



# UMC GUIDE RECREATION PARKS & LEISURE

University of Missouri-Columbia Extension Division

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## Community-School Cooperation for Recreation

*By Anthony J. Zito*

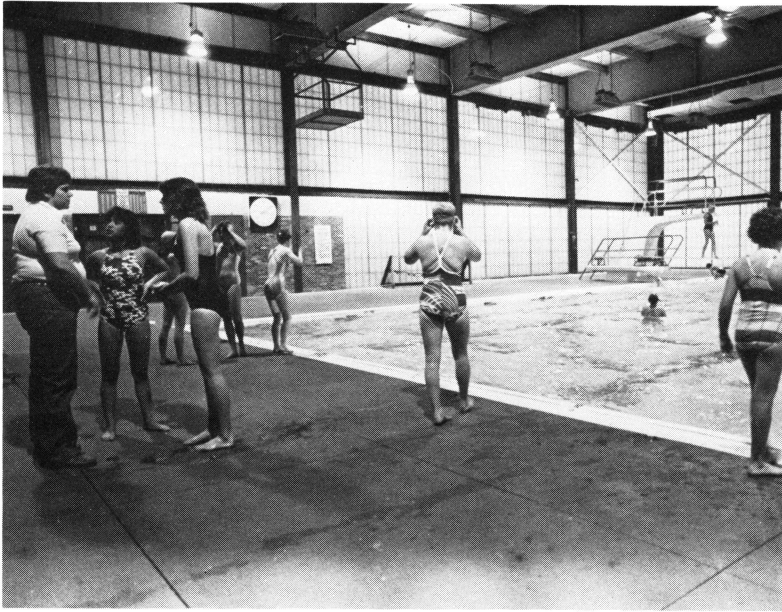
*Department of Recreation and Park Administration*

The purpose of this guide is to provide information to help improve and increase cooperation among schools and park or recreation departments in Missouri communities.

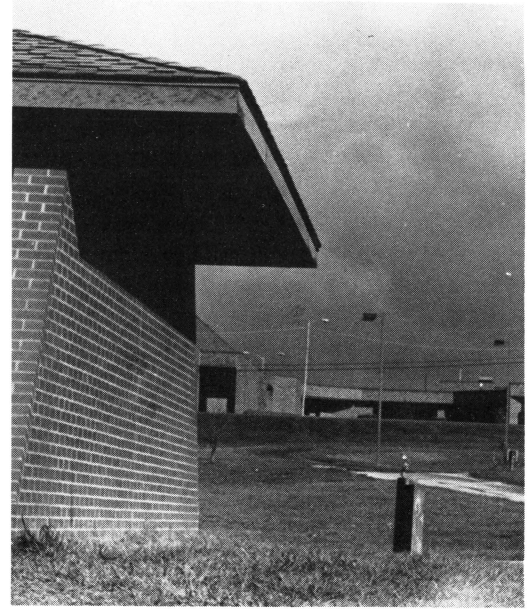
More cooperative efforts are warranted for a number of reasons. Taxpayers throughout the United States have asked for limits on taxes they pay and on government spending. (In Missouri the "Hancock Amendment" was passed in 1980 to limit government spending.) However this trend conflicts with public demands for more recreational opportunities. Many park and recreation budgets have been cut severely. Finding alternatives to traditional means of acquiring, developing, and programming for park and recreation areas and

facilities may benefit numerous communities. The local school's facilities and professional personnel place it in a unique position to cooperate in providing park and recreation services to its community.

The development of a cooperative working relationship among schools and the park and recreation agency or board is a local community consideration. Recreation and park programs and services must address each community's interests, needs, and resources. What is successful in one community may fail in another. However, some basic considerations have proven useful in cooperative school-community recreation and park programs.



**Coach Joanne Macher of the Columbia Swim Team talks with her competitors. Columbia Parks & Recreation provides time at Hickman High School's indoor pool. Oakland Park provides**



**students at Oakland Junior High facilities for baseball, soccer, tennis, an exercise trail and outdoor swimming. Missouri law allows for this cooperation.**

#### **WHY DON'T AGENCIES COOPERATE?**

If cooperation has potential for improving services, why isn't there more going on? A simple answer would be that nobody wants to give up his or her own turf. However, the main reasons are concern for agency identity, lack of communication or information, and environmental factors.

