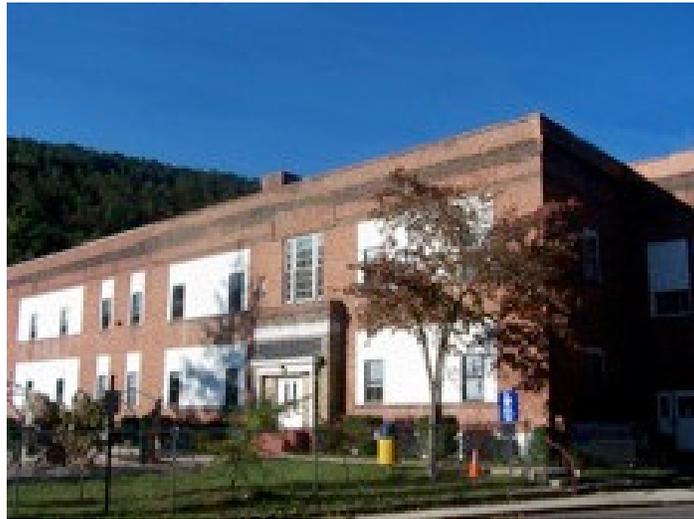


# **Kitzmilller Elementary School Advisory Group**



**Report Submitted to  
Superintendent Wendell Teets and  
the Garrett County Board of Education**

**Tuesday, March 8, 2011**



**CONTENTS**

INTRODUCTION..... 1

1. STUDENT ENROLLMENT TRENDS ..... 3

2. AGE & CONDITION OF BUILDINGS ..... 4

3. TRANSPORTATION..... 7

4. EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS..... 11

5. RACIAL COMPOSITION..... 15

6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS..... 15

7. STUDENT RELOCATIONS ..... 18

8. COMMUNITY IMPACT..... 21

CONCLUSION..... 34



## INTRODUCTION

Superintendent Wendell Teets appointed the Kitzmiller Elementary School Advisory Group (hereafter “the Group”) on September 17, 2010. The Group’s formation followed Dr. Teets’s recommendation to close Kitzmiller Elementary School at the Board of Education meeting of September 15, 2010. In accordance with the Garrett County Board of Education Policy 940, the Group’s charge involved investigating and reporting the advantages and disadvantages of closing the School. Specifically, Superintendent Teets asked the Group to examine the impact of the proposed closing on the following areas:

- Student enrollment trends
- Age and condition of buildings
- Transportation
- Educational programs
- Racial composition of the student body
- Financial considerations
- Student relocations
- Impact on the community in the geographic attendance area of the school proposed to be closed and the school to which the students will be relocated
- Such other factors enumerated by the Superintendent or which the Advisory Group finds relevant.

With this charge in mind, the Group met with Superintendent Teets and Board of Education staff to consider these topics on three evenings during the month of October 2010 at the School. The following report represents the consensus of the Group. Its members

respectfully submit it for the consideration of Superintendent Teets and the Garrett County Board of Education.

**Advisory Group Members:**

Cathy Ashby  
Director, Ruth Enlow Library of Garrett County

James A. Browning, Jr.  
Mayor, Town of Kitzmiller

Wendy Craver  
Teacher, Kitzmiller Elementary School

Teresa Durst  
Secretary/Librarian, Kitzmiller Elementary School

Pam Nelson  
Vice President for Community Services, Garrett County Community Action Committee

Angela Paugh, *Recorder*  
Secretary, Kitzmiller PTO

Matthew Paugh, *Chair*  
Councilperson, Town of Kitzmiller

Richard Stevens  
Principal, Kitzmiller Elementary School

## STUDENT ENROLLMENT TRENDS

At the Group's October 20, 2010, meeting, Dr. Teets and Dr. Phil Lauver, Supervisor of Pupil Services, presented enrollment information to the Group. They indicated that the Maryland Department of Planning projects a 9.3 percent decrease in Garrett County's public school enrollment between 2009 and 2019. With this overall decrease, the Department of Planning forecasts an 8.6 percent decline in elementary school (grades K-5) enrollment for Garrett County. Added to this, total Garrett County births have decreased on average. In the 1990s, the average number of births per year totaled 380, while the 2000s saw an average of 316 births per year.

Turning from Garrett County in general to Kitzmiller in specific, the Group reviewed historical enrollment from 2000 to 2010. Although the student population has declined to 55 in 2010 from its high of 94 in 2000, the student population has proven stable over the past five years.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Teets and Dr. Lauver submitted projections based on a cohort-survival ratio that suggested the Kitzmiller enrollment will decline over the next five years as follows: 2009 – 56; 2010 – 55; 2011 – 51; 2012 – 45; 2013 – 42.

The Group points to several considerations concerning the data presented by the Board staff. First, the enrollments projections offered to the Group differed sharply from those approved by the Board of Education in the Fiscal Year 2011 *Educational Facilities Master Plan* at its August 9, 2010, meeting. According to those projections from the Maryland Department of Planning, Kitzmiller's student population will increase as follows: 2011 – 64; 2012 – 64; 2013 –

---

<sup>1</sup> Enrollment for the last five years was as follows: 2005 – 56 ; 2006 – 54; 2007 – 53; 2008 – 57; 2009 – 56; 2010 – 55.

67; 2014 – 67; 2019 – 77.<sup>2</sup> When questioned about this difference, the Group did not receive a satisfactory answer for the discrepancy. Secondly, when the Group inquired about how the Board staff calculated the cohort-survival ratio projections, the requested information was not disclosed or explained. Thirdly, it seems that many of the projections are based on overall Garrett County data and birth information rather than specific data and information for the Kitzmiller area.

### **AGE AND CONDITION OF BUILDINGS**

Mr. Jim Thomas, Director of Facilities, Maintenance, and Operations, presented information concerning the condition of the Kitzmiller School building at the Group’s October 20, 2010, meeting. Mr. Thomas reviewed the Site Evaluation Sheet from the 2010 *Educational Facilities Master Plan* with the Group.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this evaluation, Kitzmiller received an overall score of 63.26, which represents a “fair” rating. Of twenty-four total items examined, seven received a “good” rating, five received “fair,” and eleven received “poor.” However, Mr. Thomas stressed that “fair” and “poor” ratings do not necessarily show unfavorably on the school; they only indicate items that may require repairs. If these areas were rated as “good,” it would prove difficult to secure funding for making improvements.

While the Group acknowledges the maintenance needs of the building, it also observes that Kitzmiller School has received no substantial renovations since 1956. While every other elementary school has been constructed or renovated in the last thirty-five years, it has been

---

<sup>2</sup> Garrett County Board of Education, *Educational Facilities Master Plan*, July 2010. For comparison, decreases are projected for the following schools from 2011 to 2019: Bloomington – 37; Broadford – 400 to 364; Dennett Road – 302 to 173; Route 40 – 127 to 110; Yough Glades – 225 to 144.

<sup>3</sup> *Facilities Master Plan*, 32.

fifty-five years since Kitzmiller has had a renovation project.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the need for some maintenance is no surprise. Nevertheless, the Group notes that Superintendent Teets emphasized that the condition of the building did **not** represent a factor in the school closing recommendation.

Mr. Thomas also shared information related to State Rated Capacity (SRC). The Maryland State Department of Education has defined SRC as “the maximum number of students that reasonably can be accommodated in a facility without significantly hampering delivery of the educational program.”<sup>5</sup> Currently, Kitzmiller has a SRC of 181 students. With its 55 students, its current utilization equals 30 percent. Should Kitzmiller close, the Superintendent has recommended that its students will relocate to Yough Glades Elementary. Yough Glades currently has a SRC of 340 with a Fall 2010 enrollment of 253. These numbers represent a 74 percent utilization. However, should Kitzmiller’s 55 students be added to these totals, the Yough Glade enrollment would stand at 308. Some Group members expressed concern that these additional students at Yough Glades would take the school’s utilization percentage over the ninety-percent level, the highest mark for any of the County’s elementary schools.

