



For more information about the National Trust's historic neighborhood schools initiative, contact:

Western Office (AK, AZ, CA, HI, ID, NV, OR, WA): Mike Buhler, 415-956-0610

Mountains/Plains Office (CO, KS, MT, ME, ND, SD, UT, WY): Jim Lindberg, 303-623-1504

Midwest Office (IL, IN, IA, MI, MN, MO, OH, WI): Royce Yeater, 312-939-5547

Southwest Office (AR, NM, OK, TX): Daniel Carey, 817-332-4398

Southern Office (AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, PR, SC, TN, VI): Mary Ruffin Hanbury, 843-722-8552

Southern Field Office (DC, MD, VA, WV): Rob Nieweg, 202-588-6107

Northeast Field Office (DE, NJ, PA): Adrian Scott Fine, 215-848-8033

Northeast Office (CT, MA, ME, NH, NY, RI, VT): Marilyn Fenollosa, 617-523-0885

NTHP Headquarters/Public Policy: Sydney Becker, 202-588-6322 (Contact for schools-related public policy issues.)

SMART GROWTH SCHOOLS: A FACT SHEET

Across the country, school boards have abandoned smaller neighborhood schools in favor of large campuses located on the edge of the community. As outlined in the report, *Why Johnny Can't Walk to School*, they are encouraged to do this by school construction funding formulas that favor single-story new construction over renovation, by expansive minimum acreage requirements that require huge school sites, and by a tendency to plan schools in isolation from other development. But such sprawling schools are difficult for children to reach on foot or bicycle, increase automobile traffic, and are often too isolated to serve as community centers, and too large for children to feel a sense of belonging. Some school districts have turned away from the trend toward sprawling schools and have discovered that 'smart growth schools' bring a range of benefits for the district, the students, and the community.

Many communities are discovering the benefits of using smart growth principles in creating schools that meet the needs of both parents and students. Smart growth schools:

- involve the community in school facility planning
- make good use of existing resources, such as historic school buildings
- are located within neighborhoods and fit into the scale and design of the neighborhood
- act as a neighborhood anchor and community center
- are usually small in size.

Benefits of Smart Growth Schools

Inspire Greater Community Involvement-

Smart growth schools are created with plenty of community involvement. They act as an anchor in the community. They bring neighbors together for PTA meetings, school plays, and soccer games. They offer their classrooms and libraries to residents and adult education classes, and offices for family counseling and youth employment services. Such community schools have demonstrated their ability to improve test scores and graduation rates. For examples, see *Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools*.

The historic Adams school in St Louis was renovated under a partnership with a local medical center and the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team, and includes a community center with a gym and a health screening center.

Improve Academic Achievement-

As mentioned above, community schools help improve academic performance. And since many smart growth schools are small, they also enjoy the academic excellence associated with smaller schools. Researchers are finding that students in smaller schools earn higher grade point average, participate more in extracurricular activities,

and have better attendance records and a heightened sense of belonging. This is particularly true for students of low-income families and students of color. In addition, the collaborative nature of smart growth schools has brought new education resources as well as teaching partnerships with universities.

A partnership to create new elementary schools in downtown Chattanooga resulted in two new schools with special teaching partnerships with the University of Tennessee. <http://www.hcde.org/magnet/default.htm>

Save Money-

While conventional wisdom holds that large, new schools are cost effective, studies (<http://www.kwfdn.org/Resources/publications.html>) show that they can result in unexpected expenses in transportation, security, and other areas. Some districts have learned that renovating old school buildings is less expensive than building new, and that retrofitting non-educational buildings can create inexpensive school space. Most importantly, the community involvement that is at the heart of smart growth schools brings additional resources to the school district. Because of such involvement, community foundations have donated money to build schools, private developers have put their resources behind passing school bonds, and parents have engineered partnerships to finance modernization.

In Columbus, Ohio, a team of architects and structural engineers conducted architectural feasibility analyses for ten historic schools and found that they could be renovated to meet state-of-the-art educational standards for \$13 million less than the cost of building ten new schools.

Improve Student Health-

Smart growth schools help students get back to basics: back to walking and biking to school. While 70 percent of parents walked or biked to school, only 17 percent of their children do so today, and public health officials say the lack of routine physical activity is one factor in the current obesity epidemic among children. Smart growth schools can help reverse that trend, helping children get active and creating a better environment for kids.

Well-planned school sites, by encouraging walking and bicycling, can reduce traffic around schools. This reduces air pollution and leads to a number of health benefits for children. Air pollution exacerbates asthma and recent research in the Los Angeles region shows that poor air quality may actually be causing asthma among schoolchildren. Reduced air pollution also reduces the risk of cancer.