**Concern for Agency Identity:** Reasonable concerns can be well founded and should be compelling arguments against cooperation for agencies that wish to remain independent. An agreement between agencies should consider the following questions and include necessary safeguards whenever possible.

- Will our agency be absorbed or controlled by the other agency or government?
- Does our agency have any problems or inadequacies that will be discovered and exposed?
- Will our funding sources disapprove and cut our funds?
- Will exchanging resources mean losing them or at least receiving less than we give?
- How do we know this will work?
- Why should we change when things are going "fine"?

**Lack of Communication or Information:** Poor communication is a classic problem among public service agencies. The following situations may affect cooperation:

- Staff lack information regarding the functions and resources of the other agency.
- The agency's in-house activities are so specialized that other needs or options are not perceived.

- Staff are overworked, which prevents planning or seeking other alternatives.
- Lack of understanding regarding the value of recreation.
- Lack of coordination at the policy-making level.
- Friction between user groups and custodians.

**Environmental Factors:** Environmental factors are the combination of external and extrinsic circumstances and resources that affect the growth and development of an organization. Some of these factors are unchangeable; others have the potential for change with time or negotiation. However, it may be better not to enter into a cooperative agreement if the following conditions prevail.

- An agency has no funds for new ventures or no other resources available to exchange.
- An agency already has sufficient resources to do the best job possible.
- Geographical differences make meetings difficult to arrange.
- There are feuds between agencies because of personalities, past history, or professional traditions and prejudices.
- There may be extreme ideological differences.
- Legal structure or requirements prevent changes needed for cooperation.
- Agencies have incompatible goals.
- Scheduling conflicts.
- Buildings are not designed for recreational use.

Additional constraints to cooperation can be unique to a particular community. However, those mentioned

above seem to be most common. These obstacles can be overcome if the decision-making individuals at both agencies:

- recognize the great importance and need for cooperation in the delivery of services,
- are sincere in their resolve to develop an effective cooperative program,
- dedicate themselves to developing mutual understanding and respect at all levels of the agencies' structures.

### WHY DO AGENCIES COOPERATE?

Good reasons have been established for why agencies do not cooperate. The next reasonable question is, "When the agencies do cooperate, why do they?" The typical response is "to generally improve services at the most reasonable cost." However, particular combinations of circumstances and agency characteristics favor cooperation. These factors can be placed into three categories: outside pressures, prevailing attitudes, and self-interest.

**Outside Pressures:** Sometimes external pressures can be very compelling in encouraging agencies to cooperate. For example,

- A funding source may change its priorities.
- There is a scarcity of resources that are crucial to the delivery of needed services.
- Funding levels are reduced, mandating a more efficient operation.
- Consumers or the general public demand new services or improvement in old ones.
- A gap in services occurs because of staff vacancies or other reasons.

**Prevailing attitudes** in the community or in the agencies. These views are conducive to cooperation:

- At least one agency expressed a sincere interest in innovation.
- A history of cooperation between agencies is prevalent.
- Agencies have a mutual desire to decrease overlap of services or make maximum use of existing resources.
- The agencies' objectives are generally compatible.

**Self-interest:** Cooperation may result from these perceptions:

- An agency will gain status from cooperating with a more prestigious agency.
- An agency will gain tangible benefits.
- Each agency has some surplus resources that can be traded for something.
- An increase in services will increase exposure and recognition for an agency.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Taxpayers paid for school facilities that could benefit them 365 days and nights per year—not just the 180 days school is in session. In addition 203 school

buildings in Missouri are currently closed and resting idle due to the changing population patterns and school consolidations. Making these buildings available for recreational purposes can be an incentive, especially when gaining additional monies depends upon taxpayer approval. It appears that the school, the park and recreation department, and the community could be beneficiaries of at least the following benefits:

- Maximum usage of their areas and facilities by greater numbers of individuals.
- Avoidance of duplication of areas, facilities, personnel, and programs.
- Additional areas, facilities, and programs not available or obtainable through an individual agency.
- Effective maintenance of areas and facilities.
- Maximum return on tax dollars.
- Provision of a focus for community education, recreation, and an emerging leisure lifestyle.
- Effective planning, organization, programming, and delivery of services.
- Effective public interpretation and promotion of school-community recreation and park objectives, areas, facilities, programs, and services.

