

Department of
Education

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POLICIES

- 1 Reduce or eliminate acreage standards for K-12 schools
- 2 Help communities coordinate school siting and land use planning
- 3 Revise school construction funding formulas
- 4 Increase State share of education costs in communities that are increasing density
- 5 Establish a “Safe Routes to School” program
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- 8 Develop a land use and development curriculum for K-12 students
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Schools have traditionally been the focal points of our communities. They provide a place to educate our children, but can also add architectural beauty, anchor a community’s “public realm” and give citizens access to recreational, civic and public space.

If located far from neighborhood centers, however, schools no longer serve as the hub of community life. Students, teachers and parents cannot walk or bicycle to school, but must drive, leading to traffic congestion, commuting costs, road-building expenses, poorer air quality and more dangerous streets for those students who do walk. Young families that otherwise might stay in urban centers and existing communities are forced to uproot themselves as their children get older.

In this section, we discuss ways that the school can remain, or once again become, the heart of community life and at the same time save taxpayer money, encourage efficient development patterns, and promote more active and healthy lifestyles for our children.



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Policies that Work: A Governors' Guide to Growth and Development
<http://www.govinstitute.org/policyguide>

1

Reduce or eliminate acreage standards for K-12 schools

ACTION

In 27 states, school boards must follow acreage guidelines when preparing plans and requesting financial assistance for new construction. The same goes for the maintenance, repair and renovation of existing school buildings.

Schools and communities would benefit, however, if states reduced or eliminated such guidelines. Requiring unnecessarily large lots for public schools often forces school boards to build outside existing towns or developed neighborhoods, and the remoteness makes it difficult for schools to serve as centers of community they once were.

The location also can increase costs - for everyone. If schools are far from where they live, students must get there by car or bus, which is more expensive than walking. Locating schools far from the community also can lead to increased taxpayer expenses, because water lines, sewer lines and roads often must be built to service the schools.

Minimum acreage standards prevent community and education leaders from choosing the best site based simply on the school's and the community's needs. School investments can spur economic development, yet minimum acreage standards make it difficult for communities to take full advantage of their investment.

PROCESS

The process for reducing or eliminating acreage minimums varies from state to state. The standards may be set by statute or as a departmental guideline. Where acreage standards are not established by statute, the Department of Education can issue new guidelines. In 2004, the Council of Educational Facility Planners International established model acreage standards that encourage smaller, neighborhood-centered schools. States can adopt these model standards or modify them to fit their needs.

EXAMPLE

South Carolina's Minimum Acreage Requirements

In 2003, South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford signed legislation eliminating the state's minimum acreage for K-12 schools. The Office of School Facilities in South Carolina's Department of Education has revised its

planning and construction guidelines to reflect the elimination of the minimum acreage requirements. It now encourages districts to consider the standards set by the Council of Educational Facility Planners International.

South Carolina Office of School Facilities: <http://ed.sc.gov/agency/offices/sf>

2

Help communities coordinate school siting and land use planning

ACTION

In many communities, school-siting decisions and land-use planning are disconnected. In some instances, school districts are even exempt from local land-use laws. States can provide incentives to increase coordination between school districts and local planners so that school siting reflects the values and needs of the community.

PROCESS

States can encourage coordination of school-siting and land-use decisions by offering incentives to school boards and local governments to build schools that students can easily and safely reach on foot. The incentives could take the form of planning grants to either entity, or state-level resources, ranging from supportive guidelines to technical assistance provided directly from the state planning agency or the Department of Education.

EXAMPLE

Maine's School Construction Policy

Beginning in the mid-1990s, Maine recognized the relationship between land use planning, school construction and the costs associated with dispersed development patterns. State planning and education officials noted that despite declining enrollments, spending on school construction was rising significantly. In addition to passing legislation that made renovation of existing schools easier, the State Education Department and the Office of State Planning launched an education and technical assistance effort that encouraged coordinated land-use and school-siting decisions. By directing the State Planning Office to work with the Education Department and by providing state funds to be used for renovation and technical assistance, Maine has encouraged more collaboration between local school districts and municipal planners.



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Maine School Construction Policy: <http://www.maine.gov/spollanduse/docs/techassist/ingcspawlspeech.pdf>

3 Revise school construction funding formulas

ACTION

Some states' school funding formulas favor new construction in outlying areas over building or renovating schools in existing cities and towns. Those funding formulas arbitrarily take investment decisions out of the hands of school districts and their communities.

State policies and formulas often cap funding for school renovations, which unnecessarily pushes administrators to build new schools - even when they'd prefer to rehabilitate of an existing building. Many states have a "two-thirds rule," under which school districts are required or at least encouraged to build a new school when renovation costs exceed two-thirds, or some other set portion, of the construction costs of a new school. Not following the guideline can lead to forfeiture of state funding in some states.

