



Schools and
Smart Growth



The interests of Smart Growth advocates and education reformers converge on a simple but powerful idea, the small neighborhood school.

Sprawl Schools and Small Schools

By David Goldberg

A convergence of movements offers hope that Johnny can once again walk to a great neighborhood school.

As students at Fairfield Senior High School in suburban Cincinnati headed back to school this year, they got a message from the local police: Don't even think about walking.

Law officers were moved to issue the warning after the local school district decided to eliminate bus service for high school kids in response to a budget crisis. It turns out that because the school, built in 1997, is set among busy, multi-lane roads with no sidewalks, even students who live within a mile of the school had been taking the bus, if they didn't go by car. Police were terrified at the prospect of kids trying to navigate that hostile environment without automotive armament.

Much as it pained him, Fairfield Mayor Erick Cook, himself a principal of an elementary school in another district, echoed the plea. "The bottom line is, the school system, developers and the city failed the kids by neglecting to put in sidewalks," Cook said. But the larger problem, Cook went on to acknowledge, was the selection of the site in the first place. In the hunt for a spot large enough for the modern high school, with its outsized parking and sprawling, single-story building, officials felt forced to look to the developing fringe of town. Because most kids would have to arrive by car, they opted for highway access. And rather than build the sidewalks that were left out when the area developed, they chose to bus students who lived nearby.



But Cook noted that Fairfield is hardly alone in this situation. In fact, his own school, South Lebanon elementary in South Lebanon, Ohio followed a similar pattern, having moved a few years ago from a historic, centrally located building to a new site accessible only by car or bus. It's a trend he laments. "As the people began to move outward, you moved away from the ability to create neighborhood schools."

Again, though, Ohio has plenty of company—about 49 other states, in fact. In suburban DeKalb County, Georgia, 57 percent of school principals rate the area around their schools moderately to extremely dangerous for kids on foot or bicycle, according to a survey by the county health department. Neighboring Gwinnett County actually has sited schools on highways in commercial and light industrial zones in order to fetch a higher resale price

overweight or obese and a third of middle and high schoolers are sedentary. At the same time, the rise in rush-hour traffic associated with school trips has been identified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a key contributor to air quality problems in a number of cities.

In addition to the effects on traffic and kids' health, critics of school sprawl note other issues, as well. Large, new schools built in a previously undeveloped area often act as a magnet for new residential development, drawing people and resources away from existing schools and neighborhoods, and large, drive-to schools fail to serve as a neighborhood resource and focal point. Because school districts and local governments do their planning in isolation from one another, the new growth often takes local officials by surprise, causing them to scramble

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should the school fall into disuse. Indeed, the phenomenon of building spread-out schools in unwalkable environments is so common it now has a name: "school sprawl".

A raft of statistics illustrates the consequences of the trend. As recently as 1969 roughly half of all students walked or biked to school. In 2001 the number was closer to one in 10. A study in South Carolina discovered that children are four times as likely to walk to schools built before 1983 than to those built after that year. The report attributed the change largely to the increasingly remote and pedestrian-hostile settings of newer schools. Of course, kids generally are less active today, and that's one reason the rates of obesity and physical inactivity among kids have risen so that 30 percent of our kids are

to build the roads, water mains, sewer lines and other services to support it. This uncoordinated planning is one reason many suburban schools open with classroom trailers parked outside, the critics say.

Meanwhile, there is mounting evidence that the impersonal environment of the mega-school inhibits the basic function of the school; that is, giving kids the best education possible. This realization has given rise to a growing movement for small schools, a cause gaining an increasingly high profile with the involvement of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and many others. This movement is finding common cause with the movement for Smart Growth, a term used to refer to better planning that values improving the places we've built before sprawling willy-nilly

into new territory. Together they're working to change the rules and habits that contribute to school sprawl.

Why Big Schools?

The case for larger schools has been that they can offer a more comprehensive curriculum, and that the upper grades can have access to a wider range of activities, from chess club to Japanese club, for which there would be too few students in a smaller setting. This often had the ring of an attempt to make a virtue of necessity, as state and local school officials pushed for the economies of scale from greater concentrations of students, services and facilities.

Perhaps the most influential advocate for “sprawl schools” was the Council of Educational Facility Planners (CEFPI), an Arizona-based professional association that issues guidance on school construction. According to standards that were in place from the 1970s until very recently, an elementary school of 500 students requires 15 acres, and a high school of 2,000 would need at least 50 acres. By contrast, older neighborhood schools occupy two to eight acres. Those existing schools themselves were disadvantaged by the so-called two-thirds rule used by CEFPI and others: If the cost to rehab a school exceeds 60 percent of cost of replacement, build a new school. Building anew at the “proper” size means either razing nearby buildings—which is prohibitively expensive—or moving the school out of the neighborhood. According to a South Carolina study, school site size has increased in every decade since 1950, and schools built in the last 20 years are 41 percent larger than those built previously.

“The problem has been that, in order to meet those standards, given the cost and availability of land, school officials feel the need to abandon neighborhood sites and build in the middle of nowhere,” said Constance Beaumont, author of “Why Johnny Can’t Walk



to School,” a report by the National Trust for Historic Preservation that was among the first to address the issue of school sprawl.

There are signs that the tide is beginning to turn in some states, Beaumont noted. Maryland now prioritizes rehab and construction in urbanized areas, rather than building schools in greenfields. In the last few years, 80 percent of construction money went to reconstruction and rehab, versus 25 percent in the mid-1990s. In California, a program called Safe Routes to School earmarks one-third of federal road-safety money for improvements around schools, creating safe crossings, adding sidewalks and bikeways, etc. The program has been so popular that a version of it has been included in proposed federal legislation.

Others are taking a closer look at the trade-offs involved. In Oregon a study in the Bend-La Pine district found that, compared to sites on the metro fringe, “sites in higher density neighborhoods decreased total transportation costs by 32 percent annually and lowered site development costs by 14 percent.” As a result, this fall the district opened Ensworth Elementary School, a compact, two-story prototype neighborhood school designed and located so that all of its 300 students can walk or bike. And nearly all do, said Beaumont, who now works for Oregon’s transportation and growth management program.

Perhaps most significantly, CEFPI itself recently unveiled “Creating Connections,”



So what have they found? Smaller schools have lower drop-out rates and higher average scores on standardized tests. Children in high-poverty schools see an even more pronounced improvement. While it's true that larger schools generally do show a small savings on spending per student, when that figure is computed for students who actually graduate, the per-graduate cost per student actually is slightly lower. Larger schools can have more extracurricular offerings, but participation in after-school activities declines as schools get larger. A U.S. Department of Education report found that schools with over 1,000 students have much higher rates of crime and vandalism than schools with 300 or fewer students. And teacher satisfaction is higher in smaller schools, according to a Chicago study. (You can find links to much of the research online at <http://www.smallschoolsworkshop.org/info3.html#8>.)

Convinced by the research, several philanthropies are supporting the small-

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a re-examination of its siting guidelines that puts an emphasis on viewing schools in the larger community context. (Find it on the web at <http://www.cefp.org:80/creatingconnections/index.html>.)

Small Schools

The return of the neighborhood school is getting a large boost from a growing body of research demonstrating the benefits of smaller school environments. The research has been motivated at one end by the concerns of rural communities that are seeing their local schools closed in a wave of consolidation, and at the other by advocates for smaller, more manageable schools in low-income, urban areas.

schools movement. Since 1994, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has committed more than \$1 billion to improving public schools, primarily through creating small high schools. Gates advocates high schools of 400 students or fewer, arguing that they can “provide a personalized learning environment where every student has an adult advocate. Students in small schools feel less alienated and tend to be more actively engaged in school activities.”

Despite the growing appreciation for small schools, a number of daunting challenges remain. School funding is among the largest. Many administrators remain convinced that a smaller number of campuses reduces administrative and other costs. The notion

that big and (typically) new is better than small and (frequently) old is ingrained and difficult to reverse. One of the thorniest issues, though, may be the implications for student-body diversity when schools draw from smaller geographic areas.

“There is a bit of a conflict between small schools and integration,” acknowledges Jonathan Weiss, a former Clinton Administration official and author of “Public Schools and Economic Development: What the Research Shows”, a report for the KnowledgeWorks Foundation. “Because we tend to live in neighborhoods that are segregated by race and income you often need to draw from a larger area to get a diverse population.”

As a school board member in Decatur, Georgia, John Ahman has grappled with this tension firsthand. To preserve its prized walkable, neighborhood schools, the small city of 19,000 for years has resisted a state guideline that would have meant consolidating their five elementary schools into two. But recently two inescapable realities forced change: The need to close a school with fewer than 80 students and a desire to address a persistent achievement gap in a pair of schools that were predominantly African-American. The solution ultimately was to close two schools, expanding the attendance zones for the remaining campuses so that they would be more racially balanced and create city-wide school for fourth and fifth grades.

“It was a brutal battle,” Ahman recalls. “It might have been easier just to consolidate them all into a couple of large schools, but we didn’t want to do that. I hate to say it, but a lot of white people just didn’t want their kids going to school with poorer, black kids.” But the board was determined both to integrate the schools and to make it possible for families to continue to get their kids to school without driving. “To make them walkable, we posted

14 crossing guards to make it safer to cross our busier roads,” in addition to installing crosswalks and traffic controls.

