
Our Vision for the Petite Riviere Community School

A Response to the Impact Assessment Report

PRES Study Committee Report
January 31, 2013



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Executive Summary



Petite Riviere Community School – a vibrant rural education centre supporting student learning and community activity. This is our vision and we invite you to share it with us.

The purpose of this SAC Study Committee Report is to respond to the Impact Assessment Report (IAR) outlining the various options for our school. It presents our vision for the Petite Riviere Community School, which we term the “Petite Plus” option. This proposal builds on the success of our school to improve the facility and optimize it as a community school.

The Petite Plus option is well-supported and is recommended as the best choice for the SSRSB. This recommendation is based on extensive research, consultation with board staff and experts, and our own analysis of our school and community. There is strong support for it over any other option presented in the IAR.

We believe that this review process should yield a very positive result for our students and our community. Petite Plus is an example of the community school model which is an appropriate one for the future of Petite Riviere Elementary School (PRES).

Our elementary school has a growing student body of 90, up 30% since 2006. It supports several vibrant rural communities which are also growing. Within our catchment area, many young families with school and preschool children have moved in. We are a destination community for business people, seniors and most importantly young families, due to the excellent reputation of PRES. Keeping our school is critical to our future prosperity.

Community schools have significant academic advantages for students, such as higher achievement and graduation rates. This is true at PRES where there is high achievement and excellent programming range and opportunities. Our curriculum fully meets the Public School Program and exceeds it in many instances through student-led and community-based learning.

The academic foundation which PRES graduates receive is evident in the ongoing recognition of their performance at both the junior and senior high school levels. In the past five years at Hebbville Academy approximately 70% of PRES graduates placed on the “Principal’s List” achieving 80% academic average. Of those students, the majority achieved “Gold List” with an average 90% or higher. Park View Education Centre’s Awards Night recognizes academic, athletic and citizenship performance. Scholarships and bursaries totaling almost \$50,000 were awarded to PRES students in the past five years. Clearly our school provides an excellent academic experience.

Our school benefits in many other ways from its location in the centre of our communities. The safe and secure setting, surrounded by nature and history and culture enriches the learning experience of our children. Its proximity to families allows a dedicated volunteer presence to thrive. All of these factors complement the curriculum and enhance life-long learning for all.

Petite Plus is an innovative and affordable option that builds on an already efficiently run school. It involves building improvements to add a new gymnasium, two community rooms, washrooms and a dedicated entrance for the community space. By linking even more closely with the community, local knowledge, skills and projects can continue to deliver an enriched learning environment for students.

The community school model is well established in Nova Scotia. In our district, Forest Heights Community School and Greenfield Community School are successful examples. To adopt Petite Plus and apply the community school model, represents a unique opportunity for the SSRSB. To become a community school, modest investment in PRES is required. This investment would be accomplished through the Alteration & Addition (A&A) program, funded by the Province, not the SSRSB capital budget. So choosing Petite Plus would meet the SSRSB’s need to reduce costs. All other work noted in the IAR as long-term requirements (roof repair, septic upgrades and some paving) would be included in the A&A business case. Investing in PRES also avoids unnecessary costs associated with an abandoned school, such as passing financial liability to the municipality.

Keeping PRES open avoids unnecessary social and health impacts on children and families within our catchment area. Among these, transportation is deemed the critical issue to many in our community. There is a strong desire to keep our children close-by, and not incur longer bus rides for more students. The idea of shared buses for aged 4 to 17 year olds was not supported at all by our school family. Extra-curricular involvement and physical wellness are also very well supported by schools close to home. Commuting time for children can be better spent playing at home or taking part in sports and arts programs.

Many of the elements of the community school model are already in place at PRES with a strong volunteer base, a central location, unique assets and ongoing community and school-led programming. Through our work developing the Petite Plus option, there is confirmed interest from many participants. These include the Lunenburg County YMCA for after-school care, Municipal Recreation for programming, South Shore Health for integrated service delivery, South Shore Regional Library and many local youth clubs.

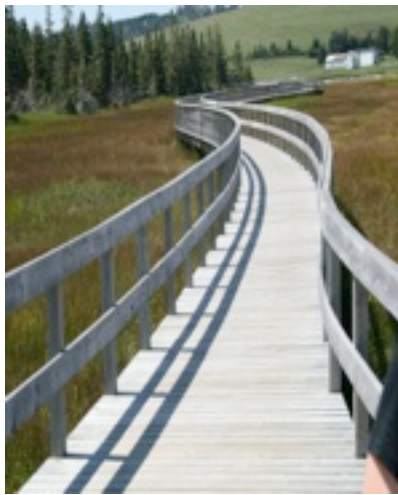
As part of the Review Process, we carefully examined all options. Based on this consideration we have put forward the Petite Plus option as the preferred choice. However, we would be willing to accept a new school combining Petite-Pentz (option #5 in the IAR), as the only other viable option. This is on condition that PRES remain open until a new school is ready, that the new school be community-based, and that the preferred location is the current PRES site, with secondary consideration of a site along route 331.

We provide the fiscal, academic and community evidence that supports our recommended option of Petite Plus. It complements Kids and Learning First, the Child and Youth Strategy, the Rural Revitalization Task Force, the SSRSB vision, and our own interests to support our vibrant community.

Petite Plus is the best option for students, continuing the strong tradition of academic excellence and programming at our school. It is the best option for our rural communities, enriching the learning at the school and benefitting from the presence of a school in our area. It involves some new capital funding but is not as costly as a new building. Petite Plus is the most cost effective for SSRSB. Choose the Petite Plus option and support the long-term success of our children and our communities.

Our Community

Petite Riviere Elementary School, its students and the wider community are intrinsically connected. We enjoy a rich quality of life in our community, and PRES promotes a strong academic, athletic and civic foundation for our children.



Community Life

The communities of Petite Riviere and the surrounding area are both a beautiful tourist destination, and a living, working, year-round community. Spectacular ocean beaches make summers very busy with tourists, campers and people enjoying the nature and culture around us. Many outdoor adventure opportunities, including swimming, kayaking, fly fishing and sailing are close by. The nearby ocean and river are a source of livelihood, education and a point of pride for the community.

The businesses, artisans and services in our communities provide a true sense of place. A traditional country corner store in Petite Riviere provides many amenities. There is an award-winning local winery, respected antique shop, a new brewery and multiple seasonal cafes. A community playground in Vogler's Cove is loved by preschoolers. Essential services are provided by two volunteer Fire Departments, and local halls also play host to sold out concerts, pancake suppers and many community activities all year round. Many churches offer social and learning opportunities for residents and visitors of all ages and interests.

Our corner of Lunenburg county is within easy commuting distance to Bridgewater, Liverpool and Lunenburg providing many employment opportunities beyond the local area. There remains high stability and potential for employment growth. In short, the village of Petite Riviere and the surrounding communities make this a vibrant rural place with a multi-generational population.



The heart of the community is the local elementary school. Petite Riviere Elementary School (PRES) has a widely recognized reputation as a caring place where learning excellence takes place. A rich and nurturing community school, and a gathering place for learning and social opportunities for all in its surrounding areas, our area would be forever changed without this key community asset.

Academic & Extra-Curricular Life

PRES is situated on a quiet side road, not far from the village centre among woodlots and farm fields. The Petite River borders the backyard and a walking trail provides a place to observe nature and learn about the immediate world around us. An osprey nest on the property inspired our team name and school motto “Where we **S.O.A.R** like the Osprey”; we **S**tay **S**afe, we take **O**wnership of our actions, we **A**chieve and try our best, and we **R**espect ourselves and others.

To support physical activity, outdoor playground equipment, a soccer field, basketball courts and small woodlot provide many opportunities for games, exploration and social interaction. Our school vegetable garden and greenhouse offer students and community members a chance to learn basic gardening skills, and a harvest benefitting the school hot lunch program.

Students at PRES are also being recognized for their academic and leadership qualities throughout their junior and senior high school experience. Graduates have gone on to become teachers, veterinarians, military personnel, doctors, artists, musicians, business entrepreneurs, tradespeople and they remain committed to our community and its economy.

The teachers of PRES are highly committed and their skills have been appropriately matched to their positions. Permanent classroom teachers have provided consistency and experience over the past six years, while term contracts allow for a new wave of teachers and perspectives. Filling specialty areas or finding qualified teachers when needed has never been a problem. Combined grades are rewarding for both teachers and students. Many teachers take on dual roles and help provide an active and diverse extra-curricular life for students. At first glance it may seem like a large work load however, staff view themselves as essential and valued members of their school community. Input is welcomed and new ideas are freely shared in a supportive environment.

Being educated within your own community and knowing your place in that community has huge advantages. PRES students have the unique benefit of walking together to the ocean for a fun filled beach day, or to the Mi'kmaq/Acadian burial site at Sperry's beach to explore local history. They look forward to the annual release of baby salmon in the river, and building stick fortresses in the school woodlot. They know their classmates well, and those students in their school and positive role models from the larger community as well. Through these daily mixed aged activities they learn leadership, mentoring, and nurturing skills. Students can link their curriculum, school volunteers, outreach and programs to the community in which they live.

School and Community - Our Interdependent Relationship

Since PRES is located in the center of the catchment area it provides an opportunity for extensive parent and volunteer participation during and after school. This opens many community-led learning opportunities for students to be enriched. Extra-curricular activities include snowshoeing, running, soccer and basketball, as well as art classes, guitar, and pottery. These activities and more draw on the skills and passions of teachers, staff, parents and community members who give of their time to share, and benefit from these experiences themselves.

Mixed generation communities like those found here are sustainable because they engage everyone. This is accomplished at PRES with public events like the Spring Fair, Remembrance Day ceremonies, the Heritage Fair and School Concerts. These events are attended and enjoyed by parents and grandparents, friends, seniors, alumni and others within the community. Families are close by which also supports feelings of connection and safety. Students in PRES are growing up with confidence, security and the freedom to be themselves and to excel. In short, PRES is a vibrant center of learning excellence and community activity that supports a prosperous rural village.

Our Vision - Petite Plus

The best option for students, the best option for our communities and the least cost option for the SSRSB.

We have carefully reviewed the IAR and have worked through all of the five options. None are preferred, and as a result, we have developed a concept for our school that would see it truly serve as a centre for our community. Our concept, called Petite Plus, embraces the community school model for our elementary school. This is supported overwhelmingly by the SAC, PRES staff and the community at large as their first choice.

Petite Plus is a viable choice. It involves specific building improvements to meet the modern specifications for elementary schools. Some of these are additions, while others would be alterations. The existing structure would see an addition of:

- a new gymnasium
- a community room for pre-school and after school care
- a second community room with kitchen
- washrooms and,
- a dedicated entrance for the community space

All of these suggested additions grew from analysis of the IAR and various building assessments. The PRES gym was deemed in these to be undersized, so a new one would remedy this deficiency. The staff room is a small and very busy space with community volunteers using the kitchen four days week. A new community kitchen space would alleviate this and return the staff room to the staff. A purpose-built community room could easily accommodate YMCA after-school services. New washrooms and an entry for the addition would also be required.

In terms of alteration of the existing spaces, the current gym, staff room kitchen and administration office would be re-purposed to meet current specifications. The gym is too small, and could be redesigned as a cafeteria, an element that PRES does not currently have. The location of the administration offices is not ideal, and the stage requires an accessibility ramp. These functional spaces could be re-located to a more central location in the building, and the former offices could serve as much needed storage space. Our vision addresses the needs of the school and community and remains the best choice for the SSRSB.

Best Choice Academically

Academic and extra curricular life would be enriched with a reconfiguration of the current PRES facility to a community school. By keeping students at this site, shorter bus rides ensure student safety, reduce bullying and unsupervised time, optimize free time for school and home activities and contribute to their overall health and wellness. A large volunteer base of nearby parents and involved community members provide diversity, a large support base and enriched student learning.



Delivery of school programs and the range of opportunities offered would be improved by the facility improvements of the Petite Plus option. A new kitchen would compliment the many volunteer hot lunch and breakfast programs, as well as Inquiry Based Learning activities involving cooking and nutrition. Accessibility issues would be addressed with the relocation of the main office closer to the remodeled entrance. A new, larger gymnasium would meet the needs of our highly active students and inspire them. For example, students would be proud to host sports tournaments. School concerts and plays would be enhanced by a modern space, and this allows for larger audiences as well. For these and other reasons, our already elevated school and community spirit would be boosted, ensuring future generations of successful PRES alumni.

Best Choice for the Community

As a community school, Petite Plus would be an access point for a wide range of community activities, programs, services and events. The potential benefits to both school and community are many.

