

# PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



**Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts**

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## **Standing Committee on Education and Economic Development**

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**MEETING STATUS:** PUBLIC

**LOCATION:** COMMITTEE ROOM, J. ANGUS MACLEAN BUILDING, CHARLOTTETOWN

**SUBJECT:** SCHOOL REVIEWS, HUB SCHOOLS & SCHOOL-CENTRED COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE

**COMMITTEE:**

Bush Dumville, MLA West Royalty-Springvale [Chair]  
Dr. Peter Bevan-Baker, Leader of the Third Party, MLA Kellys Cross-Cumberland  
Jordan Brown, MLA Charlottetown-Brighton  
Kathleen Casey, MLA Charlottetown-Lewis Point  
Matthew MacKay, MLA Kensington-Malpeque  
Steven Myers, MLA Georgetown-St. Peters  
Chris Palmer, MLA Summerside-Wilmot

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Sonny Gallant, MLA Evangeline-Miscouche

**MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Bradley Trivers, MLA Rustico-Emerald

**GUESTS:**

Common Good Solutions (Lauren Sears, David Upton), Nova Scotia Small Schools Initiative (Leif Helmer), Schoolhouse Institute (Paul Bennett)

**STAFF:**

Ryan Reddin, Clerk Assistant (Research, Committees and Visitor Services)

Edited by Parliamentary Publications and Services



The committee met at 1:30 p.m.

**Chair (Dumville):** We will call the meeting to order and I will call for the adoption of the agenda.

**Ms. Casey:** So moved.

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey.

Our first order of business today is a briefing on school reviews and the missing third option, community hub schools. I would like to welcome everybody here today, the committee members and our presenters and those people sitting in the audience. It's good to have you here today. We've got Paul Bennett from the Schoolhouse Institute and Leif Helmer from Nova Scotia Small Schools Initiative. I welcome you both here today and I see you got yourself dug out of Halifax and –

**Paul Bennett:** We did.

**Chair:** - you picked a great day to come to the – you were in the eye of the storm today. I don't know if you'll get back tomorrow or not.

**Paul Bennett:** We're planning on staying on the Island as long as we can, but we may not be able to get off the Island. I'm sure you're going to be treating us well.

**Chair:** Once we get you here we don't want to see you leave too soon. But –

**Mr. J. Brown:** It's the money, Nova Scotia money over here in PEI (Indistinct) –

**Chair:** Yeah, we need that. Anyway, just for your benefit, these speakers do not – they're not for amplification. They are for Hansard and so before you speak I would just ask that you give your name in full so Hansard can pick it up and everything is conducted through the Chair in these meetings.

I would like to welcome you here today on behalf of the committee, and if you wish – do you wish to go right through your presentation and have committee members hold their questions until after or do you prefer that they ask questions in the middle of your presentation?

**Paul Bennett:** We're going to give a formal presentation and allow plenty of time for questions and answers afterwards.

**Chair:** Okay Paul, the floor is all yours.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Chair?

**Chair:** Oh.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Do you have copies of the presentation that you –

**Paul Bennett:** No, I don't. I've actually got the – we've got the PowerPoint presentation if you wish to have a copy of that. There are plenty of copies of that, but I don't have a formal copy.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Like a paper copy or a – okay.

**Chair:** All right, Mr. Bennett, you may continue. Begin.

**Paul Bennett:** Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. It is a pleasure for us to be here today. I'm Dr. Paul Bennett. I'm the founder and director of Schoolhouse Institute in Halifax and author of two books on the future of rural schools, and a commentator on radio and television on educational issues.

I am here today with Leif Helmer who is the president of the Small Schools Initiative and a leader of the movement to transform small schools into community hubs. The two of us will be doing a joint presentation and we would like to, first of all, set the scene for you and do an analysis of your school review process, how we see it and a new alternative that we would like you to consider, which is what we call the schools-at-the-centre model of economic and social development. Not just for rural communities, but also for urban neighbourhoods that may be in a position where their school is threatened.

The clock is ticking for four more rural communities on the Island. Since the adoption of the revised PEI school change policy in September 2016, school closures have continued under a new set of rules but they formalized the process and they tend to put the Public Schools Branch against the communities that they are seeking to serve.

Your current government, the Wade MacLauchlan government, is now in effect conducting a whole-scale review of all of the schools on the Island and when we look at your Island schools, you now have 56 and when I first started writing about PE Island schools you had 64. So you have already had some reductions in the numbers and our point is: There is a limit to the amount of consolidation that any one jurisdiction can authorize before you start changing the very nature of your school system.

As you know, there's a coalition of save Island schools that's emerged and it has attracted prominent Islanders, like Alan Buchanan, who are now calling for a complete review of what is to all people – whether you be in the schools branch, whether you be teachers or parents and taxpayers – you find it grueling and divisive, and we think there's a better way and we're hoping to give you an insight into what we are proposing.

As everyone – I think I've lost it – okay, it's back. As you know, you have four rural school communities that are currently under review and you will notice the word I am using. When the school is under review, the community is in effect under review, and if you go to school review meetings you get the feeling that these are life and death situations for many of the school communities. While there are four schools, this is really about rural Canada.

In rural Canada, schools are more than just places where children and youth earn an education. They are also the hub and life-blood of the community. When the local school goes, all too often, so does the community. That's not me speaking. That's a report issued in June of 2008 by the Senate entitled *Beyond Freefall: Halting Rural Poverty*, the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry. So this is not new. We have known for the last 20 years that closing schools has ramifications for rural Canada.

My own work, my first book on the subject: *Vanishing Schools, Threatened Communities*, had a quotation that I would like to share with you. Quote: At the precise time that more affluent provinces are introducing educational choice and smaller, more specialized schools, we are planning

for the consolidation and standardization and ultimate, one-size fits all education with a few untidy outliers.

What we see is that you have a few untidy outliers that you are trying to eliminate without realizing that there are opportunities to repurpose them.

The bestselling book in 2001 was Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, and there's a great quote in there I would like to share with you: Smaller schools, like smaller towns, generate higher expectations for mutual reciprocity and collective action. So, deconcentrating mega-schools or creating smaller schools within schools will almost certainly produce higher civic dividends. In other words, small schools have a lot of advantages for community building that we shouldn't lose sight of.

I would also like to note that you are very familiar with how divisive school closures can be. I'm sure everyone in the room remembers this incident which occurred during the last round of closures. It happened in January of 2009 at the eastern district school board and it came to the point where the deputy minister of education, the future deputy minister of education, and the superintendent of the school were in a face-off with the mayor of Georgetown and the shoe was forced and it was all captured on the news.

One of the key points is: Why go through such divisive processes? We should be building communities, not tearing them apart; and this is a classic example of what can and does happen if you continue along that course of action.

Right here you get – when you have rural communities or communities that are threatened, they come to the meetings and they look very much like this on the left. They file in and they are often very polite, but read their faces. They are actually alienated and becoming more so with not only the school system, but with communities in general.

You look on the right, remember that you have already had six schools eliminated on the last round ending in 2009-2010 and that's what's remaining there: Rollo Bay

school, 1966 to 2009. You're looking at the possibility where you're going to have another four or five where there's going to be a residue of, we would argue, distrust in the school system and communities are being abandoned by public education, which we do not think serves public education well.

Let's take a look at your current policy. You have centralized school governance to such an extent, you probably have now the most centralized school administration of any of the 10 provinces that I regularly study and since September of 2006, there is no question. You need to be looking at whether your board governance policy allows for much in the way of public legitimacy, whether you have eliminated the essential core of what it is to have a civic society, which is you have to have meaningful representation.

Eliminating school boards is one thing, and elected trustees. Removing anything other than periodic meetings with consultation groups with top-down initiatives, is tantamount to eliminating the democratic process in education and need I – I don't need to remind you that school trustees began in Prince Edward Island. I refer to Robert Harris's 1885 famous painting in the National Gallery of Canada: School trustees, rural teacher – it's focused on the role of trustees and trusteeship, generally speaking, as a core of civic society and it began here. It needs to be restarted here. You need to develop a better model.

Let's take a look at the current decision-making process. You have a board of directors of three, one of whom is the deputy minister of education and two other appointees, and it appears that everyone is responsible to them. If you were in any other country, you'd be called a troika. That is, your school system has a troika of decision makers.

You have advisory councils, two of them that we have learned through discussing with various communities, people don't know who is on those advisory councils. In one of the schools that are threatened, they didn't realize that their principal was on an advisory council. There are issues of legitimacy when the advisory councils aren't functioning the way they were intended.

And then you have final review meetings which are focused on families of schools, but they are no different than any school review process or what it is called in Ontario accommodation review processes, and they run along the same lines with the same set of parameters. They are interchangeable across North America and I'll show you a little bit more.

Your school review report entitled Better Learning for All, which was released not long ago, your education minister says that: The ongoing school change process may be difficult for some, but it is necessary to deal with disproportionate class sizes, student-teacher ratios and academic programming across the PEI school system. Well, there are communities involved. We're talking about closing in communities like Belfast the one remaining social property that is a gathering place for everyone.

To say it's not about rural and urban and it's about fairness is to be missing a huge part of this equation and there are big differences between rural communities and urban communities. Rural communities, the school is the social anchor. It's the meeting place. It is a critical piece of rebuilding the community. Without a school, the community can't attract any children and slowly dies a slow death.

A second point is that urban communities have neighbourhoods and you have one, St. Jean Elementary School, which just happens to be in an area of Charlottetown which some would describe as under privileged or a challenged area. This is not a community that you want to take a school out of either. So whether it be rural or urban, there are issues.

I think we have real problems with your due-process and fairness. The school branch board of directors recognizes that school changes can impact upon, quote: The interest of students, parents and other stakeholders and they are going to provide A, fair notice of any proposed change; B, explanation of the decision-making process; C, information on how to provide meaningful input and D, opportunities to make submissions to the board before final decisions are made.

