

Rural Reckoning: Losing schools means losing families

Cape Breton teeters between closing schools as populations shrink, and saving them to keep kids

By Joan Weeks, [CBC News](#) Posted: Sep 27, 2015 6:11 AM AT Last Updated: Sep 28, 2015 6:52 AM AT



Many Cape Breton schools face closure as populations shrink. (CBC)

Out-migration has hit hard in many sectors of Cape Breton, but perhaps none so hard as the school system.

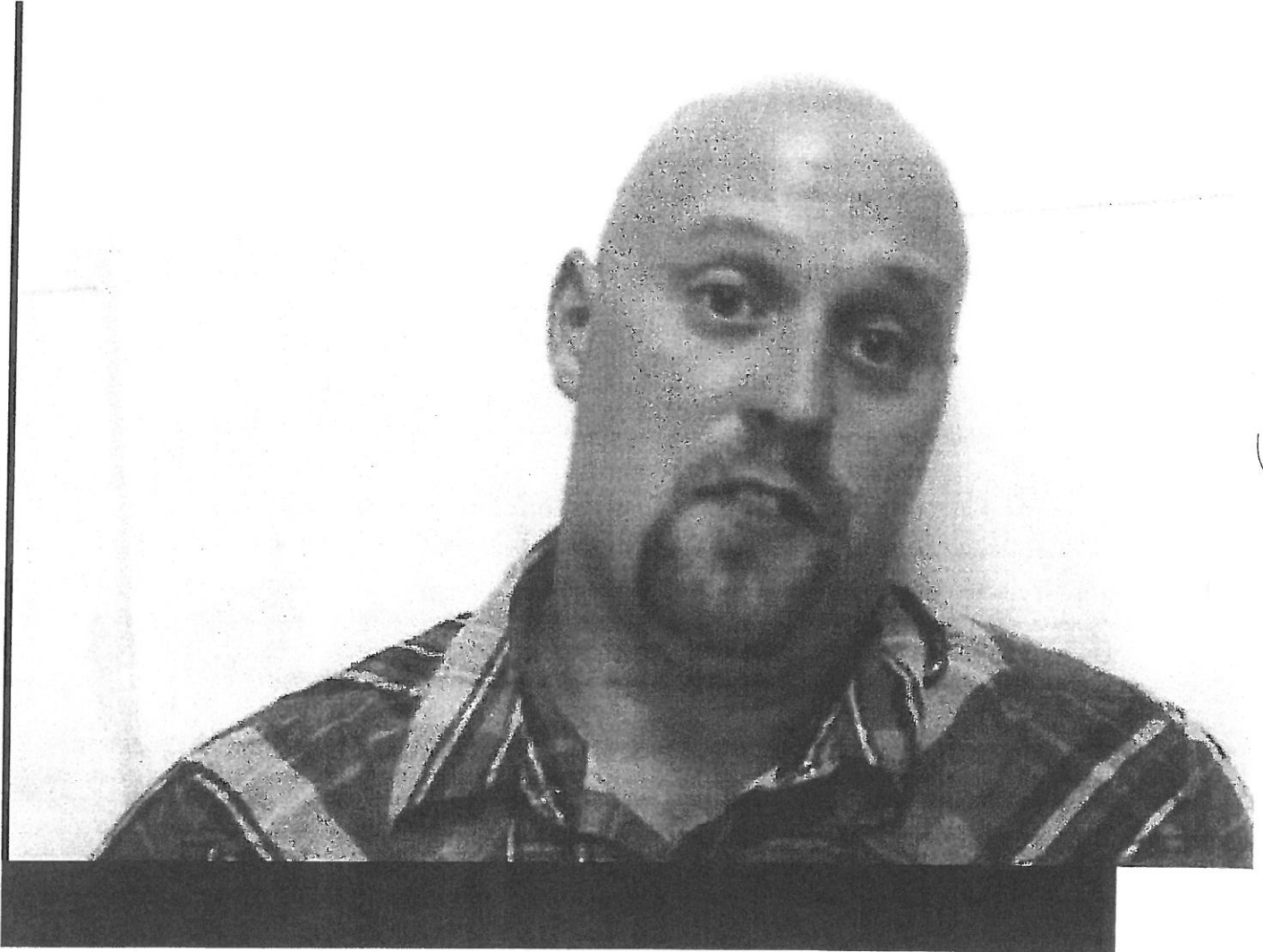
Since 2003, **26 schools across the island have closed**. Now, 51 remain, but 19 of those are being considered for closure.

- **Too few students may force closure of Cape Breton schools**

By next April, the school board will decide which will be shut down. The schools are spread across the CBRM and the threat of closure has thrown people in their home communities into an uproar.

Brett Hanham, Loydette MacDonald and Justin Mahon are from Louisbourg, where George D. Lewis School is threatened. They've joined the school review process to have a say in its future.

