

ASPECTS AFFECTING SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS

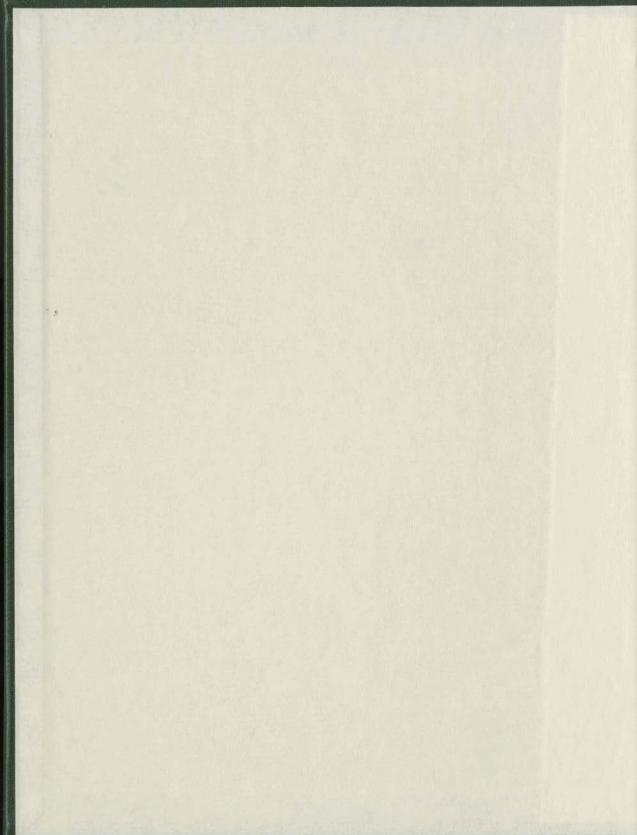
CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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***ASPECTS AFFECTING SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS***

By  
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## **Abstract**

Over the years a variety of definitions have been developed in order to understand what constitutes a small rural school.

However, the art of determining a definition of a small school is not easy. The lack of direction on the part of researchers in narrowing down an approach or definition intrigues me. It makes me wonder if government's present approach to designating schools as "necessarily existent" last year was also hit or miss. The following questions are of interest for me:

What criteria was used to designate a school necessarily existent? Who decided on its designation? What part did schools play in its designation? What input did the school board have on its designation? What direction was given to schools and school boards from the Department of Education? What implications are there for the uniqueness of the school in the community it serves? What significance does the school serve in the community?

For the past twelve years I have worked in small schools. Three of these schools are designated as necessarily existent. Twelve years ago I worked in a small school on the coast of Labrador for five months in a replacement position. I worked on an island in a necessarily existent small school for ten years. Presently, I am working in a larger, necessarily existent school in Central Newfoundland. Through this experience I have gained firsthand knowledge about the operation and running of a small school. Over the years I have seen many parent, school and community groups fight to keep their school.

However, this recent designation of necessarily existent small schools makes me somewhat sceptical about the process involved and the criteria used for this designation. I need to understand how the process works because in the role of principal in such a school, it may be very important in obtaining adequate resources to offer the prescribed program.

Two other key aspects of the small rural school also interest me: the dual role of being both a principal and teacher in these schools and the unique place that these schools serve in their communities.

This paper folio will examine three key aspects of the small rural school: the designation of being small necessarily existent schools; the dual role of being both teacher and principal; and uniqueness of these schools in their community.

**Acknowledgements**

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I would also like to acknowledge the support and guidance given by my supervisor, Dr. Dennis Mulcahy.



## **Chapter I: *Small Necessarily Existent School Status***

### **Introduction**

In 1998-99, the Department of Education in Newfoundland and Labrador introduced a new concept of small necessarily existent schools. This classification is intended to place many small schools into this category if they fit certain criteria. The intended purpose of this designation would be to allow many schools to remain open and receive the teaching personnel to maintain the minimum core program.

The process involved in obtaining this designation raises important questions:

- What criteria were used to designate a school necessarily existent?**
- Who decided on this designation?**
- What role did the school board, schools and the community play in the designation?**
- What significance or benefit does this designation have for the schools involved?**

An intriguing statement from Domino Wilkins, Director of Education - School District #5 (1998) in a memo dated May 20, 1998 to school principals and school council chairpersons, implies that the criteria may not be clear. He notes that the Department had not provided a definition for necessarily existent small schools:

**The Department of Education has not provided a written definition..... (p 1).**

The lack of a definition causes one to question the process involved in the designation of small necessarily existent schools.

This chapter intends to focus on how small schools have been treated in the past and how small schools are presently treated by the necessarily existent small school

status. The paper will explore the process and criteria used by school boards and the Department of Education in giving the schools this designation. An analysis of how the concept of necessarily existent small schools has affected two small rural schools will also be given in this chapter.

### **Small School Definition**

A review of the literature will show how developing a definition of a small rural school has been a difficult task. This is acknowledged by Riggs (1987) when stating:

**There is no single definition of small schools accepted by all researchers (p. 6).**

Mulcahy (1993) supports the idea that it is difficult to define small schools:

**Defining small schools is equally problematic. Each province, state and country has different criteria and standards. Some consider the number of students overall, while others look at the number per grade level. One very common approach is to think in terms of schools less than 100 students as being a small school (p. 1-7).**

This difficult task of defining small schools is prominent not only in other parts of the world but in Canada as well, where many provinces of Canada view the idea of "smallness" differently. Riggs (1987) supports this variation in smallness by outlining various definitions of smallness:

**In France (which in 1979 had 11 000 one-teacher schools), and in Portugal (where in 1918, 80% of the students were served by schools with no more than 2 classrooms), a three-teacher primary school would not be considered small. Manitoba has two definitions- one for elementary and one for high school. Marshall (1985 p. 28) says that when an elementary school has "less than the one-teacher-to-one-grade situation", it is defined as small and qualifies for special assistance. (p.6)**

Therefore, small schools have been defined according to enrolment and multi-grade classrooms.

This varied approach to small schools has created much interest in this designation. Many researchers study small schools in the light of rural education. However, the terms rural or small are themselves difficult to define. Mulcahy (1995) supports this:

**Interestingly, I have discovered that both rural and small schools are problematic terms within the field. With regards to rural, the most common practice is to rely on the approach taken by the census and differentiate rural from urban in terms of population. In Canada, the population figure of 5,000 is generally used as the dividing line. Thus, communities with less than 5,000 is generally used as the dividing line. Thus, communities with less than 5,000 people are designated as rural. In contrast to this, in the U.S.A. the figure is 1,000. The Department of Education uses this definition to delineate rural schools in Newfoundland and Labrador. (p.1-7)**

It appears that the classification of communities as rural is also based on population.

This approach has allowed a variety of issues or policies to be considered in relation to rural small schools: school closure and consolidation, community resistance to closure, the impact of busing, student performance, participation in school extra-curricular activities, technology and distance education. Many of these issues have affected the lives of students and parents as they fight to keep their schools and maintain adequate programming for the students. These issues have contributed to the latest approach to small schools being classified as Small Necessarily Existent.

### **Issues Affecting Small Schools**

The rural nature of Newfoundland and Labrador provides the setting to explore

issues that affect small rural schools. Mulcahy (1996) describes how Newfoundland and Labrador is a unique area for study in rural education:

**Sixty percent (60%) of all schools are officially classified rural; fifty percent (50%) of the 472 schools in the province have fewer than 200 students. Sixty-five (65) of these schools have fewer than 50 students and only 14% of our schools have a student population of more than 400 (NF Department of Education Statistics, 1996). Given these numbers, perhaps, the context makes rural education studies an obligation. (p.1)**

These statistics show how many Newfoundland and Labrador schools fit into the term of reference as rural small schools. Therefore, we must explore the issues, policies or recommendations that affect these small schools.

School closure and consolidation is one of the issues that affects many rural communities. Mulcahy (1996) outlines possible school viability criteria:

**I am writing this article on November 13, 1996. In two weeks time the government will release a revised Schools Act. One section of this Act will detail a revised version of school viability regulations. These regulations will set the criteria that will be used to decide the future of small schools in this province. Earlier this year (January, 1996) the government set minimum standards for school viability in terms of grade enrolment. A K-6 school for example, had to have at least 20 students per grade to be considered viable. Any school not meeting this standard would be labelled non-viable and targeted for closure. Under these regulations 150 rural schools become non-viable. (p.3)**

This reference to a certain number per grade puts a great amount of pressure on many communities. Many parents fear the loss of their neighbourhood school. They fear the distance that many of their children may have to travel in order to go to school. These people also worry about a return to bursaries. In the past the government used bursaries to pay a student's board in another community. This allowed students to attend schools that

offered grades that were not offered in their home community. However, many parent groups today are saying that their geographical location dictates that the school must exist in their community and offer a full program. Many of these parents went through the bursary program and vow that their children should not have to go through what they went through.

Many reasons have been cited for the consolidation of schools. Samson (1997) outlines some of these:

**The criteria for consolidating schools that come from the literature are couched in terms such as economy of scale, declining enrolment, school size, better education, better facilities, together with more opportunity and more program choices (p.12).**

The issue of school closure and consolidation has dramatically plagued the lives of many small rural schools in recent years.

Another issue affecting small schools is multi-grade teaching. Multi-grade classrooms are classrooms with two or grades combined for instruction. It is often put forth as one of the disadvantages of small rural schools. Mulcahy (1993) refers to multi-grade teaching as:

**The single, most pervasive shared curriculum characteristic of small rural schools not only in Newfoundland and Labrador but all over the world (p.5).**

Many parents are often presented with the argument that the creation and existence of multi-grade teaching is a good reason to eliminate a school. Mulcahy (1996) points out:

**The existence of multi-grade classroom or the threat of having to create them was used to convince people to agree to the elimination of schooling in their community.**

**Parents were told that multi-grading was an inferior and outdated form of schooling. If they really cared about their children's education, they were told, they would agree to have their children bussed to another community where they would attend a larger school with single grade classrooms. (p.4)**

Therefore, the existence of multi-grading in small schools was used by some people as a reason against small rural schools and cause some groups to want to close these schools.

Many people view the uniqueness of multi-age teaching as a positive factor in small rural schools. Mulcahy (1995) describes the uniqueness of multi-grade classrooms:

- 1. Students of more than one grade level are grouped for instruction in one classroom.**
  - 2. The teacher is responsible for and must be knowledgeable of two or more grade levels of curriculum.**
  - 3. The age range of the students will be more than one year.**
  - 4. The range of student ability will probably be greater than a single grade class, especially in situations where 3 or more grades are combined.**
  - 5. Students remain in the same classroom for two or more years.**
  - 6. Students have the same teacher for two or more years.**
  - 7. The way the composition of the class changes is also unique.**
    - a) some students move on to the next grade and a different classroom and a different teacher;**
    - b) some students move on to the next grade but stay another year in the same classroom with the same teacher;**
    - c) some new students join the class for the first time.**
- (pp.3-5)**

A variety of opinions clearly exist for and against multi-grade teaching. Small rural communities have to face many obstacles each year in trying to maintain a school that

offers adequate programming for its students. The main fight for these schools is to remain open, to fight the battle of closure and consolidation.

