

**Rural Schools and Educational Reform:
Should We Keep Rural Schools Open?
A Review of the Literature**

Prepared by
Dr. Allan C. Lauzon and Ms. Danielle Leahy
School of Rural Extension Studies
University of Guelph
Guelph, Ont.
N1G 2W1

This research was funded by OMAFRA under the SRC Research Program, Project 023450

Introduction

Rural school closure is not new. Educational reform in the Canadian context has been characterized by a continual process of reform and consolidation since its inception as a public service. Originally, in the earliest days of public education in Canada, the structure for school governance was quite simple. According to Gallagher (1995), schools were an essential element of the social and cultural fabric of community life. People, even those who did not have school age children, were still close to the school and in many ways part of school life. Organizationally, schools were governed by a board of elected trustees whose job was to govern and manage the local school, ensuring that it adhered to the provincial guidelines. Typically, each community had one school and one board of trustees, except for those larger urban communities where one board of trustees might be responsible for the governance and management of several community schools (Gallagher, 1995). While this structure served both children and communities well, school does not operate independent of the larger social and economic forces. At the end of World War II Canada was increasingly becoming urbanized and consequently patterns of schooling and school board activities changed. It is during these years that education is radically altered through its *professionalization*. The increasing use or need for professional managers in education leads to undermining any sense of community ownership. Furthermore, with education becoming professionalized there are further changes in governance with school boards moving from being local to regional. The consequence, according to Gallagher (1995: 67) was that “Schools were now more distant, in many respects, from many of the community members whose children they were intended to serve.” Also during this period the cost of education increased. Some communities, unable to raise sufficient funds to cover the cost of education, became dependent upon provincial grants in an attempt to ensure educational equity. Subsequently, community members become even more detached from schooling and there was a rapid decline in commitment to education, causing a rift between those who have children and those who do not. Gallagher (1995) argues that the consequence was further marginalization of parents and community members from the educational process and the school. Howley (1997: 2) characterizes education during this period as “part of the march of progress toward an inevitably better future - a progressive, postwar and increasing post-rural future.” Between 1971 and 1991 there was a significant growth in the number of teachers and administrators employed as the professionalization of education continues. In response to the further estrangement of parents and community members from schools, there were attempts made to involve lay constituencies in education. However, despite the collaborative rhetoric, community members still remained passive spectators to the educational enterprise. Gallagher (1995: 69), in summarizing this period of education, concludes that

What had been community-based schools became the domain of hired, professional, expert teachers and administrators, and of school trustees whose personal agendas often went well beyond the establishment of school policy.

What had once been a community based and supported enterprise had been transformed into a professional activity where those who had the greatest interest - parents of children - had the least power or authority to play an active role in the educational enterprise.

Recently we have once again embarked on another round of reform and consolidation of education in Canada. In a time of increased need for economic efficiency in order to combat provincial deficits, Canadian provinces have turned to the idea that by increasing the size of administrative units within education a savings can be created while at the same time providing

an education of greater quality (Gallagher, 1995). Many of these changes, according to McEwen (1995), are being driven by demands for greater accountability, with a particular emphasis on economic performance. Much of this can be attributed to the effects of economic globalization (McMurtry, 1998) and the fact that education is increasingly influenced by the business community (Levine, 1999). Education has become, according to Howley (1997), the handmaiden to economic globalization and this is actively undermining the vitality of rural communities. Part of this can be understood as part of an agenda for global changes as a result of economic globalization, and this impacts negatively on rural communities and rural life (Lauzon and Hagglund, 1998). Miller captures the essence of this when he writes that

Many rural communities now face a decline in their quality of life due to the 1980s economic downturn and the 1990s globalization of the marketplace. Businesses have closed and many young well-educated citizens have left for urban areas. Additionally, social services, including schools, have been regionalized or consolidated as cost-cutting measures. These trends have led to high levels of unemployment and the deterioration of rural economic, social and environmental well-being (1995: 1).

Miller (1995) further states that in response to these changes there is a misguided belief that the focus of community development should be on economic development. However, in the absence of looking after the social fabric of the community, and ensuring the integrity of the biophysical basis of community, it is unlikely that any advances in economic development will be sustainable. As Hay and Barasan (1992) note, the very nature and fabric of rural communities is being altered and the problems of this are further exacerbated by the fact that “rural” is seldom a dimension considered in the formulation of national or provincial policy. As Pinder (1994) notes there is an implicit bias in policy formulation that actively excludes the consideration of the unique characteristics, qualities and needs of rural community life.

