



EXPLORING SCHOOLS AS COMMUNITY HUBS:

**Investigating application of the
community hub model in context of
the closure of Athabasca School,
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada and
other small schools**

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to research the concept and model of community hubs, specifically schools that have become community hubs, and to investigate the hub model as an alternative to the closure of Athabasca School, a neighbourhood elementary public school in Regina, Saskatchewan, that was closed at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. Information was collected through a literature review and internet search for information on community hubs in Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Africa and Australia. Interviews were also conducted with community members from the neighbourhood and Regina Public School board members to gather their thoughts and opinions regarding Athabasca School as a community hub.

Athabasca School is a small school located in Regina's River Heights neighbourhood. This neighbourhood, part of the larger community of Lakeview, is a mixed neighbourhood with an average gross household income of \$86,487 and is attracting many young families. Stated enrolment for the 2010-2011 school year is 122 students in grades pre-K to 8; and 20 students in the Functional Integrated Academic Program.

A general definition of *community hub* is that of a concept, community plan or urban design for a conveniently located public place that is recognized and valued in the local community as a gathering place for people, and an access point for a wide range of community activities, programs, services and events. A community hub can be general in nature, similar to a neighbourhood or multipurpose centre, or it can include specific public services such as a library, park, school, health care and/or social support programs. Although each hub is unique to the surrounding community, three objectives are common: service coordination and delivery, place making and community building.

The *school as a community hub* has a great number of variations in different communities. This paper discusses ten different education models that may be considered community hubs.

The most fully developed philosophical basis for community hubs was created by David Clandfield, a retired University of Toronto professor. His ideas on the school as a community hub emphasize a two-way model how where children's learning activities contribute to community development, and where community activities enrich learning activities.

Compared to Clandfield's philosophical principles for flourishing community hubs, most models today should be considered "works in progress". The model of schools as a community hub is an evolutionary, not revolutionary idea, and discussion of these ideals should be encouraged. This report considers lessons learned from community schools, the context and opportunities for the Athabasca community, and questions to consider.

Introduction and Background

Introduction:

The two-fold purpose of this report is to research the concept and review models of community hubs, and specifically schools that have become community hubs in their neighbourhoods and service regions; as well, to investigate the hub model as an alternative to closure of Athabasca School - a neighbourhood elementary public school in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada that was closed at the end of the 2011 school year.¹

What is a community hub?

Can Athabasca School be a community hub?

The goals of the report are to present the community hub concept to the Regina School Board at the biennial review meeting in September 2011, as an option for Athabasca school. The second goal is to share information learned with other schools and communities in Regina and rural and urban Saskatchewan who are facing prospects of closure due to declining enrolment. Third, is to provide a solid research foundation for action.

Guiding questions:

- What is a community hub?
- What does a community hub look like in other cities?
- How could a hub work for Athabasca School or other urban or rural schools?
- What are the best practices or precedents used from other cities in their creation and maintenance of their community hubs?

The impetus for this report is from the Save Athabasca School Committee - a group of concerned community members who live in the neighbourhood surrounding Athabasca school. The Committee members felt very strongly that declining student enrolment could be reversed through an alternative approach in use of the school. Their desire is the creation of a learning hub for community residents of all ages. In their view, the school could generate partnerships, programs and services which could create sustainability and entice families to the area.²

Methodology and scope:

Information was collected through a literature review and Internet search focusing mainly in Canada, United States of America, United Kingdom, Africa and Australia. Interviews were conducted with 8 community members in an effort to understand their feelings and ideas surrounding the concept of Athabasca school as a hub. 7 current Board members,

¹ Regina Board of Education (2011) Media Release http://www.rbe.sk.ca/docs/media_room_NR_renewal_decision_january_11_2011.pdf

² Personal communication Gordon Chubak, July 21, 2011

plus the Director of Education of the Regina Public School Board, were interviewed to understand the school closure process and to gather their thoughts and opinions on transforming a school into a community hub. This research project was approved by the University of Regina Research Ethics Board. The scope of the literature was quite broad given that the term *community hub* is both a concept and a practice.³

This report is not a re-examination of the decision to close Athabasca School, or the validity of the reasons given by Regina Public Schools. This report is also not an examination of the value of neighbourhood schools or walking distance schools in neighbourhoods.

Background information on Athabasca school:

Athabasca elementary school is located in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, in the pocket community of River Heights. The school is considered a small school with students from Kindergarten to grade 8. Stated enrolment in the 2009-2010 school year was 109 students from pre-Kindergarten to grade 8 and 19 students in the Functional Integrated Academic Program (FIAP)⁴.⁵ Stated enrolment for the 2010-2011 school year is 122 students in grades pre-K to 8; and 20 students in the Functional Integrated Academic Program (FIAP).⁶ The projected number of children in 2014 would be 144 total.⁷

The Regina School Board's decision to close Athabasca was based on the lack of sustainable enrolment, as indicated by their current and projected statistics.

The Regina School Board's decision to close Athabasca was based on the lack of sustainable enrolment, as indicated by their current and projected statistics. The Board has a minimum enrolment requirement of 140 students.⁸

River Heights community is located within the larger neighbourhood of Lakeview. The 2006 Neighbourhood Profile states the area is a mixed neighbourhood with many pre-war and post-war character homes, mixed with recent multi-family infill housing. In 2006 the population was 7,490, with an average gross household income of \$86,487.⁹ It is a pleasant, affordable neighbourhood that is attracting young families.¹⁰

³ Rossiter, S. (2007) Feasibility Study of Community Hubs for the Parramatta Local Government Area – Briefing Paper

⁴ Functional Integrated Academic Program is a holistic program that respects the abilities of students with disabilities. Policy, Guidelines, and Procedures for Functional Integrated Programs. Saskatchewan Learning, 2006.

⁵ Regina Public Schools (2010), School Profile: Athabasca http://www.rbe.sk.ca/docs/renewing_rps_athabasca2010.pdf

⁶ Regina Public Schools (2010). 2010-2011 Student Enrolment and Trends.

⁸ D. Hoium, B. Young & D. West personal communication July 6, 2011.

⁹ City of Regina (2006). Lakeview Neighbourhood Profile. Urban Planning Department.

¹⁰ <http://www.realrenewal.org/liberty-4daaeca569bc1.htm>

“Understanding Community...”

“Community is a social space in which people associate for individual and collective interests. Community is also a social process marked by interaction and deliberation among people who share purposes, interests, capacities and fallibilities. Relationships and community grow out of shared values (like caring, participation, mutual respect, equality, and inclusiveness) and experiences. Diverse members choose to engage in common effort. Feelings of trust, competence, independence, and interdependence are made clear and strengthened. Building, strengthening, and sustaining relationships is a purpose and a function of creating communities of learning.”

