



Pathways to Play

Community School Parks

Program Report

January 2025

City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks



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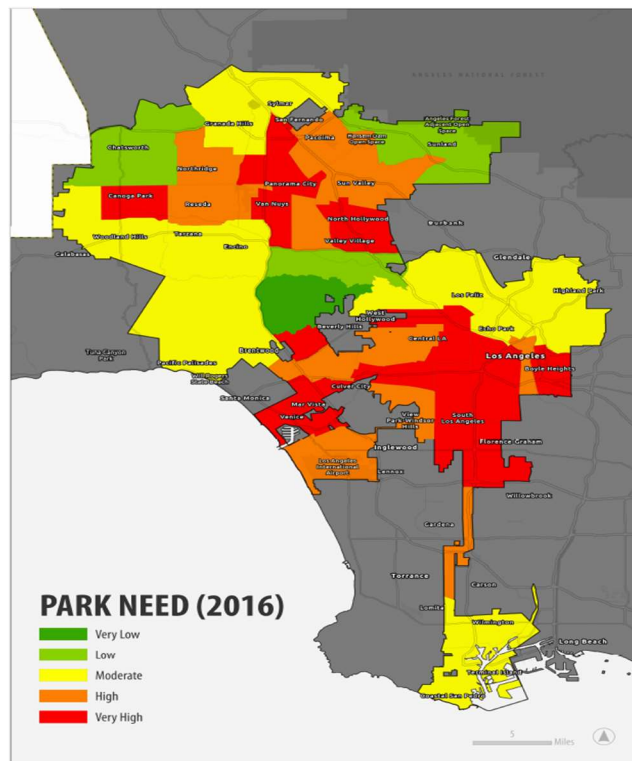
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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study aims to accelerate the expansion of the Community School Park (CSP) program in areas of Los Angeles where communities do not have a public park within a half-mile walking distance of their homes as an issue of equity. Research findings show significant racial disparities in physical activity—a key protective health factor against obesity and cardiovascular disease—exist in the United States.¹ Poverty is the most important factor influencing an individual’s physical activity level; however, ethnicity (race), the culture of the community, and the opportunities in the area in which you live are also important factors.¹

The report focuses on the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) agreement to use the school campuses for public recreation during periods when the schools are not in session. An appropriate joint powers agreement (JPA) between the City and LAUSD should be agreed upon, which would apply to all schools rather than having to negotiate each separately. The terms of such an agreement must be tailored to the needs of this ongoing program.

The primary criteria for a school campus to be considered as a RAP CSP are neighborhoods that do not have a park within a half mile or ten-minute walk. The County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation 2016 Park Needs Assessment (<https://lacountyparkneeds.org/final-report/>) identifies the priority park need areas of the City of Los Angeles in the map below.



¹ Hawes, A. M., Smith, G. S., McGinty, E., Bell, C., Bower, K., LaVeist, T. A., & Gaskin, D. J. (2019). Disentangling Race, Poverty, and Place in Disparities in Physical Activity. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(7). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16071193>

The City of Los Angeles has a population of 3.8 million people comprised of various diverse communities spread over approximately 500 square miles, stretching 44 miles north to south and 29 miles east to west. The city has an extensive grid of freeways, and the automobile remains the primary mode of transportation.

The City's park system has nearly 500 parks on over 16,000 acres of land, one of the largest park systems in the United States. However, the City's sprawling nature, even with its improved public transportation, leaves many communities with no access to open space within walking distance of their homes.

Griffith Park, the largest urban park in the nation, with its approximate 4,000 acres of land making up 25% of the City's total park acreage, can be seen for miles from communities such as South Los Angeles but cannot be easily accessed from distant locations. Unfortunately, the lack of park access is highest in under-resourced communities of color, where there is also a lack of equitable health care and access to other resources.

According to the American Diabetes Association, some communities are disproportionately impacted, lacking diabetes awareness, education, and community resources.² Childhood obesity continues to be a significant health concern in the United States, affecting 22% of children ages 2 to 19³ — an equivalent of 15-million children. Children of color from low-income households have higher rates of obesity and obesity-related diseases, as well as lower physical activity levels.⁴

In other words, the built environment can play a significant role in combating diabetes and childhood obesity.



So, why not build more parks?

Over the past 15 years, RAP has constructed or expanded nearly 80 parks. Although this was very successful and likely the highest over that period of any park agency in the nation, RAP was only able to achieve an increase in park access of 10%. According to data available by RAP, only 64% of city residents currently live within a half mile walk of a park.

² <https://diabetes.org/about-us/health-equity-commitment>

³ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29483202/>

⁴ <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2023/june/parks-and-recreations-role-in-the-childhood-obesity-epidemic/>

Unfortunately, land or funding is insufficiently available to address the park access issue. Compared to a vertically configured city of comparable population size, Los Angeles is a widespread city that requires a higher number of park locations to service the population in order to meet the half-mile standard of walkable parks.

The need for more affordable housing and higher-density housing development often creates competing priorities with critical funding for infrastructure such as parks often left out of legislative housing mandates.

In 1965, the California legislature created the Quimby Act through the Subdivision Map Act. It required residential subdivisions to dedicate land for parks and open space or otherwise pay a fee. The Quimby Act is a valuable funding tool for California park agencies. The in-lieu fee can only be used for expenditures associated with new or renovated park capital construction or land purchases for a dedicated park. These funds are prohibited from being used for any other purpose.

Developers generally pay the in-lieu fee instead of dedicating land for parks. Although these fees are essential and needed to improve existing park infrastructure, they have done little to improve access to more parks. These funds are restrictive in how far they can be spent on new development. This raises additional equity issues as these funds generally cannot reach parks in the highest underserved communities of Los Angeles.

The scarcity of land and lack of park funding have disproportionately impacted low-income communities of color. Quimby collections are unavailable primarily due to a lack of residential subdivisions or because they are too far from the collection's origin.

The City of Los Angeles Proposition K and California State Propositions 68 and 84 provided valuable park funding to the Los Angeles Park system, mainly renovating existing parks and assisting in building many new parks over the past 15 years. However, the need far exceeded the availability of funds under these propositions, and their funds have since been exhausted.

The Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP) annual budget currently exceeds \$300 million. However, most funds are allocated to necessary recreational and maintenance operations. RAP rarely receives budget allocations for capital improvements or property acquisitions at an impactful scale and what limited allocation it receives is usually dedicated to specific projects or acquisitions.

According to the Trust for Public Land 2024 ParkScore, a metric that ranks the excellence of park systems in the 100 most populous cities by measuring equity, access, park investment, amenities, and acreage, Los Angeles ranks 88th. Los Angeles' relatively low ParkScore underscores the need for an alternate strategy to more adequately address these issues. With school campuses as the only ubiquitous public open spaces in these neighborhoods, they are the only answer to this problem.

The primary solution to this issue is the partnership between the City and the LAUSD, which has existed since the late 1960's but has yet expanded to come close to the scale needed to make a difference.

The LAUSD has an extensive and well-distributed system of elementary, middle, and high schools that could offer vital recreational opportunities for shared or joint use of their interior and exterior spaces when the school is not in use. No other shared-use partnership in Los Angeles is more critical for children than the CSP Program.

Shared use of schools and parks is the best, if not the only, opportunity to quickly improve park access and the health and well-being of the students and the surrounding community.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The CSP Program is a partnership between RAP and LAUSD in which elementary and middle schools are repurposed as parks/open spaces when school is not in session. The location and availability of hundreds of these schools make this partnership essential and the primary solution to providing equitable park access and students with active and passive recreation opportunities.

LAUSD's and RAP's stakeholders have raised concerns about possible challenges from CSP program's development and implementation. In response, the Los Angeles Parks Foundation (LAPF) has agreed to review the proposed JPA and recommend best practices in a report that could inform both agencies with observations and recommendations they should consider.

LAUSD and RAP have differing missions, separate administrative and policy-making bodies, jurisdictional boundaries, and budgetary sources. ***Aligning benefits to each of their missions and creating a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) is critical to the success of the CSP program.***

These benefits include opportunities for students to participate in free or low-cost organized cultural and fitness programs RAP offers at their school. Physically active students tend to have better grades, school attendance, cognitive performance (e.g., memory), and classroom behaviors (e.g., on-task behavior).^{5,6}

While RAP encourages parents/guardians of young children to attend, volunteer, and participate in CSP programs alongside their children, after-school active recreational programs can benefit working parents as well by extending the amount of adult supervision to the student of working parents through team sport participation. Childcare is a well-documented issue facing parents in low-income communities. These free to low-cost programs are equivalent to free childcare for working parents.

The CSP program further enhances the community's health by providing walkable park access for families, adults, and seniors, particularly on weekends and in the summer when school is not in session. CSP sites should be designed and programmed to include a wide variety of ages to attract diverse users for both passive and active recreational activities.

After adoption, the JPA will be the controlling document for the next decade. Climate change's current and anticipated effects have elevated greening issues, and the CSP Program addresses these issues as well by making schoolyards park-like for recreation and school-related use in the future.

3.0 JOINT POWERS AGREEMENT

The JPA draft under current consideration is a historic document between RAP and LAUSD. This document should include comprehensive terms and conditions agreed upon between the agencies acting as a master agreement, alleviating the need to re-negotiate an agreement every time a new school is

⁵[https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/facts.htm#:~:text=Students%20who%20are%20physically%20active,%2C%20on%20task%20behavior\).&text=Higher%20physical%20activity%20and%20physical,concentration%2C%20memory\)%20among%20students.](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/facts.htm#:~:text=Students%20who%20are%20physically%20active,%2C%20on%20task%20behavior).&text=Higher%20physical%20activity%20and%20physical,concentration%2C%20memory)%20among%20students.)

⁶ Michael SL, Merlo C, Basch C, et al. Critical connections: health and academics. *Journal of School Health*. 2015;85(11):740–758.

added. The JPA will allow the CSP program to scale more quickly as long as it has the necessary resources and funding to support each agency.

Unfortunately, the current JPA draft under consideration would undermine RAP's park management decisions on operating hours and staffing requirements, limit existing recreational activities, and prohibit the use of school buildings to serve as recreational centers as components of the community school parks, similar to recreation centers operating in LA city parks.

Looking ahead with climate change driving high temperatures which may affect the use of unshaded schoolyards, categorically prohibiting the use of the indoor spaces of the school buildings as outlined in the current draft of the JPA will not be in the interest of achieving equity. Because LAUSD school buildings are air-conditioned, providing essential services to the communities during heat emergencies over the summer that occur during CSP operations will be critical. To ensure that no additional LAUSD staff capacity will be required to run this program during the summer, RAP could supervise the school facility gyms as a cooling center for community use.

The draft further states that RAP shall not operate athletic practices, leagues, competitions, or other organized and competitive activities at a CSP. The standard formats for conducting organized athletic activities employed by RAP would be prohibited, which is curious since the district routinely issues permits for outside athletic organizations.

One of the primary objectives of the CSP program is to offset the lack of physical exercise and combat the health issues associated with obesity and diabetes prevalent in many under-resourced communities. Although LAUSD and RAP have differing missions and separate administrative and policy-making bodies, both parties have a shared interest in promoting benefits for impacted children.

The JPA should highlight the CSP program's benefits consistent with normal park operations. There are hundreds of schools for consideration that over time can positively impact the issues associated with equitable park access and health disparities that have historically plagued the under-resourced communities of Los Angeles.

Detailed recommendations for improving the JPA can be found in the recommendations section at the end of this report.

4.0 RESEARCH OVERVIEW

4.1 Best Practices

The history of joint use nationwide includes many small to large cities with mixed success stories. As part of this review, attention was given to cities with a history of joint use that would have some comparable characteristics to Los Angeles. However, it is challenging to benchmark Los Angeles against most cities as most do not have similar characteristics when accounting for population, climate, and geographic scale.

Interviews took place with current and past directors or executive staff from the cities of San Diego, San Francisco, Chicago, Virginia Beach, and San Antonio.

All have varying challenges and successes to share. Still, the cities of San Diego and Virginia Beach demonstrated excellent success with common themes, which will be the focus of this report.