From an education perspective, this has the potential to be disastrous for rural communities. First, consolidation of boards and schools is often skewed in favor of urban values and the needs of larger communities (Burlingame, 1979; Sher, 1981; Brown, 1996; Ribchester and Edwards, 1999). Second, as Howley (1997) argues, a different logic is needed in considering rural schooling if the development of these institutions are to actually benefit rural communities. Again, this points to the need to consider the unique context of rural communities and the impact that restructuring or consolidation has on the quality of rural life. Howley (1997) further argues that in general, there is a scepticism that rural school needs are different. This, he maintains, is a result of three assumptions. First, the very notion of the school is problematic. He argues that the concept of school is based upon the platonic ideal of what a school should be and subsequently all schools are, by definition, lacking. This is closely tied to his second reason and that is that in general, in a highly urbanized culture, there is a general disregard for rural places and their diversity. Subsequently, they are not important, and hence not considered. Third, research in education promotes universal themes and recommendations across differing contexts, hence “ruralness” is rarely considered a variable in the context of educational research. This he notes mean that often educational researchers fail to ask the right questions if they wish to understand rural education and the implications consolidation may have for rural communities. Furthermore, if the research community does not ask the right questions and policy makers draw upon the research community to inform policy development, then rural, as a variable, will be left out of

the policy development agenda.

The remainder of this literature review will examine empirical literature as it relates to the issues of rural school closure and board consolidation.

The Economics of Educational Reform and Consolidation

Since the inception of public education the trend in educational reform has been toward, larger schools and boards (Sher, 1979; De Young, 1991; Brown, 1996, 1999; Ministry of Education and Training, 1996). This trend is indebted to an organizational model that is rooted in the 19th century model of industrial production that is based upon *economies of scale* (Fanning, 1995). Simply stated, economies of scale refers to the ability to reduce production costs by increasing the scale of the operation, thus reducing the production cost of each unit without incurring a decline in product quality. By borrowing this production model, administrators and politicians believe they can lower the costs of education while maintaining a quality education, just as industrialists have reduced costs without suffering any change in the quality of their product. This has been the driving force in much of the educational reform and consolidation over the history of public education in Canada. Furthermore, the public, in general, has historically accepted this argument without demanding that administrators actually demonstrate the cost savings. For example, there was very little public outcry as a result of the closures that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. There were a variety of reasons for this. First, it was assumed that “bigger is better” and the transfer of students from small schools to larger schools would afford them greater educational opportunity and provide them with an education of greater quality and value (Sher, 1977). Furthermore, the professionalization of education that happened during the post war period was still dominating whereby lay people would not challenge the expert; they invested significant trust in professionals and assumed that any action they advised would be beneficial for their children. Despite the trust of the sixties and seventies, and the cynicism that has emerged in the eighties and nineties, the question still needs to be asked: Does this organizational model translate across contexts (industrial production to education), and is there empirical evidence for the alleged benefits? For the purposes of this section we will only explore alleged benefits in terms of cost savings. Pedagogical outcomes and opportunities will be explored in the next section.

First, there are two areas to potentially save money through the application of this type of organizational model and the associated savings as a result of economies of scale. They are teachers salaries and administration costs (Giessen, 1998). First, is there a savings associated with teacher salaries? Giessen (1998), in exploring this issue, argues that there is a ceiling on the savings that can be realized as a result of school consolidation if teacher student ratios are increased. For example, rural schools may only have a small number of students and hence their teacher/student ratio is low and costs high on a per pupil basis. If these students can be assimilated into a larger system without having to increase staffing there will be a savings. However, assuming that there is maximum ceiling on class size, for example of 30 student per class, then the 31st student means that a new teacher would have to be hired and this begins to cancel out the savings. The question is can a savings be realized through closing rural schools and re-locating the students to larger schools? The answer is it is depends on the circumstances of consolidation, the number of students being moved, and the number of students currently enrolled in the school that will receive them. There will be a savings if students are re-located to a school in which no or few additional teachers will need to be added and still retain acceptable student/teacher ratios. For each teacher that needs to be added the actual savings will decline. For

example, in West Virginia more than 25% of its schools were closed yet it still has the same teacher/student ratio in 1995 as it did in 1990. In other words there was no savings with regard to teacher salaries as a result of consolidation. The savings that arise as a result of reduced teacher salary costs is, at best, open for debate and not in anyway definitive.

The second area for potential savings was a reduction of administrative costs. Assuming fewer schools means assuming fewer administrators, and hence a savings. However, again the research findings are ambiguous as to whether there is actually any savings. Marshall (1988) found that after consolidation administration costs were reduced as a percentage of the budget but the actual costs increased. Nachtigal (1992) found that the number of administrative staff actually increased as a result of the greater bureaucratic demands of the consolidated system. While there may be a savings in some cases, like the savings associated with teacher's salaries, it will be dependent upon the specific context. Furthermore, Monk (quoted in Witham, 1997) found that after a secondary school population reached 400 students any savings due to the elimination of small classes is exhausted. Geissen has argued that 400 - 499 pupils is the optimal size for economic efficiency and that after this level is reached costs start to rise. For example, according to Geissen, schools of 800 or more pupils are as expensive to run as those with 200-299 students. De Young and Howey (1990) have noted that almost all jurisdictions that force consolidation of small rural schools have failed to document or evaluate the improvements that are alleged to result from these school closures. The financial gains may be difficult to establish. Furthermore, school closures often mean only slight savings because the vast majority of a school budget is for personnel costs (Howley, 1997; Purdy, 1997; Brown, 1998). An argument can be made for administrative savings, however, as stated previously, often there is a significant increase in the bureaucratic structure required to run a large educational system, negating any savings (Irmsher, 1997). In fact, there may in fact be diseconomies of scale as a result of an increase of in the number of staff needed to meet the demands of a bureaucratic system. Brown (1996) argues that add to this the increased costs of transportation and any savings is significantly decreased if not eliminated.

