



## Joint use 101

### What is joint use?

Joint use is a way to increase opportunities for children and adults to be more physically active. It refers to two or more entities — usually a school and a city or private organization — sharing indoor and outdoor spaces like gymnasiums, athletic fields and playgrounds. The concept is simple: share resources to keep costs down and communities healthy.

Examples of joint use agreements:

- A principal unlocks the school gate after hours so neighbors can shoot hoops or play ball on evenings and weekends.
- A school and swim team share a pool.
- A school opens its soccer field to a local league for weekend games.
- A YMCA opens its gym to the local PE teacher so students have a place to exercise.

### Why is joint use needed?

The research is clear: the more active children are, the healthier they will be now and when they grow up. Yet certain places make physical activity harder instead of easier. Place matters since experts now know that where we live, work and play — the physical environment itself — determines, to a large degree, whether we will be healthy.

Too often, kids find the gate to their school's blacktop or basketball court locked after school hours, locking them out of opportunities to be active. Closing off recreational facilities after school leaves many children and families struggling to incorporate physical activity into their daily routines. They may live in an area without a nearby park or be unable to afford exercise equipment or a gym membership.

Joint use agreements can fix these problems. Joint use makes physical activity easier by providing kids and adults alike with safe, conveniently located and inviting places to exercise and play. Besides making sense from a health perspective, joint use agreements make sense financially because they build upon assets a community already has. Sharing existing space is cheaper and more efficient than duplicating the same facilities in other parts of the community.

### Where is joint use happening?

Joint use is happening in cities throughout California and across the nation. In fact, the concept of joint use is not new. Schools have shared their land and facilities for community use for over 200 years. Most states, including California, have policies to encourage or require schools to make facilities open to the public. In California, a 2008 survey conducted by the Center for Cities and Schools revealed that close to 60 percent of responding school districts already have some type of joint use partnership, but thousands still do not.

### **How does it work?**

Joint use agreements facilitate a partnership between two or more entities, often school districts and local government agencies (e.g. parks and recreation or nonprofit organizations), to open up spaces such as playgrounds, athletic fields, pools, and gymnasiums to the community outside of school hours or to open up community facilities to schools at a reduced cost or for free.

Joint use partnerships can be formal (based on a legal document) or informal (based on a handshake), but formal agreements offer increased protections for both the facility and the community group using the facility. Since school staffing can change over time, personal relationships are not the most secure way to guarantee access to facilities into the future. A formal agreement can also help prevent problems related to maintenance, operations, liability, ownership or cost from arising.

- **Maintenance – How can we keep the space in good condition?** Joint use agreements can detail each partner's goals to help ensure that school properties are respected and maintained. When school resources are being shared, it's important to have joint use agreements that specify who needs to make repairs and who will address wear and tear to the property. Some school officials have noticed a decrease in vandalism since implementing a joint use agreement. They have noted that when the community shares school resources, they take pride and ownership in the space, which can help deter vandalism.
- **Operations — Who will unlock the gate? Who will run the programs?** These questions can be answered with joint use agreements so that partners know what they are responsible for.
- **Liability – What if someone gets hurt?** Experts say most schools' existing liability insurance is sufficient to cover any liability issues associated with joint use. Joint use agreements can identify liability concerns and make sure they are accounted for.
- **Ownership – How does joint use affect how decisions are made about the property?** Joint use agreements should outline a process for resolving any conflicts that may surface. They should also highlight how the partnership will benefit each party.
- **Cost – How expensive will the partnership be?** Joint use agreements can be used to define how much each partner contributes. Partnerships do not need to cost a lot to be successful. Agreements can help partners anticipate what costs might be.

## **What makes joint use partnerships successful?**

Research from the nonprofit New Schools Better Neighborhoods shows that, to be successful, partnerships should have:

- Clearly articulated goals
- Detailed planning that includes sources of funding and division of responsibilities
- A recognition of the individual benefits to each partner
- A long-term commitment from everyone involved
- Ongoing communication among partners and with the community
- A process for resolving any conflicts that may arise
- Support from policy makers and community members

## **How can I get involved?**

Your community could be home to the next joint use success story. Visit [www.jointuse.org/about/sign-up/](http://www.jointuse.org/about/sign-up/) to get updates on joint use in your inbox.

For more in-depth information on joint use, check out “Joint Use School Partnerships in California: Strategies to Enhance Schools and Communities,” a joint report from the Center for Cities and Schools and Public Health Law & Policy. Download the report at [http://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/reports/CC&S\\_PHLP\\_2008\\_joint\\_use\\_with\\_appendices.pdf](http://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/reports/CC&S_PHLP_2008_joint_use_with_appendices.pdf).

*For more information on joint use, visit [www.jointuse.org](http://www.jointuse.org).*

*For more information on the joint use statewide task force, contact Manal Aboelata, Program Director for Prevention Institute ([www.preventioninstitute.org](http://www.preventioninstitute.org)), at 323-296-5750 or [manal@preventioninstitute.org](mailto:manal@preventioninstitute.org).*

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