

Is School Size Important?

In the 1913-1914 school year, the number of one-room schools in the United States swelled to an estimated 212,000. Yet, at the same time, educational reformers were leading a much publicized campaign to abandon these small schools. Among the weaknesses cited were the inadequate recruitment and supervision of teachers, out-of-date curricula, haphazard school attendance, limited course offerings, poor academic performance, and unsanitary practices. What children needed in the new industrial age, the reformers argued, were larger schools with age-graded classrooms, workshops, gymnasiums, cafeterias, diversified course offerings, and much more.* Eventually the reformers prevailed. Most U.S. one-room rural schools were consolidated and the buildings sold, used for other purposes, or abandoned. Yet small schools have not entirely disappeared from the educational landscape. In the following article, Michael Corbett, a professor of education in Nova Scotia, explores current international research on the effectiveness of small and large schools, the hotly contested trend to close small Atlantic Canadian schools, and efforts to preserve these schools as essential to the well being of rural communities.

—eds.

What We Know and Don't Know

About Small Schools: A View from Atlantic Canada

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Rural Schools Matter

Schools and elevators matter. . . . much more than if they were merely facilities for the delivery of curriculum and grain. Schools and elevators have been central to traditions of local governance and cooperative enterprise. . . .

Their disappearance from the landscape in waves of efficiency-driven consolidation evokes deep fears of obsolescence in turn. For that reason, resistance to school closures, at least, is one of the few causes around which collective political action still happens in rural communities—difficult as it is to sustain where student numbers have declined and amalgamated boards stretch budgets over vast districts.

—Roger Epp and Dave Whitson (1)

The quote above refers specifically to a province in western Canada, but it applies more broadly to an important sentiment in rural Canada generally. I am writing from the particular context of Atlantic Canada, which includes the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland. The region is much more profoundly rural (one in five people are rural dwellers) than most other areas of the country. It is fair to say that if there is a Canadian rural education policy, it can be essentially boiled down to the closure of small schools. As the national population has shifted from rural to urban places, there has been a relentless movement toward larger, more centralized schools (see Tables 1-5). While public and policy opinions are divided over whether small, rural communities should retain functioning schools, there is no doubt that these schools matter deeply to people who live in rural places.

In Atlantic Canada, the process around small school closures is particularly contentious. Successive provincial governments have struggled to come up with a sensible process around small-school closures that has done little to diminish the acrimony. (2) There are things we know and things we suspect from the literature that for the most part support what small schools activists know all too well from local experience. Below I will outline several issues that the literature on small schools and particularly on small rural schools raise.

School boards and other educational jurisdictions regularly make the decision to close small schools in both urban and rural communities. In cities, this tends to be a blow to those neighborhoods chosen for closure, but it generally does

not mean that the entire community loses a school. It amounts to a reorganization of buildings or a response to the complex demographics spurred on by urban real estate markets. In small rural communities the situation is different. The effect is essentially to cut the heart out of a place and to orient families out of their home places and into larger towns. It is sometimes argued that this is “good for them,” but rural people have not agreed, and as Roger Epp points out, schools and grain elevators often represent a “last stand” for rural communities in crisis. (3)

A Population in Decline?

The story of rural Atlantic Canada is presented in the media and in political discourse as a continuing tale of population decline. In some respects this is true, and in some places rural communities have been devastated. The decline has been more rapid in some communities than in others, and in those communities closer to urban centers and larger towns the bleeding has not been as great. At the same time, though, Tables 1-5 illustrate not only how rural population has held steady at more than double the national average of 20 to 24 percent for several decades, but also how rural communities in Atlantic Canada have retained population in a manner that is nearly as robust as in urban areas.

Notwithstanding overall population stability in rural Atlantic Canada, since the early 1980s there have been waves of school consolidations and closures along with two major restructurings of school board governance that saw eighty-five local school boards in 1981 reduced to seven district boards in 1996. The rationale for these reductions was framed in terms of modernizing the system and saving costs at the provincial level. (4) In Atlantic Canada, many rural citizens have watched what has happened to their neighborhoods and communities, and they know what the loss of a school means. Once the school is closed, the community may never be the same again, and in rural communities where services have been cut time and again, the school is often the last remaining public institution. I will restrict my comments here to elementary schools. In the case of village and small-town elementary

schools, it is the place where the children of the community come together for at least a brief period in their childhoods. It is in school where these children effectively become integrated into life in the community. But in addition to the importance of small schools to their communities, there is considerable evidence that such schools actually represent an effective way of delivering quality education.

