



Recommended Policies for Public School Facilities

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Section 2: Schools as Centers of Community Policies

Introduction

It is the responsibility of each state to ensure that every child has access to a quality education. In many states, the courts have determined that school facilities that provide educational settings suited to the state's determined curriculum are a significant part of this responsibility. However, school facility management and construction have traditionally been entirely the responsibility of the school district. Many states, particularly those who have increased their funding to local school districts are putting in place policies, procedures and technical assistance to ensure that their public school facilities are educationally adequate.

The purpose of this paper is to provide policy guidance and recommendations to elected and appointed officials and administrators at the State, local, and school district level to improve **schools as centers of community** in order to support and enhance the delivery of educational programs and services for students and teachers. The implementation of policies that result in high quality, high-performing, well designed and maintained school facilities has a direct and indirect impact on the teaching and learning process. Effective facilities management can contribute to the success of every student in every school in the United States.

In 2001, led by the 21st Century School Fund (21CSF), and supported by the Ford Foundation, a group of very experienced school facility and community-based groups came together in a collaboration called BEST (Building Educational Success Together). The BEST partners are: 21CSF; the Education Law Center (Newark, NJ); Neighborhood Capital Budget Group (Chicago, IL); the Knowledgeworks Foundation (Cincinnati, OH); The National Trust for Historic Preservation (Washington, DC); the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities (Washington, DC), New Schools Better Neighborhoods (Los Angeles, CA), New Visions for Public Schools (New York, NY), and Mark Schneider (State University of New York at Stony Brook).

The BEST partners developed a four-part policy agenda: 1) Increase public participation in **facilities planning**, 2) create and support **schools as centers of community** that offer school-based supports to children to eliminate barriers to success and serve the broader community, 3) improve **facilities management**, including maintenance and capital improvement programs and 4) secure adequate and equitable **facilities funding**. We have developed recommended school facility policies in these four areas. **This paper is the second part of an effort to address our four-part policy agenda.**

State policy reform is one tool for affecting the planning, design, construction, maintenance and funding practices and processes at the state and local school district levels. However, state level standards and control must be carefully developed and applied, so that creativity, public participation, and local priorities can drive the facility planning and design outcomes.

These school facilities policies may be used to:

- assess your state and local policies—compare these recommended policies to your state and school district’s policies;
- facilitate a discussion among teachers, parents, students, principals, facility managers, community and business leaders, about any policy barriers to well-maintained, educationally adequate school facilities;
- identify policy or funding incentives that can be adopted to support high quality educational facilities for all children; and
- build consensus for state level mandates that require local school districts to engage in best practice for school facility condition, design and utilization.

We hope that others will correspond with us, critique our work, offer suggestions, substitutions or additions to any or all areas. We also hope that we will receive accounts of successes or failures in using or implementing the policies or elements at any level.

Policy Rationale

School facilities are powerful indicators of community values and aspirations. They not only support the academic needs of the students they serve, but can also address the social, educational, recreational, and personal needs of the members of the broader community. Schools should be a resource to the community at-large. When school facilities are perceived this way, value is created for the school and for the community, since families can be strengthened and communities can realize added vitality.

The concept of schools as centers of community includes: (a) extensive and innovative community use of the public school facility; (b) schools where community partnerships support high quality education, and contribute to life-long learning; (c) co-location with local government agencies and/or community organizations resulting in creative program service delivery and more efficient utilization of public land and buildings; and (d) opportunities for new and/or additional sources of funds for financing building improvements and program delivery.

Very often old and historic schools in particular have served as community anchors for generations. Restoring and modernizing these buildings to support a 21st century learning environment enables them to serve as high quality educational centers while retaining an important link to a neighborhood's past. These buildings can be used as models to promote similar restoration projects, and to new schools as "centers of community." In situations where a school, especially a historic school building, is already closed, it could become an alternative school as part of an adaptive re-use plan or it could be used by another government entity and thereby continue to be a location that provides services to the citizens of the community, or it could be a facility that includes some shared uses.

Revitalizing school buildings as centers of community requires shared vision and shared leadership. In some communities, school planning is proceeding in a cooperative and shared planning process and vision that examines and considers the educational and other community needs. Although school districts are usually autonomous bodies, there are significant benefits to planning for and designing school facilities within the larger municipal planning framework with maximum joint planning and/or provisions for shared use. The school building as well as the activities that take place in it and on the school site during and after school hours are important components of community development or redevelopment and can also have an economic impact in the community.

