

A Consideration of Elementary School Configurations

Presented to Board of Education
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The current school-funding crisis in New York State poses serious difficulties for Dryden and most school districts that depend heavily on state aid. Observing other districts contemplate school closings, some people have lamented that Dryden didn't consolidate its elementary schools earlier when we had the chance in 2002-2003 and suggested that we should do so now. The purpose of this paper is to revisit the question of consolidation. In doing so, we hope not to reignite what was a protracted and difficult debate in this community, but to examine how Dryden's decisions not to consolidate have worked out and to consider what consolidation today would involve. The report is in two parts. Part 1 examines how the decision to keep three elementary schools open has worked out financially, academically, and socially. Part 2 considers the options and impacts of school consolidation today.

Part 1

Academic, Financial, and Socioeconomic Impacts of School Consolidation: Local Experience and National Lessons

The purpose of part 1 is to consider how Dryden's decision to keep three elementary schools open has worked out financially, academically, and socially. We will do so by looking at our own cost figures and test scores and by looking at research and research-based policy advice on school consolidation and school size. With both costs and academic results, we have much more evidence to go on than we did eight years ago.

The Decisions of 2002 and 2003:

Following two years of study and widespread community debate, the board proposed in 2002 a building project at Dryden Elementary School (DES) that would have renovated the existing building and added the classroom, gym, cafeteria, and other space needed to accommodate over 200 additional primary grade students (total K-5 population 900-1000). Proponents of the plan cited educational benefits (ease of administration and collaboration, fewer building transitions, etc.), potential operating and staffing cost savings of up to \$100,000 per year, and the too-high costs they anticipated for renovating the schools in McLean and Freeville. Opponents believed the new construction would be costlier than renovating existing buildings, cited the educational benefits of smaller schools, and feared that the Freeville and McLean communities would be harmed by the closing of the schools.

On June 25, 2002 the building consolidation plan was defeated with 958 votes in favor and 1643 opposed (see table 1.1). The following fall, a large group of residents and staff, including people who had voted for and against the earlier plan, were charged with developing renovation plans for the three schools. The plans were brought to the voters in a November 18, 2003 referendum, which passed by a 2 to 1 margin (865 in favor; 424 opposed).

Table 1.1. Results of 2002 consolidation referendum and 2003 renovation referendum

Proposition	Votes in Favor	Votes Opposed
2002 referendum to expand Dryden Elementary School and close schools in McLean and Freeville.	958	1643
2003 referendum to renovate all three elementary schools (Dryden, Freeville & McLean)	865	424

With the benefit of hindsight, we now know how the comparative costs of those decisions stack up. Here are the figures:

Table 1.2. Comparative costs and savings of the 2002 and 2003 decision

	2002 Proposed Consolidation Plan	2003 Implemented Renovation Plan	Savings
Total Project Cost	\$22.3 million	\$12.8 million	\$9.5 million
Amount of Capital Reserve Used	\$300,000	None	\$300,000
Payment Plan Period	20 years	16 years	4 years
Annual Cost in Tax Levy	\$509,713	\$118,538	\$391,175 for 16 years \$509,713 for 4 years
20 year cost to local taxpayers	\$10,494,260	\$1,896,608	\$8,597,663

Renovating three schools proved less costly than some had imagined and, because the project stayed within state aid guidelines, the local share of the 2003 project was much less, which is why the annual cost in the tax levy is so much lower. The 2002 plan had the potential to save \$100,000 in operating and staffing costs, but would have added nearly three times that amount to the annual tax levy. Further, by not using the capital reserve fund for the renovation, the district was able to use those funds to launch and sustain a program of annual summer renovation projects, which are 81.6% reimbursed by the state and which reduce annual maintenance and future capital project costs.

On a financial basis, keeping the schools open proved to be less expensive than closing them, but what about the educational aims of the consolidation plan? The news here is also good. Around the time of the consolidation proposal, only 60 percent of DES 4th graders were performing at the acceptable or better level on 4th grade math and ELA tests. By 2008 78% were meeting the ELA targeted level and 88% were in math. These are dramatic improvements.

On a social level, Freeville and McLean, with the schools still open, have held on. New businesses have opened. Homes have held their values. Road, bridge, sidewalk and other infrastructure improvements have been made, complementing the improvements to the schools. And the schools have remained important venues for recreation and other facets of community life.