PRES is already embracing this community school model. Currently, there are parent-tot sessions hosted by the Family Resource Centre as well as a “Girl Talk” program hosted by the Second Story Women’s Centre, proving it as an important meeting place for a diverse population. These opportunities would continue to grow and expand with moderate changes and support benefitting the student population as well as the larger community.

There are initial plans underway to set up an after school YMCA program at the school, which could be hosted in this additional space. There are a limited number of auditoriums in the region, so an extension would contribute to the cultural life of the community. There is also a demand for space that facilitates fitness classes. With welcoming community rooms with more local groups could be accommodated.

Best Choice Financially

Making a commitment to enhance PRES is a sound financial investment. In recent years there have been many improvements to the current building, and these investments would be lost upon closure. The Addition and Alteration expenses to expand PRES would be incurred by the Province, not the SSRSB so there is no impact on the board capital budget. Keeping the school open also avoids the burden of cost to the Municipality to maintain and likely demolish an empty building.

With a modest investment in PRES, income generating opportunities could offset potential operating expense increases. Sharing community space through rental agreement is a common practice in many schools, including Forest Heights. Space rental for fitness classes, educational programming, private professionals and community meetings are all viable.

The community school concept supports sustainable rural communities and an enriched school experience. It would be a draw for new residents, a single-point of service delivery for many, and a multi-age learning place for students and residents. Making a commitment to Petite Plus is easily the best choice for our students, families and communities.



Evidence For Our Vision

There is a local desire and a need to retain our small schools. This is further backed by support from the Municipality, research and the priorities of the SSRSB and the Department of Education.

Community Support

“The small school influence on a child’s formative education is critical and provides the benefits that elementary school-aged children need: attachment, intimacy, familiarity and comfort.”
-parent of 3 PRES graduates

In 2010 the Petite Elementary Home and School Association completed a survey on the value of keeping PRES open, and the topics of its setting, community importance, value to rural life and student transportation. We received responses from 33 school families and 38 community members.

All 71 respondents confirmed their wish to keep PRES an active, vibrant and successful place of learning. All agreed on its location and its approach that “PRES offers a unique, intimate educational setting”, and that “PRES is important to our community and has a positive impact on our community”. There was full agreement on a preference for small schools at the Primary to 6 level, and a recognition that such an asset in a village supports rural quality of life now and into the future; “small community-based schools are an important part of rural communities and are an important element to sustaining rural life”. Lastly, there was wide support for keeping PRES open as our community school.

That strong desire has been further galvanized by the events of the winter of 2011, when PRES was listed for possible review, and the quick decision in the winter of 2012 to put PRES on review for closure. People from all parts of the school community have gathered, and given considerable thought to how we can move forward on a positive path, to not only maintain PRES, but also to envision how it can be utilized even better to the benefit of all for decades to come. Out of our discussions, the Petite Plus community school model evolved. This proposal has overwhelming citizen and community organization support behind it.

Beyond general support, there is a desire for specific services proposed for the community school at PRES. In our most recent survey, the 63 respondents indicated a willingness to pay for services that could be offered at the school. 38 people want licensed pre-school, 39 want licensed day care,

and 61 desire after-school care. These numbers far exceed the required support indicated by the YMCA for viability. Strong interest in a youth club was demonstrated by 52 people, with 55 supporting fitness classes, and 46 supporting adult education opportunities.

A Growing Community

A history of Petite Riviere is described in ‘A Rising Village’, chronicling the early years of our village. Petite Riviere is indeed a growing community and school enrollment is continuing to grow along with it. The school population increased between 2006-2011 from 76 to 90 students, an increase of 30%. This is not declining enrollment, but in fact, steady growth. While it may be true that enrollment is declining in Nova Scotia and in the SSRSB, it is not the case for our communities. We are growing!

Table 1.0 data from Nova Scotia Community Counts www.gov.ns.ca/fiance/communitycounts/

Population Census % change 2001–2011
SSRSB overall trends
0–4 yrs –13.2%
5–9 yrs –24.4%
Crousetown, Green Bay, Petite Riviere trends
0–4 yrs +10.0%
5–9 yrs +37.5%
Broad Cove, Cherry Hill, Voglers Cove trends
0–4 yrs +22.2%
5–9 yrs –17.9%

Table 1.0 shows that there are more elementary aged children in 2011 than in 2001. An analysis of the detailed Dissemination Level data from StatsCan’s 2011 Census shows that the PRES catchments area has a populations of approximately 86 0-4 year olds, 95 5-9 year olds and 89 10-14 year olds. A map showing the pertinent Dissemination Areas and how they interact with the PRES catchment area is shown in Appendix E.

PRES is a central reason why younger families have moved here and why others will continue to be attracted to the area. We have observed that young families who may have once left NS are now returning. Young families are realizing the benefits of small schools and the opportunities that rural life provides themselves and their children. This contributes to a positive economic climate, a high property tax base, and a destination community for many.

If it were true that PRES enrollment was in permanent decline then financial support for improvements would be a hard point to make. However, the Petite Riviere catchment population is increasing. The case for improvements to the facility to ensure a successful future of a model community school makes good sense.

Provincial Direction for Education



“Kids and Learning First is the province’s multi-year plan to help succeed. The plan builds on what is working well and identifies key challenges that must be accepted and addressed. Kids and Learning First is about doing things differently, to get better results for every student.”

Several objectives and goals in the Department of Education’s multi year plan for our schools, **Kids and Learning First** (Feb 2012) support the community school model. One major objective is to “protect the quality of education in rural communities” (pg 16). Choosing to invest in PRES directly supports this goal, while closure or consolidation would undermine the quality of education for our rural place.

Another objective is to “welcome parents and community members into our schools; give them meaningful roles” (pg 31). Embracing the community school model we are proposing fully meets this objective. A catalyst is the community-use-of-schools grants program that will strengthen schools as centres in their communities. We support government’s commitment to provide grants that will help schools and groups who offer physical activity, cultural, and educational programs (pg 31). These funds are already in place and could easily be applied to PRES.

Most importantly for our future is the Put Students First initiative which commits to “protect isolated schools” (pg 17) . Because our community would be very isolated without this school, we strongly wish to maintain a centre for learning as our community hub. With PRES open, additional funding flows to SSRSB to support isolated schools.

The Levin Report

In 2010-11 the Department of Education engaged Dr. Ben Levin, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Education Leadership and Policy at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, to conduct a review of the Nova Scotia public education system.

Steps to Effective and Sustainable Public Education in Nova Scotia: Report to Nova Scotia Department of Education provides recommendations for public education in Nova Scotia to become more effective and more efficient given the realities of social and fiscal pressures.

Dr Levin reviewed the state of the Province’s schools and clearly saw the benefits of small community schools for rural places, even within the constraint of balanced budgets. His crucial advice on this matter is that “schools should not be closed if they are a considerable distance from the next school; putting students, especially in elementary school years, on long bus rides is undesirable” (pg 21).

The link from education to rural prosperity is clearly made in Levin’s work. He goes on to suggest how to protect small schools and invest in communities, stating “the province might also consider some incentives, such as providing some funds for renovation of schools...” (pg 21). We have identified several sources of provincial grant funding, and best among them is the Health and Wellness Capital Facility program which specifically funds construction of community schools.



Early Childhood Learning (ECL)

In our work on this proposal we have learned about significant, and likely imminent developments regarding early childhood learning in Nova Scotia. *Giving Children the Best Start* was the discussion paper that forms the basis for upcoming funding and policy direction to improve this critical phase of life-long learning. It recognizes the health and economic benefits of an ECL program for young children, and community schools are the ideal place to house these services. The vision for early years in Nova Scotia is clear: “children are healthy, safe, and nurtured in their families and communities.”



Giving Children the Best Start
The Early Years: Discussion Paper



The Kids and Learning First education plan commits to helping children before they begin school . “The plan will help children get off to a better start by strengthening links among day care, other early childhood development programs, and grade primary.”

One action is “to strengthen connections between child care and elementary” and what better place to do so than schools. This has been piloted in several schools in various boards, including SSRSB at New Ross.

Supporting our proposal on this is the Best Start report’s guiding principle of being community-based. “Programs, services, and policy will be based on the needs and strengths

of communities . This will be a continuous process of adapting and refining our ability to reach our communities . Programs, services, and policy will also build on community leadership, knowledge, and life experiences .”

An issue identified as a barrier to ECL is “poor linkages with other levels of governments, such as municipalities and school boards” and we strongly believe that the community school model offers a better pathway to make this connections.

PRES currently hosts a Parent & Tot program, a first for us, in partnership with the Family Resource Centre, with funding from the Lunenburg County Community Foundation. Both partners are engaged and can be active in the future in our school. The Parent & Tot opportunity has proven to be of benefit to new parents, toddlers, siblings, and to other children in the school.

Pre-primary would add 10-14 more students to our school (3/4 yr olds). This program has already been piloted in other SSRSB schools and was very successful, and well received by parents. Day cares in schools is another avenue for community use and viability. A successful model exists at a similarly sized and situated school, Shatford Elementary School in Hubbards. These early childhood learning programs would work here and directly support the Petite Plus option.

Direct Expressions of Interest

In our work we have explored the option of a community school. Communication with our SSRSB superintendent indicates "...there is a formal agreement that dates to the opening of the school. There is also a steering or advisory committee. It is supported by the municipality, well used and successful" (pers. comm., Nancy Pynch Worthylake). This working example can be applied to PRES, will provide a meaningful community role and would guide successful implementation.

In our development of this option, we have explored the community school model with many potential partners. A key partner may be MODL. Just as Chester Municipality is a partner in the Forest Heights Community School, MODL is an important partner to engage.

Another significant opportunity for our community school is an after-school program. We have learned much about the experience of other SACs and other district schools. From these conversations, and with direct input from Ms. Candy Lohnes at the Lunenburg County YMCA, we feel there is very strong potential for this service to be delivered at PRES. Initial market research shows a demand for 61 spots, among the families we surveyed this month.

"We would be very supportive and will look into it... upon decision on review... if viable, we would be keen... once you ensure need is there." Candy Lohnes YMCA Director



The municipal recreation department is another very good partner, and one that currently uses PRES facilities. These recreation programs could easily be expanded, according to Janice Rand, Program Coordinator of Lunenburg Municipal Recreation.

“Two big factors – interest and leadership. If you have interest in a topic or activity, we can try to find leadership. Or, if there is leadership available, we can try to build interest. We did have a fitness class offered from the school at one time. We would get 10 to 12 people weekly. The possibilities are of course endless if there is the support and resources. Our department is always willing to work with communities to get programs going.” Janice Rand, MODL

The South Shore Regional Library has experience with satellite branches in SSRSB elementary schools from its fine work with Greenfield Community School. The Chief Librarian of the SSRL was very positive on this experience, and has expressed strong support for expanding that model to our school, once more supporting the rationale to implement a community school at PRES.

“I am very supportive of the model of co-locating library services in rural schools, and I look forward working together to explore it for Petite” - Troy Myers, Chief Librarian

Community Wellness

In our work developing this model for our school, there emerged a vision for Education and Health working together. This vision is one where the school’s educational vitality and role in the community is actively enhanced through a collaborative partnership with South Shore Health. The catchment area of PRES has a lack of nearby access to health services. A satellite community health centre could provide benefits to both the school population and the general community.

Using this collaborative model, the school could function as a hub that would significantly facilitate, integrate and strengthen both learning outcomes and community development. It could provide a number of useful health care and health promotion services aimed at keeping both the school and the local population healthy. In doing so it could help to offset stress on the South Shore Regional Hospital and primary care services provided in Bridgewater. This collaboration would also build on the good working relationship already established between South Shore Health and the South Shore Regional School Board as shown in such partnerships as the Health and Learning Committee and the School Health Teams recently established in Junior and Senior High Schools.

The following is a preliminary list of what services could be provided by such a partnership:

- rotating services of a nurse practitioner, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, mental health counsellor, youth counsellor, nicotine treatment worker, dental hygienist, etc.

- Schools Plus
- flu immunization clinic
- foot care clinic
- blood pressure checks
- focal point for health promotion campaigns



With a modest contribution of space and basic upgrades, a collaboration between South Shore Health and South Shore Regional School Board could cost-effectively maximize the potential that the current PRES facility and location provide. It is quite possible that a locally organized capital campaign could help to offset the “bricks and mortar” costs related to renovations for the collaborative health care centre.

Similarly, the **Lunenburg County Community Health Board** has supported our community park project, may fund our school gardening program, and potentially some of the start-up costs for an after-school program. These are all assets and services that we do not otherwise have access to in a rural place.

