability Framework, espoused by the Young Foundation, could well be applied in looking more broadly at situating schools within communities instead of as outward extensions of a centrally managed school

system. Taking schools off the endangered buildings list and allowing them to deteriorate further is no longer defensible when new and more creative options are available and right around the corner.

Figure: Building Blocks for Social Sustainability, The Young Foundation, 2012



5. The Rise of the Nova Scotia Community Hub School Movement



The Petite Plus Vision – in Watercolour, Christopher Gill, 2013

New and exciting ideas are surfacing as a result of inspiring community enterprise and local community-led initiative. The recent round of Nova Scotia School Reviews conducted in three different boards during 2012-13 produced some of those pleasant surprises. Once popular myths about “Bigger is Better” consolidation ventures were exploded by a steady procession of speakers at every “Public Hearing” in almost every one of the 14 different schools under review for closure. Over and over again, school board members were harangued and schooled on the finer points of small school research, best educational practice, and plain common sense. The common public refrain, repeated over two dozen times: Small schools are living examples of “personalized learning” and not just a gleam in the eye of some ‘cutting edge’ school board curriculum consultant. Renovating small schools is far more cost effective than building new oversized facilities with the overblown capital, infrastructure, and transportation costs factored in. Local taxpayers do not ultimately win when the costs of maintaining or disposing of abandoned schools are downloaded on rural municipalities. Putting young kids ages 4 to 10 on buses for from 2 to 3 hours a day is not only very unhealthy, but puts

them at higher risk of bullying and is nonsensical in the digital age. (NSSI, Facebook, December 2012 –March 2013)

Public hearings in the small rural villages of Petite Riviere, Maitland, and River John turned out virtually the entire community. Speaker after speaker asked – who here is actually in favour of “Big Box” elementary proposals and bussing elementary kids to such distant schools? The answer – No one, except perhaps for battle-worn board staff suffering in silence. The visionary *Petite Plus* vision, created by Leif Helmer and Dee Conrad, at Petite Riviere Elementary School on the South Shore, became something of a catalyst. The Study Committee’s February 1, 2013 report set a new standard by going well beyond simply rejecting the school closure agenda promulgated in the SSRSB’s Impact Assessment Reports, produced by Dr. Jim Gunn, now freshly-minted as a Halifax-based Deloitte management consultant. It not only offered a constructive solution to the Petite Riviere problem, but also ventured into new territory, suggesting a completely new strategy to address declining enrolments across the entire school district.

The Maitland Plan, developed by Cathrine Yuill and her Study Committee, gained critical support from Kevin Quinlan, Principal of NSCC Truro, and Chair of the Coastal Communities Network. With the quiet support of the local principal, Yuill and her Committee proposed to open the school to community partnerships and lease excess space to NSCC Truro for continuing education programs, expand Boy Scout activities, and serve as a base for CHARTS, the East Hants arts festival group. Local parents besieged CCRSB Board Chair Trudy Thompson, a Maitland resident, turning thumbs down on a proposal to buy the parents off with the promise of a “Big Box” school an hour away on country back roads. Most significant of all, the MDES group acknowledged that their school, with only 25 students, must be transformed into a “community hub” school to have any chance of surviving and to secure its future sustainability.

The River John Study Committee, led by the feisty Abby Taylor, was initially caught off-guard by the determination of the CCRSB to move ahead with school closure. Outraged by the IAR report plan to close the school and bus 76 students in different directions, Taylor rallied her entire besieged community for what looked much like a “Last Stand” against the central administration down in Truro. After developing a local Community Hub model, the Study

Committee has secured the return of the RCMP office, a local film-maker, FLAWed Productions, and the SCORE Pre-School program. A month later, on February 28, 2013, a crowd of over 287 local residents packed the River John School Gym and unified behind the Community Hub plan. Maritime children's author Sheree Fitch, a River John resident, joined the long speakers' line-up and spoke with characteristic passion about her commitment to keeping the school open.