Based on this information, there is no need to regret the community's decision not to consolidate. The district is better off financially (as are the taxpayers), students' performance is improving, and the local communities are stable. This good news may come as a surprise to some, but not to those who have recently reviewed educational research and policy advice on the consolidation of rural schools. That research and policy advice defies the conventional wisdom that "bigger is better." Consolidation, it turns out, is often (not always) a poor choice – educationally, socially, and economically. As the next few pages will show, school districts, especially rural districts, are advised to approach consolidation with caution.

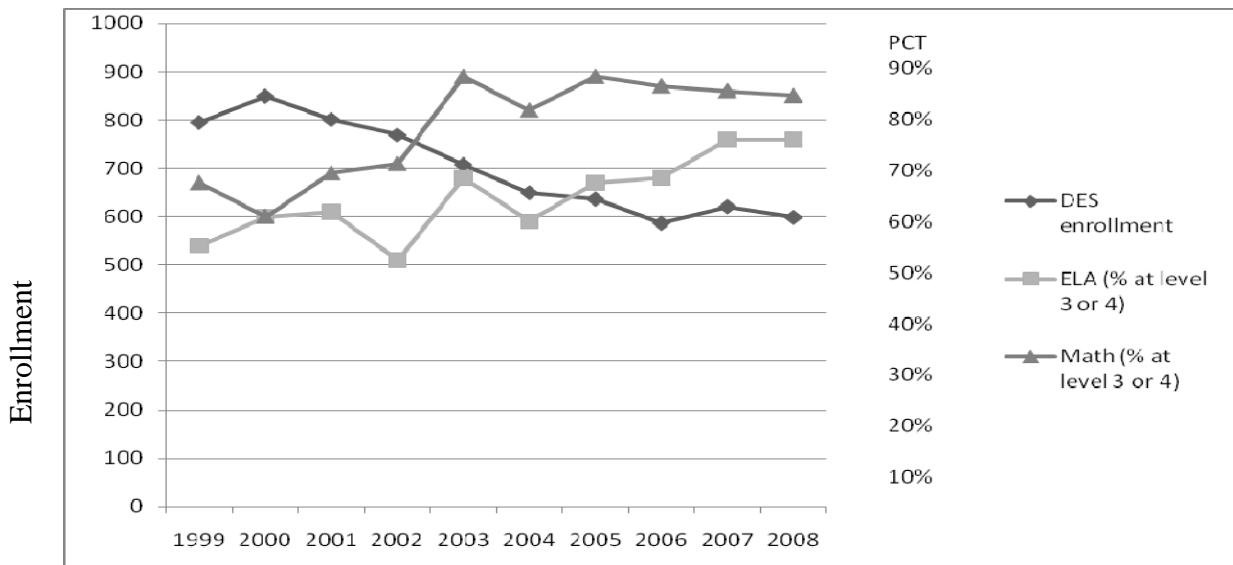
Research and Educational Policy Advice on Consolidation, Academic Achievement, Socio-economic Conditions, and School Spending

Smaller is Better

A growing body of educational research, conducted in many states and involving thousands of schools, shows that school size matters when it comes to academic achievement, especially in districts with children from lower income families. In these cases, smaller is better. The “excellence effect” of raising achievement by itself is good news. Even better for districts like Dryden is the “equity effect” in which economically disadvantaged students in smaller schools tend to perform as well as more affluent students. These effects on academic achievement make smaller schools an educational asset. The Center for Rural Affairs and the Rural School and Community Trust are two of many organizations now recommending that policy makers encourage the preservation of smaller schools and that new schools not be built too large. Further, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) has suggested that no elementary school should house more than 400 students. Keeping schools smaller is one of the few structural changes policy makers can do that improves academic achievement. (Reducing class sizes in the primary grades is another structural change widely supported by research and recommended by policy advisors.)

Some might want to ignore this research or think it doesn’t apply here. Actually it does. Between 1999 and 2008, the enrollment at Dryden Elementary School dropped from around 800 to around 600. During that time, as noted earlier, academic achievement has risen substantially, as seen in Figure 1.1 below. The year-to-year changes are depicted graphically with the enrollment line trending downward and the math and ELA score lines trending upward. In both the relationships are very strong ($r = -.905$ for Math; $r = -.723$ for ELA), statistically significant ($p < .001$; $p < .05$) and practically important (approximately 20% more students passing). These results are completely consistent with the educational on research school size and academic achievement.