Irmsher (1997) makes a very interesting point, arguing that in order to understand any cost-savings you must understand how the numbers are calculated. For example, in examining high schools she states

Standard operating costs are usually computed by dividing the total amount spent by the number of students enrolled. But when cost-effectiveness judgements are based instead on the figure derived by dividing dollars spent by number of students graduating, the results are totally different (Irmsher, 1997: 2).

Raywid (1999: 2) would also support this, arguing that

The issue of relative costs is receiving attention and a first cost-benefit analysis of New York's small schools found them to be a good value, with the quite small additional budgets...well worth the improved outputs. When viewed on a cost-per-student basis, they are somewhat more expensive. But when examined on the basis of the number of students they graduate, they are less expensive than either medium sized or large schools.

Smaller schools have more positive educational outcomes. Perhaps it is Witham (1997) who

makes the most interesting and important point; changes in the educational system, such as consolidation, must ultimately include learning outcomes as part of the cost savings equation. If consolidation leads to saving money but impacts negatively upon student performance, then what has really been saved. It is to this issue that we now turn.

School Size: Is it Important?

As stated previously, there are assumptions that larger school units can offer increased educational opportunity while lower operating costs. This section will explore the idea of enhanced opportunities and learning outcomes..

First, while it cannot be denied that increased size does offer more types of programming opportunities, they may not be as great as one would think. For example, Cotton (1996) found that only a 17% increase in the variety of program offerings is realized as a result of a 100% increase in enrollment. Furthermore, it is found that most students rarely utilize the opportunity for a more diverse program. It has also been argued that often larger schools can offer special programs for disadvantaged and disabled students. Despite the presence of these programs, Irmsher (1997) reports that they often lead to isolating these students and cutting them off from the main culture of the school, In fact she further argues that larger schools lead to social stratification where it is the academic and athletic stars who benefit from close daily contact with adults. This means that within the school the other 70-80% of the students belong to social groups whose membership does not include any adults. Fanning (1995) maintains that consolidation and increase in school size often worsens the social problems that teachers, school administrators, politicians and adults in general often worry about. For example, Giessen has reported that larger schools are more likely to have a greater number of suspensions and more long term suspensions than smaller schools. Furthermore, he reported that larger schools are more likely to have a greater number of teen pregnancies than smaller schools. This problem is further exacerbated, according to Giessen, because further increases in size decreases parental involvement. Giessen goes on to state that “Not only do small schools and smaller districts educate as well as larger schools, but evidence suggests better (1998: 4). Marion and McIntire (1992) in a study which examined 710 schools in the United States demonstrated that smaller high schools had greater levels of achievement and attained more years of post secondary education after graduation. Irmsher (1997) concludes that larger schools:

- have poorer attendance than smaller schools;
- dampen enthusiasm for involvement in school activities;
- have lower grade averages and standardized scores;
- have higher dropout rates;
- and have more problems with violence, security and drug abuse.

In addition to the above, there is also the negative impact of being bussed. While the empirical literature in this area is sparse, there is, however, sufficient literature to at least warrant a cautionary note that consolidation that leads to bussing, particularly across long distances, may have negative impacts upon student performance and health. For example, Fox

(1996 quoted in Zars, 1998: 3) writes that

as time on the bus increases, students participate in fewer non-essential activities (those activities other than sleep, personal care, school, and the bus ride)....The individuals with large average times on a bus report lower grades and poorer levels of fitness, fewer social activities and poor study habits. The universal complaint by all students is the loss of choice in activities and the overall loss of sleep.

It may also impact in other ways according to Zars. For instance it may have a negative impact on lifestyle (i.e. skipping breakfast) or parents may be more likely to keep a child who is not feeling well home, knowing that if the child becomes sicker it may be difficult to see that the child gets home. Zars also reports that she has failed to find any state reports that seriously consider the effects of bussing . It remains an unknown. She states that there are three essential questions to ask:

1. What is the impact of long bus rides on children (greater than 30 minutes one way)?
2. What is the effect of long bus rides on families?
3. What are the true costs of bus rides (including the costs of child travel time)?

