

# Regional Plan Association

## **Designing Healthy Schools & Healthy Communities: Making It Happen in New Jersey**

*A Conference Sponsored by Regional Plan Association and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*

October 14, 2004

### ABSTRACT

Since public education first began to be a right for all Americans in the early 1800s, public schools have been central to their communities, both physically and socially. The neighborhood school was where a child might make his or her first best friend; it was where children gained a sense of independence while walking or bicycling to and from class. The journeys to and from the school building could be as important for children as what they learned inside the classroom. Historically, that has been the role of the public school, but it's too often not the case anymore.

Schools, both in their architecture and their placement, have become monolithic, dully-built concrete and brick structures apart from a community, as if children needed to be separated from their neighborhoods. In urban areas, finding new school sites is viewed as secondary to promoting income-producing ratables, leaving brownfields and other less desirable areas as the only option. Often surrounded by a moat of parking lots and suburban highways, the isolation of the public school has made school a more limited experience for children, and has led to a list of related ill effects. The fact that we have designed schools and communities that make it difficult for children to walk or bicycle has contributed to a sedentary lifestyle, which in turn is a contributing factor to the epidemic of childhood obesity. Fortunately, the idea of making schools once again part of a neighborhood, community and city is starting to gain ground.

With the State requiring each school district to undertake and complete a Long Range Facilities Plan by October 2005, the time is right to begin considering opportunities for making our schools the heart of a healthy community. New Jersey's school construction program, one of the largest in the country, is focused on investing billions of dollars in newly constructed, renovated, and expanded school facilities in the State's neediest districts, the Abbott districts as well as supplemental funds for suburban and rural districts to meet growing facility needs. In New Jersey, communities that have been historically neglected now have the chance to build community schools, schools capable of enhancing the economic, social, and physical health of the neighborhood. Rather than building schools on the periphery of a community, community schools are built in the centers of neighborhoods. They are integrated into civic life through community facilities and programs such as libraries that are open to the public, continuing education centers, and health clinics. However, the challenge remains: **how can we link school planning to the larger town planning agenda.**

Building on the Regional Plan Association's white paper, "Designing Healthy Communities, Schools: The Heart of a Healthy Community," this conference will explore how designing schools in conjunction with their environs can help create healthy and active communities, the unique opportunity that exists in New Jersey's Abbott districts to build exemplary schools and school-centered neighborhoods, and specific examples of community schools and the creative processes behind their development. New paradigms and policies that are shaping how schools get built in the 21st century will be illustrated and examined by experts in school planning, community design and architecture. Interactive focus groups will be formed around particular issues and led by a resource team of experts and state agency staff to ground the discussions and recommendations in reality. It is hoped that the conference will enlighten local and state officials about healthy school design, as well as identify roadblocks to progress, opportunities for excellence, and new networks of partnerships.

# Regional Plan Association

NJ CT  
NY

## Designing Healthy Schools & Healthy Communities: Making It Happen in New Jersey *A Conference Sponsored by Regional Plan Association and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
College Road East & Route 1 North  
Princeton, NJ  
October 14, 2004

### AGENDA

---

- 8:30am Registration and Sign-In
- 9:00am *Welcome: The Case for Healthy Schools*  
Dr. M. Katherine Kraft, RWJF
- 9:20am *School Planning and Urban Design*  
Rob Lane, Director of Design, Regional Plan Association
- 9:45am *Keynote Address: City of Learning™ -- A New Paradigm for Building Healthy Schools*  
Roy Strickland, College of Architecture and Planning, University of Michigan
- 10:30am Break
- 10:40am *Panell: Designing Neighborhoods Around Schools: An Urban Design Agenda For School Planning*  
Moderator: Rob Lane, Director of Design, Regional Plan Association  
*The Perfect Place: The Role of School Siting in Design*, Jeanne Perantoni, SSP Architects  
*Best Practices Case Study: Trenton*, TBD, City of Trenton  
TBD, School Construction Corporation
- 11:40am *Questions and Answers*
- Noon Lunch
- 1:15pm *Issues Workshops*  
Participants will be asked to break into working groups to discuss the challenges of linking school planning to community revitalization. In each session, participants will be asked to examine a specific issue and answer some of the following questions: What can the State and the municipalities do to help communities plan for healthy schools? What institutional barriers exist between the municipality and the school district? How can one connect long range schools planning and the larger town planning process? What partnerships might be created to facilitate the planning process? The sessions include:  
*Renaissance Districts: Untapped Potential?*  
*New Strategies for New Sites: Innovative Techniques for School Siting*  
*New Dimensions for Long Range Planning: Breaking the Box*  
*Case Study Workshop (location TBD)*
- 2:45pm *Issues Presentations*  
The working groups will present the results of their group discussions.  
Facilitator: Tom Dallessio, RPA New Jersey Director
- 3:20pm *Closing Remarks*  
Thomas K. Wright, Executive Vice President, Regional Plan Association

# Regional Plan Association

**Designing Healthy Schools & Healthy Communities: Making It Happen in New Jersey**  
*A Conference Sponsored by Regional Plan Association and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
College Road East & Route 1 North  
Princeton, NJ  
October 14, 2004

Please complete the following registration form and submit it via fax to Regional Plan Association, (732) 828-9949 or forward this information via email to [symposium@rpa.org](mailto:symposium@rpa.org).

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

ORGANIZATION: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY, STATE ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Please list the following who will be accompanying you:

SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT: \_\_\_\_\_

PLANNING BOARD CHAIRPERSON: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Staff (please include titles): \_\_\_\_\_

Please select from one of the following breakout sessions (please note, session space will be assigned on a first come, first served basis and will be confirmed the morning of the event).

- ★ Renaissance Districts: Untapped Potential?
- ★ New Strategies for New Site: Innovative Techniques for School Siting
- ★ New Dimensions for Long-Range Planning: Breaking the Box
- ★ Case Study Workshop (*Case study TBD*)

There is no fee associated with this program. Directions to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation can be found on the back of this registration form or accessed from the RWJF website at <http://www.rwjf.org/about/offices.jhtml>.

If you have further questions, please contact Sasha Corchado of Regional Plan Association at (732) 828-9945.

# Regional <sup>NJ CT</sup><sup>NY</sup>Plan Association

## DIRECTIONS TO ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION:

### From Trenton Railroad Station

Take U.S. Route 1 North via the entrance ramp two blocks west of station. Drive north on U.S. Route 1 to the College Road East exit. Turn right at the traffic light into the RWJF driveway.

### From Northern New Jersey

Take the N.J. Turnpike (I-95) South to Exit 9. Turn off at Exit 9 (New Brunswick), keeping to right on leaving the toll booth. Take Route 18 North, 0.5 miles, following signs for U.S. Route 1 South to Trenton. Exit at College Road East. Turn right at the traffic light into the RWJF driveway.

### From Southern New Jersey

Take I-295 North to Exit 67 Route 1 North (New Brunswick). Follow Route 1 North to College Road East exit. Turn right at the traffic light into the RWJF driveway.