The State should revise the formulas to instead favor the rehabilitation of existing schools, or at least the construction of schools in centrally located districts.

PROCESS

Governors can encourage rehabilitation of existing schools by supporting legislation that modifies the "two-thirds" rule or by encouraging the Department of Education to modify the rule so that school rehabilitation or construction in older communities is generally favored over new construction outside existing communities. The change would give school districts more flexibility in using state money to rehabilitate older buildings.

The state Department of Education also may need to conduct outreach to school districts about the benefits of renovation and may need to help local districts adopt policies and practices that support renovation. After years of pushing in the opposite direction, it may be necessary to point out that improving existing schools provides community benefits that are greater than can be seen through a simple test of comparative building costs. The two-thirds rule is so ingrained in the educational community that school districts often follow it even when state funding or approval is not involved.

EXAMPLE

Pennsylvania's School Construction Requirements

In 1998, the Pennsylvania Department of Education rescinded its "60 percent rule." It reaffirmed that decision in 2002. At the same time, Pennsylvania rescinded a prohibition on building multi-level schools made out of wood-frame construction. Together, the changes have encouraged rehabilitation of existing schools. Currently, 80 percent of all school reimbursements in the state involve work on existing buildings. The Pennsylvania Code also supports rehabilitation projects. PA Code § 349.24, "Building and equipment reimbursement considerations," reads: "Renovation of a school building to achieve current educational standards and reasonably current construction standards shall be reimbursable. The Department will maintain guidelines which differentiate between educational renovation and deferred maintenance or structural alteration."

Pennsylvania Building and Equipment Reimbursement Considerations: <http://www.pacode.com/>

Pennsylvania School and Facilities Construction: http://www.pde.state.pa.us/constr_facil

4 Increase State share of education costs in communities that are increasing density

ACTION

Local governments often resist high-density developments because they fear they will result in increased school costs. In such cases, the state can encourage high-density development by providing "density bonuses" that help local governments offset their projected higher school costs. Such density bonuses can take the form of additional education funding for communities that change local zoning regulations to allow for higher density development in walkable, infrastructure-rich areas.

PROCESS

First, the State must determine what zoning actions local governments would have to take to be eligible for more funds. The State also would have to decide how much in additional funds to allocate for each new housing



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unit approved and built. Such an action would likely involve collaboration with the state planning and housing offices or their equivalent departments, and with local governments. Finally, the State would need to decide whether to provide funds when a unit is permitted, built, or — preferably — some combination of the two. The Governor may need to restructure the way some state discretionary funding is allocated to communities.

EXAMPLE

Massachusetts' Chapter 40S

Under Massachusetts law 40R, localities that revise zoning regulations to support denser development receive density bonus payments and an additional \$3,000 when each unit is built (see *Policy #8, Integrate the state's growth criteria into discretionary funding decisions, in the Comprehensive Approaches section*)

Under companion legislation, Chapter 40S, localities that adopt 40R zoning districts can qualify for additional state aid to cover school costs associated with the higher densities. The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development reviews the zoning districts under 40R to determine whether they meet the State's objective.

Massachusetts 40R: <http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/lgl-40r-toc.htm>

Massachusetts 40S: <http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/lgl-40s-toc.htm>

5

Establish a "Safe Routes to School" program

ACTION

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, between 1969 and 2001, the number of schoolchildren who walked or bicycled to school declined from 48 percent to 16 percent. The decline contributes to traffic congestion and poor air quality around schools. A growing body of evidence has shown that children who lead sedentary lifestyles are at risk for such health problems as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Is it any wonder that childhood obesity rates are increasing when we make it more difficult for kids to walk or bike to school?

The Department of Education should work together with the state transportation and health agencies to develop an effective "Safe Routes to School" program. Safe Routes to School programs provide funding to help states and communities assess bike and pedestrian conditions around schools, and then facilitate the infrastructure and program changes needed to make the routes safer.

Sprawling land-use patterns can make it difficult to implement Safe Routes to School many communities (see *Policy #3, Revise school construction funding formulas, in this section*). In 2008, however, 29 states already had a Safe Routes to School program.

PROCESS

Most Safe Routes to School programs are funded through a combination of federal, state and local sources. Funding is typically necessary for the assessment, planning, and construction of Safe Routes to School infrastructure as well as for programming, including awareness-raising events and pilot walks. Federal funding, mostly through transportation appropriations (TEA-21 and SAFETEA-LU) is available to pay for infrastructure. Some government funds can be used to cover the programmatic costs as well.

