

Mill Village Study Committee Report

January, 2013



Preface

The following document has been prepared in response to the Deloitte & Touche Impact Assessment Report: Mill Village Consolidated School (September, 2012), as prepared for the South Shore Regional School Board.

To facilitate preparation of this report, a Study Committee (consisting of the MVCS School Advisory Council) was established and conducted the requisite public meeting.

In accordance with the **Ministerial Education Act Regulations¹, Section 18 – Study Committee [Sub clause 18(12)]**, this response was submitted to the SSRSB no later than February 1st, 2013, representing the first day of February of the year following the year in which the school review process was initiated.

Pursuant to **Sub clause 18(14)** of the same **Ministerial Education Act Regulations**, it is the clear, direct, and unwavering recommendation of the MVCS Study Committee (as well as the purpose, recurring theme, and sentiment of this report) that **Mill Village Consolidated School remain open!**

With this recommendation, it is also recognized that no school can remain open indefinitely. It is the hope of the MVCS SAC that, should the SSRSB rule in favour of closure, MVCS will remain open for the maximum 5 years, to allow all currently enrolled MVCS students to complete their full term (through the completion of Fifth Grade) at their current, community school in Mill Village.

Along the same lines, should the SSRSB rule in favour of MVCS remaining open, it is the express desire of the MVCS SAC that no new review processes for MVCS be commenced until – at minimum – the end of a similar five year period; meaning MVCS will not again be faced with uncertainty and the threat of closure until at least the 2017/2018 school year.

Also, while the **Ministerial Education Act Regulations** are being addressed, the MVCS SAC would like to draw attention to the fact that the Deloitte & Touche Impact Assessment Report failed to satisfy **sub clause 17(3)**, namely:

“An Impact Assessment Report must cite all sources of data and statistics and document the methodologies used in the creation of the report. Subsection 17(3) added: N.S. Reg. 164/2010.”

It is relevant to emphasize that this failure to comply with the act was pointed out to Mr. Gunn in a meeting with the MVCS SAC, and it was admitted to by Mr. Gunn, yet no documentation to support the report’s financial figures were produced.

We, the members of the MVCS Study Committee, along with the MVCS school principal, endorse the following report and reiterate our recommendation that MVCS remain open.

¹Source - http://www.gov.ns.ca/just/regulations/regs/edmin.htm#TOC1_9

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INTRODUCTION

While Mill Village Consolidated can be numerically considered a small school, the heart and enthusiasm of the pupils, staff, and surrounding communities cannot be so constrained. This is a place that inspires memories. Alumni carry these memories with them today, even as the current student body creates their own on a daily basis.

The idea of enduring memories may be regarded as idyllic, even romantic, but the mistake cannot be made to think that this is always so. A memory that – if created – would be burned deeply into the area’s collective psyche, creating a permanent scar, would be that of the day MVCS closed.

The Deloitte & Touche Impact Assessment Report (September, 2012) explores reasons for creating that indelible memory. Its principle basis for the support of closure is the question of financial sustainability of the school. In the report, (**Section 4.3, Operational Expenditures (Table 6: Estimated impact on SSRSB of transferring students to DJCWA) (pgs. 8-9)**) it is quoted that MVCS requires an annual sum of \$164 617 to remain in operation. As will be revealed throughout this report, this figure can be nearly offset by just one of the many innovations proposed by the school’s Study Committee.

This same committee, in the pages to follow, will address this and other fundamental sustainability issues as raised by the Deloitte Report, while also introducing the reader to the myriad of inconsistencies, errors, and omissions contained therein.

Additionally, this Study Committee Report will look beyond the game of financial snakes & ladders, and delve deeply into the school’s influence on its students and community members, and the impact its closure would have on them; regarding them as the people whose interests the DoE, and its Regional School Boards, was created to protect.

MVCS was built for the *community* of Mill Village. For students and staff, past and present, and for all those who have known them. MVCS *is* a place that inspires memories. It now becomes everyone’s responsibility to ensure that these memories are fond and ongoing, rather than cruel and in need of repression.

Small schools vs. Large

The debate over the relative merits of small schools as opposed to their larger, centralized brethren is not new. Quite the opposite; it is an annually recurring theme throughout the province of Nova Scotia. At face value, debate is not a bad thing. As proponents of both sides of any issue work to justify their respective cases, light is shone on the deeper truths: pros are pushed glowingly to the fore, while cons are cast in damningly stark relief.

The net result of successful debate, then, is to be left with a clearly-presented set of facts that can be used to create a 'best-of-both-worlds' middle ground, or – at the very least – make an informed decision between the two existing camps. Given these parameters, it may be unfair to categorize the small vs. big school discussion as a true debate. Indeed, it may be more apt to categorize it as a trial. In this sense, small schools *are* currently on trial in Nova Scotia, and they have been charged with obstruction, labeled as impediments to change, progress, and even education itself.

Were these charges to be tried in a court of public opinion, they would have been dismissed long ago. Unfortunately, they are being tried in the court of the Department of Education, where a verdict of 'not guilty' is shorthand for 'not guilty at the moment' and the case gets retried in hopes a different result.

In any given year, up to forty¹ rural Nova Scotian schools are 'under review' for closure, many of which have been through the process before – sometimes on multiple occasions. To be considered for closure on more than one instance means one thing only: that the school in question has been saved at least once. To be spared the gallows, a school requires a strong, concerted, community effort, bringing to bear enough hard data and raw emotion to turn back the DoE's guilty-until-proven-innocent approach. That the province's Education Department would then dismiss an entire community and try to close the school again – often without any new 'evidence' – speaks to issues much deeper than those on the surface.

To confront these issues, three major points must be investigated where rural schools in general, and Mill Village Consolidated in particular, are concerned. The initial point is the **Community Effect**.

MVCS

- Loss of centralized location for community events and services

In the specific case of MVCS, in the past year it has housed a community tree-lighting ceremony, a Mother's Day Tea, a Halloween haunted house, a craft fair, psychic readings, contests, fire safety demonstrations, and an RCMP bicycle safety clinic. The school is the location of Pilates

¹("Don't shutter small schools, open them up to community" – Dare & Bennett, 17Dec2011)

classes, Zumba classes, youth fluoride program, birthday parties, T.O.P.S. meetings, Schools Plus activities, the community skating rink, a classic car show, and is the local branch of the South Shore Regional Library. Additionally, MVCS opened a community drive-in theatre in 2012 – the only one in the entire South Shore!

- Negative growth potential

With local education no longer being offered, there is little incentive for new families of school-aged children to relocate to the area. Similarly, existing families may feel pressure to move out of the area to be closer to their children’s new school. This downward population trend would trickle-down to business as well, making it less appealing for start-ups and harder – if not impossible – for established business to continue.

- Reduced quality of life

Students of the closed rural school will face lengthened school days (and, in turn, abbreviated down-time at home) as bus times are increased in both travel directions. As well, living further from school will impede many families’ ability to transport students to extra-curricular events, or attend school functions themselves.

DJCWA

For the area losing its existing facility, one could predict such harshly negative Community Effects, but may reasonably expect these to be balanced by positives for the recipient town. However, there is little to be gained by the super-school’s location. As an urban setting, it will have an established school or schools and, presumably, existing facilities for other community organizations. So when considering the Community effect on the town, there is negligible gain.

The second point to consider is that of the **Rural Lens**.

Rural communities – as explored in the Community Effect – depend on their schools to anchor the village and prevent a ‘ghosting’ effect precipitated by population change. What must also be considered is that the school, in turn, depends upon its rurality to provide a better environment for its students, and their families.

MVCS

- Safety and familiarity

It is often said that “it takes a Village to raise a child”. This references the cohesive factors of having familiar friends as neighbors, but extends to knowing all of your schoolmates in a smaller facility. Students feel more comfortable when surrounded by friends and family and can focus more on achieving quality education rather than finding a niche or group within which to fit socially.

- The blanket approach

Just as we now recognize that not all students can be taught in a cookie-cutter fashion, we can no longer assume that size dictates the quality of a school. Bigger is not in all cases better and each school situation – like each student – must be viewed and weighed individually. Just because several schools *can* be amalgamated, doesn't mean they *should* be.

DJCWA

- Student redundancy

In larger urban schools, students are less likely and less able to participate in extra-curricular activities. Smaller schools rely on a high percentage of their student body to fill positions on sports teams, and in clubs and committees. Without their involvement, the school cannot field teams or host clubs. In larger schools, more students are available for these same positions, making student participation unnecessary for many, which lends itself to exclusion and alienation.