If the Community Hub movement continues to spread, it will be because of the public advocacy of committed and determined small schoolers like Leif Helmer, Catherine Yuill, and Abby Thomas during 2012-13. That movement can be traced back to its origins in a brainstorming session held December 12, 2012 in a Tim Horton's coffee shop in Bridgewater on a cold winter's night. The *Petite Plus* plan, hatched that night, became the most adventuresome and exciting, embracing innovation, local artists, and videoconferencing. With a \$2 million renovation, the Petite Plus plan was designed to save local taxpayers between \$6 million and \$8 million of the cost of a new Big Box elementary school. It provides a viable Third Option, breaks new ground in Nova Scotia public education, and may well turn out to be regarded as a turning point in the Herculean effort to turn back the relentless tide of centralization, consolidation, and rural school abandonment in Nova Scotia.

School closure battles in 2012-13 came to a head in March of 2012 as three boards, CCRSB, SSRSB, and TCRSB, were required, under the School Review process, to make decisions on the future of 14 different schools. The Chignecto-Central Regional School Board was first out of the gate and rendered its decisions on March 20, 2013. Two schools proposing the Third Option of becoming a Community Hub School, Maitland District School, and River John Consolidated School, were each given two years (until 2015) to produce a viable business plan of face closure. The Wentworth Study Committee was challenged to come up with a Community Hub proposal, and given a one year stay of execution, or it would be closed in 2014. Historic Bass River Elementary School, spared in 2010 and currently in the midst of its 100th anniversary year, was voted to be closed in June 2013. Thirteen of 17 CCRSB board members voted to support the Maitland Community Hub Plan, but gave Cathrine Yuill a firm deadline of June 2015 to put the plan in place.

A shift in attitudes is underway in the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board and the school board members now appear more inclined to put their trust in communities to come up with their own plans for school sustainability. New Glasgow member, Jamie Stevens, President of the Nova Scotia School Boards Association, argued that closing schools did not make good sense while this Economic Commission was touring the province looking for ways to rejuvenate rural Nova Scotia. “I think it would be short-sighted of us,” he stated, “to close small schools to meet our budget deadlines.” (Gorman, 23 March 2013).

Traditional school board ways and thinking die hard. On March 27, 2013, the South Shore Regional School Board rendered its decisions, deciding the fate of six more schools. At that critical meeting, the eight-person elected board claimed that balancing the SSRSB budget could only be achieved by closing schools, seeking to cover a reported \$1.8 million shortfall in the coming year. (Ware, 23 March 2013) After an intense, on and off again, internal debate stretching over an entire weekend, they rejected the Petite Plus plan and decided to merge Petite Riviere Elementary School with Pentz Elementary School, 15 kilometres away, in a proposed future school located between the two villages. Two other small rural schools were also slated for closure, Gold River-Western Shore Elementary School, in June 2013, and Mill Village Consolidated School, a year later, in June of 2014. While Mill Village was given a year-long reprieve, the tiny school lost its Grade 6 students, further weakening its student enrolment. (Ware, 28 March 2013)

Just when the clouds appeared to be gathering, Nova Scotia’s widely-read newspaper came to the rescue. On Good Friday, March 28, 2013, *The Chronicle Herald* published an editorial essentially endorsing the Schools at the Centre vision and proposing Community Hubs as the preferred approach to revitalizing rural schools and communities. The editorial, entitled “Small School Closures: Think Bigger,” provided a succinct and persuasive case for halting the divisive School Review process until the whole concept of Community Hub Schools was explored and threatened communities given ample opportunity to consider such an option in the months and years ahead. (Editorial, 29 March 2013)

Putting facilities first is not a winning strategy if we are truly committed to building “learning communities.” A Third Option is the best way forward because it challenges school

communities themselves to come together, to develop their own Community Hub plan, and to breathe new life into public education. Thinking small, dreaming bigger, opening the doors, and turning small schools into community hubs is now surfacing, from the ground up, as the wave of the near future.

6. The Way Ahead – Save Small Schools, Revitalize Small Communities

Closing small schools is not a winning formula for rural and small town Nova Scotia. It's a terrible blow to rural communities when they lose their school, because local schools are an important part of the glue that holds communities together. They are the new social anchor — whether it be for parents coming together at fall rituals like the Ice Cream Socials, Brownies meeting in the gym after school hours, or Elections Nova Scotia using schools as polling booths. The closure of a school is devastating to small towns, remote communities, and villages alike. It often leads to the whole district's slow decline, as families and teachers move away and marginal businesses close as a result (Dare and Bennett, 2011; Gill 2012).

