

City Schools

A Partnership Between the City and the School Board

THE IDEA OF “CITY SCHOOLS”

The fundamental objective of every character town is to provide each child in the city with a good education. Education of the city’s children is a critical part of life; schools are a fundamental asset of the city; and city governments have a responsibility to meet this objective.

Cities that are responsible for public schools inherently understand the idea of “city schools”. For the many communities with separately elected school boards, or independent districts, the direct responsibility of the city’s schools is legally removed, but the city’s role, contributions and the responsibilities it is willing to assume are important. The key is:

Focus on education.

1. *Accept the City government’s responsibility for the success of the town’s schools.*
2. *Partner with the School Board, Neighborhoods and Businesses.*
3. *Adopt a “City School Policy” and include a City School Element in the City’s General Plan.*

Besides the moral obligation, an educated electorate is critical for democracy. Cities function better with an informed citizenry. Educational excellence is an important economic development factor. Higher incomes are generally associated with higher educational attainment. For communities to be pleasant and prosperous places, its children must be well educated.



THE PRINCETON SCHOOL BLOCK
Princeton Elementary School adjacent to:

- **Bob Crosby Field,**
- **College Park Little League**
- **College Park Community Center and Community Pool,**
- **Fire Station No. 3 and**
- **The Princeton Park**

The basic idea of “City Schools” is to fully integrate the city’s schools into the fabric of the city and to co-locate and programmatically connect schools with the city park system and its many cultural centers including libraries, museums, theaters, zoos, gardens, galleries and recreation centers. The synergistic effect of proximate, partnered city schools, parks, libraries, nature trails and cultural centers creates the opportunity for the community education system to increasingly enhance the lives of the city’s citizens. The City School Idea is dependent on the active and effective participation of four primary parties:

- The School System,
- The City,
- Neighborhood Organizations and
- Businesses, including Non-governmental Organizations [NGOs].

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THE CITY'S ROLE IN EDUCATION

The fact that the schools belong to the county or independent school system does not mean the city should have a “hands off” policy. To the contrary, the city is the entity that can best tailor the county schools to meet the holistic intellectual enrichment needs and aspirations of the city’s residents and their children.

Each city has the opportunity to “adopt” the schools in their jurisdiction and provide enhanced services and facilities that make a qualitative difference to their citizens. The idea of “city schools” is based on establishing a qualitative reason for parents to choose to live in the city based on the quality of education available to their children in the public schools. The realization of this idea requires the city to take actions that make a difference.

Since the city will be in business for many years to come, the idea of a combined neighborhood school/park/library/cultural center can be pursued even if it takes years to accomplish.

- New schools may need to be located next to parks and cultural centers with the educational mission squarely on the shoulders of the county school board, or
- New parks and cultural centers may need to be located next to schools.
- In all cases, it is important for the city to have a committed partnership with the school board to create a mixed-use, safe campus of schools, parks and cultural centers in order to make steady progress towards a great city school system.



City History Taught in the Park.

A MODEL CITY SCHOOL POLICY.

1. Develop a City School Policy based on:
 - a. A School Element in the City’s Plan,
 - b. A Neighborhood Connection Plan, and
 - c. Multiple Joint Use Agreements.
2. City support for the school system as it develops high quality faculty, facilities and programs, including:
 - a. Recruiting faculty is influenced by the quality of life in the city,
 - b. Retaining excellent students,
 - c. Integrating schools into the community fabric, and
 - d. Creating an active relationship between local businesses and the schools.

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3. Develop a City Parks Plan to provide a public park, with a cultural center, adjacent to every elementary school and neighborhood.
4. Develop a working agreement with every middle and high school in the city to enable public use of recreation facilities and use of school facilities for the use of “certified” city organizations such as homeowners associations. The combination of school, parks and centers will be more reliant on the resources of county school board in the case of middle and high schools since these schools are bigger facilities.
5. Develop tri-party City-School Board-Business agreements for technology systems, library services, transit service, vehicle maintenance coordination, continuing education and other programs that enhance the city schools.
6. Provide city maintenance funds or crews to those schools where the school grounds serve as a city park as documented in a Joint-Use Agreement.
7. Employ the city’s public outreach systems to connect the schools to neighborhoods and businesses.
8. To provide specific connections between every city school and its appropriate neighborhood organizations.
9. Jointly find a business partner for every city school, including mentoring, technology assistance and other support using programs such as Junior Achievement.



Northlake Park Community School collocated with Lake Nona YMCA Family Center and a City Park; in the heart of a neighborhood.