City of San Diego

Memorandum of Understanding, <https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/mou-cosd-sdusd-dev-maint-joint-use-facilities-20210914.pdf>

- Program Name: "Play all Day Parks"
- Used as joint use template for each site
- Goal is to add 45 joint use sites in the next 5-10 years
- Prioritizes elementary and middle schools
- MOU executed in late 2021
- The district contributes all capital infrastructure funds. In turn, the city agrees to oversee maintenance. The City's Parks and Recreation Department must be able to operate, program, and maintain the joint-use facilities consistent with the City's park standards
- Purpose: Fills an essential gap in addressing the City's need for more parkland and recreational opportunities in communities, particularly the older urbanized communities with little available land for new parks.
- Acknowledges each Joint use facility is unique, will have site-specific amenities, and requires negotiation on a site-by-site basis.

Site Specific JUA, <https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/joint-use-adams-elementary.pdf>

- A 25-year term
- Litter, vandalism, and graffiti removal—The District is responsible during school hours; otherwise, the city is responsible. There is a shared responsibility when school is closed.
- District responsible for capital investment. Greening is a large part of the district's investment.
- The city is mainly responsible for landscape and playground maintenance
- The district does not allow the use of its restrooms
- Portable restrooms allowed. The city is responsible, but must be locked when not in use
- City, with District approval, is allowed to construct new restrooms
- Mutual indemnification
- Insurance: Acknowledges each are self-insured
- School custodian opens gates, Parks Dept. closes them
- All outdoor use as very few middle schools have a gymnasium

Virginia Beach

Although Virginia Beach is not comparable to Los Angeles in many ways, it was still important to document the unique relationship between the agencies and what makes it one of the most successful stories of joint use.

Their Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is currently being updated. The report includes a draft version in the appendices.

- A 50-year history of joint use
- The Virginia Beach School District is its own agency but receives 50% of its budget from the City of Virginia Beach

- The MOA is extremely direct and minimalistic in ways that account for the successes of the program.
- The MOA is a mutual agreement for the use of both schools and parks. **This is an important point that should be incorporated into future policy and any future master agreement.**
- No fee to either party for use of each other's facilities. **(This should also be included as part of future policy)**
- Parks have priority use of school gyms after school needs are met
- School District pays the Parks Department \$5 million annually to provide grounds maintenance for all of their Elementary and Middle Schools, approximately 91 sites
- 50/50 cost share on all capital projects
- Parks Department provides before and after school care for every elementary school
- Parks Department uses approximately 20 school properties for their summer camp program
- Most of the park's indoor activities are done in a school gym
- Parks Department is responsible for managing all use of elementary and middle school athletic fields
- Liability: Neither party is responsible for the wrongful acts or negligence of the other.

Although this agreement would be difficult to replicate and unique, it provides a strong example of seamless joint use that is mutually beneficial for both parties.

Essential elements of both include:

- Dedicated capital and operational funding sources
- Simple shared liability
- Elementary and middle school focus
- Shared no-cost use of each agency's facilities
- Priority given to parks dept.

4.2 Published Supporting Reports/Actions

- 4.21 Opening School Grounds to the Community After Hours, A tool Kit for increasing physical activity through joint use agreements. <https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/opening-school-grounds-community-after-hours>
- 4.22 Joint Use School Partnerships in California: Strategies to Enhance Schools and Communities. https://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/reports/CC&S_PHLP_2008_joint_use_with_appendices.pdf
- 4.23 Green Schoolyards for Los Angeles, The Smart Policy Solution for Equity, Health and Climate Resilience. <https://www.tpl.org/green-schoolyards-los-angeles>
- 4.24 Los Angeles Unified School District
[Green Schoolyards For All Plan April 2024 \(lausd.org\)](https://www.lausd.org/green-schoolyards-for-all-plan-2024)
- 4.25 Los Angeles Unified School District, [school garden guidebook lausd.pdf](https://www.lausd.org/school-garden-guidebook)

4.3 History of Joint Use Between RAP and LAUSD

A record search of the actions by the Board of Recreation and Parks Commissioners over the past 15 years revealed over 900 associated reports to the Commission. Joint use has been an essential part of the culture and operations of RAP and LAUSD, which mainly involved swimming pools and athletic fields. However, the scale and complexities of individual agreements negotiated on a case-by-case basis were lengthy processes that required enormous staff and legal time to activate each school location.

Many joint-use agreements negotiated were driven by Proposition K, LA for Kids Program (Prop K) funding (<https://apps.engineering.lacity.gov/sites/g/files/wph726f/REFERENDUM.pdf>). Prop K was passed in 1996 and created a citywide assessment district that generated \$25 million each year in funds for the acquisition, improvement, construction, and maintenance of City parks, recreation facilities, and other projects through an annual real property tax assessment on City residents over a 30-year period. Prop K was visionary in that it included projects related to joint use as it pertained to funding school capital projects that would allow for public use. However, the successes of these agreements were mixed as many of the projects were funded for High Schools, which were difficult to gain public access to due to the needs of the school's student-athletes.

The fairly recent RAP Board of Commissioners and City Council reports listed below give greater detail to the history and future planning of joint use:

Board Report 17-231, <https://www.laparks.org/sites/default/files/pdf/commissioner/2017/nov01/17-231.pdf>

Board Report 19-235, <https://www.laparks.org/sites/default/files/pdf/commissioner/2019/nov20/19-235.pdf>

Board Report 22-145, <https://www.laparks.org/sites/default/files/pdf/commissioner/2022/jun02/22-145.pdf>

City of Los Angeles, Neighborhoods and Community Enrichment Committee Report, CF 23-0491, https://clkrep.lacity.org/onlinedocs/2023/23-0491_misc_7-31-24.pdf

5.0 COMMUNITY SCHOOL PARK OPERATIONS

Both agencies must consider many factors when deciding which sites to include in the CSP program. One of these considerations is the uniqueness of every school that was not designed for public use. Other considerations should include the availability of public access points, access to restrooms, sight lines, shade, green space, amenities, school property vulnerabilities, and principal and public support.

5.1 Restroom access

The need for restrooms depends significantly on the predicted length of stay, intended use, and expected trip length needed to access the CSP. For example, many RAP pocket parks do not have restrooms, mainly due to their size and limited amenities, which reduce the expected length of stay. They are usually accessed via a short walk from a residence. A CSP with recreational programming increases the anticipated length of stay and the likelihood that participants travel a longer distance to access the CSP.