She concludes by writing

Bussing policy choices have been made and expanded without regard to the impact on the central enterprise of schools which is student learning....research is scarce and where it exists on school bussing in this country, insubstantial (Zars, 1998: 6).

While this is in reference to the United States, the literature here in Canada is no better.

While large schools have many disadvantages associated with them, small schools seems to fair much better in their assessment documented in the empirical literature. For example, Meir (1996) argues that optimal school size is between 300 and 400 students. She argues that there are a number of benefits that can be realized from this size of school. First, there is the general issue of administration, management and governance. Communication is easier and more efficient and effective in this size school. Second, there is an opportunity to enter into relationships with others and therefore children and teachers truly get to know one another and it is only in relationship that respect is generated - the very foundation of education. Third is the issue of simplicity; a smaller, less bureaucratic structure allows more readily for the individualization of instruction in response to individual needs which is also enhanced by relationships and ease of communication. Fourth is the issue of safety and security. A smaller school means everyone knows everyone and hence intruders who do not belong are easily identified. Furthermore, there is a greater sense of community and hence a greater sense of responsibility for the school. Students and teachers are more likely to engage in responsible and constructive community action when there is sense of belonging and community present in the school. Fifth, parents are more likely to be involved. Given the greater ease of communication, establishment of relationships, and less bureaucratic protocols, parents are more likely to form alliances with

teachers who they believe care about their child's progress. Sixth, there is improved accountability. In a small school that is characterized by ease of communication, established relationships and a sense of community, and parental involvement, then everyone knows how students are doing. McEwen (1995: 3) defines accountability as "Who is responsible for what and to whom." In the small school where there is respect and open communication it becomes apparent that teachers, administrators, parents and children all are involved in the educational process and in that sense must be accountable. In other words they are accountable to each other. Seventh, is the issue of belonging or feeling connected to a community and this means eliminating social stratification so that all members belong to social groups that consist of students and adults. This is more easily realized in small schools for all community members are needed in order to have sufficient levels for participation - not just the stars. This is supported by Irmsher (1997) who argues that smaller schools provide an atmosphere and culture that encourages teachers to innovate and students to participate. Roellke (1996) found that participation rates are greater in small schools with more students participating in a diversity of activities. Cotton (1996: 3) argues that

Many practices common in small school are in operation largely because they are much easier to implement and manage in small environments than in large ones. Looking at instructional practices in small schools, researchers find that teachers are more likely to form teaching teams, integrate their subject-matter content, employ multiple grouping and cooperative learning, and use performance assessments. Finally, small schools tend to exhibit greater emphasis on learning that is experimental and relevant to the world outside of the school.

The result is greater commitment from both groups, more positive attitudes and satisfaction, higher grades and test scores, improved attendance rates and lowered dropout rates (Irmsher, 1997). Cotton (1996: 3) further writes that

...the need, in small schools, for everyone's involvement in school activities appears to be related to other social and affective areas. People in small schools come to know and care about one another to a greater degree than is possible in large schools, and rates of parent involvement are higher. Staff and students are found to have a stronger sense of personal efficacy. Small-school students tend to take more of the responsibility of their own learning, learning activities are more likely to be individualized, classes are typically smaller, and scheduling is much more flexible.

One of the common points of agreement is that those students who can best be considered marginalized have better academic outcomes in small schools than in large ones. For example, Irmsher (1997: 2) argues that all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, progress adequately when they are part of a "smaller, more intimate learning community"; in other words no one suffers academically from being in a small school. Howley (1996), however, argues that while school size may not matter for the performance of affluent students, small schools do benefit the performance of the impoverished. This leads Howley to conclude that relative poverty or affluence then becomes an important variable in the context of school consolidation and that consolidation may work against those communities that are most in need of help. Levin

(1995) notes that an increasing number of the poor are single parent families and that 90% of single parent families are headed by women. He argues that while single parent families constitute a significant proportion of “disadvantaged” students, it is not their single parent status that contributes to the problem but the fact that a significant proportion of single parent families live in poverty. Thus educational policy intersects with social policy and social and educational policy cannot be treated nor created in a “policy vacuum.” Levin further argues that one of the strongest links for alleviating poverty’s effects is the forging of stronger links with families and communities. Yet as has been demonstrated in this review of the literature, school consolidation creates distance between the school and parents and the community, the very things that Levin argues are essential in alleviating poverty’s effects on educational outcomes. Thus school consolidation actively discriminates and disadvantages those who are most in need. As Levin continues, socio-economic status is the best predictor for how much schooling a person will receive, how well they will perform, and what their life prospects will be beyond school. He concludes that “Poverty has such an enormous negative influence, however, that it must be part of the education reform agenda whether justified on grounds of economic interest or social justice (1995: 211).” Cotton cites the following advantages of small schools:

- enhancement of personal and academic self concepts of students;
- greater sense of belonging and less feelings of alienation;
- more positive attitudes of teachers and administrators;
- significantly higher participation rates in extracurricular activities;
- higher attendance rates;
- less dropout rates;
- and less behavior problems.

