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Guidelines for Sharing Recreation and Park Facilities and their Costs

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Guidelines for

Sharing recreation and park facilities AND their cost

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As vacation travel costs increase, people will look for substitute recreation in their home communities. This will create a demand for facilities and services that the tax income of the community will not cover, particularly in rural areas and small towns.

Perhaps such communities should investigate the possibility of using school facilities for recreation and park purposes.

Cooperation between school boards and municipalities can supply facilities neither agency alone can afford. It can also eliminate costly duplication of facilities and services.

About half of the sports and recreation facilities in this country are under the jurisdiction of tax supported schools, but they are open less than half the hours each day and half the days each year.¹ There is a growing recognition of the public's right to use the schools at times that do not interfere with normal school programs.

Important procedures in developing recreation programs and in establishing joint cooperation between school and recreation park officials are as follows:

1. Establish a joint committee that includes members of the school board,

¹Robert M. Artz, School-community recreation and park cooperation, National Recreation and Park Association, Arlington, Virginia, No. 82, p. 28.

city council, recreation and parks authority, as well as the superintendent of schools, director of parks and recreation, city manager, and the planning director.

2. Hold periodic conferences between city and school officials, both at the policy and administrative levels.
3. Establish a written contract that spells out how the facilities of the agencies involved can be used cooperatively.²

When school facility operation and use is expanded, funding must also be expanded. Parks and recreation departments must be prepared to pay their "fair share". In most cases the school has no funds available for recreation. For a while, the city will need to pay the costs of all new recreation programs, including the custodian's time.³

The intent is to provide the best program possible at a cost taxpayers are willing to pay.

²Joseph J. Bannon, and Edward H. Storey, Guidelines for recreation and park systems, University of Illinois, Department of Recreation and Park Administration, Urbana, Illinois, July 1977, Circular 1017, p. 6.

³Arlin Epperson, Municipal-school cooperation for recreation, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, 1975, p. 106.

While cooperation has been successful for many communities, there have been problems to overcome. The major problems are as follows:

1. Funds have been lacking for maintenance, staff, and adapting school buildings for community recreation programs.
2. The fear of vandalism and theft has made school officials overprotective.
3. Excessive or arbitrary fees have discouraged use of school facilities.
4. Conflicts have arisen over liability and maintenance responsibilities, in activity scheduling and sponsorship, and in determining those activities to be allowed.
5. Top school officials have often been uncooperative and unsupportive.⁴

Another problem in communities such as we have in South Dakota is that the school district is larger than the community using the facilities.

The primary stimulus for overcoming these problems and developing a good working relationship must come from the superintendent of schools, the city manager or mayor, and/or the director of parks and recreation.

Austin, Texas

The Austin, Texas, community has done an outstanding job in school-community development. The policy adopted by the city administration and the board of education recognizes the need for recreation and emphasizes their responsibility to offer the greatest benefit for the public's investment.

When land is acquired jointly, the main objective is to satisfy educational needs. But parks and recreation needs are also a high priority. The cost of jointly acquired and developed areas is based on the amount of time they are used by each

agency. Under this plan, the ratio is 9 months for school use to 3 months for recreation and park use. Austin reimburses the school district for 25% of the cost⁵ of acquiring and developing outdoor areas.

City and school authorities agreed to the following policies:

1. The school will provide a custodian if more than a specific part of a building is used by the parks and recreation department. Custodial service begins when the building opens and extends beyond closing time, allowing for cleanup. The parks and recreation department pays only the cost of the custodian when their programs do not overlap with the regular school custodian hours.
2. All routine maintenance costs of the school building are assumed by the school. If unusual damage results from the recreational program, it is paid for by the parks department.
3. The board of education assumes all utility costs except for the electricity and water bills during the months of July and August, which are paid for by the city.
4. The city takes care of watering the mowed areas used for recreation by both agencies, and the school takes care of the trimming, watering, and mowing of all other areas.