In addition to the information offered by Mr. Thomas, the Group examined the 2008 *Garrett County Comprehensive Plan*. Adopted by the Garrett County Commissioners on October 7, 2008, this Plan purports to serve as “the policy guide and framework for future growth and development in Garrett County.”<sup>6</sup> The Plan indicates the need to “maintain and upgrade school facilities to high standards, regardless of projected system-wide declines in

---

<sup>4</sup> The other schools are as follows: Accident – constructed 1982; Broadford – constructed 1976; Crellin – constructed 1962, additions 1978 and 1998; Dennett Road – constructed 1957, renovations/additions 1968 and 1978; Friendsville – constructed 1976; Grantsville – constructed 1980, additions 2008; Route 40 – constructed 1957, additions/renovations in 1978, 1996, and 2003; Swan Meadow – constructed 1958, additions 1998; Yough Glades – constructed 1998. Source: Garrett County Board of Education, Educational Facilities Master Plan – July 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Maryland State Department of Education, “Review of State Rated Capacity, Actual Class Sizes, and Class Sizes Anticipated in Master Plans” (December 1, 2003), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Garrett County Planning Commission, “2008 Garrett County Comprehensive Plan,” 1-1.

enrollment.”<sup>7</sup> After specifically discussing enrollment declines through the year 2015, the Plan identifies Kitzmiller Elementary School as a target for “renovation or possible replacement beginning in FY 2010.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the Plan suggests a policy that supports “renovation and upgrades” to the Kitzmiller Branch of the Ruth Enlow Library, which is located in the School.<sup>9</sup>

With future growth and development in mind, the Group also discussed recent research that promotes the continued use of older school buildings as a key to revitalization and economic development.<sup>10</sup> While some may deem older buildings inferior, architects point out that the age of a school does not indicate its construction quality.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, “most schools built between 1900 and 1940, for example, are masonry bearing structures that rely on massive walls to provide structural stability.” Often, “a building constructed in the early 1900s may be more solid than those built in the 1950s and 1960s, when inferior materials and construction techniques were common.”<sup>12</sup> At a time when “green” buildings are advocated, buildings with multiple stories, high ceilings, and large window openings – all features of Kitzmiller Elementary School – prove more environmentally friendly.<sup>13</sup>

The Group also notes that Kitzmiller School serves a historic function. As a focal point of the community, Kitzmiller School reflects the area’s heritage. As Franco and Higgins observe, “More than any other building, historic schools embody a shared experience for

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 8-1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8-4.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>10</sup> Dennis Yablonsky, “Older Schools Can Help Conserve Resources, Revitalize Older Communities,” in *The Case for Restoring and Reusing Older School Buildings*, The Pennsylvania Department of Education, 4.

<sup>11</sup> As two residents of Two Rivers, WI, once quipped, “If an older building can be equated with a poor education, why would anyone want to send a child to an Ivy League school?” Cited in Constance E. Beaumont and Elizabeth G. Pianca, *Why Johnny Can’t Walk to School: Historic Neighborhood Schools in the Age of Sprawl*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, National Trust for Historic Preservation, October 2002, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Hylton, *Save Our Land, Save Our Town*, 30.

<sup>13</sup> Dennis Anstrand, “Well-Constructed Buildings Can Last Indefinitely With Systematic Renovations,” in *The Case for Restoring and Reusing Older School Buildings*, The Pennsylvania Department of Education, 6.

generations of residents.”<sup>14</sup> Historic schools give a sense of community identity and cohesiveness. The Maryland Department of Planning concurs: “Older schools represent an element of Maryland’s historic architectural heritage. . . . Through renovation of older schools and revitalization of school sites and adjacent areas, Maryland can revitalize established communities, while conserving resources and making the best use of existing infrastructure.”<sup>15</sup> In 2000, the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) placed historic neighborhood schools on its list of “America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places.” Eleven years later, the NTHP still records their status as “endangered.”<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, should the building cease to function as a school, the community does not have the resources available to maintain this historical landmark. Group members fear the abandonment of the school will lead to a blighted property and neighborhood safety hazard.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

At its October 20, 2010, the Group received information regarding travel times from Mr. Ed Wildesen, Director of Transportation. Mr. Wildesen based his estimates upon driver reports of time submitted to the Transportation Office. According to his projections, the travel times to Yough Glades Elementary School would amount to 58 minutes and 55 minutes for Shallmar Road and Town of Kitzmiller students, respectively. For students on Pee Wee Road, the time on the bus would increase from 20 minutes to 37 minutes. Mr. Wildesen suggests bus ride times

---

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Franco and Mindy Higgins, “Public Schools Form an Essential Part of Pennsylvania’s Architectural Heritage,” in *The Case for Restoring and Reusing Older School Buildings*, The Pennsylvania Department of Education, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Maryland Department of Planning, *Model and Guidelines: Smart Growth, Community Planning, and Public School Construction* (Baltimore: Planning Services Division of the Maryland Department of Planning, 2008), 9.

<sup>16</sup> “11 Most Endangered Historic Places: Historic Neighborhood Schools,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, accessed 19 Jan 2011, available at <http://www.preservationnation.org/travel-and-sites/sites/nationwide/historic-neighborhood-schools.html>.

would remain the same for those students on Vindex, Mt. Zion, Walnut Bottom, and Chestnut Grove Roads.

The Group had a few questions about Mr. Wildesen's projections. For some, a 25-minute bus ride from Vindex Road to Kitzmiller seemed to represent a stretch. Others wondered if these travel times took into consideration drop offs at other locations. That is, would the bus stop at Southern Middle or Southern High prior to dropping the students off at Yough Glades? Do these times take into account those days when bad weather or increased traffic will make the bus runs longer?

Even if these projections are correct, travel times will increase for more than half of Kitzmiller's current students. Undeniably, longer bus rides will negatively impact these students. In an investigation of rural families, M. Fox discovered that long bus rides reduce the number and variety of household activities, student sleep time, recreational time, academic attentiveness, and extracurricular participation.<sup>17</sup> In another study, Belle Zars found that bussing could be considered an "exploitation of children's time" and that students with large average times on buses report lower grades, fewer social activities, and poor study habits.<sup>18</sup>

Along with these factors, riding a bus increases a child's health risk. Diesel bus fumes may account for a rise in childhood asthma, according to a Yale University study.<sup>19</sup> Busses expose students to diesel exhaust dozens of levels higher than those considered a significant cancer risk under Environmental Protection Agency guidelines.<sup>20</sup> Students with the longest rides

---

<sup>17</sup> M. Fox, "Rural Transportation as a Daily Constraint in Students' Lives," *Rural Educator* 17.2 (1996): 22-27.

<sup>18</sup> Belle Zars, *Long Rides, Tough Hides: Enduring Long School Bus Rides* (Randolph, VT: Rural Challenge Policy Program, 1998), 1.

<sup>19</sup> John Wargo, *Children's Exposure to Diesel Exhaust on School Buses* (North Haven, CT: Environment and Human Health, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Gina M. Solomon and Todd R. Campbell, *No Breathing in the Aisles: Diesel Exhaust Inside School Buses* (New York: National Resources Defense Council, 2001).

and who sit on busses while they idle receive needless exposure to toxic air pollutants.<sup>21</sup> These effects prove especially harmful for younger, elementary-age children with developing lungs.

