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After-Hours Use of Schools

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AFTER-HOURS USE OF SCHOOLS

The use of school facilities for educational programmes or social activities outside of school hours has proven benefits for students, parents and the community at large. PEB studied this topic several years ago and found widespread agreement on both the educational and economic advantages of providing a safe structure with learning opportunities for latch-key children and of opening the school to people of all ages for cultural activities, sports or community services.

Experience in a number of OECD countries today continues to demonstrate how after-hours use of schools can improve student success through more study time, add value to the formal curriculum through extra-curricular activities, provide adults with opportunities for personal development or learning and offer the wider population a well-situated structure that can be the centre of community life. This article describes current practice in Belgium, Canada, France, Ireland, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In the afternoon, at weekends and during summer vacation, schools which would otherwise sit unoccupied may serve for adult education, child care, cultural events, senior citizens' groups, etc. Both primary and secondary institutions offer appropriate facilities – classrooms, workshops, performance spaces, computer laboratories, gymnasiums – at a central location in the community. School playgrounds may be used by the public outside of school hours as is the case in Geneva. Residences at boarding schools may be used for student retreats as is the practice in Belgium's Flemish Community. In Ireland government agencies and social services share premises with schools. A recently built secondary school in Quebec opens its sports facilities to the public while the municipal library next door serves the students.

Governments can encourage a more efficient use of buildings, grounds and equipment through financial incentives, policies of openness and planning with schools and the community. The US Government is awarding funds to develop after-school centres to combat violence and improve student success. In the UK, schools receive special funding for innovative schemes or out-of-hours child care programmes. Schools under construction in Turkey

as part of its new educational programme are planned as community centres and were designed by Turkish universities.

Costs, organisation and responsibility are issues that must be addressed for the smooth sharing of premises. Policies must be well-defined in regards to insurance, rental fees and other conditions for use. Collaboration between the different actors involved, through dialogue, joint planning and combining resources, not only produces better facilities for everyone but can have unexpected benefits, such as in France where the Open School programme has resulted in less damage to premises as children take possession of their schools.

Geneva: elementary schools open to all

Schools have always played a vital social role in neighbourhoods or towns. Although their primary purpose is to transmit knowledge, they also act as uniquely convenient meeting places to which an area's residents are naturally drawn, whether they are the parents of pupils or ordinary citizens. With this in mind, the City of Geneva has continually sought to ensure that its schools are as versatile and multipurpose as possible by opening them up to extracurricular activities and local organisations.

This policy of openness does not have a major financial impact on the cost of buildings, since it consists of making optimum use of core school facilities and making available the areas that cannot be used for instructional purposes. Rental fees have deliberately been kept as low as possible and only cover direct operating costs, so that they will not be beyond the reach of local organisations with limited funds.

In practice, the openness policy of Geneva's elementary schools takes the following forms:

- **School premises**

From 4.00 p.m. (when classes end) to 6.00 p.m., children may participate in the extracurricular activities organised in each school under the responsibility of specialised instructors for a small fee (a proposal to provide these activities free of charge as had previously been the case was recently rejected by popular vote). These activities are held in the appropriate premises, such as handicraft workshops, sewing rooms or physical education halls.

From 6.00 to 10.00 p.m., gymnasiums, playrooms and dance rooms are rented to local groups. These premises are sometimes available at weekends, but school buildings are closed throughout the school holidays.

- **Special premises for associations**

Most elementary schools have premises intended for local groups, which rent them by the year.

- **Playgrounds**

The playgrounds of Geneva's elementary schools may only be used by pupils during school hours but are open to the public at other times. In some downtown areas, school playgrounds are often the only place where small children and teenagers can play. In 1980 the municipal authorities launched an ambitious programme to provide 100 play areas, on school playgrounds in particular, and virtually all of these facilities have now been built. Thanks to this large-scale programme, Geneva residents now have access to safe and attractive play areas for children.

This Swiss example is specific to the City of Geneva. Arrangements may differ in other areas of the country.

France: constructive use of vacation time

The Open School plan, launched as an experimental programme in 1991, offers educational, sports and leisure activities along with study support in junior and upper secondary schools during holidays and on Wednesdays (when there are no classes in France) and Saturdays throughout the school year. The activities are reserved for children and youth who have little or no vacation opportunities.

