

## **We're Losing the Connections to Our Past**

Ohio's historic schools are being lost at an extremely alarming rate. Since 1997, many rural and community centered schools have been unnecessarily demolished or abandoned. The website Old Ohio Schools provides the proof.

## **Ohio School Facilities Commission**

In 1997, the Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC) was created to address the growing issues with Ohio school building conditions. Issues that were increasing exponentially because of local district deferred maintenance plans. According to the OSFC website, "the Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC) administers the state's comprehensive Kindergarten through 12th Grade public school construction program. The agency helps school districts fund, plan, design, and build or renovate schools". The OSFC coordinates facility assessments on all of Ohio's school facilities. These assessments are then provided to each school district for review and are used to help the districts create a Master Facility Plan and determine the future of existing facilities. [How Does The Funding Work?](#) explains how the OSFC will co-fund a district's project based on a yearly eligibility ranking list compiled by the Ohio Department of Education. Overall this program is truly beneficial to Ohio's educational system, but there are some concerns.

During the initial years of the OSFC, a "2/3rd's Rule" was created to determine if a building was to be renovated or replaced with a new school. If the cost to renovate an existing school was over two-thirds the cost to build an equally sized new building, then the OSFC would say the facility was to be replaced. **The OSFC has since changed the "rule" to be more of a "guideline" and will now co-fund the cost of renovation up to 100% of the cost of an equally sized new building.** The OSFC staff and consultants will not actively promote this option and it is up to those interested in renovation, within the local community, to advocate for a more in depth cost analysis for historic schools. If the local district's facility assessment for renovation costs are greater than 2/3rd's the cost of an equally sized new building and the district chooses to renovate the existing building, then a [waiver](#) needs to be submitted to the OSFC for approval.

If a school district decides to abandon their existing school facility/facilities, the OSFC will even co-fund abatement and demolition costs. Even if adaptive re-use was a possible option, most abandoned schools were razed and many of the properties are now empty lots.

All records of the OSFC are public, as defined within the [Public Records Policy](#), unless they are specifically exempt from disclosure under the Ohio Revised Code. Anyone can make a records request by using the OSFC Media Contact found [here](#).

## **Twenty-first Century Education**

While not all facilities are candidates for continued educational use, many schools could be remodeled and upgraded. The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities (NCEF) published document, [Historic Neighborhood Schools Deliver 21st Century Educations](#), provides the proof that "well-renovated, well-maintained historic schools can support a first-class twenty-first century education".

Another important OSFC program caveat local districts and communities need to be aware of is the co-funding of technology. The OSFC will only co-fund the technology infrastructure for a project, which includes the networking cable system, networking devices (routers, switches, wireless access) and shared servers (file, mail, web). Unfortunately, individual computer systems (desktops/laptops) are not co-funded. If a local district chooses to upgrade these items, it would be a 100% locally funded initiative (LFI). LFI examples include, individual classroom computers, teacher laptops and devices located within a shared computer lab environment.

## The Feasibility Study

The only accurate method to determine the condition and future usability of an older or historic school is to **conduct a feasibility study by an architect, engineer or design professional that has experience with this type of facility.** The document [Renovation vs. Replacement & the Role of A Feasibility Study](#) provides more details. After completing the proper studies, many school districts even find it less expensive and a better overall value to renovate existing buildings than build new schools. In most cases, schools constructed prior to the 1950's were built to last indefinitely. These buildings did not have projected lifespans, while newly constructed schools are built to only last an estimated 35-40 years. By reusing an existing building envelope (foundation, walls, roof), total project costs can also be between 25%-40% less than building new.

Schools located in the center of town provide students with a tangible connection to the greater community. Across the country, the trend has been to abandon older, walkable schools in favor of a consolidated "educational campus," usually closer to the edge of town. This practice has been shown to be detrimental to children's health and welfare. Schools are not isolated from the communities that they serve. Now more than ever, children need to feel connected to the social continuum of past and future generations.

The recently published report from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Renee Kuhlman (Director, Special Projects; Center for State and Local Policy), "[Helping Johnny Walk to School](#)", outlines the many consequences of abandoning/demolishing existing neighborhood schools for new "mega" schools located on the outskirts of a community. State-level policies enforcing minimum site requirements and negative biases toward renovation within funding formulas are some of the main reasons why established historic schools are being lost. Ohio is a prime example of one state that invokes educational facility policies. Most importantly, the report provides conclusive evidence that "neighborhood schools" are more beneficial than the alternative for both the students and the community.

## Why It's Important

Given the chance to utilize existing buildings is about doing what's right for our communities, our children and their future. It's part of what students are being taught in school everyday, for them, it has become a way of life.

This site was created to show the residents of Ohio, that with the right plan, their existing schools can be updated to allow many more years of academic use.

*"The truth is that in numerous cases, older school buildings can be renovated to 21st century standards with everything we'd expect in a new school."*

*– Royce Yeater, school facilities architect and head of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Midwest office*