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Shocks to the System: The Micropolitics of Communities in Economic Shock When Determining the Outcome of Local Education

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SHOCKS TO THE SYSTEMS: THE MICROPOLITICS OF COMMUNITIES IN ECONOMIC SHOCK WHEN DETERMINING THE OUTCOME OF LOCAL EDUCATION

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It is estimated that the United States lost almost eight million manufacturing jobs in total from its peak in 1979 to 2010, which not only resulted in job loss, but wage depression and higher welfare spending in the US (Dubner, 2017, DeSilver, 2017). These losses were exacerbated in small rural mill towns where up to 70% of a town's revenues, at some point, had depended on the exiting industry. Too often, affected workers, if they did find work, were reallocated to jobs with dramatic wage reductions, leaving communities with substantially reduced funding revenues and rising welfare, disability, public service expenditures, and reduced school funding (Dubner, 2017). These industry closures represent economic shocks. As public schools are funded by local taxes, and often account for over 50% of a town's revenues, communities in economic distress are often prompted to examine the necessity of their schools in order to determine what is financially feasible. In this qualitative study, three communities are examined to determine how the micropolitics within the communities addressed the sudden loss of funding after a paper mill closure and what the mill's closure meant to their local public schools. Thirty-five interviews and three written responses are analyzed, and the findings are supported and verified through the use of descriptive statistics and secondary sources. Two

additional interviews were conducted and transcribed in order to gain information on school funding and mill valuation.

This study highlighted three key elements that be used to address the financial distress of the community and its schools: a local capacity to recognize and implement the work needed to financially prepare for the economic shock, the collaborative ability to work towards a common vision, and the establishment of a purpose where the school is integrated as an essential component of the community. Communities where individuals, small groups, and informal leaders worked in conjunction with the formal leadership resulted in increased success in achieving those three elements. In communities where the informal and formal leadership groups were unable to achieve those three elements, communication was found to be weak, trust was lacking, and progress in overcoming the financial crisis was stymied.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Problem Statement

It is estimated that more than one million US manufacturing jobs were lost between 2000 and 2007 to China alone (Dubner, 2017), and almost eight million manufacturing jobs in total from its peak in 1979 to 2010 (DeSilver, 2017), not only resulting in job loss, but wage depression and higher welfare spending in the US (Dubner, 2017). Too often, affected workers, if they did find work, were reallocated to jobs with dramatic wage reductions, leaving communities with substantially reduced funding revenues (Dubner, 2017). As public schools are funded by local taxes, these losses of revenue have prompted some communities to examine the necessity of their schools in order to determine what was financially feasible to support (Jimerson, 2007). In rural areas, school funding becomes more complicated when large industries that had provided high percentages of a community's revenues close or dramatically reduce jobs (Besser, 2013). Displaced workers often find few options for replacement work and thereby increase community costs with rising welfare, disability, and public service expenditures (Dubner, 2017), which further reduce school funding. It should be noted that not all communities experience the same impact. The impact varies depending on a number of variables. These include the size of the employer and the number of jobs eliminated as a percentage of all jobs within the community (Besser, 2013).

Nationally, the US economy has struggled since the recession of 2008 (Dwyer & Lothian, 2011). Although not exhaustive, a recession with a long recovery (Dwyer & Lothian, 2011), an appetite from the public for cheap goods (Lach, 2012), and free trade agreements (Planning Decisions, Inc., 2003; Maine Department of Labor, et. al, 2005) have all contributed to large

industries moving their businesses overseas, cutting back their labor force, and closing their businesses – resulting in an economic shock to affected communities where their largest employers and tax contributors are gone (NPR, 2011; Planning Decisions, Inc., 2003; Colgan, 2006). Businesses once thought invincible are leaving communities they served as evidenced by: the 2007 closure of Maytag in Newton, Iowa, resulting in the loss of 4,000 jobs and leaving roughly 20% of its population without employment (NPR, 2011), and the closure of International Paper in Courtland, Alabama (population 600, job loss 1,100) that affected not only the town, but also the county losing their largest employer in 2014.

Unfortunately, these national closures also reflect what is occurring in Maine. During its flush years, Maine Yankee Nuclear Power Plant paid over 90% of the town of Wiscasset's budget and provided over 600 jobs (Haller, 2014). Upon its closure in 1997 (Brown, 2017) the town had to find new funding revenues for essentially every financial obligation, resulting in local taxes increasing by more than ten times and poverty levels doubling (Abel, 2013). In 2011, the paper mill in [Woodville] closed, resulting in the elimination of approximately 450 jobs (Sambides, 2011). This closure left the community having to depend on private donations from a PowerBall winner to make needed repairs to it school (Sambides, 2013). From 2000 to 2003, Maine lost 22.1% of its manufacturing jobs – the highest rate in the nation – with over 26% coming from the pulp and paper industry (Wickenheiser, 2003). Since 2011, five Maine paper mills have been closed, eliminating over 2,300 jobs (Ohm, 2016). These jobs were typically some of the highest paying in the state, generating significant amounts of tax revenues for rural Maine towns with limited business infrastructure (Irland, 2000).

Economic Shock

Large industry closures, like what occurred in the towns referenced above, often result in an economic shock. An economic shock is defined as "a sudden event that significantly challenges the status quo of a community" (Besser, Recker, & Agnitsch, 2008), but can also be referred to as a disaster (McFarlane & Norris, 2006). Examples include natural disasters (like damage from a hurricane or tsunami), changes in staple commodities (loss of a business), or a de-valuation in currency (Frailing & Harper, 2017; Besser, 2013, McFarlane & Norris, 2006). Economic shocks leave communities in a financial quandary and, because schools often comprise a large percentage of a community's costs, those schools are also left struggling to find ways to maintain programs and staff with less revenue. Solutions on how educational programming can be offered during economic instability are as varied as the towns solving them. These varied solutions and how those solutions are determined will be the foci of this study.

Effects of Economic Shock

Throughout the United States, rural communities have been the most adversely affected by economic shocks (Frailing & Harper, 2017; Besser, et al., 2008). Policy makers, in a possible quest to equalize economies of scale, have tended to institute a one size fits all policy to encourage economic stabilization within a community affected by an economic shock (Arnold, 2000). What works in California, (where 95% of its population live in an urban Census classified area), may not work in Maine (where only 1.17% live in urban areas) (US Census, 2010). Thus, when a rural community loses a major employer, the outlook may look very different from that of an urban community, due to the latter being in the proximity of other industries and schools. Additionally, rural states like Mississippi, Alabama, and West Virginia have also been among the poorest (US Census, 2010), further exacerbating the effect an

economic shock has on the communities. As a result, small towns are more likely to experience significant ramifications from an economic shock than a more urban or metropolitan area where there are other businesses to fill the void (Davidson, 1996; Besser, et al., 2008). Small towns also receive less funding from the government and non-profit organizations, and garner less public attention to help them recover from the economic shock (Davidson, 1996; Besser, 2013). Further, having limited resources to counter the industrial closure brings fear to communities where residents wonder about the consequences of negative economic viability and the long-term quality of life for their residents (Parisi, Harris, Grice, & Pressgrove, 2008). This fear, to a lesser degree, also brings concern regarding the fate of their local public schools.

Ramifications of Economic Shock on a Community and Its Impact on Community Schools

When a community experiences an economic shock, the entire community is affected. For example, the loss of industry, in turn, affects its local schools. What a community does with its local school after an economic shock has both educational and non-educational ramifications. The consequences of economic shock not only affect the educational capacity of keeping schools open and educating the local children, but also affect the health of the community. How a town chooses to address the economic shock results in a domino effect – sometimes with positive results and other times with negative or mixed results, especially when school closure is chosen (Lytton, 2011; Caref, Haind, Jankov, & Bordenkircher, 2014). Sederberg (1987) suggests that schools provide economic relief that actually aids rural communities, off-setting some educational costs. Lyson (2002) contends that rural community schools attract families, which attract businesses, and can help steady property values—characteristics needed to overcome an economic shock. Weiss (2004) contends that public school spending impacts local economies,

attracts businesses, and makes communities more economically competitive. When these factors are not evident, a self-perpetuating cycle begins: communities without industry do not attract families and have less stable taxation. Fewer families mean less attraction for businesses. Fewer homes and businesses mean fewer taxable properties, and thus, decreased funding for the community and its schools, potentially resulting in consolidation or closure. In essence, the closure of the school perpetuates a lack of economic relief. To further exacerbate the issue, school funding can take over a year to reflect the changes in the community's revenues (Cooley &Floyd, 2013; Sederberg, 1987). Regardless, failing to anticipate possible problems can seriously undermine a community's ability to successfully arrive at a solution to overcome the economic shock (Parisi, et al., 2009; Magis, 2010).

Although not the only financial obligation, schools are often a substantial part of a community's expenses (Woodruff, 2008). Communities are forced to evaluate expenditures. Schools may consume greater than 50% of a community's expenditures, which may become a difficult cost to bear in times of fiscal constraint (Office of the State Auditor, 2016; Johnson 2001). Community members may advocate for measures such as reduced staffing or programming, school consolidation, or school closure to help solve their financial woes. For example, due to the closure of International Paper, Lawrence County, Alabama school districts cut teaching positions, AP classes, and extracurricular positions. They also increased taxes to address the funding losses that are still not completely resolved (Associated Press, 2012; Whitaker, 2014). Due to devastating floods in 2016 that destroyed Richwood, West Virginia's businesses and schools, all possible solutions were open for discussion – consolidation with neighboring towns, relocation with reduced staff, not rebuilding the school – any measure to help close the financial gap (Quinn, 2016).

Research regarding schools and economic shocks due to a large business closure are not vast in number. The collapse of the farming industry is a similar area of focus. However, the economic ramifications of a large business closure or paper mill closure are more significant. The loss of higher than average pay and the large volume of people losing their jobs associated with a paper mill (or other very large industry) is not an equal comparison. School consolidation and school funding are well-researched arenas and have a place in this study. However, their focus does not typically address economic shock. Additionally, a community's social equity after an economic shock is an area of great interest in research, especially when resilience is added. However, the effects on schools, especially in rural areas, are typically an add-on feature when discussing economic distress, represented with a section, paragraph, or footnote. Research in rural education and its funding is growing in interest among researchers, as are the effects of a large business closure on the communities they are vacating. And although much of a community's expenses are associated with its school(s), how educational decisions are made in the face of economic distress requires further examination.

Economic shocks in rural areas have been studied longitudinally and the research has found that the demise of a community does not have to occur (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008; Magis, 2010). Resiliency is a key — community resilience as it seeks to address disaster-related health or mental health problems, and community resilience as it applies effective organizational behavior and disaster management (Norris, et al. 2008). Providing more detail, communities experiencing success in recovering from an economic shock depend on the resilience (Magis, 2010) often found in four primary sets of adaptive capacities: "Economic Development, Social Capital, Information and Communications, and Community Competence" (Norris, et al., 2008). All four components are evident in the ensuing study.

Although economic shock occurs in communities across the United States (and the world), this study focused on what was occurring in Maine because of its rurality, the severe effects from a departing pulp and paper manufacturing industry with few employment options left to its remaining residents, and the generalizability the location had to many other states with closing industries in rural areas. The residents in small rural communities also exhibited an interconnectedness with blurred social and professional boundaries – a characteristic found nationally. Thirdly, Maine had a significant number of communities that met criteria outlined. Finally, although growing, there is less research regarding rural communities as opposed to the more widely researched perspective of suburban and urban settings.

Loss of Large Industry in Maine

Maine, the most rural state in the United States (US Census, 2010), has often struggled to attract a wide range of businesses (Sigaud, 2015; Tax Foundation, 2016); and it has also consistently lagged behind the national median income (US Census American Survey data, 2016). It has been listed as one of the worst states in the nation for businesses due to high taxes, sluggish economic growth, and the inability to attract large business (Forbes, 2016). Thus, since its inception as a state, its communities have relied heavily on Maine's natural resources and its geographic location to attract large businesses (Colgan, 2006). Military, lumbering/wood/forestry, and manufacturing have been some of the primary resultant businesses that have relied on the state's resources and location (Griffen, 2013). As technology has increased and the military was reduced in size (President Trump is trying to reverse that trend (H.R. 5515: National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019), Maine's coastal location closest to Europe, has proven to be less and less important; this has led to multiple military base or installation closings (Colgan, 2006). Rising energy costs, increased levels of technology,

foreign competition, and declining consumer demand have contributed to the loss of paper mills (Shortall, 2014). Additionally, in manufacturing and pulp and paper, reductions were first due to a migration of jobs to the southern U.S. and then, most recently, overseas (Colgan, 2006).

Maine and Economic Shocks

Maine's series of financial setbacks when dealing with the pulp and paper industry as well as the military often constitute economic shock. In Maine, economic shocks often arrive as a series of economic shocks (sometimes referred to as slow motion shocks), due to cuts in the work force over time. Often, the final blow to a community comes with the actual closure. For example, the closure of Maine Yankee Nuclear Power Plant was voted on during three state referendums from 1980 to 1987 and was eventually closed in 1997 (Kanes, 2010). Its closure resulted in the town of Wiscasset losing 90% of its tax revenues (Haller, 2014). The town of Limestone had three years to prepare for the closure of Loring Air Force Base (Courter, Ball, Stuart, Smith, Levitt, Callaway & Cassidy, 1991), and when the base closed, more than three-fourths of the population left the community and the school saw school enrollment drop by 71% (Maine Department of Labor, et. al, 2005). A final example would be [ABC Paper] Company, which at its peak employed over 4,000 workers in the remote community of Poplar (Austin, 2011). The sheer number of employees made it the second largest private employer in Maine (Woodbury, 2005). In addition, the town offered little else in alternative employment options (Austin, 2011). Although closing in 2008, its troubles began in 1986 with over 1200 employees laid off and another 1100 by 1999 (Woodbury, 2005). Since 2008 (the year the mill closed), unemployment in Poplar has fluctuated between 10 and 21 percent, the population has almost been cut in half, and the median age of its residents has increased from 25 to 51 years (Bidgood, 2014).

Effects of National Policy on Maine

For years, a solid representation of economists assured people that global free trade would primarily benefit the USA. However, now many of these same economists are acknowledging that these policies have been harmful to American businesses (Dubner, 2017), and have thus, indirectly, also negatively impacted local community schools. Although they are not exclusively the reason behind Maine's (or the nation's) reduction in large businesses, a variety of economic policies instituted by the federal government have also greatly contributed to the closing of many Maine industries (Colgan, 2006). The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 (Duina, 2006) and the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1990 (BRAC) (Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, 2015; Maine, 2005) serve as examples of two federal policies that have prompted the departure of large manufacturing and pulp and paper companies, and military installations away from Maine (Planning Decisions, Inc., 2003; Maine Department of Labor, et. al, 2005). For example, the closure of the Pineville Paper Mill in Pineville (MacQuarrie, 2014) was, in part, attributed to NAFTA policies (Planning Decisions, Inc., & Maine International Trade Center, 2003). BRAC was a direct reason for the closure of Loring Air Force Base in Limestone, Maine (Maine Department of Labor, 2005). Industry closure was also acutely evidenced in Brunswick, Maine when the Naval Air Station closed eliminating over 5,000 military and civilian jobs and leaving a 3,200 acre business campus sitting empty (Bridgers, 2011).

Also to be noted, Maine's pulp and paper, textile, and manufacturing industries were affected by the Clean Air and Water Act of the 1970s. Research is not consistent when determining if industries actually lost jobs and output due to these policies (Gray, Shadbegian, Wang, & Meral, 2014; Environmental Protection Agency, 2018), but evidence is clear regarding

the benefits of the environment (Environmental Protection Agency, 2018). Finally, a community's economic contribution, or the economic activity that occurred because the business existed, was also impacted (Crandall, Anderson, & Rubin, 2017). Smaller businesses that the mill had dealings with or which the mill's employees would frequent, also saw a reduction or elimination in their employees and sales, which further reduced the revenues collected by the town (Crandall, Anderson, & Rubin, 2017).

Upon first glance, the departure of large businesses in Maine appears to be a very small part of Maine's business infrastructure. Maine's dependence on small business hovers at 97% and does not appear to be decreasing (Maine Department of Labor; Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information; Maine Labor Market Information Services; and Dorrer, J., 2005). A small business is generally defined as a business employing five hundred or less people (SBA, 2017). However, where large businesses are located, they often become an anchor and pervasive presence in a community. Thus, when a large business exits a small rural community, it takes not only a substantial number of jobs, but also a part of its identity. And although Maine welcomed visitors with a sign that said, "Open for Business," big industries, despite some communities' generous Tax Increment Financing (TIFs), were not rushing to Maine (Schalit, 2014).

Maine reflects what is occurring in many rural states. Communities in financial crises are attempting to formulate solutions with very tight deadlines and are struggling to find ways to fund community expenses. Regular maintenance, including projects like road upkeep, building repairs, and hiring of positions funded by the town are put on hold in towns. School budgets are regularly being voted down; and small communities are disbanding and becoming townships – all in an effort to address declining economies (McLean, 2016). Previously, these major industries provided generous revenues and services to schools and their communities both

directly (through employment and taxation) (Maine Department of Labor; Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information; Maine Labor Market Information Services; and Dorrer, J., 2005), and indirectly (through donations for buildings and materials, guest speakers, job shadowing, internships) (Wise, 2013). The loss of these big industrial companies can be overwhelming to communities and schools, as they lose more than just funding.

Although too late to save many large Maine industries that have been closed, there are presently changes occurring in the U.S. that may alter the fate of remaining large industries in the US. With the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president, the military is seeing increases in funding; foreign countries are also seeing changes in free trade agreements. The Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) authorized approximately $639 billion for the Defense Department, in part to increase the number of troops (H.R. 5515: National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019). Although in no way exhaustive, but signaling further changes, the US has: withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) with Asia, imposed higher tariffs on a variety of materials, renegotiated the US-Korea Trade Agreement (KORUS), and begun negotiating The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP) with the European Union (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2018). NAFTA, renamed the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), was renegotiated with little change to the US pulp and paper industry (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2018). Whether these changes will bring large businesses back to the U.S. remains to be seen.

Maine Communities, Economic Shock, and Local Schools. Maine communities, when faced with sudden reductions in the tax base, have used various strategies to fund their school systems. Maine, during efforts to address decreased revenues, had in Monticello one of the state's highest achieving elementary schools in 2010 (Local School Directory.com, 2017). The

student enrollment was 72 students in grades PK-3. Yet, the community felt it could not financially continue to support its school; as a result, the school was closed in 2014 (Bukaty, 2014; MDOE, 2015). Wiscasset, in an effort to fund its schools, took an unusual measure by taking tuition subsidies for out-of-town students who had been expelled from their own districts (Haller, 2014). A final example is the town of Limestone, which saw a loss of 71% of its school population with the closure of Loring Air Force Base in 1994 (Maine Department of Labor, 2005). Although at a much reduced student enrollment, and using funds provided by the Defense Reauthorization Bill, the local school became a charter school for students studying math and science (Clark, 1993). Each of these communities looked at its school to help address the increased community costs and each arrived at a different solution to the same problem. However, what is not clear is how each community, regardless of its location in the United States, determined how to solve their financial challenges. The social and political processes employed outwardly appear as individual as each community. Thus, the inconsistency in how and why communities arrive at different solutions needs to be further explored.

Purpose of the Study

The exit of a major business or industry that has provided a significant level of local taxation and/or number of jobs in community is devastating. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of an economic shock on the educational capacity of three Maine communities. Also examined are the rationale and implication of a plan of recovery detailing what education would look like in the community impacted. This study focuses on three communities in Maine. However, comparison to other rural states is appropriate, as many other states have also faced sudden decreased funding, drops in school enrollment and community population, and the pressing question of how to solve a financial crisis and maintain its schools.

Single industry communities in Maine were seeing those businesses close, taking with them the property taxes that had funded a high percentage of the town's educational costs. Because schools were funded by property valuations and student enrollment in Maine[1] (Title 20-A, 2016), towns then needed to find a way to fund education, as well as pay for the town's other financial commitments. A community's ability and/or willingness to take action will determine its long-term success after an economic shock (Norris, et al. 2008; Parisi, et al., 2009; Magis, 2010) and will also define the face of its educational program. The intent of this study is to help communities who: are facing a eventual economic shock, have experienced a series of slow motion shocks, want to examine options, or want to be prepared in the event that resources may change. This study will also aid policy makers, school leaders, and community members to better understand the processes of how decisions are made, detail how key players rise up, make inferences when formulating policy and procedural recommendations, and share possible outcomes.

Research Question

Schools are closely aligned with the communities in which they reside. Although schools often have the ability to raise and collect taxes, they are not able to weather the financial changes occurring within a community through isolation. Schools are a part of community and, thus, the town and school must work in tandem. To understand how a school responds during economically stressful times, one must also understand the parallel events occurring within the community. The school and community have a symbiotic relationship where the decisions of one affect the other. Thus, the research question is: When a community experiences an economic

[1] School funding varies from state to state. The northeast is the most reliant on property taxes to fund education (45.7%), the west the least (23.9%) (Kent & Sowards, 2008).

shock, how does the community make decisions about the future of its schools and the funding for them?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review lays a foundation for further research, drawing upon a variety of concepts, (slow motion and economic shock, rurality, social and economic benefits of a community school, school funding, micropolitics, the interconnectedness of a small community, and decision-making), and range of lenses (economic, education), all funneling into a common theme, together providing a framework to better understand how communities in economic distress make decisions to support their local school. A thematic organizational structure will provide an overview of the aforementioned concepts. As this study is specific to Maine, Maine's rurality is defined with an historical context provided, followed by a brief foray into Maine's dependence on big industry. Next, Maine's school funding formulas, presented in a simplified manner, is examined to further understand the challenges communities are faced with during economic decline, followed by micropolitics in educational decision-making. Finally, examples of Maine communities and schools and how they responded to financial concerns are dispersed throughout the literature review for further clarity.

Rural Maine

While the aforementioned research provides a base for further study of the ties between school and community during and after an economic shock, specific study of Maine schools and towns in the context of economic shock requires familiarity with concepts such as Maine's rurality, school funding, and its industry. Consider first the definition of rural: the U.S. Census (2010) classifies towns that have less than 2,500 people as rural. However, there are also areas called urban clusters and urban areas. Urban clusters consist of multiple communities in close proximity and where 2,500 to 50,000 people reside. Urban areas are comprised of 50,000 or

more people. These labels should not be confused with population density, which measures the number of people living in a square mile. Maine has 61.3% of its population living in a designated rural area (US Census, 2010). The national average is less than 20% (US Census, 2010, Wickenheiser, 2012). Maine is also one of the least dense states in the nation with 41.3 people per square mile compared to the national rate of 87.4 people per square mile (US Census, 2010). Maine has three urban areas – Portland, Bangor, and Lewiston – and twenty-four urban clusters. Thus, the remainder of the state is rural (US Census, 2010). Two counties, Piscataquis and Lincoln, have 100% of their population living in rural areas (US Census, 2010). Thus, the rurality of Maine is a characteristic that needs to be recognized as having specific needs that more urban areas would not have.

Social and Economic Benefits of a Community School

Throughout the country, the question of school efficiency, both educationally and non-educationally, is addressed in a variety of ways. Examining the benefits a school brings to its community aides the reader in understanding why communities make decisions regarding their school a bit clearer. To better address the benefits a school may have on a community, Charles Sederberg (1987) examined the non-educational effects of rural Minnesota schools on communities, compiling a list of school and community characteristics. He made the case that schools provided economic effects that aided rural communities, actually off-setting some educational costs (Sederberg, 1987).

Lyson (2002) conducted a study in New York that assessed the social and economic benefits (non-educational efficiencies) schools had on their rural villages. He also identified community level characteristics associated with the presence or absence of a school. His findings showed that schools served as important indicators of social and economic feasibility and

vitality. He found two common solutions that communities used to solve financial concerns were either to consolidate or close the local school. Overall, those solutions did not save communities money (Lyson, 2002). However, there was research supporting the benefits of consolidation, demonstrating that larger schools could: provide more flexibility in programming and staffing; provide more specialized facilities, offerings, and instructors; and that teachers benefitted from increased salaries and greater opportunities for professional development (Nitta, Holley, Wrobel, 2008). Some communities were also eligible for increased and/or additional funding from states (Duncombe & Yinger, 2010). Economies of scale were factored heavily in research supporting consolidation (Duncombe and Yinger, 2007)

School Consolidation

Much research has been done on the economics of school consolidation. Throughout the history of education, consolidation has been touted as a way to address issues such as inadequate funding, economies of scale, low student enrollments, and programming (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2006). Proponents state school consolidation is cost effective, provides greater curricular and program offerings, and realizes more efficiencies (Bard, et al., 2006).

Duncombe and Yinger's (2007) research examined school consolidation costs in rural New York districts and found there were certain points where consolidation demonstrated cost savings. Economies of size in operating and capital spending were the foci. Additionally, prior research done by Andrews, Duncombe, and Yinger (2002) had more fully examined economies of size in school consolidation. Their research was further supported by Bard, Gardener, and Wieland (2005), who reported that costs as a function of school size yielded a U-shaped curve in which both the very small and the very large schools were the most expensive to operate. In Maine similar findings have occurred, with consolidations bringing increased efficiencies in

areas such as staffing, administration, and purchasing of supplies, but questionable overall financial savings, especially when financial incentives were removed (Fairman & Donis-Keller, 2012). Consolidation involves transition costs that can take up to ten years to disappear (Duncombe & Yinger, 2007) and often does not take into account the non-educational costs (e.g., increased taxes and social services) associated with the loss of a school (Lyson, 2002). Maine communities that are very isolated need to weigh different variables such as distance and time costs when determining what is the best solution (Fairman & Donis-Keller, 2012). Research is not consistent regarding the benefits of school consolidation (Arnold, 2004) and caution is often recommended when determining if school consolidation is the correct choice for a community (Duncombe & Yinger, 2005; Donis-Keller, O'Hara-Miklavic, & Fairman, 2013).

Although studies such as Duncombe and Yinger (2005) and Bard, Gardener, and Wieland (2005), established a "sweet spot" regarding what would constitute a too small school or a too large school, their numbers should be interpreted with caution, as the only aspect examined was the cost per student. Bard, Gardener and Wieland (2005) pointed out that there were other scenarios as to what could be construed as the most favorable school size. Variables such as socioeconomic status and the actual location of community could change the results of the best school size (Bard, et al, 2005). Lyson (2002), Andrews, et al, (2002), and, Duncombe and Yinger (2005) also expressed in their studies that many variables can affect the effectiveness and financial efficiency of a local school.

DeYoung and Howley (1990) even go so far as to say that school consolidation and closure are not about financial savings, but are actually about how states legitimize their goals with little concern for the local culture. They opine that schools serve the function of developing students for the purpose of state and national economic development and growth and to

homogenize the educational experience in the name of equality (DeYoung & Howley, 1990). The argument that closing or consolidating rural schools ensures that valuable intellect is not squandered, society is modernized, learning is systematized, and state control is extended rings hollow in this case (DeYoung & Howley, 1990).

There is also evidence that small schools observe higher academic achievement levels of students in poverty and that school consolidation or closure can be economic discrimination (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011; Howley, 1995). Affluent communities can actually see academic achievement decline when consolidating with dissimilar socioeconomic communities (Bard, et al. 2005). Maine, ranked 42nd in per capita personal income (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2016), should be cognizant of these possible ramifications.

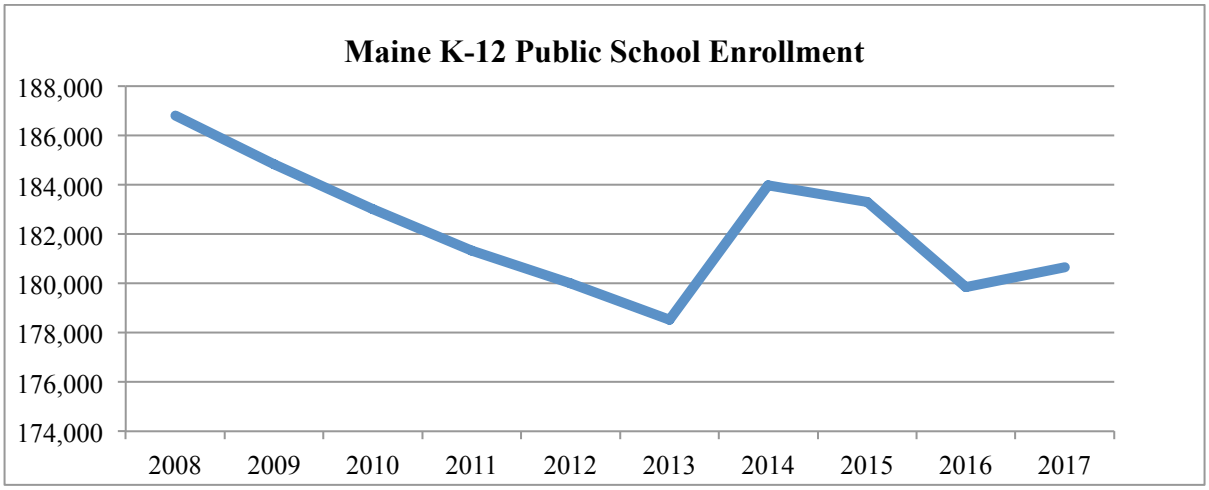
Small rural communities often hold much pride in their schools, and heated debate often ensues with each school closing (Egelund & Lausten, 2006). The indirect costs of school closure include: less parent involvement (Peshkin, 1978; Lytton, 2011); the reduction of students involved in extracurricular activities; larger classes; fewer instructional programs; truncating full day kindergarten or early childhood programs; and fewer parent programs (Lytton, 2011). Not necessarily financial costs, but cultural costs include: increased personal and community traditions, expanded personalized connections (Tieken, 2014), a more robust community, community integration, and personal control (Lyson, 2002). Additionally, the need to address non-educational expenses is typically not included in the cost of running a school (Lytton, 2011; Sederberg, 1987). Furthermore, a community without a school presents non-educational concerns including: the community becoming less attractive to families; a decrease in property values and tax revenues, as well as the pace of residential and commercial development; a loss of facilities as a resource to community; and strained community relations (Lytton, 2011).

Additionally, schools provide purchasing power to local businesses, steady employment opportunities, and a stimulation of retail trade (Sederberg, 1987). However, it should be noted that the school closures may often be a sign of a community in the last stages of death, rather than the cause of the community's decline (Eglunch & Laustesen, 2006).

Maine School Consolidation

Maine has relied on school consolidation for decades to address educational needs. In 1957, reflective of what was occurring nationally, the Maine Legislature passed the Sinclair Act to address the baby boom that was overwhelming rural schools — schools that were also in need of repair (Rooks, 2007). This legislation resulted in the School Administrative District (SAD) model, which largely remained in place for almost fifty years (Rooks, 2007). Where the 1950s and 1960s saw increasing student enrollment, that trend changed in the 1970s. Maine schools were shrinking. From a high of 250,000 students in 1970 to 200,000 in 2007 (Rooks, 2007), then new Governor Baldacci sought to address the continuing drop in student enrollment.

Figure 2.1 Maine Student Enrollment in Public Schools, Grades K-12



SOURCE: Maine Department of Education, 2018

He also examined state fiscal restraints, public demand for tax relief, and stalled student academic progress. He attempted to address concerns with his 2007 consolidation plan. The 2007 plan also focused on administrative costs and local budgetary concerns (Fairman, Donis-Keller, 2012). Ten years later, opinion regarding school consolidation in some towns is still emotionally charged. Whether either consolidation effort was a success is dependent upon whom is being interviewed.

Economic Shock and the Effects on Maine Schools

Impacts of economic shocks have been quite diverse, and local community schools, with equally dissimilar results, have felt the impact due to the loss of industry. Some have made no changes in their school structure despite declining enrollments (Poplar and Woodville), some have closed schools (Oakview), some have consolidated (Briscoe and Springvale), and some have reinvented themselves (Limestone) (MDOE, 2016). The plight of Maine communities suffering an economic shock reflects back to Lyson's (2002) work that stresses money saved through consolidation or closure could be forfeited in lost taxes, declining property values, and lost businesses. Thus, the benefits a school can have on a community are much wider and encompass both educational and non-educational benefits to a community. Communities, especially those in economic distress, have a limited amount of revenue and sometimes funding a school is just too onerous and not practical. Therefore the need for stakeholders to fully grasp both the educational and non-educational benefits of the local school becomes essential when making determinations about how education will be provided in rural Maine communities.

School Funding in Maine

Maine Property Tax. The state of Maine generates revenues through three major taxes – income, sales, and property (Maine Municipal Association, 2018). Property taxes, collected from

residential, commercial, industrial and recreational properties, account for approximately 45% of the revenues used to support local government services and cover the majority of the costs incurred by K-12 public education (Maine Municipal Association, 2018). Municipalities determine the amount of revenue that needs to be raised by the property tax to fund municipal services and schools. County assessments in the form of a mil (a percentage of value) are levied (Maine Municipal Association, 2018). The average Maine community uses 68% of its property taxes to fund education, with some of those expenses mandates by the state and federal government (e.g. Special Education and Every School Succeeds Act) (Maine Municipal Association, 2018). However, taxation on property is not equally distributed and does not take into account income levels of property owners. For many of Maine towns, property taxes have become a financial hardship and because education is the bulk of the reason why property taxes are high, education becomes the area in which the reduction of costs is sought.

Maine School Funding

Maine's rurality continues to be a factor in how critical services are dispersed (Wickenheiser, 2012). According to Laurie Lachance (2012), executive director of the Maine Development Foundation, among a dispersed and rural population, "It's extremely difficult to get those economies of scale that are needed to most effectively and efficiently deliver those services" (Wickenheiser, 2012, p. 1). Until 1997, the cost to educate a child in Maine was derived from an expenditure-driven formula, which essentially meant that whatever was spent during the previous year or couple of years determined what it would cost to educate a child (Silvernail, 2011). The total cost per student usually took into consideration two years of per pupil expenditures, plus inflation to establish new costs (Silvernail, 2011). However, this funding formula resulted in disparities of educational funds to Maine's school districts, where from 1991

to 1999, the ten highest spending districts spent 2.5 times more per student than the ten lowest spending districts (Silvernail, 2001) and saw a difference of nearly 20 mils (Laplante, 1994). In an attempt to rectify the discrepancies, reform was pushed "to insure that all schools had the programs and services that were essential if all students were to have equitable educational opportunities to achieve the *Learning Results*" (Silvernail, 2011, p.1). This work resulted in what is known nationally as an adequacy model and in Maine as the Essential Program and Services Model (EPS) (Silvernail & Bonney, 2001). Simplistically, EPS represents a per pupil guarantee (MDOE, 2016), and dictates the way Maine school districts receive and budget for revenues. These amount of revenues is determined by identifying what resources are needed to provide educational services that Maine students need in order to meet the educational proficiency standards; then is calculated the cost to purchase those services through state and local taxes (Picus, Odden, Goetz, Aportela, & Griffith, 2013). As part of the process, the state first determines how much of each district's projected budget will be subject to subsidy (according to the identification of needed resources). Statewide data on educational spending from the previous year determines the "foundation" amount per pupil (Laplante, 1994) as well as a state determined mil rate each community must raise (Maine School Management Association, 2009). Once the foundation and mil rate have been determined, the number of elementary students in each district is multiplied by the state's average expenditure. This results in the projected financial need for running an elementary school. The process is then repeated for secondary education (Laplante, 1994). Inflation is then factored into the equation as well as subsidies for other variables like special programs and debt service (MDOE, 2016).

The state and local shares of financial responsibility are based on the taxable property in the town and how it compares to other Maine communities, called "relative fiscal capacity"

(Laplante, 1994). The state ranks towns by wealth, while the share of approved spending by the state will be decided later (MDOE, 2016). The formula is complex, with student enrollment part of the formula, but the foundational principle is that, through this method, funding is more predictable and mathematically based. Additionally, this funding allows all Maine towns to receive some level of state funding (Maine Department of Education, 2018).

However, due to the unevenness of property wealth distribution, towns vary greatly in what they are able to raise in revenues. A large business within a small town may pay most of the town's revenues, resulting in light taxes on residents, while another town with no industry or property rich parcels must raise its revenues from only local homes resulting in high property taxes. Towns in Maine see variances of more than ten times as much property value per pupil (Maine Department of Education, 2018). An example using real values with town pseudonyms demonstrates the inequity. Town A with property values of $2.4 million per child would require a mil rate of just over 2 mills to raise $5000 for a child's educational costs. Town B with $80,000 in property value per child would need over 60 mills to raise the same $5000 (Maine Department of Education, 2018).

Nationally, Maine's funding formula was once seen as one of the most equitable in the country (Laplante, 1994), but more recent reports indicate growing inequities (Picus, et al., 2013; Ushomirsky & Williams, 2015). It should also be noted that by 2016 the state was to contribute 55% of the EPS programs (Title 20-A, Part 7, Chapter 606-B, §15690, 2016). In part, due to the state's inability to honor this law, the 55% requirement was repealed in June of 2016, leaving disparities between more affluent and less affluent communities. In a report provided by The Education Trust (2015) regarding the funding gap between the poorest and richest 25% of Maine school districts in 2014-2015, it was found that students in the more affluent districts actually

received more funds than students in the economically distressed districts (Ushomirsky & Williams, 2015). Equity further worsened among districts having students with high special needs (Picus, et al., 2013) and a requirement that school districts pay a portion of the teacher retirement (Title 5, Chapter 421, 2018) – a cost that has been rising since 2013 and extends for as long as people are drawing on their retirement.

According to Maine School Management Association (2009), Maine's school funding laws are perceived to favor larger schools and populated communities. Picus et al. (2013) attributes this inequity due to Maine's over reliance on local property taxes. Small schools are not able to meet the student-to-teacher ratios set by EPS, nor are they able to achieve the economies of scale needed to operate and maintain their programs and buildings (Maine School Management, 2000). Small communities typically pay salaries that are less and are hampered by a formula that awards more funding to Labor Market Areas (LMA) from the State of Maine, that pay more (Maine School Management, 2009). Because it generally costs more to live in Maine's more urban areas, Maine's government has provided a cost differential based on the Cost of Living Index (COLI), which is published by the American Chamber of Commerce Researchers Association (ACCRA) (Silvernail & Sloan, 2009). This formula calculates a national average index equal to 1.00 (based heavily on the cost of housing) and then determines if a metropolitan statistical area is above or below the index and adjusts school funding (Silvernail & Sloan, 2009). Rural areas are not eligible to participate in ACCRA COLI, and are unable to receive this benefit, even if they are able demonstrate their cost of living index is higher than the set national average index (Silvernail & Sloan, 2009). There are additional cost differentials within Maine's Essential Program and Funding laws (Silvernail & Sloan, 2009). Wealthy communities receive an additional advantage, as they are able to raise the minimal mil rate and, yet still receive state

funding, thus providing much more educationally than poorer communities (Laplante, 1994; Maine School Management, 2009; Picus, et al., 2013). A further inequity is found in communities where property values suddenly increase, but where local income remains low (Griffith, Picus, Odden, & Aportela, 2013). This was acutely evidenced in Jonesport, Maine, which operated three small schools and lost 95.4% of its state subsidy from 2004 to 2009 due to a sudden increase in property values (Mack, 2011). Coupled with median incomes below the state, more households depending on food stamps than the state average, and almost 24% of its individuals living in poverty (Johnson, Athearn, Randal, Garland, & Ross, 2015), the town continues to struggle financially, while working to maintain all three schools. Finally, communities that experience a sudden change in revenues may find themselves grappling with funding issues quite foreign to what had been the historic norm, sometimes leading to cuts in programs or an elimination of a school.

Sudden and Severe Funding

Small rural communities in Maine have experienced financial prosperity when a large industry established itself within the community. In 2015, the average paper mill worker made almost $20,000 more than the median Maine income, with many of these jobs occurring in Maine counties with overall wages well below the state median wage (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2016). When a community loses a business that is so deeply embedded in its financial infrastructure, school funding will also suffer. To help towns experiencing "a sudden and severe disruption in its municipal valuation" Maine established "Sudden and Severe" (Adjustment for sudden and severe disruption of valuation), funding in 1997 as a way for towns to request an adjustment to their valuation for the purpose of determining educational funding (§208-A, 36, 2,101, 1). Updates had been sporadically made, with an uptick of activity beginning around 2011

to address increasing needs seen across the state (§208-A, 36, 2,101, 1). When requesting Sudden and Severe funding, towns initially were assured of a streamlined process, but when more and more towns starting requesting the funds this process became hard to fulfill. Causing further turmoil among the Maine legislature was that the funds were not always used as designed. The Sudden and Severe funding issues became problematic enough that in 2016 the Maine State Legislature proposed another series of bills, under the Sudden and Severe Funding, to address the crippling loss of a single industry and the resultant effect on local school funding. The original bill had only specific Maine towns named (those that advocated for the change), all of which experienced a paper mill closure (LD 1699). Additionally, to ensure more efficacy in fund use, the process was changed to require towns to provide substantial and expensive documentation of an appraisal of the property "that shows the value of the property immediately prior to the loss and the value of the property following the loss," M.S.R.S. § 36 (2) (2018). This wording essentially means that a town must conduct two distinct appraisals. So, at the same time that a community is burdened with having to raise school taxes on value that no longer exists, it also has to fund the additional appraisal.

Unfortunately, with the more current changes to the laws, more confusion has arisen regarding how towns could qualify. William "Bill" Van Tuinen, who was responsible for assessing paper mills nationally and in Maine, explained that many mill towns experiencing a sudden drop in valuation or loss of a mill, for whom the law was targeted, would now no longer qualify for the funds:

> It is not nearly as clear if you can qualify for Sudden and Severe because the law says it has be something other than on-going obsolescence. If the loss is due to functional or economic obsolescence that obsolescence cannot be due to short-

> term market volatility. So, sometimes it's hard to recognize on-going obsolescence until it really manifests itself really severely.

Various iterations and proposals were brought forth in 2016, but the Legislature recognized the concerns that towns undergoing a negative economic experience had. The Maine legislature then attempted to find a solution – while also realizing that change in Maine school funding has historically been slow to respond (Maine School Management, 2009). It is this delay that has hurt many mills towns. Bill Van Tuinen again explains,

> So, if a town has a sudden and severe loss in valuation and they don't qualify for Sudden and Severe…just letting the time tick to where the reduced valuation is really shows fully in the fiscal capacity for education funding – it takes a few years. I mean it stalls the process. And you have to live with the higher valuation that no longer exists and pay education taxes or receive education subsidy based on an unrealistic valuation. It takes a while for that to filter through the system where you are relieved of that burden. In other words, there is no relief possible for the first year of the municipality suffering the sudden and severe disruption.

Eventually, SPO705 LD 1699 passed stating that if a community saw at least a 4.5% decline in state valuation attributable to one taxpayer within the previous fiscal year, then State aid could be reassessed (Title 20-A, section 15672, subsection 23, paragraph D). All of the towns in this study accessed Sudden and Severe funding, but not with equal success.

Funding Changes

The evolution of schools in Maine follows a process of slow change and development influenced by various forces: economic trends, new laws, new funding initiatives, and cultural needs and distinctiveness (Donaldson, 2013). Each force can provide nuances of changes that

promote a domino effect on communities and their ability to support a community school. Additionally, changes that come quickly are *not* quickly reflected in funding at the state level or in the ability to make changes at the school level (MDOE, 2016). School funding in Maine is always at least a year behind any community changes (Maine School Management, 2009) and only reflects a community's ability to pay based on its property values and student enrollment (MDOE, 2016); the income level of its residents is not taken into account (Griffith, et al., 2013: Picus, et al., 2013). Thus, a community that has historically supported higher levels of educational funding may suddenly have to pay considerably more with limited options on how to meet its new financial obligations. It is at this juncture where communities are forced to make decisions – decisions that will impact their school and community long-term.

