Smart Schools for Sustainable Communities:

Aligning Sustainable Communities Planning and Public Education in California

An Invitational State Policy Roundtable

Hosted by the

California Strategic Growth Council

and

Summary & Recommendations

Prepared by Center for Cities & Schools

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ROUNDTABLE BACKGROUND & GOALS

California has been implementing new policy initiatives and making tremendous financial investments in improving educational quality and in making our cities and regions more livable and economically sound. Although schools and community quality are intricately connected, rarely do we connect policies across these sectors to leverage "win-wins" for communities and schools. This forum begins that process by building on recent statewide activities including the passage of Senate Bill 375, the creation of the Strategic Growth Council (SGC) the federal Sustainable Housing and Communities Program, the Senate Select Committee on School Facilities, and the California Department of Education's new vision and guiding principles for school facilities that enhance achievement for all students.

Convened August 31, 2010, the half-day roundtable brought together a diverse set of state, regional, and local policy leaders to discuss promising strategies for connecting schools to the creation of healthy, sustainable communities in California. Structured as a "public research" event, participants discussed issues, pointed out challenges, and identified policy and implementation opportunities. In this report, we summarize the speakers' presentations and provide a set of key state policy recommendations developed from the Roundtable discussion.

EVENT SUMMARY

Welcome & Introductions

Bob Fisher, Member, Strategic Growth Council

High quality schools play a critical role in the communities where they are located. As Californians, we care about our schools and spend an enormous amount of public funds on school infrastructure. As a member of the Strategic Growth Council, I think that connecting with educators and making the sound infrastructure decisions that simultaneously support schools and communities is essential. Facilitating this discussion is a promising project for the SGC.

Deborah McKoy, Executive Director, UC Berkeley Center for Cities & Schools

With this cross-sector gathering of policy leaders, professionals and practitioners, we hope to forge a lively discussion on the critical importance of connecting education to our state's smart growth planning and development. The UC Berkeley Center for Cities & Schools is proud to partner with the Strategic Growth Council and the California Department of Education on this roundtable aimed at sharing insights, experiences, and opportunities to learn from each other and forge new understanding and identifying shared goals and future potential for collaboration. The afternoon is organized in two parts. First there will be a panel discussion from key leaders in educational policy and regional planning. Next will be facilitated small group discussions aimed at identifying the priorities and recommendations among participants.

New Federal Partnerships for Sustainable Communities

Matthew Dalbey, Smart Growth Program, Office of Policy, Economics, and Innovation, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

New federal initiatives are aimed at promoting sustainable communities planning across the country. In particular, the EPA, HUD, and DOT Partnership for Sustainable Communities has developed six Livability Principles: 1) enhance economic competitiveness; 2) coordinate and leverage federal investments; 3) value communities and neighborhoods; 4) support existing communities; 5) promote equitable, affordable housing; and 6) provide more transportation choices. Public schools play an important role in all of these principles.

Most fundamentally, children need safe places to get the best education possible. But EPA also sees other benefits related to schools, including health benefits of walking and biking to school; reduced travel-to-school emissions from automobiles and buses; and reduced transportation costs. School siting in particular plays an important role in realizing these benefits. A question that arises in many communities is: how do we incorporate planning for school facilities into our community plans? Unfortunately, there are barriers to doing so at all levels of government. To help address this, EPA will soon release "Voluntary School Siting Guidelines" in partnership with the US Department of Education as mandated by the Energy Independence Security Act of 2007.

California Policy Panel: High Quality Schools in Healthy, Sustainable Communities

Public Schools are Public Infrastructure.
Jeff Vincent, Deputy Director, Center for Cities & Schools

A nexus of issues drives our conversation today: a) sustainable communities planning, b) ensuring healthy children and healthy communities; and c) ensuring high quality educational environments. Each currently has its own policy momentum in California. There is a common-held belief that high quality schools are cornerstones of sustainable, healthy communities and that high quality educational opportunities result in improved community and economic vitality. The key question is how do we enhance community sustainability and structure educational opportunity for all young people? I'd like to suggest that these cannot be mutually exclusive, but are intrinsically linked if we are to improve quality of life for all Californians.

Our public schools are public infrastructure. California has about 1,000 school districts with about 8,200 K-12 schools on an estimated 125,000 acres of land. Our schools are community gathering spaces and most neighborhoods have them. Counting students and staff in our schools, one in six Californians travel to and from a school everyday. Since 1996, more than $35 billion in state school construction and modernization funds have been made available; coupled with local bonds, the total is more than $80 billion. In fact, K-12 infrastructure funds are the largest share of state infrastructure investment; between 1972-2006 about 35 percent of $178 billion in statewide infrastructure funds went to schools. To effectively meet the state planning priorities of strengthening the economy, protecting the environment, and promoting health and safety for all, we must coordinate and leverage our infrastructure funds (see Government Code 65041.1), including schools.