- Student overpopulation

Depending upon the existing student body, large class sizes would be exacerbated by the influx of new students, and any pre-existing social convention – delicate enough in any school setting – would almost certainly face massive upheaval, which in turn could be expected to lead to increased social anxiety and possible alienation for students who were previously well adjusted within their social settings.

Lastly, we must consider the **Governance** of the SSRSB itself.

- Antiquated

It has been well documented that modern education is trending towards smaller, more intimate settings, rather than the big-box approach. Large-scale classes put added pressure on teachers as it is more difficult to present material to children with differing learning curves: maintaining a high pace puts slower students at a disadvantage, while slowing the pace will cause more advanced students to lose interest and/or focus.

Overall, it appears that the construction of larger, big-box schools is an approach that is no longer viable within the education system. Just as the corporate world (i.e. Microsoft) is adopting the posture that their client base can no longer be neatly sorted into rigid categories that eliminate individual needs, so, too, must government bodies yield to the idea that students and communities differ in their situations. What is the right solution for some is not necessarily in the best interests of others.

There have been changes in governance since the social funding cuts-driven amalgamations and consolidations of the 1980s and 1990s. Rural communities must not only be considered (as enduring rather than diminishing) but consulted in this new approach as they know their situation best.

After considering the far-reaching ramifications of super-schooling, the body of evidence points to the results being overwhelmingly negative for all students, teachers, and families involved. To counter-point these drawbacks, big-box proponents like Jim Gunn repeatedly fire the only weapon in their defense arsenal: financial gain.

And yet, even if putting a price tag on the education and welfare of children was a responsible approach, even if the DoE could be looked upon as a business with the bottom line *being* their bottom line, and even if the fund-raising efforts of the schools themselves can be conveniently discounted and left off the books, it would still ring as hollow; still smack of baseless desperation.

The fact of the matter is that construction costs. Hiring freelance advisors to spin the numbers costs. Hiring consulting services costs. Building new infrastructure where facilities already exist that serve the same purpose – and more – costs. And the only way to recoup that cost is to close the existing facilities. This is not progress. This is not a vision. This is financial plate-pushing and the mortgaging of our future to fund present-day extravagance. In short, this means that the one-gun defence of super-schools is loaded with blanks.

In conclusion, the time has come where client satisfaction must drive the DoE's (and its school boards') actions. It is time to stop running counter to the rest of the continent and recognize that small schools have great advantages over their big-box counterparts. It is time to admit that education is about expanding our horizons, letting go of misguided pre-conceptions, and accepting new facts and ideas.

It is time to learn.

Any student – rural or urban – can tell you that.

REBUTTAL

Detailed Summary of arguments against the Deloitte Impact Assessment Report: Mill Village (September, 2012)

This summary will follow the Deloitte Report, referencing its wording and location wherever a disagreement exists. When applicable and/or appropriate, reaction to previous issues with specific allegations may be cited.

Criterion 1.4: Availability of specialist services (pg. 7)

Paragraph 2, under “Status quo” states: “Because the appropriate specialists are not available full time to respond when an incident arises, there can be problems in providing adequate support to a student who requires attention or interventions daily”.

MVCS has, at the time of this writing, at least one student who does require daily intervention and near constant attention. Said student is receiving the attention and interventions they require because Mill Village does, indeed have the required specialist personnel on hand; stating otherwise is erroneous.

When questioned on this, Mr. Gunn first attempted to say that this is one of many generic, stock assessments he gives to schools with no history of using or requiring the use of the criterion in question. When this was countered by showing that the paragraph specifically says MVCS, Mr. Gunn then backpedalled and attempted to cover his tracks by saying his report does not consider support staff under the criterion. This labels the submitted assertion as not only erroneous, but unfounded and indefensible.

Section 4.6, Impact on educational staff (pg. 12)

In the section’s opening sentence, the report postulates that “... schools with low enrolments must deal with staffing issues which are not characteristic of schools with larger enrolments.” To wit, these supposed staffing issues are named later in the paragraph as being

“... related to the ability of a school to attract qualified teachers and then have them stay on staff for an extended number of years, the ability to match teacher qualifications to teacher assignments, and the ability to give teachers a reasonable workload both in what they are teaching and in what they are volunteering to do in extra-curricular and professional staff activities.”

Addressing these staffing concerns directly, we find evidence of not only a lack of research on the part of the consultant, but also conflicting information within Deloitte’s report.

- Attracting / maintain qualified teachers.
Criterion 5.2: Teacher turnover (pg. 13) illustrates (in paragraph 2 under “Status quo”) that “During the past 6 years, 4 teachers transferred from MVCS and the same number transferred from DJCWA. Also, for the coming school year, another teacher has transferred from MVCS and another teacher has retired”.

Given these HR statistics, culled over a significant six-year sample, we see negligible difference in transfers, and a retiring educator who clearly stayed on staff for ‘an extended number of years’ in order to reach retirement.

- Matching teacher qualifications to teacher assignments.
With resident or itinerant specialists in fields ranging from French, music, and physical education to school psychologist and guidance counsellor, and 3 full-time homeroom teachers (covering just 51 students), the qualifications appear to be at or above what should be expected.
- Ability to give teachers a reasonable workload.
This is argued from both the curricular and extra-curricular points of view. Addressing the extra-curriculars first, we find that MVCS places exceedingly minimal demand on its teaching staff to support its events. Within the past two years, the *community* drive-in theatre, a Mother’s Day tea, a *community* tree-lighting, two award-winning parade floats, two award-winning school Christmas trees, a *community* skating rink, two haunted houses, and – not incidentally – this report are among the many events that have been planned, created, and produced by parents and *community* volunteers without the requirement of any teacher involvement.

Where actual teaching workload is considered, contrary to Mr. Gunn’s assertion, the Deloitte report’s own numbers show that amalgamation will actually increase teacher responsibility.

Criterion 4.1: Reduction or increase in student allocation (pg. 11) projects that an amalgamation would foster a reduction of 1.84 FTEs. An extension of this math reveals that subtracting 1.84 FTEs from the projected MVCS requirement of 4.69 means that only 2.85 teachers will be expected to compensate for the 51-student influx into DJCWA. This does not seem a ‘reasonable workload’. Moreover, examining the figures posted in **Appendix E: Staffing Allocation Forecast (pg. 30)** shows us that MVCS has a projected student to classroom teacher ratio of 18.35:1, as opposed to ratios of 26.33:1 at DJCWA or 26.34:1 in an amalgamated scenario. In either case, these figures paint a considerable increase in responsibility (nearly 8 children per educator), not the more ‘reasonable workload’ in which Mr. Gunn would have readers believe.

Criterion 5.3: Ability to match teacher qualifications and preferences to teaching assignment (pg. 14)

The opening sentence of the paragraph constituting the “Status quo” section advises that “... the music position is an itinerant position which serves 3 schools, which is not preferred”. Although not named, the three schools referenced are MVCS, DJCWA, and Milton Centennial School (MCES). As MCES is slated for closure at the conclusion of this 2012-2013 school year, neither the music nor physical education (cited later in the paragraph) positions will remain itinerant through that school. Thus, the point as raised is moot at best, uninformed at worst.

Criterion 5.6: Ability to spread professional/in-service activities (pg. 15)

Paragraph one of the “Status quo” section raises two issues. Primarily, it opines that,

“... teachers are required [to] be away from their duties and school to attend various professional development/in-service activities or to represent the staff a[t] various meetings, at the call of the SSRSB regional (sic) office or by the Department of Education. The teachers on a small staff are under greater pressure to cover these expectations because they are few in number”.

As these absences are (by definition) for professional development and (by Mr. Gunn’s own words) at the behest of either the SSRSB and/or the DoE, their attendance should not be viewed as a detriment to MVCS. It is in the best interest of the school (and another valid argument against the concept of having limited teacher resources/qualifications), its teachers, and its students to have the resident educators as up-to-date and ‘professionally developed’ as possible. If these meetings and workshops (which – again – are called by the SSRSB or DoE) are of any value, the greater percentage of the in-school workforce to have attended them, the greater their impact. If they are – as Mr. Gunn’s comments seemingly imply – mere inconveniences that serve no greater purpose than to interrupt teachers from their day-to-day teaching, that is a separate issue that can neither be laid at the feet of MVCS nor any other school.