I will submit to you that that is nothing more than the principle of judicial fairness. That is not a democratic set of principles. That is taken from legal jurisprudence. It has no place as a role for a public body. It does nothing to advance full and proper public democratic accountability, which is what the school system is and was founded on. There are some issues there.

Is this democratic when you come before a public hearing, as this woman did in Heatherton, Nova Scotia, and make your case? And there's a board in front of you listening but not commenting, and then: Thank you for your report. A hundred per cent of the people speak in favour of keeping the school open. The board decides to close the school and the community is abandoned. That's what happens. We're here to say that there's another way and a better way and we hope to illustrate that.

The mandate of your schools branch for a school review is very clear and it's very much focused on one thing: Schools are underutilized and demographic trends. That's just a very narrow way of defining this. Some are over-crowded and some are underutilized. It's very – it's narrowing the focus of the discussion so it excludes economic development, social development and democratic decision making.

That is really not in the interest of Prince Edward Islanders, and when you look at the schools identified for closure and their space utilization rates, it's interesting. Not all of them are underutilized. There's a plan to rezone everybody, to move them around for the next 10 years and presumably to move them around again when that doesn't work.

One of the issues that the two of us have confronted for the last six years is all of the schools that have been built over the last 25 or 30 years are too big. It's a planning issue. It's not a people issue. We need to find ways of repurposing those schools because there are too many square feet that can't be accommodated with students, and that's where we go.

Leif and I have been involved right from the very beginning in a movement in Nova Scotia and spreading out throughout the Maritimes. There are many groups that have

supported us along the way. We call this the schools-at-the-centre vision.

It's aimed at rural schools, but what we see is the potential for rural schools to be the centre of more sustainable communities. I think everyone here is looking to see rural communities and even urban communities to be more sustainable. So why not take a different lens and look at rural schools through the lens of schools at the centre?

If you take a school at the centre it means a school is an asset, not a liability, to a community. It means that it's a potential vehicle for integrating support mechanisms for inter-generational teaching and learning and for building a community and making it stronger, not making it weaker. I mean, that's the whole purpose of what we're talking about.

How many times have you heard this saying: We can't afford to keep those small schools open? I'm here today to say: Hey, you should look at the research of the Heartland Institute. Dollars and cents the cost-effectiveness of small schools, which explodes completely the myth that small schools are more costly to run. It demonstrates how building a new school for \$15 million to \$30 million dollars is far more expensive than maintaining, properly maintaining over time smaller schools and right-sizing your school system so that the buildings fit a population and not the population is trying to fill in the buildings – fill up the empty buildings.

There's also something to consider when you hear the phrase small schools are too expensive. Is anyone considering the following: The construction costs? Capital costs for a new one? The long bus rides? The municipal or transit upgrades and the joint demand sparked by new facilities? One of the things that you – that is, joint demand for more public service, for more light, for more parking, for more pavement, for – and so what the research shows is you may gain some initial advantage, but five years out it's more expensive to close schools because you're going to have to make additions, improvements and you're going to generate no cost. So the first one, small schools are not necessarily more expensive than the consolidated schools, and that is a key point.

Secondly, the quality of learning: The trend to closing schools was intensified by an assumption that smaller schools are somehow inferior. We know that when we ask parents what they value in a school, and students, the one-to-one relationship. You know that the class sizes are generally smaller and the reciprocal arrangements are stronger, and, by the way, as Michael Corbett and Dennis Mulcahy showed in their 2006 report, there is no evidence to support that consolidated schools offer a superior form of education or higher levels of student learning.

In fact, what we found is smaller schools have higher percentages of students that go on to college and university. They tend to do better overall, and you're more likely, if you go to a consolidated school, to get lost in the shuffle, to become a casualty and to drop out earlier. These are things we need to research further before you go further along the path to consolidation.

What we're here to argue for is rural education should be offered on a human scale. It's not us alone. *The Chronicle Herald* on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012, endorsed our proposal. They called it in the editorial a new model of schooling. They basically are saying that the new wave is small and it's not fighting to keep the old. It's trying to repurpose schools in a new way and take advantages of trends that are underway.

We're also here to say that you need to take the school review process and put it within a rural development strategy. How can you be advancing the development of your rural communities and closing schools? It doesn't really compute. The two are kind of in contrast with one another. We'd advise you to take a look at social sustainability frameworks and networks, which serve other countries and regions well, which is: What is critical to having a thriving, healthy community? Look at the centre. Two things: Social amenities and a voice in decisions affecting your future. Those are the two most important things for building healthy, thriving communities. Closing a school, eliminating school boards – you've taken the two out and then you wonder: Hey, what's happening here?

Here are the building blocks for social sustainability and again it points up

amenities and social infrastructure, social and cultural life, voice and influence and space to grow. These are the key things for vital and lively communities.

We're challenging you to think differently about school reviews today. Consultation is passé. It means we've decided what to do. We're going to consult you about how – whether – what you think of our plans. We're here to say engagement is where you should be. Engage the communities with a new set of assumptions.

Assumption number one: Schools are social anchors and economic drivers at the centre of local communities. Assumption two: Small communities are threatened in rural and small town Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island and they need to develop a broad rural revitalization strategy. Assumption three: The existing school review process is too adversarial, seriously flawed and too often divisive. Finally, we need to be more attuned to technology, which can bridge distances, and why aren't we talking about networking schools and using the potential of those schools?

The school review consultation meeting is very predictable. People file in that file out. Most people oppose the closure. The thing goes on and –

**Ms. Casey:** Excuse me. I'm sorry, could you go back to that last slide? I missed it when you were going (Indistinct) -

**Paul Bennett:** I hope I can find it in here. It's just a typical school review meeting I've been to. By the way, I've been to 80 of them over the last four – and I can assure you they all follow the same format no matter what province you're in.

We're very keen on advocating what we call a public engagement model. Do away with your school review process and advance what the public policy forum calls a public engagement model. It's a viable means to achieve the end of community-based, broadly accepted public policy decisions.

Look at the principles here. All of the principles of public engagement are violated by the process you are now engaged in. It's not genuine public consultation. People show up at a meeting and they sniff in the

air: Wait a minute here, we didn't shape the question.

We are producing briefs to oppose what has been recommended, so it kind of violates – I won't go through all of these, but there is a dynamic political environment emerging everywhere today. We're here to say: You need to embrace public engagement and you will find solutions come from the communities themselves when they confront it. You can have win-win solutions.

Let's take a look at your school review process and compare Prince Edward Island with the current one in Nova Scotia. You have five steps to closure. Data collection and the school's branch board directs the process. Number two: Public consultation of identified viable options. Number three: Board recommendations. Number four: Sixty days of public input and recommendations, and then a final decision. This is about as short and as clear cut as you could ever be if it's designed to close schools and to minimize the potential for public input.

Nova Scotia went through a long process that the two of us were very much a part of. Look at how different it is. The philosophy is different. Long range outlook; go to the community, gather community hub proposals. Ask them what they want to do rather than close their school. Collect their information, and only then go into a school review.

The school review process, is, while not perfect, is far better than you have. It's also based on the assumption that we're working together to improve schools, we're not out to close them. The idea is to come up with a better solution than the one that might actually be first proposed.

My colleague, Leif Helmer, is someone who has come into this from his own school in Petite Riviere and I'd like to ask him just to share some of his thoughts on how we can successfully create community hubs and improve the situation. Leif?

**Leif Helmer:** Great. Thanks, Paul. Good afternoon, Leif Helmer for Hansard.

As Paul suggested, you've got a lot of communities here who are under a very

difficult timeframe, 60 days. The clock is ticking. You're probably at around the 40-day mark now. We were under the same situation four and a half years ago when our community was put on notice, with about 90 kids at the time, that our school would be reviewed. We weren't given 60 days. We had about six months and we were able to work with the community in that time to reject some of the options. They were all various versions of closure: Close right now, merge with another school, close in two years, and merge with a different school.

We developed our own option and it's a third option. It's not status quo, which we recognize maybe isn't sustainable and it's not closure. It's something in the middle and this is where the community hub concept for Nova Scotia emerged.

This is late 2012, early 2013, during the school review process and a number of us – a number of schools then started to put this vision forward. Again, it's a community-based piece. It's an idea that says: Let's invest in these as assets in the community rather than see them as unused space or difficult to manage or maintain and let's keep this community asset going. So our school population now is about 75. We are still going four years later. We're working with our school board still to make that renovation and investment and we hope that it's in the next couple of months they make that decision. So far more time, granted.

One thing I will say is that it's really hard to be creative when you're under the gun like these communities are right now in your province. It would be far better to have a community-building exercise outside of a school review and a separate part from it. However, that's what we're dealing with right now.

We got busy and we innovated. This is a community innovation. We looked to some of the leading practitioners. David Clanfield in Toronto came up with community hub more in an urban context, but it works very well in the rural context. We had him come to our community and to tour Nova Scotia a couple of years ago. He pretty well put the definition of hub out there so it is more than just a multipurpose centre. Although, that's what we are considering it for our solution

in our school, is co-locating a bunch of different services in our school.

David also sees it as two-way learning between the students that are there as well as community groups that may be there as well. We talk about natural fit partners. So for us, the local YMCA and the local library would be tenants in the two wings of our school, which would still be going in the middle. David proposes this whole variety of hub models that are out there to enrich the learning within the school and to bring the community into the school.

We lobbied hard at the Ivany Commission and we made special presentations throughout for the Now or Never report in Nova Scotia, which is a broad piece of community and economic development as well as social sustainability. We put that message forward to the Ivany commissioners that closing schools was not in the interest of a better community development whatsoever.

It was contrary, and how could you have one part of government closing schools with the other side of government doing something completely different and investing in highways, investing in factories, investing for programs for high-speed Internet and entrepreneurs trying to attract people, at the same time taking away whatever young family needs in their area which is a small school or a school.

This third option has emerged, thinking small and dreaming big, opening doors and turning these small schools into community hubs. We worked with about five different communities over the last number of years. We managed to get a moratorium put in place on the school review process in 2013. The minister of education there had the wisdom to say: Let's put a pause on this contentious process, let's give these communities some more time.

