

Jack Pines and Walleyes

We must keep in mind—as we rush toward a more uniform curriculum—that each community is unique.



GLENDON L. LAKES

This is America—a town of a few thousand, in a region of wheat and corn and dairies and little graves.

The town is, in our tale, called "Gopher Prairie, Minnesota." But its Main Street is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere. . . . Main Street is the climax of civilization.

—Main Street, Sinclair Lewis

Pine River, Minnesota, is high swamp, hot dishes, Jack Pine Savages, walleyed pike, and a few bear. Like Gopher Prairie and other small towns, Pine River values its traditions and individuality. Our students need enough common knowledge to

compete with the graduates of other schools, but we must keep in mind—as we rush toward common standards rein-

Glendon L. Lakes is Principal, Pine River Junior-Senior High School, Pine River, Minnesota.

forced by statewide tests—that each small community is unique. The curriculum should also have unique elements if it is to meet the needs of our students.

Since many Pine River students will spend a lifetime trapping coons and “skinning out” deer, we teach taxidermy and tanning even though the custodian complains that the salt ruins the wax on the floor. Since many of our students will continue to fish or run resorts here on the lakes of central Minnesota, we offer limnology and our students chase inversions through the lakes.

schools, attempts to meet the needs of both groups of students.

The cutbacks in state and federal aid will, I fear, curtail necessary courses if we are to meet the needs of each individual community. It is less expensive to teach mathematics, social studies, and English classes to 35 students than to offer construction or photography to classes of 15. Our current national priority of going “back to the basics” will compound the effects of the budget reductions. The outcome may well be the least expensive curriculum—one that

No apologies are needed. In the Pine Rivers of our country someone soon tells you if you’re off the track. The people in our community expect us to teach what students will need after graduation. It would be hard to improve on that as a guide when we decide what the curriculum should be in Pine River, Tucson, or even Gopher Prairie. A curriculum can only be strong if it provides both a common core of knowledge and the unusual variations that mirror the desires of the community. ■



The college preparatory and vocational programs in our small schools are often limited by the enrollment. We have less than 1,000 students in the district. Physics is offered only every other year. Since our five vocational classes sometimes don't make the magic number of ten required for state reimbursement, we cooperate with an adjoining district. Pine River, like other small

fails to serve the community and bores the students. What could be worse?

Like most districts we have changed our programs over the years. We moved toward (and away from!) an open-space program in the elementary school. Course electives proliferated and withered back into some year-long courses. Each change reflected a change in the community or in our kids.

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