



PART II: Selected Aspects of the Educational System

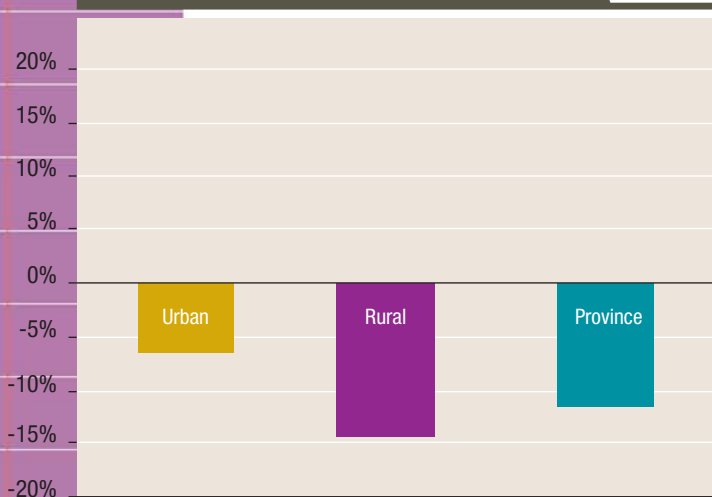
Chapter 5: Educational Opportunities in Rural Newfoundland and Labrador

The majority of schools are located in rural⁴ Newfoundland and Labrador. In 2007/08, close to two-thirds (63.9%) of the province's 280 schools were located in rural areas. While declines in the number of schools can be seen throughout the province, rural regions are experiencing the largest decrease. Since 2002/03, rural regions have experienced a 14.4% decrease in the number of schools, compared to a 6.5% decrease in urban regions (see *figure 5.1*).

Small⁵ schools in Newfoundland and Labrador

In 2007/08, 64 (or 22.9%) of the province's schools had less than 100 students enrolled. This includes 37 schools with less than 50 students attending. The majority (90.6%) of these 64 small schools were located in rural regions. The percentage of small schools in the province has remained fairly constant over the past six years (see *figure 5.2*). This reflects the fact that the enrolment in some medium sized schools has declined to make them small schools. The same trend can also be seen in some larger schools which have turned into medium sized schools because of the shrinking student population.

Figure 5.1: Percent change in the number of urban and rural schools (2002/03-2007/08)



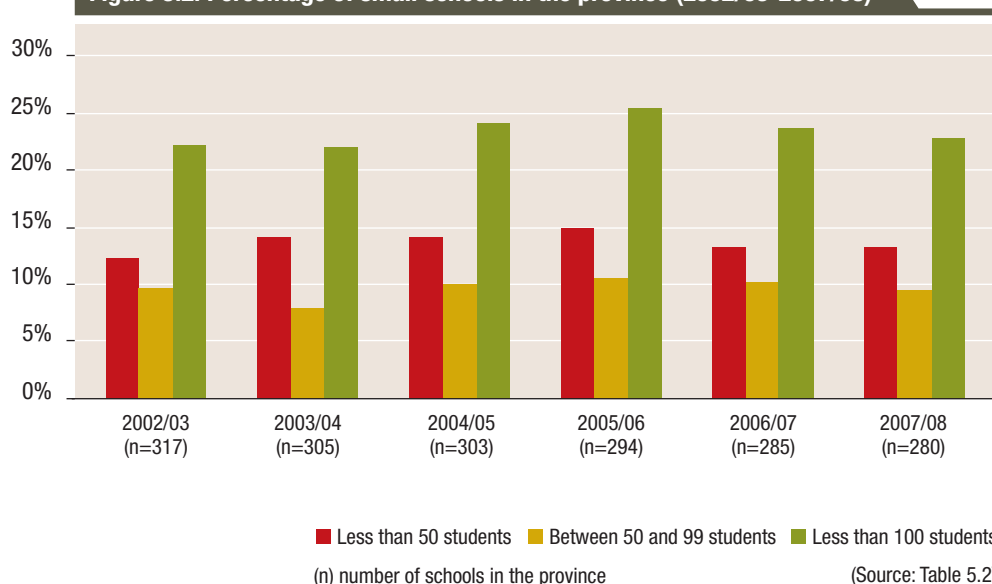
(Source: Table 5.1)

⁴ Includes communities with a population of less than 5,000 residents.

⁵ Refers to schools with an enrolment of less than 100 students.



Figure 5.2: Percentage of small schools in the province (2002/03-2007/08)



The multi-grade classroom, K-9

Multi-grade classrooms are still present in some schools in the province and are expected to continue into the future. The merging of different grades into one classroom only occurs as a last resort when there are no other viable options available. As the Minister of Education at the time stated, "There will be times when some schools, based on numbers, will not offer certain grades because there are no students coming in. There will be times when the numbers are to a point that there