Recognizing the reality that the Decatur of the world have faced, some small-schools advocates suggest breaking up larger campuses into several schools-within-a-school. One frequently cited success story in this regard is New York City’s Julia Richman Education Complex. Once a failing, violence-plagued school of thousands, the sprawling compound has been divided into six schools, each with a different theme and identity. A Washington Post article on the complex described it like this: “There is no public address system and no bells announce the end of class. The metal detectors ... have disappeared, along with cages for particularly violent students. Vandalism ... and fights in the hallway are rare. The number of students graduating and going on to college has shot up.”

What makes places like Richman work, says Weiss, is not merely making the schools smaller, but also selecting administrators and faculty who share a vision, and giving them the extra resources needed to succeed. In any case, advocacy for small schools won’t succeed if done in a vacuum that disregards other community issues, he cautions.

“In a way small schools are one part of the larger smart-growth puzzle,” says Weiss. “Communities should be careful about pursuing small schools in isolation from pursuing broader, more integrated Smart-Growth strategies. It’s unlikely small schools by themselves will be a panacea.”

David A. Goldberg is the communications director for Smart Growth America, a nationwide coalition based in Washington, D.C. that advocates for land-use policy reform. In 2002, Mr. Goldberg was awarded a Loeb Fellowship at Harvard University where he studied urban policy.

Smart Partnerships for Smarter Schools

By Brad Broberg

Many public-private partnerships, using Smart Growth fundamentals, are being formed to help ensure that school districts keep pace with population increases, development and parental demands.

When Hurricane Andrew blasted South Florida in 1992, Pembroke Pines and the rest of southwest Broward County escaped the horrific destruction the killer storm unleashed on much of neighboring Dade County. Even so, Andrew left his mark.

Thousands of devastated Dade County families, whose dwellings Andrew flattened, fled north to new homes in places like Pembroke Pines, where the greater distance from the coast offers greater security against the threat of future hurricanes.

As a result, the population of Pembroke Pines soared. Before Hurricane Andrew, Pembroke Pines was home to 65,000 people. Today, more than 150,000 people live in the community approximately 20 miles northwest of Miami. “We had prepared for steady development over a long period of time [but] we more than doubled our population in a short time frame,” said Charley Dodge, longtime city manager.



Slammed by whirlwind growth, Pembroke Pines faced pressure to provide public services—and do it fast—for the flood of new residents. The most pressing problem? The need to build more schools.

Traditionally, local school districts shoulder that burden. However, the Broward County School District was unprepared to meet the demand, said Dodge. “They did not plan or set aside land or have the capability,” he said.

Minus Hurricane Andrew, the Pembroke Pines story is a familiar tale in high-growth states such as Florida, Arizona and California, where school district after school district struggles to keep up with development.

Less familiar—but gaining ground every day—is the approach Pembroke Pines took to provide the schools its residents needed.

Frustrated by the school district’s inertia, the city of Pembroke Pines partnered with a private company, Haskell Educational Services, to build and operate its own elementary school under Florida’s charter-school law. “We made the decision in December of 1997, broke ground in January of 1998 and opened in August,” said Dodge.

Although the partnership has since ended, Pembroke Pines has opened six more schools serving 5,200 students in grades K–12. Not only are the city’s schools providing much-needed classrooms, their smaller size and high test scores make them extremely attractive

to parents. “We have a waiting list of 11,000 students,” said Dodge.

With local, state, and federal budgets stretched thin, public-private partnerships offer numerous advantages over the traditional approach to opening new schools, say proponents. Mainly, public-private partnerships can create schools faster and cheaper, eliminating the need to ask taxpayers to approve general-obligation bonds, to put projects out for bid or to abide by costly regulations governing public works. Plus the private partner has a powerful incentive—namely profits—to be as efficient as possible.

The Pembroke Pines model is one of many forms public-private partnerships are taking.

In California, residential developers can negotiate with school districts to spend school-impact fees directly on new school construction rather than sending the money through bureaucratic channels and waiting for the system to produce a school, said Snell. “The time savings is huge,” she said.

Ron Utt, senior research fellow with the Washington, D.C.-based Heritage Foundation, has found that public-private partnerships can trim the cost of building a school by 30 percent and slash the time it takes to plan and open a facility from as many as five years to less than one. Even so, he warns that the push for such partnerships won’t come from school boards. “It’s not going to be the public sector promoting these things,” he said. “It’s going to be the private sector promoting these things ...

“School districts struggle to keep up with development.”

They range from workplace satellite schools to lease-purchase agreements to developer-built schools—all of them supporting Smart Growth’s goal of ensuring infrastructure keeps pace with development.

“Any method you can think of has been tried,” said Alan Olkes, senior vice president with Imagine Schools in Coconut Grove, Florida, and the former superintendent of the Miami/Dade County School District.

In Washington, D.C., a national real estate company, LCOR, partnered with D.C. Public Schools to build a new elementary school. The school was financed with debt issued by the District of Columbia. The debt was backed by revenue from a 211-unit apartment building LCOR constructed on part of the school site given to LCOR as part of the partnership agreement, explained Lisa Snell, education director for the Reason Public Policy Institute in Los Angeles.

to allow more growth to occur.”

Three years ago, Congress passed a law intended to take public-private partnerships to a new level. The law allows qualified real estate investors/developers to issue private-activity bonds to finance school construction. By cutting financing costs, the tax-exempt bonds enable private investors/developers to build schools less expensively. And, because the investor/developer owns the school—at least for the length of the lease—it can rent out portions of the building when classes are not in session. As a result, the investor/developer can afford to lease the school to a school district for less than what the district would spend if it built the school itself. What’s more, when the lease expires, the law gives the school district ownership of the school.

Unfortunately, the law hamstring potential partnerships in two ways. First, it limits school construction involving private-activity bonds to less than \$3 billion nationwide.

Second, regulations written by the U.S. Treasury Department implementing the law forbid investors/developers from claiming any depreciation. As a result, says Utt, only a handful of schools have been built with private-activity bonds.

Even so, a few lease/purchase agreements are being executed. TurnKey Solutions is a Temecula, California, design/build contractor. “The company keeps construction costs low by using pre-approved plans to produce component-built schools in half the time and for 20 percent less than conventional construction,” said Tony Vignieri, communications director. Those efficiencies make it possible for TurnKey to finance school construction in-house and lease the buildings to districts unable to foot the upfront bill.

corporation issued debt to build the schools and lease them to the district.

“It’s been a very good experience for as because it’s allowed us to build these two badly needed high schools on a pay-as-you go basis,” said Don Boehm, in-house finance attorney for the Houston Independent School District. Charter schools and the companies that build and operate them are a popular vehicle for combining public dollars with private initiative to open schools faster—and often cheaper—than might otherwise occur.

As private businesses, charter-school companies are subject to far less red tape, said Doug Bouma, executive vice president of The Bouma Corp., a Michigan general contractor that builds schools for both public school systems and charter-school operators. “It’s a huge

“With local, state, and federal budgets stretched thin, public-private partnerships offer numerous advantages over the traditional approach to opening new schools.”

“It’s a way out for school districts that are up against the wall,” said Vignieri. Another version of the lease/purchase approach involves finding a not-for-profit or government partner to issue the debt—something school districts generally cannot do without voter approval. Then the school district signs a lease-purchase agreement with the partner that enables the district to pay for the school over time without asking taxpayers to support a general obligation bond.

The Houston Independent School District took that approach to build two high schools. First, the city of Houston established tax increment reinvestment zones in the neighborhoods surrounding the two school sites. Then a public facilities corporation was set up. Based on lease payments from the school district—payments funded primarily by money collected within the tax increment reinvestment zones—the public facilities

advantage when it comes to time and money,” he said. “There’s a night-and-day difference.”

Strictly speaking, charter schools may not reflect true public-private partnerships because local school districts only rarely participate as full partners. Yet charter schools do represent public money being spent on a private solution to a community problem. “Whether we like charter schools or not, they are the law in Florida ... and the fact that they are creating (classrooms) is viewed as a benefit overall,” said Michael Bell, assistant superintendent for School Choice/Parental Options with the Miami/Dade County School District.

While the process varies from state to state—and some states don’t allow charter schools at all—the basic concept is the same. A charter school proponent submits an application to that state’s particular governing authority. If the application



is approved, the charter school's proponents receive a fixed amount of public money per student to open and operate a school.

Charter-school proponents are frequently parents dissatisfied with the quality of their local school. However, in high-growth states, charter schools are frequently inspired by overcrowding.

Take Arizona, where Imagine Schools has been "following the growth," says Nancy Hall, regional vice president with the company's Phoenix office. "There's just a real need in Arizona. They can't put the traditional public schools up fast enough to take care of the growth."

Imagine Schools is one of many companies that establish and/or operate charter schools. They act either on behalf of the school's proponents or—as is the case with Imagine in Arizona—as the proponent itself.

In Arizona, Hall teams with a local REALTOR®, Rick Brandt, to track where new development is headed, conducts demographic studies of promising areas and then applies for approval to open a charter school. So far, Imagine has opened six schools that way, including one in a former furniture store and two in a former hardware store. Two additional schools will open next fall.