Spokane, Washington

Since 1945 the acquisition, improvement, and operation of school and city recreation properties in Spokane, Washington, have been achieved through an advisory coordinating committee. The committee is composed of two members from the schools and the recreation director of the parks department. All projects are usually initiated by the department executives, submitted to the coordinating committee for review and approval, and then

⁴ Artz, op. cit. p. 34.

⁵ Bannon, op. cit.
pp. 18-19.

referred to the two official boards for action.

All new school properties are designed with the cooperation of the parks department in order to provide adequate centers for community recreation during non-school hours. Where possible, park playground areas and equipment are located adjacent to the schools. Each department purchases and equips its own area.

During school hours the park facilities are assigned to the schools as needed, and they are under the direction of the superintendent of schools or designated assistants. School facilities used for programs during non-school hours are under the supervision of the recreation director of the parks department.

The costs of the program are shared. The schools furnish lights, water, heat, and other items pertaining to building maintenance. During the hours that a building is used by the parks department, the department pays for recreation leadership and janitorial services. All recreation equipment is furnished by the parks department unless the superintendent of the schools and the recreation director decide to use school equipment.⁶

Elkgrove Village, Illinois

Through a joint program, the school district and park district planned and built the Grant Wood Elementary School in Elkgrove Village, Illinois. The facility serves as an elementary school, park district offices, and a youth center with after school and weekend programs at the location. During the day, the youth center portion of the building is used for physical education classes and lunchroom activities.

At the Thomas Lively Junior High School in the same city, a swimming pool has been built that serves as both an educational and community facility.⁷

A South Dakota study

Municipalities, school boards, city park boards, and citizens are concerned with both the lack of and the duplication of facilities. In general, school and city park boards lack information about the relative costs of municipal-school shared facilities and about feasible procedures for sharing costs and responsibilities.

This study reviewed

1. municipal and school costs of jointly using and operating certain recreation facilities,
2. standard procedures and contractual arrangements for sharing the costs of developing and operating recreation facilities, and
3. standard policy procedures for establishing joint committees for planning, developing, and operating recreation facilities.

Procedures of the study

A list of 88 municipalities and 88 school boards that share recreation facilities was compiled from Nordstrom's study⁸ and the state Department of Education.

A survey schedule was developed for both municipalities and school administrators. As a pretest, surveys were mailed to five school administrators and five park board administrators who have been managing joint facilities.

From the first mailing to the schools, 55 were returned. A follow-up mailing brought the total return from school administrators to 82%. City officials received one survey mailing, with a total return rate of 52%. Because of the duplication of information between city officials and school administrators from the same community, it was not necessary to do a second mailing for city officials.

⁶ Artz, op. cit. p. 19.

⁷ Bannon, op. cit. p. 19.

⁸ Paul E. Nordstrom, Study of Parks and recreation in South Dakota, Agricultural Experiment Station, South Dakota State University, AES 15.

The survey sheets were analyzed separately for both the school and the city to make some comparisons.

Limited information is available on cost procedures used in joint cooperative recreation programs. Such information was analyzed when available and is reported in this study.

Reporting the study results

Cooperative agreements

All school administrators surveyed were reported to have joint cooperative programs.

However, of the 72 school board administrators responding to the survey, 61 said there is joint cooperation between the school and city. Of this group, only 38% have some form of written agreement, and the rest operate with verbal agreements. Most of the joint understandings have been for 10 or more years.

Both city and school administrators said that costs were the most important reason for joint use of facilities, followed by providing more adequate facilities. Only 8% listed public pressure as a factor.

When asked to identify the current level of cooperation, 44% of the school boards and 34% of the city administrators said that the school board is taking a positive look at their responsibilities regarding community use of schools. About 39% of the city officials said that city recreation facilities are used regularly by the schools, with the city taking care of all facility costs. Twenty of the 72 school administrators surveyed said that the school pays all costs involved when they use city recreation facilities. In 18% of the cooperative arrangements, school officials said that city facilities are used only on special requests.

More schools have written agreements for use of city facilities than cities do with schools for use of their facilities.

In 46% of the cooperative programs studied, school janitors are compensated for the additional work resulting from community use of the schools.

Reasons for limited cooperation in sharing school facilities

Since joint planning has been undertaken, 19 new schools have been built, but only seven (37%) were planned as facilities for both school and community recreation programs.