A Model for the Future or a Backward-Looking Anachronism?

If rural communities are viewed as having a vibrant future, local, accessible, and sustainable schools are a necessity. This is well understood internationally, particularly in China, (5) in Great Britain, (6) and in northern Europe and Scandinavia, (7) where there has been considerable interest in small schools in rural contexts as part of national development strategies. At the same time, there has been considerable recent interest in questions concerning small rural schools that is nested in a renewed attention to rural economic development, cultural development, (8) environmental sustainability and stewardship, food and communal sustainability, security, (9) and social/spatial justice. (10) Most of these analyses argue for the importance of economically and socially vibrant rural areas to support overall national and regional growth.

Paul Theobald made the argument some time ago that rather than closing small rural schools, we should instead be looking to good rural schools as models for the kind of inclusive, warm, and nurturing learning communities that we need in these troubled times. (11) Many educationalists and most ordinary citizens across a wide range of rural geographies have understood large schools to be problematic, but larger and larger schools in both rural and urban areas have grown virtually everywhere.

In recent years, there has also been a renewed interest in small schools as a structural remedy for the multiple ailments of large urban schools. (12) This interest was intensified when in 2003 the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation dedicated \$350 million to the creation of small schools and “schools within schools”

in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods. (13) By 2008, though, the Gates Foundation had retreated from the small schools initiative and Bill Gates claimed that although small schools can be beneficial, they are not the “silver bullet” he sought. Howley and Howley (14) argue, however, that the Gates initiative did not consider or support rural schools. Rather, it focused exclusively on urban locations, thus recapitulating a chronic metrocentric bias in educational policy and practice. (15)

The Gates Foundation has retreated from its small-school initiative largely because there is no way to “scale up” or standardize the locally-sensitive, non-standard practices that make a good small school work well. Yet Bill Gates has admitted that small schools may indeed be a powerful reform tool or at least a part of a nexus of factors that can improve schools. (16) This is nothing new to rural small-school activists who have been struggling for generations to protect the integrity, functionality and even the existence of their schools.

Is There Evidence That Small Schools Are Deficient?

There is a marked absence of evidence that small elementary schools perform any less well than large schools no matter how school size or performance is defined. Ken Leithwood and Doris Jantzi of the University of Toronto have recently conducted a meta-analysis of studies of small schools. (17) Of the studies, ten provided evidence about the relationship between school size and the academic achievement of elementary school students. None of these studies found evidence that achievement rises with increases in school size and only three found non-significant relationships. (18) The six remaining studies reported a negative relationship between size and achievement. (19) The smaller the school, the better the achievement. (20) None of these studies has shown statistically significant evidence that small schools underperform large ones. In fact, in both the Leithwood and Jantzi study as well as others, there is evidence that small elementary schools outperform large schools. (21)

Corbett and Mulcahy did an analysis of the viability of two small schools in

Cumberland County and found that these schools were capable of meeting the broad goals of the Public School Program of the province of Nova Scotia. The researchers also interviewed a sample of past graduates of both of these schools and discovered that the vast majority were satisfied with the education they had received. Virtually all were employed, some locally, and some far from where they grew up. Virtually all reported that the experience of the intimacy and inclusiveness of the small community school was essential to their success in life. (22)

There is evidence that in the case of economically and socially disadvantaged populations, small schools can support academic achievement and social integration. (23) There are, however, few North American studies as yet on the impact of small schools in rural communities. Several European studies cited above have illustrated how the retention of community schools in rural and remote villages tends to promote community vitality and survival. In Atlantic Canada, rural places, which account for some 40 to 55 percent of the provincial population, tend to be relatively economically disadvantaged overall, so retaining small schools in these communities is an equity concern.

Are There Policy Options Other Than Closure?

When rural citizens are asked whether they want and need a school in their communities, they almost always answer in the affirmative. The current school closure procedure spreads uncertainty and fear in communities chosen for consideration. These communities tend to be in a precarious position, given rural depopulation and the systematic stripping of services through past decades. I think it can be said that we know that this way of thinking about school closures divides communities and downloads responsibility for difficult decision-making onto local people elected to school boards. The result is an acrimonious process driven for the most part by questionable fiscal agendas. These fiscal agendas are usually seen from the perspective of a region or of the province, and essentially take only limited account of the economic and social impact of a school closure locally. Apart from the

social impact, the loss of a school is an obvious economic blow to a community. (24)

On the question of whether closing small schools actually saves money at any level, there is once again a dearth of good evidence. Small local schools typically represent established community infrastructure that gets replaced by new construction and by increased busing. There has been no good evidence that waves of consolidation over the past five decades in Atlantic Canada have led to any cost saving for school boards or for the province. In fact, education budgets have risen steadily through the consolidations and amalgamations of schools and school boards. Of course, these changes reflect things other than school consolidations, including the increase of transportation and maintenance costs, the provision of special services to previously neglected populations, and increased teacher salaries.