There was a year and a half or so when our top civil servant, Bob Fowler, went around the province. It started by one government, ended its work under a different government and still, those findings were adopted in whole and then led to the adoption of a community hub approach. We did a lot of work presenting to the Fowler commission and bringing forward our schools-at-the-

centre rural development approach. That was – the bulk of our work was policy work in those years.

We then worked closely with communities where they were facing closure. These were schools in Maitland and River John where we worked over a long period of time to help them develop hub proposals that they then brought to their school boards. There was a lot of coverage in Nova Scotia about these for the better part of that year, lots of community investment of ideas of what's going to work here, customized solutions for their two schools.

Unfortunately, in both cases at the board level there was no support or very little support there, although River John managed to get to a tie vote; they still ultimately lost, and the hub proposals were both turned down.

We're currently working with – sorry, this is the River John piece. I'm a little ahead of myself. The River John proposal made a new use of the older space and suggesting that it was the Ivany report in action, a nice application of it, creating a maker space as well as a discovery centre as a central part of their open concept. This is the existing building that they would simply invest in. Unfortunately, despite all of the community partners and the help that they had, they were not able to bring that forward.

The other piece that we have talked –

**Chair:** Excuse me, just one question from Jordan Brown.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Just the – and sorry to interrupt your presentation.

**Leif Helmer:** No problem.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Maker space?

**Leif Helmer:** Yes.

**Mr. J. Brown:** I'm curious as to what that is.

**Leif Helmer:** Right, so this has been adopted as an entrepreneurial activity space where, in this case, kids as well as community members could come in and be tactile learners. I'm an educator myself. I

teach at the Nova Scotia Community College. One of our campuses is exploring this as how to make entrepreneurship work for them, so the Yarmouth campus –

**An Hon. Member:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. J. Brown:** So it's for the kids that are going to school or kids in the community?

**Leif Helmer:** The one that we're looking at at the college level is for community members and entrepreneurs – community, students and entrepreneurs and facility to work together. So kind of like a – they also call it sandboxes where you play, kind of an unstructured idea of sharing.

At the River John concept it was more at the – because it was an elementary school, it was more at that level but it would involve community members and that kind of tactile student that needs to work with their hands a lot and bringing those types of skills into the school, so beyond the curriculum, it would be extracurricular as the tactile learners.

We think that in the Maritimes we could go as far as a community schools curriculum where new curriculum outcomes towards keeping rural skills, heritage skills if you like, could be reinvested or reconsidered. There's some theory around this. Mike Corbett, who has done a lot of reading on this, suggests that it's a way to push back against the global consumer society, forward-looking education system of consolidation and trying to reframe it around rural skills taking hold and being passed onto the next generations. That was an important piece for us.

Place-based traditions can often be lost in consolidation, so specific skill sets in the communities that are being threatened for closure could also be lost, and we think that there's an opportunity there.

**Paul Bennett:** One thing we've noticed is that centralization and standardization of curricula seem to go hand in hand and the two are connected in education, and so the more – the further the kids are away from where they live, the less it's likely to be based on their locality, on their heritage, on their families, and the more isolated the school system becomes from the families and the communities. Place-based education

suggests that there's an educational reason why we need smaller schools.

**Leif Helmer:** And from a parent perspective, it's important for my kids, rural kids, to see their neighbours as teachers in front of them, and so all of the teachers who teach at my school happen to live in the catchment. It's not an insular view. It's simply – it's important for the farmers and the fishermen to see that there can be success in their community. They don't have to leave to be educated. They can stay right where they are, so bringing that piece in is really important.

We have a farm across the street from the school and the kids are always going there on field trips. It's great. We think that there's a role for that to be strongly considered here as a largely rural province, and Nova Scotia is similarly rural, so there's actually an opportunity to do this well rather than simply adopt the consolidation approach, which is also 10 years old and not current.

I'm going to move a little bit ahead here just where we recognize our timing. In Georgetown, for two different major renewal conferences, there has been a focus on revitalizing rural places like Georgetown and like Belfast, and like some of the others that we'll visit.

Most recently, in 2016, it was focused on solutions. One of those solutions is place-based schools and supporting small schools in communities and doing things intentionally with policy that understands that rural development can't happen without some public asset in those places. Schools are the last public asset. We have seen the post offices go. We have seen the court houses close down, so schools become the last public asset in many places.

An example from Cape Breton, from Sidney, the New Dawn enterprise grew out of the Holy Angels academy in Sydney but it was too late. It was three years after the closures of the public school and far too often – and Home Bay is another example – we see these amazing community-led projects happen in former schools and what we're saying as a third option is you can collocate some of these unique services and resource places within active schools and we

have lots of examples in Nova Scotia where that's happening.

New Dawn was one of the bright lights at the Georgetown 2.0 solutions and being creative with considering that building as an asset and being creative is really breathing new life there, now as a social innovation centre. So this is findings from that place-based schools priority coming out of Georgetown 2.0. Again, this is less than a year old and this was the summarized thinking of that working group on such as small schools, finding a third option and investing in community hub pilots.

**Paul Bennett:** Yes, there were 45 proposals to come out of Georgetown 2.0 and this was one of them, and I actually chaired the committee in Georgetown in June that came up with this particular proposal and it was broadly based and it was an action plan. In many ways, there's a lot of Prince Edward Island investment of time and energy into the positive outcomes of Georgetown.

**Leif Helmer:** So why not see one of those positive outcomes in Georgetown? Or Belfast? Or both? I'm going to pass it back to Paul at this point.

**Paul Bennett:** Now, most of you I guess have seen the piece by Alan Buchanan in *The Guardian* back on January 30<sup>th</sup> so I won't repeat it, but he made some critically important points and I have since spoken with him and I thought I would repeat a couple of the points here.

You have community with a capital C and that is: You need to have the schools as part of the community. Communities without schools are not fully functioning, and in the case of Belfast you've got a unique and kind of ironic situation. You have Belfast Consolidated School and you have a district organization that kind of have already demonstrated consolidation, so in removing the school you're actually taking apart and destroying a previous consolidation.

There is also a lot of potential here for you taking somewhere like Belfast and saying: Their district community council could be the solution. We should be working with them to develop Belfast, and not coming in on top with a set of recommendations without actually relating to them. For 45

years, Belfast has had a district council that looks after the wellbeing of the population and oversees the development, and you know how small Belfast is. There are 1,637 residents so they need all the help they can get in trying to redevelop that whole section of the province. I think Alan made a really good point when he said: There's a lot of ground building that can be done, building from the bottom up and not from the top down.

I just want to illustrate the old school model, which is consolidation, as opposed to a new school model, which is community planning. Old school model: Schools are burdens and liabilities because of deferred maintenance. So, after a period of time they are all built to be obsolete. After 25 or 30 years they become liabilities, deferred maintenance, we close them. The new model would be: No, they are potential assets from the day they were built for community development and community realization.

The old school model of school consolidation planning is officials within the department of education decide, they look at a map and they decide: We want to rationalize all of the schools and we want to have bigger schools, more consolidated, and we think that's really what's good and if that doesn't work, we're going to rezone areas so we fill schools. We are actually consciously bussing students to fill spaces because we're basing everything on school spaces.

Bussing Belfast students will only compound the existing problem. Within five years one of the receiving schools is going to have over capacity so you're going to have to do something. The solution is not bussing kids from one school to another to fill spaces because that's the old school model: Space utilization is the be all and the end all, and cost per student.

Now, in Georgetown you have seen the figures. You're going to save \$92,000 a year by closing Georgetown, but look at the potential you could unleash by saying: No, we're going to ask the Georgetown community to repurpose that school and come up with a portion of that \$92,000 through social enterprise and other means, and the community will be stronger.

The community planning model is basically this: We're going to build on the community's assets. We're going to take something like a local development corporation. We're going to work with them, not against them. We're going to look for excellent, efficient uses of buildings. We're going to look at the possibilities of hub schools and incubators for social enterprise, and we're going to take this as an opportunity and not a threat and we're going to allow enough time for the community to actually make its views known.

What are we recommending? We have an action plan that we would like to leave with you today, and today we're calling upon the minister of education to announce a moratorium on all school review processes affecting all schools recommended for closure in the current round and cycle of school reviews.

We're calling upon the Government of PEI to reform the school change act to restore democratic legitimacy by establishing a more robust system of locally-elected district community councils representing parents, teachers, employers and community members.

We're calling upon the minister of education to announce the department of education's intention to take the lead in developing a rural revitalization strategy working in partnership with economic, health, and community service authorities and embracing an integrated government-wide approach to dealing with these issues.

Over the medium term, we think it makes sense to take a look at the schools at the centre philosophy aimed at revitalizing not just schools, but rural communities, and adopting a province-wide community building and development strategy.

Over the medium term, we'd like to see a brand new public engagement process involving all interested groups including the schools branch, regional development agencies, home and school groups, teachers, local boards of trade, local government, and citizens – in other words, genuine community engagement.

We'd also like to recommend that you consider developing a regional development

authority to take the lead in facilitating the partnerships necessary to help small rural communities develop their school structures into multiuse and community assets. What we've learned is without such an agency integrating these particular services, it ain't going to happen. Take a look at Nova Scotia and why we're having so much trouble getting community hub schools off the ground. We needed a regional development authority. You could do that.

Another thing is from my previous research – I've done an awful lot of research on e-learning and the potential for online learning, and network schools and some of you may know some of my research. This last one speaks to a real opportunity you have. We would like to suggest that you have a rural school or online education network based upon the Newfoundland model creating digitally-networked schools and taking fuller advantage of e-learning and blended learning to bridge the distances in K-12 education.

You are a small Island, but you have 56 schools. You have one university serving much of that. We think there's potential for the University of Prince Edward Island and its faculty of education to support learning in the schools through networked online learning programs. We think you have tremendous potential to develop that and we'd be keen to see you move in that direction.

Our presentation is really just not so much to talk about your school review process, but to open the doors to a wider conversation about making sure that school policy and economic development policy support one another, and I want to thank you for the time and hearing us this afternoon.