Furthermore, their recent recommendations to South Shore Health in a collaborative community health plan for 2013-2018 (in conjunction with the Queen’s County CHB) prioritizes the use of spaces like community schools as offering opportunities for improved overall health and wellness in our counties. The effects on the health of the community as well as on the individual due to issues of isolation and lack of local services are well documented. Their collaborative community health plan cites that a “lack of affordable housing, public transportation, health care providers and the closure of small schools are creating barriers for many families” (pg 7). Within their priority areas of addiction, mental health and wellness, and healthy child, youth and family development, among others, they suggest specific actions to address these including:

- possibilities for collaborative care practices in schools to help create supportive environments (pg 20, Addictions)
- Schools Plus model as an example of a potential partnership to help in targeting at risk populations. (pg 20, Addictions)
- Mentorship opportunities within the community (eg seniors mentoring youth) to increase support for youth in schools with mental health issues. (pg 23, Mental Health and Wellbeing)
- Creating social opportunities and events to build a stronger sense of community and enhance social support networks (pg 24, Mental Health and Wellbeing)

This can and is being done in the local school!

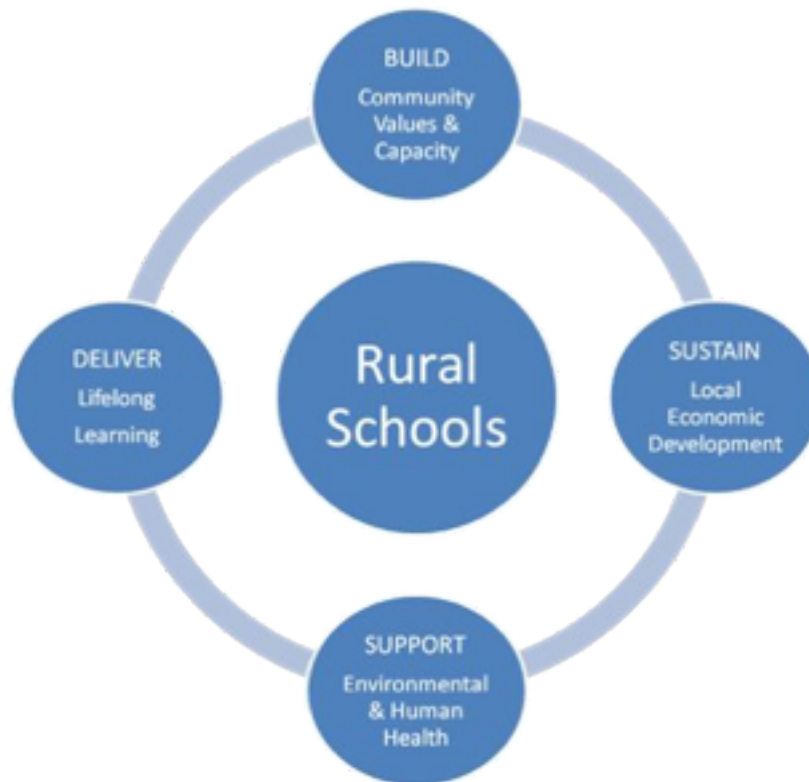
“How healthy an individual is can often be linked to the care and support that they received during their early years. This support is a combination of what they receive from within their own family and also what they receive in the community.”

“Having community schools and small businesses will allow rural communities to be self-reliant.” - both from the Collaborative Community Health Plan, 2013-2018, Queens and Lunenburg County Community Health Boards

Rural prosperity

“The prosperity of our province will only be complete when it is shared throughout our province... we need to keep young people in those [rural] communities... there are a lot of different things that we are going to have to do in order to sustain rural communities... it is not just about keeping young people but servicing the communities that are there.” (Premier Darrell Dexter, January 2, 2013, CBC Information Morning)

Rural revitalization is a critical challenge facing NS, and it is one that must be resolved. There will be many parts to the solutions, and schools in rural places are a critical factor for success. Schools are the cornerstone of rural prosperity and offer an efficient space to deliver many services and benefits to these places. “In rural Canada, schools are more than just places where children and youth earn an education. They are also the hub and lifeblood of the community. When the local school goes, all too often so does the community.” from the Final Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry (June 2008)



This figure shows the diverse outcomes that rural schools provide us. It succinctly shows that schools perform a crucial, long-lasting function for the communities they serve. Supporting diverse local economies is a stated goal of both the province and our municipality. There is a recognition that rural areas need specific attention and schools are a critical part of the solution to deliver services to communities.

“while many rural communities are experiencing a decline in population...declining populations do not make the people remaining there any less deserving. We must find innovative, creative ways to deliver high-quality social programs and services in our rural communities”

Weaving the Threads - NS Community Services Strategy

Petite Riviere will continue to develop as a vibrant, multi-generational community for as long as PRES remains open. Families are attracted to Petite Riviere and surrounding area because of the local school and the opportunities this affords their children. The presence of local services and programming are reinforced by the existence and involvement of the community school. Services such as the local fire department, and organizations such as 4H, seniors groups, church organizations etc, all rely on volunteers (including young adults) to operate into the future. The general stores, gas stations, cafes and other businesses rely on a certain population base for ongoing financial viability. If the school closed, our communities would change as young people went elsewhere and fewer new families would re-locate here. This would have a direct impact to

lessen the tax base for MODL, and would diminish many local businesses. Most importantly it would forever change the dynamics within the community.



“We moved here and restored this business because of the local school. Our business peaks in the summer season, but relies on local residents year round. We feel that closing Petite Riviere Elementary would have a huge negative effect on the future of our store. We also have two children that attend Petite Riviere Elementary so we have a vested interest in both the community and our school.” - Andre & Dana Fortin, Owners of the Petite General Store

No Support for Major Consolidation

Our community surveys, meetings and information sessions have very clearly demonstrated no support for a major consolidation of three schools in Hebbville. This would be the most costly option for the SSRSB and would involve more buses and longer commutes. It is the opposite of the community school model supported by the research and strategy documents outlined above. No one wants a ‘super school’ and in the fall of 2012 all three of the Study Committees met to confirm this. Those discussions led each Study Committee to also confirm their first choice of status quo, or status quo plus in our case. We unanimously do not want what is described below by Bennett observing the Nova Scotia situation in his book *Vanishing Schools, Threatened Communities*.

“...the student’s journey will commence earlier and extend even longer. It will begin with full day primary for four-year olds and pass through enlarged elementary schools to city and regional high schools resembling airport terminals or suburban ‘big box’ stores. In rural areas, students will be confined to super-sized regional education centres for their entire P-12 education.”



Looking Beyond the Review Process

The task at hand is to be responsible, while being innovative and forward-looking within the school review process. The decision on PRES has deeper impact than simply what the SSRSB budget will look like. It involves the very future of a special part of Nova Scotia that would never be the same again. Premier Dexter, while in Opposition, was quoted as recognizing that “pulling undervalued schools from some rural communities is like pulling threads from a blanket. It makes the fabric very, very thin.” He goes on to support the thinking that, “[we need] to look for ways schools can deliver compatible new services” (The Chronicle-Herald, March 28, 2006).

Our proposal offers a solution to this challenge, and seeks to build something remarkable here.

Delivering an Excellent Education Program

Petite Elementary is a nurturing school where strong learning programs lead to academic excellence. Many learners have grown to excel in junior and senior high school, university and life beyond school. A trusting environment, individual attention and enriching community-based learning combine to give young learners the best possible start.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM DELIVERY



“School consolidation has often been achieved by over-riding public opinion on the basis of claims about the educational and financial benefits of larger schools. These alleged benefits are not supported by any significant evidence, and the more researchers have looked at the question of school size, the more clear it becomes that small schools are actually superior.”

- Mike Corbett and Dennis Mulcahy, “Education on a Human Scale: Small Rural Schools in a Modern Context,” 2006

“Academic achievement in small school is at least equal- and often superior- to that of large schools...” (Cotton, 1996).

“The education my children are receiving is excellent. They receive the individual attention they require for their learning needs. This school is a vital part of our community -- evident in the high volume of volunteers within the school. The school has a sense of community that can not be found or duplicated in a large elementary school.” - parent of a PRES student

PRES delivers an excellent education curriculum. Not only does the school meet the Public School Program requirements, it exceeds it in many areas. Education is supported by a range of diverse programming including optional programs such as Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS). There is unlimited availability of community-based learning. Drawing on the diverse skills of residents and volunteers, outreach programs are delivered to give students a direct advantage, and an enriched curriculum grounded in their local place.

The education program at PRES is also enhanced by the geography of the area. Local field trips complement the curriculum with strong ties to the Mi'kmaq and Acadian cultural history, as well as an understanding of local trades and the surrounding natural beauty. These educational experiences cannot be duplicated outside of the community our children reside in.

Because PRES is a small school there are significant academic benefits for students. Learning encompasses outcomes and the important process of learning. The specific interests of students are encouraged and integrated into classroom activities. The opportunity for student-led learning develops self-confidence and embraces their natural inclination to explore. One recent example began with a simple interest in a child's new pet gecko. This interest inspired classmates to research other reptiles, and collaborate to host a roving, school-wide “Reptile Expo” where older students shared their learning with younger children. The quality of the education at PRES provides students with a strong foundation and positive attitude towards learning which they carry forward as life-long learners to junior and senior high school and beyond.

At PRES the academic, social and behavioral requirements of high needs students are met by a small but dedicated staff who know them well. Those with diagnosed Autism Spectrum Disorder as well as those with aspects of ADHD or ADD have a program planning team continually addressing and adjusting their individualized programs to facilitate their academic and social success. Results have been very positive. Students with Learning Disabilities have access to busy but capable Resource and Learning Centre teachers to provide support strategies for their learning. What makes this support programming successful at schools like PRES is the intimate relationships between staff and student. This atmosphere ensures that every child's needs are met, and demonstrates that all learners are provided with the resources they need for success.

The excellent academic foundation which PRES students receive is exemplified in the ongoing recognition of their performance at both the junior and senior high levels. In the past five years,

approximately 70% of PRES graduates achieved the “Principal’s List” at Hebbville Academy. This represents an overall academic average of greater than 80%. Of those students, the majority achieved the “Gold List”, with an average of 90% or higher. PRES graduates continue to excel in high school as well. Park View Education Centre’s Awards Night recognizes academic, athletic, and citizenship performance with financial aid. Scholarships and bursaries totaling almost \$50,000 were awarded to PRES students in the past five years.

It is quite clear that the quality of the education that our graduates receive is exceptional and prepares them very well for success as life-long learners. Many remain in the community and contribute back to the school as successful business people, professionals, community volunteers and civic leaders.

Assessment Criteria 1.1 to 1.6

1.1 Availability of minimum public school program requirements

Criteria 1.1 addresses how the minimum public school program is being met. Though not explored in the IAR, our reading of the research consistently demonstrated that small schools deliver the school program better than large schools. This finding is supported by the overwhelming research from across North America. “Small schools are equated with,

- high participation in teams,
- organized activities,
- adults and students are more connected and care,
- higher rate parent involvement,
- stronger sense of personal efficacy, take more responsibility,
- curriculum more relevant, experiential,
- multi age grouping,
- flexible scheduling,
- cooperative learning” (Cotton, 1996)



The IAR found no difference between options for this criterion, however we contend that PRES exceeds the PSP, and that the Petite Plus option will further enrich the learning at our school.

Petite Plus - The requirements of the PSP are being met.

Petite-Pentz - The requirements of the PSP would be met.

1.2 Availability of a range of programming options

Criteria 1.2 addresses the availability of a range of programming options and 1.3 assesses the availability of optional programs. Again, the IAR does not differentiate how our school has distinct advantages in this criterion. However, it is our firm belief that PRES has many advantages for both programming options, and optional programs as a community-based school. These advantages would be even more pronounced in the Petite Plus scenario.

Petite Plus - No program or course options are offered in elementary schools

Petite-Pentz - As above.

1.3 Availability of optional programs (Intensive French, PATHs)

In 1.3 there is an assumption made that grade 6 intensive French at Hebbville would be of interest to our school community. This is not supported by any research, and if it was of interest to a specific family, that family could apply for transfer of their child to Hebbville after grade 5 rather than after grade 6 graduation from PRES. This is a much more specific and customized approach to the issue of access to intensive french or french immersion.

When considered in a broader sense, there is remarkable access to optional programs at Petite. As a smaller and connected school student body, there are many student-led learning activities that involve children from primary to grade 6. This year examples include the Reptile Show, Lego Club and Art Club -- all led by students for other students to learn from and enjoy.

As a community school, there is a remarkable range of optional programming such as the community led learning initiated by the local anglers group with DFO. This annual program of learning involves hatching and caring for salmon until they are developed enough to release in the Petite River. There are numerous other examples from PRES over the years including a local history book series, local artists performing or teaching their craft in the school, and participation by students in community events.

