

The *Krimp* in Our Side: Population Decline in Rural Gelderland & Impact on School Culture

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Population, 1 January	2016	2040	2060
younger than 20 yrs	22.5	21.6	21.0
20-64 yrs	59.3	51.9	52.7
65 yrs or older	18.2	26.5	26.3

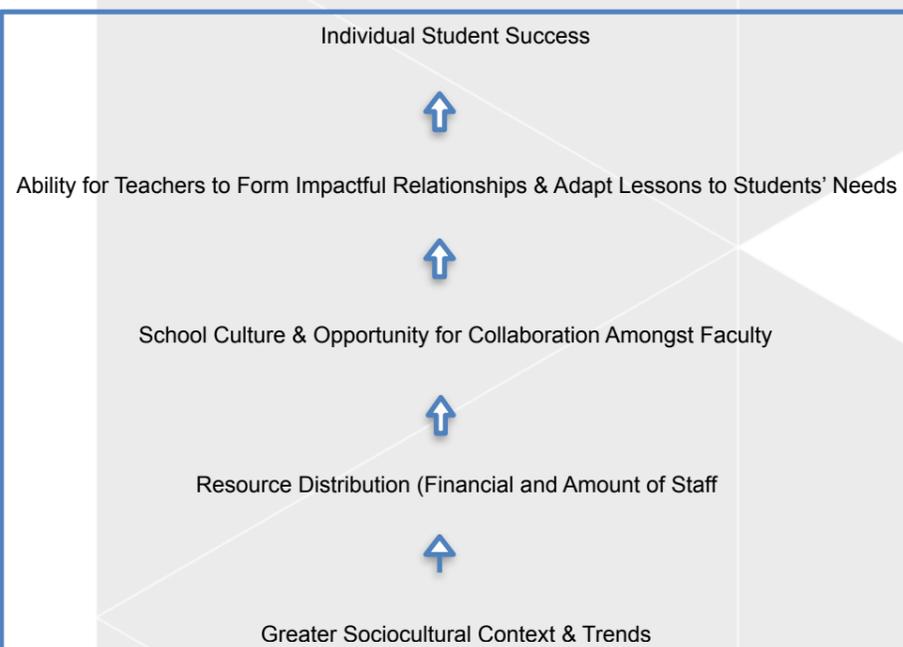
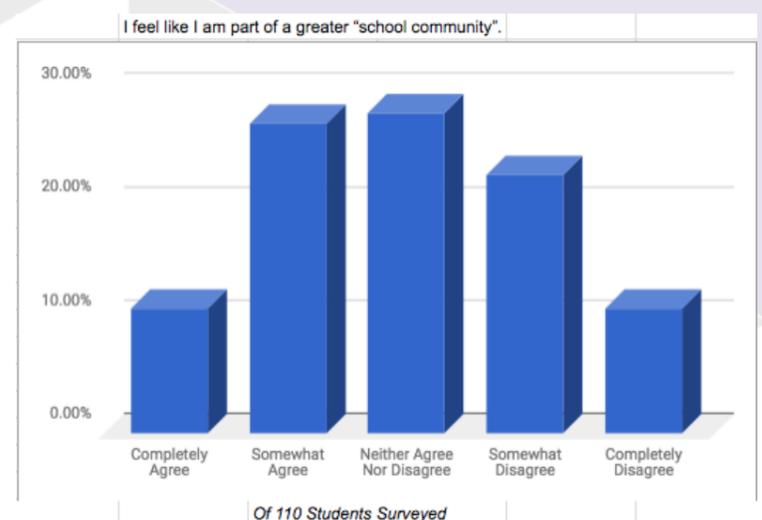
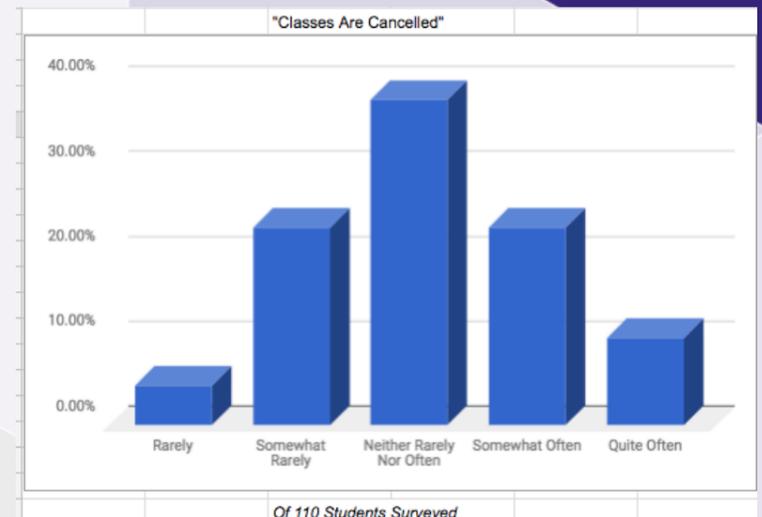
Source: Statistics Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Rural areas of the Netherlands have seen a dramatic decline in population for the past 20 years. Shifting economic pressures, birth rates, and the urbanization of the workforce have led to a steep loss in population for rural Gelderland. With fewer children being born and more and more young people moving to urban centers, there has been a steep drop off in school enrollment. This means fewer overall pupils, less funding in school fees (as well as funds from the Municipality), and fewer potential teachers applying for employment at rural schools. This case study focuses on how this shifts impacts the sense of community and potential for individual teacher and student success.