**Chair:** Thank you very much for your presentation. Normally, the presentations – we have other speakers, it usually doesn't go on this long. We do have some time for questions and I'll start off with Steven Myers.

**Mr. Myers:** Thank you very much. It was a great presentation and I know, Paul, we've chatted about this prior to, probably going back pretty near three years now. I know I met Leif at River John when that group

presented their community hub model. I think that was back in 2014.

I was impressed by the community involvement from what I saw in the model that was put forward in River John. I guess my first question is, and you may have answered it with the slide, but I'm just looking for further clarity: How did you go about making the Nova Scotia government agree to allow this to be a step in the process, to slow it down? Was there pressure for a moratorium, or was this something they had willfully come forward with?

**Leif Helmer:** Yeah, we asked for a moratorium right around Easter of 2013 and that was granted. There was a moratorium put in place at that point. The minister of education circulated that to all the school boards. Here, it would be much more simple, it would just be a straight shot to that three-person Public Schools Branch.

After the moratorium was in place, the minister of education put in a full review of school review to evaluate how it was working, how it could be improved. That took about a year, year and a half. That was how that took place.

**Mr. Myers:** Okay, thanks.

**Paul Bennett:** Just one additional comment. Our first presentation was in March of 2012. The minister of education was cool to the idea, the first, when we put schools at the centre, but after a year of school closures including a very difficult year in 2012-2013 she came to see the advantages of what we were saying.

The moratorium actually, was probably – she made the decision on April 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2013. Our first presentation, the whole model that we presented today was in March of 2012. Almost a year of development of this idea, it took time to grow, but it can't grow over six weeks or 60 days. We're basically saying you need time to work on some of these longer-term issues.

**Mr. Myers:** I just have one more.

**Chair:** Sure.

**Mr. Myers:** Thanks. Back during that period, I know, when – and you guys were

involved with a number of groups. I did take the opportunity to go up to Maitland and I went to Wentworth because those were close for – they were the closest ones to PEI, just to see – kind of have a look and see what was going on. They're communities that wouldn't be unlike the communities that we're talking about here. They would be very similar in many ways.

The model that you presented here today, is that something – this would be a two-parter, saving me asking two questions. The model that you presented today, is that something you could see working for the small schools on Prince Edward Island and let's say Georgetown, in particular, because it's the smallest one? If it works there, it works for the other four quite easily.

What assistance would your group be willing to offer to help expedite that process so we – maybe we – if government didn't want to give that long a period of time, can we – what expertise could we rely on from you folks to expedite the process so we can get there?

**Paul Bennett:** I'll answer the last first.

Our second presentation today is from Common Good Solutions, David Upton and Lauren Sears, and they are the real experts on developing social enterprise. They are going to be giving you quite a bit of, I think, positive information and support on how to make this work.

We'll only say this: We've learned, the two of us, have learned some bittersweet lessons through all of this going back over quite a number of years. First of all, the conception of the hub school, people tend to understand it, but they have to realize that it's repurposing the school with students in the school. Don't wait until the school closes because it's so much more difficult to get the community galvanized to start repurposing their school. That's lesson number one.

Lesson number two: Don't let the school bureaucrats write the regulations because what we didn't say is we got the education act amended. We got everything we wanted until it came time to writing the regulations. So the question is, why haven't the communities succeeded? Well, because if

you look at the regulations, it's – there are so many hurdles that communities have to jump through, that no one has successfully met all of those. The criteria that are set for developing a public school have to be favourable to the communities and have the genuine spirit there.

A third thing is this, and we're often asked, what happened to those schools? Very much like the story we have had. You take River John, they really did not succeed and it has been demoralizing for that community, but out of it they are going to have a children's book store led by Sheree Fitch, the children's author. All the community is working around that, so it wasn't a total loss.

In Maitland, it was a serious issue. It was the best business proposal, but it was, actually, a bit of a stretch for that school board. Remember the school boards made the decisions. It was a very strong business proposal. By the way, they're still up online.

In the case of Wentworth, they've lost their school and they are now – they've got a co-op, and they're starting again so they're at the other end of this. They're trying to repurpose the school without the students in it, but they're working on a community hub plan.

Everyone is working on community hub plans. We're only here to tell you and advise you that: Start it earlier. Start developing community hubs while they're still in the educational system and you're going to have healthier communities. That's all. Don't leave it closed for a year with mothballs, and it's so hard to reopen it and everyone is exhausted.

Right now, there's a critical juncture. A key decision, a positive decision would be a moratorium and a decision to embrace a community development model and you'll have all those people, who are out now to resist the government saying: Wait a minute here. You want to work with us to repurpose the schools? Some will close, but it'll be the right ones. It won't be the ones where the decision has been made somewhere else.

**Chair:** Chair recognizes Peter Bevan-Baker followed by Jordan Brown, and then Kathleen Casey.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you so much for your presentation. While I don't need to be convinced philosophically about the value of small schools, I'm very much about evidence-based decision making.

You've talked a little bit – the two justifications for the recommendations of the PSB are that it will save money and that it will improve education; however, the literature is unambiguous in saying that small schools are – they outperform large ones. You can look at meta-studies, studies of studies. It's quite clear that the evidence does not support that claim.

My first question to you is what, if the justifications of the school board are questionable, why are they – why is this being pushed as hard as it is? Or why are these recommendations there?

**Paul Bennett:** I'm glad you asked. I've just written an article for *The Country School Journal* in America about the person who gave us school consolidation. His name is Edgar L. Morphet. The answer very succinctly is this: Those who believe in school consolidation are basing it on one assumption, economies of scale. That is an economic philosophy that if you have larger units, it costs less per person to serve. Now, that is a model that has many critics. That's their model.

Another model is: What does it take to be a healthy community, and what actually works in the best interests of kids? What we do know is – I've cited the evidence in the presentation. The first one is: Small schools are no more expensive than those larger schools. When one considers the costs of capital improvements, additional support, transportation and the joint demand that they create, you go to a bigger school in a centralized location and people expect more and it costs more from the public purse.

Overall, when one considers five years out, I'd ask the government if they have any analysis of what the cost would be five years out. They'll tell you it's \$92,000 for Georgetown and \$120,000 or something for Belfast. Yes, but, listen, five years out, my guess? They'll invest far more.

I'll give you an example. Heatherton, the school that closed that we know so much about and we worked so hard with. That school closed for a new roof, \$150,000, and then the government turned around and they found \$3 million for an extension, another wing, for a school in Antigonish. Same taxpayer. Why?

School closure processes generally don't consider the capital costs associated with the alternative facilities. We're saying, before you make a decision – the other thing is off-loading to municipalities is a huge issue, which is the cost is then borne sometimes by other authorities that have to maintain the buildings.

First, on the question of the cost, and there's research, Dollars & Sense: The Cost Effectiveness of Small Schools, and the research mainly in the United States by Howley and definitely by Lawrence, Barbara Lawrence has demonstrated.

On the second thing, the quality of education, I will simply refer to Michael Corbett and Dennis Mulcahy's report, Education on a human scale, where they do a really thorough job. They searched everywhere for evidence that: Are bigger schools going to produce better education and higher achievement levels? They find: No, there's no conclusive evidence. The two key points don't seem to stand up to close scrutiny when it comes to educational research.

Leif, any thoughts?

**Leif Helmer:** Small –

**Paul Bennett:** He knows a lot about this.

**Leif Helmer:** – school. You can't – it's very hard to win a school closure battle if you come at it from education quality because everybody knows that education quality is one of the pillars of small schools and it's – there is no question about it.

That's why you see the efficiency model zoning in on under-utilized space because that's the one metric that tends to show that these small schools are half empty or whatever. To that, and that's what we responded to, and said: Okay, we're getting a score of 70% utilization. Let's bring in

some other services, natural fit partners like YMCA or the library and utilize that space. That's where the third option emerged from.

Utilization and efficiency of staffing, efficiency of operational costs is what is driving it. It's very much an efficiency model and we rejected that and said: It doesn't apply, especially elementary to grade – elementary P to six or K to six. The public school program is the same, generally, every school at that age level so it's not programming, it's not quality. The only way you can manage it is if you focus in on utilization of the space, so that's why we said: Okay, if we have extra space let's fill it with something that makes sense, so that's what we've done.

**Paul Bennett:** You never get an accurate assessment of the cost for transportation in any of these analyses and I did a report that some of you would know that I wrote, Education on Wheels, student transportation in Maritime Canada, a couple of years ago.

One of the things that I really emphasized in that report is it's the last thing that is ever considered in school closure decisions. Like the cost of transportation, the additional incremental costs of increasing the number of students and the number of buses that might be added. That's a key point. There are additional costs there.

Another critical thing is community impact. At the very least, you need to revise your school review process to include community impact. It's not there. In Ontario, the Kathleen Wynne government made the same mistake. They had a school review process that had community impact and they took it out. There's a province-wide movement. Thousands of people at Queen's Park, because they took out the community impact analysis. We're here to say you should be building communities, not tearing them apart and breaking them down through a school review or consolidation process.

**Chair:** You have another question, Peter?

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Yes, Chair.

**Chair:** Okay, and then I'll go – okay, thank you.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Chair.

Yes, and to frame my next question I'd like to pick up on what you both just said, that prior to the Industrial Revolution there was really no public education to speak of whatsoever. Public education was built on the same sort of philosophy as the way we built factories to make chocolate and chairs and Chevy trucks, but that doesn't work for children because children are human beings and are different and individualized and so that the – I'm looking at the graphic that you have here on your card. It's neither a one-room school room nor is it a massive comprehensive school of 1,000 children.

My question is, is there a right size for a school or is that dependant on the circumstances of the community or the –

**Paul Bennett:** I'll give you a quick summary of the existing research. In 2006, the secondary school principals of the United States reviewed school size. It is today still the only report that deals with it. They actually said that the average high school should be no more than 550 and that it was healthier to be 550. This runs completely at odds with North American school design principles, which have high schools at 1,000.

