



# Making the Case for Community Recreational Use of School Property

Shared use of school property, facilities and equipment has been explored as a strategy to increase physical activity opportunities for local communities. But, does providing access to these spaces actually increase physical activity and decrease obesity?

Several studies sought to measure these associations. The following facts highlight some of the most relevant research in this area, and make the case that shared use of school property is a good strategy for increasing physical activity.

## Does access to recreational facilities increase physical activity?

- It is reported that people with access to recreational facilities exercise more than those without access to these facilities.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Research indicates that children are more likely to be physically active outside of school hours when they have access to school recreational facilities<sup>3</sup> and when those facilities are renovated.<sup>4</sup>
- Evidence suggests that access to school recreational facilities in underserved communities improves the likelihood that community members will be physically active.<sup>5</sup>



## What is the role of schools?

- Schools have been identified as a critical environment to facilitate physical activity through recreation and sport, both during and after school.<sup>6</sup>
- The academic success of school children is improved with increased physical activity.<sup>7</sup>
- Schools are generally perceived as safe, therefore community members may be more likely to engage in physical activity in this setting.<sup>8</sup>
- School facilities, especially those that are centered in the community, can be an excellent resource for recreation and exercise where there is limited availability of recreational space or private options are too expensive.<sup>9</sup>
- Shared use of facilities by school districts and local governments is important in promoting greater collaboration within governmental agencies and increasing physical activity.<sup>10</sup>

## Are there inequalities in access to recreational facilities and levels of physical activity?

- Individuals in disadvantaged communities often live in urban areas with less green space, fewer recreational facilities, and higher pollution levels.<sup>11</sup>
- Schools in higher-income communities are more likely to be available for community use during non-school hours than those in lower-income communities.<sup>12</sup>
- Children in low-income and predominately racial/ethnic minority communities are less active, in part, because of limited access to safe, free or low cost, and convenient recreational facilities.<sup>13</sup>
- Communities with higher poverty rates and higher percentages of African-American residents have significantly fewer parks and green spaces.<sup>14</sup>
- A lack of coordination between local governments and school districts in land use and facilities

planning can result in schools that are less connected to community members.<sup>15</sup>

## What are additional benefits associated with community recreational use of school property?

- Social networks and enhanced community connections may increase and criminal activity may be deterred in communities with greater access to outdoor school facilities with green features.<sup>16</sup>
- Social benefits from community access to open green space in urban settings are generally attributed to residents spending time outdoors and interacting with neighbors.<sup>17</sup>
- For school children, after-hours programming has been shown to reduce delinquency and improve academic performance separate from the physical activity benefits.<sup>18</sup>
- Recreational use of school facilities can promote good will between schools, other local government agencies, and the larger community.<sup>19</sup>
- Community access to school facilities can assist in securing community support for tax increases and school bond referendums, even for those residents without school-aged children.<sup>20</sup>
- The use of school property for recreational activities can promote more activities at one location, thereby also decreasing driving and transportation needs because many schools are located in residential areas.<sup>21</sup>

For more information, please reference the Public Health Law Center's 2012 policy options brief [Finding Space to Play: Legal and Policy Issues Impacting Community Recreational Use of School Property](#) and American Heart Association and Public Health Law Center policy sample [Eliminating Barriers for Community Recreational Use of School Property: Policy Guidance on Liability and Shared Use](#).

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> N. Durant, SK Harris et al., *Relation of School Environment and Policy to Adolescent Physical Activity*, 79 J SCH HEALTH 4. 153 (2009); Brink LA, CR Nigg, et al. *Influence of Schoolyard Renovations on Children's Physical Activity: The Learning Landscapes Program*. 100 AM J PUB HEALTH 9, 1672-1678, (2010); T. Farley, R. Meriwether et al., *Safe Place Spaces to Promote Physical Activity in Inner-City Children: Results from a Pilot Study of an Environmental Intervention*, 97 AM J PUB HEALTH 1625-1631 (2007); JE Maddock, L. Choy et al., *Increasing Safe Places for Physical Activity Through a Joint Use Agreement: a Case Study in Urban Honolulu*, 5 PREV CHRONIC DIS 3, 1-8 (2008).
- <sup>2</sup> Active Living Research, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *Designing for Active Living Among Adults*, (2008). [http://www.activelivingresearch.org/files/Active\\_Adults.pdf](http://www.activelivingresearch.org/files/Active_Adults.pdf).
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.activelivingresearch.org/shareduse>
- <sup>4</sup> Brink LA, CR Nigg, et al. *Influence of Schoolyard Renovations on Children's Physical Activity: The Learning Landscapes Program*. 100 AM J PUB HEALTH 9, 1672-78 (2010).
- <sup>5</sup> N. Durant, SK Harris et al., *Relation of School Environment and Policy to Adolescent Physical Activity*, 79 J SCH HEALTH 4. 153 (2009); Brink LA, CR Nigg, et al. *Influence of Schoolyard Renovations on Children's Physical Activity: The Learning Landscapes Program*. 100 AM J PUB HEALTH 9, 1672-1678, (2010); T. Farley, R. Meriwether et al., *Safe Place Spaces to Promote Physical Activity in Inner-City Children: Results from a Pilot Study of an Environmental Intervention*, 97 AM J PUB HEALTH 1625-1631 (2007); JE Maddock, L. Choy et al., *Increasing Safe Places for Physical Activity Through a Joint Use Agreement: a Case Study in Urban Honolulu*, 5 PREV CHRONIC DIS 3, 1-8 (2008).
- <sup>6</sup> JF Sallis, TL McKenzie et al. *Environmental interventions for Eating and Physical Activity: A Randomized Controlled Trial in Middle Schools*, 24 AM J PREV MED 209-217 (2003); JO Spengler, SJ Young et al., *Schools as a Community Resource for Physical Activity: Legal Considerations for Decision Makers*. 21 AM J HEALTH PROMOT, 390-396 (2006).
- <sup>7</sup> *Exercise: Miracle-Gro for the Brain*, On the Brain: The Harvard Mahoney Neuroscience Letter, 7 (Winter 2005), [http://www.hms.harvard.edu/hmni/On\\_The\\_Brain/Volume11/OTB\\_Vol11No1\\_Winter2005.pdf](http://www.hms.harvard.edu/hmni/On_The_Brain/Volume11/OTB_Vol11No1_Winter2005.pdf); *Physical Education is Critical to a Complete Education*, Nat'l Assoc. Sport and Physical Ed., 1 (July 2001), <http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/standards/upload/Physical-Education-is-Critical-to-a-Complete-Education-2001.pdf>; James B. Grissom, *Physical Fitness and Academic Achievement*, 8 J. Exercise Physiology Online 11, 11-25 (Feb. 2005), available at <http://www.asep.org/files/Grissom.pdf>; *The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, an Academic Performance*, Dept. of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 6, 28-29 (July 2010), [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health\\_and\\_academics/pdf/pa-pe\\_paper.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/pa-pe_paper.pdf).
- <sup>8</sup> *Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities and Youth Obesity*, LeadershipForHealthCommunities.org, 9 (Apr. 2007), [www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org/images/stories/lessonslearned\\_naco.pdf](http://www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org/images/stories/lessonslearned_naco.pdf).
- <sup>9</sup> American Heart Association, *Joint Use Agreements: Sharing School Recreational Facilities with the Community* (2011), [http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@adv/documents/downloadable/ucm\\_312809.pdf](http://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@adv/documents/downloadable/ucm_312809.pdf).