A significant benefit of a CSP is having a well-programmed site with various recreational programs, particularly programs tied to increasing physical activity. These activities and the fact that participants may travel further from their homes require that access to restrooms be a

consideration of any CSP site. However, restrooms offer significant financial, logistical, and operational challenges. Many of these challenges are not unlike what you find in a city park and all of them can be overcome with adequately staffed and funded maintenance operations.

Safety, cleanliness, and vandalism are a few of the primary concerns for a park. Still, a CSP will add additional issues mainly because schools were not built with public recreation and access in mind. Many schools have limited exterior restroom access or have challenging visual sight lines to where the exterior public recreation is taking place.

Restrooms that do not have easy exterior public access and are not in the field of view for operational staff create safety and related operational issues, which require more funding and staff resources to mitigate. These same concerns apply to the interior use of a school, such as a gymnasium. The difficulty increases when RAP needs to limit public access to other interior areas of the school.

The CSP program operates best if RAP has the keys to open and close available restrooms. Minimizing the need for LAUSD staff to be present reduces operational coordination conflicts and eliminates the cost of paying additional LAUSD staff.

It should not be assumed that every CSP site is the same, as each site has unique challenges and opportunities that impact staffing and budgetary needs. If the CSP site meets critical park needs in parts of the City where communities lack access to parks, portable restrooms or the construction of new restrooms should be considered to overcome any of the issues mentioned earlier.

5.2 Risk and Liability

The lack of coterminous municipal and school district jurisdictions, funding sources, and administrations has complicated addressing the issue of fully utilizing these public resources. This has allowed the focus in drafting the JPA to be on liability concerns and limitations instead of maximizing public service.

The draft JPA is a significant step in standardizing the agencies' risk and liability language. However, the language needs to be mutual, where neither agency is responsible for the wrongful acts or negligence of the other, clearly delineating the operational boundaries and periods when the school or CSP is in use.

5.3 Staff Resources

The staffing level will be determined by the programming level at each site, which will fluctuate seasonally. Operationally, some sites may require additional resources due to the layout of the school grounds. RAP has created a checklist to analyze the viability of a potential CSP site. The analysis includes critical elements such as:

- Entry gate location
- Site lines of supervision
- Shade availability
- Availability of green space
- Bathroom location
- Storage
- Recreational programming opportunities

- ADA requirements

Although these elements assist RAP in determining the viability of a CSP site, greening and infrastructure improvements should be considered to increase its viability. Capital improvements such as adding shade structures, mobile storage bins, a new entry gate, or, as previously mentioned, a new restroom should be considered if the CSP site meets critical park needs.

Every site's uniqueness requires RAP to plan and budget for staff operations individually. However, to estimate operational cost impacts, a few different types of possible CSP sites with varying programmatic levels are listed below.

It is impractical to imagine any level of CSP program success without sustainable funding to staff them.

Fully Programmed (Exterior Only)

This CSP model would be similar to a community park for exterior use only, where RAP offers a variety of recreational, cultural, and sports programs on weekends, after school, holidays, and in summer.

Fully Programmed (Interior and Exterior)

This CSP model would be similar to a community park but includes using the school's gymnasium or all-purpose room where RAP offers various recreational cultural and sports programs on weekends, after school, holidays, and summer.

Partially Programmed

This would be a CSP site that includes limited recreational programming.

Non-profit Programmed Site

Limited RAP involvement other than supervision. These organizations would be required to meet the LAUSD and RAP permit requirements and be responsible for every LAUSD requirement the proposed Joint Powers Agreement has of RAP.

Passive CSP

This model would resemble a typical City pocket park but still require staff to open and close gates. It would also require capital improvements such as playgrounds, fitness equipment, fencing, and access gates to the exterior school grounds to prevent access to other areas of the school. Furthermore, additional consideration is needed to support the maintenance costs of any new capital assets.

It is important to note that any CSP site may be identified as a pickup point for transportation to a Community Park for swimming at a RAP Pool or a visit to a cultural facility. Additionally, CSP sites could benefit from RAP's **Mobile Recreation Unit**. Specially equipped vehicles staffed and serviced by the RAP Recreation Branch could support community-level activities such as neighborhood block



parties, school fairs, fitness events, or other special events on LAUSD campuses to enhance local programs at school sites.

5.4 Operational Budgeting

Regardless of the type of CSP, operationally, RAP will require a budget and position authorities consisting of three parts to run successful CSP operations. Additional steps to institutionalize and sustain this program are now needed through dedicated funding streams to support the recreational and maintenance operations needs of both agencies.

Budget Considerations, Part 1

Additional management/administrative/supervisory divisions of principal recreation supervisors, recreation supervisors, senior recreation directors, recreation directors, and clerks are required. This division is essential to ensure the proper management of the well-established policies and procedures that exist throughout the recreation districts and regions contained in the current operational structure of RAP.

The funding needs of this division will grow as the CSP program grows. It is essential that the staffing in this division be supported and funded to provide the necessary communications, expectations, and guidance for decision-making that follows well-established rules and regulations that protect the employees and the communities they serve.

It is recommended that operational oversight, planning, administration, and supervision be budgeted in 10 CSP site increments. A current evaluation of the first 10 CSP sites has shown that RAP has successfully reallocated several positions for this purpose with an approximate budget of \$500K. This recurring annual cost for those 10 CSP sites will increase as the CSP program grows.

Budget Considerations, Part 2

The district is anticipated to require payment to cover use fees, monitoring, and maintenance staff. It is difficult to estimate these fees currently, but they must be expected and budgeted. All attempts should be made to minimize these fees by recognizing that benefits to both the City and District exist through reciprocal use. Neither agency should charge permit fees to each other. The proposed JPA should include no fee permits under a reciprocal use policy.

Budget Considerations, Part 3

Additionally, budget support is needed to support field operational staff positions performing day-to-day recreational programming, equipment, and other active recreational requirements such as uniforms, officials, instructors, etc. Field operational staffing positions will primarily be made up of part-time staff. RAP reported that approximately \$90,000 per CSP site is needed to support a well-programmed site. The success and impact of the CSP program dramatically depend on RAP's ability to provide recreational and cultural programming.