- Toward School^{PLUS}: Empowering High Schools as Communities of Learning and Support - A Policy and Program Framework. Saskatchewan, Canada, (2004).

What is a community hub?

There is no single or precise definition of a *community hub*. A general definition of a community hub is that of a concept, community plan or urban design for a conveniently located public place that is recognised and valued in the local community as a gathering place for people, and an access point for a wide range of community activities, programs, services and events.¹¹

A community hub is a conveniently located place that is recognised and valued as a gathering place for people, their activities and events.

Community hubs are designed to encourage social gathering and provide spaces for people to congregate and meet together in both planned and incidental ways. A hub typically involves a facility and/or space that allows for local organisations and community groups to offer a range of activities, programs, services and events which address the social needs of a community.¹² A hub can be general in nature, similar to a neighbourhood or multipurpose centre, emphasising community information, social interaction, meeting space, child care and community development. Or, a hub can include public services such as a park, library, school, health care and/or social support programs. Other designs may involve a commercial focal point like a

¹¹ Rossiter, S. (2007) Feasibility Study of Community Hubs for the Parramatta Local Government Area – Briefing Paper

¹² Ibid.

market-place or transport centre, or feature an open urban gathering place such as a plaza.¹³

Community hubs are not just about co-locating services, or having a fully booked set of rooms, or having a wide variety of groups booking a facility, or designing a useful building, or even cultivating a community - the key to a successful hub is integration. The hub concept is fully realized when activity is generated in a common space through interweaving the social fabric of the community, hub services, activities and programs.¹⁴

The key to a successful hub is integration of ALL services, activities and programs.

Although each hub is unique to the surrounding community, there is commonality in three objectives and purposes:¹⁵

1. Service coordination and delivery. Collaboration between different organisations is encouraged in an effort to better serve community needs. The shared common facility is an efficient use of resources that is local, thereby reducing travel and providing easy access for individuals.
2. Place making. Through the use of urban design, the physical quality and appearance of public places is enhanced in order to reinforce a place's identity and make it a more attractive environment for people to gather and interact with each other. Place making is both a process and a philosophy that takes root when a community expresses needs and desires about specific places in their lives, even if a defined plan of action is not yet clear.¹⁶
3. Community building: A common meeting place and resource centre to encourage projects that will further enhance community development and social capacity. A focal point for people with common interests.

The type of model, and mix of uses will depend on the resources available and the needs of the local community. A hub can be a specifically developed project from the ground up, or a re-designed and remodelled existing building that is arranged within a single facility or within a cluster of buildings.

Regardless of the physical structure, what makes a community hub more than just a high use multipurpose centre is the common vision and integration of a range of services that promote social interaction among all ages of community members.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ http://www.pps.org/articles/what_is_placemaking/

The school as a community hub model

A hub can be located anywhere, and often anchor facilities such as community centres, libraries, recreation facilities, cultural centres, or primary schools are used in a common hub model.¹⁷ The generic term *hub* is defined as “a center around which other things revolve or from which they radiate; a focus of activity, authority, commerce, transportation”.¹⁸

A hub can be located anywhere. Common hub anchor facilities are community centres, libraries, recreation facilities, cultural centres, or primary schools.

The term *hub* or *community hub* is very loose in definition at this time. Many centres and places consider or call themselves hubs; whether or not these places are such would depend on definition.

The scope of this research project is not broad enough to examine all community hub models in more than a cursory manner. Because the genesis of this project is found in the context of the Athabasca School closure, this paper will attempt to investigate and further the definition of the concept of *school as a community hub*.

Journal articles on the subjects of community hubs and schools as community hubs were not readily found in the normal course of research. With only a small body of research to use as analytical metrics, and with the concept being quite loose, this paper has had to rely on self-declaration and self-definition in defining places as hubs.

The dominant body of information on community hubs and schools as community hubs is found on the internet, often in the websites of places calling themselves hubs, and also in newspaper articles and press releases about the same. Internet and literature searches indicate schools are common community hub anchors.

A Google key word search using “school community hub” yielded numerous pages of references to schools in Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Africa that have either implemented a hub type model or are in the process of developing one. Outlined below are the headlines or tag lines from the search results:

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: “*Schools as Community Hubs sees schools as important access points for families and youth which can provide a focus point for support and community connection in Edmonton*”.¹⁹

¹⁷ Rossiter, S. (2007) Feasibility Study of Community Hubs for the Parramatta Local Government Area – Briefing Paper

¹⁸ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/hub>

¹⁹ http://www.ecsd.net/parents/schools_hubs.html

Arlington, Virginia, USA: *Carlin Springs Community School* “Uses the public school as a hub to bring together community partners to address not only academic needs, but also social, emotional, and health needs of students and their families -- before, during and after school”.²⁰

Hoo Peninsula, England: *Hundred of Hoo Comprehensive School*: “We see ourselves as the central educational, cultural and social hub of the community we serve. We are a community school, and we are striving to become more responsive and sensitive to our community’s needs”.²¹

Lethbridge Primary School, Victoria, Australia: “The school is being rebuilt within the township of Lethbridge close to sporting amenities, creating a central community hub”.²²

South Africa: “South African schools to develop into hubs of dynamic learning, recreation, and support for their school-going and surrounding communities”.²³ “Extramural Education Project (EMEP) transforms schools into community hubs and develops a comprehensive array of extra-mural projects that maximize the utilization of underutilized schools”.²⁴

These programs are but a few examples of many schools that have adopted a community oriented education philosophy that utilizes a hub concept. Therefore the terms of *community school* and *school as a community hub* appear to be used synonymously and interchangeably in their institutional descriptors (e.g. “about our school” web pages and documents).

The terms of *community school* and *school as a community hub* appear to be used synonymously and interchangeably

²⁰ http://www.communityschools.org/search.aspx?F_keywords=hub

²¹ <http://www.hooschool.co.uk/ahubforcommunity>

²² <http://www.lethbridgeps.vic.edu.au/>

²³ http://www.emep.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4&Itemid=3

²⁴ http://southernafrica.ashoka.org/learning_education

Hub type education models in Canada, the United States, United Kingdom and Australia

Support for the idea of a school as a community focal point is not new, and parents, educators and politicians view integration of family and community as essential to both the education and social environment of a child and the community the child lives in.²⁵

Research has shown that the school is a natural vehicle for enhancing community capacity.²⁶ The tangible and intangible assets that schools, and indeed all education facilities,²⁷ provide to a community have been well documented.²⁸ Benefits include increased school attendance, increased social skills, and heightened community pride,²⁹ as well as supporting social determinants of health that will improve student education and life success and general well-being.³⁰

The proverb “It takes a community to raise a child”³¹ reflects the trend since the 1960’s of recognizing and utilizing the skills of others (families, elders, mentors etc.) as a resource for both the school and individual children. The natural congregation site of a neighbourhood school has led to many different and successful models and programs realized throughout Canada, the USA and overseas.

