

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is joint use of recreational facilities?

Joint use involves the school district or county office of education (COE) jointly sharing recreational facilities with another governmental agency, community-based organization or the community before, during and/or after the school day. Joint use practices vary from one district/COE to the next. In some cases, schools practice joint use by keeping their gates open and maintaining their school grounds for community use outside of school hours. In other cases, a district/COE may enter into a joint use agreement with a governmental agency (e.g. Parks and Recreation) to share responsibilities and keep school recreational facilities open for either unsupervised use or supervised physical activity programs.

What are joint use agreements?

Joint use agreements are binding contracts between the partners involved that clearly address the terms and conditions of each party sharing the facility. A formal joint use agreement is good practice, as the agreement helps ensure that all parties are clear about their roles and responsibilities, such as defining how maintenance, operations and liability issues will be addressed and identifying how to support the sustainability of the joint use partnership.

What are the advantages of joint use of recreational facilities?

Joint use of facilities benefits students and the wider community by providing safe, accessible places for recreation before, during and/or after school hours. Increased opportunities for physical activity can improve students' overall health and well-being, prevent obesity and improve academic performance (see the fact sheet, "Active Bodies, Active Minds" at www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org and www.csba.org). In a time of shrinking budgets, joint use of facilities provides an opportunity for school districts/COEs and local government agencies to work together to maximize resources, keep costs down and achieve shared goals.

What is the role of the governing board?

The governing board can set the district/COE direction for increasing physical activity opportunities for students through joint use by adopting policy (see the California School Boards Association's (CSBA) sample policy BP 1330.1 – Joint Use Agreements). Under the California Civic Center Act, the governing board can allow for community use of school facilities (see CSBA sample policy BP 1330 – Use of School Facilities). A specific joint use policy can lay the foundation for joint use agreements and support joint use practices. The governing board can play an important role in promoting joint use policies and practices by:

- Ensuring that joint use efforts support district/COE goals.
- Establishing positive relationships with local stakeholders.
- Sharing information about joint use with the community.
- Holding district and school staff accountable for the terms outlined in the joint use agreement.
- Assisting with monitoring and evaluation.



Injury, Violence, Physical Activity & Disability



Photo by Tim Wagner for HEAC

Individual board members can support these efforts by educating other board members and district personnel about the relationship between physical activity and academic achievement and how joint use partnerships create a school and community environment that supports student learning.

What key issues should the board and superintendent look at when considering joint use?

Some key issues to consider when developing joint use agreements include:

- **Engaging stakeholders:** Identifying local partners in joint use efforts and determining their contributions are key aspects of the development, implementation and evaluation of joint use projects.
 - ~ School staff, students, families and community members can be advocates for joint use by talking with city officials and community stakeholders about the need for joint use partnerships in their community.
 - ~ Insurance providers, joint powers authorities, risk managers and district legal counsel are important to involve during negotiations of the terms and conditions of the joint use agreement.
 - ~ Local government agencies or non-profits might have funding, human capital or other resources to provide to the joint use partnership.
- **How joint use will be implemented at the school level:** Before approving an agreement, the superintendent and the board should consider the role of school site personnel in implementing the agreement. Support from school site personnel is essential for a successful joint use partnership because they are responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the facility.
- **Scheduling and operations:** Joint use agreements should address scheduling of the facility by outlining which user has priority at which times, which facilities are included in the agreement, who will be responsible for supervision, communication protocols for joint use partners and processes for resolving conflicts.

- **Initial, operating and maintenance costs:** Federal, state and local funding may be available for the construction of joint use facilities. Many joint use partnerships involve the sharing of existing facilities. Joint use agreements should address the costs associated with sharing the facility and specify which partner is responsible for maintaining the property, making repairs, etc.
- **Duration of the agreement:** Joint use agreements should specify how long the initial agreement will last, procedures for renewal and/or termination, and how the agreement will be monitored.
- **Liability, insurance and risk management:** Although the law may protect the district from liability in certain circumstances, joint use agreements should identify liability concerns and insurance needs, and determine how they will be allocated between partners. Districts/COEs can share or pass on risk of liability to the partner agency. A joint use agreement can include an "indemnity clause," a provision in the agreement by which one party agrees to be responsible for part or all of any liability the other party might incur.

What makes joint use partnerships successful?

A successful joint use partnership is one where all partners are clear about their roles and responsibilities, maintain ongoing communication, have a system for resolving conflicts and are committed to the sustainability of the partnership. Successful joint use partnerships require support from students, community members and policymakers.

Where can I go for more information?

For more information on joint use, see CSBA and California Project LEAN's policy brief, "Maximizing Opportunities for Physical Activity through Joint Use of Facilities" at www.CaliforniaProjectLEAN.org and www.csba.org. For case studies and information about developing, implementing and financing joint use agreements, see Public Health Law Program's toolkit "Opening School Grounds to the Community After Hours" at www.phlpnet.org/healthy-planning/products/joint_use_toolkit.