It's the town's only school, with 80 students from grades Primary to Nine.



Justin Mahon says schools are crucial0:44

Mahon has two children, an eight-year-old who attends George D. Lewis and a four-year old who starts school next year. If the George D. closes, Mahon worries about his oldest child.

"My kid has a learning disability so he would be put in a bigger school, which would mean that he would be pushed aside. In Louisbourg we have teachers that don't even take their break and take time to help him read and he has come up," he said.

Once that's gone, that is the heart of the community. - Kevin Saccary

"He's almost reading at the level he should be reading at now because of these teachers and a small school. This is the heart of our community."

Most of MacDonald's career has been spent in community development. "We have businesses, we've had people come to us and say, 'You know, we'll have to shut our doors.' We have school kids that come into our businesses every day and it's going to impact us greatly. We are going to lose our small families."

Hanham, 29, doesn't have children at George D., but says losing the school will affect his future.

"We understand that you can't save every school and that with the declining populations, especially in the CBRM, that changes do have to be made, but this is almost more than dollars and cents. This is our community," he said.

"I don't know where I'm going to be, but if there is no school [there's] probably not a chance that I will end up settling in Louisbourg."

The three watched what happened to a nearby community after its school was closed. "Main-a-Dieu had 300 families when they had a school, says Mahon, "and then they lost their school and now I don't think they'd have 100."

MacDonald agrees. "They lost their library. They lost their Credit Union. They lost their store. They lost their gas station. and they lost their young families."

Invest in schools

Kevin Saccary is the deputy mayor of the CBRM. He's also the councillor for Louisbourg and his home town of Port Morien, where the local elementary school is being considered for closure.

Saccary has been fighting to keep rural schools open for twenty years. Instead of closing schools in areas where populations are declining, Saccary thinks the province should spend money to keep them open and keep their communities viable.

"The provincial government needs to play a larger role in working with rural and suburban areas to help them maintain a quality of life. Once you close a school anywhere, it's pretty difficult for a province or a local school board to put that back," Saccary says.

"Once that's gone, that is the heart of any community. I've experienced businesses such as convenience stores and small corner stores in just about every single community. The windows are boarded up; now there's nothing.

"When you take the school out, it's like the last person closing the door."

In the battle between provincial budgets and communities struggling to survive, Loydette MacDonald says the consequences of closing a school in a small rural community is high.

"Losing our school is not just going to shut a building down. It's going to shut our community down."

**The Future
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Journal Issue: Excellence in the Classroom Volume 17 Number 1 Spring 2007

Attributes of Rural Communities

As the noted rural sociologist Daryl Hobbs has observed, one of the problems with past generalizations about rural America is that rural America defies generalization.¹ But it is possible to describe in some detail the features of a rural community. Some of these features can be considered fundamental to or inherent in a rural community; others are simply associated with such a community.

Among the inherent characteristics are small size, sparse settlement, narrowness of choice (with regard, for example, to shopping, schools, and medical services), distance from population concentrations, and an economic reliance on agricultural industries, sometimes in tandem with tourism. In keeping with Hobbs's assertion, not all of these essential characteristics necessarily apply to each rural community. For example, a community might be small but densely settled. The term rural, then, might imply small, but small need not imply rural. Even assuming uncritically that rural implies small can be problematic: sometimes large-enrollment centralized school districts serve geographically large rural settings. Likewise, certain regions, such as the newly coined "micropolitan statistical area," can be simultaneously urban and rural. As defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, each of these relatively sparsely settled regions must have at least one urban cluster with a population of at least 10,000 but less than 50,000.²

The economic base of rural communities tends to be place-bound. Enterprises like agriculture engage seasonal workers, and other place-bound industries like meatpacking are increasingly using immigrant workers to minimize labor costs.³ Indeed, the rural economic base may be shifting to include more industries that are place-bound and that can make use of low-skill workers. Such shifting has far-reaching effects for the schools in general, and for their ability to recruit and retain high-quality teachers in particular.

Other attributes are not inherent in rural communities but nevertheless tend to be closely associated with them. For example, many rural areas are seriously impoverished.⁴ Indeed, the incidence of poverty in conventionally defined nonmetropolitan areas is higher (14.6 percent) than it is in metropolitan areas (11.4 percent), although poverty rates are highest (16.6 percent) in metropolitan central cities.⁵ Among the 250 poorest counties in the United States, 244 are rural, and out of the more than 8 million children attending public schools in rural areas, 2.5 million live in poverty.⁶

Rural communities are also associated with aging populations and with population and job loss. For example, populations have dropped in rural areas in response to declines in traditional rural industries like wood products, textiles, apparel, and leather, coupled with agribusiness consolidations and the decline of family farms.⁷ These trends have created one of the most pressing challenges facing many rural communities—namely, retaining younger populations.⁸