BENEFITS OF THE COLLABORATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS, CITY PARKS AND CULTURAL CENTERS

The package of a Unified Master Plan, a Neighborhood Connection Plan and Joint-Use Agreements for schools, parks and community centers has many advantages:

1. **More Efficient Building Locations**

If two schools are developed adjacent to each other, this situation will influence the location of facilities that could be shared, be it an auditorium, a library or another facility where one bigger/better facility could be developed instead of two smaller facilities. The location of delivery areas can be coordinated to isolate the areas interrupted by trucks. One community room or library may be sufficient for two adjacent schools, if properly located and managed.

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2. **More Effective Recreational Spaces**

Once the educational and recreational programs are set for each site, the programs can be examined to eliminate overlaps, to find mutually beneficial opportunities and to explore other areas of joint thought. For example, if a park is programmed for a single baseball field and an adjacent school is programmed for a single baseball field, the conversation is obvious:

- First, is there a need for two fields? If not, how can one field be shared?
- If two fields are needed, how can the two fields be located together to create a more useful result than locating the two fields far away from one another?
- Can one field be built first for shared use with the property for the second field used for an interim activity such as soccer, stormwater or parking; then developed as the second ball field after the interim use is concluded? Would this phased approach facilitate renovation or re-construction of a school?

3. **Coordinated Infrastructure**

- Can water and sewer lines be constructed once, anticipating construction of future facilities on the same site?
- Can a single stormwater system be designed, constructed and maintained for multiple facilities rather than having two or three separate systems?

- Can parking areas for a park and a school be organized to minimize the number of spaces needed, to reduce costs and to improve security?

4. **Coordinated Health and Education Services**

The availability of building space overcomes a barrier often cited for not providing needed services. Available space can be used for pre-school, after school, health clinic, tutoring and other needed services.



Theater at a Downtown Arts Center

5. **Enrichment Inherent in Accessible Cultural Venues**

The mere proximity of libraries, museums, theaters, performing arts centers, zoos, public gardens and similar community assets will draw teachers to use these amenities. This enriches the educational breadth and experience of their students.

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Schools have cut programs in music, arts and recreation; partly due to funding, partly due to competing time requirements such as STEM. But special-purpose facilities, such as museums, can provide an availability that will not be ignored. Co-location of related uses and activities is the logical outcome that needs to transcend individual fiefdoms.

6. **Cost Savings**

A single budget can be prepared for the coordinated funding of several combined projects...even if the separate facilities will be constructed over a multi-year period and funded by different entities. This is quite commonly done for large, multi-phased developments. The advantages of a single budget include the identification of potential cost savings, better phasing of expenditures based on the phasing plan and better cash management.

7. **Management and Maintenance Consolidation**

An arrangement that enables a single entity to manage several adjacent properties applies to grounds keeping and maintenance, stormwater management, security, parking management, janitorial service, lighting coordination and programming spaces and buildings for community use. As long as the school and the education mission are recognized as primary, the efficiencies and cost savings of a combined complex appear to be available.

CASE STUDY: DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

“Where Schools are Change Agents” by Jennifer Zirkle and Rachel Lynn, Brailsford & Dunlavey reports a turnaround in the school system that is leading the resurgence of the City. Detroit, the U.S.’s fifth largest city in 1950 with 1.8 million people had 714,000 residents in 2010. The school population fell from nearly 300,000 students in 1967-68 to 94,000 in 2009; more than 100 school have been closed.

In 2009, the population passed Proposal S for \$500 million strategic investments by extending the then current, millage rate for a previous bond issue and utilizing Build America Bonds and Qualified School Construction Bonds. The monies had to be spent within three years.

Improved schools were selected to serve as cornerstones for neighborhoods targeted for revitalization. Schools were leveraged for community services and activities such as health clinics for students and the surrounding neighborhood.

“By improving 2.4 million square feet of facilities while pulling 11 inefficient and deteriorating schools offline, 19,300 students [were placed] in new or renovated learning environments.” “The buildings that were left behind were sold or leased to external parties, demolished or remain vacant today.”

The authors conclude by recognizing that the recovery of Detroit will be slow, but that signs are emerging; and that community revitalization is being supported by leveraging the investment in new and renovated schools.

Source: Planning Magazine, February 2013

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8. Partnerships

There are many levels of partnership the city can foster, including agreements with:

- School officials to identify ways in which city policies affect schools, or school policies affect the City,
- Businesses to provide sponsorships for individual schools, mentors, Junior Achievement programs and the like,
- Neighborhood organizations to provide crossing guards, after-school programs and community events.