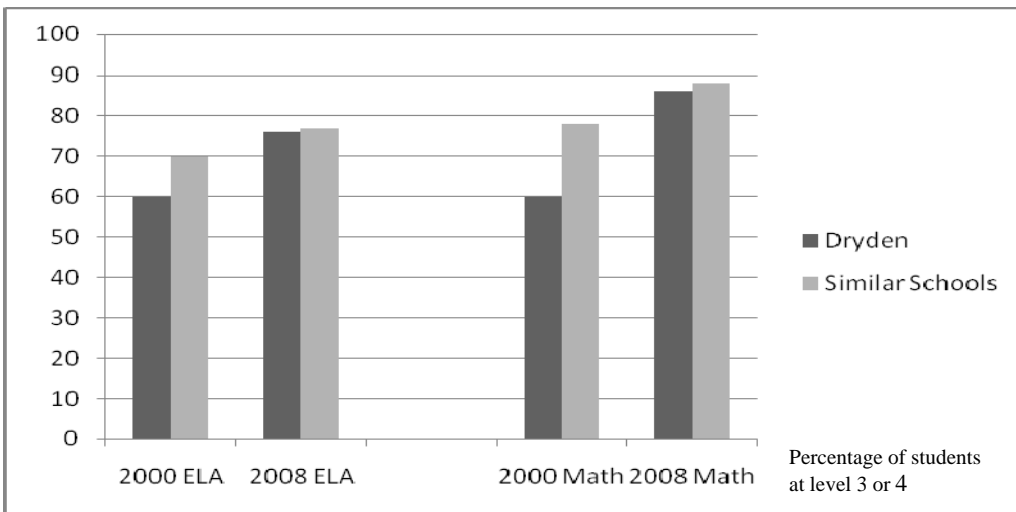
Figure 1.1. Enrollment and Academic Achievement at DES



Correlation of enrollment and math scores: $r = -.905, p < .001$
 Correlation of enrollment and ELA scores: $r = -.723, p < .05$

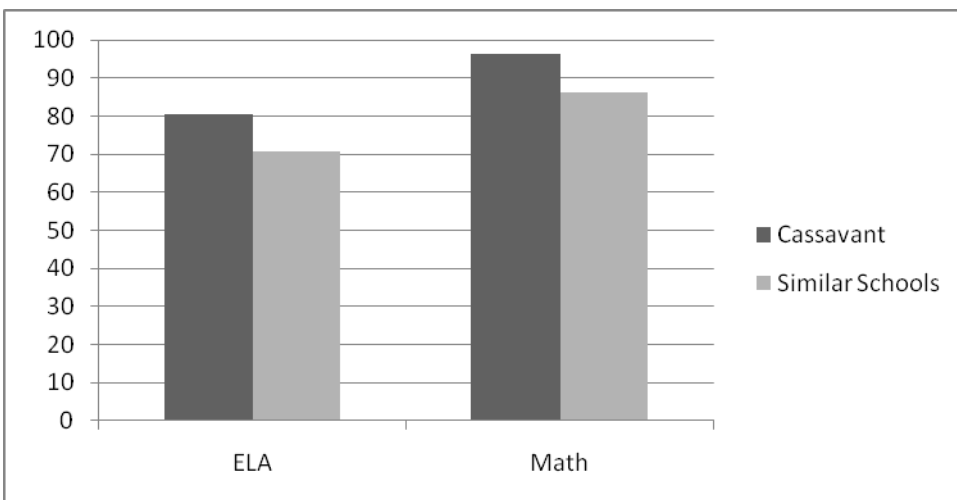
Another graphic is instructive. Seen below in Figure 1.2 is how Dryden compared with “similar schools” (by needs and resources) in New York on ELA and math tests in 2000 and 2008. In 2000, Dryden lagged well behind similar schools in both areas with only 60% scoring at the targeted (level 3 or 4) compared to 70% for similar schools in ELA and 78% for similar schools in Math. By 2008, the gap has all but disappeared (and it should be noted that both Dryden and similar schools are performing better). While similar schools have improved by 8-10%; Dryden has improved by 16% in ELA and 28% in math. As DES has become smaller (enrollment), academic achievement has risen at a pace that greatly outstrips that of similar elementary schools. This finding is consistent with the research on school size and academic achievement. This is not to say that school size is all that matters-- good teaching, parental involvement, a sound, well-aligned curriculum, and a host of other factors still count. But smaller schools tend to enhance, rather than impede, the good efforts of teachers, parents, and administrators to give children their best effort.