Petite Plus - PATHs is a special initiative offered, and it would continue to be offered at our school. Intensive French is not offered at PRES.

Petite-Pentz- As above for PATHs, Intensive French could be offered at a Grade 6 level if numbers and interest warranted.

1.4 Availability of specialist services

Petite Plus - We are able to attract and hire fully qualified specialist teachers for our school in the following areas: Music, Phys.ed, Resource, Leveled Literacy, and Behaviour Specialist. Teachers who are dedicated to just our school fill these positions. The Guidance Teacher is shared with three other schools. If a student requires emergency support our Guidance teacher and her connecting schools have all agreed to be flexible.

Music, French, and Leveled Literacy are part time positions for PRES and/or are itinerant with one other school. Our Resource, Behaviour specialist and Phys.ed teacher are one individual and we are able to fill that position in-house.

It is a challenge to juggle the schedule and percentage of all teachers for all the required areas. With creative thinking and flexibility it can work very well.

Petite-Pentz - This new school would double our population base, doubling our staffing allocations and time at the school. This presents a chance for greater coordination of positions. Time at our school by these specialists would likely increase. A full time Phys.ed and Behaviour Specialist position would be most likely. French, Music and Guidance would likely still be less than full time.

1.5 Suitability of teaching areas for program delivery

In addressing suitability of teaching areas for each option, the consultants factual finding that: “the teaching areas at PRES are suitable for all program delivery” (pg 9).

The IAR tends to minimize the status quo (and all options that involve maintaining current assets) while suggesting new schools ensure all will be met. In fact teaching areas have been very effectively organized at PRES. From a Learning Centre, Library/conference room, Resource room, to a music/French room we have been able to re-configure our space to meet the needs for program delivery. We are not under-utilizing space, and have 4 classrooms of learners and 3 for specific program delivery.

Petite Plus - Teaching areas at PRES are suitable for all program delivery.

Petite-Pentz - New schools are designed to meet all expectations, standards and codes of the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal.

Despite this broad statement in the IAR, there have been several recent cases of sick building syndrome with new schools in Nova Scotia. We are aware of one presently at the new consolidated school in Yarmouth, and have heard concerns from families of Bluenose Academy.

1.6 Ability to satisfy course load preferences of high school students

This criteria is related to high schools and is not relevant to Petite, Pentz or Hebbville Elementary schools.



Running an Effective and Affordable school

Petite Elementary is a valuable part of the SSRSB infrastructure that can serve our students well for many years to come. By adopting the community school model and using an A&A to improve the school, this asset can be maximized for learners for decades to come. It is the most cost effective option for SSRSB.

OPERATIONS & CAPITAL ANALYSIS



“We need a new model of schooling...a school that can improve services in smaller settings and do it efficiently, too.... What would it look like? It would make more use of expert online courses, with support from onsite teachers – accelerating the plan to triple enrollment and course offerings in the province’s Virtual School. There should be less long-distance busing, a waste of time in a digital world. Schools could be in smaller, high-efficiency buildings, or share sites with other services...we can design compact new ones to meet the need to deliver education efficiently on a smaller, local scale.” - The Chronicle Herald, “New Model Schooling,” April 17, 2012

“It makes much sense to have school facilities used more extensively for a range of related purposes, from community recreation to associated services to child care. This is especially the case in rural areas where such facilities are often limited.” -from The Levin Report, pg 22

Our school is an important asset for our community. It has been the centre of learning for about 50 years, educating two or three generations of families here. Our vision calls for it to continue to meet the educational needs of our kids now and for decades to come.

It is also an important asset for SSRSB, since there has been significant recent investment to improve the building in the past few years – nearly a quarter million dollars since 2002. Our vision includes further investment to maximize the asset, adding new square footage and repurposing current spaces to provide even more opportunities for students and the community alike.

PRES costs very little in property services expenditures such as salaries and benefits for the custodian, supplies, materials, minor repairs and utilities for the building. At about \$70,000 per year, this is a very modest annual operating budget, especially considering it includes personnel, and other contracted services.



As outlined in the IAR, only a few minor upgrades are required in the short term. These include a small ramp to access the stage, and widened doorways to bathrooms for better accessibility. This is a small investment of between \$28,000 to \$54,000 according to the IAR, though this even seems high for the work involved. These minor improvements would support those more substantial ones made to the building since 2008, such as replacement of all of the windows, installation of new doors, a new water system, new furnace and many other improvements. These major improvements have already been made and paid for, providing the building with new systems with a long lifespan ahead of them.

Our school is also a very cost efficient building to run relative to newer more modern consolidated schools. With the energy efficient windows and entry systems, the building is affordable to operate. We requested a comparison of annual costs on a square footage basis for PRES compared to a newer SSRSB school.

The operating costs for 2011/12 for Petite were \$65,929. and it is 13,800 sq. ft., for a cost of \$4.78/sq. ft. The SSRSB Finance department decided to look at Dr. J.C. Wickwire as a comparison which had operating costs for 2011/12 of \$366,271. and it is 62,016.sq ft., which costs \$5.91/sq ft. This means PRES is 20% cheaper to operate on a per square foot basis.

Achieving the Petite Plus option will require an Alteration & Addition. This is a process well-known to board staff, and has been successfully used to fund major projects at North Queens, Chester Area Middle School and Forest Heights in the very recent past. It is a straight-forward process that requires a business case, which is clearly supported by this response, to fund major works. Importantly, these funds are not from the operating or capital budget of the SSRSB, but are from a pool of funds from the Department of Education. This is the pathway forward for our school, with your support.

From our discussions with operations Director Steve Prest, we understand that an A&A can include both the addition component in our vision, and the alteration component required to compete any other larger repairs (roof, septic, paving) needed at PRES. In a sense the A&A will address both the creation of new space and long term capital repair of existing spaces.

Hidden Costs

There are many hidden costs with abandoned schools. The IAR does not address the hidden, but very real costs, shouldered by tax payers as a result of school closures and demolition. According to the Mayor of the Municipality of Lunenburg, Don Downe (pers comm. Jan 2013) MODL has spent approximately \$85,000 per year keeping Riverport, Centre and Blockhouse schools on hot idle. That is more than it costs to keep Petite running for a year.



The current estimate for the eventual demolition of Riverport Consolidated is in the hundreds of thousands. These costs fall under MODL's mandate and are felt by the very same municipal tax payers who contribute to the operating costs of the SSRSB. The Provincial Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities has recommended changes to the Education Act (March 2011) that would see that the full weight of maintenance, operation and demolition costs of surplus schools be shifted to the province.

Municipal Council has also made it very clear that they recognize the importance of schools to the economic and social fabric of rural communities in our Municipality and that they show support for community efforts to keep these small schools open, including PRES. (March 2011)

Operational & Capital Expenditures

It is critical for the Board to recognize that the IAR submitted in September was incomplete, and the Study Committee had to specially request that Table 6 of the IAR be completed. Missing in the initial report was the increase in costs for a receiving school under the consolidation options (affecting criteria 2.1). We urge Board members to ensure the IAR they consult is complete in this respect.

We also note that despite being required by the Education Act (s.17-2c) to include “capital construction planning for the school region”, this information is absent in the IAR and is not included in any prepared by Deloitte for the SSRSB. It is worth considering if the IARs in fact are sufficient to inform the Board in this critical aspect of costs, and if in fact the process can proceed given this was not provided to the Study Committees nor public to review.

Assessment Criteria 2.1 to 3.2

2.1 Ongoing annual reduction or increase in property services costs

This criterion was initially incomplete in the IAR, however it indicated the P-5 consolidation option as saving \$235,000 and “would be offset by operating costs of a new school” which were not calculated. Once these costs of \$240,000 are factored in, the P-5 consolidation does not save any property services costs.

Likewise the P-6 consolidation was described in the IAR as saving \$140,000 and “would be offset by operating costs of a new school” which were not calculated. Once these costs of \$60,000 are considered, the Pentz-Petite P-6 reduces property services by about half, since one building would be maintained not two.

More relevant to the discussion at hand is the Total Yearly Cost Savings (Table 6 - also incomplete in the IAR) which calculates the operating costs in a more complete manner (15 parameters instead of 1) Why focus on just one of fifteen elements related to costs?

2.2 Ongoing annual reduction or increase in principal’s operating costs (supplies) and SAC fixed amounts

This criterion is insignificant since a savings of \$3000 in principal’s supplies and SAC amounts is too small to be relevant in this discussion.

2.3 Implications of provincial funding formula application for each option (Hogg Formula Sq Ft Funding)

The Hogg formula determines funding from the Province driven mostly on a square footage basis to boards. If PRES were closed, SSRSB would lose funding from the Province in the range of \$6000-23,500. Likewise SSRSB would lose \$73,000 in Principal funding under the Hogg formula. The Small Isolated School funds would also be lost to the board, SSRSB would lose \$72,000 from this source if PRES were closed.

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)

Short term capital costs are those necessary to keep the school open a further five years. For PRES, they are very low. The IAR estimates between only \$28-54000 is all that is needed (for an accessibility ramp, and minor upgrades to the bathrooms) to meet regulatory and code items. This is very doable, especially if the Board decides to increase the budgeted amount for maintenance (as presented at the January Committee of the Whole). These minor maintenance items build on great work in the past decade when substantial investment of more than \$212,000 has been put into the building.

3.2 Reduction or increase in long-term capital renovation or construction costs

The IAR states “longer-term requirements should not be considered a determining factor for closing the school” (pg 13) so we suggest that criteria 3.2 regarding long-term capital should be omitted, and not considered by the Board. Supporting this argument, is the fact that long-term costs are considered to be an Addition and Alteration by the Province and come from a separate budget and do not come from the Board’s budget.

There is very little value for money in closing a school for the sake of saving some minor renovation and annual maintenance costs. This is especially true since SSRSB has the opportunity to expand PRES and meet the vision of our community to build on and improve our school through the Addition and Alteration process.

A new school will cost at least 10 million dollars, possibly 15 million. While on the surface this saves SSRSB some minor renovation and annual maintenance costs, it is a major expenditure that is not assured and still comes from taxpayer dollars. Closing the school on the premise of a new one being built is risky. There is no guarantee of funding and no guarantee of a location acceptable to the affected school families. Keeping it open and being innovative is much more cost effective and fiscally responsible.

Capital Costs Summary

Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
PRES upgraded	PRES-PES new P-6	PRES closed
PES upgraded	PES closed	PES closed
HA upgraded	HA upgraded	HA new P-5
\$3.75 - 4.25 million	11.5 million	16 million

Scenario 1 is preferred by all the Study Committees and costs the least. Within this scenario, accepting the Petite Plus option (\$1.5-2 million) plus the upgrades noted in the IAR for PES (\$750,000) and HA (\$1.5) would require total capital costs of \$3.75 - 4.25 million for all three facilities to be upgraded, Petite more significantly with an addition and alteration. This is the win-win scenario for all 3 schools and is about one-third the cost of the next cheapest option.

Scenario 2 is the only other scenario that could be considered a partial win-win-win, is one that sees a new school built for Petite-Pentz (\$10 million) and Hebbville upgraded (\$1.5 million). It is an expensive option, and transfers at least \$500,000 in an abandoned school costs to MODL. A combined PRES-PES does not come from SSRSB budget and would require very little operating expenses for maintenance in the foreseeable future. From a total annual cost savings view, this scenario saves the most each year (\$165,000) relative to what exists now.

The last scenario is very clearly lose-lose-lose for all 3 schools. Not one Study Committee supported it, and both the Petite and Pentz groups worked hard to show that this option was unacceptable for them. The costs of a new building (\$15 million) and demolition of two abandoned schools (\$1 million) makes it the costliest choice, about 4 times the preferred scenario. There is no certainty that a new school would be approved and the superintendent has already indicated that there is no room in the current Hebbville Academy to accept all of the Petite and Pentz children.

New School Options

The IAR suggests costs of \$12.9 for a large P-5 and 12.5 million for a smaller P-6 – very similar costs for very different buildings. New cost estimates received from Mr. Prest of the SSRSB indicate that the IAR is incorrect in the estimates for new school construction. A new large P-5 school for all students from the 3 schools would be more that \$14 million for such a school. A new P-6 school for the Pentz and Petite students would be about \$10 million, or 40% less than the IAR

suggests. This information is noted because, a major consolidation to a new school at Hebbville for all of the 400+ elementary students is not preferred by anyone. Such a choice is the worst-case for us and our community, and is simply unacceptable for all of the reasons discussed in this report.