The third and final paragraph of the same “Status quo” section ends with the ominous advisement that “... it is relevant to emphasize that the use of substitute teachers comes with a financial cost”. The wording and placement of this tidbit is highly suspect. Again, these teacher absences are mandated by either the SSRSB or the DoE, meaning there would be the requirement of substitution at all schools. So, if the teacher is mandatorily absent, if the same absences are required in all schools, and if it can be assumed that no one suspected teachers substituted pro-bono, then this should not be mentioned as an issue at MVCS. That there was no mention whatsoever of the cost of substitution under the “Close school (Transfer all students to DJCWA)” section of the criterion, yet it was labelled ‘emphatically relevant’ at MVCS, appears to be a deliberate attempt by Mr. Gunn to prejudice and mislead the reader.

Criterion 6.2: Increase or decrease in time/distance for families to attend school activities (pg. 16)

The second sentence in the criterion, under the “Close school (Transfer all students to DJCWA) leads the reader to believe that “Given the maximum additional transit time for students under this option is 15 minutes by bus, it is expected that families with cars will experience smaller increases.”

The quoted ‘maximum increase’ is one of several admittedly baseless estimations quoted throughout the Deloitte report. Despite several requests, neither Mr. Gunn, nor the SSRSB have been able to provide a bussing schedule contingent on amalgamation. In point of fact, as of this writing, and according to Mr. Gunn when asked directly, there is no such schedule. So, to quote the timing of an as-yet undeveloped bus route (to a degree of accuracy that includes ‘maximums’ in minutes) is reckless at best.

Further, while it is not known whether this ‘15-minute maximum’ was invented to soften the apparent impact for the reader, it is also not known how familiar Mr. Gunn is with either the geographic cachement of MVCS or with the Nova Scotia Motor Vehicle Act.

To profess that “... families with cars will experience smaller increases.” is simply ludicrous. Some families within the MVCS cachement cannot reach MVCS in under fifteen minutes, much less commute to DJCWA in that time. Even if the spirit of the comment was considering the travel from MVCS (as opposed to family homes) to DJCWA, it is not possible, within the confines of the various posted speed

limits, to travel between schools in ‘less than 15 minutes’. To borrow a phrase from Mr. Gunn (quoted above under **Criterion 5.6**), “... it is relevant to emphasize...” that the posted limits are the maximum allowable speeds, by law, under ideal driving conditions. As conditions are rarely - almost never, in fact – ideal, the law itself further invalidates Mr. Gunn’s claims.

Criterion 6.3: Impact on bell times: is a bell time change positive or negative in impact (pg. 16)

The only comment present in the criterion, under the section “Close school (Transfer all students to DJCWA), states that “There will be no impact on bell times with this option”. Unfortunately, this is another inaccuracy being parlayed as fact. The truth of the matter is that MVCS bell times currently encapsulate a school day that runs from 08:30 to 14:15, while DJCWA currently has a school-day schedule of 09:00 to 15:00. Whether DCJWA maintains their current schedule (forcing former MVCS students to adjust), or changes it (forcing existing DJCWA students to adjust), there will indeed be an impact. This point is minor, but further illustrates the lack of factual presentation in the Deloitte report, and the related lack of research performed by Deloitte’s advisor, Mr. Gunn.

Additionally, it is again “... relevant to emphasize...” that claiming that “There will be no impact on bell times with this option.” is not only misleading, it completely dodges the issue the criterion is meant to address, namely whether the bell time changes are positive or negative in impact. Leaving questions unanswered – whether intentionally or not – decreases the validity and credibility of the report overall.

Section 6.9, Appendix I: Identification Report for Mill Village Consolidated School (pg. 34)

In the rooms designed vs. usage graphic (at the bottom of page 34), the column “Cafeteria” shows 0 were designed, with no usage. While this is true, it can easily be argued that, without proper counterbalance, it is misleading. MVCS neither currently has, nor has it ever had a cafeteria. However, it does have – and has had for some time – a fully functioning, department of Health approved, kitchen that provides both a breakfast program and a hot lunch program. The lack of a common seating area exists, admittedly, but does not prevent the MVCS student body from enjoying nutritious meals at school as the “0” cafeteria column may lead the reader to believe.

Section 6.9, Appendix I: Identification report for Mill Village Consolidated School (pg. 37)

The table labeled “Community Population Trends” is current only to 2006 (half a dozen years prior to the Deloitte report) and is for the “Municipality of the District of Lunenburg”. MVCS is located neither in the past, nor in the County of Lunenburg.

It is understood that this table is provided for reference purposes only, but it is symptomatic of two general failings of the report on the whole: primarily, an absence of comprehensive editing and fact-checking. Secondly, and perhaps more disturbing, is the previously-referenced use of stock responses. In a report that will weigh heavily in the decision to close or maintain a rural school – and the profound impact this decision will have on many lives – the use of new, up-to-date, site-specific information should be mandatory and not overlooked in favour of cut-and-paste page-filler.

Section 6.4, Appendix D: Enrolment Projections (pg. 29)

As culled from the SSRSB's Human Resources department, "Table 8: Historic enrolment figures and future projections for MVCS" shows an extended period of sustained student body growth within MVCS. After the 2006/2007 school year, the table records only 1 year of decline in the following 10. That single year (2010/2011) has passed, putting MVCS in an uninterrupted period of 6 consecutive years of enrolment increase.

At the same time, DJCWA (according to "Table 9: Historic enrolment figures and future projections for DJCWA") is mired in a *ten*-year trend of steady declination. This *decade* long downturn is only projected to end in the 2016/2017 school year by adding one single student, an increase of less than half of a percentage point!

Given these sets of data, it is clear that MVCS is not only consistently gaining students, but doing so while other, larger, schools wither steadily away. With this in mind, it begs the question why MVCS is under review for possible closure. According to Mr. Gunn, a school's sustainability hinges on its enrolment and its finances. As the enrolment is becoming more robust – and cannot be considered a concern - the only factor then to consider is the facility's finances.

Criterion 3.1: Reduction or increase in short-term capital maintenance costs (This refers to spending required to keep an option alive until another is available) (pg. 10)

The first paragraph under the "Status quo" section boldly proclaims that "An investment of approximately \$95,000-\$255,000 will have to be made to bring accessibility up to code."

The word 'approximately' verifies that the totals are nothing more or less than guesswork. There is no real-world basis from which to draw these numbers. The report states (in the same paragraph) that "The approximate range is wide to reflect the array of choices available for individual items." Again, the numbers are admitted approximations, and a 'range' of \$160 000 is so wide as to be meaningless. The same guesswork could be used to frame any range including any numbers no matter how large or how small. When the data is being invented, anything is possible, and nothing is useful.

At the time of this writing, estimates are being collected by MVCS from licensed contractors to create a tighter, more fact-based 'range' of costs. Quoted within this report is not a quote, but an industry-relevant estimate based on real-world experience.(page 25) By his own direct admission, neither Mr. Gunn nor his co-contributors performed any such undertaking. They were, however, comfortable tossing out numbers in the quarter of a million dollar neighbourhood. This is grossly irresponsible, but – incredibly - gets outdone by another random figure.

Criterion 3.2: Reduction or increase in long-term capital renovation or construction costs (pg. 11)

If espousing unsubstantiated quarter-million dollar figures weren't ostentatious enough, it is followed by being nearly tripled in the "Status quo" section of the criterion: "The SSRSB's preliminary estimate of long-term costs at MVCS is approximately \$750,000."

This figure does claim it is based on "Estimates [that] were obtained...", however nowhere in the report does it say where – or from whom – these 'estimates' were collected. In fact, when the breakdown of these costs is inspected in **Section 6.7, Appendix G: Capital Expenditure Data (pg. 32)**, the overview states that "An engineer's review/report would be required to better approximate the costs for some items."

Even more telling is the direct admission by Mr. Gunn that most figures were made by looking at the cost of comparable work completed at other schools and asking the opinions of office employees. With that level of 'research' the basis of his findings, there is little wonder that Mr. Gunn conceded – in a direct quote – that ***“Long term expenditures are impossible to predict.”!***

Section 6.6, Appendix F: Operational Expenditure Data (pg. 31)

Indeed, even as “... expenditures are impossible to predict.”, they also are evidently quite difficult to audit. A close examination of “Table 11: Actual operating expenditures for MVCS over the past 5 years”, reveals multiple problems in presentation. Some lines reflect values that are inconsistent with the 'actual' numbers they claim to represent, while others are too vague in title to have definite meaning, while still others combine these fatal flaws:

Line 711400 “Equipment” > To what equipment does this refer?

Line 721140 “Playground Maintenance” > MVCS is unaware of any 'maintenance' work being performed on the school playground. If the figure refers to new equipment and its installation, these figures should be stricken from the books as they were privately funded donations made by *community* members, and did not impact the SSRSB or MVCS budgets.