But rural communities are also associated with positive attributes, such as beauty and serenity. And economies in rural areas grew briskly after the 1990–91 recession and grew more rapidly than those in urban areas in the first part of the 1990s.⁹ One study attributes the more rapid growth to technological innovations of the information age, new forms of work organization that permit workers to reside away from population centers, and the expansion of jobs that do not require college degrees. The study sees the largest share of jobs in the near-term rural economy as requiring more than a high school degree, but not as much as a college degree.¹⁰

Finally, rural communities vary widely both within themselves and across regions of the nation. Some rural areas, particularly resorts, for example, feature extremely valuable real estate, whose high property taxes have implications for funding rural schools. Yet poverty can exist in these same resort settings. Highly valued properties are typically held by part-time residents who engage permanent residents in low-wage service jobs like waiting on tables and caretaking. Real estate prices can become so high that permanent residents are forced to live elsewhere and to commute into the resort communities. In states where property owners vote on school budget referenda, it can be hard to secure the support of the absentee landowners for maintaining the schools even if the property wealth base is high.

Rural school districts in the western United States also differ from those in the east, partly because of geography and partly because of history. In years past, many small country schoolhouses dotted the nation's eastern, particularly northeastern, states. As school district consolidation has proceeded over the years, the number of districts has declined substantially, but many small districts continue to exist, particularly in New York and Pennsylvania. Elsewhere, particularly in the south, county-level districts are more common, and consolidation efforts are more typically focused on individual schools.

A legacy of consolidation can have important internal implications for schooling.¹¹ Consolidation can join separately organized communities that vary widely in terms of their culture, values, and worldview. Teachers and other school officials in consolidated districts must then find ways to bring together the differing perspectives into a common and coherent schooling endeavor. When consolidations are contentious, teachers and administrators must do what they can to forge a new community identity. As the prevalence of hyphenated school district names in the aftermath of school consolidations suggests, the task is not easy. The presence of multiple community identities within a school district is a common hallmark of a rural school setting.

One final twist is that sometimes rural attributes can be taken on voluntarily. Some schools and school districts, for example, are small out of choice rather than out of necessity. To the degree that added costs are associated with small scales of operation, policymakers have been more sympathetic to providing relief for places that have no choice but to be small. Of course, in practice, the choice-necessity distinction can be a vexing one to draw.

Working Conditions for Teachers in Rural Areas

Studies comparing working conditions for teachers in rural and other kinds of school settings have found differences in average class size and in the mix of courses taught, particularly at the secondary level.

Pupil-teacher ratios are relatively low in both elementary and secondary schools that enroll few students. According to the NCES, elementary schools with fewer than 300 students report pupil-teacher ratios of 13.3, compared with 20.3 for schools with more than 1,500 students. Figures for secondary schools are comparable, although they tend to be lower.¹⁸ The lower pupil-teacher ratios in smaller schools affect different aspects of teacher workloads. On the positive side, smaller schools tend to have smaller class sizes, although cost sensitivities can prompt measures like combining grade levels. Smaller class sizes, all else equal, are an attractive feature of working in small or rural schools.

Other advantages can stem from a small school or small classroom environment. Rural teachers, for example, report more satisfaction with their work environments and feel they have greater autonomy and more direct influence over school policy.¹⁹ Evidence also suggests fewer problems with discipline in rural areas.²⁰

On the negative side, smaller numbers of students limit the ability of teachers to specialize and may require them to deal with wider ranges of pupil needs. This drawback is perhaps most obvious at the secondary level, where a single high school science teacher may teach all the science subfields, but even in elementary schools teachers can find themselves dealing with a wider age span than is customary elsewhere because grade levels have been combined.

Smaller student enrollment can also make it hard for schools to offer more specialized courses. In earlier research using data from New York, I found that increasing enrollment up to 100 in a grade level in secondary schools predictably broadened the curriculum. Increasing enrollment beyond 100, however, often resulted in increased sections of existing courses rather than in more varied courses.²¹

The smaller numbers of students in rural schools can also affect school stability from one year to the next. Schools with larger numbers of students tend to enjoy a cushion against change. But when students are few, the school or district can change substantially from one year to the next in ways that affect the work of teachers. Recent federal legislation, most particularly the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, raises the stakes for fluctuations from one year to the next, notably in calculating the adequate yearly progress (AYP) accountability yardsticks. Failures to meet AYP standards because of fluctuations stemming from small numbers make small schools vulnerable to sanctions even when teaching performance is exemplary. The small number problem is exacerbated when the performance levels of subpopulations are assessed, making the already small numbers even smaller. The Bush administration has begun to provide increased flexibility to small and rural districts as part of its refinement of NCLB, but making accountability measures sensitive to the realities of small and rural schools and districts remains a challenge.