Brandt, a broker, said charter schools respond much faster when attractive real estate

opportunities arise. The public process "takes way too long," he said. "In this environment, that's a critical thing."

Another charter-school strategy is to partner with a developer from the get-go. A current example can be found in Lake County, Florida, where Imagine Schools is partnering with the developer of a large residential community.

With no public school on the drawing board, the developer turned to Imagine Schools to satisfy the local planning authority's demand for a school. The school also will help the developer market the community, said Olkes.

Besides being a tool to support Smart Growth, charter schools can lead by opening schools in areas where the local school district can't justify building a new school but where development is desired. For example, the city of St. Louis is talking with Imagine Schools about opening a downtown charter school as part of a redevelopment initiative, said Olkes.

Workplace satellite schools are one more way the public and private sectors can team up to open schools. Although sometimes operated as charter schools, they are often a joint effort between school districts, which provide the teachers and curriculum, and large employers, which provide the facilities.

The Miami/Dade County School District opened its first workplace satellite school at the headquarters of American Bankers Assurance Group—now known as Assurance Solutions—in 1987. At one time, the district operated five such schools, but due to various circumstances beyond the district's control is now down to two schools; Assurance Solutions (K–5) and Mt. Sinai Hospital (K–2).

Such arrangements pay mutual dividends. The school district gains classroom space

without having to build a new school while the employer gains a tremendous fringe benefit for its workers. In addition, productivity increases. Assurance Solutions' absentee rate lowered from 11 percent to 6 percent because parents had to come to work in order to get their kids to school. Plus it reduced its turnover rate, said Olkes, superintendent at Miami/Dade, when the Assurance Solutions' satellite school opened.

"Workplace schools are a wonderful thing," said Olkes. "It's great to see parents come and have lunch with their kids."

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"Charter schools and the companies that build and operate them are a popular vehicle for combining public dollars with private initiative."

High Performance Schools

By Heidi Johnson-Wright

Green/sustainable school buildings create healthier students, happier parents and more attractive Smart Growth neighborhoods.

Students begin each school day by walking through a sun-dappled grove of trees, which gently shades the main entry way. They are drawn into a building that, instead of resembling a prison, is bathed in natural light streaming in from windows and skylights. From the dining area, students enjoy a breathtaking view of Mount Hood on the horizon. On the nearby grounds, six acres of carefully preserved wetlands are available as a learning lab. The students at Clackamas High School in Portland, Oregon, are immersed in the benefits of a high performance school.

“Schools are incredibly important places. Within them are invisible networks that determine whether students perform well or not. They are the backbone of society, an

imprint for life. If they’re not done well, there are serious consequences,” said Heinz Rudolf, a principal with Boora Architects, Inc. of Portland, Oregon.

Rudolf should know. His firm prides itself on the design of schools—including Clackamas—using high performance principles, resulting in facilities that are cost effective, energy efficient, comfortable, sustainable and environmentally friendly.

Clackamas, opened in April 2002, aptly fits these criteria. It was built at a cost of just \$117 per square foot, as compared with typical high schools built at a cost of about \$135–145 per square foot. The school uses such things as day lighting, natural convection ventilation and

impact-resistant, sound-absorbent materials to create a healthy, technologically-sustainable environment.

But the school is about more than just the bottom line. Clackamas is an inviting, aesthetically-pleasing place to be.

“When we design based on functionalism, we must make sure that every piece has a meaning, in a holistic way,” Rudolf said.

Clackamas is a good example of this. Its internal spaces are designed for both interaction and privacy.



“When you enter, the space is uplifting. It is day lit everywhere. Behavioral scientists and psychologists say that daylight influences one’s ability to learn, it impacts test scores. Daylight is free and better than artificial light ... the windows connect people to the outside through beautiful views,” said Rudolf.

“A school should be on the opposite end of the spectrum from a jail cell, which exists for punishment,” he added.



high performance schools. Such schools are part of a growing network of community-driven, voluntary partnerships that foster energy efficiency and conserve resources in commercial, government and public-housing buildings. They promote Smart Growth principles that draw people into communities to live and work.

These schools—some new builds, others retrofitted—conserve energy, save money, reduce pollution and help revitalize aging cities and neighborhoods. High performance schools also help municipalities address whatever regional environmental problems they may be facing, such as water use, storm water management, air quality, recycling or mold problems. But the benefits go beyond increased dollars and decreased landfills. High performance schools can have a real impact on the education experience for the students who attend them.

“Schools are the backbone of society, an imprint for life.”

Most people—parents, teachers, taxpayers and certainly students—would agree. But although the public may understand concepts of optimum form and function, the term “high performance” is still new to many.

“If you ask someone ‘Do you want a high performance school?’ They’ll probably answer ‘maybe,’” said Ted Bardacke, an Associate with Global Green USA, an environmental nonprofit organization headquartered in Los Angeles.

“But if you ask someone ‘Do you want your kids educated in a school that provides natural daylight, reduces mold, saves money and protects the environment?’ They’ll answer ‘Yes,’” he said.

Bardacke’s hypothetical question neatly sums up many of the benefits associated with

Bardacke said that there are generally two things a school district wants.

“Good attendance, because in some instances funds get allocated to districts based upon average daily attendance, which is also often a good predictor of childhood health. And higher test scores. There are studies that show a correlation between high performance schools and test scores.”

Bardacke underscores his point by citing a statistic from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that childhood asthma—a condition often associated with poor indoor environmental air quality—is the number one cause of school absenteeism linked to a chronic childhood condition.

It’s not just student health at stake. Factor in faculty and administrative staff, and one in five

Americans either works in or attends a school facility every day, for an average of six–eight hours daily.

Better learning environments mean a better educational experience, which also fuels urban revitalization.

“There is a high correlation between excellence in text scores and real estate values. Good schools raise property values,” Bardacke said.

Consequently, more people are demanding high performance schools.

“It is overwhelmingly important to have a good learning environment for students,” said Dr. Rich Bauscher, Superintendent of the Middleton School District in Middleton, Idaho.

“Parents tell us that their kids’ attitude and desire to learn are attributable to the aspects of high performance schools.”

For example, providing ample daylight enables students to see well. Avoiding dark, subdued areas and providing the right colors in the decorative scheme can have a significant effect upon students’ moods and behavior.

“With the right lighting and colors, kids are less apt to be in bad moods and show disciplinary problems,” said Bauscher, whose district’s graffiti problem has been drastically reduced, thanks largely to high performance design.

Purple Sage Elementary School, which opened in fall 2003, is one of the Middleton District’s shining examples of high performance principles at work. Natural light, plentiful windows, and light colors create a cheerful interior environment. Climate controls are electronic, delivering precisely comfortable temperatures.

“Restroom lighting is electronically controlled with sensors; it goes on when someone enters and goes off when they exit. The same is true for maintenance closets and storage areas, which is great for custodial personnel,

who may have their arms full of supplies,” explained Bauscher.

The school’s toilets have automatic flushers. The sinks have automatic faucets which dispense water only when needed. Both decrease water waste and janitorial workload.

“We had an open house at Purple Sage, and the parents were ecstatic. They really appreciate this,” said Bauscher, referring to the school’s pro-student, environmentally-friendly features.

Anna Orrison, a parent of a first-grader at Purple Sage and a member of the district’s Future Sites Committee, said that the quality of the Middleton schools played a major role in her family’s choice of where to live. She is enthralled with the pleasant environment at Purple Sage.

“Different wings (of the school) use different colors. The color coding system is a simple and comforting system for young children. It makes it easy for them to find their classrooms. The school also has beautiful light and big rooms,” said Orrison.

But it’s not just new buildings in Middleton that have high performance aspects. The district has retrofitted some older buildings as well.

“Some of the older buildings used incandescent lights. These were all replaced with fluorescent lights that are energy efficient. The buildings have been repainted with lighter colors,” said Bauscher, who pointed out that new lighting, painting and carpeting can be done relatively cheaply if a school district has relatively few dollars to work with.

Middleton is the fifth fastest growing district in the state of Idaho. As it expands by adding new facilities and expanding old ones, high performance concepts will remain a permanent part of the process.

Skeptics maintain that the approach adds red tape and delay to the creation of new facilities,

a process already made cumbersome by funding and siting issues.

Bauscher acknowledges that the process is front-loaded in terms of effort, that such concepts must be incorporated from the very beginning. The traditional linear method of starting with the architect, then on to the engineer, then the contractor doesn't work. The process must be an integrated one from its inception. When done correctly, proponents say, the approach takes no longer from start to finish than the conventional method.

Bauscher maintains that the end result is worth it, given the benefits to students and the environment, as well as lower operating costs.

"If we create a school, it will be there for 75–100 years. Why not do it right from the start?" said Bauscher.

It's not just school administrators who can make high performance schools a reality. REALTORS® can play a role, too, by pushing for schools to be built with energy-efficient features, sustainable materials, day lighting and better indoor air quality. The result is better schools, cost savings to the district, healthier children, higher test scores and clients who want to buy homes in areas served by these schools.

Sherry Maupin, a REALTOR® with Woodhouse Group in Middleton, Idaho, and a Middleton school board member, urges other REALTORS® to get involved with their local school districts.

"Run for school board or at least attend their meetings. Become involved with PTA or PTO," said Maupin.