Part of the challenge in some communities is keeping neighborhood school buildings open. In many large cities and rural areas across the country, scores of schools are at risk of closing or consolidating due to declining enrollments. When deciding whether to retain or close a public school building, school districts rarely factor in the growing body of research showing that schools with smaller enrollments (small schools) increase the academic success of children, especially children from low-income families. New studies have shown the health benefits of walking to school, and neighborhood schools provide students and their families with access to the school's athletic fields and facilities after school hours and on weekends.

Additionally, school buildings play an important role as community anchors. In many neighborhoods, and some rural communities, public schools are one of the only public facilities that can serve as meeting places, recreation centers, and sources of ongoing educational opportunities. Many communities use schools to house health and social services, municipal programs and libraries. In rural areas, healthcare is not always readily available because it is difficult to attract and keep medical care providers. In these instances, co-locating health clinics within schools can save money and provide easy access. Co-located entities with shared missions can cooperate and enrich one another. A richer educational environment results from interaction between these independent, co-located entities and can have a direct impact on the vitality of the school community. Furthermore, when rehabilitating existing facilities or building new schools, careful and joint planning can result in a building design that makes a positive difference in the effective joint use of a facility.

Policy Intent

To create incentives and encourage school districts to intensify the use of public school buildings and grounds in support of broad community needs and requirements that will benefit the school systems and the community.

Recommended Policies

2.1 School Facility and Grounds Partnership Legislation and/or Policy

The State should develop legislation and/or policies to encourage partnerships that implement public-private, intergovernmental and/or interagency use of school facilities and grounds.

Many states and localities lack a culture of communication and/or cooperation. In some cases, the existing policies often discourage governments or agencies from working together. In addition, local decisions about the use of school facilities can create obstacles to fulfilling community wishes to co-locate and enhance services at school facilities. State legislation can provide the vehicle and support for communities to pursue cooperative uses or co-location of services. Several states have begun to recognize the importance of schools that serve as centers of community and have enacted legislation to support these schools by removing barriers from building and maintaining such facilities.

Every neighborhood and community wants its school to be the ideal school—a school that meets the needs of students, parents, teachers, administrators and the community. In addition to this, the community and perhaps, the state, wants the school to meet local demographic, enrollment, and budgetary constraints. There is always competition for the limited capital funds for public schools to renovate and improve existing schools and funds for new schools for increasing enrollments. When the need for funds for community needs and requirements is added, the competition can intensify. However, in

some states, specialized sources of funds for these community needs or cooperative arrangements exist and can ease the tension. In some cases, the joint use provider can offset long-term costs, such as maintenance, that the school district would otherwise have to bear. In other cases, the joint use provider can contribute to the construction costs by diverting funds that might otherwise have been spent on a separate new facility. The goal is to provide services to the entire community that support teaching and learning for people of all ages. Every community has a stake in the success of its school, and the success of the school depends in large part on the degree of community engagement in the school.

2.2 School Facilities for Community Use Legislation and/or Policy

The State should develop legislation and/or policies that facilitate and encourage the sharing of school facilities for community use through appropriate policies, procedures, and financial incentives.

In order to demonstrate the state's commitment to schools as centers of community, a few states have enacted legislation that encourages, supports, and/or authorizes school districts to take the necessary actions or enter into agreements at the local level. State and local laws enabling and supporting joint use of school facilities allow school districts to partner with organizations to serve the needs of the community. At a minimum, such community schools legislation should include the following elements: (a) the duties and responsibilities of the state board of education and the local boards of education; (b) the authority for jurisdictions to establish community schools advisory councils; (c) the authority to employ and fund community schools coordinators; (d) joint powers clauses that permit governmental agencies to use their appropriated funds to work cooperatively with other agencies; (e) the authority to enter into agreements and to set fees and conditions; and (f) establish special funding and/or direct funding or incentives to support planning and implementation of co-location or joint use for community school facilities.

2.3 Co-Location Standards Policy

The State should develop legislation and/or policies that recognize the various program and facility requirements for shared usage as being additive to the typical standards for public school projects to adequately accommodate the co-located entities.