Request for Support for Riverside Consolidated School (<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/request-for-support-for-riverside-consolidated-school>)

24/2/2015

9 Comments (<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/request-for-support-for-riverside-consolidated-school#comments>)

Photo by Mike Buck, Save Riverside School Facebook

Riverside Consolidated School, located in Riverside-Albert, Alma and surrounding areas. The results of the study could lead to the permanent closure of the school as early as June 2015.

Last week, members of the Anglophone East School District (AESD) and the District Education Council (DEC), passed a motion to commence with a sustainability study on two rural schools – Riverside Consolidated School and Dorchester Consolidated School.

Tasked with finding greater efficiencies within the education system, they chose to examine infrastructure cuts instead of programming.

Riverside Consolidated School, located in Riverside-Albert, serves the communities

****Note: the public meetings are posted on the Connecting Albert County Calendar (/calendar.html).****

The detailed time line of meetings and decisions can be found here (<http://web1.nbed.nb.ca/sites/ASD-E/Sustainability/Documents/Riverside%20Timeline.pdf>).

The children affected by this closure – ages 4 to 10 – would be bussed to Hillsborough Elementary School, an option that parents feel is unacceptable.

Kelly Edgett, speaking as Chair of the Parent School Support Committee (PSSC), is appealing to stakeholders and parents across Albert County to consider the long-term and far-reaching impacts of school closure on the community as a whole, and to consider sending letters of support to elected officials and members of the AESD and DEC (email addresses below).

One of the points made by PSSC is the distance between communities, frequent stops, and the roundabout routes that buses take to pick up and deliver students.

"Buses, as we know, do not travel in straight lines," says Edgett. "Currently, the student with the longest bus ride travelling from West River to Caledonia Regional High School travels 219 km per day (109.5 km each way). We have accepted this reality for our middle and high school students. This is not acceptable for elementary students."

She notes that if Riverside Consolidated School is closed, "a kindergarten student living in Alma will travel 68.6 km to attend Hillsborough Elementary. Even with a minimum of stops, this trip will take 1 hr and 31 minutes on a fine weather day, meaning the **young children will spend 3 hours each day on a bus**. To put this in perspective, a Kindergarten to Grade 2 student spends 5 hours in the classroom. More than half of this time will be spent traveling."

A letter distributed to residents from PSSC states:

"Reasonable access to education is imperative to people who work in this region. Our area, home of the UNESCO Fundy Biosphere Reserve, draws people from all over the world to explore and discover. The completion of the \$22.8-million Fundy Trail Parkway set for 2018, predicts a huge increase in tourist traffic. Parks Canada is investing millions of dollars into Fundy National Park's infrastructure, programs, and projects. The New Brunswick government has recently completed the new \$12-million Forest Dale Nursing Home facility in Riverside-Albert. With the continued existence of Riverside Consolidated School our communities can remain strong and vibrant.

"We, the parents of current, future, and past students of Riverside Consolidated, urgently request that the Anglophone East School District and District Education Council recognize the impact of denying reasonable access to education in our communities."

The letter also asks concerned residents to get involved by writing letters and by sharing the information with others. "We respectfully request that you read the following information, as it concerns the



Culture & Heritage

Connecting Albert County - Culture & Heritage
(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage>)

Community spirit! (<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/community-spirit>)
Now here's an idea. When Barb Haire and Peter Jubb recently got married, they decided to ask their guests if they...

Victory Cannon Campaign - Albert County Museum (<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/victory-cannon-campaign-albert-county-museum>)

Driving through Hopewell Cape, New Brunswick, you will notice the pair of cannons sitting in the square flanking ...

Alma Fishing Fleet Launch 2015
(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/alma-fishing-fleet-launch-2015>)

Photo by Kevin Snair, Creative Imagery By Jane Chrysostom Kicking off the activities for the Fall lobster fishing ...

Molly Kool award winners announced!
(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/molly-kool-award-winners-announced>)
Barbara A. Gebuhr of Riverside-Albert and Elizabeth "Beth" McLaughlin of Moncton (posthumously) have been name...

Alma Fleet Launch!
(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/alma-fleet-launch>)
On the midnight high tide on late on October 13th, a fleet of lobster fishing boats will sail from the wharf ...

Growing food & creating history at Riverside Consolidated School
(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/growing-food-creating-history-at-riverside-consolidated-school>)

community as a whole, and fill the inboxes of the people listed at the bottom of the letter with your support," the letter states.

