

## Rural Education

**R**ural communities wish to envision a bright future for themselves and their children. Due to various demographic and economic realities, they often become innovative out of necessity. This innovation is most clearly seen in the rural school, which is a strong symbol of identity, both as a formal centre of learning and as one of the largest employers in the community.

Dr. Dawn Wallin's research focuses on issues in rural education, particularly on rural educational priorities and school division capacity. Her study is based on a provincial survey and four regional case studies of Manitoba school divisions. The research showed there are three main educational priorities for those who live and work in rural areas: improving student outcomes, quality of teachers and administrators, and educational finance.

According to Wallin's research, rural parents, staff, school administrators,

trustees, and other community members have a generally positive perception of their capacity to achieve their educational priorities. Further, results indicate that rural school divisions' strengths are related to the diversity of networks they build to create educational opportunities and to facilitate resource management. In response to a question about what role the provincial government should play in educational governance and change in rural areas, answers centered on educational funding, curriculum implementation, meeting student needs, and input into provincial policy and decision making.

### profile

Dr. Dawn Wallin is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. Her area of specialization is Educational Administration. Prior to coming to the University of Manitoba, she was an assistant professor at the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg, Texas, and a teacher/administrator with Kindersley School Division in Kindersley, Saskatchewan. Her research interests include rural education, women in leadership, and educational administration.



"There has to be the will . . . to value children and put children first, ahead of the fiscal and political landscape."  
—School Trustee

The implications for rural education from this research are numerous:

- Rural communities want to have the capacity to address early childhood, Kindergarten to Grade 12, and adult education and training.
- Education cannot be separated from the rest of community life.

- Stories of those who live and work in rural communities must be shared and media presence must be cultivated to bring attention to successes.
- Locally determined research and participatory partnerships between researchers and those who live in rural communities should occur with local, national, and international interests.
- Rural educators must share their concerns with government policy makers and must be a consistent source of advocacy.
- Provincial education representatives and local rural stakeholders can creatively strategize across departments to deal with rural issues.
- Cross-community groups can work together, sharing information and services wherever possible.
- Governmental and community agencies must collaborate to better meet provincial mandates while respecting local community realities.

"We want what is best for our kids. They shouldn't be denied because they aren't close to the city centre."  
—Parent

Since educational leaders are the most optimistic in their belief that rural communities have the capacity to achieve their priorities, it follows that they, along with targeted resources and assistance from provincial authorities, should take the lead to implement rural school improvements grounded in a commitment to quality rural schooling and community development.

For further information, contact

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