Planning for a Sustainable Bay Area: What do regional policies mean for schools?
Kenneth Kirkey, Planning Director, Association of Bay Area Governments

ABAG's regional planning process works to promote sustainability and transit-oriented development. We are especially interested in how our Priority Development Areas (PDAs) relate to schools and school quality. In particular, we have been working closely with the Center for Cities & Schools on: 1) expanding the conversation about sustainable regional growth to include educational stakeholders; 2) assessing the role schools and school districts play in regional land use planning; and 3) fostering links between city and school governance to support infill development. We are pursuing activities that create "complete communities" in our PDAs: housing for residents of all income levels; good access to quality education and jobs; increased walking, bicycling, and transit ridership; decreased auto use; local services and shopping; clean air; and access to open space.

Between 2000 and 2006, overall public school enrollment has decreased in the Bay Area by about 2.6%. However, more recently we have seen pre-primary enrollment grow by 8%, with the largest increases in San Francisco, San Mateo, and Marin Counties. While conventional wisdom holds that the number of children in the inner bay area will decline, we're not so sure. One of the deciding factors about where these families will live is what their school options are. People in our PDAs are having children, but will they move as the children grow up? If so, this may undermine our regional growth goals.

Ensuring High Quality School Environments: A Policy Overview.
Kathleen Moore, Director, School Facilities Planning Division, California Department of Education

I am pleased to discuss the current school facilities policy environment at the state level and how it is designed to ensure high quality schools across the state.

My presentation will

1. First, provide some perspective about how much school building occurs in California and the role of local districts, often called local educational agencies (LEAs). The more than 1,000 public school districts across the state each make their own facility decisions under widely varying circumstances.

2. Second, I will review key challenges school districts face as they plan for their facilities. I will also describe school infrastructure funding sources and provide an overview of the key state agencies that the districts must navigate to build and renovate schools in California.

3. Third, I will describe the work of my staff at CDE's School Facilities Planning Division and our priorities, especially pointing out how they align with key elements of smart growth.

I wish to state clearly that the CDE is very interested in doing an even better job of encouraging smart growth, while staying true to our mission of ensuring that new schools are safe, appropriate educational environments for all students. Cross-sector discussions like this aid in such an endeavor.

[See Ms. Moore's full presentation: http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/fa/sf/documents/strategicgrowth.ppt]

Aligning Infrastructure Investment for Sustainable Communities: Goals, Policies, and Strategies
Julia Lave Johnston, Deputy Director, Planning Policy, Governor's Office of Planning and Research

OPR is defined by statute as the comprehensive state planning agency for California. It is responsible for formulating long-range goals and policies for land use, population growth and distribution, urban expansion, and resource conservation. It is also required to provide technical assistance and advice on land use planning and CEQA to state, regional and local governments. OPR is part of the Strategic Growth Council, which is charged with developing policies and coordinating investment strategies to encourage the development of sustainable communities.

High quality education is of huge importance to the people of California. Because of this, the quality and location of schools has a huge impact on development patterns and community economic development, as well as quality of life for residents. For example, targeted school sitting can revitalize urban areas and encourage urban infill. It can promote active living by allowing children to safely bike and walk to school and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the number and length of car trips that are required to drive children back and forth to school. Targeted investments in school facilities can also reduce community infrastructure costs.

While there are multiple benefits to coordinating school investments there are also multiple agencies that have a piece of the puzzle for sitting, building and administering schools. This can result in tensions between the state, city and county governments and school districts. We need to find a way to all work together to create incentives to put schools were communities and the state reap the greatest benefits economically, environmentally and create the best future for the children of California.

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CHALLENGES, RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Below is a summary analysis of the main challenges and recommendations generated by this roundtable discussion. In general, there was agreement that high quality schools play important roles in ensuring healthy, sustainable communities, but also that community conditions and land use patterns play important roles to ensuring healthy, sustainable schools. The question at hand was how to change current practices to bring different sectors together to work in more collaborative and mutually beneficial ways.

Challenges

Challenge #1: Local/Regional Agency Silos. *Local/regional governments and school districts in California are autonomous entities that too seldom collaborate on school and community planning, missing many opportunities for "win-wins."* Local agencies tend to have very different cultures, language, and planning timelines – and frequently have adversarial relationships – all of which greatly hinder collaboration. Due to the historic nature of local schools being largely autonomous, local agency staffs have little capacity to forge successful cross-sector partnerships. One core challenge, particularly from a regional planning perspective, is that school district geographic boundaries rarely match those of other local/regional planning entities. So a school district may overlap with multiple municipalities, or vice versa.