Well-planned school facilities must support the teaching and learning process and activities, as well as meet the specific needs of different communities. Because community needs and requirements vary based upon the specific programs and/or services offered, any program or facility standards established as part of a funding formula must be flexible enough to accommodate these different requirements. It is imperative that a variety of approaches that will support the approved community programs and services be permitted. This means that square footage needs and

relationships between spaces should be determined and driven by programs. Requirements based on functional needs should be accepted rather than prescriptive programs and standards that require certain locations for functions or that dictate pre-established gross square footages (one-size-fits-all). Prescriptive standards present obstacles to communities anxious to meet community needs for co-location or multiple uses.

Planning and design for such facilities should consider flexible configurations for multiple users and permit shared use of overlapping spaces. Attention to these issues will ensure that facilities continue to meet educational and community goals as they change and evolve. Furthermore, when school sites are selected, districts should be encouraged to select locations that use existing public resources such as libraries, parking, and/or athletic facilities.

2.4 Site Selection, Planning & Development Criteria Policy

The State should develop legislation and/or policies that establish realistic site selection and site planning and development criteria that support and enhance neighborhoods and communities.

Schools that function as centers of their communities must be accessible to the people who benefit from them. They should also be positioned to take advantage of other public services. Some states have established site selection criteria that encourage access to public water and sewage services, located in close proximity to public resources, located near residential development for walk-ability and reduced transportation, located near public transportation, and to promote joint use of parks, libraries, museums and other public services

As school systems begin the process of selecting a site for a new school they should consider the following: (a) the proximity to the student population that will be served and the schools that will be relieved of the overcrowding, (b) the ability to maximize walking to the school by students, (c) the ability to maximize walk-ability to the school and site by the entire community, (d) the relationship between the site and other public facilities, (e) the availability of public water and sewer service, (f) the condition of the existing roads to serve the school site, and (g) the potential relationship between the school and the neighborhood and community.

The process of selecting school sites within existing communities for enrollment growth and/or the replacement of an obsolete school should consider combined public functions to minimize the site requirements. These could take the form of cooperative arrangements where the site for the school might be smaller than typically required, but where other programs can be accommodated on an adjacent non-school site.

2.5 Historic Schools and Significant Existing Buildings Policy

The State should develop legislation and/or policies that encourage and support the continued use and adaptive reuse of older or historic schools and/or the conversion of existing buildings and structures within a community to serve an educational function.

The continued use of existing older schools results in three major obstacles when the current and anticipated educational needs for the next generation require renovation. These obstacles are site standards, funding formulas with arbitrary and antiquated requirements, and the interpretation and application of the current building codes. Many schools that have served as centers of community are disappearing from our neighborhoods and particularly from rural communities. Every reasonable effort should be made to continue use of older and historic schools as public school buildings.

Frequently, older schools are smaller and are therefore pressured to consolidate with other schools to create new schools, often on new sites, and possible out of the center of the town. Communities need to evaluate the impact of this action, socially, economically and educationally. Some factors to consider are that (a) smaller schools have been shown to provide a more effective environment for learning, (b) neighborhood or community schools are often walk-able or are accessible by bike or public transportation, and (c) local schools can serve the community during and after school hours.

Some states have arbitrary standards that support new school construction outside of established communities, while discouraging the renovation and reuse of school facilities or older buildings as schools. A typical example of these arbitrary site size standards: (a) Elementary School: 10 acres +1 acre for every 100 students; (b) Middle School: 20 acres +1 acre for every 100 students; and (c) High School: 30 acres +1 acre for every 100 students. Eliminating these policy barriers and encouraging standards that allow for more flexible criteria will enable school districts to fully realize the potential of existing facilities and continue to serve the students and citizens in the community.

Although many states have inflexible standards that require schools to be sited with minimum acreage requirements, a growing number of states have become more realistic and more flexible. The standards (some established in the 1950's) have been widely recognized as obstacles to the preservation and use of older/historic schools or urban schools and as deterrents to the sensible, economically conservative use of land and public utilities in both urban and rural areas. School districts need to have the flexibility to assess local needs and to site schools accordingly.

The recent edition of the educational facility planning guide that helps set policy and direction in this field has dropped the arbitrary acreage requirements. In its place is a recommendation for a flexible approach to site selection that studies the school's functions and program requirements to determine the site size requirements. School districts should consider the use and co-use of existing public and private resources to

serve education programs, such as recreational facilities, transportation infrastructure, museums, libraries, YMCAs, and existing community centers.