Figure 1.2. Dryden and similar schools 4th grade ELA and Math Scores over time



Finally, compare in Figure 1.3 the average percentage of Cassavant students performing at level 3 or 4 on third grade tests (different from tests in table above) for test years 2006, 2007 and 2008 with those of similar schools during the same period. In both, Cassavant is performing well above the level of similar schools, and in math could be considered a lighthouse or exemplary school.

Figure 1.3. Cassavant and similar schools: Average Percentage of students at level 3 or 4 on third grade ELA and math tests 2006, 2007 and 2008



With a mission of promoting academic achievement, both research-based policy advice and Dryden's own data would suggest viewing its smaller schools as assets, not liabilities. In the face of declining district enrollment, the focus should be on further reducing the population (or population per grade level) in DES, which still exceeds the NAESP recommended maximum enrollment by 200 but has benefitted from the reduction of its K-5 population. Based on substantial educational research and on our own data or experience, seeking to increase the enrollment at DES would impede, not enhance academic achievement.

School Closings and Consolidation Damage Rural Communities

The social costs of closings are varied and considerable. Often the school or its grounds are the primary venue for both organized and informal activities. The recreational use of grounds is of special value when the community otherwise lacks sufficient parks, which is the case in Dryden, Freeville, and McLean. School closings force citizens to do without play space or to bear the cost of acquiring and developing recreation areas. The formal organized events, whether school or community sponsored, are important to the vitality and identity of community members. Each concert brings with it memories of previous events that featured older siblings, parents, neighbors, or grandparents. Beyond this direct community use of the schools, the very presence of the school is a daily reminder that the village or hamlet is alive and well. As the buses and children arrive each morning, these communities come to life. Close the school, and the empty building is a daily reminder of the community's brokenness. In 2002, residents of McLean and Freeville, recognizing they are a minority in the district, asked that others consider their situation. What the residents of these communities feared is borne out by studies of rural communities following school closures.

The political and economic costs of school closings are noteworthy as well. Walberg (1992), Valencia (1984), and the Center for Rural Affairs (1999) found that school closings led to reduced parental and citizen involvement, lower voter turnout, and declining public support for levies and bonds. The Center for Rural Affairs and the Rural Schools and Community Trust cite research findings that rural school closings are associated with declines in retail sales, labor supply, residential and commercial real estate values, and available loan capital. Further, rural villages with closed schools (compared with those with open schools) have lower per capita incomes, higher rates of poverty, less occupational diversity, and less population growth. Although none of these is desirable, the effect on real estate values has the most serious potential impact for the school district. Lyson (2002) found a significant difference in the property values of homes in rural villages in New York with a school vs. those without a school (most had a "closed" school building). Property values were over 20% lower in villages without schools.

If the schools in Freeville and/or McLean closed, property values in those communities would drop. This would have impact not only on the homeowners in those communities, but also on all taxpayers in DCSD. Consider Freeville, which has an assessed property value of \$20.9 million. With the recent tax rate of \$20.43, Freeville contributed \$426,987 to the DCSD tax levy. If property values fell the expected 20% in the years following a closing, Freeville properties would have an assessed value of \$16,781,670, and their tax levy contribution would fall to \$342,849. This \$84,138 shortfall would have to be covered by all DCSD taxpayers. Add to that if the McLean school also closed. Often such losses in revenue are not part of pre-consolidation estimates of savings, which may contribute to the surprising research finding that consolidation rarely brings the expected economies and is often more costly.

Further, with the now well documented adverse economic impact of school closings on rural villages, there is the probability that those villages could challenge "a decision by a Board of Education to close a school in one community and consolidate enrollment in another community" (Lyson, 2005, p. 26), forcing a more protracted Type 1 State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR), which would require a complete environmental impact study. It is possible that the closing would be stopped or that the village losing its school would have to be compensated for their losses.