An additional health factor concerns a commuting option that closing Kitzmiller School will take away from some students. Although many of the students who attend Kitzmiller would have a bus ride no matter which school they attend, some children within the town limits can now walk or ride their bikes to school. Maryland school planning guidelines stress that “new and existing schools should . . . promote energy efficiency by being accessible through walking and bicycling to students and community residents.”<sup>22</sup> The guidelines go on to discuss the health implications of walking and bicycling options for students. As public health officials indicate, “the lack of routine physical activity is one factor in the current ‘obesity epidemic’ among children.”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in association with the Centers for Disease Control prepared a 2006 Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan. The plan aims to “encourage and enable the citizens of Maryland to lead physically active lifestyles” and to “reduce levels of obesity.”<sup>24</sup> One of the key strategies for these goals includes increasing “the number of physical activity options in communities” and promoting “pedestrian and bicycling initiatives in communities.”<sup>25</sup> As the Maryland Planning Guidelines conclude, these strategies can only become effective “in a neighborhood with a sidewalk network” (i.e., a

---

<sup>21</sup> Patricia Monahan, *Pollution Report Card: Grading America’s School Bus Fleets* (Cambridge, MA: Union of Concerned Scientists, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Maryland Department of Planning, *Models and Guidelines*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, *Maryland Nutrition and Physical Education Plan: Working Together Today to Create a Healthier Tomorrow* (Annapolis, MD: May 2006), 79.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 77. See also Frank W. Booth and Manu V. Chakravarthy, “Cost and Consequences of Sedentary Living: New Battleground for an Old Enemy,” *President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Research Digest* 3.16 (March 2002), 8.

community like Kitzmiller).<sup>26</sup> Schools should be “within walking and bicycling distance of the neighborhoods they serve.”<sup>27</sup>

Though some bussing will be necessary, the Group points out that a commonly cited standard for one-way length (duration) of school bus rides for elementary school children is thirty minutes.<sup>28</sup> West Virginia and other states have set this as their travel time guideline.<sup>29</sup> The travel times for Kitzmiller students will double this amount. Even though it may be argued that other students within the county travel longer distances, such travel times are not the ideal, and they should be avoided as much as possible. Moreover, if the Head Start Center currently located in the School closed and Garrett Community Action could not find another suitable location in Kitzmiller, children as young as three years would have travel times much longer than children that age should endure.

Apart from travel time and health matters, Group members expressed concern about the impact that “double-routing” (i.e., elementary school students placed on the same busses with middle and high school students) will have on the younger children. With the prevalent concerns about bullying, the Group felt that this arrangement will make the elementary school students more susceptible to victimization, and parents fear they will receive exposure to language and activities unacceptable for their age level.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Maryland Department of Planning, *Model and Guidelines*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, *Nutrition and Physical Education Plan*, 84. The research is clear: “Children are more likely to walk or bike to small schools in walkable neighborhoods than to larger schools in remote locations.” See Reid Ewing, William Schroeder, and William Green, “School Location and Student Travel: Analysis of Factors Affecting Mode Choice,” *Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board*, no. 1895 (2004): 55.

<sup>28</sup> Craig Howley, *The Rural School Bus Ride in Five States: A Report to the Rural School and Community Trust* (Washington, D.C.: Rural School and Community Trust, 2001), i.

<sup>29</sup> Robin Lambert, “West Virginia Community Story Tells Much About School Consolidation,” *Rural Policy Matters* 12.7 (July 2010), 1-3.

<sup>30</sup> Howley, 9.

## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

When the group met on October 5, 2010, Board of Education staff presented information on educational programs. The first area mentioned concerned split classes (i.e., classrooms with more than one grade). It was suggested that closing Kitzmiller and bussing the students to Yough Glades will “allow for more developmentally appropriate instruction for all students.” No research or data was presented to support this assertion.

When the Group examined the evidence, it found that the research indicates that “being a student in a multigrade classroom does not negatively affect academic performance, social relationships, or attitudes.” Studies indicate little or no difference in academic achievement in students in a single or multigrade classroom.<sup>31</sup> Where the multigrade classroom has the greatest impact on student performance is the affective area. Results generally favor the multigrade classroom over the single grade classroom when measures of student attitude toward self, school, or peers are compared.<sup>32</sup> Combined grade classes have been found to foster greater independence, better social skills, and an increased motivation to learn.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, relationships among students, teachers, and parents are enriched as a result of working together for more than one year.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the data clearly supports the multigrade classroom as a viable and equally effective organizational alternative to single-grade instruction.

---

<sup>31</sup> Bruce A. Miller “A Review of the Quantitative Research on Multigrade Instruction,” *Research in Rural Education* 7.1 (1990), 2; Lilian G. Katz, “The Benefits of Mixed-Age Grouping,” *ERIC Digest* (1995), 1; Simon Veenman, “Cognitive and Noncognitive Effects of Multigrade and Multi-Age Classes: A Best-Evidence Synthesis,” *Review of Educational Research* 65.4 (1995), 319.

<sup>32</sup> Miller, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Wendy C. Kasten and Barbara K. Clark, *The Multi-Age Classroom: A Family of Learners* (New York: Richard C. Owen Publishers, 1993), 5; D. E. McClellan and S. J. Kinsey, “Children's Social Behavior in Relation to Participation in Mixed-Age or Same-Age Classrooms. *Early Childhood Research and Practice* 1.1 (1999), 1. Kasten and Clark note that in many countries, such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Portugal, and Finland, multigrade classrooms are quite common.

<sup>34</sup> David Pratt, “On the Merits of Multiage Classrooms,” *Research in Rural Education* 3.3 (1986), 111.

Along with the argument that single grade instruction provides for “more developmentally appropriate instruction,” the Board staff indicated that single grade level classes afford more opportunities to utilize research based strategies such as think/pair/share and cooperative learning. As the Group examined these strategies and held informal discussions with multigrade teachers in Garrett County and Mineral County, West Virginia, the consensus was that these strategies could be utilized just as effectively in multigrade classrooms.

In fact, researchers hail cooperative learning as one of the advantages of combined grades. Educational theorists recommend the use of various groupings. Heterogeneous groups can be accomplished by grouping students by various levels, regardless of grade level.<sup>35</sup> In such situations, students become models for one another. It allows the older children to review concepts being learned by the younger children, while the older students become models for the younger ones. In these combined grade settings, students build leadership abilities as they work together and help each other.<sup>36</sup>

A third educational program issue broached by the Board of Education staff concerned art, music, and physical education programs. They contended that resource time could be reallocated to enhance programs for all elementary students. The specifics of what these enhancements would entail were not delineated. However, for Kitzmiller students, the concern is that even if there are more opportunities, would these students be able to participate? In many instances, the answer is likely “no” due to the distances involved in travel and challenges to parental involvement. Since the students are currently in combined grade situations, they quite

---

<sup>35</sup> Diane Lataille-Demore, “Combined Grade Classrooms: What Works?” *The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat* (2007), 3.

<sup>36</sup> Wendy C. Kasten, “Why Does Multiage Make Sense?: Compelling Arguments for Educational Change,” *Primary Voices K-6* 6.2 (1998), 5.

likely get more exposure to art, music, and physical education than they would in a single grade configuration at Yough Glades.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to art, music, and physical education, the Board staff proposed that closing Kitzmiller School “would allow for more efficient service delivery for all special education services.” It should be noted that a minimal amount of Kitzmiller students (currently, about six) receive special education assistance. As with all children in the southern end of the County, those students with the greatest needs are transported to Dennett Road Elementary.

The Board staff also indicated that “access to agency services,” such as mental health, “would be enhanced for all students.” It was implied that mental health professionals were inconvenienced by traveling to Kitzmiller to provide services. Conversations with Health Department personnel clarified that this was not the case, and full services would continue to be provided regardless of school closing actions. The Group also observes that these agency service personnel would continue to travel to Kitzmiller should Garrett Community Action find a suitable location for the community’s Head Start center.

Returning to the combined classroom issues, the Board staff’s final proposal advocated closing Kitzmiller would lead to “increased opportunities for appropriate socialization” and “interaction with children their own age.” First of all, the Group asked how one defines “appropriate socialization”? The purpose of socialization concerns helping children to interact in the larger world.<sup>38</sup> So do children become best socialized by being isolated with other children who are exactly the same age and who do the same thing all day? Secondly, the Group points out that multiple-grade class rooms have socialization benefits of their own. Many affective

---

<sup>37</sup> Distance education may also have potential to alleviate some issues related to staffing and traveling concerns. See Wallace H. Hannum and Matthew J. Irvin, “Distance Education Use in Rural Schools,” *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 24.3 (2009), 1-15.

