



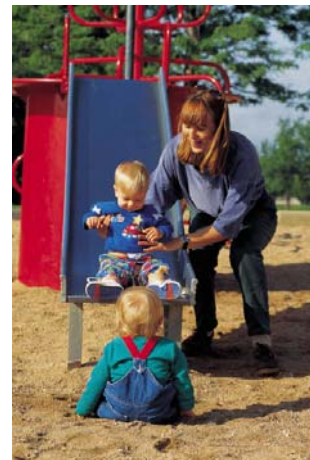
Joint Use Agreements

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.

WHY JOINT USE?

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.

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.



WHAT MAKES JOINT USE PARTNERSHIPS SUCCESSFUL?

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

In many communities, where safe places to play are few and far between, schools offer a variety of recreational facilities—from gymnasiums and running tracks to sports fields and playgrounds—to meet residents' needs. But districts often close their property to the public after hours, concerned about security, maintenance, liability, and other costs.

The good news is that school districts, local governments and other community-based organizations can share the costs and responsibilities of opening school property to the public after hours through joint use agreements. Public Health Law & Policy (PHLP) has just released a [toolkit that helps communities and school districts work together](#) to develop joint use agreements increasing access to recreational facilities on school grounds.