I see that your high schools are likely the right size because I see their function – but you say there's a problem? The research would suggest that if you have between 450 and 550 it is healthy.

For elementary schools, the research there is all over the map. Generally speaking, and I was on a – I was, for nine years I was on the York region board of education and I had schools I was responsible for and I once represented 25,000 or 30,000 constituents. I remember well, as soon as a school fell below 100 it was on the risk list. That's idiocy because what we know is the school fits the community and they should be right sized for the community.

We're here to say: avoid the symmetry, because one thing that Edgar Morphet did to all of us in school administration was he convinced us of a bunch of things. One: Schools only come with six classrooms, 12 classrooms, 14 classrooms, 18 classrooms, in boxes. They're called the egg crate system of model. He also, in his textbooks, tried to teach us that the only way you

allocate students and teachers is according to square footage in the facility, and that you cost the cost per square foot of a building and you calculate the number of students per square feet. That's how you run education.

One thing I see when I'm looking at your reports, I looked at all of your reports that are posted there for all six schools, and they all still adhere to the principles that came from Morphet and were generated in the 1940s.

One thing I would suggest is that you take a look at a new set of criteria for evaluating the value of schools. You need to take a look at the process through which that data is generated because it's dictating decisions that run counter to what's best for students and for teachers, as well, by the way.

**Chair:** Thank you. I must move on here because we have other presenters. Twenty minutes turned into 45, so –

**Paul Bennett:** Sorry.

**Chair:** That's all right.

Jordan Brown, then Kathleen Casey.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thank you, Chair.

I am kind of curious, and I just want to follow up on that point, actually, and perhaps despite Peter might have been going to ask this question next, I'm not sure, but what – I take your point, in a lot of ways small is good, but where – there's got to be a natural end to that. Reason would have to dictate that having seven grades with 15 kids in it is not going to be an effective use of teaching time, particularly if there are one or two kids in there with some kind of a disability. Where is the bottom end of that kind of spectrum?

**Paul Bennett:** Twenty-two.

**Mr. J. Brown:** And what do you mean by that? Like –

**Paul Bennett:** That's the average –

**Mr. J. Brown:** – using an egg crate (Indistinct)

**Paul Bennett:** – 22. I've asked that all the time. Below 20, I would say that you've got an issue there with the viability of running a school and I say that looking across North America; but let's take it – what if the schools were thoroughly networked? What if they were repurposed? What if the students occupied one third of the total floor area? What if the community was engaged through early childhood education in one wing, elderobics and elder activities in another, and what if community hubs were there? So –

**Mr. J. Brown:** So I –

**Paul Bennett:** - in other words, the –

**Mr. J. Brown:** I don't want to interrupt you, but I'm not interested in all of the community aspects of that. I'm talking about the students, and that was going to be a question I was going to ask you about. A big part of your focus is on the community aspect of the schools –

**Paul Bennett:** Right.

**Mr. J. Brown:** - and I get that, okay? I'll tell you, too. The district that St. Jean is in is my district. St. Jean is what I would call a hub school. It's got a number of different entities that are in there right now. If you went around the school today you wouldn't find an empty space in the school. The school is full. But, I guess what I'm asking you –

**Paul Bennett:** Jordan, can I challenge you?

**Mr. J. Brown:** Yeah, but just –

**Paul Bennett:** How much are those –

**Mr. J. Brown:** Just let me finish my question –

**Paul Bennett:** How much are those community partners contributing in terms of their lease payments, rents? Because part of our philosophy is that anyone using the schools should be asked to contribute to the maintenance. It's a different philosophy, and what we find is people when they're saying: This school may close, oh well perhaps we will contribute a little bit. So all of a sudden that issue – I'll give you a direct answer. A hundred and fifty is the planning for

elementary schools. Above that, no one recommends. These days, 150 is pretty good. Two hundred and fifty, I'd consider too big and there's research that suggests above 250 for elementary schools is not good.

So I'll answer your question. The reason I said 22 is I'm assuming a thoroughly networked school with expert teachers who are bringing exemplary classroom via the Internet and you have more than the complement of staff that normally would be in a school of 22.

**Mr. J. Brown:** And what does that look like? Like, 22 kids at a minimum? What does that look like from a K-6 delivery?

**Paul Bennett:** You don't have any of those, so it's a worry – like I'm just trying to take out the whole question. You've got one at 49 that you're looking at, right? 50? That's well within the range where something could be done so I think it's safer to say – it's very difficult. We – Maitland had 23 students and we worked so hard and they developed a complete repurposing model, but in the end they decided not to go because it was maybe a little too small in terms of student numbers.

**Leif Helmer:** I can speak to one that's currently going right now in Queens County, remote part near Kejimikujik National Park; 31 students, three instructors – one who is there part of the time and another school another part of the time. Multi-grade – I have multi-grade for all of my kids who have gone through that so primary-one in the same room, a one-two in the same room so this school, Greenfield, with 31 kids.

They have a primary-one-two and then they have a three-four-five. So they have two full-time teachers doing that. They are a hub school. They have a library at one end of the building and they have a fitness centre in the other and they've got two main classrooms for those multi-aged classes and they are doing it, and they have been doing it for the last four and a half to five years as a publicly owned building that the community fundraised for and built and a 25 year lease that the school board has taken out for that use.

There is a low end, can't save them all and we're not talking about going back to a one-room schoolhouse; but we're seeing success with a school of 30 right now in my neighbourhood.

**Mr. J. Brown:** It's interesting because – and I have heard of Greenfield before and I looked at it a little bit, too. It's interesting to see that because they solved a problem in the community in terms of a need and they built the community. My understanding is, you correct me if I'm wrong –

**Leif Helmer:** Yes.

**Mr. J. Brown:** - the community said: We have a need; we'll fundraise and build a purpose-built school –

**Leif Helmer:** Yes, that's right.

**Mr. J. Brown:** - and I guess what I wonder is: Are we in a similar setting as Nova Scotia or New Brunswick, or Ontario you mentioned before, where we right now – like literally, we can use the example of St. Jean. If I was Tiger Woods I could hit a golf ball from Prince Street School to West Kent Elementary School and there are literally two schools in between the two of them where you're kind of making stops along the way so –

**Paul Bennett:** Can I give you a quick – that is an opportunity as well as a threat. In other cities they actually decide there will be a certain program focus for each one so when I showed you that slide about specialized schooling, they basically say: This will have an arts focus, this will have that. Each school has its own unique mission and so it's not that they are all the same and that's part of what we're saying too, is that when you have all schools that are equal size and offering pretty much the same program, it looks like it's basically vanilla and when you start looking at right sizing schools for communities, you start looking at: Maybe this one could focus on this and that. So it opens up other possibilities.

I'll go back – I know you're not convinced with my answer on that so I will say this: A school of 22 where the grandparents are there, where the nursery schoolers are there, where there's a hub, where there's business people coming in and talking to you, where

there are authors that come in and do readings is not a lonely place. It's just that there are fewer children in that space.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Let me ask you this question – and I mean (Indistinct) –

**Paul Bennett:** I'm kidding.

**Mr. J. Brown:** This brings up so many questions, I'll tell you, for me. But just as an example, with that example that you just gave me, okay – and I can tell you – my wife is an elementary school teacher so if I go visit her at the school that she teaches at, I don't get five feet in the door without them stopping me and saying: Where's your visitor pass?

How do you – I get the theory. I get what you're trying to tell me here and I'm interested by the model, but day in, day out two things that strikes me that you need. One is a community need that you're solving, and I think there's a lot of hub school models, quote unquote, that use that or community hubs, I guess; but the hub school model strikes me as an interesting twist on that, that I really want to see the detail of how it works and where it works, and how do you regulate?

You're saying: Oh, bring these people in and they can interact with the students and all that kind of stuff. Right now we're so anti-strangers interacting with our students that literally you would be tackled, probably, if you came in there without proper authorization to be in the school.

**Leif Helmer:** It's true and safety is often raised as a barrier, but we think it's easily addressed. So many of the hub schools we have looked at have separate dedicated entrances. They have – the school itself has the same visitor pass in a situation. Guest speakers are still required to have clearance with the teacher and to be greeted at the front door by the principal.

There's a lot more communication and coordination that has to happen, but with dedicated wings as we often see with the hub designs – Halifax's brand new high school has a dedicated theatre attached to it. It's not always used by the students. Sometimes a theatre company rents that for

weeks at a time and puts on a performance, so they have figured it out.

It can be done, but safety and security is paramount. No question about it. It's a given for us as well as educators, and a lot of the hub schools have figured that out and it works.

**Paul Bennett:** I think it may be the reason why the hub school model has taken off in rural communities, but in the urban centres we have had more of a challenge because of the significant questions about: How can we ensure the safety and security of the kids?

What we find in rural communities, though, is a high degree of trust and people know each other and they are pretty open schools. There's a different atmosphere and vibe there anyway and it seems to have been a more fertile ground for the hub school movement.

**Mr. J. Brown:** I don't want to – I'll tell you – my background and context is I'm a lawyer, I did a lot of criminal law earlier in my career. I've seen and defended and been involved with cases where there's been drug dealers on school grounds, outside typically, sexual predators on school grounds in rural communities and we do know and trust these people, but it is an issue for sure.

Are there any current examples of a hub school where an existing school has been taken and converted into an active hub school? So not a community hub, a hub school?

**Leif Helmer:** Right yeah, so well Citadel High School has elements of that. It was a new build; Greenfield has lots of elements –

**Mr. J. Brown:** So I'm not – I'm saying existing schools –

**Leif Helmer:** Existing? Sure, yeah. So, Chedabucto place – Chedabucto up in Guysborough County, where there was a reinvestment there. We have an example on the eastern shore where the Department of Natural Resources has its public outreach staff and facility right there in a high school, so they do exist. They don't have to be purpose built, new builds, for sure.

We have lots of examples where a branch of a library is put into an existing classroom. My daughter's junior high, the YMCA has an after-school – they took over a classroom and turned it into an after-school program. Those are examples of bringing hub partners in in existing buildings, so yeah, it floats.

