



Saving Public
Access to Community
Space Everywhere

SPACE Coalition: 2021 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission

The Honorable Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance:

In [Reconnecting Ontarians](#), the Honourable Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, referred to the “double bottom line” of these sectors:

“both a financial bottom line through which the people who work in these sectors generate hundreds of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in economic activity, and a social bottom line in which all these sectors enrich Ontario as a vibrant, dynamic, diverse and inclusive place to live.”

The SPACE Coalition notes that utilizing school space for community purposes similarly has both financial and social benefits. In general, community use of schools promotes:

- Improved student performance,
- Life-long learning,
- Good value for taxpayers,
- Physical activity and healthy lifestyles,
- Safer neighbourhoods and crime-prevention,
- Newcomer settlement and integration.

This summer offers an opportunity for community use of schools while students are not present. We therefore urge you to ensure that the Ministry of Education can support, through Focus on Youth or a similar funding mechanism, those community groups that provide summer programs for children and youth. To ensure effective program planning, this funding needs to be confirmed as early as possible. This will allow school boards to recruit the students they will employ through grants like Focus on Youth, community groups to prepare effective and safe programs, and parents to plan their children’s summer activities.

These activities will help to minimize summer learning loss for children, while providing youth with transferrable skills, additions to family income, and funds to pay for post-secondary education. Summer programming will also help to address families’ concerns about coming together for sports and recreation more generally.

In the longer term, Community Use of Schools (CUS) funding recognizes that schools offer an effective use of taxpayers’ investments in providing a place for residents to come together, volunteer, become physically active, and build strong and healthy communities. These elements are even more important as our economy and our social networks recover from COVID-19. SPACE therefore requests that you not only maintain CUS funding based on 2020/21 projected enrollment, but also enhance it to account for rising labour and utilities costs, as well as labour costs related to enhanced cleaning protocols that will continue into the “new normal”.

Like [Reconnecting Ontarians](#), SPACE's vision for the new normal includes community groups and volunteers running arts, sports, recreation, leadership, and civic engagement. The government's role includes ensuring community groups have affordable, accessible, and equitable use of schools for these purposes.

We recommend that the Government of Ontario:

- 1. Provide funding, through Focus on Youth or a similar mechanism, to the Ministry of Education to support community programming at school facilities this summer.**
- 2. Increase community use of school (CUS) funding provided by the Ministry of Education to local school boards to account for increased labour and utilities costs. Base CUS funding on 2020/21 projected enrollment, not actual enrollment.**
- 3. Direct the Ministry of Education to confirm summer, community use and other funding for school boards as soon as possible and by the end of March to ensure effective program planning.**

Background

The [SPACE Coalition](#) (Saving Public Access to Community space Everywhere) is an umbrella group of organizations including a range of province-wide groups, local organizations, social services, child welfare, sports organizations, and planning bodies such as Social Planning Toronto.

We believe that community use of schools is a cornerstone of healthy neighbourhoods and communities. Schools are the original community hubs, bringing neighbourhoods together long before that term was coined. Scouts and Guides held meetings in schools. Community theatre and arts groups rehearsed and performed there. After-school, summer and weekend programs built kids' social skills and friendships while providing supervision outside school hours. Adults enjoyed sports, recreation, and cultural activities. Non-profit groups offered many of these, contributing to resilient individuals and neighbourhoods in a safe place within "15 minute" walks in the neighbourhoods.

Now, after months of isolation, family stresses, and few social and emotional supports, there is a very high need to provide programs and services to children, youth and families. Enhancing social, emotional, and physical well-being with the demonstrated benefits of cultural and physical activity, are critical to reduce future costs for physical and mental health services.

Minister MacLeod described Ontario as "a place whose quality of life rivals any other jurisdiction in the world" and asked "what does your Ontario look like?"

Our Ontario includes affordable, accessible, and equitable access to school space for community groups offering sports, arts, recreation, civic engagement and more.