Line 721160 “Building Maintenance” > \$2 spent over five years? When this value is viewed in light of a \$750 000 five-year projection, it becomes clear that one (if not both) of these figures is tragically ludicrous.

Line 721500 “Flooring” > The table asserts an expenditure of \$3 788 in the 2009/2010 school year. This is unsubstantiated as no new flooring was installed.

Line 721550 “Paving” > \$0. When asked how this figure could possibly be defended against the fact that the school was completely repaved in the summer of 2011, Mr. Gunn replied – via Email – that:

“An expenditure for paving is not showing in Appendix F likely because it was charged to a more general account for paving/patching in several school yards --- if the contractor paved several areas in the school system and submitted one invoice, it would not be broken out in detail for each school. It wasn't listed in Appendix G because those who prepared the appendices were unaware and it didn't show up under your school's accounts.”

This response readily admits that the cost of the job is not reflected in the Deloitte report in either Appendix F, or G (**Section 6.7, Appendix G: Capital Expenditure Data (pg. 32)**) and points to a deep undercurrent of lack of preparation and lack of accountability.

Despite being the hired consultant on this project, Mr. Gunn passed the buck, laying blame on “... those who prepared the appendices...”, compounded the error by saying that they “... were unaware...” MVCS had gotten paved at all (either a research or editing failure), and prefaced it all with the qualification that the explanation is only “... likely...”, meaning he still has not made the effort to complete the audit and provide absolute, concrete answers, with all monies properly accounted for.

Adding insult to injury, when Appendix G is consulted, it not only fails to reflect the costs of the already-completed paving project, it shamelessly states, in Line 8, under “Longer-term requirements” that the “Driveway and parking need replacement or repair” at an estimated cost of \$100 000! ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS is the 'estimate' given to perform repairs that the entirety of the Deloitte team “... were unaware...” has already been done!

It would seem that the only conclusion to be drawn from this is that no research was done here whatsoever. Not only was the audit incomplete, but it is entirely inconceivable that any professional would give a six-figure 'estimate' to complete a project that is already finished. This has to be held as one of the prime examples of both the lack of quality and lack of reliability of the Deloitte report.

Overall, when asked to comment on the accuracy of the Deloitte report, Mr. Gunn answered:

"I can't explain where the numbers are, but trust the report implicitly".

Given the previously outlined errors, omissions, and inconsistencies, and given their lack of explanation, correction, editing, or ownership, it is hoped that there can be forgiveness and understanding for those who share neither Mr. Jim Gunn's enthusiasm nor his blind faith.

The Transportation Conundrum:

The Deloitte Report states definitively that closing Mill Village School would not affect the children's bus rides: *some students will see an increase in onboard travel time. This is expected to be **a maximum of fifteen minutes** for any individual student and thus all routes will be less than one hour in total transport time and thus in line with SSRSB Policy 215. (Criterion 6.1, Deloitte Report)*

The SSRSB Transportation Committee and the SAC timed the ride from Mill Village Consolidated School to JC Wickwire, using a school busⁱ. Just after noon, on dry roads, with no delays or traffic. The results showed that the ride for our children would be increased by a **minimum of over sixteen minutes**, not the maximum of fifteen minutes as the Deloitte Report concludes. **Why is this extra minute significant?**

It shows that the Deloitte report was done shoddily, and brings any other facts they've found into question.

With the addition of end-of-day, heavier traffic, children will certainly spend even longer on buses. This enforced downtime after the end of the school day increases stress and exhaustion levels for children, who often engage in horseplay to combat boredom. As this is an unsupervised time, (the driver needs to have both eyes on the highwayⁱⁱ) this can escalate to bullying, fighting, and more. Weary students are told that the school day is not over, that the school bus is considered an extension of the classroom and the day is not yet over until they are let out at their bus stop.ⁱⁱⁱ Using this calculation, this means a seven-hour day **before** play, schoolwork, sports, or any type of socialization can be done. Many students resort to doing their homework on the bus, hardly an optimal situation for learning or retaining knowledge.

To put this into perspective, one has to ask: would I enjoy an enforced bus commute of an hour twice a day? Most adults would **not**.

Recent studies surmise long rural routes could even be considered exploitation of children's time^{iv}, and that students with large average times on buses report lower grades, poorer levels of fitness, fewer social activities, and poor study habits.

As SSRSB has not completed their route review and we have no information on what would happen this fall, we are forced to imagine the worst: that our children will be on the dangerous untwinned provincial highway with high schoolers for the long ride home – ending for many at dusk.

Given that Nova Scotia now accepts four year olds as primary students, closing Mill Village Consolidated and shipping them ‘down the road’ to Liverpool sentences very young children to at least an hour on the bus every morning, and then after a full day of school, an hour at night. **The parents of the children at Mill Village Consolidated do not find this progressive, beneficial, or acceptable.**

The SAC, after consulting with the Transportation Department of SSRSB, proposed a new school bus run for the Mill Village Consolidated catchments area, one that would save the School Board money and ensure that our kids would spend less time on busses. Our plan cuts transportation costs by **half**.

This easy and innovative solution was realized with the support of our active Schools Plus coordinator. It employs a practice used thirty years ago by other small schools in the area, and involves using one bus (versus three) to pick up all the MVCE students in the catchments area.

This would involve two runs^v (both well under the proscribed hour) and consists of picking up Branch A, dropping off at the school for supervised play-time, and returning for the children located on Branch B. In short, one modified run.

The drop-off run in the afternoon would switch delivery times, so those who had to wait in the morning would be home first. The lag time after and before school could be filled with programs for the children, using primarily Schools Plus and our strong core of volunteers to fill in any gaps. Program ideas have already been submitted.

The Study Committee was able to (with the support of the Transportation Department) time the proposed runs.^v These final times were 46 minutes for Branch A, and 42 minutes for Branch B, thereby proving that this idea is cost-efficient and doable.

Costs^{vi} saved include:

Annual bus maintenance, per bus: approximately \$53,000/year

Insurance: approximately \$820/year, per bus

Fuel consumption: this depends on the length of the route and the make and model of the school bus

Salaries: drivers are paid \$20.91/hour

To reiterate: using this plan, the SSRSB could cut costs by over \$107,000 (**figures based on bus maintenance and insurance costs alone**) per year by using one bus for Mill Village Consolidated Elementary.

Using the new configuration would not equal more time^{vii} - drivers would not need to be paid more per CUPE tipping time. (See Criterion 6.4)

(As this group was primarily concerned with transportation for the MVCE students, it did not focus on bussing for the older children who travel to Wickwire or SQJHS. However, the established system and the proposed route are not mutually exclusive - it is difficult to see how they could not be 'blended in' in some fashion if necessary to facilitate travel for them as well.)

We have timed the run and driven it with the Transportation Department of the SSRSB. We proved it was possible. Final decisions on the usage of this system rest with the SSRSB.

It is worthwhile mentioning that using the same (proposed) run using one (or even two buses) would not work to take children to Liverpool. Run times would be **still** be longer than one hour.

This solution saves the SSRSB considerable sums of money if MVCE is left open.

Studies show that children who ride buses to and from school every day have much higher pollution levels in their lungs and bloodstream^{viii}. With the recent concern for student health and child obesity displayed by the school board, increasing the level of pollutants in students seems problematic. New cases of childhood asthma are being diagnosed in Canada at dizzying rates. Exposing elementary-age children to elevated levels of carcinogens while limiting their outside play time does not mesh with the school boards' goals and practices.

The communities that Mill Village Consolidated serves are willing to help cut costs by trimming excess where we can. We do not, however, believe that putting our young children on busses for an excessively long daily drive that involves highway driving, with increased risks of high-speed collisions, is a **reasonable** nor **moral solution**.

Maps of the area procured from the Region of Queens Planning Department.

