



*A Chapter of the American Planning Association*

**School and Local Government Policy  
Final  
Adopted by the Michigan Association of Planning's  
Board of Directors  
January 13, 2007**

School districts and local governments are extremely interdependent entities. Yet, for the most part, these two entities make decisions and function independent of each other. The siting of schools has tremendous impacts on the growth and development of the local jurisdiction in which the school is located. Newly relocated or expanded schools act as “pull” factors drawing residential development and school age populations to them. In turn, growth in local jurisdictions, including infrastructure expansions and new developments increases pressures on existing schools, typically inducing school expansion or relocation. For this reason, among others, the coordination of school facility planning with local government comprehensive planning and zoning to ensure efficient land development, infrastructure location, and resource protection is an important concern for the Michigan Association of Planning (MAP). Further, MAP recognizes that school siting decisions have lasting impacts on urban form, development patterns, community character, the environment, infrastructure and quality of life. When made in a collaborative and informed manner, school location decisions have the ability to create community centered schools located in the neighborhoods they serve, cost sharing opportunities for the joint use of schools as community focal points and shared facilities, provide safe routes for students to walk and bike to school, and help connect the schools to existing community resources and infrastructure. On the contrary, when made without careful consideration of the long terms impacts, school location and design decisions could spur rapid growth and development at the urban-rural fringe, propagate sprawl, contribute to on and off-site environmental impacts such as farmland loss and an increase in impervious surfaces, prompt infrastructure expansion into unplanned areas, and result in automobile dependent communities with fragmented pedestrian infrastructure. Consequently, MAP supports applying smart growth principles to educational facility planning.

MAP believes in providing opportunities for informed decision making by promoting mutual consultation, information sharing, and joint planning by local governments and school boards

1. MAP encourages meaningful communication between local governments and school boards prior to the purchase of school sites to collaboratively determine appropriate locations; during the site planning period to coordinate on-site and off-site improvements; and after school construction to monitor, maintain and upgrade the existing infrastructure.

2. School boards should be encouraged to actively consult with local governments in preparing long term school facility plans that at a minimum take into account the anticipated enrollment of geographically projected student populations, contain an inventory of existing school facilities, contain data on future facility space needs, and a list of locations or potential sites for new schools
3. Local governments should in turn be encouraged to share with the school board, information regarding future proposed and approved residential developments in the locality, comprehensive plan amendments having an impact on school facilities and changes with regard to anticipated growth and development areas.

MAP supports policies that ensure the expansion and location of schools in areas where future growth, infrastructure placement and development have been planned. In order to do so,

4. MAP believes that local governments and school districts should be encouraged to work together to determine future school sites within existing and anticipated urban service areas of the local jurisdiction and incorporate the determined sites in local comprehensive plans.
5. MAP supports regulations that require the location of educational facilities including elementary, middle and high schools, and related infrastructure such as the location of playing fields, administrative offices and school buildings to be consistent with the comprehensive plan, zoning ordinance, and implementing land development regulations of the appropriate local jurisdiction.

MAP supports managing growth by locating schools where roads, sidewalks, parks, sewer, fire protection, and other such services are already in place. Consequently MAP supports policies that

6. Require the coordination of local government capital improvements programming with school facilities planning.
7. Require school districts and local governments to work together on on-site and off-site improvements necessary for the effective functioning of the school and ensuring that school expansion or construction is concurrent with such infrastructure improvements and investments.

MAP supports the institution of guidelines and standards for the planning, approval, review and design of schools.

8. MAP supports policies that encourage school boards and local governments to consider the long term environmental impacts of school locations and consequently invest in storm water management, environmentally sound site design, green infrastructure, and energy efficient buildings. Local governments and school districts should also be encouraged to perform land suitability analysis to ensure that schools are located in areas where environmental impacts are minimized to the greatest extent possible.
9. MAP supports the institution of site plan review and new school facility planning standards that consider at a minimum the proximity of the new school to school age

populations and existing overcrowded facilities; consistency of the school siting decision with future land use plans and projected infrastructure locations of the responsible local jurisdiction; funding needed to construct new schools compared to renovating older structures; and potential growth, environmental, cultural and development impacts from the siting decision.

10. MAP supports school policies that encourage the establishment of public participation requirements for school siting and expansion decisions.
11. MAP supports establishing a standing advisory or oversight committee comprising of local government representatives, school board representatives, appropriate state officials, planning staff, school board staff, and community members to provide recommendations on school siting, relocation and expansion decisions as and when the need arises.

MAP emphasizes policies that value schools as part of a network of well connected and easily accessible community resources.

12. MAP encourages the use of schools as community focal points by providing incentives for the joint use of school facilities (e.g. library, ball fields, cafeteria and playgrounds) by the community.
13. MAP encourages locating schools and consequent infrastructure to promote safe routes to schools, opportunities for non-motorized transportation, pedestrian off-site improvements, and compact and walkable neighborhoods.
14. MAP supports policies that encourage the identification and protection of historic school buildings and facilities, and policies that encourage the consideration and evaluation of historic school buildings for renovation and adaptive reuse.

MAP supports dedicating resources, including providing educational opportunities and training sessions to improve decision making and facilitate communication between school boards, local governments and the public.

15. MAP encourages improving training and educational opportunities that emphasize the connection between school facilities planning and local government comprehensive planning for both school boards and local government officials.
16. MAP supports policies that provide opportunities to the public, school boards and local government officials to learn about the educational, community wide, environmental, financial, and facility related benefits of renovated or new urban schools compared to rural schools.
17. MAP supports state level incentives for the maintenance of existing school facilities and funding prioritization of renovation and reuse projects over new school construction.
18. MAP supports the development of a guidebook outlining steps communities, school boards, and local governments can take to integrate smart growth principles into school facility planning. MAP also encourages including in the guidebook, best management practices for incorporating sustainable site design principles into school planning, and model policies that both school districts and local governments can adopt to facilitate a collaborative process to plan for community centered schools.