**Chair:** I hate to cut off this discussion –

**Leif Helmer:** Yeah.

**Chair:** – but maybe you could get their cards and continue this –

**Ms. Casey:** (Indistinct)

**Mr. J. Brown:** What's that?

**Chair:** Do you want to speak next?

**Mr. J. Brown:** I do have more questions, but if we want to go through, that's –

**Chair:** We've – I'm just trying to move on. We've got other presentations, so if you could make – if you could do some quick questions and they can give you some quick answers it would be all right. Do you want to speak?

**Ms. Casey:** No, he can go ahead.

**Chair:** All right. You're on her time.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thank you, Kathleen.

I just – I'll be honest in saying, too, I'm curious as to how you guys came to be here now in the middle of this process and the kind of declaration, I'll say, that was made at the end of it has me a bit skeptical as to the information that's being presented here.

I don't know what – you're saying we're here and you're looking for an outcome from this presentation, or this meeting. We're a committee, a legislative committee that's set up outside of our current school change process. I think it's kind of good information to have, but I'm wondering if you guys are presenting to the board of directors of the Public Schools Branch. Whether you're here as advocates for any of the schools – I understand you're going to do a presentation in Georgetown and maybe Belfast, as well, which is great, too. I'm wondering the how and the why we're here.

**Paul Bennett:** It started with an invitation that we had from the schools. I'm very well known in Georgetown, having been there. I had a book launch there, so they contacted me and independent people have contacted Leif and have invited us to come because we have been through all of this. We've been through it and out again and come up with an option.

As soon as people started saying hub schools – and if you Google hub schools you'll find Leif Helmer and Paul Bennett associated with 90% of the articles up there, so we're naturally drawn to this. The two of us, when we created the Nova Scotia Small Schools Initiative, we took a broad approach. We said: Look, we're trying to communicate a different way of viewing schools at the centre of communities and we'll go wherever people invite us.

As to the schools branch, we're still looking to get in the door. We've asked to speak directly with them and we've had communications with the minister of education and we will be here Friday. We would come back, I suppose, if there is an opportunity to –

**Mr. J. Brown:** There are – you know there are a number meetings that are lined up where anybody is invited to go speak –

**Paul Bennett:** Oh, yes, but that is our critique is that's not really – why would we participate in a system that we actually are here critiquing?

**Mr. J. Brown:** And there's a process to present online, like have you done –

**Paul Bennett:** We're talking about our policy here, not individual schools, so we're –

**An Hon. Member:** Okay –

**Paul Bennett:** – that's why we're here, is to talk about our policy.

**Chair:** You're done?

**Ms. Casey:** No, I've got –

**Mr. J. Brown:** With the greatest respect, you see how the optics look. I mean, you're consultants that are here from Nova Scotia

to make a pitch that's going to be picked up by somebody. That's what it looks like to me.

**Leif Helmer:** I think we're sharing what we learned in Nova Scotia and sharing with you how –

**Mr. Myers:** Imagine if I did that. Imagine if I attacked one of the presenters the way you're attacking them, Jordan. Will you go on?

**Mr. J. Brown:** You invited them to come, so –

**Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Myers:** I didn't invite them to come, they wrote (Indistinct) –

**Chair:** Gentlemen. Gentlemen, it's been a good meeting so far –

**Mr. Myers:** Are you talking to me? They wrote a letter to the Chair, not to me.

**Chair:** – let's keep a good meeting here.

**Ms. Casey:** Thank –

**Mr. Myers:** Jordan –

**Ms. Casey:** Thank you, Mr. Chair –

**Mr. Myers:** They wrote a letter to this (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey –

**Mr. Myers:** It wasn't to me –

**Mr. J. Brown:** Yeah. They presented through you.

**Mr. Myers:** No, it wasn't. It was for (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Listen, gentlemen –

**Mr. MacKay:** We all approved it –

**Chair:** Gentlemen?

**Mr. MacKay:** – around the table.

**Mr. Myers:** It was –

**Mr. J. Brown:** I realize that, and I'm asking them why (Indistinct)

**Mr. Myers:** – it was titled to the Chair –

**Ms. Casey:** We have guests at the –

**Chair:** Okay, we have guests. I agree.

**Mr. Myers:** – it wasn't through me.

**Chair:** Kathleen Casey.

**Ms. Casey:** Great, thank you –

**Chair:** Last – I've got to get the other presenters on by 3:00 p.m. so –

**Paul Bennett:** Of course, yes, sorry (Indistinct)

**Chair:** Okay, a couple of more minutes and then we'll take a five minute break.

**Ms. Casey:** Thank you for your presentation and we all realize that nothing has been closed and we're still in the recommendation stage, so –

**Paul Bennett:** That's correct.

**Ms. Casey:** – a couple of things you said throughout your presentation. What you just said was you were here because we've been through all of this. Can you tell me what your success rate is in implementing hub schools in the jurisdictions that you've had consultations?

**Leif Helmer:** Sure.

**Paul Bennett:** Okay, I'll take a shot. We managed to get an amendment to the education act to change the school review process in Nova Scotia. That was introduced and approved in June of 2014. We also successfully got involved in a new clause in the education act authorizing schools and in the process to create community hubs. We successfully got the department of education to develop a set of guidelines to authorize those –

**Ms. Casey:** Sorry –

**Paul Bennett:** – then, in New Brunswick. I was there last year, similar working with the rural schools coalition of New Brunswick

and we were working with two schools of the six that were closed and Dorchester school and one other succeeded and both are developing hub school models.

The three that we talked about in our presentation we've – the three that we initially were working on were River John, where it was actually it was closed. Maitland was closed and Wentworth has actually become a co-operative. Those are the ones, and Leif has illustrated he has got other examples for you.

**Leif Helmer:** Yeah, I would say we're batting 500. We have three that closed and took a good run at hub proposals and three that are currently working on proposals.

**Ms. Casey:** Okay –

**Leif Helmer:** So three out of six.

**Ms. Casey:** Have you been retained by any other group on PEI?

**Paul Bennett:** No. We're not –

**Leif Helmer:** No, we're not retained.

**Paul Bennett:** No.

**Leif Helmer:** Nor in Nova Scotia –

**Ms. Casey:** No, I just –

**Paul Bennett:** We're just here for expenses of coming back and forth. That's it.

**Mr. J. Brown:** What do you mean by that?

**Leif Helmer:** Covering the bridge fee. That's all.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Who is, though?

**Leif Helmer:** We're paying –

**Paul Bennett:** The town of Georgetown because of our relationship through the Georgetown conference. They said: You should come back.

**Mr. Myers:** He was hoping you were going to say me.

**Ms. Casey:** Great, thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm done.

**Chair:** Chris Palmer: one quick question, please.

**Mr. Palmer:** It'll be very fast.

When I went to school not very long ago there were 300 kids in my grade level. There was a dedicated physics teacher, a chemistry teacher and biology teacher. How do you functionally do that with the grade level of like 50 kids in it? How do you do that? Is that Internet-based?

**Leif Helmer:** Yes. At the elementary level we don't have a physics –

**Mr. Palmer:** Right.

**Leif Helmer:** – we have a science curriculum, which is general enough that – you know our teachers, who teach grade five and grade six have to be really skilled because –

**Mr. Palmer:** Right.

**Leif Helmer:** – they need to know both those curriculum. We have that and so it does work especially at the elementary level and those are the ones that we're looking at here and there, so –

**Mr. Palmer:** Okay, so the hub model doesn't go past the grade eight or nine level?

**Leif Helmer:** It could. Fifty is more of a common number that you would see at the elementary level. You wouldn't see 50 at a high school.

**Mr. Palmer:** Is that 50 in a grade level or 50 in an entire school?

**Leif Helmer:** Oh, 50 in an entire school is how I interpret it.

**Mr. Palmer:** Okay, yeah.

**Leif Helmer:** If it's 50 at grade level that might have impacts on the kind of school choices, course choices that you might be able to have.

**Mr. Palmer:** Yeah.

**Leif Helmer:** I know in, again, North Queens, look at that area. They don't have a specialized physics teacher, but the kids can

take it online and they do an online physics course. That's in Nova Scotia again with virtual schools.

**Mr. Palmer:** That's where your network comes in?

**Leif Helmer:** Yeah.

**Mr. Palmer:** Where you have one shared teacher across and kids watch it on TV or whatever?

**Leif Helmer:** Yeah. You might not have a physics class to choose from in grade 12. You only have a biology teacher, who happens to work there, but if you want to take physics 12 you take it online.

**Mr. Palmer:** Okay, good.

**Paul Bennett:** There are jurisdictions in the US Midwest where this is actually functioning. Where there are four or five jurisdictions where they have the local university supplying faculty of education lessons. Sometimes, it's the exemplary teacher in the entire system teaching, say, grade 12 physics or grade 12-higher math. This is very typical now so that you can bridge some of those challenges. In the elementary schools it's more a question of special projects that can be assisted by resource people who might be in Charlottetown.

**Mr. Palmer:** Okay, thank you.

**Chair:** We're going to stop there. On behalf of the committee I want to thank you very much for presenting here to us today, Paul and Leif. This is recorded so there's a recording that is probably up now that you can go on –

**Clerk Assistant (Reddin):** End of the meeting.

**Chair:** - at the end of the meeting. Later on, there's a hard copy produced, but the recording is available at the end of this meeting. Thank you very much, gentlemen.

We're going to have a three-minute recess while we get our next presenters set up.

Thank you.

[Recess]

**Chair:** Let's go. We now have a briefing from David Upton and Lauren Sears and the floor is all yours. You heard my preamble before for the other group and I understand you have to be out of here for 3:30 p.m., but you have a great presentation we want to hear. If you could –

**David Upton:** Thank you. My name is David Upton and this is my associate, Lauren Sears. We're going to adjust our presentation a little bit and get to what I think are the most salient sort of points.