Programmed CSP sites are being emphasized because current schoolyards have minimal recreational assets to support passive recreation sites. Integrating the CSP program with the PlayLA program could minimize or eliminate costs associated with sports and fitness programming.

5-5 Capital Funding

Should a park or school funding ballot measure be considered, it is highly recommended that Community School Parks be included. LAUSD has begun a promising campaign to green their schoolyards, but to address the enormous scale of the problem that faces each agency, additional capital funding sources and their associated maintenance needs must be considered.

Greening is a significant priority of the CSP program and necessarily overlaps with LAUSD need to reduce the high heat indexes resulting from asphalt-paved school grounds. It is also important for a successful CSP site. Creating a park-like environment includes vitally important green space for passive use and opportunities for physical exercise through programmed recreational opportunities. These spaces require assets such as shade structures, tree planting, playgrounds, outdoor fitness equipment, park benches, hydration stations, and walking paths, to name a few.

It is difficult to imagine a successful, sustainable CSP program without a funding mechanism to address the significant capital needs of the school yards. A detailed evaluation and community process led by a collaborative effort between agencies is needed to confirm the scale of funding needs. Such an evaluation is required to understand the needs of each community and be able to accurately estimate the scope of improvements and ensure access to the CSP is compliant with the American Disabilities Act (ADA).

In November 2022, efforts to pass a City of Los Angeles Proposition SP, Parks and Recreation Parcel tax measure failed. One likely cause of the failure was inadequate time to perform the necessary community outreach, input, and education. Other factors, such as lack of project specificity, including locations and scope, also resulted in the failure of Proposition SP.

There is no question that the existing park system is in high need of infrastructure improvements and additions, and the City lacks available open space in communities of color and low income. ***Therefore, community school parks must be considered in any future park funding ballot measure, but they must be given the time to properly gather community input and educate the community about the severity of the issues facing the City's park system. Part of that education should include this partnership, and the millions of dollars saved using existing public land to expand public open space through the CSP program.***

The public process the County of Los Angeles used to pass the Safe, Clean Neighborhood Parks and Beaches Measure (Measure A) in November 2016 was very successful, passing with an extraordinary 75% voter approval. It is essential to recognize the importance of Measure A and acknowledge that it serves 88 incorporated cities. Although Los Angeles is the largest of those cities, it only gains approximately \$20 million annually from Measure A, which falls drastically short of addressing the need.

There are little to no park funding opportunities available at the local, state, and federal levels to meet the scale of existing park infrastructure needs and a CSP program. The time to plan is now, while a Joint Powers Agreement between agencies is being considered. The JPA should address future funding possibilities so that the term of the JPA is considered appropriate to meet the lifespan of any capital improvements.

5.6 Maintenance

This is one of the most significant issues that both RAP and LAUSD face. Neither organization is equipped with adequate staff to maintain their facilities properly. It is with great optimism that the CSP program will grow from 10 to more than 100 schools, which requires both organizations to plan for that future.

The maintenance cost associated with either agency is likely to be significant. There should be a shared responsibility. This report recommends that RAP be the primary agency responsible for maintenance when a CSP site is open to eliminate unnecessary conflicts and streamline response to issues, similar to operating a park. However, funding from LAUSD should be made available to RAP where a CSP is operating, and LAUSD has also greened a portion of that site. It is not likely that the district will have the means of staffing to care for trees and green spaces. However, it does not negate the need to maintain those spaces appropriately. With a properly staffed maintenance workforce, RAP is the most qualified.

The demand for maintenance staff will multiply as more schools are greened and more CSP sites are added. The proposed JPA should address this reality.

5.7 Opening and Closing of the Gates

The opening and closing of gates sound simple enough, but the experience and history of the current gate closure program for the city park system have been a problem for years. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) is responsible for the majority of gate closures of city park facilities. LAPD is provided funding within the city's annual budget for closing parking lots and other access-related city park gates. RAP is responsible for a few through its park rangers, mainly Griffith Park. The rangers are stationed in Griffith Park and cannot perform this task citywide because of their minimal staff.

The proposed JPA requires RAP to have staff on site 100% of the time the CSP operates. The JPA proposes giving the keys and that responsibility to RAP. However, this issue becomes more difficult should LAUSD agree to allow for more pocket park-type facilities that are traditionally unstaffed. As previously stated, it is likely unfeasible to think that every CSP will have dedicated staff as this program grows and this would be financially not viable.

The difficulty level has many factors, such as operating hours, staffing, funding, and staff safety. Still, it should be planned individually for every CSP and not generalized without specific plans. Each school must have a plan to avoid issues such as after-hours vandalism that will ultimately bring scrutiny to the CSP program.

5.8 Safety

Safety is also a complicated issue. Jurisdictional boundaries exist between LAUSD Police and LAPD, which likely requires a separate memorandum of understanding between the agencies. This is extremely important to the staff and public, who can only enjoy a CSP when an issue arises can be addressed adequately by law enforcement.

The proposed JPA needs to outline a plan that provides the staff operating these sites with a clear line of communication with law enforcement.

5.9 Fees

Currently, permits are required of any outside agency wishing to access any portion of a school and are issued bi-annually. While the JPA is being negotiated, RAP uses LAUSD's Civic Permit portal to process permits for each CSP. Although fees will still be included, the permit process should become unnecessary once an executed JPA exists. RAP pays approximately \$17,000 in permit fees annually for each CSP.

According to RAP's rates and fees, the use of their athletic field ranges from \$35 to \$60 per hour depending on if field lights are used or if it's an artificial turf field. The use of a recreation center is \$60 per hour. It is important to note that many schools use parks free of charge because general outdoor park use is outside the permit process, which generally only pertains to the LAUSD's use of athletic facilities. In addition, the Griffith Park Observatory and Cabrillo Marine Aquarium serve thousands of students from schools throughout the region **free of charge**.

Interestingly, RAP's rates and fees encourage reciprocal use, which exempts schools from RAP's permit fees. This model **should be highly encouraged in all future agreements where fees from both agencies are exempted under reciprocal use**.

