



Safe Routes
to School
National
Partnership

Shared Use 101 It's About Play



Communities across the country suffer from insufficient physical activity and a lack of access to physical activity opportunities. When children and adults don't get enough physical activity, it can lead to poor health, including obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Levels of physical inactivity are even higher in the South and in low-income communities and communities of color than in the rest of the country.¹ All of these things mean that finding ways to increase physical activity is important.

Many communities are working to address physical inactivity by increasing access to spaces that have traditionally been closed to the public, such as schools and other municipal buildings; this practice of creating community access is called shared use (also known as “joint use”). A common example is when a school opens up access to its grounds outside of school hours to allow the public to use a track or playground. The key is that entities are pooling existing resources to create increased access to physical activity opportunities. Shared use has been recommended as a promising strategy to address issues of physical inactivity and obesity by leading public health authorities including the Center for Disease Control and Prevention,² the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,³ and the American Academy of Pediatrics.⁴

How does shared use work?

Shared use usually involves an agreement between two entities, in which one (often a school or church) agrees to open or broaden access to their facilities for community use, such as recreational activities, and the other (often a city or non-profit) agrees to share some of the costs

or risks of doing so. The partnerships can be formal (e.g., based on a written, legal contract) or informal (e.g. based on historical practice). Successful partnerships generally rely on the pooling of resources to expand community access and use public space more efficiently. Shared use can also happen without a partner through an open use policy, which allows schools or government entities to set out when and how they will allow community access to their property.⁵

While shared use often is centered around schools, it can involve other community institutions, such as libraries, community centers, community clinics or hospitals, and faith-based facilities.

Why shared use?

Too often, children find the gate to their school's blacktop or basketball court locked after school hours, locking them out of opportunities to be physically active. Closing off recreational facilities after school leaves many children and families struggling to incorporate physical activity into their daily lives. They may live in an area without a nearby park or be unable to afford exercise equipment or a gym membership, and these challenges are especially acute in low-income areas. Shared use makes physical activity easier by providing children and adults with safe, conveniently located, inviting and affordable places to exercise and play. Besides making sense from a health perspective, shared use agreements make sense financially because they build upon assets the community already has. Sharing existing space is cheaper and more efficient than duplicating the same facilities in other parts of the community.

Resources

- [Shared use Clearinghouse](#)
- [Shared Use FAQs](#)
- [Spectrum of Shared Use](#)



Challenges

While shared use is an effective approach to increasing access to physical activity opportunities, with successes in rural, urban and suburban communities, communities may need to overcome a variety of challenges. Fortunately, shared use agreements can overcome potential hurdles by addressing concerns and spelling out solutions. Some common concerns are as follows:⁶

- **Maintenance** – Shared use agreements can detail each partner's responsibilities to help ensure that the properties are protected from damage and receive regular maintenance. When resources are being shared, it's important to have shared use agreements that specify who needs to make repairs and who will address "wear and tear" to the property. Some school officials have noticed a decrease in vandalism since implementing a shared use agreement. They find that when community members share school resources, they take pride and ownership in the space, which often deters vandalism.
- **Operations** – Who will unlock the gates or run the program? These questions can be answered through a shared use agreement so partners know what they are responsible for.
- **Liability** – What if someone gets hurt? Experts say most schools' existing liability protections and insurance are generally sufficient to cover any liability issues associated with shared use. Districts can check with their insurer to confirm that this is the case. Shared use agreements can identify liability concerns and make sure they are accounted for.
- **Ownership** – How does shared use affect how decisions are made about the property? The agreement should be clear about the ownership of land, facilities, and any items constructed or brought on to the property.
- **Cost** – What costs will the partnership involve? Shared use agreements can be used to define how much each partner contributes. Partnerships do not need to be costly to be successful. Agreements can help partners anticipate what the cost might be.

Conclusion

Shared use policies and agreements work to address the lack of physical activity opportunities in communities across the country. In underserved communities, shared use policies and practices help to overcome the inequitable effects of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic diseases. Everyone has a role to play in creating healthy communities.

References

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- ⁴ American Academy of Pediatrics. Policy statement. Active healthy living: prevention of childhood obesity through increased physical activity. *Pediatrics*. 2006; 117(5): 1834–1842. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/117/5/1834.%20full?sid=1683e4b9-4c9b-4045-84f1-051d3546796f> Retrieved Oct. 1, 2013
- ⁵ ChangeLab Solutions (2014) Open Use- An Alternative <http://changelabsolutions.org/open-use> Retrieved July 25, 2014
- ⁶ www.jointuse.org Retrieved July 25, 2014