FOCUS ON CRITICAL ISSUES

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Summer 2006

Schools cycle back into the heart of the neighborhood

For many reasons, schools are "coming home." Parking lots are smaller; green spaces bigger; neighbors and parents closer. Schools are reclaiming their rightful place in the community – at its heart.

Past issues of *Focus on Critical Issues* have explored aspects of the many crises Oregon educators face, from funding stability to workforce shortages and achievement gaps. It's time to celebrate a success story that's been creeping as quietly as a kid's sneakers headed cross-kitchen for another cookie.

Schools are changing – from footprints and heating systems to landscapes and siting decisions. With Oregon schools' record-breaking funding requests nearly upon us in November, thousands of fingers are crossed for better facilities to meet growing needs.

It's a good time to highlight how school boards are working with agencies, cities and citizens to create the next generation of schools.

– Editor

What happened to the old neighborhood school?

Communities began to move away from the concept of a small neighborhood-centered school that kids could walk to in the 1970s. They sought better land prices, more land for ball fields and space for expansion, and they found it most easily on the outskirts of town.

But because the distance between these larger sites and the neighborhoods they served was no longer walkable or even reasonably bikeable, schools needed still more land to park the cars and buses necessary to get students to school.

Today, the footprint of a school parking lot often exceeds that of the school itself. Elementary schools that once fit into a city block or two occupy 10-15 acres, and high schools once sited on four to 10 acres consume as much as 80 acres of land.

Schools on large sites in outlying areas remain popular, but they bear hidden costs. Because most high school students now drive and most young students are driven or bused to school, districts are spending more for student transportation.

Oregon state law requires school districts to provide busing for elementary students who live more than a mile from their school and secondary students who live more than 1.5 miles away. Although the state reimburses districts for 70-90 percent of their student transportation costs, rising fuel expenses squeeze budgets for school supplies, teachers and educational programs. And the state's tab for K-12 transportation has risen from $120 million in the 2000-01 school year to $143 million in 2005-06.

Oregon ranks about 26th in the country in school transportation expenditures, spending an average of $325 per pupil, according to the most recent statistics from the National Center

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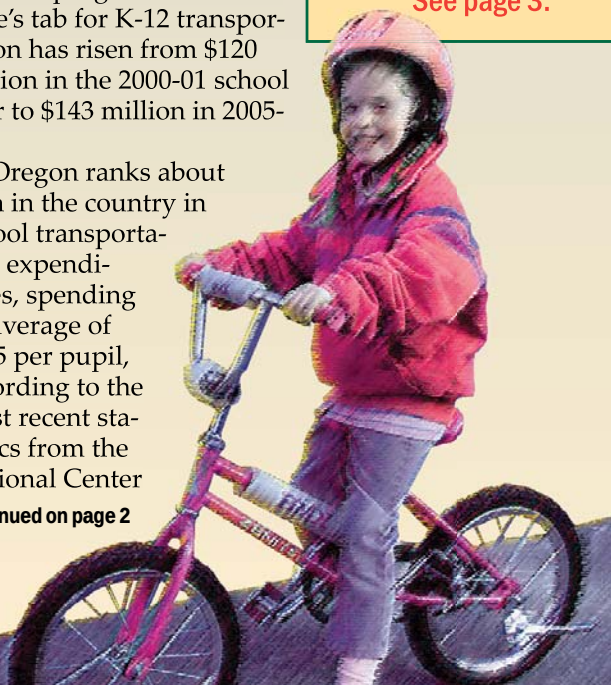
October 4 is Walk+Bike to School Day

See page 3.



Neighborhood schools – from page 1

for Educational Studies. Roughly half of Oregon students are bused, compared to about 16 percent in California.

Kids' health suffers; too much time spent in "park"

Meanwhile, the percentage of overweight youth has more than doubled since the 1970s. Public health officials lament that convenient opportunities for simple exercise – like walking or biking – have disappeared.

"School siting practices have helped engineer physical activity out of the life of children," said John Chism, manager of Oregon's Physical Activity and Nutrition Program. "But kids need to develop good physical activity habits at an early age."

When the "kid-friendliness" of neighborhood streets suffers, time-strapped parents chauffeur children everywhere. Spontaneous play – made possible by well-connected, safe-for-children streets – is disappearing while kids spend more time on such sedentary and largely solitary activities as watching TV and playing video games.