The four parties - the city, the school board, businesses and neighborhood resident organizations - can directly participate in the detail design of the City School Element of the City's General Plan that includes a Neighborhood Connection Plan supported by Joint-Use Agreements. The support of other parties such as the many NGOs in every town can enhance the success of the mission.

THE CITY SCHOOL ELEMENT OF THE CITY'S GENERAL PLAN

The fundamental idea is to plan, design/re-design, construct, use and maintain adjacent schools, parks and cultural centers as a single entity...to combine the individual parts into a functional, cohesive whole. While the primary emphasis is on elementary schools, the concept applies to all schools. City School Elements contain:

1. **Master Land Use, Circulation and Connectivity Plans** - The combination of the individual properties functions as one unit and a unified master plan.

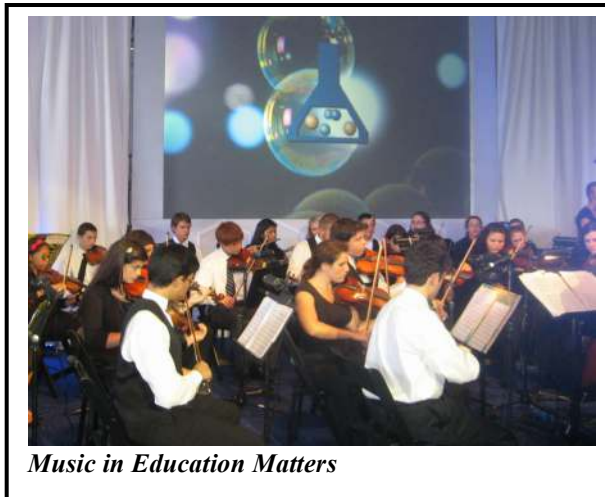
The Plan directs activities for the totality of the co-located properties. This Plan identifies locations for buildings, park lands and recreation areas, parking, stormwater areas and circulation systems for pedestrians, vehicles and transit. This is a plan that combines the land uses and circulation systems of the separate functions [school, park, community center] into a single unit; the idea is much more than just coordinating the planning of adjacent properties; it is combining the planning as though the pieces were those of a single entity operating as a single unit.

2. **Coordinated Infrastructure** – Water and sewer, electrical, stormwater, gas and other utilities can be planned in the unified master plan to provide efficiencies, eliminate redundancies, and provide separations when necessary for costing, security and maintenance. Infrastructure construction and maintenance can be advantageously coordinated, not necessarily combined. This potentially reduces the cost of design, construction and maintenance.
3. **Phasing Plans** – Since the unified master plan contains several pieces that may be scheduled for funding in different years by different entities, a phasing plan is part of the Plan to ensure that the differing time schedules become an asset to the overall project. Interim uses can reserve lands for their ultimate uses once the time comes for completion of the planned elements.

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- 4. Partnership Arrangements** – Building on an attitude of partnering, the City and the School System can involve businesses with an “adoption” partnership. NGOs can be engaged with pre-arranged interactions, such as a youth orchestra or neighborhood activities enacted through joint-use agreements.



NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTION PLANS

This plan enables residents in the neighborhood to have easy and safe access their city schools, parks and community centers. The Unified Master Plan identifies a secure and safe access system for entering and exiting the combined school, park, community center complex.

The Neighborhood Connection Plan extends off-site; beyond the school grounds into the neighborhoods. Sidewalks, bikeways and safe street crossings are the main feature of this plan for each school. This Plan fulfills the city’s responsibility to provide safe bike/ped access to schools, shops and parks for its residents.

JOINT-USE AGREEMENTS

Joint-Use Agreements between the school board and the city exist in many jurisdictions. They can focus on one activity, such as enabling public use of school grounds for recreation and related activities with defined responsibilities for the school board and the city.

There can be more expansive arrangements and include cultural enrichments such as programmed interactions with museums, art centers, music halls and libraries. Co-location is helpful. Some agreements integrate nutritional and health clinics along with other obviously integratable services.

1. As an example, these Agreements enable community organizations, such as city “certified” homeowners associations, to use the school grounds and meeting rooms for neighborhood activities consistent with school schedules.
2. As an example, these Agreements may lead to joint contracts for grounds maintenance, lighting and security systems, parking management, transit stops and stormwater management.
3. As an example, local sports clubs can use play fields under prescribed conditions.
4. As an example, operating costs may be reduced with one grounds maintenance contract for a single large area rather than several contracts for several smaller areas.
5. As an example, the local hospital may teach nutrition and health safety during or after hours; law enforcement officers may provide safety information.
6. As an example, a community stage can be used for school productions.

