

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. As Mayor of the Village of Millville I would like to welcome everyone to this meeting and say thank you to the organizers for giving me the opportunity to speak.

We have all gathered here tonight for a common purpose. To discuss the sustainability of the Millville Elementary School. School closures in rural areas is constantly being discussed at the provincial and federal levels.

For more than a decade now, the Province of New Brunswick has raised the question of whether or not there is a need for an elementary school in the Village of Millville. They would argue that enrollment is down, building costs are too high or that amalgamation is the way of the future.

However, anyone that has ever lived in a small rural community, and has been fortunate enough to attend a school within that community, will agree you cannot put a price on small community schooling or education.

*Educationworld.com* is quoted as saying

*“Reforming public education may be as simple as creating smaller schools. Small schools may be the remedy for what is wrong with public education. Small schools can reduce the negative effect of poverty, reduce violence and increase parent involvement and student accountability.”*

There exists in the majority of small schools, a sense of pride and a sense of personal possession and involvement on the part of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community residents. To a great degree, the school is the community center in many small towns and rural areas.

The majority of people in our small village has attended this school. The baby boomers when it was Millville Consolidated and housed grades 1 to 12 and then their children when it became an elementary school with grades 1 to 5, then K-5 in 1991.

At one time or another, most of us have attended various functions at this school. There have been countless Christmas programs, year-end barbeques, parent teacher meetings, bake sales, auctions and graduations. We have walked the halls of this school admiring a student's artwork so proudly displayed on the school walls. In the summer time our children play soccer and baseball out in the baseball field and now, they are able to enjoy the newly re-constructed playground and a skate-board equipment in the process.

Often times, teachers can sit around a single table and to create a culture of shared decision-making. The close, intimate setting of this school has helped students to learn independently and progress at their own rate. While older pupils helped the younger ones, the teachers are able to take time to individualize lessons and provide personal contact with each student on a daily basis. Younger pupils became fully aware of what is

expected of them in the next grade because they can see and hear older children working on advanced lessons.

A new study, entitled: *Small Schools: Great Strides*, reveals some significant potential benefits of small schools:

- Dropout rates are significantly lower
- Students have higher grade-point averages
- Students have better attendance records
- Fewer students fail courses
- Fewer students are retained at the elementary level
- Students achieve higher standardized test scores in reading.

What are the result of these benefits?

- Personal relationships: The size of the school does not inhibit personal interaction; it encourages it; and
- Morale among students tends to be higher. As a result, students are likely to have better attitudes toward school and less likely to create discipline problems.

Today children may not necessarily live in a typical family setting. Teachers are more apt to know their students as individuals and to be familiar with the family backgrounds from which they come. This may allow teachers to

make special provisions for individual needs and talents and to receive better cooperation from parents in resolving problems that may arise. In essence, students can interact more frequently and informally with their teachers.

There is also a greater tendency for cooperation between teachers and administrators because relationships tend to be more personal and informal. Teachers who live and work in small communities are more likely to be viewed as respected and valued citizens by other community members.

Millville Elementary School offers a climate that is orderly, serious, safe, and attractive. There is strong leadership by the principal, teachers and staff and high expectations for student achievement which are clearly communicated to students. Scheduling is much more flexible than in a large school, and schedules can be easily altered to accommodate instructional activities.

Because of many parent volunteers, the children in this school are able to participate in more field trips, social activities and arts culture activities. Often community members will volunteer at the school whether it be to help decorate for an event or simply to sit with a child while they do extra homework or listen to them read.

In the past few years our community has seen a few hardships. The outdoor rink house burned and was rebuilt. The Millville Branch Legion was burned and was rebuilt and the fire hall was burned and is in the process of being rebuilt. This shows that this small community can overcome big obstacles.

One thing that remains consistent is our population. Citizens of this community may have lived there here for their entire life. One comment I consistently here is that people move to Millville so their children can attend a small school even it means they have to travel a great distance for work.

In conclusion I want to state that no educational facility should ever close their doors even in the small, rural areas. Small schools need not apologize for their size. The challenge facing teachers, parents, and students attending small schools only helps to provide the most meaningful education possible.

If Millville Elementary School were to close it would be like removing the heart from our community. Once again we are fighting to see that this facility remains open for the better interests of our community and our children.