According to the Federal Highway Administration, funding levels for Safe Routes to School programs began at \$54 million in FY 2005 and could increase to \$183 million by FY 2009. Each state is eligible to receive at least \$1 million. To receive federal funding, states are required to have a Safe Routes to School coordinator to manage the program.

EXAMPLE

Colorado's Safe Routes to School Program

The Colorado Department of Transportation administers the state's Safe Routes to School program. Federal funds are awarded through a statewide competitive process. The money is then distributed according to the geographic distribution of the K-8 student population. Between 10 and 30 percent of the funds (\$1.6 million in 2008) is spent on programming. The remaining funds support infrastructure projects as well as a full-time Safe Routes Coordinator at the Colorado Department of Transportation.

Colorado Safe Routes to School: <http://www.dot.state.co.us/BikePed/SafeRoutesToSchool.htm>



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6

Start a Walk to School Day

ACTION

Walk to School Day originated in Chicago in 1997. By 2006, schools in all 50 states and the District of Columbia held Walk to School events to promote physical activity, safety and concern for the environment. It's one way for communities to increase opportunities for students to walk to school — and for both students and adults to begin identifying the barriers that can make walking to school unsafe.

Many communities and states use Walk to School events as a first step toward developing Safe Routes to School programs or to build more interest and support for walking and bicycling (see *Policy #5, Establish a "Safe Routes to School" Program, in this section*).

PROCESS

The State can encourage local governments and school boards to designate a "Walk to School Day" by funding or otherwise supporting local efforts through the departments of education, transportation, and health. Starting a "Walk to School Day" involves gathering interested parties at schools and throughout communities to promote the idea that students should walk in supervised groups along safe routes.

Interested schools are encouraged to register their intentions at www.walktoschool.org. Doing so will increase awareness of local and statewide support for the event. Also, community leaders will be able to learn about practices in other communities.

EXAMPLES

California's Walk to School Day

Five California schools participated in Walk to School Day in 1998, and the state Department of Public Health began funding Walk to School programs in 1999. California's Walk to School headquarters provides resources such as letters and fact sheets for schools and organizations looking to implement Walk to School activities.

Taking into account California's diverse population, many of the resources are available in multiple languages. The Walk to School headquarters estimates that 1,800 schools in California will participate in this year's activities.

California's Walk to School Day: <http://www.cawalktoschool.com/>

Washington's Walk to School Day

The Washington State Department of Health in collaboration with Safe Kids Washington has sponsored a Walk to School Day for a variety of schools throughout the state. The program raises awareness of how walkable the community is (or not), promotes pedestrian safety, and allows community leaders, parents and children to share time together.

The event is timed each to coincide with the annual International Walk Your Child to School Day in October. Safe Kids Coalition volunteers, healthcare workers, police, firefighters and other safety advocates come together to raise awareness of and provide support for safe walking and biking programs. Many schools hold Walk to School assemblies, where children are given reflective zipper pulls and T-shirts to reinforce their awareness of the rules for safe walking. And parents and grandparents are encouraged to join the students on their walks.

Washington Department of Health:
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/>

7

Encourage the sharing of school facilities for community use

ACTION

Schools traditionally have been the centers of their communities. They can both educate our children and provide access for others to recreational, civic and public space. If community members view a local school as an asset, they will seek rather than oppose the increased presence of schools in the community.

Laws and policies in many states limit the joint use of schools, however, making it difficult for communities to transform them into neighborhood centers and to realize the cost savings that come from sharing facilities for other activities. The need for joint use of school facilities is particularly acute in communities that are built-out and growing. In those places, land is scarce and allowing the joint use of facilities makes it possible to meet the needs of the community while using land efficiently.

States can support the joint use of school facilities by changing statutes, revising funding formulas, and



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developing guidelines and standards that allow public schools to be used for both educational and community functions.

PROCESS

In many states, enabling legislation is needed to allow for the joint use of school facilities. The legislation should allow communities to partner with private and non-profit organizations to provide community services at school locations. In addition, the legislation should spell out the roles of the school district and its partners; it should delineate who has the authority to make employment or funding decisions, and to lead "joint-use" events. Funding criteria must be flexible enough to allow communities to make their own decisions on what uses are most appropriate.

EXAMPLES

California Department of Education's Joint Use Program

The California Department of Education's Joint Use Program provides supplemental funding for the construction of joint-use facilities such as gymnasiums, libraries, childcare facilities and teacher education facilities. Both new construction and additions are considered. The state provides a maximum of \$2 million for facilities to be used by Grades 9-12, with lower limits for lower grades.