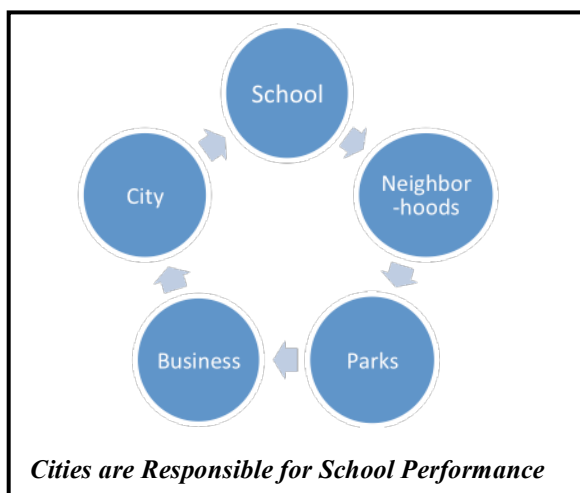
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Joint-Use Agreements can exist between the city, school boards, neighbor organizations, businesses and “nongovernmental organizations [NGOs] such as the YMCA or The Boys and Girls Club. Recreation centers adjacent to elementary schools can be important places for pre-school and after school programs, adult education and community health activities.

Agreements between the school, the city, NGOs and businesses to staff the centers can include extended day and summer programs, among others. Power comes from collaboration.



CONCLUSIONS

Our society no longer has the luxury of separate, special-purpose entities that focus exclusively on their own mission while being oblivious to the needs and opportunities offered by neighboring entities. Even when we could afford it, it may not be a good idea to separate the education of children from the many cultural venues of the city.

The joint use of related facilities is the opportunity before us, even when owned and funded by separate entities. Better and less expensive results can be achieved when the best efforts of all related parties are applied with a singular focus.

Essentially, the city must decide to play a strong role in the education of its children by:

- supporting and supplementing the resources and facilities of the public school system,
- facilitating the connection of every neighborhood to its schools through physical connections, social activities and economic support,
- facilitating the connection of every school to the city’s parks and the many cultural venues in the town, and
- insisting that local businesses be involved in the public education process to instill the entrepreneurial spirit in children and the community.

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AFTER NOTE: A PROPOSAL FOR A A HIGH SCHOOL CENTRIC SYSTEM

Planning for new schools in a growth area is fraught with uncertainty. Schools follow growth; and then growth follows the good schools. The strategic long-range placement of high schools is the way to break the cycle of action and reaction. Fix high school attendance districts with elementary and middle school zones that change based on need.

High schools are big with thousands of students and hundreds of faculty and staff. They are expensive; say \$50 to \$100 million. As “regional” facilities, their precise location is somewhat flexible. Once built, high schools are immovable, they stay put for a long time.

Consider the example of a “carrier strike group”. The aircraft carrier is the biggest, most expensive and most important ship in the fleet. The cruisers, destroyers, submarines, air wings and escorts are organized and constantly adjusted to protect and support the aircraft carrier. High schools are the flag ships of the education system. They are supported by a fluid system of middle and elementary schools that are adjusted to respond to changing needs.

The basic idea is to organize the school system around fixed high schools. Provide surety to residents about the high school their children will eventually attend in exchange for the flexibility to re-zone elementary and middle schools within the unchanging high school district. This fixed yet flexible system enables the school system to respond to variable student population growth rates.

High school attendance zones will be, in general, fixed for the long term. This offers residents the knowledge in the first grade of which high school and high school district their children will attend.

Middle schools and elementary schools will be aligned with a single high school:

- Attendance zones for middle and elementary schools may be adjusted as frequently as necessary to maintain an efficient use of capacities and proximity to where students live.
- New middle and elementary schools will be added or closed in the high school district as needed.

Monies will be allocated by the County School board to each high school district on an equitable basis; the funding per student will be equal throughout the county district...no rich districts, no poor districts.

High school principals will be responsible for their high school and, through the principals for the middle and elementary schools, also for these schools within the high school district.

Teachers and staff can move freely between the schools within the high school district at the direction of the high school principal. Books and courses can be standardized within the high school district to accommodate student mobility within the high school district.

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AFTER NOTE B: COMMUNITY RESPECT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION.

My father graduated from Steele High School in 1939, the year before the school was raised. He attended many class reunions and always had an affinity for his time there.

I look at the picture below and cannot help but wonder what it would have been like to climb those stairs every morning and find my class in this magnificent building.

My conclusion, I think, is that I would have been really impressed that someone thought my education was important enough to put me in such an imposing and impressive place as this.

As Winston Churchill said in 1941: “**We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us**”. School building design, good and bad, is more impactful than we think.