Clearly all of these qualities and characteristics are likely to enhance the performance and the success of the disadvantaged student and the affluent student alike.

Raywid (199: 1), reflecting on the many studies conducted during the 1980s and 1990s that compared small schools with large schools, writes

These studies, involving large numbers of students, schools, and districts, confirmed that students learn more and better in small schools. Students make more rapid progress toward graduation. They are more satisfied with small schools, and few of them drop out than from the larger schools. Students behave better in smaller schools, which thus experience fewer instances of minor and serious infractions. All of this is particularly true for disadvantaged students, who perform far differently in small schools and appear more dependent upon them for success than do more fortunate youngsters....As these studies-of-studies show, it is rare indeed to find empirical support or justification for the large high school.

She continues

All of these things we have confirmed with a clarity and at a level of confidence rare in the annals of education research (1999: 1).

But the impacts of small schools also have positive impacts on other aspects in terms of school personnel and the institution. Raywid (1996) reports that teachers have a growth in commitment to the school and students, engage in reflective practice, and expand extra efforts in ensuring that students are active and succeed. In addition, she states the result is improved school organization, effective and appropriate governance, stronger student supports, improved staff effectiveness and satisfaction, better advisement, and enhanced curricula. Raywid (1996) also argues that in times of change small schools are easier to restructure and reform strategies easier to implement. Clearly the benefits of small schools are indisputable.

School Consolidation and the Rural Community

In the above section it was demonstrated that one of the most important variables in considering school and board consolidation is the relative affluence or poverty of particular communities. This sections continues that discussion, examining what the impact of rural school closures and board consolidation has on rural communities.

In many areas in Canada and the United States, the school has traditionally been the focal point as community meeting place and resource. This is found to be especially true of rural regions where the schools have long been central in community activities and the shaping of local identity (Miller 1995). Fuller (n.d.) describes that schools served as sources for entertainment for the community, as a "catalyst for democracy" as the setting for political debates, as a forum for community problems and an opportunity for community members to take an active part in the political process. A school community centre also helped to improve the "climate for education" (Fuller n.d. p. 430). It is in the rural school that the "innovative" practices, such as cross-age grouping and the use of the local community in the classroom, now being used in urban settings originated (Sher 1981). Rural schools are typically a source of pride, identity and stability for their communities (Sher 1981) and usually reflect and shape the social, economic and cultural outlooks and conditions of their communities (Seal and Harmon 1995). Howley (1997) has argued that rural schools sustain local communities as thoughtful and expressive actors. Salent and Waller (1998) have argued that schools have positive social and economic impacts upon their host community and provide a fundamental element of ongoing community development. However, as they have suggested, the literature actually suggests this rather than demonstrating it. There is little research of what the impact is on rural communities when schools have been closed and boards consolidated. The questions, according to Salent and Waller (1998) that need to be answered are:

- What happens to rural communities when consolidation results in the closing of a local school?
- Do these communities lose their economic vitality?
- Do these communities become less cohesive?

□ Do these communities experience a decline in political involvement?

In a search to address some of these questions Salent and Waller (1998) reviewed the pertinent literature and found only three studies which examine the economic effects on rural communities. A summary of these studies revealed that:

- The school district payroll ranged from 4-9% of the total county payroll.
- Total take-home pay from school district jobs ranged from 5-10% of the counties retail sales.
- The school district expenditures ranged from 1-3% of all employed people in the counties.
- People employed by the school district ranged from 1-5% of all employed people in the counties.
- Realtors reported that they believed that the school was essential in order to maintain property values.
- Schools are fundamental in promoting social distinction and community identity.
- Schools are the source of a significant number of community events.
- Schools unite communities.

In a study undertaken by Sell et al. (1996) that compared communities where a school was closed with the communities who were the recipients of these students in their community schools, they found that:

- The host communities' community organization participation increased while vacated communities' participation declined.
- The quality of life scores for each of the vacated and host communities declined but the vacated communities' scores were significantly lower than the host communities' scores.
- Parents in the vacated communities had less parent-teacher contact than the host communities and participated in less school activities.

Clearly, in this study, vacated communities reported a significant decline in the quality of community life, not to mention playing a less active role in the education of their children.

Lane and Dorfman (1997) and Salent and Waller (1998) maintain that the community relies on the school and in the time of economic downsizing and restructuring, the rural school is often the strongest community institution and may play a prominent role in the development of social capital and community development. Salent and Waller (1998: 5) capture this when they write

There is more to schooling than meets the eye of teachers, legislators, and academics who conceptualize purposes for schooling not fully shared by those who constitute a community. There is a school's noneducative, community-maintenance function, which usually becomes apparent to its support group only when it is threatened. ... As schools have become more professionalized and centralized, they have tended to distance themselves from their local communities. The vital links between experience, work, and education have been weakened. As a result, public and private schools in many urban and rural communities have lost their power as a valuable community resource.