As a school board member, she is able to learn about what surrounding districts are doing and also about national academic

High Performance School Resources

Architects, engineers, educators and others interested in high performance design should visit the website for the Collaborative for High Performance Schools, which can be found at www.chps.net. The Collaborative's goal is to facilitate the design of high performance schools: environments that are not only energy efficient, but also healthy, comfortable, well lit, and contain the amenities needed for a quality education. There's no cost to become a CHPS school, and the program offers free training for project managers, engineers, architects, school district administrators and the general public.

Rebuild America is a growing network of community-driven voluntary partnerships that foster energy efficiency and renewable energy in commercial, government and public-housing buildings. At the federal level, it is the largest, most established technology deployment program within DOE's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE). The program's goals are to: conserve energy, accelerate use of the best energy technologies, save money, reduce air pollution, lower U.S. reliance on energy imports, help revitalize aging city and town neighborhoods, and create "smart energy" jobs. Visit the Rebuild America website at: www.rebuild.org

At www.hpschooldesigntraining.com, design and engineering professionals specializing in sustainable design for K–12 schools can take free on-line training on such topics as: lighting and electrical systems, day lighting and windows, mechanical and ventilation systems, water conservation, recycling systems, resource efficient building products and more.

Check out <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/toolkit.html>, which features the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Kit. This free kit shows schools how to carry out a practical plan of action to improve indoor air problems at little or no cost using straightforward activities and in-house staff. The kit can be downloaded from the website or ordered by telephone at: 1-800-438-4318.

What is a High Performance School?

(As defined by the Collaborative for High Performance Schools)

- ✓ **Healthy:** High indoor environmental quality is essential. The significant amount of time that students and teachers spend inside schools during the course of their educational career, combined with children's increased susceptibility to indoor pollutants underlines the importance of healthy schools.
- ✓ **Comfortable:** Comfort includes thermal, visual and acoustic comfort.
- ✓ **Energy Efficient:** Energy efficient schools save money while conserving nonrenewable energy resources and reducing atmospheric emissions.
- ✓ **Material Efficient:** To the maximum extent possible the school incorporates materials and products that are durable, nontoxic, derived from sustainable yield processes, high in recycled content and easily recycled themselves.
- ✓ **Water Efficient:** High performance schools are designed to use water efficiently, saving money while reducing the depletion of aquifers and river systems.
- ✓ **Easy to Maintain and Operate:** Building systems are simple and easy to use. Teachers have control over the temperature and lighting in their classrooms, and are trained how to most effectively use them.
- ✓ **Commissioning:** Commissioning is the process of ensuring that building systems are designed, installed, functionally tested, and capable of being operated and maintained according to the schools' operational needs. Commissioning also can restore existing buildings to high productivity through renovation, upgrade and tune-up of existing systems. Overall, the school should operate the way it was designed to and should meet the needs of the owner.
- ✓ **Environmentally Responsive Site:** To the extent possible, the school's site conserves existing natural areas and restores damaged ones, minimizes storm water runoff and controls erosion, and enhances the school building's high performance features.
- ✓ **A Building that Teaches:** By incorporating important concepts such as energy, water, and material efficiency, schools can become tools to illustrate a wide spectrum of scientific, mathematic and social issues.
- ✓ **Safe and Secure:** Students and teachers feel safe anywhere in the building or on the grounds.
- ✓ **Community Resource:** The most successful schools have a high level of parent and community involvement. This involvement can be enhanced if schools are designed to be used for neighborhood meetings and other community functions.
- ✓ **Stimulating Architecture:** High performance schools should invoke a sense of pride and be considered a genuine asset for the community.
- ✓ **Adaptable to Changing Needs:** High performance schools need to be able to embrace new technologies and respond to demographic and social changes.

statistics for schools. She stays involved with local developers to find out what they are doing within the community, and thus where expansion will occur.

“I also keep up with what’s been approved by the local planning and zoning board,” she said.

As a member of Middleton’s Future Sites Committee, Maupin pushes for “forward thinking.” When she joined the committee, she advised them to do a five-year and a 10-year plan. The committee studies things like areas of the community where there’s population growth and areas where it’s likely to occur, socio-economic demographics and lot sizes for planned developments—a good indicator of what type of housing will go up there.

“Usually the first question a REALTOR® is

asked is: ‘what are the schools like?’”

“Educate yourself on classroom sizes and teacher/student ratios. Get standardized testing scores for the district you’re in and the surrounding districts. You should be able to get these from your state’s department of education or the local district administrators,” said Maupin.

“As REALTORS®, we sign a code of ethics that we are to strive to create better environments. What’s more vital to this than schools? School systems are the hub of society.”

Heidi Johnson-Wright frequently writes about Smart Growth and sustainable communities. She and her husband live in a restored historic home in the heart of Miami’s Little Havana. Contact her at: hjohnsonwright@yahoo.com

“Good schools raise property values.”

Live Where You Teach

By Christine Jordan Sexton

Cities and school districts are working together to build affordable housing for teachers.

Some teachers in America are learning the cold hard facts of Housing 101: Even though they are deemed “professionals,” their salaries aren’t high enough to guarantee that they will have enough money to buy a home in the town where they work and play.

But the lesson may not end there. A growing number of cities and counties are setting up programs that offer housing perks so that teachers can live close to where they work and actually be a member of the community.



Teachers in the resort town of Nantucket, Massachusetts, are the latest group of educators who will benefit when units that are owned by the town, and leased to the nonprofit Nantucket Education Trust become available this November. Ten teachers submitted applications for the five units, said Nantucket School Board Facilities Director Jack McFarland.

With its 17th century seaside cottages, cooler than average temperatures and history as a whaling center, the island of Nantucket has become the perfect summer getaway, attracting upward of 45,000 people during the height of summer. Real estate prices on the island, which boasts 82 miles of pristine shoreline, have taken off.

While the spike in property value has made some people rich, it has left the town of Nantucket struggling with a significant problem, an eroding middle class who can no longer afford to live in there.

The units, McFarland said, are being developed to help alleviate what is commonly called the “Nantucket Shuffle.” It happens when teachers—and other lower paid professionals—are forced out of their housing because they can’t afford the high rents that owners charge tourists during the peak season.

As a result, some teachers—who initially are hired at salaries that start in the mid-40s—are forced to bunk together to afford the rent. Others just sleep in their cars. McFarland said that teachers can make the 30-mile commute to and from the island, but it is

time consuming and expensive. Additionally the long commute increases absenteeism and prevents teachers from participating in extra curricular activities.

“It’s really a sad thing,” McFarland said. “At last count, 58 teachers and school staff were renters and apt to get lost in the Nantucket Shuffle this year.” Rental demand determines how many of the teachers will have to move out of their homes before the end of the year, he said, noting that teachers were spared from having to move last academic year because the rental demand was lower than usual.

“But in some past summers, when demand was high, most had to move before mid June,” McFarland said. “In any event, the vast majority that must move bunk in with friends or other staff who are lucky enough to keep

economic stimulus in Massachusetts, including providing for affordable housing.

The Nantucket homes will be rented below-market value, although exact figures were not available. The three smallest rentals must meet the minimum affordability standards outlined by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which also offers affordable housing programs to teachers through the Teacher Next Door program. In the four and a half years since its inception more than 4,000 government properties have been sold said HUD Housing Program Officer Norm Jezeny.

Recruiting teachers to the Nantucket area, where they eventually could be paid upward of \$75,000, has become increasingly difficult in a market where the average value listing

“Teachers...are[being] forced out of their housing because they can’t afford the high rents that owners charge tourists during the peak season.”

their housing through to the end of that school year. But there have been some tough cases over the past few years. I have heard of several who lived in unfinished basements or unfinished attics; and a few that lived in some of the island merchant’s employee dormitory rooms that had space available at the time.”

Five units will be available to Nantucket teachers in November—two, one-bedroom duplexes; two, two-bedroom duplexes and one, two-bedroom bungalow-style home. Two more units will be opened the following January and another three in the spring. In all, the town of Nantucket will have 12 units to rent to teachers this academic year.

The homes are being built on lots owned by the town of Nantucket and are being financed by \$2.3 million in tax-exempt bonds issued by MassDevelopment, the quasi public state economic development agency charged with

for 2004 is \$1.1 million. The median listing is \$800,000.

“The fact is there is no way on God’s green earth that a school teacher could afford it,” said Nantucket REALTOR® Ken Beaugrand, who, along with McFarland and a community of others, pursued the housing initiative for five years.

Beaugrand, owner of Nantucket Real Estate, said keeping happy the 11,000 locals who live in the area and work in the service industry is key to keeping tourism revenue pouring in. Maintaining their quality of life and providing their children access to good schools is paramount to that goal, said Beaugrand.

Aside from economic reasons Beaugrand also believes that it’s incumbent for Nantucket—or any community—to provide children access to a quality education.



“We did something to make sure the educational system was going to be effective,” he said of providing the rental accommodations.

The need to provide affordable housing options is apparent. Even though interest rates are at a historically low level, typical working families are finding it increasingly difficult to afford median priced homes.

For instance, a Fannie Mae report released in April 2004 indicates that teachers who are repeat home buyers and who have a 20 percent down payment will have difficulty affording a median priced home. Another finding of the April 2004 report is that among metropolitan areas, only Atlanta, Houston and Philadelphia will remain affordable to median-income home buyers.