Rising to the challenge

But some school boards and communities are pushing back:

- They're challenging stale assumptions about school siting and design that have yielded big-box-style schools engulfed by acres of asphalt.
- They're upgrading. Schools on smaller sites in neighborhoods enable students to walk or bike to school.
- They're pushing for well-designed schools that harmonize with surrounding neighborhoods and generate civic pride, connecting an aging population that has become less and less engaged with its schools.
- They're recognizing that "sustainable schools" means more than energy-efficient "green buildings" – it also means finding energy-efficient locations for schools.
- They're building relationships to share the benefits – and costs – of building (or rebuilding) schools within communities, where school volunteers and parents are nearby to help.
- And to help children get around more easily and safely, communities are building systems of bicycle and pedestrian paths.
- They're finding that walkability allows more students the flexibility to take advantage of early bird and after-school activities, including sports, music and tutoring that students cannot participate in if they rely on the bus for transportation home.

Highlighting successes

In this issue, you'll read how several Oregon schools made decisions to preserve, upgrade or build new schools – with community support – that put them back into the heart of the neighborhoods they serve. You'll read how several districts planned safe and convenient paths for kids to walk and bike to school – cutting congestion and busing expenses.

These examples of departures from the sprawl approach yield important transportation and community-cohesion benefits.

But, as noted by Gaelen McAllister, a parent who helped plan Bush Elementary in Salem, their biggest payoff may be in parent-teacher communication:

"At schools where 80 or 90 percent of the kids are bused or driven, you don't see many teachers chatting with parents when they pick up – or drop off – their children. Here at Bush School, you do. " ■■

BOARDS & PLANNING

How can school boards create schools that are more community-centered and more accessible to students by foot or bike?

What lessons have veterans of successful school planning-initiatives learned?

Here are nine principles boards should consider in the process of planning a new school or an older school's renovation.

1. **Bring all stakeholders to the planning table.** Invite parents, neighborhood leaders, and city officials – including representatives from planning, parks, and transportation departments – onto the advisory committee that plans the school. Too often, school facility and community planning take place in different silos. Integrate these planning activities.
2. **Get a good architect.** Look carefully at projects completed by architects under consideration. Go with the more creative ones. If you're debating whether to renovate or build new, find an architect with experience in the rehabilitation of older buildings, especially if renovating a historic school. It's not uncommon for inexperienced architects to overestimate costs or to exaggerate the challenges of rehabilitation.
3. **Give planning committees adequate time.** Once you've appointed a school planning committee, give it the time needed to research creative school design, parking and siting concepts. Avoid rushing ahead with a cookie-cutter approach.
4. **Question "rules" that don't make sense.** When you hear there's a

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Boards & planning – from page 2

requirement that would harm your community's vision, question it. Go to a primary source and find out whether it exists. If it does, seek an exception. Rules may just be policies or standard practices that can be more flexible than you think.

5. **Give students transportation options.** Push for safe pedestrian and bike routes to school. Provide plenty of bike racks at the school. Above all, locate schools within walking or biking distance of neighborhoods they're to serve.
6. **Push for good design.** Quality design matters. A beautiful school generates neighborhood pride and loyalty. That can boost community engagement, resulting in more volunteers who can then be relied on to help raise money for new educational programs.
7. **Question arbitrary school-acreage standards.** Assertions that 10, 20 and 30 acres – plus an acre for every 100 students – are required for elementary, middle and high schools, respectively, are common. The State of Oregon imposes no such requirements, and even the Council for Educational Facility Planners International, which had recommended them, has dropped these guidelines.
8. **Tap available information and funding sources.** The Oregon Transportation and Growth Management Program maintains a "Walkable Schools" Web page and plans a round of grants in 2007 for local transportation and land-use planning projects. These grants can support safe-routes-to-school initiatives.
9. **Build – or maintain and rehabilitate – community-centered schools.** Schools that are part of the neighborhoods they serve provide the foundation for a good education and engender community support for school programs and budgets. Examine school design, parking and siting concepts that support schools that are the centers of their communities. ■■

WALK +BIKE
OREGON WALK + BIKE TO SCHOOL

Wednesday, October 4, is International Walk-or-Bike-to-School Day

In 1997, the Partnership for a Walkable America sponsored the first Walk Our Children to School Day in Chicago as a day to bring community leaders and children together to create awareness of the need for communities to be walkable.

By 2002, children, parents, teachers and community leaders around the country joined walkers around the world for the second International Walk to School Day. Last year about 8,000 kids participated in Oregon.

Schools can register and see who is participating, as well as get ideas for Walk-to-School Day (Week or Month), *www.walktoschool.org*.

Here are some starter ideas:

- Form "walking school buses" – groups of children who walk designated routes to school under adult supervision, picking up kids along the way just like a bus.
- Plan a walk-to-school parade.
- Invite elected officials, parents and children to meet in a specific neighborhood or several different neighborhoods at a designated point and walk to school together.
- Make signs for walkers to carry; show the community and the media what you're doing.
- Work with other groups that care about kids being able to safely bike and walk to school.
- Dedicate recess, phys-ed or other classes to getting out and walking together.
- Greet walkers at your school with stickers, gifts and refreshments.
- Make it an event that involves the community, public officials and the media.
- Have students keep track of all the miles they walk or bike to school or during school hours to earn prizes and work towards a school-wide goal. ■■

"Kids need safety training and safe routes every day of the year."

