Smart School Siting

EDUCATION IN THE HEART OF A COMMUNITY

A school's first community function is to provide students a quality education; but schools are also part of the community fabric, and are most highly valued when they are located and perform as the "heart" of a community. The lifespan of a school and its role in the community should be considered in the school site selection process.

In order to best serve a community, school site selection should align with community plans for greater connectivity, health, and social cohesion. Smart school siting provides a community-centered facility for education, safe access to physical activity, and overall accessibility that improves quality of life for students and communities.

School Sites Should Consider Your Community

Schools are public facilities that are most valued when they succeed in cultivating community support and connection. A school located near its community, and available for recreation, entertainment, congregation and needed services, becomes a valued resource in the community.

Smart school site selection considers the best location for community usage throughout its lifespan. The facility should maximize connectivity with the community, support community growth and consider public health impacts of the surrounding area.

Smart school sites are:

- Located deliberately based on proximity to student population
- Suited to accommodate for all modes of transportation
- Considerate of maximizing community and student health
- Determined through a process integrated with greater community planning
- Located near other community amenities for shared use opportunities

This resource guide is referenced as *"Smart School Siting: A Resource Guide"* in the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission's 2015 Ohio School Design Manual (OSDM).

The information and resources will be valuable before and during the site selection process since a school site should not be determined solely by:

- Site size
- Donated land
- Plans that do not include costs over the lifetime use of the school, such as transportation and maintenance
- The prioritization of building new

Introductory Resources:

The Oregon School Siting Handbook (pg 23)

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Helping Johnny Walk to School

Townmakers Guide: Livable Schools

Consider the Proximity of Your Student Population

One of the most important considerations when siting a school facility is the proximity to the student population Students and families that live within walking or biking distance to your school benefit from their increased daily physical activity. It can improve concentration and behavior in the classroom, lower school transportation costs, improve health indicators such as obesity and other chronic disease and promote long-lasting healthy lifestyles.

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) can generate student proximity maps for current or potential school locations in order to assist with school siting decisions. Districts submit student addresses to ODOT, and they generate a geographic information systems map that shows the location of student residences in proximity to the school location within a 2 mile radius.

Maintaining schools close to students or building new schools within communities has the ability to:

- Increase student health by encouraging students to walk and bike to school
- Decrease traffic and pollution immediately around schools which are harmful to students
- Increase community cohesion and safety due to more activity in neighborhoods
- Decrease the burden of school transportation costs by reducing bussing

The Ohio Department of Transportation can provide proximity maps to school districts that will map the location of the current student population in proximity to the school site. For more information, visit www.bike.ohio.gov and go to Safe Routes To School/Develop your SRTS Program.

Tips and Resources:
Consider the full costs of building far from the population served: bussing, extending utilities, parking and paving, the impact of urban sprawl, etc.

The ODOT Map Room, to request proximity maps.

EPA School Siting Guidelines

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Accommodate all Modes of Transportation

Accommodating walking and biking, as well as vehicle and bus transportation, will create a safer and more accessible school. Planning the access points and paths for walkers and students on bikes before you break ground will eliminate conflict, streamline egress and develop a safe environment for all modes. Incorporating all modes of transportation in the school plan and footprint, and connecting with community planners about how your site will influence growth, development and transportation plans will benefit the community.

Consider pedestrians and bicyclists as well as traffic patterns, volume, access and physical activity opportunities at the school by:

- Connecting sidewalks
- Creating separate entrances for motorized and non-motorized transportation
- Ensuring easy access from the street to the front door
- Using way finding and signage to make safe routes clear
- Providing safe, protected bicycle parking
- Considering remote student drop-off locations
- Locating parking lots further from school.

In a CDC survey, parents cited long distances as a primary barrier to their children walking or biking to school.

Tips and Resources:

ODOT, Bike and Pedestrian Program

Federal Highway Administration, Bicycle and Pedestrian Program

Ohio metropolitan or regional planning organizations (MPO)

Local transportation resources: contact your county, city, township or other government entity with transportation decision-making authority in your community. Start with the metropolitan or regional planning organizations if you are located in their service area.

MPOs that could provide walk/bike audits

Bike Parking

Providing safe, convenient bike parking is important not only to fulfill the current demand but also to encourage and legitimize bicycling as a mode of transportation to school. Consider providing bike parking for about 10 percent of the student population that lives within one mile from school. Ideal bike parking should be located in several areas around the school, close to entrances, sheltered from the elements, and in an area with natural community and school surveillance. Consider temporary parking outside for visitors and protected options for permanent student and staff bicycle parking.

Tips and Resources:

Removable bike racks could be moved for snow removal or brought out of storage for events such as football games or school fairs.

