

Impact of School Closures in Rural Nova Scotia



May 16, 2017

“On virtually every indicator of social and economic well-being, larger rural communities with schools ranked higher than communities without schools.”

T.A. Lyson, Sociologist

“Without rural schools, where will the children and families come from to re-generate the declining rural economy? Without them, how long do communities survive? ”

Nova Scotia Small Schools Initiative



Agenda

- Research
- What other Councils have done
- Election Platforms
- Advocacy Communication Options
- Intervention pros and cons



Research

- Studies show that when rural schools close, communities suffer in all socio-economic measures.
- Among 350 rural villages in New York State, Sociologist T.A. Lyson found those that had lost their schools were less likely to see population growth, were less likely to attract middle-class families, and experienced higher rates of poverty.
- University level research has shown that the school is a natural vehicle for enhancing community capacity. The tangible and intangible assets that schools, and indeed all education facilities, provide to a community have been well documented.



Research continued...

- Nova Scotia's education minister has proposed funding a pilot project that could keep a Cape Breton school open and have some of its unused space turned over to outside institutions and businesses. A decision is expected from the school board in May.
- In April 2017 four NS elementary schools in two separate school boards successfully advocated to cancel their school closures in April – future development cited as reason.



Other Council Actions

- **Publicly ask the school boards to reconsider**
 - Summerland, Borden-Carleton, Antigonish, Ladysmith
- **Pass motions directed at the Minister/Department of Education requesting review of the school closure process**
 - Township of West Lincoln, Belleville, Brockville, Prince Edward County, Dufferin County, Grey County, Bruce County, Town of Antigonish working with Municipality of the County of Antigonish
- **Filed lawsuits over school closures**
 - Osoyoos, Bridgewater, Niagara



Election Platforms

- Liberals: Until the school board review happens ... pause all school review processes that do not involve facility replacement. The full review of the administrative structures will be completed by the end of 2017. Any potential changes will be reflected prior to the 2018-19 school year.
- NDP: Establish a moratorium on school closures, develop new hub school guidelines, partner with communities to develop hub school proposals and will provide 50% of the funding required to initiate a pilot project.
- PCs: They will take money out of the boardrooms and put it in the classrooms by reviewing school board governance



Summary

- Municipal Councils represent the people—we are expected to be a voice for the community and request a seat at the table on issues not under municipal jurisdiction.
- Demolition of schools is costly to taxpayers—that money could be invested more wisely.
- Loss of infrastructure is a loss of opportunity for the community.

“Schools are crucial elements of social infrastructure, vital to the viability and attractiveness of communities.”

Ivany Report



Advocacy Communication Options

- Letter to the editor
- Council motion
- Meeting with MLAs
- Letter to the Minister of Education
- Presentation to the school board
- Newspaper and radio advertisements
- Media interviews
- Web content
- Municipal Matters
- Support legal action



Court Intervention Pros and Cons

Pros	Cons
Supportive of community	Cost association with support
Could influence decision	Legal intervention not on staff workplan
Part of holistic approach to community building/economic development	Sets a precedent
Saves rural infrastructure	Review is based on legal arguments, not on value of school to community

Workplan implications

- Communications: delay developing
 - Social Media Strategy
 - Developing Social Media Presence
 - Public Participation Strategy
- Administration:
 - Divert resources from Municipal Corporation issues.
- Diverts legal resources



Discussion