Local Control of Education

As the US Constitution does not mention education, public education in the United States is assumed to be primarily a function and responsibility of each state. State legislatures have full authority to determine the responsibilities and organizational configuration of the public school system, as well as set accountability systems for effectiveness (Faber, 1991) Most states have a state board of education, but historically, much of the responsibility for educational programming has been delegated to local school districts (Faber, 1991), resulting in what has been termed local control. Local control, often referring to the local oversight of the local school system, is a revered and tightly held concept, with few critics or dissenters (Doyle & Finn, 1984), and is an especially deeply held value in rural communities (Arnold, 2004). Maine is no exception. However, nationally, local control is on the decline (Conley, 2003). National and state directives are becoming more common (Conley, 2003), often with financial incentives or penalties attached (Fairman & Donis-Keller, 2012). Developed by governors and state education

leaders to combat inequities in education and increase student proficiency levels, the Common Core State Standards, a set of standards upon which to build local curriculum, were promoted and adopted by forty-one states (National Governors Association, 2010; Common Core, 2018). In the same way textbooks and instructional materials that were developed and used since the 1960s were adopted by states, some saw these standards as a national curriculum, and felt that local control was being further wrested from states (Williams, 2013).

Education policies, which are developed based on more urban needs often due to sample sizes that are more generalizable, do not always accurately addressed rural education needs (Arnold, 2000). Thus, local schools become subject to outside groups making decisions about local education, with educational control based on perpetual political change and a series of political deals and changing viewpoints (Conley, 2003). Less opposition to state control occurs when there is less population and fiscal commitment to local districts (Conley, 2003). For example, reducing the number of school districts tends to remove the school from contact with the local community (Conley, 2003). There is a perceived loss of control when a school board does not meet in the town and many of the members are not known to the community (Conley 2003). Additionally, public policy decisions are driven by what is considered affordable to the general public (Clandfield & Martell, 2010; Conley, 2003; Arnold, 2000). Schools, which are expensive to operate (Johnson, 2001), often become the focus of reduced funding in addressing economic decline (Warner, Brown, & Clark Lindle, 2011). School consolidation and school closure, at the state or provincial level, are often seen as means to gain financial savings, with less thought of the community in which the school is vacating (Warner, Brown, & Clark Lindle, 2011). The neoliberal argument is that schools are public property and should be discarded if not providing a return on its investment (Clandfield & Martell, 2010). Thus, fewer students should

result in fewer schools (Clandfield & Martell, 2010). However, there are groups of researchers, as well as advocacy groups that believe schools are a long-term factor in rural sustainability (Tinkham, 2014; Purcell & Shackelford, 2005; Bard, Gardner, & Wieland, 2005; Miller, 1995) and these groups are becoming more vocal. The level of collaboration found between the school and the community directly reflects on the success of both (Harmon & Schafft, 2009). The National Rural Education Association and the Rural School and Community Trust are but two groups advocating to keep local schools in their communities and advancing their perception of bringing back more local control. One decision that does return to the local level is what to do with a local school when the community experiences economic distress.

Micropolitics, Economic Distress, and Local Public Schools

During times of financial stress, school consolidation and closure raises the issues of fiscal responsibility and student success in the midst of the loss of community identity (Warner, Brown, & Clark Lindle, 2011). Micropolitics (the use of power by individuals or groups to achieve their goals) become a feature within the community addressing values laden issues (Warner & Lindle, 2009), with groups advocating not only for the infrastructure of a school (Sell & Leistritz, 1997; Warner, Brown, & Clark Lindle, 2011), but the preservation of its community (Warner, Brown, & Clark Lindle, 2011; Corbett & Tinkham, 2014). Research has closely examined the micropolitics within the local school (Webb, 2008; Ball, 2012; Björk, & Blase, 2009; Björk, & Blase, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2007; Blase, & Anderson, 1995) and has looked at, to a lesser degree, specific policy initiatives through a political lens (Johnson, 2001; Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2007). The concept that power operates covertly and stealthily within schools, especially when developing policy (Webb, 2008), indicates that micropolitics also play a part in decisions regarding a local school's outcome within a community.

Micropolitics should also be observed as a continuum (Hoyle, 1986) that reflects the community where the change is occurring. Communities have personalities, values, and beliefs that are unique to their town and, which come into play when determining the outcome goals for their schools. These facets are demonstrated more acutely when the status quo is interrupted and change is forced upon its people (Blasé & Björk, 2010). The way communities address change is often determined by specific, local conditions, with groups constructing a view that is meaningful to them in their particular setting (Kelchtermans, 2007). Based upon those views, the allocation of limited resources then forces decisions to be made by stakeholders (Williams, 2013). Inevitably, it is at this point in the process where disagreements arise (Williams, 2013). Thus, the purpose of this study is to determine, specifically, how the processes used in making educational decisions work. This study will naturally include also the reasoning behind the decisions regarding school structure and its funding, and how the decisions play out in rural communities that have experienced the closure of a large singular industry.

Micropolitics is the use of strategic power within groups or organizations to promote a preferred outcome (Corbett & Tinkham, 2014; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Ball, 1987; Johnson, 2001). During times of pressure on communities and states to reduce government and local commitment to school funding, power struggles arise, with each group or organization advocating for their position (Tinkham, 2014; Corbett & Tinkham, 2014). How those micropolitics emerge and unfold varies from community to community. Groups then form to present their view and work towards ensuring that their view prevails. Eventually decisions are made and a local school sees changes. The change appears inevitable, but how the change is arrived at and who makes the change is not.

These changes can be attributed, in part, to what is termed social capital – an element of micropolitics. Social capital is roughly defined as the social relationships between people that enable productive benefits (Szreter, 2000) and draw upon elements of trust, norms, and networks to solve common problems (Putnam, 2000). Although the idea of social capital harkens back to Arisotole (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 2000), in 1961 L. J. Hanifan used the term social capital to urge community involvement for successful schools (Hanifan, 1916). The term social capital has no agreed upon definition, and is rooted in economics, sociology, anthropology, and political science literature with each deriving elements to better explain or describe the social interactions within each content (Adler & Kwon, 2000). Commonalities of most definitions focus on social relations and the benefits that stem from those associations. Researchers tend to examine on three different levels (Adler and Kwon, 2002): bridging or communal which are the external interactions between people (Burt, 1992; Portes, 1998); bonding which are the internal interactions between people where common values or norms are shared (Putnam, 1995; Coleman 1990); or a combination of bridging and bonding where groups are formed based on need and norms (Loury, 1992; Pennar, 1997).

There has been considerable interest and expanding research regarding social capital due to the complexity and specific nature of the context and use. More recent research continues to broaden the framework of meaning as well as crosses multiple disciplines (Adler & Kwon, 2000). For this study, social capital is about the value of networks, bonding similar people and bridging dissimilar people (Dekker & Uslaner, 2003). This study will address the hypothesis that who you know is more important than what you know (Sander, 2002), that rural social interactions are far more complex than the homespun bucolic community life where everyone knows everyone (McHenry-Sorber, 2014), and that different modes of participation result in

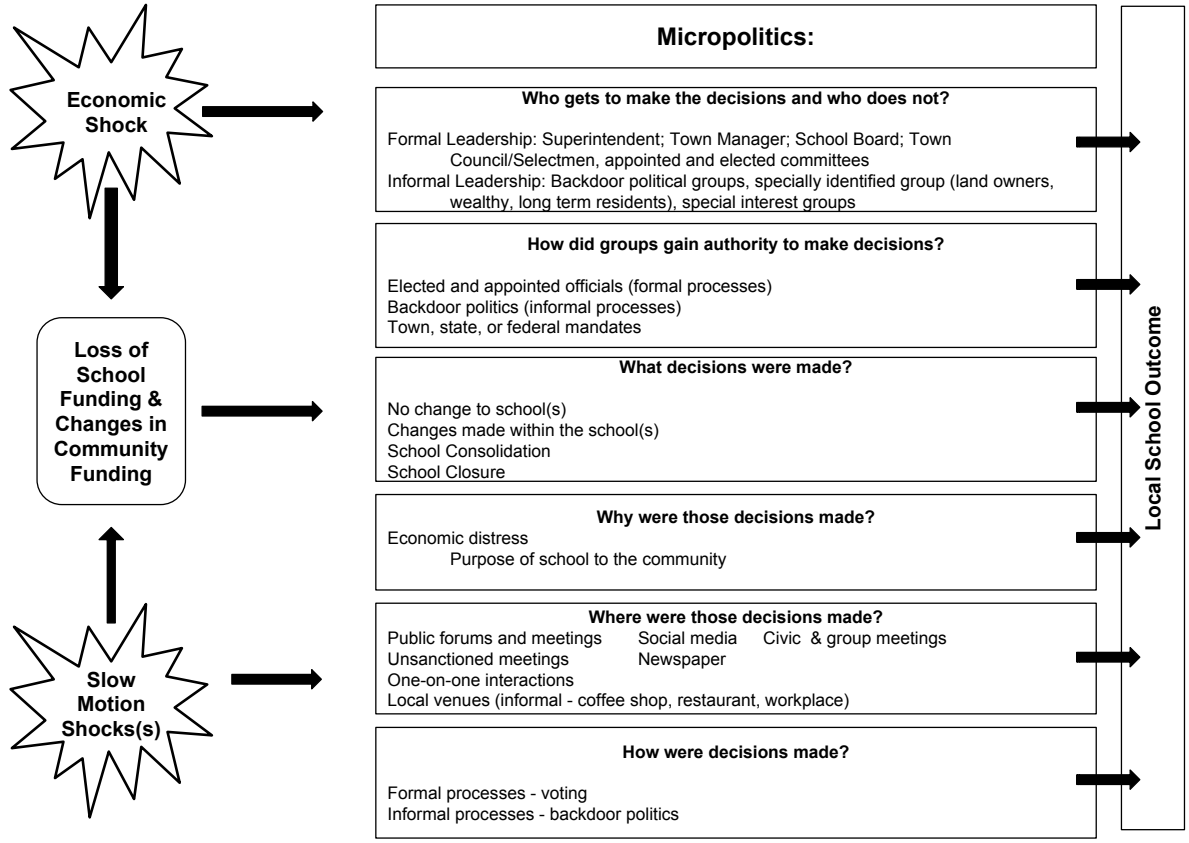
varied results in creating or destroying a sense of community or involvement (Putnam, 2000; Dekker & Uslaner, 2003).

Corbett and Tinkham (2014) adroitly express what micropolitics are and how social capital comes into play when they state, "Life is a messy configuration of multiple networks that mesh together, containing collaboration and institutional order but also tensions, conflict, and competing interests." These networks or groups can include any interest or advocacy groups, both within and outside that community, promoting a viewpoint or opinion (Williams, 2013). An "us" versus "them" mentality can arise, with all sides providing well-constructed positions that are in opposition to each other (Tinkham, 2014). Conflict over who should make decisions in rural communities is important because it is conflict over whose values will influence the fate of the school (Scribner & Layton, eds., 1995). However, power is not equally distributed and the values of some stakeholders hold more sway than others (Karanxha, Agosto, Black, & Effiom, 2013). School leaders may find it difficult to discuss issues of race, power, and socioeconomics, and find it difficult to advocate for groups with little political power (Karanxha, et al., 2013), leaving some groups with little or no voice in the decision making process (Blase & Björk, 2010).

Additionally, when changes have to be made, the micropolitics of small towns can become hierarchal, with shared decision-making succumbing to the will of more powerful groups, which then leads to heightened controversy that may last decades (Williams, 2013). Due to their smaller size, rural communities are likely to have relationships that cross roles and class, actually encouraging integration among many groups (McHenry-Sorber & Schafft, 2015). Those strong ties, however, can also have rigid social strata (McHenry-Sorber & Schafft, 2015), made more pronounced when addressing emotionally charged issues (Besser, 2013). Social capital in

communities is valuable and, these decisions can have implications beyond the financial and educational realms (Beaulieu & Israel, 2005). Divisions regarding educational issues can also result from non-educational issues: native versus new residents (Howley, et al., 2012), socioeconomic lines (Carr & Kefalas, 2009), or special interest groups with a specific agenda (Williams, 2013). What results is "a complex political intersection of networks…described as 'wicked problems' (Corbett & Tinkham, 2014, p. 693.), where winners and losers are left to deal with the fallout. However, there is also research that links the role of the school to rural economic development. This research suggests that if community development is to be successful, social capital must have strong ties between the community and school (Miller, 1995). In conclusion, it is clear that there are multiple problems, concerns, and personal issues that impact the appropriation of funding for local, rural schools. Micropolitics and its resultant consequences most certainly influence decisions on educational funding and programming.

Figure 2.2 Conceptual Framework



Theoretical and Disciplinary Perspectives

This study will draw from a variety of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives: economics, education, politics, and sociology. Economists examine the impact economic shocks have on the quality of life in small towns or the town's resiliency in how it handles the economic decline. Besser, Recker, and Agnitsch (2008) provide a well-articulated definition of economic shocks, as well as a foundation for understanding when examining large industrial closures. As stated previously, an economic shock is defined as an event that produces a significant change within a community's economy (Besser, et al., 2008). Other research defines the same event as a disaster (McFarlane & Norris, 2006). A slow motion shock sees communities impacted by

changes over a period of time – years or decades (Besser, Recker, & Agnitsch, 2008). Consensus crisis shocks are when a sudden event occurs but the shock brings the community together (Recker, 2009; Besser, 2014; Matarrita-Cascante, & Trejos, 2013). Disagreements among groups and individuals are set aside to respond to a consensus shock (Magis, 2010; Besser, 2014; Matarrita-Cascante, & Trejos, 2013; Ronan & Johnson, 2005). 911 would be an example of a consensus shock. Corrosive community shocks, which often result in anger, loss of institutional trust, or litigation, are typically tied to environmental or manmade disasters and controversial development projects (e.g. building of a toxic waste facility, prison, or casino) (Recker, 2009; Besser, 2014). However, corrosive community shocks are also associated with communities that have seen the loss of a major employer, especially communities that depend on logging, mining, farming, and fishing (Besser, 2014). Corrosive community shocks are even more pronounced when some community members believe they will bear a heavier burden of the costs (e.g. white-collar versus blue collar). They also arise when the loss reveals a group, class, or racial differences among the community that was previously less obvious or insignificant in their differences (Frailing & Harper, 2017; Besser, 2014; McHenry-Sorber, 2014). The mill closures in this study reflect a series of slow motion economic shocks that were corrosive in nature. Thus, it is through that lens this study will be examined.

Although Besser, Recker, and Agnitsch (2008) did not explore the impact of economic shocks on the community schools, they did find instances where the community quality of life was diminished (decreased earnings, increased taxation). Researchers also found that a community's resiliency, social capital, and local capitalism determined if the community would rebound from such shocks (Magis, 2014, Besser, 2013; Whitham, 2012; Ronan & Johnston, 2005; Frailing & Harper, 2017). The research previously done on the topic of economic shock

and its impact on local communities has typically been on social capital and quality of life or economic programs (Besser, 2013; Whitham, 2012; Besser, et al., 2008; Duncombe, Yinger, & Zang, 2013; Cooley & Floyd, 2013; Lyson, 2002; Sederberg, 1987). Researchers also have a keen focus on community resilience after an economic shock (Norris et al., 2008; Parisi et al, 2008; Magis, 2010; Ronan & Johnston, 2005). Finally, there is some research that ties the successful economic development of a community to its schools through the use of the school as a resource (Harmon & Schafft, 2009), integrating the community into the curriculum, and supporting community based programs (Miller, 1995). This study uses micropolitics as its main lens in examining the dynamics of economic shock in communities.

Micropolitics are the relationships that arise during change (Ball, 1994; Hoyle, 1982) where groups operate together based on common interests, political views, ideology, desire for control, and/or established coalitions (Ball, 1994; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Hoyle, 1982). Thus, micropolitical actions are those decisions that are determined to establish a common goal, protect those goals if threatened, and to restore the goals if lost (Kelchtermans, 2007: Hoyle, 1982). Additionally, policy often reflects those in power, and when power shifts, established policy can change to facilitate the desires of the new power group (McHenry-Sorber, 2104; Owens, 2006).

The micropolitical perspectives that come into play when dealing with schools involve a variety of facets: coalitions, conflict, control, goal diversity, ideology, interests, power, policy, and politics (Ball, 2012). These perspectives include a wide variety of groups and populations (Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Williams, 2013; Hoyle, 1982). All facets become aspects to be considered when communities and their groups arrive at positions affecting their schools. Political theorists have argued that organizations have not fully taken into account how complex and unstable conflict is when rural communities are making emotionally charged decisions (Blasé, 1991) and

how each facet provides elements that can change the course of a decision a community makes (Ball, 2012; Hoyle, 1982).

Micropolitics and School Funding

Given that public schools rely completely on taxation and may be the largest percentage of a community's budget, the health of the economy surrounding and supporting a public school system is crucial to providing educational services. The prioritization of allocating reduced funds is problematic; there are often no simple answers. However, the purpose and importance of the local school is brought to the forefront and decisions regarding its funding must be addressed.

The Complexity of Micropolitics

Micropolitics refers to the process of making decisions about the allocation of valued goods for an organization – who gets what, how they get it, and when they get it (Blase & Björk, 2010) and has been described as a situation where groups supporting various agendas, beliefs, and opinions jockey for power. Each group pushes what they believe to be the truth or best solution (Hoyle, 1982; Corbett & Tinkham, 2014; Tinkham, 2014). Hoyle (1982) describes micropolitics as the "dark side of organizational life" where hidden agendas, gossip, company politics, and "Machiavellism" takes place. The processes and structures of micropolitics make up a community's political culture (Blase & Björk, 2010) where differently positioned groups are straining to have their views accepted (Corbett & Tinkham, 2014). It is at this point where factions may emerge more forcefully in communities and the intent of the micropolitical groups becomes more obvious. The result is that a complex system of political networks arises with each group presenting their views, all arguing that their plan as the most reasonable and presenting their detractors' plans as unreasonable (Hoyle, 1982; Corbett & Tinkham, 2014).

Groups, Networks, and Stakeholders

Interest and advocacy groups can populate networks or stakeholder groups (Corbett & Tinkham, 2014). These groups may be more formal like state legislators, local school boards, or state school boards, or be more informal like administrators and teachers, community members, or parents – any group that has a specific view or agenda (Williams, 2013). When school changes are seen as threatening, people in any of those groups may, in order to protect their point of view, react by building alliances to use power and other resources to impact the path and direction of the decisions being made (Hoyle, 1982; Björk & Blase, 2009; Blase & Anderson, 1995). Additionally, not every group has equal representation (Corbett & Tinkham, 2014). Thus, the strongest, loudest, or most financially backed group may prevail, further polarizing the success of the final decision.

Homogeneous communities typically have more common values and put resources toward the values that are collectively honored (Owens, 2006). However, the more diverse the community, the more difficult it becomes to decide whose values should be "recognized, promoted, and funded," (McHenry-Sorber, 2014). Selecting who makes those decisions can become contentious with subtle and covert machinations and power plays – to the point where some stakeholders are silenced or rendered powerless (Blase & Björk, 2010; McHenry-Sorber; Corbett & Tinkham, 2014).

Rural Community Micropolitics

The micropolitics in rural communities, where established traditions of local control reign, launch debate around the meaning of school (Corbett & Tinkham, 2014; McHenry-Sorber, 2014). Communities fighting for survival are faced with difficult decisions resulting in a political system where differing core values are at stake (Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Corbett & Tinkham, 2014).

Additionally, relationships cross social group boundaries where ‘everybody knows everybody’ (McHenry-Sorber & Schafft, 2015); this can cause social conflict and community fragmentation to occur (McHenry-Sorber & Schafft, 2015; Anderson & Lonsdale, 2014). As social capital is highly valued, micropolitics may become prevalent at greater levels than in urban environments (McHenry-Sorber & Schafft, 2015; Anderson & Lonsdale, 2014; Whitham, 2012), complicating the need for the business community, leaders of civic organizations, local citizens, and local politicians to work together. (Whitham, 2012; McHenry-Sorber, 2014; Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Williams, 2013).

The study of micropolitics within schools has seen a steady rise in research since the 1960s (Ball, 2012) and has generated a variety of theories about why people make decisions. The intent of this study is to investigate the development, operation, and interaction of groups making decisions regarding the fate of their schools in the face of economic distress.

Although extensive research has been done regarding the micropolitics within a school (Ball, 1987, 1994, 2012; Björk & Blasé, 2009, 2010; Blase & Anderson, 1995), there has been much less research concerning the micropolitics of a rural, economically distressed community addressing the dynamics and future condition of its school (Clandfield & Martell, 2010; Corbett and Tinkham; 2014; Kareanxha, Agosto, Black, & Effion, 2013; Tinkham, 2014). The lack of consistency in the face of a similar problem requires more study to aid communities, educational leaders, and policy makers in their ability to know how to better address stressful times regarding their schools. The resultant approach needs to ensure that all voices are heard, and a viable educational option is delivered. Thus, this particular study does not have preconceived answers, but instead relies on a process where answers arose.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study examines how residents in three rural communities made decisions regarding their public schools in the face of sudden financial distress due to a paper mill closure. The goal is to determine how local residents set priorities, who the power brokers were, how people gained authority, where and how decisions were made, and the results of group decision-making. The intention is to gain a deeper understanding of the complex roles people play in their communities, and how those roles impact the decisions being made. Because the schools are so closely tied to their communities socially and economically, it is necessary to also look at the same decision-making process at the community level.

Research Design: Comparative Case Study

I conducted a comparative case study of three cases (Creswell, 2015). Comparative case studies include analysis and synthesis of similarities, differences, and patterns among two or more cases sharing a common focus (Yin, 2013) – characteristics I wanted to flesh out to better understand why some communities were successful and others less so, and how micropolitics come into play during the decision-making process. The end result in a comparative case study should be a foundational understanding of each case, as well as a deeper understanding of complex social phenomena, where the researcher has little control over the events, resulting in a real-world perspective (Yin, 2009).

The strengths of a case study are its ability to incorporate a full range of evidence including documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations that provide a variety of perspectives (Yin, 2013). This allows for discussions on how the findings might have

implications for an increase in understanding of concepts being studied (Yin, 2010). I pulled from a wide variety of sources, from school board meeting minutes and newspaper articles, to less read resources like business closure plans and economic projections. This results in a detail and richness in understanding the complex and changing views within a community that would be lost if dependent upon interviews alone.

Concerns of case studies can be a lack of rigor, biased views that influence findings and conclusions, confusion in what a case study is (Yin, 2013), and attempting to generalize findings without enough depth (Yin, 2010). I attempted to adequately address these concerns by fully articulating what was to be studied and why, careful participant selection, clear delineations of the study (Yin, 2009, 2010), and a dogged perseverance in following through to sample and continue sampling until my categories were saturated (Strauss & Corbin, 2015). Another concern of mine, although not specific to case studies or to this study, but research in general, was the high margin of error for the American Community Survey data. Data contained in the long form of the U.S. Census is regularly gathered. Estimates for smaller communities have less accuracy than larger communities, but the data are used by communities as well as local and state governments to determine the allocation of resources. Hence, I felt that although the data was an estimate, the data still held value and was representative of what communities would reference when working through their decisions.

Further Reasoning and Phenomenon Studied

Maine communities that had experienced a series of economic shocks due to a pulp and paper mill closure, and had a local school within the town's boundaries before the economic shock determined the population, with the subjects' experiences being the units of analysis. Additionally, it was recognized that each community has its own personality and holds unique

norms in the decision-making process. Due to these differences, I anticipated that political and social processes in making determinations regarding the local schools would vary, while also offering broad similarities. For example, did school superintendents respond in a similar fashion or were backdoor politics the exception or the rule? A comparative case study is applicable when a study, such as this one, calls for multiple units and subunits of analysis (communities; the groups making decisions regarding financial gaps; and the resulting outcome of how the local school is configured) (Yin, 2003; Yin, 2009).

Using qualitative methods provided me with an inquiry lens for a comparative study of three communities, while drawing from an interpretivist paradigm allowed me to see the reality each person constructed as they attempted to make meaning of the events around them (Glesne, 2011). The micropolitics that emerged from each community presented a compelling reason for me to examine through an interpretive lens. The central tenet of an interpretive view assumes that reality is socially constructed, with the researcher becoming the conduit from which the reality is revealed (Glesne, 2011). Thus, an interpretive approach assumes that social reality is shaped by the participants' experiences and social interactions within the social and historical context studied (decision making regarding local schools after a paper mill closure). The emergence of multiple realities, experiences, and interactions were observed in each community's decisions, as well as how those decisions were arrived at. Meaning was created as individuals interacted with and interpreted events, while I, the researcher, attempted to remain neutral. The resulting analysis is an exploration of the similarities, differences, and patterns among three cases, offering insight in how one's experiences and perspectives influence the outcomes.

Interviewing and Its Value

Interviews are a basic method of questioning to better understand people's experiences and perspectives, while also assigning meaning to those experiences (Seidman, 2013). Interviews also provide worth and value to interviewees' words (Seidman, 2011; Glesne, 2011). To gain insights into people's perceptions, values, associations, and opinions surrounding events that occurred with the three communities (Glense, 2011: Rowley, 2012), the process of interviewing was selected. Additionally, individual interviews were chosen to provide a safe experience, as well as, an attempt to make a personal connection with each interviewee. The interviews were used in conjunction with data from other methods to provide a richness of information to better inform the researcher and provide a well represented view of the decision making process that occurred in the three communities.

Case Selection

Community Selection. Yin (1994) recommends using two to three cases that predict similar results for literal replication and four to six cases (or more) for cases producing contrasting results for predictable reasons for theoretical replication. The identification of all rural communities located in Maine that had experienced an economic shock due to a large paper mill closure was completed first. To do this, data were gleaned from public sources that included business records, newspapers, State of Maine data, and historical records that reported mill closures from 2009 to 2016. From that list of eight communities that had paper mills that closed, three communities were chosen based on the following criteria: they were of similar size, had populations of less than 5,000 year round residents, and had at least one public school in operation at the time of the mill closure. Additionally, the mill had to have provided at least 40% of the town's revenues at some point in operation and more than 200 jobs had to be lost at the

time of the closure. The revenue and job employment criteria provided the basis upon which economic shock was measured. Additionally, a period of at least two years needed to have passed since the economic shock, but not more than eight. This time lapse provided an opportunity for micropolitics to emerge in decision-making regarding the schools, and provided deeper information in understanding how communities in financial distress arrived at conclusions regarding their schools under the stress of economic instability. It was also important that key decision makers would be available and memories fresh – thus the limit of eight years.

The three communities selected have experienced a series of slow motion shocks that resulted in a final economic shock. Before the start of the study, I was unaware of the decisions made on how each addressed lost revenues, nor how those decisions were made. Also unknown to me was that each community selected a different course of actions with their schools. One community kept all the local schools open with some internal changes. Another kept all local schools open, but consolidated with a neighboring community, resulting in the closure of the joining town's only public school. The third community closed all its local schools and consolidated with a neighboring town where their students now attend all grades. While these differences were not criteria for selection, as the study progressed, the differences indicated distinct pathways of decision-making. Why the communities determined such different end results regarding their schools immediately became part of my questioning. The more I talked with people, the more patterns and trends manifested. Each community made its decisions within different time periods and via a variety of financial, social, and political routes. There does not appear in the research a norm as to how communities will respond during economic stress and how the funding and configuration of their schools is determined. Thus, the basis of this study was formed.

Table 3.1 Community Information

Oakview	Pineville	Timberton
Population 2015 3,000[1]	Population 2015: 5,000[1]	Population 2015 5,000[1]
Job Loss With Mill Closure 200[2]	Job Loss With Mill Closure: 600[2]	Job Loss With Mill Closure 200[2]
Operating schools within community before mill closed: 3	Operating schools within community before mill closed: 4	Operating schools within community before mill closed: 3
Operating schools within community after mill closed: 0	Operating schools within community after mill closed: 4	Operating schools within community after mill closed: 3
School enrollment change in eight years: -192 students	School enrollment change in seven years: -83 students	School enrollment change in three years: -103 students
Median age before mill closed: 37 years [3]	Median age before mill closed: 38 years [3]	Median age before mill closed: 44 years [3]
Median age after mill closed: 41 years [3]	Median age after mill closed: 42 years [3]	Median age after mill closed: 49 years [3]
Poverty level before mill closure: 13%[3]	Poverty level before mill closure: 9%[3]	Poverty level before mill closure: 14%[3]
Poverty level after mill closure: 20%[3]	Poverty level after mill closure: 16%[3]	Poverty level after mill closure: Not available
[1]Rounded to nearest thousand [2]Rounded to nearest hundred [3]Rounded to nearest whole number		

The Use of Artifacts for Background and Supporting Evidence

Public documents were also gathered before the interviews. This data came from the various public documents (newspapers, town reports, school board meeting minutes, Maine

Department of Education documents, business closures, business briefs), historical records, and pictorial representations using an historical process. I also pulled from local histories, the US Census, town websites, and in one town a display of comments posted by community members in a local storefront window. These multiple sources allowed me to examine the issues from a variety of viewpoints and were used to provide background information regarding the communities and then, later, to support, enhance, and compare to what was shared at the interviews. These documents also provided me with names of people to contact for interviews. Names that showed up often provided the first level of connection. Thus, someone listed as the school board chair during the time the mill closed, would be deemed a candidate worth contacting.

To paraphrase and provide apologies to George Orwell, those who write history control the past. Each of these documents was written with a very specific perspective and view. The business reports were clipped, heavily reliant on available data, and written with a very specific purpose and audience. School board meetings were generally formal in writing, but there was evidence that indicated discord and dissent. When interviewees were asked about specific events that were reported in the newspaper or public meeting, their recollection of events would be in agreement, but also sometimes differed or was dismissed as inaccurate. The intention, therefore, was to make meaning from multiple sources, compiling data to determine what realities were present. The intent was to compile sufficient information to characterize and explain the cases being studied, point out common characteristics, and then draw various elements together to form a cohesive interpretation (Ghauri, 2003); in essence, to make meaning from the various and shared experiences and resources, (Seidman, 2013) and provide foundational knowledge upon which to build. This study represents those realities and truths that were shared.

Once the identification of the communities was determined, participants were recruited to provide an understanding of actual life experiences, the meaning people attributed to their experiences, and the opportunity to observe others' points of view (Seidman, 2013). Charmaz (2014) states that 12 interviews are sufficient to discern common themes and experiences, but more may be needed for credible analysis. The intent in this study was to achieve a point of saturation where participants in the same community begin repeating or recounting similar events multiple times (Seidman, 2013). Additionally, although one can never fully understand another person perfectly, the intent was to come as close as possible to understanding the "truths" or views being shared within in each community (Seidman, 2013).

Interviewees were chosen by purposive sampling and were selected because they met the expected criteria. Recruitment for participants representing each community was done through referrals from multiple sources. Review of public documents provided the first list of identified people who were involved in the various events being studied. Professional connections; contacting the local schools, town offices, and civic organizations; and educational connections all provided an expanded list of possible participants. These lists were combined and names that were identified multiple times were contacted first. Further participants arose from the initial referrals providing additional participants. No participants self-selected or asked to be in the study.

A cross section of people were interviewed – all of whom were 18 years or older with preference given to those who lived in the community. For each town, community residents who lived in the town during the mill closure as well as people who were involved in the decision-making process regarding the community and school(s) were selected. Not all participants lived in the community; most school superintendents did not live within the community they worked,

but were very active in the decision-making process. Some participants were no longer part of the community, but most were. In additional, three state and/or national level employees who were either part of the mill valuation work or school funding work were interviewed. The majority of the participants represented multiple groups and/or networks by holding numerous positions, demonstrating the frequency of crossing group boundaries in rural areas, where it is seen as acceptable and normal – and often essential to the workings of a community. For example, in one community, one resident was a long time town resident, a former mill worker, and a town manager. Another participant was a long time resident, a retired educator in the town, a former Teachers' Union leader, a former holder of a town government post, a business owner, a school committee member, and had family members who lost their jobs during the mill closure and the school reorganization. Eleven of the thirty-five participants (31%) held at least two different positions (i.e. served on school board and worked in the mill). Of the thirty-five interviewed twenty-three (66%) were residents when the mill closed and continue to live in the community. Three additional people sent me information answering my questions, but were not interviewed; all were residents of the community they were being questioned about.

Table 3.2 Interviewee Criteria

Criteria	Positions Represented
Held key decision-making position at the municipal level	Town manager Selectperson (a.k.a. selectman) Economic director Town government committee member
Held certain positions in school department	School superintendent School administrator (principal, curriculum director, athletic director) Teacher Support staff (educational technician) School board chair School board member
Community resident	Lived in town during the mill closure Lifetime or long time resident
Held certain positions in the mill	Preference for mill worker living in the community Mill worker
Leadership	School superintendent Town manager Legislator
Other	Commissioner of Education Mill appraiser

Once possible participants were identified contact was made through an email or letter, followed by a phone call (See Appendix A). In a few instances direct contract was made for the initial contact. If a person agreed to participate a formal invitation establishing the time and place for the interview was set (Creswell, 2015) (See Appendix B). All participants were then provided materials via a packet of written materials that outlined when and where the interview would take place along with their rights as an interviewee. A follow up phone conversation followed the packet of materials. Finally, at the start of the interview, their rights were again reviewed (See Appendix B).

Table 3.3 Interviewee Group Representations

Representative Group (Individuals may cross multiple groups)	Oakview (14 total interviewed)	Pineville (11 total interviewed)	Timberton (13 total interviewed)
Close family member worked in the mill	3	3	4
Community leader (town manager, town council)	4	1	4
Community member	9	6	11
Educator	2	6	6
Mill worker	6	1	2
School leader (superintendent, principal, curriculum director, assistant principal, school board)	3	5	4

Participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential, as would their identifying characteristics. The names of towns, schools, newspapers, titles, and resident and professional names are presented using pseudonyms. All genders have been identified as male in leadership positions, due to the small number of females and the desire to protect confidentiality. However, Maine is a small state, and the number of towns where mills are closing is well publicized during each mill closure. Thus, residents are likely to recognize their communities. I am aware that townspeople may not like or agree with everything I wrote. However, I have attempted to present each community in a respectful manner, understanding that slow motion and economic shocks can provide challenges for even the most well prepared communities. I tried

throughout the study to maintain the perspective of a bystander who has studied the community in depth, but who is not an accepted resident nor is part of any social network within either the communities or the schools.

Interviews were held in a place that was convenient, accessible, and appropriate (Glesne, 2011) for the participant. Locations consisted of participants' homes, the local coffee shop, their place of work, and in one of the closed schools, and at my place of work. Two interviews were conducted via digital means (phone and Skype). Most interviews lasted one to 1.5 hours, although two lasted approximately 30-45 minutes (Creswell, 2015; Seidman, 2013; Glesne, 2011) and a few more were well over two hours. The time to conduct the interview was flexible, understanding that the pace needed to be comfortable for the interviewee (Creswell, 2015; Charmaz, 2014). Interviews first began with questions that established a rapport and comfort between the interviewee and interviewer, and then moved into questions specific to the study. The interviewee questions (See Appendix C) were semi-structured, with each interviewee having a series of questions that were similar (Creswell, 2015), but also allowing for an openness that permitted the interviewees to add details and ask clarifying questions, as well as allowed the interviewer to follow up on unexpected leads and probe points of interest that arose (Glesne, 2011). The semi-structured questioning also allowed participants to share with me any aspects that were not addressed or were unknown to me. The intent was to gather as much knowledge as possible, with viewpoints that varied among people, and in order to develop a well-rounded summary of each community.

Each interview was digitally recorded using multiple recording sources to ensure against the failure of one source. Completed interviews were transcribed verbatim soon after the interview was over (Glesne, 2011) and examined for common themes. Memos, detailing my

comments, observations, and personal feelings gained from the interview (Creswell, 2015), were written after each interview to provide reflections on what was shared (Glesne, 2011).

Thirty-five interviews were conducted. Three additional participants were not interviewed, but sent written responses to the questions. Through the interviews and the written responses, a total of thirty-eight participants were represented. Additionally, three more interviews were conducted with state and national people involved with the mill revaluations and the school funding laws. These additional three interviews provided needed background information, but were not counted among the participants. Interviews were used to collect perceptions from individuals who represented a variety of roles (Creswell, 2015; Glesne, 2011). To more fully grasp the social and political interactions that occurred when deciding how to address a school's outcome and funding issue during financial distress, due diligence was made to provide an opportunity for all voices to be heard, with each community having at least eleven total representatives. Due to the nature of micropolitics, where some groups are marginalized or left out entirely (Corbett & Tinkham, 2014; Blaze & Bjork, 2010), it was important to include individuals whose ideas were not well represented during the decision making process. These people provided valuable information in observing the processes of decision-making and how power or authority was assigned.

Data Analysis Overview

Analysis focused on understanding the specifics of each case through participant interviews and the artifacts that I collected. I coded my data using the qualitative software Nivo12, with data analysis first being coded line-by-line, and resulting in almost one hundred categories in each community (See Appendix D). The line-by-line coding allowed perspectives from the interviewees to emerge in more detail, which allowed me to determine broader codes

(See Appendix D) and provided an immersion in the data (Glesne, 2011) that allowed me to be well versed with it.

Using inductive logic, axial coding was next conducted (See Appendix D), and addressed such questions as when, where, why, who, and how (Charmaz, 2014). The axial coding helped to describe the study more fully and linked relationships between categories on a more conceptual level (Charmaz, 2104). Data were organized to determine similarities and differences in trends, patterns, and themes. Data frequently overlapped and could be assigned to multiple categories. At this stage of coding, I attempted to create a framework of relational categories that best represented the patterns that arose from the interviews and supporting materials.

Public documents were used to validate the data presented in the interviews through the cross verification of multiple sources. During this process, there was a constant sorting and comparison of emerging categories and information, and continued on-going journaling (Charmaz, 2014). An examination of public documents also yielded perspectives of the times and the considerations of the changing perceptions surrounding the school, and verification as to why the school remained opened, consolidated, or closed, and who made those decisions.

A final round of coding was done from the words and perspective of common positions (e.g. school superintendent, town manager, mill worker) in order to determine if positions demonstrated commonalities. This coding was more informal, as I used the codes from the axial coding and organized according to position. For example, all superintendents discussed having a vision, but only one discussed the importance of ensuring the school was seen as an extension of the community. All of the mill workers commented on the above average pay they once received and how challenging it was to replace those jobs. Finally, the town managers addressed financial concerns through a variety of lenses – seeking new businesses, raising taxes, lowering taxes,

economic infrastructure, funding schools, etc. Again, with each position there were similarities, but also differences.

I maintained a researcher journal throughout the process where I monitored information that would not have been evident from the audio recordings. Strong emotions, references to connected events, non-verbal cues, and my own thought processes while coding and analyzing the data are some examples of what was included in my journal. Throughout the process the use of my researcher journal and transcripts was employed to elaborate on ideas and provide cross analysis to the case studies. Additionally, within my journal, I would make short notes or memos for clarity or connection while examining public documents. These memos were included in the coding. Finally, the public documents had key elements coded (not the full document), while the journal entries were coded as written.

An analysis of each community was conducted to identify trends, patterns, and items of note or interest. This work was then followed by a comparative analysis of the three communities with the goal of finding commonalities or similarities (Stake, 2011). However, differences emerged as data were collected and analyzed at the community level (Patton, 1990). Thus, each case has an individual report (Yin, 1994). Only after all three of the cases had been conducted and analyzed was there a comparative analysis (Yin, 1994).

There was no expectation that the qualitative data among communities would align, but a comparison of the results of the multiple communities (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2015) found interesting similarities and differences with the decision-making process employed by each community experiencing economic shock and its decision-making process regarding local education. Using a comparative case study of data collection and analysis provided an understanding of a real world situation, and resulted in a broad generalization of the issue posed.

The constant comparative procedure, moving from specific to broad data facilitated a detailed comparison of the information shared and researched (Maxwell, 2013; Charmaz, 2104).

Researcher Subjectivity

I am a lifetime Maine resident whose lineage harkens back to the 1700s. For me, this genealogical fact translates into an ardent sense of pride for the state of Maine, a strong work ethic, and a belief that people should conduct themselves at a high level of morality and character. I am also a long time public educator, believing that public education is the path to providing choices for all people. Maine is also known for its independent streak, and I am no different. While I recognize that one generic policy will not fit every community, I am also cognizant of the fact that organization and efficiency have to be considered. I believe that too much policy is developed from a more urban view, and that to maintain the health of Maine's rural communities, especially those in economic distress, we must better understand what makes small rural communities work and why.

I used a journal to monitor my own objectivity. I inserted memos and notes in the margins of the interviews to connect my thoughts to actual words, and more fully developed the emotion that was evidenced in many of the interviews. The journal and memos were only part of the process in attempting to minimize bias, as each coding and analysis further examined trustworthiness and accurate reporting through cross referencing of materials and interviews. These checks for objectivity were also accomplished through strict self-monitoring, reviews by dissertation committee, six residents (two from each community) reading sections about their towns, and professional peer review.

Validity and Reliability – Design, Representative Readers, and Confidentiality

Designing a study where multiple voices could be heard and represented aided in minimizing bias. The selection process included people whose ideas and plans were implemented, as well as dissenting voices. Interviews were audio recorded for accurate transcription and participants' words were carefully coded through a systematic process. Alternative explanations were included, with conclusions shared with a selection of the interviewees (selected via the interview process) to ensure I encapsulated their version of truth and meaning. Additionally, extensive data were gathered from public and supporting documents to provide further credibility and accuracy.

Every community had at least two representatives, taken from the list of participants, who read the study specific to their town, and were able to offer comments. In cases where there was much contention, representative readers from the opposing sides were sought out. These efforts and assurances encouraged participants to candidly share their views and opinions regarding their communities and schools. In instances where I believed confidentiality would be compromised I used more general identifiers; for example, school leader rather than the more specific superintendent or principal or government official rather than town manager. All pronouns were attributed to males. Not because there were not females in positions of authority, but because there were so few. These positions — sometimes having been held for two or three decades and having high profiles within their communities and schools — were the most challenging to protect. Those who recognize the community may also recognize the position. In communities where there was much turn over in those positions, I identified the people by their specific position. During the year and a half I was interviewing participants there were multiple changes in many of the leadership positions.

Finally, the interconnectedness of the population groups was not always easy to untangle. Tradition played a heavy role in the processes being examined. In a community people must interact in ways that foster their identity and those complex interactions generate the social ties and networks (Salamon, 2003) upon which this study depended. Respecting those connections and all that people did to support their communities resulted in conversations that were frank and informative.

Limitations

The study relies heavily on secondary sources – newspapers, meeting minutes, business briefs – which were used when comparing information shared by the interviewees. These sources have strong biases, but were balanced by including the voices of a wide range of people. The triangulation of data allowed for comparisons and fact checks.

The lag time between when interviews were held and when the mill closed varied. The three communities selected experienced some of the most recent mill closures in Maine. Emotion is powerful in molding opinions. Those who lost jobs saw the events differently than those whose lives were not as directly impacted. Time may have helped to lessen the emotions, or may have allowed those emotions to fester more deeply.

It is most probable that not all voices were heard. Although I made strong efforts to represent multiple voices, some people may have chosen to not participate, may have not been accessible to me through my networks, or have been so small in number as to be overlooked.

CHAPTER FOUR

THREE COMMUNITIES, THE LOSS OF THEIR PAPER MILLS, AND WHAT THEY DETERMINED TO DO

Each community had successes, and each had obstacles to overcome. Each community case study also demonstrates how decisions were determined at both the town government level and the school level. Common to rural areas, there was much overlap of the positions held by participants, and boundaries were not always easy to discern among groups of people. All three communities had commonalities: each had a paper mill that closed, had less than 5,000 residents (US Census American Community Survey data, 2010, 2016), had a town government that was led by a town manager and supported by select persons (also referred to as selectmen), and had schools led by a superintendent and representative school board members. Additionally, all three communities (and thus, schools) were, at one time, dependent upon the mill for over the majority of their town and school revenues.

