



Hantsport School Study  
September, 2008

Prepared by:  
PROvisions Consulting  
Jemma Lambert, Principal  
902.765.4600  
[Jemma.lambert@hotmail.com](mailto:Jemma.lambert@hotmail.com)

Janet Larkman, Associate  
Larkman and Associates Consulting  
902.584.3485  
[janet@larkman.ca](mailto:janet@larkman.ca)



Town of Hantsport  
Hantsport School Study  
TABLE OF CONTENTS

**1.0 Overview**

- 1.1 Project Scope
- 1.2 Executive Summary

**2.0 The Hantsport School**

- 2.1 History
- 2.2 Student Performance, Student/Teacher Ratios, Cost per Student in Context
- 2.3 Community Partnerships, Extracurricular Activities
- 2.4 Municipal Investments
- 2.5 Facility: Prior Investments

**3.0 The Hantsport Community**

- 3.1 Unique Features
- 3.2 Demographic Trends Impacting Population

**4.0 Economic Scan**

**5.0 Literature Review**

- 5.1 The Small Schools Movement
- 5.2 The impact of School Closures
- 5.3 Approaches to Evaluation

**6.0 Response to the AVRSB Report**

**7.0 Public Participation Process**

- 7.1 Overview
- 7.2 Structure
- 7.3 Focus Groups
- 7.4 Testimonials

Closing local schools touches entire communities, not just the students, especially in rural areas. In many small, rural towns, local schools are the heart and soul of the community – its historical and cultural center. ‘Of all civic institutions in a village...the school serves the broadest constituency. Not only do schools meet the educational needs of a community and may be a source of employment for village residents, the local school also provides social, cultural, and recreational opportunities. It is a place where generations come together and where community identify is forged.’<sup>i</sup>

## 1.0 Overview

In April, 2008 the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board (AVRSB) completed a study entitled “Eastern Kings Schools Review, “intended to explore matters of enrolment, staffing and operational costs in the region in light of projected declines in student populations. Specifically, the

Annapolis Valley Regional School Board is undertaking a review of a number of areas within the region where the rate of student decline is high, where program delivery is becoming more challenging and there is a growing excess of school capacity...This will provide a basis for a detailed examination of options to improve the educational opportunities for our students and better utilize our school facilities.<sup>ii</sup>

In particular, the study focused on the “second subsystem” comprised of the Gaspereau, Wolfville, Shaw, and Hantsport schools where the board had some facility upgrade and enrolment concerns particularly at the Junior High/Middle School level. The study limited its analysis of these matters over the next 3-6 years.

The AVRSB articulated their commitment to, and interest in finding ways to manage the region “...more effectively and efficiently for the benefit of our students both academically and operationally.”<sup>iii</sup> Finally, the board acknowledged the need for careful long-term planning to ensure for the best educational opportunities possible for the student body now and in the future.

In response to this study and a special meeting of Council held to discuss the report with the community, the Municipality determined to seek the services of a consultant to explore the value of the Hantsport School not only in educating its youth, but also in its value to the wider community.

Pursuing such input from stakeholders is well-placed and is, in fact, considered essential to any region considering school closures or consolidation.

Concerns for economic efficiency and school size must not outweigh the effect of school consolidation on the community. Only by granting equal importance to all the major factors can decision-makers ensure that narrow concerns about formal schooling do not unconsciously override broader educational concerns and the general well-being of the community to which those broader educational concerns are intimately connected.<sup>iv</sup>

These sentiments are mirrored by the courts and professionals alike; issues that will be explored in greater depth in this report.

This project, then, is intended to capture, both in content and process, the wider meaning and value of the Hantsport School in context. It will encapsulate an exploration of relevant demographic and economic trends for consideration by the AVRSB, partnerships between the Hantsport School and the community, community values as it relates to the geographic and programmatic presence of the school in town, and will present community consensus with regard to such matters. Questions raised through this process, as well as those raised by the AVRSB Report itself will be highlighted for further discussion. In addition, current thinking with regard to these matters will be presented in an effort to globalize the discussion and to provide perspectives from those in the field for consideration.

## **1.1 Project Scope**

In response to the AVRSB Eastern Kings Schools Review, the Town of Hantsport determined to invest in a project to assist the board in their deliberations of these critical matters by providing information on the following:

- Variables which may impact population and enrolment figures in the longer term
- Hantsport School/Community Partnerships
- School performance in context
- The relationship between the Hantsport School and the community
- Community held values as it relates to the Hantsport School

The project scope included the following:

- Analysis of demographic, economic and performance based trending
- An exploration of scholarly material on the subject
- Instigation of a Public Participation Process
- Articulation of school/community partnerships and benefits

That the Town of Hantsport has invested in this effort clearly speaks to their commitment to the Hantsport School, their interest in maintaining community-based education, and their conviction that the education of their youth and the health of their community are inseparable.

## 1.2 Executive Summary

In response to the recent AVRSB report “Eastern Kings Schools Review,” the Town of Hantsport felt it was incumbent upon them to instigate a comprehensive study of their school, its value to the wider community, and its role in the future of the municipality.

Extensive background research on the history of the school, the measurable value of small schools, and the regulatory and legal underpinnings of school closure evaluation processes was completed. Additionally, the Hantsport Study completed a comprehensive economic scan to evaluate the positioning of the Municipality now and in the future to determine if student enrolment projections utilized in the AVRSB report were reasonable. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Town of Hantsport undertook a public engagement process to determine community held values as it relates to the school and its role in the wider community.

The following points highlight significant findings which are reviewed in detail within the body of this report:

- **Every incorporated Town in the Province of Nova Scotia has at least one school in their community.** The expectation of Hantsport’s residents justifiably includes the location of a school within town boundaries.
- **The Hantsport community has, with fully 100% consensus, articulated their unwavering support for the Hantsport School.** Without exception, residents want the school to remain in the community.
- **Hantsport residents describe their school as the hub of their community.** It serves as the educational, social and cultural center for the Town of Hantsport.
- **Hantsport residents highly value their library and use it with regularity.** Unique to Hantsport, their Town library is located within the Hantsport School.
- **The residents of Hantsport are unanimous in their praise for the effective and positive relationships between students, teachers and parents.** They articulate that these relationships contribute to the success of the student body as a whole.
- **Hantsport business owners roundly voiced their strong support for the Hantsport School.** They provided numerous examples of partnerships between the business and school communities and noted that the Hantsport School both drew employees to the area and served as the educator for future employees. Without the school in town, many business owners expressed that they would not be able to operate, as much of their business, products and services are dependant upon the school for their survival.

- **The Hantsport School's operating costs per student will remain below the study area average through 2014.** Should the AVRSB determine to invest in capital improvements to increase operating efficiencies, operating costs per student will enjoy a reduction.
- **Student/Teacher Ratios at the Hantsport School will exceed the study area averages through 2014.** Should student enrolment exceed AVRSB assumptions, this ratio will be positively affected.
- **Due to substantial business expansion in the Town of Hantsport, the twinning of the highway, and highly competitive real estate values, it has been determined by this study that Hantsport and surrounding areas will experience a stabilization, and likely increase in population over the study period.**
- **Population projections for the Province of Nova Scotia indicate, at a minimum, a 4.4% increase by the year 2031.**
- **The Town of Hantsport has invested \$5.498 million in programs and infrastructure directly and positively impacting the Hantsport School and its students over the last 5 years.**

The Town of Hantsport amply demonstrated their commitment to their school through the public participation process. **In excess of 7%** of the total population voluntarily attended one of three public focus group sessions. Sentiments voiced during these sessions were echoed in the random, follow-up telephone surveys.

While cognizant of the fact that the AVRSB will not base their decision on the performance of any individual school, the achievement of mission, that being excellence in preparatory education, is consistently met by the Hantsport School as demonstrated by their numerous Provincial and National awards, teachers serving in leadership roles, and outstanding athletic and cultural programming.

In short, the community of Hantsport stands united in their commitment to their school and their unwavering and unified stance that the Hantsport School must remain in order to serve its vital purposes as a community school and community center.

## **2.0 The Hantsport School**

Every incorporated town in the Province is home to a school.

Considered an essential community asset and a central benefit of in-town living, taxpayers residing in the Town of Hantsport hold dear the fact that their children can walk to school in the morning, return home for lunch and walk home again at the end of the school day. Residents highly value the overall size of the school; a quality they feel insures no kids fall through the cracks. They are proud of the performance of Hantsport School graduates, both academically and athletically, and highly complimentary of the performance and commitment of the teaching and administrative staff.

Explored in detail through the Public Participation Process, the role and relevance of the Hantsport School to the wider community is substantial, distinguishing it as a true community school with an unusual history and wide audience of supporters.

### **2.1 History**

Constructed in 1961, the Hantsport School was built to house and educate students through grade 11, at which time students traveled to Windsor for their final year. This arrangement was, in the eyes of school and municipal managers, quite a satisfactory arrangement. The school was managed by their own local board who oversaw all matters pertaining to achievement of mission.

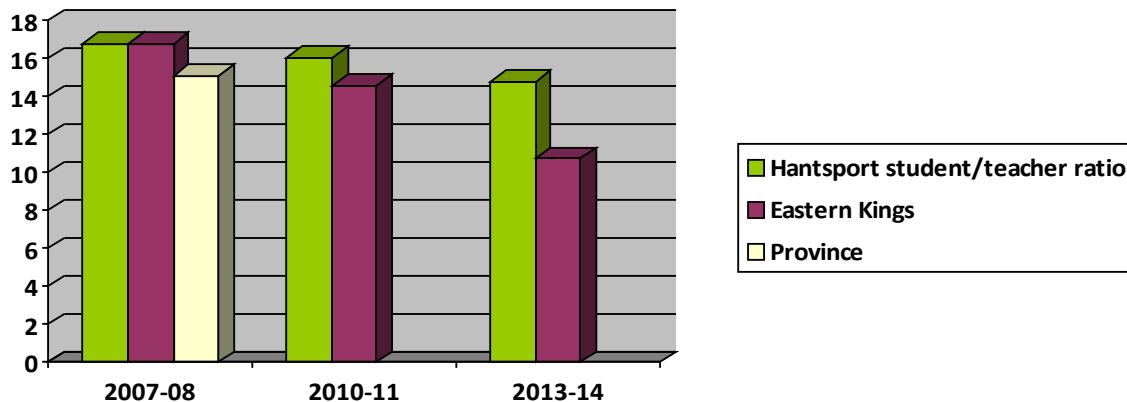
In the early 1980s, amalgamation of schools and school boards began, with the recommendation that the Hantsport School join with West Hants. Hantsport decided at that time not to join, distinguishing themselves as the only independent school in the area. Negotiations did continue, however, with Hantsport advocating for amalgamation with Kings County. This arrangement did come to pass, transforming the Hantsport School to an institution serving the educational needs of P-9 students, after which time students traveled to Horton High School to complete their schooling.