In some states, detrimental funding biases exist that are based upon old formulas and different objectives, and that support demolishing existing schools and then building a new facility. These formulas and/or funding criteria prevent the development of an unbiased feasibility study that considers renovating existing schools. Renovation is often a feasible option, and can be achieved at a cost savings over new construction. This preference for new construction is usually expressed through what is often referred to as the “two-thirds rule” or some variation of it. In other words, if the cost of renovating an existing school exceeds a certain percentage – 2/3, 50%, 60%, or some other percentage of the cost of building a new school – the state requires (or encourages) the local school district to build a new school or forfeit state financial aid. In some cases, school districts have adopted these same standards even when state funding and/or approval is not involved under the assumption that they are acting in a prudent and fiscally responsible manner.

In another state, the state share of funding is provided based upon the following percentages of the cost of building a new school for a renovation project: (a) 100% of the cost if the school is over 40 years of age, (b) 85% of the cost if the school is 31-39 years of age, (c) 75% of the cost if the school is 26-30 years of age, and (d) 60% of the cost if the school is 21-25 years of age.

In some states, all options must be reasonably evaluated before a decision is made. This requires a thorough examination of building costs and the commitment to only fund new construction in the event that renovation is not cost effective, is not in the public’s interest and does not meet the educational program needs. The state department of education should have the authority and responsibility to review and approve or disapprove the feasibility studies that are prepared by the school district before they are authorized to proceed with any replacement school project. This will help assure that the study is performed without a predetermined solution, particularly to replace the existing neighborhood school.

Nothing is more important than the health and safety of children, parents, teachers and school personnel. Every school should meet the intent of building codes that are designed to ensure structural, fire and health needs. However, there are many, acceptable ways of meeting the requirements and intent of the building codes. Currently many states require that building renovation work must comply with building codes suited for new construction. In the renovation of older and historic structures, some states have adopted more flexible approaches to code compliance by allowing building owners to propose alternate solutions to code issues while meeting structural, fire, and health rules. These alternate codes require approval by the appropriate code officials while preserving the historic characteristics that make the building a community asset. States should allow qualified historic schools to use the state historic building code or an applicable historic building code.

States should gather data and information pertaining to historic schools or soon to be eligible historic schools in the state. In most cases, buildings are eligible for historic status when they reach 50 years of age. States should look at 40 year-old schools and document their history, current usage, and anticipated use during the next ten-twenty years. This will help proactively inform communities about the costs and benefits of different options when decisions about renovation versus new construction arise.

It should be asserted that benefits are not always financial. The history and architecture of a school building, and its value to a community is a benefit. The ability to walk or take public transportation is a benefit. Adjacency to public libraries and other services is a benefit.

In cases where existing school buildings become unsuitable or unavailable, other older and/or historic non-educational community buildings should be considered. Reuse (a) is fiscally conservative since it reuses existing municipal or community infrastructure; (b) often encourages investment in presently underdeveloped areas; and (c) retains community history by reusing older structures.

2.6 Locating and Maintaining Public Schools in Existing or Planned Communities Policy

The State should develop legislation and/or policies that support state or local government policies, planning efforts, criteria, land usage, and development plans that recognize the importance of locating and/or maintaining public schools within existing or planned communities.

Some states and communities, particularly those with high growth rates and declining open space, have decided to direct development to areas identified through a public planning process. They have determined that the cost of building new developments in areas with no existing or planned municipal services simply places too large of a burden on taxpayers. Instead, they focus scarce dollars on supporting areas where they can concentrate resources such as public water, sewers, roads, and police and fire stations. This approach often gives residents near-by access to such amenities as shops, parks, transportation corridors, and post offices. In-fill and more concentrated housing development often results from these decisions. Therefore, new schools, where necessary, should be built in existing and expanding communities. In dense urban areas, a new or renovated school can mean new life for a neighborhood. A school can attract new residents while providing quality service to existing neighbors.

Rural areas have somewhat different issues but many of the same considerations apply. Consolidation of small schools is a major threat in rural areas. Consolidation often means that smaller schools or schools located near small populations will be abandoned in favor of larger schools located on large previously undeveloped parcels. In many cases, these schools are far from existing communities. This adversely affects both the community that lost the original school and the students who are required to commute to

school. Consolidation requires long bus rides for children and disassociates the public school from its community.