Each case study captures a snapshot view of time of two to eight years after the closure of the mill. Memories were still strong with those interviewed and the ability to find a wide range of people willing to participate in the study was generally a smooth process. US Census data from 2000 and 2010 were primarily cited, although Decennial data was also used to show trends and patterns closer to the time of the mill closure.

To better understand how and why communities made their decisions, it is important to first understand the history of each town. This historical knowledge allowed me to better conceptualize the unique community personalities, recognize the relationships through the town's history, and grasp the importance and hold the paper mills had on the towns and schools before delving into each town's analysis.

PINEVILLE

> "Many are familiar with the trauma of the closure of the mill, and its sale to an entity that wished to tear it down. But like many tragedies, most know how bad things were – but far fewer people know 'the rest of the story' that is being written in the Town of Pineville – and it is an important story."
>
> -Community member and town manager as reported in the town report.

Community Background

Pineville was a community of less than 5,000 people, and that population had remained relatively stable since 2000, despite the mill's closure. Reflective of Maine's lack of diversity, slightly over 97% of the inhabitants are white. Also reflective of Maine, the median age had risen, although in recent years, Pineville had seen a slight dip – a possible indicator that younger people were settling in Pineville or that more families with children are moving to Pineville. From 2010 to 2015, the residents of Pineville saw their median income drop almost $15,000, poverty increase, and the median values of their homes drop over $2,500 (US Census Bureau American Communities Survey, 2010 and 2015). Historically, it was a farming and shipbuilding town — occupations that continued even after the opening of the pulp and paper mill in 1930. However, with the lure of good pay and a growing demand for paper, employment increasingly became more concentrated at the mill.

There were elements unique to Pineville that other Maine towns losing a mill did not have. Pineville is located near a number of well-visited tourist sites—all of which drew people to the area. It is also located on an underdeveloped harbor, has a fiber optics system that was advanced for the area, natural gas options, and has a wide variety of small businesses that primarily cater to the local residents. Additionally, community members often emphasized the

convenient location of the town, stating, “We are [x] miles to everywhere,” when describing what made Pineville a positive place to live.

Pineville was governed as many towns in Maine were — by a town manager that oversaw the daily operations and a town council that served as the town’s executive body. The residents of the community elected the members of the town council and the town council hired the town manager. The town council met twice a month. Various sub-committees and boards, which met as needed to address specific issues within the community, were drawn from the town council, other governmental offices (town clerk, registrar, economic director, code enforcement officer), and the community at large.

The school district also followed a typical model. It was lead by a school superintendent hired by the school board who oversaw the daily operations. The school board members were elected officials, and served as the school’s executive body; one official was elected by the committee as the chair. The school board met at least once a month, but more often when there was a determined need. Additionally, the school board had sub-committees made up of representatives from the school board.

There were two small private schools with a combined population of less than 50 students, one with a religious affiliation and one an alternative high school. The public school district included four public schools in the community: two elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. These public schools serviced slightly over 1000 students from the town of Pineville and three neighboring communities, in addition to tuition students who resided in towns that offered high school choice. Pineville was once a community that did not receive much state funding for education, but the closure of the mill reversed that trend. After being able to support

much of the district's expenses locally, Pineville is now a recipient of more than half its educational funding from the state of Maine.

The mill closure had little effect on the school district's enrollment. Instead, the school's enrollment has been like much of Maine where the decline was due to state trends: changing economies, lower birth rates, aging communities, people of a childbearing age migrating out of state for work, and lack of racial diversity (Blint-Welsh, 2018; Steeves, 2011). The district had been steadily losing students well before the mill closure, yet was slow to adapt to the loss of students.

Figure 4.1 Pineville Timeline
All events are listed in the order they occurred. However, to maintain confidentiality, actual dates were removed.

1980-1989
- Mill apex of employees
- Recessionary contract negotiated at the mill
- New town manager hired

1990-1999
- Multiple years where mill reduced number of employees
- Mill request revaluation
- Town received approximately 70% of revenues from mill

2000-2009
- Multiple years where mill reduced number of employees by hundreds of employees
- New superintendent hired
- New school curriculum changes began
- The school district of Pineville consolidated with the town of Oldham, which established a new school district

2010-2019
- Future Search Committee – began changes in curriculum and developed a Strategic Plan
- Oldham School closed
- Multiple years where mill reduced number of employees
- Mill granted a Tax Increment Financing (TIF[2]) by Pineville for special project
- Pineville labeled a Business Friendly Community
- Mill granted a TIF by Pineville for development of green energy
- Pineville purchased local marina
- High School renovation began
- Updated programming instituted to address changing needs of school
- Superintendent lobbies at state level for changes in Sudden and Severe funding requirements
- Mill purchased power plant
- Mill closed – Town lost over 40% of tax revenues
- New town manager hired
- Mill sold
- Sudden and Severe Funding received
- New town manager hired
- Renovations done on elementary and high school buildings and/or property, further curriculum changes and updates
- Two economic stimulus groups developed
- Downtown community and arts organization developed
- Mill site purchased for new business
- Mill buildings purchased for repurposing by a variety of businesses and organizations

[2] Tax increment financing is a locally driven flexible finance tool to leverage new property taxes. These taxes may be used to finance public or private projects for a defined period of up to thirty years. (Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, 2018).

Background on the Mill

Pineville is located on a major river source, which at one time, was used to provide power to its paper mill. The mill figured prominently in the town, as it was located right on the river directly next to its downtown area, taking up a large tract of land. Throughout the years, the mill changed ownership multiple times, but, despite what occurred nationally, was a constant in its paper production (Fuller, 2014). The paper company also provided essential support for the local community, the schools, and various organizations. The mill's generosity was observed across many groups of people in interviews for this study. A former mill worker shared,

> There was a lot of synergy from the mill that spilled into the community. They were very good to the community. Everything was painted [Pinewood green] around the community. They gave money to the town. They had a street sweeper they let the town use.

An educator and community member supported this opinion, adding,

> When the mill was more local, they were always there to help people out. They were very generous. The mill was a source of pride for the community. The mill was supportive of the community and generous with programs like music, drama, and band – programs that were not initially well funded.

The mill enhanced or provided programs and materials not supported by local budgets, which increased the community's reliance on the mill. Schools reaped the benefits of the mill's largess. A former teacher and long-time community member shared that,

> For example, they purchased some Down Syndrome adult bicycles when we had a core of students needing them. This was something that the schools could not

> have purchased – it was extra. But those bicycles helped the students in that program.

Not only did the mill support non-funded items, it provided standard items like notebooks, pencils, and crayons to ensure that all children had what was needed. One former educator shared, "The mill used to do things for the school. They did a lot." The mill's generosity spilled into school and community sports. "My son was a wrestler and participated at a travel level. He traveled to North Carolina and wrestled in Nebraska and the mill supported him. They paid for his travel and expenses to go." A community member and coach added, "They sponsored the Little League team and the Pop Warner team." Community members felt that without the mill's funding, many of these sports programs would not exist or would be reduced in scale.

In addition to supporting the community and the schools, the mill provided essential jobs. "You know, a job at the paper mill, didn't really require a strong education. And we had a community here that for 50 plus years that a line of citizens could walk into a well-paying job," stated one community member. Those working in the mill were proud of their jobs and recognized that they were among some of the best paid in the community, often with no more than a high school diploma. A long-time community member and educator reminisced,

> When I first was here in '86, I was making $13,000 as a teacher. I was walking out, maybe in December at a basketball game and this older gentleman, he was probably 65, and I was all of 24 years old. He said, "Hey, young fella, how much are you earning?" I said, "$13,000." He said, "I make $65,000 a year and I didn't finish the tenth grade. You tell me who's smart and who's dumb."

Jobs in the mill paid higher than Maine's median income. Stated one former mill workers, "If you did overtime, you could make over $80,000 a year." By the mid-1980s, employment reached

its highest levels (Fuller, 2014), pulling people from every county in Maine (Trotter, 2014). The industry was robust, and seemingly unstoppable with its 24-hour production. A former mill worker stated,

> When it was round and white and you could swing it across the floor, then you could sell it. Printers needed paper and there was a shortage. And so anything we made sold and went out the door and they continued to make money.

The workers and owners had a sense of invincibility. Times were flush.

However, although not the only reason, neoliberal policies incentivizing oversea production of traditional US-made products threatened the Maine pulp and paper industry in part due to a strong US dollar, which lowered the price of imports as much as 25% (Milne, 1985). A crack had appeared in the industry and signaled the beginning of a slow, but downward trajectory for many pulp and paper mills in the US. Pineville became a part of this new fabric where instability in an industry became the norm, and shutdowns and lay-offs were common each year. These times signaled the slow motion shock that would slowly whittle away the strength of the mill, change the community's dependence on the one industry, and force the school district to reflect on the purpose of its schools.

Preparing for Life Without the Mill

In anticipation of a possible mill closure a special committee (Future Search Committee) was convened to identify what was important to the town. This committee determined that, in part, the schools were an essential component to the health and stability of Pineville. The school took this information and took active steps to enhance the academic offerings provided. Academic programming was expanded with an updated curriculum, special programming addressing aspirations, AP offerings, a welding program, Gifted and Talented programs, and an

expanded visual and performing arts component. Although the high school continued to work with a nearby Community College, the school no longer saw its primary function as preparing workers for the mill. Rather, it became a school that provided students with multiple opportunities.

Upon the mill's closure there came a need to reassess staffing. With the mill's extra revenues, the school district had operated at levels above what was allowed by the Educational Programming Services (EPS) formula. Funding after the mill closure became problematic and resulted in the RIFing (reduction in force) of teachers at the public schools to balance its budget. Budget issues were compounded by the school's reliance on the local mill for funding, supplies, sponsorships, and a variety of other supports.

Micropolitics in Pineville – The Decisions Made and Why They Were Made

The Mill and the Town. Prior to the closure of the mill the community of Pineville had been watching the fluctuations of the paper industry. More and more the shutdowns occurred due to poor economic conditions. An increase in the use of technology, Asia's economic upheaval, and excess paper inventory did not let up. More lay-offs occurred. Additionally, at one point the mill disavowed the valuation figure, stating the town overestimated the figure by $100 million (Boyd, 1995). At that time the mill provided about 70% of Pineville's tax revenues (Boyd, 1995), further demonstrating Pineville's dependence on the mill.

After a series of shutdowns and layoffs that reduced the workforce of the mill to half the number of workers it had employed at its peak, the community government decided to take action to prepare for a mill closure, instituting an Undesignated Fund Balance – essentially a savings account. This specially designed fund, according to town reports, was, "To limit the Town's exposure to unforeseen cost and more specifically to provide an adequate level of

funding should a significant valuation loss occur from its largest taxpayer [Pineville Paper]." To do this, the Undesignated Fund Balance policy required that "a surplus minimum be maintained equal to three months of the town's total expenses (gross budget) plus an amount equal to three months of the annual taxes for the mill." Pineville had been overly reliant on the mill and its revenues to the town. To have the mill question the taxation set caused an uneasiness and further signaled the growing chasm between the town and the mill. An educator in the community, understanding the relationship of the mill and the town, observed,

> There was an argument between the town and the mill around evaluation. And the mill actually withheld payment. All right? So, the town struggled through that and said, "Never again." So, they [the town of Pineville] started salting away money, putting away reserves, putting away reserves. They had close to eight and a half, nine million dollars in reserves. It was a war chest.

The term "war chest" was used by many, indicating that this measure to prepare for the future was perceived as more than preparing for something more challenging than just a year of less of income.

Publicly, there was very little discussion regarding this surplus. When questioned why the town took this approach, one long-time community member replied,

> Why do some people save their money for retirement and others say, "I am going to live life now and when it comes to retirement, oh well." I think it is the same mindset. We had a town manager that was very fiscally minded. He could pinch a penny. He really knew how to save money. And I think it was that mindset that did it. Well, you know what? I never heard that from the town's people. I never once heard anybody – I think everybody kind of knew, because we had seen it in

other towns, that this isn't a bad thing. I think they looked at it as, hey, it's our savings account. Just like your home. You should have a savings account. You know they tell you to have six or eight months in savings in case things should happen to your job. We were going to have six or eight years in case something happened to the mill. I never heard anything negative about having a surplus.

However, there were a few people who felt differently at the time, but that disagreement did not garner any traction. One community member said,

I think to sum up… to what made people amenable to putting away for the rainy day fund, I don't think they really were. I think it was one town manager who was a very strong personality and he was very firm about it and I know that there were - are people in this community, still, who don't have great [positive] memories of him. But, now they probably appreciate what he did. But at the time, I have heard stories about people who didn't think he was great, he was very difficult at the time. Stingy, frugal, if you want to be polite. There were people in this town, who did not appreciate what he did and would have liked to have had more money spent and had lower taxes or whatever. He just had a very strong personality. And he was reasonable in terms of spending the money where it really counted. You know, if you justified it, and you showed him the numbers, like a study, then he would spend the money. But, I think it was basically, one man's very strong personality."

Along with a very strong vision, this long-time town manager capitalized on the unrest within the community, the worry that taxes would increase substantially without reserves in place, and,

according to one educator, he espoused that Pineville needed to transform itself from "a mill town to a town with a mill."

The frugal actions of the town manager likely eased the burden on the town when the mill finally closed in 2014. Even a community member who disagreed with the town manager acknowledged this, stating, "But the right person, in the right job, at the right time, can make a big difference." During the time leading up to the mill closure a variety of other events impacted the community. Financial support to community and schools became a memory of the past. One community member and educator shared, "As the mill changed hands, things changed. They did not fund as many things." The schools saw a shift in what had been provided start to diminish as local funding was now required.

Another change was that the mill's management moved out of town, signaling yet another division between the mill and the community. One former mill worker reported,

> But, after that strike, the mill management didn't live there anymore. They all moved to [Westwood]. Pretty much. If you didn't live in [Westwood] or [Windsor] you were kind of an outcast of the management group. So, we kind of lost that connection of the community with their kids being in the school.

This view was supported by an educator who said, "They [the mill] didn't want the management living in the town, and that was [by] design by the company." Management would no longer be visible on the sidelines coaching sporting events, supporting local initiatives, or supplementing school activities, programs and materials. Management's removal provided another break in the relationship between the town and the mill.

The Mill Closure's Impact on the School

As the town was preparing for the mill closure, so was the school. With the mill closure and declining student enrollment, Pineville's school committee and leadership became much more amenable to working with other communities and bringing students into the local public schools. This proved initially difficult as during more affluent times the Pineville School District was full and did not want students from other towns. Residents had historically held a local isolationist view and a sense of superiority over residents of other towns. The school board was known for not working collaboratively with surrounding towns, unless those towns gave them full responsibility in the decision-making process. Multiple school board and community members who were interviewed espoused this opinion of past school boards with one board member saying,

> There was a majority number in Pineville representatives on the joint school board and they [Pineville representatives] basically came in and said, "Look, I don't know what you guys want to do, but we are going to do what we want to do. We've got the votes, and if you guys want to tag along, that's great. If not, you can go ahead and do whatever the hell you want to." Basically we said, "We don't care if your kids are coming here or not. We really don't give a crap."

Over and over people shared the observation in the interviews about Pineville's desire to remain a singular school entity – separate from other towns. The Pineville School District was seen as an entity that would not work well with other towns. This attitude provided strained relationships with the other sending communities, but was not problematic when schools were full. "They [Pineville] wanted to be on their own. They wanted to be Pineville School Department. So, then [Oldham]'s connection with Pineville was kind of strained," reported a community member and

school board representative. When Pineville left the School Union[3], they left neighboring towns without a high school, reduced resources, and having to contract out for services. A school board member shared, "They [neighboring towns] were renting a superintendent, renting a special services director, and couple of other things." The money was in Pineville as was the student population. It was at this time that the small communities instituted high school choice[4], demonstrating that they did not need to rely on Pineville.

But like most towns in the Maine, the student population was on the decline and the Maine state government was promoting school consolidation. Pineville eventually found itself needing students and reached out to a neighboring town that they had left in the lurch some years back. [Oldham], facing declining enrollments and increased costs, while also retaining historical memories of its snubbing by Pineville, agreed to consolidate. However, it kept its option for school choice for high school and did not make the process easy. Soon after rejoining with Pineville, the school board determined that the K-8 [Oldham] School would close. Interestingly, although Pineville could have made this decision with their votes alone, the Oldham school board members also supported the closure. However, this decision did not sit well with Oldham residents. An [Oldham] community member publicly commented, "I hate that you're taking away our small school; it's the heart of our community. It all comes down to money. I just want to say, as a parent, this sucks," (Hewitt, 2011). A displaced educator from [Oldham] who lived in Pineville shared, "As it has in the past, [Oldham] is coming out on the short end." Oldham's only school closed in 2011, three years before the mill closure. However, Pineville had matured and a

[3] School districts consisting of more than one community could form a regional district with each town having its own school board (union) or consolidating and having one school board (school administrative district or regional school unit)

[4] If a town does not have a public school, the town will pay to send its students to a school. Some communities allow families to choose the school – school choice.

plan was developed. They made an effort to be a better partner, despite still having the voting power on the school board, understanding that they needed to work with [Oldham]. “We don’t just turn it [[Oldham] School] over. That would be very poor stewardship and a very poor partnership,” stated one school board member. To make the process less impactful on [Oldham], the school board developed a plan – further evidence that Pineville’s school board and leadership were more willing to work with other towns than they previously had been. The Pineville School District helped the town of Oldham with closing costs and developed a plan to ease the transition. The school board chair outlined the plan,

> What the RSU did with the closure, we supported the school. I think the first year it was closed we paid half of its operating costs. Bare bones. How much is it going to cost to keep the heat on 50? And we will give you half the money. We are going to pay the light bill for the first six months. And the second year we are going to pay a third of the light bill. Then three or four months of the light bill. And then a third of the heat.

A bone of contention that did arise was [Oldham]’s insistence that high school choice remain. Oldham’s residents wanted school choice, while Pineville residents wanted a commitment to Pineville’s High School. As one school board member in the new district said, “You are either married or you aren’t.” Residents in Oldham saw the option differently, retaining memories r of a strained prior consolidation. Despite Pineville’s changed attitude, the memories of the past breakup remained and Oldham residents demanded school choice for their high school students.

Pineville’s Decision-Makers and Power Brokers and Their Paths to Authority

Rural life encourages people to interact on many different levels resulting in an interconnectedness that crosses both social and professional boundaries (McHenry-Sorber &

Schaff, 2015); and Pineville epitomized those complex relationships. The police chief was also a coach in the school, the town manager was a substitute teacher in the schools, the superintendent of schools served on the town's economic committee, and many other business owners and educators also held seats in government or coached local sports. Memories were also long. One mill worker and school board member verbalized, "Our communities don't forget very easily. There's a reputation that is there – we're still trying to break down those perceptions." Explained more fully, an educator asserted, "If you understand history, you can start to project the future."

Strong leadership rose up in Pineville in many areas. Two key players in making the decisions were the town manager and the school superintendent, who developed a long term plan for Pineville's future and sustainability and attained their authority through traditional means – their hiring by town representatives. Their ability to keep that authority and guide the community to their way of thinking was carefully crafted and presented. They worked closely together and were both active with economic development groups. The superintendent also informed, educated, and supported school board members to spread the vision throughout the community, resulting in a community that supported its schools. A community member shared "[The town manager] was crucial in sustaining the prosperity of the Pineville community." His longevity made him a part of the Pineville fabric and always being a fiscal conservative provided a past practice that people generally accepted.

Prior to 2009, the school lacked a common vision and was not deeply connected to the community outside of sports. The new superintendent in 2009 brought in a visionary. This person saw that the mill would not be able to fund the schools at the levels they previously had and recognized change was eminent. He immediately set up work to communicate with the community and, for the first time in the school's recent history, developed a strong vision for the

school. The superintendent provided the vision, hired people who were supportive of the vision, and guided the school board in becoming ambassadors within the community to promote the vision. This superintendent was politically astute and tireless in getting his message out. He visited town nursing homes and senior centers, attended civic meetings, held open meetings where people could ask questions, and spoke of how a strong school department would help the whole community at every opportunity. He developed a committee to better determine how the school could meet the needs of the community and its children, which segued seamlessly to the new school vision. He orchestrated school and business collaborations, visited a host of groups both civic and private, and educated his school board in the necessity of a strong vision and mission. Said one Pineville educator,

> [The superintendent] was like, "We're going to do this. It's going to be fine." I think just like any organization starting, taking on the personality of its leadership, we just believed it's going to be okay, and work our pants off behind the scenes to take care of all this other stuff.

He took hold of the town manager's message that the town needed to change from, "a mill town to a town with a mill" and applied that to the school, where the first choice of employment for high school graduates was no longer leading into the mill, but rather a host of options bolstered by strong academic opportunities.

Both men were able to gain the trust of the community – the town manager through years of consistent work and fiscal-mindedness, and the superintendent through hard work, planning, and political savvy. Both had their detractors but, overall, the general consensus indicates that they had the best interests of the community at heart. Said one community member, "We don't always agree with them, but they always truly believe in our town. I think they really do fight for

our town." The communication of the vision was ongoing and constant. Both brought a consistency in their vision and strategies due, in part, to long-term tenures in their positions.

> The town manager and the superintendent worked together. The superintendent shared, I sit in on the town's economic development council. I oversee one of their ad hoc committees, standing committees, and we work, we have so many collaborations with the town. Everything we do we take a look at what's the highest best use, the most efficient delivery process. How can we do it? And it's all about collaboration. Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate.

They surveyed groups (paper, digital, and verbal) and provided multiple ways for community members to communicate. Regular newsletters were sent to community members, messages were repeated at a wide array of organizations, and meetings were open to the public. This practice proved to be valuable. Across all groups, the message was the same. The people of Pineville joined together and determined that they would stand by one another and ensure that the town was not another endnote in the pulp and paper industry. Ultimately then, although the town technically made the decisions through the typical use of committees and boards, soliciting feedback from various groups of people, the real driving force behind many of Pineville's changes was the individual visions and perseverance of the town manager and school superintendent.

While some voices often risk going unheard during challenging times, Pineville's dissenting voices appeared to be minimal. The leadership worked to gather voices from a myriad of groups, recognizing that despite their work, not everyone would be heard. As one community member explained,

> Nobody ever has full opportunity for voice. There are people who are more vocal and there are people that are pushier. So, I think people like that know that their thoughts were not necessarily heard, unless they were able to share with somebody who was able to step up and say, "Well, you might not like what I have to say, but this is how I feel."

Others who disagreed share there were opportunities to express opposing opinions, but they did not feel strongly enough to speak up. No one shared a fear of speaking or a worry of retaliation if they did share opposing views. It appeared that many people did feel heard. A former educator and community member described the community,

> They always thought about what if the mill closes. But, how do you remain positive [attitude] when you are losing your job? But Pineville managed to rally and do that. It just. Pineville is just a different community. I mean everybody. There is an outpouring of, 'What do you need? What can I do for you?"

Very few people spoke against the vision set by the superintendent and town manager, and those that did, did not stand out. An educator and community member articulated,

> There were no advocacy groups. I think all that is really attributed to the mindset of we knew that it was going to come to an end. We saw Poplar go down. We heard about some of the struggles Madison and other communities are having. We are preparing…but I think the fact that we communicated very well across the board really made it as smooth a process as it can. And, I mean it's not smooth, but it wasn't a shocker.

By recognizing the inevitable closure of the mill, and by effectively communicating, those who were in opposition were quite small in number.

Groups with specific agendas appeared to be a small minority. They were concerned about their taxes increasing or had specific and individual personal agendas. They spoke out at public meetings, but never gained traction. In the interviews multiple educators and community members described the few instances of disagreement. Some people needed to feel heard. One person shared, "They just like to vent. They just like to grumble. I hear it because I know so many people in town. But, then, they never do anything about it." And, some people disagreed. Another person commented,

> We always have groups that rise up at budget time. "Oh, you're spending too much. We have to cut back." But it's not based on fact. Let's sit down and how what we're doing and what's going on. It's a transparent process. There's always going to be somebody for it and somebody who'll go, "I don't think so."

Finally, some people just wanted a public forum to complain. One participant said, "I call them the Muppet guys." Their personal agendas (teachers should not get raises because they already make too much or graduation requirements should be lowered) never rose to a level of support among community members. Regardless of reason, all voices and opinions willing to participate in the process were given an opportunity to be heard.

When questioned during the interviews if some voices had more credibility than others, one community member who had not grown up in Pineville responded, "I think if I was a lone voice, I wouldn't be taken seriously, even if I had all the facts, and if I had a really well thought out argument. I don't think I would be listened to unless there was a critical mass of people who thought the same thing." To gain that critical mass, it was easier if a person had deep roots in the community, as community members with long family histories had more credibility. However, to

survive and be healthy, new voices were being granted increased status in this changing environment.

People who were negative or who believed that Pineville should just give up and let things run its course, were encouraged to go elsewhere. "We had some very talented people that just didn't fit the direction we were going," said a former mill worker and school board member. Change was now seen as a positive. When dissenting ideas were proposed, the unity of a wider group would address it while promoting its common message.

> The biggest thing Pineville has going for it, as it moves into the future are its momentum and community spirit. The positive energy of its residents and businesses and their willingness to work together for the future of the community is the foundation on which all of the community success is based.

Hope became contagious, as shared by a community member,

> They [people of Pineville] were just not willing to give up on the community. People were out there. They were vocal. But people listened to everybody. Everybody. I feel like all of our thoughts were taken into account when they were looking at things. Did we always agree with everything that ended up happening? No. But, again they didn't want to lose their community. And I think that helps us.

"Communication is the end all, be all," said an educator and community leader. The town manager and the superintendent had the vision, and they were able to build the critical mass that supported the work they were doing by communicating. This shared information allowed the community to band together with a common vision, message, and outlook. "When the mill closed, the community seemed to band together. And we just kind of held steady and really

rallied for everybody," stated one community member. In agreement another community member and educator said, "There is a general sense of optimism here, and people feel good about that." The town's people took on the challenge to save their community. A community member and educator articulated the community view,

> We don't know what to do — I have never seen that attitude. [What] we talk about here are our next plans. What economic opportunities are we going to have? Who are we going to partner with? Who can we learn from? Maybe it's just the make-up of the community.

The town manager and the superintendent rose up and gave the community of Pineville confidence that they had much to work with, and as a collective whole they would only be stronger. This leadership and hope for a better future allowed the community to work on their vision for a stronger Pineville.

Where the Decisions Are Made

Pineville held many formal meetings where decisions were supposed to take place. The town held town meetings and had open town council meetings. The school held their twice-monthly school board meetings, yearly budget meetings, and special committee meetings, in addition to a future search committee[5] for the school that spanned multiple years and included almost 100 people in the process. Economic development groups sprang up and welcomed a diversity of people within their ranks. Surveys, mailed to every home in Pineville, were provided to bring in voices that might be missed in public forums.

Believing that some groups felt marginalized and with limited voice, the superintendent set out to restore communication with a wide range of people and implement a variety of ways to

[5] A group formed to develop a plan for the school's future

be heard. “We did a mailing to everybody explaining where we are, and inviting them to fill out surveys. We had a link to our website, we had paper copies in different businesses and all the town offices. We held forums.” In addition to the commonly held meetings – school board meetings and town council meetings – the superintendent also branched out more dramatically than had been done in the past. He visited the senior homes and nursing homes to court the more elderly population. He attended civic groups addressing the business side of the community and he worked with the town betterment organizations. He reached out to the various town governments and welcomed interaction with local businesses. He was regularly seen in the schools, often interacting with the youth, and he trained his school board to be positive voices promoting the schools. Although he did not live in the town, his children attended the Pineville schools, a silent signal of his belief in their strength.

Venues such as the local Dunkin’ Donuts, local gym, athletic events, area diners and coffee shops, the library, grocery store, and gas station were the informal locations where opinions were emotionally shared and where those with the common message could also be heard. The school board members proved to be valuable resources in these informal arenas. Business, albeit very informally, was constantly conducted in these places, but the message of hope was continuously hammered. Additionally, the families of board members contributed to the growing message of hope and action. One spouse, who eventually was elected to the board, spread the message through her local business. “There’s no gossip in there. It’s about education. It’s all positive town-related type stuff. And people come to her because they like the depth of conversation. She’s in a position where she can say, ‘No that’s not right.’” Coaches on the local sports teams added to the message during sideline conversations. “Almost everybody knows how

to get ahold of me. And they can ask me," shared one coach and community member. It was a well-orchestrated message, but also one that many could feel positive about and get behind.

What did not appear to be a factor was social media. When asked about social media participants shared neither positive nor negative views, nor was it a major component of community communication before or after the mill closure. People instead relied upon in-person and newsletter messages from their leadership and trusted groups.

Reacting To the Mill Closure: Pineville's Decisions

> A funny thing happened as a result of this disaster…not a funny ha ha thing – but a strange and wonderful funny thing. Out of the shadow of the mill, the light began to shine on other aspects of the community. When change hits, a common response is caution. Faced with the unfamiliar, surrounded by the uncertain – the Town could have put the brakes on everything. Instead, the community picked itself up, dusted itself off – and is headed for the future,

wrote a town manager in a town report.

Economic Plan. There was much that went into the transformation of Pineville — much of what occurred before the mill ever closed. Apart from the savings fund, the town council embarked on a series of projects that were implemented to help the town prepare for a possible closure. The waterfront was cleaned up, and walking trails and parking were added. Some downtown buildings were purchased as enticement for future businesses or to demolish for beautification. Hiking trails were blazed and access to area lakes was improved. A new performing arts center was built and a concerted effort to entice people to stop in town on the way to other sights was instituted. The town bought the local marina and brought in fiber optic high speed Internet. A former mill worker saw the future, too:

> I knew something was going to happen, but I didn't know when. So, as far as my personal decisions, we were making plans to – like to not have two car payments. To not do this and not do that. We needed to live on less money than we have now, as were a lot of people that I worked with.

The town built senior housing and promoted high-quality and affordable housing for all ages. Roads were repaired and highly traveled routes were upgraded. The local movie theater was touted by a community member and town government official, as "an asset to a community, with its marque bringing character to the downtown, not to mention a bump in the quality of life and place." So much work was being done that in 2012, two years before the mill closed, Governor Paul LePage named it a "Business Friendly" community.

After the mill closed the work continued. The natural beauty of the area, tourism, affordable real estate, a growing arts community, and an age-friendly community with sidewalks, ample parking, and handicap accessibility were all potential selling points and things to capitalize on. A push to improve the downtown was addressed with façade programs and economic stimulus grants. Small businesses were courted. "They actively recruited families. The affordable housing, a safe place to raise a family, and being within the Golden Triangle where you can travel 18 miles in three directions and have tremendous shopping and employment opportunities" were the selling points reported by an educator and community leader.

When the mill closed a number of economic stimulus groups arose that did not appear to be in competition with each other. The Heart and Soul Foundation was organized as a short-term program to examine community values and help Pineville understand where they should put their priorities. This group included students at the High School, elderly in their own homes and care facilities, and every group in between. According to one community member,

> They are really trying to get the voice of everyone. They used this place [vacated downtown store] to collect stories. They filmed people, took pictures, they just got out, they did a fence – block party. They tried multiple things to say we're going to open this up and get your voice.

They posted stories of hope in downtown windows for people to read, generating a pride in the seemingly unknown diversity of what made Pineville so great. The slogan, "Pineville Strong" was seen posted about town and on messages.

The town also hired an economic developer, a decision that drew mixed feelings caused by not knowing if this position would work in conflict with the community based groups. An educator and community member shared,

> There were people who said…were a little bit hurt by that [hiring the economic developer], but at the same time, they said I think we need to jump on board and do it the right way. But, you see Pineville Strong, and everyone sorts of uses that slogan to really push what we are doing.

The community rallied behind all the groups and the economic director, striving to make the negative of the mill closure into a positive. "The community members. They just get it," reported one community member. The community knew it had to work together, which might mean stretching their thinking, and understanding that some changes would be realized years out rather than immediately.

An area of focus was trying to determine what the main draw of Pineville would be without the mill. An educational leader verbalized this when he said,

> What is our main draw? It's the education. So…and they believed fully in it. Our board is supportive. Our town is supportive. And we continue to be part of our

strategic plan that we wrote up in 2016. Part of our strategic plan was a huge part of the community partnership.

Thus, a primary selling point for the community became the school.

Before the school could be promoted, some financial and some historical issues had to be addressed. The first hurdle to overcome was funding. Pineville had long been able to afford most of its education through local funding. But with the mill closure, funding looked vastly different. The way Maine school funding worked, was that changes in a town's economic status were not realized for three years because funding was based on a three-year average. The Maine legislature had tried to address the time lag with the Sudden and Severe funding law (Maine State Statute § 36 (2), 2018). However, the law required an extensive amount of documentation with an outside appraisal of a property that saw a sudden and severe drop in valuation. Pineville found itself without an operating mill, but the mill was still on the tax rolls, just at a reduced rate. The superintendent during this time saw that the legislation would take up to five years to "fill in the hole that was created in one year." He worked tirelessly, testifying often to the Maine legislature, showing how the law did not help towns like Pineville who were in financial crisis. In circles where Sudden and Severe is common knowledge, this superintendent's name often rises to the top as one who made a difference in changing the law. For the town of Pineville, his work yielded millions of dollars in savings, which allowed the town to further prepare for the losses associated with the mill closing. This work further enhanced his status to one of respect among many community members.

The School as an Anchor to Revitalization

Before the mill closure, leadership saw the need to diversify academic programming within the school. The town determined that education needed to be a draw to entice families to

move to Pineville. When the superintendent was hired in 2009 the town council and hiring committee told him that his charge was to make the school system into " a nationally recognized school system." He agreed, but also pushed them to understand what that meant – changing long held cultures and views. They agreed. "And so we just started going to work," stated an educational leader. A relationship between the school and the town government really began in earnest with that hiring, and the superintendent was given opportunities to make changes in order to push towards their common vision.

That vision had, and continues to have, the schools as an integral part of Pineville's future successes. The Pineville School system touted itself as preparing all children to be successful adults in many vocations, rather than just a path to the mill. This educational diversity, in turn, would aid the town in becoming stronger. "I think the community used the school to come together. The functions and the activities are the sporting events and the plays. All that stuff. But they use it as a way to come together," said one community member. The school was seen as the anchor for the community – a way to aid or collaborate with local businesses, draw families to the community, and provide opportunities for its students. Job preparation to the mill was not eliminated, with partnerships still strong with a nearby community college, but a wider range of options were offered. As one educator and community member shared,

> We had a community here that for 50 plus years that a line of citizens could walk into a well-paying job. So, I think that developed generations of people who did not particularly value education. Or that lack of appreciation of education. Or the value of an education necessarily. So, that [perception of education] changed, slowly, over time, because when the mill was no longer a viable option, all of a

> sudden you had to improve your skill set. And kids began to think, now I need to go to college. Now I need to take my education a little more seriously.

The people began to see the value of an education that would be more adaptable to individual skills and interests, and a pathway to opportunities not previously promoted. The town also saw the long-term value in an educated community, which typically has higher earning levels. (David, 2014)

To make this educational switch a reality in uncertain economic times, more change had to occur. While the school was over budget and fighting for changes in the funding formula to better reflect their lost revenues similar to most school districts, Pineville's expenditures were primarily tied up in salaries and benefits. Cuts needed to be made to balance the budget. It also became a time for school officials to deeply think about the people who would move their vision of what school should represent forward. "After the mill closed there was some lay-offs at school," shared an educator. Stated differently by an educator leader,

> I really believe in relationships, and I believe with starting with a positive, and I always assume greatness, and create opportunities for you to achieve greatness. But if you fail to recognize those opportunities, then I will create other opportunities for you.

Those "opportunities" manifested themselves in changes in staff and leadership. Using the resources they had, the school broadened its scope of offerings, eliminated programming what they determined non-essential (like a cooking class) and became more welcoming to others outside their tightly knit core. A long time community member and educator shared, "A lot of things in the school have changed. There was a time when if a kid was gay, it was hidden, and

now no one cares. You know, it's not a deal now, anymore. It's become a lot more tolerant. A lot more accepting, kind of school." The town of Pineville and its schools were changing.

Communities felt they were now a part of a district, rather than just additional revenue. When addressing these towns, Pineville marketed the school as one with a broad scope of programs while remaining small and personable. They built programs based on need. A specific program was instituted to address the growing levels of poverty. The arts and advanced placement programs were promoted, as were an apprenticeship program and a more historical offering of a trade that would usually be offered off campus at a technical center.

The school board became a unified voice in support of the changes that were occurring. "We talked about how going through this together as a board, made us a better team because we've been through a battle. We've gone through adversity. And when you do that I think your people's values pick up," verbalized one school board member and former mill worker. Those values were translated into plans. They determined that cutting programs was not going to achieve their goals. "If you cut everything, you have just now made it worse. If we had cut out our school and cut out programs, would people have wanted to come to Pineville?" opined school board member and lifetime community member. Additionally, the school board and superintendent encouraged and supported the outreach and collaboration with outside agencies. The superintendent built a culture where the community would look to the school to be a partner. He shared, "I've done everything I can to intertwine the school system into the fabric of the communities. It would be very difficult to extricate." The food service program that provided meals to the students also cooked fresh meals three days a week for seniors, replacing a satellite program where meals were produced miles away and delivered frozen.

> And the seniors very much know what they want. They want the comfort food. They want the pot roast. They want the meatloaf. They want the roast turkey. A lot of them will come in and have their lunch and they will buy another one to take home for the next day,

reported educator and community leader. This was an astute political move, because elderly people on a fixed income, often groups that votes against school budgets, saw the benefit the school provided them.

The school also worked with local businesses to purchase materials. For example, books were purchased through an independent local bookseller.

> The week before vacation, we bused all the middle school students down to our local bookstore to select their second books and back, and we had the press release out, we had the news that was there. All the local people were stopping, 'Why are there school buses stopped on Main Street? Why are kids getting off? Why is the book store flooded with students?' It was a great PR piece, but yet it was intentionally designed to have a community aspect on it, not just from me to sit here and fill out orders on Amazon to save a few bucks. It's all those little things that you can do that ... there was so much excitement that week,

shared an educator. The additional cost of buying locally was seen as a savings in what it banked in community good will and keeping funds right within the community. This message was further articulated by another educator,

> Everybody knows that our school money that we support our schools, is coming back to the community. It may seem like a little thing, but it's a

> big thing because you're saying, 'We support the community.' It's kind of a symbiotic relationship.

The school recognized that spending locally enhanced the vibrancy of the town, while it ensured that local businesses also bought into the school and community vision.

Influential Factors That Determined Pineville's Decisions

One difference Pineville had when facing the mill closure, that other mill towns did not possess, was a geographic location that offered possible options for development and/or expansion. It also recognized that the school could be one of the biggest draws to attracting families; and families were what the town most wanted. Families represented increased student enrollment at schools, taxpayers to the community, support of local small businesses, and inhabited housing. A former mill worker spoke to a new community member, sharing,

> They bought a house in Pineville. And I said, "Why are you looking at Pineville?" He says, "I figure if I get laid off here, I am going to be able to drive to [Derry], or drive to [Windsor], or drive to [Granada]. It's 30 minutes any way I want to go." He said, "I am right of the middle of it all and I can find a house that I can afford." And he asked me, "How are the schools?"

The community rallied around building a new Pineville, while also maintaining that community closeness. One long-time community member stated it, "Did not want to become the town people drove through to somewhere else." The town and school reinvented themselves to adapt to the changing times.

Community Perceptions of the Decisions Made

Over and over community pride was referenced and it appeared that a sense of community permeated the town culture. The arts, once seen as weak or unimportant, were now a

vibrant part of the community. People of a different race or sexual identity were treated with increasing respect, where they once were "encouraged" to reside elsewhere. Where affluence and financial stability were the norm, people were seeing that happiness could be obtained with smaller paychecks. A long time community member said,

> Pineville is a 'what if' town. Because there was this initial concern about losing everybody out of the community, like some of the other mills towns have had happened. And losing businesses out of the community, like what has happened to other communities. But again, I think I come back again to, the community and the ties in the community, people did not want to give up on their town. And so there were people working to pull stuff in and encourage people to come to the town for business. They were just not willing to give up on the community.

The community was willing to make sacrifices, both financially and culturally. A healthy, but changed community was better than a dying community.

Analysis

Almost thirty years after finding a large amount of oil, the country of Norway established a fund to safeguard and manage financial wealth for future generations and plan for a future when the oil would no longer be flowing (Norges Bank, 2018). On a much, much smaller scale, Pineville did something similar by establishing an Undesignated Fund Balance. Pineville had seen the devastation experienced by many mill towns across Maine who had not planned for their futures without the mill, this future planning allowed Pineville a bit of time to develop and implement plans to offset the loss of the mill.

In planning, Pineville's decision makers determined that its schools would play a major role in ensuring the health of Pineville. The school and community worked together toward a

common vision, with each providing components of a whole in order to bring success back to Pineville. Extensive communication and a level of transparency between the community, the school, and leaders inspired confidence and hope. Having a strong common vision, with many working towards the same goals, was important. Regardless of station – educator, mill worker, small business owner, town government, school board, young, old – the same message was shared over and over. The interconnectedness and cross over of one person holding many positions may have aided Pineville. The town manager that also coached had both the perspective of the town and the school, as did the superintendent that served on the economic development committee. Both of these leaders emphasized the positive and promoted the agreed upon communication. Their intuitive knowledge allowed them to capitalize upon assets beyond the mill. In many small towns, the interconnectedness and long memories of its people can stultify progress. Both town and school leaders were respected by the community residents and enjoyed long tenures in their positions. Through exceptionally strong leadership, Pineville was able to see beyond their identity as a mill town, convince a critical mass of people to join in that vision, and reinvent and diversify who they would be as a community and school.

On a smaller scale, the school department reflected what was occurring in the community. It was no longer going to be a pathway to the mill, but rather would be an asset to help attract people to the area. Students would be prepared for a multitude of opportunities with the diversification of offerings and sound fiscal management. Although the leaders and community hoped that many of its students would return to Pineville, they also realized that they would be preparing many to leave its borders. It was an investment they were willing to take in hopes that the pull to return home where opportunities existed would be strong. A quality of life was being rebuilt that did not depend on a singular business.

Pineville is also located in an area that allowed for easier diversification. Their natural placement near to many tourist draws was fortuitous for possible growth. For businesses, it offered amenities that other communities could not (deep water port, high speed internet, close to three larger communities). Towns that offered school choice, which could help with the declining student enrollment, surrounded the school district. The community and its schools had capital to build upon. It was not, as one mill worker described another shuttered mill town, "at the end of the line to nothing." It was, instead, as another community resident described it, "a what if town," not willing to give up – a town willing to rewrite its path to ensure its success.

CHAPTER FIVE

OAKVIEW

The town of Oakview was probably the community hardest hit in this study. Not only did they lose their paper mill, but their loss occurred a year after the national recession of 2008, while they were also embroiled in a series of financial missteps committed by their school's leader. Additionally, they had been in a downward spiral through the loss of businesses, declining student enrollment, and increasing levels of poverty among its residents. The figurative phrase, "could not catch a break" epitomized the trajectory of Oakview's financial pathway.

Town Background

Oakview is a community that has seen many changes and which was hit hard by the changing economies of the state, nation, and world. A population high occurred decades before the mill closure. There had been a slow decline each year with the 2015 US Census listing the population having approximately 500 fewer people – 96% who were Caucasian – shortly after the mill closure. The population was aging with slightly less than 50% listed as over 65 years of age (US Census American Community Survey data, 2015). The median income had remained relatively stable in number, but stability over fifteen years meant that there had been no income growth and that people were less well off financially. Reflective of people's declining resources was the median home price, which experienced a drop of 23% in five years.