This arrangement has continued as described above since that time.

## 2.2 Student Performance, Student/Teacher Ratios, Cost per Student in Context

### *Student to Educator Ratio*

According to the AVRSB report, Hantsport currently enjoys a 16.82 student/teacher ratio, which is projected to decline to 14.79 in 2013. As compared to the Provincial average of 15.1, and AVRSB projected averages through 2013-14, Hantsport will exceed all other averages in the Eastern Kings area through 2014.

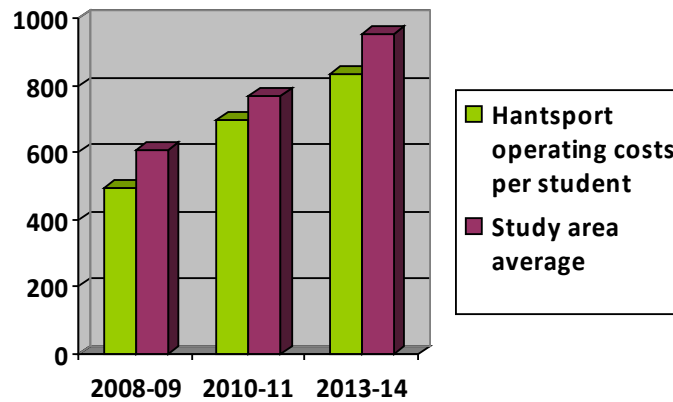


In exploring the AVRSB enrolment projections with education administrators, doubt does exist with regard to their accuracy. It is noted that enrolment numbers are increasing in the lower primary grades at the Hantsport School and are expected to continue their upward climb over the next several years; this determined through careful market scans with feeder preschools in the area.

It is anticipated that Hantsport's enrolment numbers will recover and stabilize from recent dips over the next 3-5 years.

### *Facility Operating Costs Per Student*

According to the AVRSB report, Hantsport's operating costs per student will rise from \$495 in 2007-08 to \$833 in 2013-14. When compared to the study area, Hantsport's costs per student, while increasing, will remain well under the study average throughout 2013-14.



The Hantsport School has, and will continue to outperform those in the study area in relation to operating costs per student. This will be achieved without any additional investment in facility improvements.

#### School Performance

When compared to regional and provincial averages, the Hantsport School is performing well, achieving educational mission, and adequately preparing students for their high school careers.

Hantsport faculty have distinguished themselves and their programs, receiving awards and recognition for their work both provincially and nationally. Recent awards include:

- **2006 - Recipient, Nova Scotia Athletic Foundation's Fair Play Award** in recognition for 90% participation of female students
- **2007 – Recipient, Canadian SEED Program Award** for the school's environmental efforts
- **2007 - Participation in National Science Fair**
- **30% of Hantsport teaching staff** serve on provincial Lead Teams and regional mentorship programs
- **39% of Hantsport's teaching staff** are graduates of the Hantsport School

The Hantsport School's "No-Cut" policy is the envy of the region. As a result of this policy, any students wishing to participate in athletic teams are welcomed to do so. Parents and teachers alike credit this policy for building self-esteem, building leadership characteristics, and in contributing to a healthy and active lifestyle. It is recognized the small size of the school makes it possible to support such an initiative.

## **2.3 Community Partnerships, Extracurricular Activities**

Described by many as the "community center," the Hantsport School facility holds an important place in town as the largest and, for all intents and purposes, the only venue for large group gatherings. Utilized seven days a week for any range of activities, children, parents and interested visitors can be found populating both indoor and outdoor spaces for recreational, civic and cultural purposes.

Community activities utilizing the school facility include:

- Soccer
- Baseball
- Track and field
- Badminton for youth and adults
- Tennis lessons
- Summer day camps
- Adult volleyball
- Numerous music, drama and art shows
- Numerous civic celebrations such as Remembrance Day and Canada Day and carnivals

Community volunteerism is quite active at the school and includes such placements as:

- Coaching: 30+ parents each year
- Reading
- Proctoring: 10+ parents per year
- Trip monitors
- Computer lab
- Fundraising/Bursary
- Science labs

Partnerships between the school, the municipality and local businesses abound as well. Some examples of these important activities include:

- Hantsport School students utilizing the municipal water treatment plant for research related activities

- Business and community partnerships that, together, raise a number of bursaries for graduates
- Businesses providing hands-on life skills training opportunities
- Business support for fall and spring flings
- Business donations of athletic equipment and uniforms
- School trips to Minas Basin and CKF

Numerous civic and athletic organizations utilize the school for after- hours functions including:

- Hantsport Minor Soccer
- Hantsport Minor Basketball
- Hantsport Minor Baseball
- Hantsport Shamrocks
- Hantsport Legion
- Sierra Club

Students also contribute to the health of the community as well, initiating a number of events each year, including:

- Terry Fox Run
- Earth Day
- Community Clean-up
- Exploratories
- Recycling Program
- Work on the town track
- Playground clean-up
- Community gardens

Local businesses and property owners have donated large amounts of both indoor and outdoor equipment for use by students and staff, not the least of which is the baseball field which was donated by a local resident and is used by both students and the wider community throughout the year.

The Hantsport School is considered by residents as a community school in the truest sense.

## 2.4 Municipal Investments

The Municipality of Hantsport has demonstrated its commitment to the Hantsport School in numerous and concrete ways. The investments listed below directly and positively impact the Hantsport School facility, students, administration and parents and greatly benefit the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board by doing their part to enhance the school as well as the community. What follows is a review of current investments:

### *Recreation and Leisure*

- In 2008-2009 the Municipality of Hantsport partnered with the Department of Health Promotions and Scotia Bank to construct a community trail. Used and intended for use by youth as well as adults, the trail reflects Hantsport's commitment to active living strategies. **Total investment: \$38,000.**
- In 2008 the municipality partnered with the Department of Health Promotions to renovate the School Street recreation field. This field is used by students throughout the school year and is a resource directly adjacent to the Hantsport School. **Total investment: \$60,000.**
- In the years 2006-2008 the Municipality of Hantsport partnered with the Department of Health Promotions, local industries and the Soccer Association to add a 5 acre sports park onto the town's existing recreation fields. These facilities are used by school children both during and after regular school hours for various athletic pursuits. The addition of these new fields continues to add depth to the town's commitment to an active lifestyle. **Total investment: \$240,000.**
- In 2004, the municipality partnered with the Department of Health Promotions and the Hantsport Community Centre to develop 2 new tennis courts for use by students and adults. **Total investment: \$60,000.**

### *Infrastructure*

- The Hantsport School enjoys public water and sewer service which provides dependable, free treatment and supply to the facility. In 2004 the Town of Hantsport partnered with the Glooscap First Nation, and the Provincial and Federal Governments to construct an environmentally friendly, state of the art water treatment plant. The plant itself, when constructed, distinguished itself as the first membrane water treatment plant east of Ontario and is a model of green technologies. This new facility

ensures that the Hantsport School will continue to be provided with efficient, dependable water resources far into the future. **Total investment: \$4.2 million.**

- Through the years 2003-2008 ongoing upgrades to the water and sewer systems further enhanced the school's collection system. **Total investment: \$400,000.**
- Between 2004-2008 new sidewalks were constructed in those areas in town without such pedestrian resources. This enhancement is used by all Hantsport students, all of whom walk to and from school. **Total investment: \$500,000**

**Total community infrastructure investment totals \$5.498 million over the last 5 years alone.**

## **2.5 Facility: Prior Investments**

The Hantsport School was constructed, as has been noted, in 1961. Several improvements have been made to the facility over the years including:

- A new roof system
- New windows
- Improved HVAC systems
- Improvements to the exterior facade
- Improvements to the washrooms
- Installation of a new floor in the gymnasium
- Enhancements to the insulation value
- Major improvements to the water collection and treatment system
- Major upgrades to pedestrian sidewalk access
- Major improvements to the adjacent playing fields

While it is recognized that the school has suffered from a lack of regular maintenance and would greatly benefit from cosmetic upgrades, the facility itself is sound and, when compared to its neighbours, is quite efficient in its operating costs.

## 3.0 The Hantsport Community

### 3.1 Unique Features

The Town of Hantsport is a small (640 acres) picturesque community located at the eastern most end of Annapolis Valley. Strategically located 45 minutes west of downtown Halifax, 10 minutes west of Windsor and 15 minutes east of New Minas, its setting is appealing as an ideal community for families and retirees alike. Well known for its significant, local industry Hantsport has a longstanding history as an attractive location for shipping and manufacturing. Enjoying some of the lowest crime rates in the Province, a low unemployment rate, and easy access to the highway, currently in its final phase of twinning, Hantsport is a strong, vibrant and economically robust community.

Its residential district is characterized by predominantly single dwelling units on relatively large lots. The town's commercial district, while housing no box stores does provide the basic amenities residents and visitors require.

25% of Hantsport workers walk or cycle to work, and all Hantsport students walk to school indicating that the value of proximity of work, school and services is a key community value for Hantsport residents.

The community has just recently benefitted from the construction of the valley fibre optic network, now enabling residents, students and businesses to take advantage of high speed internet service.

Beloved by its residents, one can find young families who selected Hantsport as the place to raise their children, industry workers who have been more than happy to call Hantsport home, and retirees who enjoy the walkability, amenities and energy the community offers.

