

The Role of Joint Use Agreements in the Battle Against Obesity

Summary:

What role could Duval County policy makers play in enhancing the physical activity of Duval County residents?

The answer is simple: Joint Use Agreements

According to the CDC, approximately 17% of the children, ages 2-19, in the United States are obese. This equals approximately 12.5 million children. Furthermore, one in seven pre-school aged children living in low-income areas are considered obese. These children are more likely to have high blood pressure, have a higher risk of cardiovascular disease, higher chances of having type 2 Diabetes, respiratory issues (including sleep apnea), joint discomfort, liver disease and gall stones.¹

The causes of the increase in obesity are simple: the intake of too many calories and a lack of physical activity.¹

One way to reverse this trend is to utilize joint use agreements to promote physical activity. A joint use agreement can be defined as “a formal agreement between two separate entities— often a school and a city or county— setting forth the terms and conditions for shared use of property or facilities.”²

Joint use agreements will allow Duval County residents a safe place to participate in physical activity for the entire family.³

Duval County at a Glance:

- There are currently very few formal policies in place for joint use in Duval County.
- According to the Duval County Health Department 40% of the children in the urban core of Jacksonville live below the poverty line. 100% live in what has been classified as distressed neighborhood. Crime rates are high and access to safe space for play is limited.⁷
- More than 62% of the adults in Duval County are overweight or obese.⁸
- Only one third of the adults in Duval County get the recommended amount of physical activity.⁸
- For youth, only 44% and 30% of Duval County middle and high school aged students, respectively, got the recommended amount of physical activity in 2011.⁹

Liability:

In the state of Florida²:

- School districts are protected by sovereign immunity.
- School districts and other recreational facilities are required to take reasonable steps to prevent injury to those using their facilities.
- Following previous decision in Florida Case Law, schools would hold the same protection after hours as it would during the school day except for under common law duties.
- According to Florida's Tort Claim Act, no officer, employee or agent can be held liable in a tort action unless the individual was found to be acting in bad faith or with malicious intent.

Local Successes with Joint Use:

While there are a few formal joint use agreements set up between the city of Jacksonville and the Duval County School Board, there are even fewer formal agreements set up for the use of local schools by community organizations.

- Currently, Holiday Hill Elementary School has a joint use agreement with the City of Jacksonville for the use of their park.⁵
- Highlands Middle School pool also has a joint use agreement with the City of Jacksonville.⁶

- This has proven to be a cost effective way to increase physical activity among children and adults in the surrounding communities by giving them a safe place to play and conduct classes and programs.

Recommendations:

The following are recommendations for policy makers in Duval County and the City of Jacksonville:

- Support formal joint use agreements between the City of Jacksonville and the Duval County School Board that allow community members access to school recreational facilities during non-school hours.
- Review existing joint use agreements for Duval County and the City of Jacksonville.
- Make clear definitions of eligible users for the facilities and the times that the facilities are available for use.
- Set specific parameters for any liability issues and responsibility for repair to damages inflicted to facilities by the eligible users.
- Encourage Joint Use between other non-governmental organizations to increase access to physical activity and aid in maximizing community resources and assets.

Endnotes

1. Centers for Disease Control (CDC). "Childhood Overweight and Obesity: A Growing Problem." 2011. <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/problem.html>. Accessed: March 22, 2012.
2. National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity (NPLAN). "Liability Risks for After-Hours Use of Public School Property to reduce Obesity: Florida." 2009. <http://www.nplanonline.org/nplan/products/liabilitysurvey>. Accessed: March 22, 2012.
3. Bridging the Gap: Research Informing Policies & Practices for Healthy Youth. "Joint Use Agreements: Creating Opportunities for Physical Activity." 2012. <http://www.bridgingthegapresearch.org>. Accessed: March 22, 2012.
4. Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities: Supporting Community Action to Prevent Childhood Obesity. "Jacksonville, FL." 2009. <http://www.healthykidshealthycommunities.org/communities/jacksonville-fl>. Accessed: March 23, 2012.
5. City of Jacksonville: Park Internet- Recreation & Community Services. "Holiday Hill Elementary School Park." <http://apps2.coj.net/parksinternet/parkdetails.asp?parkid=77>. Accessed: March 23, 2012.
6. City of Jacksonville: Park Internet- Recreation & Community Services. "Highlands Middle School." <http://apps2.coj.net/parksinternet/parkdetails.asp?parkid=77>. Accessed: March 23, 2012.
7. Duval County Health Department (DCHD). "Health: Place Matters". 2008. <http://www.dchd.net/services/hper/new/Reports/.../place%20matters2.pdf>. Accessed March 22, 2012.
8. Duval County Health Department (DCHD). "DCHD Assessed Behavioral Risk Factors in Jacksonville". 2012. <http://www.dchd.net/behavioral%20risk%20factors.htm>. Accessed April 2, 2012.
9. Duval County Health Department (DCHD). "DCHD DCPS Assessed Risk Behaviors of Youth." 2011. <http://www.dchd.net/youthriskbehaviorsreports2011.htm>. Accessed April 2, 2012.

