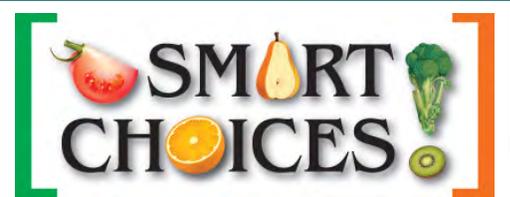


Community Access



Objective

- *Increase the physical activity level of students and the community by increasing access to safe and convenient indoor and outdoor recreational facilities.*



Key Messages

Physical activity resources are distributed inequitably in the United States.

- Low-income, non-white neighborhoods are twice as likely to not have access to a single physical activity facility, have fewer parks and green spaces, and have less safe places to play due to inadequate equipment and crime.¹⁻³
- Access to physical activity facilities is associated with greater levels of physical activity.⁴⁻⁶

Lack of safe indoor or outdoor physical space to be active is a health risk for communities.

- More than one out of ten Dakota County adults report having had no leisure-time physical activity during the previous month, and less than 60% of Dakota County students engage in moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes per day five or more days per week (the recommendation is 60 minutes per day for youth).⁷
- A recent study indicates that first grade children whose parents perceive their neighborhood as unsafe were more likely to be overweight compared to children whose parents perceive their neighborhood as safe.⁸

Opening existing school facilities to provide children with access to safe places to be active increases physical activity and contributes to academic success.

- A two-year study indicated that when a supervised school yard was opened after school hours it increased the number of children who were physically active outdoors by 84% compared to another neighborhood without similar access.⁹
- Children who have access to supervised play areas have been shown to spend less time watching television, movies and video games.⁹
- Physical activity outside of the school day is associated with improved academic performance grade point average and reduced drop-out rates.¹⁰



Key Strategies

- **Establish community partnerships.** Reach out to local parks and recreation staff, faith-based organizations, local health departments, school administrators, parent groups, school wellness committees and other community-based organizations to determine what the needs are for physical activity, what facilities can be shared and how programming and promotion will be established to increase opportunities for the community to be physically active.
- **Establish a joint use agreement between a school district and one or more public or private entities.** The agreement should be designed to allow the public access to school property outside of school hours. The agreement specifies how the facility will be maintained and how resources will be pooled to use facilities such as gyms and outdoor tracks more efficiently, whether for organized athletic activities or open gym-type opportunities. Opening gym doors to the community without a written process for use will not protect schools and users if issues arise.¹¹ (See examples of joint use agreements in “Resources for Implementation” below.)
- **Utilize the joint use checklist to develop the agreement.** The checklist can be found on pages 15-17 of the “Playing Smart...” document under the “Key Resources” section below.



Success Stories

Randolph Public Schools, ISD 195, Randolph, MN Fitness for the school community and beyond

As Randolph Public Schools began planning for a school expansion, they decided to include a weight room in the blueprint, and not just for students and staff, but for the entire community to use. The Randolph school board felt strongly that since they've received such generous taxpayer support over the years they would open the school facility to adults interested in adding physical activity to their evenings free of charge. The weight room is furnished with treadmills, ellipticals and televisions to give it a fitness center feel. Beyond the weight room, the community also has access to a mapped out course in the hallways that tracks how many laps equate to one mile. Randolph Public School has received positive feedback from the community regarding the availability of the weight room and many school staff have also taken advantage of this beautiful facility! Since the program is managed by the community education department, the adult participants sign the standard liability waiver that states that the individual's insurance applies unless there is negligence. Randolph Superintendent Mike Kelley has proclaimed that “giving free access was well worth it!”

Hernando Public Schools, Hernando, Mississippi

The small town of Hernando, Mississippi, where the median household income was \$43,217 in 2012, is nestled in a state with one of the highest rates of obesity in the nation. To make matters worse, few communities had access to walking trails, gyms or parks to enable an active lifestyle. The solution: open public school fitness facilities and calm concerns about vandalism and liability voiced by a local high school principal by developing formal joint use agreements between the public school system and the city. A Center for Disease Control and Prevention joint use agreement incentive program assisted the three participating school sites with \$3,750 each to purchase new gym equipment such as padding for gym walls, basketballs, and fitness clusters for the playground area. One of the elementary schools built a walking path with the funding. Overall, the joint use agreement and increased access to school facilities has been a success. The school and city mutually agree upon a use schedule, with priority still going to the school. Frequent users of school facilities include the city's youth basketball program and a men's basketball league. Perhaps one of the biggest benefits of the agreements to schools is that it establishes good public relations with the community and allows approximately 300 children and their families per school to use these facilities after hours, when at one time that was not an option.

For more case studies on successfully executed joint use agreements, visit:

http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/Playing_Smart-National_Joint_Use_Toolkit_Updated_20120517_0.pdf



Sample Policy Language

“The district is encouraged to promote the use of school facilities outside of school hours for physical activity programs offered by community-based organizations.”¹²



Resources for Implementation

- **Opening School Grounds to the Community After Hours: A Toolkit for Increasing Physical Activity through Joint Use Agreements:**
<http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/CA-JUA-toolkit>
- **Promoting Physical Activity Through Joint Use Agreements:**
<http://www.nchealthyschools.org/docs/home/use-agreements.pdf>
- **Playing Smart: Maximizing the Potential of School and Community Property through Joint Use Agreements.**
<http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/model-JUAs-national>
- **Model Agreements: Joint Use in California:** <http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/model-JUAs-CA>
- **Opening School Property After Hours: A Liability Primer:**
http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/documents/Primer-on-Liability_FactSht_FINAL_20100820.pdf

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Smart Choices is a partnership of the Dakota County Public Health Department and school districts in Dakota County committed to making the healthy choice the easy choice by creating opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity before, during and after school.

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