

Small Schools – Our Preference

Research Project

Community Researchers
Professional Development Session #1
Hartney, Manitoba
October 22, 2007

Research framework

Small Schools – Our Preference

Prepared by the Division Research Reference Committee

Researcher-in-Residence Project

Southwest Horizon School Division

September 2007

1.0 Introduction

Dating from the earliest days of Canadian prairie settlement, community support for education is closely aligned to communitarianism, a political philosophy that aims for the ‘common good’. Many communities and community-based organizations continue to strive for the ‘common good’ by undertaking learning activities aimed at deriving social and economic benefits for the community or mitigating the effects of external forces on individuals living in the community (Etzioni, 1995).

There is ample evidence to support the statement that (a) rural communities are highly vulnerable to external forces; and that (b) many of these communities have relatively few internal resources or capacity to mitigate the effects of these forces. This research takes the position that small schools are one of the key internal resources that can help mitigate these effects. Furthermore, the research team believes that promoting, sustaining and developing innovative education programs and learning opportunities for all age groups in rural communities hold significant potential for rural community sustainability. However, these education programs and learning opportunities should be developed and modified based on an on-going, responsive and systematic acquisition, renewal, upgrading and completion of knowledge, skills and attitudes about and for educational decisions at the community level..

2.0 Project Goals

Recently, the Southwest Horizon School Division received funding support from the Canadian Council on Learning for a Researcher-in-Residence program. The goals of the project are to:

1. Develop an understanding at the community level of the importance of research as an essential component for the Division to make information decisions.
2. Prepare a research agenda and gather evidence on learning in rural areas that will help influence rural policy-makers.
3. Provide local people and community with evidence-based information on various needs, challenges and opportunities for learning in their community.
4. Develop local capacity for developing, finding and using research to make informed decisions.

3.0 Research Objectives:

The following have been identified as the specific objectives to be achieved by the project:

1. To gather baseline information on costs for community- or technology-based learning.
2. To determine the extent and potential of sharing services with related agencies.
3. To assess the major influences affecting community learning needs (excluding province educational policy).
4. To identify key intervention points for input into policy-making at the local, regional and provincial level.

4.0 Purpose and Significance of the Research Project

As an overarching statement, research is the systematic and planned process to:

- identify issues;
- prepare questions and select appropriate research methodologies;
- gather information (data);
- analyze data;
- prepare findings;
- draw conclusions; and in some cases,
- propose recommendations for action or further research.

The purpose of the Small Schools – Our Preference Research Project is to use an innovative, Participatory-Action Research approach to identify, examine and explore a number of key questions aimed at enhancing learning opportunities in the Southwest Horizon School Division in Manitoba. We believe we will achieve this goal by (a) using multiple research methods to gather data; and (b) engaging community researchers to help gather, analyze and discuss research findings.

The significance of this research project is based on the following dimensions of the project:

- a. baseline information used for strategic and future planning;
- b. community-based participatory research process (data collection, analysis and recommended actions) and the development of local research skills for gathering and analyzing information; and

- c. School Division Board members, teachers, parents, community leaders and provincial policy makers deriving ideas and identifying issues that will help them make critical and timely decisions about education and learning opportunities in the Southwest Horizon School Division.

The significance of the research will also rest with the research report as a realistic and accurate account of emergent themes issues. These themes will reflect the particular issues of small rural schools and their relationship to their communities and the region.

Finally, the significance of this research plan extends into the communities within the Southwest Horizon School Division. As stated in the application to the Canadian Council on Learning:

the Southwest Horizon School Division (SHSD) has a philosophical position that learning and rural community sustainability are closely related.

5.0 Roles and Responsibilities

Generally speaking, the role of a researcher is to infer what will happen to an object, individual, community or activity under particular circumstances or situations. Many times in social science research, the social system being studied has a high degree of complexity and unpredictability. At this point, the role of the researcher shifts from predicting what will happen, to providing decision-makers and program planners with a sense of direction for the future. The *Small Schools – Our Preference* research project will not be predictive; rather, the project is aimed at providing a sense of direction for

current and future planning. To achieve this, the project’s research activities are based on a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. PAR provides recommendations for action at the community level. Most importantly, PAR involves the participation of various individuals in the research and research process including the people being studied. The following table outlines these roles and responsibilities for the project.