Failure to acknowledge school community relationships also negates the potential role that the community may play in the educational function. Miller (1995) argues that the community can serve as part of the curriculum where it can be examined in its complexity - its history, its economy, its ecology to name a few. It becomes a living laboratory through which students learn. Furthermore, it enhances their sense of connection to place, an important, and we would argue essential ingredient to developing sustainable rural communities. Second, it can be a source for the development of entrepreneurial skill, leadership development, and a sense of civic responsibility. Furthermore, it gives the children a context in which to develop these whereby they can see the potential of their own community. One of the challenges that rural communities face is the outmigration of their brightest and best youth. Perhaps this would provide them with the incentive to look to their own home community as a potential future.

We believe Miller (1995) is right when he suggests that rural schools are the cultural center of the community, serving many functions that cannot be quantified or calculated in a cost/benefit analysis. As Giessen (1998: 5) wrote, "These costs are much more difficult to put dollar figures on, but they do play a significant role in the local community." Shannon (1992: 1) provides a fitting closure to this section of the review. He writes that

I am convinced that the fundamental problem with public education is that our schools are divorced from their communities; education is divorced from everyday life. ...The price of separation has been high. It has cost educators a wealth of resources and potential support. It has alienated adults, diminishing their understanding of education, their interest in lifelong learning and their ability to help their children learn. But most detrimental to society as a whole has been the weakening of children's ties to their parents, to their communities, and to the idea of learning as part of life.

Governance and Organization

As stated earlier in this review, the central organizing principle of educational reform has been tied tied to 19th century notions about modes of production and further extended by Henry Ford's model of mass production and Fredrick Taylor's scientific management whereby control and knowledge of the production process was centralized within management. Taylor believed that knowledge and responsibility should reside with management and those who actively engaged in the production process on the shop or factory floor should have as little responsibility/authority as possible, and knowledge should only be shared with them that was necessary for them to carry out their designated functions. The question that arises, at least for

us, is bigger really better? Or to frame it another way, is this anyway to manage education? Since education's organizational structure was inspired by developments from the 19th century private sector, it might be interesting to look at contemporary changes in organizational design and development.

Lauzon (2000), in a study that examines the literature from organizational development, with a special emphasis on learning organizations and its application to rural communities, found that (1) organizations had changed and this was in response to the *changing nature of change*; (2) organizations need to be readily able to adapt to a changing environment; (3) the ability to adapt requires reflexivity and a capacity for organizational learning; and (4) that highly centralized hierarchical organizational structures were dysfunctional, unable to respond to change rapidly, and were being replaced by decentralized networked structures whereby the flow of resources could be easily redirected in response to change. It is ironic that although business is a driving force behind educational reform, it continues to promote changes that are based upon outdated industrial models of organization, hardly suitable for a knowledge based economy.

Gallagher (1995), in his book *Changing Course: An Agenda for REAL Reform of Canadian Education*, has argued that educational reform has, in the nineties, been characterized by two approaches: increased centralization, as characterized by educational reform in Canada, and increased decentralization, as characterized by educational reform that has taken place in New Zealand. Commenting on recent changes in education in Canada, Gallagher (1995:71) writes that

This move to another round of consolidation of school jurisdictions in Canada, on the grounds of savings and efficiencies, is an excellent example of first-order change or of trying to "do more with less." It does not consider doing different things with less, or doing things differently. This approach is constrained by the perspectives on an industrial society. It suggests that the solution to excessive administration and inefficiency is larger (and therefore more efficient) units of administration. It sets aside the non-financial but real costs of further distancing parents and other community members from what once were their schools. In truth, many school boards, particularly in the larger school districts, are already as remote from the people they represent as provincial and regional governments are. The argument that school trustees are still the voice of local government is, in many cases, naive.

Gallagher argues that reform needs to be characterized by second-order change, radical change that challenges the very foundation of how education is organized in Canada. He recommends that Canadian education, to meet the challenges of a post industrial age, must adapt a decentralized approach to public education whereby communities take responsibility for schools through school councils who are invested with real authority and resources. This would be in alignment with the types of organizational changes that have taken place in the private sector and would lead to greater flexibility and adaptability to meet local needs and reintegrate schooling back into the community.