Dr. Jane Moore, Oregon Public Health Services

Rosa Parks Elementary School, Portland

Designed a "community campus"

Opening to students in September, Rosa Parks Elementary School lies within the New Columbia housing project, a mixed-use development that replaces the old Columbia Villa housing project in North Portland.

Rosa Parks Elementary shares a campus and a concept with partners North Portland Boys & Girls Club, Portland Parks & Recreation, and the University Park Community Center. The $15 million school campus received funding from several sources, including the Housing Authority of Portland, the City of Portland, the Boys & Girls Club, Portland Public Schools, and federal new-market tax credits.

The school district saved around $6 million in building costs by sharing costs with its partners, according to Doug Capps, a former Portland School Board member who serves as the district's project manager for Rosa Parks. The school district's share of the building costs was $8.9 million.

A family resource room at the school was designed as a community meeting place, offering computer access as well as information about social services and other community needs.

Campus partners will share the school facilities as well as a new gym and an event room at the community center.

"Rosa Parks Elementary is an excellent example of a school building on a smaller site, centrally located within a neighborhood," says architect John Weekes, who worked on the project. The building features solar panels and natural light, and includes design elements that meet high performance standards for sustainability. Some of those elements will be used as tools to teach students about sustainability. ■■

Leo Adler Parkway, Baker City

Trail links school to neighborhoods

Since the early nineties, community leaders in Baker City have dreamed of creating a park and path system that would link residential neighborhoods to the downtown and other local sites. Thanks to a large bequest to the city from Leo Adler, a local magazine distributor, coupled with state and private foundation grants, the dream is approaching reality. Two and a half miles of the three-mile Leo Adler Parkway were completed as of 2001, and the remaining four-block gap is expected to be finished by 2008.

Children and students already benefit from the trail, which links neighborhoods to the Baker City High School, a public library, and a sports complex with softball, soccer, track and flag football facilities.

"The parkway is very well used by young people," said Jennifer Watkins, a planner with Baker City. "It's used not only by high school students, but also by younger kids who go to the sports complex to practice baseball, soccer, etc. The kids can get there on their own. They don't have to be driven."

Planning for the project got under way in 1996 with a five-day charrette (planning meeting). The local high school provided space for town-hall-style meetings at which parkway plans were discussed with the community as a whole.

"We've had wonderful cooperation from Baker City High School," said Tabor Clarke, a local resident who led parkway planning. "The school incorporated the path and restoration of the Powder River into its agricultural curriculum. For me, this engaged the students from the school. The students took some ownership of the project, which was very satisfying to our group. We had great input from the students and the high school staff."

"The school incorporated the path and restoration into its agricultural curriculum. The students took some ownership of the project."

Tabor Clarke, planning committee

Baker School District Superintendent Don Ulrey said the new path is ideal for students and for visitors to Baker City.

"We're looking at building a new middle school along the path," he said. "And we'll offer aquatic and environmental classes that will make further use of path. It's a great gift from the Leo Adler Trust, along with the scholarships the trust has provided for our students and a pledge toward a new library."

"I can't think of a better way to get kids back and forth from school," said Clarke. "You can see how much more safely the kids can get from one place to another and avoid getting onto dangerous open streets." ■■

A Trail for Two Cities: Monmouth/Independence

Students, community will travel on Ash Creek Trail

Ash Creek Trail, a four-mile people-friendly link between the fast-growing communities of Monmouth and Independence, will one day provide students from five public schools and Western Oregon University with a safer route to class.

It also will offer better access for members of the two communities to parks, shops and neighborhoods, with some recreational and learning opportunities along the way.

The pedestrian path and bikeway was a goal for years for many residents. Now it's beginning to move from vision to reality, thanks to joint planning among the city governments, schools and communities.

"We are not islands," said Monmouth Mayor Larry Dalton, about the relationship among the two towns, Central School District and WOU. "We depend on one another."

The first 500 feet of the four-mile trail was completed last summer near Talmadge Middle School in Independence. A teen construction crew, part of Polk County's Help Achieving Lifelong Objectives (funded by the federal Workforce Investment Act), worked on the site, which was prepped by city workers.

The trail on the Independence side should be completed in October 2007. But the trail's route through Monmouth entails some difficult challenges that have slowed progress, according to Craig Johns, the city's public works director.

The original design led the trail across Highway 99 near Monmouth and through a wastewater treatment facility and there were worries about flooding and erosion.

"A few people who own property abutting the proposed trail feel it may bring undesirable people close to their property. But study after study indicates that trails are self-policed by users, and there is very little crime and litter," according to Greg Ellis, Independence city manager.