Yet there are policy options other than school closure. In England, for example, the movement against school closures was so powerful in the 1990s that a policy was instituted nationally to essentially keep schools open unless community members wanted them closed. This policy, known as the “presumption against school closure,” has resulted in a radical halt to waves of school closure across the nation. (25)

There is no reason why aging small schools could not be used as prototypes for energy-efficient retrofitting and new environmental technologies that suit the particular conditions found in their communities. Much of rural Atlantic Canada contains classic and heritage homes that also need this kind of retrofitting, and there is no reason why the schools could not lead the way. The same could be said about using community schools as showcases for new and emerging information technologies that would make schools key multi-age and multi-generational communication and intellectual work centers in rural locations. Alternatively, new smaller structures could be built with a multi-service model in mind to combine educational, health, and social services into a single building. There are many options possible, but to consider them would require a new vision of the place of rural Atlantic Canada and how it fits into the overall economic, cultural, and social landscape. Apart from a metrocentric policy bias that I have alluded to above, a key impediment to the achievement of this vision is the separation of governance that

pits school boards against rural municipalities and local citizens. School boards are not in the business of saving communities; and indeed to function “efficiently” they effectively ignore the impact they have on communities, which causes chronic conflict and angst.

If services like schools are removed from Atlantic Canada’s rural communities, it will be difficult to rebuild them. As much as the discourse of decline is ubiquitous, (26) we have ample historical evidence that rural regions are remarkably resilient. The fact that at least 45 percent of Nova Scotians, about half of New Brunswickers, more than half of Prince Edward Islander, and 42 percent of Newfoundlanders still live in rural places illustrates both how established people stay in rural communities and how newcomers are attracted to the lifestyle of rural Atlantic Canada. A policy direction that supports rather than guts rural communities would take advantage of the natural beauty and the rich resources of the province’s non-urban places. It must also be remembered that more than 70 percent of the province’s exports come out of rural places. It is entirely possible that in the coming decades immigration will increase in rural areas.

Conclusion

What is clear from the above material is that the closure of schools on the basis of their size is not warranted in terms of academic achievement or community or other measures of educational quality. There is a lack of evidence to suggest that small schools are incapable of achieving the broad goals set out for public schooling. This, I would argue, is precisely why the Nova Scotia school review process, for example, effectively skirts the issue of school quality. Small schools work; thus, citizens of Atlantic Canada do not want to give up on their schools. Therefore, to produce evidence that small schools should be closed, a calculus is employed which quantifies the viability of a school on the basis of things like building size and unused floor space to create an image of large schools full of wasted space. While there is excess capacity in communities that have experienced population decline,

there are many useful things that could be put into unused space with a little imagination. In fact, in many small schools this is exactly what is happening as small schools take advantage of programs to support community library enhancement, aid to senior citizens, child care, and family resource services. Today, established and emerging information technologies also open up possibilities for different ways of looking at how to organize schooling which might potentially make it possible for young children to remain closer to their homes. We have barely begun to scratch the surface in this area.

It is possible, in conclusion, to see small schools as opportunities rather than as liabilities for communities and for the province as a whole. They were constructed as places for the socialization of children, but also as monuments to both community and to learning. The message sent by closing them is typically an affront to both of these values. Closures also signify that the province has effectively given up on these places as viable communities with a positive future outlook and growth potential. To achieve an alternative vision, though, will require a different approach to the development of the province, one that includes both urban and rural vitality. Such a vision exists in other places, including Scandinavia, England, Australia, and Korea where the provision of rural education has become a central equity concern.

Notes

*Andrew Gulliford, *America's Country Schools* (1984; repr., Niwot, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1996), 35 ; David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 13-30.

1. Roger Epp and Dave Whitson, eds., *Writing Off the Rural West: Globalization, Governments, and the Transformation of Rural Communities* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 2001), 301-302.
2. In Canada, education is a provincial jurisdiction, so schools are funded and operated under the auspices of provincial and territorial governments. While there are significant differences among the provinces in terms of how small, rural schools are handled and when they are slated for closure, what results is a rural politician's

nightmare. There is no shortage of commentary around this question. For a sample, see Dan Legere, "Want To Save Small Towns? Save Their Schools," *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, February 4, 2013.