In urban areas, older and historic schools were built to serve the adjacent neighborhoods. Communities should consider the benefits of walk-ability, public transit, and community access when weighing options about renovation or new construction. In urban areas where a school does not exist, the community should consider placing a school in an under-utilized neighborhood structure to preserve adjacency benefits.

Schools as Centers of Community Policies Resources & Best Practices

2.1 School Facility and Grounds Partnership Legislation and/or Policy

2.2 School Facilities for Community Use Legislation and/or Policy

a. State Example: *North Carolina*

The state has enabling legislation in their Community Schools Act (Chapter 115C-204 through 209) "...to encourage greater community involvement in the public schools and greater community use of public school facilities."

http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/Statutes/GeneralStatutes/HTML/ByChapter/Chapter_115C.html

b. State Example: *Iowa*

The state allows public agencies to exercise any powers, privileges or authority together that they can carry out separately.

Title 1, Subtitle 10, 28E.3

<http://www.legis.state.ia.us/IACODE/1999SUPPLEMENT/28E/3.html>

c. State Example: *Iowa*

The state allows any public agency to enter into an agreement with any other public or private agency for joint or co-operative actions.

Title 1, Subtitle 10, 28E.4

<http://www.legis.state.ia.us/IACODE/1999SUPPLEMENT/28E/4.html>

d. State Example: *Arizona*

The state allows school districts to enter into agreements, as well as enter into leases, set fees, permit uncompensated use, and expend public monies.

Arizona Statue Title 15-364

<http://www.azleg.state.az.us/FormatDocument.asp?inDoc=/ars/15/00364.htm&Title=15&DocType=ARS>

2.3 Co-Location Standards

2.4 Site Selection, Planning & Development Criteria

a. State Example: *California*

The state has established standards for school site selection. The criteria established for school sites encourages schools to locate near public resources. A school site should be selected to promote joint use of parks, libraries, museums and other public services.

Title 5, California Code of Regulations, Division 1, Chapter 13, Subchapter 1

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/fa/sf/title5regs.asp>

Creating Connections: CEFPI Guide for EFP

<http://www.cefpi.org/>

2.5 Historic Schools and Significant Existing Buildings

a. State Example: *South Carolina*

The state prohibits the requirement that public schools be constructed on a lot or parcel of a certain minimum size. School districts must receive approval from the South Carolina Department of Education prior to property acquisition or additions on existing properties.

<http://www.scstatehouse.net/code/t59c023.htm>

b. State Example: *California*

The state calls for site size to be determined by an additive or functional method, which calculates the amount of space needed to support each programmatic requirement (The CEFPI Guide for Educational Facility Planning). The site size based on this functional method can be adjusted due to a variety of circumstances. For example, there may be insufficient available land due to urban or suburban development or sufficient land is available but it is not located near the student population. It should also be noted that California encourages school sites to be within walking distance of the student population.

Division 1, Chapter 13, Subchapter 1, Article 2. School Sites, § 14010. Standards for School Site Selection

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/fa/sf/title5regs.asp>

Guide to School Site Analysis and Development 2000

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/fa/sf/documents/schoolsiteanalysis2000.pdf>

c. State Example: ***Massachusetts***

The state shall approve and fund new school construction projects only where the feasibility and cost of renovating an existing school building, or of acquiring an existing building or buildings which are structurally sound, available within the community, and adaptable for school purposes, has been studied and the applicant demonstrates that the proposed new construction is the best available alternative to meet the projected need based upon the educational program to be housed, total cost effectiveness, and the public interest.

Massachusetts Education Laws and Regulations 603 CMR 38.03.10

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr38.html?section=03>

d. State Example: ***Massachusetts***

Massachusetts Building Code Chapter 34

http://www.mass.gov/bbrs/780CMR_Ch34.pdf

e. Example: ***Proposed National Standard***

A guide to contracting for a feasibility study, written by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/school_feasibility_study.pdf

f. Example: ***Proposed National Standard***

Forthcoming CEFPI appraisal guide for Historic and Older Structures

<http://www.cefpi.org/>

2.6 Locating and Maintaining Public Schools in Existing or Planned Communities

a. State Example: *Maryland*

The State Public School Construction Program has criteria that schools construction should meet. It states school projects should be located in developed areas, or in designated growth areas, be served by existing infrastructure and not encourage development in previously undeveloped areas.

State of Maryland Public School Construction Program
Administrative Procedures Guide

<http://www.pscp.state.md.us/>