These people include:

- serge.rousselle@gnb.ca (mailto:serge.rousselle@gnb.ca), Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development
- brian.keirstead@gnb.ca (mailto:brian.keirstead@gnb.ca), MLA, Albert County
- Gregg.Ingersoll@gnb.ca (mailto:Gregg.Ingersoll@gnb.ca), Superintendent, Anglophone East School District
- tamara.nichol@nbed.nb.ca (mailto:tamara.nichol@nbed.nb.ca), Chair, District Education Council
- htdoyle@rogers.com (mailto:htdoyle@rogers.com), Representative for Albert County on the District Education Council
- barry.snider@nbed.nb.ca (mailto:barry.snider@nbed.nb.ca), Principal, Riverside Consolidated School

Further information

To see the PSSC letter, click here ([/uploads/4/0/4/4/40449191/pssc.pdf](#)).

To learn more about policy information on school closures, see Policy 409 "Multi-Year School Infrastructure Planning" - section 6.4.2 (<http://www.gnb.ca/0000/pol/e/409a.pdf>) (page 5 of 9).

To read CBC's coverage of the story, click here (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/schools-in-dorchester-riverside-albert-under-review-1.2973210?cmp=rss&cid=news-digests-new-brunswick>).

Save Riverside School Facebook Site (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/442482112575673/>)

Like 320 Tweet

9 Comments (<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/request-for-support-for-riverside-consolidated-school#comments>)

Ryan

25/2/2015 02:18:19

I have personally travelled to and worked at Riverside Consolidated a couple of times during my short time as a supply teacher 4 years ago. This school was full of character and truly exemplified the community the students were from. I believe that Riverside Consolidated is a school that embraces its surroundings, one of my times there the students took a trip to the local park which was a few minutes drive away from the school, this trip was one that showed the students what their community has to offer. This school does have small class sizes, but it offers a huge benefit to these students.

Reply

Maxine Mainville

25/2/2015 05:42:21

I realize everything is about dollars and cents but how is this even up for discussion?

Reply

Rosa Geldart

25/2/2015 08:50:34

These children deserve an education without the extended daily commute. They need accommodated, not penalized.

Reply

Marie Henwood

25/2/2015 09:45:32

This is unacceptable. I went to this school then had to go Hillsborough for High School. The days were extremely long and exhausting. I still remember those long bus trips and the toll it took on me. Why is the Government being so uncaring to our rural children and parents. Not impressed!!

Reply

Tanya

26/2/2015 13:47:53

[rtcounty.org/culture--heritage/growing-food-creating-history-at-riverside-consolidated-school](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/growing-food-creating-history-at-riverside-consolidated-school))

Bob Osborne of Corn Hill Nursery leading a pruning demonstration at Riverside Consolidated School. Riversid...

[Molly Kool - A Worthy Role Model](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/molly-kool-a-worthy-role-model)

(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/molly-kool-a-worthy-role-model>)

By Jenn Shelby When I was a child, I was fascinated by the sea. The bracing breeze...

[Molly Kool Award](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/molly-kool-award)

(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/molly-kool-award>)

Born in 1916, Molly Kool became the first licensed female Master Mariner (sea captain) on May 25, 1939. When asked...

[Quilt Show and Sale at the Albert County Museum](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/quilt-show-and-sale-at-the-albert-county-museum)

(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/quilt-show-and-sale-at-the-albert-county-museum>)

On Friday July 10th we dropped by the Albert County Museum to see the 39th annual Quilt Show and Sale. We were ama...

[Alma Celebration Days](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/alma-celebration-days)

(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/alma-celebration-days>)

Planning for months and months in advance, perusing past year's programs, events and activities, brainstorming...

[Why we saved Riverside Consolidated School: the human cost of bussing](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/why-we-saved-riverside-consolidated-school-the-human-cost-of-bussing)

(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/why-we-saved-riverside-consolidated-school-the-human-cost-of-bussing>)

There are many reasons why the citizens of Albert County, NB, fought to keep Riverside Consolidated School open. A ...

[How to save a school: Riverside Consolidate School shares its success story](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/how-to-save-a-school-riverside-consolidate-school-shares-its-success-story)

(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/how-to-save-a-school-riverside-consolidate-school-shares-its-success-story>)

...

I attended this school from k-7 then went to Hillsborough. I remember the bus rides from Albert were a little over 30 minutes and then I moves to cape enrage and had to be on the bus by 7am to be at school by 8:10. This was exhausting and my grades showed it from then on. This is not an acceptable commute for anyone let alone small children... How do they expect these kids many with disabilities (ADHD, ODD, Autism) to be able to sit on a bus for up to an hour and a half just to get to hillsborough elementary and then sit in a class room for 2 hours? It is not fair to the children... The school board needs to be put on a bus told to sit down and be quiet and go for a trip on our roads.. This is not even mentioning storm days when all we have are one lane roads down here and busses are expected to still travel to Hillsborough because the city streets are cleared they expect the country streets to be too and unfortunately most mornings the plows don't even do there first trip on the main streets till 7am let alone the side streets and the route 915.... This is putting our kids lives in danger having to drive that much further... Sorry rant over