Geographic Location and Businesses

Historically, Oakview was primarily farmland, with apple orchards and dairy farms and cattle. A steep vertical drop in the river generated power, which prompted mills to be built. With ready energy and the introduction of the railroad, gristmills, sawmills, logging and lumber, shoe factories, and paper mills became industries that built Oakview into a bustling mill town.

Oakview is located approximately 45 minutes from one of Maine's largest cities. There are a few small lakes located within its boundaries and a river that runs the length of the town, but neither water option was well developed for recreational use beyond a public boat ramp and some walking and biking trails reclaimed from the railroad beds. Lake and river frontage was primarily used for camps or homes, which were situated along the shore, and a dam, which still generated electricity. There was a small, but well-known historical site as well as a museum that was working to build up its presence. Oakview had been labeled a minor service center, as there were health care operations in town. A bit unique to Oakview was its part ownership of a recreational area located in a neighboring town. There were small businesses of varying success and size, but there was no large business infrastructure upon which to fall back upon. Oakview promoted itself as a place of quiet country living, while working to determine what its assets were and how to best move forward.

The town of Oakview is a community where family roots run deep and having four or more generations of family who live in the community is not uncommon. It is also a community that had seen much in the way of change with affects that left Oakview residents with unanticipated scars. A neighboring town's mill going on a long strike, a paper mill closure, school consolidation, the closure of all its schools, and financial mismanagement are a few events this community has had to overcome in recent history.

Figure 4.2 Oakview Timeline

All events are listed in the order they occurred. However, to maintain confidentiality, actual dates were removed.

1980-1989

Associate degree or higher required for most jobs in the mill
Reed paper mill workers went on strike

1990-1999

TIF granted to Oakview mill

2000-2009

New town manager hired
New superintendent hired
Grassroots economic development group formed
Paperwork submitted to state of Maine to consolidate schools
Oakview school district started behavior program for special needs students with [Reed] ([Reed] sent students to [Oakview])
New town manager hired
Voters reject school consolidation
Superintendent resigned
Interim superintendent
New superintendent
Mill closed
Sudden and Severe funding granted

2010-2019

New superintendent hired
Voters approved school consolidation with [Reed]
Oakview Middle School closed
Middle school students start attending [Reed] schools
New superintendent hired
New town manager hired
Oakview's grade 9 students start attending [Reed] schools; Grades 10-12 chose to attend North Campus [Reed] or South Campus (Oakview)
Oakview High School (South Campus) closed
New superintendent hired
New town manager hired
New superintendent hired
Interim superintendent

Leadership Landscape – the Town and School

Oakview was governed by selectpersons (also referred to as selectmen) who were elected by the town's residents in general elections. In turn, the selectpersons hired a town manager and other supporting positions such as a tax assessor and town clerk. The selectpersons, town

manager, and assessors met twice a month throughout the year. The town manager was a full time position, but people who had other full time work or who were retired filled the selectperson positions.

The school district's leadership followed a model found in most Maine towns, where the community's residents elected the school board members. The board selected a school chair among its elected group to lead the board, but who still had only one vote like any school board member. The school board then hired a school superintendent. The school superintendent was responsible for the day-to-day running of the school district, while the school board was responsible for the broad overarching responsibilities like policy, property management, and as guided by the superintendent regarding the school budget, hiring of staff, and school programming. It was expected that the school board and the school superintendent work closely together, although Maine law allowed the board delegate duties and responsibilities necessary for efficient operation (M.R.S. 7407, chapter 304, Title 20-A, Part 4, Subpart 1, number 13).

History of the Schools and the Closure of All Schools. Oakview residents expressed much pride in their schools through community support and involvement. Until 2011, the towns of Oakview and neighboring Hawthorn were a single school district. At one point in time, there were four schools in Oakview, representing the education of children in grades K-12. Oakview had a primary, elementary, middle school, and high school. Said one former resident, "We used to have K to 12 in Oakview, and now they don't have any grade levels in Oakview." Well before the mill closed, Oakview closed the primary and elementary schools to build a consolidated elementary school in Hawthorn. The two communities paid for this new elementary school construction with entirely local funding because they could not get state funds — an indicator of the support the schools in Oakview had within the community. Shared one educator, "They

[Oakview and Hawthorn] were kind of an independent spirited group, and they said, "You know, let's just do this" [locally fund the school]. It was funded by the local[s]." Paying out of pocket for a local school would be an unheard of practice in most Maine towns now, but indicated the importance the school had on the two towns and their communities.

By the time the Oakview paper mill closed in 2009 there remained only two functioning schools in town — the middle school and high school, both showing signs of age and both the victims of neglect. A former superintendent of schools described the buildings saying, "The schools were in pretty disrepair, but they had local control and were very proud of that local control." Throughout the interviews multiple interviewees shared regarding the disrepair of the buildings. Even a former town manager chimed in, saying, "The buildings had not been maintained well," and a former superintendent sharing, "The middle school at Oakview was in extreme disrepair. And had a lot of life safety issues, air and mold issues." These issues grew exponentially each year, with some opinions shared that the neglect was purposeful in an attempt to either get a new school or force consolidation. The residents of Oakview were directed in a course of action by their leaders that would eventually get them funding for a new high school, but that funding was forfeited when Oakview consolidated with Reed. Consolidation would change the course of how education looked in Oakview. However, what first needs to be explored is school enrollment, as student enrollment and reduced funding are the two elements that started the process to move towards school consolidation.

School Enrollment. School enrollment had been on the decline in Oakview schools and neighboring Reed (the town Oakview eventually consolidated with) far before the paper mill closed. In addition to the declining school enrollments, both school districts were struggling with increasing costs. A former superintendent said, "The population at that time [when the mill

closed] was half of what it was at its maximum at Oakview High School." Oakview schools had already experienced a drop in student enrollment during the mill strike in neighboring Reed and had continued to see student enrollment remain stagnant or drop. Long time resident and former town manager said,

> [Lack of employment] had the effect of lowering the student population in both the Oakview and Reed school systems. The [Reed] strike accelerated the student decline, which had been happening at a slow pace for many years. The permanent replacement of over a thousand hourly workers by folks who were not welcome in the community, meant that there were very few replacements for the students who graduated.

Families did not want to settle in a town where emotions ran high and where your position regarding the strike would determine who your friends would be. Safety also became a factor, as the strike brought a violence that was uncharacteristic of the Oakview community. One interviewee shared that during her son's wedding, she had to physically remain between her ex-husband who went on strike and her current husband who worked in the mill. Strikebreakers' homes and vehicles were defaced with ugly words, windows were broken, and car tires slashed. One mill worker who crossed the picket lines said, "They threw a two by four through my windshield the first day I drove my truck to the mill." But those who fared worse were the super scabs – those who went on strike and then returned to work in the mill. One worker reported that a relative "threatened to blow his head off" and had shots fired into his home. The strike was so divisive that divisions and emotions still remain decades later.

Thus, the town was aging, families weren't moving to Oakview, and the children, once they graduated, were not staying. Shared one resident and former school committee member,

"Most of them [community members] were retirees and their kids had grown up. A lot of the times you see our kids graduate and go on to other states." The former town manager supported this observation saying, "Some of our best and brightest left the state. They're not coming back." Outmigration of its young people was especially hard on the community for social and financial reasons. The community and school district in Oakview were experiencing a perfect storm of events – business closures, declining student enrollment, increasing school costs, and a dwindling tax base – and were forced to make decisions that would address their increasing needs.

Background on Oakview's Mill

The mill in Oakview was unusual because it actually was located in both Oakview and Reed. A former town manager explained, "The oldest paper mill sat right on the town line, so half of it was in Reed and half of it was in Oakview." Where certain operations took place depended on where taxes were paid. A larger percentage of the mill was in Reed, and thus the mill paid more in taxes to Reed than it did to Oakview. Reed was also in the lucky position of having a second, larger paper mill within its town borders, which made it the more affluent community. An Oakview resident shared that Oakview appreciated what the mill provided to the town to a greater degree than Reed appreciated what the mills provided, saying, "Oakview never rode the mill the way Reed rode their mill. We were the poor town. They were the rich town." Thus, because Oakview did not have the huge mill revenues that its neighboring town of Reed did, residents often felt like second-class citizens. As the decline of the town continued, that negative perception was reinforced. A long time resident said, "Oakview really has this connotation of being the townies. There was this old culture." A resident newcomer expressed reservation, saying, "And so, right off the bat I get the impression, gee, did I buy a house in the

wrong town? Well, this was snobbery." The cultural division permeated every aspect of the community. A former superintendent shared,

> And that [cultural division] gets perpetrated by those that – on either end. And neither one is right or wrong – it's just – there is quite a diverse divide between – all you do is just drive through the town and it tells it all. It tells it all. There are some beautiful homes in Oakview. Don't get me wrong. But when you look at the majority of the housing, even, it definitely looks different. And I think that there has always been that perception – the haves and the have nots.

The two towns, sharing one mill, were a contrast in their interactions with the mill. This dynamic, where one town had so much more, prompted the identification of Oakview being the poorer community. The identification was correct – Oakview had high poverty levels, especially among its children. This relationship was clearly defined on socioeconomic lines, and continued to define, how and why many decisions were made in Oakview.

Like many Maine mill towns, during more flush times, good paying jobs at the Oakview paper mill were available right out of high school. Shared an educator, "There was kind of a tradition of these families, just generation after generation in the mill." A former mill worker said, "When the [Oakview Paper Mill] was operating, it employed a tight-knit mill family, offered good wages and better-than-average benefits." Like many mill towns, if you knew someone in the mill, employment opportunities increased. Also, mill jobs were coveted by many and seen as jobs for which to aspire. A resident who had multiple family members work in the mill said,

> And the feeling always was in [the town] that you get out of high school, you've got a job for life at the mill and real good employment. There were actually two

> groups of people within the town – those that worked at the mill and those that basically envy those people who worked there and have good jobs.

In the mid 1900s, a second mill was opened in the adjoining town of Reed and workers were given the option to move from the "old mill" or "the lower mill" to the "new mill." This process was described by a lifetime resident and former town manager,

> When the new mill came, which was [name of mill] Paper Company, a lot of the older people that had been at the mill, liked the lower mill, old mill. The lower mill, I know that's what my dad always called it, the lower mill and the upper mill. They could go to the new mill, they could go apply, and if they wanted to, they could go to the new mill, but a lot of people stayed at the old mill. Either they were used to that, *or* they liked it. And the new mill made more money. I think they had maybe a little more benefits. They [the new mill] were a little more appealing I think, attractive to the younger generation. So, the younger ones seemed to go more.

Additionally, many people were able to walk to work at the lower mill, a convenience not able to be continued if one moved to the new mill. For many of the workers, it was a comfort to remain in the old mill while still enjoying better than average pay and good benefits. A former mill worker shared, "[The] facility was a good place to work. Flextime was available. Paid time off and holidays were available." These were benefits many jobs in the area did not offer. Finally, for many years the mill did not require advanced education for its well-paying jobs. A lifetime resident who was both a child and grandchild of mill workers shared,

> You didn't need a college education to get a great job. Most, back in the 70s, when you graduated from school, if you didn't plan to go in the military or college, you went right to the mill. That was if you planned on staying in the area.

The good paying jobs and benefits were still a strong draw for people, but were not enough to keep people in the area when the mill instituted changes. Shared one former mill worker, "I think in the 80s it started to change. You needed some type of education. And, actually, none of my children worked in the mill. That's probably the first generation that stopped working in the paper mill." Those changes evolved over time – changes which also changed the face of the town with fewer people actually being employed by the mill and those who were employed by the mill, often not living in the community.

Costs Associated with the Mill. Not to be overlooked is the damage the mill placed upon the environment in the town. As described in a report conducted by the State of Maine, the pollution that was caused by the discharge of untreated paper mill effluent produced "fumes rumored to peel the paint off houses." The river did not support most aquatic life and was described by a long time resident as having "scum so thick, the fish were killed. Was full of foam and dark liquid, discolored exposed metal and paint, and gave off hydrogen sulfide gases that clung to everything. This [the polluted river and air] was referred to as the smell of money." The Maine state report further explained, "The river was being treated as a sewer, and it all too often looked and smelled like one." Almost 80 years later, the river still bore the scars of that time. One lifetime resident said, "Many of us live on the river, which is considered waterfront. Not that I would go do anything in the river. It's water to look at." Federal and state requirements had greatly improved the quality of the river and air around the mill, with vast improvements. Oakview's mill lasted through these changes, adapting as needed, and continued to be successful

in a niche market producing specialty papers not found in many paper mills internationally. But national and international economies were changing, as were labor practices, and Oakview's paper mill, like many Maine paper mills could not keep up with the world's changing needs, economies, and policies.

Slow Motion Shocks. The loss of the Oakview paper mill had been a long time in coming. Although the mill had been relatively stable, its work force was aging. Jobs had not been available for younger people for many years. Said a lifetime resident and daughter and granddaughter of a former mill worker,

> They weren't hiring. There wasn't a big turnover. Some of the folks had started to get to the age of retirement. They didn't fill those shoes of the retirement. They might have moved people up, but then they didn't hire.

Although the 1970s and early 1980s saw a relatively affluent time, the following years saw that affluence decline, despite the mill being in operation, and especially after the strike at the Reed paper mill. A former mill worker and Oakview resident shared,

> We had been reducing head count since the mid 80s, which resulted in very low replacement level. That caused the mill population to be mostly folks who had seen their kids proceed past K-12 age. Their jobs disappearing had little impact beyond loss of capital circulating throughout the community. The lack of employment opportunities for younger workers had pushed them out of the community.

These job reductions and the strike in neighboring Reed were signals that would predict the eventual closing of the mill in 2009. It also signaled the decline of the community with the loss of many smaller businesses, the exodus of people, and housing that was turned into subsidized

housing and apartments for low-income people. Oakview, despite its mill functioning well was an economically poor town – a position uncommon in Maine towns with a fully operational pulp and paper mill. These slow motion shocks hit Oakview throughout the years, which made progress challenging.

Neighboring Mill's Strike and After Shocks Ripple through Oakview

The strike at the new mill in Reed tore Reed as well as surrounding communities apart, and pitted families against each other, and friends against friends. Shared a resident and town manager,

> When the strike hit, all of the people that took the jobs, they're from away, and they didn't move here [Oakview]. I can tell you that. Maybe they have now, but they sure as hell didn't in the beginning because it was dangerous. Oakview became part of a crap storm.

There was loss of jobs, evaporating businesses, declining student enrollment, and, through no fault of the town of Oakview, the town became part of a historical event that lasted almost two years – and decades in dealing with the fallout.

Mill Closure and Its Impact on the Town

By the time the mill closed, it was essentially a shadow of its former self on the tax roles. It had slowly decreased the number of employees, and had reduced the number of working machines, resulting in less production. The Oakview paper mill closure was a classic example of a slow motion shock where the closure was the last event in a series of events over a period of several years or decades.

For the town, this meant declining town revenues. However, during the mill closure, a large utility did some work in town that offset some of the lost revenues. A former town manager shared,

> They were putting in new transition lines, which was a huge project, millions of dollars. That's what saved us. Because when the mill closed, this whole thing took off, and we actually got money from [it.] Because all those poles and power are revenue for the town, and they're an increase and their substation, and their increase in their path of power lines that were going in there. All their upgrades were in Oakview. So, there was a lot of revenue that was generated from the utilities that offset, actually way, big league offset, gigantically offset our trauma from losing the mill.

A biomass plant, generating electricity, and a lumberyard, both provided steady revenues for the town, but not enough to cover what the mill had provided. Oakview had not been able to rebound and continued to struggle financially. Shared a former superintendent, "Folks are leaving town because they can't afford to live there and there's no work. All those kinds of things. So, really, they didn't have a lot of options." When a town loses population additional woes will follow. A former town manager and lifetime resident said,

> We'll have foreclosures. We'll put a house out for bid. And some of the houses that we get are not biddable. Like we're having to tear them down, and they're coming off the tax rolls. They're not paying for their sewer, which we have a sewer plant that needs so many customers.

Lack of taxpayers meant there was less revenue to support town expenses. Shared former school superintendent, "I remember driving into Oakview and thinking this is like a ghost town. You

know, there is no business – businesses are closing. Even the Mom and Pops are closing. Everything was closing. Communities die when nobody lives there." The former town manager saw the urgency to make changes and shared his musings, "We [Oakview] have to reinvent ourselves. What are we?" Decisions needed to be made — difficult decisions that were challenging for a town that was still feeling the hurt of an ugly strike almost twenty years prior.

Oakview's Decision-Makers and Their Paths to Authority

Leadership. Tradition and cultural norms established who would articulate what decisions needed to be made. Like many small towns in Maine, the selectmen and town government officers made decisions for the town and the superintendent and school board made decisions regarding the school. Oakview had its share of leadership turnover. For the three years before and after the mill shut down, the town had three board selectmen chairs, three town managers, and five school superintendents. This turnover brought new people with new ideas, but did not allow for any consistent vision to be followed. Additionally, some of the changes were due to unfortunate circumstances that included legal issues, mismanagement of funds, and decisions that were not transparent, which eroded the confidence of the town's people. Thus, Oakview was deeply divided regarding how the decisions were made. Opinions generally fell into three categories: those that believed the leaders were: working for the greater good of all people, working on personal agendas, or a combination of the two. Said one resident, "I guess, in my heart of hearts I believe people want to do the right thing by kids." A former town manager shared,

> They [the town officers] had a really good relationship with the management [of the mill], the local management of the Oakview mill. If they had a problem with

> their value [valuation], they felt comfortable coming down, sitting down in the chair and discussing it.

However, there were conflicting opinions, as evidenced by one resident and former government official and school chair that stated, “The community is so strong. And we try to stick together.” This comment was in contrast to what was shared by a resident and former school chair that claimed, “We had a dysfunctional school board. You don't do your school board any favors by walking around and making teachers promises and those sorts of things.” Some residents interviewed felt the leadership did not work for the greater good. A former town manager said of one the school superintendents, “ [He would say], the town can make all the cuts they want and I’m not cutting.” One resident summed up the leadership shortfalls by stating, “Every school board has some challenging people who got there because they had something that they wanted to change. The good ones learn that it doesn't work that way, some of them never will.” Regardless of intent, the residents of Oakview were still grappling with how to work with a divided community.

Personal and Professional Overlap of Groups

Indicative of many small Maine towns was the interconnectedness between groups. It was difficult to keep organized the myriad of positions one person held or had held. Marriages and births provided additional connections that were equally intertwined. Shared a lifetime resident, who held multiple positions in the town government and who had many direct relatives who worked in the mill,

> Family, small town, small community, so you pretty much knew a lot of people in there, and if you didn’t, then you knew their relatives or somebody, you were somehow all intertwined. We are such a close-knit community. You have families

> that work, and you know their mom, and you know their brother, or their children. And they somehow are all intertwined. So, you lay one off or get rid of that position that's full time, and that could be your boss's family. You know what I mean? So, it's just…it's a lot of hard feelings. People remember me as a little kid, growing up, and I'm dealing with my best friend's grandmother, the uncle, their brother, their sister, their mother. So, it's a different relationship.

Even those who were accepted in the community recognized the complexities of relationships in almost all of their dealings. Shared one resident who held positions in town government and on the school board, and whose spouse worked in the mill,

> When you get into negotiations, you are there to work and come to a happy medium. Okay? When you leave that room, you should be friends. If you went into that room as friends, you should leave that room as friends. You keep your friends close, but you keep your enemies closer.

Trust, or lack of, was an issue some of the people interviewed felt was a concern – and areas leaders need to reestablish to move forward. However, given the divisiveness from the strike that split the community, the lack of trust was not surprising.

Finally, some decisions came down to history and the divide between those that worked in the mill (and their position) and those that did not, and which side you supported during the strike [of 1987]. Shared a resident and town manager of an event that happened in school, but demonstrated the divides within the community, "I could play ball better than this one, but he had the right name. But now it was on a town level instead of a personal level." People in small towns have long memories and individuals were relegated to a group based on their lineage, income, race, or other factor, where they will often remain for their entire life.

Leadership. Leadership in the community came from a variety of places, but most of the positions of authority were elected or appointed by the elected officials. The town manager was hired by selectmen who were elected. An elected school board appointed the superintendent. Consistent and of note, was that town officials, the school board, and the superintendent's position saw a turnover of people—for example six superintendents in ten years. Due to continued declines in enrollment and revenues, talks of consolidation began in the early 2000s. Talks of consolidation were highly charged and emotional. Shared a long time resident and former local government and school official, "Because when things got really nasty, town's people wanted a change. So, they put up pink signs. Nice blue and pink signs to get me out. To get new blood." He was supported in opinion by a former town manager that said, "All of a sudden there were new people running for selectmen that had never run before because they could make a difference and they came on with an agenda." However, with change, also came the recycling of former elected people. "[Person 1] was front of chair [chairman of the school board] for a number of years. [Person 2] was elected [chair] and that did not go over well with [Person 1] and his people. After [Person 2] left [Person1] was re-elected chair." An educator supported this opinion, saying, "We have kind of a rotating door of faces on the board." Additionally, vacancies were common and elections would run with no one on the ballot. Shared a resident and former school chair, "I was asked when there was a vacancy on the board and nobody stepped forward to fill it if I would accept it, and I did. I had no intentions of anything political." In contrast another resident who was active in town government and who served on the school board said, "I called the chairman of the board and asked would you like me back and he said, "Yes." So, I was back on the board." Those appointed or elected to positions might also reflect or support the agendas of others. Shared one former school board member, "But they got

someone who wouldn't stand up to them, who wouldn't tell them that being in the school and doing tours of the school on a regular basis was inappropriate."

However, some people saw the school superintendent as the bigger problem than the school board. A lifetime resident and former educator articulated the feeling many people expressed, when she said,

> The last couple of superintendents that we had were really strong willed men who thought they knew what needed to be done, and it was really going to steamroll your way there. To me, that's a direct impact of the school and the school board, and they had the ear of the board…I've heard the word wooden puppets. The board members were basically puppets, repeating what the person wanted them to hear.

Over and over, frustrations with the school district leadership and the school board were expressed in interviews. These frustrations were centered more on who was in charge and determining if the work was altruistic or self-serving. Thus, leadership was not consistent resulting in a lack of clear vision. Trust was not easily found because of prior events and dealings. Many of those interviewed felt that over and over a full accounting was seldom provided and decisions were made based on deception and omission. The community was divided into factions, some going back to the mill strike. These divisions of people stymied collaboration and clear communication, halting the progress of determining how to save its town and its schools.

Reacting to the Mill Closure: Oakview's Decisions

The Town and the Mill

Economic Development. For years the town had been experiencing an economic downturn. A group within the community established a grassroots organization called the Oakview Betterment Group two years before the mill closure to address the declining number of businesses and the aging downtown. Their goal was to aid local projects while promoting the town and the small town feel. They cleaned and repainted the street light poles, did park clean ups, built and/or repaired bike paths, and supported events like regular Farmer's Markets, the Oakview History Night, and the Holiday and May Gatherings. This appeared to be one of the few consistencies in a ten-year period. Meanwhile, the town worked hard to keep the mill operational. In the 1990s, the town granted the mill a 20-year tax increment financing (TIF) and later a deal was struck with the Reed mill to take its waste. A resident and former town government official shared,

> We met with the mill a few times. The mill higher ups. We tried to give them TIFs so they would keep the mill open. Once our big guys moved to [out of state], I knew it was a matter of time before the mill was done, and they were going to close it. And it wasn't long after that that they closed the mill.

The town wanted to keep the mill operational and was willing to make concessions. But, like many Maine mill towns, the decision to close was determined far off in a corporate office with ties to the town long severed.

Sudden and Severe Funding. Due to the town's continued woes connected to the reduced revenues, the town applied for Sudden and Severe funding –funding the state of Maine would provide to towns with a sudden reduction in value — and received it. Although, there

were other income streams, the town was unable to meet its costs and fund the schools. Said former town manager, "That speeded up the help that we got on the school and the county, instead of having a two year lapse." Community Block Grants were applied for with some success, but they soon dried up. The town initiated a "Take Pride" campaign and offered matching funds to beautify the town. Additionally, they developed promotional brochures, conducted a space analysis, and mapped assets and vacancies for future businesses. A resident and town manager said, "We have a town that is used to trying to survive with nothing, or with the minimum. I don't know how we go much lower than we are. I don't know how we do that without just shutting down." But, the biggest expense – the schools – was cause for further consternation. Shared one resident, "I have seen the services in town go down, while they continue to fund the schools." This disconnect between the town and the school was articulated with the comments of a former town manager who said,

> School boards are kind of an entity unto themselves and they do not like towns coming on and saying, please try to curb your spending this year because we've got this major problem. It came school budget time and there was a lot of mild panic.

This disconnect between available revenues and what was deemed essential caused further division with the already struggling community.

Oakview's Schools

Turmoil in the Schools. The town, already in financial decline and feeling pressure from the state of Maine, had started exploring benefits that might be associated with district school consolidation with neighboring towns before the mill closure. However, school and community relations saw 2009 a year of tumult and unrest. The superintendent had resigned amid allegations

that resulted in a lawsuit, resulting in unexpected expenses for the town. Further problems arose after an audit found a school department deficit resulting in over $200,000 that had to be covered by the town's general fund. The unexpected costs placed yet more stress on a town already struggling from the mill closure. Many of those interviewed reported this time was very stressful and wondered what would happen to their town.

A Community in Financial Distress. Oakview was feeling the stress of funding its schools before the mill closure. However, when the state administered punitive fees to promote consolidation, communities in economic distress found that they had to overcome traditional rivalries. Rivalries, a common reason for not consolidating, were still intact, and the towns were resistant to joining forces. They did not want to solve their financial struggles by consolidating with rival Reed.

Thus, the closure of the mill was another defining point. Long time resident and former educator said, "When the layoffs in the Oakview Mill started, that's when they started looking at what else could be done [with the schools]." The town manager reinforced the point, saying,

> About a third left [families who worked in the mill]. But every year it continued to decline. Because, you know, there are those folks who wait until they can find another option before they make that move. But, it continued to decline. I think that you will find that the enrollment today is even less than it was even six years ago.

Fewer families and businesses meant that revenues for the town continued to drop. Finances were stretched thin. Pressure was being exerted to find financial relief at the community and school levels. A former town manager shared the severity of the situation by stating,

> At that point it was a real strong mouthy school board before the consolidation. And it was not pretty. I had people say to me, "Why do you want to hurt our kids?' It's like I don't want to hurt anybody's kids, but if you can't pay for Nikes then you buy the Wal-Mart brand. And we can't afford Nikes anymore.

Thus, the mill closure was the last in a series of events that prompted the towns of Oakview and Hawthorn to consider consolidation more seriously. After looking at other communities that were a bit further in distance, they settled on geographic proximity with their archrival, the town of Reed.

> Consolidation did not go smoothly. Shared a resident, We voted for consolidation. We did it in pieces. And then they kept telling us we can work out the details of that later. We continued to act like the poor cousins. If you tried to stand up for things, you were labeled the troublemaker.

Decisions were made that some residents still question and resent. The closure of Oakview's schools was among the most emotionally charged.

The Oakview Middle School was the first school to close. Once consolidation was agreed upon, the following year all middle school students were sent to Reed. This closure did not prompt as much outcry as the poor state of the middle school was, from most people's perspectives, unsafe and in desperate need of repair. Although a number of people interviewed felt that they had been manipulated into a decision through neglect of their buildings. From a community that had paid for its own school, with only local funding, this neglect was unacceptable. However, there was still an expectation that the high school would remain open in Oakview.

The two high schools in Oakview and Reed were built around the same time and had roughly similar needs. However, a couple years before consolidation was finalized, Reed had the foresight to make significant repairs, which resulted in Reed becoming the town where the high school would be located. A resident shared,

> Before the high schools merged, Reed had a fairly decent budget. They did extensive renovations on the roof and the gymnasium. The next year, when we talked about the merger, their response was, our schools are in better shape. Having put quite a bit of money into them right up front before the merger, they were able to have definitely schools that were in better shape.

Her opinion was supported by another resident and parent who said, "One thing about Reed was that they had put a new roof on their high school. They had enough money to think ahead to the consolidation and think, okay, they're going to be making some decisions here." However, Oakview had operated under the assumption that the Oakview High School would be the high school for the district. A former chair shared,

> The plan did not call for closing the high school. The original plan actually called for one school to remain in each of the towns. There would be an effort to build a new contemporary high school, and the implication was that it would be in Oakview.

Maintaining a school was important to all of the communities involved. Said former superintendent, "Nobody wanted to lose that sense of community. So, without a high school, you really do lose some of that community." Oakview wanted to keep at least one school within the town's boundaries, but did not have a clear plan on how to advocate for that position.

Additionally, many people felt that the superintendent at the time had an agenda and that dealing occurred behind closed doors. One resident described it as follows,

> He came into our district wanting to be the white knight, and consciously decided not to put money in the buildings because he wanted to get a new school, a comprehensive school, for the towns. Right from, basically, from the get go, he had plans drawn up and he talked about not putting money into the buildings because when they come to do the assessment, you want to look as badly as you can. That word badly, I'm not sure that's the correct word. You want to present as poorly as possible, when they come to visit. There was definitely a conscious decision to not do any upkeep, and not put money into the buildings, which backfired in some ways, except that I wonder all along if it wasn't the plan to force the three towns, because this Superintendent also was very much willing to take on another town.

Another educator described it thusly, "There was an oligarchy and the superintendent badly mismanaged money and resources. Much was done undercover and without others' knowledge until it was too late." Another resident said,

> If they [community members] feel like you are just behind closed doors, making these decisions that are going to affect them [community and school], and you top down administer with an iron hand, you're not going to have people on board and you're going to have a lot of hard feelings. I still feel like a lot of the school board members are just really nice people and people I would call friends, but were pretty naive and out maneuvered.

Almost ten years have passed and emotions still run high with perceptions of deception about lack of transparency from the previous superintendent.

Oakview' lack of advocacy was reflected in their unsuccessful attempts to keep the high school in Oakview. A resident and parent of children involved in the changes shared, "Reed acted like this is your Manifest Destiny or something — to be the ones to have the school." Yet another resident and parent said,

> There were a number of people that really wanted to have at least one [school]. It came down to finances and what they were giving for information in terms of which building was most feasible to update and move forward with.

The last remaining school in Oakview, the high school, closed, and the assumed plan for a new high school never materialized. Oakview was left with no schools within its town borders. Said a resident,

> I don't think that they set out to close all the schools in Oakview. I think they were taking the information as it came and trying to do the right thing for the community and really in some ways, due to their kind hearts and being taken advantage of, that decision was made [to close all the schools].

By the time consolidation was done, Oakview had no remaining schools, housing only the Office of the Superintendent. Reed, the far more affluent community, had an elementary, middle and high school, while the third community in the district, Hawthorn, had the one elementary school that Oakview and Hawthorn had so proudly funded with only local monies. One resident stated, "Oakview has nothing but derelict buildings, except for the Superintendent's Office," a point of contention among residents. This resident further stated,

> If they could have housed something there besides the superintendent's office, I think Oakview would have felt like they at least still had a dog in the fight. I think they feel like they have nothing, and I think they don't even know how to fight for

> what could we have because at this point, I'm not sure that there's anything financially that they could do recover from all that they've lost.

Regarding its schools, the residents of Oakview who were interviewed felt defeated and battered by yet another obstacle they felt was beyond their control, not realizing that the community division and the lack of a common advocacy hindered them.

Once the schools were closed and consolidation was finalized, programming for the new high school was examined. At heart was the funding formula for the State of Maine. Shared an educator,

> When they pick at the budgeting process, essential programs and services, it is a formula, and so when you look at that, okay, the state of Maine's going to pay this amount. You can have all you want. You're paying for it. You need two teachers on the EPS. But that is the piece that's been voted in by the legislature, so it is the law, and then from there, as a district, do you want to have these other options at all?

And options come with a price – monetary and cultural. A former superintendent stated, "Electives declined drastically. They focused mainly on the college prep and that was it. Very few options for kids." Historically, Oakview had strong music and performing arts programs. Shared resident and parent, "The Oakview band would have beautiful uniforms and 70 plus kids – while Reed could barely – they were a mill town. They were about the sports. Oakview, we had a band. We had a drama program." Stories were told of athletes wearing their athletic uniforms to play in the band before a game. With consolidation, band became an extra curricular activity. Due more to declining enrollment, the breadth of athletic offerings was reduced. A parent and resident opined, "They can't offer cross-country and soccer and football. They are

having to make those choices. Again, a lot of times it just comes down to money." The inability to fill positions and, again, student enrollment, came into play in reducing the number of world language offerings. Shared a resident and former educator, "I can remember when we had German and French and Spanish, just at Oakview." Many AP courses became online courses. Changes in programming were common, and administration, with increasing financial limitations, was scrambling to save their schools and offerings.

Staffing also became a contentious issue for two prominent reasons. The first was the disparity in the two contracts. Shared a former educator, "If you stayed in Oakview, it was because you were committed to Oakview, because you could drive two miles and make $5,000 more." The discrepancy in contracts was years in being combined – years fraught with negotiations, mediations, and many, many meetings. Shared resident and former school board member, "There was a point when it got very, very bitter. We couldn't budget [funding salaries increases to level the contracts] because we didn't have the money. Bringing those contracts together was horrible. We went through mediation. We ended right before court." Oakview was experiencing labor disputes – again. These disputes were at the school level, and were very emotional.

The second reason for staffing changes was the long-standing culture that Reed was the superior school district. Said one educator, "They always had this perception of, they were a little…felt a bit more prestigious there than the other towns, so they had to kind of get through some of that nonsense." Schools were reconfigured to put all students of a grade in one building. This meant that staff would need to move locations. This proved almost as contentious as the negotiations. The process was explained by a former superintendent who said,

> We did not terminate anybody in the consolidation process. There were people that self-selected to retire or resign, or go somewhere else because they didn't want to make the change. We did ask people to change grade levels. You move folks around.

Staff moving from Reed to Hawthorn was seen as a demotion. One educator said, "We reconfigured the PreK-2. It dragged on and on. Because you don't send the evil competition teachers from one school to the other." A former educator described the process further, "The Reed teachers came over here and they created havoc. They resented coming." The building leadership finally said, "Snap out of it, move on, you're still employed, yes we still love you, let's go. Get this thing done." However, this divided culture continued, despite the passage of almost a decade. "You still have two different districts that have been rivals forever in a mill town setting," said one educator.

Although there were no jobs lost, many felt that the selection process for which building would be used and for reassigning staff, was in Reed's favor. The superintendent and the high school principal in Reed were chosen over Oakview' candidates. "I sort of got ousted because there was a more veteran superintendent," shared a former superintendent. This selection was reinforced by a former school board chair, who said, "He [Reed superintendent] did not have a great reputation among his peers for intellectual prowess, but the new board was a majority of Reed school board members." The selection process where Reed personnel received staff, faculty, and administrative assignments over Oakview' candidates was mentioned in multiple interviews. One resident stated, "And then our principal – our principal. They didn't even really give him an interview for the position. He even applied and they didn't even give him an interview for the principal position there." There was a perception by many interviewed that

Reed was favored at all levels. However, that favoritism may have been tied with those who advocated more strongly. Said one Oakview' resident,

> But I just don't think they fought hard enough for our students and our teachers and our – it was just easier to let them [Reed]. Even like the football coach. He was already a teacher in the district. He had been a football coach for years and years. The other football coach had been a coach for a while, but our football coach had been there a lot longer. And I remember even in that. They didn't hire the teacher, the coach, the person who had gone to school for it, they hired a Reed community member who was the football coach.

These divisions, at both the school and community level hindered progress and categorized people into groups that were difficult to break from. Newcomers found it challenging to assimilate in the community and schools, which was reflected in high turnover and difficulty attracting a large pool of candidates for open positions. Those who had been part of the community for generations were tied to tradition and the identities assigned to the traditions, almost not being allowed to move forward.

Traditions were often seen in a school's athletic programs – an area where much pride and community identity was held. Considered to be one of the most intense rivalries in the state, tradition was hard to overcome. A history of many decades of football games that were almost evenly matched instilled pride in each community. A lifetime resident looked back, saying, "They were rivals all through their growing up years, they were rivals through college, whatever, high school. And they couldn't get over that barrier of, oh my gosh, are kids are going to join together." Plus, the perceived differences in social class and standings, as well as economic differences, appeared too difficult to overcome. One resident expressed her opinion,

> But the cultures were so different. And again, again, that made it really hard. The cultures were very very different. And the cultures very different from leadership on down. My kids played sports with the school board's chairman's mother and she is a...And she said my child is going to go to the school that we built right in Reed. She basically told me you guys can just go suck an egg because my kids are going to stay right there in Reed. And she said, I would never send my children to Oakview. I got the impression that it was all socio-economic. That we were the school that had all the behavior issues. We were the school that had all the kids on free and reduced lunch. We just didn't measure up to Reed.

Reed wanted the funds the Oakview students brought, but did not want their students in their schools. Oakview' students felt like they had lost their identity and were trying to assimilate into a culture that had promoted division for decades. The cultural divides felt enormous, and continued to hinder solutions for the community. The traditional identities and class status of the people to their communities was ingrained and reached back for decades – ensuring that identities were not easily changed.

Oakview's inability to break from those assigned identities continued. The inability to arrive at a collective vision and effectively advocate for themselves resulted in further feelings of slight. The scales seemed to continue to tip in Reed's favor. Shared one parent and resident,

> When they adopted a student handbook – instead of combining and trying to get a little from each one – nope – they just *[adopted Reed's]* – in fact, for a while it even said Reed. Still on it. Grading system. We always had 90-100. So, even our kids got penalized for top ten and stuff because Reed had 92-100. Guess which

grading scale we use? And still use today? I really don't understand how we capitulated on almost everything. But we did.

Schools and community decisions sharply divided people in this community, and the sense that Oakview's residents were not quite the same caliber as those living in Reed remained.

To aid the healing process, all schools had been renamed to reflect the new district. The students voted on a new high school mascot and the school colors took one color from each of the two high schools. After consolidation students attended a progression of schools within the district, dependent upon the grade level. The school board was working to break down the rivalries that were so imbedded, but tradition continued to run deeply. The Oakview athletic fields were still being used, but one resident said, "There are talks of eventually doing a big complex in Reed to have all of the fields up there. I am not sure we are ready for that." Oakview, despite losing all its schools, was still trying to maintain a connection to the school within its community, while continuing to feel marginalized by Reed, but also, unknowingly, by tradition.

Oakview's Decision-Makers and Their Paths to Authority

Regarding consolidation, the groups making the decision were the school committees of Oakview/Hawthorn and Reed, and the two superintendents, working under pressure from the State of Maine. Shared by former school chair, "All across the state – shotgun weddings with the threat of diminished resources afterward if you didn't do it [consolidate]." In addition to punitive state measures, towns were feeling pressure due to reduced funds brought on by declining student populations. One resident opined, "I think Reed could have cared less about us until they needed our students. I don't think it really had too much to do with money – we didn't bring much as far as money. We had significant students." Consolidation felt forced and the partners joining were not in agreement over many details of the plan.

Traditional Divides. Additionally, the historical and cultural divide between the rival towns continued to be problematic. Shared one lifetime resident regarding the emotional divides within the town,

> It's a volatile climate in terms of what you might or might not say about the mill, about the school district. It has been that way since the strike. It fractured the communities, and it's never really healed as there's…people will say, he's a scab, or he's a super scab.

Despite the passage of over three decades, those deemed scabs (those who did not support the strike) and super scabs (those who went on strike and then crossed the picket lines to return to work in the mill), if they live in town, still retained an aura of disdain among some community members, and had less of an accepted voice. Additionally, town lines still divide. Stated one Oakview resident, "Us oldies still remember who is Oakview and who is Reed." These divisions and memories made decision-making challenging. Their residency defined people within the two communities.

These powerful memories kept a hierarchal system in place. Many people in Oakview believed that Reed made the decisions, often based on socioeconomics. Said one resident and parent regarding educational decisions, "There were very, very few times that our people, people from Oakview, were put into positions of leadership." As an outsider trying to work within, a former superintendent stated,

> There was a huge issue that Reed and Hawthorn had the rural middle class. The more affluent people lived in Reed, and the lower classes, if you would, the less financially well off folks typically lived in Oakview. I think that combining that sort of…they [Oakview] felt like they didn't really belong.

Drawing on his own history, one resident reflected on the class divide by sharing,

> They're the Nike group [having more wealth]. I remember I got sent to the office for getting in a fight with one of the Nike kids. The principal was a very good friend of my father and my mother. I'm sitting in his office and he walks in and goes, "What the hell are you doing here?" And I said, "I was in a fight." And he goes, "Why isn't he [Nike kid] here?" And I said, "You're gonna have to explain that to me, because I don't know." And that's just how it was.

A generation later, when consolidation occurred, one mother shared the frustration of her children having to go to high school in Reed. She described a discussion she had with a woman from Reed who also had a child at the high school, saying,

> Her son made the statement that he hated the kids – hated the Oakview kids because they made the school all crowded and crappy and dirty and – we went to the same church! It was like – hey, hey! I put my pants on the same way you do. And I don't even think I am overstating my case about it.

The divisions in this town were a primary factor in how decisions were made.

Communication and Decision-Making. However, during decision-making times, transparency and collaboration were the messages being touted during many of the changes. During school consolidation talks a committee with representation from all three towns was established. Some felt the process was successful. A former superintendent shared, "We worked well together as far as protocols and stuff like that. The board came together. I actually remember when they stopped talking about us and them and starting talking about we." The former superintendent's views were supported by a former school board member from Oakview who said, "It was a big committee. They met for long periods of time. And then every step of the

way it got a little easier and easier." The process was seen by some as working towards a common goal of consolidation.

Communication. But not everyone agreed that the process was transparent or collaborative. Shared a former educator and long time community member, "There was a feeling around the selection of the committee members, and whether they were purposely selected to swing the vote that way, and who has the loudest voice." Yet another community member said, "A lot of those decisions were made behind closed doors and they are considered personnel decisions and you are always told as a community you don't have all the facts." This mistrust was reiterated in yet another resident's opinion, "There definitely was a committee, whether it was an equitable committee, I do not know. Some of the people on it, they certainly didn't feel like it was particularly equitably put together." The divisiveness of the community seeped into all aspects of decision-making. Typically, those on the school board or governmental posts believed the process to be more open, while those not on a committee felt a lack of voice and a sense that information was not shared through acts of omission and commission.

Influential Factors That Determined Oakview's Decisions

The residents of Oakview lacked a common vision. What everyone did seem to realize was that the town did not have the finances it once did, which affected its ability to maintain local control. As one former educator and resident shared,

> It really has come down to financial decisions. None of the three towns have the financial resources to support a K to 12 educational system. People are voting for it [consolidation] because they can't afford to do differently and they don't have a lot of choices. It's an imperfect world.

Residents agreed that something needed to be done, and that the solution was limited to consolidation. Those in leadership felt they provided options, but residents interviewed disagreed. Looming costs felt overwhelming to residents, and the pressing element of the state's specified time restrictions was an additional pressure in the decision-making process that heightened already raw emotions – an environment not conducive to collaborative problem solving.

Finances were the driving force for what the town did after the mill closure and why the school consolidated with a neighboring rival. A town, once financially able to pay for a new school with all local funds, found itself in an untenable position of impending poverty. A former superintendent said, "It has to be for the right reasons. And the right reasons being economics." Money, or lack of, became the driving force in decision-making.