5.10 District Weekend School Operations

Many LAUSD schools incorporate "Saturday Schooling" to assist those students who need extra educational assistance. There is an inconsistency in policy allowing those students to co-mingle with CSP participants during the student break time. This creates conflicts with access to available green space and tree canopy cover, such as at Northridge Middle School. Without using this green space, the CSP program is given access to other areas of the school without valuable shade, leaving the Saturday schooling students out of programs. However, at Obama Middle School, the Saturday schooling students and CSP have had a good experience with the students being able to participate in arts and cultural classes. The CSP instructors can involve the students and provide valuable resources during their breaks. This requires a review by the district to set consistent policy that should be included the JPA.

6.0 EQUITY – DATA AND COMMUNITY-INFORMED DECISION-MAKING

We should aim for every public school in Los Angeles to operate as a CSP on weekends, holidays, and any other time school is not in session. However, starting with sites in communities with the highest need is paramount. This section offers a framework for how we can prioritize equity.

6.1 Context Setting

Historical and current planning practices in Black and brown communities, including redlining, exclusionary zoning, and freeway construction, have stymied the development of the built environment in these communities, including park ^{space}.² As we work to reverse these trends, the region's current housing crisis presents another barrier to new park space. It puts a premium on real estate, making it more difficult than ever to create new parks or expand existing ones.

The Community School Parks program addresses park-poor neighborhoods in Los Angeles and other park inequities by utilizing school campuses as publicly owned spaces that are already evenly

distributed throughout the city. In this way, CSPs can help ensure that every Angeleno lives within walking distance of a safe, vibrant open space.

6.2 Selecting CSPs Using an Equity Frame

RAP has carried out much of the groundwork and data collection needed to prioritize and open CSP sites where communities currently lack park access. To ensure that opening school campuses centers on equity, we recommend using these three additional criteria to inform site selection: park access, population density, and income levels within a half mile of the CSP site.

Several city park departments, including RAP, use the “new population served” metric to evaluate a community’s park needs. This is useful contextually because it shows the number of new residents served by expanded park space and whether residents living within a half mile of a potential CSP already reside near a park or recreation center. The RAP indicator also highlights LA neighborhoods with extreme park scarcity, such as Koreatown and Pico-Union, which score in the tens of thousands of new population members served but literally no open space for community recreation and play.

However, additional criteria should be considered because RAP’s new population served criteria can include sites that only minimally qualify as a park due to size, layout, location or lack of safe travel paths for access by foot. They also do not fully capture park needs in very densely populated areas where existing parks are ill-equipped to handle demand. This is especially true in neighborhoods where multiple family members share small apartment units without outdoor space. Sites like this may rank low on park need due to their proximity to a recreation center, but the need remains high due to extreme density. Adding a specific measurement of parks per 1,000 people better illustrates this need so that a school like [Figueroa St. Elementary School](#), for example, which ranks 115th for the number of ‘new population members served’ by RAP’s measurement, could still be ranked as a high-priority park due to its low park access score of .01 parks per 1,000 people (a number far below the standard of 4 acres of park space per 1,000 people⁷).

Finally, ranking site selection by median household income will help prioritize lower-income communities over higher-income neighborhoods with limited park space but access to other open spaces, such as yards. An income indicator can also help identify school sites that, while located within walking distance of a major park site, should still rank very high on a CSP prioritization list. For example, [Esperanza Elementary School](#), located in the Westlake Neighborhood of Los Angeles, is 0.3 miles from MacArthur Park, one of LA’s larger urban park sites. As such, the school shows a low number of new residents served at 611 and a higher number of park spaces per 1,000 residents (60% served by a park) compared to other high-need sites. The area is nevertheless one of the most populous state-wide, with 40,605 residents within a half-mile radius. It also sees much higher levels of poverty, with 15,266 residents living below the poverty threshold.⁸ In extreme cases like Esperanza’s, not even the most robust datasets can fully capture park access barriers, underscoring the need for a prioritization process that accounts for LA’s demographic

⁷ [California State Parks’ Outdoor Equity Program Community Factfinder](#)

⁸ [California State Parks’ Outdoor Equity Program Community Factfinder](#)

complexities. These demographic realities also highlight the need for a site selection process incorporating community input, which is addressed below.

In addition to these critical criteria, it is recommended that the analysis be broadened even more to include health and housing burdens, as they are closely linked to the need for open space. Environmental and climate-related burdens, such as extreme heat and lack of tree shade is also worth identifying. Environmental, health, and housing indicators inevitably reveal the need for more campuses featuring green, shade-providing elements and the urgent need to expand green campuses in the communities that need them most.

6.3 Community Engagement and Site Selection

When choosing between two high-need sites whose only difference is that one has tree shade or green space and the other does not, a decision to open a school that is already “greened” is understandable. Other scenarios that may necessitate a case-by-case approach involve community interest. For example, some schools may strongly need park space, but principals or community members might hesitate to open a CSP. In this case, another high-need site with a supportive school community should take priority.

Outreach should be a part of the CSP implementation process. Engagement activities such as survey collection, tabling sessions and attending events with school community members and neighbors are an essential part of outreach. This engagement will allow community members to share knowledge or concerns about the school community, give feedback on the programming, and offer any details that would help a potential CSP succeed. Sustained opportunities for school community members to provide feedback and take on leadership roles in areas such as programming and awareness-raising are also crucial to a community-informed process.

6.4 Summary of Steps for Equity-Focused CSP Site Prioritization:

1. Review and compare the key criteria discussed above. A good starting point would be to rank high-need sites according to park access numbers, measured by the number of parks per 1,000 people. Compare this with lists that are ranked by additional indicators including:
 - a. The number of people living within a half mile of the site.
 - b. Income indicators, such as median income, per capita income, and the number of people living in poverty within a half mile of the site.
 - c. The number of new population members served by a new site.
 - d. Look at extreme cases, such as the most populous or lowest income, and determine how they score on park access. If park access data is high (meaning there is a relatively high number of parks per 1,000 people) but the population is also high, verify that existing park or recreation sites adequately meet park needs. Refer to the Esperanza Case, summarized above, for an example.
 - e. Compare access, population, and income with supplementary data, such as whether a site is categorized as “Disadvantaged” or “Severely Disadvantaged” (from the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment) or has needs related to heat, climate, health, and housing.