Challenge #2: State Policy Gaps and Obstacles. *California state policy provides very few requirements and/or incentives for local governments and school districts to work together.* Changes in state policy over time have eroded what structures did exist for local planning collaboration. In particular, 1998's Senate Bill 50, which established a new state school facility funding program, reversed the prior *Mira/Hart/Murietta* Appellate Court decisions, significantly decreasing local agency cooperative planning requirements. Today, regional planning agencies and cities have few requirements to plan with or for school districts, and school districts do not need to obtain city or county approval of new school sites and can override local zoning ordinances. Prior to SB 50, coordination was arguably more common, especially in working together to ensure adequate public school facilities along with development. Additionally, state oversight of school infrastructure approvals and funding is spread over multiple state agencies, creating various logistical challenges.

Challenge #3: Current funding structure deters school modernization. *State and local school infrastructure funding is biased against existing schools.* Current school facilities funding policies make reinvesting in existing schools through modernization and expansion more challenging than building new facilities. As a result, inequities persist in facilities funding and in the physical conditions of schools across the state. This bias does not align to the state's planning priorities that include "promot[ing] infill development and equity by rehabilitating, maintaining, and improving existing infrastructure...(Government Code 65041.1(a))."

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Consider including Department of Education (CDE) as a member of the Strategic Growth Council. Given the SGC's intent to coordinate state infrastructure investment, the absence of school infrastructure stakeholders leads to missed opportunities. CDE should be invited to participate in the SGC's Infrastructure Working Group and other relevant SGC activities. CDE and SGC should continue to collaborate on improving collaboration around school funding and siting.

o *Lever:* Provide assistance to CDE's newly formed Policy and Standards Unit in the School Facilities Planning Division in its upcoming review of Title 5 in the Education Code

o *Lever:* Utilize the Health in All Policies (HiAP) process to engage CDE.

Recommendation #2: Analyze school infrastructure funding patterns. To accurately understand how California's recent school infrastructure funds have been spent, conduct detailed assessment of the usage of both state and local funds in recent years: how much was spent? What is was the source of funds? What projects were funded? Which school districts and schools received funding? How do these patterns relate to the state's planning priorities, SGC goals, climate change goals, and educational goals?

Recommendation #3: Use the next statewide school construction bond to prioritize modernization of existing schools. To address the ongoing capital needs of school districts across the state, there is likely to be a statewide school construction bond brought forth for 2012. In that process, the guidelines for the usage of those funds will be decided in the legislature. Bond language should be proposed that links to the state's planning priorities. Specifically, the bond funds should be prioritized for: existing schools, areas targeted for increased development in the regional sustainable communities strategies, and existing schools deemed to be in the worst physical condition.

Recommendation #4: Establish state policy structures, mandates, and incentives for local planning collaboration. This requires a detailed understanding of current state codes and how they might be updated and/or strengthened. Doing so is complex. Below are three specific strategies that could lead to greater local agency collaboration.

o *Lever:* Link Regional Plans, General Plans, and School Facilities Master Plans. SGC and CDE should (minimally) make a formal joint recommendation that MPOs, municipalities, and school districts collaborate on land use and infrastructure planning.

o *Lever:* Increase Safe Routes to School (SRTS) funding. SRTS funds work to ensure complete streets around schools. Complete streets are streets that are designed for safe biking and walking, as well as automobile use. This helps meet the state goals of reducing vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions. Currently, SRTS funding only goes towards existing

schools. An opportunity exists to allow SRTS projects to also develop complete streets around new school sites.

- o *Lever:* Support Innovative Pilot Schools. Use state school construction funds to support "pilot" projects, including funding collaborative siting and planning phases, infill schools, joint use facilities, and retrofitting existing buildings into schools. Pilot projects may have freedom from some state school facility design standards to foster experimentation with new practices and solutions.

- o *Lever:* The State Allocation Board (SAB) should consider formally adopting the tenants of Government Codes 65041.1 and 65042 that outline the state's planning priorities and instruct all state agencies to support them.

Recommendation #5: Provide technical assistance and build the capacity of local agencies to collaborate. State agencies should take a lead role in providing the tools, information, and examples of best practices for localities.

- o *Lever:* Conduct trainings and develop information for legislators on public school infrastructure planning policy and funding.

- o *Lever:* Conduct trainings and develop information for school districts (superintendents, school boards, and school facilities planners) on the state's planning priorities and how school infrastructure can be planned and implemented in accordance with SB 375 and the regional planning processes.

- o *Lever:* Disseminate best practices of new/modernized schools that uphold both the state's planning priorities and CDE's vision and guiding principles for school environments.

- o *Lever:* Encourage regional MPOs to provide their detailed demographic analysis to school districts to foster collaboration based on uniform data/information.

Recommendation #6: Engage students and schools in sustainable communities planning. Sustainable communities' processes should connect to California's growing environmental education programs, including CDE's work in establishing more than 60 "Green Career Academies" in high schools throughout the state. Inspired and funded by AB 519, Green Academies are growing statewide to create school and industry partnerships that "focus on clean technology and energy businesses and provide skilled workforces for the products and services for energy or water conservation, or both, renewable energy, pollution reduction, or other technologies that improve the environment in furtherance of state environmental laws." (AB 519)

Participants

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