3. Epp and Whitson, *Writing Off the Rural West*.

4. See Michael Corbett and Dennis Mulcahy, *Education on a Human Scale: Small Rural Schools in a Modern Context* (n.p.: Acadia Centre for Rural Education, 2006) as well as Paul W. Bennett, *Vanishing Schools, Threatened Communities: The Contested Schoolhouse in Maritime Canada 1850-2010* (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing Co., Ltd., 2011).

5. Yao Lu, "Education of Children Left Behind in Rural China," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74, no. 2 (2012): 328–341; Jiayi Wang and Zhichun Zhao, "Basic Education Curriculum Reform in Rural China," *Chinese Education & Society* 44, no. 6 (November 1, 2011): 36–46.

6. Jennie Dowling, "Changes and Challenges: Key Issues for Scottish Rural Schools and Communities," *International Journal of Educational Research* 48, no. 2 (2009): 129–139; Linda M. Hargreaves, "Respect and Responsibility: Review of Research on Small Rural Schools in England," *International Journal of Educational Research* 48, no. 2 (2009): 117–128.

7. Niels Egelund and Helen Laustsen, "School Closure: What Are the Consequences for the Local Society?" *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 50, no. 4 (2006): 429–439; Marita Kilpimaa, Kaarina Maatta, and Satu Uusiautti, "What Is the Future of Village Schools? A Case Study on the Life Cycle of a School in Northern Finland," *Review of European Studies* 4, no. 1 (February 28, 2012): 125. Rune Kvalsund, "Centralized Decentralization or Decentralized Centralization? A Review of Newer Norwegian Research on Schools and Their Communities," *International Journal of Educational Research* 48, no. 2 (2009): 89–99; Esko Kalaoja and Janne Pietarinen, "Small Rural Primary Schools in Finland: A Pedagogically Valuable Part of the School Network," *International Journal of Educational Research* 48, no. 2 (2009): 109–116. Peter Meusburger, "The Future of Elementary Schools in Alpine Regions," *Revue De Géographie Alpine* 93, no. 2 (2005): 85–94.

8. David Bell and Mark Jayne, "The Creative Countryside: Policy and Practice in the UK Rural Cultural Economy," *Journal of Rural Studies* 26, no. 3 (July 2010): 209–218.

Michael Corbett, "Educating the Country Out of the Child and Educating the Child Out of the Country: An Excursion in Spectrology," *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 52, no. 4 (2006),

<http://ajer.synergiesprairies.ca/ajer/index.php/ajer/article/viewArticle/582>;

Devora Shamah, "Supporting a Strong Sense of Purpose: Lessons from a Rural Community," *New Directions for Youth Development* 2011, no. 132 (2011): 8–9, 45–58, doi:10.1002/yd.427.

9. Patrick J. Carr and Maria J. Kefalas, *Hollowing Out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What It Means for America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010); Michael Corbett, "Rural Schooling in Mobile Modernity: Returning to the Places I've Been," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 24, no. 7 (2009): 1–13; Michael Corbett, "How Will This Make Me a Better Teacher?: Theory, Literacy Learning, and Survival," in *Innovation for Equity in Rural Education*, Proceedings of the International Symposium for Innovation in Rural Education (2009): 100–107; Corbett and Mulcahy, *Education on*

a Human Scale; Craig B. Howley and John M. Eckman, eds., *Sustainable Small Schools: A Handbook for Rural Communities* (Charleston, WV: ERIC/CRESS, 1997); Craig Howley and Amiee Howley, "Disabusing Small-schools Reformism: An Alternative Outlook on Scaling up and Down," in *The Gates Foundation and the Future of U.S. Public Schools* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 104–125; Jack Shelton, *Consequential Learning: A Public Approach to Better Schools* (Montgomery, AL: New South, Inc., 2005); Paul Theobald, *Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

10. Unn-Doris Baeck and Gry Palugaard, *Rural Futures? Finding One's Place Within Changing Labour Markets* (Oslo: Orkana Akademisk, 2012); Kim Donehower and Elieen Schell, *Rural Literacies* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007); Jo-Anne Reid, Bill Green, Maxine Cooper, Wendy Hastings, Graeme Lock, and Simone White, "Regenerating Rural Social Space?: Teacher Education for Rural-regional Sustainability," *Australian Journal of Education* 54, no. 3 (November 2010): 262; D.A. Greenwood, "Place, Survivance, and White Remembrance: A Decolonizing Challenge to Rural Education in Mobile Modernity," *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 24, no. 10 (2009): 1–6; Michael Riordon, *Out Our Way: Gay and Lesbian Life in Rural Canada* (Toronto, Ontario: Between the Lines, 1996); Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