The primary place decisions were made regarding school consolidation, the town's finance and planning, and various decision making processes was through the public committees meetings where elected or appointed officials made the decisions. The school board and the selectmen had monthly meetings on different days, allowing participation in both the school and town government. As one former town manager and resident shared, "The opportunity is there different nights, so that we could take turns to go." Additionally, a special committee was developed to explore consolidation. The consolidation committee had the superintendent's from the two districts and thirteen members with representation broken down as follows: six representatives from Reed, four representatives from Oakview, and three representatives from Hawthorn. Subgroups, which included over 80 community members, contributed feedback. Budget meetings were held in Oakview for both the town and school and the voting process was in place. As community divisions had limited voices of certain groups, the voting process was

changed. A former town manager (different than the one quoted just prior) and spouse of a former mill worker,

> It was during that time [consolidation] that Oakview decided to go with a secret ballot town meeting. Because the schools just — they were just overrun with teachers and whatnot that were doing the voting, and once people could vote in private instead of 60 or 80 people at a town meeting, there were five or six or seven hundred people voting.

The two town managers, each with different histories within the town, recognized the need for more collaboration with various groups and transparency with residents. Both worked to provide venues and opportunities that would allow for more involvement.

School Leadership. While town government officials were working on their responsibilities to help the financially strapped town, the school superintendents were also pushing their agenda of consolidation, believing it was part of the financial solution. The two superintendents attended various meetings (Rotary, Masons, local business groups, etc.), did presentations to parents, maintained an "open door policy" to answer questions, had a blog, held informational meetings, developed a representative committee, and allowed students to be part of the process. Signs on the school marquee and handouts sent home with students provided quick messages and a public access channel provided another venue to distribute information. One of the former superintendents said, "I don't think we could have done more for the community with this process. Open door policy, and answer questions, we went out and about. Seventy-five percent of the voters said yes [to consolidation]." The vote would indicate that the communities were supportive of consolidation.

Communication Outside of Dedicated Areas. Despite the vote, the perception that transparency was a myth continued to be shared in interviews. Many decisions were informally made in the community. The local coffee shop, sporting events, and small businesses were all places where heated conversations took place. Social media had its positives and negatives. Said one educator, "Facebook, you know, the devil's workshop. Satan's little thing." The concern that most often arose was the instantaneous dissemination of misinformation and the inability to know what was being shared. A lifetime resident and former town manager said of social media, "Is that a rumor, is that not a rumor? All those that things that you hear." Like any decision where emotions run high, viewpoints differed.

Community Perceptions of the Decisions Made

Community changes most often were attached to finances, making residents feel lives were being quantified. Rising taxes are always points of concern. One educator explained the emotionality of the residents,

> The special interest is in their [Oakview] own wallet, and the taxes. We've got a lot this year of fixed income, retired. Some of it is well thought out and rational. Others, it's crazy day. It's almost like a plea, like for the love of God, don't raise this [taxes]. I'm already about to lose my home because of taxes.

People were attempting to bring to light the social and emotional needs that were seemingly being pushed aside to address economic distress that was strangling the town.

Traditions, Cultures, Perceptions. School changes run deep because of traditions, cultures, and perceptions, in addition to finances. Said one former school chair, "I don't think people did feel fine about it [consolidation]. I think the resentment is actually growing increasingly." Pervasive among many residents were feelings that they were sold a bill of goods

not advertised. Said one lifetime resident and former town manager, "They were pretty bitter, some people would show up and be pretty bitter about…we lost our identity. We don't have our schools." Yet another resident's description was, "It was very much a hostile takeover. I mean it didn't feel like a merger at all." Consolidation, programming changes, and personnel changes were but some of the decisions eliciting strong emotions. Interviewees reported that they did not feel heard and, although some of them voted for consolidation, they felt a pressure to do so. Additionally, they felt that they were coerced through facts of omission or outright inaccuracies.

Analysis

The town of Oakview has seen great changes in the last thirty years. The town, which was considered financially stable (although always poorer than its neighboring town of Reed), is now in financial distress. Its schools were all closed and consolidation with Reed occurred. Tradition and cultural divisions were, and continue to be very embedded and difficult to overcome. There was no long-range plan to prepare for the closure of the mill, nor a long-range plan for the school to consolidate. Lack of planning ensured that every problem, expected and unexpected, was met with a sense of urgency and high level of emotion. Social class divisions continued to hinder the decision-making process.

The town was deeply divided when the Reed mill went on strike. Although the strike did not occur in the Oakview mill, residents were forced to take sides to show solidarity with mill workers known as a brotherhood, or choose to cross the picket line to ensure the ability to support one's family. The hostility was so high that people fled the area, preferring to commute. The commute ensured their families were safe and allowed them a life outside of the mill. The workers that remained have experienced discrimination and loss of much socially. Town meetings, school board meetings, and interactions have retained the divisions of where alliances

fell. Where people might agree, they were unable to if that meant agreeing with someone with whom one did not share a common alliance dating back to the mill's strike.

Leadership at the town and school was inconsistent. This instability contributed to the lack of a continuous long-term plan. Oakview's residents wanted its leaders to lead, but a serious breech of trust by a school leader and a lack of perceived advocacy by other leaders resulted in Oakview's residents harboring mistrust towards its leaders and a caution when bestowing authority. Oakview's informal leadership served as a monitor to its formal leadership. However, the informal leadership in Oakview did not wield the same level of power found in neighboring towns. Surrounding towns' informal and formal leadership actually exerted more power, which served to reduce the power of Oakview's leaders. Oakview was the persona non grata of towns in the area – seen as less wealthy and able to be controlled. Oakview was a town in need of leadership willing to work on their behalf.

Although the school consolidation was not solely due to the closure of the mill, it was yet another indicator of the decline of the pulp and paper industry — an industry that allowed small rural towns to be financially flush with the ability to maintain coveted local control. The schools were further impacted with declining enrollment and a series of legal and financial woes a trusted superintendent placed upon the town. This mismanagement resulted in financial difficulties during a time when the town was reeling from loss of revenues from the mill, declining town population and school enrollments, and could not easily bail out the school district.

The town of Oakview was wounded over the loss of its schools, believing that they had lost a component of their community that could not be returned without great financial sacrifice – a sacrifice too great and overwhelming for the town. However, when probing deeper many of

those interviewed believed consolidation was inevitable. They recognized the declining student enrollments, the mounting costs, and the high levels of student poverty. However, what they wanted was to retain at least one school within their town boundaries. One former superintendent believed they still had a school as the superintendent's office remained in Oakview. The residents did not see that as an equal swap. Thus, they were left with something akin to mourning.

Change slowly crept into Oakview. The location of the town is a 45-minute drive to a large Maine city along a major State road. Housing costs were more affordable than in the city, and the smaller schools provided a community feel. Shared one educator, who is starting to see some change in population,

> Professionals [are] deciding they want to move out this way, and they have no tradition of the mill at all and don't care to hear about it. You might have a budget meeting where it's endlessly about the mill, the mill, the mill and the person beside them is like, "I don't give a damn about your mill." So that's kind of the new ripple. Let's look at all our assets. Talking about the mill going down and all the world is coming to an end. Hell no! We are on the edge of greatness here!

It is that attitude of potential greatness that was driving some to fight for change, both in the schools and the community.

CHAPTER SIX

TIMBERTON

Timberton is a community that believed they could defy the odds of having their paper mill closed. Their mill had orders, was making money, and had a town and work force committed to ensuring that the mill remained open. But national and international dealings proved far bigger than Timberton's mill, whose demise still occurred.

Town Background

As you drive into Timberton, there were signs stating that it was "a good place to live, work, and play," and that it was "open for business" – messages that supported a town trying to market itself after the closure of its paper mill. Timberton's population remained relatively stable with less than 5,000 residents since 1990. There have been ebbs and flows of around 200 people, but the number of people was usually remained slightly less than 5,000 people – 98% of whom were Caucasian (US Census American Community Survey data, 2016). In the last twenty years, the median age had risen over five years (US Census American Community Survey data, 2016). The median income showed a slight incline, but due to a loss of jobs and businesses the poverty rate increased from almost 10% during the same time (US Census American Community Survey data, 2016).

Timberton was the most recent of the three communities studied to have lost a major pulp and paper mill. Although never topping the success it had at its peak, it still provided solid revenues to the town and jobs that were highly sought after. Like the previous two towns in this study, Timberton experienced a series of setbacks that foreshadowed challenging times for both the town and the schools within the community.

Figure 4.3 Timberton Timeline

All events are listed in the order they occurred. However, to maintain confidentiality, actual dates were removed.

1970-1979

Mill closed
Mill purchased by state of Maine and upgraded
Mill sold and reopened
Associate degree or higher required for most jobs in the mill
Mill workers went on strike – mill remained operational

1990-1999

Reduction in work force at mill (due to efficiencies)
Mill expanded physical plant
Mill expanded physical plant

2000-2009

New superintendent hired
Interim superintendent
Interim superintendent
Mill sold

2010-2018

Mill sold
New superintendent
Singleton left school district
[Concord] and [Keene] left school district
Mill revaluation
Interim town manager
Mill reduced work force (twice in the same year)
New town manager (interim hired)
Mill closed
Interim superintendent
Mill sold
New superintendent (interim hired)
Mill paper machine sold

Geographic Background and Businesses

As the town is located on a major river with a steep drop, it is a natural place to locate businesses needing energy. Unique to the town of Timberton is that it has its own electrical plant, which, in combination with one of the largest solar arrays in Maine, provides most of the town

with its needed electricity. Timberton had a variety of businesses – all considered small businesses. Farming and lumbering had been a large part of Timberton's economy since its inception as a town and continued to play a crucial role. Timberton was home to a large agricultural/farming operation that encompassed dozens of acres (providing a bit of a stopgap to town revenues when the mill closed), as well as, independent lumbering contractors that continued to haul wood to the remaining mills located outside of Timberton and further afield. Many of the town's businesses lined the street of the downtown, anchored by one of its schools at one end, the mill at the opposite end, and a famous retail store in the middle.

Leadership Landscape – the Town and School

Timberton was like many Maine towns where the town was governed by a Select Board and the school by a School Board. Both boards relied on public forums for their meetings as well as specifically identified public town budget meetings where the public was allowed to speak in more depth. This style of government was a form of direct democratic rule, where the residents of the community could come together to make decisions on policy and budget.

Timberton's government was a town meeting/manager form of government. A five person Select Board that was elected by the town's voting residents for a three-year term ran this form of government. Although the town meeting was the true governing body, the Select Board hired a town manager, who was the chief executive for the town. The town manager was a full time position, whereas the selectpersons typically served as a community service while also having other full time vocations. The town manager worked under the Select Board's direction. The Select Board met twice a month, holding public meetings where residents were able to provide input to their representatives.

The school oversight was a regional school unit (RSU), although it consisted of only one municipality. There was one school board made up of seven elected representatives who met at least once a month. These representatives appointed a chair and vice chair, who led the meetings, but had one vote like all the representatives of the board. The school board hired a school superintendent who oversaw the day to day running of the school district. An aspect that was challenging for the residents of Timberton was that the school board and the Select Board met at the same time and day. Participation in both groups for the community, as well as, the governing boards were, therefore unable to occur in the public forums offered.

Timberton's Schools

The town had one school department that consisted of three public schools: an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school. In 2016 there were less than 700 students enrolled. All the schools were located within walking distance to the center of town. There were no private schools within the town's borders at the time of this study.

Declining School Enrollment and Town Secessions. The school district, once having four towns, became a district with only the singular town of Timberton. Reflective of most Maine schools was the declining school enrollment. From 2012 to 2016, the school district lost almost 20% of its student population. However, a large reason Timberton's school enrollment dropped so dramatically was the secession of three towns from the school district before the mill closed. In 2012 the town of Singleton left the district, citing better educational opportunities in another neighboring district (Rhoda, 2012). Singleton's exit resulted in about 70 students no longer attending the Timberton school district. In 2013 the towns of [Keene] and [Concord] left the district citing frustrations with the weighted school board voting system (Timberton represented 75% of the voting power, while remaining towns had only 25%), loss of local

control, and a fear that their K-8 school would be closed. This secession was worse, with 150 students exiting the school district. The secession of three towns from the district, an aging population, and smaller families all contributed to the declining enrollment. When combined with the mill re-valuation and later closure, the Timberton school district, now a singular school district town, found itself looking at increasingly large drops in revenues for multiple consecutive years.

School's Path to Employment in the Mill. Unlike many Maine mill towns, the high school was not seen as an employee's path to employment in the mill. As far back as the 1970s, the mill in Timberton required a minimum of an Associate's degree for employment. There were positions that provided exceptions, but generally a college degree was needed. Scholarships, provided by the mill, were available to students pursuing degrees associated with pulp and paper. However, even during times when the mill was doing well, the scholarships would go unclaimed. Also, unlike some other Maine mill towns, the Timberton paper mill was not a generous benefactor to the schools, other than through the traditional means of paying its taxes to the town. Thus, the school and community did not reap the benefits of specially funded projects or programs. Not losing this extra source of funding may have indirectly helped Timberton, as they were already funding the school and community programs they had in place.

Background on the Mill

The paper mill in Timberton has a somewhat unique history in that it experienced a complete shutdown before the final closure and was able to be resurrected and reopened again as a paper mill. During the first the mill shut down, closure occurred with only two hours of notice to its workers and the town government, citing poor market conditions. One community member who had family members who lost their mill jobs recounted, "They basically said, "Thank you

for your services." No severance or anything like that. After 38 years." At that time, there were no severance packages, and expected pensions vanished. However, during the first shutdown, the state of Maine intervened, helped revive the mill, made upgrades, and then saw that the mill was sold.

Despite re-opening and restoring jobs, workers went on strike the year after reopening. However, the company persevered, moved forward with modernizations, and increased efficiencies to the mill. Due to a series of improvements and increased efficiencies at the mill, a corresponding reduction in force occurred with each improvement. This marked the slow decline of the number of employees needed to run the mill and the flight of mill management from the town.

Despite the aforementioned problems, the Timberton mill was seemingly defying the odds and remained open. However, in the early 2000s the mill was sold again, but to a company known for buying mills and closing them to control competition. One town selectman shared,

> They could care less about any community they're in. They could care less about any employee they have. It's like, holy mackerel. These guys are not nice. They were using this mill, our mill, to get their foot hold in the door and once they got their foot in the door, and they don't need it anymore [the mill in Timberton].

In good faith, despite their concerns, the town attempted to work with the mill to ensure its operation. They wanted to continue to defy the odds and remain open, holding on to memories of a previous closure. Shared one resident and town manager, "Everything that they [the mill owners] wanted done to keep the mill going we did." Despite beating the odds for many years, the mill's closure was in sight. Said one community member and town selectman, "They [mill owners] knew what they were doing. They calculated this right to the end." Employees

associated with the mill saw further reductions in employees, increased foreign competition, and a buy-out from a company not familiar with small town traditions. The mill eventually closed, resulting in a loss of over 200 jobs, and a clause that stated if the mill was sold, the buyer could not produce anything that the selling company was making – essentially ensuring that the paper mill could never return to Timberton.

Mill Revaluation's Impact on the Town. However, the school and community faced their biggest challenge from the mill two years prior to the mill closure. One August, after the town had already set their municipal budget, the mill, due to declining business and the shutdown of machines, requested a revaluation. The revaluation was completed and sent shock waves through the community. A long time resident and selectperson explained,

> The mill went from [X] million to [Y] million[6]. And that right there was probably more of a problem than when the actual mill closed as far as taxes go, because the big valuation piece of that had already dropped, the bottom had already dropped out of that.

The town was left short millions in anticipated revenues, made worse by the fact that the town and schools had already set and voted on their budgets based on the first valuation. Taxes went up, schools were left scrambling to cover negotiated contracts and expected programs, and the town government was left with the challenge of suddenly losing 65% of the revenues from its largest income source. Said one resident and spouse of mill worker, "That revaluation was very upsetting to a lot of people, mainly because their taxes went up." "They thought the mill was trying to screw the town – the mill was trying to get something over on the town," shared town manager. A long time community member and a licensed assessor opined, "The community, I

[6] The mill dropped approximately 65% in value.

think, didn't realize what was going on." What made the revaluation yet more difficult was that in 2016 the mill claimed it was shut down and should not be taxed at the level it was, but, it had been operational for part of the year and the town taxed it thusly. The mill paid their taxes as assessed by the town, but brought legal action upon the town. A lawsuit was still pending at the conclusion of this study, with the mill hoping for a reimbursement of what they deemed overpayment of taxes. Also, because of the mill's operations during part of the year, the town of Timberton was not yet eligible for Sudden and Severe funding, further exacerbating the financial woes of a town losing its biggest tax contributor.

The Mill's Impact on the Town and Schools. For decades, the mill was an integral part of the town and shaped much of what occurred within the town. At one point 65%-75% of the town's expenses were covered by the mill's taxes. Because the mill provided a higher than average pay, much was also overlooked. A lifetime community member shared, "I remember as a kid going to elementary school and you would go outside and the sky would be brown." The river provided equally unpleasant coloring.[7]

However, despite the emissions to both air and water, the mill provided a nice living to people who historically needed minimal education to secure jobs in the mill. An educator and community member stated,

> I couldn't believe that my friend, he doesn't have a college degree…I don't know if you call it a labor job, but he was making over $100,000. Here I was, I had two master's degrees and I am making $60,000 because I was always picking up odd jobs and stuff.

[7] In 1972 the Clean Water Act was passed, providing extensive clean up of Maine's rivers (Fisk, 2008).

Additionally, there was prestige in working at the mill. Shared one former mill worker, "When you're from this area, that's the pinnacle. You work at the paper mill, and you build your life around it." Like most mills, knowing someone in the mill increased your chances of obtaining a job. A community member shared,

> You could just go down to the mill and then your father, your cousin, someone you knew, and they could get you there [a job in the mill] and you could to work at the mill basically. So, you really didn't have to go on to school to get a good job like you do now.

With the mill purchase in the 1970s, a minimum of an associate's degree was required, which limited the number of local people working at the mill. Shared one educational leader, "[The mill] required a two year degree and a lot of the families don't have that educational background. You have to have a two-year associate degree to work in [the mill]. So, that changes the tone, too, and the climate within the school." Due to the required education beyond high school, the school did not build its curriculum around the mill. The Timberton schools made the change to a more diversified curriculum before many other Maine mill towns dependent on a paper mill.

Timberton's Decision-Makers and Their Paths to Authority

Multiple Roles Within a Community. Timberton is a rural community, and like many rural communities, people assumed multiple responsibilities, were related either through blood or marriage to many of the residents, and had a clearer understanding of people's stations within the community. An educator also served in the town government and was so active he was referred to as Mr. Timberton. A multi-generational community member, married to a mill worker, served on the school board. This interconnectedness was often the standard rather than the exception.

Lines were blurred between families and friends, and the schools and the town government, while also being staunchly drawn.

The Decision-Makers and Their Paths to Authority. In Timberton, the perception of who made the decisions and how they were made was quite divided along two lines among those interviewed. One group felt that decisions were made by elected and/or appointed officials and were transparent and open to feedback. The second group felt decisions were made by a small number of people, not necessarily those who were elected and/or appointed, and that information was not transparent. Some people perceived that a hierarchal system was in place where a select group of private individuals made the decisions and fed their input to those elected or appointed officials serving as their puppets. Those small numbers of people may have been on committees, or they may have had the ear of those on the committee. The people who were seen as having an increased level of power and/or authority had historically possessed some, but possibly not all, certain attributes: wealth, owner of a business or large amounts of property, long standing in the community (crossing multiple generations), and/or well-placed town job (selectmen, superintendent). Additionally, committees may have arisen for a specific need or for a vocal group to address their concerns, continuing after their usefulness or disbanding because of new concerns or political fallout. As one lifetime resident, business owner, town official, and former educator stated, "There's a lot of committees in a small town." What was not agreed upon was how the people in those positions arrived at their decisions.

What was agreed upon was that the selectpersons, other various governmental groups, and the school superintendent and school board made many of the decisions and they were either elected or appointed to those positions. Selectmen were elected, as were school board members. The school board hired the superintendent, and the town manager was hired by the selectpersons,

and appointments were made for other town and school committees and positions. However, participation and getting people to serve on the committees was challenging. People in various positions worked to get people involved. Said one school board member, "I had the board chair come and sit on my couch and really say we need people like you on the board." Sometimes positions would go unfilled and a write-in candidate would win a spot. A community member shared in a recent election that one school board member was elected with 37 votes and was not even listed on the ballot.

Where Decisions Are Made and How the Decisions Are Communicated. Those people who believed the town was transparent and open, also believed the democratic process was the venue most often where decisions were made, and those decisions were arrived at through the gathering of information during public meetings, emails, phone calls, and direct lines of communication. A school board member described her perception of the school board, "We're a very compassionate board. We're there for all the right reasons." The elected official takes in all the information and then represents the community based on the information gathered. An educator, who agreed with the school board member's assessment about the ease of contacting one's representative, added,

> Access to our school board and our superintendent, they're all very good. Easy to call them up. They're all great. I call up the school every once in a while and just say, are you aware of…? They are encouraging people to come.

Further supporting this idea of community openness and transparency, as well as the interconnectedness of the people, another school board member, long time resident, business owner, former town government official, and former educator shared, "I don't mind if you

complain as long as you complain about something constructive. People come in here and see me all the time." Communication was seen as a back-and-forth, and a sharing of ideas.

Supporting this sense of transparency, the community and schools had websites that were maintained and where information was also disseminated through YouTube and a public access channel. A representative took in all information and then made a decision for the collective whole, as evidenced by an educator and government official's statement, "The community wants direction on what they should do." Active participation in the meetings was also an element of the process in helping the representatives, and it was believed that those who were not active, were not concerned enough. A lifetime community member stated, "If you are not getting involved, then I guess you don't really care that much about it." However, multiple people expressed that although there are many opportunities to express one's opinion, there was also concern regarding declining public participation. Shared one community member active in all aspects of the town, "We have 3500 voters, I believe, and we had 150 turn out at the school budget meeting…The minority seems to be swaying the majority who are just sitting back and doing absolutely nothing." However, one statement, provided by one who felt that process was transparent, may have instead indicated the second group's concerns, "The community is extremely quiet." Their silence may indicate something deeper – something that was not being shared or said for reasons outlined below.

The interviewees who believed communication and decision-making was not open and transparent would agree that on the surface the same aforementioned groups made the decisions. It was not unusual in small towns for some leadership positions to be sought after and held for the advancement of personal agendas. Towns handle this level of micropolitics in different ways. A growing population of people in the town of Timberton was working to make leadership

positions more altruistic, putting peer pressure on those with personal agendas to not run for office or seek appointments. But for some interviewees, they felt feedback from some groups with more overt and covert power was given more lip service than actually thought. As one community member and former school leader explained,

> I felt that people in the audience that night and school board members did not listen when I tried to speak. I felt that my point of view was not well received and maybe not respected as I felt it should have. There were others in the audience, but when they saw the reaction to how I was treated, they chose not to speak because…they didn't want the repercussions from that. It was the last budget meeting I attended.

This hesitancy to speak out was supported by an educator leader's comment, "The rivalry of the adults is so ingrained." To explain further why, he went on to say,

> The people who are the most vocal are some of our local business people that have really nice houses in the community or a business in the community. They're worried about the bottom line tax dollar and not about what's best for education.

In multiple interviews the hierarchy of people within the community was shared. A former educator and community member shared, "They have a lot of power in some ways." That power was articulated by long time community member, "It's a good old boy syndrome." When asked who the people were who made the decisions one community member responded,

> Maybe some of the stronger voices that are leaders, those people with that last name. [lists some names]. There are a lot of us who don't understand who makes the decisions, why they're made. We've seen it where at least it appeared that the people who were making the decisions are benefiting the most.

And certain people were in positions to make decisions that did not appear ethical to one community member: “We had [a worker] in the [school] district make, with all the stipends, probably $100,000. Some people think he runs the district.” If those prominent names were not listened to, then changes were made, at times affecting employment. “We've had one board member that definitely wanted to see our old superintendent be done. And…he got off the board right after,” said one town resident. What was apparent in all the people interviewed, was the firmness in their beliefs about how the communication and decision-making processes worked.

Vision, Leadership, and Voice. Timberton experienced a lack of coherent and sustained vision, both at the town level and at the school level, which left the community seeking direction. Each time a new leader was in place, a new vision arose, as well as new thinking to address the growing concerns of the town and school. A community member and officer in the town government expressed concern, “Timberton has experienced a lot of turn over at the top in administration in the last ten years. I think we are on our fifth or sixth superintendent.” Other committee groups within the town had multiple changes within the same period. Additionally, with change being constant, residents would align in groups to either continue a previous leader’s path or follow the new leader. When commenting about a long time member of the board of assessors and community member, a town manager shared, “[He] did not feel welcomed anymore, so he withdrew his services from the town. And so you have people who live in town and are split on each side of the issue.” It should be noted that there were also people who had served the community in positions of leadership for many years – some for decades. However, the positions of school superintendent and town manager, the figureheads for both the school and town, saw much change.

Additionally, a series of people in leadership who were not seen as forthcoming, honest, and/or transparent resulted in both groups having a lack of trust. Hiring practices and how funds should be allocated were issues where some interviewees felt there was subversion. “It’s like a ship. You’re keeping the ship afloat, but if nobody’s steering it where it should be going, we’re not sinking, but we’re not going in a strong direction, all working together,” shared a community member and educator. In particular, a couple of former superintendents did not inspire trust. One school leader said,

> He [former superintendent] talked a good talk, but he didn’t really give the board the information they needed. There was a lot of anger because the board was giving him direction and he was giving them lip service. It wasn’t happening. Trust.

In addition, a former superintendent, who was questioned about his decision-making, would not respond to the school board and constituents. According to one community member and educator,

> The business manager didn’t want to put any expected revenue in the budget [regarding some programming]. The superintendent was insistent on projecting quite a bit of revenue expected and it just didn’t come through. The new superintendent had to kind of deal with that and make up for it.

And like management in the mill, some of the superintendents did not live in the community. One long time resident and educator added, “I don’t think he was fully invested in our community.” When leadership lived outside of the community, there was less contact with the residents and a perception by community members that the leader was not as invested in the community, as she/he would have been if she/he resided in the town.

Finding people to fill positions was challenging in a small rural town, which, sometimes out of necessity, prompted people to hold multiple positions and relationships to cross many boundaries (McHenry-Sorber, 2014). Sometimes, community participation in the governmental process is lean, which may occur due to disinterest, disengagement, small populations of people, and a host of other reasons (Schudson, 1997). The micropolitics that occur due to the interconnectedness of people is not easily defined due to the complexity of the relationships within the community. This level of closeness can be both helpful and harmful. Demonstrating the interconnectedness of the community and its school community, a Timberton resident explained, "Some of them are people that I went to school with — you're friends with them outside as well, so you're more comfortable talking with them. I think that makes a difference, too." A long time community member when discussing the school board and the board's thought process said, "A lot of people on the board are from the area and grew up here — lived here all their lives." The crossing of social and professional boundaries was seen by some interviewees as helpful, promoting communication and comfort when discussing issues, while to others it generated limited thinking and hindered opportunities for others.

One place where both groups of people felt they had a voice was in the secret ballot. When discussing a school budget vote, an educator compared how the public meeting went versus the secret ballot, saying, "They are speaking more through the ballot than they are in a public forum, or talking amongst themselves." This behavior of speaking through the secret ballot process provided a voice for people who felt shouted down and marginalized, but also ensured that public meetings were not accurately represented.

This contrast in behavior was frustrating to leaders, as people would express that the process was followed, and the opportunity for input was given. Leaders would anticipate a certain outcome based on the meetings, discussions, and feedback, only to see a different result in the polls. The superintendent shared, "The problem is, we can pass it at the budget meeting in the auditorium, but when it goes to the vote in the secret ballot, and the old folks come out. I call them the gray hairs. That's where we may lose." This division in results would indicate that there was a large group that was dissatisfied with the way decisions were either decided or the process in which the decisions were made. The feeling that public meetings were not safe places to share hindered the leadership's ability to establish a vision a critical mass could support.

Lines were clearly delineated regarding which group made which decisions. The selectmen and town government groups made decisions for the town (e.g. taxes, roads and maintenance, grants, etc.) and the school board and superintendent made decisions regarding the school. The two groups had historically not had a collaborative union. A town manager, whose goal was to build bridges between the town office and the school department reported, "The selectmen are so frustrated with the school board because they can't get – they say getting information out of them is like getting blood out of a stone. We just don't trust them." He went on to describe an incident that described the tension between the two groups.

> The school had a parking lot that was owned by the town, technically, and the town used the school cafeteria and auditorium for their town meetings. During one pissing contest, the town manager at the time, who was a retired teacher, drew a pension from the school system, and worked for the school system for 30 years – he said to the school board, you can't use that parking lot any more. So, the

school board chairman called back and said find somewhere else to hold your town meetings.

The superintendent and the town manager at the time of this writing were working to change that relationship by working together on the town report, sharing financial information, and finding ways to help one another. Working towards a common cause and vision had proven to be rocky and was not a path easily blazed. However, more people were seeing the necessity of collaborative relationships. Whether the people of Timberton will form those collaborative relationships will remain to be seen.

Reacting to the Mill Closure: Timberton's Decisions

The Town and the Mill. To determine why the town and school made the decisions they did, one must first understand the series of events that led up to the mill closure. In actuality, the revaluation and the secession of three towns from the school district were larger hurdles to overcome than the actual mill closing. Although the secession of the three towns from the local school district occurred first, its analysis will occur after an examination of the mill and the town. This understanding is first needed because the school's tendrils reached beyond funding and into the community's identity.

The first major decision regarding the mill occurred when a request for revaluation was made. Typical of the process, the mill approached the town selectmen, who granted the review, and then the mill hired a qualified assessor agreed upon by both parties. The town of Timberton had a Board of Assessors, which was separate from the Selectmen. A Board of Assessors was not a typical board for a town of Timberton's size, but the mill and two dams brought on specific challenges that encouraged the town to have such a board. Timberton was fortunate, in that on the Board of Assessors sat a well-trained and nationally respected mill assessor. The assessor

agreed that the mill was over valued and dropped the mill's value by two-thirds. However, the town's municipal budget had already been set. The revaluation created a two million dollar funding shortfall. The town was worried, as explained by the town manager,

> We had already set the municipal budget and the school budget and everybody was real proud of themselves because we were going to come in with a tax budget of about 16 [mils]. And for years it has been in the 16s. And then the revaluation happened in August…and if they didn't take any action, that mil rate would have gone to about 23. From 16 to 23, which would have been about a 50% increase all at once.

Made worse in this instance, according to Maine law, assessors were required to maintain confidentiality about assessments for a major taxpayer requesting a change in valuation, so town selectmen were unaware of the large drop that would be occurring when they were building the budget. The Board of Assessors had the knowledge, but they were bound by law to not disclose any information. By this time the mill's contribution to the town had fallen to 40% of the tax base.

People within the community felt that the revaluation had to be inaccurate and even if it was the mill was in a position to pay much more. A large number of people just could not see that what was occurring in other mills in Maine and across the nation could occur in Timberton. Residents were also prompted to attempt to redistribute responsibilities for the mill's revaluation, as they also felt a sense of betrayal from one of their own – this expert on the Board of Assessors who was also a long time resident. This discontent prompted about 350 community members to sign a petition to abolish the Board of Assessors and put the responsibility on the selectmen. The reasoning was twofold. First, a decision like this should not rest on one person's shoulders.

Second, although the selectmen would also be bound by the law to not disclose changes in valuations, they would be able to build the municipal budgets with that information in mind and not be caught unaware, like with this event. This disgruntled group felt that the selectmen would be in a better position to protect their property taxes. The petitioners' request was voted on and passed. The Board of Assessors was dissolved and the selectpersons requested a second revaluation to be completed by another assessor believing that the first assessment had to be inaccurate. That assessment came in even lower – little comfort to those who supported the first assessor and the Board of Assessors, and too late to address the tears that occurred in the community with the petition to dissolve the Board of Assessors.

Economic Plan

With the revaluation in place, the community needed to find ways to keep their mil rate down and their costs in check. The Timberton selectmen decided to reduce their police department and go with the County Sheriff's Department, contract some governmental services that were formally part of a town committee or board, and seek new businesses. They actively worked to make the town more appealing to commuters by cleaning up the downtown, improving a parking lot, establishing more green space, building a new playground, and marketing themselves more aggressively. "You've got to have something in order to attract people," shared a long time resident and selectman. The town also looked at its schools to bring people to Timberton. The town manager articulated,

> We need more families to come to Timberton and put their kids in the school system. We have a playground out here in the middle of town. And that is one of the investments that the town wanted to put in to be more attractive.

But to bring families to fill the school, more was needed besides seats in a school. Long time resident and selectman shared,

> We are also trying to maintain a tax rate that is reasonable while still attracting new residents and business to our town in the midst of a financial crisis. You're going to come for quality of life. It's slow pace.

Grants were provided for business improvements. There was a focus on tourism, helping a local campground, building multiuse trails, and promoting local theater. Sidewalks were improved and a major route traveling through the community was rebuilt. Having its own electricity company was a resource most towns did not have. Said one town government official, "Two hydroelectric dams still generate electricity and revenue for Timberton." Additionally, the electric company entered into an agreement with a private organization that brought in the largest solar array in Maine, furthering the output of electricity. A large agricultural business, providing over 200 jobs, was given tax increment financing (TIF) to encourage its commitment to the community. However, despite good pay and regular bonuses, few people that lived in Timberton worked at this farm. It was not the employment draw town officials had hoped for. The business provided solid revenue for the town, but, in general, the community was not taking advantage of the jobs offered. Some of the people interviewed commented that the jobs were too hard on the body. Where the mill had jobs that were manual labor, the pay was well above the state average. This agricultural operation had jobs, but it paid essentially a median Maine rate. It therefore bears the question, what is the compensation point where the hard manual labor would be acceptable to employees? Thus, although the community was able to find a business that could provide employment, the town's vision of 200 people in town with jobs in the community did not materialize.

Of interest was that laid off mill employees had some higher levels of education (an advantage when looking for employment) than the employees involved in other mill closures in Maine, and they were provided severance pay and benefits based on the length of time they had worked in the mill, as well as a trade readjustment allowance (TRA) for job training, job search, and relocation allowances. Those families that had lived through the abrupt mill closure in the 1970s almost felt lucky, with one community member sharing,

> And the mill, I felt, and the people that worked in the mill, when they got done, they got so much per year as severance pay. And everybody was pretty happy with that. I didn't hear too many complaints about that.

Thus, many were able to find employment or other opportunities elsewhere, albeit with a longer commute or less pay involved. Others found employment at a reduced pay level – happy of the employment, but wistful of the pay they once had. "In this part of Maine, where it's pretty rural, there's not a lot of businesses and jobs that pay good benefits and pay a good wage," stated one community member and former mill worker. Moving forward was challenging when looking at less pay, friends and relatives who landed better jobs, and the general lack of options.

The selectmen continued to plan for the town's future. An ominous feeling continued yo hang over the town due to a lawsuit where the mill was requesting back taxes be refunded. Should the mill win, the selectmen knew that a refund would further hurt the town, already struggling to make up for lost revenues. The town manager stated, " If they [the mill] win this abatement fully, we will have to write them a check for a million dollars." Shared town selectman,

> We looked at a five-year plan. We looked at a line of credit, which we had not touched, to make sure we could meet our balances. We went with basically no

> carry over. We went with no money in the checkbook. We haven't touched the line of credit and we've just extended it for another year.

However, some people did not understand this process. With taxes rising and revenues decreasing there were still questions. "In some people's minds, why do you want to raise all these taxes when you're sitting on a million dollars in your checking account?" shared a town resident. The process, being dragged along for years, was a dark cloud hanging over the town, a cloud the town was working hard to make sure they were prepared for. The passage of time also helped the community to prepare for this cost and found that they were much better prepared if a negative decision was returned.

The Schools and Their Role in Revitalization – Help or Hindrance

Like the town, the school suffered a series of shocks which impacted its funding. School enrollment had already been on the decline in Timberton. The mill closure had little impact on school enrollment because so few families that had children actually lived in Timberton. Said one elementary educator, "When I talk about mill kids here, I am talking about six families whose parents worked directly at the mill." This was supported at the middle school and high school, as reported by another educator, "As far as elementary and middle school [enrollment] we didn't see that [drop]. We saw a little bit of a drop there [middle school], but our numbers are staying steady." The first economic shock to the schools was when all of the smaller towns in the district seceded from the district three and four years prior to the mill closing. Timberton saw an almost 20% drop in their student population. With multiple neighboring districts within a twenty-mile radius, and the assurance of no small school closures, the lure to other school districts saw three towns take their students out of the Timberton School District. Additionally, the wounds

from less than smooth secessions remained. Said one former school leader and community member,

> Power can be good and bad. You can abuse your power and I think Timberton might have gotten beyond what they should have done with their outlying towns. And it has cost them and it's continuing to cost them. And I think the drop in enrollment is more from losing the towns than it is from losing the mill at this time.

Timberton controlled the votes on the school board and this was a time when many small school closures were occurring. The State was encouraging consolidation and a close examination of the costs of keeping a small school open. Additionally, Timberton was still on the receiving end of an operational mill's revenues, and thus holding much power. One community member shared, "I know that we had some very vocal and strong people on the Timberton board. They looked down on these smaller towns. This is the way it's going to be. Take it or leave it." This attitude was not uncommon across the state when enrollments were high and towns had solid revenues. But declining enrollments meant school districts needed to find ways to attract students to their schools. Said one educator, "Students are a hot commodity." In rural Maine student enrollments were a shrinking commodity that showed no signs of improving.

Declining enrollment and property values represented less funding for Timberton's schools. As Maine school enrollment counts lagged two to three years behind the current fiscal year, the town was able to work through these departures with short-term cuts and reductions. However, with the revaluation of the mill and its eventual closure, the school's situation only became more concerning. As the school budget absorbed more than half of the town's budget, the school board and superintendent were left wondering how to address the sudden drop in

revenues. Cuts were made, but agreement on the best course of action was divided. Over and over the leadership in Timberton has been unable to move effectively forward due to conflicting ideas and visions.

Despite divisiveness in financial decision-making, the pride the community held for its schools was consistent. This pride was reflected in how the town was committed to keeping their schools. Said one educator and life time community member,

> The elementary, and the high school, and the junior high are the hub of the community. Everything, in my mind, revolves around it. I think that it is something that if it closed would be devastating to the community. That would be a big blow if that ever happened. The schools are the hub of what's going on.

Consistently people, regardless of their status within the town, expressed that the school was the heart of the community. "Without our school, we lose our identity. For me, that's huge. That is huge. And if the community can support that and pay those taxes to get that school to stay open, I support that," shared a Timberton resident. Even with the loss of the mill and its revenues, there was no serious discussion about closing any of the schools in town. The one school that was briefly considered was the elementary school, but financial examination showed that to be a poor option. Explained selectman, educator, and community member,

> But there is still a bond on it. There's still a note on it. So they still owe money. If you close a building you owe money on, you've got to pay the money back immediately to the State that you borrowed.

Thus, shutting the school would have cost much more than keeping it open. Ironically, the way many Maine communities found savings was to close schools. Timberton needed to keep one of its schools open to save funds.

Additionally, the Maine funding formulas were changing. The state took into account property valuations from three to five prior years. For Timberton, that represented a time when the mill was operating and paying full operational revenues. As stated by the superintendent, "Changes in state funding formulas, further hurt Timberton. With the change in the funding formula, we already started out $125,000 in the hole." As school expenditures were most heavily weighted in salaries and benefits, the teachers went three years without a raise. The mill revaluation, changing funding formulas, and a drop in student enrollment had the school experiencing a considerable drop in revenues.

An unexpected result of the mill closure, although not completely unexpected with school administration, was the increase in family requests for health benefits. Although the family health insurance was allowable and a negotiated benefit, the increase in people taking advantage of that benefit put further strain on the school budget. Unemployed mill workers needed insurance, and as some of those mill workers had a spouse that worked in the school, they took advantage of a 100% full coverage offered to staff and their spouses and children under the school contract. The superintendent explained,

> We had 60 families [in Timberton schools] that were directly impacted in the community by the mill changing. Our [school] insurance plan is actually the Cadillac in the area. We had…teachers whose spouses worked in the mill, and they now, have picked up family insurance, which costs us more.

As with many Maine schools, insurance was a contentious topic. Community members saw this benefit as expense that should be cut, especially as many of them paid for their benefits. Educators took the position that they had long worked for lower pay to have the better benefits.

With increasing costs to taxpayers, the discussion regarding benefits the school offered had become a bigger issue among community members. The town manager shared,

> We [the town office] used to have 100% coverage for individual and 100% for family. And over five years they put together a plan to cut that back. Now we have entered into our first year of 100% for the individual and 50% for the family. So, it was a 10% cut every year until we got down to 50%. The school is still 100%. 100%. And that's the issue.

Despite the various school Unions lobbying hard to keep their benefits at 100%, the school board moved to require families to pay a portion of health insurance for families. This decision did not settle well with faculty who felt that they were shouldering a large part of the balancing of the school budget.

Consolidation talks occurred, but none of the towns were ready to relinquish any of their schools. Each community believed that schools were what attracted families and businesses to an area, in addition to serving as a community meeting place. However, the strongest pulls with people were the ties their local traditions. Shared a school leader,

> That's the thing. It's tradition. The word tradition comes up a lot. And we don't want to lose our traditions. And change is hard. Change is hard for communities. They went to school here, their kids went to school here, and they want their grandkids to go to school here. People don't want to change that. Often time, these schools are the heart and souls of their communities. They are the social life of the communities. Athletics plays a huge role in them.

Like many mill towns, there was great pride in the sports' programs. Long time community member said, "I think the school and its athletic achievements are the town's life blood. We are

owls and we are always going to be owls. We are green and white and we are always going to be green and white." When further pressing a community member about the possibility of consolidating, he shared, "[Name of town] unashamedly has said, "Look. We've got eight gold balls in our trophy cabinet. And we don't want to lose that identity." This pride in sports crossed town boundaries and reached far back into people's memories. Explained one educator and community member,

> The guys at the mill could remember back in the 1980s. The date. What quarter of the football game it was. What the play was. Who's the quarterback? It's like it was yesterday, and it was 20 or 30 years ago.

Tradition strongly reigned and consolidation was too difficult to imagine with a former rival.

However, the town and school saw that their school enrollment continued to decline and that students were needed to maintain programming and services. A compromise allowed surrounding towns the option of sending their students to Timberton to join a team. For example, towns without a football team were allowed to join Timberton's team, but Timberton residents wanted the team within their town. However, declining enrollment had hit sports teams, too. Recently, Timberton and a neighboring school district found neither could convince enough players to field their baseball teams, so they joined together to make one team. A neutral name and entirely new mascot was developed. "It bothers people, and I will admit that I am one of them. It bothers people that in the newspaper we are not listed as the Timberton owls," stated long time community member. Also common was the feeling of loss when change did occur. One lifetime resident and parent of a Timberton player shared,

> So, because it was a brand new team — I didn't really agree with this — but the parents weren't asked their opinions, unfortunately. I would have liked to have a

> parent meeting on it. But, our athletic director just decided to do it on his own with the coaches. It was just weird though, being in the paper, because not everybody, and sometimes in parentheses, if there was an article in the paper, they'd put Timberton slash Lakeside in the parentheses, because who knows, nobody knows what [name of combined team] is. It's not even a town.

The small step to consolidate a few sports teams has seen little else materialize other than discussions.

These discussions were more amiable when talks turned to sharing food services, or purchasing in bulk, or items that did not touch upon tradition. Somewhat surprising, based on the personnel issues and high turnover of the position almost all the neighboring school districts have had with superintendents, was a hesitancy to share one superintendent. One concern voiced by a school leader was, “Where would the office be? Unless it’s in the middle of the Kennebec River, somebody’s got to think they got an advantage.” This view was supported by a town selectman, who said,

> The guy on this side of the bridge says that person's only spending 43% of their time here. This one over here says they're buying things for me and using them over there. Everybody thinks they're getting the short end of the stick.