For the record, I guess I want to start by – this is kind of an interesting thing. The last time I was this intimidated in front of a group of Prince Edward Islanders was in the mid-1970s playing hockey against the Charlottetown Colonels. I'm really – we were playing for an Atlantic championship then and I'm really hoping for a much better outcome this time, for the record.

**Chair:** Well, I apologize for being – getting you on late.

**David Upton:** No, no. I have recovered. It's taken me some time to recover, but I'm over it.

**Chair:** Okay.

**David Upton:** For the record also, we are not here for any reason other than to explain some of the things we have learned. We do the kind of work that we're doing on a national basis. Although we're based in Nova Scotia, we also have an office in Toronto and we do work in Manitoba right now, BC next week. We work across the country.

We're not just working on hub schools, but I'm working on projects where community needs are often met by community wants. So I'm going to abridge our presentation a little bit. Unfortunately for you, I've got to cut Lauren out of this piece and I will just get down to the stuff so we can get at it.

The work that we do focuses primarily on the space that intersects between where there are social or cultural or environmental challenges that are looking for be met and business opportunities. Without any of that –

traditionally the non-profit world has existed in that space where community needs have to be met. So if you think about working with a person with disabilities or a community job and all those kinds of things. I won't belabor them, and traditionally business has worked in that space, particularly small business, has worked in that space where business existed to meet a community or a customer want.

So social enterprise, which is sort of the work that we do on a national basis, and increasingly out of the country – social enterprise works in that space between community and customer and it's a way of bringing the best out of both sides of that equation. So if you think about non-profit organizations that sometimes struggle waiting for more money to be handed to them and businesses that exist strictly to maximize their return on revenues for shareholders, social enterprise is in that space where both of those areas are sort of in the forefront.

An example of social enterprise's work – they basically have a social purpose but they use a business strategy to achieve that social purpose. I'm not going to go over any of the things related to the work or the presentation that preceded mine, but I will say that we did some work a couple of years ago as part of the national research project to look at social enterprise. In Nova Scotia we identified over almost 1,200 social enterprises and the revenue from those social enterprises that particular year, these are primarily and almost exclusively non-profit social enterprises, was \$127 million from the sale of goods and services.

Almost all of that revenue was redirected back to meeting all of the social, all of the surplus revenues moved back to meeting a social or cultural or environmental priority. Typically, they made money but most importantly they created jobs and if this committee is about economic development, I thought that might be just of interest. It's a way of implementing those two things. So that is – I don't know. Can you actually abbreviate the Coles notes version? I just tried to do that. Again, I'm just going to – this is just some of the clients we work with.

What I wanted to talk about was hub schools and how the part that interests us in hub

schools. Now, we have come to the table quite late on this. In Nova Scotia we are now working with a couple of schools to help them rationalize their argument from a business perspective as to why these schools should stay open. We don't have a horse in the race in the sense that – essentially we're technicians. What we look at is – we look at a bunch of things.

When we talk about hub schools, there are dynamics in play here that are different between rural situations and urban situations, and I can sympathize with the point that I believe it was you, sir, who made earlier about the notion that four schools that you can hit a golf ball over. They must be very small schools if you expect me to do it, but the point is that that's – I can't imagine that being much of a rural problem and so you have to take each case as a standalone situation and you look at the merits of each case on a sort of social and a business case perspective. You look at those things and you try to assign – the work that we do is to try to assign social costs where they belong.

I think most of us reasonable people would believe that publicly, and as communities, we have an obligation to meet certain social standards: Children should not starve; people should have roofs over their heads, all those things. Generally, there's broad agreement on that kind of stuff. Where we run into the challenge is, how do you – where's the line between what's economically viable and what's socially, sort of, preferred?

The work that we do is in that process and I can recommend some people who are on the Island who do this kind of work, who would probably be helpful in that process; but the thing that's most important about that process is that it's not about right or wrong because there – what's that thing my wife (Indistinct) – there is no truth in a post-modern world. That's her perspective, and the truth is your truth and my truth are not likely going to be the same if we're adamantly sort of situated on one side or another of an issue.

There are examples of schools that have done this. Chilliwack has a secondary school that has done it. We're working on a project right now in the north end of Halifax which

is increasingly being gentrified, but it's in the past been a place where a lot of awfully poor people lived. We're in the process of creating a community land trust. There's a daycare in that school, an early childhood development centre, that has been there for – well, one of the guys who works for me is 38 years old and he went there as a four year old so it's been there for a long time. They were given the building for \$1. It's a three-story building and they can't afford the building. They can't afford to do the upgrades on it. The whole thing is going to hell in a handcart, frankly.

We've put a proposal to them to create a community land trust with that building because the fears of that community are that buildings are being taken over by people who can afford to buy them. They generally bulldoze and then put up condos. They (Indistinct) they're just trying to figure out a solution.

So, we're going to take a floor of that building; we're going to rent it for commercial purposes. The daycare and all those little kids will have their own floor. The businesses will operate on the second floor, pay off the long-term mortgage that will pay for all of the renovations and upgrade the building and we'll make profit from the third floor where we'll rent the space.

The asset will remain in service of community and perpetuity. We'll use a business solution to solve a community-based problem, and we move forward to the next project. That's a really, sort of quick synopsis of the thing, and I'm not suggesting that that model would be the answer for Georgetown or any other (Indistinct) place –

**Mr. J. Brown:** St. Jean.

**David Upton:** Pardon me?

**Mr. J. Brown:** St. Jean.

**David Upton:** Or St. Jean, but the point is that you assess the situation. You do it using a process that makes sense and that's objective as opposed to emotional and you make the best business decision that you can remembering that, and this is really important, you have to go into the process

from government's side for the community's side.

You have to go into the process acknowledging that – my father-in-law, who was a very hard man, he said: Son, you can have anything you want; you just can't have everything you want. So if people go into that well-intended and with an agenda that includes genuine collaboration, I would argue that most of these problems can be resolved.

My experience as an educator at the post-secondary level, I teach an MBA program as a part-time thing, but my wife was a teacher, like yours, for many years and I spent a lot of time in those classrooms and like you was constantly checked out to make sure that I belonged there; but there are ways around those problems. There are ways to do it if you want to.

The process that I would recommend for, broadly, at any kind of these (Indistinct) is bring the interested parties together, those stakeholders together. I think broad public consultation has become like reality TV or something. It brings out all the crazies and is often not very – and this is my opinion and it may be different from some of (Indistinct) – but it doesn't always seem to – it mostly doesn't seem to work because the loudest voices get all of the airtime.

Bring together the key stakeholders. Have the conversation. Try to align and clarify what a (Indistinct) could be where everybody is – the people who are going to spend the extra \$90,000 or whatever it is. Look at all that stuff. Figure out: Is there something that we agree on? I think, generally, talking at eye level well-intended people can find that space.

Once you do that, really it's about ideation. It's about thinking about other creative ways to solve the problem, whether it's some mix of public and private investment or public and private rental space. There are lots of ways to do it and every one of them is unique and different, and not all of them are viable. You kind of – at some point you have to weigh those things.

Once you've got that place done and you've screened those kinds of ideas, you talk about and think about – getting a little bit of

primary and secondary research done around the ideas to make sure that you can look at other scenarios where that might have happened. Do some planning, see if you can get it financed and then launched and then measured, but (Indistinct) the most important thing to do is the important thing and you can't start with, at least in my humble opinion, it's pretty hard to start with: You should do this. Because you're not going to want to do it just because I said it, and so you have to come to a – you have to start with the conversation.

My abbreviated presentation is that these kinds of challenges are really maybe opportunities for a new kind of discourse, for a new kind of opportunity to solve problems, to meaningfully engage people in that process and to do it with a common agenda of what's best in this circumstance.

I think if people lay their cards on the table, and my experience working with government is that's not always the case. My experience working with community is that's not always the case. There are no good guys and bad guys in these kinds of conversations. There tends to be people with agendas and the idea is to get clarity so that the agenda becomes open and transparent, and then once you have that almost always well-intended people can come to a conclusion that works.

For those who know me at work, and Lauren will be reporting back later, this will be the shortest presentation I have ever made. Not everybody from Nova Scotia is that loquacious as – I am usually more loquacious than that. So I welcome any questions if you wanted to hear more about social enterprise. There are all kinds of fabulous slides in there that Lauren would have done a terrific job of presenting, but in the interest of –

**Lauren Sears:** (Indistinct)

**David Upton:** - time, I'm going to give you a chance to ask a couple of questions and then as they say in the movies: Blow this pop stand.

**Chair:** Wow. There's not very much ice time there, hockey (Indistinct) –

**David Upton:** Yeah, well you know, at my age and size this was plenty. Thank you.

**Chair:** Okay, Jordan Brown.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thank you very much, and actually, I thought was a great presentation for the time and I do just want to say for the record after I went over and said to Paul, I apologized kind of for the confrontational way in which things came up last time, but I will say one thing that has – I have been kind of confronted with through this process, being an MLA that is participating in the school change process, is that there are a lot of people with a lot of different views.

Frankly, it is difficult when you have people that say: It should be this, or it should be that or it should be whatever. This one-size-fits-all model will work in your community, and I really appreciate kind of your saying that: Look, the whole thing is that you have to have kind of an open conversation and to start down that road and look at what will work.

I'm curious in particular – the north end of Halifax model strikes me as one that would be very similar to the jurisdiction that I represent with St. Jean Elementary School. I'm kind of curious as to how that process unfolded to make that work.

**David Upton:** It's actually still unfolding, but the way that it's – there was a group of people who wanted to block – they started with a group of people who wanted to block further development of condos in that area which was actually pushing people who have lived there for hundreds of years out of the community because they could no longer afford to live there. That was the premise. They looked around for a building. They found a building that by accident had a daycare and sort of – how could they do the math?

They have gone through a whole bunch of iterations because there is no end to the things that could do. You could put in apartments in there, you could do all kinds of things, but you have to – the community did not want condos. They did not want more apartments, more people who weren't from the community. They wanted to build

something that would fit the community. That's what they wanted.