Options, including a new traffic signal and an over- or underpass, are being studied, and some property-line issues are yet to be resolved. The timeline for Monmouth's part of the trail has not been finalized.

To develop a master plan for the Ash Creek Trail, the cities obtained a grant through the Transportation and Growth Management program, a partnership of the Oregon Department of Transportation and the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development.

"The master plan was a joint project, but construction of the trail in each city will be planned, financed and constructed by the cities individually," Ellis said. "The funding currently comes from our urban renewal district, but we will be applying for several grants."

Those grant applications will include ODOT's Bicycle-Pedestrian Grant Program and its new Safe Routes to School grant program.

"There are so few east-west routes in this area, the communities really needed this," said Sue Geniesse, ODOT planner. "The trail is a true alternative to taking your car out."

Ash Creek Trail – begun 2006
Four-mile trail will eventually connect five public schools, Western Oregon University and four parks

Need:
- High percentage of students walk or bike along unsafe routes
- Traffic jams around schools

Challenges:
- Route crosses highway, borders residential property
- Funding

Solutions:
- Cooperative model with school district, two towns, the university and the county

Already, 30-40 percent of the kids walk or bike to school on streets and on the highway. "The trail will get those kids onto a much safer route," said Geniesse.

Ellis foresees fewer students being driven to school once the trail is complete in Independence. When kids can walk or bike down the trail, the traffic jam around schools, which Ellis calls "a transportation nightmare," may end.

Independence formed a citizen advisory committee, including teachers and the superintendent, to plan the trail. Long-range plans include ideas for environmental and ecosystem education for students. The education component may pay off by making Ash Creek a cleaner tributary to the Willamette River.

Representatives from the Public Works Department, planning commission, WOU, Central, and local citizens are involved.

What does sustainability mean for schools? Where to begin?

Sustainability means to act in a manner that exhibits awareness of how all things are connected and make well-considered choices for the greater good of all.

Schools are great examples of interconnected systems to which principles of sustainability can be applied with wide-ranging benefits. Such systems include the building, its component materials, systems and operation; surrounding natural resources and ecosystems; students, staff, and the community; transportation methods, district budgets, and even global conditions.

We're living in an age of dwindling resources and growing health awareness, one in which the interconnectedness of systems has been shown to offer solutions for some of what ails us. We're pioneers on the path to making those solutions practicable.

As Mark Schneider wrote in *Do School Facilities Affect Academic Outcomes?* for the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities:

"While existing studies on school building quality basically point to improved student behavior and better teaching in higher-quality facilities, what is needed is more firm policy advice about the types of capital investments that would be most conducive to learning and to good teaching. This would help those who manage construction dollars better target and maximize the return on such investments."

Following are some considerations for school boards to ponder when exploring this territory:

See Sustainable Oregon Schools Initiative, Page 12.

Choosing the site

Wise selection and use of a site can provide opportunities to study ecosystems, monitor stream quality, reduce transportation costs and reduce non-point-source pollution. Educators and parents have a renewed interest in putting schools on smaller, central sites that allow these institutions to fulfill their time-honored role as community centers.

- Select a site on public transportation lines and with bike and foot access to encourage physical activity and community interaction while avoiding harm to the atmosphere (avoid the greenhouse effect).
- Investigate past uses of the site; e.g., was it the site of an underground storage tank, landfill, or mine that could lead to soil contamination?

Planning the design (new or remodel)

- Incorporate materials with a low environmental impact: reused, with recycled content, and renewable. These avoid the energy and pollution costs of extracting virgin materials.
- Choose high-quality local materials, when appropriate, to support your local economy and preclude shipping-related air pollution and fuel use.
- Aim for a high-performance facility, which greatly reduces energy and water needs over its lifetime. While the cost of a high-performance building may initially be higher, you'll more than make up for it with lower operating costs.
- Select a design that provides adequate air flow and avoids materials that give off toxic substances. The healthier your students and staff are, the more you'll be able to accomplish.
- Incorporate natural lighting and outdoor views, which has been demonstrated to enhance student performance.
- Design for community or local governmental uses, encouraging community involvement and supplying more learning opportunities for students.
- Preserve and upgrade existing schools (especially those that students can already walk to). This extends the life of existing resources and avoids consumption of new ones.

Building operation pointers

- The building should be commissioned* to ensure it performs at the level to which it was designed. Systems must be inspected, tested, monitored and periodically re-tested.
- The cost and effort to prevent most air-quality problems is significantly less than what it takes to diagnose and resolve such problems after they develop.
- Use surfaces that are easy to clean and maintain, and ensure a regular cleaning schedule to reduce asthma triggers.
- Use only non-toxic materials for cleaning, maintainence and landscaping to reduce the dangers to people and the environment.
- Involve students in facility operation and monitoring to teach them about building design, indoor environmental quality, financial principles, and their local ecosystem. They'll also learn math, science, health, business and social studies skills. ■■

* ***Building commissioning*** is a process for examining the systems in new and renovated buildings for energy efficiency and quality control. It can significantly reduce energy use and save on operating expenses. See Page 11 for more information.