In our discussions with Pentz, it was clear that both schools wish to stay open. For PRES we are suggesting the Petite Plus option. The only other option that we could support is the Petite-Pentz option for a new P-6 community school in our immediate area. We humbly suggest that 123 Wentzell Road is the best site choice for a combined P-6 for our catchments.

There are a number of reasons supporting this advice, from extensive costs to demolish two buildings, further costs to purchase land, and another 10 million to build a new building. The geography is another factor to consider in school location. The catchment area of PRES is large, with kids already bussed from this side of the Queens county line to our school. Finding a site somewhere between Petite and Pentz could mean longer bussing for kids from the western edge of Lunenburg county. A site between Petite Riviere and Pentz would likely also remove the new school from any community at all, putting it between everyone, but close to no one!

The community of Petite Riviere is truly a village. The setting is much different than Pentz school, located outside the two closest villages of Lahave and Pleasantville, neither of which matches the distinct sense of place of Petite Riviere.

With respect to the site location, PRES is centrally located, with the distinct advantage of being on a seldom travelled paved road, much superior to the location of Pentz on the busy 331 highway. PRES is on the river, where trails lead students and teachers to learn in the outdoors and a woodlot which offers hours of imaginative playtime. It is also walking distance from a spectacular beach, dune forest, and salt marsh boardwalk of Rissers Beach Provincial Park. Semi-annual beach days are a favorite for PRES students, as they enjoy a walking field trip to explore their surroundings.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly for some is that abandoning both schools means about a one million dollar cost for the municipality to bear to idle and likely the costs associated with demolishing two buildings. By keeping the land at PRES, only one building would be passed to MODL.



Coincidental to this discussion is the fact that the land directly adjacent to the PRES school is for sale; 3 acres for \$80,000 is available presently should more space for expansion be required.

Staffing Our School

A small but caring staff at PRES that works to together to meet all needs in an intimate school community.

STAFFING EFFICIENCIES & IMPACTS



“A great school with great teachers! Perhaps PRES could be enlarged as well as the school district so there are more children coming here” - community member

“The trend to close schools was intensified by a culturally popular assumption...schools need to be big to be good. In fact, for many decades of the 20th century, school consolidation was considered synonymous with school improvement, despite the fact there was virtually no evidence to support the assumption.” - Michael Corbett and Dennis Mulcahy, Education on a Human Scale: Small Rural Schools in Modern Context. Acadia University Centre for Rural Education (2006),

At PRES there is flexibility to create an environment for children that best facilitates how they learn. We are able to guide them to high achievement in their academic, social and physical experiences. Examples of how we are able to do this include:

- switching to a Monday to Friday schedule, seven periods a day
- allocating across the school an uninterrupted two-hour Language Arts time in the morning. This switch aided in meshing our Leveled Literacy time and Resource time with classroom teaching. Everyone is focused on Language Arts.
- mathematics follows a similar pattern, with some carry over into the afternoons.
- our specialist topics, French, music and Physical Education are scheduled for late morning and afternoons.
- our teachers use the entire school campus to enhance the learning experiences of our students.

Reconfiguring our physical areas at PRES has been essential in helping us create environments for Learning. We have a music/French classroom. It is also used as a community room for Parent and Tot sessions and as a presentation room for small class theatre productions. There is a Library/conference/Guidance room and a designated room for Leveled Literacy and behaviour programs.

We have a designated Learning Centre for staff and students to use. As with any size school in the province, some children come with diagnosed behaviour and learning differences and some with just very heavy hearts. PRES is no different. A small school presents a welcoming face that encourages the much needed parent/family connection that is crucial for all children to achieve.

Staffing our school with a mix of seasoned veterans and new faces is the right balance for any school. As principal I try to ensure that the new faces are able to establish sincere relationships with their students and the staff. Diversity in experience provides an opportunity for staff to share ideas and perspectives.

Professional Learning Communities are working well at Petite. While one is embedded in the school day, the other is for all staff held after class hours.

Our smaller size is exactly why we are able to be more flexible and inclusive in staffing and scheduling. We have the advantage of being able to incorporate all perspectives within our school vision. Student's strengths and challenges are known by many and facilitated by many. A child at PRES has many staff guiding them as they learn. Instructional learning for staff is ongoing and occurs everyday informally and formally. Petite works due to its locale, providing green spaces for sport or imaginative play. It connects the children and staff to their environment, their communities and their heritage. Happy, content children, staff and school communities can only continue to achieve and grow.

Assessment Criteria 4.1 to 5.6

4.1 Reduction or increase in teacher allocation

Petite Plus - An application of the staffing formula to the projected enrollment for 2012-2013 indicates that PRES would require 7.22 FTE teaching positions. This is maintaining what we currently have.

Petite-Pentz - Putting the 2 schools together and in implementing the funding formula would mean an increase in staffing FTE.

4.2 Reduction or increase in administration allocation

Petite Plus -Based on projection of student numbers the administration allocation would maintain or decrease.

Petite-Pentz - Based on an increase in student enrollment the administration allocation would increase.

4.3 Reduction or increase in support staff allocation

Petite Plus - Support staff allocation would be maintained, or likely increased in this scenario, based on student enrollment numbers and needs.

Petite-Pentz - Support staff allocation would increase due to student enrollment numbers and needs

5.1 Ability to attract suitably qualified teachers

Petite Plus - Not a concern. There is no evidence to conclude that an ability to attract qualified teachers to come to PRES is a concern. Specialty areas can be a challenge, if a teacher is on a circuit with more than one other school. However this has been accomplished every year with success.

Petite-Pentz - There is no evidence to conclude that attracting teachers to a school as described in this option would be a concern. Classroom or specialty teachers. Finding the right fit is the exciting challenge for any school configuration.

5.2 Teacher turnover

Petite Plus - Permanent classroom teachers have been consistent over the past 6 years. Term contracts create a new wave of teachers in all schools.

Petite-Pentz - There is no evidence to suggest that teacher turnover would be an area of concern.

5.3 Ability to match teacher qualifications and preferences to teaching assignment

Petite Plus - Not a concern. Filling small % of specialty areas may be challenging, but not impossible.

Petite-Pentz- No evidence to suggest that this would be a concern with a new school as described in this option.

5.4 Ability to keep teaching assignments to a reasonable load

Petite Plus - Multi grades are a must. If class size is kept to a reasonable load, there is a lot of evidence regarding the merits of multi age level teaching for students. The issue has been the ever-increasing size of our multi grade classes and the high needs students.

Petite-Pentz - With a larger staff, the risk is reduced and there is greater flexibility to share the workload and keep assignments reasonable. However this assumes all staff participate.

5.5 Ability to spread the load of co-curricular and volunteer extra-curricular activities reasonably among teachers

Petite Plus - Teachers at PRES are highly committed to providing the co-curricular and extra curricular activities. Many of the teachers take on dual roles, teachers serving on CORE teams, Student Planning Teams, special events etc. Yes it can appear to be a lot, but the flip side is that all staff are seen as essential and important. There is also extensive time invested by community volunteers, which would be enhanced by this option.

Petite-Pentz -The workload could be spread over more bodies and we would have greater degree of finding people who have that particular interest to help out in a certain niche. But not so big as to make some feel outside or their ideas/help not needed.

5.6 Ability to spread professional in-service activities

Petite Plus - The number of days teachers are required to be away to attend the various professional development activities affects each classroom of students equally no matter the size of the school. For example: all grade 2 teachers attend a literacy PD activity; all grade 6 teachers attend Math.

The number of days representation by our staff is required at certain provincial or Board PD activities does put added pressure on a small staff to cover these days.

Petite-Pentz - The ability to spread the professional/In-service activities would be enhanced.

Keeping our Children Close-by

Short bus rides with children of similar ages means more time at home or at school and less time on poorly maintained back roads. Longer bus rides have health impacts and reduce academic achievement.

A school located in the centre of our community allows for extensive parent and volunteer participation before, during and after school – and kids get home early!

TRANSPORTATION



“Learning at home helps children connect the learning they do in school to their lives at home and in the community.” - NS Department of Education “Early Learning” kit bag pamphlet

“Up to two hours of a 5-year-old’s life commuting daily to school? Those of us who had children attend Hebbville know the travel time to that school, for instance, is in the upper limit allowed by policy. Not great even for older kids. Unacceptable for the young ones. If students are bused elsewhere, total kilometers rise with a corresponding rise in (uncertain) fuel costs and capital costs.” - Municipal Councilor Eric Hustvedt

Transportation is a critical issue for Lunenburg County and is quickly being recognized as an area for action by local government, health authorities, community services and justice. Municipal Councilor Eric Hustvedt states that transportation is “the biggest concern I hear from residents”. With a trend in consolidation of services in major city and larger town centres, many rural Nova Scotians are further isolated to the detriment of their quality of life and the sustainability of their communities. As a dynamic and growing rural community, Petite Riviere has many local services and connections for its residents, including the library book-mobile, community breakfasts, celebrations and concerts – all of which can be enhanced by investing in our multi-purpose community school, Petite Plus.

Transportation is also the critical issue for many parents within the PRES catchment. At PRES, we are fortunate to have three long term drivers who have come to know our students and their siblings over the years and are attuned to their personalities as well as the various changes to their routines. Children can confidently negotiate variations in their routes at the end of a school day, trusting their driver to deliver them safely to an alternate stop.

The IAR sorely lacks much depth on student transportation and has no information on busing distances. Despite being required by the Education Act (s.17-2c) to include “the time and the distance involved in transporting students”, information on distances is absent in the IAR and is not included in any prepared by Deloitte for the SSRSB. Again, it is worth considering if the IARs are in fact sufficient to inform the Board in this critical aspect of bussing, and if the process can proceed given this was not provided to the Study Committees nor public to review.



Transportation is the number one concern of parents who we have consulted and yet a route review was not completed. As a result, the student travel times and costs in the IAR are estimates at best. It is clear, however, that consolidation would add more time and distance to our kids’ commute on poorly maintained side roads. The IAR suggests bussing time under consolidation would be 50-60 minutes each way, we assume this would be for all or the majority of students, something not many adults in Nova Scotia would choose.

Community members reported overwhelmingly that they are satisfied with their current transport times for PRES. Discussion among our community strongly supports busing elementary aged children together, and not combining junior high or high school kids with younger students.

We are disappointed with the IAR's narrow focus on travel time and cost to SSRSB. We feel that the burden of cost has been shifted to our children under all consolidation models. Student health, wellness, achievement and safety should be the priority. These are all under question and potentially at risk with longer bus times. We present research to support shorter busing as the clear alternative.

The Health Impacts of “Empty Time” Spent on a Bus

Dr. Graham L. Pollett the Medical Officer of Health, reported in 2008, in *“The Impact of Bus Time on Child and Youth Health”* that there are three significant concerns within this issue. He found “children who live in rural areas experience longer bus rides than their urban counterparts, representing 75% of total bus miles. School consolidation is the primary reason for increasingly long bus rides.”

He found there were 5 main areas affected by long bus rides:

- 1) reduced opportunity for physical activity and extracurricular activities (i.e., obesity);
- 2) safety (i.e., traffic accidents, seat belts, etc.);
- 3) bullying;
- 4) air quality (i.e., inhalation of diesel fumes, bus idling, etc.); and
- 5) academic performance.

“Students who ride a bus to and from school, and especially students, for whom the bus ride is long, tend to engage in fewer after-school extracurricular activities. Michael Fox, a Canadian geographer, concluded that time on the bus was “empty time” during which few activities can occur. Specifically, as bus time increased, participation in activities other than sleep, personal care and school decreased. Children in Fox's study noted sleep, engagement in social and recreational activities and working as activities they would participate in if they had more time after school.

On the topic of bullying he concluded that “in order to focus on safe-driving practices, bus drivers may miss or overlook bullying that occurs on their bus. Given that the driver is typically the only adult on the bus, a substantial portion of bullying can occur during the ride to or from school.”

For Air Quality, “previous research has focused on the health of the bus, rather than on the health of the students. Much of this research has focused on the impact of bus idling on air quality and emissions in the cabins of diesel-powered buses. The resultant air pollutants have been associated with a number of health issues, including asthma, respiratory infections, allergies, and reduced lung function.”

Academic Performance is also reduced by bussing: “students with longer bus rides attained a lower composite achievement score. Similarly, parents of rural students commented that the bus ride was too long and that the long bus ride was hindering their child’s academic performance, extracurricular activities and sleep time.”[All taken from “The Impact of Bus Time on Child and Youth Health”, Graham L. Pollett, MD, FRCPC, Medical Officer of Health, 2008]

A School Busing Handbook prepared in 1992 for the Saskatchewan Public School Boards Association, summarized the harmful physical effects before recommending that they be ignored in pursuit of further school consolidation.