It is local education authorities that authorise the use of a secondary school's premises once the principal has received agreement from the school board.

In 1998 the programme was extended to primary school students. This posed a problem for space since primary school buildings are already used outside of class time as recreational centres (*centres de loisirs sans hébergement*). So in most cases, primary pupils attend Open School at junior secondary institutions, under the responsibility of the host school principal, who works with the primary school director and teachers to define programme activities. Nevertheless certain activities may take place in primary schools on an exceptional basis, with the mayor's authorisation and in accordance with legislation.

French experience is that young people who participate in Open School become more mindful of their environment: they take proud possession of the premises and keep the school clean. The institutions suffer no damage during the programme, and there is usually less damage engendered at the start of the following school year.

United Kingdom: encouraging expanded community use

The majority of schools in the UK are involved in some form of after-school or community activity. Such activities range from homework clubs and extra curricular classes to adult education, sports and the performing arts.

Despite this positive picture there is great scope for more. The government is keen to promote and encourage links between schools and their local communities, so that schools become centres of learning for the whole community and their premises and equipment are far more fully utilised outside school hours.

As a first step, new guidance is being prepared for schools. This will highlight the benefits of encouraging community use, show how to overcome any perceived barriers and include practical advice on such issues as finance, planning, health and safety, security and insurance. The guidelines, to be published this summer, will contain a number of recent case studies.

Another initiative, announced this spring, concerns the establishment of 85 Learning Network Centres based in schools, a substantial number of which will be in inner city areas. The centres will bring state-of-the-art information and communication technology systems within the reach of everyone in the community. They will give children and adults access to new approaches to learning and offer an expanding range of opportunities before and after school. The centres will act as cores for cascading best practice to neighbouring schools and may also develop language laboratories, cyber cafes and arts facilities.

Quebec: combining resources

As in many countries, Quebec schools are structures that help shape a community. Over the last four years, the *Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec* (MEQ, Quebec Ministry of Education) has financed the construction or enlargement of 64 primary schools. Nineteen of these involved local contributions in order for the buildings to serve the community outside of class times.

There is an important move in Quebec for local communities to use secondary school equipment to optimise its use. The *Odysée* secondary school in Val-Bélair, inaugurated in February 1999, is an example of a new kind of partnership between schools and municipalities. The population of Val-Bélair has access to its gymnasium and pool while the adjoining municipal library serves the students.

Ireland: grouping services

Educational facilities throughout the country are being used more and more for larger community use, while not specifically designed to do so. Ireland recognises that school premises cannot remain limited to educational use in the future and is building new schools with this in mind. Two such schools are currently planned in Dublin: one, in Sandy-mount, will house facilities for the Departments of Education and Health, and a second, in Cherry Orchard, will group primary school facilities, an early-start programme, basic health-care programmes, home-school liaison activities and possibly adult education.

Special schools are also increasingly attracting mixed and after-hours use. St. Gabriels Special school in Limerick provides educational and medical support for children with special needs. Beechpark in Dublin, which caters for the needs of pupils with autism and is set to become a centre of excellence, combining educational, diagnostic, psychological and other related supports.

Problems in the areas of insurance, liability and accountability remain to be solved.

Belgium's Flemish Community: detailed policy recommendations

The policy in Belgium's Flemish Community allows for the use of all types of school facilities by a number of organisations and individuals for social, cultural and sports activities. A school's grounds, sports areas, classrooms, workshops, lunchroom, kitchen, library or theatre can be reserved any time

that they are not being used by the school system. On Wednesday afternoons, when there are no classes, priority goes to activities organised by the school or the *Autonome Raad van het Gemeenschapsonderwijs* (ARGO, Autonomous Council for Community Education).

There is no rental charge for school-related groups – of parents, alumni, students or faculty – or for users organising activities expressly for students. Others who are authorised to use the space – day care services and cultural, youth and sports organisations – pay an hourly fee; prices are set by the local education authorities. Requests must be made one month in advance, and all users must take out material damage and third-part accident insurance.

Common activities include lectures, meetings, exhibits, banquets, fairs and film projects. The premises may not be used for political and commercial activities, nor for bicycle or motorised races or certain other motorised activities.

Boarding schools

Residences and sports facilities at Flemish boarding schools are commonly used for student retreats designed to teach team work through interaction in groups. Availability varies according to the institution; some may be rented only during the school year, others only during school holidays and others are open year-round. Visits to museums, nature reserves or other nearby attractions are often organised during the retreats.