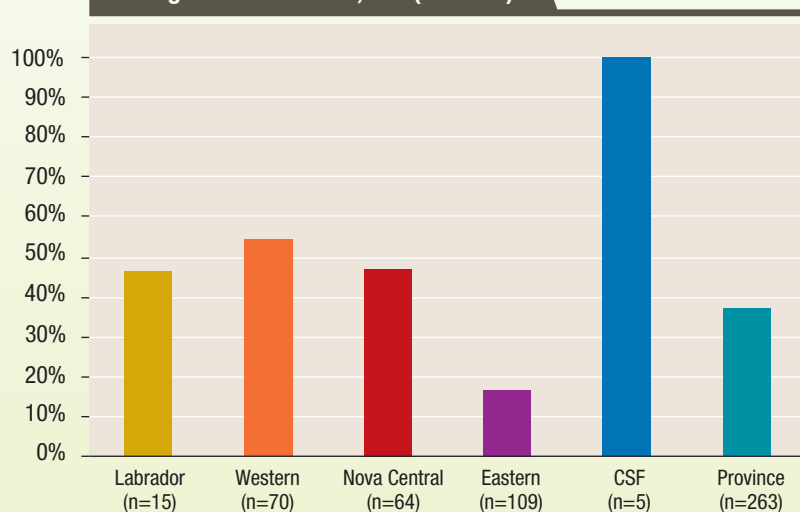
will be an introduction of multi-grades." (Burke, 2008, May 7). More small schools in rural regions may be faced with the reality of merging several different grades in a single classroom. In 2007/08, 37.3% (or 98/263) of the schools in the province had multi-grade classrooms, with the Eastern district recording the lowest percentage (see *figure 5.3*).

Distance education in Newfoundland and Labrador

Distance education started in the province in 1988 with the intent to provide students the opportunity to enrol in courses important for post-secondary admission, but difficult to offer

in rural schools due to low levels of student enrolment. Throughout the years, this program continued to expand by offering increasing numbers of courses to students. At the same time, advancements in computer technology and the telecommunications industry changed the face of distance education. These new technologies required a new way to oversee its continuing development and expansion.

Figure 5.3: Percentage of schools with multi-grade classrooms, K-9 (2007/08)





This led to the creation of the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI) during the 2001/02 school year, with the intent to expand the range of the distance education program and offer students in small schools a broader range of course options.

The expansion of distance education

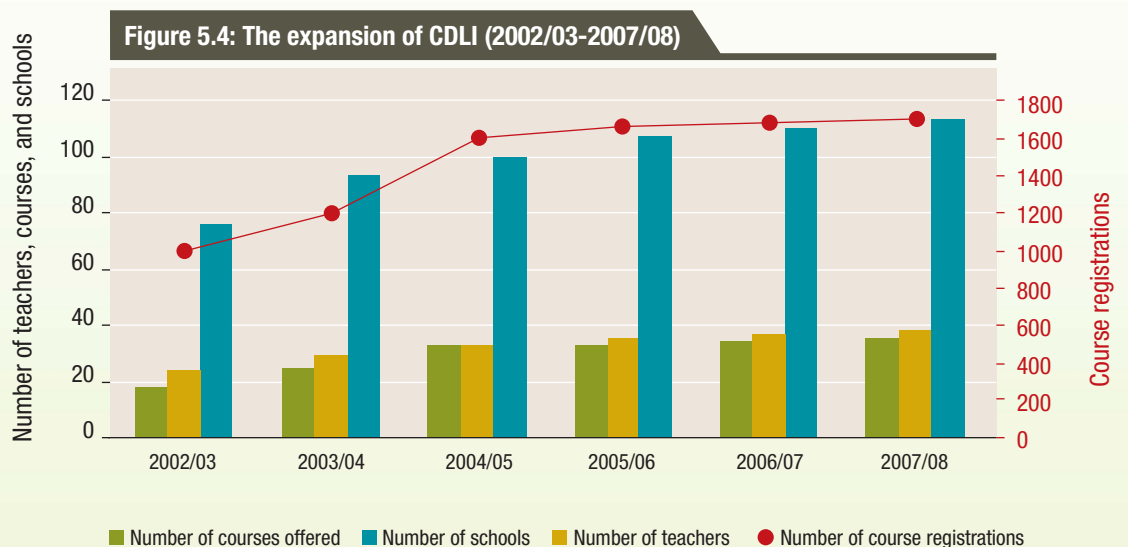
After successfully field testing ten courses in 2001/02, CDLI expanded its course offerings so that students from across the province could access any course offered. *Figure 5.4* tracks the growth of the CDLI program since 2002/03 when courses were first offered.

In summary, since 2002/03, CDLI has experienced a:

- 100% growth in the number of courses offered;
- 69% increase in course enrolments;
- 55% increase in the number of teachers; and,
- 49% increase in the number of schools providing distance education courses.

Future trends

In light of the current government's commitment to promote and expand the role of distance education in the province's schools, distance education can be expected to continue growing. For example, in its 2007 policy



(Source: Table 5.4)



blueprint, the provincial government stated its intention to:

- Expand distance education opportunities, increase distance education support to schools and enhance broadband connectivity to rural and remote schools, and,
- Further expand the Information, Communication and Learning Technologies (ICLT) project to enable more students to apply the internet to learning in the classroom.

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2007, p.36)

This commitment can be seen in recent government initiatives. For example, in January 2008, the provincial government announced \$1.3 million in funding to provide a common e-learning technology system in the public education system. Memorial University of Newfoundland, College of the North Atlantic and the public school system will provide the same learning management system for distance education courses. Previously, senior high school students familiar with e-learning would have to learn and adapt to a new learning system when taking post-secondary distance education courses. Other recent initiatives include an increase in the number of distance education courses at all levels of the education system (Department of Education, 2008, January 23).