The Fiscal Impacts of School Consolidation

Advocates of consolidation argue “economy of scale,” that combining schools or school districts will lower per pupil costs and reduce taxpayer burdens. It seems logical and has been accepted as a matter of faith in education and public policy for decades. More recently researchers and others studied actual results. For example, Valencia (1984) reviewed 40 studies of school closures and found negligible effects on per-pupil costs. Andrew (1974) reviewed 35 school closures with pre-closure projections of cost savings. In only 12 instances had anyone calculated cost changes after the closures. Of those, only four reported savings. For the rest, costs remained the same or increased. Jewell (1989) studied closures in 50 states and found no relationship between school enrollment and per-pupil cost. More recently, after closing over 300 schools in West Virginia, spending for administration and transportation rose dramatically (despite declining school age population) and academic performance declined (Rural School and Community Trust, 2009). Despite the West Virginia example, other studies have shown that when savings from consolidation do accrue, they usually do so in administrative savings, at least initially. Most other expenses (instruction, maintenance, student support services etc.) follow the students. In some instances, consolidation does lower the cost per student, but not the cost per successful student.

In Dryden, any attempt to calculate potential savings in consolidation would have to account for the very likely declines in property tax revenue from the affected communities and the added cost of declining academic performance. Therefore, we anticipate that more students would need remedial (academic intervention services) work in math and ELA, for how many years, we would still need to determine. Declining performance on tests could also cost the district under the punitive provisions of No Child Left Behind. Further, damage to the reputation of the district might make it less attractive to home buyers, further eroding property values and revenues.

Conclusion

In sum, when Dryden residents voted against consolidation in 2002 and decided in 2003 to renovate and keep their three elementary schools, they made decisions that have saved the district hundreds of thousands of dollars per year, improved academic performance, and maintained the vitality and tax base of our three communities with elementary schools. All three results are entirely consistent with educational research and policy advice for rural school districts, but still surprising for many people. Consolidation has been advocated uncritically by educators and politicians for many decades. With growing evidence questioning the wisdom of consolidation in many instances, Dryden can be pleased to have been among the first districts to avoid the pitfalls of consolidation rather than being one of the last to go ahead with it.

Part 2

Reconsidering Consolidation in 2010: Options and Implications

In Part 1 we showed the academic, financial, and socioeconomic impacts of the 2003 decision to keep Dryden's three elementary schools open. The local cost savings, gains in academic achievement, and maintenance of communities' economic and social vitality were consistent with a growing body of research and policy advice regarding school closings and consolidation in rural school districts. Still, the district's elementary population has declined since 2002 as has the economy of New York State. Those changes leave some people wondering about consolidation going forward. The purpose of Part 2 of this report is to examine the options and implications of consolidation today. We will consider:

- Whether DES has the physical capacity to house students from Cassavant and/or Freeville.
- Whether DES has the programmatic capacity to house students from one or both smaller schools.
- What savings and expenses would be associated with these options.

The capacity of DES to house Cassavant (McLean) and Freeville students

Dryden Elementary School does not have the capacity to accommodate both the Freeville and McLean students, but could accommodate students from either school by raising class sizes, especially in the primary grades, and holding legally mandated individual instruction in hallways and/or other non-classroom space. Before explaining the logistics of the latter option, we need to explain "what's changed" to make the former option impossible. While it's true that DES housed over 800 K-5 students a decade ago, it's also true that DES could not house 800 K-5 students today. What is different today?

1. For reasons of economy and compliance with new special education requirements, DES now accommodates special education students, services, and classrooms that were located at BOCES ten years ago.
2. DES now houses a pre-kindergarten program that is fully funded by the state. Hence, in addition to the 600 K-5 students in DES, there are now 36 pre-K students. The P-5 population of DES is about 640. With a growing recognition that children's academic and career futures are often cast by grade 3, we need to keep this program and anticipate future demand to expand it.
3. Ten years ago, the grade-level configuration in DES was 38% in grades K-2; today it would be almost 50% grades K-2 with consolidation, greatly over-taxing the capacity of the primary wing at DES. There would also be diminished ability to conduct school-wide events as fire code guidelines would be exceeded.

The nature of education and schools' grade-level configurations changes, as the above enumerations illustrate. This is not new. Many district residents recall when the McLean School was a grade 1-12 school (before the days of kindergarten) and DES was as well! DES can no longer accommodate 800 K-5 students. Looking at the difficulties of adding even an additional 100 students (from McLean or Freeville) will only reinforce the assertion that closing both schools and moving the students to DES is not possible.