Reply

Margaret McQuinn

3/3/2015 00:32:25

I agree with all the above and hope the school keeps going

Reply

Jody Taylor

3/3/2015 01:34:01

There are many negative effects that result from the students being on the bus for longer periods of time. According to Jimerson (2007) and Howley and Howley (2001),

- * Students with the longer commute of sixty minutes or more tend to participate less in extracurricular activities.
- * Students with long bus rides have little time to spend with family after arriving home from school.
- * Homework may suffer, time to relax and sleep are diminished because they have an early commute each morning.
- * Sleep deprivation can lead to a depressed immune system.
- * Parents are more likely to keep their children home.
- * Physical activity decreases as down time on the school bus is normally a time when children could be playing. Getting exercise is important in preventing childhood obesity.
- * Bullying as older children are left unsupervised with very young children on the bus.
- * Negative impact that older children have on younger children by exposing them to ideas and language that is inappropriate for the age group.
- * Negative correlation between the length of bus rides and student achievement.
- * Quality of the roads. If the children must travel long distances to school, it is of the utmost importance that the bus routes be properly maintained to ensure their safety. There are many negative effects that result from the students being on the bus for longer periods of time. According to Jimerson (2007) and Howley and Howley (2001),
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- * Negative correlation between the length of bus rides and student achievement.

[Little initiatives can have a big impact - Riverside School Scholarship Fund](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/little-initiatives-can-have-a-big-impact-riverside-school-scholarship-fund)
(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/little-initiatives-can-have-a-big-impact-riverside-school-scholarship-fund>)

Over 25 years ago, a small group of volunteers celebrated the history of Riverside Consolidated School and started...

[Amazing show of support for Riverside Consolidated School](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/amazing-show-of-support-for-riverside-consolidated-school)
(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/amazing-show-of-support-for-riverside-consolidated-school>)

When people visit the Fundy shore for the first time, they're often overwhelmed by the tide. The water co...

[Request for Support for Riverside Consolidated School](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/request-for-support-for-riverside-consolidated-school)
(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/request-for-support-for-riverside-consolidated-school>)

Photo by Mike Buck, Save Riverside School Facebook Last week, members of the Anglophone East School District (AESD)...

[Possible closure of Riverside Consolidated School](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/possible-closure-of-riverside-consolidated-school)
(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/possible-closure-of-riverside-consolidated-school>)

Within hours of receiving news that Riverside Consolidated School was one of two rural schools being considered fo...

[Tales from the Creek](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/tales-from-the-creek)
(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/tales-from-the-creek>)

As story telling is a great way to convey information and history in an interesting way, the Curryville Community...

[Cemeteries in and around the Village of Riverside-Albert \(well, some of them\)](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/cemeteries-west-and-south-of-the-village-of-riverside-albert-well-some-of-them)
(<http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/cemeteries-west-and-south-of-the-village-of-riverside-albert-well-some-of-them>)

Directions and mileages are given from the Old Bank Museum and Information Centre, located at the intersection of...

* Quality of the roads. If the children must travel long distances to school, it is of the utmost importance that the bus routes be properly maintained to ensure their safety.

Reply

Pamela Stokes

3/3/2015 02:22:44

No child should ever be on a bus that long to go to school!! To put their safety at risk more by being on the roads longer, having to get up even earlier and I'm sure most will miss out on play and outdoor fun because it'll be later when they get home. This shouldn't even be considered in my opinion. Terrible idea to close!!

Reply

Kimberley Jonah

3/3/2015 11:01:19

They should not close this school, it will be hard for the young students to travel a long way. This school has also raised alot of money to help those in need.

Reply

Your comment will be posted after it is approved.

Leave a Reply.

Name (required)

Email (not published)

Website

Comments

Notify me of new comments to this post by email

Submit

[Albert County Clay Company](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/albert-county-clay-company)
(http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/albert-county-clay-company)

Judy Tait unloading the kiln. "We had been settled here for quite a while before we noticed so much clay about, ♡...

[Heritage & Culture of Albert County](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/heritage-culture-of-albert-county)
(http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/heritage-culture-of-albert-county)

Connecting Albert County celebrates the heritage, culture and sense of community shared and valued by the people ...

[Articles about the culture and heritage of Albert County](http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/culture-heritage)
(http://www.connectingalbertcounty.org/culture--heritage/culture-heritage)

.rss-box-585175136215453761 { background-color: #E5ECF9; border: 1px solid #C5D7EF; text-align: left; width: 100%; ...

We welcome comments to our blog postings. Please provide your email address and name with your comment, and respect our content guidelines (/comment-guidelines.html).