### **History of Two Schools**

One of the schools explored in this paper will be Long Island Academy, a K-12 school located in the community of Beaumont. Long Island is located in Notre Dame Bay on the northeast coast of Newfoundland. It has many hills and mountains with very little flat or level land. However, it has many ponds and bays surrounded by a thick growth of alders, birch, and spruce. The island is triangular in shape. Its southern side is six and half miles long and both the north western and north eastern sides are four and half miles long. The island consists mainly of two fishing communities, Lushes Bight and Beaumont. Inhabitants on the island grow their own vegetables, cut their own firewood and hunt. They also hunt wildlife for food.

Long Island is an isolated community on an island. It is connected to Pilley's Island by a provincial ferry. This is a continuous ferry system which runs daily from seven thirty a.m. to six thirty p.m.

It is reported that Long Island's first school was built in 1888 in Lushes Bight. Other schools were built since then and after closure were purchased by members of the community for houses, churches and fishing stages.

However, in September 1972, the doors opened to a new school in Cutwell Arm (Beaumont). It is the present Long Island Academy which became an all-grade school in 1980. Today this K-12 school serves all the island and has approximately seventy students.

The second school that will be examined in this paper is Point Leamington Academy. Point Leamington is a town in Central Newfoundland that was formerly known as South West Arm. It is in a sheltered harbour in Notre Dame Bay, approximately sixty kilometres east of Grand Falls -Windsor where the school board office is located . It is a feeder community for Glover's Harbour, twenty-five kilometres away, Pleasantview, seven kilometres, and Leading Ticks, thirty kilometres away from Point Leamington.

The present school in Point Leamington was built in 1966 as a high school and an elementary school was built near it in 1975. Although there was a Seven Day Adventist school and a Pentecostal school in Point Leamington, today all students attend the same school. The elementary and high school were joined in 1993 to form Point Leamington Academy which houses all students in the communities of Point Leamington and Pleasantview.

### **Communities the School Serve**

Long Island Academy serves the communities of Lushes Bight and Beaumont. It is a small island in Notre Dame Bay that is connected to the mainland of Newfoundland by a ferry which is operated by the Newfoundland and Labrador government's Department of Transportation.

Long Island Academy is located at the south end of Beaumont South. The north end of Beaumont is about one kilometre from the school. Students are bussed to the school with three bus stops in Beaumont and two in Lushes Bight.

On Long Island, very few parents are receiving social assistance. The majority of the people on the island are senior citizens. Many people are employed in the lobster, crab,



lump, herring and mackerel fisheries. Other people work away from the island on different types of shipping services on mainland Canada. There are also government employees: teachers, post master, and Department of Transportation workers.

Point Leamington Academy serves the communities of Pleasantview K-12, Point Leamington K-12, Glovers Harbour 7-12, Leading Ticks 7-12. The communities are about these approximate distances from the school: Glovers Harbour 25 km, Pleasantview 7 km, Leading Ticks 30 km. Students from K-6 in Glovers Harbour and Leading Ticks attend Leading Ticks Elementary. All students who attend Point Leamington Academy are bussed to school with the exception of some students who walk to school.

Many people in the Point Leamington area are employed in such areas as forestry, manufacturing and the fishery; others commute to Grand Falls, while still others work with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Department of Forestry and Agriculture. There are very few people receiving Social Assistance.

#### **Road and Weather Conditions that Affect Student Travel**

Long Island has a paved main road and gravel side roads. The bus only travels on the main road, which is the responsibility of the Department of Transportation. It is well maintained. A local contractor looks after the roads in winter. School is usually only closed during blizzard and slippery conditions. Loss of time for students is no more than three days a year. This school is the only one on the island.

Some classes may be cancelled because commuting teachers can not get to the island. Wind, maintenance, and ice conditions often affect the regular schedule of the ferry to the island. Many times Long Island and a neighbouring island had to share one ferry for

the down turns.

Point Leamington Academy is connected to the communities it serves by paved roads which are also the responsibility of the Department of Transportation. School is only closed during blizzard and slippery road conditions, which average about three school days per year. The greatest distance that students have to travel on the bus is about 35 kms which takes at least fifty five minutes on a road that is very winding and hilly. The nearest school from Point Leamington Academy is Botwood Collegiate in Botwood which is about twenty five kilometres. The school exists in Point Leamington because the distance from Leading Ticks to Botwood is too far.

### **Characteristics of Schools**

Both Point Leamington Academy and Long Island Academy are K-12 schools. These schools are different in class size, teacher allocation, and administration.

Student enrolment is much higher at Point Leamington Academy than Long Island Academy. (Refer to Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1 Student Enrolment and Staff Deployment for 1998-1999**

<b>Point Leamington Academy</b>			<b>Long Island Academy</b>	
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Enrolment</b>	<b>Deployment (Units)</b>	<b>Enrolment</b>	<b>Deployment (Units)</b>
<b>K</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0.5</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.5</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.5</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0.5</b>		
<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0.5</b>

5	14	1	6	0.5
6	18	1	9	0.5
7	16	1	7	0.5
8	21	1	7	0.5
9	29	2	4	0.5
10	23	1	7	0.33
11	32	2	4	0.33
12	32	2	8	0.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>13.5</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>5.5</b>
<b>Other</b>				
<b>Description</b>	<b>Deployment</b>		<b>Deployment</b>	
<b>Music</b>	<b>0.5</b>			
<b>Guidance</b>	<b>0.5</b>		<b>0.5</b>	
<b>Special Needs</b>	<b>1.5</b>		<b>0.5</b>	
<b>Administration</b>	<b>0.5</b>		<b>0.5</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>16.5</b>		<b>7</b>	

Table 1.1 clearly illustrates some differences and similarities between the two schools. The similarities are:

1. Both schools are K-12.
2. Both schools have a half unit for administration.
3. Both schools have a half unit for guidance.
4. Both schools have low enrolment in grades K-6.
5. Both schools have similar teacher allocations from K-4.
6. Both schools have multi-grading from grades K- 4.

The differences between the two schools are:

1. Significant increases in student enrolments per grade, especially from grades 5-12.
2. Total teacher allocations are different. Point Leamington Academy has 6.5 teaching units more than Long Island Academy.
3. Point Leamington Academy has two vice-principals and a secretary which Long Island Academy doesn't have.
4. Point Leamington Academy has a Music program, band, choir; Long Island Academy has neither.

#### **Changes in Student Enrolment and Teacher Allocation**

Both Point Leamington Academy and Long Island Academy will have to face decreased student enrolment in the future. (Refer to Table 1.2).

**Table 1.2 Student Enrolment Decline**

Grade	Point Leamington Academy			Long Island Academy		
	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001
K	8	5	6	7	2	1
1	5	7	5	5	7	2
2	8	7	7	1	5	7
3	8	7	7	-	1	5
4	9	10	7	7	-	1
5	14	9	10	6	7	-
6	18	12	9	9	6	7
7	16	27	17	7	9	6

8	21	15	27	7	7	9
9	29	24	15	4	7	7
10	23	27	24	7	4	7
11	32	24	27	4	7	4
12	32	32	24	8	4	7
Total	223	207	185	72	66	63

These numbers were obtained by looking at the projected enrollments for each grade for each year. In both Long Island and Point Leamington, staff members familiar with the population, projected the kindergarten enrolments.

Student enrolments have affected teacher allocations in Point Leamington Academy. For 1998-99 Point Leamington Academy had a total of 16.5 teaching units. For 1999-2000 it will lose one regular teaching unit because of a loss of approximately sixteen students. Student enrolment is expected to continue to decline at Point Leamington for the coming years.

The enrolment at Long Island Academy for 1998-99 was 72 and for 1999-2000 is 66. Therefore, the school will keep the same seven teaching units for 1999-2000. However, student enrolment is expected to decline in the future due to out-migration.

Both schools have fears that decreased enrolment may mean a continued loss of teaching units. However, at what point will these declines stop? A similar K-12 school with School District #5 is H.L.Strong Academy in Little Bay Islands. It has four teaching units for twenty six students. Does this mean that both Point Leamington Academy and Long Island Academy will remain open regardless of a significant enrolment decline?

### **Definition of a Necessarily Existent Small School**

For September 1998, many schools in Newfoundland and Labrador operated under the classification of a Necessarily Existent Small School. This designation allowed the Department of Education and the School Board to allocate teachers along programming needs. It is important to determine what Necessarily Existent Small Schools means.

Wilkins (1999) identifies two key components to the definition of Necessarily Existent Small Schools:

- a) The school must be small in accordance with the Department of Education definition: that is, for a small school with no senior high grades, the mean school enrolment must be less than 12. For example, a K-6 school would require an enrolment of fewer than 84 students (7 grades x 12) to be same; by definition. A school with senior high grades must have a mean school enrolment of less than 25 to be considered small. For example, a K-12 school with an enrolment of fewer than 325 students (13 grades x 25) is small by definition.**
- b) The second component to be declared a Necessarily Existent Small School is a judgment call of the School Board in co-operation with the Department of Education. If the Board and Department considered it unreasonable to combine the school with another school because of bussing distance, isolation, or road and climate conditions, the school may be declared necessarily existent as well small, thus making it a Necessarily Existent Small School (p.1).**

Therefore, Necessarily Existent Small Schools must be declared small and necessarily existent to receive this status. A combination of grades and enrolments and distance to the next community are important considerations in determining the status of schools. Wilkins (1999) provides examples to illustrate:

**Leading Ticks Elementary is considered a Necessarily Existent Small School because it**

**meets the definition of small schools. The School Board and the Department of Education considers it unreasonable because of distance to bus primary and elementary students to Point Leamington Academy. On the other hand, the Board and Department would not declare Ricketts Elementary, Seal Cove, for example a Necessarily Existent Small School. It is by definition but the Board and Department had judged that is reasonable to bus primary and elementary students to Baie Verte, a distance of 13 kilometres (p.1).**

These examples clearly shows that both components must apply in order for schools to receive the Necessarily Existent Small School status.

Interestingly Mr Gary Hatcher, Director of School Services with the Department of Education provided me with a different version of the definition of small schools. Hatcher (1999) says that schools must satisfy two criteria to be determined Necessarily Existent Small School:

- 1. It must be small. That is if it offers high school grades, the mean grade enrolment must be 12 or less.**
- 2. There is no other school which offers the same grades, that is reasonably accessible to the students (p.1).**

Although a shorter version of the definition that Wilkins provides these criteria seem to centre around distance and size. However, one might wonder why didn't both individuals provide the same definition? Is it that Department and school boards are not making decisions on common criteria or does this suggest a high degree of subjectivity in the decision?