DES can accommodate students from McLean or Freeville by raising class sizes in the primary grades and closing three rooms currently used for individual special education or reading instruction. Any cost savings from raising class sizes could be realized without closing a school, but no one has suggested raising primary school class sizes during budget discussions. Consolidation of DES and a smaller school would also require mandated individual instruction to be conducted in hallways and other public areas, risking other distractions

and consequences discussed below. That said, it is technically possible to close one school and add its students to DES. The questions remain whether it is programmatically desirable and financially beneficial to do so.

Programmatic Implications of Consolidation

In consolidating DES and one of the smaller schools, we foresee no programmatic advantage and several programmatic concerns. The district would have no reserve facility capacity, compromise its effectiveness and compliance with special education regulations and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, risk faculty grievances, and diminish the academic achievement of students.

Moving the Freeville or McLean students to DES and disposing of the closed school would leave the district with no reserve capacity. If the pre-K program expanded, the elementary population spiked (which happens recurrently), or another special education classroom had to be formed (which has also happened in recent years), the district would not have adequate space. Here we can take a lesson from the neighboring Homer School District, which hired consultants to assess the option of closing the K-6 Hartnett School in Truxton. In closing Hartnett School, Homer would simply fill currently empty spaces at Homer Elementary and Intermediate Schools and save over \$500,000. Still, the consultants did not recommend closing the school because the district would have insufficient reserve capacity. Increases in pre-K, spikes in population, or the closing of area private schools would leave the district with insufficient space and require far more costly capital projects. In Dryden, closing one of our smaller schools would more than exhaust our current reserve capacity.

While having the physical capacity to house 100 additional primary students, DES would be severely taxed programmatically to accommodate those students who require one-on-one or small group instruction as part of an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or as part of academic intervention services. Specifically, the loss of space for student services will compromise the delivery of special education. IEPs are legal documents and the services must be provided in an environment most conducive to the student's learning. Having to provide services in the hallways or stairwells will result in the district being cited for non-compliance of IEPs. Additionally, academic intervention services will be compromised in that they also will have limited space available for teachers to bolster student understanding as is required under the No Child Left Behind legislation.

An additional concern, beyond not meeting student needs, is not meeting teacher needs. Commissioner Steiner has proposed changes in the Annual Professional Performance Review that requires all teachers to be evaluated based on the performance of their students. In the teachers' contract there is a clause that requires the district to provide adequate facilities for teachers to provide instruction. If reading, speech and special education teachers are required to provide student services in halls, stairwells or busy classrooms, the union would have a legitimate grievance that the teachers' evaluations would be impermissible as forms of evaluation.

As mentioned earlier, there are two structural factors school districts can manipulate to enhance academic achievement-- school size and class sizes in the K-3 years. In consolidating DES and a smaller school, Dryden would jeopardize both.

As noted in Part 1 of this paper, there is abundant research evidence that smaller schools are associated with higher levels of academic achievement. In Dryden, as also seen in Part 1, our experience confirms the research. As DES enrollments have declined, academic achievement has risen much faster than at similar NYS schools, greatly narrowing the gap between Dryden's performance and that of similar schools. Our McLean school performed well above the level of similar schools. We aim to be better, not worse, than similar schools. The research, policy advice, and our own experience tell us that expanding the population in DES and closing a smaller school would retard academic achievement.

Compounding the issue of school size and academic achievement is the matter of class size. Intuitively, most would think that smaller sizes are always better in facilitating academic achievement. In fact, the research is mixed on this variable at most grade levels. However at the K-3 level, it is clear. Smaller is better, with a much stronger effect on academic achievement when K-3 classes are 15 or fewer and dramatic drop-offs when those classes are above 18. Currently Dryden is not at the optimal level. Closing a school would make matters worse. DES can accommodate students from Freeville or McLean only by increasing primary grade class sizes. Bear in mind that students performing below targeted levels are mandated to receive academic intervention services (AIS), which is an additional expense to the district. Worse still, many students not performing at targeted levels in grade 4 never improve, which is a tragic and expensive consequence. Class size reductions in grades K-3 is a powerful intervention strategy. Table 2.1 below shows the projected class sizes if one school is combined into DES:

Table 2.1

	2010-2011 (no closure)	2010-2011 (if CES is closed)	2010-2011 (if FES is closed)
Kindergarten	TBD	TBD	TBD
1 st Grade Classes	16	18.5	18.83
2 nd Grade Classes	16.2	17.16	18.83
3 rd Grade Classes	18.6	19	18.6
4 th Grade Classes	19.42	19.42	19.42
5 th Grade Classes	20.66	20.66	20.66

As seen in the table above, the number of grade level sections in district would have to be reduced in order to fit the students into DES. This results in higher class sizes at the K-3 level, hindering rather than enhancing the opportunity to improve academic achievement. The research on the short and long-term academic-achievement benefits for students in smaller classes at the primary level is now abundant. If Dryden takes seriously its mission of improving academic achievement, it would consider adopting a strategy of reducing rather than increasing class sizes at the K-3 level.

Such a strategy is not without costs and risks. Recognizing that, let us learn from a school district that embraced the costs and risks. In 2003, the Rush Henrietta School District (near Rochester), which is deemed as #14 similar school to DES and CES, adopted a primary grades class-size reduction plan. The chart below shows the results for the first cohort to reach grade 8 under the new state testing guidelines. Whether comparing this group to earlier 8th graders or 4th grade results since 2003, the outcomes are dramatic.

Effects on Dryden School District tax payers if one of the primary schools is closed

Thus far we have shown that DES has the physical capacity to house students from either Cassavant or Freeville and illustrated the numerous programmatic and logistical difficulties of trying to do so. The question remains, what savings would we realize if we went ahead with a school closing? We will begin with current expense categories for FES followed by CES. This table shows potential reductions in certain expense categories. They will be followed by a listing of expenses or costs that are likely to increase as a result of closing, giving us a prediction of net savings.

Table 2.3 Potential Reductions for Closing Freeville Elementary School

<u>Potential Savings:</u>	Freeville	Cassavant
1 Teacher	\$51,400 ¹	\$51,400 ¹
1 Custodian/Cleaner	\$41,948	\$41,948
1 Clerical Staff	\$48,168	\$48,168
1 Monitor	\$3,252	0
Mail Delivery	\$886	\$886
.6 Teacher in library	\$15,420	\$15,420
1 Nurse (cut to half time)	\$21,845	\$21,845
Head Teacher	\$2,741	\$2,741
District Travel	\$5,870	\$5,870
Security	0	0
Sewer	0	0
Office Costs	\$1,193	\$1,193
Teacher Supplies	\$500	\$500
Gas/Electric (estimate)	\$15,234	\$15,460
Insurance	\$400	\$400
Telephone	\$2,302	\$3,207
Transportation, net in aid	\$1,007	\$1,007
Total Savings	\$212,166	\$210,045
<u>Additional expenses and loss of revenue:</u>		
Unemployment (1 st year cost)	\$74,100	\$74,100
SEQRA – requirement of an Environmental Impact Study (estimate – 1 st year)	\$30,000	\$30,000
.25 Teacher Aide	\$4,126	\$4,126
Additional AIS support required at DES (estimated one teacher)	\$51,400	\$51,400
Buildings & Grounds (time to secure and check building)	\$3,982	\$3,982
Total Additional Costs (first year)	\$163,608	\$163,608
Net Potential Reductions – in first year	\$48,558	\$46,437
.25 Teacher Aide	\$4,126	\$4,126
Additional AIS support required at DES (estimated one teacher)	\$51,400	\$51,400
Buildings & Grounds (time to secure and check building)	\$3,982	\$3,982
Loss of Revenue ²	\$84,138	\$84,138
Total Loss of Revenue and Additional Costs (after first year)	\$143,646	\$143,646
Net Potential Reductions – after first year	\$68,520	\$66,399

¹ A savings necessitated by the lack of space in DES, not facilitated by consolidation.

² Loss of \$84,138 in revenue from the village/hamlet of the closed school per research cited in Part 1. This may not happen immediately, but would occur over time according to the Cornell research.

Table 2.3 Potential Reductions for Closing Freeville Elementary School (continued)

Additional Considerations for closing either CES or FES: Change needed at DES to accommodate additional classes. We have potential legal exposure to the board or district for making a decision that would foreseeably harm students' achievement. As Homer District's consultants advised, in losing all reserve space, we are likely to need more expensive capital projects to accommodate the problems of an over-filled school and/or increases in the P-5 population. Research would suggest we anticipate increased behavior/discipline problems, reduced parental involvement, and diminished public support for schools.