<sup>38</sup> John A. Clausen, *Socialization and Society* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1968), 5.

gains have been documented in multi-grade research. Students show increased self-esteem, more cooperative behavior, better attitudes toward school in general, increased pro-social behavior, enriched personal relationships, increased personal responsibility, and a decline in discipline problems.<sup>39</sup>

After considering the information presented by the Board Staff, the Group also contemplated several curriculum features unique to Kitzmiller that students will lose if the School is closed. The historic botanical garden located across from the School forms an integral part of the School's science and environment education.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, the School's location along the North Branch of the Potomac River provides geological opportunities for teachers and students. Moreover, Kitzmiller's heritage as a coal mining community allows students to gain insights into this industry and its history. All of these exist as examples of "place-based learning," which is defined as "learning that is rooted in what is local – the unique history, environment, culture, economy, literature, and art of a particular place."<sup>41</sup> Research on place-based learning demonstrates that using local ecology and locations within the community has positive results both in improving academic achievement and in engaging youth in school and community.<sup>42</sup> These invaluable advantages will be lost for students at Yough Glades.

---

<sup>39</sup> B. Mackey, R. Johnson, and T. Wood, "Cognitive and Affective Outcomes in a Multiage Language Arts Program," *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 10 (1995), 49-61; J. K. Uphoff & D. A. Evans, "The Country School Comes to Town: A Case Study of Multiage Grouping and Teaching," in D. Sumner (Ed.), *Multiage Classrooms: The Ungrading of America's Schools* (Peterborough, NH: Society for Developmental Education, 1993), 36-38.

<sup>40</sup> Melvin Brown, "A School Forest and Botanical Garden," *The American Biology Teacher* 14.6 (October 1952), 141-143.

<sup>41</sup> Devora Shamah and Katherine A. MacTavish, "Making Room for Place-Based Knowledge in Rural Classrooms," *The Rural Educator* 30.2 (2009), 2.

<sup>42</sup> David Sobel, *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities* (Great Barrington, MA: Orion Society, 2005); Paul Theobald, *Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

## **RACIAL COMPOSITION**

At the Group's third meeting, it reviewed information related to racial and ethnic composition of the involved schools. Currently, Kitzmiller has an enrollment of 55, with 54 Caucasian students and 1 Asian Pacific Islander. This equals a 1.8 percent minority population. At present, Yough Glades has an enrollment of 253 students with 252 Caucasian students and 1 African American student. Thus, Yough Glades has a minority population of only 0.39 percent. As a combined school, Kitzmiller and Yough Glades would have 308 students with 2 minority enrollees. That would represent a 0.65 percent minority population. With numbers this small, it becomes apparent that racial composition does not represent a significant factor in school closing considerations.

## **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

At its October 11 convening, the Group heard information on financial considerations from Superintendent Teets and Mr. Ervin Fink, Executive Director of Administration. After reviewing the factors affecting countywide funding losses, including decreased enrollment and increased county wealth, Dr. Teets and Mr. Fink presented information specifically related to Kitzmiller Elementary. School staffing costs were estimated at \$322,000 in County funding and \$55,000 in Federal programs for a total of \$377,000. Total utility costs at the school for fiscal year 2010 were \$32,405. Thus, it was proposed that closing Kitzmiller Elementary would provide for a savings of \$409,405.

These numbers were broken down further to examine the cost per pupil. Kitzmiller's utility cost per pupil was \$589. Bloomington (\$1,172) and Friendsville (\$730) boasted higher

utility amounts per student. For average staffing costs, Kitzmiller has a cost of \$6,854 per pupil. Once again, Bloomington had a higher per pupil staffing cost of \$12,133. Crellin and Friendsville staffing costs came in right below Kitzmiller at \$6,190 and \$6,175, respectively. The total cost per pupil at Kitzmiller was \$7,443. Bloomington was highest at \$13,305. Friendsville came in under Kitzmiller at \$6,904 per pupil.

The Board administrators also provided a brief snapshot of several programs and their total cost and costs per student. Although most of these programs would not add up to substantial savings, the Group did point out that two programs exceeded \$200,000 in total costs. The Driver's Education program adds up to \$209,400. To the Group's knowledge, Garrett County represents the only system in Maryland that offers driver's education as part of its high school curriculum. The program undoubtedly provides a benefit for students.<sup>43</sup> A second program that costs \$201,300 is JROTC. While this training program promotes worthwhile goals such as citizenship and leadership, investment in military programs reduces funds available to support programs such as college preparatory classes, resource classes, and student counseling services. These two programs combined cost the school system \$410,700. That amount equals the proposed savings from closing Kitzmiller Elementary School. The pros and cons of saving these programs as opposed to saving a community must be weighed.<sup>44</sup>

The Group would also caution that projected cost savings from consolidation can be temporary or illusory because lower costs in some expenditure categories are often offset by higher costs in other areas. One study analyzed expenditure patterns before and after consolidation in nineteen schools. It found that total costs per pupil actually increased more in the nineteen consolidated schools than statewide average increases (32% compared to 29%).

---

<sup>43</sup> Students also receive CPR training.

<sup>44</sup> As an aside, eliminating high school driver's education programs could help to support the local economy by giving business to private training schools in the County.

The researcher concluded, “There appears to be no overall basis for expecting that significant financial advantage or increased revenue are necessary outcomes of consolidation.”<sup>45</sup>

If any savings from decreased staffing would be realized as a result of closing schools, these savings would also adversely impact the local economy. The jobs that would be lost represent well-paying positions. These qualified individuals will be forced to look elsewhere, likely outside Garrett County, for new employment opportunities.

Garrett County would also be wise to learn from the example of our neighbors in West Virginia. In a national award winning series of articles in 2003 on the cost of West Virginia school closings, *The Charleston Gazette* found that over a ten year period the state closed 325 schools in pursuit of economies of scale, and in doing so substantially increased the number of administrators, despite the fact that the number of students being served by the system declined by 41,000 in this period. In the meantime, per pupil transportation costs more than doubled.<sup>46</sup>

The Group would also highlight that, even if small schools cost more, they may be worth the investment. It would urge policy makers to consider the example of Vermont. In 1997, Vermont adopted a new system of funding education. Unlike most states, Vermont chose to provide additional funding to cover the higher costs of the state’s smallest school districts. An extra \$1 million per year was allocated to districts with fewer than 100 students. Initially, lawmakers intended this as a temporary arrangement. Many legislators favored consolidating small schools and directed the state education department to determine which schools, if any, should continue to receive extra funding. The department was charged to recommend “alternative arrangements for those small schools.” But early in 1998, the department’s report

---

<sup>45</sup> James S. Streifel, George Foldes, and David M. Holman, “The Financial Effects of Consolidation,” *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 7.2 (1991), 13-20.