Policies for the use of school premises are defined by ARGO to serve as guidelines to help schools manage their infrastructure efficiently. ARGO is responsible for community education for Belgium's Flemish Community, but schools have almost complete autonomy; therefore actual practice may differ from recommendations.

Turkey: new designs with the community in mind

Having extended compulsory education from five to eight years as of the current academic year, Turkey is now investing resources into accommodating its three million new students. In addition to increasing the capacity of existing schools, 345 new schools are under construction and will be used for various community activities.

The new facilities are designed to meet the future needs of an evolving educational system. Schools will serve as community centres for social, cultural and sports activities. Following a needs assessment



The *Odysée* secondary school in Val-Bélair, Quebec, shares its sports facilities with the city in exchange for use of the municipal library (lower right).



New schools in Turkey are planned for shared use by the adult community.



carried out by the Ministry of National Education, six Turkish universities prepared innovative projects for buildings that can adapt as the education programme develops.

Interiors and exteriors are designed to accommodate people with physical handicaps. In the interest of easy access and to avoid vertical circulation, multiple storeys are avoided, apart from buildings on small sites which are limited to four floors. There are separate entrances for nursery school children, and classrooms for the early years of education are located on the ground floor.

The new schools offer science and computer laboratories, art and music rooms and workshops designed for individual and group work. Faculty rooms are also designed for both individual work and meetings. The schools have two canteens, one for older students and one for younger. There are plans for indoor basketball and volleyball courts, as well as outdoor fields

and recreational areas – all of which can be used by the community.

With the advent of eight-year compulsory education, Turkey aims to modernise its educational facilities by the end of 2000, providing buildings that can serve for lifelong learning and community education.

United States: investing in a new after-school programme

The United States is investing increasing sums in school buildings for activities after school, weekends and summers in high-need rural and inner-city communities. Through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers programme, the US Government provides funds to public elementary, middle and secondary schools for “educational, recreational, health and social service programs for residents of all ages within a local community”.

The Community Learning Centers (CLCs) are located in school buildings and operated by local educational agencies working with local government, businesses, institutions for tertiary education, recreational services, etc. Funds may be used to rent facilities, purchase equipment or remodel, but not to purchase or build new facilities.

Grantees are required to carry out at least four of 13 activities proposed which include the following:

- senior citizen programs;
- children's day care services;
- expanded library service hours to serve community needs;
- telecommunications and technology education programs for individuals of all ages;
- parenting skills education programmes;
- employment counselling, training and placement;
- services for individuals who leave school before graduating from secondary school;
- services for individuals with disabilities.

In 1998 the Department of Education administered \$40 million toward CLCs through a grant competition; 2 000 schools submitted applications, totalling \$500 million in requests for funding – one in 20 received support. In 1999 the government committed \$200 million to the programme – half of which is to be granted through a new competition; it will fund 1 600 centres, serving 250 000 students. Private foundations are also making important contributions.

In recognising the need for such programmes, the US Department of Education cites studies showing that the peak hours for juvenile crime and victimisation are from 2.00 to 8.00 p.m. and that adolescents who are unsupervised after school are more likely to use alcohol and drugs and are less successful in school than those involved in constructive activities.

The National Study of Before- and After-School Programs

In 1991 the first nationally representative study was conducted in the US to document the characteristics of formal before- and after-school programmes for 5 to 13 year-olds. Below is a sample of the findings, taken from *The National Study of Before- and After-School Programs: Analysis and Highlights*.

- A major need identified in the survey data is for adequate space within facilities.
- Approximately half of all programmes use shared space. The sharing of space is more common for programmes located in public schools (67%) and religious institutions (60%) than in child care centres (31%).
- Locating a programme in a school often helps solve transportation problems; minimises costs related to rental space, staff, equipment and materials; and reduces the fee burden on lower-income families.
- Non-profit organisations operate two-thirds of the programmes in the United States; of these, public schools represent 18%. The largest single category of providers is private for-profit corporations, with 29% of the programmes.
- Programmes remain very dependent upon parent fees for their operating revenue, and only limited funds are available from state social service agencies. These funding patterns are leading to the development of a school-age child care system that is stratified by family income.
- Income from parental fees constitutes 83% of revenue for programmes. Most of the remaining income comes from government (local, state and/or federal) funds (10%), although some form of government funding is received by only a third of all programmes.
- The average hourly fee for combined before- and after-school sessions is \$1.77.

