

## Community 2

There are stores and churches, a post office, ski hill & restaurant, a nature preserve, a service club, sporting camps, artist studios and garages in our community and at the heart of all of these, is the school.

The sights and sounds of children laughing and playing fills the community with hope, with joy with promise for the future.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what impact it would have on the community if the school were to close but we can look to other communities to get an idea.

The devastating impact of school closures has been seen throughout this province as well as other provinces. In a recent article by Joan Weeks, CBC News (Sept. 27, 2015) parents in one Cape Breton community watched as a nearby community, Main-a-Dieu, shrank from 300 families to less than 100 after losing their school. They also lost their Credit Union, store, gas station and they lost their young families.

These communities know that the consequences of closing a school in a small rural community is grave. Shutting down our school would be like taking the future out of our community.

This presentation will address the **Social and Economic impact** on the community should our school be closed.

### **Social Impact:**

#### **Morale of the Village:**

Our school helps maintain the social fabric of the Millville community by:

- bringing people together,
- fostering a sense of belonging, and
- developing a sense of pride in the place that is home.

This point can be further exemplified by the fact that approximately **750** people from all over North America came together to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Millville School Anniversary Reunion held in 1999.

That's right **750** people. That is more than double the present population. They came together to remember their time as students, as a community. This speaks volumes about what it means to belong.

While it is sad to lose buildings and possessions, they can be replaced. When a school is taken from the community what is lost can never be replaced. The threat of school closure has been on the minds of many for a long time. It is wearing and it is discouraging to those who work so hard to make this community such a great place to live and raise children. It is discouraging to those who have helped financially support the school in all of its efforts to make this school a great place to learn, and play and grow.

**Closing the school and removing our children would be like losing the heart and soul of our community.**

### **On the Children of the Village:**

Children, especially young children who attend a school that is not within their community do not belong. They do not fully belong in their new school community, and they do not fully belong in their home community. They lose their connection to school and community. In a paper titled, *Fostering School Connectedness*, circulated by the Psychology team of Anglophone School District West to all schools in the district, it was made explicit the importance of school connectedness. It stated that students who feel connected to school are more likely to succeed academically and make healthy choices.

They go on to say that:

Students who feel connected to their school are:

- More likely to attend school regularly, stay in school longer, and have higher grades and test scores.
- Less likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, or have sexual intercourse.
- Less likely to carry weapons, become involved in violence, or be injured from dangerous activities such as drinking and driving or not wearing seat belts.
- Less likely to have emotional problems, suffer from eating disorders, or experience suicidal thoughts or attempts.

Removing children from their community makes them less connected.

- They lose their sense of pride and identity for community,
- Are less engaged in what is happening and
- Fail to learn about the history, values and experiences of their own people
- Are less engaged in what is happening in their community and lose their connection to the older citizens.

The small school experience is one that cannot ever be achieved in a larger school. Small schools offer students a unique learning atmosphere. Students all know each other well and they help one another. Bonds form quickly among students, teachers, staff and volunteers reducing stress and anxiety. Students, staff, parents, volunteers and guests feel at home right away. Behaviour problems are less than they would be at a larger school as there is greater accountability, less bullying, and more time for one on one instruction. Teachers are able to get to know their students' families well which makes for ease of communication and greater school/community connection.

Connection to community is so important that it is studied as part of the, *You and Your World Curriculum* and *Social Studies*. This is where students learn about the importance of self, family, community. It is where they learn how to be active citizens.

**Why then does it make sense to remove children from their community?**

**On New Families:**

New families with children will not likely settle in the area if there is no school. Families want to be near a good school for their children to attend. They want to be close enough to be involved in their child's education especially in the elementary grades. Without a school, the draw for new young families will not be as attractive. Without new young families, the community will not survive.

**The economic impact on our community will be huge.**

## **On Volunteers:**

Our school has always enjoyed the support of local residents as volunteers. They offer the school rich interactions & a multitude of activities such as sewing, quilting, dancing, choir, music, crafts, chess, sports and much, much more.

Volunteers provide much needed support by reading with children, fundraising, lending a hand with drama, school grounds clean up, preparing food, going on field trips, noon hour sports, enrichment clubs and preschool group.

Volunteers have strong community ties and have a desire to do something that makes a difference to the children in their communities and their families. Many of our volunteers are moms with young children or seniors. Our senior volunteers ensure our children learn valuable life lessons and skills such as quilting, knitting and sewing.

Our volunteers get as much from our students as our students get from them. This valuable two way connection between our seniors and the younger generations could potentially be lost.

**Closing our school would sever these essential community ties.**

## **Economic Impact:**

### **Loss of Trade to Area Businesses:**

In addition to the economic impact with regard to new families choosing not to put down roots if there were no school in the community, local business will also be negatively impacted.

When students are relocated to new communities, families have the tendencies to switch their spending closer to their children's schools. Chances are that the time, energy and money that was spent in Millville will be spent in the new school community.

MES has always supported local business: garages, crafts persons, purchasing food items & local produce, gasoline. The activities centered on the school have also had a positive impact on local business. This would be lost if the school were to close.

Northcliff Resources Ltd. is in the process of getting approval for a tungsten mining project which will have a 27 year duration. The Sission project will create 300 jobs and also spin-off businesses will be developed to service the mine. This

will result in additional employment beyond the 300 jobs purposed. Closing Millville Elementary School will make it challenging to attract employees and their families to this area (Greg Davidson, Northcliff Resources Ltd.).



**It should be noted that there is a negative psychological impact on residents to have their former school standing empty in the heart of their community. It is certainly not attractive nor enticing to new businesses or new families.**

### **Conclusion:**

This presentation has outlined the social and economic impact that closing the school would have on Millville and the surrounding areas. Closing the school would erode the quality of life of the students, their parents and the community.

**There is nothing positive that would come as a result of this potential closure.**