Table 1: Roles and responsibilities of researchers

Who	Role	Responsibilities
Dale Peake	Project lead	Project leadership including development of implementation of research plan, financial administration and communications to SHSD board, staff and parents.
Karen Rempel	Researcher-in-Residence	Develop, implement and carry out research plan based on input from the Project lead and the community advisory group. Provide 3 professional development sessions for SHSD research team capacity building. Provide on-going liaison and research function to keep project moving ahead.
Michelle Edwards, Stephanie Helm-Emberley, Tony Franklin, Betty Mayes, Dale Peake, Karen Rempel, Kathy Smith, Donna Stewart, Guy Williams	Division Board Research Reference Committee	Provides feedback on direction and progress to the research team. Provides information to the larger Board.
	Research team	Participate in professional development sessions aimed at building in-house/local level research capabilities. Carry out field research activities in conjunction or with the guidance of the researcher-in-residence.

Research framework

PAR also involves a combination of research techniques based on a set of guidelines called Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). RRA is research framework characterized by:

- local residents as researchers;
- multiple methods of data collection and analysis; and,
- technical advice from a researcher.

Over the course of the last 5 months, the Research Reference Committee has identified and discussed key issues, challenges and opportunities (see Appendix A for Meeting Notes). From these discussions, the following major themes emerged:

1. Opportunities and challenges of rural education and learning.
2. Building adaptive capacity and resiliency for change in the SHSD.
3. Education, learning and sustainable rural communities.

Notably, each of these themes is embedded with a number of sub-themes and questions. The major themes and sub-themes or questions are the foundation for the type of research activities including the research participants, the instrument i.e. questionnaires, and the analysis of the data. Table 2 is a set of tables that outlines these major themes, sub-themes, researchers, participants, research instruments, analytical methods and contribution to the overall project's research objectives. These tables are followed by the specific information package to be used by the community researchers in carrying their interviews.

Table 2: Research Activity Framework

Major theme: Opportunities and challenges of rural education and learning.				
Research questions	Researcher	Participants	Instruments and analysis	Research objective per CCL project
How should or could multi-level classrooms operate?	KR and MTS	Teachers Parents	Survey Research Instrument and key informant interviews Send out in November Key informant interviews February by KR to parents and MTS for teachers	gather baseline information on costs for community- or technology-based learning assess the major influences affecting community learning needs (excluding provincial educational policy)
How can teachers implement and sustain multi-grade classrooms (use MECY document)	KR and MTS	Teachers Parents	Survey Research Instrument and key informant interviews	identify key or critical intervention points for input into policy-making at the local, regional and provincial level.
How do students learn today?	KR and MTS	Teachers Parents	Survey Research Instrument and key informant interviews	
How can we improve professional development sessions for teachers?	KR and MTS	Teachers Parents	Survey Research Instrument and key informant interviews	
How important are extra-curricular activities? What are the benefits? The challenges and barriers and recommendations for changes?	KR and MTS	Teachers Parents	Survey Research Instrument and key informant interviews	
How have teachers, parents and students responded to technology-based learning	KR and MTS	Teachers Parents Admin	Case study and interview questions:	gather baseline information on costs for community- or technology-based learning
How can new programs / curricula be implemented effectively?	KR and MTS	Teachers Parents Admin	Technology-based learning: Waskada, Pierson and Hartney Arts Curriculum – Souris,	
What resources in the community can help implement programs?	Community researcher	Cross section	Deloraine and Melita	

Major theme: Building adaptive capacity and resiliency for change in the SHSD.				
Research questions	Researcher	Participants	Instruments and analysis	Research objective per CCL project
Information and communication about SHSD	Community researchers	Cross section of community members including: senior, business, government agency, rural municipality, parent, youth, farmers, young parents, immigrants and minorities	Interview guide	<p>assess the major influences affecting community learning needs (excluding provincial educational policy)</p> <p>identify key intervention points for input into policy-making at the local, regional and provincial level</p>
Critical opportunities and challenges				
Connections with community				
Significance of schools				
<p>What is the extent and potential of sharing services with related agencies</p> <p>When should or could they participate in planning cycle?</p>	KR	<p>Agencies:</p> <p>Health</p> <p>Child and Family services</p> <p>Social services</p> <p>Agriculture</p>	<p>Survey / questionnaire</p> <p>Surveys sent out by SHSD admin staff</p>	<p>determine the extent and potential of sharing services with related agencies</p>

Major theme: Education, learning and sustainable rural communities.				
Research questions	Researcher	Participants	Instruments and analysis	Research objective per CCL project
What can schools do for the community?	Community researchers	Cross section of community members including: senior, business, government agency, rural municipality, parent, youth, farmers, young parents, immigrants and minorities	Interview guide	<p>assess the major influences affecting community learning needs (excluding provincial educational policy)</p> <p>identify key intervention points for input into policy-making at the local, regional and provincial level</p> <p>determine the extent and potential of sharing services with related agencies</p>
What connections can be made to the community?				