An opinion was presented that in addition to towns being sporting rivals, the mistrust that had been held by communities concerning their superintendents, meant they needed to keep their superintendent under close observation. Thus, having a full time superintendent was a cost Timberton and its neighboring towns are presently willing to pay.

Funding the schools was a priority in Timberton, but the costs also forced the selectmen and school board to seek out additional funding. One source of funding from the State was the

Sudden and Severe funding, which Timberton sought. However, due to the wording of the law at the time, the town could not get Sudden and Severe funding. Explained former town official and community member,

> Timberton would not have qualified for the Sudden and Severe because the State could have said it's not sudden and severe with the closing of the mill. It's obsolescence that has occurred year after year for the last few years that you recognized all at once.

Also, there was political fallout from other towns that had been granted the funds, which had not been used as intended. "The Governor was not happy with [Woodville] because they didn't reduce their expenses and they just kept taking this money and spending it on their expenses," shared a town selectman. However, because of the mill's revaluation, a contingency went to Augusta to argue their town's plight. Shared an educator, "So, they busted down there, they being the selectmen, our superintendent, to kind of lobby for some emergency legislation." The trip proved fruitful, with the town receiving some funding, but not at the levels that were anticipated.

The loss of three sending communities, combined with the revaluation and eventual closure of the mill forced the school to seriously address spending. Stated one resident,

> It's hard because every community is different, but you want to keep sacred the things that you really hold dear. It's always a hard decision to want to cut because you wouldn't have it if you didn't value it at all.

And cut the school board did. Said one educator, "We've had to cut programming at the high school, because you cut staff and that is usually programming. We're not offering the things we

did five years ago." Programming was eliminated or presented in through a different method. A school leader stated,

> Foreign language was changed to an online program, industrial arts was eliminated, and alternative education was contracted out. We tuition our kids over to [Barra] if they're in alternative ed. We still have a need. We are just sending our kids across the river instead of having our own program.

Positions left vacant due to retirements were not always filled. What used to be four teachers per grade at the elementary level decreased to three and Physical Education cut a teacher through reduction in force.

Further exacerbating the problems of the school department were the rising levels of poverty bringing its own problems. "We have a huge population of Section 8 housing. 76% of our kids are free and reduced lunch. When you are a high area of poverty, you've got a lot of crime," shared the school superintendent. Despite reduced revenues in which to work with, the school now also needed to address the needs of students in poverty. A school leader said, "We did all kinds of fund raising events to raise money for the Good Shepherd Food Bank." With poverty came increased mobility, which meant students had more interruptions in their academics, putting them at further disadvantage for success. Unique to Timberton was that it had its own electric company. Families who struggled would move more often because of an inability to pay their bills – electricity being one of those unpaid bills. An elementary educator stated,

> We've had more homeless families. Housing is an issue. People still come to town, but it's for housing. And sometimes it's electrical, because we have

> Timberton Electric here. People burn their bridges with CMP and Emera, so they move here and go Timberton Electric for a while.

The number of children living in poverty, once a small population in Timberton, continued to grow placing more and more responsibilities upon the schools which had less funding. This need for increased social services was not immediately recognized and caused further funding concerns within both the school and community once it was recognized.

According to superintendents and town managers interviewed, Timberton was a springboard for superintendents wanting to get experience that would allow them move to a larger, better paying district, although most moved to towns and school districts of similar size. The school department struggled to keep a superintendent, having had five in thirteen years. However, as stated by one community member, "Every time you have the turnover in administration, then you have a different view of how things should be done." An educator who shared this opinion said, "I think each one of them [superintendent] set a different vision." Additionally, with change of leadership comes an understanding (or misunderstanding) of small town politics. A school leader articulated this by saying, "The previous superintendent came from another state to this district. Did a little bit in another district in Maine. No fault of his own. Didn't have a lot of knowledge about Maine and rural Maine especially." The micropolitics within a small town are not easily navigated. The traditions, relationships, and the wearing of multiple hats make for complexities not seen in larger communities or cities.

As much as people will close ranks and support their family or close friends, they will also hold long memories of injustices or slights. Past injustices have made people cautious to trust. A longtime resident and town official shared,

> I used to hear stories about how the school board and the town office literally hated each other. They would threaten each other. And sometimes, when you peel back all that history, you realize, ah, this group doesn't like this group because of what happened in 1975. And this group doesn't like this group because of these people.

The building of trust was a commitment many commented on and genuinely desired. Community leaders recognized that the lack of trust was what has slowed Timberton's growth. One town manager made it a goal to build bridges among the community, stating, "Building bridges is about consistency, flexibility, and persistence. You don't have to be best friends, but you need to get to the point where everybody respects each other. And everybody is kind of understanding where everybody is coming." The town manager successfully reached out and asked the superintendent to add to the town report – something that had not been done for years. They now meet regularly and share information. Said the superintendent, "We need to get the board back on track, so they're [community members] not angry all the time." In addition to communication, the school leaders determined that actions might speak louder than words and reached out to help the community. Shared one educator,

> We do lots of community stuff. We do a community service day a couple of times a year where high schoolers go and rake and do whatever they can for old people. Stack wood. Whatever. Just trying to show that your tax dollars go for a lot of things.

The school administration recognized that the school absorbed the majority of the revenues and that having community support was needed. Past injustices had to be overcome and people needed to work together to ensure the health of the school and community.

Influential Factors That Determined Timberton's Decisions

The sudden and large loss of revenues would be challenging for any community. It forces people to determine what they deem most important and what is important varies from person to person. However, what came up over and over was the sudden lack of funds. Said one community member and business owner, "It always comes back to money. Most of the time money is the root of the evil. You don't have enough. You want more." A town is no different than the families that lost their jobs when the mill left. They are in a situation where budgets were made based on an expected income, but finding a new and similar source of revenue is difficult. Said one community member,

> School district have to make choices and decide what their priorities are and what they value and then look at more efficient ways to do business. I think there's no tax base there, it's not there. You're not going to find it. People aren't all of a sudden going to have more money, so you really would have to look at what do we value, what do we hold dear, and *are* there other things we can do more efficiently?

Timberton was no different than any town facing financial uncertainty. Decisions had to be made. To make those determinations a school leader shared, "How do you make those decisions? People vote. And they don't always vote based on fact. They vote on emotion." Voting did become emotional, especially when tradition entered into the possibilities of cuts. A community member and educator said, "Sports tend to bring people out more than anything else." And in a small town, they also vote based on who is related to whom, and which group is associated with another group. The cross pollination of groups ensured that decisions were never black and white. Shared by a former superintendent,

> One of our board members, who was a former teacher, and his son was actually the Phys Ed position that got riffed [reduction in force]. [The school district] hired him back, and now all of the sudden, we've got 20 votes. Votes that we know will be in the affirmative.

Taking a strong political stance can also determine the outcome of decisions. One business owner and active community resident who was not bothered by the politics said, "So, if I put a sign out that I voted for Donald Trump that means that you voted for Hilary, you're not going to come in? I mean that's your choice." However another community member spoke of the hurt that occurred with differences of opinions, "I have relatives that won't come talk to me now." Memories are long. During one school budget meeting, an educator shared that a topic was brought up regarding why something did not set well, with the explanation being, "Many moons ago, I'm told, many years ago, maybe in the 60s, before the Sinclair Act, maybe." The interconnectedness and long memories can make change difficult, often with concerns that a disagreement in one area will affect the relationship in a different area and not be forgotten for a long, long time.

The primary place decisions were made was through the public committees that were elected or appointed to make the decisions. Both the school board and the town council had twice monthly meetings and yearly budget meetings. What proved challenging was that they held their meetings on the same night. Said one town selectman, "We try [to have communication between the selectmen and school board]. But they are an independent group and they don't have to do any more than listen to us. It's difficult." The delegation of power had historically been clearly delineated and groups were not willing to cede any power. This message was shared by a town manager,

> They [selectmen] attend sporadically, but they feel that they really aren't wanted there and they don't want to feel like their big brother. Legislatively they [selectmen] don't have control over the school budget and the school board knows that, so a lot of it comes back to [sigh] trying to influence people to run for the school board.

Both the selectmen and the school board depended on these venues for community input, but both felt equally frustrated by the boundaries that had somehow been imposed. Despite the boundaries, most people believed that the public meetings were the primary place to get one's views aired, recognizing that not everyone would feel comfortable in such public venues, taking to more current methods such as digital means. One community member and school board member shared,

> Usually, if they want to voice their opinion, and it's about something negative — Facebook, social media, newspaper...If we have an article in the newspaper, there are a few that use fake names and are on there often about how the school board doesn't know what they're doing or the selectmen and the town manager.

There also appeared to be levels at which people would take their views. When events become contentious, the issues are brought to the newspaper. A community member and town manager shared,

> Because it is awful easy when people tick you off, to just say we are done. And then you move away from positive to neutral, and then you go neutral to where you start waging war. Where you are always criticized. And then if they really want to get under you, go to the newspaper. You start waging war in the newspaper.

Finally, the most aggressive method would be through social media — according to the town manager and multiple school leaders. This source was identified as being the most troublesome due to its anonymity and the ability to spread misinformation quickly.

Many decisions were informally made out in the community. The local coffee shop, sporting events, and small businesses were all places where heated conversations took place. Some leaders saw the power of these outside conversations. Shared one former school leader and community member,

> You've got to move away from those public forums. You've got to go, whatever it is in your community, the hot spots. I mean I know the Dunkin Donuts in Timberton. There's people there every day. At different times, it's different groups. If I were Superintendent there, I'd be going for coffee a few times, I'm not even a coffee drinker. But you need the small groups or groups that meet, you need to be in those meetings. You need to be working it.

The school leadership provided newsletters and both the selectmen and school leaders maintained a website. However, soliciting input was often dependent upon community members reaching out to both of these groups. The town had a public access channel and posted information on that channel, as well as YouTube. The public access channel was seen as a way to better reach the aging population, while YouTube was used for a younger generation.

Community Perceptions of the Decisions Made

Although emotions were high and the decision making process was not always clear, pride in schools came up over and over. Every single participant supported the schools at some level. A sense that work must be done internally also emerged. Groups wanted to work more closely together and repair some of the isolation and lack of transparency that had been in place

for a long time. An active community member reported, “Part of the isolation is control. And we all want control. We all want people to do things our way.” Groups were reaching out more to other groups. Due to the rising poverty levels, people were also working to help one another. Shared one educational leader, “I’d get people calling me up to find out where can I get a good bank loan. I was honored that they would call.” It appeared that every decision had a path back to the schools. Over and over the importance and health of the schools was reiterated and could be the rallying point in which to gather the citizens of Timberton to work together.

Analysis

There was a core of people who wielded much power within the town of Timberton, and who exercised a powerful pull on what decisions were made both in the community and the schools. They used their power through means of persuasion – often behind the scenes, but also by their support of various organizations and/or people, and calculated times of more visible and vocal expressions. They most often consisted of people with long histories within the community, had some degree of wealth that may have been measured in land and/or money, and who by some means had garnered the respect of the community. The people who wielded influence were exemplified in two examples. One was a lifetime community member who was an educator, town selectman, and very active within the community. Such was his standing in the town that he was referred to as “Mr. Timberton.” His power was well respected and often spoken of as one who has the best interests of the community at heart. Another example was a group of people who owned much property or businesses and who contributed to the coffers of the town through taxation. This group was also very active in ensuring that taxes were held in check and that the responsibility to finance the town did not rest on their shoulders.

Though those whose history in Timberton stretched back years exercised a substantial amount of power, there was new leadership in both the town manager position and the school superintendent. Both recognized the power both of the aforementioned groups had and both were striving to work with a broader scope of people while also developing relationships with the power brokers. One leader was a member of the community; the other was not. Both have long historical ties to the community. This history was helping restore trust to the positions, and allowed more to be done to find a common vision for the town and school. Their collaboration was reaping benefits by restoring a trust in the work being done.

It was the lack of vision that hindered the community of Timberton. The people of Timberton believed they would be one of Maine's paper mills to remain open. The mill had orders and was working at a profit. Even the sale of the mill to a company known for purchasing its competition was something they were convinced they could work through, agreeing to essentially every request the company made. In hindsight, people were not as surprised the mill closed, as they were that they could not defy the odds. The truly believed if they worked hard enough, the mill would remain open. There was much status with a mill job and, thus, those jobs were worth fighting for. One former mill worker stated,

> Losing the mill was losing a job, but it was also losing the status of the job. It's a job people look up to. Losing that pride, along with the relationships with everyone you work with, that was one of the toughest things.

Additionally, the town reaped the benefits of the mill with nice revenues from taxation and mill workers who supported community businesses. Keeping the mill was a necessity in maintaining their identity and way of life.

What the community did not see, or chose not to see, was what was occurring all over the country with pulp and paper mills. Some of the obstacles too large to overcome included an increase in foreign competition and subsidies, neoliberal policies, declining demand for some types of paper products, rising labor and operational costs, and the move to ever larger companies buying out competition and then operating fewer mills. The town did not plan for the possibility of a closure. However, what hurt the town more than the mill closure was the revaluation of the mill. The revaluation of the mill was the economic shock; the closure of the mill was the final shock in a series of slow motion shocks (shutdowns, lay-offs, reduction in salaried and benefits, mill revaluation). The town, in not having a solid plan, was not prepared for the revaluation and the sudden loss of revenues.

Town leadership was relatively stable in its town manager and many of the selectmen, but they lost sight of the larger picture in their quest to keep the mill operational. The town did attract other businesses like the agricultural farm and solar array before the mill closure, which brought revenues to the town, but it succumbed to public pressure to not put aside any financial reserves. There were vocal opponents who did not want to see their taxes increased, and establishing a reserve would have done that. Also, the town government could not garner support to establish a reserve, as the mill was still operational and the perception was that Timberton's mill would be one of the few left open. A reserve was seen as unnecessary. As a result, although the town had worked to attract more businesses to community, they did not have the emergency funds to lessen the blow of the revaluation or the closure.

Unique to the town was its board of assessors, who were quite knowledgeable, but who were limited by law as to what they could share with the town. They had the knowledge of the impending revaluation, and the impact on the town would experience, but they were unable to

share that information. Later, as information became available, the community turned on this board, believing the laws they were required to follow could be eliminated with a change. Thus, the Board of Assessors was disbanded and its responsibilities given to the selectmen who would still have to maintain the confidentiality, but who could operate the town on full knowledge of revenues. The dissolution of this board caused divisions with the community, which continued to stir emotion in people. Additionally, the disconnect between the town selectmen, town manager, school board, and Board of Assessors became problematic when determining a course of action. The Board of Assessors attempted to explain possible scenarios, while following law and not divulging any details. The Board of Selectmen was trying to save the largest business, while listening to its constituency to keep taxes and spending down. The town manager was attempting to work with all groups and appeared unable to generate a plan that would bring all the groups together. The school board was working with a teachers' union that was very strong and had negotiated salaries and benefits that would be difficult to fund. Each group felt the burden of addressing the loss of revenues, but they did not work well together and were pressured by groups who had more power. To make the disconnect more complete an interim town manager was hired one year after revaluation and a year before the mill closed, with the assignment to guide the struggling community out of this challenge.

There was a long history of the School Board and the Selectmen not communicating. Each felt they had their responsibilities, which were clearly delineated, and the groups should not wander into the other's territory. Additionally, leadership at the school level was inconsistent and had not inspired confidence in its community. This position was more political and was affected by the opinions of the community as well as some mismanagement and lack of communication. Essentially, a revolving door had occurred in the position of superintendent. It was here that the

micropolitics of the town were more obvious. Superintendents were not renewed for perceived slights, not fitting in, and differences of opinion. In fairness, some superintendents were not renewed because of mismanagement of funds and special favors afforded to select people. Nevertheless, due to the inconsistency and growing power of a smaller group of people, the school did not have consistent leadership. This was made more problematic when events like family ties affected hiring practices or when special favors allowed one person to make well over the average salary expected for the position. Isolation of groups in authority and lack of communication only supported the inability to agree on a vision for the town and school.

The school was a hub of the community, particularly around its sports programs. Thus, this was one area where the community agreed – they wanted to keep their schools. Only one person articulated that schools would attract families; rather most spoke of tradition, history, and pride. However, there was fear that the schools may not survive as they were, especially since there was one neighboring school district directly across the river, and three additional districts within a 20 mile radius from the center of town. Said one former mill worker and lifetime community member,

> The population is dwindling as it is. Now that the mill's gone, there's even less reason to stay. So I think it will be felt in the two school systems. It's not going to be a process that's felt one or two years after the fact. It's going to be something that's felt five to 10 years down the road.

But keeping the schools was important to the community and they were working to assure their presence in the community. There were many concerns about school costs, but the budgets passed.

Timberton had some aspects that could make it more attractive to potential residents. The river upon which the town borders was the site of many recreational activities. However, waterfront in Timberton was not a draw to the town because of the two dams, thus eliminating recreational use. It also had a major Maine retailer that drew people from out of town. Competitive electric rates, coupled with affordable housing, and basic needs businesses (a pharmacy, and grocery, hardware, and clothing stores) could potentially be a draw for families (who could help populate the schools) willing to commute. However, Timberton was somewhat isolated. Finally, the toughest sell was the acceptance of being an outsider. There were levels of acceptance, with those from out of state having the most difficult time assimilating into the community, followed closely by those from the affluent areas of southern Maine. A new comer's chances of acceptance rose if he/she came from a small rural Maine town and shared similar values to those of Timberton. One interviewee mentioned that immigrants could help the community, but their differences might make them hard to "fit in."

Finally, the residents of Timberton wanted to preserve their town and still had hope that they would remain strong. They were not hopeful that another mill would appear, but rather were working to attract new businesses. Those select groups with power still wielded strong influence, but the general population was slowly seeing that the town could not do what it had always done and innovation was needed. Trust in leadership was slowly returning, but was fragile as it takes time to undo the mistrust built up over a lifetime. Additionally, a common vision had not yet emerged beyond generalities of saving a town. Timberton was poised, ready to grow, but not yet ready to fail.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CROSS CASE COMPARISON OF THE THREE COMMUNITIES

Negative economic shocks are challenging to even the healthiest of communities. A sudden loss of revenues is seldom seen as a positive and puts communities in a position where difficult choices must be made — either find funding to replace the lost revenues or learn how to survive without previous expenditures. When a community is overly dependent upon one industry, and that singular industry exits the town, the problems are usually magnified. The decision making process is a complicated one that depends on a variety of variables. Analysis of the micropolitics surrounding the decisions made within each town after an economic downturn can help to reveal how and why decisions were made as they were. By analyzing mirocopolitics, we can better understand how a community's political culture is made up of small-scale politics represented by the formal and informal power structures in the form of individuals and groups (Blasé & Bjork, 2010). Specifically, this study focused on how the micropolitics that operated within three communities — Oakview, Pineville, and Timberton — impacted decision making as these communities sought to navigate the closure of an industry (pulp and paper) upon which they had been heavily reliant for revenues and school funding, as well as examine how decisions were made about the future of their community schools. This study found that the micropolitical groups in these towns, especially those groups with power, either worked together towards a common goal or in opposition to the other, with more positive outcomes observed with the groups that worked collaboratively. The dynamics of how groups interacted became an important variable in how these communities made decisions during financial distress (and other times). Groups within these three communities that were able to more effectively cross the boundaries and constraints of class, tradition, and social constructs were seen more often developing a

common vision that a critical mass of residents could support. Additionally, the level of collaboration between the formal and informal leaders appeared to contribute to whether or not a cohesive common vision (an essential decision to be made) was established and realized.

Micropolitical interactions, which are present in any situation where two or more people are involved, determine who gets to make the decisions and why, and impacts outcomes in any decision. Power is asserted, given, and sought, especially when decisions need to be made. Formal leaders are elected and appointed, while informal leaders emerge depending on any number of qualities that provide them with power or influence. Tradition, wealth, and social structures are but a few variables that may provide an individual or group with more clout within a community. When decisions need to be made, especially during times of stress, the types of interaction between the formal and informal leadership (power groups) will determine ensuing actions and results.

In this study, interviewees expressed higher levels of satisfaction with decisions that were made when the formal groups were most in control, following established protocols, and working effectively with the informal power groups. Interviewees also expressed high levels of dissatisfaction with decisions made when established protocols were not followed. When formal leaders appeared to operate outside the bounds of what was acceptable by community residents, then it was generally expected that the informal power groups/leaders would provide the checks and balances to ensure the honesty and trustworthiness of the formal leaders. Residents involved in this study felt the system was working most effectively when formal leaders maintained primary control, while still listening to and collaborating with the informal leaders, who provided a balance to the power held by the formal leadership.

The level of collaboration present in how the micropolitical groups in Oakview, Pineville, and Timberton interacted provided insight as to how these towns navigated the industry closures and then made decisions regarding their schools. School leaders in communities that saw the school as a community resource (Harmon & Schafft, 2009) established effective coalitions, educated the public and various officials, used the budgeting process as a tool, and rolled out data and information (Miller, 1995). They then found increased levels of collaboration between the school and community. Of the three communities studied, Pineville and Timberton had schools that remained operational due to stronger advocacy groups, a sense of purpose for both the academic programming and non-educational uses of the building, and a fierce commitment to maintain local control. However, whereas Pineville's school leaders worked collaboratively with the town select people/council and town manager, Timberton did not—a micropolitical difference that may help explain why Pineville was ultimately more successful in developing a plan for sustainable school funding and community economic growth. The micropolitics within Pineville were such that formal leaders (school superintendent and school board, as well as the town manager and town council) had the greatest power and influence over decisions, while informal groups such as prominent residents and politically active individuals supported the formal groups. The formal leadership groups in Pineville worked collectively to establish a clear vision with active goals (based on community input) that were shared and accepted by the residents of the community, and then collaborated with the informal leaders to enact this vision. In contrast, whereas a clear vision and supporting goals were established and generally accepted among the town's residents in Pineville, Timberton had competing interests. As a result (although not the only reason), Timberton was unable to develop a common vision, and was thus presented as less successful than Pineville. Yet, while groups in Timberton did not work

collaboratively, keeping the schools operational was a shared goal and was strongly supported when decisions were made about the school. Disagreements arose regarding the formal school leadership, staffing, and programming, but not whether the school should remain open or closed. For both Pineville and Timberton residents, a sense of hope and a level of support were present in overcoming the stress of the mill closures when decisions were made about the schools, and allowed both towns to create and sustain a common vision at least in regards to the school. Thus, while Pineville demonstrated that the more comprehensive the common vision for the town as a whole the more successful a town would be, Timberton illustrated that even if that common vision is limited to a certain area, such as the school, even that limited common vision can have positive effects on a town's ability to address its economic crisis. Additionally, both towns demonstrated that the goal of sustaining the school could provide the motivation necessary to unite formal and informal leadership — a crucial component in the development of a common vision. In short, if we are to understand how towns develop a common vision, and why it allows them to successfully navigate an economic shock, we must first understand how micropolitics function in the development of this common vision.

The analysis presented in this chapter first considers each town's cultivation of a shared vision. This requires an analysis of the formal and informal leadership of each town, the ways in which they obtained power, the complexity of the blurred professional and personal lines of power groups, the degree to which these leadership groups worked together, the contexts in which they interacted or influenced decisions, the relationships to the schools, and the decisions they made. In considering the role of the schools in each town's ability to navigate an economic crisis, this chapter then describes the role of funding and financial preparedness, the purpose and importance the school held within each community, and the ability to adapt to changes. The

ability of both the community and school to overcome an economic shock depended upon the decisions and behaviors of those wielding the power.

Common Vision and Shared Goals Versus Divided Vision and Separate Goals

The single greatest factor in the success or difficulties of the three towns included in this analysis appeared to be the ability of those in power to create and maintain a shared vision for navigating the economic shock. The shared visions incorporated a sense of identity and connectedness among the residents. Rural communities often reflect valued norms (Miller, 1995) and shared identities. Thus, their vision and supporting strategies would be unique based upon the specific needs and values of the community. The communities where groups of people were able to collectively achieve a shared vision, agreed upon strategies, and common identities presented as more successful; those that had multiple competing visions and a lack of identity appeared to struggle. The residents in Pineville best demonstrated the success of a shared vision. These groups of people, led by the superintendent and town manager, recognized the importance of working towards common values (Owens, 2006) and a shared sense of identity (Miller, 1995). The residents determined that they did not want to become another Maine town dominated by a single employer of low skilled jobs such as a call center. Based on community input, Pineville's leaders established a vision of a town with a more diversified economy, a broader educational purpose, and a financial plan for the town and school that would ease the community into a new era — all which residents supported. The leaders then developed plans to capitalize upon the town's natural and economic resources and determined how they wanted to be perceived by other communities. They attempted to rebrand themselves — no longer a mill town, but rather a progressive town. This action alone was a big shift in the residents' mindset. When the mill was fully operational there was a local isolationist view with an almost ingrained sense of having to

"dislike people from other towns" (as reported by a life long resident). With the mills closure people saw that they could no longer be separate and needed a wider range of support to be more viable as a town and school community. Additionally, support of small businesses was actively promoted, and two larger industries were actively courted and were in the process of establishing their businesses due to the work of the various economic groups.

Indeed, each of the towns' groups that wielded power was cognizant of the advantage business diversification held and each instituted measures to attract and bring additional businesses (and their revenues) to their towns. Additionally, each community had vocal groups who realized that these revenues were needed to support the schools' educational programming and services that often represented the majority of the towns' expenses. Unlike Pineville leaders, Timberton power groups struggled to establish an agreed upon plan to promote the town or a common vision that had more depth beyond just addressing their immediate needs. As a result, even though they successfully gained one large industry before the mill closure, and complemented that with other smaller businesses that were well established, they still struggled to find long term solutions that could replace the lost revenues of the paper mill. One exception was the work of "Mr. Timberton" — a generally loved and respected personality who was a strong advocate for Timberton. He worked tirelessly to find ways to help his town and school, wanting to bring people together to improve the quality of life for the residents of Timberton. Although he made some progress, this one individual was not enough to change an entire community culture. Oakview's formal leaders experienced similar problems: although their economic group had a website, a host of community activities designed to bring businesses to town, and some federal grants to promote their downtown they had recently experienced (yet again) new leadership in both the town manager and school superintendent positions. As of this

writing, it remains unknown if the groups with decision-making power will be able to work together and bring the residents towards a common vision for the future given the need to overcome the constraints of a deeply embedded social hierarchy stretching back for decades.

The Effects of Tradition and Social Ties on the Establishment of Leadership

In order to understand why some towns were able to cultivate a shared vision while others were not, social interaction — and, in particular, leadership — within the towns should be understood on two levels: the formal type of leadership that follow prescribed governance rules and protocols, and the informal leadership that exists outside of formal governance structures. The two types of leaderships provided different contexts in which people interacted around decisions in the three communities (Ball, 1987; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Pejovich, 2012). Additionally, one should attempt to understand how in a small town tradition and established social ties heavily influence the establishment of these leaders. In small communities, everyone knows everyone. People are related by blood, marriage, and workplace connections. These connections overlap and alliances may operate within a rigid social construct that makes decision making more complex (McHenry-Sorber, 2015). As Owen presents (2006), navigating the complexities of small rural relationships can be problematic when formal school leadership is not proficient in managing the micropolitics both within and out of the school. Formal leadership's lack of proficiency in navigating the micropolitics of community may result in key decision makers being found outside of the formal leadership structure. One vocal person may garner support of an idea by drawing upon relationships (Corbett & Tinkham, 2014). In this study, decisions would take place privately—for example, in local coffee shops or during a sporting event. This was certainly the case in Timberton, where interviewees referenced certain family names over and over, and noted that decisions were made in informal settings. In these three

communities this practice had an overall negative effective on the decision-making process, as the private nature of these decisions did not provide opportunity for rebuttal or fact-finding. Thus, in those instances where tradition allowed a small group of informal leaders to establish themselves and to control the flow of information, it was difficult to establish a coherent vision that reflected the viewpoint of the community as a whole, rather than merely of the town elite.

Informal leadership, however, can be helpful. In Oakview, the informal leaders served as a check for the formal leadership. These checks uncovered actions that were not beneficial to the town and schools, and which prompted change and action, as well as the impetus for informal leaders to assume formal leadership responsibilities. Due to the nature of small towns, blurred lines often occurred within the professional realm. In Timberton a town select person was also a teacher in the school; the Pineville superintendent served on the economic development committee; and an Oakview town manager was a reserve police officer. Additionally, many of these same people resided in the community, had family ties, and were active in local events like sports and church activities. This crossing of boundaries was expected and accepted, as populations were small and the number of people needed to fill roles and those willing to participate were limited. However, having multiple roles also obfuscated the clarity of the micropolitical groups. Thus, an individual could be both formal and informal leader. This was found in Oakview and Pineville where town managers were also vocal town residents. Their voices held authority within the towns where they lived. However, when making decisions about school consolidation, Oakview's town manager and superintendent's voices were powerful, but not authoritative enough to overcome the neighboring town of Reed's power groups.

Additionally, the role of social ties in establishing leadership was also present in the schools, as local schools became subject to outside influences and groups that impacted

educational decisions (Conley, 2003). People were often hired by school leaders based on personal connections or relations, with all three school districts hiring locally connected people. However, when budgets needed trimming, those positions may have been kept because of who was in the position, not based on whether that position was critical to the vision of the community. In Timberton, the son of a local business owner was perceived by some to have been afforded an easier path to employment. In all three towns, groups outside the educational system also played a pivotal part in who kept and who lost their jobs — sometimes ignoring policy. This was seen during school consolidation efforts in Oakview. Reed residents were more active in public meetings, which helped to sway formal leadership in making personnel decisions — decisions that were perceived as more advantageous to Reed. This presented a conundrum — locally cultivated talent had been shown to be a positive contributor in these communities, yet it also presented concerns of nepotism and family connection. Local talent was observed to be more amenable to staying in the area with relational ties a powerful incentive. As blurred societal boundaries were part of the richness in the micropolitical operations of these small communities, they also sometimes caused feelings of mistrust and marginalization by residents not afforded such opportunities. In the case of a teacher with low seniority who lost his job during budget cuts but was well connected in the community, the school board attempted to change practices and policies to reflect the goal of regaining the teacher his job.

While historical and social ties proved problematic in a number of instances, those communities that understood how to navigate these traditions and social ties found that they could be effective tools for furthering a cohesive vision for the town. For example, Pineville school board members made a concerted effort to promote the vision of the school at sporting events, in places of work, and other areas of the community. They were guided by their

superintendent in how to respond to misinformation and promoted the positive events that were occurring, all while remaining true to their constituents. The vision — helping all students succeed by broadening the purpose and programming and being fiscally responsible — was repeated often and in language that all could support. Pineville's leadership realized that the message had to be supported by many social groups and they were able to utilize broader social ties and traditions in the community to ensure this collaboration.

The Role of Formal Leadership. In the three towns included in this study, formal leadership positions include town manager, town government officer, school superintendent, or school board member. The three communities that were studied all had a town government that consisted of a town manager and town select people (most often referred to as selectmen) or a town council. The select people and town council were elected, and they in turn hired the town manager. Town subcommittees were appointees and volunteers, although there were other elected positions like Timberton's Board of Assessors. A school superintendent who was hired by the locally elected school board led all the schools. School board subcommittees were school board members who were appointed or volunteered. Input into the subcommittees was provided by outside groups like a schools' curriculum committee or safety committee.

Each of the towns in this study benefitted when formal leadership functioned effectively, as the public nature of the formal town and school governance structures and their regular meetings allowed for disagreement or alternative views to be aired, with the opportunity for rebuttal or deeper discussion by town residents. In this study, it was observed that formal leadership, when allowed to operate within the formal structures, and when led with integrity, resulted in more transparency regarding the leaders' actions, generated higher levels of trust within the community, and prevented discord amongst the residents. This supports Jane

Mansbridge's (1980) description of how leadership functions: the town meeting style process promotes face-to-face meetings, allows for debate, encourages empathy, listening to and learning from other listeners; this process allows for changing opinions, and supports solidarity among participants (Mansbridge, 1980). Thus, if formal leaders followed agreed upon guidelines and set protocols, then the decision making process was relatively transparent. An example of this can be found in the high level of transparency recounted by interviewees in Pineville. Pineville's leaders crafted a careful vision and plan for the future that were presented in a multitude of meetings and communications methods. By contrast, Oakview and Timberton's informal leaders exhibited backdoor politics and their formal leaders provided a series of events that eroded the trust of community residents' through mismanagement of funds and authority. Informal leaders came from socially well-heeled residents based on history and tradition in Oakview and large landowners and those with strong political bearing in Timberton. Lack of trust resulted in perceived lack of transparency among residents. However, despite the strength of the informal leadership, Oakview and Timberton adhered to the formal leadership meetings and, in the instance of Oakview's consolidation process, held many meetings in an effort to provide more communication from formal leadership. With the exception of the secret ballot process, formal venues served as a place where communication between informal and formal leadership could occur, thereby diminishing the power of any messages being spread in other locations by informal leaders. Formal leaders, like school superintendents and town managers believed that if they could control the messages being sent out into the community, the informal leaders would have less power and authority in promoting their message.

Even though the public nature of formal leadership aided town officials in increasing transparency, this did not solve all problems of representation: some people may not have

attended meetings, not have said anything if they attended, or made a decision about attending with the fear that conflict could have broken out (Mansbridge, 1980). These "hesitation" characteristics (reasons why a person or group with less power, authority, or credibility would not speak up) were all expressed with varying levels of comfort and trust found in residents towards both formal and informal leaders; this, as well, impacted the level of support residents gave to decisions presented by the leaders. In Timberton, two of the residents — one who was a leader in the school, the other a leader in local government — perceived that their views were discounted to such a degree that neither person would attend any future public meetings. In Oakview, the after effects of the mill strike continued to elicit strong emotional feelings that, for some, had implications for their personal safety. Certain people and groups were fearful that, if they spoke out, they might experience physical harm, vandalism to their home or vehicles, and retaliation to their family through verbal and physical aggression. The aspect of voting was implemented on more contentious or conflicting issues to put distance between the conflicting groups (Mansbridge, 1980). Voting allowed for all voices to be heard, but resulted in the majority making the final decision. Each of the towns had elements of voting as part of their decision making process. However, individuals or groups might have become disenfranchised, or wanted to continue to promote his/her agenda, regardless of the venues provided. When this occurred the result was the dissenting person or group found other venues to express their views beyond what the formal leaders provided. Pineville was able to minimize the level of discontent by first establishing a vision that many of its residents could support, but then by a collective and collaborative work by the formal leaders who went out into the community to spread the vision and address any questions directly. Formal leadership also explicitly spoke about transparency by providing residents with documents, holding public meetings, and bringing the message to a

wide variety of smaller groups and organizations (e.g. senior center, civic groups) where the leaders felt there might be dissention. Proposals and decisions appeared to have more authority when made by formal leaders who followed the established rules and laws.

Acquisition of Authority with Formal Leaders. Formal leadership does not immediately command respect and followers — generally respect must be earned or granted. Although leaders do not need to be mirror images of their communities, it is helpful if there is an alignment of philosophy, priorities, power, and personality to lead effectively (Owens, 2007). Mansbridge (1980) argues that in order for formal leaders to remain in their positions, they must look for "formulas that satisfy as many, and alienate as few, interests as possible." This was demonstrated in Pineville, where formal leaders, such as school board members went out into the community supporting their superintendent and their agreed upon vision. Through their businesses and social interactions they got others not in leadership to also promote the vision. This then allowed them to work effectively with informal leaders: a Pineville school board member's spouse continued to pass the message of the school board along to her clients in her local business, and a Timberton school leader met regularly with "locals" at the local coffee shop to spread information. In short, the formal leadership was best able to gain and maintain authority when it respected the informal leadership, which in turn supported the formal leadership.

Sustained Leadership. In this study sustained leadership was more apt to see a vision and strategies develop and gain support within the community. The ability to attract and retain sustained leadership, however, proved challenging. For all three communities, economics was an issue of concern. Simplistically, the pay and benefits were just lower than more populous or wealthier areas – many in close proximity. Pineville's superintendent acknowledged this by

stating his pay was lower, but that he put value in the support of his school board and their support of him, the option to have his child(ren) attend the school in the district he led, and the belief that Pineville offered a quality of life not found in areas that would pay more. He had offers from other districts that involved significant pay raises, but he chose to remain in Pineville. Oakview and Timberton both struggled to retain school leadership, but found longer tenures of town managers when they were from the local area.

The Role of Trust in the Establishment and Maintenance of Formal Leadership. To maintain their authority and power, formal leaders need to inspire trust within the residents of the community. There has been much research in the value of trust people hold with their leaders. In his book, *The Speed of Trust* (2006), Stephen Covey writes, "trust is the one thing that changes everything." All three communities had weathered leadership tenures that were found to have operated in less than ethical ways, eroding trust in those formal leadership roles. In the short term, some formal leaders may have found success through passed budgets, alignment with state laws and policies, or connections with informal leaders, but their circumvention of rules eventually was revealed along with the implications of the break in ethics. For example, Oakview employed a superintendent who appeared to be a positive addition; one who wanted to stay with the town. However, hundreds of thousands of dollars were directed inappropriately and dealings were found to have taken place outside of the required public meetings. Oakview residents lost further confidence with a series of short-term superintendents. Timberton experienced similar events — to the extent that one superintendent discovered the business manager had reported less funding to protect the town (like a savings account the superintendent wasn't aware of). Pineville experienced multiple changes in the town manager position after their long-standing one retired – one lasting less than one year when his contract was prematurely

terminated. In Pineville, these changes appeared to be due to the new town managers not continuing with or wanting to change the vision so many residents supported. Thus, while in the short term some of the formal leaders were able to make gains using less-than-ethical methods, in the long term the success of formal leadership was heavily dependent upon the leadership's ability to gain and maintain the trust of the communities' residents.

The Role of Informal Leadership. In this study, informal leaders were identified as those who held no public office, but who held great sway in the town's decision-making process. Although not all inclusive, informal leaders in this study were generally individuals or groups with higher social standing, more wealth, or large landowners within the town. Tradition and history in Oakview provided its informal leaders with long standing authority based on where they lived or worked, whereas in Timberton, the informal leaders were those with more wealth and owners of large tracts of land. Pineville's informal leaders appeared to have close ties with its formal leaders and worked well together. As we might have expected based on previous research, stronger informal leadership tended to arise when there was conflict over values (Scribner & Layton, ed., 1995), resulting in groups advocating for their individual interests, rather than a shared interest (Tinkham, 2014). Additionally, when there was a lack of strong formal leadership and community vision, residents felt the need to fill this void with individual advocacy, resulting in the rise of informal leadership (Tinkham, 2014; Corbett & Tinkham, 2014), formal leadership being usurped, and roadblocks erected to limit change. Informal leadership, however, was also able to move agendas forward and institute positive changes. The end result of this informal leadership typically depended upon whether the eventual outcomes were targeted more towards personal gain. Although unable to quantify personal motive with any certainty, the more individuals or groups were focused on personal interests, the less likely the

outcome would contribute to the common vision and goals. For example, in Timberton, a core of people who owned much land were overt in their unwillingness to see their property taxes rise – publicly speaking against the personal hardship they would be placed under should taxes increase, despite general knowledge that they had more wealth than other residents in the community. Their message was to keep taxes down at all costs.

Even within the walls of the schools, informal leadership was active. Schools boards were often made up of residents who had personal agendas that could drive decisions affecting the outcomes of everyone in the school. In a more positive view, Oakview had informal leaders who questioned some practices, were then elected, uncovered discrepancies and inappropriate practices, and worked to solve those problems. However, leadership was not consistent. In Oakview, for example, residents would be elected, fall out of favor, and lose their seat, only to be re-elected at a later time when the usurper fell out of favor. Teachers from Reed, the community that consolidated with Oakview, were reluctant to work in Oakview, and Reed students' held the view that Oakview's students were "dirty" and "poor." This bias resulted in discord among the residents of Oakville and Reed, and resulted in the rise of informal leadership. Reed's informal leaders (who were against funding an existing school in Oakview) worked tirelessly to sway decisions in Reed's favor, and resulted in all of Oakview's schools closing. Similarly, Timberton had a well-established informal leadership that was, at times, able to control elected school board and town select person seats and the voting that occurred. The informal leadership held much sway in these instances, but their work or advocacy was used to ensure that their power would be maintained — often at the expense of other groups in the community.

Informal leadership was most effective when it collaborated with formal leadership. Pineville's informal leadership, for example, appeared to work closely with the formal

leadership. Community residents supported the town manager and school superintendent with words and actions. Special interest groups worked collaboratively with the formal leaders, promoting the established vision. The school board and town select people reached out to residents in the community, where those residents then further spread the common and continuous message started by the formal leadership. Sporting events, the local coffee shop, and the grocery store — all became places where the common message was shared, and where inaccuracies or disagreements regarding the message were refuted. Strong communication between informal leaders and community residents helped to ensure that when decisions were made, people were well informed, resulting in minimal dissent during public meetings. In essence, through a continuous stream of communication, the formal leadership educated and guided the informal leadership, who in turn educated and guided the residents, allowing for the successful acceptance and support of a shared vision.

Another place decision-making took place and where informal power was gained was via social media. While social media use allowed informal leaders to spread misinformation, social media did ultimately benefit the formal leadership when they were able to use it to articulate and disseminate a coherent vision. Timberton and Oakview both struggled with misinformation being spread through social media (or through newspapers or other third party information sources); yet all had websites, and Timberton used YouTube. All three towns shared how people using social media could spread messages that were inaccurate, yet were passed along as truth. Additionally, interviewees in Oakview and Timberton shared that residents who served in a public capacity (school board or town council) for personal reasons would present information as truth and could promote their agenda more effectively via social media. This informal manner in gaining authority eroded the formal public process and was one reason for more than one formal

leader's dismissal or non-renewal. However, the formal leadership of the three towns was also able to tap into the "socialnomics" of social media (the value determined and then shared via social media) and promoted agreed upon messages. The formal leaders' ability to navigate the use and message output appeared to provide for greater success against the informal leaders, but did not eliminate the power social media held in all three communities. All three town governments maintained active websites, as did the leaders in the school districts, but none used social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Pineville's formal leaders attacked the possible implications of social media through a concerted effort to be physically present throughout the town, constantly spreading a common message, but were not active using social media platforms. Timberton's leaders made use of YouTube and the public access channel to provide informational messages from the school and town office, but found those accessing both were their older population. Social media and the messages being circulated were seen in all three communities and schools as a tool that needed to be monitored.

Acquisition of Authority with Informal Leaders. Problems arose when informal leadership acquired authority independently from formal leadership, as this sometimes led to private decision-making that undermined formal leadership. Power can operate stealthily (Webb, 2008) and may rise up in unexpected arenas based on specific local conditions (Keltchtermans, 2007). In all of the communities, there were people serving for what appeared to be more altruistic reasons, striving to bring financial, academic, and social success to the town and schools. These people tended to work more collaboratively with the formal leadership. However, this was not always the case. Timberton and Oakview both found that although they had formal leaders in place, leadership was not strong or did not adhere to informal expectations and, thus, informal leaders arose and assumed responsibility. In these cases, formal leaders were hired, but

the real power remained with the informal leaders, which often prevented progress. In particular, the informal leadership was often seen as a detriment to progress, seen as operating outside of acceptable (and ethical) boundaries, which resulted in resentment that simmered among those with less clout or with residents in general. Economic class lines, which were based on education, location, and family history, were clearly drawn and perpetuated. In these cases, the informal leadership contributed to an "us against them" mentality that was easy to slide into, but not easy to escape.