ⁱ 12:15, January 25, 2013. In attendance: G. Jackson, SSRSB Transportation Officer, a SSRSB school bus driver, and Van Dyne-Evans and Croft of the Mill Village SAC. Ride timed using SSRSB GPS system

ⁱⁱ 'Keep noise levels low so the driver can concentrate on driving the bus' – Student responsibilities, Transportation section, SSRSB website

ⁱⁱⁱ SSRSB Policy and Procedures #280, Appendix A

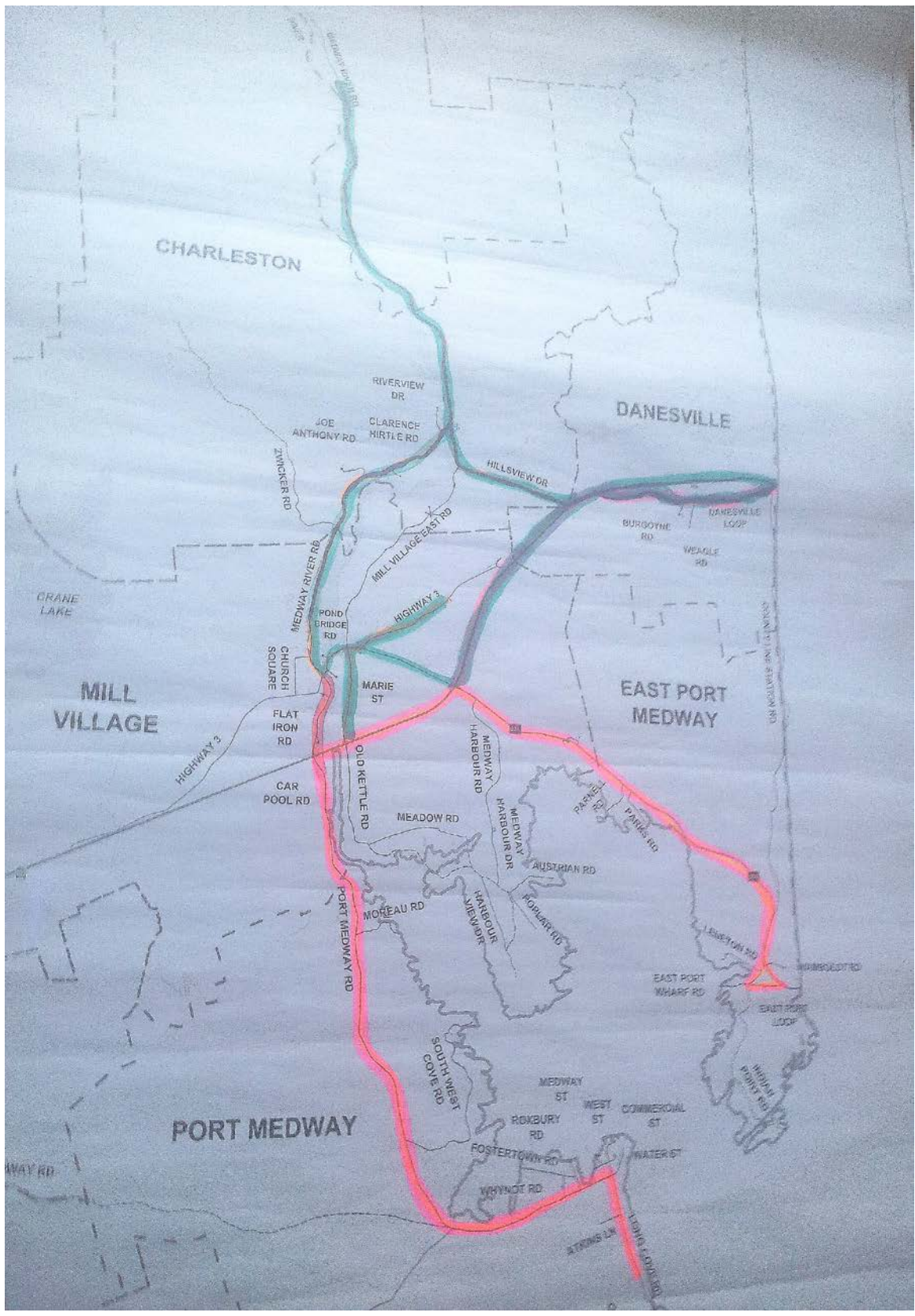
^{iv} Long Rides, Tough Hides: Enduring Long School Bus Rides. Zars and Belle, Rural Challenge Policy.org

^v 10:00 am, January 25, 2013. In attendance: G. Jackson, SSRSB Transportation Officer, a SSRSB school bus driver, and Van Dyne-Evans and Croft of the Mill Village SAC. Ride timed using SSRSB GPS system.

^{vi} figures supplied by D. Crouse, Transportation Coordinator, SSRSB

⁷ Bus run-time sheets for the existing MV catchments area supplied by D.Crouse, Transportation Coordinator, SSRSB

^{viii} Yale University and Environmental Human Health, Inc: Hidden Dangers! Pesticides in Diesel Exhaust, 2002



PROPOSED ROUTE:

Branch A: Green Route, timed by SSRSB Transportation Officer at 46 minutes.

Branch B: Pink Route, timed by SSRSB Transportation Officer at 42 minutes.

Accessibility

The shadow cast by MVCE's inaccessibility to handicapped students has been a major sticking point in reviews. The building was constructed in 1962 in a style mirrored by many schools built at the time, and was not intended to be handicap-friendly.

To date, Mill Village Consolidated has never had a handicapped student.

It seems foolish to spend huge sums (the Deloitte report quotes between \$95,000 and \$255,000 for various options) to make the building accessible, when the **town** itself is not accommodating – there are neither sidewalks nor pedestrian lanes designed on the roads.

The only public buildings handicapped-accessible at this time are the local fire halls, and the restaurant portion of the general store. Churches, the main post office counter, the auto-repair shop, the general store, and the town hall are not accessible. The Study Group would argue that the chances for a family with a handicapped child of school age to choose to move into the area are slim.

Realtors echo this, stating that they would not suggest houses in Mill Village to any family they knew needed to live in an area that was handicapped-accessible, agreeing that the small towns in question would not be mentioned to a family with a handicapped child as choices for the above reasons.

We feel families requiring these types of accommodation would instead choose to move to an area where supports are already in place, a more-populated area such as Bridgewater, where accessibility would not be so severely limited.

That said, we do understand the School Board's clear mandate for accessibility. The Building Access Act, Chapter 45 3(1) states that *"every building shall have at least one principal entrance designed in conformance with NBC Supplement No. 5 'Building Standards for the Handicapped" for use by physically handicapped persons, opening to the outdoors at sidewalk level or to a ramp leading to an area at sidewalk level.'*

Mill Village Consolidated unfortunately presents a problem to standard solutions of an elevator or a handicapped ramp leading to the second floor of the building. Costs for the building of such niceties are prohibitive.

However, the Study Group has found a **very low-cost, easy answer**.

Our solution is thus: **If** a situation ever arose where a student needed accessibility that Mill Village Consolidated currently does not provide, it would be possible to ‘flip’ the school and have all classrooms on the main floor. With modifications to the existing downstairs bathrooms to create a single large, handicapped-accessible stall (estimates included) and a simple ramp leading from the side entrance down the one step onto the main floor of the downstairs, a quick, easy solution to the accessibility problem is created.

Square footage is equal both downstairs and up, so classroom space would not be affected. The only foreseen changes to the upstairs portion would involve the kitchen (prepared food would need to be transported downstairs, something that our volunteers will happily do) and the principal’s office would remain centrally located upstairs, close to the main parking lot and the front door. The principal does not see any difficulty with going downstairs to facilitate any needed face-to-face student contact.

The Study Group realizes that a single stall downstairs would not be sufficient for all the students in the building to use as a bathroom, and we propose that the upstairs bathrooms would still be used by students able to climb the stairs. As the administration office is located next to the stairwell, supervision would not be a problem, nor would students be wandering empty halls.