Discussion and Conclusions

The literature has highlighted a number of issues that need to be considered in the context of rural school closure and board consolidation. First, there is little empirical evidence for cost

savings that can be realized through consolidation and board closures. The literature reveals that this is a contentious issue and that differences in outcomes are dependent upon on how administrators and politicians calculate the costs and savings. The alleged savings that can be realized at this point appear to have more to do with rhetoric and ideology than it has to do with the empirical realities of what we currently know. There is a need to have clear principles for making these calculations and it must account for the consequent educational outcomes. This is particularly important given the preponderance of evidence supporting that small schools are more effective pedagogically than larger schools, particularly for disadvantaged and marginalized youth. Furthermore, there needs to be accounting of the impact upon student's lives and their development. Education is about more than simply class room learning, but much of the education of students occurs as a result of being an active and participating member of a community. It is here where students learn their first lessons in civic and social responsibility. It is here where students learn lessons in compassion, empathy, and leadership. Not through textbooks and classrooms but through their active participation and involvement in their school community. Consolidation often negates this opportunity for many students to participate in these activities as a result of long rides to and from school, or as a function of school size. As stated in the review, it is only a select group of students in large schools who have the opportunity to become members of communities that share time and space with adults. Giessen (1998), reflecting on the nature of large schools and paraphrasing the Carnegie Council, characterizes large schools as "mills" whose main function is to "process" the masses of anonymous youth into an endless stream of students.

Furthermore, decisions with regard to closure and consolidation cannot ignore the positive reciprocal relationships that can be developed and cultivated between communities and their schools (Miller, 1995). While the evidence is not great, the uncertainty is and we simply do not know what happens to rural communities when we close their schools. Certainly economic globalization, government restructuring and industry downsizing have taken a significant toll on the quality of rural community life (Lauzon and Hagglund, 1998). Is it the case that the closure of rural schools is simply another "nail" in the "coffin" of rural life? Policy makers must recognize that the complexity and intersection of policy is played out in rural communities in very real and tangible ways. As stated before, educational policy, if it is to consider its impact upon rural life in a significant way, cannot be written in a "policy vacuum." Furthermore, there is much that community has to offer schools. The cultivation of this relationship as a true partnership offers benefits to both the community and to educators and students.

Few would refute the educational reform is necessary. However, it needs to be acknowledged that education is often used as a scapegoat, relieving of us of our collective responsibilities for that changes that we all need to make (Shannon, 1992). Reform is necessary, but as Gallagher (1995) suggests it needs to be radical; trying to do more with less will not solve the problem. We need to do things differently. Lauzon (1998) has suggested that we are at a fundamental turning point in our collective history, that the changes that we are encountering are on par with the changes that were brought about by the scientific and industrial revolutions and that these changes will facilitate structural changes. Part of this change is a need to change our metaphor of education from organization to community and this has implications for size (Raywid, 1999). Fanning (1995) suggests that leaders, politicians and citizens have invested significant faith in technical and structural solutions to social and economic problems, failing to recognize how the fundamental assumptions of modern life have shifted. Senge (1990: xii) captures the essence of this in his book the *Fifth Discipline* when he writes that

I have come to believe that there is an opening today for a new movement of meaning and change. Our traditional ways of managing and governing are breaking down. The demise of general Motors and IBM has one thing in common with the crisis in American schools and the “gridlock” in Washington - a wake-up call that the world we live in presents unprecedented challenges for which institutions are ill prepared.

We need to challenge the very assumptions upon which public education has been built and the relationship of school to community. If rural communities are to not only survive, but thrive, then educational solutions must acknowledge and account for the necessary relationship between rural communities and their schools. Technical solutions are not enough. As Fanning (1995: 4) writes “ The sound development of children is closely linked to the well-being of communities. Consolidating often destroy these links.” If we wish to “produce” more than technocrats to work in the global economy, but whole humans interested in community life and engaged in responsible citizenship, then we need to forge linkages between students and communities, between students and place. Giessen (1998: 6) writes that

If one thing is clear from the research it is that small schools are worth saving and that small schools are worth the cost.

Having completed this review of literature, we would agree.

References

- Brown, Jean. (1999). “Educational Leadership in Small rural Schools.” Presented at the International Symposium on Rural Education and TeleLearning. St. Anthony, NF. Aug. 11-14.
- Brown, Jean. (1996). “Grandy’s River Collegiate: Can a Rural School Survive in an Urban Landscape?” *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, XLII (3), 238-251.
- Burlingame, M. (1979). “Declining Enrollments and Small Rural Cities and Districts: An Explanatory Analysis.” *Education and Urban Society*, 11 (3), 313-332.
- Cotton, K. (1996). Affective and Social Benefits of Small-Scale Schooling. <http://www.ael.org/eric/digests/edorc965.htm>.
- DeYoung, Alan. (ed.), (1991). *Rural Education: Issues and Practice*. New York: Garland Publishing.
- DeYoung, Alan J. and Craig B. Howley. (1990). “The Political Economy of Rural School Consolidation.” *The Peabody Journal of Education*, 67 (4), 63-89.

Fanning, J. (1995). Rural School Consolidation and Student Learning. <http://ael.org/eric/digests/edorc954.htm>.

Fuller, Wayne E.(n.d.) "Changing Concepts of the Country School as a Community Centre in the Midwest." *Agricultural History*.