The power of informal leaders in the form of local elites was especially evident in Timberton where they worked very hard to maintain power, even at the expense of others and the success of the community. When the superintendent spoke against the backdoor politics that were occurring, and addressed inaccuracies being spread throughout the community, this informal group was able to impact formal leadership decision making that resulted in the non-renewal of the superintendent's contract. Interviewees commented on the unfairness of this dismissal, but also recognized the power held by this small group and the difficulty in wresting that power away from them. Additionally, interviewees voiced the belief that to speak against this group, might result in retaliation such as the loss of one's job if he or she were employed by the town or school, as well as the ability to function peacefully within the community. The superintendent, in fact, was never granted the authority assumed for the position. Power was not equally distributed and informal leaders held more authority than the formal leaders (Karanxha, Agosto, Black, & Effiom, 2013). The power the informal leaders held resulted in a network of insiders, where favor was granted to those within the group or supporting the group's beliefs. Those groups or individuals who were not in the group would be expected to follow suit or be

the recipient of some type of retaliation. Additionally, this informal power may have contributed to the high turnover of the formal leadership.

Collaboration Between School and Town Leadership. Leadership was observed to be most effective in this study when the town and school department worked collaboratively (Ball, 1994; Blasé & Anderson, 1995; Hoyle 1982). A common vision amongst the two entities (town and school) was more powerful and was more apt to encourage the entire (or a high percentage of the) community to buy in (Kelchtermans, 2007; Hoyle, 1982). Timberton's holding of town meetings on the same night and time as the school board meetings reveals an example of divided leadership. Communication was unable to occur across public meetings, and a common message could not be arrived at through collaborative discourse. This division extended into the community as residents were forced to choose to attend one over another. In short, a division between school and town leadership made it nearly impossible for these communities to attain a common vision, which detracted from their ability to navigate their financial difficulties.

The opposite occurred in Pineville where the formal town and school leaders worked closely together promoting a common message of hope with a "can do" attitude. The town manager reached out to the community to gather input on ideas to overcome the economic shock and areas of community importance. He had built up a reserve fund, which allowed the community time to work through a few years of economic uncertainty. The superintendent, while working with the town manager, also built upon the work the town manager had done. The superintendent crafted and refined the purpose of the school – moving from the preparation for a mill job to a more academic and diversified program with the academics, arts, and trades being more equal. The superintendent organized a future search committee, where representatives from a broad array of residents and businesses assembled to determine the purpose of the school, its

association with the community, and areas of importance. Additionally, the superintendent reached out into the community, making the school an integral part of the community by having its food service department cook meals for a local nursing home. Thus, community service was visible, and the implementation of partnerships with area businesses through work study programs, mentoring, and purchasing agreements furthered community engagement. The school became a rich part of the community through forward thinking leadership and a similar message of hope in multiple public meetings. Furthermore, board and committee members were extended voices of the leadership.

Oakview's town and school leadership met regularly and worked to design a plan where the school factored into the economic growth of the community. However, Oakview residents were under heavy economic obligations and unable to raise the necessary revenues at the community and school levels. Additionally, the school leaders were addressing state legislation that pushed consolidation. The formal leaders were not adverse to collaboration, but expressed that the intensity of their specific responsibility weighed heavily and, thus, minimized collaboration between the community and school.

The Relationship Between Personnel Turnover and Effective Leadership. Leaders whose employment and longevity was stable proved to be more effective in this study — especially in the most visible leadership positions of the town manager and school superintendent. In small towns, such as those studied, the leadership positions were seen by some as stepping-stones for career growth in larger towns or school departments. Others saw these positions as short-term tenures due to the boards or councils that may have been less than easy to work with. Turnover in the superintendency was observed to be more likely to occur when school board and superintendent communication and relations were weak or decision making

heavily leaned on the school board (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006). Still others perceived these positions as a way to gather experience for a placement in a district of similar size, but in a location more personally desired. Turnover was high and with each new leader came new ideas. Both Timberton and Oakview had seen new superintendents on average every two years and had hired "recycled" superintendents. By contrast, the Pineville superintendent was an outlier in this small study, having a long-standing tenure. Continuous turnover in leadership was hard on the communities and schools, especially if it was a yearly occurrence.

One aspect of personnel turnover that proved detrimental to a town's ability to navigate an economic shock was the shift in vision. Whenever a new leader was hired, he would bring a new vision and goals or at least a new spin on the originals. Even if the vision and goals were similar, the methods to achieve the goals often differed. With each new focus came the questions of who and what to support — a difficulty that towns with consistent leadership did not need to navigate. Pineville was the best example of this: leadership in both the town and school district remained stable and allowed the community to work towards a common vision. Time was provided to see projects reach fruition, as the common vision remained constant and supported by its residents. This was not true of Timberton and Oakville. Interestingly, when the town manager left Pineville after almost three decades, the town went through a quick series of new town managers; the residents and council wanted to remain true to the work that was started and ended up hiring someone from the community to continue the work after a series of new hires did not find success. Timberton and Oakview had multiple superintendents and struggled with long term planning. Oakview had plans for a new school, yet ended up consolidating. Staff took years to combine their contracts because of the divisiveness of competing values and

communities with very different financial structures. Plans needed time to take root and changing leadership did not allow for a long view to emerge.

As was the case with the superintendent, in this study the stability in the role of town manager also proved to be more effective. Conflict (Whitaker & DeHoog, 1991), political climate, and economic development are factors that influence the longevity of town managers (McCabe, Feiock, Clingermayer, & Stream, 2008). In towns where almost half (or more) of the town's revenues have evaporated, town managers suddenly faced conflict and declining economic development. Town managers in the three communities lasted a bit longer, but there were also turnovers highlighting similar characteristics of mobility, and revealing the revolving door of the profession. In the case of the town manager, people hired with a personal connection to the community fared better in longevity. All three towns had town managers raised in the community or who had been long time residents and who served for five or more years – often followed or proceeded by an "outsider" who lasted one to two years. Town managers who had stronger roots in the community appeared to be more committed to overcoming the problems of economic development and were less concerned with community conflict. Oakview and Timberton had multiple locally developed town managers, and their responses indicated a commitment to their hometowns that those from away did not express. However, hiring a local was not an easy or simple solution, because the same local person brought with her/him the divisions and loyalties within that town. But, according to many people interviewed, these same people were perceived as providing credibility, trust, and the desire to live in the community.

At times leaders wanted to remain; however the micropolitics where informal leadership had power and/or influence prevented that consistency. When changes are seen as threatening, those with authority, in order to protect their point of view or interests, may react by using their

power to impact the path or outcome of decisions in their favor (Hoyle, 1982; Bjork & Blasé, 2009; Blasé & Anderson, 1995). In Timberton, one school superintendent, well respected among his peers, made some decisions that the informal leadership disagreed with, resulting in hostile school board meetings orchestrated by the informal leadership. This behavior was also seen in Oakview where elected personnel on the school board or town council were voted out of office multiple times.

Circumstances like those just described, as well as instances where financial mismanagement occurred, eroded the confidence of the residents and set the next person up for tighter scrutiny and lack of trust. Pineville's superintendent, hired before the mill closure, offered a different perception. He was not from the community, but was from the general geographic area. He was hired with a directive from his school board to make the Pineville schools places more current and diverse. His work spiraled off what was started at the community government level and was almost universally accepted by the residents and was directly connected to the town vision. He actively reached out to a broad range of people, working to inspire their trust in him and his vision and strategies. This particular superintendent understood the power of the informal leadership and navigated the social groups to the point where he was respected among their ranks. His success was seen in his longevity and the desire of many interviewees for him to remain. He demonstrated the ability to honor a community's core values, while promoting his vision (Owen, 2006). We see, then, that initial personnel turnover, in at least two of the three communities, typically gave rise to more turnover, leading to a pattern of changing leadership that prevented the perpetuation of a sustained vision, whereas stable leadership greatly aided the community by creating a better opportunity for the development of common goals.

The Importance of Multiple Perspectives When Determining School Closure or Consolidation

The communities and schools in this study that incorporated multiple perspectives, used data (Miller, 1995), and gained the support of the community through both formal and informal leaders were observed to be more most successful in working towards a common vision and meeting many of their goals, regardless of whether they closed or consolidated their schools. Leadership recognized that there could seldom be 100% agreement among residents (McHenry-Sorber, 2014) and sought to provide transparent processes and structures (Blasé & Bjork, 2010). Pineville and Oakview did extensive work to ensure that many venues for voice were provided to people in the re-configuration of their schools. Pineville sought to consolidate with a neighboring town and kept all its schools open. They held regular public meetings, providing information (controlling the message) and seeking input, and working to be seen as a collaborative partner with a neighboring district. Oakview residents desired to keep a school within its town boundaries, but ultimately consolidation would close all the schools within the community. The process of consolidation in both Pineville and Oakview saw public board meetings, discussion groups, special board subcommittees, websites to collect feedback, and forums. Pineville's community supported the vision and maintained loyal support to its schools. Budgets passed easily, despite decreased median incomes, and many in the community held the school up as a part of the town to be proud of. Oakview's residents, despite having a solid majority vote for consolidation, had a disgruntled minority crying foul. Oakview provided as many opportunities for voice as Pineville, but also had the challenge of a strong hierarchal social structure (Williams, 2013). Although varied opinions were shared, there was a perception that the decisions about the school were aligned with those people who had more social clout (Howley, et al., 2012), and that

all voices were not heard. Having both formal and informal leadership supporting and promoting a common vision, as in Pineville, saw a community more supportive of its schools and community. Initially, Oakview's formal and informal leaders worked together, but as the process played out, internal concerns (for example: which principal and superintendent would remain, which school would close), forced leadership to take sides. These internal decisions were emotionally charged and contributed to the faltering support of a common vision.

How people make decisions in small communities about their schools is based on whose values hold the most influence (Scribner & Layton, eds., 1995) and where the informal power is located (Tinkham, 2014; Corbett & Tinkham, 2014). This dynamic makes the maintenance of a shared vision especially important when making decisions concerning a school. This was evidenced by the outcomes seen in Pineville and Timberton where decisions were more favorable to their communities, and in Oakview where divisive opinions about the schools, strong power groups in neighboring Reed, and a rotating series of people in and out of power in Oakview continued. Inconsistent leadership may have been due to the difficulty formal leadership encountered when working with informal leadership, or the assignment of unrealistic expectations, or just a poor match. Regardless, schools and communities should consider the level of importance stability in leadership holds and how to achieve solid tenures with appropriately appointed formal leadership.

Losing a school was different than gaining students, so the comparison between Pineville and Oakview is not a perfect comparison. However, an analysis of both towns, and their decisions regarding their schools, does indicate that both communities held a wide variety of opportunities for residents to contribute their voices and opinions.

The Influence of Social Capital on Decision-Making

Social capital, defined as the "norms and networks that enable people to act collectively," (Adger, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000), was seen in these towns as an asset to be drawn upon during a crisis, used for gain, and enjoyed for the pleasure it brought (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Although those involved in this study did not identify social capital by name, they drew from its elements citing that people banded together to address the economic crisis, helping one another in times of distress, and valuing the relationships within groups. Social capital was also seen to encourage social trust and promote communication and collaboration (Putnam, 2000). What was true for individuals was also reflected in groups. Communities with diverse social networks were in a stronger position to address poverty and vulnerability, resolve issues and disagreements, and take advantage of opportunities these networks presented (Putnam, 2000; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Conversely, the lack of diverse social capital resulted in exclusion or marginalization, a feeling of not being part of the decision-making process, nepotism, discrimination, and the loss of opportunities (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Portes & Landolt, 1996). The historical social hierarchies, determined by a host of characteristics, buoyed a town in distress. This was evidenced by the Oakview public suppers held to help individuals or families in need and to assist "one of their own," and Pineville's small economic groups that actively worked to bring in the voices of many through forums, cards that provided ideas and possible solutions in a few downtown store front windows, and small group discussions. However, the "dark side of organizational life where hidden agendas, company politics, and 'Machiavellism'" (Hoyle, 1982), were also present, led to divisions and feelings of marginalization. In Oakview, the divisions between Oakview and the neighboring town of Reed were substantial. Reed residents looked down upon those from Oakview and worked to ensure

that decisions were determined that would benefit Reed. Oakview felt the loss of its school leaders during consolidation when neither the superintendent nor principal was chosen to lead the newly formed school district and the sting of discrimination when Reed teachers refused to teach in an Oakview school building. In separate instances, a superintendent and former town government official, both residents, felt so marginalized and unheard, that both refused to participate in any future school board meetings or town meetings.

The social groups within each community additionally demonstrated the power of social capital with decisions having implications beyond financial and educational realms (Beaulieu & Israel, 2005). Small town athletics brought entire communities out and represented a strong association within the communities and schools studied. A Saturday basketball game during a cold January winter night would often see the school gymnasium packed in all three communities. “Once a [school mascot], always a [school mascot],” shared one long time resident of Timberton. Sports brought people together and gave them a common element in which to have pride. Winning a championship was especially pride inducing and would be referenced for decades. To be part of a winning team gave its participants increased respect within the community. To be a long time resident in the community associated with a powerful family *and* win a sports championship was a high honor. Although these characteristics did nothing to help a community or school in crisis, they did identify individuals whose opinions would carry more influence within the community — an identification that was important when analyzing the makeup of a town’s leadership and its ability to cultivate a vision for navigating a financial crisis.

The Importance of Understanding Funding

The funding laws in Maine are not always easy to navigate and often easily construed as having multiple meanings. The three communities recognized that they were in financial trouble, but not all solidly understood the intricacies of the funding process. On a basic level, most Maine school districts are able to raise and collect taxes (schools in municipalities were not able to as the government municipality determines funding) (Maine Department of Education, 2018; Maine School Management, 2009; Title 20-A, §15690, Part 7, Chapter 606-B). However, the school boards and the town councils often independently built separate budgets. Thus, one group can seek much more funding, taking from the other. For example, if the school increases their funding needs, the town may have to put road repairs on hold or cut back on services to address the decreased funding available for non-school expenditures. With Timberton holding town council and school board meetings on the same night, discourse and coordination between the two governing bodies could never occur. Schools and towns seemed to not realize that they pulled from the same pool of money for their revenues and that they might benefit more if they worked towards common goals, as seen in Pineville.

Funding, and the importance of understanding the laws, became more complex when there occurred a sudden drop in revenues, which could more easily mask mismanagement. The intricacies of the law may also have meant that funds were not received that towns could have qualified for. Oakview and Timberton school leaders, who were less familiar with funding laws, did not see the same level of funding under the Sudden and Severe Funding as Pineville did. Sudden and Severe funding was implemented at the State level to address communities that experienced a sudden and severe disruption in its municipal valuation (Title 36, Part 2, Chapter 1010, Subchapter 1, §208-A). Pineville's long-term superintendent was very active at the state

level, helping to shape changes in state school finance law in Pineville's favor. His actions helped to precipitate state level changes – changes that benefitted Pineville, and changes, that if they had not occurred, would have resulted in large financial loss for Pineville. Oakview and Timberton had representatives at these same hearings, but provided far less input and did not see the benefits as acutely as Pineville. In another instance, Oakview did not notice the mismanagement of hundreds of thousands of dollars over multiple years and discovered it only when other events coalesced resulting in large losses for the district and town. Both Timberton and Oakview had superintendents whose management of funds was questioned by their school boards and residents. Funding was complex and the ability of the formal leadership to understand and apply the knowledge was clearly played out in each community, allowing those communities who understood the funding laws to achieve more success than those that did not.

The Effects of Understanding the School as a Community Resource

Only those towns that were able to present their schools as resources for the continued financial success of their community were ultimately able to generate the community-wide support for school funding necessary to avoid closure and consolidation. Pineville saw value in education and realized that a school with diverse offerings would be a draw for families. The schools became something worth saving — something critical masses of people were willing to fight for. Timberton felt similarly about its schools, never wanting to close any school doors within the town. However, residents questioned school funding and did not provide the financial support that Pineville did. Timberton kept their three schools open and operational; however, a few years prior, all the surrounding schools that made up the district, seceded from the district, leaving only Timberton in the school district. In an effort to see financial savings (Warner, Brown, & Clark Lindle, 2011), Oakview ended up closing all of their schools and consolidating

with the neighboring town of Reed. They also had strong ties to their schools and wanted to keep an operational school in their boundaries, but the financial obligations were overwhelming. They chose to consolidate with a much wealthier community that was able to absorb the high levels of poverty within the Oakview schools. Oakview closed all of its schools and sent its students to towns outside of its borders. They were also the only town where the level of poverty was over 70% in the schools — an anomaly in pulp and paper mill towns. However, this statistic was also reflective of a community where most of the mill workers lived out of town, and where remaining residents were not able to take advantage of mill jobs and wages. All were faced with reduced funds, but those towns that understood their schools as a resource that could eventually help generate income (specifically in the form of more opportunities or the acquisition of additional taxpayers) were more likely to gain community support for school funding, and thus maintain their schools.

Also of note was the importance the residents of the three communities held regarding their schools and future viability. In these three communities, "the local school was seen as central to the community's shared identity and the long term viability of a community" (Fairman & Donis-Keller, 2012). Associations and histories the school provided elicited strong emotions and a connectedness among community members. The schools were seen as an importance component in the communities – both financially and psychologically. All three communities wanted to retain the schools within their borders, and all worked to ensure their location within the community. However, Oakview residents, in combination with State mandates, were unable to overcome the financial burdens before them, and closed all of their schools. Residents expressed a sense of mourning with the loss of their schools, with some believing the community then became less attractive to families who might move there. All three communities had

residents and leaders who believed the schools helped the community in multiple ways — making the town more economically appealing, instilling a sense of identity and community connectedness, and, in general, just being a resource upon which to build.

The Effects of Losses in Supplemental Funding

In all three towns, the movement of mill management out of town was followed by less supplemental funding being provided to the towns and schools. Supplemental funding consisted of monies and gifts provided beyond the taxation imposed by the town. These gifts included sponsorship of sports teams, gifts like Pineville's street sweeper, and student scholarships. Schools, often the recipient of supplemental funding from the mills, were the first to see these gifts disappear. Gifts, routinely given, often become expectations. Pineville and surrounding community schools were significantly affected by the mill's generosity and saw the most change in their budgets when the mill closed compared to the other two communities in this study. However, because Pineville had a long-term plan and reserves in place, they were able to accommodate these losses. Thus, the loss of supplemental funding was problematic, but was able to be overcome due to the extra reserves Pineville had in place. Because Timberton and Oakview had a series of events that withdrew supplemental school support before the mill closure, their schools were not impacted to the degree Pineville was when their mills closed. The schools that built budgets based upon actual revenues had only to make up the loss of taxation, rather than both the loss of taxation and gifts. Schools with reserves were also able to better cover their expenditures, but the cost would have been greater if those funds had not been available. An argument was also made that the reserves could have been utilized in other areas (like a reduction in the tax increase), had the school operated within its actual revenues. However, that was conjecture on the part of the interviewees. Regardless, the loss of supplemental funding from

the mill was felt in all communities, indicating that the loss of tax-generated revenues was not the only financial loss communities had to overcome.

The Importance of Adapting School Programing to Changing Economies

Communities and schools struggled to accurately recognize that global economies are constantly changing and can impact the health of the mill and community. Schools in the three towns studied had historically a primary purpose of training students to work in the mill — a vocation that would now be training students for unemployment if they did not make changes. All three schools moved beyond the primary purpose of training for a mill job, although Pineville and Timberton continued to offer scholarships and funding for pulp and paper studies, as pulp and paper was still considered a good profession if employment could be found. But they also expanded offerings of college prep programs, visual and performing arts programming, and Career and Technical Education offerings. Additionally, all of the schools established certification programs where students could graduate from high school with work ready certifications. They collaborated with Career and Technical Education (STE) schools for education in the trade fields. STEM courses and technical education were examples of changes adapting curriculum to meet the needs of other industries. Strong social skills, knowledge application, and higher order thinking were also implemented through programming. The rapidity of such changes in the world was challenging to address for schools. As the most in-demand occupations did not exist ten years prior, forward thinking would have indicated that changes would continue at an accelerated pace (Moeller, 2018). Each of the school districts decided to develop programming that would aid their students in meeting future needs through a more diverse set of programs and offerings. This allowed them to move away from programming

that heavily supported an employment path to the mill, and prepared its students for a greater number of employment and educational opportunities.

The Effects of Changing School Enrollment

Declining school enrollment was generally not due to the mill closure, but it was still an issue schools needed to address when faced with an economic crisis. Maine's school funding was partially based on student population numbers (MDOE, 2018). Declining enrollment meant less allocation of school funds (MDOE, 2018). Pineville and Timberton, when student populations had been robust, were not always good neighbors to communities with students seeking the opportunity to attend their schools. Pineville's school leadership and school board were described as being arrogant during times when student enrollment was high, not welcoming the addition of students from the neighboring towns. In Timberton, every community ceded from the Timberton School District, leaving the singular community of Timberton making up the district. Those communities went through the arduous process of ceding, with most eventually joining other districts, in part due to how the power on the school board was allocated (in Timberton's favor). Timberton needed more students, but was surrounded by towns that had actively separated themselves from Timberton. Thus, Timberton had minimal options to increase enrollment. The negative interactions and rebuffs were well remembered by the towns that had sought a connection with these two school districts. When Pineville and Timberton sought more students, courting students they once snubbed, reparation of relationships was required.

Consolidation was the most obvious effect of changing enrollment. School consolidation can bring increased efficiencies and other benefits in many areas (Fairman & Donis-Keller, 2012), but increased school enrollment and financial savings were the driving forces for the districts in the study. Duncombe and Yinger (2005) and Bard, Gardener, and Wieland (2005)

state that there are savings to be had and that a "sweet spot" exists for optimal district size. Oakview ultimately consolidated, but no one was able to accurately determine or report if savings had been realized. Those interviewed did have strong feelings as the success of the consolidation — with some feeling it was the right thing to do and that students were benefitting, to others who were against the consolidation and continue to work to dismantle the union. Pineville leaders claimed financial savings occurred with the consolidation with the neighboring town of Oldham and was looking for possible additional towns to bring into the district. Moreover, there were strong social hierarchies where one town was perceived to be better than another and to cross town boundaries would be a betrayal of sorts. Oakview first experienced this division when the mill in Reed went on strike, and then later when their poverty levels were much higher than the town they consolidated with. Recruiting students, for some groups, was likened to asking one to cross enemy lines or invite the enemy into their schools. Timberton interviewees expressed this when discussing the loss of sports teams and the consolidation of some teams. Finally, fear, loss of power, and a loss of town identity were powerful contributors to many decisions — again the interplay of groups and individuals within a town. The loss of local control as well as the loss of a historical identity (Fairman & Donis-Keller, 2012) weighed heavily on residents. Consolidation always appears to harbor heated debate and the fear of the smaller school closing (Egelund & Lausten, 2006), but is also a balance of potential savings and an economy of scale in what may be affordable for a community.

Economic Plans and the Impact on Schools

While all three towns saw the diversification of businesses as a preparation or reserve put in place for when the inevitable change occurred, communities that recognized that support for local businesses ensured that the businesses would remain (paying taxes and providing revenues)

were more successful at maintaining active local economies during the economic shock. This vision was particularly effective when the school leadership also shared it. The school leadership in Pineville was particularly quick to support local businesses, and purchased materials and books from local sellers. They acknowledged to their community that costs were a bit higher, but they also adroitly informed their constituency why they were seeking local purchases. They organized celebrations that encouraged residents to participate, all while supporting local businesses. The businesses that received support from the school, in turn promoted the school. The micropolitical implications resulting from such unusual allies further solidified this community's commitment to both town and school as a collaborative effort.

Preparation in the Face of Rapid Economic Change

A number of strategies have been described in this chapter and in the cases, which the three communities used to address challenges during an economic shock. Although some of the strategies may appear simplistic or even uncommonly obvious, they are not always easy to achieve; micropolitics sometimes prevents or impedes the successful implementation of efforts. Community and school leaders face a variety of people with diverse perspectives and need to navigate their way through needs and beliefs of the community to best determine a course of action. The following section highlights some of the strategies that appeared to be most effective in the communities studied.

The Importance of Creating a Reserve Fund. Reserve funds for emergencies were not the norm in these small towns. Reserves were often was seen as frivolous. Taxpayers argued that if there was money in savings then there was money to reduce taxes or fund the expenditures needed to operate the school and community. However, this logic failed to take into account that a lack of anticipation or preparation could seriously undermine a community's ability to

successfully arrive at a solution when faced with an economic shock (Parisi, et al.; Magis, 2010). Only one of the three communities, Pineville, recognized and actively acknowledged that the mill would not remain open, nor reopen as a working paper mill, and accordingly established a reserve fund to prepare for the eventual mill closure. This occurred over a decade before the mill's closure, when Pineville recognized that its high dependence on the mill was not healthy after a revaluation of the mill was requested. Thus, the town put nine million dollars into a reserve fund, reducing its dependence on the mill to about 40%. They also made many capital improvements in the town and school — all in an effort to prepare for the potential mill closure. In addition to the reserve fund, the school department started capital improvements on its buildings — another security measure. This was only possible, however, because Pineville had very little disagreement among its residents in setting aside the reserves. This combination of cohesive vision and economic foresight allowed Pineville to become a more successful community in terms of new businesses, stable educational programming, and student enrollment.

Though Timberton also established a reserve fund after the mill closed, it was not to help the community transition more easily. This reserve fund, which was still in place at the time of this study, was established because of ongoing litigation with the mill. Should the findings favor Timberton, they too would have funding to help the town and school. However, should the courts find in favor of the closed mill, the funds would be a return of overpayment of taxes to the mill's owners. Oakview did not allocate any reserves to aid the town in addressing the mill's closure and probably could not have done so due to other internal expenses that siphoned funds away from possible preparation. In regards to new or growing businesses, and educational stability, Timberton was less financially secure than Pineville, but more successful than Oakview.

Unlike Pineville and Timberton, Oakview operated in survival mode, allocating no funds to any kind of reserve. Before the mill closed, the town had experienced an exodus of families, resulting in declining school enrollment and the closure of many small businesses. It also had experienced the mismanagement of school funds resulting in the further loss of revenues. Not only could the town not establish a reserve fund, but it also had to raise taxes on local homes to pay for unexpected expenditures. The closure of the mill was just part of a series of events that contributed to the town being unable to prepare a reserve fund. It all led to the eventual loss of all their schools.

Recognizing and Capitalizing on Existing Resources Within the Community. Although resources may appear to be limited after a long-term dependence on one large industry, causing residents to wonder about the economic viability of their community (Parisi, Harris, Grice, & Pressgrove, 2008), all towns in this study recognized that other resources needed to be explored and attempted to build upon them. All are located on a major water source – a resource seen by all as positive. Pineville was developing its harbor and tourist attractions along the river; Timberton generated its own electricity there, and Oakview had developed walking trails along the river frontage. However, these plans once again meant cultivating a common vision. Small groups of people did not want to see the waterfront changed. They did not want to see public access to the waterfront reduced by large commercial buildings, and some continued to hold out hope that the mill would return if only given enough time. Additionally, Oakview and Timberton had operational dams that continued to provide power and revenues to their communities, hindering recreational options. Leadership expressed it was a balancing act to know what was good to add to the community and what should have been left alone or denied. In each

community the value of water frontage was recognized, with all wanting to improve access and ensure water quality to its residents.

In some cases, recognizing and capitalizing on local resources meant the restoration of those resources that had been damaged previously — an additional expense. The paper mills exacted a high toll on their communities in the form of pollution. Two of the communities were still dealing with the after effects, including Pineville which was part of a regional effort that involved the expenditure of millions of dollars in an effort to dredge up and replace contaminated soil from mill effluents sent into the river decades earlier. Pineville's mill was a contributor to the pollution in the river, but was also a recipient of pollution that occurred a few miles upstream from a chemical plant. This river was rated the worst polluted river by a certain chemical in the history of Maine. In Oakview, a resident, who lived on the river shared that the water was still of concern and that swimming and fishing were still not options. Although long exited from the community, the residual effects of the pollution caused by the mill will remain for many years. In order to capitalize on the rivers as natural resources, communities therefore needed to shoulder additional costs.

The Process of Evaluating the School as a Physical Resource. Schools, like towns, also examined their resources — most often, their buildings. This was unsurprising since, after its employees, buildings and maintenance are often a school's largest cost and, in times of economic distress, the operation of a community's schools becomes a difficult cost to bear (Office of the State Auditor, 2016; Johnson 2001). All three towns were under much stress when determining what they could afford. Oakview was losing students and funding. Over 70% of its students were identified as qualifying for free or reduced costs for meals (Maine Department of Education, 2018). Additionally, before the mill closure, Oakview had let one of their buildings

lapse into disrepair hoping to receive state funding for a new building. Though they were successful in getting permission for a new building, the town with which they were considering consolidating had a school in better repair; consolidation thus seemed a better use of resources. Similarly, Timberton examined the possibility of closing one of its schools — one that needed many repairs. Yet, unlike Oakville's leadership, the leadership of Timberton reported that closing it would be more expensive than keeping it open because the debt service laws required immediate full payment of all outstanding debt. A building in good repair was more valuable to a town, than one that was not. In Oakview, one of the shuttered schools was unable to be used due to all the work needed; it was being left empty to deteriorate. Pineville was the only town to decide that its buildings provided a resource that should be maintained. In a move uncharacteristic of most communities, Pineville actually had a building renovation project underway at the time of the mill closure. They held the belief that the schools would be an integral part of any revitalization of the town and therefore chose to view their buildings as a resource worthy of investment.

When determining whether their buildings were a resource in which they should invest, schools also had to take into account economy of scale (Duncombe & Yinger, 2002). All three community schools had more space than they needed and wanted more students to fill that space. Pineville had reached out to a neighboring school district and determined they could absorb all their students within the buildings they currently had. However, the neighboring community decided they were not willing to give up their school. When Oakview completely consolidated with Reed, they found themselves bursting at the seams, with some classrooms divided in half to make more classrooms — all while three schools in Oakview sat vacant. If Timberton had closed one of its schools, the remaining two would be at capacity. Due to a funding law, the decision to

keep all of their schools open was determined. Finding the right balance was an imperfect science for all of the communities.

When determining what to do with their buildings, towns also needed to consider the effects of closure or consolidation (Fairman & Donis-Keller, 2012). The practicalities of consolidating with a town that was very different in student socioeconomic levels only magnified social class distinctions. Oakview residents shared their community would not have been as fractured if one of its schools could have remained open in the town. They had operated on the premise that their high school would be the one chosen to remain open, and were surprised when it closure occurred. They expressed a sense of defeat well before the final consolidation vote ever took place, as there were perceptions that their formal leadership was unable to effectively advocate against the more powerful community of Reed. Informal leadership was given more power in this consolidation and it did not fall in the favor of the population from Oakview. In contrast, Pineville invested funds in its school buildings, reorganized programming, and developed plans where the school was a cornerstone of the community. This community, with its reserves, was in a much stronger position financially than either Oakview or Timberton. In essence, they invested in their schools. In short, when making their respective decisions, each of the schools had to take stock of their resources, consider whether there would be potential long-term benefits to maintaining a school within their community, and determine whether those long-term benefits might outweigh the short-term financial gains of consolidation or closure.

Understanding the School's Academic Offerings as a Means of Community Improvement. Finally, each of the school districts recognized that academic offerings needed to be diversified: programs needed to prepare students for multiple options, as well as attract families to the community. Preparation for a mill job was no longer enough. Education needed to

be promoted, as the more education a person had, the higher earnings they would be capable of achieving, which would, in turn, benefit the town through increased tax revenue (Day & Newburger, 2002). Additionally, schools provide an economic relief to communities (Sederberg, 1987) and attract families, which attract businesses (Lyson, 2002). To keep businesses in town, a labor market was needed. Timberton had a large company with available jobs; these jobs were left unfilled despite unemployment figures for the area that indicated the jobs were needed. Although entry jobs were not the most desired positions, workers had opportunity to move up in the company to more appealing jobs. However, many of the jobs were not jobs that students typically had experience or knowledge of. Pineville was especially interested in refining the educational offerings to better prepare students for a multitude of employment options. They instituted a welding course at the High School, despite a similar course being offered at the Career and Technical Center. Leaders felt it was an important educational opportunity that aided students in gaining a well paying job and allowing them to remain in the community. Interviewees in all three towns expressed concern about providing school programming that would aid its students' transition into adulthood. School leaders, working with town leaders, felt a well-rounded education would, in turn, allow the town's children to remain after graduation through employment in the local businesses.

Conclusion

Within the three communities studied, the most important factor in each community's ability to succeed following an economic shock was the ability of the town to create and maintain a shared vision for how to navigate that shock, develop a shared sense of identity and purpose, and to implement a variety of strategies to meet the challenge in a timely fashion, often ahead of the mill closure. A community's ability to create and perpetuate this shared vision

unique to their identified needs was reliant largely upon the relationship between the formal and informal leadership. This relationship was typically shaped by the formal leaders' ability or inability to navigate community history and existing ties, and was more effective when there was limited turnover in formal leadership and a high degree of trust residents held towards the formal leaders. When formal and informal leaders were able to collaborate successfully, the creation of a shared vision, supporting goals, and common identity and purpose tended to be successful; when multiple visions or purposes conflicted, or informal leadership usurped formal leadership, decisions were often made unofficially, and bitterness and dissent percolated within the community, resulting in an inability to move successfully forward.

In addition to a common vision, those towns that were able to recognize, agree, and capitalize upon existing resources tended to be more successful at reinventing themselves and functioning without the mill that once supported them. Determining how to best use existing resources required the towns to reflect upon their changing demographics: with the loss of the paper mills, small Maine communities no longer have the families to fill their schools nor the revenues generated from taxes to support their educational programming and buildings. As a result, towns needed to consider whether consolidation or closure of their schools might allow for the best use of their existing resources. Once again, leadership proved integral to this process: those communities that rallied together behind a common vision and sense of purpose were best able to use both school and community resources to successfully move forward following an economic shock. Ultimately, then, these three communities provide an insight into the micropolitical processes that occur while determining what to do about the school in economic distress, and demonstrate that the ability to understand the success or failure of a community in

the wake of an economic crisis lies largely in understanding the machinations of leadership, the values placed on education, and the importance of a shared community vision.

Table 7.1 Descriptions of the Three Cases

Characteristics	Pineville	Oakview	Timberton
Approximate population of town (2015)	5,000	3,000	5,000
Number of mills before closure	1	1	1
Approximate number of jobs lost with mill closure	Approximately 600	Over 200	Over 200
State school funding before mill closure	Approximately 30% - 4 years after 50%	A high receiver from state even before mill closure – approximately 70% - dropped to less than 40% after school consolidation	Fluctuated around 50% - actually was higher (60%+/-) before other towns seceded
Success in developing a shared vision for the town's future	High	Low	Medium
Value placed on keeping own schools	High	High	High
What key interests did residents seek to protect?	Community 1. Not see taxes increase in large increments 2. Continue to make Pineville "business friendly" 3. Not become a call center 4. Continue to grow as a community with more arts and non-mill related events and businesses Schools 1. Schools operational in community 2. Maintain school programming 3. Local control of schools 4. Minimize job loss	Community 1. Control tax increases 2. Make community more inviting to businesses 3. Maintain local identity 4. Maintain local control of finances Schools 1. Schools operational in community (unable to maintain them) 2. Provide programming that prepared students for life beyond the mill 3. Local control of schools 4. Minimize job loss	Community 1. Minimize tax increases 2. Continue to gather taxes from the mill 3. Maintain community identity Schools 1.School operational in community 2. Maintain school programming 3. Local control of schools 4. Minimize job loss 5. Maintain school identity

Table 7.2 Strategies Used by the Three Communities to Cope with Financial Shortfall of Mill Closures

Strategies Used	Pineville	Oakview	Timberton
Created a Reserve Fund	Yes The fund was established after the mill requested a reevaluation, but before mill closure. The town manager determined reserves were needed to soften the eventual closure of the mill and the community residents agreed.	No	Yes The fund was established after the mill closed. Mill management questioned the level of taxation on the mill prior to the closure and went to court to gain a refund. The select persons set aside the funds in case the courts found in favor of the mill that would require the town to reimburse the mill for over payment of taxes.
Created Economic Development Plan	Yes Town manager and town council actively solicited input from community, hired economic development officer, and highlighted areas to make Pineville more attractive to businesses (fiber optics, improved roads, economic incentives). Two economic development groups were active in promoting the community and gathering information. Community determined school was important to maintain and became part of the economic development plan.	Yes Town manager and select persons reached out to businesses, volunteer economic stimulus groups worked to make area more attractive (walking trails, booklet for new businesses, community events). Volunteer economic group organized local events to bring people to the community.	Yes Town manager and select persons worked with interested businesses and provided economic incentives to make area more attractive to new businesses. Select persons and town manager determined and prioritized projects (examples: new community playground, TIF for a business)
Closed or Consolidated Schools	Yes Consolidated Schools within community before mill closed: 4 Schools within community after mill closed: 4 School consolidation: with Oldham; two smaller towns were already part of the district – neither had schools in their towns	Yes Closed Schools within community before mill closed: 3 Schools within community after mill closed: 0 School consolidation: with Reed; originally part of a two town district, both towns joined with Reed)	No Schools within community before mill closed: 3 Schools within community after mill closed: 3 School consolidation: three towns left prior to mill closure leaving Timberton a single town school district

Table 7.2 Continued

Strategies Used	Pineville	Oakview	Timberton
Revised School Programming	Yes Developed a welding program at the school (separate from UTC) Instituted BARR program Incorporated more AP and fine arts offerings Academic pathways expanded beyond a path to the mill to a broader offering	No Changes were made before mill closure and school consolidation due to prior declining opportunities within the mill. However, school consolidation saw fewer Fine Arts offerings and more college options.	Yes Changes were minimal – more a reduction of how offerings were presented (example: foreign language and many AP courses were offered online)

Table 7.3 Micropolitics of Decisions to Implement Coping Strategies

Strategies Used	Micropolitics	Pineville	Oakview	Timberton
Created Reserve Fund	**Power/ Leadership:** 1. Who proposed strategy? 2. Who had input or influenced decision? (Small group vs. town-wide input) 3. What formal leaders/ groups involved? 4. What informal leaders/ groups? **Process:** 1. How was decision approved and who approved? (Small group vs. town-wide) 2. Where was strategy developed and decisions made? (Public vs. private) 3. Level of cooperation between formal and informal leaders? (High, med, low) 4. Was there collaboration between town and school leaders? (Yes, No)	**Power/ Leadership:** 1. Long term town manager 2. Select persons 3. Town government (small group – essentially one person) 4. Residents and groups who supported the plan to set aside reserves **Process:** 1. Public meetings town government (small group) 2. Town government designed idea and then presented as information to residents during community meetings and yearly reports 3. Level of cooperation between formal and informal leaders was initially low with the town manager strongly promoting the need of a reserve account. 4. Yes, collaboration between town and school leaders occurred.	**Power/ Leadership:** 1. Town government and school leadership did not have the resources to pay their bills and were unable to put aside reserves. 2. Town government (small group) 3. Town manager and select persons 4. None **Process:** 1. Town government made the decision for the community, school superintendent and school board for the school – no reserves were set aside (small group) 2. Public meetings as well as executive sessions of both groups 3. Low 4. No	**Power/ Leadership:** 1. Town manager and select persons 2. Town government (small group) 3. Town manger and select persons 4. Residents did not provide input as it was a legal consideration **Process:** 1. Town government made decision to put aside funds in case of legal action (small group) 2. Public meetings as well as executive sessions 3. Low 4. No

Table 7.3 Continued

Strategies Used	Micropolitics	Pineville	Oakview	Timberton
Created Economic Development Plan that Considered Town's Natural and Other Resources	**Power/ Leadership:** 1. Who proposed strategy 2. Who had input or influenced decision? (Small group vs. town-wide input) 3. What formal leaders/ groups involved? 4. What informal leaders/ groups? **Process:** 1. How was decision approved and who approved? (Small group vs. town-wide) 2. Where was strategy developed and decisions made? (Public vs. private) 3. Level of cooperation between formal and informal leaders? (High, med, low) 4. Was there collaboration between town and school leaders? (Yes, No)	**Power/ Leadership:** 1. Town government, economic development groups, resident input, other appointed boards and/or committees, visioning sessions open to wide representation of people, resident input 2. Town-wide input 3. Town council, town manager, economic development groups 4. Resident input, future search committee **Process:** 1. Town-wide 2. Public 3. High 4. Yes	**Power/ Leadership:** 1. Town government, economic development groups, other appointed boards and/or committees 2. Small groups 3. Town manager, town select persons 4. Volunteer economic development groups **Process:** 1. Small group 2. Public and private 3. Medium 4. No	**Power/ Leadership:** 1. Town government, economic development groups with town select persons over sight, other appointed boards and/or committees 2. Small groups 3. Town manager, town select persons 4. Volunteer economic development groups **Process:** 1. Small group 2. Public and private 3. Low 4. No
Closed or Consolidated Schools		Yes Consolidated	Yes Closed	No

Table 7.3 continued

Strategies Used	Micropolitics	Pineville	Oakview	Timberton
Revised School Purpose / Programming	**Power/ Leadership:** 1. Who proposed strategy 2. Who had input or influenced decision? (Small group vs. town-wide input) 3. What formal leaders/ groups involved? 4. What informal leaders/ groups? **Process:** 1. How was decision approved and who approved? (Small group vs. town-wide) 2. Where was strategy developed and decisions made? (Public vs. private) 3. Level of cooperation between formal and informal leaders? (High, med, low) 4. Was there collaboration between town and school leaders? (Yes, No)	**Power/ Leadership:** 1. Superintendents and school committees in each community 2. Town-wide (voting at school board level and within each community), visioning sessions open to wide representation of people 3. Superintendents and school committees in each community 4. Parent advocacy groups, variety of residents in each community; Pineville and Oldham residents **Process:** 1. Town-wide. Voting at the school board level during a public meeting and then voting by residents in Pineville and Oldham 2. Public and private. The two school boards and superintendents. 3. High 4. Yes – active participation between the two	**Power/ Leadership:** 1. Superintendents and school committees in each community 2. Town-wide (voting at school board level and within each community) 3. Superintendents and school committees in each community 4. Parent advocacy groups; Boosters; Oakview and Reed residents **Process:** 1.Town-wide. Voting at the school board level during a public meeting and then voting by residents in Oakview and Reed. 2. Public and private. Highly structured plan developed by the two school boards and two superintendents, as well as a specially formed school board consisting of representation from Oakview and Reed. 3. High (as reported by those associated with the school), medium to low (as reported by residents who felt it was a "done deal") 4. Minimal – town was kept informed, but collaboration was not apparent	**Power/ Leadership:** 1. Superintendents and school committees in each community 2. Town-wide (voting at school board level and within each community) 3. Superintendents and school committees in each community 4. Parent advocacy groups, groups concerned with property taxes; residents in all of the communities involved; Families with identified clout (long time residents, high economic income, owner of large amount of land) **Process:** 1. Town-wide. Voting at the school board level during a public meeting and then voting by residents in each of the communities. 2. Public and private. School board and private advocacy groups; state level for secession requirements 3. High (informal groups drove these decisions) 4. No – Select person meetings and school board meetings were held on the same night; Select persons were informed, but collaboration was not apparent

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Introduction

It is estimated that the United States lost almost eight million manufacturing jobs in total from its peak in 1979 to 2010, which not only resulted in job loss, but wage depression and higher welfare spending in the US (Dubner, 2017, DeSilver, 2017). Maine, during the same time period, saw a 53% decrease in similar jobs with the largest losses occurring in the paper industry (Maine Department of Labor, 2012). These losses were exacerbated in small rural mill towns where up to 70% of a town's revenues, at some point, had depended on the exiting industry (Boyd, 1995). Too often, affected workers, if they did find work, were reallocated to jobs with dramatic wage reductions, leaving communities with substantially reduced funding revenues and rising welfare, disability, public service expenditures, and reduced school funding (Dubner, 2017). These industry closures represent economic shocks (Besser, Recker, & Agnitsch, 2008). As public schools are funded by local taxes, and often account for over 50% of a town's budget expenditures, communities in economic distress are often prompted to examine the necessity of their schools in order to determine what is financially feasible (Office of the State Auditor, 2016; Johnson 2001). During financial distress, individuals and groups advocate not only for the infrastructure of a school (Sell & Leistritz, 1997; Warner, Brown, & Clark Lindle, 2011), but the preservation of its community (Warner, Brown, & Clark Lindle, 2011; Corbett & Tinkham, 2014). During this process, micropolitics (the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals), impact a community as its residents are faced with addressing values laden issues (Warner & Lindle, 2009). It is through an understanding of these

micropolitics that we begin to gain an understanding of how these towns navigated the loss of a main industry.