The Study Groups’ solution **makes sense**, is easily (and quickly) put into place **if ever the need arose**, and is financially do-able. The particulars are spelled out in the attached quote, but would involve switching classrooms to the main floor, knocking out a partition wall between the small (back to back) downstairs bathrooms and reconfiguring the created bathroom to be handicapped accessible, and then

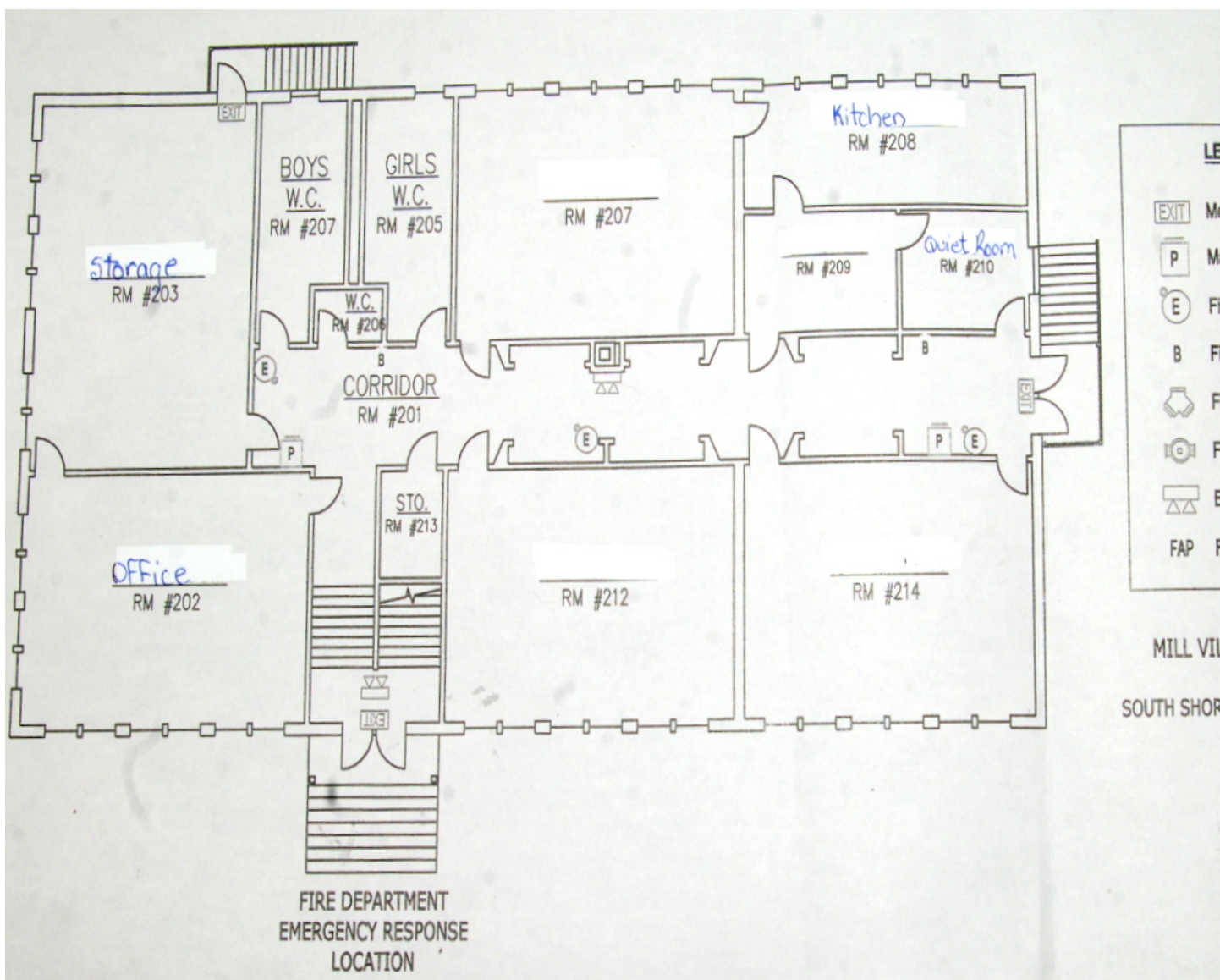
building a small ramp down the one stair from the side entrance. This entrance is fully accessible from the parking lot and handy to the bus corral.

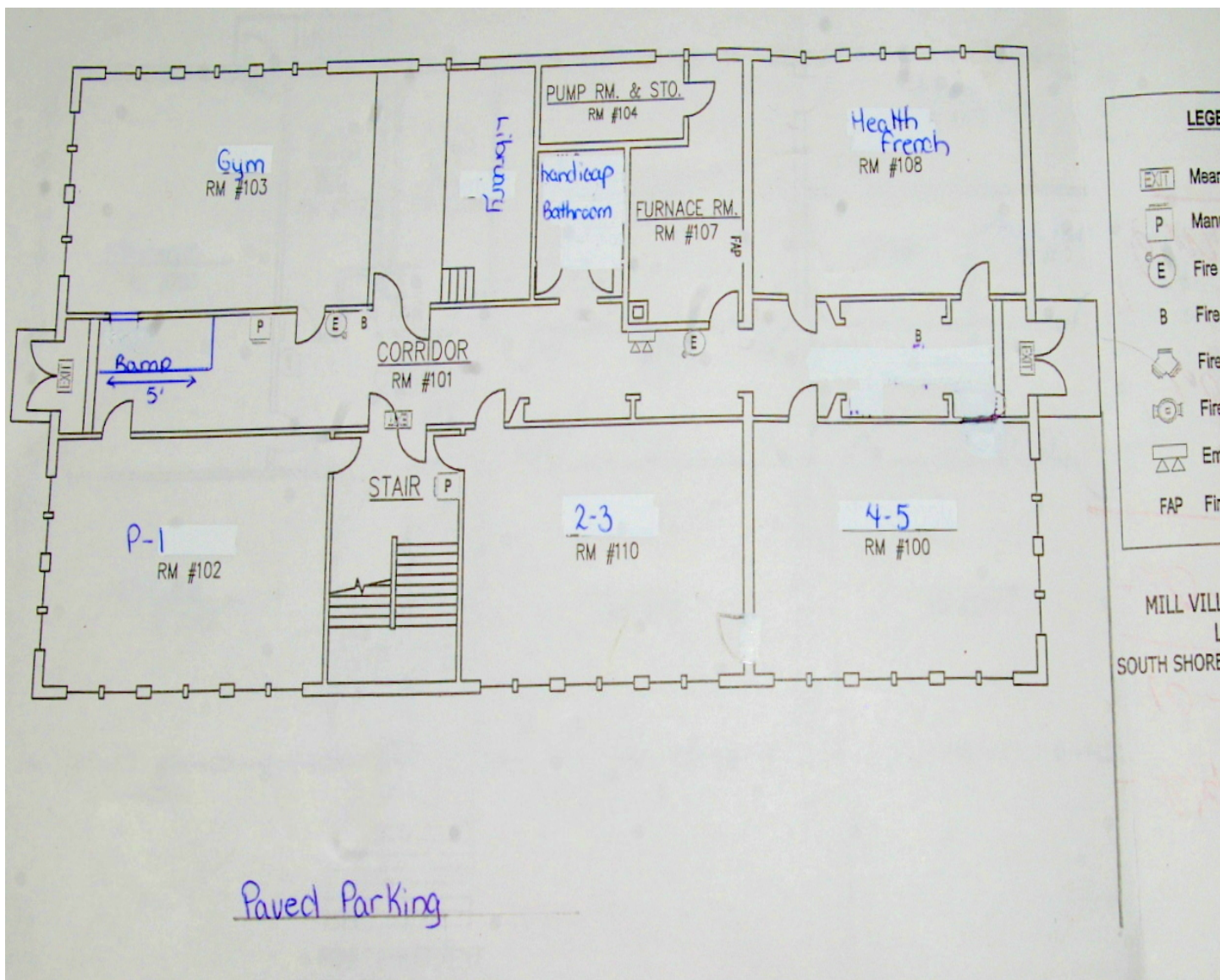
'If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change' ~Wayne Dyer

The Study Group feels confident that this solution to the accessibility problem will put the question of 'Is it possible for Mill Village Consolidated Elementary to become handicapped-accessible – and do it affordably?' to rest.

Drawings of proposed changes, next page.

Quote, page 25.





Wade Hatt's Construction Ltd.
61 Highway # 3
Danesville N.S
B4V 8P5

Phone: 677 2195

DATE Jan. 27 2012
Mell Village Consolidated School

Quote (not a bill)

Remove one wall
Remove one door replace with
new door for wheel chair ramp.
Put up wall to finish in sink
Build ramp inside 16 ft.
and re-locate the toilet and
put a new toilet in

Labour & Materials	6280.00
HSI	942.00
TOTAL	7222.00

27564530 RT.

MVCS

The letters MVCS are ubiquitous throughout both the Impact Assessment Report prepared by Deloitte & Touche and this report, prepared by the school's Study Committee. For the purposes of the Impact Assessment, this is enough. However, in the spirit of this Study Committee Report, closer scrutiny is required. Unless one is a current or former Tiger (or close friend or family member thereof), it is unlikely that the letters MVCS evoke any particular emotional response. The initialism is clinical, remote, and fosters a sense of detachment from the school and those associated with it. It is helpful, perhaps, for those who would consider the potential closure of MVCS to have this impersonal, distancing factor built into the report. It is no doubt more facilitating to look at the issues facing MVCS from this distance. Considering it as a building only, located X distance from Y towns and requiring Z annual dollars to maintain.

MVCS is then no different from X, Y, or Z: letters, representing a number, ultimately representing a dollar sign. Unfortunately, the simple ease with which these values are interchanged is illusory. It is the sleight of hand of the 'mathemagician', an artist's rendition of a world seen through closed-colored glasses. Unreal. Surreal. Anathema to the true value of MVCS.

