

# ***SB 375 and Public Schools:***

## **Aligning Public Education and Regional Growth for California's Future**

November 2009



### ***Public Schools are Public Infrastructure***

Schools are one of the most important public infrastructure elements in California's neighborhoods, cities, and regions. The billions of dollars we spend on school infrastructure – both building new and modernizing existing schools – greatly affects education quality, families' quality of life, local economic development, land use patterns, and California's future.



### ***Missed Opportunity***

"Where we live and how we get to work, go about our daily business, and take our kids to school matters a great deal in the fight against climate change."<sup>i</sup> However, our massive public school infrastructure investment is absent from California's Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act (SB 375). This landmark legislation aims to combat climate change through strategic infrastructure and land use investment, and represents a groundbreaking and historic step toward a cleaner, healthier, and more prosperous Golden State.



### ***Why Schools Matter for Climate Change***

As physical infrastructure, schools have significant impacts on transportation patterns, residential choices, housing development and prices, and water and utility demands.<sup>ii</sup> California's nearly 1,000 K-12 public school districts operate more than 8,200 schools on more than 130,000 acres of land (~200 square miles) across the state. Since 1998, Californians have invested more than \$82 billion in state and local school infrastructure dollars, including building 1,000 new schools on about 13,000 acres. However, school districts and local governments are not required under state law to work together on school and land use planning.<sup>iii</sup> Further, schools provide invaluable human resources in the fight against climate change – from training the next generation in green jobs to linking real-world questions of sustainable development with high-quality teachers to engaging parents in school- and district-wide initiatives.



## ***Schools and SB 375: Connect for Sustainable Communities***

California's ongoing school construction investment and innovations in public education, coupled with the new infrastructure planning approach in SB 375, create a strategic opportunity to make land use decisions that better support students, families, and communities. This opportunity follows two distinct, yet interrelated paths – physical infrastructure planning and public engagement process – that together will realize the potential of this landmark legislation.

### **1. Coordinate all California's public infrastructure planning, including schools.**

School infrastructure planning must be inclusive, comprehensive, and integrated with the Sustainable Community Strategy in SB 375. State policy should incentivize school districts and local governments to coordinate school facility master plans, school siting, and municipal general plans.

### **2. Involve California's schools and students in Sustainable Community Strategies (SCS) planning processes.**

Students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents and other school personnel are key stakeholders that have important insights into the sustainable growth and development of their communities. The Sustainable Community Strategies (SCS) required by SB 375 provides an authentic opportunity to engage the school community, connect to curriculum, and harness the knowledge of these oft-overlooked stakeholders. Innovations in statewide education reform through California's Green Academy High School programs launched this past year by the Department of Education and other such initiatives offer a tremendous opportunity to authentically connect districts and school sites with on-the-ground questions of sustainable development raised through the SCS process.

*The Center for Cities & Schools at the University of California-Berkeley promotes high quality education as an essential component of urban and metropolitan vitality to create equitable, healthy and sustainable cities and schools for all.*

<http://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu>

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<sup>i</sup> Adams, T. et al. 2009. "Communities Tackle Global Warming: A Guide to California's SB 375." Natural Resources Defense Council and California League of Conservation Voters.

<sup>ii</sup> U.S. EPA. 2003. "Travel and Environmental Implications of School Siting"; PACE and Center for Cities & Schools. 2009. "Smart Schools, Smart Growth: Investing in Education Facilities and Stronger Communities."

<sup>iii</sup> McKoy, D. et al. 2008. Integrating Infrastructure Planning: The Role of Schools. *ACCESS* 33: 18-26.