Cognizant of its limitations as a small community, Hantsport has actively sought partnerships with its neighbours to insure that its residents benefit from the same array of services enjoyed by larger municipalities without unreasonable tax burdens. Town officials, in their wisdom, have nurtured such partnerships with the following results:

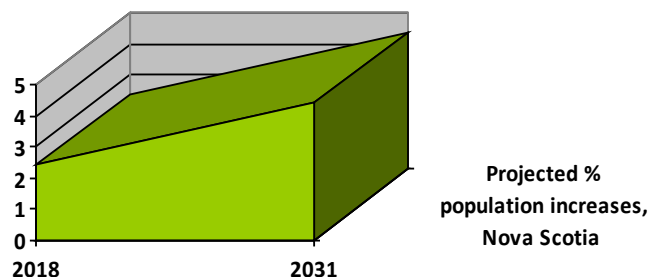
- *Fire Services* are provided through a partnership between Hantsport, Kings County, West Hants and Glooscap First Nation

- *Police Services* are provided through a partnership between Hantsport, West Hants, Windsor and East Hants
- *Water* is managed through a partnership between Hantsport, Glooscap First Nation, West Hants and Kings County
- *Solid Waste Services* are shared between Kings and Annapolis Counties, Wolfville, Kentville, Berwick, Middleton and Bridgetown
- *Sewer Services* are coordinated between Hantsport and Kings County
- *Emergency Management* is coordinated between Hantsport, Windsor and West Hants, as are *IT services*
- *Recreation Programming* is achieved through a partnership between Hantsport, Kings County and West Hants

### 3.2 Demographic Trends

#### *Population*

The Province of Nova Scotia is, according to Statistics Canada, projected to experience a 2.4% increase in population by 2018. When looking longer term, that percentage is expected to nearly double to 4.4% by 2031.



As reported in the recent document entitled “Painting a Landscape of Rural Nova Scotia,” Hants County experienced a population increase of 15.72% from 1986-2002.

Due to its proximity to Halifax, Hants County has seen steady increases in population over the last 20+ years. More of those people are staying in their communities long-term: 89.5% report such in Hants County.

Hantsport’s population reflects such stability, with less than a 1% change in census over the last 6 years, with a remarkable 94% reporting having been in the community 5 years or longer and 5% reporting a move into the community over the last year.

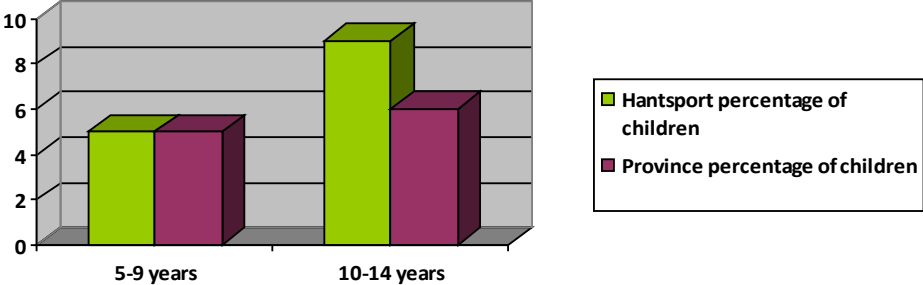
The twinning of Highway 101 to the Hantsport town line, in its final stage of construction at this time, will further enhance the Town's relevance as a bedroom community to Halifax and surrounds.

*Families in Hantsport*

30% of the total population living in Hantsport are families with an average of one child. Families with single, female heads of household report a total of 2.4 children per household.

The percentage of school aged children between the ages of 5-9 years residing in Hantsport mirror those Province-wide at 5%.

The percentage of school aged children between the ages of 10-14 years residing in Hantsport (9%) far exceeds the Provincial average of 6%.



Median incomes for households with children are 10% higher in Hantsport than the Provincial average. (\$81,025/\$73,048)

## **4.0 Economic Scan**

Too often, development decisions are made in isolation of the broader social and economic context. Because decisions that pertain to schools have the power to dramatically affect the economic and social well-being of a community, they should be made with the utmost care.

This study is intended to assess the economic growth prospects for Hantsport, and the role that the Hantsport School plays in the viability of the Town. It should be noted that development impact assessments are most effective when conducted in the context of an up-to-date land-use plan. While the Town of Hantsport's Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) is some 30 years old, the Town is presently engaged in developing a new Integrated Community Sustainability Plan (ICSP), which is expected to be complete in early 2009. The ICSP will add an important element to discussions pertaining to the Hantsport School.

The closure of a school is a key development issue, and is one of the very few development issues for which the residents of a town are likely to have full consensus. The loss of a school can only be seen as negative in its impact on the future viability of a community. Hantsport is no exception.

Projected expansions of the major industries in Hantsport, coupled with the twinning of the highway 101 and the construction of the Exit 8A interchange, suggest that Hantsport and surrounding areas are poised for growth. This growth is expected to be seen in residential developments, in-migration, increased demand for goods and services, and increased enrollment in the Hantsport School. This section of the report will look at the economy of Hantsport and the surrounding area from Avonport to Falmouth, and the impact of a possible school closure on the regional economy.

### **4.1 Economic Profile**

Hantsport is considered to be a very stable town where people --- and businesses -- put down roots for the long term.

Hantsport's legacy is as one of the world's largest wooden shipbuilding ports. Today, the town's economic base is built on two large export manufacturing companies, CKF Inc. and Minas Basin Pulp & Power, which together employ some 500 people, in a town with a population of just over 1000. Fundy Gypsum is a small employer compared to CKF or Minas Basin; however, the presence of its deep-water port is an important piece of infrastructure that offers the fastest ship-loading technology and the largest dry-storage shed in the province.

The Jodrey family of Hantsport founded Minas Basin in 1927, CKF Inc in 1933, and Scotia Investments Limited, a private investment holding company, in 1945. CKF Inc. is Canada's

largest manufacturer of molded fibre products. Minas Basin Pulp and Power Company Limited processes more than 80,000 tonnes annually of 100% recycled paperboard products. In fact, 90% of the cardboard used in Nova Scotia ends up in Hantsport for recycling.

These companies have been at the centre the of the town's economy for more than 75 years. Indeed the Jodrey's unwavering commitment to the town over generations --- not just the geographic location but the people, the workers, and the community -- have been key to Hantsport's stability. They are also key to its future.

In addition to the large employers, are a diversity of some 150 small to medium sized enterprises (SME) in town, including a grocery store, hardware store, pharmacy, hairdresser, clothing store, tanning salon, two banks, NSLC, insurance, a web design/IT company, Tim Hortons, a pottery studio, and countless cottage industries. Scotia Recycling recently selected Hantsport as the location for its international head office. The base of goods and services is very dependent on the presence of the school, as parents, students and teachers all support local businesses to supply their needs on a daily basis. The present level of investment in local businesses would simply not be possible if students were bussed out of the area every day, and if the school did not have a physical presence at the centre of town. Without a school in Hantsport, countless businesses would be forced to close.

## **4.2 Economic Growth Prospects**

The prospects for economic growth in Hantsport and surrounding regions are remarkably good, indeed unique amongst small towns in Nova Scotia. At the forefront of this growth is Minas Basin Pulp and Power, who have made major upgrade investments in recent years to increase efficiency while expanding capacity. At the same time, they have garnered significant backing -- a clear signal of confidence -- from the provincial government.

In January 2008, the Province of Nova Scotia announced that the company had been awarded the right to construct a tidal power demonstration and research facility in the Bay of Fundy that includes designing and operating a structure to receive electricity from the turbines and process data. Then in April 2008, plans for a \$27 million expansion of Minas Basin were announced, with the government of Nova Scotia investing \$20.7 million in the company. The expansion will include a biodiesel plastics processing plant that converts plastic garbage into a marketable fuel source, and will also divert 4,000 tonnes of plastic waste. A facility will also be constructed to create electricity from forest byproducts.

Media and governments have cast a spotlight on the company, putting Hantsport on the map and making Minas Basin into of a household name. All of this has put Minas Basin at the forefront of a world-wide movement of sustainable economic development, and it has become a model of best environmental practices in industry. The effect of this cannot be understated for the future growth of the region.

In business, like attracts like, and businesses in the growing environmental technologies and renewable energy sectors now see Hantsport as a progressive place to invest. The recent decision of Scotia Recycling, with 17 locations across eastern Canada and the United States, to set up its international headquarters in Hantsport is a case in point. The role of Minas Basin in the growth of the new tidal energy industry will further attract investment and research opportunities. Further, the innovative work of Minas Basin is attracting a new form of educational tourism, wherein individuals, businesses, students, and organizations are traveling to Hantsport to tour the facilities and learn about new approaches to sustainability.

### **4.3 Market Advantages**

Hantsport's prospects for growth are based in part on locational advantages.

Hantsport is centrally located in the province; it is less than an hour from 50% of Nova Scotia's population, a market of close to half a million people. Because Hantsport is located along a strategic transportation corridor, it has a market reach within 12 hours of 75 million people, who represent a market potential of \$3 trillion. The cost of doing business, for land, labour and resources, is 40 per cent lower than Boston, and 20 per cent more cost effective than Toronto<sup>y</sup>.

The Town of Hantsport's Residential Tax Burden/ Average Household Income is 2.1%, which is on par with Halifax Regional Municipality, and well below the average for most small towns in the province. The amount of commercial tax as a percentage of revenue for the Town of Hantsport is 58%, the highest of any municipality in the province, and more than double that of Halifax Regional Municipality.

Property in Hantsport is very affordable compared with neighbouring communities. Average property values in Hantsport are \$148,000, compared with \$248,000 for Wolfville, \$168,000 for Windsor, and \$237,000 for Halifax. Hantsport is also below the provincial average of \$158,000. Property values in Hantsport are a fraction of those in most other parts of the country, with Vancouver averaging \$575,000, Calgary at \$403,000 and Toronto at \$371,000.

### **4.4 Technology Infrastructure**

The sustainability of the school and the growth of the economy are expected to benefit from the installation of the new Valley Fibre-optic Network. Recently completed, the network is a fibre-optic backbone running through the Annapolis Valley along Highway #1 from Meteghan to Windsor, linking to existing networks in Halifax, and from there connecting to links world-wide. The difference between the capacity of this network and previously existing infrastructures can best be illustrated by comparing a two-lane highway with a 500-lane highway. In other words, the network will enable bandwidth capacity for digital communications to increase exponentially.