BACKGROUND

According to Statistics Netherlands, women in NL are having on average 1.65 children — the lowest ever since the year 1900. The average age of first-time mothers has climbed to 29.1, with many couples choosing to significantly delay child-rearing (thereby shortening their years of fertility) and are simply choosing to have fewer children or none at all. Many younger parents are choosing to move to urban centers (such as Utrecht, Arnhem, or Amersfoort) rather than stay and raise children in rural Ede. The average age of a citizen of Ede is rising, and is projected to continue to rise.



RESULTS

This qualitative case study shows a school with a high level of performance, ambitious pupils, and dedicated faculty that are struggling in the face of shifting economic demands and population trends. Interviews with staff reveal that school culture is impacted by declining enrollment and less funding — resulting in larger class sizes and the “mainstreaming” of students with learning, cognitive, and psychosocial disabilities — and also possibly by outdated expectations of work culture as well; schedules offer little time for rearrangement and collaboration because faculty work fewer days that are densely packed. Additionally, economic strains have led to financial anxiety, which in turn can cause distrust amongst the faculty.

LARGER CONTEXT

The trend of the “Krimp” is not isolated to Ede and its surroundings; we can see drop-off in the population of rural areas across the Netherlands, Belgium, France, and Germany. It may even mirror, in fact, similar trends in the US where young people and families (those with the opportunities to choose where they can live) flock to urban centers.

As world population increases and quality of life goes up, fewer people are choosing to have children/are having smaller families. Additionally, with agriculture becoming increasingly mechanized and the transition to urbanized economies, more individuals are choosing to live in cities than in rural areas. This creates economic and social strain on the remaining population; particularly those without the means/desire to leave the area and their children. This case study is just one example on the impact that these shifting economic and demographic forces can have.

The trend of shifting economic and population densities is a global one; across the Europe and the US alike young people are choosing to both have fewer children and to move to cities. This has a direct impact on those rural communities: those who remain are often left with fewer resources, fewer options, and a decreased sense of hope for the future. These trends form a larger motif of a strained rural community, which in turn may impact the sense of communal identity and “way of life.” This, in turn, influences social and political identities — important, when contextualized by current trends of Nationalism and Conservatism in Europe and the U.S. alike. This is an instance in which, I believe, the Netherlands and the U.S. are struggling against the same global force.

Works Cited: See flyer.

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Key Issues According to Faculty and Students (Aggregated from interviews and anonymous surveys)

- Faculty:**
- Larger class sizes
 - Less opportunity for differentiation (mainstreaming of students with targeted needs)

Possibly can be traced to: Lower overall enrollment and less funding

- Lacking opportunity for collaboration due to conflicting schedules
 - Not enough faculty to cover classes when faculty have to miss work
- Possibly can be traced to: “Work/life balance”; many faculty members work 3 days a week, leaving little room for schedule changes and cross-departmental collaboration.

- Lack of greater sense of “community”
- Lack of trust

Possibly can be traced to: Increased economic pressures and demands made on both faculty and administrators.

- Students:**
- Faculty being unable to tailor to their learning styles/needs
 - Lack of sense of community
 - Too much testing
 - Less “traditional” learning style (more project-based)