2. Manually check for other factors contributing to site feasibility using Google Earth, site visits, and school community engagement to verify site size, layout, and safe access points.
3. Gauge school community support through outreach and engagement with principals, staff, parents, students, and neighbors.

7.0 GREENING, PLAY, AND SHADE

7.1 Greening

Heat island effects are typically generated by buildings, roadways, and other paved areas that reach high temperatures and remit the heat back into the surrounding environment. This is unlike natural green environments that absorb the heat, which results in lower temperatures in the surrounding environment.

Many schoolyards found in Los Angeles define the definition of high urban heat islands. Many of their outdoor spaces are paved with little to no green space. The concern over this issue is significant as we continue to see extremely high-temperature weather due to climate warming.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency website,
<https://www.epa.gov/heatislands/heat-island-impacts>:

- *Young children* tend to be more susceptible to extreme heat due to their small size and other characteristics. Children's more rapid breathing rates relative to body size, time spent outdoors, and their developing respiratory systems raise their chances of aggravated asthma and other lung diseases caused by ozone air pollution and smog, which usually increases during heat waves.
- *Populations within low-income* areas are at greater risk of heat-related illnesses due to poor housing conditions, including lack of air conditioning, small living spaces, and inadequate resources to find alternative shelter during a heat wave.⁴

The result of heat island impacts on school yards results in unusable outdoor spaces unsuitable for safe recreation that is important for children and adults' social, mental, and physical well-being.

According to the CDC website,
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/health_and_academics/index.htm

Healthy students are better learners, and academic achievement bears a lifetime of benefits for health. Recent research illustrates that higher academic grades are associated with more positive individual and cumulative health behaviors among high school students. However, youth risk behaviors, such as physical inactivity, unhealthy dietary behaviors, tobacco use, alcohol use, and other drug use are consistently linked to poor grades and test scores and lower educational attainment.⁹

⁹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. *Promoting Positive Adolescent Health Behaviors and Outcomes: Thriving in the 21st Century*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25552>.

On September 27, 2022, the Los Angeles Board of Education unanimously voted to accelerate and greatly expand efforts to bring green space to all its campuses. The resolution, authored by Board President Kelly Gonez and Board member Nick Melvoin, establishes a minimum standard of 30% green space for all campuses and directs the Superintendent to develop a plan to meet the standard district-wide by 2035, prioritizing schools with the most asphalt for immediate action.

Campus greening projects are prioritized for sites with minimal existing green space in high-need communities. The greening improvements will include shade for physical education and activity areas, cool paving, outdoor learning areas, permeable paving and increased vegetation. Shade from trees with dense foliage can decrease surface temperatures by 15 degrees, creating cooler and healthier microclimates, and extending the usability of these outdoor spaces on days with higher temperatures.

Constructing and maintaining these improvements are critically important to providing outdoor areas as healthy spaces. Research has estimated that many areas in the Los Angeles region will experience an increasing number of days with extreme heat (over 95 degrees), a serious health threat to vulnerable populations, which includes children. This ambitious program will require partnerships between LAUSD and a variety of partners to achieve the goals.

The Community School Parks program is an effective partner in developing multi-use and multi-benefit school campuses to expand the community, serving public open spaces for recreation programs and facilities to create healthy, vibrant communities. The City of Los Angeles Plan for a Healthy Los Angeles establishes goals for 'Bountiful Parks and Open Spaces' with 'robust tree canopy in all neighborhoods. The Los Angeles County Parks Strategic Plan describes the benefits of parks that support active lifestyles with the potential to decrease chronic illnesses, reduce health care costs, and encourage social interaction to provide social benefits.

To realize the potential benefits of School Parks, investments and maintenance of physical improvements will be necessary to ensure that these spaces are healthy, safe, and appealing assets for their communities. Shaded activity and recreation areas, site furnishings for seating and activities will be necessary to provide for a wide range of community participants from older adults to children. The goal of these facilities should be to provide the resources for all community residents found in well-designed parks that include green space and passive and active recreation facilities. Unlike typical schools during weekday use where children are the primary population, they should be planned and designed to serve families seeking green space in park-poor neighborhoods.

To address extreme heat threats, especially for summer use, School Parks should be coordinated with LAUSD to contribute to the district's 30% campus greening and 20% shade minimum requirements. As School Park sites are selected, their schedule for greening improvements should be identified and evaluated. If the sites have not received greening improvements, CSP projects should include planting and care for new trees to provide shade in existing green spaces without shade, and in perimeter areas that are unlikely to be disrupted in future greening projects. Trees for CSP projects should be a minimum of 48" box size to provide meaningful shade when first planted. Species should be selected from the approved LAUSD list that provides large canopies of dense shade.

Opportunities for community gardening areas, understory planting and learning or activity gardens should be explored in the development of School Parks to create spaces that will be healthy and beautiful. The presence of vegetation has been documented to have positive mental health benefits. Gardening is likely to be a desired activity in serving families of a wide range of ages.

Site furnishings, including seating, tables, and drinking fountains, should be available in shaded areas to encourage a wide range of activities for community members of all ages and abilities. Tables are more effective than individual seats or benches to promote social interaction. Drinking fountains accessible to CSP participants will be necessary for hydration. Consideration for people of various abilities should be included in the planning of the School Parks.

Residents and park participants consider well-cared-for parks to be valuable community resources. All improvements, including trees and vegetation, and the irrigation systems that are necessary for their survival in the desert, like conditions of paved school yards, will require ongoing maintenance to ensure that plants thrive, and furnishings are clean, safe, and functional. Community School Park investments must include funding and resources for the upkeep and maintenance of their sites.

Recreation and Park's (RAP) aspiration to execute its strategic plan to implement a successful CSP program is fortuitously linked to making the schoolyards park-like, coinciding with LAUSD's greening plan and funding sources. Discussions are currently being held with the District Sustainability Officer to coordinate the sites of LAUSD's greening plan, prioritizing the CSP sites. Hopefully, the amenities envisioned for the CSP will be able to be funded as an aspect of this initiative, and the State Architect will authorize the approval for its development with amenities of a park-like site.

