

SMART GROWTH IN ACTION

Neighborhood Schools Initiative

MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, WISCONSIN

Faced with increasing numbers of children who had to be bused to distant schools because schools in their neighborhood had no room, Milwaukee Public Schools decided to take action to not only create more neighborhood schools, but also to restore the communities around them. In 1999, the Wisconsin legislature approved the Neighborhood Schools Initiative. It authorized the Milwaukee school district to borrow up to \$170 million to build or renovate neighborhood schools.

The district developed the Neighborhood Schools Plan through a collaborative, interactive planning process, inviting input from residents all over the city. From the many focus groups, hundreds of community outreach meetings, and thousands of door-to-door and telephone surveys came the plan's guiding principles. Focused on the 28 most crowded elementary schools and the six most crowded middle school attendance areas, the plan, when completed, will add more than 11,000 seats and 750,000 square feet of space with six new schools and renovations or additions to 34 existing schools. The school district will also convert 32 schools to K-8. Bonds issued by the Milwaukee Redevelopment Authority will fund the plan.

The 37th Street Elementary School, on a 5.5-acre site in the downtown Washington Park neighborhood, is one of the initiative's projects. The school's attendance area is 63% African-American and 32% Asian. Half of the population is under the age of 18, and 63% of the households are headed by single women. Most of the homes are rented, with only 25% occupied by owners. Early in the planning process, the design team conducted a design workshop to incorporate input from residents, parents, teachers, and students. Throughout the planning and design of the new school, the team involved the neighborhood as much as possible to develop a site and building plan that respects and enhances the community. The school's library, gym, cafeteria, parent center, and art and music rooms will be open to all. In addition, the site can host outdoor recreational and community functions, such as a weekly farmers market.

Understanding the relationship between a stable home environment and success at school, the school is investing in the neighborhood as well. The school board will replace 31 homes, razed to make way for the new school, on a two-for-one basis by working with partners to rehabilitate vacant properties and build new homes. The new homes will be offered with low-interest loans to low-income households in an effort to double the homeownership rate in the neighborhood. The school board is spending \$11.8 million on the new school, and the housing providers \$15 million on the housing component. The board believes this commitment will not only improve education, but will also spur investment in the neighborhood. Milwaukee Public Schools is not just building a school, it is also rebuilding the community.



SMART GROWTH PRINCIPLES MILWAUKEE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

#1	Includes Mixed Land Uses	✓
#2	Exhibits Compact Building Design	★
#3	Provides Range of Housing Types	★
#4	Promotes Walkable Neighborhoods	✓
#5	Exhibits a Distinct Sense of Place	✓
#6	Preserves Open Space	
#7	Utilizes Existing Development	
#8	Provides Transportation Choices	✓
#9	Practices Fair Decision-making	✓
#10	Promotes Stakeholder Participation	★

QUICK FACTS

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