The Valley Fibre Network, owned and operated by a not-for-profit corporation that includes the region's municipalities, Acadia University, the Regional Development Authorities, and the Nova Scotia Community College, will pass through Hantsport, opening the opportunity for the school, including its public access C@P site and library, to utilize its capacity. Other schools in the Valley that are already connected to the network have introduced new tele-learning programs to their students by partnering with the university and colleges en route. The increased digital capacity will lower the school's operating costs while increasing program opportunities, and hence attractiveness of the school for students and parents. The Valley Fibre project further opens doors for the expansion and retention of existing business and the attraction of new business and residents.<sup>vi</sup>

#### **4.5 Transportation Infrastructure**

- The twinning of highway 101 is under construction.
- An interchange at exit 8A is under construction.
- The Stanfield International Airport and the Port of Halifax are less than one hour from Hantsport.
- Hantsport has deep-port sea access on the Bay of Fundy. Considered one of North America's premiere facilities for deep-water container loading, the facility processes more than two million tons of gypsum per year, enabling Fundy Gypsum to ship its products worldwide.
- Hantsport has freight railway networks linking it to the Port of Halifax.

#### **4.6 Commuter Patterns**

Adults are generally willing to commute to work, but prefer to reside in the community where their children go to school.

Residents and workers in the Hants West region are heavy commuters. A total of 690 workers commute into the region, while 2,490 commute out of it. The primary origin and destination for commuters is Halifax Regional Municipality, although there is also activity between Hants and Kings Counties. The total population of all commuter-connected communities is 455,166. Of these Halifax-Annapolis Valley residents, 244,900 are currently employed participants in the labour force. The ratio of commuters that live in the Hants West region and travel out of the region for work to those that travel in is 28:1.

#### **4.7 Impacts of Highway Twinning and the Exit 8A Interchange**

According to a study commissioned Nova Scotia Department of Transportation and Public Works, traffic volume on the 101 highway at Hantsport has an annual growth rate of 2.0%. Volumes have increased from 2,850 vehicles per day in 1970 to 11,500 vehicles per day in 2003.

The impacts of the highway 101 twinning and the construction of the Exit 8A interchange are expected to result in an increase of commuter traffic, as the close proximity to Halifax makes for easy commuting.

The relevance of highway developments to the projected stability and growth of the Hantsport economy is described in the Exit 8A study:

Rural areas tend to have lower densities than urban or suburban areas and are more dependent on the automobile. Sometimes rural communities lose public services through amalgamation or downsizing which can lead to higher social costs in terms of increased transportation costs and time spent to access the remaining service locations. So changes to transportation patterns can have significant impacts. As a general rule, people use services that they can reach within 10 minutes and try to choose jobs within a 40 minute commute. <sup>vii</sup>

The focus groups, surveys, and studies referenced in this report all concur that having access to services at close proximity is an essential component of where people choose to live. For parents, close proximity of school to home is paramount.

While adults can generally tolerate commutes, when it comes to where their children go to school, parents universally prefer for access close to home. The studies linking property values to school proximity are an expression of the value people place on schools within the community, close to where they live. This notion of that people want to live in viable communities but will commute to work is reflected in the TPW Exit 8A Study:

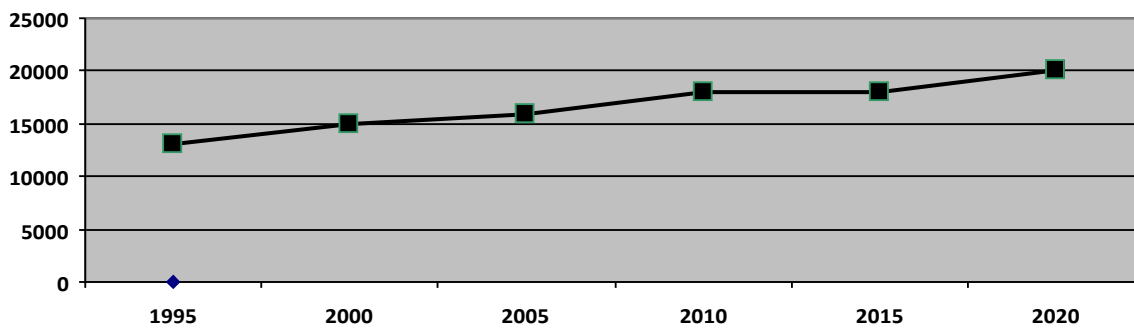
Hants Border, the area just west of Hantsport, has been designated a growth area. According to local planning authorities, a new residential development of 50 to 60 lots is proposed in the Hants Border area, and is the only major residential growth the area has witnessed in recent years. It will take several years for the full development to be built out.

It is anticipated that the twinning of Highway 101 will increase the desirability of the Valley Area generally, and that may result in residential growth in the Ben Jackson Road and Ben Jackson Connector areas.

The report goes on to suggest that the upgrades to the 101 could also spur new commercial developments:

It is estimated that a reasonable benefit for new commercial development around an interchange could include at least one new commercial enterprise, possibly a gas bar with convenience store. Also, possibly this location could be developed as a Rest Area similar to the one constructed recently adjacent to Highway 104 in Pictou County.

The following graph, based on information provided in the Exit 8A study, illustrates the expected increase in traffic flow on the 101 over the next decade.



Projected Average Annual Daily Traffic - Exit 5A to Exit 8, Highway 101 <sup>viii</sup>

#### 4.8 Population

Although the table below shows that Hantsport's population has been in decline over the past decade, it indicates that the trend is towards less decline. A population loss of less than -1% is contrary to the trend of most rural small towns in Atlantic Canada, and suggests that Hantsport's population base is either stable or poised to grow. The lack of population growth may be more reflective of the limits of land mass available in the town proper than anything else, given that the surrounding region saw an additional 5.4% population growth between the

1996 and 2001 censuses.<sup>ix</sup> The prospects of population growth in surrounding areas can be expected to have a positive impact enrolment numbers in Hantsport.

#### Hantsport Population Changes

1996	2001	% change	2006	% change
1252	1202	-4%	1191	-0.90%

\*Source: Statistics Canada

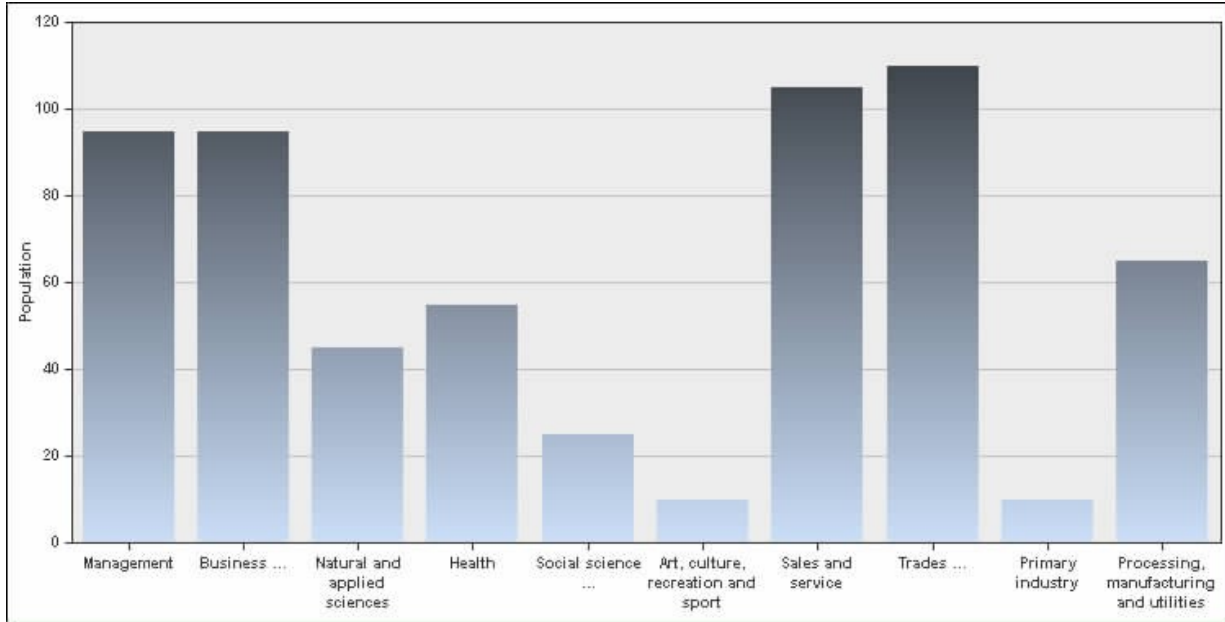
#### 4.9 Labour Market

While the labour market participation rate has changed only slightly since 1996, unemployment has fallen dramatically. Unemployment is down from 13.1% in 1996 to 8.3% in 2001. The total number of employed persons (aged 15 and older) is up 6.7%.

According to local businesses, an estimated 15% of the workforce will be retiring in the next 5-10 years. Those workers will need to be replaced. This is expected to result in an influx of new families into Hantsport and the surrounding region over the course of the next decade.

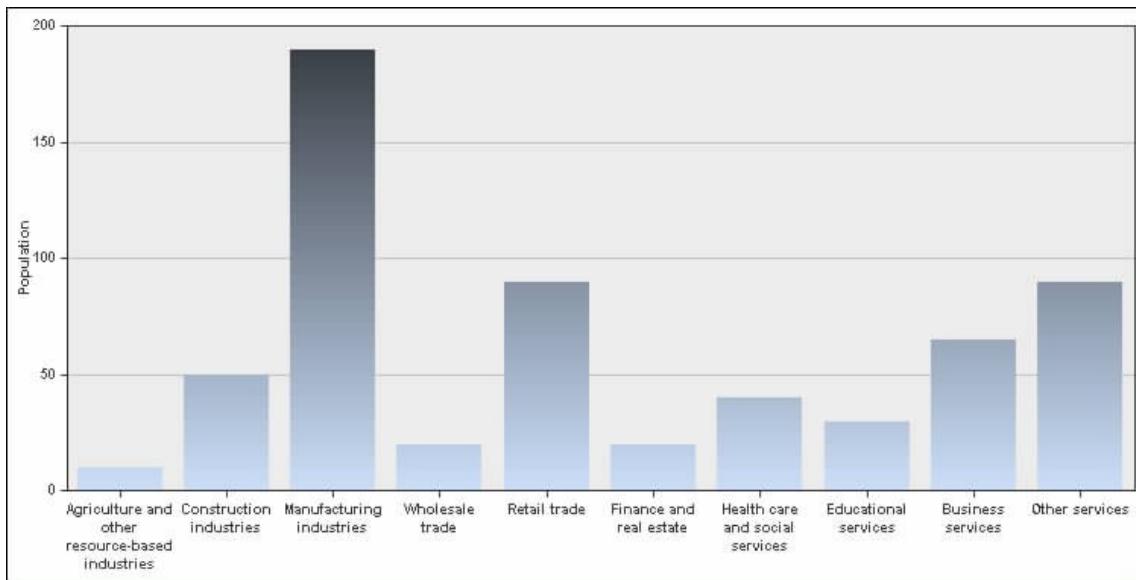
## Hantsport, Occupation for both sexes

Experienced labour force 15 years and over



## Hantsport, Industry for both sexes

Experienced labour force 15 years and over



Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population.