<sup>46</sup> Eric Eyre and Scott Finn, “Closing Costs: School Consolidation in West Virginia,” *Charleston Gazette* (25 August 2003). The articles also ran on August 30; September 8, 12, 24, and 29; and October 3 and 6.

came to a surprising conclusion: “Small schools in Vermont cost more to operate than larger schools, but they are worth the investment because of the value they add to student learning and community cohesion.”<sup>47</sup> Academically, small schools students do as well or better than large school students, despite living in communities with higher rates of poverty and lower education levels.<sup>48</sup> Rather than suggesting “alternative physical arrangements,” the department urged the legislature to increase and expand the small schools grant. The Vermont lawmakers did as the department recommended.<sup>49</sup>

With these examples in mind, the Group would point out that the monies utilized to operate Kitzmiller Elementary School represent a small portion of the overall County and Board of Education budget. For example, in the fiscal year 2011 “Garrett County Government Budget,” total General Fund expenditures equaled \$67,938,695.<sup>50</sup> The \$409,405 devoted to Kitzmiller School amounts to only 0.6 percent of the County’s overall budget expenditures.<sup>51</sup>

## **STUDENT RELOCATIONS**

At its inaugural meeting, the Group received information related to student relocations from Mrs. Barbara Baker, Director of Elementary Education. The information presented focused on prospective class sizes should Kitzmiller Elementary’s students become absorbed into Yough

---

<sup>47</sup> Vermont Department of Education, *Small Schools Study*, presented to the Vermont Legislative Oversight Committee, 15 January 1998. Available at <http://newrules.org/equity/smallschoolvt98.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> The Group directs the reader’s attention to Garrett County’s own Crellin Elementary School as an excellent example of this point. See Liz Bowie, “Small Garrett County School Ranks No. 1 in Test Scores,” *Baltimore Sun* (22 July 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Vermont Statutes, Title 16: Education, Chapter 133: State Funding of Education, § 4015: Small School Support. Available at <http://www.leg.state.vt.us/statutes/fullchapter.cfm?Title=16&Chapter=133>.

<sup>50</sup> Garrett County Board of Commissioners, “Garrett County Government Budget: Fiscal Year 2011,” 11.

<sup>51</sup> \$409,405 represents 0.78 percent of the Board of Education’s \$52,560,152 in expenditures for the 2011 fiscal year. See Garrett County Board of Education, “Approved Operating Budget: Fiscal Year 2011,” 5.

Glades. At its present configuration, no classroom would exceed an average of twenty-five students.<sup>52</sup>

Although these numbers are not staggering, a larger school located further away from home will impact the students transferring from Kitzmiller. This is especially true for the less affluent students, like those in Kitzmiller. In 2010, 68.4 percent of Kitzmiller Elementary students received free or reduced lunch.<sup>53</sup> In the 2000 Census, Kitzmiller's median income was \$25,000, which stood at only 78 percent of the county and 60 percent of the national median household incomes.<sup>54</sup> As Craig Howley and Robert Bickel find, "The less affluent a community served, the smaller a school should be to maximize the school's performance. The well-documented correlation between poverty and low achievement is as much as ten times stronger in larger schools than smaller ones."<sup>55</sup> Regardless of income, studies have found that smaller class sizes are associated with high academic achievement, especially in the lower grades of Kindergarten through third grade.<sup>56</sup> The gains are most pronounced when class size is under twenty.<sup>57</sup> If Kitzmiller students attend Yough Glades, all the classes are projected to include twenty or more students.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> The numbers for Grade 5 did show an average class size of 28 students. However, these represent 2010-2011 fifth graders who will transfer to Southern Middle School for the 2011-2012 school year.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.mdreportcard.org/statDisplay.aspx?PV=36:E:11:1301:3:N:6:5:1:2:1:1:1:1:3>

<sup>54</sup> Terrell Ellis & Associates; U.S. Census Bureau.

<sup>55</sup> Craig Howley and Robert Bickel, *When It Comes to Schooling, Small Works: School Size, Poverty, and Student Achievement* (Randolph, VT: Rural School and Community Trust, 2000), 8. The performance measurements researched include standardized tests. Howley and Bickel further observe, "Studies clearly show that trying to save money through consolidation of schools . . . would predictably have the perverse effect of actually widening the achievement gap and worsening the inequities [between students of various socioeconomic backgrounds] . . ."

<sup>56</sup> Lorna Jimerson, *The Hobbit Effect: Why Small Works in Public Education* (Arlington, VA: Rural School and Community Trust, 2006), 9.

<sup>57</sup> B. J. Biddle & D. C. Berliner, *What Research Says About Small Classes and Their Effects*, Educational Policy Reports Project (Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, 2002), 22. Biddle and Berliner conclude their study thusly: "no other educational reform has yet been studied that would produce such striking benefits" (25). They acknowledge that this policy will increase educational costs, but assert that the benefits from reducing class size are long-lasting and substantial.

<sup>58</sup> The final draft of the State Rated Capacity (SRC) formula currently being considered by the Interagency Committee on School Construction states: "The approved capacity for an elementary school classroom is: ...

Why do smaller schools benefit students this way? The smaller the school the better each student can be known and valued. No one gets lost in the crowd. All the adults in the school can know all the students. A smaller school can be more flexible in response to individual students and their circumstances. Students have better attitudes when the school is personalized, when all can take part in activities, and when everyone knows their actions will be noticed.<sup>59</sup>

Not only will Kitzmiller students be impacted by this change in class size, but current Yough Glade students will also have detrimental effects. Larger class sizes will mean less individual attention for these students and their academic, co-curricular, and social development. Since 1970, the overwhelming consensus among educational researchers is that the advantages of consolidation on academic performance and achievement are greatly outweighed by the disadvantages.<sup>60</sup>

Another impact of the relocation of students would involve the loss of the “It’s in the Bag” Program. This program helps feed children at risk with healthy meals and snacks on weekends when they are not in school. Volunteers store, sort, pack, and deliver the food to students in backpacks. Currently, St. Mark’s Lutheran Church supports fifty-four students at Kitzmiller Elementary through this program.<sup>61</sup> If the School is closed, St. Mark’s representatives have indicated they will be unable to continue this program, and these needy Kitzmiller students will not receive the benefit of “It’s in the Bag.”

---

Kindergarten: 22; Grades 1-5: 23 ...” (p.2 of Appendix 102 A – State Rated Capacity). A combined Yough Glades-Kitzmiller student body would result in four of the six grade levels exceeding these capacities.

<sup>59</sup> See Kathleen Cotton, *Affective and Social Benefits of Small-Scale Schooling* (Washington, D.C.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1996).

<sup>60</sup> Michael Kennedy, “Thinking Small,” *American School and University* 74.1 (2001), 18.

<sup>61</sup> St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, “It’s in the Bag,” *On the Mark* 2.2 (February 2011), 4.

## COMMUNITY IMPACT

Over the course of its meetings, the Group encountered numerous issues related to the impact that closing Kitzmiller School would have on the community of Kitzmiller. In 2004, a State of Maryland Community Legacy Grant helped the Town of Kitzmiller secure the services of Terrell Ellis & Associates and Devlin Architecture to assist in the preparation of a strategic plan for the Town of Kitzmiller. The plan recommends a framework to revitalize Kitzmiller by taking advantage of “its strength as a unique historical community located in an area known for its recreational and scenic qualities.”<sup>62</sup>

When it comes to forming a blueprint for Kitzmiller’s future, the Plan establishes from the beginning that “by far the most important priority for the community . . . is the retention of the elementary school in its current building.”<sup>63</sup> It further reiterates, “The elementary school is the heart of the community and is a focal point of activities and services for residents. Its survival is paramount and this issue is of greatest importance to those who live there.”<sup>64</sup> Yet again, the Plan states, “The most important community facility is the elementary school. By far, residents in Kitzmiller view the school as its number one asset and its number one concern.”<sup>65</sup> And, if that was not enough, it identifies “the potential loss of the school” as the community’s “number one threat and its retention as the number one priority.”<sup>66</sup>

With this priority in mind, the Plan outlines a strategy to “develop and promote the local school as a community center of continual learning and focal point for community services for all residents.”<sup>67</sup> This approach promotes the concept of the school as “a place that provides a

---

<sup>62</sup> Terrell Ellis & Associates and Devlin Architecture, “Community Legacy Strategic Plan,” 2004, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 22.

myriad of important and essential services, including that of educating young children.”<sup>68</sup> These services would include expanded educational offerings to include preschool, adult basic education, job training, and community education programs; development of senior services at the school; exploration of a rural health clinic in cooperation with the Garrett County Health Department; continued partnership with the Ruth Enlow Library; promotion of place-based, hands-on learning opportunities; and establishment of a youth center.<sup>69</sup>

The Group would like the Board of Education to be aware that Kitzmiller has already implemented several facets of the strategic plan and is in process on others. For example, in accordance with a goal of strengthening building codes, several blighted properties were recently razed.<sup>70</sup> To make streetscape improvements, signage was erected at the intersection of Main Street and Kitzmiller Road.<sup>71</sup> Based on its location along the Coal Heritage Scenic Byway, the community restored its former Company Store, which now houses a visitor’s center and restaurant.<sup>72</sup> In order to improve the community’s housing stock, the Town secured funding to begin a development of single family homes on Centre Street. One of these homes has already been sold to the target buyers of families with young children.<sup>73</sup>

With these projects in process and others in the pipeline, Kitzmiller is well on its way toward implementing the revitalization plan it has developed. However, as the Strategic Plan document makes clear several times, the success of these endeavors, and indeed the future of the Town itself, is dependent upon the School remaining in the community. The Group does not

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

think it exaggerates in saying that retaining its School is more important to Kitzmiller than to any other municipality in Garrett County.