Listed below are brief descriptors of 10 prominent community education models in Canada that individual school districts or provinces have adopted, and examples of some current models implemented in the United States, United Kingdom and Australia. These descriptors are based on school policy literature; it is beyond the scope of this research to examine whether these models are practiced according to their ideals. For the purposes of this paper this is a cursory and not exhaustive search that provides a quick snapshot of the leading models that refer to themselves as *hubs of the community*.

**Most leading community
education models
consider themselves as
hubs of the community**

All of these models, and their particular implementations, are “works in progress”. They are dynamic, and elements of their programs, delivery, and structure are being constantly modified and tweaked to address their own needs under their own definitions of “hub”.

²⁵ Clanfield, D, Martell, G. (2010). The School as Community Hub: Beyond Education’s Iron Cage. *Our Schools/Our Selves* 19(4) 100. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

²⁶ Kelly, R (2005) The school as a hub: Best practice model for child and youth work. The International Child and Youth Care Network, Issue 76 <http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0505-kelly.html>

²⁷ <http://uwaterloo.ca/documents/pwc.html>; www.udel.edu/IR/presentations/EconImpact.doc

²⁸ Clanfield, D, Martell, G. (2010). The School as Community Hub: Beyond Education’s Iron Cage. *Our Schools/Our Selves* 19(4) 100. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

²⁹ The Coalition for Community Schools, 2003. Making the difference. Research and practice in community schools. Institute for Educational Leadership.

³⁰ Social determinants of health. <http://www.thecanadianfacts.org/>

³¹ <http://www.h-net.org/~africa/threads/village.html>

Each locale has personalized their community education model with different titles. In an effort to assist the reader, this section is organized by model title headings and followed by the one or more school district(s), province(s) or country(ies) that use the model.

1 - Community Schools

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Since the 1980's, Community Schools have played an important role in the Vancouver Board of Education plan to meet the needs of neighbourhoods by providing after school programs and services to children and their families.³² In 2004, the Vancouver Board of Education implemented a new and innovative structure that is based on a hub model, and referred to as Community School Teams. Each team includes a Coordinator, Teacher, Youth/Family Worker and Programmer who deliver in-school and out-of-school time programs and services that benefit the lives of children.³³ These teams of professionals work in one or more "families" of schools which are referred to as hubs. Funding for the team is through an annual CommunityLINK grant from the Ministry of Education.³⁴

Governance is comprised of school administrators, and local community partners who provide direction to the school team on the services and programs that benefit the students and families in each neighbourhood. The local collaboration results in formal and informal asset maps and needs assessments that are conducted in each neighbourhood. Therefore programming for each hub is community built and responsive to neighbourhood needs.³⁵

Saskatchewan, Canada

Community Schools are founded upon the principles of community education, which in turn have roots in community development. In 1980, the Government of Saskatchewan established the Community Schools Program. Shortly afterwards, a group of community education professionals formed the Saskatchewan Community Schools Association to assist in promotion and support.³⁶ As of 2009 there were 118 Community Schools in the 29 school districts around the province.³⁷

Community Schools play a key role by serving as centres for families to access a range of services such as health, counselling, justice, as well as personal support and recreation activities that are either linked to or available within the school. The Saskatchewan Department of Learning states: "In Community Schools, the school is a hub of the community, serving as a community 'centre' and a meeting place where an array of

³² <http://www.vsb.bc.ca/communityschoolteams>

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ <http://www.vsb.bc.ca/community-school-team-hubs>

³⁶ <http://www.communityschools.ca/aboutus-ourhistory.html>

³⁷ Saskatchewan Ministry of Education Provincial K-12 Student Enrolment Summary 2010 and Community Schools Directory 2009-10

services and supports are available”.³⁸ Collaborative approaches are used to achieve learning excellence and well-being for the entire community.

Community Schools have been successful in helping to address circumstances in higher needs communities which are experiencing growth in urban Aboriginal poverty. The schools provide students a learning environment that meets diverse learning needs, is academically challenging, as well as culturally affirming in respectful and reflective ways. The history of children and youth is taken into consideration along with cultural and socio-economic life experiences.³⁹

Any school and their community can establish a Community School by adopting the philosophy and practices.⁴⁰ However, additional funding for staff and programs are only available for schools designated by the Ministry of Education.⁴¹

New Brunswick, Canada

In 2005 the New Brunswick provincial government implemented a Community Schools plan for public education in an effort to turn all schools into community centres of learning. By 2012 the Department of Education aims to have 75 Community Schools across the province.⁴²

Each community school is unique and encourages parents and community members to work with teachers to support the school before, during and after hours. Local businesses, community groups, non-profit agencies and individuals partner with schools by providing volunteers, in-kind assistance or financial support.⁴³ Through the use of these volunteer groups, the focus is on academics, family supports and community service.⁴⁴

In 2009, a school-based health centre was opened at the Port Elgin Regional Community School.⁴⁵

United States

Community Schools are operating in several states and the Coalition for Community Schools defines the model as:

³⁸ http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/branches/pol_eval/community_ed/commschools.shtml

³⁹ Saskatchewan Learning (2004). Building Communities of Hope: Effective practices for meeting the diverse needs of children and youth

⁴⁰ http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/branches/pol_eval/community_ed/commschools.shtml

⁴¹ Barbara Young, personal communication, July 6, 2011.

⁴² <http://www.gnb.ca/cnb/news/edu/2007e0707ed.htm>

⁴³ Community schools. Be connected, be involved. www.gnb.ca/education

⁴⁴ <http://www.gnb.ca/cnb/news/edu/2008e1638ed.htm>

⁴⁵ <http://www.gnb.ca/cnb/news/pre/2009e1950pr.htm>

“A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone – all day, every day, evenings and weekends. Using public schools as hubs, community schools bring together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities”.⁴⁶

2 - Community Schools Partnership

Surrey, British Columbia, Canada

In 2007 the City of Surrey and the Surrey School District partnered to create a unique joint venture of the Community Schools Partnership. The model provides a wide array of programs in neighbourhood schools that encourage all community members to attend educational, recreational, social and health programs that occur during evenings, weekends and school holidays.⁴⁷

