



Safe Routes  
to School  
**National  
Partnership**

# Superintendents and the Shared Use of School Facilities



Shared use (also known as joint use) occurs when a school or other 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.

Superintendents can serve a critical role in supporting shared use. Superintendents are the chief administrators for school districts. They work to implement the vision and policies that the school board establishes. Superintendents can work with students, staff, and the community to make sure that shared use becomes a reality in the district, benefiting students and the community.

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

But children spend an average of 6.5 hours per day in school, which makes schools a prime location for intervention.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6-8</sup> Shared use can help students get the physical activity they need to learn and be healthy.

“We know where there is physical activity, there will be learning.”

**Roberto Martinez, Local District Superintendent**  
Los Angeles Unified School District

## 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 Superintendents Support Shared Use?

School boards play a critical role in a school district, by setting the direction of the school district, approving funding decisions, providing support for the implementation of policies, and holding staff accountable for the implementation of these policies. At the same time, school board members, who can be either elected or appointed, engage and represent the community. School boards have the chance to make a difference for both students and the community through supporting shared use policies.

Here are some ways that school board members can get involved:

- Work with school board members to adopt a policy to address the shared use of school facilities.
- Ensure the school board understands the key role of physical activity in supporting academic performance, and how district policies can support student physical activity.
- Actively participate in the district wellness council or committee, and include shared use as a strategy to increase physical activity.
- Prioritize implementation of shared use agreements in schools that are adversely affected by obesity and poor academic achievement.
- Direct staff to allocate time to partnerships that benefit students, the district, and the community.

## Resources

### Safe Routes to School National Partnership

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

### Joint Use.org

- » [www.jointuse.org](http://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/healthyouth/health\\_and\\_academics/pdf/pa-pe\\_paper.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/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](http://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](http://www.physicalactivityplan.org/education_st6.php). Accessed Sept. 30, 2013.