

Holmesville Public School - Colborne Central Public  
School Accommodation Review Committee

*If consolidation leads to saving money but impacts negatively  
upon student performance, then what has really been saved.  
(Whitham, 1997)*

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Option 1

**Option:**

- Close Colborne Central Public School and send all of its students to Holmesville Public School amalgamating existing boundaries for both schools. *(note: it is expected that both schools will have the promised transition year - school year 2012-2013 - to prepare for amalgamation) (note 2: it is requested that border crossing requests be giving special consideration during the transition from 2 schools to one)*

**Rationale:**

**Value to Student:**

- Sustains the smaller school atmosphere that increases student success by providing a secure, comfortable, learning environment. Provides the environment for success observed in research (see references) by discouraging bullying, reducing the drop out rate and encouraging greater participation in extra-curricular activities.
- Recognizes student achievement by amalgamating two schools with above average EQAO results and prevents unnecessary and unwanted separation of friends and neighbours (see survey data)
- Maintains the rural citizenship qualities both communities expect from their children and educational institutions (see Survey data from both schools)
- Provides excellent green space per student therefore avoiding the necessity of staggered recesses and segregation of students
- Avoids crowded facilities and the resulting issues (insufficient gymnasium and outdoor recreation space)
- Allows the congregation of students and staff in grades K-8 in sufficient numbers to adequately provide resources and job-imbedded professional development
- Increases utilization of the outdoor learning habitat at Holmesville Public School
- Recognizes that some students due to various reasons may wish to cross-border, thus potentially improving enrolment at several schools
- Creates a positive situation where the receiving school is eager to welcome new students in order to maintain their learning environment
- Provides sufficient school grounds for healthy physical activity and extracurricular activities
- Ensures adequate physical space to support student learning

### **Value to the Board**

- Provides increased opportunities for a variety of grade configurations
- Makes more efficient use of existing capacity at Holmesville Public School creating a sustainable rural school (see Capacity and Projected Enrolment Data)
- Uses board resources efficiently by utilizing smart boards and computer technology already available at Holmesville Public School and Colborne Central Public School
- Recognizes the current and future limitations on Ministry funding available for ongoing maintenance of our school buildings
- Allows the congregation of students and staff in grades K-8 in sufficient numbers to adequately provide resources and job-imbedded professional development
- Requires no additional construction/capital expenditure
- Utilizes a facility with minimal projected maintenance (see Facilities Review) and significant recent improvements including a new boiler, septic system and well
- Recognizes that the second Ministry priority is to fund consolidation of schools and creates an opportunity to request such funding.
- Provides the option for parents near to schools not included in the accommodation review to cross-border, thus potentially improving enrolment at several schools
- Publicly affirms the board's commitment to excellence in education and demonstrates the board's support for schools that outperform. Earns the board recognition and respect for supporting student success
- Demonstrates the board's endorsement of strong extra-curricular activities that are provided by motivated staff and volunteers i.e. band, choir, sports
- Allows the Board to satisfy the majority of parents in a way that has not happened in past Accommodation Reviews, creating goodwill between the community and the board
- Helps to maintain enrolment in the AMDSB as parents concerned with education quality at receiving schools under the staff option may choose opportunities outside the AMDSB
- Provides a model to be shared with others of sustainable, successful maintenance of rural education.
- Implements a suggestion previously made by AMDSB staff of closing Colborne and sending its students to Holmesville (2002 ARC report)

### **Value to the Community**

- Meets parents expectations for a JK-grade 8 elementary school
- Meets parents expectations for a rural school option
- Combines two communities with similar goals and beliefs
- Amalgamates the extensive fundraising done by both communities to support their schools
- Amalgamates two schools renowned for community involvement and sustains the rural communities associated with those schools
- Ensures that the rural areas associated with Colborne and Holmesville remain attractive to families with school age children because both areas still provide a rural education opportunity
- Provides recreational facilities for the local and school community to use after hours

### **Value to Economy:**

- Helps prevent the decline and deterioration of rural areas by sustaining infrastructure necessary to stimulate growth and development
- Facilitates the retention of the rural population and thus sustains the local municipalities and county. Ensures the ability of the local governments to provide necessary services.
- Maintains property values in rural areas and thus the tax base as well
- Research shows that rural communities with schools have higher property values, less people on social assistance, and more professional workers and entrepreneurs.

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Remarks on Staff Option

1. Creates a “super-school” when smaller, sustainable education has been shown to increase student success.
2. Unnecessarily closes two rural schools, and provides only town school options, thus it does not maintain the rural lifestyle chosen by rural parents.
3. Requires unnecessary construction of additional classroom space at GPS
4. Economically damages rural communities by reducing the need for local businesses, lowering property values, making it difficult for local municipalities to maintain infrastructure when fewer people are choosing to live in an area due to lack of schooling available.
5. Creates divisiveness between students e.g. a) If roads are closed and rural students can't attend school but town students can. b) Town students have the ability to go home for lunch while bussed students do not
6. Claims to save \$400, 000 in staffing, yet board staff stated that most/all of those staff will simply be relocated to other positions. Thus the savings require further clarification for all options to be fairly considered.
7. The value to the student in this proposal is unclear and it seems that the sole value is cost savings that in actuality are relatively minor.
8. Separates students, neighbours, friends, communities unnecessarily.
9. Adds students to GPS when facilities already seem insufficient - students are having gym class in a book room, lunches are staggered, students have segregated play areas outside, and green space is limited.
10. Concerns parents when students are being added to facilities with poorer EQAO results.
11. Exacerbates existing safety and space issues related to bussing, parking, pick up, etc. at GPS
12. Demonstrates the financially hazardous government attitude that there are different "pots" of money that can be drawn upon. There is one taxpayer regardless of which government budget -the money comes from. i.e. the plan anticipates receiving funding for construction from early years learning while not being able to do critical basic maintenance on existing structures.
13. Closes two top achieving schools in the area and fails to recognize the complicated combination of factors that are required to produce excellence.

