



Safe Routes
to School
National
Partnership

School Principals and the Shared Use of School Facilities



Shared use (also known as joint use) occurs when a school or another entity opens up its facilities for use by community members, often for recreational activities. Shared use improves health and academic performance by helping students and community members get more physical activity. Shared use also increases community goodwill towards schools, as community members directly benefit from and engage with schools.

Principals can play a key role in championing shared use in their school systems. Principals are responsible for supporting the academic success of their students, and also for acting as a liaison to parents and the community. Efforts to provide more physical activity opportunities through shared use rely upon the support and promotion of principals. At the same time, shared use campaigns support the central goals of principals. Shared use efforts are a promising strategy to increase physical activity and student academic performance.

What Is Shared Use?

In opening up school facilities for shared use, some schools make their fields or playgrounds freely available to the public during non-school hours. Other schools partner with a city or nonprofit agency, making agreements regarding the contours of shared use. These partnerships can be formal (e.g. based on a written legal document) or informal. Formal arrangements are often documented through an enforceable agreement that sets forth the terms and conditions for the shared use of the property or facility. Such formal agreements can provide a process for identifying key considerations and avoiding potential problems. Successful partnerships generally rely

on the pooling of resources to expand community access and use public space more efficiently. For example, a school may get assistance for maintenance from the parks and recreation department, in exchange for permitting the community to use the grounds.

Shared Use Helps Students Learn and Thrive

Students who are physically active learn better.¹ Improved academic performance for children who are physically active may result from the fact that such children generally show better learning behaviors and have improved concentration.²

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that young people aged 6–17 years participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.³ However, children and adolescents are not getting enough physical activity. For example, in 2011, a mere 29 percent of high school students had participated in 60 minutes per day of physical activity during the preceding week, and only 31 percent attended physical education class daily.⁵

But children spend an average of 6.5 hours per day in school, which makes schools a prime location for intervention.⁵ Leading public health authorities, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, recommend sharing existing school and community recreational facilities to provide more opportunities for physical activity.⁶⁻⁸ Shared use can help students get the physical activity they need to learn and be healthy.

“When you do this work you become part of the community and they know who you are and that you are willing to be a part of them. Then we can all work together — teachers, neighbors, senior citizens, businesses, and everyone else....”

**Lourdes Vasquez, former principal
Martin Luther King Elementary School
Lancaster, PA**

Shared Use Defined

“Shared use” or “joint use” occurs when government entities (or sometimes private nonprofit organizations) agree to open or broaden access to their property and/or facilities for community use, such as recreational activity.



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How Can Principals Support Shared Use?

School principals play an essential role in planning, implementing, and reviewing physical activity programs on school campuses. To support shared use, principals can:

- Open up your school for the community to use during non-school hours. Pilot a shared use project, and work to set up evaluation measures to ensure the project is working.
- Support parents in being physically active on campus by encouraging a walking club during non-school hours.
- Participate on the school wellness council to learn about and assist in additional ways to support physical activity for students.
- Encourage your school board to adopt a shared use policy, and work with your school board members, superintendent, teachers, students, and parents to implement it and address physical activity needs.
- Be creative! Be open to the many different ways to get students and the community physically active and practicing a healthy lifestyle.

Resources

Safe Routes to School National Partnership

- » Shared Use of School and Community Facilities
- » Shared Use Clearinghouse

Joint Use.org

- » www.jointuse.org

ChangeLab Solutions: NPLAN

- » The Benefits of a Written Shared Use Agreement
- » A Look at State Rules Affecting Joint Use Agreements

Kaboom

- » Playing Smart: Maximizing the Potential of School and Community Property through Joint Use Agreements

University of California Center for Cities & Schools

- » Joint Use Schools Initiative: Partnerships and Environments for Student Success

Public Health Law Center

- » Finding Space to Play: Legal and Policy Issues Impacting Community Recreational Use of Property

References

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The association between school based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2010. http://www.cdc.gov/healthy-outh/health_and_academics/pdf/pa-pe_paper.pdf. Accessed October 2, 2013

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The association between school based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2010. Accessed October 1, 2013.

3 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2008.

4 CDC. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2011. *MMWR* 2012;61(SS-4).

5 Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011) <http://www.bls.gov/tus/charts/chart8.pdf>. Accessed on October 2, 2013

6 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2020: Physical Activity Objectives (PA-10). 2010. Available at: www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/objectiveslist.aspx?topicid=33. Accessed Sept. 30, 2013.

7 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.full?sid=1683e4b9-4c9b-4045-84f1-051d3546796f> Accessed Oct. 1, 2013.

8 National Physical Activity Plan. Education: Strategy 6. 2010. Available at: www.physicalactivityplan.org/education_st6.php. Accessed Sept. 30, 2013.