**OVERVIEW**

The U.S. is in the grips of a full-blown obesity epidemic. Currently, 35% of adults are obese. If current trends continue, over 50% of the population will be obese by 2030. In light of these dire statistics, it is critical to find ways to increase physical activity opportunities in the places where people live, work, learn, and play: making the healthy choice the easy choice. However, over 50% of U.S. adults and 65% of adolescents do not currently get the recommended amount of physical activity each day.

Providing access to safe, affordable and convenient recreational facilities is a critical strategy for helping people be more active, especially in lower-income communities and communities of color that often lack such facilities. Some school districts are maximizing shared use of school facilities to address the educational and health needs of students and the community’s need for recreational activity spaces.

**SHARED USE AGREEMENTS**

School facilities can be an excellent resource for recreation and exercise where there is limited availability. However, many schools either do not share their recreational facilities or limit the types of shared use and facilities that are available to the public during non-school hours. Concerns about liability, insurance, safety, cost, staffing and maintenance are commonly cited as reasons for not opening their facilities to the community outside of school hours.

The reality is that if school districts maintain their property, carry insurance, and enter into formal shared use agreements, they can minimize their liability risks.

Change Lab Solutions has created a toolkit that provides model agreements, case studies, funding options, and other information for implementing shared use agreements. Shared use agreements allow school districts, local governments, and community-based organizations to overcome common district concerns and share costs and responsibilities of opening school property to the public after school hours.

**THE HEALTH BENEFITS**

In order for adults and children to get the exercise they need to be healthy, they need places to be active. Research has shown that lower-income people who have parks or recreational facilities nearby exercise 38% more than those who do not have easy access. Additionally, people living in close proximities to parks and other recreational facilities have significantly lower BMIs.

**SOME SUCCESS STORIES**

Schools can create access by opening existing facilities during non-school hours, integrating the opportunity for community use when planning new construction projects, or building collaborative relationships and entering into reciprocal agreements with local governments or community organizations.

- The San Francisco Unified School District and the City and County of San Francisco have an agreement that allows the city to unlock the outdoor playground areas for open, unsupervised use during non-school hours. The city assumes the liability and responsibility for injury, vandalism and/or littering during these recreation times.

- A program in the Boyle Heights and Pico-Union neighborhoods in Los Angeles, Calif., called Joint Use Generating Activity and Recreation (JUGAR), brought together community stakeholders and public agencies to increase access to public space for physical activity. Effective engagement of school administrators and community partners ensured that

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**FACTS**

**Shared Use Agreements**
Sharing School Recreational Facilities with the Community
all stakeholders understood the needs of the community and the terms of the agreement, which led to JUGAR’s success.\textsuperscript{14}

- A school district in New Orleans allowed for supervised use of its recreational facilities outside of school hours, which led to children being 84\% more likely to be active outdoors. It also led to children spending less time watching television and playing video games.\textsuperscript{8}

- A Seattle school district have partnered with the city’s parks and recreation department on a five joint use agreement.\textsuperscript{15} The agreement mandates that all public facilities should be available for utilization by all residents to their fullest extent.\textsuperscript{15} The school district and the city are equally responsible for maintaining the facilities to ensure maximum usage and public safety.\textsuperscript{15}

- In recent years, the Arizona legislature has classified school grounds as public parks outside of class hours.\textsuperscript{16} This includes charter schools and liability protection for the use of indoor facilities.\textsuperscript{16}

Funding for shared use projects or agreements may come from a variety of sources including developer impact fees, 2\textsuperscript{16} Century Community Learning Center grants, special bond funds, local general obligation bonds, shared use partner funds, private foundation grants, business sponsorships, and utilization fees.\textsuperscript{2}

THE ASSOCIATION ADVOCATES

- Modifying existing resources and toolkits to apply more generally to states across the country and disseminate these resources to communities to educate and inform about the importance of developing and maintaining shared use agreements through existing state and federal funding programs or information dissemination.

- Integrating shared use agreements into the existing federal and state programs, such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

- Incorporating shared use agreements into statewide recreation plans (SCORPs).

- Having state and federal governments require communities applying for public funding or grants to implement shared use agreements.

- Passing state legislation that encourages, supports, or authorizes school districts to enter into agreements supporting shared use of facilities and protects schools from liability when they enter these agreements with third parties.

- Integrating shared use agreements into school construction projects and encourage districts to reconsider traditional school architecture to make facilities more inviting to the community. Since the voter population with school-aged children is often declining in many areas of the country, it may be easier to garner support for school construction projects if the new facilities are shared with the community.

\textsuperscript{16} evansjo.com, AHA/FS/1/2014}