The Partnership currently has 25 schools set within 5 zones in the district. Each zone is considered a hub for the schools in the area and overseen by one coordinator who locates external community based agencies to provide suitable programs for families in need. The outside agencies (recognized as experts in their fields) offer their programs to participants in and around the hub.⁴⁸ Funding is provided through the BC Ministry of Education Community Link program, the City of Surrey, and the United Way.⁴⁹ Merlin Chatwin, Coordinator for Surrey’s Community Hubs Schools states:

“The partnership helps address barriers to learning and most of these programs are for vulnerable kids. The students are starting at a deficit and are at risk, and the hub attempts to negotiate learning through the risk. Regular families do not have issues with attendance or forgetting what is learned over the summer because their kids are involved with camps and continued learning. Whereas at-risk kids usually are babysitting and sitting in front of electronics when not in school and so tend to regress. The program is not aimed to specifically target schools with at-risk kids so as not to single them out, but there is recognition that all schools will have those kids”.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/what_is_a_community_school.aspx

⁴⁷ Surrey’s Community Schools Partnership: The Future Lives Here
http://www.civicinfo.bc.ca/practices_innovations/community_schools_partnerships--surrey--2009.pdf

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Merlin Chatwin, Personal Communication ,May 2011

Manitoba, Canada

The Community Schools Partnership Initiative was launched in January 2005. The then Manitoba Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth based the Partnership on the Saskatchewan approach and establishment of the School^{PLUS} model.⁵¹

The main purpose of the initiative was to support schools in low socio-economic neighbourhoods by encouraging families, organizations and schools to work together to improve students' success and strengthen communities.⁵² Currently there are 25 Community Schools in the province.⁵³

Community Schools in Manitoba act as hub centres of activity and provide a gathering place for adults and children to enjoy educational, social, recreational and cultural activities. Programs are unique to each school and based on the specific needs of the entire community.⁵⁴ Funding and sponsorship may be provided through government, the education community or interested partners.

3 - School^{PLUS}

Saskatchewan, Canada

In 2001, the government of Saskatchewan developed a comprehensive education model titled School^{PLUS}. The plan was implemented in 2006 across the province of Saskatchewan.⁵⁵

This model builds upon the successful practices of Community Schools in which the school is the centre of the community and hub of services and supports for the neighbourhood it serves. School^{PLUS} expands the practices by directly linking integrated services and the agencies responsible for those services to the education system. In response to the local community priorities and conditions, services such as health, social justice, recreation, culture, housing supports and/or adult learning opportunities are provided.⁵⁶

The School^{PLUS} model “promotes learning success and well-being for every child and young person”.⁵⁷ This is achieved in a community environment in which a strong learning program is coupled with human service partners who provide the social and health supports needed to increase learning for children and their families.⁵⁸

⁵¹ <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/cspi/>

⁵² Manitoba Education, Citizen and Youth,.(2006). Community Schools: A support document for partners in the community schools partnership initiative.

⁵³ http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/cspi/proj_sites.html

⁵⁴ Manitoba Education, Citizen and Youth,.(2006). Community Schools: A support document for partners in the community schools partnership initiative.

⁵⁵ Saskatchewan Learning (2004). Building Communities of Hope: Effective practices for meeting the diverse needs of children and youth

⁵⁶ Government of Saskatchewan. School Plus at a glance. <http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/SchoolPLUS>

⁵⁷ <http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/SchoolPLUS>

⁵⁸ Government of Saskatchewan. School Plus at a glance. <http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/SchoolPLUS>

The Regina Public School Board has furthered the concepts of School^{PLUS} by implementing an Instruction and School Services team of 46 ancillary professionals that are available to all students in the district.⁵⁹

Nova Scotia, Canada

In 2008 the Department of Education established SchoolsPlus as a pilot in four school boards across the province. The success of the program has led to expansion in 2011 to include all eight school boards.⁶⁰

The goal of the program is to make life better for families by coordinating the delivery of services from government and other agencies via schools. Family resource, child care and youth health centres will be located within select schools at all school boards. This will lead to the enhanced use of school facilities by students, families and the community. Families are ensured access to services when and where they need them.⁶¹

Each SchoolsPlus location has an advisory committee including representatives from several different areas of government such as Community Services, Education, Health, and Justice who identify gaps in services and provide resources.⁶²

Western Australia

The Department of Education and Training has developed the Schools Plus program for students with disabilities. This model provides supplementary resources for schools to support the teaching and learning adjustments for eligible students and complements programs and services that are provided by State-wide Specialist Services, District Education Offices and Central Office.⁶³ Of note, this Schools Plus program is not a hub type model, but the writer included this annotation to avoid confusion for further research as the program uses the same name as the prior two programs.

4 - Community Learning Centres

Quebec, Canada

In 2006 the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport committed to supporting a pilot project of 15 Community Learning Centres located in Anglophone school

⁵⁹ Personal communication D. Hoiium, July 6, 2011.

⁶⁰ <http://www.gov.ns.ca/news/details.asp?id=20110414001>

⁶¹ <http://www.gov.ns.ca/news/details.asp?id=20110414001>

⁶² <http://ssrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/schoolsplus/>

⁶³ <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsplus/detcms/portal/>

neighbourhoods across the province. In 2011 the program has been extended to 22 centers in English speaking communities.⁶⁴

Community Learning Centres are hubs which deliver education and support services in an effort to nurture relationships between schools and their communities.⁶⁵ Each centre is different and collaboration of services depends upon the community it serves. The focus is to encourage life-long learning for adults and to improve student retention rates by providing opportunities for students to become resources for their community.⁶⁶

5 - Full Service Schools

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

The Full Service School model is designed to improve the quality of life for students, families, and communities through the coordinated delivery of education, health care, prevention, and social services. As of 2011, the Toronto School Board is in the process of implementing this model to 15 schools.

The initiative supports student success and encourages community engagement through the location of programs and services inside an operational school or in the community depending on the availability of services.⁶⁷ Services may be recreation, arts, culture, physical health, mental health, childcare, adult education, and settlement.⁶⁸ In an effort to be mutually beneficial to students and communities, each school will take a different approach.