11. Theobald, *Teaching the Commons*, 119-131.

12. William Ayers, Michael Klonsky, and Gabrielle H. Lyon, *A Simple Justice: The Challenge of Small Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2000); Craig Howley, Amy Howley, Michael Klonsky, and Susan Klonsky, *Small Schools: Public School Reform Meets the Ownership Society* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Deborah Meier, *In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); Jessica Shiller, "Marketing Small Schools in New York City: A Critique of Neoliberal School Reform," *Educational Studies* 47, no. 2 (2011): 160–173.

13. Tom Vander Ark, "The Case for Small High Schools," *Educational Leadership* 59, no. 5 (2002): 55–59.

14. Howley and Howley, "Disabusing Small-schools Reformism."

15. Barbara Ching and Gerald W. Creed, eds., *Knowing Your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Michael Corbett, "Wharf Talk, Home Talk, and School Talk: The Politics of Language in a Coastal Community," in *Rural Education for the Twenty-First Century: Identity, Place, and Community in a Globalizing World*, Kai A. Schafft and Alecia Youngblood Jackson, eds. (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2010), 115. Alan J. DeYoung, "Constructing and Staffing the Cultural Bridge: The School as Change Agent in Rural Appalachia," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1995): 168–192; Paul Theobald and Kathy Woods, "Learning To Be Rural: Identity Lessons from History, Schooling, and America's Corporate Media," in *Rural Education for the Twenty-first Century: Identity, Place, and Community in a Globalizing World* (State Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2010).

16. Gates put it this way: "(I)n general, the places that demonstrated the strongest results tended to do many proven reforms well, all at once: they would create smaller schools, a longer day, better relationships—but they would also establish

college-ready standards aligned with a rigorous curriculum, with the instructional tools to support it, effective teachers to teach it, and data systems to track the progress.” Bill Gates, Prepared Remarks by Bill Gates, Co-chair and Trustee,” A Forum on Education, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, accessed on April 25, 2013 @ <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/media-center/speeches/2008/11/bill-gates-forum-on-education-in-america> (2008).

17. Kenneth Leithwood and Doris Jantzi, “A Review of Empirical Evidence About School Size Effects: A Policy Perspective,” *Review of Educational Research* 79, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 464–490.

18. Mark Sadoski and Victor L. Willson, “Effects of a Theoretically Based Large-Scale Reading Intervention in a Multicultural Urban School District,” *American Educational Research Journal* 43, no. 1 (2006): 137–154.

19. Sarah Archibald, “Narrowing in on Educational Resources That Do Affect Student Achievement,” *Peabody Journal of Education* 81, no. 4 (2006): 23–42; Robert Bickel, Craig Howley, Tony Williams, and Catherine Glascock, *High School Size, Achievement Equity, and Cost [microform] : Robust Interaction Effects and Tentative Results/ Robert Bickel, Craig Howley and Tony Williams*. [Washington, D.C.] : Distributed by ERIC Clearinghouse, 2000,

<http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED450991>;

Randall W. Eberts, Ellen K. Schwartz, and Joe A. Stone, “School Reform, School Size, and Student Achievement,” *Economic Review* no. Q II (1990): 2–15; Ilyana Kuziemko, “Using Shocks to School Enrollment To Estimate the Effect of School Size on Student Achievement,” *Economics of Education Review* 25, no. 1 (February 2006): 63–75; Valerie E. Lee and Susanna Loeb, “School Size in Chicago Elementary Schools: Effects on Teachers’ Attitudes and Students’ Achievement,” *American Educational Research Journal* 37, no. 1 (March 20, 2000): 3–31; Xin Ma and Laureen J. McIntyre, “Exploring Differential Effects of Mathematics Courses on Mathematics Achievement,” *Canadian Journal of Education* 28, no. 4 (2005): 827–852.

20. Leithwood and Jantzi, “A Review of Empirical Evidence,” 467.

21. See studies cited in note 18 above for more standard quantitative assessments of the effect of school size on achievement, the results of which are similar to those of Leithwood and Jantzi. Other studies which have used qualitative case-study methods have consistently shown essentially the same things, i.e., Corbett and Mulcahy, *Education on a Human Scale*; Meier, *In Schools We Trust*; Shelton, *Consequential Learning*.