References

OECD (1998), *Under One Roof: The Integration of Schools and Community Services in OECD Countries*, Paris.

Case studies provide a wealth of examples of solutions to the challenge of optimising the use of existing schools by better integrating them into local communities and by promoting new synergies with other services.

OECD code 95 98 03 1P, ISBN 92-64-16110-4, 65 pp., 120 FF

OECD (1996), *Making Better Use of School Buildings*, Paris.

In many towns and villages there is a shortage of facilities for lifelong learning, child care and other leisure, sporting and cultural activities. Yet thousands of school buildings are unused during school holidays and on weekends. This report explains how better use can be made of these valuable and expensive facilities and how they can serve to help halt the decline of rural populations and provide new opportunities during decentralisation.

OECD code 95 96 04 1, ISBN 92-64-14880-9, 37 pp., 60 FF

OECD (1996), *Integrating Services for Children at Risk*, Paris.

This report describes government policies and academic research concerning efforts to integrate children's educational, social welfare and health services in Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom. It identifies major strengths and weaknesses in current efforts to coordinate service activities.

OECD code 96 96 02 1P, ISBN 92-64-14791-8, 86 pp., 85 FF

OECD (1995), *Our Children at Risk*, Paris.

Children at risk come from a variety of disadvantaged backgrounds and are more likely than others to fail to reach necessary standards in school, to drop out and to experience real problems being integrated into mainstream patterns of adult life. Action requires flexible school organisation, curriculum and teaching to meet the educational and social needs of children at risk and their families as well as community wishes and business interests. This publication draws on reports and case studies from 17 OECD countries and three foundations. It addresses pre-school, school age and transition to work periods.

OECD Code 96 95 05 1P, ISBN 92-64-14430-7, 150 pp., 170 FF

AGRON, Joe (1998), "The Urban Challenge: Revitalizing America's City Schools", American School & University Magazine, July.
<http://www.asumag.com/julcov.htm>

In the United States one of the causes of deterioration to buildings is the lack of free time for maintenance in schools that are constantly occupied for after-hours activities.

CEEDS (Center for Environment, Education, and Design Studies).
http://www.newhorizons.org/ceeds_articles.html

Articles at this site include "Reconnecting Community and School: Initiatives to Expand Children's Environments" and "Less is More: Learning Environments for the Next Century" which provide innovative examples of resource sharing to unite students and the community.

HACKER, Michael (1994), "Using Schools after Class Hours?", OECD Observer, No. 189 August/September, OECD, Paris.

The author points out some of the social and economic advantages of using schools after hours, as well as administrative and other challenges such as defining responsibility for cleaning and arranging furniture, protecting display material and children's work and disputes over priority for use of spaces by different groups. He warns that "the use of a building by more than one user at different times... will expose any weaknesses in the management structure".

ICS Advisers and the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Sciences, "Vernieuwings prijz 1998".

The "Innovation Prize" was awarded in conjunction with the School Building Prize 1998 (*PEB Exchange* 36, February 1999) to recognise creative plans for community use of primary school premises. The jury evaluated renovation projects according to the flexibility of building construction and multi-purpose use. This 8-page brochure was published in Dutch.

US Department of Education, 21st Century Community Learning Centers Web Site:
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/21stCCLC/21qa98.html>

Characteristics of high-quality programmes and recommendations on how projects can take stock of community needs and resources and set achievable goals can be found in the FAQ section of this site.

US Department of Education (1997), *Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers: Extending Learning in a Safe, Drug-Free Environment Before and After School*.

This guidebook outlines the steps needed to convert a school into a Community Learning Center and lists resources for further information and assistance. It also provides concrete suggestions for estimating typical costs, developing a budget and designing an effective programme. The full text is available at:
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/LearnCenters/>
or call 1 877 433 7827, (62 pages).

US Departments of Education and Justice (1998), *Safe and Smart: Making the After-School Hours Work for Kids*.

This report produced jointly by the Education and Justice departments highlights the need for after-hours activities for children along with their benefits. The full text is available at:
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/SafeandSmart/title.html> or call 1 877 433 7827, (93 pages).

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