Three of the studies relevant to this issue focus on fatigue, general health and conditions on the buses (Solstad, 1975) (Ryan, 1976) (Clutchy, 1974). The fourth relevant study (Scharf, 1974) discusses the effect of the bus journey on the excretory functions of pupils.

“As one part of an extensive research project on the functioning of centralized comprehensive education in rural areas of Norway, Solstad (1975) conducted a study to determine students’ reactions to school transportation. He used a questionnaire to collect data from about 1900 ninth grade students. The findings indicate that substantial numbers of students, especially those having to travel long distances, were physically upset by transport. Common physical problems included having a headache, feeling unwell, being car sick and feeling cold. The students’ attitude toward daily travel was increasingly unfavorable with distance travelled and with physical discomfort experienced.

Ryan (1976) interviewed students and parents in three remote northern Ontario communities. Parents indicated that fatigue and irritability were common among students who rode the bus long distances. Students were required to get up early in the morning, often well before the other members of the family and did not return home till 5:30 or 6:00 p.m. Much of their spare time during the evening and weekend was spent sleeping. Students complained that the buses were extremely cold, bumpy and generally uncomfortable and that the level of noise and disorder on the buses was distressing.

Assessment Criteria 6.1 to 6.4

“We strongly feel that the closure of Petite Elementary would be a loss for all, not only for community life but at the cost of students education. Spending more time on buses and less in classrooms or at play is not right.” - parent of 2 PRES students, and 1 future student

6.1 Increase or decrease in the time/ distance on bus for students

The transportation of our students between their home and PRES is currently efficiently managed with three buses and drivers. No student’s bus time is greater than one hour. Most importantly a majority of students have a bus ride no more than 20 minutes, many villagers for only 5 minutes.

Students who are not sitting on buses for extended periods have more time for after school activities, scheduled or otherwise, time with friends and family, time for homework and at-home learning, opportunity and energy for physical activity, hobbies and down time.

6.2 Increase or decrease in time/ distance for families to attend school activities

The popularity and success of our extracurricular and after-school activities speaks to the accessibility of our facility to the families in our catchment area. We have a strong base of volunteer parents and community members willing to be involved at the school on a regular basis for the benefit of our students. There is a long tradition of a high level of participation and this adult presence in the school benefits students directly by modeling volunteerism and civic mindedness. For example, the breakfast program hosts know every child by name and are a welcoming adult presence for each child three mornings a week.

Our public events are always very well attended by both families and neighbours alike. The current location of our school ensures continued accessibility to all who wish to visit, participate and share with our study body. A consolidation to HA would diminish this.

Distance to school is a critical determinant of whether parents will attend school events, volunteer or participate in teacher conferences. Families without the use of a car will have difficulty attending events and activities, including seniors and others who would otherwise attend.

6.3 Impact on bell times: is a bell time change positive or negative in impact

Students from the furthest reaches of the catchment would have to board a bus even earlier to maintain bell times as proposed in the IAR options to close PRES. Our community is accustomed

to and supportive of the 8 am to 2 pm bell times and do not wish this to change nor would they be comfortable putting their young children roadside before dawn.

6.4 Ongoing annual reduction or increase in student transportation costs

A transfer to HA would mean more buses driving longer distances in order to accommodate the SSRSB's policy on not exceeding maximum student travel time of one hour. Not only is it costly to add a bus to the fleet, a tax payer expense, it is also nearly \$60,000 to maintain and staff that bus annually. This is the same amount for PRES's heat, electricity and maintenance staff! With fuel prices increasing the logic of adding more buses to our poor backroads is weak.

Our proposed option results in no increased financial costs relating to transportation and specifically, no fleet addition, less fuel consumption and less maintenance.

Opportunities for All Students

Since we are a small school, every child who wants to take part, can. There is no competing to ‘make’ a team. We are all Ospreys and we soar together.

There is a remarkable range of extra-curricular activities offered at our school, drawing from the passionate teachers, staff, parents and community members who bring their skills and time to share.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES



“In small-school environments, the studies show, all students - whatever their ethnicity or place on the socioeconomic ladder - tend to achieve at higher levels, have a greater sense of belonging, feel safer, are less likely to drop out, and are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities and go on to college. Furthermore, parent involvement is higher in smaller schools, as is teachers’ job satisfaction.” (Cotton, 1996)

“[The small school] encourages a deeply immersive and engaged experience that is all-encompassing, potentially transformative and of enormous value.” - from the Globe and Mail 2013 Report on Education, Dr Robert Campbell, President of Mt Allison University

“As a former student of this school and now a parent of a student there, I feel this small community school is why I am where I am today. Awesome family and school connections, a principal and staff always treating everyone fairly, and great teacher-student relationships!” - PRES graduate, and parent of PRES student

Small schools offer a lot. There is a mistaken assumption that larger schools mean more opportunity for a child to take part in sports or clubs, and that since there are more teachers there will be more choice. What is overlooked in this thinking is that there are only 10 spots on a basketball team or 15 for soccer for example, and if there are 400 kids in the school a child has to compete to play. This does not improve accessibility to extracurriculars, rather it has the opposite effect. In a smaller school, everyone who wants to play, does. This increase in opportunity reduces anxiety about capability at a young and vulnerable age and encourages risk taking and open mindedness when approaching new interests and activities.

We also think the idea of having a range of choice is over-estimated in the elementary school context, and that students are very well served by the average range of choices for sports teams and clubs. They may have more choice at the junior and senior high level but this is appropriate. At PRES we are fortunate to have many parents, teachers and volunteers available to coach sports teams, or facilitate other activities like choir, guitar, and lego, for example. Having a school within the community further enriches a child's academic achievement.

The research supports that extra-curricular participation is much higher and more varied in small schools over larger ones, and that students in small schools derive greater satisfaction from their extra-curricular participation. There is also a very strong link between participation and positive student attitudes and social behaviour which is significant. (Cotton, 1996) This is certainly true at PRES where all are encouraged and welcomed to join and participate in a range and variety of both in-school and extra-curricular programming and activities. The students at PRES take pride in their achievements and their school. Because they are involved they take ownership of the outcome, mentoring and encouraging each other to succeed.

Assessment Criteria 7.1 to 7.2

7.1 Availability of a suitable number and range of extra-curricular activities

The IAR was correct in suggesting that the status quo option poses “no problem or concern whatsoever about the availability of a suitable number and range of extra curricular activities for the students of PRES” (pg 26). Staff, parents and other community members provide a rich extra-curricular experience for the students of PRES. Staff are able to share and balance this commitment with the support of a large number of volunteers. Community involvement has the added advantage of grounding learning in students' immediate history and environment.

Competitive limitations in a larger school would mean that only a certain number of kids are allowed on any given team. Generally all students are welcome and included at a smaller school. This advantage gives an opportunity for exposure to more diversity in terms of age, ability and

background. There is also a cap on students who can participate in any one program given limited supplies and/or staffing and so with a larger student base there would be fewer students able to participate. This also applies to community members and parents who wish to participate in programming open to the public. A smaller school offers plenty of opportunity to participate in a range of activities, while the larger school can actually create barriers to access.

7.2 Accessibility to activities for a reasonable majority of students and families

Accessibility to activities would be reduced for PRES families if the school is closed.

All families would have to commute further if there was a transfer to Hebbville, not just “some” (pg 26) as the report suggests.

It should not be assumed that moving elementary aged children earlier to Hebbville is a welcome opportunity to transition to the school earlier, before it is required in Grade 6. Many families chose to live in Petite Riviere and the surrounding communities, to allow their children that chance to be nurtured and learn in a smaller, exclusively elementary aged school.

The Deloitte report also assumes that schools with larger enrollments have increased opportunities, and that consolidation means an inevitable transition of loyalties to the new school. This is not necessarily the case for people in the PRES community, including adults without children, seniors and parents who no longer have children at the school. Access to the school for these people would be limited or eliminated altogether under consolidation and with a change in location.

Obviously, increased commute times for the students currently attending PRES would mean less time for extra-curricular activities, their studies and time with family and friends. In addition, commuting on buses presents limited adult supervision in a high risk situation which is further cause for concern for many parents.

Connected to our Community

The school is vital to our village and communities as an activity hub. Likewise the community enriches the students' learning and lives.

COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP AND SCHOOL USAGE



"Students have relationships with family members and others outside the school that strengthen and nurture them. Bringing the power of these relationships into the school and the caring and knowledge that goes with them has significant benefits for everyone." - from Kids and Learning First, DoE, pg. 29

"One thing I noticed in the school for the whole time I was there all of those years was that school has always been supported by the parents and the community supports the school. I always call it 'the perfect place to be...the school has a real sense of family.'" - Janet Baxter, retired principal who spent over three decades there as a teacher and administrator.

"The volunteer hours that are worked cannot be replaced. Some seniors who do not travel far, yet have great talents are more able to help locally. Unique programs can bring together community organizations for healthy activities and offer a wide range of benefits which are now be considered by health boards for community wellness." - senior community member

The school is vital to our village as a community hub. Community participation in the school enriches the students' learning and lives. PRES is more than just a school, it is embedded in, and contributes to, active and vital communities. It supports the economic viability and growth of our communities attracting a population base and keeping it here. The Petite Plus option expands this defining characteristic of our school, and is the natural extension for its future.

The community school model has many unique advantages. These include:

- Enriched learning informed by community activities and context
- Recognition and utilization of the skills of others within the community, as a resource for the school and for individual children
- Service coordination and delivery easily accessed by the community
- Shared use of space mutually benefitting school and community
- Wide range and diversity of programming, services and events for school and community
- Enhanced community capacity
- Increased school attendance, improved social skills, heightened community pride, strong sense of place and belonging (from Exploring Schools As Community Hubs, 2011)
- Improved student health and wellness (Community Hub Model schools support the social determinants of health) and life success
- Breakdown of silos and a shift to community for faster more relevant decision making

PRES embodies these attributes which would only continue to develop under the Petite Plus concept.

Assessment Criteria 8.1 to 8.6

8.1 Usage of school for community activities

In addition to community-led activities like troupe meetings, parent and tot, Girl Talk, parenting sessions, and gardening club held at PRES, there are also a range of successful events which engage our region. The annual Spring Fair and Remembrance Day ceremonies offer meaningful opportunities for community connections, while the widely attended Heritage Fair and School Concerts showcase our students' achievements to the larger community. PRES is also the local polling station for all elections. Our estimate of the numbers of parents and community members that attend these events annually is 1500.

Mark Furey, former EMO co-ordinator has suggested that another essential use of schools in rural areas is for emergency shelter and comfort. As a coastal area our catchment is prone to severe storms, flooding and prolonged power outages. Municipal services for emergency measures often involve local fire departments as first responders and halls as safe areas. However, extended stays, with adequate washroom kitchen and sleeping space is not available in our area. A community school would provide precisely the kind of space for such emergencies. This is another way that our municipality, and other provincial departments could deliver essential services to our rural area through the community school model.

In the event of a transfer to HA it is assumed that families "with more than one child may find it easier when their children attend the same school" (pg 28). There is no evidence to suggest that PRES parents would value consolidating their children over the opportunity to give their elementary aged children a small, community elementary school experience.

8.2 Availability of alternate sites for community activities

Students and community members, particularly those who do not have a direct link to the school and would not necessarily travel to a school outside of their community, would miss out on many opportunities for gathering and learning due to commute times and inconvenience.

While there are other sites for community access in the area, like fire halls, church basements and community halls, there is no one site which encompasses all of the desired elements of a community hub, like daily use benefits, staff after hours, diversity of facility requirements for different kinds of events and a welcoming environment, other than our school. If this building were to close the options for community gathering spaces would be very limited.

8.3 Availability of school facilities for community use

The school building itself is a readily used multi-purpose facility for a wide range of activities by a diverse population. The grounds are used as a community park, playground, trail and sports field after hours, on weekends and during the summer months. Historically there have been fitness classes offered for various age groups held at the school and there is interest and capacity to resurrect this programming in the community. The Municipality of the District of Lunenburg has a very active recreation program and needs community spaces such as PRES school to host activities such as yoga, sports, computer literacy classes, leadership and educational programming and more. This year PRES has also been host to parent-tot sessions which offer an important meeting place for parents and young children to connect and to learn. In the Petite Plus option this community use of school facilities would be optimized and increased.

8.4 Gain or loss of shared services or resources between school and community

The building and grounds are used by a variety of groups and individuals like the Bridgewater Family Resource Centre's Parent & Tot sessions, Second Story Women Centre's "Girl Talk" program, the Municipality's Summer Recreation programming, annual community social gatherings, park and community garden space. As both a gathering place for social and learning opportunities, PRES is an invaluable multigenerational, shared community space. Without this service there would be decreased interaction between school and community, more isolation for both school families and outside community members and a void in services for the community in general.