Bush Elementary, Salem

Eliminating parking lot regains neighborhood feeling, character

Bush Elementary, one of Salem's oldest schools, was a neighborhood school about a century ago. Over the years, however, the neighborhood changed. A major highway and an overpass bisected the area, impeding children's safe walk to the school.

And the neighboring hospital desperately wanted land on which to expand.

With visions of flashing ambulance lights and drivers screeching up to the emergency room, concerned school and community members decided it was time for Bush Elementary to move.

"We engaged in a large community outreach effort about siting the new school," said former Salem-Keizer School Board member Bonnie Heitsch.

Parents, the neighborhood association, and representatives from nearby Willamette University and the city were among those involved in siting discussions. Although the group didn't reach consensus on all issues, participants did agree that the school should remain in the neighborhood.

"Because the school is located in the central city, it would have been cheaper to build further out and bus the students to school," Heitsch said. "I was adamant that we keep the neighborhood school in an area where kids could walk. As it worked out, we only moved a few blocks, over railroad tracks, over the highway and away from the hospital."

The school board negotiated a sale with the hospital and found a new site in the neighborhood that adjoined a small city park. Some older rental houses had to be knocked down to build the new school, and special care was taken to be sensitive to neighborhood concerns.

"The community was involved in the process of determining the character of the school building," said project architect Henry Fitzgibbon of Soderstrom Architects of Portland. Careful planning and design ensured that the new buildings would reflect the style of the existing older homes. The stone front porch of the school, muted colors – even the concrete sides of the gym that look just like wood siding – keep the feel of the 1940s-era houses that surround the school.

"The neighborhood was uncomfortable about taking out rental housing to build the school but we think that, in the end, Bush School improved the neighborhood," Fitzgibbon said.

Bush Elementary's neighborhood site allowed only four acres, instead of the usual eight acres, for the school. But the adjacent park makes the site seem larger, according to parent Gaelen McAllister, who served on the school's citizen advisory committee.

"The park space is used much more now that the school is there," she said. The play structure, soccer field and covered basketball areas that the school put in enhance the park for after-school and weekend users.

The new school building is also community-friendly in its design, McAllister said, and is used often in the summer and evenings by outside groups.

Fitzgibbon explained that the building was designed in sections so school personnel can be flexible in closing off portions of the school when other sections are being used.

Another 'people-friendly' aspect of Bush Elementary is the on-street parking—and the elimination of a large parking lot.

Heitsch credits the City of Salem for enabling the school to resolve the parking issue in a creative way.

"A city ordinance required us to have a parking lot," she said. "The lot would have had to be located between the school and the park. It would have taken up valuable green space, chopped up the site, and forced kids to wade through it to get to school. The city's waiver of that ordinance was one of the greatest helps to the project," Heitsch said. "We have plenty of street parking along the sides and front of the building."

> *"If you are going to put cars on campus, bring them in from the back."*
>
> *Bonnie Heitsch, former Salem-Keizer School Board member*

"Fundamental urban planning" is how Heitsch describes the pedestrian-friendly design of Bush Elementary. Students, parents and community members can walk right in to Bush without negotiating the barrier of a large, concrete parking lot.

Bush Elementary School's physical size got smaller in its relocation, but the school got better, according to Heitsch. The percentage of students walking to school has greatly increased, to almost 60 percent, she said.

"More parents come in to school now, too," adds McAllister. "They walk their kids to school, and they stay to talk and visit. We're not isolated now," she said. "The school is part of the neighborhood." ■■

Ensworth Elementary School, Bend

Closer to "home"

Student transportation takes a $143 million bite out of the Oregon Department of Education's annual budget. It takes another bite out of local school district budgets when the districts chip in their 30 percent of the cost of student transportation.

In Bend, whose population grew 53 percent between 1995 and 2005, the cost of land for school buildings is increasing, too, from $42,000 to $150,000 an acre in just a few years. To find land at affordable prices, school districts have for years felt pressured to go outside local urban growth boundaries to build new schools. But such schools certainly cannot be described as the heart of their communities.

Ensworth Elementary, Bend SD
Opened 2004

Need:
- 53% population growth – between 1995 and 2005

Challenges:
- Land is expensive – up to $150,000 an acre
- Busing costs are rising

Solutions:
- Reduce building 'footprint' to fit smaller lot
- Site close to neighborhood to save on transportation costs

A project that exemplifies reversing the sprawl trend is Ensworth Elementary School in northeast Bend, part of the Bend-LaPine School District that has 24 schools and about 14, 700 students.