Research demonstrates that the psychological sense of community may be the pivotal axis upon which successful community development turns. Interestingly, most efforts at community development have failed to focus on this. Often, economic development is equated to an emphasis on economics at the exclusion of the social dimensions of community. Mounting evidence suggests that without building this sense of community development efforts are likely to fail.<sup>74</sup> One of the key institutions that provide a sense of community in rural towns like Kitzmiller is schools.

Study after study demonstrates the central role schools play in community survival. Schools serve as a gathering place and key recreational center. Most importantly, schools foster “a stable pattern in the web of social life that binds individuals together. It is what makes a community something more than an aggregation of people.”<sup>75</sup> Schools function significantly in revitalizing small, rural communities. Many other institutions and businesses have become regionalized. In addition, residents often go outside the community for needed services, further weakening community self-sufficiency. As Miller states, “By default, the school stands at center stage, providing the community with a sense of identity and a common meeting place.”<sup>76</sup>

Faced with economic distress, the survival of communities and a valued way of life hangs in the balance. But the issue of survival does not center entirely on economics and employment opportunities, as many community development efforts seem to stress. To view the rural crisis solely in economic terms, grossly oversimplifies the complex nature of community. It also limits

---

<sup>74</sup> Bruce A. Miller, “Rural Distress and Survival: The School and the Importance of ‘Community,’” *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 9.2 (1993), 87.

<sup>75</sup> D. H. Monk and E. J. Haller, *Organizational Alternatives for Small Rural Schools: Final Report to the Legislature of the State of New York* (New York: Cornell University, 1986), 28.

<sup>76</sup> Miller, “Rural Distress,” 93.

the options for creative and meaningful solutions that go beyond economics to include other dimensions of community well-being. These include the value of place, quality of environment, one's history as a member of a community, and, perhaps most importantly, a sense of belonging and affiliation among caring friends, neighbors, and relatives. It may be that this psychological sense of community provides the foundations upon which successful community development efforts are built; not the other way around.

Those concerned about the decline of rural communities feel that the most promising direction for revitalization and survival rests with education and the linkages that can be developed and sustained between school and community.<sup>77</sup> When the school is used as a community center, it serves as both a source of lifelong learning and as a vehicle for delivery of a wide range of services. Using the community as curriculum, it emphasizes the study of community in all its various dimensions.

As Harmon and Schafft stress, "Well-functioning schools help to increase the social integration of communities and neighborhoods by strengthening local identity and sense of commonly held purpose. Schools function as centers of community activity and nurture public participation in civic and community affairs. They provide physical spaces that enable community members to come together. Rural schools, in particular, serve as symbols of community autonomy, vitality, and identity."<sup>78</sup>

As the twenty-first century proceeds, "Collaboration must extend beyond a singular focus on student achievement to a blended community and educational leadership strategy that takes as

---

<sup>77</sup> For example, New Mexico has established a program to address the special needs of schools and communities in the extensive rural areas of the state. Adopting principles for rural revitalization from remote communities of South Australia, the program aims at instituting holistic community socioeconomic revitalization at the grassroots level with the schools playing a leading role. See Gerald R Pitzel and Alicia C. Benavidez, "Rural Revitalization in New Mexico: A Grass Roots Initiative Involving Schools and Community," *The Rural Educator* 28.3 (2007), 4-11.

<sup>78</sup> Hobarat L. Harmon and Kai Schafft, "Rural School Leadership for Collaborative Community Development," *The Rural Educator* 30.3 (2009), 5; see also Alan Peshkin, *The Imperfect Union* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 161.

a fundamental assumption that ensuring the academic success of students, on the one hand, and the social and economic vitality of the rural community, on the other, are not mutually *exclusive* priorities, but are instead deeply and indeed inextricably connected.”<sup>79</sup> Unfortunately, recent history suggests that the evolving role of public schools in America is moving farther away from its most valuable lifeline of support – the public and local community.

In 2002, Thomas A. Lyson analyzed data from seventy-one towns or villages in New York State with populations of 500 or less, almost all of which had once had a school. About half of these seventy-one communities had a current school. The economic and fiscal capacity of the communities without schools was much lower than that of the communities with schools. Communities with schools saw greater population increases, higher average housing values, higher per capita income, a more equal distribution of income, less per capita income from public assistance, less poverty, and less child poverty. He concluded, “in even the smallest rural villages . . . , schools serve as important markers of social and economic viability and vitality.”<sup>80</sup>

A Kitzmiller School closing would not only mean loss of the town’s educational center, but it would impact other community institutions as well, leading to further morale loss. Closing the School would cost the Kitzmiller community its branch of the Ruth Enlow Library. The public library plays a significant role in the community. First, access to its resources adds to the overall quality of life in the community. Second, the library provides residents with up-to-date computer systems, fax machines, internet access, and information retrieval skills that are of growing importance in an information-based economy.<sup>81</sup> Third, the library helps to promote school readiness and continued literacy among Kitzmiller’s children through its programs, such

---

<sup>79</sup>Harmon and Schafft, 8.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas A. Lyson, “What Does a School Mean to a Community?: Assessing the Social and Economic Benefits of Schools to Rural Villages in New York,” *Journal of Research in Rural Education* 17.3 (2002), 131-137.

<sup>81</sup> Christine Hamilton-Pennell, “Public Libraries and Community Development: Partnering for Success,” *Rural Research Report* 18.10 (Winter 2008), 2.

as the summer reading activities and story times. Relatedly, the ability of children to choose what they read and the quality of their reading experience is likely to decline if they do not have access to a public library.<sup>82</sup> Fourth, the library serves as a resource for life-long learning.<sup>83</sup> Unfortunately, many of the residents currently utilizing the Kitzmiller branch do not have means of transportation to visit other library locations. Indeed, children, the elderly, and the poor are particularly vulnerable groups of users when a library closes, and they often have more difficulty gaining access to alternatives. Although library closings would impact any community, the effects would be even more acute in rural, isolated towns such as Kitzmiller.<sup>84</sup>

Along with the library, the closing of the Head Start center could result if Kitzmiller School is discontinued. The loss of its educational, health, and nutritional services would prove especially detrimental for Kitzmiller's low-income children and their families. If children do not participate in the program, school readiness will be negatively impacted. Moreover, should participating students be required to attend a center in Oakland, this will mean extended bus rides for children as young as three years.

The Town of Kitzmiller has also had discussions with Garrett College about developing educational partnerships in the community. Plans include utilizing the School for continuing education and General Education Development (GED) classes. A GED class for the Fall of 2011 is already scheduled in the community. The closing of the School could endanger this budding partnership.

---

<sup>82</sup> Richard Proctor, Hazel Lee, and Rachel Reilly, *Access to Public Libraries: The Impact of Opening Hours Reductions and Closures* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1998), 87.