Over the past five years, some 43 different schools have been subjected to the Review process and, in many cases, the recent or threatened closure presents a looming crisis for smaller communities. But the written word for "crisis" in Chinese consists of two characters — one representing danger and the other representing opportunity. The school closure crisis is in fact offering the Department of Education and school boards an opportunity — and that's what sparked the formation of the Nova Scotia Small Schools Initiative and what motivated us to present this brief.

What's the best option for Nova Scotia? It begins by adopting a wider community development lens —and re-thinking the central administrator's view of schools as big boxes dedicated solely to the education of children. Viewed within that narrow lens, schools with declining enrolments are seen as liabilities instead of community assets. If the Education Department clings to this view, then there is no possible path other than closing dozens of

schools. But if you are prepared to think flexibly about schools, we can solve their excess capacity problems and in the process achieve better schools.

We need to look at the unused space in schools in a different way. Nova Scotia's *Schools Plus* initiative is only one possible approach and it will be found unequal to the challenge. It is far too narrowly circumscribed and does not even address the central question – re-engineering day schools and converting the surviving schools into community development centres. The mandate of the *Schools Plus* initiative is also limited to serving the 5 to 15 per cent of students at highest risk of dropping out of school and either falling by the wayside or drifting into a life of criminal activities. (Bennett, AIMS, April 2013)

The *Schools Plus* initiative looks like another “add-on” program that does not really address the fundamental challenges facing rural education. Properly implemented, it might make money by renting or selling the unused space to family service agencies offering complementary services. It falls short in every other aspect because it does not embrace the fundamental principle of rural community development – the School at the Centre model of rural revitalization and development.

Embracing a Public Engagement model will open the door to new and innovative ideas. Why not consider more creative solutions, such as renting the unused school space to generate extra income? What about selling off some of the "white elephant" big boxes and moving the remaining students to a non-traditional space in the same neighbourhood? An independent school partnership is another obvious choice, and the two schools could co-operate in various ways — for example, sharing buses or maintaining an outdoor skating rink in winter.

For many rural schools with shrinking enrolments, the Community Hub model should have considerable appeal. It starts by accepting that the regular day school will have to occupy a smaller footprint inside the existing building, occupying space more in keeping with the current and projected student numbers. Once the actual required space is determined, then community groups with compatible social functions, serving intergenerational groups, can and should be invited to share in occupying the space and in contributing to the development of a

more diverse, community-based offering of programs for kids and for adults alike. Forming a co-operative among the community groups and developing a Business Plan are the next logical steps in transforming the school facility into a genuine Community Hub school. (Elliott, 2011; Helmer, 2013; Yuill, 2013).

The clock is ticking, but the dire warning issued in this brief could well be the precursor to an 11th hour re-awakening. Hidden deep inside the divisive and punishing school closure crisis is the opportunity to create new and better schools. Simply closing community schools when enrolment shrinks and moving children to distant regional education centres will consign rural communities to a bleak future. Suspending the School Review process would buy some “re-thinking time,” allow Nova Scotians to confront this silent, unrelenting process, and encourage the Province to take the lead in a project aimed at re-inventing our current model of schooling for the 21st century. Transforming threatened small schools into community hubs unlocks local initiative and enterprise --- and opens the door to that brighter future.

Key Recommendations:

We call upon the Nova Scotia Commission on the New Economy to take the lead in addressing the looming crisis affecting rural and small town Nova Scotia, driven by worrisome rural depopulation trends and aggravated by the recurrent cycles of small school closures and their potentially devastating consequences for what remains of rural life.

The Nova Scotia Small School Initiative, composed of parent and community activists from all parts of Nova Scotia, recommends a province-wide strategy seeking to arrest the disturbing trend and to provide rural communities with a reason for hope in the 21st century.

It is recommended that:

1. The Nova Scotia Commission take the lead by embracing a *Community School at the Centre* philosophy aimed at revitalizing rural communities through a province-wide, community-building and development strategy focusing on rehabilitating neglected school communities. Instead of abandoning small schools to a School Review for closure process, move schools to the centre of planning for the future.
2. The Commission support a Moratorium on the School Review process, covering all schools identified in the current provincial cycle of school accommodation reviews. Such a move would send a powerful signal that the current School Review process is broken, acknowledging that it's adversarial, divisive, destroys confidence in the public system –and needs to be re-examined as a go-forward strategy.
3. The Commission recommend to the Premier the adoption of a Rural Revitalization Strategy, working with five different departments, Education, Economic and Rural Development, Health, Community Services, and Cultural Affairs/Libraries, and generated through a public engagement process involving all interested groups, including school boards, regional development agencies, school councils, teachers, local boards of trade, local government and citizens.
4. The Commission consider the advantages of recommending a Public Engagement Model in place of the current quasi-judicial School Review process seeking to find community-based solutions and rendering most, if not all, School Reviews unnecessary exercises. Such a model could actually run in tandem with, and be fully integrated with, Community Development Plans.