22. Corbett and Mulcahy, *Education on a Human Scale*.

23. Ibid., Howley and Howley, “Disabusing Small-schools Reformism”; Meier, *In Schools We Trust*.

24. Hargreaves, *Respect and Responsibility*.

25. Howley and John M. Eckman, eds., *Sustainable Small Schools*; Corbett and Mulcahy, *Education on a Human Scale*; Bennett, *Vanishing Schools, Threatened Communities*.

26. Michael Corbett, “Educating the Country Out of the Child and Educating the Child Out of the Country: An Excursion in Spectrology,” *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 52, no. 4 (2006).

<http://ajer.synergiesprairies.ca/ajer/index.php/ajer/article/viewArticle/582>.

Tables

Population, urban and rural, Atlantic Provinces and Canada

Table 1

| New Brunswick Rural-Urban population 1981-2006 | | | | | |
|--|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | Population | Urban | Rural | % Urban | % Rural |
| 1981 | 696,403 | 353,220 | 343,183 | 51 | 49 |
| 1986 | 709,445 | 350,305 | 359,140 | 49 | 51 |
| 1991 | 723,900 | 345,214 | 378,686 | 48 | 52 |
| 1996 | 738,133 | 360,421 | 377,712 | 49 | 51 |
| 2001 | 729,498 | 367,902 | 361,596 | 50 | 50 |
| 2006 | 729,997 | 372,935 | 357,062 | 51 | 49 |

Table 2

| Nova Scotia Rural-Urban population 1981-2006 | | | | | |
|--|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | Population | Urban | Rural | % Urban | % Rural |
| 1981 | 847,442 | 466,842 | 380,600 | 55 | 45 |
| 1986 | 873,175 | 471,125 | 402,050 | 54 | 46 |
| 1991 | 899,942 | 481,508 | 418,434 | 54 | 46 |
| 1996 | 909,282 | 497,858 | 411,424 | 55 | 45 |
| 2001 | 908,007 | 507,009 | 400,998 | 56 | 44 |
| 2006 | 913,462 | 506,932 | 406,530 | 56 | 45 |

Table 3

| Newfoundland Rural-Urban population 1981-2006 | | | | | |
|--|------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | Population | Urban | Rural | % Urban | % Rural |
| 1981 | 567,681 | 332,898 | 234,783 | 59 | 41 |
| 1986 | 568,350 | 334,730 | 233,620 | 59 | 41 |
| 1991 | 568,475 | 304,455 | 264,023 | 54 | 46 |
| 1996 | 551,790 | 313,820 | 237,975 | 57 | 43 |
| 2001 | 512,930 | 296,196 | 216,734 | 58 | 42 |
| 2006 | 505,469 | 292,099 | 213,370 | 58 | 42 |

Table 4

| Prince Edward Island Rural-Urban population 1981-2006 | | | | | |
|--|------------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| | Population | Urban | Rural | % Urban | % Rural |
| 1981 | 122,506 | 44,515 | 77,991 | 36 | 64 |
| 1986 | 126,640 | 48,285 | 78,355 | 38 | 62 |
| 1991 | 129,765 | 51,813 | 77,952 | 40 | 60 |
| 1996 | 134,557 | 59,460 | 75,097 | 44 | 56 |
| 2001 | 135,294 | 60,675 | 74,619 | 45 | 55 |
| 2006 | 135,851 | 61,173 | 74,678 | 45 | 55 |

Table 5

| Canada Rural- Urban population 1981-2006 | | | | | |
|--|------------|------------|-----------|---------|---------|
| | Population | Urban | Rural | % Urban | % Rural |
| 1981 | 24,343,177 | 18,435,923 | 5,907,254 | 76 | 24 |
| 1986 | 25,309,330 | 19,352,080 | 5,957,250 | 76 | 24 |
| 1991 | 27,296,856 | 20,906,872 | 6,389,984 | 77 | 23 |
| 1996 | 28,846,758 | 22,461,207 | 6,385,551 | 78 | 22 |
| 2001 | 30,007,094 | 23,908,211 | 6,098,883 | 80 | 20 |
| 2006 | 31,612,897 | 25,350,743 | 6,262,154 | 80 | 20 |

Note: The rural population for 1981 to 2006 refers to persons living outside centers with a population of 1,000 AND outside areas with 400 persons per square kilometre. Previous to 1981, the definitions differed slightly but consistently referred to populations outside centers of 1,000 population.

Source: Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo62a-eng.htm>