Interview Guide Package for Community Researchers

This interview guide package is intended for use by the community researchers when carrying out interviews or asking questions about the Small Schools – Our Preference research project.

The package contains the following:

- A. An information sheet on the project that can be reproduced and left with the research participants.
- B. A form letter.
- C. A consent form to be completed by each participant.
- D. An information sheet to be completed for each interview.
- E. Background information that can be used in conjunction with the interview questions.
- F. A summary sheet of the interview questions that can be sent out to the participants, used during the interview and/or left with the participants.

A. Information Sheet

WHAT IS THE *SMALL SCHOOLS - OUR PREFERENCE* RESEARCH PROJECT

- In February 2007, the Southwest Horizon School Division and Karen Rempel, PhD candidate from the University of Calgary submitted and received approval (i.e. funding support) from the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) for a Researcher-in-Residence program.
- The researcher-in-residence program is targeted at developing research skills at the community level for developing and carrying out local research activities. The *Small Schools - Our Preference* project is one of 9 projects being carried out across Canada. It is the only project focused on a rural area.
- The project began in June 2007 and will conclude in December 2008.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT?

- The Southwest Horizon School Division (SHSD) has a philosophical position that *learning and rural community sustainability are closely related*.
- However, the Division, like other rural divisions, is forced to make difficult and often, complex decisions when confronted with the many challenges facing rural areas and rural schools. At the same time, the SHSD would like to be informed and more proactive to take advantage of new types of learning opportunities. The purpose of the study is for the SHSD to find and use good information that will help us make informed decisions, increase our capacity to adapt and change, and contribute to the sustainability of rural communities.
- The goals of the *Small Schools is Our Preference* project are to:
 1. Develop an understanding at the community level of the importance of research as an essential component for the Division to make information decisions.
 2. Prepare a research agenda and gather evidence on learning in rural areas that will help influence rural policy-makers.
 3. Provide local people and community with evidence-based information on various needs, challenges and opportunities for learning in their community.
 4. Develop local capacity for developing, finding and using research to make informed decisions.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE *SMALL SCHOOLS - OUR PREFERENCE*?

- Karen Rempel, Brandon, is a PhD candidate from the University of Calgary. She is a Research Affiliate with the Rural Development Institute at Brandon University and special lecturer in Rural Development. Her research area is the role of learning in economic development in rural communities. Karen is the ‘researcher-in-residence’. Her role is to help guide the research project.
- The Research Reference Committee is comprised of two SHSD teachers, 1 principal, the school superintendent, 3 current school board members and 1 past school board member. The role of the Research Reference Committee is to guide the project throughout its entirety. Members of the Research Reference Committee have been asked to recommend one person from each of the communities to help gather and analyze data.
- The Research Reference Committee asked a community person in each community to take on the role of Community Researcher. Each These individuals have or will participate in three training sessions used to develop their skills in data collection, analysis and preparing research findings.

WHAT WILL THE COMMUNITY RESEARCHERS DO?

- Each Community Researcher will participate in three professional development sessions to help them understand the scope of the research project and develop research skills. They will also develop an understanding of the role of researchers and their obligations to participants in the research.
- Each Community Researchers will ask 8-10 individuals from their community to participate in the interviews. The community researchers will ask a standard set of 8 –10 questions and audio tape the response. These tapes will be transcribed into text and the text used as research data. The identity of the participants and the interview information will be kept confidential. The Community Researchers have taken an oath of confidentiality. In addition to these standard questions, the Community Researcher will also be asked to interview a few ‘key informants’ in the community on either arts in the community, job training programs or technology.

OTHER RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

- In addition to these interviews, there will be several other research activities such as teacher and parent surveys are being carried out in the Southwest Horizon School Division. The Community Researchers will not be involved in these research activities.

B. Form Letter



DATE

Dear

The purpose of this letter is to confirm our recent telephone conversation and to formally ask for your cooperation in an interview as part of the *Small Schools – Our Preference* Research Project. As I mentioned on the phone, this interview is part of a year-long research project to gather information on how the SHSD and your local school can be better informed and more proactive to take advantage of new types of learning opportunities.