Archives

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- [September 2015 \(/culture--heritage/archives/09-2015\)](#)
- [August 2015 \(/culture--heritage/archives/08-2015\)](#)
- [July 2015 \(/culture--heritage/archives/07-2015\)](#)
- [June 2015 \(/culture--heritage/archives/06-2015\)](#)
- [April 2015 \(/culture--heritage/archives/04-2015\)](#)
- [March 2015 \(/culture--heritage/archives/03-2015\)](#)
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Riverside Consolidated School avoids closure

Fredericton (<http://www.ipick.ca/fredericton>) Apr 29, 2015



(<http://www.ipick.ca/wp->

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Anglophone School District East's education council voted unanimously Tuesday night to keep Riverside Consolidated School open.

About 120 people from the Riverside-Albert area attended the council meeting at Bernice MacNaughton High School in Moncton. The residents stood and applauded after the unanimous vote.

Dan Sinclair with the Parent School Support Committee said it was a huge relief.

"This is amazing news. It's amazing news for me as a parent, but it's also amazing news for our region," he said. "We were on the edge of our seats for two months, but finally hearing it, we are ecstatic," he said.

Parents had campaigned to keep the K-5 school open, saying elementary students are too young to be taking the 30 kilometre bus ride to Hillsborough Elementary. Riverside Consolidated currently has 56 students.

Earlier this month, parents hosted a bus tour demonstration of the route, to show council members how long the journey takes with student pick-ups. In total, it took 90 minutes, one-way.

Members of the committee said that event influenced their vote.

"I'm going to tell you, here, from my heart, it's too long to put four-year-old kids on a bus with 19-year-old kids," said council member and former Liberal MLA Harry Doyle. "It's just too darn long."

Council members did tell residents that the school will be triggered for a sustainability study again in the next two years, and that they need to find ways to better utilize the school and its rooms.

Four other New Brunswick schools have already failed sustainability assessments.

Coles Island, Pennfield Elementary, Lorne Middle School and Bath Elementary will close this spring unless the minister of education overturns the decision of the respective district education councils.

The education council for Anglophone School District South will vote Wednesday night on the fate of Brown's Flat Elementary and Norton Elementary.

Via CBC (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/riverside-consolidated-school-to-stay-open-1.3053075?cmp=rss>)

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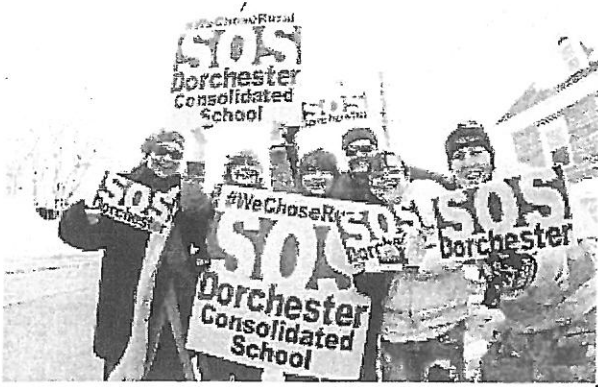
School Consolidation: Why the "Speed-Up" in Rural School Closures?

April 12, 2015 by [Paul W. Bennett](#)

Two Canadian provinces, **New Brunswick** and **Ontario**, are on the front lines in the ongoing battle over school closures, mostly concentrated in small rural communities. With school consolidation on pause in **Nova Scotia** the wake of the **2013 School Closure Moratorium**, it has returned with a vengeance in both N.B. and Ontario. The renewed threat in New Brunswick has now sparked (<http://globalnews.ca/news/1924706/rural-schools-coalition-formed-to-fight-n-b-school-closures/>) a feisty province-wide **Rural Schools Coalition**. (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1434428563518354/>)



(<https://educhatter.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/riversideconsolidatednb1905.jpg>)



(<https://educhatter.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/sos-dcs.jpg>)

A dozen small **New Brunswick** communities are currently in a state of upheaval with local schools facing possible closure, sparking growing popular resistance (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1434428563518354/permalink/1434840660143811/>) from **Dorchester** to **Pennfield** and north to **Dalhousie**, affecting Anglophone and Acadian communities alike. In Ontario, Education Minister **Liz Sandals** has not only identified some 600 schools as “half full” and ripe for review, but now introduced legislative changes to “speed-up” that province’s “**School Accommodation Review**” process.

Armed with the dreaded **New Brunswick Policy 409**, (<http://www.gnb.ca/0000/pol/e/409a.pdf>) and aided by that province’s **District Education Councils (DECs)**, the Education Department is imposing an arbitrary, cost-driven “school sustainability” process (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqyUDVJIENs&sns=fb>) upon supporters of the threatened schools. It looks, sounds, and feels distinctly like a runaway “*Express Train 409*” bearing down on their rural communities. After blowing through the first dozen, forty-two more schools, 27 anglophone and 15 francophone, are next in line.