#### **4.10 Enrolment Projections:**

The Annapolis Valley Region School Board developed the following enrolment projections based on the assumption that there would be no new influx of students. The numbers are a straight calculation in which the current student body completes the primary to grade nine cycle, and new enrolment in grade primary remains static.

07-08:	238
10-11:	186
13-14:	171

However, based on a review of pre-schools in the surrounding area, coupled with growth projections by local industry and anticipated labour replacement requirements for retiring workers, as well as new housing developments predicted by the Department of Transportation, enrolment can be expected to increase over the next six years. If the enrolment in grade primary were to increase by a predicted five students per year, bringing numbers closer to where they were in 2000 and prior, enrolment would look like this:

07-08:	238
10-11:	190
13-14:	261

Compare the cost per student calculations using the AVRSB numbers to calculations using the alternate projections above.

Cost per student using AVRSB enrolment projections:

07-08:	\$485
10-11:	\$697
13-14:	\$833

Cost per student using alternate enrolment projections:

07-08:	\$485
10-11:	\$681
13-14:	\$546

Should the alternate enrolment projections prove accurate, the Hantsport School would have the lowest cost per student ratio rating amongst the schools in the Eastern Kings School Review by 2013.

#### **4.11 Educational Attainment**

Educational attainment levels in the region are higher than the provincial average. 54% of adults over 15 have attained a post secondary certificate or degree, compared to 50% provincially. 17.7% have high school certificates (42% of whom also have some post-secondary experience). College, trade or vocational certificates and diplomas are held by 33.3% of the population, and 10.8% have completed a university program. Over one-half of Hants County workers (58%) have experience with software packages such as Word or Excel2.

In the 2007 Knowledge Economy Report Card produced by Nova Knowledge, the relationship between education and wages is made clear: “Almost three-quarters of all new jobs require some form of post-secondary education. What’s more, as this chart shows, a post-secondary degree can mean as much as a 60 per cent rise in wages over the average. When compared to wages earned by those who have only a high school diploma, that translates into as much as \$750,000 in additional lifetime earnings for an advanced degree, and \$360,000 for a community college diploma”.

#### **4.12 Indicators of Stability and Quality of Life**

Hantsport is a very stable community, in which more than 80% of the population has lived here for three generations or more. In the 2005 Census, 66% of residents indicated that they were living at the same address five years ago. Another indicator of stability is in home ownership; 72% of dwellings are owned, and only 28% are rented.

The stability of the community is further reflected in its employment and income levels. The unemployment rate is only 5.5%, as compared to a provincial average of 9.1%. The median income for families is \$65,281, 15% higher than the provincial average of \$55,412.<sup>x</sup> The median income for one-parent families is \$40,905, 27% higher than the provincial average of \$29,917. Government transfers as a percentage of total income are below average -- 12.9% as compared to 15.1% provincially. The percentage of people in low income is also lower than the provincial rate, 8.9% compared to 13.8%.

Residents consider it a significant advantage that the school, businesses and homes are all in close proximity. Consider that more than 25% of people walk or bicycle to work, compared to only 8% provincially. Walking or cycling to work contributes to health, while reducing both individual cost of living expenses and collectively reducing impacts on the environment.

#### **4.13 The role of small rural schools in Economic Development**

The connections to economic development are obvious. Higher scholastic achievement tends to produce people who are more educated and more motivated than those who do poorly in school and/or who have a negative experience of school. Educated and motivated graduates become adults who tend to have higher earning powers, and therefore make a larger economic contribution to the society. Those who have a negative experience of school are more likely to drop out.

Creating smaller, more personalized learning environments where every student is held to high expectations, works. Students stay in school, are more motivated and achieve at higher levels.<sup>xi</sup>

A study by the NYU Institute for Education and Social Policy based on 1995-96 data in New York City found that schools with fewer than 600 students spent approximately 23 percent more per student than schools with more than 2,000 students. But because the small schools had a higher graduation rate, the cost per graduate was slightly less: \$49,553 compared to \$49,578 at large schools. (This is because the dropout rate at the small schools was lower.) While data is not conclusive, it generally costs more per student to run a small school than a large one, although the cost per graduate is less.<sup>xii</sup>

In *Education on a human scale: Small rural schools in a modern context* by Dr. Mike Corbett of Acadia University and Dennis Mulcahy of Memorial University, make the following case for small schools:

The system we work in today was invented nearly 100 years ago for another time and another mission - the processing of large numbers of students for rote skills and the education of only a few for knowledge work. It was never designed to teach all children to high levels. (Darling Hammond, 2006).

Corbett and Mulcahy challenge those who would advocate the destruction of community based schools to produce the evidence that shows this is a good thing.

#### **4.14 Business Support for the School**

The long term relationship between the community and the Town's businesses is reflected the deep involvement each has with the school. The business community supports the school through taxes, donations, school tours, sponsorships, and mentoring programs. Minas Basin, for example, offers school tours, regularly comes to speak to classes, and donated the sports fields used by the school, which are owned and maintained by the town. These community-driven facilities have helped build a reputation for the school as offering one of the best sports programs in the province. The school in turn supports the businesses by purchasing their goods and services. In many cases, students of the school become future employees.

CKF and Minas Basin have employed three generations of individuals from the town, the majority of which attended the Hantsport School. Maintaining the stability of the school has a direct link to maintaining the stability of the workforce, given that people prefer to live in a 10 minute proximity to the school in which their children attend, particularly at the elementary grade level.<sup>xiii</sup>

Focus Groups from the business community in Hantsport expect the following impacts should the school close:

- it would be a death blow
- detrimental to new people moving in
- population will decline
- it will decrease property values
- it will increase taxes
- it will increase expenses on parents (increased travel)
- it would be bad for environment re: bussing
- a negative impact on kids: involvement will go down
- will erode our sense of security
- kids will be able to hide and will fall through the cracks

## 5.0 Literature Review

A wide range of literature exploring the meaning, value and role of the community-based public school, the impact and history of school consolidations/closures and documents relating to the subject of and approaches to school closure processes have been consulted as a part of this study. What follows is a review of relevant literature for the use of decision-makers and stakeholders.

The movement toward school consolidation, in which small schools are eliminated in favour of larger ones, has its roots in the North American Industrial Revolution. Large schools were believed to be more economical and efficient and began, at that time, to be embraced as the one best model to pursue.<sup>xiv</sup> Under this model, it is believed that larger schools provide greater opportunities for diversity in curriculum and do so for fewer dollars. Closely linked to this philosophy is the assertion that small schools are, by association, deficient in their ability to provide a well-rounded, cost efficient education.

Consolidation has been a defining characteristic of educational history throughout the twentieth century. This characteristic was driven by a powerful assumption, albeit an unsubstantiated one, concerning the best way to go about the business of public schooling. And that assumption is that 'bigger is better.' Throughout the century, this unsupported educational policy was vehemently espoused even though it was demonstrably unkind to communities.<sup>xv</sup>

At its height, and certainly valid today, the quick rush to consolidation was considered successful by some because no one had challenged the assertion that bigger schools provided a higher quality education.

Education professionals genuinely regarded consolidation as a panacea, and consequently displayed considerable zeal in developing consolidation plans, marshalling favourable evidence, and lobbying in its behalf with state and local policymaking bodies.<sup>xvi</sup>

Commonly touted as positive ramifications of consolidation, cost savings and improved educational achievement have, in fact, not been confirmed as reliable outcomes. Studies over the past 40 years have revealed little evidence that consolidation of small schools into larger ones has necessarily reduced fiscal expenditures:

School consolidation produces less fiscal benefit and greater fiscal cost than it promises. While some costs, particularly administrative costs may decline in the short run, they are replaced by other expenditures, especially transportation and

more specialized staff. The loss of a school also negatively affects the tax base and fiscal capacity of a district.<sup>xvii</sup>

When examining the impact of school consolidation on student performance, studies have revealed that academic opportunities and achievement, while touted as inherent benefits of larger schools, has not been demonstrated.

Since there is not a universally agreed upon school or district size, is there evidence that school size does make a difference? A review of the literature certainly seems to indicate that small schools... have advantages over larger schools....<sup>xviii</sup>

Few educational issues are better documented than the effect of school size on student achievement and well-being, and the evidence overwhelmingly supports small schools and districts.<sup>xix</sup>

## 5.1 The Small Schools Movement

Perhaps in reaction to these outcomes, new research on the inherent values and benefits of small schools began to take hold. Current thinking shifted away from the large school model to one prioritizing lower student-teacher ratios, personalized relationships, inclusion, and sense of community for students, educators and parents.

Perhaps one of the biggest proponents of what has been termed the “small schools movement,” is the Gates Foundation. With a \$28 billion endowment, the Foundation has transformed the North American vision of education by both envisioning and operationalizing the philosophy that small, community-based schools are the best environments for student preparedness.

It’s not just about size...it’s always about how you deliver quality instruction in a way that kids learn. But size is an enabler. It allows you to have an environment in which kids will know each other and the adults will know the kids.<sup>xx</sup>

### Efficiency and Effectiveness

Researchers have focused their analyses of small schools on the matter of efficiency and effectiveness with surprising results:

When viewed on a cost-per- student basis, they (small schools) are somewhat more expensive. But when examined on the basis of the number of students

they graduate, they are less expensive than either medium or large high schools.<sup>xxi</sup>

A close examination of matters of these two characteristics (efficiency and effectiveness) particularly as it relates to the assertion that larger schools are able to provide a greater breadth of course offerings for far fewer dollars has also come under criticism. Research reveals that a 100% increase in enrolment yields only a 17% increase in variety of offerings.<sup>xxii</sup>

A common justification for the move away from small schools to larger ones rests on the assertion that large schools provide a broader curriculum, therefore improving educational achievement and preparedness for post secondary education. This assertion, however, has not held up under scrutiny. Instead, what has been confirmed is that the strength of the relationship between school size and curricular breadth diminishes as schools become larger.<sup>xxiii</sup> Further, only an estimated 5-12% of students in larger schools actually avail themselves of the extra courses typically offered in larger schools.<sup>xxiv</sup>

In short, studies have confirmed little appreciable difference in the offering of or participation in broader curriculum offerings in the large school context.