Another finding shows that the number of “unaffordable markets” is increasing. Indeed, Chicago, Denver, Seattle, and Washington D.C. are the latest areas that have the dubious distinction of being considered unaffordable, joining New York, Los Angeles, Boston and San Francisco.

In the Bay area—which has long been considered one of the most expensive regions to live—the Santa Clara Unified School District has taken steps to become the most teacher friendly place in California. The city of San Jose launched a number of initiatives targeted at making housing more affordable for teachers who work in the district.

City of San Jose Assistant Housing Director Mike Meyer said the largest initiative is the San Jose Teacher Homebuyer Program, which has helped 440 teachers purchase homes since its inception in 1999. The city also has, like Nantucket, built units for teachers to rent at below-market costs.

The San Jose Teacher Homebuyer Program allows qualified teachers who are purchasing their first homes to access \$40,000 in zero-interest down payment assistance. To date the city has provided nearly \$16.6 million in loan assistance which has leveraged just under another \$113 million in financing for homes.

“From a housing perspective, we feel like this has gone a long way in helping make San Jose distinctive in its efforts to retain and attract high-quality teachers,” said Meyer.

One of those teachers is San Jose native Joe Black. After college, Black bounced from Japan—where he taught conversational English—to Seattle before eventually returning to the Bay Area. Black, who teaches reading and drivers education at James Lick High School, was the 400th teacher to tap into the program. Additionally, Black got loans from the state of California and the County of Santa Clara which enabled him to buy a two-bedroom, two-bath condominium in the Berryessa, a suburban area of San Jose.

While a future of renting wouldn’t have been ideal, Black would have been content so long as he was teaching. But “being able to buy a home is like the icing on the cake. It makes what I do that much more rewarding.”

Like Nantucket, San Jose also has units it can rent. The city, which still has some projects under construction, will eventually rent a total of 374 units in four developments.

While Nantucket and San Jose have been successful in their efforts to bring affordable housing to teachers, not every town has had similar or positive experiences.

Just 50 miles from Nantucket is Falmouth, Massachusetts, in Cape Cod. Falmouth Superintendent Peter Clark doesn't mince words when describing his efforts in 2002 to have the Falmouth School Board establish affordable housing options for teachers.

"It blew up in my face," he said, noting that the biggest mistake he made was not initially reaching out to the community and explaining the goal—to provide homes to teachers and other employees who initially earn about \$32,000 a year and, therefore, cannot afford to live in the area.

and would be rented at 20 percent below-market value.

The school board cancelled the program due to budget reasons, said Lisa Brown, personnel coordinator for the San Juan Island School District. It sold one home and converted the other, she said, to use for its "Parent Partnership Program," an initiative that allows the San Juan Island School District to partner with parents who choose to home school their children. The partnership enables the district to tap into state education dollars.

"The need to provide affordable housing options is apparent."

"People misunderstand what affordable housing is," said Clark, who continues to push for the project but this time is working with a broader coalition that includes neighborhood involvement along with involvement of the town of Falmouth and its housing subcommittee.

Citing a lack of affordable housing as a stumbling block to teacher recruitment the San Juan Island School Board in Friday Harbor, Washington, announced in 2001 that it would rent two houses it owned to teachers. Preference would be given to teachers in either their first or second year in the field

"It came at a time when there were no teachers living in the homes, and we needed to expand our programs for budget reasons," said Brown, who added that "retired snow birds" who only want to live in the homes during the hot summer months have been willing to rent to teachers during the school year.

"It wasn't a problem to stop (renting the homes) because we had another option."

Christine Jordan "C.J." Sexton is a freelance writer based in Tallahassee, Florida. She has written for the Business Journal of South Florida and is a correspondent for Women's E-News.

Downtown Schools: The New Urban Frontier

By Martin Zimmerman

In recent years, downtown districts have been experiencing a comeback hardly imagined a generation ago. Cities of various sizes are scrapping downtown agendas dating from the days when the only attainable goals were adding parking decks, resuscitating ailing department stores and constructing corporate office towers. A bevy of diverse functions are being implemented—specialty shops and galleries, farmers’ markets, civic buildings, streetscape enhancements, even mass transit and housing, are coming to life again.

One such function is the downtown public school, once a casualty of the wrecking ball in the days of urban renewal. This new generation of public schools is dubbed by a host of enthusiastic observers as a “new-building type”, characterized by an integrated, even global mix of students, creative and discerning architectural forms, updated curricula, and partnerships with community institutions and services. What follows are capsule descriptions of three successful ventures: San Francisco,

Minneapolis and Raleigh, North Carolina. Each school project demonstrates how creativity, vision and long-term commitment can overcome the status quo.

San Francisco—Tenderloin Community School—Urban Melting Pot

In the fall of 1990, a meeting was held between the Bay Area Women’s and Children’s Center (BAWCC) and Superintendent Cortines of the San Francisco Unified School district, to discuss the results of an exhaustive two-year resident survey of Tenderloin, the name given to a downtown district, long reputed to be one of the toughest sections of San Francisco. Tenderloin, so-named in the days when cops and graft coexisted and prime steak was a job benefit, encompasses 56 high-density blocks just north of San Francisco’s City Hall and civic center. Their findings confirmed a radical shift in the demographic makeup of Tenderloin. Numerous rooming houses, formerly a safe

haven for the disenfranchised, were now bursting at the seams with families from China, Laos, Cambodia and the South Pacific islands. As many as 200 children lived in tight quarters on some blocks, and the swelling population was inching upwards towards the 30,000 mark.

Armed to the teeth with data, and with the backing of businesses and nonprofits, BAWCC made its case, but failed to garner the school district’s support. There was no choice except to embark on a citywide campaign to win favor from



those who held the purse. It took another eight years before the goal of final build-out could be achieved. At last in the fall of 1998 the K-5 Tenderloin Community School officially opened its doors to serve a global student population mixing the newcomers with Latino/Hispanics, African-Americans and Caucasians.

The respected Bay Area architectural firm EHHD adapted the complex program requirements to a tight 1.3 acre site along Turk Street. These requirements placed high priority on incorporating badly needed community resources within the school. For parents and students, there is a library with books in many languages, a multipurpose room available for rental, ESL classes and even a rooftop community garden. There are three playgrounds, two at ground level for preschool

Community School (TCS) has also solidified a base of downtown affiliations to augment its curriculum. These range from the Philip Burton Federal building to the San Francisco Ballet. With characteristic modesty, Ms. Wilson can now say that, "TCS has achieved its mission of educating, supporting and celebrating the entire community in all of its diversity."

Minneapolis—The Interdistrict Downtown School—Desegregation

Sometimes it takes a court order to build a school. The genesis of the Interdistrict Downtown School (IDDS) dates back to the 1970s, longer than Tenderloin, and at a time when few could imagine a school for downtown Minneapolis. But when the city of

"In recent years, downtown districts have been experiencing a comeback hardly imagined a generation ago."

and grades 1-2 and one rooftop for grades 3-6. Located below grade is the Esherick Center, named after deceased architect Joe Esherick of EHHD, which includes the Computer Center, Health Center with dental and mental health service areas and the Adult Education Center. According to Midge Wilson, director of BAWCC and a key player from the outset, there is even a handbook available in three languages explaining the various services available at Tenderloin Community School for students and families.

The design, both inside and out, shines as a bright sunburst of reds and yellows, and signals the school's presence as a refuge amidst a hustle, bustle district thought to be second only to Chinatown in density. The front façade and interiors are adorned with murals composed of 5,000 glazed tiles, a collaborative effort between school children and artist Martha Heavenston. Now in its seventh year of operation, Tenderloin

Minneapolis was placed under court order to desegregate its schools, something had to be done. Nevertheless, it took until 1989 to establish a working partnership between the city school system and its nine suburbs to resolve the desegregation issue. The outcome was an agreement to build three new magnet schools in order to comply with the courts. It was also agreed that the first of these schools was to be in downtown Minneapolis.

It took until 1993 to obtain an appropriation of \$10 million from the state of Minnesota to cover construction costs. With a decision-making structure established between all 10 school districts to guide the programming and design, the requisite committees were convened and architectural consultants were hired. All planning was to be held in check by a twin mantra: 1) devise an innovative 21st century curriculum capable of engaging the downtown community; and 2) assure that the facility is cost-effective.



downtown Minneapolis in 70 years.

Cunningham Group architects have crafted an innovative design of bold and dynamic forms. Incorporating these with many sustainable design options, such as the downtown's first active solar wall installation, have further enhanced the school's reputation. It took years of work, unprecedented cooperation across district lines, inventive curriculum planning and innovative architectural design, to forge

The outcome proved to be a remarkable combination of variables involving many additional partners. Two with the most direct impact turned out to be the University of St. Thomas, which was interested in moving its School of Education facility from St. Paul to its downtown Minneapolis campus, and the city's interest in providing additional parking to serve the entertainment/theatre district. Today both educational institutions share air rights on top of an underground parking deck financed and built by the Minneapolis Community Development Authority and just up Hennepin Avenue from several theatre marquees.

