Ten Elements of Smart School Siting

School districts and local governments can work together to ensure that decisions relating to school locations support healthy students and a healthy community. What follows are 10 key considerations for smart school siting.[1] Our model school siting policies for districts spell out in detail how districts can implement the 10 elements of smart school siting.

1. **Collaborative Planning** Provide for meaningful coordinated planning between school districts and local governments, with the goal of sharing data, addressing joint needs regarding school locations, ensuring due consideration of environmental impact and other siting factors, and encouraging residential and mixed-income residential development near school sites.

2. **Long-Term Data-Driven Planning** Engage in long-term planning, based on data including current and projected student enrollment, demographics, residential density of children in new and existing development, anticipated development, student transportation costs and trends, and assessments of all costs and benefits. Provide a substantial role for public input into short- and long-term school facilities planning in order to ensure community buy-in and achieve better results.

3. **Account for All Costs** Consider all costs and benefits of different options, not only the cost of construction and land acquisition, but also the cost of required street and utility infrastructure, transportation to the site, disposal of closed facilities, and so on. For each option, assess both quantifiable and unquantifiable costs and benefits, and assess costs and benefits not only for the school district, but also for students, families, staff, local jurisdictions, and the community as a whole.

4. **Co-Location and Shared Use** Consider making it feasible for students and the larger community to share resources (e.g., libraries, gymnasiums, parks, fields) by locating facilities near each other and, where desired, through more formal intergovernmental contracts or joint use agreements spelling out how use and responsibility will be shared.

5. **Preference for Renovation** Prioritize renovating existing facilities before building new ones, especially where historic structures are in question.

6. **Diverse, Walkable Schools through School Siting and Assignment Policies** Work toward developing schools that allow students, families, and staff to walk, bicycle, and take public transportation; provide the community with easy access to school facilities; and serve a student body that represents the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of the community's students and families. This involves (a) providing schools in locations that balance walkability and diversity; and (b) designing school attendance zones and assignment policies to support walkability and diversity.

7. **Equity in School Facilities** In weighing determinations about school construction, closures, and rehabilitation, consider equity of school facilities to avoid providing some students with a learning environment that is inferior to that provided to others. For example, take steps to ensure that inferior facilities do not disproportionately house students of color or lower-income students, and evaluate the impact of school siting decisions on students and communities from an equity standpoint, including assessing whether some groups of students bear a greater burden of lengthy trips to and from school. Consider facility and transportation equity for students and families with disabilities.

8. **Health Impacts** Take all health impacts of proposed sites into account (through a formal health impact assessment or another methodical analysis), including the location's supportiveness and safety for physical activity; air pollution and asthma levels; past or present toxic contamination of site or nearby areas; and nearby sources of pollution or toxic contaminants, such as highways, industrial facilities, or pesticide applications.

9. **Safe Routes to School** Support Safe Routes to School programs to maximize opportunities for walking and biking to school.

10. **Safe Infrastructure for Walking, Bicycling, and Public Transportation in School Vicinity** Improve the safety and convenience of travel by foot, bike, and public transportation near schools and on school property by providing safe infrastructure. For example, ensure that the areas surrounding schools have sidewalks, bicycle lanes, or whatever infrastructure is necessary to allow students to safely travel to school through different modes of transportation. Ensure that site design safely accommodates students arriving and departing by all modes of transportation, including walking, bicycling, public transportation, school bus, and private vehicles: prioritize safe access for children who are bicycling or walking (including those walking after drop-offs from cars or buses).

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[1] In deriving these principles, Public Health Law & Policy has drawn from the work of Building Educational Success Together (BEST) coalition partners, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and many others.