The goal for a Full Service model is integrated policy and integrated funding among relevant Ministries that will support all schools to be Full Service schools and vibrant hubs of the community.⁶⁹

Governance and leadership may be through the school Principal or shared with a full-time site coordinator. Site-based planning teams may include parents, community leaders, local residents, faith community members, and agency representatives that identify the health and service issues they believe need to be addressed in their schools.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ <http://www.montrealgazette.com/life/English+language+schools+reinvented/5157533/story.html>

⁶⁵ <http://www.learnquebec.ca/en/content/clc/about.html>

⁶⁶ http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/sections/virage/index_en.asp?page=centre

⁶⁷ Segal, N. (2010). Toronto District School Board: Full Service Schools. Report 04-10-1586

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

United States

In selected states, Full-Service schools (also referred to as community schools) have been operating for over 20 years.⁷¹ The Boston Full-Service Schools Roundtable explains the difference over a Community School by: One or more community based agencies partnering with a school; Teachers, parents, students and community partners are accountable for the outcomes; Full-Service schools are the hub around which the community revolves.⁷²

6 - Whole Child Program

Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada

Started in 2001, the Whole Child Program links students to integrated health and human services that are provided collaboratively in Community Schools in an effort to improve the well-being and encourage the healthy development and resiliency of children and their families.⁷³

Located in an elementary school, the Whole Child Program began with independent start-up funding from the RCMP's National Youth Strategy and a one-time grant from City of Whitehorse in addition to fundraising. Since 2006, funding has been through the Yukon Department of Education. The program is governed by a Board of representatives from participating partners which include the RCMP, non-governmental agencies, and community volunteers.⁷⁴

7 - Neighbourhood Learning Centre

British Columbia, Canada

The Neighbourhoods of Learning program was announced in 2008 as a means to formalize community-school partnerships already in place in some areas of the province.⁷⁵

The funding for a Neighbourhood Learning Centre is only provided for new construction or renovation of existing space and not for services. The community programs connected to the centre must have self-sustaining operating costs with enough revenue or alternative funding to pay for the overhead and maintenance of the utilized space.⁷⁶

⁷¹ <http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/faqs.aspx>

⁷² www.fullserviceschoolsroundtable.org

⁷³ http://www.yesnet.yk.ca/schools/wes/whole_child/goals.html

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ British Columbia Office of the Premier & Ministry of Education, 2008. http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2005-2009/2008OTP0216-001326.htm

⁷⁶ <http://www.neighbourhoodlearningcentres.gov.bc.ca/>

Each Centre is unique with programs and services that are generally provided by non-profit groups, organizations, government-funded programs, and community partners. Events and sessions reflect the needs and priorities of the children, family and community it serves.⁷⁷ Examples of usage include extending existing school hours; space for groups; child care; parenting resources; or seniors mentoring students in a school garden.

Other collaborations include local civic governments which have built joint-use facilities including a public library and recreation centre.⁷⁸

8 - Out-of-school time programs

United States

The Federally funded Out-of-school time programs promote student and family gathering at schools, and are offered in schools as well as neighbourhoods in various American cities. Activities are aimed at reducing risk or criminal behaviours and range from academic improvement, sport, music, art, and social skill development. The programs are offered to children and young adults after school, during holidays and summer.⁷⁹ Of note, this program does not refer to its schools as hubs, but is an example of child engagement.

9 - Extended Schools

United Kingdom

The 2006 the Extended Schools policy reshaped schools as service hubs for their communities. Working with local partners, Extended Schools provide a range of services and activities that help meet the needs of students, families and wider community. Services often take place outside of normal school hours and can include access to childcare, sport and music activities or learning support.⁸⁰ The idea of extended schooling has roots in full-service initiatives in the United States.⁸¹

As of 2010, core offerings that have been adopted by all extended schools are made up of five elements that include: Childcare; Community access to school facilities; Out of school activities; Parenting support that includes family learning; Swift and easy access to specialist services for children with difficulties in behaviour, emotions or health.⁸²

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Neighbourhood Learning Centres Stakeholder Forum, January 27, 2010 Meeting Summary

⁷⁹ <http://rer.sagepub.com/content/76/2/275.full.pdf>

⁸⁰ http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Childcare/DG_172212 and <http://www.extendedschools.org/> and http://www.infed.org/schooling/extended_schooling.htm

⁸¹ http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/Bond_Integrated_service_delivery_for_young_people_lit_review_2010.pdf

⁸² <http://www.extendedschools.co.uk/What%20is%20Extended%20Schools%20Admin.asp?nid=22&pid=21and>

10 - Schools as Community Centres Program

New South Wales

The Schools as Community Centres Program model is based on a planned community development approach in an effort to use an integrated service delivery model to better meet the needs of families with children from birth to age 8. 48 Schools are operating in targeted communities to support families and young children.⁸³

The program is jointly funded by the Departments of Education and Training, Community Services, Health and Housing. The school is promoted as a community centre by providing services and activities that link families with education, health and community services that will support their children's development. Administration is provided by the school principal and a community advisory group.⁸⁴ Of note - this program does not refer to itself as a community hub, however is an example of a community education model.

⁸³ <http://www.extendedschools.org/>

⁸⁴ <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/programs/ecip/schcommcentres/index.php>

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Why schools as community hubs?

Not just for youth at risk or inner city schools

Historically Community Schools were initiated to deliver quality education while removing barriers to learning through in-house partnerships with health, justice and social services. As revealed in the descriptors of the above education models, many Community Schools respond to the needs of inner city families, lower socio-economic and immigrant areas. However, with rental housing shortages, suburban employment opportunities, and in-city migration, nearly all schools have children that are in need. The motivation for Community Schools is no longer solely for inner city youth at risk.⁸⁵

Kimberly Schonert-Reichl from the University of British Columbia studied 1,266 children ages 9 to 12 years old from seven school districts located throughout the Lower Mainland region of B.C., and discovered children reported consistently

higher levels of well-being when they could identify individuals in their community that knew and cared about them.⁸⁶ A key finding of Schonert-Reichl's study was how relationships with peers and adults in the school and community were important in fostering children's social and emotional competence. The report states "Community connections ground children and give a sense of belonging that can help to counteract challenges in their lives".⁸⁷

"Community connections ground children and give a sense of belonging that can help to counteract challenges in their lives"

Another finding was the mismatch between what kids were actually doing out of school versus what they wished to be doing. The vast majority of children wanted to be engaged in activities to build their competence, physical health, and connectedness. However, a significant proportion reported being engaged in a wide range of technology-related activities, such as on-line computer games, and instant messaging. None of the children wished they had more technology time.⁸⁸

A 2004 Saskatchewan Learning report discusses the alienation and isolation of children in school:

"Many difficulties that adolescents have in high school stem from a basic mismatch between adolescents' developmental needs and the kinds of experiences most high schools provide. Issues related to the organization, structure, and

⁸⁵ Merlin Chatwin, Personal Communication, May 2011

⁸⁶ Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2007). Middle Childhood inside and out: The psychological and social world of children 9-12. University of British Columbia.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

culture of high schools limit their ability to be learner-centred environments where experiential learning and learning for understanding are commonplace and where the needs, realities, and interests of students are supported.”⁸⁹

One particularly pithy quote from the SaskLearning report typifies student experiences in the 1980’s and 90’s as “Numbness is the way of coping ... the majority of students have psychically dropped out.”⁹⁰