Thus the twin mantra was achieved. IDDS could link its curriculum to a host of arts and science institutions throughout downtown via Minneapolis simply by walking through an interconnected system of overhead, pedestrian walkways, and no land needed had to be taken off the tax rolls. Construction costs were minimized by omitting uses which already existed in the downtown. IDDS has no gymnasium or performing arts space, and relies on the YMCA, a nearby theater, the Minneapolis Public Library and even a private bookstore to serve these needs. In the end, IDDS would cost no more to build and operate than suburban schools. In 1998 the four story K-12 magnet school finally opened, the first in

such a successful outcome.

Raleigh—Moore Square Museums Magnet School—Cultural Partnership

Raleigh, the capital city of North Carolina, may not be as big as Minneapolis or San Francisco, but it is a community with a mission. With the completion of Moore Square Museum Magnet School (M2M3) in 2002, the long-standing mission to strengthen the downtown core and make close-in neighborhoods attractive and affordable took a big step forward. Moore Square is just a few blocks from the state capitol building and a host of downtown museums and performance facilities such as the North Carolina State Museum of Natural History, the Exploris/IMAX facility, Raleigh City Museum, the Contemporary Art Museum and Pope House Museum. This proximity is central to a prime educational objective of Moore Square Magnet School. Cathy Bradley, its first principal, has noted that “because our campus is located in the heart of downtown Raleigh, we are ideally situated to realize our goals—joining with museums and cultural organizations to enhance learning.”

Moore school's prominent corner tower faces its namesake square, which is one of five urban

squares dating back to Raleigh's founding in 1792. It serves as a beacon to welcome students and guests from throughout the Wake County system into its dynamic three-story ceremonial room and gallery space. As a magnet school its students are selected by lottery from throughout the system, with a twenty percent set-aside for students of color. Moore school also acts to anchor and blend with the scale of the adjoining neighborhood where downtown planners are encouraging affordable in-fill housing.

According to architect Charles Todd of Little Associates architects, a great deal of remedial work was required prior to actual construction once it was confirmed as a brownfield site. In the process, remains of a former prison, a gas station and auto repair shop and rubber factory had to be contended with, and contaminated soil removal to depths as great as 30 feet was required. And like its sister

running in place or tiddly-winks." Eventually, it was decided that a gym, the science labs and the cafeteria were essential, but extracurricular team sports could be sacrificed. The student body was also reduced from 1000 to 600 allowing two playing fields, surface parking and bus drop-off to be located inconspicuously behind the school. Last year, M2M3's success on all of these fronts brought national recognition in the form of an EPA Smart Growth Award.

Will This Trend Continue?

Only time can tell. But a new awareness seems to be emerging as greater downtown emphasis is placed on the cross-fertilization of racial and ethnic diversity, culture and education. Quality public schools are being recognized as important agents not only for downtowns

"Quality public schools are being recognized as important agents... for downtowns to continue attracting residents and jobs."

schools in Minneapolis and San Francisco, lawns and large playing fields that are taken for granted on twenty-acre suburban sites had to be reduced to fit an urban city block of four-acres. As one of the curriculum planners points out wryly, "We weren't sure at the time if the primary recreation activity was to be

to continue attracting residents and jobs, but equally important: the provision of as broad a range of urban choice and amenity as possible.

Martin Zimmerman is an urban affairs writer, architect and city planner currently based in Charlotte N.C.

Smart Growth and the Community School Vision

By John Van Gieson

Community school advocates and leaders of the Smart Growth movement use the same principles and partnerships to promote better schools for our children.

When her children experienced behavior problems after B. G. Gray ended an abusive relationship, the Portland, Oregon, home care worker knew where to turn for help—her daughter’s school.

The school, Earl Boyles Elementary School, is a community school located in a tough neighborhood known as “Felony Flats” on the east side of Portland. It offers a wide array of after-school programs, counseling, health care and social services to students and parents, like Gray, who need help.

“My kids and I came out of very bad abuse, and they helped us a lot,” Gray said. “I don’t think we would have made it without their help and support.” After transferring to Earl Boyles from a regular school, “my kids actually started making progress in their personal life, their attitudes and their behavior, as well as their grades,” she said.

Her daughter, who once hated to get up in the morning to go to school, actually looked forward to the classes she took in the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) program at Earl Boyles, Gray said.

“Our SUN community schools are our best tool to help ensure at-risk kids are able to learn in school and stay out of trouble after the school day ends,” said Multnomah County Chair Diane Linn. “This helps not only these children and their families, but our whole community.”

The concept of merging social services into schools dates to the late 1800s when



desperately poor immigrant children were crowding urban schools, but the movement has really taken off over the last 15 to 20 years, fueled in part by a new wave of immigration.

A community school is a school where local partners join forces with the school district to provide before and after school programs meeting the educational, health, mental health and social services needs of the students, their parents and the community at large. Community schools are usually open from early morning until late evening.

“It’s like a one-stop shop for families,” said Suzanne Yeager, executive director of communications for the Saint Paul, Minnesota, public schools.

Community schools are tailored to meet community needs, with parents and community members involved in determining what kind of programs they want at their school, resulting in considerable differences between programs, even in the same district.

School districts typically set rigid academic

standards for their community schools and staff them with exceptional principals and teachers. Services the students receive include medical referrals, dental clinics, vision screening, counseling, after-school programs, arts classes, sports programs and drug, violence and pregnancy prevention programs.

Services provided to parents include parenting classes, English classes for immigrants and assistance in negotiating the maze of social services. Community school counselors help parents resolve basic issues such as food and housing that affect their children's ability to succeed in school.

Wilma Goudy, a family intervention specialist at Earl Boyles, helped a single father with two sons attending the school get back on his feet after they were evicted from their apartment. Goudy works for Metropolitan Family Services, which partners with 10 community schools in the Portland area.

"To make a long story short, there were three of us from different agencies that paid money for his apartment, and he was able to move from temporary housing to permanent housing," she said. "We were able to furnish

system. In Portland, it was city and county government. In New York City, it's the Children's Aid Society, a 153 year-old social services agency that focuses on meeting the needs of children. In Saint Paul, the driving force was the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, founded in 1906 by a prominent local businessman.

"What's unique about this new focus on community schools is it's not just the schools that are leading the effort, it's the United Way, social service organizations, philanthropies, cities, counties and universities," said Martin J. Blank, staff director of the Coalition for Public Schools in Washington, D.C.

It takes a big table when members of the School Community Council of the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation in Evansville, Indiana, meet to discuss their 21st Century Community Learning Centers program serving 10 schools.

"We have 65 to 70 community agencies sitting at the table actively collaborating," said Cathlin Gray, assistant superintendent of the Evansville Vanderburgh schools. "At each of the 21st Century Schools there is a

"We cleared out a lot of bad housing. We're systemically upgrading the neighborhood."

the apartment, get the kids' beds and assist with food and the electric bill."

Now, Goudy said, the boys "are doing really well. They're both in school. It's a big deal for their self-esteem, their self-worth. It's really uncomfortable for a kid to come to school and say, 'We're homeless.'"

To succeed, community schools need outside partners, and the impetus to develop full-service schools in a particular community often comes from outside the school

site council, and the site council is school-based. Members include parents, teachers and community agencies."

Perhaps the most impressive argument for community schools is that their ability to engage students and parents leads to dramatic improvements in grades and test scores. In a report entitled "Making the Difference, Research and Practice in Community Schools," the Coalition for Community Schools assessed the results of programs in 20 schools reaching from Boston to Carson, California.

“Fifteen of the 20 initiatives in this study reported improvement in student academic achievement, as measured by improved grades in school courses and scores in proficiency testing,” the report said.

In one year, Dayton’s Bluff Achievement Plus Elementary School in Saint Paul reported gains of 35 percent in math scores and 28 percent in reading scores on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment test, according to a Saint Paul Public Schools case study report entitled “The Transformation.” This

low-income kids learn,” said Tom Kingston, president of the Wilder Foundation. “It’s taken us seven years, but we’ve finally gotten there. In the last two years we’ve gotten incredible test scores. Dayton’s Bluff is catching up with the suburban schools.”

Advocates say the nurturing nature of community schools fosters a sense of safety and security in the school that has a positive impact on the surrounding community.

In New York, the Children’s Aid Society runs

“Perhaps the most impressive argument for community schools is that their ability to engage students and parents leads to dramatic improvements in grades and test scores.

in a school where up to 80 percent of the teachers used to call in sick on a given day, the report said.

At Cedar Hall Elementary School in Evansville, Cathlin Gray said, the number of students passing Indiana’s state test has increased from 23 percent to 65 percent.

“We got raw improvements across the board,” she said. “But we’re not there yet.”

Turning an under-achieving school in a neighborhood riddled with social problems into a community school that compares favorably with the better suburban schools is no easy task, as a number of school systems have learned.

It took several years, key changes of administrators and a restructuring demanded by the major partner, the Wilder Foundation, for the Achievement Plus community school program to deliver results in Saint Paul.

“We had an agenda for school reform, and we felt if we got the right services and staff in place we could dramatically change how

13 community schools in partnership with the city school system. The flagship school, Intermediate School 218, is located in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan, serving a lower-income neighborhood comprised largely of immigrants from the Dominican Republic.