NOTE: FES has a current renovation debt balance (as of 6/30/10) of \$908,763. The annual principal and interest being by state and local funds is \$105,365. Payments continue for 11 more years.

NOTE: CES has a current renovation debt balance (as of 6/30/10) of \$1,232,033. The annual principal and interest being by state and local funds is \$142,888. Payments continue for 11 more years

Summary and conclusion:

In Part I we concluded that "when Dryden residents voted against consolidation in 2002 and decided in 2003 to renovate and keep their three elementary schools, they made decisions that have saved the district hundreds of thousands of dollars per year, improved academic performance, and maintained the vitality and tax base of our three communities with elementary schools. All three results are entirely consistent with educational research and policy advice for rural school districts."

In Part II, recognizing the fiscal crisis in school funding and the reduction in our district's K-5 population, we revisited the possibility of consolidation. With the addition of pre-K and return of special education classes to DES, housing 800 student (closing both Freeville and Cassavant) is not physically possible. One of those schools could be closed and its students moved to DES, but with consequences those hoping for consolidation would not likely seek. Among those consequences are: 1) reserve space would vanish, 2) class sizes would increase, 3) mandated individual instruction would be displaced into hallways and other unsuitable spaces, and 4) academic achievement would decline. Also noteworthy, consolidation would bring almost as many offsetting costs or lost revenues as it would initially appear to save.

In 2010, as in 2002 and 2003, the path of consolidation is ill-advised. People's inclination to support consolidation is understandable. School consolidation has been advocated uncritically by educators and politicians for many decades, despite no research evidence of improved academic achievement and mixed evidence regarding cost savings. Dryden has three elementary schools. In a perfect world, our elementary student population would be evenly distributed among the three, but that is not the reality of the buildings. In view of our local data on academic achievement and costs, which are consistent with the research literature and policy advice, we should still embrace the fact that we have three, and not just one or two elementary schools. Our children, our communities, our wallets, and our consciences are all better for it.

References:

The following references are a sampling of the more salient research and policy summaries consulted for Part 1 of this paper and recommended by the Rural School and Community Trust, Arlington, VA. They also contain more details and reference information for studies mentioned above. Those in a hurry should begin with the three non-indented links. The indented links expand on the associated topic. Below these are two links to studies on the socioeconomic significance of rural schools in New York State, authored by Cornell University's Tom Lyson, and a research summary on school size and academic achievement by Craig Howley. That is followed by one of the many research summaries on class size that was mentioned in Part 1 and Part 2.

The Fiscal Impacts of School Consolidation: <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2042>

Closing Costs: <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2043>

Anything But Research-based: <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2034>

School Size: Research-Based Conclusions: <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2038>

National Study Links Small Schools and Higher Achievement:
<http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2135>

Small Schools: Why They Provide the Best Education for Low-Income Students (Challenge WV):
<http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2050>

Hobbit Effect: Why Small Works- <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2026>

School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance: <http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2099>

Lyson, T. (2002) What Does a School Mean to a Community? Assessing the Social and Economic Benefits of Schools to Rural Villages in New York <http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/v17,n3,p131-137,Lyson.pdf>

Lyson, T. (2005). The importance of schools to rural community viability. In L. J. Beaulieu & R. Gibbs. *The Role of Education: Promoting the Economic and Social Vitality of Rural America*. Jackson, MS: Southern Rural Development Center. pp. 23-27. Retrieved March 22, 2010, from http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1b/ea/0e.pdf

Howley, C. (2003) School reform proposals: The research evidence [on] small schools. Tempe, AZ: ASU Education Policy Studies Laboratory. Retrieved March 20, 2010 from <http://epicpolicy.org/files/Chapter03-Howley-Final.pdf>

Finn, J. D. (2003) School reform proposals: The research evidence [on] class-size reduction in grades K-3. Tempe, AZ: ASU Education Policy Studies Laboratory. Retrieved March 20, 2010 from <http://www.epicpolicy.org/files/Summary-02.Finn.pdf> (A summary of the complete research review found at <http://www.epicpolicy.org/files/Chapter02-Finn-Final.pdf>)