City and school officials identified the concerns that prevent full cooperation in sharing school facilities; 57% of the schools' administrators and 29% of the city officials said that the lack of school district funds to take on any new programs which might require additional revenue was a problem. Other concerns of school and city officials about using school buildings were the fear of costly maintenance because of vandalism and the difficulty in scheduling community recreation programs with the school calendar.

School and city officials surveyed felt that many citizens have a poor understanding of problems encountered by school personnel in allowing school facilities to be used by the general public.

About 25% of school officials said that many school buildings were not planned to isolate areas for recreation use only.

Lack of coordination and communications at the policy making level can result in limited leadership and is a source of friction between user groups and school custodians. Fifteen percent of the school officials and 16% of the city officials were uncertain about how to set up a joint program and the sharing of costs.

Reasons for limited cooperation in sharing city recreation facilities

City recreation facilities are not located close enough to the school for convenient use, said 33% of the school officials and 16% of the city officials. Other major concerns were the same as those listed as reasons why school facilities are not used more by the general public. Again, uncertainty over how to set up a joint program and how costs should be shared prevents full cooperation by 19% of both school and city officials.

When asked if both city and school officials jointly planned to provide public parks near school facilities, 31% of the school officials and 35% of the city officials said they have. However, of the school officials surveyed who had new schools built since joint cooperation was established, only 37% said that they worked with city officials in planning new school facilities for school and community recreation.

Ownership of recreation facilities

The total number of either school, city, or jointly owned recreation facilities, as reported by the 72 school districts surveyed, are reported in Table 1. Facilities under single ownership and jointly operated are also recorded in Table 1.

There are a limited number of jointly owned city-school recreation facilities in the 72 school districts surveyed.

Furthermore, joint use of facilities generally takes place under a cooperative agreement rather than joint ownership.

Outdoor facilities are the most frequent type of facilities used by the schools (Table 2). Gymnasiums and indoor swimming pools also often used by schools.

Except for indoor swimming pools, gymnasiums, and track fields, most school districts did not pay the city for the use of their recreation facilities.

School recreation facilities are used by the city, but only in a few cases did the city pay part of the cost of running the facilities (Table 3). School facilities are often available after school, weekends, and during the summer months. Special arrangements are usually necessary, except for the open outdoor facilities.

In many cases, however, there are a large number of city and school district recreation facilities that are either not being used by the other unit of government or are used on a limited basis. Facilities that are jointly owned or facilities under a cooperative arrangement are used more frequently.

Costs

None of the 72 school districts surveyed use a standard formula to establish user fees. In most cases, school districts use city recreation facilities without any major cost commitment and no school district paid total costs incurred (Table 4) when using city recreation facilities (Table 4). For those schools that did pay for services, the fees ranged from about 5-80% of the estimated total costs.

While some districts charged individual groups using their facilities, very few had a system where the city shares in a percentage of the maintenance and operating costs of the facilities (Table 5).

There was no direct relationship between the amount of time the recreation facilities were used and the amount charged by the unit of government providing the facility.

Many school districts made their facilities available to the community, but in most cases the amount of time did not exceed 20% of the total use. Playground areas, paved multiple use areas, sports fields, auditoriums, and gymnasiums receive the major use by the general public.

The community's population does not seem to have any significant effect on whether the city shares in the maintenance and operating costs of school recreation facilities used by the public. This also holds true for the schools sharing in costs of city recreation facilities.

Joint ownership costs

Of the 72 school districts returning the survey, only 10 share ownership of recreation facilities with their community. The population of these cities ranges from 393 to 50,000, with five of the communities over 1,000. The municipal governments and school districts in the two largest cities jointly own tennis courts. In the smaller cities, the most common joint projects are gymnasiums and sports fields.

Table 6 shows that there was no standard formula for sharing costs of jointly owned and operated facilities.

Establishing user fees and policy

Rental fees were charged for use of the school facilities by 39% of the school respondents. The school board is responsible for setting the fee in 28% of the school districts surveyed. Other methods used for setting the user fee were based on expenses only, such as utilities or the custodians salary.