8.5 Gain or loss in benefits to students and school provided by the community

Without the nearby elementary school community members without direct ties to the school community would be unlikely to travel any distance to deliver or participate in community-led activities and programming. This would be a major loss to the students and school. The curriculum, extra-curricular activities, events and additional programming are enriched by the participation and perspectives of local community members with diverse backgrounds, ages and experience.

Examples at PRES include - Garden project, accessibility of parent volunteers, community volunteers who live in and understand their shared community, and seniors who can provide historical context to the school and community, and more.

8.6 Community use of excess school space, ie can space be used in a cost neutral or revenue generating manner?

Presently there is some community use of space in PRES. The Bridgewater Family Resource Centre's Parent and Tot sessions, SSWC's "Girl Talk" program, troupe meetings by local Beavers, Brownies, etc..., and a community-run school garden all make use of the site and facility. There are some administrative barriers to sharing space which could be resolved in our community-hub concept.

The current requirements for a resource room, art/music room and library occupy the rooms that are not used as classrooms. Petite Plus would provide dedicated, purpose-built community spaces, as well as revenue generating spaces.

With small improvements to the current PRES facility, including a new gymnasium, community rooms, and separate washrooms and an exit this building would be further solidified as a viable community space for the surrounding area and of great benefit to all who live there. This would present opportunities to attract sporting tournaments, music lessons and private professionals. For example, a room could be rented out to a dental practice who could offer their services to the community, teach students the value of dental hygiene and provide services to the students at the school as well. Such spaces could be rented out and generate income, further advancing the schools economic viability. This section of the building would be lockable to ensure the safety of students.

There are few public auditoriums in the region, the closest being those in Lunenburg and Liverpool. An extension to the PRES space could include a gymnasium with a combined stage space, providing an excellent cultural venue for students and the community. The school could play host to touring shows, musicians, speakers as well as offering a more professional and accommodating space for school-led events. Rental fees for this space, as well as expanded capacity for ticketed fundraising opportunities could contribute back to the school.

The Petite Plus option embraces all of the current benefits of PRES: its convenient location, engaged school community, and involved volunteers. As we have suggested, strategic facility improvements and a supportive approach can take it to the next level as a true community hub.

Avoiding Unnecessary Impacts

The preferred option of all three schools in western Lunenburg county is to remain open. This position is supported by the council of the Municipality of the District of Lunenburg. Splitting up school families, and shuttering valuable community centres is unnecessary, unwanted and unaffordable.

IMPACT ON RECEIVING SCHOOLS



“The time has come to ask whether closing rural schools in order to reduce Education expenditures is actually a false economy. While on the surface it appears that some savings may be accrued within Education by closing schools, those perceived gains are generally negated when the costs – in terms of community health, economic development, and student achievement - are taken into account.” - from Schools at the Centre, Small Schools Delegation 2012

“Small neighborhood schools are now widely recognized as state of the art. Many school districts that long ago closed small schools in favor of mega-schools are now struggling to recreate what they lost. They didn’t save the money they thought they would and they lost something of great value: their small neighborhood school and their older neighborhoods.” (Wolf-Wendel/ Epp, 2010)

“Closing the school would close the community to families. It would turn Petite into a retirement or vacation community. We need to attract even more young people to the variety of affordable real estate that is presently available.” - parent of PRES student

Closing small schools has irrevocable impacts. These impacts are felt by the staff and students at both the school that is closing as well as the receiving schools. The Petite Plus option to support a community school in Petite Riviere is backed by current goal setting across government departments, priorities in Education and multiple organizations at the municipal level who identify rural prosperity as essential in the overall success of our province.

After much discussion with school and community members the choice is clear to us. The current research on community schools, including their advantages for student achievement, and reduced transportation impacts, points to embracing this model for PRES. Rural places with schools are much more vibrant, diverse and connected. Keeping the school is crucial for future prosperity of the families of PRES. The cost analysis regarding the investments through an A&A and the savings related to closure, also points to a community school here. Taken together, these three strong factors make the choice very clear that choosing the Petite Plus option is best.

Assessment Criteria 9.1 to 9.3

Petite Plus

In the Petite Plus option, there is no negative impact on any receiving school. In fact there would be many benefits as PRES would see an investment in its long-term success. This option has the least social cost of any presented to the board. It is the least cost option, with fewer impacts on students including school population size, age range, and transportation times. It also has fewer impacts on student accessibility to teachers, programming and volunteers. Petite Plus will further support excellent achievement levels and the overall health and wellness of students and community members alike.

Petite-Pentz

In this option the receiving school would be a new building, purposely designed for the projected population of students, so there would be no negative impact on a receiving school. There very well might be a negative impact on one or both of the schools involved, as at least one would be closed, and these students would attend a new school. As a result there are some social impacts

associated with this option. There is also the financial cost of at least one school being transferred to the municipality.

Hebbville Consolidation

The Hebbville consolidation option would create an elementary school that is too large. Transporting children from PRES to Hebbville would further remove them from their communities and home environments and result in deeper social impacts. The SSRSB itself has confirmed as of January of this year, that Hebbville Academy “cannot reasonably accommodate students from both Pentz and Petite Riviere elementaries” (Progress Bulletin, Jan 3 2013).

This option would also mean major disruption at Hebbville: relocating the YMCA, valuable tenants that provide important after-school care services; losing regional specialists and IT staff currently based at HES and taking on the expense of relocating them; and most significant to HES students is the loss of a fitness and games room. The IAR (App H) correctly states that losing these “would be a definite loss that would have a negative effect on the program delivery and the programs available”.

The IAR recognizes that loss of these functions is a loss to both the students and staff at HES, and it would thereby diminish what Hebbville currently provides. The professional development gain is noted as a benefit of having specialists and IT interact with teachers.

There would most certainly be renovation and repurposing needed to accommodate the new learners, and while the IAR reports no additions or alterations would be required, it does not address lesser cost items that would not be required (but not considered large enough for an A&A). This option has the greatest social and financial costs to students and staff.

It is clearly not viable to bus students for hours to create a school that is too big, and in so doing, disrupt an effective school by bumping out valued tenants that provide multiple benefits. In this option the impact on the receiving school is very high, and the impact for the school families and communities of PRES is even higher.

Your Support

Our school, children and community need your support to succeed.
Please provide it to us. Share in our vision, and choose the Petite Plus option.

INSPIRING LEARNERS & STRENGTHENING A COMMUNITY

The SSRSB Mission is “to engage all students in quality, equitable education within a healthy, safe and respectful environment.” We in turn strongly feel that our small school provides the best quality education for our elementary aged children. Our community deserves equitable services for schooling our children nearby, and they deserve equitable transportation times. PRES is a model of how to provide a healthy, safe and respectful learning environment. We also share in the Belief Statements of the SSRSB, especially that “education is a partnership among home, school and community.”

It is in this spirit of co-operation and respect that we recommend the SSRSB choose the Petite Plus option. This will keep Petite Riviere Elementary School open, and will provide the SSRSB the time to explore and apply the community school model with us.

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Appendices

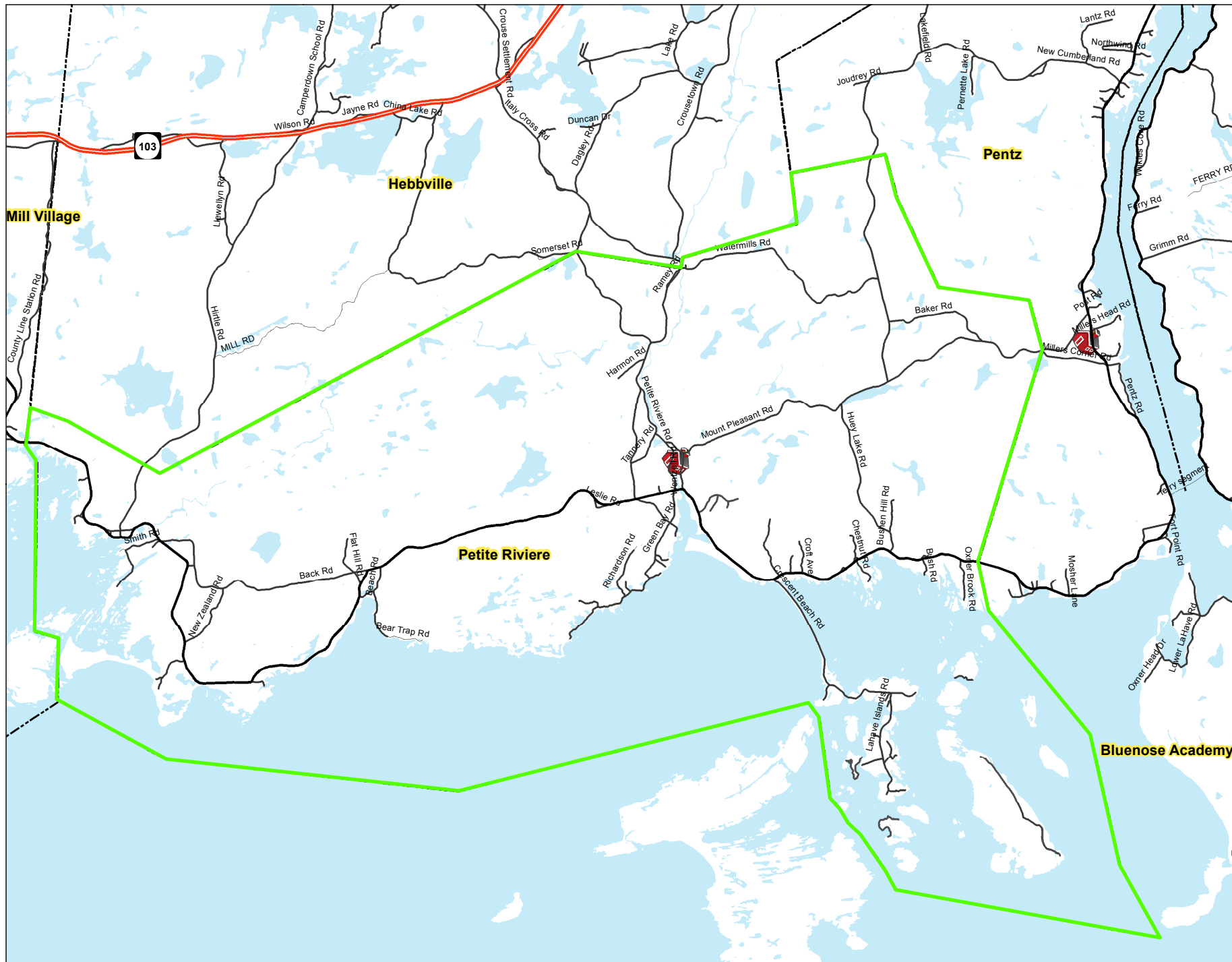
Appendix A: Catchment Maps

Appendix B: Schools at the Centre

Appendix C: Dollars & Sense




Appendix D: Community Hub Model

Appendix E: Petite Riviere Demographic Chart






PRES Elementary Catchment Area

Legend

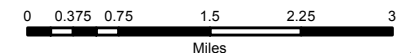
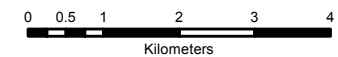
-  Schools
-  Elementary Catchment Areas
-  PRES Catchment Area

Roads

-  Highway
-  Secondary Highway
-  Streets



Scale 1:100,000



Disclaimer: This map is for information purposes only. The SSRSB is not responsible for any errors within this map or its associated datasets. DO NOT USE THIS MAP FOR NAVIGATION PURPOSES

**SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE:
A REVITALIZATION STRATEGY FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES**

Policy Brief

Small Schools Delegation

Paul W. Bennett, Sandra Labor, Kate Oland, Ron Stockton, Michelle Wamboldt, and Jens Laursen

*in collaboration with the Small Schools Delegation**

The Real Challenge: Moving Schools to the Centre

There are really two Nova Scotias. The first Nova Scotia is urban and essentially centred around two major cities, Halifax Regional Municipality and Sydney, and it is both the economic engine and the home to almost half the province's population. The other Nova Scotia is primarily rural and small town, covering most of the province's physical space, and remains home to some 45 per cent of our population. Great inequalities continue to exist in Nova Scotia's education system and neglecting rural education will only contribute to further rural decline. It is the future of this "other Nova Scotia" which concerns us and has prompted us to come forward with this call to action.