# Holmesville Public School - Colborne Central Public School Accommodation Review Committee Additional Information

## ***Observations: Holmesville Public School Programming and Teacher / Parent Feedback:***

- The Avon Maitland District School board Report for Holmesville Public School indicates staff feel there are many benefits to students by keeping Holmesville School open.
- Holmesville and Colborne Public Schools have:
  - Good EQAO results;
  - A positive school environment that encourages learning;
  - Intramural sports open to all students ;
  - Outside programming available (e.g. music lessons and band).
- There is improved accountability due to established relationships, parental involvement and a sense of community
- Teachers, children and parents truly get to know and respect each other in a small school environment. Respect is the very foundation of education as per research published by the University of Guelph: “Rural Schools and Educational Reform.”

## ***Scientific Literature Supporting the Rural School:***

There is a wealth of literature supporting smaller schools. For example, a recent University of Guelph research study on “Rural Schools and Educational Reform” lists the following as “advantages of small schools”:

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

The University of Guelph document goes on to say:

Education is about more than simply class room learning, but much of the education of students occurs as a result of being an active and participating member of a community. It is here where students learn their first lessons in civic and social responsibility. It is here where students learn lessons in compassion, empathy, and leadership. Not through textbooks and classrooms but through their active participation and involvement in their school community.” “It is only a select group of students in large schools who have the opportunity to become members of communities that share time and space with adults.

In their closing points, the Guelph researchers stress (and we agree): *“If one thing is clear from the research it is that small schools are worth saving and that small schools are worth the cost.”*

The same conclusion is reached in a study by Mike Corbett and Dennis Mulcahy (cited below). Research collected from The Rural School and Community Trust (Reference <http://friendsofwcs.com/2010/small-schools/>) says the following:

**Small Schools Get Better Academic Results.** Student achievement is higher in small schools, and even higher in small schools operating in small districts. Small schools also have much lower drop-out rates and more graduates who go to college. Students from smaller schools do as well or better in college than those from larger schools. Small schools are particularly effective for students from low-income families and for students of color, helping to reduce the achievement gap.

**Small Schools Promote Better Student Behaviour.** A 1999 U.S. Department of Education study found that schools with more than 1000 students had far higher rates of violent student behaviour than schools with fewer than 300 students, and teachers and students in small schools were far less likely to be victims of crime. Small schools allow teachers to focus more on teaching and less on discipline.

**Small Schools Have Higher Rates of Participation.** Students who participate in activities at school have higher achievement, are less likely to drop out, have higher self-esteem, attend school more regularly, and have fewer behaviour problems. Small schools create more opportunities for participation, so a larger percentage of students participate and they participate in more kinds of activities. Small schools also have higher levels of parental involvement, and parental involvement is a critical factor in student success. Parents can be most involved if all their children attend one K-12 school instead of going to separate elementary, middle and high schools. In sparsely settled areas, a large school would have to cover a very large area, and travel time alone discourages many parents and students from participating in activities.

**Small Schools Are More Cost-Effective.** Making schools bigger does not produce significant cost savings. School consolidation often increases

transportation costs, offsetting any savings. Increased behaviour problems and dropout rates add “hidden” costs. Because small schools graduate a higher percentage of students, their cost per graduate is comparable to larger schools even if cost per enrolled student is not. In addition, consolidation causes budget problems if state funding is tied to attendance rates, because attendance rates decrease as school size and travel distance increase.

**Small Schools Strengthen Local Economies.** Rural communities with schools seem to fare better economically than similar communities without schools. One study found that rural communities with schools had higher rates of growth, higher housing values, a lower percentage of households receiving public assistance, more professional workers and entrepreneurs, and higher per capita self-employment income than rural communities that had lost their schools. Another study confirmed the importance of schools in retaining population. Very little of the money spent bussing students to larger schools benefits the local economy, as it might if state and local policy were to put that money to use adequately funding small schools. Finally, because high school drop-outs earn less than high school graduates and are far more likely to be unemployed, to depend on public assistance, and to end up in prison, small schools help increase the number of economically productive adults and cut government costs.

## CONCLUSION

Holmesville and Colborne Central Public Schools have excellent reputations and deservedly so. They have produced large numbers of graduates who are disciplined, motivated and successful in their lives.

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#The results that both Holmesville and Colborne achieve are examples of what the AMDSB aspire to. To build on this and attempt to model it elsewhere is intuitively more beneficial to our future than the option of effectively punishing those responsible for exceptional behaviour and performance.

Life starts with a good base, and primary school is a critical influence. Therefore, we strongly urge the AMDS to keep Holmesville Public School as a rural small school option in Central Huron.

The consensus of those attending the first ARC meeting was to have a solution in the best interests of the children. The literature indicates a rural small school option is in the best interests of the students and stresses that such an option is also beneficial for the teachers, the surrounding community, and society in general.

## LITERATURE

Bard, J; Gardener CE , Regi L., Wieland R.L. Rural School District Consolidation, Volume 4 Issue 2 Spring 2006

Corbett, Mike; Mulcahy, Dennis: Education on a human scale: Small rural schools in a modern context; 2006

Funk et al. (1999). Drop-outs are three times more likely to be unemployed; 2.5 times more likely to receive welfare benefits, and 3.6 times more likely to be in prison than high school graduates with no college.

Lauzon A.C. Leahy D., Rural Schools and Educational Reform: Should We Keep Rural Schools Open? A Review of the Literature; SRC Research Program, Project 023450

The Rural School and Community Trust: [www.ruraledu.org](http://www.ruraledu.org)

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