Gallagher, P. (1995). *Changing Course: An Agenda for REAL Reform of Canadian Education*. Toronto: OISE Press.

Giessen, F.J. (1998). Small Schools, Educational Achievement, and Cost-Effectiveness. <http://www.uwsuper.edu/Lserc/krey1.htm>.

Hay, D.A. and Basran, G.S. (1992). "The Future of Rural Canada in an Industrial Society. In *Rural Sociology in Canada* (eds. D.A. Hay and G.S. Basran), Oxford University press.

Howley, C. (1996). Ongoing Dilemmas of School Size: A Short Story. <http://www.ael.org/eric/digests/edorc966.htm>.

Howley, C. (1997). "Studying the Rural in Education: Nation-Building, 'Globalization,' and School Improvement." *Education Policy Archives*, Vol. 5 (12), 1-14.

Irmsher, K. (1997). School Size. <http://www.ael.org/eric/digests/edoea975.htm>.

Lane, B. and Dorfman, D. (1997). Strengthening Community Networks: The Basis for Sustainable Community Renewal. <http://www.nwrel.org/ruraled/strengthening.html#d>.

Lauzon, Allan C. (1998). "Adult Education and the Human Journey: An Evolutionary Perspective." *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol. 17 (2), 131-145.

Lauzon, A. C. (2000). Rural Communities as Learning Systems. A report prepared for the SRC Research Program, OMAFRA

Lauzon, A.C. and Hagglund, L.O. (1998). From the Ground Up: Health Care restructuring and the Health of Rural Communities. A report prepared for the SRC Research Program, OMAFRA.

Levin, B. (1995). "Educational Responses to Poverty." *Canadian Journal of Education*, Vol. 20 (2), 211-224.

Levin, B (1999). "The Origins of Educational Reform: A Comparative Perspective." *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Analysis*, Vol. 12, <http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/origin1.htm>.

McEwen, N. (1995). "Accountability in Education in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Education*, Vol. 20 (1), 1-17.

McMurtry, J. (1998). *Unequal Freedoms: Globalization as an Ethical System*. Garamond Press.

Miller, Bruce A. (1995). The Role of Rural Schools in Rural Community Development. Eric Digest No. 384479.

Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1996). *Ontario School Board Reduction Task Force: Final Report*. Queen's Printer. Toronto, Ontario.

Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1996). *School Council Handbook: A Resource for Members of School Councils*. Queen's Printer. Toronto, Ontario.

Pinder, K. (1994). "The Changing Role of Ontario's Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs." In *Toward Sustainable Rural Communities: The Guelph Seminars* (ed. J. Bryden), Guelph, Ontario: University School of Rural Planning and Development, University of Guelph.

Raywid, M.A. (1996). Downsizing Schools in Big Cities. <http://www.ael.org/eric/digests/edoud961.htm>.

Raywid, M.A. (1999). Current Literature on Small Schools. <http://www.ael.org/eric/digests/edorc988.htm>.

Ribchester, Chris and Bill Edwards (1999). "The Centre and the Local: Policy and Practice in the Rural Education Provision." *Journal of Rural Studies* 15 (1), 49-63.

Roellke, C. (1996). Curriculum Adequacy and Quality in High Schools Enrolling Fewer than 400 Pupils (9-12). <http://www.ael.org/eric/digests/edorc967.htm>.

Salent, P. and Waller, A. (1998). What Difference do Local Schools Make? A Literature Review and Bibliography. Prepared for Annenburg Rural Trust Policy Program, <http://www.ruraledu.org/slant.html>.

Seal, Kenna R. and Hobart L. Harmon (1995). "Realities of Rural School Reform." *Phi Delta Kappa*, (October), 119-124.

Sell, R.S., Leistritz, L. and Thompson, J. (1996). Socio-economic Impacts of School Consolidation on Host and Vacated Communities. Agricultural Economics Report No. 347, Department of Agricultural Economics, North Dakota University, Fargo, North Dakota.

Senge, P. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. Doubleday.

Shannon, M.J. (1992). Education-Based Community Development. http://www.cpn.org/sections/topics/youth/civic_perspectives/designed.html.

Sher, Jonathan P. (ed.) (1981). *Rural Education in Urbanized Nations: Issues and Innovations*. Westview Press. Boulder, Colorado.

Sher, J.P. (ed.) (1977). *Education in rural America: A Reassessment of Conventional Wisdom*. Westview Press. Boulder, Colorado.

Sherwood, Topper (1999). A Practical Look at Comprehensive School Reform for Rural Schools. Eric Digest No. 425047.

Witham, M. (1997). The Economics of (Not) Closing Rural Schools. Eric Document 415 036.

Zars, B. (1998). Long Rides, Tough Hides: Enduring Long School Bus Rides. http://ruraledu.org/zars_busing.htm.