

Innovative and Accessible Community-Oriented Schools

OBJECTIVE: We need accessible and innovative neighborhood schools that are located and designed to bring community members together and connect residents to resources within their communities. We need to creatively, sustainably, and effectively use publicly-owned school land to incorporate community resources. This includes community gardens, recreation or community centers, training and job preparation, lifelong learning, mental and physical healthcare, and affordable housing for teachers and staff. We especially need these resources in low-wealth and Black and Hispanic/Latino neighborhoods.

BACKGROUND: Residents have identified a number of community needs that require land, which is in short supply throughout many parts of Durham. Some residents have envisioned schools being used in more efficient and creative ways to provide training, housing, and spaces for meeting and learning, benefiting students, teachers and the rest of the community. As large landholders, publicly-owned schools have opportunities to demonstrate sustainable land practices, biodiverse natural and naturally landscaped areas, provide space for community resources, and bring communities together. Currently, school properties are disconnected from surrounding neighborhoods due to long drop-off lanes required for personal vehicle access in front of schools. Buildings located far from streets, often without connecting sidewalks, are not easily accessible to those needing to walk, bike, or take the bus.

We want schools to play an integral role in neighborhoods, as a transformative community asset. We want schools to be central to neighborhoods, connected to nearby parks and trails, so that residents can live, learn, play, grow, feel connected to, and feel pride in their community's schools. As Durham grows, we want new schools designed to be smaller and fit into existing communities throughout Durham, creating safe, active routes to access schools and creating stronger centers of community.

Quotes from Durham Residents

“schools as neighborhood centers-become the focus of a community similar to a park”

“Some sort of transportation at every school, when building schools, transportation should come hand in hand”

“The school teachers can't afford to live near their schools”

“Reimagine school property as public property (i.e. playgrounds)”

“Schools as community spaces for ppl to gather. => encourage parents to participate”

“Make schools about more than just parents: use as event spaces/ community functions”