MVCS stands for Mill Village Consolidated School. The initialism hangs proudly, boldly, over the school's main entrance, so that all who enter are reminded this is not just a building. It is a school. It is *the* school of Mill Village, Nova Scotia. Given this perspective, it would seem prudent to bridge the distance created by the Deloitte report, strip away the utilitarian veneer, and inspect the issue of closure from a more human angle. The letters MVCS themselves, when considered as Mill Village Consolidated School, lead one in precisely this direction. In order of appearance, "Mill Village" will be addressed first.

Established along the Medway River, **Mill Village** is a small rural community that has been in a period of transition for some time. Proximate to the towns of Bridgewater and Liverpool, Mill Village has clung steadfast to its rurality and endeavoured to carve its own identity over the years, leaning by times on its natural resources (fisheries, logging, hunting, etc.) and by times on technology (invention of the tele-printer, and Teleglobe Earth Satellite Station). In every case, local business was there to support the residents. Unfortunately that, too, has undergone a recent downturn as corner stores, craft stores, and textile works, garage facilities, auto sales, and gas retailers have all closed or relocated out of the community.

Despite, or perhaps in spite of, this downturn, the people of Mill Village have remained, and are now beginning to see a reversal of this downward trend. New business – for the first time in many years – has come to the area as a year-round restaurant and a drive in theatre have both opened and are

drawing patrons from all corners of the Queen’s Regional Municipality. This uptick in local business is in concert with a continued rise in school-aged population growth (referenced previously in the Deloitte Report under **Section 6.4, Appendix D: Enrolment Projections (pg. 29)**). In fact, these are but the tip of the iceberg, as now big business looms as well, with the re-opening of the Mill Village Gold Mine.

According to its website, www.canucresources.ca, Canuc Resources Corporation, an international mining presence, has - after raising over \$600 000 in ‘flow-through’ financing – begun work on its Mill Village gold property. Encouraging returns on early goldm drilling samples taken near the historic Thompson and Gold Eagle workings have led the company to believe that a full-scale operation is viable and it will be focusing exploration efforts on Mill Village.

Large-scale mining, if productive, would have several area benefits, chiefly (and most relevant to this study) among them being employment and tax revenue. Current employees of Canuc may bring families with them, even as job opportunities could encourage others to move to the Mill Village area. Both scenarios have the potential to increase not only the community base, but also the enrolment numbers at MVCS. As well, as revenue begins to stream from the mining operation, tax dollars will be injected into the local economy – some of which will almost certainly be redistributed to bolster area infrastructure like roads and schools.

Even as area residents are now poised to reap the rewards of their dedication to the community and its rural lifestyle, we are reminded that these developments are only possible in thanks to those who persevered through the down times; readily and happily. With this in mind, the next word in MVCS comes into focus: **Consolidated**.

While many other, similar words could have been used in naming the school, none could have been more apt. Mill Village school is not simply ‘Elementary’, nor is it callously ‘Amalgamated’, or generically ‘Regional’. It is proudly Consolidated. To consolidate is to join together into one whole (unite); to make firm or secure (strengthen). It is precisely and exactly indicative of what the school has done for the *community* and, in turn, what the *community* has done for the school.

As area residents watched small business slowly fade from the area, they became more acutely aware of the resources that remained; central among these being the *community* schoolhouse. They relied on the school to house societies, groups, and committees. The school relied on them to staff volunteer events and fill the ranks of its PSG and SAC. The school provided fun, family events for all *community* members, while locals continued to run the hot lunch program and provide free student transportation to extra-curriculars.

The school gave the Village a gathering point, a focal point on which to balance its sense of *community* pride and identity. And whenever these ideals were jeopardized with the threat of school closure, area residents rallied in MVCS’ defense and protected what they believed in and cared for. There is no difference today. Area residents wish – perhaps now more than ever – to have their friends and family as both their neighbors and children’s classmates. They relish the thought of having their

children attend the same school, in the same *community*, that they were taught and raised in. Familiar surroundings, filled with friendly faces, in a safe, quiet setting located close to home.

They are '**Consolidated**' by these goals. And so a *community* that is 'united' – and, in many ways defined - by the school, is 'strengthened' in its resolve to maintain it in its useful course.

If it has now been established that 'Mill Village' is 'Consolidated' by MVCS, the final letter in the initialism must be examined. MVCS is, after all, a **School**.

It is a school that, for decades, has produced well-educated, well-rounded students who have a deep appreciation of all that a *community* school can offer. First and foremost, any school is responsible for providing quality education to its students. As previously explored in this report, MVCS maintains a full curriculum that is facilitated by qualified educators and comprehensive support staff. The Deloitte Report confirms this assessment, stating that "The teaching areas at MVCS are suitable for all program delivery." (**Criterion 1.5: Suitability of teaching areas for program delivery (pg. 7)**, under "Status quo"), and that "The requirements of the [Public School Program] are being met." (**Criterion 1.1: Availability of minimum public school program requirements (pg. 6)**, under "Status quo").

There exists, then, no educational detriment to enrolment at MVCS. Students receive a provincially-standardized curriculum (the only elementary program option in Nova Scotia is French Immersion, which is offered at neither MVCS nor DJCWA) in a suitable facility, with intimate class sizes. This alone could be considered 'good enough'. In fact (the class sizes notwithstanding) this 'good enough' could be looked at as a template for many provincial schools: a decent building, providing the required courses.

Fortunately for the MVCS student body, however, the **School** has elected to buck the trend of a 'good enough' cookie-cutter approach and offers much more than is required of them. Partly due to **Consolidated Mill Village** culture (and partly due to having nearly lost MVCS in the past) the staff, students, and area residents cherish what they have and are not willing to rest on 'good enough' while they still have it.

Far from resting, in fact, over just the past two years, MVCS has hosted and/or organized and provided nearly **one hundred** extra-curricular activities (see pages 32-34 of this report for a complete list) for the students and *community* at large. This number, at first glance, appears to be either impossibly large or artificially inflated by recurring events. Closer scrutiny, however, bears that neither is true. While some activities may indeed be recurring, they are counted only once.

More importantly, the list of activities is not only long, it is widely varied. The building holding MVCS is used for weekly exercise and weight loss groups, is an outreach branch of the South Shore Regional Library system, and holds such community events as a Mother's Day tea and bike rodeos. In the summer, drive-in movies (Principal's Pix) are held at the school. MVCS has traditions such as the Annual Worm Race (a 50+ year event), Easter egg hunts, and releasing salmon fry into the Medway River. Pending new partnerships for 2013 include (among others) a foot-care clinic and SCANS (Seniors

College Association of Nova Scotia). Both groups are eager to make use of the MVCS space and join in serving our community.

If MVCS were to close, these activities could not be replaced, nor moved to an alternate site. Many things celebrated at the school are germane to the school. They exist – and persist – *because* of the school. MVCS provides the backdrop and draws the volunteers. It raises money from the community through events and re-invests them in more events. Without the support of the community, the school would not have the financial wherewithal to entertain its community. Without the school, the community would not have these events and services to enjoy. It is a strong, long-standing relationship that is wholly symbiotic. From a healthful breakfast at the start of a cold winter school day to a wholesome family drive in during the late hours of a hot summer night, MVCS *is* the heart of a community with *big* heart.

So, it stands that MVCS cannot responsibly be viewed as a sanitized initialism. It cannot be looked at as a commodity to be traded off against financial gain (whether real or imagined). It is a **school** inexorably intertwined with the quality of life of its students and their families. Not simply because it is safe. Not only because it is local. Not just because it is, in Deloitte’s words, the “Status quo”. The **school** is synonymous with **Mill Village** because they have a common vision; a **consolidated** agenda: as pages 32-34 of this report (and many area resident testimonials) will attest, MVCS – like the *community* – will do anything for its children.

It has been postulated that nothing in the name of the school could be more apt than the use of the word ‘**consolidated**’. However, despite its precision and accuracy, perhaps the use of MVCS does require a little re-imaging, after all. Not as the soulless, utilitarian initialism used in the Deloitte report; quite the opposite, in fact. Perhaps it is time to refer openly to MVCS as everyone associated with it already feels: that we are consolidated in the knowledge that – in every way possible - MVCS is the Mill Village **Community** School.