As you started to get clarity around the challenge then we started to figure out, so that's at the point that they came to us. They said: We don't want apartments. What can we do? We started to think about – in the end we're going to put up the dough and take the space and help them do it because it's such a great way for business to demonstrate value and from a strict marketing perspective this is good for business. It's a way of differentiating ourselves in the market. This is a way of us positioning us as a company that actually is trying to make a difference, and make a buck.

I like to earn a living, but I think – I don't think those things are mutually exclusive. I think you can do both things. I think there are lots of businesses – let's face it, I don't suppose Prince Edward Island is much different than the times I've lived in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia and that is the core of most communities has been small business.

The small businesses are the backbone of all those communities in more than just providing jobs. I would say that's traditionally been the way it's gone. I think there are lots of small businesses that will step up given the opportunity and the plan. The question is: How do you engage them?

I can tell you this: I'm a small business guy, who is a small business guy. The last thing I want to do is get hammered in the paper, or chastised publicly for a position on something. I was trying to earn a living and I'm trying to be a half decent person while I do it. That's all.

I think that if you bring reasonable people into a conversation there are all kinds of those kinds solutions that are possible. It's really the math. When we – I pay – I have offices by the –

**Lauren Sears:** Citadel Hill.

**David Upton:** - the Citadel in Halifax and I pay \$4,600 a month for a pretty small space, a relatively small space. I can go into that place. I can pay the \$400,000 to do the renovations on the space and in real dollars,

today dollars, it'll cost me less money than I'm paying in rent right now. I'll do a whole bunch of good for the community. The only thing I have to give up is I don't have to – I'm not going to own a million dollar asset. I'm just going to pay for my pre-pay, my space by taking out a mortgage to renovate it and I'll have that space for the 25-year lease.

It's really good for my business, really good for the community. There are no losers. It's just about reimagining the opportunity.

I would suggest to you that in every community, or in lots of communities at least – I hate to be too general – there are those sorts of opportunities waiting to be exploited. You just have got to look at what the real problem is. The real problem is – I, in many ways, agree with the points that Paul made, I should say for the record. I think that there are challenges, and I think we do take a silo or a one-dimensional view of some of these challenges. I think that there are well intended people all around the conversation. See about bringing them back to the manners that they were (Indistinct) by their parents.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Can I ask one more question, Chair?

**Chair:** Nobody else is asking. Oh, Peter.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Carry on, Jordan.

**Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. J. Brown:** What I was going to ask is, is there a perceived, I guess – is there any theory as to where a community hub model – we have a great model in St. Peters that is based around that, very successful, would be more effective, or more what you want than a hub school model? In other words, there with active kids taking classes and –

**David Upton:** I think those are – I think I could certainly make the case, sort of anecdotally, that kids being integrated into the community is not a bad thing, but I'm not an expert. I'm not on education. I'm a parent and a grandparent and I know that I had a kid with a learning disability and I should have suggested this maybe earlier, and fortunately we were in a position to put our kid in a private school because he could not get – my kid was not a social challenge,

he wasn't a bad kid in school, he just had an LD, which meant that he didn't learn as well in the way that they were teaching as other kids.

Since then, my kid's gone, got graduated from university, has a great career, but it cost me \$30,000. For the record, any of you who has a child who has a learning disability, if you're hoping that the public school is going to fix that, unless the public system on Prince Edward Island is considerably better than the one in Nova Scotia, I'd say: Fat chance. That's my personal experience and not a professional opinion, just that's what I know. I ate Kraft Dinner and Hamburger Helper for a long time and I was a little bitter about it, but I did it, frankly.

I don't see why those things – I was involved with the first hub in North America. When we brought it in it was one of the first of 12 hubs in the world. We brought it into Halifax in 2008. That hub model was a fabulous thing. It did lots of good things, but it wasn't economically viable. They built this case that the people built around it wasn't the right business case.

It has gone onto San Francisco and Ottawa and lots of other places to do very well. Inevitably, this comes down to money. It's always about the money. It's a scarce resource. We're all competing for those resources. We have to make a good, sensible business case that solves as many problems as we can because dollars are scarce. I would argue that hub schools can do that.

**Chair:** Go ahead.

**Mr. J. Brown:** The final one, you mentioned business case and I know that was a focus, too, of the previous presentation and just your point a few moments ago. I'll be honest and saying the school system that I would hope to send my kids, who are now four and two, through –

**David Upton:** Yeah.

**Mr. J. Brown:** - is the school system that provides them with the best overall education. Not -

**David Upton:** Absolutely.

**Mr. J. Brown:** - makes the most money for my community, or whatever. I just want to clarify what – how you – what that means, business?

**David Upton:** When you're saying that a school has to close for \$90,000. The stake has been driven into the ground, I would argue, and we're talking about money. We're not talking about the kids anymore; we're talking about the money. Nobody is saying we need to close the school because it's not good for kids. We're saying we have to close the school because we can't afford it. That's what I understood was the argument. Did I misunderstand it?

**Mr. J. Brown:** For the record, my understanding is that the theory right now is they're taking teachers and trying to – I'll give you an example in my district. There is one school that is at 135% capacity utilization.

**David Upton:** Right.

**Mr. J. Brown:** And there's another school that is at 37%. My understanding of the objectives, as stated by Bob Andrews, you probably know who that is -

**David Upton:** Yeah.

**Mr. J. Brown:** - is that effectively you take the outliers off and try and bring everything back to the middle and kind of go from there. I'm not the one espousing that theory, but that's my understanding.

**David Upton:** I'm a little bit uncertain of that. In an urban setting, I think that's probably reasonably logical because distance to travel. Putting a five-year old on a bus for 45 minutes is probably not a good deal. Again, I don't know anything about the socio sort of economic, or socio-psychological challenges that would be involved in all that. All I know is based on my limited experience with five-year olds, that would be tough.

I don't want to – I can't give you a solid argument as to why schools – but, let me say that I think the business case – when I hear about schools closing it always seems to be about money. All I'm suggesting is that building economic supports in place to defray the cost of running those schools

seems like a logical thing if it's going to keep the school in place and help a community. It's really about the economics, I think.

I know that's not the only factor and that's why having educators at the table and city or municipal officials, rather, at the table and all those guys and voices at the table is a way to find out what are real issues and what aren't real issues and can they be bridged? I would suggest that with an effort that often there is some common ground that can be found.

**Mr. J. Brown:** Thanks very much.

**Chair:** Peter Bevan-Baker.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** Thank you, Chair.

I was just looking back through my notes, David, just because there's very poor, very few studies done on the effect of bus rides and extended bus rides on children.

**David Upton:** Right.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** The ones that are there suggest that longer bus rides lead to lower grades, poorer fitness and decreased participation in social activities. There is empirical evidence there to suggest that longer bus rides are not conducive to – and personally, I think that we need to keep our kids out of buses and in their communities, that's what I think we need to do, but that has nothing to do with my question.

My question –

**Ms. Casey:** (Indistinct)

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** He answers his own questions.

**David Upton:** (Indistinct) yes.

**Ms. Casey:** One minute.

**Dr. Bevan-Baker:** My question surrounds two things; a holistic approach, and we just found out we have a minister of rural development so I hope – that's hot off the press – and I hope that that means that government will take a more holistic approach to this looking at economic

development and health and wellness and all of the other aspects of rural development and the critical aspect that schools play in that.

My question surrounds engagement, and maybe it would have been better placed to Leif and – but I'm not sure about that – maybe Paul or Leif would have been a better person to put this to, but I'll ask you.

Elected school boards used to be the case here but almost always they were acclaimed, very low voter turnout. So getting engagement at a community level – now contrast that with what's happening presently with the threat of school closure and you get the community up in arms out en masse to do – to go to public meetings, surround their school, really get motivated. How do you maintain that community commitment, which is required, in order for a hub model to be an ongoing success? That won't be a one-word answer.

**David Upton:** No, no. What I guess I would answer is that the word community gets used a lot and it gets used in a lot of ways, and I think in the context of your question that thinking of community of interest as opposed to geographic communities might be a better way to look at it.

So if there is an elders program there, that's a community of interest and people will vote with their feet whether they think it's a good idea or not. If there happens to be crafts and arts or retail outlets in that space that might be a community of interest and people will vote with their feet and their dollars.

And I don't – I think we've got to really be careful not to make a mistake that hub schools or community hubs, or whatever the hell they are, that they are a panacea for solving any of these problems. They're just another tool in the belt of ways that we can find to keep rural – I'm a rural guy, I grew up rural – to find a way to keep rural communities viable and I, from a personal perspective, really believe that's important.

But I also believe it's important to put neighbourhoods generally, whether they're urban or rural, urban communities – schools are often every bit as critical, so – that's not a good answer but that's what I've got.

**Chair:** Anybody else? David, I wish we could have had you longer but –

**David Upton:** I know a standup routine ready (Indistinct) –

**Chair:** Please feel free to come back, but on behalf of the committee I thank you very much for your presentation.

**David Upton:** We'll make sure that you guys have this and I think our phone number is on here somewhere, maybe?

**Lauren Sears:** Yes.

**David Upton:** Look at that, so –

**Unidentified Voice:** Call –

**David Upton:** - and I thank you for seeing us and thanks for the weather.

**Chair:** Thank you very much.

Moving on, we've had a couple of members say that they wanted to be out of here at 3:30 p.m. If everybody is in agreement, maybe we can do this quickly. I don't know if we can or have to put it over. Do we want to deal with MLA Sidney MacEwen's request regarding wait times or put it over to our next meeting?

**Some Hon. Members:** (Indistinct)

**Chair:** A little direction from the committee?

**Some Hon. Members:** Next meeting.

**Chair:** Next meeting? Okay, any new business?

I have consulted with the clerk. There's no meeting next week because we haven't heard back from anybody that we've put out our letters to, so the next meeting will possibly be two weeks from today. Okay?

Thank you very much, gentlemen. I really appreciate your cooperation. Meeting adjourned.

**An Hon. Member:** Thank you.

The meeting adjourned