Organization of the Chapter

This chapter briefly summarizes the main findings from the study of three rural communities that experienced economic shock from the closure of paper mills, building upon and contributing to the existing research. Limitations will be addressed and followed by the major findings of the research. While each community had its unique circumstances and micropolitical environments, there were similarities in the strategies they used to meet their economic challenge, in who was involved in making decisions for the future, and in how those decisions were made. The similarities may provide tentative conclusions that may be drawn from the experiences of this small sample. The relevance of the findings from this study may provide additional insight to other communities facing similar events, as well as to policy makers at the local, state, and national levels. Finally, future research that could enhance, extend, expand, or spiral off the findings of this study will be addressed.

Significance of the Study

There is much research about the micropolitics within a school (Webb, 2008; Ball, 2012; Björk, & Blase, 2009; Björk, & Blase, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2007; Blase, & Anderson, 1995) and within the political groups found in and around a school (Johnson, 2001; Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2007). Similarly, there is ample research on both formal and informal leadership (superintendents, principals, school boards, teacher leadership), as well as on the micropolitics within a school or within communities. Corbett and Tinkham (2014), Tinkham (2014); Scribner & Layton, eds., (1995), Karanxha, Agosto, Black, & Effiom, (2013) have all explored the interest or advocacy groups within communities and how conflict over who should make

decisions in rural communities is important. Their research has examined formal leadership, which was important and representative of how decisions were made, and informal leadership and its impact and distribution of power. However, this existing scholarship often examines larger communities, but does not take into account the context of small rural areas. That is not to say that smaller communities have been entirely ignored: research on the inner workings of rural leadership in small towns — including school leadership — is a growing area of interest. Scholars have begun to consider the micropolitical workings related to school boards, principals, or superintendents or the community's reaction to the schools. What has been less explored is how the parties interact with each other and with more informal leadership, and the importance of those interactions for understanding how these towns navigate an economic shock. This study therefore attempts to build on previous research by focusing on this phenomenon within smaller rural communities, and by concentrating more extensively on informal leadership than previous studies have. In order to do this, this study considered how school leadership interacted with both the micropolitical groups within the school and the community during an economic shock – relationships that were not as prevalent in urban areas.

By considering how school leadership interacted with the micropolitical groups within the school and the community during an economic shock, this study sought to address another area that has been overlooked by previous scholarship: how groups decided what strategies to use to meet the challenge of an economic shock. The previous research of such people as Tinkham (2014), Karanxha, Agosto, Black, & Effiom, (2013) focuses on economic shock, but is primarily applied to economics and its effects, the rebuilding of communities, and the development of economic plans, and does not specifically examine decisions about how to sustain funding for the schools. Most previous research overlooks the role that the school plays

in a town's ability to overcome an economic shock (Besser, 2014; Besser, Recker, and Agnitsch, 2008; Magis, 2014, Besser, 2013; Whitham, 2012; Ronan & Johnston, 2005; Frailing & Harper, 2017). Prior research did not identify the school as a resource for the community, nor the effects that an economic shock had on the schools in the affected community. Even in a more social context, prior research largely ignores educational aspects of the situation, and instead examines economic shock in relation to resiliency and social capital (Magis, 2014, Besser, 2013; Whitham, 2012; Ronan & Johnston, 2005; Frailing & Harper, 2017). The exception to this is research on school consolidation, which has been well researched and represents rural areas well (Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2006; Duncombe & Yinger, 2002, 2005, 2007; Fairman & Donis-Keller, 2012; Lyson, 2002; Arnold, 2004; Donis-Keller, O'Hara-Miklavic, & Fairman, 2013; DeYoung & Howley, 1990; Egelund & Lausten, 2006; Peshkin, 1978; Lytton, 2011; Lytton, 2011; Tieken, 2014). Yet, even this research considers the perspective of a school or community in isolation, and does not examine how decisions made in relation to the school during an economic shock require a collaborative effort between the school and the community. In contrast, this study focused on towns' educational circumstances in relation to the community, and examined the role that both community and school leadership plays in how decisions are made, with the goal of ultimately understanding how a community's school contributes to a community's ability to navigate an economic shock. It, thus, builds upon and contributes to the existing research in the areas of research on how rural communities experience economic shock, research on rural school consolidation or closure, research on the micropolitics of small rural communities, the micropolitics of formal and informal leadership within small rural communities, school district leadership in particular, and research on the school's importance to a community.

Another area of in depth research would be that of open and closed systems — well supported in the theory of micropolitics. An open system is strongly influenced by its environment/organization and regularly exchanges feedback, analyzes the feedback, makes necessary adjustments to achieve a system's goals, and then communicates information back to those involved (Thompson, 2017; Simon, 2013; Scott, 2002). Boundaries are dynamic to allow for feedback to exchanged and understood (Scott, 2002). A closed system, however, has rigid boundaries that limit the exchange of information (Scott, 2002). Each of the three communities studied, demonstrated varying levels of communication and outcomes that were determined, in part, due to the boundaries established among its residents and organizations. Thus, a study such as this one would benefit from further analysis that takes into account open and closed systems.

Description of Study

This qualitative comparative case study examined three communities experiencing an economic shock due to a paper mill closure to determine how the micropolitics within the communities addressed the sudden loss of funding due to the paper mill closure. This study further considered what the mill's closure meant to these towns' local public schools. The data sources included thirty-five interviews, three written responses, and a wide variety of documents, which included school board meeting minutes, newspaper articles, business closure plans, and economic projections. Two additional interviews were conducted and transcribed in order to gain information on school funding and mill valuation. Rich, descriptive case studies were developed for each of the three communities, describing how the communities addressed an economic shock, the impact on the local school, and the micropolitics involved in the decision making process. Cross case analysis examined similarities and differences in the micropolitics within each community and how decisions were made to implement specific strategies to shore up

funding for the future of their communities and schools. Some tentative conclusions were drawn from the experiences of this small sample that may provide insight to other communities facing similar events.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of this study is its scope: only three communities were studied and 35 community residents interviewed in total. While the participant sample aimed to include voices representing town government, school district leaders, and other individuals who were deemed influential in the community decisions about the town's and school's futures, the small sample may not have captured all voices or views in each community.

The three communities and all the individuals interviewed possessed unique characteristics, identities, values, and opinions. Although Maine has experienced multiple paper mill closures, the circumstances surrounding each community's experience are unique. Thus, although this study provided an in-depth examination and description of the three communities, caution must be exercised when applying findings from this study to other communities not studied. It is possible that the micropolitics or strategies used in other rural communities experiencing mill closures may differ from those found in this study's three cases.

Additionally, this study relied heavily on personal accounts and biased sources. Emotion is powerful in molding opinions; those who lost jobs saw the events differently than those whose lives were not as directly impacted. Additionally, though the three communities selected experienced some of the most recent mill closures in Maine, there was lag time between when interviews were held and the time when the mill closed. In some cases, this gap may have helped to lessen the emotions, while in others it may have allowed those emotions to fester more deeply. Furthermore, the use of secondary sources, including newspapers, meeting minutes, and business

briefs, introduced bias, as these sources often projected opinions held by the authors of such sources. In analyzing the different subjective accounts in this study, I sought areas of confirmation and found that participants provided fairly consistent versions of their community's story. I attempted to increase the reliability of the research by triangulating a broad range of resources and continuing to interview until a saturation of data was achieved. I had two professional peers read the entire study for clarity of content. I also had two residents [with opposing opinions and perceptions] from each of the three communities read the section specific to their residency. These six readers provided feedback and clarification. Interviewees could also corroborate or dispute what was reported. If information was disputed, further resources were examined to provide a level data saturation that would indicate a prevailing view of the time. Additionally, two of my committee members, Dr. Catharine Biddle and Dr. Janet Fairman, provided extensive examination of the research data and analysis process.

Brief Summary of Major Findings

Across the three communities examined in this study, an important factor in a town's ability to more successfully navigate an economic crisis was the establishment of a common vision and established goals for the town's future — an endeavor that was shaped closely by the unique combination of micropolitical factors within each town. This vision presented as more effective when it promoted the betterment of the town, the diversification of business within the community, and supported the school(s). Community leaders in this study who employed clear ethical standards – not causing people harm or disadvantage — when crafting this vision were seen by their community as more trustworthy and were held in higher esteem. Operating within ethical boundaries would seem logical and obvious, but multiple examples arose where those boundaries were blurred or ignored when previously held power appeared to be lost or

diminishing. Additionally, the relationship between formal and informal leadership appeared to greatly affect the ability for towns to establish and sustain a common vision, as the formal and informal leadership needed to work together to incorporate a wide spectrum of voices from within the community, understand the school as a community resource, and allow the town to begin to prepare monetarily prior to the actual shock. Thus, three key elements arose in this study that were needed to address the financial distress of the communities and its schools in this study: a local capacity to recognize and implement the work needed to financially prepare for the economic shock, the collaborative ability to work towards a common vision, and the establishment of a purpose where the school was integrated as an essential component of the community. Again, although a small study, it was observed that communities where individuals, small groups, and informal leaders worked in conjunction with the formal leadership resulted in increased success in achieving those three elements. In communities where the informal and formal leadership groups were unable to achieve those three elements, communication was found to be weak, trust was lacking, leadership inconsistent, and progress in overcoming the financial crisis was stymied. The broad findings of this study are described in more detail below.

Community Leadership to Prepare for Economic Shock. As community leaders sought to cultivate a shared vision, a crucial factor in the success experienced within the communities studied, was their ability to recognize the reality of the shock and then prepare before the shock occurred (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008). This advanced planning allowed the town's leaders to better mitigate the financial impact and address needs under less intense pressure. These resources did not solve the bigger issue of lost revenues, but by alleviating the intensity of the shock's immediate impact, they provided the town with time to develop more lasting solutions that addressed the loss of revenues long-term. By setting

aside resources and diversifying businesses upon which the community depended for revenues, these added resources allowed for less impact on local taxation, provided a buffer where individuals and businesses were able to acclimate to the change more slowly, and allowed for unforeseen costs to be more readily absorbed.

Preparation Through a Reserve Fund. When articulating the need for a reserve fund, leadership in these three communities, both formal and informal, expected taxpayer pushback. To establish and fund a reserve account was articulated by some interviewees as frivolous. Some taxpayers argued that if there was money in savings then there was money to reduce taxes or the expenditures needed to operate the school. Leadership, therefore, effectively articulated to the community the need for a reserve fund, and navigated the machinations of a wide range of voices, traditions, and social ties. No leader was able to incorporate the needs of every individual, but consensus was achieved when the town leaders held an understanding of the various groups and a commitment to work collaboratively. This included collaboration with school leaders. In this study, town and school leaders that worked towards a collective goal produced wider support within the community and less dissention against the common vision. Successful leadership was proficient in the management of their finances and understood the laws and policies associated with the management of funds.

In two communities where the leaders made the determination to set aside resources and alleviated the immediate economic concerns, their next step was to support the diversification of the town's businesses. Effective town leadership represented in this work recognized that the town was built on an insecure foundation if it relied on a singular industry, and, therefore, worked diligently to provide for a more stable financial environment through the recruitment of multiple businesses able contribute to the town's revenues. In this study, leaders in the

communities experiencing limited or no growth articulated a similar need for multiple businesses, but were unable to attract the needed diversification. Although remaining businesses in the three communities were unable to fill the void of the lost industry, their presence did aid in lessening the impact of the industry's exit, and provided the base upon which the towns could begin to rebuild their economies. Additionally, it was expressed that the diversification of business could make the town more attractive to its young adults, encouraging them to remain and settle in the area.

Recognizing Community and School Resources. Just as town leaders encouraged the diversification of businesses, they also recognized the need to examine their other resources and build upon those resources as a means of lessening the impact of the main industry's exit. These resources were described as geographic (water frontage, mountains, scenic area), developed (tourist area, shopping), historic, or any resources that would hold value, generate additional resources, or entice people or businesses to the area through these resources.

When assessing the town's resources, leaders in all three communities saw the local school as one of the most important resources when navigating an economic shock. However, capitalizing on a resource is not the same as identifying the resource, which was reflected in the decisions and outcomes made regarding the local schools in these three communities. Sederberg (1987) suggested that schools provide economic relief to rural communities, while Lyson (2002) argued that schools attract families to a community, which attracts businesses, and steady property values. Among the communities examined here, town leadership that identified the school as a local resource was more likely, but not guaranteed, to successfully guide the community in keeping the school operational in times of economic distress. Also, the school, when seen as a resource, became a place that centered the community, provided a unifying

identity, and supplied a venue beyond the education of its children (Sederberg, 1987; Lyson, 2002). Its presence became an active contributor to the community. For example, Pineville's school lunch program, partnered with an area organization for the elderly to provide meals. This connection established a connection between the elderly population – a population that did not always support the schools — and produced school advocates. Similarly, the Pineville school leadership purchased books from a local bookseller and supplies from a local store, which resulted in the businesses supporting the schools and denoted a mutually beneficial relationship. Pineville's leaders believed that extending the school's reach beyond the school doors contributed to the well being of businesses and residents in the community, and could help attract prospective employers and workers moving to the area (Hanushek, Jamison, Jamison, & Woessmann, 2008). Finally, in all of the communities studied, the schools represented much more than a provider of academic training. The schools were seen as a meeting place for all people – they were considered a valuable community resource (Lyson, 2002). The schools were places that held life events like baby showers and birthday parties, and facilitated bonding experiences like hunter safety classes where the older hunters helped educate the new hunters. Outside organizations used rooms for their meetings and recreation programs were highly visible on weekends and after hours. Oakview residents recognized that its schools were resources, but the financial obligations were overwhelming. Although none of three towns in this study did so, voting and town meetings are common events in Maine schools. Despite very different outcomes, the schools in this study were considered the hub of their communities – a valuable resource for the community's residents.

School Leadership to Cope with Financial Constraints

In this study, it was observed that if the community was struggling financially, so was the school. If backdoor politics occurred within the town government, it also tended to occur within the structure of the schools and school district leadership. Like community leaders, the school leaders followed similar paths of action to meet their financial challenges by identifying their resources. A simple resource that was often overlooked was the maintenance of buildings. Before the mill closure Oakview had let one of their buildings lapse into disrepair hoping to receive state funding for a new building. They were successful in getting permission for a new building, but because the town with which they were consolidating had one in better repair with a new roof, they lost the funding and eventually all of their schools. Maine's revolving renovation fund for new schools was underfunded and the process took many years for a district to be identified for a new school building (Silvernail, 2011). Thus, buildings were expensive to operate and maintain, and repairs were often delayed to school budgets approved by voters. In contrast, Pineville actually completed a building renovation project the year the mill closed, realizing a building in good repair was more valuable to the town than one that was not. A well cared for building also afforded the community more time to make decisions about what to do with their schools.

While having schools within the community can be a helpful resource when navigating an economic shock, the communities in this study also demonstrated that it is necessary to consider the possibility that the school may be too much of a financial burden. There is an economy of scale of which all towns need to be cognizant (Andrews, Duncombe & Yinger, 2002; Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2005; Fairman & Donis-Keller, 2012). Small communities may need to look at keeping an elementary or primary school, but then consolidating at the

middle and high school level. When considering this, leaders need to recognize the role that tradition may play in this process. For example, Timberton reached out to a neighboring town that was struggling to keep its school open, but was an athletic powerhouse. The town was not willing to relinquish their athletic success to join with one less successful. To join with a town seen as less than important/successful/affluent was seen as moving backwards. For some towns, to join another town viewed as somehow inferior would be worse than the position they were in already. This was the case with the Oakview and Reed consolidation, where Oakview entered the union receiving over 70% of its funding from the state and Reed receiving less than 3% (MDOE, 2018). Oakview was losing students and funding. It could not support its schools effectively and needed to find a way to find a solution. Consolidation was a viable option. However, the practicalities of consolidating with a town that was more affluent only magnified the social class distinctions (Bard, et al, 2005; Lyson, 2002; Andrews, et al; 2002; Duncombe & Yinger, 2005). Although both were mill towns, the economic divide was, and continued to be, an area about which residents felt resentment. Reed felt it was carrying the load, whereas Oakview felt it was looked down upon. Additionally, informal leadership was given more power in this consolidation and it did not fall in favor of the people of Oakview. As demonstrated by these examples, school leaders in both formal and informal arenas attempted to understand what they could afford, what resulting decisions would look like, and how these decisions would be perceived by the community — and then crafted their visions accordingly.

The Importance of Good Communication, Transparency, and Collaboration between Formal and Informal Leadership

Leadership in Pineville, Oakville, and Timberton was most effective when informal leadership both supported formal leadership and provided checks and balances. This required

that both groups communicated effectively with each other and with the residents of the community. In particular, both town and school leadership needed to be strong communicators with the ability to work across the micropolitical groups to develop a common vision for the greater good. This meant formal leaders navigating the complexities of tradition, social ties, and informal leadership. Timberton provided an excellent example of the consequences when leaders failed to accomplish this, and the benefits that could occur when leaders did communicate effectively: at least two school leaders in Timberton were not able to establish their authority among the informal leadership and were unable to advance their vision. Both ended up with contracts that were not renewed and feelings of discontent. However, one long time resident, educator, and town leader was adroit at collaborating across groups. His voice was one many people listened to and a person whose ideas would be supported. He understood where business took place and the key players that needed to be included if any agenda was to move forward (Sander, 2002; Dekker & Uslaner, 2003). He held formal leadership positions while working closely with the informal leaders. This demonstrates how important it was for the leaders of these towns to understand the micropolitics of a community and then work within the accepted social structures (McHenry-Sorber, 2014; Putnam, 2000; Dekker & Uslaner, 2003). The findings of this study also indicate that the greatest success occurred when formal leadership supported the vision of the formal leadership, and formal leaders respected the informal leadership and recognize that their voices are a necessary check to formal positions of leadership.

Reframing the School's Purpose

In each of the three towns, there was a clear pattern indicating that residents understood that not only does education need to be promoted, as the more education a person has, the higher earnings that person is capable of achieving (Day & Newburger, 2002; Hanushek, et al., 2008),

but if the school is to aid the community in overcoming an economic shock, then its purpose should include diversified programming that prepares students for multiple post-secondary employment and educational options. At one time, all of the schools in this study were stepping-stones towards gaining employment at the mill. However, at various points in time, that perception changed to a belief that schools needed to provide a variety of paths to help their students into adulthood and prepare for changes in the broader economy and workforce needs. The arts, a college pathway, and alternative vocations were promoted more in all three of the communities. However, to keep businesses in town, a labor market was needed — a problem that could also be helped by more diversified educational opportunities. The Hanushek, Jamison, Jamison, & Woessmann, (2008) reported that a well-educated workforce was seen as an asset to prospective employers, increased a community's chances of attracting businesses that required highly skilled employees, and had the potential to generate "major economic growth in rural areas." However, because of an economy of scale and the inability to attract qualified teachers, rural schools are often unable to provide on-site programming that would train students for prospective new businesses, or who would be prepared for the businesses already in the area. This was particularly apparent in Timberton, which had a company with available jobs — jobs left unfilled despite unemployment in the area, because many of the jobs were not jobs that students typically had knowledge of. Students also did not understand the concept of working up through the system. Although entry jobs were not the most desired positions, workers had opportunity to move up in the company to more appealing jobs. Timberton's students may have found employment at this company if the school had trained students in a broader range of skills. Other schools in similar situations might learn from this and begin developing ways to overcome the lack of qualified teachers with alternative certification paths or other strategies. They could

also benefit from offering incentives for hard to hire areas of teaching, and considering ways to develop and support local talent. Additionally, the experiences of the three towns in this study suggest that there is value in preparing students in a broad range of skills — working with people, communication skills, higher ordering thinking skills, and problem solving skills — skills that can be transferred to any profession. Other possibilities could incorporate technology, non-traditional programs, sharing staff with other school districts, unique scheduling, and non-traditional certification through teacher internships.

Relevance of the Findings for Small Rural Communities

Although this study focused on three rural towns in Maine, the results of this study have potential application to rural communities across the country that are facing economic shocks. Obviously, the findings will need to be applied and adapted in the context of each town's unique circumstances, and therefore the more specific details of Pineville, Timberton, and Oakville's experiences may not be applicable to other communities. However, while the circumstances of other community's experiences will vary, the broader realities are likely to be similar: the closure of a large industry in a rural community where immediately accessed economic resources are limited will result in the urgency in which decisions need to be made, regardless of the town's location. While making decisions, individuals and groups (the micropolitics of a community) will emerge and assume leadership responsibilities, and power groups will influence outcomes. The decisions these individuals and groups make, the processes they use, and where business takes place will differ, but preparing and understanding how the micropolitical groups work under these circumstances will still be an important element for leadership. Additionally, the need for a common vision could be the point where communities band together to move the community towards financial security and determine the priority and importance residents place

on having an operational school. An aspect communities and schools might consider is how to attract and retain quality leaders. Sustained leadership was observed in this study as more successful in developing and implementing a common vision and strategies to meet that vision. The turnover of leaders appeared to prevent continuity of ideas and plans. Long-term tenure of leaders is no guarantee of success, but the results of this study do suggest that benefits increase with higher levels of consistency among leaders. Thus, while the patterns demonstrated in this study may not provide an exact blueprint for how other towns can survive an economic shock, they can at least provide other towns in similar circumstances a sense of which factors might need to be addressed in order to support the development of a common vision and identify strategies to address the economic challenge.

Broadly, this study indicates that when faced with an economic shock, leaders and the people within rural communities experiencing economic distress will be charged to imagine new realities, while managing the conflict the change will bring. They will need to convince those involved that the risks inherent in change are worth bearing (Stephenson, 2010), and assure those holding informal power, that there is benefit in collaboration. The importance of education will need to become evident for residents, with this task often falling on school leadership and faculty. For all leaders, the endless meetings, public events, and methods and modalities of communication are used to broker trust and legitimacy, tapping into the community's hope, fears, and assumptions (Stephenson, 2010) with the end goal being sustained and on-going communication, shared decision-making, and new social understandings where former divides are minimized or eliminated.

Implications for State Policy Makers

As was the case when considering this study's applicability to other rural communities, the scope of this study must be taken into account when making recommendations for policy makers. Policy cannot be based solely on the needs of three individual towns. But, the patterns demonstrated by these three towns should prompt policy makers to begin to think more broadly about how they can better address economic shock when it occurs in other towns in the future. Similarly, even though the sample size of this study was small, the experiences of the three towns in this study do demonstrate that current state policies can potentially have a negative impact on Maine communities. This should prompt policy makers to review the impact of current policies on other rural Maine communities, in order to ensure that the negative effects seen in these communities are not occurring elsewhere.

More specifically, state level policy makers should further examine how policies and laws may have different impacts for urban and rural communities, contributing to existing wide discrepancies in wealth, employment opportunities, funding for education, and other social needs. Although Maine's Essential Program and Services (EPS) funding formula was intended to "fully provide for all of the staffing and other material resource needs of the essential programs and services identified by the Legislature" (MRS Title 20-A, Chapter 606-B, §15671) high poverty and/or small schools may need additional resources and staffing as the students in that community may demonstrate lower achievement, have more barriers to achieving a higher learning rate, and not have the size or funds to address the needs of all students. Small rural schools may be unable to attract or retain teachers or administrators due to low pay and additional responsibilities. The EPS formula may put a small school at a disadvantage because student enrollment is too low to support needed staffing. Finding a qualified superintendent for

part time work at reduced pay can be a challenge. The more rural the school, the higher the transportation costs, and for very small schools an economy of scale is not realized (Duncombe and Yinger, 2007; Bard, Gardener, & Wieland, 2006, 2005). The EPS formula did attempt to make adjustments regarding each of the above concerns, but living expenses and educational costs are dissimilar activities that required different resources (Silvernail & Sloan, 2009), which had prompted both affluent communities and communities in economic distress to question the funding formula. Oakview provided evidence of this need for legislative reform, as funding and policies at the time of the economic shock made school consolidation the option they were almost forced to choose, despite the desire of the residents to keep at least one school within their town. Additionally, before consolidation, Oakview schools were identified as some of the lowest performing in the state (MDOE, 2018). This identification qualified the school for extra academic supports for its students, and set required improvement goals. However, funds were provided to support the achievement of the set goals did not always cover the need or the requirements set by the MDOE and/or federal government. This lack of financial support, not only made it more difficult for Oakview to address the new academic requirements, but also hindered the community in navigating its economic shock. Because of the difficulty in addressing the wide range of needs in Maine's school districts, policies result in inequalities. Policy makers should consider the impact legislation will have on a wider range of towns, and consider the incorporation of stopgaps to address a variety of specific community needs such as a community and/or school's socioeconomic level, population, implementation costs, and community resources.

Policy makers might also reflect on Maine's school funding, once seen as one of the more equitable in the United States, is seeing wealthier communities push back. The results of this

push back may further disenfranchise rural communities, particularly when they are undergoing economic shock. A recent law referred to as Raise the Floor, was presented by a number of "minimum receiver" districts (districts that receive less than 10% of their school funding from the state), aimed at changing the funding formula for education (Maine State Legislature, 2018). Should this law pass, it would mean policy makers would need to allocate more funds to Maine's education or take funds from Maine's higher receiving schools. This study would indicate a passage of such a law or policy would further hinder high receiving communities, taking needed resources from those less affluent — a move that could further hinder those communities undergoing economic shock. Additionally, all Maine communities have been receivers of State of Maine school allocations, even if they had the means and resources to assume the full cost. (MRS Title 20-A, Chapter 606-B, §15671). Policy makers should determine if children in these less affluent, rural communities are at risk of receiving a lower quality of education due to their location and financial status — particularly when a community is undergoing an economic shock. Passing legislation that further removes resources from these communities could potentially add burdens to an already economically strapped area.

Maine is a rural state, and when a small rural town is losing a large industry, it typically does not have the resources to fall back on that more urban and suburban areas have (Davidson, 1996; Besser, et al., 2008). In more urban areas, there are often other businesses to lessen the impact of a large industry closure. To fund schools in areas of student decline, the historical practice has promoted school consolidation and school closure — especially in Maine's more rural inland areas. To populate these schools, there needs to be a draw for families to move to rural Maine areas. Jobs are needed beyond cottage industries that are independently operated out of private homes. Financial benefits through affordable housing and medical care, as well as

more carefully appointed tax benefits should be further examined. Policy makers should consider multiple approaches that will help to diversify the economy, revitalize and help stabilize communities, welcome businesses and families to Maine, encourage communities (but especially those with a dependence on a singular industry) to set aside reserve funds, help rural communities meet school staffing needs, and revisit the Essential Program Services school funding formula.

In addition to taking into account the impact that financial shock can potentially have on education, policy makers should begin to recognize the deeply embedded sense of independence and desire for local control prevalent in many Maine residents (Doyle & Finn, 1984; Arnold, 2004). What was historically done is not necessarily the best decision, but the ability to navigate the complexities of why tradition is so strong and people's resistant to change, is important — not only at the local level, but also at the state level. Micropolitical influences extend beyond town boundaries (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Ball, 1987; Johnson, 2001), and policy makers should work to understand that these deep histories and traditions need to be taken into account if legislation is to be effective at solving problems within these communities. In particular, policy makers might reflect on historical work regarding school consolidation where penalties were put in place, rather than incentives (Fairman & Donis-Keller, 2012). The fall out of a penalty model is still being played out with consolidated regional districts continuing to dismantle their districts after the occurrence of forced unions (MDOE, 2019). Thus, policy makers may need to recognize that a one size fits all option is probably not an option that will be successful for all communities.

It should also be noted that the act of balancing pro-business policies while retaining clean air and water will be two goals that will require thought and the ability to project possible

implications of all actions taken. Too often a shortage of jobs has promoted out-migration from rural areas (United States Department of Agriculture, 2018), and industries that have left communities, have also left behind problems beyond the loss of jobs and revenues in the form of decaying buildings and polluted lands — a circumstance that puts communities in a worse situation when an economic shock does occur. The task to replace these powerful businesses is somewhat challenging as Maine promotes a clean outdoor air image. Providing a business friendly state while maintaining the progress made through the Clean Air and Water Act is important to residents, and will arguably be beneficial to towns that undergo economic shock because towns should protect their assets. An example of this would the Katahdin Woods National Monument. Although the area is still reeling from the closure of two large pulp and paper mills, and the aftereffects of pollution left by the mills, the National Monument is helping to bring people back – if not to live, at least to visit. This National Monument draws upon the natural resources of Maine's outdoors and pristine beauty and introduces a new industry to an economically distressed area. Policy makers should consider striking a similar balance when addressing the needs of other areas.

National Policy Makers. Although state policies are most likely to directly affect Maine schools, policy makers on a national level also need to take into account the needs of areas such as those in this study. As is the case on the state level, national policy makers should consider the diversification of businesses without exploiting the natural resources available across the national landscape, and the creation of policies that take into account whole industries that do not syphon funds from public schools. Businesses that are sustainable, allowing local pride and problem solving, and which offer economic development may provide a solid foundation for a community. Technology, communication methods, ready resources, and transportation are all

concerns that could be considered to promote this diversification. Furthermore, policy makers should examine ways to sustain rural education through the development and supply of well-trained teachers and leaders to fill positions, recognizing the challenges rural schools face in attracting and retaining educators. Some areas where national policy makers could provide leadership would be to facilitate policies that allow teaching certification that can cross state boundaries to encourage educators to rural areas, and divergent educational delivery to allow rural schools to remain operational.

The largest difference between what national and state lawmakers might consider in order for these communities to succeed pertains to the trade agreements between countries that arguably contributed to the economic shocks experienced by the communities in this study. Although NAFTA proved beneficial for some states and businesses, it was not so generous to Maine's (and the nation's) pulp and paper mills (Planning Decisions, Inc., & Maine International Trade Center, 2003). Congress and the President should consider the effects trade deals have beyond a singular state or business sector, and work collectively for the betterment of many. Canada is only one example (and not the only concern among a vast number of trade policies); the high provincial support and subsidies provided to its pulp and paper mills resulted in U.S. mills unable to produce a comparable product for a similar cost. Even with high tariffs on paper imported, U.S. mills could not compete. By thoughtfully analyzing the possible repercussions of many businesses, not just those with the most powerful lobbies, Congress may be in a better position to determine the effects of trade agreements. A good example of this is the effect NAFTA had on the US manufacturing businesses (Maine Department of Labor, 2012). Many people in Pineville believe that NAFTA was a primary reason their pulp and paper mill could not

remain operational. Although not the only reason, by any means, it was seen as a contributing factor.

Finally, although rural education is being more widely studied, policies should consider not only the needs found in urban or suburban areas, but in rural areas. While no piece of legislation will be universally agreed upon, there is still a perception among some groups that rural education is being ignored by the U.S. Department of Education (Arnold, 2005). Title I is an example where funding is distributed based on the number of students who are economically disadvantaged (U.S. Department of Education, 2018), but where small rural schools receive amounts that are so small change is difficult to achieve (MDOE, 2018). Sub grants within the Title program have been implemented in an attempt to address the issue, but more work is needed. Also, these school funds can take multiple years to be reflected in a school district's allocation. A school in a town experiencing economic shock would be expected to contribute local funds at levels determined when the community was on more secure financial ground. National policies should therefore contemplate stopgaps like what Maine's Sudden and Severe funding laws attempted to address. National policy makers may analyze information where a per pupil amount (used with Title I funds) may not always be a reliable indicator of need, especially when school enrollments are low.

Avenues for Future Research

Further research is needed in order to determine how closely the experiences described in this study reflect the experience of other Maine communities, other rural New England communities, or rural communities across the nation that face an economic shock due to a business closure. Research could examine either effects of multiple business closures or focus on rural that have dealt with losing a singular industry. The findings from additional research could

be compared with the findings of this study to contribute additional insights into this phenomenon.

Because each rural town has its own unique social dynamics the aspect of this study that most needs to be expanded in relation to other rural communities is the concept of micropolitics. By comparing the micropolitics found in this study to the micropolitics of rural communities elsewhere, we can gain a better understanding of the patterns present in the micropolitics of rural towns, would allow us to better aid any rural community experiencing an economic shock. More research is needed regarding the micropolitics of a community in regard to the funding of their school, as this additional research would allow us to better understand why some communities rebound from an economic shock, while others in similar circumstances struggle.

A study of how the traditions, values, family connections, personal wealth, and perceptions affect a group or individual's rise to power would provide context behind the decision-making processes. This would be especially rich in rural communities where social interactions are more complex than in urban areas, as in rural areas — everyone knows everyone and social hierarchies may determine how others vote and the behavior expected of them. The micropolitics of a community are powerful and to minimize their importance is to omit an integral component of any decisions being made by its residents.

Ultimately, this study was intentionally designed to gather broad topical knowledge and not focus on one theory, which would allow for future studies in a multitude of areas and contents. It also highlighted the importance that an individual and/or small group could make within a community and its decision-making. In small rural towns where changes are many, this study should raise challenges for local leaders (formal and informal), and policy makers at the local, state, and national level. The attraction and retention of quality school leaders in rural and

low socioeconomic areas needs increased examination. It is also a call for local residents to be informed and involved — investing in their local schools and communities. Equally important is their ability to articulate and support what decisions should be made, how they should be made, and why. Cooperation amongst all these contributing factions is essential if lasting changes are to be effective in aiding Maine and the United States' rural towns and their schools survive sudden economic shifts.

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APPENDIX A

INVITATION FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Date

Dear *(insert participant's name),*

I am conducting a study on how an economic shock (often the closure of a primary business) affects the educational capacity of a community. I am planning to arrange personal interviews to discuss what the closure of **(***insert business's name)* meant to your local school, and how decisions about the school were made. Your name was provided to me by a mutual acquaintance (*insert name of referral)*, as someone who would have valuable knowledge to share regarding this topic. A full description of the study is attached, as well as an "Informed Consent" form, the interview questions, and a brief summary of who I am. I have scheduled our interview for *(insert date and time)* be held at *(insert name of location)*. The interview will be audio recorded and I will bring coffee or tea.

Please feel free to respond by email and indicate if you have any further questions. I will also follow up with you via email or phone call. I look forward to talking with you!

Sincerely,

Kathy Harris-Smedberg

APPENDIX B

FOLLOW UP COMMUNICATION WITH INTERVIEWEE WHO AGREED TO BE INTERVIEWED

Dear

Thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me. I have attached the questions and included my introductory letter below. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reply to this email or call me at 660-3838. I look forward to talking with [*day of week*, *month day*] at [*time*]! Thank you!

Kathy

This is the letter:

Let me again introduce myself in a bit more detail. I am Kathy Harris-Smedberg. I am a principal in RSU 18 and a graduate student at the University of Maine, working on a research study as part of my doctoral degree program. As part of my research, I am conducting a study on how the closure of a paper mill affects the educational capacity of a community. It is my plan to arrange personal interviews to discuss what the closure of the paper mill in [*name of town*] meant to your local schools, and how decisions about the schools were made. My hope is that this research will show policy makers the importance a school has on the community and that rural Maine communities have unique needs to their more urban counterparts, especially when funding is involved. You were recommended by [*name of person*] as someone who would be someone who would have valuable knowledge to share regarding this topic. *(Note: The previous sentence would be adapted if a reference was obtained through a different source.)* I would need about an hour or less of your time. It is fine if you can't answer all the questions. Interviews would be audio recorded, but your participation would be confidential. I would meet you at a mutually agreed upon place that would fit your schedule.

I have included the process (consent to be interviewed) as well as the questions I would ask you, should you agree to the interview. My intent is for interviews to be informal and relaxed. I am truly attempting to just represent how communities handle this sudden loss of funding. There are no right or wrong answers. If you know of others who would be interested in participating, please forward their names to me, as I need a wide sampling.

Please feel free to respond by email or call me at 660-3838 if you have any further questions or would like more details of the study. I will also follow up with you via email or phone call. Please know that your feedback is very important. I look forward to talking with you! Thank you.

Sincerely,
Kathy Harris-Smedberg

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewer's Code Sheet (Creswell, 2013)

Pre-Interview Information

Date of Interview:

Interviewee (pseudonym):

Gender of Interviewee (1) Female_____ (2) Male_____

Interviewee's association with school outcome (why interviewee was chosen):

Interviewer's script:

Hi, I would like to thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today. I am conducting a study to examine how an economic shock, like the closure of (*fill in business's name)* impacted the education capacity of the community and how decisions regarding the school were made. You were selected to be an interviewee due to your involvement in the community and your knowledge about the changes made to the local public school(s).

Participation in this study will involve sharing your perceptions and answering questions about your community and local school before and after the closure of (*fill in business's name).* The interview should last approximately 60 minutes, but time is flexible based on your needs and comfort. You will not receive financial compensation, but you will receive my sincere thanks and a light fare of food to make your time during the interview more enjoyable. .

There are no known or anticipated risks to you for participating, other than what you would share with your fellow community members. Your identity will remain anonymous in my study and will not be shared with anyone else other than through a pseudonym. It is my hope that the results I gather will add to the knowledge about Maine's communities that have experienced an economic shock, and how decisions were made regarding community schools with the loss of revenues. I hope that the results will also add to educators', community members', and legislators' knowledge about the importance of understanding individual community needs.

All of your responses, as well as your identity, will be held in confidence. Additionally, communities will not be identified. I will be the only person involved in this study that will have access to your names and will use responsible practices to ensure confidentiality. The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed.

During transcription your responses will be coded and categorized. This information, along with your name, will be stored on a password security laptop kept in my home. The information you provide will be destroyed after the study is completed.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate, to end participation at any time for any reason, or to refuse to answer any individual question without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your relationship with the University of Maine or me.

Do you have any questions at this time? Would you like to participate in the study? *(Replies will be transcribed into study documents and consent forms signed. Time will be given for the participant to read the informed consent form.)*

I am going to ask you a series of questions. Please feel free to provide additional details you believe would be important.

Describe yourself and your connection to the community, the mill, and the school.

- Do you have children or grandchildren who attend or attended the local school(s)? What schools and grades?
- Did you attend the local school(s)? Which schools and grades?
- Did you or anyone in your immediate family work in the mill?
- What impact, if any, did you experience when the mill closed/was downsized?

What issues or concerns have been controversial or upsetting to community members regarding the closure of *(name of business that closed or downsized)*?

What does the local school mean to your community?

Look back and reflect on what happened when the decision to (*identify what the outcome of the school was)* was made.

- What happened?
- Did the process go well or not well? Why?
- What was done to address competing opinions?
- How was it determined to (*identify what outcome the community arrived at regarding the school)?*
- Who or what group made the determination?
- How did that group get the support to get their idea accepted?
- What do you think about the decision to *(outcome of school)?*
  - *If she/he agrees with the decision:* Why do you believe this was the correct decision?
  - *If she/he disagrees with the decision:* What decision do you believe should have been chosen and why?
- What was the community reaction to the decision?

When there are challenging choices, like what to do with a school when funds are limited, many people often voice an opinion.

- What were some of those opinions?
- What were some considerations presented regarding the local schools that were not chosen?

Why were they not chosen?
How did people voice those opinions? (*If prompting is needed: school board meetings, newspaper editorials, local coffee shop, etc.)*
What did the school or community do to actively gather information as to what the community wanted to do with the school?

What advice would you have for other communities that have also lost a major employer and then have to make decisions regarding their school?

I may not have asked you something important about the closure of (*name the business)*, your community, or how decisions were made regarding your local school. I would encourage you to please share those comments or stories now.

Are there questions you have for me?

I would again like to thank you very much for agreeing to be a part of this study. Your comments and stories are greatly appreciated and provide valuable information in the study of school and community. Should you think of something else you would like to share, please contact me *(I will give each participant my business card.)*. Thank you.

APPENDIX D

LINE-BY-LINE CODES

Example of line-by-line codes identified in Pineville

1. Banding together
2. Changing school districts – a new RSU
3. Collaboration
4. Common cause to work towards
5. Common life style
6. Communication
7. Community advocacy
8. Community changes
9. Community connections
10. Community culture
11. Community dependence on mill
12. Community dissent
13. Community history
14. Community identity
15. Community investment
16. Community involvement
17. Community location
18. Community pride
19. Community resources
20. Community support
21. Competition between schools
22. Core values
23. Culture
24. Decision making
25. Dependence on mill
26. Differing values
27. Dissention
28. Diversification of businesses
29. Everyone knows everyone
30. Finances
31. Financial changes in school
32. Financial changes in town
33. Gathering information
34. Geographic location
35. How mill changed town
36. Identity
37. Lack of vision
38. Leadership
39. Leadership in school
40. Leadership in town

41. Management leaves town
42. Micropolitics
43. Mill and community connection
44. Mill and school connection
45. Mill changes
46. Mill closure
47. Mill connection
48. Mill history
49. Mill management
50. Mill strike
51. Mill transition
52. Mill work
53. Neighbors helping each other
54. Options
55. Options to help
56. Parent leadership
57. Perceptions
58. Population of town
59. Preparation for life without the mill
60. Reduction in staff (at school)
61. Redefining identity of community
62. Reinvention
63. Relationships
64. School anchors community
65. School board advocacy
66. School board relations
67. School changes
68. School choice
69. School closure
70. School consolidation
71. School enrollment
72. School funding
73. School history
74. School impact
75. School more than preparation for mill
76. School programming
77. School programming changes
78. School purpose
79. Self advocacy
80. Shared common experiences
81. Similar values
82. Slow motion shock
83. Solutions
84. Student enrollment
85. Sudden and Severe Funding
86. Town history

87. Tradition
88. Use of resources
89. Valuation of mill
90. Valuation of property
91. Values
92. Vision of school
93. Vision of town
94. Voice of people
95. Vying for resources
96. What the school means to the community

NARROWING THE LINE-BY-LINE CODES (ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE)

Communication
Community
Decision makers
Economics/Financials
Identity
Leadership
Mill
Resources
School
Tradition/Values
Trust
Vision

STRUCTURES USED IN ALL THREE COMMUNITIES

Background information
- Community
- Mill
- School

How did individuals/groups gain authority to make decisions?
How were the decisions received by the community?
What decisions were made?
Where were the decisions made?
Who made the decisions?
Why were the decisions made?

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Kathy J. Harris-Smedberg was born in Farmington, Maine and was raised in a variety of Maine towns. She is a product of the public school system, graduating from Orono High School in 1980. She went on to obtain her Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education at the University of Maine at Farmington in 1984. Upon graduation she was hired as a classroom teacher in MSAD 47/RSU 18. During her thirty-three years in the district, she taught fourth, fifth, and sixth grade, as well as served as assistant principal, principal, Title I Director, and ESSA Coordinator. She furthered her education by gaining a Master of Education degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Maine in 1990. Understanding that growth sometimes means change, she accepted the Assistant Superintendent position in the Bangor School Department in 2017, where she is also responsible for Title programs, gifted and talented, professional development, and curriculum and assessment. Kathy is a proponent of Maine public school education and works tirelessly to be an advocate for all children. She loves to learn and finds delight in expanding her knowledge across many subject areas.

Kathy is a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Maine in May 2019.