Safe Routes to School National Partnership: Bicycle Parking, Storage and Security at Schools webinar

Safe Routes to School Bicycle Parking Guide (page 5-Basic Rule of Thumb)

Transportation Alternatives

Association of Pedestrian and Bicyclist Professionals recommendations suggests that public schools provide 1.5 bike parking spots for every 20 students.

Remote Student Drop-Off

One strategy to make walking and biking a convenient, safe option is to organize remote student drop-offs. These are locations where students and parents meet to walk or bike to school together, usually about a mile or less from school. The benefits of one-mile student drop-offs include: minimizing traffic around schools, maximizing safety of bicyclists and pedestrians around schools, increasing physical activity of students, and decreasing school transportation costs and traffic pollution.

Tips and Resources:

Removable bike racks could be moved for snow removal or brought out of storage for events such as football games or school fairs!

Get out & Get Moving: Opportunities to Walk to School Through Remote Drop-Off Programs

How to Start a Remote Drop-Off Program (Denver, CO)

Consider Community Health

Beyond assessing the environmental impact of school sites, it is also important to consider the impact of school siting and facility design on the health factors in a community. Examples of health factors include: access to exercise opportunities, rates of crime, physical inactivity, and long commutes. Information on health factors specific to your neighborhood can be explored with local health departments. One example may be assessing how school sites can encourage or inhibit physical activity before, during and after the school day.

Assess the impact of school siting on health by conducting a Health Impact Assessment (HIA). An HIA is a systematic process that determines the potential health impacts of a proposed policy, plan or project on the health of a population. HIAs consider how to maximize health benefits and minimize adverse health outcomes while utilizing input from communities, stakeholders and various evidence resources. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides information on conducting a HIA.

Additional community health considerations include:

- Air quality in and around school sites, and how school transportation will effect pollution levels
- Recreation and physical activity opportunities available for students and residents
- Your community's disparate health factors; contact your local health department for information

Tips and Resources:

An HIA is a process that determines the potential health impacts of a proposed policy, plan or project on the health of a population.

Contact your local health department! Local or state health departments can provide data on community health factors and outcomes, and resources to improve community health.

The CDC provides information on conducting health impact assessments.

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World Health Organization Health Impact Assessment

Integrate School Planning into the Community Planning

In order for a school to best connect with its community, the site selection and facility design process should align with community planning activities. Contact your community's development department, transportation or public service agencies, health department and other planning entities, for services and expertise that may maximize the function of your school during its lifespan. Community input elevates public trust and provides transparency in the siting process. This will ensure educated and holistic siting decisions that maximize long term usage, accessibility and relevance.

For local economic/business development plans, transportation plans, community health plans, community growth plans, and more, contact your communities:

- Metropolitan or regional planning organization
- Bike/pedestrian coordinator
- SRTS coordinator
- Planning departments which may track information such as future planning and population growth
- City, county or regional health departments
- Advocacy organizations.

In 2010, 83% of Ohio's population lived within a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) area.
(Federal Highway Administration Census, 2010)

Tips and Resources:
Organizations may offer walk or bike audits, which assess the transportation infrastructure and safety issues surrounding a school and can highlight the pros and cons of a particular location.

Walk audit online resources may be found at:
The CDC

Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center

National Center for Safe Routes to School

Ohio metropolitan and regional planning organizations

Ohio local health departments

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Consider the Benefits of Shared Use

Shared use (also called community or joint use) is an arrangement or agreement between schools and another entity, such as a government agency, nonprofit or community organization, to utilize indoor or outdoor space for recreation, programs, meetings or other purposes, after school hours or on weekends. Shared use also encompasses "open space" agreements, which are policies districts have to allow playgrounds, tracks and ball fields to be used by the public.

Shared use can also be built into the school siting process by planning and building shared facilities, siting in relation to other community assets and building with multiple uses in mind. Shared use partnerships can connect schools to other public entities such as libraries, recreation centers, colleges and universities, YMCAs , and urban leagues. Community development and planning agencies can assist with making connections, developing plans and creating facilities with multiple uses throughout the day and over their lifespan.

Shared use between schools and communities has several benefits including:

- Saving schools the cost of building and operating redundant facilities
- Increasing physical activity, overall health and academic achievement
- Increasing community cohesion and community support of schools through levies and bonds

Tips and Resources:
Ideas for shared use include libraries, gymnasiums, parks, parking lots, field space, fitness facilities, pools and playgrounds.

Ohio Open the Doors For Health

Shared Use National Clearinghouse

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A 2003 poll of Ohio residents found that 65 percent of people believed that city and school district dollars should be combined to build recreation and general public use facilities.
(KnowledgeWorks 2003)

For further assistance with school siting, active transportation, shared use or the public health impacts of school siting, contact:

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Creating Healthy Communities
Preventing Chronic Diseases in Ohio

Safe Routes to School National Partnership
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