



# 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.

## Consider the Proximity of Your Student Population



*In the 1960's over 50% of kids walked to school; by 1999, less than 15% walked to school.*

The biggest barrier to walking and biking to school is distance. Maintaining schools close to students or building new schools within communities has the ability to:

- increase walking and biking to school,
- increase community cohesion and transportation safety, and
- decrease the burden of school transportation costs by reducing busing.

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 info visit [www.bike.ohio.gov](http://www.bike.ohio.gov) and go to Safe Routes To School/Develop your SRTS Program.

## Accomodate All Modes of Transportation



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

When student populations live close by, students may walk or bike to school. Providing safe routes to school for pedestrians and bicyclists:

- increases the opportunity for student physical activity and better health,
- increases student academic achievement (studies show healthy students learn better)
- reduces vehicular traffic and air pollution around schools.

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

- connecting sidewalks,
- creating separate entrances for motorized and non-motorized transportation,
- ensuring easy access from the street to the front door,
- using wayfinding and signage to make safe routes clear,
- providing safe, protected bicycle parking,,
- considering remote student dropoff locations, and
- locating parking lots further from school.

## Consider Community Health



*An HIA is a process to determine the potential health impacts of a proposed policy, plan or project on public health.*

To assess how a potential school site may impact community health, a health impact assessment (HIA) may be performed. HIAs consider how to maximize health benefits and minimize adverse health outcomes through community input, data analysis and educating decision makers. The CDC provides information on conducting HIAs at [www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/hia.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/hia.htm).

Additional community health considerations include:

- air quality in and around school sites and how school transportation will affect pollution levels,
- recreation and physical activity opportunities available for students and residents, and
- your community's disparate health factors. Contact your local health department for information.

## Integrate School Planning into Community Planning



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

State, regional and local plans may assist with the school siting decision, by integrating the school into the fabric of transportation, health and economic growth and development currently being planned. Understanding the direction your community is headed towards in these areas will help make educated decisions on the best location for a school.

Local resources to consult:

- Metropolitan or regional planning organizations (MPO/RPO)
- Safe Routes to School program lead or coordinator
- Planning and transportation departments
- Health departments
- Advocacy Organizations

## Consider the Benefits of Shared Use



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

Shared use (also called community or joint use) provides communities broader access to schools for recreation and other purposes to maximize usage of existing facilities, avoid duplication of public facilities and wisely spend public dollars.

Shared use between schools and communities has several benefits:

- Saves schools and communities the cost of building and operating redundant facilities,
- Increases physical activity opportunities, overall health and academic achievement,
- Increases community cohesion and overall quality of community life, and
- Increases community value of schools financially

**For further assistance with school siting, active transportation, or shared use contact:**



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