California Department of Education's Joint Use Program:
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/>

California's Department of General Services, Public School Construction: <http://www.opsc.dgs.ca.gov/>

Connecticut's Hartford Learning Corridor Project

The state-supported Hartford Learning Corridor Project is a school- and community-use facility in the city's Frog Hollow neighborhood, adjacent to Trinity College. Government, private and foundation investment in the project totaled \$175 million. The project includes a public Montessori elementary school, a middle school, a science and math center, an arts academy, an early childhood education center, and a performing arts theater. The Learning Corridor is part of a multi-year effort to revitalize the neighborhood with new schools, housing, jobs, recreation and social services.

Connecticut's Hartford Learning Project: <http://www.learningcorridor.org/>

8

Develop a land-use and development curriculum for K-12 students

ACTION

Today's students will become tomorrow's decision makers. Improving their understanding of land-use issues will enable them to better understand the choices before them when they become adults. To foster this understanding, the State should help develop a curriculum on land-use and development issues for K-12 students.

Land-use and development also can be integrated into broader school curricula, including environmental science, geography, government and social studies, so students understand the patterns of growth and development in the United States and, more specifically, in their own State.

PROCESS

Integrating land-use and development into the K-12 curriculum is generally a three-step process. First, an assessment and examination of the current K-12 standards is required. State curriculum standards will likely have at least minimal references to the migration of populations, settlement patterns, urban development and suburbanization. The assessment will help determine whether or not the current standards provide enough of a foundation for the implementation of a land-use and development curriculum.

Once the assessment is completed, the Department of Education can take the second step of determining what additions need to be made to strengthen the curriculum standards to ensure that land-use and development trends and policies will be taught. The final step will be to adequately fund the production of materials and training for K-12 teachers charged with teaching the expanded or new element of the curriculum.

EXAMPLES

Connecticut's Social Studies Curriculum Framework

In Connecticut, the social studies standards include: "Standard 11, Human Systems: Students will interpret spatial patterns of human migrations, economic activities, and political units in Connecticut, the nation and the world." This standard requires that students understand development patterns, changes in



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transportation technology, and the influences on urban, suburban and rural development.

Connecticut's Social Studies Curriculum: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/>

Maryland's Teacher's Smart Growth Resource Guide

The state of Maryland developed a Teacher's Resource Guide on smart growth to assist social studies and science teachers integrate growth and development issues into their regular curriculum. The resource guide is available online and includes 20 lesson plans on topics ranging from demographics, and watershed planning to school siting and neighborhood design.

Maryland's Teacher's Smart Growth Resource Guide: <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/education/growfromhere/TOC.htm>

9

Encourage universities to develop Smart Growth Centers

ACTION

Many communities, local governments and state agencies are in need of support as they implement planning and zoning reforms. States can help provide that support by funding colleges and universities to conduct research, provide technical, and train citizens and officials.

Schools of agriculture, architecture, engineering, geography, historic preservation, planning and public policy can offer significant, relevant expertise in the areas of community development, environmental protection, land use, public policy and smart growth. States should take advantage of the expertise by providing seed money and continuing support to universities to create research and technical assistance centers that can be leverage for communities and government agencies.

PROCESS

The Smart Growth Centers should concentrate on three main tasks: research, technical assistance and training. The research focus would be broad and includes analysis of statewide and national trends. Funding for this type of work would come mostly from grants.

Technical assistance would focus more narrowly on helping communities, local governments and state agencies solve land-use and development-related issues. After the initial seed money, much of the work could be done using a variety of grants and fees.

The training segment could include educational opportunities for elected officials, state employees, planners and professionals in land-use related fields. Funding for training would come from enrollment fees.

EXAMPLE

University of Maryland's National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education

The National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education was founded in 2000 and given the mission to bring the resources of the University of Maryland at College Park and national experts to bear on issues of land development, resource preservation and urban growth.

The Center, which is affiliated with the schools of agriculture; architecture, planning and preservation; engineering; and public policy, received initial funding from both the university and the state. About 90 percent of its work is research, with the balance in the education category.

National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education: <http://www.smartgrowth.umd.edu/>

Help Desk

The following resources are available on our Web site at <http://www.govinstitute.org/policyguide/Education/helpdesk.html>

Reports

Joint Use Facilities Case Studies from New Schools, Better Neighborhoods; Schools for Successful Communities; Travel and Environmental Implications of School Siting

Organizations

21st Century School Fund; National Trust for Historic Preservation; Council of Educational Facility Planners International; National Center for Safe Routes to School

Websites

UrbanPlan; State Policies and School Facilities (National Trust for Historic Preservation); Federal Highway Administration Safe Routes to School