### **Role That Schools, School Boards, Department Have in Receiving the Definition**

In recent years, school reform has identified a greater need for all stakeholders to have an input into the education system. Therefore, it would be important to determine what role the schools, school board, and department had in developing this definition.

Hatcher (1999) describes this involvement:

**With respect to the schools which are currently designated Necessarily Existent Small, school boards were asked to submit a list of these schools within their jurisdiction which they felt should be designated Necessarily Existent Small, together with a rationale as to why they should receive the designation. These proposals were reviewed by officials of the Department of Education. Next, two senior officials of the Department met with the Director of Education and the Assistant Director-Personnel of each school board to discuss the proposals. The results of these meetings were presented to and discussed with the Minister of Education who is required to make the final decision as to whether a school receives this designation. (p.1)**

It appears that schools could be left out of the process. However, in School District #5, the Assistant Director of Personnel gave principals a chance to provide information in programming required for schools as well as the required teacher allocation to offer this program. Principals were also asked why their schools should receive the small school status. It was up to principals to get input, if they wished, from the stakeholders in the community. In Long Island Academy, I met with the staff, P.T.A. and school council to explain my rationale, programming needs, and required teacher allocations. These individuals were given the opportunity to provide input. Unfortunately, the time frame was short. It took a series of quick meetings prior to Christmas break in December 1997 to accomplish this task.



Clearly, the school board Director and the Assistant Director of Personnel and the Department of Education officials had the greatest input in these decisions. The final decision, though, rested with the Minister of Education.

### **Schools Receiving Designation**

All schools that requested status in 1998-99 with School District #5 did receive the designation. Seventeen of the fifty nine schools in the District received the designation for 1998-99. (Refer to Table 1-3).

**Table 1-3 Small Necessarily Existent Schools in District #5**

<b>School Name</b>	<b>Grade(s)</b>	<b>Community</b>
Bayview Elementary	K-3	Nippers Harbour
Deckwood Elementary	K-6	Woodstock
St. Peters Academy	K-12	Westport
John Thomas Academy	K-12	Middle Arm
Valmont Academy	K-12	King's Point
H.L. Strong Academy	K-12	Little Bay Islands
South Brook Academy	K-6	South Brook
Long Island Academy	K-12	Beaumont
Buchans Public School	K-12	Buchans
Avoca Collegiate	K-6	Badger
Cottrells Cove Academy	K-12	Cottrells Cove
Point Leamington Academy	K-12	Point Leamington
Leading Ticks Elementary	K-6	Leading Ticks
Fitzgerald Academy	K-12	English Harbour West

St. Stephens All Grade	K-12	Recontre East
John Watkins Academy	K-12	Gaultois
St. Peter's All-Grade	K-12	McCallum

### **Effects of Receiving This Designation**

The obvious benefits of receiving this designation of being a Necessarily Existent Small School are in theory:

1. Schools will remain open.
2. Schools will be given teacher personnel to support programs.
3. These schools will receive extra teaching personnel.
4. Sufficient programming will be provided for these students.

These reasons are supported by Wilkins (1999) when he describes the benefits of the designation:

**The designation was beneficial in that all Necessarily Existent Small Schools received teacher allocations in the basis of program needs rather than in according with a mathematical allocation formula. As a result, these schools received more teaching units than they would have under present government allocation formulas. This has resulted in better programs offered to students. (p.2)**

Obviously greater stability for staffing and reduced closure fears are good for schools. With extra teachers, better program offerings will result. However, is better program offerings interpreted as: better than received if they didn't have the extra staff or better than schools not receiving the designation? Since this is the first year of implementation, it is difficult to determine the full benefits of receiving the designation.

It is important to note that teacher allocations for a school board for Necessarily Existent Small Schools is separate for schools not receiving the designation. Therefore, the other schools in the district should not be affected by schools receiving the designation. The assistant Director of Personnel with School District Five informed the school council of Point Leamington of this fact in a meeting in May 1999.

#### **Teacher Allocations in Necessarily Existent Small Schools for September 1999**

Four of the seventeen Necessarily Existent Small schools in School District #5 were given a decreased teacher allocation for 1999-2000 than they received in 1998-99. The reason given by the Assistant Director of Personnel for School District # 5 was that student enrolment decreases meant a change in the teacher allocations for these schools. Therefore, a decrease in student enrolment could clearly mean a reduction of teaching staff. These reductions would be made by the Department of Education officials who compare school size, grade combinations and program needs of schools across the province. An enrolment decline was given for a reduction of one teaching unit for Point Leamington Academy in the school year 1999-2000. The Assistant Director of Personnel with School District #5 informed me that Point Leamington has four extra teaching units because of the designation.

One important point to mention here is that school principals, school councils and parents are not provided with information or criteria that these officials use in making these decisions. What are the program needs? How many teachers are expected to operate a K-12 school? What grades can be combined? What courses should be offered? What are the maximum and minimum numbers of students per class? What programs should be cut

when the teaching staff is reduced? There are many questions or issues that should be acknowledged when these officials make these decisions. This closed door decision making flies in the face of collaborative decision making models. This is not the focus of the leadership style that is proposed by the school improvement initiatives of the Department and the School District. The old saying "practice what you preach" is not present here.

The following table shows the schools in District 5 that have received a reduction in teaching allocations for 1999-2000. (refer to table 1-4).

**Table 1-4 Teacher Allocation Reductions in Small Necessary Existent Schools in District #5**

School Name	Enrolment 99/00	Enrolment 98/99	Reduction
Valmount Academy, King's Point (K-12)	227	233	0.5 unit
Buchans Public School , Buchans (K-12)	171	192	1.5 units
Point Leamington Academy, Point Leamington (K-12)	207	220	1 unit
John Watkins Academy, Gaultois (K-12)	78	85	1 unit

The table clearly shows that a reduction in student enrolment means for these schools a reduction in teaching staff. However, the table does not give a full picture. Information is

not provided on the present teaching allocations, present program offerings nor effects of a teaching loss on the school. But, it does show that a reduction of as low as seven students could mean the reduction of one teaching unit. This shows that "numbers" play an important role in the allocation of teaching units to Small Necessarily Existent Schools.

### **Concluding Remarks**

It is evident that small schools have had to face a number of challenges over the years. Research illustrates that there is a variety of approaches applied to defining what small schools are. Different criteria such as number of students enrolled, class structures (multi-grade) and geographical location were used in arriving at these definitions. It also shows how the development of such a definition is not an easy task. The process or approach to small schools has caused considerable strain on the students, parents and communities involved. Many parents report in the media that the closure of their school could mean the demise of their community.

The recent approach to small schools in Newfoundland and Labrador in declaring some as necessarily existent is viewed by many as a positive step forward. Two of the positives cited for these schools are: they will remain open and they will receive teachers on a program basis rather than on a teaching formula.

However, it is clear from the analysis of schools in School District #5 that all of the factors and criteria are not open to the stakeholders. It seems as if the Department of Education holds a great deal of subjectivity in the designation process. This causes one to question the validity of the process. One good example of this is the teacher allocations to Point Leamington Academy in the past two years. For the school year 1998-99, Point

Leamington Academy enrolment was 223 with 16.5 teaching units. For 1999-2000, the allocation was 15.5 because of a decrease of sixteen students, projected enrolment of 207. However, in June 1999, because of public pressure additional teachers were put back in the system. This meant that Point Leamington Academy will get 16 teaching units for 1999-2000. The flip flop of assigning teachers clearly illustrates a flaw within the system. If teachers were assigned according to curriculum, why did the teaching allocation change? The "numbers" game and other factors that we are not aware of must be present.

From my experience in these small schools, it is apparent that these schools have benefited because of additional teaching units. The Assistant Director of School District #5 informed me that additional teachers were given to these schools because of the designation. Thus, 1.3 teaching units were allotted to Long Island Academy and four teaching units for Point Leamington Academy. However, I question how these figures were determined. In a school council meeting in the spring, the Assistant Director said that Small Necessarily Existent Schools designated teachers by comparing similar schools across the province. This process seems to create a strong sense of subjectivity. Where is the criteria for the type of program that should be offered and for decisions relevant to: dropping courses in the high school; offering a full science program; the use of distance education; what grades should be multi-graded; and what courses should be multi-graded in these schools. The process is a good one but it does not go far enough. Principals, in spite of additional teaching units, have a difficult time offering an adequate program to meet the needs of the students. There needs to be more support from the Department on giving direction for programming in these schools. Principals need to know what

programs or courses should be offered in Small Necessarily Existent Schools and how many teachers to assign to the grades. Within this present system these schools are still struggling for teachers and adequate programming. Hopefully, the Personal Committee of the School board realized that taking a full teaching unit from Point Leamington Academy was too much and this caused them to reinstate an additional half a unit from the add back units. At this point the school is still 'stripped to the bone'.

In conclusion, the designation of schools as Small Necessarily Existent is positive but the process involved in the designation and allocation of teaching units needs to be open to the public. Otherwise, it makes people question the validity of the process. As well a greater direction in programming in these schools needs to be addressed.

## **Chapter II: The Challenging Role of The Teaching Principal**

### **Introduction**

Principals face many challenges as administrators in their schools. Over the years many demands have been placed on the principal's role in the school and in many cases, these challenges are compounded in small schools. Wylie and Clark (1991-92) support this:

**The problem lies in the necessity for small school systems to accomplish the same set of tasks as those of large school systems - but without the resources available to these larger. Since small school systems lack the number of positions available in larger systems, a single administrator often is given several "coordinated" responsibilities which would warrant a separate position in larger school systems. (p.24)**

The increased strain on administrators is often centred around restructuring or school reform. Under this pressure for change, these demands are often more difficult for the principal in a small school. This change in the expectations of principals is supported by Warren (1992) in describing restructuring in schools:

**Principals and teachers are keenly aware that their jobs have changed immensely in the last decade. Expectations have intensified. There has been a growing scepticism regarding the effectiveness of our schools, and growing demands by the general public for accountability by schools. As a result of this scepticism, the effective school movement evolved. The present school improvement, or most recently, school restructuring, efforts in this province and elsewhere have grown out of the school effectiveness movement, and have utilized much of its research findings in an effort to facilitate change in our educational systems.**



(p.12)

From my experience in the school system, advocates for school improvement have rooted the theory behind this initiative out of the school effectiveness movement. However, the process has taken on many forms in various school boards and schools.. For example, the Green Bay Board started the process by analysing theory and placing emphasis on climate building as a way for staffs to move towards school improvement. Other boards, have started by using templates which allow staffs to develop beliefs, mission statements and action plans. The old idea was to move staffs into a collaborative model which allowed for improvements in student achievement. Much of the push behind these initiatives would be the principal. If the principal was in favour, then the process moved forward. If the principal was not, the process stalled. I did not see any mechanism in place to move the resistor principal and school forward. This caused inconsistencies in school improvement processes between schools.

Through such initiatives as effective schools movement, school restructuring, accountability, and school improvement, the role of the principal is undergoing considerable change. These changes place wide degrees of demands on the duties of the school administration.