5. A Provincial Review be initiated fully examining the Education Act and Regulations as they relate to school reviews, with a view to levelling the playing field by shifting the *burden of proof* to those seeking school shutdowns. Instead of simply bolstering School Review Committees, raise the bar for school boards so that the process is reserved as a strategy of last resort.
6. Build on the *Nova Scotia Virtual School* project by initiating a Rural Schools Online Education Network, based upon the Newfoundland model, creating digitally-networked schools and taking fuller advantage of distance education in the 21st century guise of virtual schooling. Seek amendments to the Education Act and the collective agreements to remove obstacles to providing blended online and regular learning programs in rural and remote parts of the province.
7. The Commission embrace a Social Sustainability Framework and examine carefully the innovative community planning ventures recommended by the Young Foundation in the United Kingdom and now being implemented in a number of municipalities in Alberta and British Columbia. Generate a Rural Strategy, based upon Social Sustainability principles, resting on the fundamental pillars of Schools at the Centre, Community Partnerships, ICT Innovation, and Sustainable Economic and Social Development.
8. The Commission take the lead in proposing a Community Hub School model as the centrepiece of a province-wide strategy aimed at promoting rural regeneration, community-led innovation, and the long—term sustainability of our threatened rural communities.

Nova Scotia Small Schools Initiative, Core Supporters, March 2013

Annapolis Valley Region

- Michael Corbett, School of Education, Acadia University
- Steven Rhude, Wolfville Elementary School, Wolfville, NS

Antigonish County

- Denise Delorey, Save Community Schools, Heatherton, NS.
- Randy Delorey, Save Community Schools, Heatherton, NS

Cape Breton

- Kate Oland, Middle River School, Victoria County, NS
- Pam Marson-Berk, Middle River School, Victoria County, NS
- Gerri Samson, West Richmond Education Centre, Evanston, NS

Colchester County

- Anita MacLellan, Upper Economy, NS
- Tory Phinney, Bass River Elementary School, Bass River NS
- Tanya Harnish, Bass River Elementary School

Cumberland County

- Cecil McLeod, Wentworth Consolidated School, Wentworth, NS
- Carol Hislop, Wentworth Consolidated School

Digby County

- Jamie Lewis, Weymouth Consolidated School, Weymouth, NS
- Larry Donald Haight, Weymouth Board of Trade, Weymouth, NS

East Hants County

- Cathrine Yuill, Maitland Consolidated School
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- Sandra Labor, Shatford Memorial Elementary School, Hubbards, NS
- Gordon Tate, Shatford Memorial Elementary School, Hubbards, NS
- Karen Mitchell, Musquodoboit Harbour, NS.

Inverness County

- Jim Mustard, Council on Child Development

Lunenburg County

- Leif Helmer, NSCC Bridgewater , Petite Riviere, NS
- Michelle Wamboldt, Petite Riviere Elementary School
- Jens Laursen, Riverport School, Riverport

- Ron Stockton, Lunenburg Academy
- Barry Olivella, Lunenburg Academy
- Sherry Doucet, Pentz Elementary School, LeHave, NS

Pictou County

- Abby Taylor, River John Consolidated School
- Monica Graham, Freelance Writer, Sundridge, Pictou County.
- Sheree Fitch, Author, River John, NS

Queen's County

- Jessica Van Dyne-Evans, Mill Village Consolidated School., Mill Village, NS.
- Catherine Croft, Mill Village Consolidated School., Mill Village, NS.

Yarmouth County

- Frank Grant, Arcadia Consolidated School, Yarmouth.
- Max Poole, Yarmouth District High School.
- Debra Saulnier, Arcadia Consolidated School, Yarmouth
- David Sollows, Yarmouth, NS

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