The various reports cited indicate that children desire more social connection. The Toronto District School Board recognises that desire for social and community connection in their 2009 Full-Service Schools report, and discusses the need for children to gain a variety of social skills and the benefits to children and their communities if these skills are acquired:

“Community schools recognize that students who are physically, socially, and emotionally competent tend to succeed academically. Autonomy, awareness of others, responsibility, and rational optimism all inform academic achievement. In traditional schools, students who lack these essential, non-academic skills are, for the most part, left to acquire them outside school. That is not the case in community schools, where students have abundant opportunities for learning and exploration in school, after school, and in the community”.⁹¹

This pushes away from the idea of a school as an isolated standalone academic institution that children just attend during the day, and weaves schools deep into the social fabric of communities and neighbourhoods. The positive benefits of integration of all of the major elements of a child’s life (e.g. home, family, friends, school, adults and role models, recreational activities) helps provide a sense of belonging and reduces isolation.⁹²

The Toronto District’s 2010 report presents a set of ideas that shifts the way schools, neighbourhoods, and children’s lives within them are viewed:

“A hub type school builds resiliency in children by building support systems and develop relationships within the community.

“A hub type school builds resiliency in children by building support systems and develops relationships within the community. ”

⁸⁹ Toward SchoolPLUS: Empowering High Schools as Communities of Learning and Support - A Policy and Program Framework. Saskatchewan Learning (2004), p. 7.

⁹⁰ Toward SchoolPLUS: Empowering High Schools as Communities of Learning and Support - A Policy and Program Framework. Saskatchewan Learning (2004), p. 6

⁹¹ Full Service Schools: The Future of the T.D.S.B. (2009), p. 4

⁹² Schonert-Reichl, K. A. (2007). Middle Childhood inside and out: The psychological and social world of children 9-12. University of British Columbia

It is a holistic, integrated approach which enables and empowers students and adults by building strengths and assets”.⁹³

A 2009 Vanier Institute on the Family report urged urban planning with children in mind after expressing concern about the effects of social and physical isolation on children and their neighbourhoods. The report suggested that urban areas are designed for adults in automobiles and not for children who walk, which can result in “...harmful impacts such as loss of vitality and conviviality in the streets, and individual and collective insecurity and impoverishment.”⁹⁴ The 2009 Toronto School District report appears to agree on the subject of better integration of children “... the neighbourhoods of community schools enjoy increased security, heightened community pride, and better rapport among students and residents”.⁹⁵

The Vanier report asserts that in Canada only one third of children walk to school regularly and in the United States the figure is even lower. This loss of the opportunity for a child to discover themselves in their community, and the loss of personal touch with their neighbourhood is increasing as children are being driven or bussed to school, even over short distances.⁹⁶ To counteract this trend, the report suggests the children’s desires and ideas on the kind of community they wish to live within their urban environment should be part of the community decision making processes.

Children take an active role in shaping communities, and many people recognize their importance as childhood advances into adulthood. As such, growing up is “... a time in which children can build ties with their communities, and even transform them”.⁹⁷

“For children, the factors that make a place a *good* place for growing up included safety, freedom of movement, social integration, the opportunity to carry out diverse and meaningful activities, the presence of gathering places, a strong community identity, and a sense of solidarity.”

~ Vanier Institute on the Family

⁹³ Segal, N. (2010). Toronto District School Board: Full Service Schools. Report 04-10-1586

⁹⁴ Torres, J. (2009). Children & cities: Planning to grow together. Vanier Institute of the Family, Ontario, Canada, p. 2.

⁹⁵ Full Service Schools: The Future of the T.D.S.B. (2009), p. 5

⁹⁶ Torres, J. (2009). Children & cities: Planning to grow together. Vanier Institute of the Family, Ontario, Canada

⁹⁷ Torres, J. (2009). Children & cities: Planning to grow together. Vanier Institute of the Family, Ontario, Canada, p. 4.

What a school as community hub can be

How is a community hub different or better than existing programs?

There are many competing viewpoints on the best models or systems to implement. Currently community education programs reflect four formats of community use:⁹⁸

- Sharing on Demand – an eligible community group can obtain a permit, book specific times and dates to use the school space after hours.⁹⁹
- Parallel or shared use of schools – an independent organization can use the space for programs. The organization operates autonomously from the school and there may not be mutual benefit.¹⁰⁰
- Co-location – an efficient use of a planned, mixed-use site and public space where public departments' co-ordinate resources and services in a co-location that is operated by a school board or a municipality.
- Full-service school – builds array of services around needs of children and families. Agencies involved are publicly or grant funded by different levels of government or corporate business. There may also be public-private partnerships with corporate sponsorships and political agendas that may conflict with educational priorities.

At cursory glance, these formats appear to include community needs, but in practice they may not actually integrate the community and school. Most often, the sharing of building space is parallel to regular daytime school classes with minimal exchange or benefit.¹⁰¹

Offering complementary programs and activities in a school provides the benefit of improved access and communication between people and agencies, however any co-location of services in and of itself does not constitute a holistic community-building approach. In the absence of carefully pre-planned desired outcomes or shared expectations, the act of co-location creates a co-tenancy situation rather than a collaborative setting. Many community collaborations fail because there is inadequate attention paid to the creation and maintenance of mutual relationships. Considerable resources and time are needed to develop and sustain relationships between the co-collaborators of a hub (e.g. education, community members, and participating levels of government).¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Clanfield, D, Martell, G. (2010). The School as Community Hub: Beyond Education's Iron Cage. *Our Schools/Our Selves* 19(4) 100. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

⁹⁹ Barbara Young, personal communication, July 6, 2011

¹⁰⁰ Segal, N. (2010). Toronto District School Board: Full Service Schools. Report 04-10-1586

¹⁰¹ Clanfield, D, Martell, G. (2010). The School as Community Hub: Beyond Education's Iron Cage. *Our Schools/Our Selves* 19(4) 100. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

¹⁰² http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/Bond_Integrated_service_delivery_for_young_people_lit_review_2010.pdf

The most fully developed philosophical basis for community hubs has been created by David Clandfield, a retired University of Toronto professor. Clandfield is the author of *The school as community hub: A public alternative to the neo-liberal threat to Ontario schools*, and offers an enhanced idea of how a community school can become a true and complimentary hub within a community:

“A school might be thought of as a two-way hub when children’s learning activities within the school contribute to community development and when community activities contribute to and enrich children’s learning within the school”.¹⁰³

“A school might be thought of as a two-way hub when children’s learning activities within the school contribute to community development and when community activities contribute to and enrich children’s learning within the school”

~ David Clandfield

Clandfield further defines the role of students and teachers, where students “... can develop their own expertise and put it to work in the service of the community”; and teachers will have “... a duty to understand their pupils not only as potential producers of knowledge rather than vessels to be filled, but also as community mediator providing the actual means by which school and community can work more closely together”.¹⁰⁴

Key vehicles to realize a hub are the various community programs and services that are currently located within Community Schools coupled with an underlying desire and philosophy not only to keep neighbourhood schools open, but to actually work at creating and sustaining them as focal points in a community. Clandfield states that a community hub will:

“Yoke the interactive neighbourhood school with a multi-use hub to produce a kind of new Commons that can come together to develop and sustain flourishing communities on principles of citizenship, co-operation and social justice. There can be health, recreation, poverty reduction, cultural expression and celebration, environmental responsibility can all come together to develop and sustain flourishing communities on principles of citizenship, co-operation and social justice”.¹⁰⁵

Clanfield’s considerations of funding and governance are approached from the lens of collective existence and a common interest in the public spaces and facilities citizens use.