This paper will focus on the challenging role of the principal in small rural schools. I will provide a review of the literature on the role of a principal and explore the role of the principal in two schools in which I have worked for the last twelve years. As principal in these small schools I had a dual role of being both principal and teacher. This causes a number of individual challenges in how to balance out the demands placed on the position

of principal in these schools.

### **Literature Review of the Role of the Principal**

In today's society, principals are continually faced with a variety of role demands. These roles are often clearly defined and others are inherited depending on the history and culture of the school and the community. This section of the paper will illustrate various roles of a principal in the school system.

It would be important first to define what a principal is. Lunenburg (1995) offers this definition:

**A principal is an individual in a school who is responsible for the work performance of one or more other persons. People are a basic resource of schools. As the human resources of schools, people use material resources such as finances, information, equipment, and facilities to produce a product. If the people perform well, the school performs well; if the people don't perform well, the school doesn't either. The principal's job is to help the school achieve a high level of performance through the utilization of its human and material resources. More simply, a principal's job is to get things done by working with and through other people. (p.3)**

Lunenburg sees the principal as the person in a school who is responsible for directing all of the human resources in the school to facilitate the highest level of student achievement. In order to be an effective principal the individual must have consummate ability to work with people.

To fully understand the complex position of the roles of the principal, we must look at the principalship in terms of functions that the principal performs, the actual roles the principal follows, and the skills required of the principal (Lunenburg, 1995, p. 5).

These three ways of examining the role of the principal needs to be further clarified in order to understand fully the job of a principal.

It is important to note that the terms functions, roles and skills are often interchanged in the job of being a school principal. The word function implies specific actions that the principal must perform within his job. Lunenburg (1995) describes the principal's role in terms of four basic administrative functions: **"Previously we noted that principals combine and coordinate various kinds of resources by carrying out four basic administrative functions: planning, organizing, leading, and monitoring" (p.6).** These four functions provides a focus on the principal's job. Planning allows the principal to set goals and maintain plans or directions to meet these goals. Organization involves setting up the school's structure and acquiring the human resources to tackle the planned direction for the school. Leading involves guiding the people in the organization to work together to meet targets. Monitoring involves a constant examination of the school to see if it is moving towards its target.

Many different roles have also been assigned to the principal in light of recent school reform initiatives. Dawe (1994) describes Dr. R. Crocker's role of principal in education:

**The principal of the school will be an instructed leader as opposed to manager. These persons who have already made this change will not find a major impact when the William's Report is implemented. There will be greater responsibility for student performance, community relations and the establishment and maintenance of the School Council placed with the principal of each school. The success of these plans will depend on the commitment of principals and not on legislation. The principal will be the driving force for the**

**Parent Advisory Council- an executive secretary responsible for recruiting and running of elections. (p.16)**

Dr. Crocker sees the role of the principal to be an instructional leader, to be responsible for student performance, relations with the community and School Council. He sees principals as key agents in implementing school reform.

There are many roles of the principal in a school. It is not possible to list all of them. Brown (1993, pp. 18-23) highlights seven roles of principals in her study on Transformational Leadership and secondary school change:

- 1. Staff Facilitator-** supports teachers in their work in the classroom.
- 2. Problem Solver-** to assist others in solving problems and provide resources to solve the problem.
- 3. Administrative Decision-Maker-** realizing that some decisions are made alone and others collaboratively in a group.
- 4. Team Player-** ability to work with others in the school.
- 5. Vision-building-** ability to work on one's personal vision and on a determined path or vision for the future.
- 6. Change instigator-** seen as the initiators of any change initiative.
- 7. Power sharer-** ability to empower others to make decisions.

These seven roles highlight the dramatic and diverse place that the principal holds in the school.

Skill development is also crucial for principals. Craig (1994, p.7) highlights several skills that principals in his study should develop:

- 1. System Skills-** ability to see the whole picture in terms of the mission and purpose of the school.
- 2. Support Systems-** develop support systems

- both within and outside the school for a 'sounding board' to discuss feelings and look at feelings and behaviours from different points of view.
3. Interpersonal and Imaginal Skills- ability to work within groups.
4. Clarification, brainstorming, project planning and management.

Functions, roles and skill development have provided a basis for a further exploration of the principals' position within a school. It is important to note that many principals in rural schools are also teachers. Therefore, the dual role concept of principal and teacher places further demands on the person in the position of principal. However, it is difficult to obtain much information in the literature on this dual role..

#### **Newfoundland and Labrador Schools Act-Roles of the Principal**

There are many roles assigned to principals according to the Schools Act of the province. These roles are given to principals subject to the direction of the school boards who direct how principals are to carry out these roles.

The following roles have been assigned to principals according to the Schools Act of Newfoundland and Labrador:

#### **Section 24**

1. A board shall appoint a principal for every school in the district.
2. A principal appointed under the former Act shall be considered to have been appointed under subsection (1) immediately upon the commencement of this Act.
3. A principal of a school shall, subject to the direction of the board,
  - a) provide instructional leadership in the school;
  - b) ensure that the instruction provided by the teachers employed in the school is consistent with the

- courses of study and education programs prescribed or approved under this Act;**
  - c) ensure that the evaluation and grading of students is conducted in accordance with generally accepted standards in education;**
  - d) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered in the school;**
  - e) manage the school;**
  - f) maintain order and discipline in the school and on the school grounds and at those other activities that are determined by the principal, with the teachers of the school, to be school activities;**
  - g) promote co-operation between the school and the communities that it serves;**
  - h) provide for the placement of students in courses of study and education programs prescribed or approved under this Act;**
  - i) provide for the promotion and advancement of students;**
  - j) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of teachers employed in the school;**
  - k) annually provide a report with respect to the school;**
  - l) ensure a student record is established and maintained for each student in the school;**
  - and**
  - m) carry out other duties assigned by the board.**
- (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1996, pp.13-14).**

The principal is also given roles under section twenty-five of the Schools Act.

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (1996) defines those roles as follows:

#### **Section 25**

- 1. A principal of a school shall establish a school council for the school.**
  - 4. The principal of a school shall be a member of the school council for that school by virtue of his or her position.**
- (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1996, p.14).**

These roles give school boards direction in how they wish their principals to do their jobs.

There are many factors or environmental concerns within the schools that affect the way principals carry out their duties. These factors are often manifested in a unique way in small rural schools. Brown, Carr, Perry, McIntire (1996) support the fact that rural principals have problems in their role expectations:

**As models evolve for the provision of public education in this country, different role expectations for rural school principals, staff members, and community members in decision making have emerged. The bureaucratic organization has been and continues to be the dominant paradigm for school systems. This paradigm places principals in the position of responsibility for managing the day to day operations of schools in which they are responsible for planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling functions. In other words, principals make the decision. The results of the current research clearly show that these rural principals would like their role to be one of leadership rather than management. Rural principals, because their schools tend to be small, already assume a variety of roles including central office responsibilities, supervising nonteaching personnel, and directly handling student discipline. They report spending little time on instructional leadership, although they acknowledge its importance (Perry and Perry, 1991) (pp.19-20).**

Although the government has set out a number of roles for principals, it is clear that small rural school principals have a variety of demands that may interfere with the carrying out of some of their roles. To appreciate these demands it would be important to explore the role of a principal in two rural schools.

### **Administrative Structure of Two Rural Schools**

I will focus on my role in the position of both teacher and principal in two small rural schools within the same school district. I am going to describe the role and responsibilities of the teaching principal from a personal perspective based on my experiences in the Small Necessarily Existent Schools of Long Island Academy and Point Leamington Academy.

Long Island Academy is located in Beaumont, a small island in Notre Dame Bay. It is approximately three kilometres from Pilley's Island, sixty-seven kilometres from Springdale and one hundred twenty kilometres from Grand Falls - Windsor. It is connected to Pilley's Island by a vehicle-passenger ferry operated by the Department of Transportation.

Point Leamington Academy is located in Notre Dame Bay and is approximately sixty kilometres east of Grand Falls. The closest service centre is the town of Botwood about thirty kilometres away.

Both schools have different systems of administration. Because of the government formula, School District 5 has allocated a half unit of administration to these schools. The student enrolment for Long Island Academy for 1998-99 was seventy-two and two hundred twenty three for Point Leamington Academy.

In Long Island Academy, I taught approximately seventy percent of the time with the remainder of the time allotted to administration. In order to offer a full program I felt that I had to use some of the administrative time for teaching. However, the Director of the School Board is recommending to principals in these schools to use the full half a unit for



administration. There is no vice principal and no secretary for the school. When I was absent from my regular duties a teacher was assigned to be a designated principal for the day and this person was only paid when the principal was out of school.

I teach about fifty percent of the time in Point Leamington Academy and do the administrative work in the other fifty percent. This school has two vice-principals who were kept on because of the early years (1980's) when the school was broken down into two schools K-6 and 7-12. When they merged the schools to make one K-12 school they had one principal and two vice-principals. Those two positions will terminate when one vice-principal for senior high will retire in June 2000. Both vice-principals share the bonus for this position. I also had a part time secretary.

In 1999-2000 at Point Leamington Academy I will see the hours for secretary reduced from thirty two hours to twenty five hours. Long Island Academy will receive five hours. This is an attempt by the School Board to treat all schools equally within the government's allocation for secretarial hours. From my experience in Long Island Academy five hours will be a great help. However, the reduction of hours in Point Leamington Academy will increase my workload.

### **Analysis of Two Schools: Grades, Teacher Allocation, Programs**

In order to fully appreciate the role of the principal in these two schools, it is necessary to analyse the schools in terms of grades, teacher allocations, student enrolment and program offerings.

There have been a number of changes in student enrolment over the years. It has decreased in both schools and is expected to continue in the coming years. (Refer to Table 2-1).

**Table 2.1 Student Enrolment 1997-2000**

Grade	Point Leamington Academy				Long Island Academy			
	1997	1998	1999	2000	1997	1998	1999	2000
K	5	8	5	6	5	7	2	1
1	8	5	7	5	1	5	7	2
2	8	8	7	7	0	1	5	7
3	9	8	7	7	7	0	1	5
4	14	9	10	7	6	7	0	1
5	18	14	9	10	9	6	7	0
6	10	18	12	9	7	9	6	7
7	21	16	27	17	7	7	9	6
8	29	21	15	27	4	7	7	9
9	23	29	24	15	7	4	7	7
10	32	23	27	24	4	7	4	7
11	32	32	24	27	8	4	7	4
12	24	32	32	24	5	8	4	7
Total	233	223	207	185	70	72	66	63

These enrolments for September 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2000 show that the student population for Point Leamington Academy is greater than three times the student population of Long Island Academy. Despite the difference in population, both schools receive the same allocation of administration.

A further analysis of grade, groups and teacher allocations would also be useful in comparing both schools (Refer to Table 2-2).