The interview session is scheduled for **(time)(setting in(place)**. I anticipate that the interview will take approximately 1 – 1.5 hours. Subject to your approval, it is my intention to record the interview using audiotapes. These audiotapes will be transcribed into written text. No names or identities will be revealed in the written text. The written text will be used as research data and analyzed. At some time in the future you may be asked to comment on our findings and add additional comments.

The data that I gather from you and other participants will be kept confidential. The written report of the findings will contain anonymous comments however they will not be attributed to you or any other individual involved in the research. Please understand that your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and there will be no negative consequences to you if you decline to participate in the interview or answer questions. Also, you may withdraw at any time; however, the SHSD will retain and use the information that I have gathered up to and including that time.

The Southwest Horizon School Division has a philosophical position that learning and rural community sustainability are closely linked. It is our sincere hope that this research will enhance our capacity to enhance learning opportunities in our communities and contribute to rural community sustainability. If you would like to have further information please do not hesitate to call Mr. Dale Peake at (306) 729-7817 or the lead researcher, Karen Rempel, at (204) 571-8518.

If you agree to participate in this interview please sign the attached consent form. A copy of this form will be returned to you.

Sincerely,

Community researcher

cc. Karen Rempel
Dale Peake

C. Consent form



Consent form for the Small Schools – Our Preference Research Project

This consent form, a copy of which will be given to you, is one part of the process of informed consent to participate in the above research project. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included, you should feel free to ask. Please take time to read the information carefully and ask any questions that will further your understanding. You should also be informed that there are no risks or benefits associated with your participation in this interview.

The purpose of this study is to:

find and use good information that will help the Southwest Horizon School Division make informed decisions, increase our capacity to adapt and change, and contribute to the sustainability of rural communities.

You are being asked to participate in an individual interview with a selected Community Researcher at a convenient place and time to respond to questions about the relationship between education, learning and rural communities. The interview will take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours. The information that is gathered will be kept confidential and not attributed to you directly in the final research report. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

With your permission the interview will be audio-taped. Subsequently, the tape will be transcribed into text as close to verbatim as possible. The transcribed text will be used as the raw data for this part of the research project. The Researcher-in-Resident, Karen Rempel, or the community researcher, may check back with you on accuracy of the interpretations of the data. All of the text gathered from the interviews across the communities in the Southwest Horizon School Division will be used as a source of raw data for the research, for presentations or for the final research report publication.

The final research report will be submitted to the Canadian Council on Learning, who have provided some funding support for the project. The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) is an independent, non-profit corporation that promotes and supports research to improve all aspects of learning—across the country and across all walks of life. The CCL is funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada. It was created following a series of nationwide consultations on innovation. Canadians agreed that lifelong learning is essential to make Canada a world leader in innovation, skills and learning. More information on the CCL can be found at <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/AboutCCL/>.

In addition to the Community Researcher named below, the only individuals who will have access to the raw data will be members of the Research Reference Team. The raw data will be anonymous and kept confidential. The raw data will be kept for a period of 5 years following the completion of the final research report. The data will be stored in a locked container at the Southwest Horizon School Division office. After a period of 5 years the data will be shredded and all electronic files erased.

Please put a check mark on the corresponding line for the following specific request. This check will indicate your acceptance or decline of permission:

	Accept	Decline
I grant permission to be interviewed.		
I grant permission to be audio-taped.		

Your signature on this form indicates that you a). understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you; and that b). agree to participate in the research as indicated about.

Participant's Name	
Signature	Date
Community Researcher's Name	
Signature	Date
Researcher-in-Residence Name	
Karen Rempel	
Signature	Date

Questions or concerns please contact:

Dale Peake (204) 729-7817 or
 Karen Rempel (204) 571-8518

D. Information Sheet

Gender (check)

male		female	
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Age group

18 – 25		40 – 50	
25 - 30		50 - 65	
30- 40		65 - 75	
		75 +	

Occupation (can check more than one)

Student		Labourer	
Professional		Trained technician	
Business owner		Retired	
Farmer		Homemaker	

Educational level (highest level completed)

< Grade 12		University degree	
Grade 12		Trade certificate	
GED certificate		Graduate degree	
Some university or post-secondary education			

Relationship with Southwest Horizon School Division (can check more than one)

Parent		Grandparent	
Student		Civic or municipal official or politician	
Land owner			

E. Background Information

1. Opportunities and challenges of rural education and learning.
2. Building adaptive capacity and resiliency for change in the SHSD.
3. Education, learning and sustainable rural communities.