### School Size and Achievement

Numerous studies have explored the link between student achievement and school size and have concluded that achievement, attitude toward school, social behaviour problems, extracurricular participation, feelings of belongingness, interpersonal relations, attendance, drop-out rates, etc., are positively linked to small schools.

Numerous studies (Rogers, 1987, Fowler, 1992) examining college acceptance rates, grade point averages and the like, have confirmed that, contrary to popular myth, small schools prepare students for college careers as well or better than large schools.<sup>xxv</sup>

In short, those communities with the largest schools have the worst achievement, affective, and social outcomes. It is now understood that small schools provide an equal playing field where students from all socio-economic backgrounds have equal access to learning, participate with more regularity in all intra and extra curricular activities, and serve in leadership roles far more so than their counterparts in large schools.

Educators and researchers alike have closely examined the matter of cost containment or budgetary savings related to school consolidations, as this issue is often the driving force and justification for such actions. It has been noted that the significant and increasing costs of bussing, the need for additional specialized teaching staff, and facility maintenance, upkeep and improvements negate the savings associated with the elimination of some traditional teaching jobs.

Current research into school size is substantial (Cox, Lawrence, Howley and Bickel, Cotton Pickard, et. al) revealing consensus that there is a strong relationship between school size and achievement.

A large and increasingly consistent body of research suggests that we should be moving, not toward larger high schools, but expeditiously toward smaller ones. Even the popular literature of the past few years has been sprinkled with articles extolling the virtues and successes of small schools.<sup>xxvii</sup>

None of the research finds large schools superior to small schools in their achievement effects. Consequently, we may safely say that student achievement is at least equal – and often superior – to student achievement in large schools. Achievement measures used in the research include grades, test scores, honour roll membership, subject-area achievement, and assessment of higher-order thinking skills.<sup>xxviii</sup>

When considering how small is small enough, researchers have noted that effective small schools in fact come in all sizes. The key is that schools need to be small enough to foster an inclusive learning community.<sup>xxix</sup> The Gates Foundation has identified certain goals as it relates to school size, setting the number at 100 students per grade as the maximum for effective learning.

What is clearly articulated throughout the current literature is that students perform better and have an overall better school experience in smaller, community-based schools where the student-teacher ratio is low, where meaningful relationships between students and educators is possible and where students, teachers and parents can work together to create positive learning environments.

Further, it has been amply demonstrated through current research that educational policies should be established which recognize the need and value of small learning environments and, most important for rural areas, priority given to sustaining existing small schools.

Policy makers can change the rules under which...provincial systems operate, from big -school to small-school norms. ...stud(ies) show that large size is not the criterion of “excellence” it was once thought to be. And smaller schools have now been shown to exert an evidently robust effect on equity.<sup>xxx</sup>

The Rural School and Community Trust summarizes the issue succinctly:

...research on the effects of school size on student achievement and well-being is extensive, spans the political spectrum, and is unusually consistent in its findings.  
..the evidence overwhelmingly supports small schools and districts.<sup>xxx</sup>

### The Small School in Context

Neighbourhood public schools play a significant role in communities, serving children and their families, providing public space, offering programs, hosting events, building social connections and serving as a hub for many facets of community life.

The Hantsport School plays such a role. When reviewing various municipal documents, reports and studies, the school is often referred to as a key resource in the provision of various recreational, civic and social activities and is, in fact, the largest public venue available for such gatherings.

Echoed consistently by residents, the Hantsport School is considered critical to the town; its very presence contributing to a sense of community both literally and figuratively. Stakeholders articulate their commitment to the school, appreciate its relevance as a small school and recognize the incalculable value of its close proximity to their homes.

Schools are the hubs of their communities and have an importance that goes beyond education; they play a major role in the economic development of their communities and they make communities more attractive to newcomers. Businesses are more likely to move to communities with schools, and families will not move to communities without schools. As populations decline....boards reliant on per pupil funding close more schools. A vicious cycle ensues: fewer people move there, populations decline further, more schools close."<sup>xxxii</sup>

## 5.2 The Impact of School Closures

The closure/consolidation of small schools is not uncommon in Canada. Faced with declining enrolments and increasingly tight budgets, School Boards often turn to consolidation as a means to manage their fiscal challenges. While there is ample documentation of public input in response to planned consolidations, it appears that concerns over short-term financial constraints often prevails in decision-making.

As has been discussed earlier, the consolidation of small schools into larger ones does not generally result in substantial cost savings as expenses related to bussing, the need for increased specialized staff and infrastructure costs associated with the shift in student populations are significant.

Intimately linked, but often ignored, are the economic, social and cultural impacts to communities and districts resulting from consolidation. These repercussions profoundly and irretrievably damage the community's ability to sustain itself.

Researchers have taken a hard look at the economic implications of school consolidations, discovering that communities who lose their school had a lower social and fiscal capacity compared to towns that maintained their schools. Other studies indicate that when towns lose their schools, the tax base and fiscal capacity in the district is negatively impacted.

The economic implications associated with school closures are significant and will be addressed in detail in the section entitled "Economic Scan."

The Ontario Education Advocacy Organization has explored the impact of school closures in their Province, noting the important role schools play in the community and highlighting the many and varied negative impact closures have on these communities. They include:

- Loss of community connections
- Increased length of school days as a result of bussing
- Decreased participation in extracurricular activities
- Decrease in parent volunteerism
- Loss of public space
- Deterrent to families remaining in their community
- Negative impact on property values, businesses, and community viability

Closing local schools touches entire communities, not just the students, especially in rural areas. In many small, rural towns, local schools are the heart and soul of the community – its historical and cultural center. 'Of all civic institutions in a village...the school serves the broadest constituency. Not only do schools meet the educational needs of a community and may be a source of employment for village residents, the local school also provides social, cultural, and recreational opportunities. It is a place where generations come together and where community identify is forged.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

There is little doubt that school closures as the result of consolidation wreak significant havoc upon communities.

The impacts of the loss of The Hanstport School will mirror those impacts experienced by communities across North America; substantial economic and social upheaval, loss of a sense of community, loss of the largest public space in town, and, in general, community sustainability.

Many of the closures are being made in the name of ‘efficiency.’ Economic values are being given a primary place, ignoring the values of community, social connections and environment that should also be factors in deciding about the future of schools. A belief in the central role that a school can play in the social health of a community and sense of belonging of the young is a shared value of those who have been engaged in the struggles to keep a school open in their community.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

The serious nature of the impacts of school closure/consolidation on the community suggests that decision makers and policy setters carefully consider the process of evaluation in these matters. The conclusion of the Consolidation Task Force Committee of the NREA states that:

Rural communities should make every possible effort to maintain a physical school presence, and rural and school leaders should take into account every possible variable...when considering school consolidation.

To that end, much has been written of late with regard to this issue.

### **5.3 Approaches to Evaluation**

#### Provincial Standards

In March, 2006 the government of Nova Scotia struck a School Closure Process Review Committee to review sections of the Education Act as well as school board policy as it relates to school closures. The project involved opportunity for stakeholder input from citizens and both elected and appointed school board officials.

Their recommendations included the following (selected):

1. Revision of the Education Act to remove the word ‘closure’ from references to the process, in recognition that closure is only one possible outcome of a school review.
2. Revision of the Ministerial Education Act Regulation to change and *bring greater clarity* to province-wide criteria for identification of a school(s) for review and *mitigating factors*. (emphasis added)

These mitigating factors include:

- Municipal infrastructure strategies
- Essential School as determined by geographic isolation
- Potential development in the area, including projected economic activity

Notable in this recommendation is the following:

The process by which schools are identified for review needs to be clear, objective, and transparent. ..It is recommended that current identification criteria be clarified and a common definition of each criterion applied across the province.

The initial review should be system-wide in its scope, taking into consideration all schools within a region, and include consideration of the most current information available....<sup>xxxv</sup>

3. A comprehensive School Review Report should be developed by boards. All pertinent information and analysis of key factors are to be taken into consideration, including the following:

- Ability of existing school to deliver the public school program
- Any anticipated benefits to students of attending another school
- Student transportation cost and time
- Student access to and participation in extra-curricular activities
- Impact on the receiving school
- Available information on the capital construction planning for the school region
- Operational efficiencies that could be gained by closing the school
- Operational requirements of keeping the school open
- Consideration of staffing allocation
- Impact of closing the existing school on the school community
- Effect on community use of facilities and regional or community programs administered from the school facility
- Impact on educational and social opportunities for community members

Notable in these recommendations is the inclusion of the impact of school closures on the affected community, and the embracing of the concept of common criterion definitions across the province in an effort to level the playing field.

Cognizant of the potentially devastating impacts of the closure of small, rural schools, the Nova Scotia Teacher's Union (NTSU) authored a report in 2006 entitled "Review of the School Closure Process in Nova Scotia" in which they outline a series of process recommendations School Boards should adopt when considering such moves.

They begin by stating:

The Nova Scotia Teachers Union recognizes that the closure or restructure of a school within a community is a matter of such consequence to that community that the closest cooperation between school authorities and the community is necessary.

The NSTU then outlines the following principles (selected):

- The school is an essential part of the identity of a community
- The sense of belonging to a local community is an important part of the quality of life in the Province of Nova Scotia
- Schools should not be declared surplus solely on the basis of declining enrolment
- It should be recognized that excess capacity may be temporary, given that changes in school enrolment patterns can be anticipated in the future
- The utilization of surplus schools for additional educational purposes should be given serious consideration

One can clearly see the emphasis and consensus between the Province and the NSTU in identifying the impacts on the affected community as critical considerations for thoughtful, thorough reviews by school boards.

The 2007 report also noted the rights of communities to challenge a closure decision in court, noting that it should be considered in the development of policies and procedures around the closure process.<sup>xxxvi, xxxvii</sup>

## Case Law

Canadian case law has additional insights to offer communities affected by potential school closures or consolidations.