- <sup>10</sup> E. Lees, D. Salvesen et al., *Collaborative School Planning and Active Schools: A Case Study of Lee County, Florida*, 33 J. HEALTH POL. POL'Y & L. 595, 607. (2008)
- <sup>11</sup> Daniel J. Hutch et al., *Potential Strategies to Eliminate Built Environment Disparities for Disadvantaged and Vulnerable Communities*, 101 AM J PUBLIC HEALTH 587 (2011).
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- <sup>13</sup> P. Gordon-Larsen, RG McMurray et al., *Determinants of Adolescent Physical Activity and Inactivity Patterns*, PEDIATRICS.(2000);105:E83; LM Powell, SJ Slater et al., *Availability of Physical Activity-Related Facilities and Neighborhood Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics: A National Study*, 96 AM J PUBLIC HEALTH 1676-1680 (2006); LM Powell, FJ Chaloupka et al., 33 AM J PREV MED S292-S300 (2007); LM Powell, S. Slater et al., *The Relationship Between Community Physical Activity Settings and Race, Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Statutes*, EVID BASED PREV MED 135-144 (2004).
- <sup>14</sup> Powell LM, Slater S, Chaloupka FJ. The relationship between physical activity setting and race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Evidence-Based Preventative Medicine 2004; 1[2]: (135-44).
- <sup>15</sup> See IQ\_Report: Local Governments and Schools: A Community-Oriented Approach, ICMA.org, 1 (2008) [http://icma.org/en/icma/knowledge\\_network/documents/kn/Document/5753/Local\\_Governments\\_and\\_Schools\\_A\\_CommunityOriented\\_Approach](http://icma.org/en/icma/knowledge_network/documents/kn/Document/5753/Local_Governments_and_Schools_A_CommunityOriented_Approach) (stating that lack of coordination between local government and school districts contributes to larger, more distant schools).
- <sup>16</sup> William C. Sullivan et al., *The Fruit of Urban Nature: Vital Neighborhood Space*, 36 Env't & Behavior 678, 695-98 (2004), available at <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/pdf/FruitOfUrbanNature.pdf>; Frances E. Kuo and William C. Sullivan, *Environment and Crime in the Inner City: Does Vegetation Reduce Crime?* 33 Env't & Behav. 343, 346-350 (2001), available at <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/pdf/EnvironmentAndCrime.pdf>.
- <sup>17</sup> Frances E. Kuo & William C. Sullivan, *Environment and Crime in the Inner City: Does Vegetation Reduce Crime?* 33 Env't & Behav. 343, 346-50 (2001), available at <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/pdf/EnvironmentAndCrime.pdf>.
- <sup>18</sup> Nat'l Crime Prevention Council, *150 Tested Strategies to Prevent Crime from Small Cities, Counties, and Rural Communities: a Resource for Municipal Agencies and Community Groups* 186-87 (2000).
- <sup>19</sup> Emily Lees et al., *Collaborative School Planning and Active Schools: A Case Study of Lee County, Florida*, 33 J. Health Pol., Pol'y & L. 595, 607. (2008), available at <http://jhpl.dukejournals.org/content/33/3/595.full.pdf+html>.
- <sup>20</sup> Filardo et al., *supra* note 4, at 5.
- <sup>21</sup> [http://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/reports/2010\\_JU\\_Concept\\_Paper.pdf](http://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/reports/2010_JU_Concept_Paper.pdf), p.14