Ontario’s new School Review process, unveiled in late March 2015, reflects the so-called “speed-up” agenda. Faced with a deficit reduction challenge, Minister Sandals has enacted changes (<http://www.pressreader.com/canada/the-globe-and-mail-ottawaquebec-edition/20150406/281616713881431/TextView>) shortening the timelines from seven months to five, cutting the number of public consultation meeting from 4 to 2, and limiting the criteria to “impact on student achievement.” Eliminating the criterion “value to the community” has upset municipal mayors and re-ignited the **Community School Alliance**, led by London-Middlesex small school advocate, **Doug Reycraft**.

Hundreds of **Save Our School Signs** (<http://www.sackvilletribunepost.com/News/2015-04-08/article-4104750/New-coalition-formed-to-challenge-school-closures/1>) have appeared all over rural N.B. and the whole exercise threatens to kill the “community spirit” that still animates much of rural New Brunswick. In the case of two Anglophone East School District communities, **Dorchester** and **Riverside-Albert**, local public school supporters were given less than two months to react to weighty facilities cost reports and documents stacking the deck in favour of closure.

The New Brunswick School Closure process is not only top-down and draconian, but also completely at odds with best policy and practice elsewhere. Compared with School Review for closure rules in Ontario and Nova Scotia, for example, the current practice violates every principle of fairness, legitimacy, and civic engagement.

Estimated cost savings accruing from closure, in the case of both the **Dorchester** and **Riverside** schools, running to \$1.8 million, are grossly inflated, based upon projected staff reductions and compounded costs accumulated after years of deferred maintenance. Additional busing costs, at \$50,000 per vehicle annually, are not acknowledged and community school cost reduction plans are simply not being considered.

Schools listed for closure are excluded completely from the information gathering process and presented with "infrastructure planning" reports that put facilities ahead of students, parents and communities. Under the policy, closure proceedings can be sprung on schools at any time, with insufficient time to formulate a response let alone generate viable, community-based alternatives.

The standard model of **School Accommodation Reviews**, utilized in Ontario gives school communities ample time (5 to 7 months), builds-in more school-level engagement, and provides for a provincial mediator. It's far from perfect, but respects the right of aggrieved communities to proper representation and legitimate opportunities to be heard before school boards make their final decision. No school would ever be closed on the tight timeline currently being implemented in N.B.

Just across the border, in **Nova Scotia**, the whole **School Review** process is radically different and aimed at achieving cost efficiencies through a brand new school-centred community planning model. (<http://www.cbc.ca/player/News/Canada/NB/ID/2662821294/>) supporting the gradual re-purposing of school buildings. Schools are viewed as community assets and not simply liabilities to be abandoned and off-loaded to local towns and villages.

Under the newly established **October 2014 N.S. model**,

http://www.ednet.ns.ca/schoolreview/11028_16Oct2014_School_Review_Policy_EN.pdf) school boards are required to engage municipalities, school communities, local groups and business organizations in a **Long Range Planning** process. Schools with declining enrollments are encouraged to develop **Community Hub plans** aimed at re-purposing surplus school space and generating revenue to assist in ongoing operational and maintenance costs. Once the initial spadework has been done, the School Review process goes forward guided by a "**School Options Committee**" mandated to find local solutions. Only when such efforts flounder, do the schools close.

New Brunswick's School Closure policy was already grossly unfair, and Education Minister **Serge Rousselle** has just made it even worse. His latest revisions, announced in mid-stream, adding two "triggers" for closure – under 100 students or 30 per cent or less occupancy – merely confirm the suspicions of rural New Brunswickers. Appropriating the concept of a "trigger" mechanism, borrowed from the world of firearms, may have been a Freudian slip. If Express Train 409 does not run you over, then the DECs can pull the trigger to kill the vitality and resilience of rural communities, leaving them school-less and eventually childless.

New Brunswick can do much better — and **Ontario** should know better than to deny the critical role schools play in smaller communities. It's time to re-think the current move to "Hurry Up" school closure process, to take stock of what happened in Nova Scotia, and to build local communities into a more school-centred rural revitalization process.

What's "fair" about imposing School Consolidation and springing closures on struggling rural communities? What's driving the "speed-up" in provincial School Review process time-frames for closure? Where's the hard evidence to support the purported cost savings and operational efficiencies? An how can such bitter, divisive and arbitrary public processes be transformed into community-building, cost-efficiency-generating exercises?

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2 Responses

Doug Little

on *April 12, 2015 at 11:02 pm* | [Reply](#)

It is very easy to stop the closings. You simply have to convince the party in power that they cannot win the next election is they continue closing schools.



Now from here on it gets difficult. Heavy doses of public relations, lobbying, petitions, and do on follows.

It can be done.

TDSB has many schools on the chopping block. It is not just a rural issue.

markm64

on *April 23, 2015 at 1:16 pm* | [Reply](#)

Would it not be simpler to shuttle a couple buses from the overcrowded suburban schools to a rural (or inner city) underpopulated school?



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