



## Salud America! Toolkit

# 4 Easy Steps to Push for Open Use at Your School

Do you want your school district to consider an “open use” policy that allows local residents to use school rec facilities after classes to play and be physically active?

Use this toolkit to help you get the conversation started!

“Open use” refers to a school policy to allow free community access to school district property for individual play and physical activity without a partnership or agreement with another public entity or a third party. Latino children in underserved communities have limited spaces to be physically active, [research shows](#), part of the reason for their higher obesity rates. In fact, one study found that 81% of Latino neighborhoods did not have a recreational facility. Children living in poverty and disadvantaged neighborhoods also face social and economic barriers to healthy lifestyles, creating adversity from the start. These kids are prone to chronic stress and at increased risk for depression, anxiety, and diabetes.

Here’s what you can do:

### STEP 1

Google the name of your local school district and the word “school board.”

### STEP 2

Visit the school board’s website, and collect pertinent email contact information.

### STEP 3

Use the below model narrative to email your school leaders regarding open use:

Dear district leaders,

As school district facilities are a public resource funded by taxpayers in this community, I am writing today to urge you to create an Open Use Policy that allows school buildings and grounds, when not in use for school purposes, to be used for public recreational activities.

Does our district already have such a policy?

If not, children and families in our area desire greater access to recreational space for play and exercise, which can help reduce risk of disease and obesity, as well as pave way for improved physical, emotional, and social development of children.

School recreational facilities—which may include playgrounds, basketball courts, tennis courts, multi-use black top areas, tracks, baseball fields, football fields, soccer fields, multi-use playing fields, and even gyms and pools—can help increase the amount of public play space.

Just how can an Open Use Policy (or Shared Use Agreement) benefit a community? Read or watch how it worked for schools in [Earlimart, California](https://youtu.be/s64UFfNXbzQ) (<https://youtu.be/s64UFfNXbzQ>), [San Antonio, Texas](https://youtu.be/8VjhiK-IUd8) (<https://youtu.be/8VjhiK-IUd8>) including installing [always-open gates](#) to make parks more inviting, [Austin, Texas](#), and [Minneapolis, Minnesota](#).

I urge you, if such a policy does not exist, to designate Open Use Facilities in our district and create an Open Use Policy to allow community members to use these facilities for recreational purposes when such use does not interfere with school programs and activities.

I suggest you review the following “Model Open Use Policy for School Districts” from ChangeLab Solutions:

[http://www.changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/OpenUsePolicySchoolDistricts\\_FINAL\\_20150728.docx](http://www.changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/OpenUsePolicySchoolDistricts_FINAL_20150728.docx).

Additionally, I would urge you to be willing to enter shared use (or joint use) agreements with community partners for sharing school recreational facilities, using the “Opening School Facilities for Use During Non-School Hours” from ChangeLab Solutions:

<http://www.changelabsolutions.org/publications/model-JUAs-national>

Please let me know how you plan to address this issue.

Thanks!

(Name)



## STEP 4

When your district responds, thank them for their response and attention, and keep a dialog going with them.

Also please let us know at *Salud America!* how the progress is going. We can help you in your efforts:

[saludamerica@uthscsa.edu](mailto:saludamerica@uthscsa.edu)