¹⁰³ Clandfield, D, Martell, G. (2010). The School as Community Hub: Beyond Education’s Iron Cage. *Our Schools/Our Selves* 19(4) 100. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

There needs to be a break-down of the silos and institutional barriers that currently exist in an effort to find a new balance for decision making between local communities and a central authority.¹⁰⁶ The governance and financing of public school facilities needs to be re-positioned where funding is restored to the individual school boards. New sources of sustainable funding need to be located and directed towards the local decision makers and the tax-payers that support their local community assets. As example, co-partnering on the hub site could produce rental revenue which could off-set costs of specialist teachers or aides in the hub school. Rental revenue would reduce the pressure of funding schools in urban environments and rural communities.¹⁰⁷

In regard to governance, Clandfield states that school community councils need to be strengthened beyond the parent body to include members of partner agencies and the students themselves. Their role must be given authority to determine the changing education needs and priorities of the community – no longer is the role just to fund raise for playground equipment and Christmas concerts. As well, the school board needs to have discretionary say over their property tax allotment and governance needs to include working partnerships between school boards, municipalities, and local governments.¹⁰⁸

Clandfield has suggested a starting point to build a true community hub would be the exploration of a School Facilities Joint Board.¹⁰⁹

The flourishing community hub is a municipal partnership that draws distinct communities together and is not solely a school board responsibility. There is recognition that children may leave their neighbourhood school catchment area to attend a non-local school for language, religious or personal reasons, but upon return, can access their local school for the variety of social and learning events that occur during evenings, weekends or holidays.

Clandfield suggests that this blending transforms both the school and community, and strengthens the relationships between schools, their neighbourhoods, and the people involved. This integration and relationship building creates a healthy community.

¹⁰⁶ Clandfield, D, Martell, G. (2010). The School as Community Hub: Beyond Education's Iron Cage. *Our Schools/Our Selves* 19(4) 100. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Clandfield, D, Martell, G. (2010). The School as Community Hub: Beyond Education's Iron Cage. *Our Schools/Our Selves* 19(4) 100. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 64

Are current models for Community Schools, community hubs?

Do the previously discussed models of community education constitute schools as community hubs?

If one uses the most developed philosophical definition as created by Clandfield, then no, the existing “work in progress” models across the country do not constitute schools as community hubs. Under his theoretical definition they have elements, and may be considered proto hubs, however none of the models match Clandfield’s theoretical construct. His model includes altered governance and funding modes, as well as a very high degree of integration with ALL aspects and members of the community.

If the definition is the “work in progress” enacted by the real-life community education models researched in this paper, then maybe. Or, if the loose definition of a hub is to be that of a well functioning and thoroughly integrated community school, then perhaps.

Clandfield describes hub models that bring in outside individuals resources and services as being a service model, because the hub is not providing these resources from inside the community but is rather, requesting services from outside. Resources, mentors or services should come from within the community itself.¹¹⁰ It has been demonstrated that when there are intergenerational linkages, that the community has more respect for each other and property and crime rates or nuisance events are much lower.¹¹¹

The model of schools as community hubs is an evolutionary, not a revolutionary idea. Many existing models of schools appear to have congruence and sympathetic memes, and even though they are not perfect examples of the ideal community hub as defined in a pure form by Clandfield, they are moving in that direction.

The model of schools as community hubs is an evolutionary, not a revolutionary idea.

Any of these definitions struggle with their vision and goals within their current political, financial, and environmental constraints.

¹¹⁰ Clandfield, D, Martell, G. (2010). The School as Community Hub: Beyond Education’s Iron Cage. *Our Schools/Our Selves* 19(4) 100. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

¹¹¹ Torres, J. (2009). Children & cities: Planning to grow together. Vanier Institute of the Family, Ontario, Canada

Can the Athabasca community create a hub?

Given that there are no current functioning examples of a Clandfield style community hub, and that his hub model is a theoretical construct at this time, can Athabasca school be one or be made to be one? Are there other hub or multipurpose or community centre experiences that would inform the Athabasca situation and provide a pathway toward alternative use of the school?

This section will attempt to explain the current context of the Athabasca School closure and point out opportunities and questions for the community to consider.

Context:

- Regina Public Schools considers Athabasca school closed and will have no involvement in a school as a community hub project on this site at this time. The School Board is the sole owner of the building and property and has indicated they would be willing and pleased to sell the school to community members who wish to create a community hub or multipurpose centre type of facility.¹¹²
- Regina Public Schools is in the process creating their own a hub type model in North Central Regina that includes 14 partners, of which 4 are contributing financially.
There is recognition that creating a community hub takes a lot of time, effort, and resources: *“When you build a hub school you have to have partners that will help pay for it and who have other programming in the school ... this one has taken 9 years ...”*.¹¹³
- Other facilities in the area offer programs and services that are in the likely scope of a community hub cluster. Sheldon Williams Collegiate (the high school down the block from Athabasca School) is heavily booked by the community,¹¹⁴ the Neil Balkwill Civic Arts Centre offers a range of programs and activities as does the Regina Seniors Centre on Elphinstone Street. The parks of Kiwanis Waterfall and Les Sherman provide outdoor spaces. The small River Heights Shopping Centre is also an area resource.
- Through an interview with Regina Public Schools staff, it was indicated that Athabasca School had a very low level of bookings for community use.¹¹⁵ When this information was shared with community members, they stated that if they had known that school bookings were potentially a consideration in saving the school,

¹¹² D. Hoiium, B. Young & D. West, personal communication July 6, 2011

¹¹³ B. Young, personal communication July 6, 2011

¹¹⁴ D. Hoiium & D. West, personal communication July 6, 2011

¹¹⁵ D. Hoiium & D. West, personal communication July 6, 2011

they would have made more efforts to see that Athabasca was booked more often.¹¹⁶

- There is an increase of young families moving into the neighbourhood.