As the school was being developed in the early 1990s, Washington Heights had the city’s most crowded schools and one of its highest crime rates. It was known for drug dealers who catered to suburban buyers and was racked by several days of rioting after a police officer shot and killed a drug dealer in 1993.

Today, I.S. 218, also known as the Salome Urena Middle Academies after a famous Dominican poet and educator, is a model school in a neighborhood where the crime rate has dropped dramatically. Washington Heights has become one of New York’s hottest real estate markets.

“There were hardly any services before the community school,” said Hersilia Mendez, assistant director of the Children’s Aid Society

program at I.S. 218. “I really believe that we made a difference.”

Following the riots, the school worked to defuse tensions between the community and the police. “Through the school we started to work with the police and the students in getting to know each other and the students are actually teaching the police Spanish,” Mendez said.

The community school movement is growing rapidly, but many challenges remain. To develop successful community schools, Blank said, requires a commitment by educators, support by community leaders, involvement of parents, and the participation of dedicated partners.

“Historically, schools have tended to be

“Community schools require a commitment by educators, support by community leaders, involvement of parents, and the participation of dedicated partners.”

In Saint Paul, Kingston said, the changes at Dayton’s Bluff school have had a positive impact on the housing market. His foundation is developing affordable housing in the area.

“It was one of the key factors in turning around the real estate market,” he said. “We cleared out a lot of bad housing. We’re systemically upgrading the neighborhood.”

isolated,” he said. “School officials like to be in charge. After 10 to 15 years of pressure for accountability, many school leaders have begun to reach out to others they need to bring in if our schools are going to succeed.”

John Van Gieson is a freelance writer based in Tallahassee, Florida. He owns and runs Van Gieson Media Relations, Inc.

The Smart Growth Connection

Community school advocates and leaders of the Smart Growth movement have joined forces in an informal alliance promoting community schools as a focal point of both new communities and the restoration of decaying inner city neighborhoods.

They are drawing strength from education reformers who have concluded that small schools are better for kids than the mega-schools that school districts have tended to build on vacant land on the edge of town. Their research shows that children attending smaller schools get better grades, participate more in school activities and are more likely to go to college.

As Sam Passmore put it in a Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities report on Education and Smart Growth, "The interests of Smart Growth advocates and education reformers converge on a simple, but powerful idea, the small neighborhood school." Especially when those small neighborhood schools are community schools.

In an article for the American School Board Journal, Washington, D.C., consultants Barbara McCann and Constance Beaumont outlined these characteristics of Smart Growth schools:

- ▶ Small in size.
- ▶ Broad community involvement.
- ▶ High-quality education.
- ▶ Students can walk to school.
- ▶ Serve as community schools.
- ▶ Good fit for the neighborhood.
- ▶ Use existing facilities wherever possible.

Some Smart Growth developers are incorporating community schools into the new communities they are building. In Florida, the developers of Lake Nona, an 8,000-acre planned community four miles southeast of the Orlando International Airport, built the NorthLake Park Community School and leased it back to the Orange County School District. The Lake Nona Land Company partnered with the YMCA and the Orlando Regional Healthcare System to offer fitness and wellness programs at the school.

The merger of the community school, smaller schools and Smart Growth movements typically occurs when planners are building new schools or renovating old ones as integral components of plans to revitalize deteriorated inner city neighborhoods.

One of the best examples of a new inner city school that merges the community school concept with Smart Growth principles is the Tenderloin Community School located in a blighted San Francisco neighborhood with a large population of Asian immigrants.

The school was developed under the leadership of the Bay Area Women and Children's Center, which worked closely with neighborhood residents to design a school that met their needs. The result: a colorful new building, serving 540 students, that includes a community center, medical and dental facilities, an adult education center, a community kitchen and a roof garden.

As part of a massive project to redevelop blighted downtown areas along the Tennessee River, Chattanooga officials built two new magnet schools serving the inner city, the Battle Academy

The Smart Growth Connection (continued)

of Teaching and Learning and the Brown Academy of Classical Studies. The Brown Academy was built with private funds.

The 425-student Adams School in downtown St. Louis, Missouri, is frequently cited as an outstanding example of a renovation project that relies on Smart Growth principles to provide better service to a rundown inner city neighborhood.

The \$12.6 million cost of renovating two vacant school buildings that were constructed in the late 1800s and adding a modern addition was shared by a public-private partnership that included the Washington University Medical Center, Firststart Bank, the Barnes-Jewish Hospital Foundation and the St. Louis Board of Education. The St. Louis Cardinals baseball team paid for recreational facilities.

The school was renovated as part of a \$180 million plan to restore the Forest Park Southeast neighborhood. The community center includes a teen center, weight room, police substation, laundry facilities, community offices and adult education programs.

The state of New Jersey has made community schools the centerpiece of an \$8.6 billion plan to revitalize distressed neighborhoods. The state is urging local school districts to locate recreation and fitness, arts, health care and workforce training into the community schools built under the program.

The idea of smaller schools is gaining acceptance, but the movement has been hampered by old attitudes and requirements that promote construction of large new schools. In many states spacious campuses are required when new schools are built and the “two thirds” rule holds that an old school should not be renovated if the cost is more than two-thirds the cost of building a new school.

Such attitudes, regulations and law must be changed in many places in order to develop Smart Growth schools.

“When considering the transition to small neighborhood schools, local officials need to be reassured that they are not reinventing the wheel,” Passmore said.

School Funding as Land Use Policy

By Stephen Smith

Reliance on the property tax, coupled with traditional state funding formulas, may distort local land use decisions and encourage sprawl.

Several reports have documented the growing need for school facilities in states across the nation. With many schools nearing the end of their service, a debate has emerged over whether to renovate or build new schools. Such debate has grown to embrace other public policy concerns such as unmitigated, low-density sprawl, how public funds would most efficiently be used and how land use policy and education finance interact with residential and commercial development.

Widespread Need for Schools

The federal government in 1999 estimated that 45 million elementary and secondary students attend approximately 86,000 public schools in the United States. Recent estimates also have found the average school building

federal government estimates that annual elementary and secondary school construction expenditures in the U.S. rose by 40 percent from 1990 – 1998. This increase was marked by a significant acceleration in school facilities construction in the latter half of the 1990s.

According to a report issued jointly by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) much of this spending increase may be attributed to costs associated with building new schools.

From 1990-1998, approximately \$58 billion was spent to construct new facilities, \$45 billion was spent building additions to existing facilities and \$21 billion was used to renovate existing facilities. A closer look at these figures reveals a growing trend toward school renovation. This

“Critics have charged that building new school facilities in favor of renovating antiquated facilities often is detrimental to communities and the environment.”

to be more than 40 years old and in need of repair or replacement (see Table below).¹

School Construction Expenditures Surge
Although there is a great deal of policy variation among states and localities as to what, and how much data, are collected regarding the various funding streams that are tapped for school construction or capital outlay, the

cause often is championed by communities and organizations interested in maintaining schools as social and cultural centers.

Insufficient Data Complicate Analysis

Amid the massive expenditures on school construction identified by GAO, the

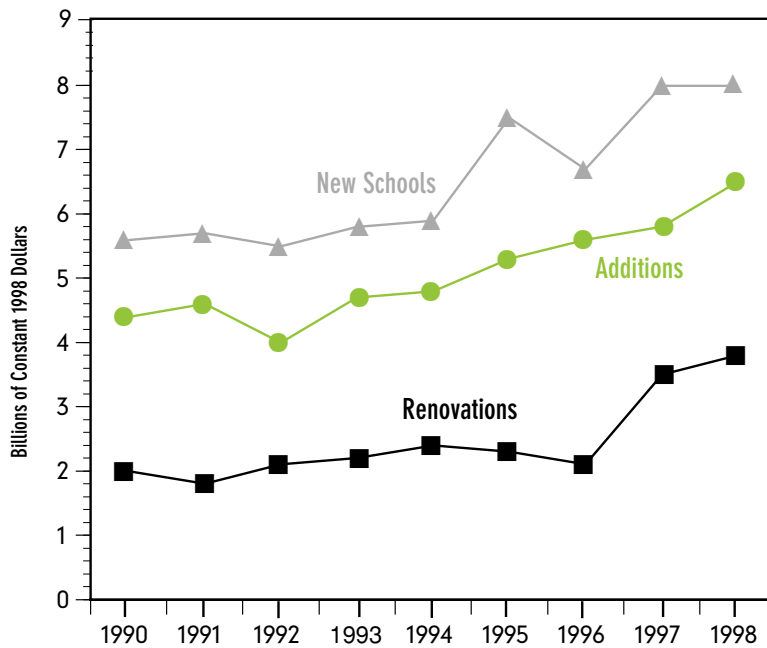
Age of public schools based on years since construction of the main instructional building(s), years since most recent major renovation, and functional age of the school, by school characteristics: 1999

School characteristic	Years since construction	Years since most recent renovation	Functional age of the school*
All public schools	40	11	16
School instructional level			
Elementary school	40	11	16
High school	40	11	15
Combined	41	8	12
School enrollment size			
Less than 300	43	15	20
300 to 599	42	11	15
600 or more	35	9	14
Locale			
Central city	42	12	17
Urban fringe/large town	37	10	14
Rural/small town	41	12	16
Region			
Northeast	43	13	14
Midwest	44	13	18
South	36	10	15
West	37	8	15

* Functional age is defined as the age of the school based on the year of the most recent renovation or the year of construction of the main instructional building(s) if no renovation has occurred.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, Survey on the Condition of Public School Facilities, 1999.