Ensworth Elementary's location was influenced by an Oregon Transportation and Growth Management program study conducted by David Evans & Associates for the district in 1997.

The study found that by locating schools in neighborhoods, as opposed to placing them on remote sites accessible only by motor vehicle, the school district could save as much as 32 percent annually on student transportation costs. Influenced by this and other study findings, the district developed a new template, the in-fill prototype, for community-based elementary schools on smaller sites.

Ensworth, which opened in 2004, differs from many new schools in two important ways.

First, it occupies a much smaller site – only about nine acres instead of the 15 acres that a school of this size would normally consume. This means the school can fit gracefully into a settled neighborhood and be close enough to homes so students can walk to school and to other local destinations. Whereas only about 13 percent of students nationwide walk or bike to school, almost all of Ensworth's students could walk or bike, and the majority of them do. Students typically walk to and from school in groups, getting physical exercise in the process.

Second, Ensworth consumes less land because it is two levels. On the upper floor, special fire exits meet code requirements. A building separated by a covered walkway from the main structure doubles as a cafeteria and gym for students and as a community center for the neighborhood. The separate entrance addresses security issues, strengthening Ensworth's ability to function as a community gathering place.

And the school's proximity to the neighborhood also allows for greater use of school playgrounds after school hours.

The intimate relationship between Ensworth and the community it serves is seen as a plus by educators.

Virginia Nelson, a kindergarten teacher at Ensworth, expressed her feelings about the new school:

"We're located in the heart of the neighborhood. The children don't have to board a bus and go someplace far away. And since the school is so close to the neighborhood it serves, we see the students' parents more often. Here we have daily contacts with many parents, who can easily swing by. The neighborhood feels a greater sense of ownership toward the school. You see it in the way people take care of the school."

Grant possibilities

ODOT's Pedestrian and Bicycle Grant Program provides about $5 million every two years that may go to Oregon cities and counties for design and construction of pedestrian and bicycle facilities within public rights-of-way.

Michael Ronkin, manager of the program, said that three to five joint city/county/school grant applications have been received each cycle since about 1980.

His best tip: "If schools are well-sited within neighborhoods, improvements have a better chance of being funded because they'll serve communities, not just kids walking or biking to school."

The next grant cycle will begin in spring 2008. For grant applications and more information, visit *www.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/BIKEPED/grants1.shtml#Other_Funding_Programs.*

Grants Pass High School

Rebuilt school is community's "pride & joy"

Grants Pass High School Project
1996-2000

Challenges:
- Deteriorating, outdated structures
- Dangerous street separating school and athletic field

Community requests:
- Avoid institutional "sprawl"
- Observe traditional values

Community support:
- Passed a $35 million bond
- $.5 million grant from Grants Pass Foundation

Grants Pass had a problem with its old high school: It was a hodgepodge of add-ons and redos. Even creative maintenance could no longer keep up with its deteriorating, outdated structures.

The street between the athletic field and the main entrance of the school was worrisomely busy.

When a dump truck lost its brakes and flew by campus, it was a harbinger of potential accidents to come.

To remodel or rebuild – that was the question. A committee of school administrators and board members, community and business representatives, and parents studied the facility extensively, weighing the needs of a growing student population and the community interests.

"The community wanted a school that was welcoming, where it was easy to move from one building to another," said Superintendent Steve Iverson. "They didn't want one large, sprawling, institutional-looking building like so many other new high schools. They wanted a school that *looked like* Grants Pass."

And they wanted to keep – or recreate – some of the favorite aspects of the old school, like its pit-style gym.

"The community also wanted the buildings to convey a strong sense of education in a traditional way," said architect John Weekes of Dull Olson Weekes in Portland. That desire led to a design with classical influences, in brick, with separate buildings that resemble a college campus.

The local *Grants Pass Daily Courier* was a key partner in rethinking Grants Pass High. Newspaper representatives met with architects and teacher and administrator groups about the flow of classrooms, hallways and the campus overall.

"The newspaper provided excellent objective coverage of the entire process," said Sherry Ely, the district's safety officer. "They helped highlight unsafe areas and informed the community about our needs."

The community showed its support for rebuilding the school by passing a $35 million bond that included funding for an elementary school. The rebuilding began in 1996 and was completed in stages.

"We'd build a new one and knock an old one down," is how Iverson describes the phasing of new buildings. The final work was completed in 2000.

Ely pointed out that some creative thinking was required because of the phasing of the project. Classes were held in portables and elementary schools, when necessary.

The city worked with the district to change the contour of the street in front of the school to help slow down traffic. "We originally proposed that the road be vacated, but it was decided to make it more pedestrian-friendly," Weekes said. A "speed table" — a giant, 20-foot speed bump — also slows motorists down.