MVCS Usage & Events

Active Lifestyles

- 3-day camping trip at Yogi Bear campground
- Canada Walk
- RCMP Bike Rodeo
- Bowling
- Skating at Queen's Place arena
- Ski trips to Martock Mountain
- Terry Fox Run
- Skating at Halifax Olympic Oval
- Bicycle safety check and relay race
- School soccer team (Mill Village Tigers)
- School basketball team (Mill Village Tigers)
- Intramural sports
- Skating at the school ice rink
- Beach Day at Risser's Beach
- Cross country skiing
- Liverpool walking tour
- Track & Field days

Learning & Literacy

- South Shore Regional Library outreach branch
- Circle Restorative Practices
- Visits to Halifax Discovery Center
- Visits to MVCS and readings by authors
- Family Literacy program
- Hackmatac reading program
- ELA and ELMA testing
- WOW reading challenge
- LLI reading program
- Reading Buddies program

Culture & Science

- Science Fair
- Music Festival
- Principal's Pixs Drive-In Theatre
- Heritage Fair
- Queen's County Museum visits
- Black History Museum visits
- Fisheries Museum visits
- Ross Farm visits
- Art Fair
- Remembrance Day Service
- Peace Pole
- Attending plays at DJCWA
- Attending plays at Liverpool Astor Theatre
- Attending plays at Neptune Theatre in Halifax
- Viewing movies at Empire Theatres, Bridgewater
- iPods donated by Liverpool Lion's Club
- Christmas concerts / pageants

Social and Socially Conscious

- Food Bank Donations
- Recycling contests
- Salmon Fry release
- Birthday parties
- D.A.R.E. program
- Go-Girls program
- Peer Buddies
- Family & Staff barbecues
- Sleepovers
- Birthday Assemblies
- Picnics at Privateer Park, Liverpool
- Feed NS participation
- Toy Drives for the Salvation Army
- Fire Prevention presentations
- Sammy the Snowplow presentations
- Friends program
- Moby the Talking Garbage Can
- Eddie the Cat w/ Clean Nova Scotia

Health and Healthy Living

- Zumba
- Pilates
- T.O.P.S
- Fluoride Program
- Hot Lunch program
- Community Skating Rink
- Apple picking trips
- Breakfast program

Themed Events

- Easter Egg Hunts
- Winter Carnival
- Trip to Circus School in Halifax
- Mother`s Day Tea
- Shocktober Fest (Halloween)
- Community Christmas Tree Lighting (multiple prize-winning efforts)
- Parade Floats (multiple prize-winning efforts)
- Costume contests
- Spring Flings
- Graduations
- Craft lessons

Miscellaneous

- Schools Plus Initiative
- Visit to Upper Clements Amusement Park
- Psychic readings
- Bottle drives
- MVCS Annual Worm Race
- Classic Car Show
- Trip to Noggin`s Corn Maze
- Craft Fairs
- Accreditation
- Visit to Little Ray`s Reptile Zoo
- TTFM student survey

SUMMARY

While the Deloitte Report points out several things wrong with the Mill Village School – accessibility and a large bill for long-term costs to the school, we at the SAC believe we have surmounted **all** of those difficulties. We believe that with the changes outlined in our report made, we can not only save the South Shore Regional School Board sums of money they would not otherwise realize, we can become a shining example of what small rural schools must be – community-based, community-supported, and community-driven.

This government is going to make sure that we have our community schools open for our students –
Minister of Education Ramona Jennexⁱ

We realize that a smaller school may present certain challenges that a larger, more uniform school would not, but we welcome those challenges and thrive on them. We believe that our children are too important to be sent away, that Mill Village Consolidated School is worthwhile and too precious to lose.

I find nothing wrong with your school – Dr. Jim Gunnⁱⁱ

It is interesting that programming options are something that the report focuses on, as Deloitte admits that *no optional programs are offered in elementary schools, other than French Immersion which is not offered at MVCES or DJCWA.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Therefore, **what** is Mill Village lacking? Our children are taught the same curriculum with the same supports as other schools. The Mill Village difference? The extras.

Our children have experiences here that no other school has, adventures that would not be possible with a larger school. These kids go everywhere and do everything! They learn much about themselves and their place in the world. Last year, the **whole school** went to Circus School. It was a nice day – Circus School, a ride on the Dartmouth ferry, and a picnic on the Commons. Typical of the Village School field trips – this one combined fun, education, and lasting memories for our students.

MVCE's mark on the community is indelible. The school is a hub of activity for the area, hosting Pilates, an outreach branch for the South Shore Regional Library, community food drives, a drive-in theatre all summer long, bike rodeos, teas, family literacy meetings, ski trips, spring and fall festivals, salmon fry releases, TOPS classes, and many, many more. Authors drop in to read their books to the kids. The soccer field is used by our season-winning team, the ball fields by the community and the ice rink by all. Mill Village Consolidated binds our students to a place and set of traditions and serves as the locus for important community activities. Events are germane to here and cannot be moved or duplicated elsewhere.

The list for long-term costs to the school is, at first glance, steep. However, none of the listed items are necessary now, nor is anything lurking 'on the horizon' that will need fixing in the near future. This list is, to put it bluntly, a shock tactic. Several officials have assured us that nothing on this list is immediate. We have also been told that expenses for Capital Expenditures listed in the Deloitte Report are approximations, that it is nigh-impossible to predict costs and these numbers are based on past practices and best-guesses. As \$80,000 seems a bit high to install bathroom ventingⁱⁱⁱ, we tend to agree.

The Capital Expenditure Data chart itself is misleading, as it lists things that have already been completed. *Driveway and parking lot need replacement and repair, estimated cost \$100,000.*^v The Driveway and Parking lot were repaired in 2011 and will not be needed to be fixed again in the foreseeable future. With mistakes and oversights like this and others highlighted, the Deloitte report total can be brought way, way down.

The Accessibility problem, if ever needed, can be fixed with simple modifications – and **not** at the cost Deloitte quoted. The SAC has found an easy way to overcome that difficulty that will be entirely up to code and with a much lower price tag.

Studies upon studies show that shorter bus rides are better for kids. Longer bus rides are tied to student exhaustion and stress, lower grades, and less participation in after-school activities.^{vi} There are links to childhood obesity. A Yale University study^{vii} found that diesel bus fumes may be to blame for the dramatic rise in childhood asthma in the U.S. Students who ride buses breathe five to fifteen times more particulate soot than children playing outside. With the latest Stats Canada statistics^{viii} showing over 65,000 new cases of diagnosed asthma in the last two years alone, it's hard to dismiss that longer bus rides endanger the health of children. And it's obvious that keeping primary school students in their neighborhood school and not riding the provincial highways with high schoolers for hour-long bus rides twice a day would make children more secure in their environment^{viii}.

How difficult would it be to foster a sense of community, of pride-in-place when the only time you get back to your house it's too late to go out and play?

It's next-to-impossible to enjoy all the extras in a school – ball games, clubs, tutoring, plays, games, sleepovers, even hanging out with your friends – when you always have to catch the bus to go home. Forcing four year olds to ride buses when their parents are not in favour of such a move and the Village School can accommodate and embrace them is asinine at best.

A better method of thought embraces and celebrates small schools as not only viable but also valuable to the communities they serve.^x

Shuttering MVCE would send shock waves through the area – we need to only look at a neighboring community to see how the story ends. Beach Meadows lost their school twenty-some years ago. The town has yet to recover, with less than a handful of children remaining among the families that have elected to stay.

Closing the school would kill the community and affect our chosen rural way of life. A great many of the families that attend Mill Village Consolidated live here because of the school. Needlessly closing such a caring and family-centered school goes against the rules of common sense.

We chose to live here. We choose to send our children to Mill Village Consolidated.

ⁱ January 21, 2011, Chronicle-Herald quote.

ⁱⁱ January 14, 2013, MVCE Study Committee/Jim Gunn meeting, in context of Deloitte Report

ⁱⁱⁱ page 6, Deloitte Report

ⁱⁱⁱⁱ Appendix G: Capital Expenditure Data, Longer Term Requirements, number 3

^v Appendix G: Capital Expenditure Data, Longer Term Requirements, number 8

^{vi} Closing Costs: An Award-Winning Look at School Consolidation in West Virginia, US, 2002

^{vii} Yale University and Environmental Human Health, Inc: Hidden Dangers! Pesticides to Diesel Exhaust, 2002

^{viii} Statistics Canada, Asthma, by age group and sex, 2012

^{viiii} Sending Off All Your Good Treasures: Rural Schools and Community Survival, Sherman and Sage, 2011

^x Rural and Remote Schools: A reality in search of a policy, D. M. Mulcahy Memorial University, St. Johns, NL 2009