1998 Contract Expenditures for Additions, Renovations and New Schools



Source: U.S. General Accounting Office, Report to the Chairman, Committee on Education and the Workforce, House of Representatives, *School Facilities Construction Expenditures Have Grown Significantly in Recent Years, 2000*.

organization reports that a lack of complete and current national data exists regarding how much annual funding is available to local school districts for school construction projects and the prevailing funding sources used.

Although some state education agencies may record information regarding local school construction bonds approved by voters, others do not consistently record such data. This endangers accurate reporting of how these projects are funded throughout the nation.

There also is a great deal of variation among local and state funding streams tapped to fund school construction projects. GAO reports that amounts of state or local funding flowing through these streams and tributaries can change annually. Most states use a combination of local and state resources to fund school facilities construction.²

Expenditures Analysis

According to GAO, there were significant changes in how construction contracts were

distributed from 1990 to 1998. These changes show that a growing proportion of funding is being spent on school building renovation. Although renovations during this period account for less than 20 percent of total contracted construction spending, these expenditures indicate that renovation activity rose approximately 80 percent during that period (see Figure above).

School Renovation Trend Emerges

According to GAO research, the thrust toward school renovation since the late 1990s reflects an increased awareness among the general public and state and local officials that deteriorated school buildings can be perceived as a blight to communities as well as a threat to education adequacy and a detriment to “smart growth” efforts designed to curtail sprawl.

School renovation expenditures are only part of the picture. During the same period, expenditures for school building additions rose 50 percent and new facilities construction increased more than 40 percent. GAO figures

indicate that there has been an overall surge in virtually every type of school construction activity.³

School Construction Market Demographics

Construction industry experts characterize the school market as “regional.” According to McGraw-Hill Construction, the industry has found that construction activity in the South and West have accelerated in recent years as activity in other regions slows. In the late 1960s for example, school construction in the Northeast accounted for approximately 25 percent of the U.S. school construction market, while West comprised less than 20 percent. By 1982, McGraw-Hill estimates that the Northeast’s share of the national market dropped to 9 percent, while the West’s stake in the national market grew to nearly 25 percent.

Future Projections

McGraw-Hill estimates that over the next decade, K-12 student enrollment is projected to rise 5 percent each year. While this is down from the 20 percent annual increases in K-12

for the requisite real estate, construction and renovation services needed to provide an adequate education in these facilities.

Amid the acceleration in real estate development often spurred by the expansive school construction activity of the past decade, critics have charged that building new school facilities in favor of renovating antiquated facilities often is detrimental to communities and the environment, causing unbridled growth. The National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) contends that several public policies, such as acreage requirements for school construction, funding formulas and zoning practices, are promoting sprawl on outlying, undeveloped land at the expense of smaller community-centered schools in older neighborhoods.⁵

Acreage Standards

NTHP and organizations such as the Rural School and Community Trust contend that state departments of education too often adhere to an arbitrary number of acres that schools are required to inhabit in order to be built. (See *Sprawl Schools and Small Schools*

“When policymakers make land use decisions based on projected tax revenues, by practicing “fiscal zoning,” they may unwittingly affect the developing form of the physical landscape.”

enrollment seen in the 1990s, the market is expected to operate near peak levels despite widespread funding challenges. While state fiscal problems also are expected to play a role in retarding the double-digit growth of previous years, McGraw-Hill predicts that underlying demographics will strengthen the school building market well into the future.⁴

Funding limitations and the continuing school construction boom have sparked greater scrutiny of how school districts confront the demand

in this chapter.) These acreage standards, adopted through either mandate or suggestion stem from guidelines established by the Council of Educational Facilities Planners International (CEFPI).

Some states in fact, use formulas that only apply to the maximum amount of state funding available and allow districts to locally fund acreage beyond or below the acreage requirements specified in policy. Not all states have set acreage standards.

The Rural School Community Trust says that sites based on many established acreage standards are so large, that in most areas the schools must be constructed in remote locations, which further consumes land, natural resources and funding for parking and transportation. Because of these factors, acreage standards often contain hidden costs and force commutes that drive communities apart in rural and suburban communities where expansion appears to be the norm. ⁶

Even when there is potential flexibility in acreage standards policy, NTHP says that school districts are not generally required to concede to community requests for renovation, and as the statistics show, they often opt to build new facilities.

State Funding Biases

Beyond acreage standards, NTHP and others say that state funding systems perpetuate sprawl by perpetuating the use of antiquated and unfounded state funding formulas. Many states use what commonly is known as known as the “percentage rule” to determine if a school will be renovated or built anew. Although these percentages vary among the states, they commonly are set at 50 percent or higher and invoked based on the cost of renovation vs. new facilities construction and vary among the states. Therefore, if the cost of renovating a school exceeds the set percentage of new construction cost, new construction most often is chosen over renovation.

Though in many states percentage rules, like acreage standards, are not inflexible mandates, school districts may enforce them as though they were law. Critics in the meanwhile, question the origins of the percentage rule. ⁷

Governing Magazine reports that the origin of the percentage rule in school facilities construction decisions stems from a 50 year-

old trade magazine article in which Columbia University education professor Henry Linn suggested that if the cost of renovating a school is more than half of the cost of building a new facility, school districts would be better off paying to build new schools. ⁸

NTHP says that the widespread application of “percentage rules” prevent full and effective cost analyses by state and local governments and unfairly eliminate potential renovation projects before their merits are adequately considered. Frequently, new construction project cost estimates fail to include costs associated with land acquisition for the new school site, water and sewer line extensions, road work and transportation. Also, application of the “percentage rule” may omit the cost of maintaining or demolishing the school building that was vacated. Such oversights may further conceal additional costs associated with new facilities construction projects and perpetuate sprawl.

Deferred Maintenance Discourages Restoration

NTHP has found that wear and tear on school facilities is further accelerated by policies that force building maintenance to compete with school operational budgets for funding. Cash-strapped school districts often are more likely to use available funding for staffing and other needs than to perform building maintenance that likely could save on the cost of repairs in the long term. When building repairs become unavoidable, it often seems simpler to scrap the dilapidated facility for a new one.

Another policy further perpetuates this problem according to NTHP, is the availability of state and federal tax incentives for private corporations to renovate historic buildings that have been removed from service. Public agencies such as school districts usually receive no such financial incentives for facilities renovation. ⁹

Fiscal Zoning

Policymakers often favor commercial over residential development, as the former is thought to generate greater net tax revenues while the latter generates school-age children and costs for the education system. When policymakers make land use decisions based on projected tax revenues, by practicing “fiscal zoning,” they may unwittingly affect the developing form of the physical landscape—and not necessarily for the better.¹⁰

Fiscal zoning discourages residential development in favor of the big-ticket projects. Sustainable economic development, however, requires a balance of residential and nonresidential uses.¹¹

Even in areas where mechanisms are in place to encourage efficient planning and land use, school districts often have the authority to make school site decisions that conflict with municipal efforts to promote “smart growth.”

When school districts choose to build new facilities in remote areas, plans for sustainable land use can be thwarted. Even when there is no such planning in place, school site locations can inadvertently alter a community’s future growth patterns and help to perpetuate sprawl.

Policy Recommendations

Education World reports that integrating the following policies into the school facilities decision making process likely would serve to help build stronger, more cohesive communities and reduce the environmental blight posed by sprawl.

- ▶ Eliminate arbitrary acreage standards that undermine the ability of established communities to retain and upgrade older schools.

- ▶ Eliminate funding biases that favor new construction.
- ▶ Avoid building massive schools in remote locations that stimulate sprawl.
- ▶ Encourage school districts to cooperate with other institutions to share playgrounds and parking areas.
- ▶ Establish guidelines to ensure adequate school building maintenance.
- ▶ Require feasibility studies comparing the costs of new schools with the costs of renovating existing schools.
- ▶ Ensure that a minimum of 50 percent of the students can walk or bike to school.
- ▶ When a school is no longer suitable for teaching kids, make plans for an adaptive use.
- ▶ Provide education in school-renovation techniques.¹²

Conclusion

Numerous intricate layers of public policy contribute to sprawl and discourage efficiency in land planning and use. Interactions among these policies and school finance systems pose complex challenges to policymakers and communities seeking to make the most of limited school funding and natural resources.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the issue of school renovation vs. new construction. While no single policy has a preeminent effect on shaping development, effective policy reforms should be comprehensive and aligned with established methods to encourage “smarter” growth. Such an alignment ultimately would extend school finance dollars as well as community capacity to foster sustainable development.

Notes

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- ⁴ Demographics Drive Market Kids Keep School Work Going Strong, Tim Grogan, Engineering News Record, (Feb. 2, 2004). Accessed Nov. 2004 via Internet at: <http://enr.construction.com/features/education/archives/040202c.asp>
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- ¹¹ Olympia Master Builders, Research Council Head Says Growth Pays for Itself (2004). Accessed Nov. 2004 via Internet at: <http://www.omb.org/index.cfm/MenuItemID/158.htm>
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