Other pedestrian-friendly changes include moving parking to the perimeter of campus instead of in front of the school, and moving the entry of the main building to within 20 feet of the sidewalk instead of its old location in the center of campus. The school's proximity to downtown and neighborhoods means students can walk to school and to after-school destinations.

Grants Pass High School received over a half million dollars from the Grants Pass Foundation, a community arts group, to enhance its new performing arts center. A large theater in the center seats 800 and a smaller one seats 100.

The center showcases community performances and conferences as well as the district's strong instrumental music and choral programs. Community contributions continue to improve the center, which is booked a year in advance.

"It's the biggest center in town," Ely said.

"We invited the community in to see the new school before it opened to students," Iverson said. "We were concerned that people might say we'd spent too much money on the project. In fact, it was just the opposite. The entire community was very pleased."

Now Grants Pass residents bring out-of-town guests to see their school, Iverson said. The Chamber of Commerce touts the school as Number One Tourist Destination in Grants Pass.

As architect Weekes put it, "It's their pride and joy." ■■

Hood River Middle School

Beyond preserving a historic treasure

Hood River Middle School enriches the town.

Contructed nearly 80 years ago, Hood River Middle School is still one of the largest and most distinctive buildings in Hood River. Built as a high school in 1927, the brick building is unique in its formal Jacobethan (collegiate gothic) style, with gable parapets, terracotta trim, finials and arched openings – and its spectacular views of Mt. Hood and Mt. Adams.

The school stands as a testament to the prosperity of the 1920s, before the Great Depression and long before modernity and cost-cutting overshadowed grace in school construction of many of our schools.

Built for $155,329, the school underwent a $2.8 million remodel about five years ago that the community agrees was worth every dime.

From the original drawings of Portland architect Raymond Walter Hatch to the DLR Group's latest additions – the design encourages the community's use of the facility.

"Our auditorium has long been a centerpiece for the community," said Bob Dais, principal of the school for the past 14 years. "We've had everything from movies and theater productions to funerals here."

With its classic chandeliers and WPA-era mural around the stage, the auditorium is a distinctive event venue.

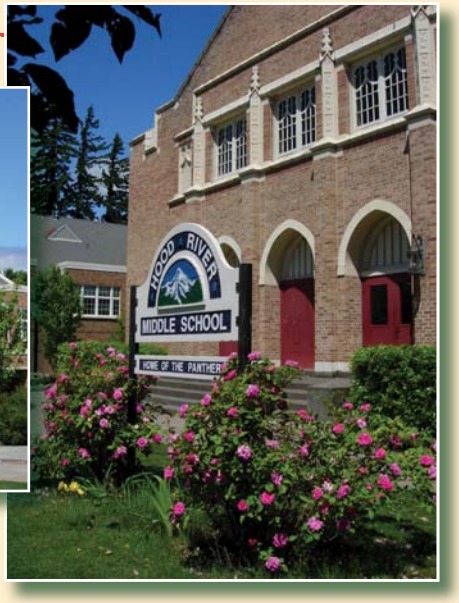
When more space was needed at the school, architects designed a new building that complements the original building, which is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

Hood River Middle School
New building addition

Challenges:
- Add space but preserve the unique character of the historic building

Community requests:
- Keep the school where it is
- Keep the trees

The new addition complements the historic building inside and out. A plaza space was created between the buildings.



The remodel of the 1927 school building preserved its unique character but improved access and space.

"The original type of architecture would be prohibitively expensive to replicate today," said architect Richard Higgins.

Because the old building couldn't be replicated, architects worked to copy the elegant forms in more affordable materials. They chose a separate structure rather than an addition because, "when you're working with an antiquated building system, the better approach is to set the new part aside," Higgins said.

Complicating the remodeling was a late-'70s-early-'80s addition, a multi-purpose room constructed in a minimalist style that Higgins referred to as "not a sensitive neighbor."

"Instead of tearing it down," he said, "we covered it up."

Careful selection of materials and attention proportion in the cover-up helped the new construction blend easily with the old.

Architects didn't stop with the exterior in their efforts to tie in the new structures with the existing architecture.

"The new addition has a lunchroom where we replicated gothic arch elements from the old building, using Sheetrock instead of stone and masonry," Higgins says. Detailed divided-light windows work well with the decorative glass in the old building.

The city's design review board (an elected committee that oversees building improvements) played an active role in the remodeling.

Community concerns about keeping some huge old trees west of the building, for example, caused the structure to be set back slightly. The result is "a beautiful setting between the trees and the building," according to Higgins.

The original building's front door faced north, but access was on the south side of the building.

"There was confusion about where to enter the building," Higgins said. "Now a new plaza between the old and new structures draws you to the entry."