### ARE COOPERATIVE PROGRAMS LEGAL?

Some school administrators have indicated that state law does not allow the use of the school buildings or the expenditures of its funds for purposes other than education. State statute #177.031 gives authority for the free use of school facilities by community groups. Additionally H.S. 38, passed in 1973 and incorporated into State Statute #171.091, gives each school district authority to use its local tax money for community-school programs at its discretion.

Cooperative action follows no uniform pattern, but has been achieved in various ways. Formal agreements endorsing the general principle of cooperation in the acquisition, improvement, and use of school and park facilities have been reached by school and city authorities in many communities. Too often agreements are oral in nature and may be misunderstood, especially if personnel changes bring differing personalities and perceptions. So park and recreation officials must make every effort to obtain a formal agreement that clearly indicates the exact nature of the relationship.

Some of the technical questions that must be addressed in considering joint use agreements include:

- Who can or cannot participate in the activities at the schools?
- What activities can or cannot be carried on in schools?
- Who will be responsible for the conduct of the activities?
- Who will be responsible for liability should accidents occur?
- What regulations should be adopted to govern use?

- What school equipment or facilities should community groups or public be permitted to use?
- Who should bear the cost of utilities and maintenance?
- What fees, if any, should be charged to user groups?
- Who will be responsible for staffing and supervision?
- What areas or facilities are to be used and when?
- What are the standard operating procedures and policies?
- Who will be responsible for financial considerations?
- How will problems be handled?

If effective cooperation is to occur, the development of a mutually acceptable written agreement outlining the nature, scope, authority, and responsibility of each agency is mandatory. The formal agreement should create an atmosphere of positive understanding, joint commitment, and respect. In addition, duplication, friction, ill-will, and omissions should be mitigated. To reach a meaningful agreement, the following procedures could be adopted.

1. Initiate formal contact between the highest administrative officials of both agencies to discuss broad goals.
2. Hold meetings of board members and professional staff from both agencies to discuss areas of mutual interest and concern.
3. Establish a joint school-community recreation and park planning committee comprised of board and staff members and citizens representing both agencies.
4. Administrative staffs of schools and park/recreation programs should determine the school-community programs and services to be provided and what areas and facilities are to be used. This should include an integrated master plan with detailed cost analysis.
5. The Joint Planning Committee should review the plan and develop the agreement document. This committee should be responsible for determining:
  - a. Areas of responsibility for programming,
  - b. Areas of responsibility for development and expenditure of funds,
  - c. Areas of responsibility for maintenance and operation costs,
  - d. A budget plan.
6. Then the document should be submitted to both boards for approval and implementation.

## SUMMARY

The school-park concept can be advantageous to park departments, school districts, and taxpayers. Effectively implemented, joint school-park department development and management should lower operation and maintenance costs significantly. Both agencies also

may be able to reduce their capital budget requirements. Too often schools remain largely untapped as recreation resources. An attempt has been made to identify reasons why this occurs. There has also been an attempt to indicate reasons why a cooperative venture should bring benefits to the school, the park and recreation department, and the community as a whole. Perhaps the most important factor in the rationale for adopting this concept is economics. There are pressures of increased public demands for greater numbers of quality recreation and park services, yet there are constraints on the tax dollar to deliver these services. If effective implementation of the park-school concept is to succeed, it will ultimately depend on the flexibility of the school and park administrators and officials to cooperate and work together toward a common goal of providing quality park and recreation services to their constituency.

## RESOURCES

For additional information or copies of school-park agreements and resolutions, please contact:

Recreation Extension  
 623 Clark Hall  
 University of Missouri-Columbia  
 Columbia, MO 65211  
 314/882-3085 or 3079.

## ADDITIONAL REFERENCES:

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