The concept of the *duty of fairness* has been explored by the courts which can be meaningfully applied to these matters:

In *Baker v. Canada*, [1999] 2 S.C.R. 817, [1999] S.J.C. No. 39, the Supreme Court of Canada set out a list of factors to be considered in determining the appropriate duty of fairness in a given set of circumstances. These include:

- (a) The nature of the decision to the individual being made and the process followed in making it;
- (b) The nature of the statutory scheme and the terms of the statute pursuant to which the body operates;
- (c) The importance of the decision to the individual or individuals affected'
- (d) The legitimate expectations of the person challenging the decision; and
- (e) The choices of procedure made by the agency itself.

The Court of Appeals in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia have both discussed *what constitutes fairness* in a school closure situation:

They must be meaningful and realistic, designed to ensure that there is a real opportunity for persons affected to take reasonable steps to try and influence the decision...<sup>xxxviii</sup>

In *Potter v. Canada*, the duty of fairness specifically as it relates to school closures states the following:

...the duty of fairness owed by the Board to parents of children attending its schools when the Board considers the closure of a particular school or schools requires the Board to give the parents a meaningful opportunity to present their case fully and fairly.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Finally, the courts have laid out fundamental requirements as it relates to the process of evaluating a possible school closure. These are:

1. *Notice*, which needs to be effective and comprehensive
2. *The right to be heard*, directing Boards to provide as much information as possible as soon as possible, to provide for structured consultations and to listen with an open mind
3. Openness and accountability, directing Boards to ensure the reasons for considering closure are well known before decisions are made<sup>xl</sup>

One can expect the courts to guard the procedural rights of parents and their children with regard to notice and the right to be heard. Expectations of Boards include adherence to the duty of fairness, to take into consideration the impacts on the community, and to remain open and accountable throughout the process.

To summarize, Provincial standards and recommendations have recognized the necessity for school boards to ensure consistency and openness, and to consider mitigating factors *before* making a decision to close a school. This includes consideration of social, economic and cultural impacts a closure may have on a community.

Communities have the right to appeal a closure or consolidation decision. Case law has clearly articulated the requirement that Boards uphold the concept of *duty of fairness* in these matters and to ensure that stakeholders have not only been heard, but listened to. Further, Boards are expected to conduct the evaluation process openly, with adequate notice and to provide all relevant information and data to stakeholders.

## 6.0 Response to AVRSB Report

Upon a careful review of the AVRSB facilities report, the following comments and questions are respectfully submitted:

### AVRSB REPORT: NARRATIVE SECTION

#### *SECTION: Grounds*

It is suggested that there is a “limited area” for use and/or expansion at the Hantsport School. It should be noted that the playing fields immediately adjacent to the school are town owned property that is 1) available by written agreement for the use of students and; 2) could be considered for expansion purposes by Town Council.

#### *SECTION: Interior*

It is suggested that “...the finishes, casework, etc. are old and in need of upgrades.” It should be noted that these elements are in relatively good condition not necessarily requiring replacement but, in most cases, cosmetic improvements.

Several notes were made with regard to the gymnasium. While the descriptors of the gymnasium construction itself are correct, it should be noted that there are no flooding issues in this area, nor have there been for quite some time. This facility is well used by both students and the community who enjoy the space and do not describe it as a resource in need of replacement.

#### *SECTION: Executive Summary*

The summary describes the Hantsport School as 45 years old “...and in need of a major upgrade to continue to serve students in the future.” While it is recognized that the school has suffered from longstanding, substantial deferred maintenance and is need of a combination of targeted upgrades and overall cosmetic improvements, the extent of its needs may not fairly be characterized as “major.”

### AVRSB REPORT: BUILDING PROFILE

- \$2 million has been estimated as the cost associated with the replacement of the gymnasium. It is unclear whether or not such expenditure is necessary or justified. As a school serving the needs of P-9 students, indoor athletic facilities need not look like those provided to high school students.
- \$300,000 has been estimated as the cost associated with replacing the ventilation system throughout the facility. It is unclear that such an upgrade is necessary without further investigation into air quality and the like. It has been suggested that a more straightforward cosmetic approach may suffice.

## Summary Comments

In general, the Hantsport School is described in fairly negative terms as it relates to its facility needs, most notably due to two points:

1. The recommendation that the facility requires a new gymnasium for a total estimated cost of \$2 million. As discussed above, there exists considerable doubt in the community that the facility actually requires such an investment. While residents and administration alike would welcome a new athletic facility, there is consensus that it is not necessarily warranted as the facility is meeting the needs of students at the present time. Further, results of the Public Participation process just completed (See Section 7), community members describe the gymnasium at the Hantsport School in highly positive terms, both in terms of its value to those using the facility for after-hours athletic activities, and in terms of its value to students. Contrary to suggestions contained within the report, the gymnasium is not experiencing any mechanical or structural issues.

When incorporating these points, the Hantsport School's improvement costs are estimated to be approximately \$800,000.

2. The availability of grounds with which to expand the facility is described as limited. Administration and community members alike note the municipally owned playing fields adjacent to the school (which will have undergone major upgrades in the fall of 2008 totalling \$60,000) may well be available for footprint expansion should that be deemed advisable.

Town owned open space immediately adjacent to the school would suggest excellent potential for future expansion.

Further, the Hantsport School benefited from a recently upgraded public water/wastewater infrastructure, enhanced outdoor athletic facilities and improved pedestrian access as a result of the completion of town-wide sidewalk improvements. (See Section 2.4)

**It is respectfully suggested that any/all assumptions utilized to produce this preliminary facility report be reviewed in far greater detail in order to more meaningfully quantify the infrastructure needs and/or limitations of the Hantsport School.**

## **7.0 Public Participation Process**

As has been noted by the School Closure Process Review Committee, articulated in the Education Act, outlined by the NSTU and exhaustively covered in case law, *consideration of the impacts a school closure will have on a community* must be assessed before any closure or consolidation plans are shaped. Such impacts are categorized as “*mitigating factors*” and have been afforded far greater importance by practitioners, lawmakers and elected officials in the recent past than ever before.

Gaining an understanding of community sentiment as it relates to the perceptions, performance and value of the Hantsport School is essential. Equally important is assessing the impact a school closure will have on the community as a whole. In this way, then, engaging and capturing shared community sentiments are the heart of any study exploring a potential school closure.

### **7.1 Overview**

In an effort to determine community consensus on the following:

- Community held values as it relates to the Hantsport School
- Perceptions of school performance
- Articulated value of the Hantsport School to the wider community
- Impacts a school closure would have on the community

A public participation program was designed. The public engagement activities undertaken as a part of this study sought to accomplish the following:

- Ensure diverse participation by performing effective outreach
- Engagement of the community in a free and open dialogue
- Discernment of consensus in and among participant groups and testing of such data through random, follow-up telephone interviews.

### **7.2 Structure**

Cognizant of the importance of this aspect of the study, much care was taken to advertise the initiation of the study and the town’s interest in hearing from its citizens. To that end, flyers were mailed to every household and several advertisements were placed in various local publications. A feature article was also written and published in the Hants Journal prior to the engagement activities.

An outside consultant was hired to manage and facilitate the public engagement activities, ensuring neutrality.

All of the activities outlined as a part of this public participation process were carried out in the first 3 weeks of September, 2008.

### **7.3 Focus Groups**

#### **Overview**

In the interest of added value, common interest and/or demography characteristics were incorporated into the public input sessions. To this end, four focus groups were held, including:

- Elected and appointed town officials
- Business Owners
- Seniors/Retirees
- Working Adults/General Meeting

All focus groups were held in the Hantsport Town Hall and lasted approximately 1 ½ hours. All groups were asked the same set of core questions, with a few additional questions posed specifically to the business community.

Participants were asked to sign in, and none were provided questions in advance.

Each session was facilitated to insure maximum participation by all attendees. Responses to questions were noted on large newsprint for all to see.

Utilizing well-tested citizen engagement processes, a series of questions intended to elicit feedback from stakeholders was designed. (See addendum) These areas of inquiry were intended to fill in information gaps and establish community consensus on this matter.

#### **Outcomes**

Attendance at the Focus Groups was excellent, with 7.1% of the total population represented. The broad attendance speaks to the community's commitment to and interest in the future of the Hantsport School.

Consensus with regard to the value of the school, the role of the school in the wider community and the impact a school closure or consolidation would have on the Town of Hantsport were shared in and among all demographic groups and were reflected in the outcomes of the focus groups themselves.

**Question: Please describe the reputation of the Hantsport School**

**Consensus Responses:**

A school that produces leaders, both academically and athletically

A small school providing an excellent education

Reflects the community, is the hub of the community, the community "center."

Nationally recognized athletic programs, great sports teams, everyone plays

**Question: What are the school's strengths?**

**Consensus responses:**

Very good relationships between students/teachers/parents

Very good relationship/partnerships with local businesses

Its strong connection with the community

Its proximity/walkability

The Library

Excellent music programs, drama programs, etc.

Small/Small class sizes

Community Cooperation

After school activities

Sports fields/playing fields

Teachers who know their students/kids don't get lost

**Question: What are the school's weaknesses?**

**Consensus Responses:**

Age and condition of building/exterior appearance

**Question: What one word describes the Hantsport School?**

**Consensus responses:**

The Hub

The Core

Integral

The foundation

Proud

**Question: What is role of the Hantsport School in the larger/wider community?**

**Consensus Responses:**

The heart of the community

The community center (literally and figuratively)

It offers social/cultural/athletic activities for all age groups

It is a draw for families, young families

A magnet

Critical to future viability, we'd be dead without it

**Question: What do you feel the impact would be if the school were to close?**

**Consensus Responses:**

A death blow/community would die

Real estate values will decline/plummet

Population decline/people will leave

Families will not choose to move here

Businesses will leave/Every business will be affected/loss of shopping essentials in town

**Question: Please describe your association with the school as a volunteer?**

**Consensus Responses:**

Science Fair, Book Fair

Coach

Trips

Home and School

Carnivals

Reading to kids/literacy

Proctor

Scholarships

Driving/Transportation

Drama instructor

**Question: What do you use the school facility for?**

**Consensus Responses:**

Library

Civic events

Cultural Events  
Athletic games and evening sports  
Volunteering

#### Questions Specific to the Business Owners Focus Group

**Question: Please provide a picture of the local economic development situation**

**Responses:**

Many graduates of the school have gone on to become employees of local businesses  
School is a feeder for future employees

**Question: Why are the businesses here in this community?**

**Responses:**

Strong link between major businesses and the location of school in town  
There is a big future here in industry  
No school = businesses will have to relocate

**Question: Please describe the relationship between the school and business**

**Responses:**

Long history  
Quality of life  
Lots of support between business and the school  
Kinds with special needs use local businesses to learn life skills

**Question: Please describe the future of business in town**

**Responses:**

Opportunities:

Twinning of highway will bring a lot of new businesses and residents. Very important to us.  
High speed coming in  
The growth of large industries bringing a lot of visibility to town

Threats:

If school closes, businesses will close  
Fear of very negative repercussions if school closes  
Lots of employees modify schedules to accommodate student activities. Will not be possible if kids are a distance away.

