

Partnerships for Joint Use

Expanding the Use of Public School Infrastructure to Benefit Students and Communities

Research Report



September 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Center for Cities & Schools at the University of California, Berkeley

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Executive Summary

School facilities and grounds are integral components of public infrastructure that provide students with space to learn, socialize, and exercise. However, once the school day is over, many school grounds and facilities sit empty. As interest grows in addressing pressing social concerns such as childhood obesity, lack of recreation/open space, suburban sprawl, and the need to efficiently use limited public resources, many consider expanding the use of school spaces to include non-school users (commonly referred to as, “joint use”) a strategic approach to help address these issues.

School districts, local municipalities, and/or nonprofit partners throughout the country are countering the common separation of uses and working together to accommodate school and community needs on school property. Using California as a “meta case,” this research report establishes an empirical understanding of the full range of joint use and how specific strategies fit into a larger picture of more efficiently and appropriately utilizing public school spaces for educational and community purposes.

Three Main Joint Use Approaches

There are three distinct, yet interrelated, overarching strategies seen in the literature about joint use: 1) basic joint use (the use of school district controlled, owned, or utilized facilities by a non-district entity); 2) joint development for joint use (a “bricks-and-mortar” strategy to build facilities that will be jointly used); and 3) joint use partnerships (establish ongoing joint use and describe the formal relationship, policies, and procedures agreed upon between a public school district and one or more other entity).

Common Joint Use Categories

Our analysis of more than 100 joint use examples across California finds nine common use categories:

1. Expanded outdoor recreational opportunities
2. Expanded indoor recreational opportunities
3. Shared library services
4. Shared performance arts facilities
5. Expanded student and/or community social services
6. Curriculum enhancement
7. Public or private meetings, events, and activities
8. Broader land development and/or local revitalization
9. Administrative uses or tenant type arrangements

Findings: Partnerships Structure Joint Use Strategies

Our central finding from this research is that successfully expanding the uses of public school facilities and grounds requires a system of supports established through formalized, multiagency partnerships that restructure governmental relationships. Expanding the uses of schools while still adequately prioritizing their core educational use requires a comprehensive set of policies and procedures that frequently do not exist. Joint use partnerships restructure governmental relationships to systematize basic joint use and thereby increase its benefits, efficiencies, and scale. Overall, we find that joint use partnerships are locally driven, and vary significantly in how they are structured and implemented from place to place.

We provide ten key findings for establishing effective joint use partnerships based on our analysis of the findings from the literature, case studies, and our interviews. The findings aim to assist in establishing a partnership-based system of supports for successfully instigating, implementing, and sustaining effective joint use.

Finding 1: Silo management in public agency planning and operations is a tremendous contextual obstacle to joint use and joint development

Finding 2: Capacity-building and resources for joint use partnerships are needed

Finding 3: State policies and/or incentives can play an important role in supporting joint use partnerships

Finding 4: Comprehensive school district-level community use policies set an important framework of clarity and aid in establishing a new culture of sharing.

Finding 5: A shared vision across stakeholders builds a partnership's foundation

Finding 6: Formal agreements structure joint use partnerships

Finding 7: School districts tend to highly subsidize the community use of schools

Finding 8: Understanding the real costs required to maintain healthy and adequate school facilities is essential to establishing a system of supports for joint use partnerships

Finding 9: School site support from principals and teachers is essential

Finding 10: Legal concerns for public agency partners can be addressed through formal agreements and adopted policies