

School Siting and Sustainability in Illinois:

Examining the Significance of School Location and Community-Centered Schools



Photo from The Patriot News/ Dan Gleiter

A collaborative project of

Healthy Schools Campaign
Office of the Lt. Governor
Landmarks Illinois

AIA Illinois
Active Transportation Alliance
Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

Goals of the Illinois Project:

- Develop a policy board
- Offer public forums on the issue to collect input (offered December 2008)
- Research state and local policies about school siting + sustainability
- Write a report
- Develop a public campaign to share report and advocate for community-centered school siting

What is a Community-Centered School?

- Geographically located in the center of a community
- Often small in size, multiply-level, and older or historic
- Location makes it feasible for walking or biking to school and affords greater community access



Many Older, Community-Centered Schools in Illinois

- Nearly half of Chicago Public Schools were built before 1940, many are neighborhood centered.



Joliet Central High School – built in 1899



Lindblom Math & Science Academy

Built: 1912
Acres: 7.5 acres
Enrollment: 1,500 students
Location: Chicago



Other Striking Features:

- Large, historic auditorium
- Renovated science labs
- Interior lighting retrofits
- Upgraded gymnasium



Carlinsville High School



- Built in 1920s, additions added in 1950s
- Approximately 30% of students walk or bike to school
- School within walking distance of neighborhoods, local businesses
- Fire in 1987; interior renovated, historic features kept
- Community strongly supports the school

Leal Elementary – Urbana District 116



Built in 1935

Number of Acres: 2

Number of Students: 396

Cost of Recent Renovation: \$8.8 million

Highlights:

- Active community participation in saving the school
- Property values enhanced by the school's presence
- Energy efficiency retrofits
- Original Art Deco features retained during renovation

Lovington High School



- Built 1907; source of community pride, alumni reunions
- Largest employer in the community of Lovington, population 1200
- 2/3 of students walk or bike to school
- Community voted down referendum to deactivate the building and consolidate; partly failed due to concerns of more and longer bus routes

Longfellow School



- Built in 1934
- Location: Rock Island
- School was being considered for deactivation, as district realized it had too many schools
- Significant community input on facility decision
- Walkability was one variable considered in school reorganization decisions
- Decision was made to renovate, wing being added to accommodate more students

Examples of reasons leading to school siting decisions:

- population changes and school reorganization
- lack of funding to operate the school
- actual or perceived inadequacy of school buildings
- increasing competition among schools to attract students
- others

What are some of the challenges to community-centered schools in Illinois?

Challenges are on many levels:

- State legislation and policies
- Local level decisions and policies
- Cultural trends
- Educational and Economic Realities

State Legislation and Policies

- State funding policies for school construction and major renovations
 - has been a lack of state funding for school capital projects
 - could be favoring rapid-growth districts and suggest older buildings get replaced
 - districts below a certain enrollment size are considered ineligible
 - new green building requirements don't fully address school location, which affects transportation issues

State Legislation and Policies

- State reimbursement for school transportation
 - Annual appropriations have tripled over past 15 years (over \$200 million in FY94, over \$700 million in FY09); claims have increased significantly
 - State's transportation reimbursement policies seemingly not tied to other air pollution or other goals; transportation mileage has been rising

State Legislation and Policies

- State funding for school maintenance and repairs
 - No state funding specifically for maintenance may be disincentive for upkeep
 - Historic preservation consultation during Health Life Safety reviews often too late to assess if schools could qualify for historic preservation

Acreage Requirements

- Local acreage requirements for schools vary widely
 - large acreage requirements sometimes negate possibility of small-acreage, in-town school sites
 - IL schools range from less than two acres to over 100 acres
- Some local school acreage standards cause school siting decisions to be sited in areas that do not make walking to school possible

Municipal School Land Dedication Requirements for Residential Development in Illinois Communities

Community	Elementary	Minimum Number of Students	Middle	Minimum Number of Students	High School	Minimum Number of Students
Normal	11	600	29	900	50	1200
Elgin	11	600	29	1200	55	2500
Oswego	15	600	25	900	80	1200
Edwardsville	25	450	40	600	75	1500
Springfield	None					
Carbondale	None					
Rock Island	None					
Danville	None					

Lacking Coordinated Planning

- **Collaboration between school districts and local communities/municipalities varies widely in Illinois**
 - Not a clear system for guiding collaboration; local strategies vary. Schools may be unsure how to approach collaborative planning, and adequate resources may not be available
- **Lack of public input can lead to poor school siting**
 - Sometimes school districts are not allowing adequate input, other times the public is not taking advantage of given opportunities to be involved in school facility planning decisions.
 - District and community partnerships can lead to more widely appreciated outcomes, including community-centered school siting

Lack of integrated approach to addressing school siting and other concerns such as childhood obesity, transportation expenditures, and addressing climate change goals

Lack of Comprehensive or Accurate Data

- Education and awareness about school siting + sustainability may be lacking.
 - With school location being a relatively new sustainability issue, lacking data may perpetuate trends of placing schools in locations far from walkable neighborhoods and town centers
- Comparisons between school facility options often made without full information
 - Feasibility studies – including State feasibility study guidelines for school consolidation – used to compare whether to renovate, replace, or relocate a school often fail to consider the impacts of school facility location on walkability, air pollution, school busing costs, traffic patterns, local property values and other externalities.
 - Decisions are often based on short-ranged population and economic projections

Recommendations to Ensure Community-Centered School Siting

- Address State policies that fail to support walkable school facility locations; modify policies to ensure more sustainable school transportation decisions and increased opportunities for active transportation
- Organize a State-wide school transportation task force to lead action on promoting community-centered schools
- Offer State assistance to school districts and communities to work together to ensure school siting decisions that are more mindful of environmental impacts and state tax dollar investments

Recommendations to Ensure Community-Centered School Siting (cont'd)

- Develop statewide public campaign on sustainable school siting; build coalitions between historic preservation groups, health advocates, planners and architects, education groups, and environmental groups
- Collect statewide data on school siting impacts
- Create online educational materials to help districts better assess long term environmental, public health, and economic impacts of school siting locations
- Develop a community-centered school portal to promote the values of well-kept, in-town schools and share best practices and more Illinois school case studies

To comment on the
executive summary of the report:

visit the school siting page
on

Governor Quinn's Green Solutions website:

http://www.standingupforillinois.org/green/school_siting.php

<http://www.GreenSolutions.il.gov>

Other School Siting Information:

National Trust for Historic Preservation

<http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/historic-schools/>

US EPA/Smart Growth - <http://www.epa.gov/schools/siting.html>

Landmarks Illinois - <http://www.landmarks.org/>

Illinois Safe Routes to School - <http://www.activetrans.org>,
<http://www.dot.il.gov/saferoutes/saferouteshome.aspx>

Capital Development Board Build Smart, Healthy High
Performing Schools guide - http://www.cdb.state.il.us/green_initiatives.shtml

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