<sup>83</sup> At the March 3, 2011, meeting of public school superintendents, Paula Isett, the Community Outreach Specialist for the Division of Library Development and Services of the Maryland State Department of Education, presented information on public library and public school partnerships which encouraged the type of cooperation and joint efforts that have existed with Kitzmiller Elementary School and the Ruth Enlow Library branch since the branch relocated to the School in 1987.

<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, one of the community facility policies and actions outlined in the "2008 Garrett County Comprehensive Plan," 8-10, includes supporting "renovations and upgrades to library facilities" at the Kitzmiller branch.

After considering these losses, the Group reviewed State school information. The Maryland Department of Planning states:

The ideal Maryland public school of the future should be a community-centered facility located within a neighborhood that will serve as a community anchor. It should be adjacent to recreational areas and parks and located within walking distance of other community facilities such as libraries and community centers. Most importantly, and where appropriate, Maryland schools need to offer additional community uses such as learning centers, health centers, senior centers or a related community oriented uses that serve neighborhood residents. For instance, later or longer hours may permit senior citizens access to health services or gym and fitness facilities during non-school hours or for community groups to use libraries and auditoriums or other facilities so that the school building remains a community asset after the academic day and on weekends.

Community-centered schools serve as catalysts to keep older neighborhoods vibrant. Older schools represent an element of Maryland's historic architectural heritage. As a result of costs and other factors, some communities are not in the practice of building prominent architectural structure like this anymore. Through renovation of older schools and revitalization of school sites and adjacent areas, Maryland can revitalize established communities, while conserving resources and making the best use of existing infrastructure.

There is often a larger community function that is served by school facilities. Community events including arts, theater, music, performance, and a range of other activities are important components of education. Community-centered schools send a clear message to neighborhoods that this is indeed their institution.<sup>85</sup>

Ironically, a decision to close Kitzmiller Elementary School would mean closing a school that the Group believes this description from the Maryland Department of Planning describes.

The Planning Department goes on to delineate the characteristics of “community-centered schools.” Highlights include the following:

(1) “A neighborhood oriented building that encourages community involvement and interaction with nearby residents.”<sup>86</sup> Kitzmiller’s location within the community allows the opportunity to relate to many community residents. Since they are within walking distance, they

---

<sup>85</sup> Maryland Department of Planning, *Models and Guidelines*, 9.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

visit with senior citizens at the town's Area Agency on Aging site. Through "Love Your Neighbor Day," the students make soup and cookie jars and deliver them to the community's elderly. Once again, because they are within walking distance, students can visit community locations, such as the post office and museum to learn about their services and history.<sup>87</sup>

The school welcomes community involvement and volunteers. Perhaps the After School Program represents the best example. Many years ago, several community members from the Kitzmiller Empowerment Group envisioned and began an after school program for the students of Kitzmiller Elementary. After several years of running a successful, all-volunteer program, the Garrett County Health Department took the reins of the program utilizing State grant funding. At the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, it was announced that the Health Department would be unable to continue the Kitzmiller program due to lack of funding. Just as it did in the beginning, the Kitzmiller Empowerment Group stepped into the gap and has mobilized individuals to develop an all-volunteer after school program that has had excellent student participation.<sup>88</sup>

As another example of community involvement, the Group points to Kitzmiller's school supply program. Each fall, Kitzmiller's churches and community groups receive a list of supplies for each classroom and student. These groups provide the students with one-hundred percent of their necessary school supplies for the year.

(2) "A place that allows students to walk or bicycle to school, improving student health and fitness."<sup>89</sup> As explained under Transportation considerations, students within the Town of Kitzmiller can walk to school. A bike rack is also provided. The School's location within the

---

<sup>87</sup> It should be noted that because students walk, these "field trips" do not necessitate additional funds from the Board of Education.

<sup>88</sup> Currently, two-thirds of Kitzmiller's student population is enrolled in the After School Program.

<sup>89</sup> Maryland Department of Planning, *Models and Guidelines*, 10.

community allows the students to participate in “National Walk to School Day” to promote healthy lifestyles. Teachers utilize the Kitzmiller River Walk to implement “Tuesday Walk Days” for their students.

(3) “A neighborhood anchor that, where appropriate, supports community use of school facilities, co-location of other uses, and shared use of public school facilities with other public uses so that the building is a community asset after school hours and on weekends.”<sup>90</sup> The school provides for the shared use of its facilities with the Ruth Enlow Library branch. It also houses a Head Start program, operated by the Garrett County Community Action Committee. The school serves as a meeting place for many community functions. These include civic functions (such as the annual Homecoming event, Veteran’s Day program, and Old-Fashioned Christmas) and religious functions (such as the National Day of Prayer observance and Thanksgiving celebration for the community’s churches). Its gym facilities are utilized for youth and young adult basketball programs.

(4) “A quality use of existing resources such as historic school building.”<sup>91</sup> As noted under Building Conditions, the school was built in 1924. The eighty-seven year old building clearly has historical significance.

(5) “Secure sidewalk networks, nearby transit access and is adjacent to or within walking distance of other public amenities including parks, athletic fields, libraries, museums and community centers.”<sup>92</sup> The school sidewalk network provides for safe walking to other points within the community, including the Kitzmiller Community Building, the post office, the Company Store, and local churches. In addition, the School is located along the Kitzmiller Riverwalk, which runs along the Potomac River. As the Department of Planning suggests, the

---

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

school is adjacent to several public amenities. The Kitzmiller Park, along with the historic Botanical Gardens, is across the street from the School. Several playground options are available for children. The library is located within the building itself. Athletic fields, which provide facilities for the Kitzmiller Little League and softball leagues, are on the School grounds. The Kitzmiller Historical Museum is one block away and allows students the opportunity to learn about the area's coal heritage.

(6) “A part of an existing community that does not actively promote sprawl related land use change outside of planned community growth boundaries and Priority Funding Areas (PFAs).”<sup>93</sup> As a municipality, Kitzmiller represents a Priority Funding Area. The Planning Guidelines discourage public schools constructed in areas between towns with the intent of serving students from both communities. Instead, it recommends schools should be in the communities they serve, especially in the midst of municipalities. Kitzmiller School is in a municipality. Yough Glades is located between the communities it serves.

In addition to the irony of closing a facility that in many ways resembles the Department of Planning's “ideal Maryland public school of the future,”<sup>94</sup> further irony is present in the fact that Garrett County is currently in process of implementing its Heritage Plan. One of the Heritage Plan's key goals involves “preserving, protecting, and promoting Garrett County's heritage resources.”<sup>95</sup> The Plan indicates that Garrett County “should care about its historic sites and structures, not only for the history and culture they portray, but also because they have tangible social and economic value.” Stressing stewardship and revitalization, the Plan urges the

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>95</sup> “Heritage Programming Guide: How to Preserve and Interpret the Garrett County Heritage Area,” *2010 Garrett County Heritage Area Management Plan*, 3. Available at [http://www.peterjohnstonassociates.com/HERITAGE\\_PROGRAMMING\\_GUIDE.pdf](http://www.peterjohnstonassociates.com/HERITAGE_PROGRAMMING_GUIDE.pdf).

community to work together “to support the future by preserving the past as a productive part of the local economy.”<sup>96</sup>

The Heritage Plan suggests that the most pivotal task in evaluation of historic resources involves “discovering what your community values most.” These places represent “the special resources that a community cherishes, the ‘Places of the Heart.’”<sup>97</sup> Without question, Kitzmiller Elementary School encompasses one such “Place of the Heart” for its community.