Opportunities

- Is there a niche or role for the Athabasca School to fill within the existing cluster of facilities, programs, and services? As noted in earlier sections, community hubs are not necessarily a single building or facility and can be clustered within a neighbourhood.
- During the course of this research project there have been many groups and individuals who have come forward with interest in participating and potentially investing in a hub type centre. These groups currently own or operate services of: a private school; senior's day centre; sporting group. Each is interested in renting space and contributing to the community.
- There is community support for the concept of a school hub. Community members state:

*"Great idea"*¹¹⁷

*"If it makes people's lives better, then it is good"*¹¹⁸

*"The school is a centre of activity"*¹¹⁹

*"Yes I would volunteer"*¹²⁰

*"A community needs a common place"*¹²¹

*"I would support it in any way possible"*¹²²
- Area residents have suggested ideas for the space such as: a daycare centre, after school programs, language classes, life skills classes, and adult recreation classes (sport and culture).

Common tenants in a school hub type model are: adult learning; childcare; health and social services; family learning; parenting support; study support, sports and recreation; arts; information technology training.

¹¹⁶ B. Hughes & G. Chubak, personal communication July 21, 2011

¹¹⁷ K. Weiss, personal communication July 20, 2011

¹¹⁸ Informant A, personal communication July 12, 2011

¹¹⁹ D. Johns, personal communication July 5, 2011

¹²⁰ Marjorie, personal communication June 28, 2011

¹²¹ Marjorie, personal communication July 12, 2011

¹²² S. Soriano-Hale, personal communication June 28, 2011

- With the definition of a school as community hub model loosely defined, the community is not restrained by pre-determined notions of what to create.

Questions for the community to consider

- Given the substantial time and efforts required for community development, is there adequate community support, commitment and long term enthusiasm to create a community hub?
- Is there consensus in the community on what the proposed Athabasca hub should be, and what role or services it should provide? The Toronto and District School Board report on Full Service Schools makes the following point that likely applies to community hubs:

“In attempts to open schools to the outside world, a great deal of energy has been wasted through a lack of consensus. Staff, students, trustees, and community have to share a common interest in developing a community school. Yet even if all these players are highly motivated, that can quickly wane when it seems that a community school merely means more work, when increased commitment is not connected with incentives and results, and when financial, structural, and personnel support are not forthcoming.”

- Does the steering committee have adequate expertise or experience in project management in the scale required? If not, is that expertise available and is it volunteer or paid?
- Can the community access the level of financial support or resources needed to keep Athabasca school heated and lit during the planning and early development stage? The building costs approximately \$100,000 per year to maintain.¹²³

Some steps that could be taken to prepare for a community hub (in no particular order):

- Creation of a steering committee
- Development of an initial plan
- Identification of stakeholders
- Dissemination and communication of that initial plan to the area and appropriate stakeholders
- Community meetings and surveys of area residents and local businesses/agencies
- Consultation with legal and financial advisors

¹²³ D. West, personal communication July 6, 2011

- Discussions with community based organisations and facilities to identify existing area needs and programs
- Meet with government officials: School boards (Public and Catholic); City of Regina, Provincial Government; Federal Government

In thinking about and planning for entities similar to community hubs, the 2009 report *Full Service Schools, The Future of the T.D.S.B.*, written for the Toronto District School Board, by C. Spence, the lessons contained on the following page were put forward:
[verbatim excerpt next page]

Lessons Distilled from Experience with Community Schools

A number of lessons have been learned through the community school experience to date, and these can be summarized as follows:

- **Build consensus and partnership**
 Extending learning time at a school through programs such as tutoring in reading, homework centres, mentoring, or drug prevention will require collaboration among diverse partners. Not only parents and educators, but also community residents, service providers, and public officials will need — and want — to be involved in the process. Programs should draw on all of the community's resources while also addressing the concerns of all who are affected as partners.
- **Conduct a community assessment of needs and resources**
 A community assessment helps a partnership turn a shared vision for continuous learning and safety into strategies that use resources efficiently to address local conditions. Assessment information can come from interviews, surveys, focus groups, and community forums. All local stakeholders can contribute to the process so that the resulting strategies address real concerns and consider all possible resources.
- **Design programs with care**
 Successful partnerships have concluded that every school and community must choose its own combination of opportunities to address local conditions and concerns. Nevertheless, effective programs establish vision and focus, address needs in an appropriate manner, coordinate efforts, and from the beginning create a system of accountability.
- **Consider the details**
 School governance, liability, and building-maintenance issues are paramount in making a community school work. Strong leadership, collaborative decision making, and a clear understanding of management and organization procedures and policies such as liability, along with managed, mutually acceptable arrangements for physical space, are critical elements of successful programs.
- **Provide effective staff**
 Staff for after-school or summer learning can come from the school, a partner agency, or the community, but should have appropriate experience, realistic expectations, and a true interest in caring for children. Paid professionals and teachers can be supplemented with volunteers and parents.
- **Evaluate a program's accomplishments**
 Community school programs are by nature complex and, no matter how well designed, will evolve through experience. Continuous monitoring of a program's progress — in addition to a shared understanding of its goals — can help leaders and staff maintain their focus, improve effectiveness and accountability, ensure parent and participant satisfaction, and identify changes that need to be made. Continuous monitoring allows a program's director to assess whether its key features are working as intended, and helps the program to improve.

Concluding notes

The desire by members of communities to save their neighbourhood schools, and the desire to build a positive and nurturing community is real and worthy of note, appreciation, and accolades. It takes time, energy and devotion to pursue such goals and there are many obstacles and challenges to overcome.

It is important to focus on the needs and desired outcomes of the community, rather than being constrained by a predetermined notion of what a community hub should be. Various urban and rural communities will have unique characteristics and a cookie cutter approach to building a hub is antithetical to the underlying beliefs that inspire the ideas. To be effective, a community hub needs to respond to the social, economic, cultural and environmental opportunities and constraints that exist within a particular local community.

The benefits of hub like facilities and integrated environments are well documented. There are philosophical approaches that can guide the creation and there are examples to draw from. Regina Public Schools and other interested parties (e.g.: various levels of government and community groups), should further research and plan incremental steps toward realising the laudable goals of community hubs in all their forms. The benefits to individuals and our society will be immense.

The Athabasca Committee should be congratulated for putting the issue of schools as community hubs squarely on the table for long term policy discussion. Whether Athabasca is viable as a hub or not in the current condition set, implementation of the ideas surrounding community hubs into our schools and communities is important.