New areas are also accessible to disabled students and community members.

Students used to walk outside to get to the lunchroom; now they use a covered walkway. And with ample space for technology in the new building, cumbersome retrofitting of the old building was avoided.

Hood River Middle School's location in the core of the community, adjacent to a city park and swimming pool, is one reason that about 27 percent of students walk or bike to school (compared to a national average of around 13 percent). ■■

RESOURCES

For more information, ideas and guidance, visit **"Schools at the Heart of Communities"** on OSBA's Web site, ***www.osba.org.***

Business Tax Credits
www.oregon.gov/ENERGY/CONS/school/HPSProgram.shtml
New high-performance schools that go for **Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification** with the Oregon Department of Energy can qualify for a Business Energy Tax Credit. Part of the LEED certification requires such schools to be "bike and pedestrian friendly."

Creating Connections: The CEFPI Guide For Educational Facility Planning
www.cefpi.org

Healthy Kids Learn Better Partnership
www.hklb.org

Iwalk, the International Walk to School Committee
www.iwalktoschool.org/resources.htm
Promoting October as Walk to School Month.

Northwest Energy Education Institute
www.nweei.org/news/rcm.html

Training, professional development and certification to energy managers.

National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities
www.edfacilities.org/rl/smart_growth.cfm#9068

NCEF's "Smart Growth and Schools" offers links to dozens of useful studies and other resources.

Oregon Transportation & Growth Management Program
www.oregon.gov/LCD/TGM
TGM planning grants can support safe-routes-to-school initiatives and TGM's outreach and quick-response services can help school districts address school siting issues. TGM maintains a "Walkable Schools" section on its Web site, which links to many resources on school design and transportation topics, including the *Oregon Handbook on School Siting*.

Portland's Bicycle Transportation Alliance
www.bta4bikes.org

Safe Routes to School across Oregon
www.walknbike.org

The **Safe Routes to School** grant program is administered by ODOT. Julie Yip, program manager, said that the federal pass-through grant program, temporarily tied up in rule writing, plans to extend requests for grants in 2007. For more information, visit *www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TS/saferoutes.shtml*

Walk-to-School Day
www.walktoschool.org/
Maintained by the National Center for Safe Routes to School, University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center, this site allows participating schools to register and keep up with what other schools around the country are doing. It also supplies ideas for observing Walk-to-School Day.

"The design of our school encourages informal chats between teachers and parents. This makes a huge difference in the quality of the school."

Gaelen McAllister, Bush Elementary School parent

Building Commissioning

Building commissioning is a systematic process of quality control and a method of risk reduction for new and renovated buildings. Commissioning is intended to save money in the long run through quality control and systems monitoring. Studies have shown that commissioning provides an average energy savings of 15 to 30 percent. Commissioning activities for new facilities begin in the planning phase and continue through construction. It includes security, fire, life and safety, heating, ventilating and air conditioning, lighting, and electrical systems and controls. Commissioning ends with ensuring that operators are trained and that manuals for operations and maintenance are available and accurate.

Commissioning is defined in ASHRAE Guideline 1-1996 as the process of ensuring that systems are designed, installed, functionally tested, and capable of being operated and maintained to perform in conformity with the design intent.

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FOCUS ON ISSUES Critical

Volume 11 Issue 1

OSBA's *Focus on Critical Issues* addresses topics affecting Oregon school boards.

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The Sustainable Oregon Schools Initiative

Learn more about sustainability through the Sustainable Oregon Schools Initiative. It's being created now with input from interested stakeholders and guidance from a steering committee that includes OSBA representatives.

Topics include high-performance, sustainable facilities; resource use; transportation; food; purchasing; indoor environmental quality; community and culture issues; and sustainability education.

The initiative's plans:

- Inform school personnel and supporting organizations about sustainability practices and opportunities through training, events, a Web site and an annual awards program.
- Create a toolkit to help school districts and schools assess their sustainability, access resources and implement projects.
- Reach out to school districts to inform them about these resources.

To learn more, visit the Web site, *www.sustainableschools.org*, subscribe to the monthly electronic newsletter, *lstole@zerowaste.org*, or call Lori Stole, 503-307-4067. ■■

Building Commissioning – from page 11

The Oregon Department of Energy qualifies commissioning agents and keeps a list online at *www.oregon.gov/ENERGY/CONS/BUS/comm/commissioning.shtml*. More information is available there about commissioning, including tips for hiring a commissioning firm.

The state offers low-interest loans for schools that invest in energy conservation. Visit *www.oregon.gov/ENERGY/LOANS/selphm.shtml* to read about these loans, energy evaluations and related services and programs.

You can read more about energy-efficient buildings and commissioning on *www.betterbricks.com*. ■■

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