Preamble read to participants prior to interview:

Thank you for coming today. My name is (community person). After I contacted you, I sent an information letter describing the project and the intent of this interview. I hope that you have had an opportunity to read this letter. Are there any questions about this information?

*The Southwest Horizon School Division (SHSD) has a philosophical position that **learning and rural community sustainability are closely related**. The purpose of the research is to find and use good information that will help the Southwest Horizon School Division make informed decisions, increase our capacity to adapt and change, and contribute to the sustainability of rural communities. I would like to ask you several questions that focus on the following:*

- 1. Opportunities and challenges of rural education and learning.*
- 2. Building adaptive capacity and resiliency for change in the SHSD.*
- 3. Education, learning and sustainable rural communities.*

Please understand that your participation is entirely voluntary and you may decline to participate or leave at any time. I anticipate that this interview will take approximately 1 – 1.5 hours.

With your permission I will record this session using audio tapes. These notes will be transcribed into text and used as part of the data gathered for this research. Your name and identify will not be revealed in these notes. If you agree I ask that you sign the attached consent form. A copy will be sent back to you in the near future.

Theme 1: Opportunities and challenges of rural education and learning.

Background:

The reality of the Southwest Horizon School Division is the reality of fiscal policies and financial resources. Not only does this reality call for difficult decisions, it relies on the cooperation, creativity, future planning and the engagement of special interest groups, cultural organizations, business and industry partners to plan and implement learning activities.

This reliance on the communities and their resources may be the point where “idealistic vision begins to rub up against pragmatism and prioritization” (Tight, 1998, p. 254). Therefore, **knowing about the potentialities, challenges and barriers for learning in the communities and region** that make up the Southwest Horizon School Division is a necessary first step to opportunities and challenges for rural education and learning opportunities in rural Southwest Manitoba.

The questions that follow are intended to provide information and increase understanding of the opportunities and challenges of rural education and learning.

Interview questions: (*prompts italicized*)

1. How much do you know about the Southwest Horizon School Division?
 - *Are you familiar with how schools and the school division operate?*
 - *Do you understand the relationship between the schools, the school division, the provincial department of education, other provincial government departments and the federal government?*

2. Can you identify or have you thought about any learning opportunities that should be happening in the community?

- *Could the school work more closely with businesses? If yes, what businesses?*
- *What kind of learning opportunities would benefit the community?*
- *What is the best use of resources including technological resources?*

3. What do you think are the most critical opportunities and challenge for rural education?

- *Declining enrolment*
- *Declining or shifting rural population*
- *Lack of financial resources*
- *Lack of teaching staff*
- *Too few or too many facilities i.e. schools*

Theme 2: Building adaptive capacity and resiliency for change in the SHSD.

Background:

The adaptive capacity and resiliency for change in the SHSD refers to the ability of the school division, its schools, communities, parents, students and rate payers to respond and adapt to on-going change. Rural areas are particularly vulnerable to change. Furthermore, many times rural communities lack many of the resources to cope, change, diversify and respond proactively to change. While there is an extensive body of literature that speaks about the problems and challenges confronting rural areas there is not as much information on how rural communities and rural institutions such as the Southwest Horizon School Division. The small amount of literature on the subject suggests the following strategies that can help rural communities and rural institutions build adaptive change and resiliency. These include:

- a balance between internal community and external networks;
- flexible and dispersed community leadership;
- broad-based community participation;
- support for social infrastructure such as schools and hospital;
- vertical and horizontal linkages with other agencies, communities, and policy makers;
- norms of inclusion/exclusion and reciprocity; and,
- the extent to which the community has a shared vision for the future (Flora & Flora, 1991; Kilpatrick, Field & Falk, 2003).

The questions that follow are intended to building the SHSD's adaptive capacity and resiliency for change.

Interview questions: (*prompts italicized*)

1. How would you describe your experience with the school and the school division?
 - *Do you think that the school and school division are communicating effectively about the issues they face?*
 - *Have you ever participated in the school board meetings, attended meetings, been a board member?*
2. How would you describe the level of support for public institutions such as hospitals, schools, and libraries in the community?
 - *How small can a school – or library – or hospital be to remain effective?*
 - *How small can a school – or library – or hospital be to contribute significantly to the community?*
 - *To what extent are you will to support fund raising activities in the community for public institutions? For example, would you be willing to fund mobile units to offer class options to students in your community?*
3. In your opinion, what are the most critical factors that the school board should consider when making decisions about schools in this division?