**Table 2.2 Staff Deployment 1997-98 and 1998-99**

Grade	Point Leamington Academy			Long Island Academy		
	1997	1998	Deployment	1997	1998	Deployment 1998
<b>K</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1 unit</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	
<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1 unit</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1 unit</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>1 unit</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1 unit</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>1 unit</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>2 units</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2.5 units</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2 units</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	
<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>2 units</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>13.5 units</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>7 units</b>
<b>Administration</b>			<b>0.5 unit</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>
<b>Special Education</b>			<b>1.5 units</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>

Challenging Needs		*	*	0.5 unit
Guidance	0.5 units	*	*	0.5 unit
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>16.5 units</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>8 units</b>

**Note:** The 1997 Deployment of Long Island Academy had one less teaching unit. There was only two units for grades 10-12 and no allocation for guidance. This additional unit was a benefit from being deemed a Small Necessarily Existent School.

Because of a decreased student population, Long Island Academy has fewer teaching units, fewer special needs units and no allocation for music.

Table 2-1 and Table 2-2 give a detailed description of student enrolment, grade and teacher allocations. This allows one to understand the type of system that I worked in these schools. While in Long Island Academy, I had to be greatly involved in day to day managerial things because there was no assistance from a secretary nor a vice-principal. I had to balance this out with a heavy teaching load. In Point Leamington Academy I give greater attention to instructional leadership, supervision of teaching and non-teaching staff and receive greater demands from students and parents.

A comparison of programs taught in each school would allow a further understanding of the type of demands placed on me in trying to offer programs. (Refer to Table 2.3 and Table 2.4).

**Table 2.3 Program Comparisons Long Island Academy**

Programming Long Island Academy	
Grades	
K-6	Full program with the exception of a trained music teacher. No French in grades K-3.

<b>7-12</b>	<b>Academic Program. No basic courses offered. High school students can take French, Advanced Math, Physics and Chemistry through Distance Education. Biology is the only science offered. No music and Art offered in high school. Basic art and Music is offered in junior high without a trained music teacher.</b>
<b>K-12</b>	<b>Multi grading for most courses.</b>

**Table 2.4 Program Comparisons Point Leamington Academy**

<b>Programming Long Island Academy</b>	
<b>Grades</b>	
<b>K-6</b>	<b>Full program with the exception of a trained Phys. Ed teacher in grades K-4.</b>
<b>7-12</b>	<b>Full program with Academic and Basic courses offered. Advanced courses offered in math when number and schedule allows. Music offered from grades K-9.</b>
<b>K-6</b>	<b>Multi grading for some courses.</b>

**Note:** Distance Education will be available for 1999 - 2000 in Advanced Math.

The teaching allocations for each school force me to make tough decisions in terms of which courses to be offered, grades to be multi-graded, courses to drop and to justify these decisions to the school council. These decisions are even more difficult when I have to declare a teacher redundant because of reductions in allocations. I made these decisions by using School Board guidelines on the administration of Article 9 in the Teachers

Collective Agreement. The process is as follows:

1. Determine program.
2. Assign each teacher according to seniority and educational background and experience.
3. Place all senior teachers first if possible.

4. Continue down the line until the most junior teacher to be declared redundant.
5. Junior teachers remain above a more senior teacher only if the junior teacher can perform the job that the senior teacher can not. For example: French teacher.

### **Allocation of Administration in Both Schools**

Department of Education formulas determine the number of teachers, administration, guidance counsellors, challenging needs and librarian units assigned to schools. These government formulas are calculated according to the student population of each school.

The administration formula for Point Leamington Academy and Long Island Academy is the same. Schools with a student population of fifty to two hundred forty - nine receive a half unit administration. Therefore, Long Island Academy student population of seventy two and Point Leamington Academy of two hundred twenty three fits into the same category. This is an extreme difference from fifty - two to hundred forty - nine students. The formula was recommended from the small schools project. Riggs (1987) recommendation 4.3 reads:

**That each school board be allocated additional salary units for school principals in accordance with the following schedule:**

# of Pupils in School	# of Allocations
Fewer than 50	No Unit
50-249	0.5 unit
250-499	1.0 unit
500-997	1.5 unit
More than 997	2.0

(to replace Schools Act (Teacher's Salary)  
1979 Section 5 (p.41).

This policy of allocating administrative units is presently a target of concern of the School

Administrative Council which is lobbying government to have this changed. With the present reduction in school boards in the province, downloading of information is poured on principals. The ensuing expectation on principals are significantly increased since this policy was created. I find that the following expectations of Principals are different from years ago:

1. Control Professional Development Days.
2. Decide on a possible of three days to close out school for professional development.
3. New initiatives such as: school councils, school improvement, school report card and school assessment, demand more from principals.
4. Site based management allows principals to totally control the money given to the school in conjunction with a site based committee.
5. Become instructional leader in spite of less program coordinators from the board office. One time there was a program coordinator for subject areas. Today these coordinators are responsible for all curriculum in a certain number of grades: K-3, 4-6,7-9,10-12.
6. More downloading of information from board office because they don't have the manpower to do it.

### **Analysis of Reasons and Perceptions of Becoming A Principal**

It is important that I give some background on my own history in regard to teaching experiences and reasons for going into administration. I graduated from Memorial University with a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Education Degrees in May 1986. In the school year 1986-87, I substituted in the Avalon North area and took a two month replacement job in the Corner Brook area. The following year I continued to substitute in the Avalon North area followed by a five month replacement position in St. Lewis Labrador. The next year I went to Long Island Academy as a junior and senior high religion and social studies teacher.

I spent eight years in this position. During the last three years of the eight I took on the duties of vice-principal which was really a designated principal position where I got paid only when the principal was away. The last two years I was there I took on the duties of principal.

The thought of entering into administration was always present and was reaffirmed throughout my stay in Long Island. While I was completing my undergraduate degree I thought about doing the Masters Program in Leadership with the hope that I would go into administration some day. However, I wanted to spend some time teaching before I embarked on this journey. While at Long Island fellow teachers and the principal encouraged me to take a active role in the school improvement process and then later to take on the duties of designated principal. From my involvement with the school improvement process I became the chairperson of this committee in the school. In this leadership role I envisioned many things for the school. Eventually the goal of the principalship was reaffirmed when the principal encouraged me to think about it when he retired. Other members of the staff also encouraged me to think about the principalship. With this encouragement and the principal including me on many of his administrative decisions I decided to begin the program of Masters of Education in Leadership. The first course I did was Education 6675 - Current Issues in Rural Education. This course inspired me to think about the importance of small schools and to feel that I had something to contribute in making or improving the quality of education in these schools. This was happening at the time when my thinking was close to the school improvement model of collaborative decision making. I felt that I could build a good team within the school that



included staff, parents and students to move the school forward. I did not fear change but accepted it as a challenge. The job of principal was indeed a challenging one, but one that left me feeling that I had something to contribute. Over the last four years I often reflected on this decision and each time reaffirmed it. This job takes a lot of hard work and personal character that can withstand many pressures.

Before I took the position I knew it would take a great deal of my time; I did not foresee how the constant demands would take so much time away from my family. The master's degree program, the long days, the meetings etc., were a steady drain on my personal life. Further, these demands seem to be increasing each year.

After ten years at Long Island Academy I felt that there was time for a change. We decided to move for many different reasons:

1. I was beginning to feel that I had lost vision or had accomplished many of things that I hoped to.
2. I felt that my family needed to get away from the isolation.
3. It was important to open up my family to more than a small community of three hundred and fifty people.
4. The experience of the island was good but they needed time to adjust to a bigger community. I felt that this was very important for my daughter who hoped to attend university.
5. The cost of living was increasing.
6. I felt that we needed to buy a house that might not result in a loss like it would have on the island.
7. Enrolment projections were not looking good. We already experienced triple grading. What would be next?
8. I needed a bigger challenge. (A larger school).
9. I had no support staff to help me.

With these reasons in mind I applied for and was accepted to the position of Principal, at Point Leamington Academy, a similar school with an enrolment of two

hundred and twenty three students. Presently, I am in my second year as principal of this school.

To date, I am quite pleased both personally and professionally with the decision to move to Point Leamington Academy. My family have adjusted well and have made good friends in the community of Botwood where we live. The school gives me a inspired vision to improve quality of education. The support of the vice principals and secretary has helped me greatly in the carrying out of my duties.

### **Teaching and Duties of the Administration in the Two Schools**

There are a number of comparisons and differences that I could describe in the position of principal that I held in Long Island Academy and hold in Point Leamington Academy. The teaching load that I had in these schools are interesting to compare. (Refer to Table 2.5).

**Table 2.5 Sample Teaching Load of Principal in both Schools.**

<b>Long Island Academy</b>		<b>Point Leamington Academy</b>	
<b>Course</b>	<b>Periods assigned out of seventy.</b>	<b>Course</b>	<b>Periods assigned out of seventy.</b>
<b>World History 3201</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Math 8</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Religion 2104</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Consumer Math 1202</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Canadian Geography 1202</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Vocational Math 2202</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Enterprise 3205</b>	<b>10</b>		
<b>Religion 8/9</b>	<b>5</b>		

<b>Social Studies 8/9</b>	<b>10</b>		
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>		<b>35</b>

It is obvious that the teaching demands on my positions greatly affected the way that I fulfilled the role of principal. These demands are explained by Mayer and Gardener (1994):

**Most authorities agree that school administrators are responsible for providing and improving educational opportunities for students under their jurisdiction. More specifically, instruction and curriculum development as well as pupil and staff personnel responsibilities dominate the job descriptions of the principal. In recent years it has become fashionable to view the tasks of school administration in the form of competencies thought to be necessary for effective school administration. (p.6)**

These demands are certainly immense under the present allocation of administration to the school.

The teaching duties that I held in both schools will be the starting point for a more detailed description of the dual role of being both principal and teacher. When moving from the position of teacher to principal in Long Island Academy it produced a number of changes for me:

1. I was held more accountable to staff, parents, students, school board, department for the running of the whole school, not just your own classroom.
2. I had to become an instructional leader and become familiar with the curriculum from K-12.
3. I had to become familiar with board policies in carrying out the duties of principal. For example: hiring of substitute teachers and support personnel.
4. I was responsible for looking after the heating and maintenance of the building.

5. I had to make decisions with regard to field trips, staffing, course selections and staff assignments, redundancy etc.
6. I had to continue with maintaining positive school and community relations.

These demands at first were overwhelming but I was too busy to get down over it. I had a choice to cave in or meet the challenge. This was quite different from being a teacher. As a teacher I was responsible for the curriculum I was teaching and the well being of my students. As a principal who had to carry out many other functions, I found that more people were counting on me. In the transition I had to be willing to work hard and learn to deal with stress. More often than not learning to manage my time was most important. I found that this came with time. Another major adjustment was to deal with discipline issues with the students. I felt that many students looked at me differently in the position of principal because I had greater powers - I could now suspend students. I also found that many teachers were more reserved in personal relationships, but there was a greater element of respect. Overall I felt that the staff was accepting and very supportive of me. Many of them were relieved that I got the position rather than someone from the outside. No other staff member was interested in the position of principal in Long Island.