Rural and small town Nova Scotia is facing a looming demographic crisis and, without a provincial rural revitalization strategy, will face a bleak future. School closures capture the news headlines, but they signal a more profound trend -- the outward manifestation of a demographic shift of population that threatens to extinguish what remains of Nova Scotia's rural communities. Such a trend, while powerful and relentless, should not be accepted like the inevitability of gravity. With declining enrollments, education budget cuts are the current reality, but the Minister of Education and schools boards face a bigger challenge -- the critical need for a new

and innovative plan, attuned to the realities of fiscal restraint, that can deliver quality, equitable education in our rural communities. Developing a plan for the future is emerging as the most critical long-term issue facing rural and small town Nova Scotia.

The core of the “Rural Problem” is not the School Review Process, but the lack of a well developed strategy for rural education and sustainability. Formulating such a plan will require time and leadership from the Department of Education working in concert with other government departments and agencies. We believe that a moratorium on all school closures is a critical first step in the process of saving and revitalizing threatened smaller communities. The review process has become a divisive force, promoting adversarial relationships, and undermining confidence in school boards and the entire public school system. With such a breathing space, the Department of Education can focus its full energies on developing a rural education and sustainability strategy, in collaboration with Rural Economic and Rural Development and other agencies.

We envision the Community School as the potential centre of community-building and development -- and should not be simply abandoned to a School Review for Closure process. What Nova Scotia needs is a provincial plan to move schools to the centre of planning for the future. A one-year moratorium and a Minister's Review of the impact of the School Review Act and Regulations would also give the province time to explore community-based alternative approaches. The Minister and Department could well lead the way in modeling a community-based model focusing on finding mutually-agreeable solutions, aligned with Rural Community Development Plans. A School Review Process would then be reduced to a process of last resort, with terms of engagement shifting the ‘burden of proof’ to those seeking school shutdowns.

dollars SENSE

The Cost Effectiveness of Small Schools

Executive Summary

Even though people may appreciate the benefits of small schools, too many think that the cost of such schools is prohibitive. To answer their concerns, Dollars & Sense summarizes research on the educational and social benefits of small schools and the negative effects of large schools on students, teachers, and members of the community, as well as the “diseconomies of scale” inherent in large schools. As the research shows, measuring the cost of education by graduates rather than by all students who go through the system suggests that small schools are a wise investment.

In addition, Dollars & Sense answers two fundamental questions: can small schools be built cost effectively, and has anyone done so? Using data drawn from 489 schools submitted to design competitions in 1990-2001, Dollars & Sense answers both questions with a resounding yes, demonstrating that small schools are not prohibitively expensive. Investing tax dollars in small schools does make sense.

EXPLORING SCHOOLS AS COMMUNITY HUBS



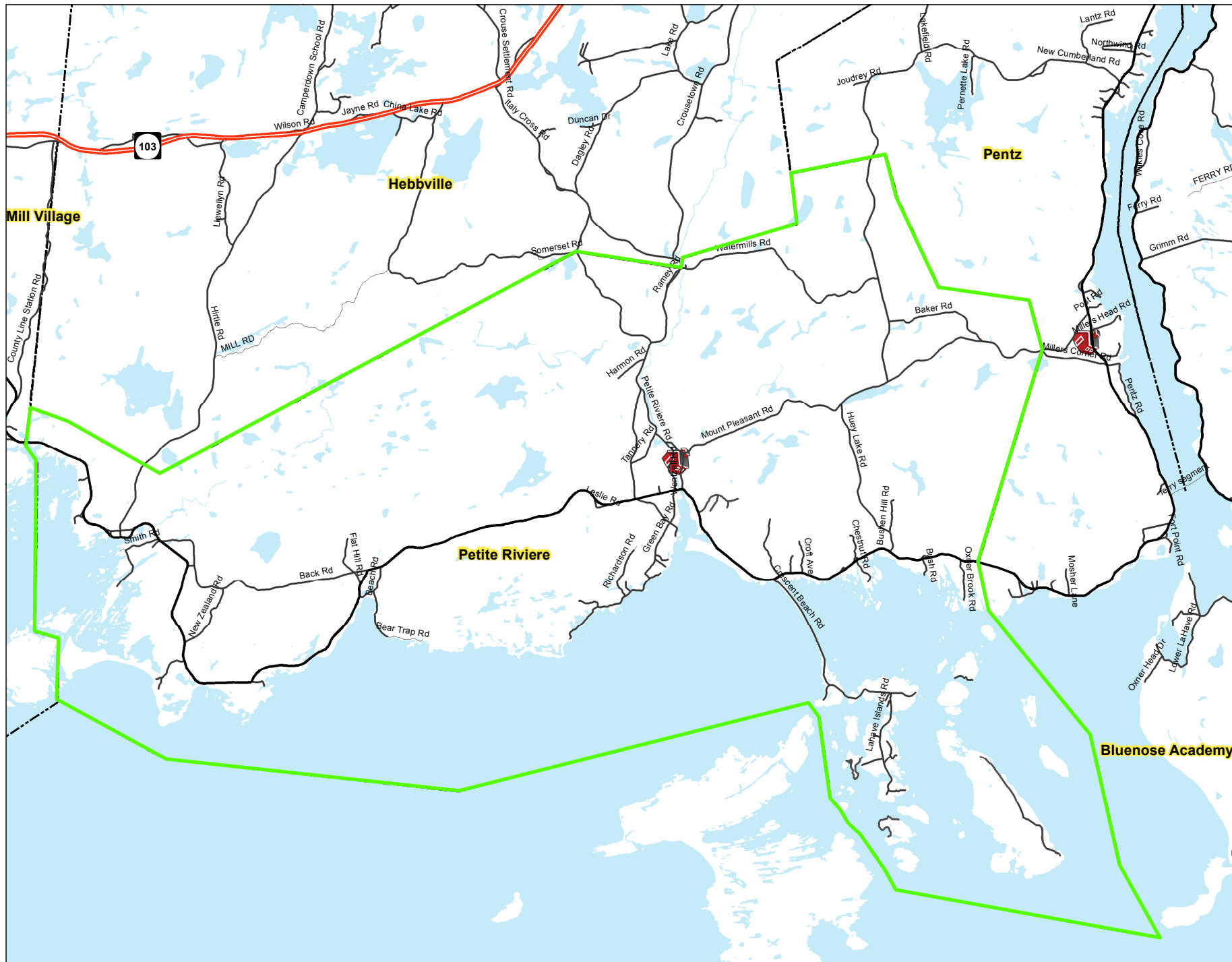
Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to research the concept and model of community hubs, specifically schools that have become community hubs, and to investigate the hub model as an alternative to the closure of Athabasca School, a neighbourhood elementary public school in Regina, Saskatchewan, that was closed at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. Information was collected through a literature review and internet search for information on community hubs in Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Africa and Australia. Interviews were also conducted with community members from the neighbourhood and Regina Public School board members to gather their thoughts and opinions regarding Athabasca School as a community hub. Athabasca School is a small school located in Regina's River Heights neighbourhood.

This neighbourhood, part of the larger community of Lakeview, is a mixed neighbourhood with an average gross household income of \$86,487 and is attracting many young families. Stated enrolment for the 2010-2011 school year is 122 students in grades pre-K to 8; and 20 students in the Functional Integrated Academic Program.




A general definition of *community hub* is that of a concept, community plan or urban design for a conveniently located public place that is recognized and valued in the local community as a gathering place for people, and an access point for a wide range of community activities, programs, services and events. A community hub can be general in nature, similar to a neighbourhood or multipurpose centre, or it can include specific public services such as a library, park, school, health care and/or social support programs. Although each hub is unique to the surrounding community, three objectives are common: service coordination and delivery, place making and community building.

The *school as a community hub* has a great number of variations in different communities. This paper discusses ten different education models that may be considered community hubs. The most fully developed philosophical basis for community hubs was created by David Clandfield, a retired University of Toronto professor. His ideas on the school as a community hub emphasize a two-way model how where children's learning activities contribute to community development, and where community activities enrich learning activities. Compared to Clandfield's philosophical principles for flourishing community hubs, most models today should be considered "works in progress". The model of schools as a community hub is an evolutionary, not revolutionary idea, and discussion of these ideals should be encouraged. This report considers lessons learned from community schools, the context and opportunities for the Athabasca community, and questions to consider.






PRES Elementary Catchment Area

Legend

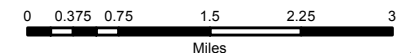
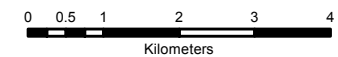
-  Schools
-  Elementary Catchment Areas
-  PRES Catchment Area

Roads

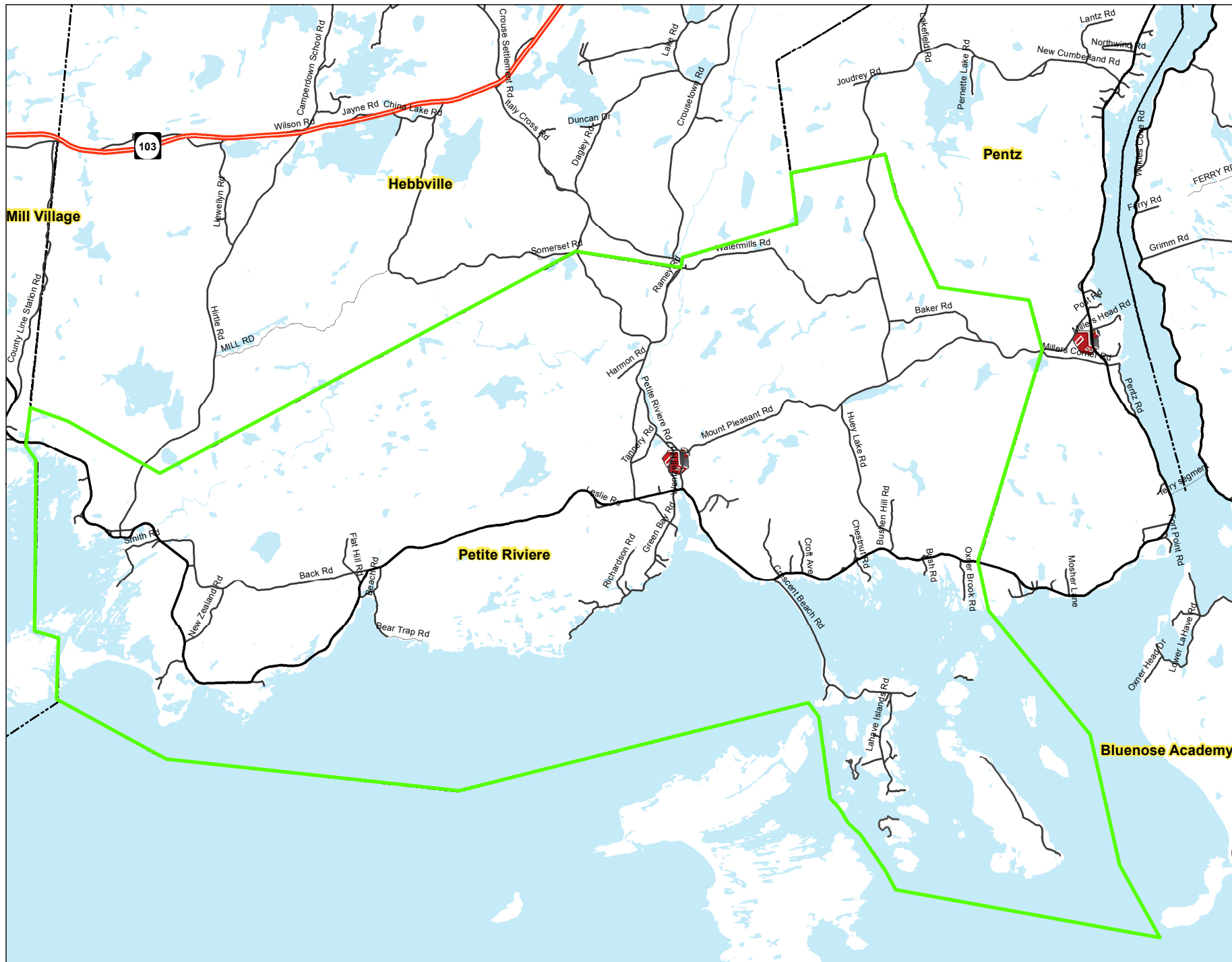
-  Highway
-  Secondary Highway
-  Streets



Scale 1:100,000






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PRES Elementary Catchment Area

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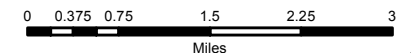
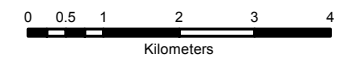
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Scale 1:100,000



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