Less than 10% of the city governments surveyed charged the schools user fees. In all cases the user fees were established by the city officials.

The majority of both school and city administrators said they were able to provide better programs because of joint cooperation.

Less than 5% have established a school-municipal recreation board to administer policy for joint recreation programs. However, about 50% reported that the school board and the recreation board work together on joint recreation programs.

When asked if they would recommend joint cooperation by city and school administrators in providing community recreation facilities, 81% of the city and 82% of the school officials surveyed said they would.

Summary

South Dakota school boards and municipalities share recreation facilities, but usually on a limited and informal basis.

Most joint programs have been functioning for at least 10 years, but less than 38% have written agreements. The commonly given reason for joint cooperation was to provide more adequate recreation facilities at a lower cost.

Most school and city officials favored joint cooperation in sharing recreation facilities. Many school administrators are taking a positive look at expanding the use of school facilities for public recreation programs. However, the lack of school district funds, the fear that school facilities will require increased maintenance, and the concern of scheduling problems are limiting factors.

Other factors identified as limiting expansion of ongoing programs were the lack of public relations between school administration and the community; the lack of coordination at city and school administrative levels; and not knowing how to set up workable cost sharing or joint ownership programs.

The method most frequently used by the school district for covering the costs for use of their facilities is a group user fee.

Only a few school districts have established a system where the city pays a percentage of the costs for use of school facilities. The same is true for schools using city facilities.

The facilities most commonly shared are outdoor playgrounds, sports fields, tennis courts, track fields, auditoriums, and gymnasiums.

While many of the school districts surveyed make their recreation facilities available to the community, in most cases the amount of time that the facilities are used does not exceed 20% of the total use.

The size of the community does not seem to have a significant effect on whether the city or school board shared in maintenance and operating costs for each other's recreation facilities.

Only 14% of all school districts surveyed shared ownership of recreation facilities with the home community. The most common examples in small communities of joint ownership were gymnasiums and sports fields. In the largest cities, tennis courts were jointly owned.

Many of the cooperative arrangements have been made without establishing a joint recreation board or written agreement.

Conclusions

Those who operate such programs find them to be a good way of providing more adequate recreation facilities at a reasonable cost to taxpayers. Nevertheless, such programs are not without problems. Few

programs are fully operational because of the lack of school district funds. Part of the need for these increased funds, as perceived by school administrators, is to take care of increased maintenance costs.

The study shows no standard method for sharing the costs. In part, this might be due to the lack of well-defined written policy statements that define cost sharing based on projected use and operation costs of the facilities.

There is the potential to make additional recreation facilities and programs available to most South Dakota residents by expanding the use of existing school recreation facilities through cooperative programs. For many communities, this is the most economical way of providing additional public recreation facilities.

When new construction is required, city and school cooperation can improve utilization and eliminate duplication of future facilities. The long range outcome of joint cooperation on recreation facilities can result in more adequate facilities at a lower cost.

Study your options

1. Before expanding public recreation facilities, inventory the existing city and school facilities and consider using the existing city and/or school district facilities.

2. If facilities are adequate but under utilized, consider the formation of a joint recreation board with representation from the school board, school administration, city administration, and city parks department and interested citizens.

3. If additional facilities are desired, explore the possibilities for joint acquisition and development of land or buildings in addition to separate ownership.

4. If joint use and/or ownership is desired, consider the various arrangements for sharing the initial and operational costs of sharing facilities. In many cases, informal agreements are used. However, in times of rising costs and scarce government funds, written agreements can help to clarify maintenance, supervision, and administrative costs in addition to scheduling and liability for damage.