The Heritage plan goes on to discuss the importance of historic structures for “preserving Garrett’s links to the past, particularly key character defining buildings (landmarks and potential landmarks) within the natural landscape.” It emphasizes that historic structures support the tourism economy. However, “significant historic structures have been lost with time; being either ruined or demolished.” Sadly, “many more historic structures in the County are currently endangered.”<sup>98</sup> For the Group, Kitzmiller School represents such an “endangered” structure. The Heritage Plan declares, “Heightened preservation actions and initiatives are important to save what remains of the County’s historic resources.” Indeed, “Direct financial, technical, and volunteer assistance is recommended.”<sup>99</sup>

Not only does the Plan accentuate a concern for buildings, but it also underscores the importance of the County’s communities. In fact, it describes these communities as forming “the basic infrastructure or engine for economic development and heritage.” It concludes, “Therefore, preserving and protecting these resources is critical.”<sup>100</sup> Communities like Kitzmiller are a valuable, though sometimes unrecognized, resource for Garrett County.

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 1-3.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1-5.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 1-6.

According to this reading of the Heritage Plan, Kitzmiller’s preservation and protection should be a priority.

In this vein, the Heritage Plan denotes the importance of reviewing the plans and policies that the County has developed to manage growth and preserve resources. Among those plans are two documents that have received mention in this Group’s report: the 2008 Garrett County Comprehensive Plan and, most notably, Municipal Comprehensive Plans.<sup>101</sup> As the Heritage Plan observes, “A common theme in all of the municipal plans is preserving historic, cultural, and natural resources.” The Plan asserts that “more must be done to sustain the intrinsic characteristics of heritage resources.”<sup>102</sup> It continues, “The Chamber should work with its municipal partners and the Garrett County Community Action Committee to assist historic preservation efforts in towns because these areas have the largest resource concentrations. Raising public awareness and providing financial and technical assistance to towns, where appropriate, can achieve many Heritage Area goals and objectives.”<sup>103</sup> Sustaining “the intrinsic characteristics” of Kitzmiller undoubtedly centers around maintaining the community’s school, as the Strategic Plan emphasizes.

The Heritage Plan further calls attention to the need for all areas of the County to have involvement in its vision. It outlines its purpose as follows: “to build a place with a unique identity by preserving links to the past.”<sup>104</sup> The plan picks up this theme again:

In this regard, history culture, architecture, and social character are keys to place making. Rather than conceiving of the Garrett County Heritage Area as a set of independent and divided communities and tourist facilities in a single county, this interpretative strategy envisions a linked county-wide experience. This means more than just visiting Deep Creek Lake or Oakland but rather *all the communities and rural areas in Garrett County*. Each of these areas has a unique

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 1-7.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 1-8.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 1-10.

identity and character offering a true heritage experience for the traveler. In addition, a county-wide experience allows for many diverse heritage attractions, facilities, and services to be linked in a simple and unified framework of physical linkage and interpretive venues/programs.<sup>105</sup>

Kitzmiller has a unique identity and character as the only surviving mining town in Garrett County.<sup>106</sup> Maintaining its school will help the community to continue to give voice to this aspect of the County's heritage.

While the impact on Kitzmiller as the vacated community would be immense, the community repercussions for the receiving school's community would almost be non-existent. Yough Glades is not located in a community, but in an area between communities. As such, it is not truly a "community-centered school." The additional transportation effects would be minimal in an area that already receives busses at the high school located less than one mile away.

With the community impact considered, the Group concludes that closing the School will be nothing but detrimental to the community of Kitzmiller and its future. When the evidence is considered, 0.6 percent of the County's expended budget seems like a small investment to make to ensure the survival of a community.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 2-8—2-9, emphasis added.

<sup>106</sup> This heritage is highlighted in James Rada, Jr., "Whispers of Communities Past: Remembering Western Maryland's Ghost Towns," *Maryland Life* 6.4 (July/August 2010), 30-33. After reviewing Kitzmiller's history, Rada concludes, "Kitzmiller is one of the lucky ones – at least it still exists" (30).

<sup>107</sup> This is especially true when it is recognized that the Garrett County Board of Education operates five schools in the 21550 zip code. Three of these schools are within 2.5 miles of each other.

## CONCLUSION

The Kitzmiller Advisory Group was charged with evaluating the advantages of disadvantages of closing Kitzmiller Elementary School. In summary, the Group's findings include the following:

(1) **Student Enrollment Trends:** Countywide enrollment is expected to decrease over the next ten years, but information for Kitzmiller in specific is conflicting. While the Board presented cohort-survival ratio projections that show a decline to forty-two students by 2013, projections from the *Educational Facilities Plan* and based on Maryland Department of Planning forecasts indicate an increase to sixty-seven enrollees by 2013 and seventy-seven students by 2019.

(2) **Age and Condition of Buildings:** According to the *Educational Facilities Master Plan*, the Kitzmiller Elementary School building received a "fair" rating. Although some maintenance needs are present as no substantial renovations have taken place since 1956, the Superintendent emphasized that the condition of the building did not represent a factor in the school closing recommendation. Still, the capacity of Yough Glades, which would exceed ninety percent of its SRC, is a concern if Kitzmiller students are transferred there. The Group notes that the County's Comprehensive Plan identified the need to maintain and upgrade school facilities (and specifically Kitzmiller Elementary) despite countywide enrollment declines. Historic and environmental concerns also promote continued use of the Kitzmiller School building as an education center.

(3) **Transportation:** According to Board projections, bus rides will increase by at least fifty-eight minutes for some students. Longer bus rides reduce the number and variety of household activities, student sleep time, recreational attentiveness, and extracurricular

participation. Bus rides increase a child's health risk due to both diesel exposure and the inability to walk or bike to school.

(4) **Educational Programs:** Although some imply that single-grade classes are superior to combined-grade classes, the evidence supports multi-level classrooms as a viable and equally effective alternative to single-grade instruction. The Board suggests that closing Kitzmiller will present advantages to resource programs, but these were not specified. Board expressed concerns for socialization appear unfounded. Special curricular features unique to Kitzmiller would be lost if the School is closed, including the botanical gardens, Potomac River, and coal heritage.

(5) **Racial Composition:** The small percentage of minority students enrolled at both Kitzmiller and Yough Glades indicate that racial composition does not represent a significant factor in school closing considerations.

(6) **Financial Considerations:** According to Board estimates, closing Kitzmiller School could result in a savings of \$409,425. Research and examples from West Virginia indicate that savings from school closings can be temporary as spending is often offset by higher costs in other areas. Even if small schools cost more, they may be worth the investment as the State of Vermont concluded. The funds in question devoted to Kitzmiller Elementary School equal only 0.6 percent of the County's overall budget expenditures.

(7) **Student Relocations:** Prospective classes sizes from a combined Kitzmiller-Yough Glades student population would not exceed an average of twenty-five students. Research shows that larger schools and class sizes can be especially detrimental to lower income students and that optimal class sizes should be under twenty students. Students in both schools will receive

less individual attention. Additionally, closing the School means the loss of the “It’s in the Bag” program for needy students.

(8) **Community Impact:** Based on Kitzmiller’s Strategic Plan, “the most important priority for the community . . . is the retention of the elementary school in its current building.” Long-term plans involve developing the School into a focal point for community services. The closing of the School could also lead to a loss of its library branch and Head Start center. The Maryland Department of Planning guidelines describe “community-centered schools” like Kitzmiller as “the ideal Maryland public school of the future.” As the County begins implementation of its Heritage Plan, it should recognize the need to preserve communities and community institutions, like Kitzmiller Elementary School.

With all these factors considered, the Group’s investigation has revealed that the advantages of a closure are few. Indeed, the “potential”<sup>108</sup> savings of \$409,405 seems to be the main and one of the only advantages of a Kitzmiller School closing. The disadvantages prove more numerous especially in the areas of impact upon student performance and the community. The outlay of 0.6 percent of the overall County budget seems like a worthy investment when it means the survival of a community with a plan for its future.

---

<sup>108</sup> “Potential” is placed in quotes due to possibility that the realized savings could be less when other factors are taken in consideration. See p. 17 above.