



Top Ten Reasons to support affordable community access to school space

1. Improves student performance

Studies have demonstrated that participation in school-based after-hours programming has a positive impact: promoting greater parental involvement in school, greater student engagement, increased commitment to homework, readiness to learn, and more positive educational outcomes for children and youth. Summer and after-school programs also can reduce the back-to-school learning gap. (Kane, T., U of California, 2004. William T. Grant Foundation and Royal Commission on Learning, Ontario, 1994).

2. Encourages artistic and cultural expression to create vibrant communities & expands capacity for learning

Opportunities for communities to 'come together' in community spaces involving the arts, dance, or music increase social cohesion and nurture the development of cultural and community life. In addition, there is increasing research on the value of the arts to learning and brain development and learning outcomes. (Ontario Arts Council 1997 and OMG Inc, et al. National Endowment for the Arts, 1991).

3. Promotes life-long learning

A wide range of *pre-school, school-age, youth, and adult education, newcomer upgrading/ESL* programs depend upon access to affordable space such as schools. A community culture of lifelong learning creates a more educated, skilled, and competitive and responsive labour force. (Royal Commission on Learning, Vol II, Ontario, 1994).

4. Use of school space is good value for taxpayers

Providing after-hours access to schools maximizes use of school space, giving taxpayers a better value for their school investments. Research by Dr. Gina Browne of Hamilton has clearly demonstrated spin-off savings from after school recreation programs for children and young adults (e.g., social assistance, counselling, and health services). (Browne, G. McMaster University, 1999 as cited in Community Dispatch, Community Development Halton, Vol 5 #2, November 2000).

5. Encourages physical activity and healthy lifestyle development

The Romanow Commission concluded that a 10% increase in physical activity by Canadians could save \$150 million a year in direct health care costs and \$5 billion a year in indirect cost. Increasing access to sport and physical activity programs in schools and after-schools, weekends, and summer can have a positive impact on lowering the rates of childhood obesity and the onset of childhood diabetes. (Sports Matters Group, Sept 2005, Pre Budget Brief Standing Committee on Finance).

6. Promotes safer neighbourhoods and crime-prevention

Canadian and international evaluations demonstrated that quality after-school programs are cost effective and yield measurable benefits within three years and result in reductions of crime of 25-50% within 10 years (Canadian Council on Social Development). Former Chief Justice of Ontario, Roy McMurtry has cited publicly the importance of access to recreational opportunities for children and youth to reduce crime. (Toronto Star, Jan 8, 2001).

7. Increases opportunities for newcomer settlement and integration

School-based *English as a Second Language (ESL)* and settlement programs provide essential supports to newcomers and help them adapt to their new life in Canada. Other social-recreational, employment or training opportunities in

schools decreases isolation, builds networking among newcomers and promotes faster integration. (Basu, R. Department of Geography, York University. Vol 1, No 1. Education, Citizenship and Social Justice. 59-82 ,2006).

8. Supports and sustains free or low-fee community programs, fostering accessibility and inclusion

Free or affordable programs are needed to ensure access for lower income families and households. Permit fees to use school space are often passed on to participants which create barriers to participation or can result in cancelled programs. Participation in affordable and accessible social-recreational activities should be included in *provincial anti-poverty strategies*. Canadian Council on Social Development reports that there is a gap in participation in social recreational activities between low income children and youth and higher income families. The lower income children and youth are in families that are struggling to meet basic needs and cannot afford fees for programs. 42% of people who rely on food banks for all or part of their food are children and youth under 18.

9. Promotes volunteerism and community participation for all age groups

Volunteers are the hallmark of a healthy community and in Canada their contribution is estimated at 6.5 million volunteers hours annually, adding \$14 billion of GDP to the non profit sector to increase communities capacities in Ontario and across Canada. Access to community space creates opportunities for volunteerism, social networking, skill-development and civic engagement which combine to create a healthier more engaged community. (National Survey of Giving and Volunteerism, 2001).

10. Promotes community well-being

Ensuring “doors are open” in our Ontario public schools, and that access is expanded and affordable after-school, on weekends and in the summer is an important pillar in moving forward on a vision where our public schools are active hubs of valuable community supports and activity. With school space as a resource, community groups and the non-profit sector can be partners in programming to address local needs and offering a wide range of after-hours programs and activities for children, youth, adults, seniors and newcomers. School buildings are voting centres during elections, meeting places for the community, and provide refuge during civic emergencies. The contribution of community use of schools to community well-being is enormous. (Nozik, Marcia. Healthy Cities, Healthy Communities, Canadian Dimension, 1998).

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