Table 1. The number of recreation facilities available from the 72 school districts surveyed by type of ownership

Facilities	School Owned	City Owned	Joint Ownership City and School	Single Ownership Joint Operation
Children Playground Area	57	32	--	9
Playground Park Area	10	49	3	8
Paved Multiple Use Area	15	11	2	2
Sports Fields	33	35	4	16
Football Fields	38	21	2	12
Baseball-Softball Fields	18	43	5	19
Archery Range	2	3	--	1
Shooting Range	1	4	--	--
Auditorium	32	16	4	11
Gymnasium	47	13	5	14
Swimming Pool (Outdoor)	1	36	--	4
Swimming Pool (Indoor)	2	2	1	4
Ice Rink	1	21	--	4
Handball Court	--	5	--	1
Arts and Crafts Room	9	1	--	1
Golf Course	--	16	--	6
Tennis Courts	15	35	6	18
Track Field	44	5	3	8
Library	35	40	--	6

Table 2. The number of city facilities used by the schools in the 72 school districts surveyed

Facilities	Number of City Owned Facilities	Number of City Facilities Used By Schools	Number of School Districts Paying For Use of City Facilities
Children Playground Area	32	15	4
Playground Park Area	49	20	2
Paved Multiple Use Area	11	6	1
Sports Fields	35	20	10
Auditorium	16	5	3
Gymnasium	13	8	8
Swimming Pool (Outdoor)	36	5	2
Swimming Pool (Indoor)	2	2	2
Golf Course	16	11	3
Tennis Courts	35	18	1
Track Field	5	5	4
Library	40	13	--

Table 3. The number of school facilities used by the city in the 72 school districts surveyed

Facilities	Number of School Owned Facilities	Number of School Facilities Used by City	Number of Cities Paying for Use of School Facilities
Children Playground Areas	57	22	1
Playground Park Area	10	10	1
Paved Multiple Use Area	15	15	1
Sports Fields	33	19	3
Auditorium	32	16	5
Gymnasium	47	24	5
Arts and Crafts Room	9	4	--
Tennis Courts	15	7	1
Track Fields	44	9	--
Library	35	4	--

Table 4. Percent of total costs charged to the school districts for use of city facilities

Facilities	0%	1-20%	21-40%	41-60%	60-100%
	-----Percent of Respondents-----				
Children Playground Area	74	7	0	7	12
Playground Park Area	90	5	0	0	5
Paved Multiple Use Area	83	17	0	0	0
Sports Fields	50	10	10	10	20
Auditorium	40	20	0	0	40
Gymnasium	0	12	38	12	38
Swimming Pool (Outdoor)	60	40	0	0	0
Swimming Pool (Indoor)	0	100	0	0	0
Golf Course	72	28	0	0	0
Tennis Courts	100	0	0	0	0
Track Field	20	0	0	20	60

Table 5. Percent of total costs charged to the cities for use of school recreation facilities

Facilities	0%	1-20%	21-40%	41-60%	60-100%
	-----Percent of Respondents-----				
Children Playground Area	95	0	5	0	0
Playground Park Area	90	0	0	0	10
Paved Multiple Use Area	93	0	0	7	0
Sports Fields	84	0	0	5	11
Auditorium	69	25	0	0	6
Gymnasium	79	16	0	0	5
Arts and Crafts Room	0	0	0	0	0
Tennis Courts	67	0	0	0	33
Track Fields	0	0	0	0	0
Library	0	0	0	0	0

Table 6. Jointly owned facilities by the school and city showing cost sharing by individual facilities

Facilities	Percent Share of Construction Costs ¹		Percent Share of Maintenance Costs ²		Percent Share of Operating Costs ³	
	City	School	City	School	City	School
Gymnasium						
Case #1	80	20	0	100	0	100
Case #2	50	50	0	100	0	100
Case #3	40	60	10	90	10	90
Case #4	20	80	0	100	0	100
Case #5	40	60	40	60	40	60
Case #6	33	67	50	50	27	75
Sports Field						
Case #1	25	75	0	100	0	100
Case #2	50	50	50	50	50	50
Case #3	50	50	50	50	50	50
Tennis Court						
Case #1	75	25	100	0	100	0
Case #2	50	50	100	0	100	0
Case #3	50	50	50	50	80	20
Track Field						
Case #1	0	100	25	75	0	100

¹Costs are for planning, developing, and building the facility.

²Costs are for repairs, upkeep, and facilities improvement.

³Costs are for utilities, custodian, grounds, supplies, and etc.

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