#### **Support Structure to the Principal in Both Schools**

The support structure in both schools was somewhat different. In Long Island Academy, there was no secretary or vice-principal. However, the small staff of seven or eight teachers was very supportive of each other. All the staff shared in the extra curricular activities and jumped in where possible to help in many ways. The school improvement team took leadership roles in many of their initiatives. The size of the staff allowed for a

lot of collegiality and collaborative decision making to take place. Many teachers also helped me: each teacher in a sense was a department head, a teacher taught Language from grades 4-12 for example; teachers assisted as the liaison person with distance education and helped me with the schedule; when special ceremonies occurred, the staff pulled together to do the task at hand.

In this school, there was also a very active Parent-Teacher Association and a good School Council. The support staff was also very cooperative.

Point Leamington Academy was different in the sense that it had two vice-principals and a secretary to assist. The school also has a good School Council and a good School Spirit Committee that helped support the school. Various teachers helped to run different activities and a large number of parent volunteers. In many cases, teachers assisted one another in the carrying out of these activities. Collaborative decision making is coming. The staff was used to a more authoritarian approach than the one that I use. The major difference is that all the staff do not pull together the same as the staff of seven, but this is due to the K-12 staff of seventeen individuals.

In Point Leamington Academy there were others interested in the position of Principal when I applied. The vice-principal was interested. I heard that many of the staff were keen on him getting the position. However, since I took over the position both the vice-principals and the other staff members are very supportive of me in this position. Many of the staff seem to be moving closer together. They seem to be supportive of the approach that I take to administration. I believe in collaborative decision making and equal treatment of all staff. This seems to be working well so far.

### **Daily Routines of the Principal in School**

The daily routine is different to some degree in the two schools.

#### **Long Island Academy:**

1. I was responsible for opening the building, checking furnace, washrooms, etc.
2. I would check on students arriving late for school.
3. Announcements would be given to home room teachers on a white board in the staffroom by me.
4. All typing, office work was done by me.
5. All discipline, parent concerns, school council issues were handled by me.
6. Any maintenance, janitorial problems, etc. were handled by me. In some cases it took a few days for maintenance personnel from the board to arrive.
7. I had regular teaching duties
8. Meetings, agendas, assemblies are all handled by me.

#### **Point Leamington Academy:**

1. The janitor is responsible for opening the building, checking furnace, washrooms, etc.
2. The secretary will check on students arriving late for school.
3. The secretary does announcements on the P.A. system.
4. The secretary helps me do the typing and other office work.
5. All discipline, parent concerns, School Council issues are handled by me at both schools. However, the vice-principals help with discipline.
6. The bus drivers are also maintenance workers. The school janitor is also around every day from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. each day. All that I need to do in Point Leamington is to alert these personnel to correct a problem.
7. I had teaching duties at both schools.
8. Meetings, agendas, assemblies are all handled by me with the assistance of the secretary .

These examples should serve as a way to inform you that the day usually begins at 8 a.m. and ends at 5 p.m. in both schools. There are times when work must be taken home at night or I would have to go back to the school later that evening. Please note that instructional issues, monitoring of teaching and non-teaching staff are also built into the day.

**Typical Day in Both Schools**

I found that the duties of principal and teacher were quite demanding in both Long Island Academy and Point Leamington Academy. The following outline will serve as a guide to see what a typical day was like:

**Long Island Academy:**

1. Phone call at 7:00 a.m. teacher sick. Time spent phoning a substitute. Days closed for weather would start at home calling staff and radio stations.
- 2.. Arrive at school at 8:00 a.m. Check school building, open doors and turn on lights etc. Put necessary announcements on the white board for teachers. Sort and distribute mail.
3. Students arrive at 8:20 a.m. Do supervision duty if it was your day or spend time preparing for class.
4. During home room meet with student(s) concerning discipline.
5. Go to classes for the morning.
6. Supervise lunch hour sports in the gym.
7. Prep period: do paper work. Phone parents for discipline or PTA concerns.
8. Meet with bus driver over bus discipline.
9. Attend meeting after school.
10. Come back at night to clear up paper work and do bank deposit.

**Point Leamington Academy:**

1. Phone call at 7:00 a.m. teacher sick. Vice-principal has trouble getting a substitute. We discuss alternate suitable people we can phone. I might make the call to the substitute or the vice-principal will do it. Days closed for weather would start at home calling staff and radio stations.

2. Arrive at school at 8:15 a.m. Put necessary announcements on the secretary's desk. Sort through mail or faxes. Type memos to staff concerning mail and distribute them to staff in the mailboxes.
3. Students arrive at 8:20 a.m. Do supervision duty if it was my day, spend time preparing for class or discuss items with staff members.
4. During home room meet with student(s) concerning discipline.
5. Go to class for first two classes.
6. Recess time talk to secretary about phone messages or work she needs to do.
7. Supervise corridor for a while. I often monitor students over the lunch hour even though I am not in class.
8. Prep periods: do paper work, phone parents for discipline or PTA concerns, meet with School Council chairperson, phone School Board on curriculum concerns.
9. Meet with maintenance people over concerns with the building. Discuss staff complaints with the janitor over building cleaning.
10. Meet with a student about discipline. Possibly write a letter to parent; it may be a suspension letter.
11. Attend meeting after school.
11. Leave at 5:00 p.m. for the day.
12. At home plan lessons or correct assignments.

It is important to note that every day is not necessarily the same. However, I found both positions kept me very busy. *It seems as if the only time to sit down for the day was the twenty to twenty five minutes for lunch. Although I have more administrative time at Point Leamington Academy, the greater number of students and staff makes the job just as busy. The big difference is the larger support structure that is available to assist in Point Leamington Academy than was in Long Island Academy.*



### **Comparison of Responsibility of the Principal Position in Both Schools**

I would like to make some general statements with regard to a comparison of responsibility of being the principal at both schools.

Both Long Island Academy and Point Leamington Academy have many similarities;

1. In both schools, the principal has a significant teaching workload.
2. Both schools are K-12 systems with similar curriculum concerns and issues.
3. Both schools have active parental involvement.
4. Both schools are Small Necessarily Existent Schools.
5. Both schools have to face declining enrolments.
6. The students from each school are very similar. For example, discipline is not a major concern.
7. Principals have the ultimate authority in running the school.

There are also some differences:

1. Point Leamington Academy has three times the student population of Long Island Academy.
2. Point Leamington has double the teaching staff.
3. Point Leamington has more non-teaching

personnel.

4. In Point Leamington Academy, the extra personnel; secretary, vice-principals, janitors and maintenance help run the school.

5. Long Island had concerns of isolation.

Transportation of students to activities and commuting staff caused problems at times.

6. *Point Leamington's* closeness to Grand Falls - Windsor is an asset for the school, field trips, YMCA, etc.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Presently in our schools, principals have challenging positions. The literature clearly illustrates the diversity of the position of principal in the schools. The combined demand of being a teacher and a principal adds considerably to the position. I must be the teacher of curriculum on one hand and an instructional leader on the other. To many this *can be seen as a conflict of interest. However, with the nature of Newfoundland schools* being rural, the multiple roles of the principal is definitely a difficult job..

Rural schools have many challenges also. Keith, Keith, Quick, Cohen-Rosenthal and Franzese (1996) describe some of these challenges:

**In contrast, a host of concerns plague rural schools: Rural schools typically lack the facilities, physical plants, course offerings, and educational programs of larger, more resource-rich districts. Nationwide school excellence and reform movements impose additional constraints on rural schools (Stephens, 1988 p. 55).**

Many of these problems are evident in the analysis of Long Island Academy and Point Leamington Academy.

The demands for accountability and reform also adds great stress on the principal's role in the school. One good example is the specific responsibilities outlined for the administrator in the School Assessment Manual (1995) and include:

**Fostering a positive school climate for the assessment process;**  
**.facilitating the selection of internal team chair(s) and members;**  
**.requesting the School Council to nominate a parent representative to serve on the internal team;**  
**.ensuring that effective communication about school assessment takes place in the school and with the school's partners during all phases of the assessment, the external Team visit, and subsequent follow-up activities;**  
**.working with the internal team and the district officer to determine desired background and characteristics of the external review team members;**  
**.providing leadership in the implementation of the School Improvement Plan, and**  
**.submitting to the school council and the public at large, a process report on school assessment as part of the school's annual report. (p.21)**

These roles and others mentioned in this paper outline the important and challenging role of the teaching principal in schools. I find it difficult sometimes to know which direction I should follow, the administrator or the teacher. This is most evident when I might need to *be called out of class which happens in both schools. Sometimes it takes days for the School Board personnel to get back to me on an important issue. At times I must go answer the phone. Major discipline concerns, parent at the office or busy people are difficult to avoid. I find this dual role problem to be the most serious when I need to come*

out of the class. I found that I was pulled out of class more in Long Island than Point Leamington but students in Long Island seemed to continue working more when I left class, than in Point Leamington.

The ultimate responsibility rests with the principal in carrying out the functions of school. Peel and Walker (1994) supports this claim:

**While site-based management involves changes in the roles, routines, and relationships of teachers and administration, it is not intended to remove the principal from the decision-making process...the principal is a key to the success of this strategy. (p.41)**

These many challenges and the dual role of principal makes the position both appealing and rewarding to me. Although I have my bad days, the positives far outweigh the negatives. It is important for principals to seek out ways of managing the multiple roles efficiently. Wylie and Clark (1992) summarizes concerns and direction for principals in these positions:

**Educational administrators working in small public school systems frequently experience the consequences of role ambiguity and multiple roles. In order to improve their job satisfactory and the effectiveness of their performance, they should work smarter, not harder. There are time and stress management skills that can and should be learned. The job gets easier as expertise grows and management skills develop. Smart heads for the many new hats rural administrators must wear today are what is needed. (p.27)**

It is important for principals to develop the appropriate skills to allow them to do the best job possible given the various constraints placed on them.

### **Chapter III: The Unique Nature of the Small Rural School**

#### **Introduction**

Many communities in Newfoundland and Labrador over the years have fought hard to keep their schools open. To some of the residents of these communities, the loss of the school would mean the loss of the community. The lobby by communities to keep their schools open has been front and centre in the media. The great importance that communities place on their schools is an important characteristic of the province.

The geography of the province contributes to the importance placed on schools in the rural communities. It also determines the unique nature of the communities. Mulcahy (1996) supports this in his description of how Newfoundland and Labrador is a unique area for study in rural education:

**Sixty percent (60%) of all schools are officially classified rural; fifty percent (50%) of the 472 schools in the province have fewer than 200 students. Sixty-five (65) of these schools have fewer than 50 students and only 14% of our schools have a student population of more than 400 (NF Department of Education Statistics, 1996). Given these numbers, perhaps, the context makes rural education studies an obligation. (p.1)**

These statistics show that more than sixty percent of the schools in the province are considered rural. This section will explore how these small rural schools are unique. It will focus on three features of small rural schools: low enrolment; teacher/administrative allocations and support; and learning resources. Two schools: Long Island Academy,

Beaumont and Point Leamington Academy, Point Leamington will be used to show how these schools are unique in the communities they serve.