## End Notes:

100% of attendees want the school to remain in community  
90-99% of attendees have or had kids attend the Hantsport School

## Comments

Focus Group attendees were energized, more than willing to contribute their input and truly concerned about the future of the Hantsport School. With regularity, participants expressed the interdependent relationship between the school and the community; each offering the other immeasurable benefits, each strengthening the other.

**Countless numbers of attendees expressed that their choice to move to Hantsport was significantly influenced by the in-town location of the school.** Several participants indicated this fact was critical in their decision-making.

Extended comments with regard to the nature and benefits of small schools ensued, highlighting the fact that, by its nature, the **Hantsport School insured students a lack of anonymity, the benefits of which were that all students gained a sense of self, leadership skills and mentoring by teachers; all attributes contributing to their on-going success.**

Elders, retirees and those with grown children expressed their dedication to the school and its necessity to the success of the community as fiercely as those with school-aged children. They echoed one another in stating that the presence of kids walking to and from school each day gave them hope, increased their sense of security and safety, and continued to influence their decisions to remain residents of Hantsport.

**The vast majority of participants visit the school 2-3 times a month, to use the library, to volunteer, to attend a sporting event or participate in civic or cultural activities.** A smaller, but still significant group indicated they attended the school or used school facilities at least once a week. A noticeably small faction noted they used school facilities a few times a year. **All said, residents are clearly invested in, and involved with the Hantsport School. *It is the largest single public venue in town, where countless activities occur.***

## Mitigating Factors

The public participation clearly revealed several significant **mitigating factors** that would be the result of a school closure. These include:

1. Hantsport would become the only incorporated town in the Province without its own school.
2. Students and residents would lose their library.
3. The Hantsport School serves as the “hub” of the community. Its facilities are used by students and adults throughout the year for any number of cultural, athletic and civic events.
4. Business owners would be significantly and adversely affected, as their business models are highly dependent upon student and administrative traffic for their livelihoods.
5. The Town of Hantsport would lose its only large public gathering space.
6. New families seeking to relocate will not choose Hantsport.
7. Real estate values will decline
8. The community’s sense of identity, safety and cohesion will be significantly impaired.

## 7.5 Testimonials

As a part of the public process undertaken as a part of this project, stakeholders were encouraged to tell their own story, as it were, about their relationship to and feelings about the Hantsport School. (See Addendum)

Some 30 personal testimonials have been submitted as a part of this study. Residents, elected officials and other stakeholders who took the time to provide their stories express deep concern for the future of the community should the Hantsport School close. The following excerpts reflect their sentiments:

*“People who choose to live in the rural area expect to have their children bussed to school. Those living in an urban area shouldn’t have to face this option.”*

*“Close our school and you would see the demise of our community...”*

*“To lose our school would be to lose our community...Being a small school our students get more personal attention. Parents and teachers know each other and the school faculty is well supported...”*

*“We have found our school to be the nucleus of the community for all ages, be it enjoying concerts, after school activities...library, book fairs, fall fair, science fair...to name a few...”*

*"The Town of Hantsport is a quiet community with a lot to offer and having the school here makes the community."*

*"We've no children..but we know and appreciate what having a school in town means to the wellness of community. ..a school is an integral part of a community's identity and strength."*

*"The community revolves around the school. I bought my home in town so that...my children...could walk a short distance to school. I believe that school is the heart of this wonderful town."*

*"It is the central part of the community...I volunteer in many capacities and really enjoy it."*

*"Our regional library is unique. It is a joy to be there when school is let out and the children stream in with their books. "*

*"We, the members of HABA would like to go on record that we are opposed to the possible closure of Hantsport School. ..We consider the school to be the hub of the community, not only offering the youth...an excellent education, but also the opportunity for active sports and competitive challenges in the sciences and musical programs as well"*

*"As we all will agree schools are the centerpiece of any community fortunate enough to be blessed with such a facility. I know from many visits to Hantsport...great things are happening there." Chuck Porter, MLA*

*"I can't imagine Hantsport without a school. Our historical society has a picture of the first Hantsport School in the 1800s, and here we are in 2008 considering the possible closure of our school. Is that progress?"*

*"The school was a key point in our decision to move to this town. I feel strongly that the loss of the community school will negatively affect the potential to attract young couples to live in Hantsport."*

*"Historic Hantsport School is indeed the centre of our community..."*

*"I would describe this school as the glue that brings us together as a viable, caring community...Loss of this school, as I see it, will rip the foundation out from under this little community, because we function around the school and its students. The school and its students are woven into the very fabric of this town."*

## 7.6 Consensus

Hantsport residents, business owners, municipal leaders and educators have, through the public participation process, expressed remarkable unity with regard to the value, role and performance of the Hantsport School to the wider community.

Determining consensus on this matter was not difficult:

- Residents, business owners and municipal leaders want their school to remain in the community.
- Stakeholders are highly invested in their school, both in its mission to educate youth, and in its wider role as the hub of the community.
- The community articulated the unique and significant role this school plays in Hantsport: it is the center of this community.
- Residents and business owners alike deeply fear the impacts a school closure will have on their community. Based on current research, their fears are well justified.
- Many new families shared their choice to select Hantsport as their home was greatly influenced by the location of the school.
- Stakeholders very much appreciate the small nature and culture of their school. They feel it provides a supportive atmosphere in which students and teachers know one another, where students get individual attention, and where policies such as the “no cut” in athletics, shapes Hantsport graduates as leaders. Research into the role and value of small schools (discussed in depth in Section 5.0) confirms these as reliable outcomes of small schools.



- <sup>i</sup> Jimerson, Laura, "Breaking the Fall: Cushioning the Impact of Rural Declining Enrolment," Rural Trust Policy Brief Series on Rural Education, 7, 2006
- <sup>ii</sup> AVSRB, "Eastern Kings Schools Review, 2008, Introduction
- <sup>iii</sup> IBID
- <sup>iv</sup> Kay, Steve, "Considerations in Evaluating School Consolidation Proposals," Small School Forum, Fall 1982, 8-10
- <sup>v</sup> *Hants County Community Profile*, Hants Regional Development Authority.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Economic Development Through Bandwidth*, George S. Ford, Applied Economic Studies.
- <sup>vii</sup> Final Report - Highway 101 Exit 8A Alternatives, TPW
- <sup>viii</sup> Nova Scotia Department of Transportation and Public Works, 2000.
- <sup>ix</sup> FP Markets Demographics, 2005.
- <sup>x</sup> Statistics Canada 2005 Census.
- <sup>xi</sup> Tom Vander Ark (2006), executive director of the education division of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- <sup>xii</sup> Rethinking Schools Online; *The Gates Foundation and Small Schools*, by Barbara Miner, 2005.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Does Close Count? School Proximity, School Quality, and Residential Property Values, *Journal of Agriculture and Applied Economics*, 2007.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Kay, S., Hargood, N., and Russell, R.K., "The effect of Consolidation on Fidelity to Traditional Value Systems," Frankfort; Kentucky State University \community Research Service, 1982
- <sup>xv</sup> Theobald, Paul & Hachtigal, Paul "Culture, Community and the promise of Rural Education," Phi Delta Kappan, October 1995, 132-135
- <sup>xvi</sup> Sher, Jonathan, |Education in Rural America: A Reassessment of Conventional Wisdom," Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1992
- <sup>xvii</sup> Rural School and Community Trust "The Fiscal Impacts of School Consolidation: Researched Based Conclusions, 2004
- <sup>xviii</sup> Bard, J., Garderner, C., Wieland, R., National Rural Education Association Report, NREA Consolidation Task Force, The Rural Educator, Vol. 27, #2, 2006, p44
- <sup>xix</sup> Rural School and Community Trust, |Anything But Research Based: State Initiatives to Consolidate Schools and Districts," Rural Policy Matters, 8(3), 2006
- <sup>xx</sup> Shelton, Jim, Gates Foundation Program Director, Summer 2005, The Gates Foundation and Small Schools website
- <sup>xxi</sup> Raywid, Mary Ann, "Current Literature on Small Schools," ERIC Digest EDO-RC-98-8, January, 1999
- <sup>xxii</sup> Pittman, R.B., and Haughwout, P., "Influence of high school size on Dropout Rate," Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 9, 4 337-343, 1987
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Cotton, K., "School Size, Climate and Student Performance," School Improvement Research Series, 1996
- <sup>xxiv</sup> IBID
- <sup>xxv</sup> IBID
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Davidson, Jill, "Elements of Smallness Create Conditions for Success," *Horace*, Vol. 19, #1, Fall 2002
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Gregory, T., "Small is Too Big: achieving a critical anti-mass in the high school," Minneapolis, Minnesota, Minnesota University, 1992
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Cotton, K., "School Size, Climate and Student Performance," School Improvement Research Series, 1996
- <sup>xxix</sup> Howley, C., Howley, A., "School Size and the Influence of Socioeconomic Status on Student Achievement: Confronting the Threat of Size Bias in National Data Sets," Education Policy Analysis Archives, 12, 52, 2004
- <sup>xxx</sup> IBID
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Rural School and Community Trust "The Fiscal Impacts of School Consolidation: Researched Based Conclusions, 2006
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Ontario Education Advocacy Organization, 2003
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Jimerson, Laura, "Breaking the Fall: Cushioning the Impact of Rural Declining Enrolment," Rural Trust Policy Brief Series on Rural Education, 7, 2006
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Kuehn, Larry, School Closure Seminar, Vancouver, BC, 2008
- <sup>xxxv</sup> School Closure Process Review, Review Committee Report and Recommendations, January 2007
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Potter v. Halifax Regional School Board, 2001 NSSC 106. In the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> School Closure Process review – revue Committee Report and recommendations, January, 2007
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Nova Scotia Court of Appeals, Green v. Elliott, p. 47
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Potter v. Canada, supra note 5 at para. 50
- <sup>xl</sup> Elliot v. Canada, supra, para. 41