

Executive Summary

Schools are essential in creating healthy, sustainable and complete communities (Butler & Diaz, 2016). Despite the many ways communities benefit from schools, public schools are being closed in Ontario (People for Education, 2009). Closures have been found to have a range of negative impacts on communities, including lowered parental involvement and academic performance in students, reduced physical activity as a result of increased distance from school and more time commuting by bus or car, as well as diminished community vitality and capacity for growth (Valencia, 1984; Kirshner, Gaertner & Pozzoboni, 2010; Eyre and Finn, 2002; Witten et al., 2001; Lipman & Haines, 2007). The growing trend

A quantitative analysis approach was employed to answer the research questions. Data on open schools were acquired online, while a Freedom of information (FOI) request was filed for closed school data. The postal codes of both open and closed school data was processed through Postal Code Conversion File Plus (PCCF+) to be assigned dissemination area (DA) codes. Once the DAs for all closed and open school communities were identified, the dataset was then linked to an existing dataset on area-level deprivation. Once acquired and harmonized, data was analyzed in SPSS using descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression, and mapped using ArcGIS.

Analysis of school closures by year revealed that between 2010 and 2016, school closure rates have been relatively consistent, and that there is little difference in the proportions of open and closed schools by language or board type. Closed schools were, however, significantly more likely to be located in small and rural communities, and in deprived communities. Indeed, binary logistic regression revealed that of all independent variables, the strongest predictors of school closures were community type and 2006 deprivation index quintile (both material and social), respectively.

Given these findings as well as study limitations and points raised in the literature review, the report provides four policy considerations, as follows.

1. Increase community engagement and collaboration in school closure decision-making proc