



Safe Routes
to School
**National
Partnership**

GREATER WASHINGTON DC

Shared Use Agreements and Transportation: Prince George's County, MD

Prince George's County Public Schools adopted a Shared Use agreement policy in 1982. In the next decade, the school and park systems came together to create a park/school model where facilities were shared. Between the policy and park/school model, Prince George's County Parks Department is able to reach more community members and increase physical activity and their program offerings utilizing an existing community resource-schools. An added benefit of physical activity programming in school buildings is that schools are often located in communities, making it easy for participants to walk, bike or take transit, further increasing their physical activity.

Shared Use Agreements Defined

Shared use agreements open schools after hours to the community for a wide range of activities, including sports, group fitness classes and various education classes such as photography or calligraphy. When classes are offered, there is usually a partnership with a non-profit or the local recreation and parks department to offer specific programming and utilize school facilities. Another example of shared use agreements is when a school opens facilities such as gyms and playgrounds after hours for general community use.

Health advocates cite that schools are an available resource for physical activity after students leave for the day. And in some low-income neighborhoods, schools are often the only available place for physical activity. Neighborhood schools are especially in a prime position to offer physical activity or other educational offerings. Due to their location, participants can access the school via foot, on bike or by public transportation reducing the need to have access to a car and furthering physical activity. For more information about shared use agreements, please see the American Heart Association [fact sheet](#).

Shared Use Policy

Prince George's County has been implementing shared use agreements since 1982. The adoption of [Policy 1330](#) by Prince George's County Public Schools permits community groups "to use school facilities for worthwhile purposes when such uses will not interfere with the program of the school." The policy is subject to provisions of the Maryland Annotated Code Education Article.

A priority for school use was established. Education system curricular or extracurricular programs have first priority followed by parent-teacher organizations; any public park and recreation program sponsored by the Maryland-National Capital Parks and Planning Commission (M-NCPPC), its affiliated recreation councils and Prince George's County Boys and Girls Club; and finally other youth groups such as the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts. The Prince George's County Parks Department is part of M-NCPPC.

The policy details logistical items such as cleanliness of the facility and use of facility equipment. M-NCPPC makes sure they take care of any permits necessary with the school plant operations and then reports the permits to the schools. This makes the process easier on the school.

This policy enables M-NCPPC to operate summer playground programs, open gyms, sports leagues and educational classes utilizing school property and facilities. It expands the reach of physical activity and educational programming and utilizes established community space.

Unique Park/School Model

In the 1990s there was a push to combine resources and build a combination of parks and schools. Property could be purchased mutually, and the two entities could share gymnasiums, cafeterias, classroom space and outdoor facilities. Since the schools and M-NCPPC often needed the facilities at different times, this has been an easy win-win. Monies were pooled to build the facilities resulting in gymnasium space that was often larger than normal for schools. And M-NCPPC had access to computer labs



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for mentoring programs which would not typically be included in a community center.

To date, there are 43 community centers in Prince George's County and 14 are park/schools or community centers attached to a school.

Keys to Success

M-NCPPC hires a school employee as an hourly employee to open and close the school and be there during the programming to answer questions or report anything that has broken. This alleviates principal concerns about the condition of the facility. Having a school employee also benefits M-NCPPC because the school employee is very familiar with the school and can often help with unanticipated needs.

A second recommendation is to have a good relationship with the school office front desk staff. This person will know almost everything going on in the school and who to contact for specific needs. A good line of communication makes the shared use process seamless.

Transportation Link

Shared-use agreements give school buildings life in the evening and weekends. With additional functions after-school hours and students accessing the building during the day, it is even more important that the school building is accessible by walking, bicycling and public transit.

Depending on the opportunities offered, ideally the school would be accessible for people of all ages including students, teachers, staff, parents, community residents and older adults. The location and accessibility of the school opens up opportunities. Walking and bicycling to the school building is an opportunity for physical activity both for students during the day and for the community during evening activities. Walking and bicycling helps everyone access the school building without having to be driven or having access to a car. This allows everyone in the community to take advantage of activities offered at the school.

There are several policy solutions that allow schools to be accessible. First, when new schools are built or existing schools rebuilt, a location in which walking and bicycling is possible should be a priority consideration. Then, the actual school site should ensure walking and bicycling access is safe and convenient. Finally, policies such as Complete Streets policies ensure that streets are built and maintained with all users in mind. This includes pedestrians, bicyclist, public transit, and people of all ages and abilities. The key here is that through a [Complete Streets](#) policy, multi-modal transportation becomes part of everyday work in the transportation agency. It does not mean that bike lanes and sidewalks will be on every street, but it does mean that the appropriate recommendations are considered for urban, suburban and rural settings.

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