Some of the information given in this paper was gained from a questionnaire randomly given to residents of Long Island and Point Leamington.

### **What is a Small Rural School?**

Since Newfoundland and Labrador is mainly a rural province then many of our schools are small rural schools. However there are some difficulties in defining the word rural. Mulcahy (1996) describes how rural communities in Canada are defined by default:

**Statistics Canada gives an urban designation to all communities with a population of 5,000 or more. All others by default are classified rural. Newfoundland and Labrador follows this model as well. (p.6)**

It follows that if all communities under five thousand are defined as rural, then there must be tremendous differences among these communities. For example, Long Island has a population of three hundred fifty and Botwood has about four thousand. Many differences are also seen at the school level as well.

Over the years a variety of approaches were used by the Department of Education in deciding which schools would remain viable or open. These decisions often centred on student enrolment. Mulcahy (1995) describes how the Department of Education attempted to define school viability:

- (a) A primary or elementary school shall not be considered viable if the average enrolment for the past three years is less than fifteen students per grade.**
- (b) An intermediate school shall not be**

**considered viable if the average enrolment for the past three years is less than 25 students per grade.**

**(c) A secondary or senior high school shall not be considered viable if the average enrolment for the past years is less than 40 per year group.**

**(d) An all-grade school shall not be considered viable if the average enrolment is less than 20 per grade or year group. (pp.2-21)**

These distinctions cause problems of classifying schools according to size. Many small schools do not meet these requirements for being viable. However, many of these schools must exist in certain communities. Students must receive their grade twelve education. If the schools did not exist, the students would have to move to another community.

These concerns over what constitutes a viable school causes many communities in the province concern. Clearly there are many schools in the province that do not meet these requirements. In some cases students can easily travel to a nearby community to attend school. However, for some students travel to a nearby community would cause great hardship. For example, Long Island Academy in Beaumont is on an island. Students would have to travel by ferry through many weather conditions that would cause problems.

Because of factors such as these, the province today classifies some rural schools as Small Necessarily Existent Schools. Hatcher (1999) defines these as satisfying two criteria:

- 1. It must be small. That is if it offers high school grades, the mean grade enrolment must be 12 or less.**
- 2. There is no other school which offers the same grades, that is reasonably accessible to**

**the students. (p.1)**

In other words, size, and if it is considered unreasonable to combine the school with another school because of distance, isolation, or weather will determine whether a school can receive the classification and remain open.

A small rural school is a school that is in a community of less than five thousand people. Some of these small rural schools will receive a special designation to keep them open and receive staff to offer the program based on need.

**Restructuring the Education System**

Restructuring efforts in recent years have caused many schools to focus on specific aspects of school life. Molseed (1997) targets central variables of restructuring:

**Conley (1993) believes that the core of any restructuring process is focussed upon the Central Variable of Learning Outcomes, Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment as these dimensions define the reason for the existence of any educational institution. The results of this study, showing a positive impact on the Central Variables, would suggest that the restructuring efforts have been successful to varying degrees among the four participating rural school districts. (p.23)**

These identified targets for restructuring give the school principal and other stakeholders important goals.

Restructuring, therefore, means a change in leadership for the school. This type of leadership identified by the literature is participant decision-making which for many people is a change in leadership. Warren (1992) describes the type of leadership needed for restructuring:



**A collaborative framework is essential to coping with change and crucial to the success of any school restructuring initiative. Research on school effectiveness indicates that children learn best in collaborative schools which have a climate and structure that encourage teachers, as professionals, to work together with the principal toward school improvement and professional growth. The principal is instrumental in facilitating such a climate. (p.12)**

In many cases, the type of leadership needed places strain on some schools. Rural schools are also given the same restructuring goals. However, many people have different opinions on whether or not rural schools can cope with restructuring.

Advantages of small schools have been highlighted in the literature. Some of the advantages show how small rural schools are unique in that the support structure already exists for restructuring. Howard (1996) list several advantages of small rural schools:

**Small rural schools:**

- 1. have greater student participation in extra-curricular activities.**
- 2. have more interaction and cooperation among students, teachers, administrators, parents and communities.**
- 3. have less red tape and are more in tune with community.**
- 4. typically achieve at higher levels than counterparts in large schools.**
- 5. boost achievement of at risk students.**
- 6. have practised new education reform measures: low student-teacher ratio; cooperative learning methods; student centred instructional methods; cross age grouping; non-grade classes.**
- 7. show teacher and student morale as being higher, teacher stress as being lower.**
- 8. place a greater emphasis on the "basics".**
- 9. act as community and service centres. (p.65)**

This shows how many small rural schools have an existing climate and culture that allows it to move forward. Through this collaborative structure they can embark on education reform measures. Therefore, in some cases, small rural schools are ready for restructuring. Many other schools need to spend time trying to become closer and create a climate that is ready for change. This makes these schools unique because they have a long history of working close together.

However, in spite of the advantages of small rural schools, there are disadvantages highlighted in the literature. Keith, Keith, Quirk, Cohen-Rosenthal and Franzese (1996) outline some of the disadvantages:

**In contrast, a host of concerns plague rural schools: Rural schools typically lack the facilities, physical plants, course offerings, and educational programs of larger, more resource-rich districts. Nationwide school excellence and reform movements impose additional constraints on rural schools (Stephen, 1988). A sparse population base results in geographic and cultural isolation, limited economic development, and restricted educational opportunities (Davis, 1985). (p.55)**

These disadvantages of rural schools are the result of their geographical location and their unique challenges.

To appreciate the disadvantages and advantages of small rural schools depends on your own unique situation. The differences of these small rural schools from larger schools is often dependent on one's personal judgment. Howard (1996) supports this:

**The perception of small rural schools being inferior to larger urban schools still exists in many people's minds today. Many studies**

**conducted over the past few years, however, refute any claims of academic superiority of larger urban schools. In fact, many writers have openly expressed the virtues of small urban schools. (p. 33)**

The debate between the superiority of urban and rural schools has existed for many years and continues to exist.

### **Services Available in the Two Communities**

The following services are available in Point Leamington:

1. Medical clinic
2. Three Automobile garages
3. Two grocery stores
4. Two convenience stores
5. Town Council
6. Town services- water and sewer and garbage.
7. Volunteer Fire Department
8. Town Ambulance
9. Swimming Area
10. Playgrounds
11. Post Office
12. Three churches
13. Public library (located in the school)
14. Youth groups

**15. Bar/Take-Out Restaurant**

Long Island has the following services:

1. Recreation Centre
2. Town Council - Water and sewer to part of island and garbage
3. Three Churches
4. Post Office
5. Medical Clinic
6. Two convenience stores
7. Outdoor skating rink
8. Volunteer Fire Department
9. Swimming area

Both communities are very similar in its services. For the most part, residents need to travel outside of the community for other services. This is one unique aspect of these communities. In urban centres many services are taken for granted. The people living in these communities need to make scheduled trips to nearby towns for many of their needs.

**Population Trends in Two Communities**

All individuals surveyed in both communities agree that the population is declining. There are several reasons given for this:

1. Families today are having fewer

children.

2. Grade 12 graduates leave the community to further their education and find work.
3. Many people leave to find employment.

These reasons are cited for population declines in many communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is important to note that things have changed with declines in the forestry and fishing industries. It appears that for the most part the present older population will remain in the communities.

Both Point Leamington and Long Island are relatively stable communities. They are stable in the sense that the population is presently employed. In Long Island, most people remain to seek employment in the fishery, some commute to nearby communities and others work on the mainland seasonally. Point Leamington has many people working in the forestry, some in the fishery, and others commute to nearby communities. Point Leamington also has a glove factory which employs many women in the community.

The instability in these communities is that most young people move away to seek employment. This means that the school enrolments will continue to decline. These communities are mainly populated by people fifty years old and higher. Therefore the population of these communities will continue to decline.

### **Low Enrolment**

Over the years, various groups have come together to fight for various issues in small schools. One of the distinctive features of these small schools is the decline in student enrolment. Therefore, these small schools tend to be smaller than urban schools.

The low enrolment has caused many schools to fight the closure issue and the reduction of teachers as the enrolment declines.

Low enrolments create certain consequences for the school:

**Advantages:**

1. Small class sizes.
2. Close relationship between student and teachers.
3. Positive relationships between students.
4. Teachers have time in the classroom to deal with individual student concerns.
5. Close relationship between school and community.
6. High involvement in extra-curricular activities.
7. Greater sense of pride and ownership.
8. Good contacts between the school and the home.

**Disadvantages:**

1. Reduction in teaching units.
2. Facing the closure issue.
3. Increased multi-grading.
4. Limited course offerings.
5. Administrators have heavy teaching loads.
6. Distance education.
7. Limited support from vice-principals and secretaries.

To further illustrate the positive and negative consequences in small schools, I would like to refer to my experiences in Long Island Academy and Point Leamington Academy. I believe that it is very important to realize that the all grade school also gives students many advantages. The all-grade school creates a family perspective within the school. Older students and teachers develop close bonds as students move from grade to grade. Through these years parents also get to know teachers quite well.

In Long Island Academy the student enrolment is about seventy. Within this

school Christmas concerts, graduations, class parties and other spirit activities are very popular. In many cases, parents and members of the community come to the school regularly to take part. The Parent Teacher Association is one example of the close link between school and community. During the last meeting of the year, this group has a pot luck supper to which members of the community are invited. This is a time for parents, community members and others to share ideas and feelings.

In Point Leamington Academy, a similar culture exists. When the school has many functions the community and parents take part. However, a difference is that all members of community come out for functions in Long Island and only a sector of the community comes out in Point Leamington. This is partly due to the larger student enrolment of about two hundred and the fact that Point Leamington is not isolated.

There are differences between these two schools related to enrolment:

1. Point Leamington has a vice-principal which Long Island doesn't have.
2. Smaller teaching load in Point Leamington.
3. A closer link between students, teachers, and parents existed in Long Island.
4. Class sizes in Long Island were much smaller than grades seven to twelve in Point Leamington.
5. More discipline problems in Point Leamington.

In spite of these differences I feel that these schools offer the students a great deal. This is a more personal system whereby a family culture exists. Sometimes in larger schools you

are only a number. Individual student needs are addressed easier in small schools.

However, sometimes the program is decreased in the smaller school. In Long Island we only offered biology in the science area. The advanced students could do physics and chemistry through distance education. In Point Leamington Academy students can do all the sciences.

### **Teacher/Administrative Allocations**

The issue of low enrolments causes concerns for teachers and administrators in the small schools. These concerns relate to decreased allocations regarding administrators, teachers and secretarial hours.