For example, to what extent should the school board consider:

- *Population of the community*
- *Taxation rate and property taxes*
- *Teaching staff*
- *Transportation issues for students*

Theme 3: Education, learning and sustainable rural communities.

Background:

Contemporary rural social policies identified that economically competitive and sustainable rural communities depend on the ability and capacity of their communities to develop learning opportunities in the community and region. These learning opportunities extend beyond K-12 education and the bricks and mortar of the local school. Furthermore, these learning opportunities extend out into the community across age groups. **Notably, the impacts learning are then found in the businesses, cultural organizations, regional groups and the social networks found in rural communities.**

At the rural community level, ‘communities of practice’ or sociocultural approaches can be found in professional development opportunities, apprenticeship programs, mentoring, cooperative education and peer support. They could also include technology-based learning and instruction as well as self-directed learning.

Sponsors of learning activities such as community organizations, individuals or agencies have great potential to deliver or facilitate learning activities. The most visible of these sponsors or agencies are educational institutions such as schools, school divisions, colleges and universities. But, there are a number of other sponsors or agencies that are, or have the potential to be involved in learning activities. These include businesses, labour organizations, churches, industry associations and special interest groups (Selman, Selman, Cooke & Dampier, 1998). Bonk and Kim (1998) urged agencies to be responsive and sensitive to what they termed as ‘new learning arenas’. Some of these learning arenas include libraries, museums, parks, businesses and the Internet (Bonk & Kim, 1998, Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Learning opportunities in the community can build on the knowledge and efforts of local people (Bridger & Luloff, 2001). They also present a variety of potential learning opportunities involving community partnerships and locally situated learning venues such as community businesses, organizations, and social networks. Many of these opportunities offer flexibility and accessibility to local residents.

The questions that follow are intended to increase the understanding of the relationship between education, learning and sustainable rural communities.

Interview questions: (*prompts italicized*)

1. Do you think it would be valuable to have students, teachers and the community involved in learning opportunities?
 - *Can you think of any ways that other human and financial resources could be involved in the school?*
 - *How can we encourage our young people to remain in the community? For example, what kinds of job training such as apprenticeship are available?*
2. How could the school reach out into the community?
 - *Can you suggest some ways that the school could be more involved in the community?*
 - *How could the school support your community?*
3. What connections can we make in the community with our academic program?
 - *Would you be willing to a partner in any of these programs? Can you think of anyone else who might be willing to be a partner?*

F: Interview questions

Interview questions: *(prompts italicized)*

How much do you know about the Southwest Horizon School Division?

Are you familiar with how schools and the school division operate?

Do you understand the relationship between the schools, the school division, the provincial department of education, other provincial government departments and the federal government?

Can you identify or have you thought about any learning opportunities that should be happening in the community?

Could the school work more closely with businesses? If yes, what businesses?

What kind of learning opportunities would benefit the community?

What is the best use of resources including technological resources?

What do you think are the most critical opportunities and challenge for rural education?

Declining enrolment

Declining or shifting rural population

Lack of financial resources

Lack of teaching staff

Too few or too many facilities i.e. schools

How would you describe your experience with the school and the school division?

- *Do you think that the school and school division are communicating effectively about the issues they face?*
- *Have you ever participated in the school board meetings, attended meetings, been a board member?*

How would you describe the level of support for public institutions such as hospitals, schools, and libraries in the community?

- *How small can a school – or library – or hospital - be to remain effective?*
- *How small can a school – or library – or hospital - be to contribute significantly to the community?*
- *To what extent are you will to support fund raising activities in the community for public institutions? For example, would you be willing to fund mobile units to offer class options to students in your community?*

In your opinion, what are the most critical factors that the school board should consider when making decisions about schools in this division?

For example, to what extent should the school board consider?

- *Population of the community*
- *Taxation rate and property taxes*
- *Teaching staff*
- *Transportation issues for students*

Do you think it would be valuable to have students, teachers and the community involved in learning opportunities?

Can you think of any ways that other human and financial resources could be involved in the school?

How can we encourage our young people to remain in the community? For example, what kinds of job training such as apprenticeship are available?

How could the school reach out into the community?

Can you suggest some ways that the school could be more involved in the community?

How could the school support your community?

What connections can we make in the community with our academic program?

- *Would you be willing to a partner in any of these programs? Can you think of anyone else who might be willing to be a partner?*