The new elementary school in the smart-growth community of Fairview outside of Portland Oregon is within a quarter-mile of every home in the new development – and is accessible via a lighted walking trail through a wetland area used for student environmental studies.

Improve Environmental Quality-

Good school planning and design can yield a number of environmental benefits and maintain or even enhance the school's functionality. In addition to the potential for easing air pollution, smart growth schools can reduce the need for parking, reducing the impervious surfaces created by parking lots. This in turn reduces runoff and water pollution.

Non-point source water pollution degrades lakes, rivers and drinking water with bacteria and other pathogens, such as *Cryptosporidium* and *Giardia*. Children bear a disproportionate share of the burden of waterborne illnesses. Studies have shown that sediment washed into source waters during storms impairs the effectiveness of drinking water treatment systems, and that the resulting increase in the turbidity of treated drinking water makes children up to two times more likely to become sick with acute gastrointestinal illnesses.

Barriers to Smart Growth Schools -- and Solutions

Unfortunately, districts seeking to build smart growth schools must challenge conventional wisdom as well as school construction standards.

Many of the rules that have resulted in sprawling schools come from the official Guidebook produced by the Council for Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI). While not all states have adopted these guidelines as requirements, in many places they are perceived as such. CEFPI is in the process of rewriting the guidelines, incorporating information and a section on Smart Growth schools.

Site Standards-

The acreage standards typically applied to new school construction and renovation projects require an elementary school with 400 students to be sited on 14 acres of land; a middle school with 600 students requires 16 acres; and a high school with 2,000 students, 50 acres. Because of these standards, a school district often must decide whether to destroy the neighborhood it is trying to educate by bulldozing homes to meet the site standards; or build a “sprawl school” on a remote site to which no one can walk.

Overcoming this barrier:

In Maryland, the state has eliminated acreage standards altogether. In addition, Maryland actually *favors* state investments in existing schools. About 80% of all state school construction funds go into renovations or improvements to existing schools. The South Carolina legislature is considering a small-schools bill promoted by Governor Mark Sanford which calls for the elimination of acreage requirements.

Funding Policies-

A standard widely used by states and school districts is the so-called “two-thirds rule” – or a variation of it. Under this rule, if the cost of renovating an existing school exceeds two-thirds of the cost of building a new one, the school district is advised to build new. In some states, failure to do so can even mean forfeiting state financial assistance. Thus even if a state-of-the-art school could be provided for between one-third and one-half of the cost of building new, school districts are often pressured – or even required – to build new.

Overcoming this barrier:

In Pennsylvania, the state Department of Education decided in 1998 to rescind its “60% rule,” which withheld state funding from local school construction projects when the cost of renovating an existing school exceeded 60% of the cost of building a new one. That same year, the state made policy changes that make it easier to preserve and upgrade historic wood-frame schools without compromising safety. Massachusetts gives “bonus points” to school district applications for state funding if the districts can demonstrate that they have maintained existing schools properly and not allowed them to deteriorate unnecessarily.

Other barriers to smart growth schools include ignorance of renovation options and a tendency to make school siting plans in isolation from the community.

Lack of Renovation Experience-

Many people involved in making school facility decisions have little, if any, experience with the rehabilitation of older buildings. They simply cannot visualize how an older building that is structurally sound could be renovated to meet 21st-century life safety, accessibility, and educational program standards. Even architects experienced in new school construction may be unaware of renovation techniques and building codes designed to make rehabilitation easier and more economical without compromising safety.

Overcoming this barrier:

Florida requires that studies on the feasibility of renovating historic schools be conducted by design professionals with preservation expertise before such schools may be demolished. Such expertise can be critical: the Kokomo Indiana school board initially was told that renovating the city's oldest high school would cost as much as \$20 million, but a new school board member with building inspection experience questioned the number and the Board learned that the true cost of meeting building codes was just \$4 million. Kokomo High was renovated in 1999 for use as a middle school.

Planning in separate silos-

Fifty years of land-use planning promoting a very segmented approach to development has no doubt affected school siting decisions, and school planners tend to think of the school siting and construction process as an decision isolated from the rest of the community. In some states, school districts are exempt from local planning and zoning laws – or they simply ignore them. And school districts can end up playing catch-up as approval of new subdivisions means a dramatic increase in students in areas without good schools.

Overcoming this barrier:

In Maine, the state education department and planning office have collaborated to reduce the conflicts between school facility plans and local land-use plans. "The ABCs of School Site Selection," a brochure produced jointly by the two agencies, urges school districts to consider renovations whenever feasible, locate schools in places that allow kids to walk to school; and work with local community planners in planning new school facilities.

This report was made possible by a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to the National Trust for Historic Preservation and through a partnership with Smart Growth America.