In previous chapters, a detailed description of teaching allocations and administrative allocations is given for Point Leamington Academy and Long Island Academy. An important point here is that Point Leamington Academy was reduced by half a teaching unit because of declining enrolments in 1999-2000. The secretarial hours for this school were also reduced because of declining enrolments. Therefore, low enrolments mean reduced personnel for schools. This causes administrators, parents, teachers to be concerned over low enrolments each year. The concern, in many cases, is related to the possibility of the following effects of reduced personnel:

1. Decreased course offerings.
2. Teachers picking up courses not trained for.
3. Teachers taking on extra-curricular duties.
4. Decreased extra-curricular duties.
5. Increased supervision for teachers.
6. Workload increases.
7. Preparation time decreased.

Low enrolments causes many concerns for Point Leamington Academy and Long



Island Academy. Prior to being classified as being Small Necessarily Existent School,

Long Island Academy had to face the following consequences because of low enrolments:

1. Triple grading for some courses.
2. Increased teacher workload: teaching courses not trained for, increased supervision.
3. Administrator teaching about seventy percent of time.
4. Decreased extra curricular activities.

The loss of half a teaching unit at Point Leamington Academy for 1999-2000 has caused the following changes:

1. Limited course offerings.
2. Increased time for administrator to cover for loss of secretarial hours.
3. Distance education for Advanced Math.
4. Music program down graded.
5. Increased multi-grading from K-6.
6. Increased teacher workload.

I find that in the position of Principal low enrolments cause me considerable concern. It appears that I go through a continuous cycle: September enrolments, budget adjustments, program adjustments in September, fear of reduction of teaching units, teaching allocations in spring, tentative program offerings, School Council preparations and explanations of possible affects of reductions in teachers, appeals to change allocations, program and teacher assignments and recommendations for redundancy if needed. These demands cause me considerable stress.

### **Learning Resources**

Small school budgets are also affected by low enrolments. In the spring of each year, the school board gives you a budget based on student enrolment projections. A site based planning team develops a school budget based on priorities developed through the

school improvement initiative. However, many areas of the budget are based on earlier usage: telephone, copier and grants for certain areas. In September the budget is adjusted when enrolments change. This causes any money put into miscellaneous to be used up quickly.

Both schools compensate by increased school fundraising. Point Leamington Academy also resorts to obtaining grants from various groups. In Long Island Academy a Parent Teacher group helps with the fundraising. The school council in Point Leamington plans on creating a parent committee to help with fundraising.

Small communities support their school a great deal. However, it is important to space the fundraising out because you are dealing with the same people.

Reduced budgets translate into reduced monies for curriculum needs. Supplies for science, computers, library books, paper and art have to be adjusted according to the budget. The more money you have the more these areas receive.

Other curriculum decisions have to be made when the enrolment decreases and the personnel decreases:

1. Rotating curriculum.
2. Multi - grading.
3. Distance education.

In Long Island Academy I had to make many curriculum adjustments:

1. Offer Language 1101 to grade 10 and 11 one year and then Language 2101 the next.
2. Alternate Canadian Studies credits and economic credits each year. For example: offer Culture 1200 to grade 10 & 11 one year and Enterprise 3205 the next year.
3. Offer Academic Math to grades 10 to 12 in some combined classes.
4. Offer art and Phys. Ed to grades k-3.

5. Do high school physics, French, chemistry and distance education through distance education.

This forces the principal to look at the pros and cons of each decision and each decision usually comes down to the same conclusion: you need to do this to offer the basic curriculum and balanced curriculum. Academic students in Point Leamington would not be able to do Advanced Math if it was offered through distance education because enrolments are to large.

Through all of these decisions it is evident that small schools are very important to their communities. This is evident in both Long Island Academy and Point Leamington Academy. In Long Island, the Parent-Teacher Association has been front and centre in their efforts to support the school. This group meets on a monthly basis to discuss issues about the school life with their teachers and principal. This forum is used to communicate with parents and for parents to share concerns with the teachers. Over the years, this group has spearheaded a Concerned Parent's Group to fight against teacher cuts. Parents led letter writing campaigns, made presentations to the Minister of Education during public consultations, talked to open line shows and wrote letters to the editor. Battles over the years have centred on maintaining teacher allocations and programming in the school.

In recent years, the School Council has led the fight along with the P.T.A. to seek funds to keep the building in good operation. They also have lobbied to receive some secretarial hours. To some degree, these efforts have benefitted the school:

1. School is deemed a Small Necessarily  
Existent School.

2. Teacher allocations have remained at eight positions in the last two years.
3. The school will receive five secretarial hours a week for September 1999. This is the first time that this school has received secretarial hours.

Point Leamington Academy parents has also shown great support for their school. Both the school council and student council have fought hard through letter writing, media interviews, attending protest marches and petitioning the government to keep teacher allocations and maintain programming.

These efforts have been successful to some degree:

1. In the past two years the school was slated to lose one unit each year but after the lobby the school was given back a half unit each year. Rather than lose two units in the two years, the school lost one unit.
2. The school has been deemed a small necessarily existent school.
3. The school received distance education for students for the 1999-2000 school year.

Both of these schools have similar concerns and have exerted similar efforts to fight for their schools. They are unique in receiving the status of being a Small Necessarily Existent School. However, what will happen if this policy changes?

Members of the community from both Point Leamington and Long Island see a positive relationship between the school and the community.

The school is viewed as the heart of the community. Many community functions take place in the school. People feel that if you take the school away the community would die. Through the efforts of the school council and the P.T.A., the community and the school have good lines of communication.

The majority of the community members turn out for concerts, assemblies, tournaments and graduations, etc. The community also supports the school in fundraising. The people are continually asked to contribute large amounts of money to the school to support graduations, field trips and sports events. This strong link to the community and the school is supported by Barr (1995):

**With respect to the community, Hutto echoes the idea that small schools bring a sense of identity to communities, which in turn fosters a sense of identity and belonging in students. Parents are often involved in school activities and interested in student progress. As a result the school often receives extra support for extra curricular activities and school-community relationships are enhanced. (pp. 31-32)**

These strong links with the community are evident when you see past graduates make regular visits to the school when they return home for a visit. They have strong links with the school. This gives them an identity. This identity and personal touch with the school is unique to some rural communities. Without the school, the community would suffer. In larger urban centres there are several schools; the same single identity is not the same where the community has a variety of identity structures. An important note here is that in

Point Leamington and Long Island, students attend a school from K-12. In larger centres, students may go to four or five different schools from K-12.

In both Long Island and Point Leamington, the school is the centre point for community functions.

The school in Long Island is used for:

1. Weddings
2. Family gatherings- baby and bridal showers
3. Christmas concerts
4. Church- rallies, suppers, Men's Fellowship, sports, etc
5. Sports- Men/Women Floor Hockey
6. Public meetings
7. Fundraising

The school in Point Leamington is used for:

1. Weddings
2. Baby and Bridal showers
3. Christmas concerts
4. Church- rallies, suppers, sports
5. Boy Scouts, Cubs, Girl Guide Meeting
6. Public meetings
7. Public library (shared with school)
8. Sports events

## 9. Fundraising

The schools in both communities is the only place large enough to hold certain functions. Most residents frequently visit the school each year on a number of occasions for various activities. This makes the school the centre of the community.

There are many reasons given for keeping the school within the communities of Beaumont and Point Leamington. Long Island Academy in Beaumont must exist because it is the only school on the island that is connected by a provincial ferry service.

Point Leamington Academy must exist because students from Glover's Harbour and Leading Ticks attend Point Leamington from grades seven to twelve. These communities are approximately thirty kilometres from Point Leamington. The next community is Botwood which is about thirty kilometres. This would be an unreasonable distance for students to travel.

In spite of the geographic location of these communities, there are strong reasons for keeping the schools open:

1. They are the centre of the community.
2. Many community functions take place in the school.
3. Without a school, the community dies.
4. It provides a sense of identity.
5. Great personal relationships are developed between students, teachers.
6. Long history of serving the total

population over the years regardless of religious denominations.

7. Family atmosphere in the school. People help each other and are seen as people not a number in the crowd.

These reasons show how important the schools are to the community they serve. These communities value education. Many parents in Long Island remember the terrible times of government bursaries when they had to move away to complete their schooling.

### **Concluding Remarks**

From my experience in these two communities, I believe that Point Leamington Academy and Long Island Academy are unique rural schools. They are unique because:

1. They are both deemed Small Necessarily Existent Schools.
2. They are the centre of the community.
3. They serve all students from K-12.
4. Parents and other members of the community value education.
5. The community financially supports the schools through thousands of dollars each year.
6. The school creates a sense of pride and identity for the community.
7. The communities are largely made up of people fifty years of age and older.
8. The communities have a long history of fighting to keep and maintain their schools as they have become accustomed to.
9. Students develop a sense of identity and ownership within these schools.



10. Students develop a great rapport with their teachers.

11. The community will die if the schools are closed.

The literature supports the fact that many small schools are unique in nature.

Many advantages are given in the literature for rural schools. Barr (1995) outlines some of these advantages which were reported in the Royal Commission report Our

Children, Our Future: Final Report:

**These advantages included, but were not limited to, the following: smaller pupil-teacher ratio; learner-centred atmosphere and program; high student morale; good discipline; high parental involvement and student loyalty to home, school and community. (p. 33)**

These advantages are clearly positive for rural schools. Other positive aspects of small rural schools have been discussed earlier in this paper.

Another unique feature of small rural schools is the community's ability to rally together to keep their school open with the proper resources available. This is accomplished through great community support. Osborne (1997) describes how rural schools do this:

**Rural schools and communities can harness their respective talents, creativity, time, and resources in a combined fashion to create extraordinary schools in ordinary communities. In conclusion, the authors would assert that parental and family involvement is no longer an option for rural and small schools but is an essential element. (p.25)**

In my experience in Point Leamington and Long island, it is a given for parents and community members to be involved in the school. There is a core group that rallies the rest

of the community when needed.

There must be effective leaders in these small schools. They must maintain positive school and community relations. This will help the school move forward with key initiatives that will make improvements in the school. Manges (1996) explains the important role of the principal in rural school reform:

**The heart of successful rural school reform lies in the ability of the rural school principal to remove barriers which restrict the ability of staff to focus on curricular improvements affecting teaching and learning. Once these barriers have been reduced a clear mission must be fashioned which includes the sharing of common cultural perspectives and a constant push for improvement. Building principals who are effective in sustaining rural school reform, possess effective interpersonal skills, are capable of sustaining a climate of cooperation, and place a strong emphasis on curriculum development. Thus, to be successful, rural school reforms must be led by principals who demonstrate the power to get things done, not power over people. (p.23)**

From my experiences in these small schools things get done. The support structure between staff and community is established if the principal can convince the community and staff of the merits of a project- the project will take off. Therefore, strong leadership is needed. Quite often the system is established already in these unique small rural schools because there is a strong sense of community and a value system that places education and the school in the highest priority.

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