Recognizing heat island impacts as a significant issue and impediment to using schoolyards as a CSP is essential. Currently, RAP is attempting to open elementary and middle school locations under the CSP program by bringing in portable shade that will allow them to run recreation programs safely. This is not a sustainable plan that can run over time, and at the scale, the CSP is required to fill the significant park access gaps. RAP's consideration for the safety of the program participants will most likely result in summer recreation activities being canceled due to extreme heat on CSP sites or moved indoors to gymnasiums or all-purpose rooms. The former will require portable gates to secure other areas of the building.

Fortunately, the District has taken several actions to alleviate schoolyard heat island impacts gradually.

December 13, 2022: The Board of Education approved more than \$13 million worth of new bond-funded facilities projects to provide safe, welcoming, and sustainable outdoor spaces that align with the 2022-26 Strategic Plan and support student-centered, experiential and engaged learning at schools across Los Angeles Unified.

Five outdoor learning environment projects, valued at approximately \$11.9 million, were approved at 52nd Street Elementary School, Birdielee v. Bright Elementary School, Commonwealth Avenue Elementary School, Humphreys Avenue Elementary School, and Lockwood Avenue Elementary School. These projects, part of Pillar 2: Joy and Wellness in the Strategic Plan, provide additional

green space on school campuses by creating outdoor learning spaces while removing relocatable buildings that are no longer needed.

March 27, 2023: The Los Angeles Unified Board of Education approved more than \$92.3 million bond dollars to upgrade and maintain modernized facilities and to provide safe and sustainable green spaces for outdoor learning. Improving and maintaining state-of-the-art facilities further advances the LAUSD’s 2022-2026 Strategic Plan.

April 18, 2023: The Los Angeles Unified Board of Education approved facility infrastructure upgrades, including charging infrastructure and new sustainable green spaces for outdoor learning, as part of continuing efforts to advance the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan.

April 2024: LAUSD released the Green Schoolyards for All Plan. A comprehensive initiative to transform its schoolyards into green and sustainable spaces. This initiative, guided by the Green Schools for All resolution adopted by the Board of Education in September 2022, aims to ensure that at least 30% of the existing hard-surface schoolyard space across all LAUSD schools are converted into safe and sustainable green space by 2035.

The School Board has shown great concern about the effects of climate warming and the rise in temperatures on the asphalt surfaces of their schoolyards. These actions recognize the need for greening and introducing compatible recreational and fitness amenities to make the CSP schoolyards more park-like. These will significantly benefit the educational development of the students and enrich the surrounding community with possible access to a park.

Continued greening investment is needed to make the CSP program successful and will likely take many years. RAP and LAUSD must be closely aligned and coordinated with the school greening projects and the CSP program. Closer alignment is needed to match the priorities of both programs. The long-term success of the CSP program depends greatly on schools with impactful greening elements that address student needs and public use.

7.2 Playgrounds and Site Amenities

Site furnishings, including seating, tables, and drinking fountains, should be available in shaded areas to encourage a wide range of activities for community members of all ages and abilities. Tables are more effective than individual seats or benches to promote social interaction. Drinking fountains accessible to School Park participants will be necessary for hydration. People of various abilities should be considered when planning a CSP.



A well-shaded playground located at Fairlawn Elementary School in Santa Maria, CA.

It is important to look at additional infrastructure improvement needs that will add recreational value to both the school and CSP site with sustainable features compatible with greening efforts. Older, unshaded playgrounds in the middle of an asphalt schoolyard offer no recreational value to support a child's physical, social, and mental development. Playgrounds are likely the most critical infrastructure element that introduces a family and their young children to a park. This introduction often leads to additional involvement and participation in recreational, arts, and cultural program offerings as the children and their relationship with the park or CSP grow.



For a playground to offer that essential invitation and create that relationship with first-time park users, it must be well-maintained, interesting, challenging, and well-shaded. Studies performed by PlayCore's CORE Data Services Lab on Gametime playgrounds designed as National Demonstration Sites (NDS) provided valuable community input by giving the public a means of providing feedback via a QR code found at the playground. Visitors across 120 sites in the United States and Canada overwhelmingly cited shade as the feature they most wanted to be added to National Demonstration Sites. Objective visitation data also showed the impact of shade: Based on a random sample of 72 National Demonstration Sites across 25 different U.S. states, visitors stayed an average of 11% longer at sites with shade than at sites without shade. This data demonstrates how shade from trees or shade structures drives higher engagement with a playground, increasing physical and social-emotional health benefits.

8.0 OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

It is essential to understand that each of these organizations is independent of one another, which ultimately increases the complexity of creating a CSP program. Differing missions, oversight, regulations, and funding sources are just a few of those complexities.

8.1 Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)

Unlike many large cities where the mayor is the appointing authority, the Board of Education members are elected by the public. The Board of Education then appoints the Superintendent of Schools.

The proposed new JPA for the CSP program, permits, and all previous joint-use agreements are handled by the Facilities Services Division within LAUSD. This division prepares CSP agreements, coordinates review and feedback from their legal counsel, and prepares any required actions for

consideration by the Superintendent and Board of Education. Schools requested by RAP are coordinated first with this division, where they assist RAP with an introduction to the school's principal. The principal falls under the Division of Instruction, which is separate from the Facilities Services Division and is a significant partner in the success of the CSP. Although the Principal may not have the final say in public access to their school during non-school hours, they are very influential in gaining the support of the local community and providing overall general support for their school being used as CSP.

As with any large organization, organizational separation of different divisions is often an issue, where one side of the house may be uninformed about programs or issues that are not part of their responsibility. This has been reported during initial meetings with principals, where they are uninformed of the CSP program and have no clear understanding of its goals and how it could benefit their school.

In 2023, the Board appointed a Chief Eco-Sustainability Officer and established the Eco-Sustainability Office (ESO). The mission and goals of this office are extraordinary and can be found at <https://www.lausd.org/eso>. As was previously discussed in this report, the efforts of this office have an enormous opportunity to strengthen the partnership with RAP and the CSP program. Collaboration of planned greening of schools with proposed CSP sites will significantly improve the health and well-being of children during and after school, on weekends, and in the summer. There is a far better chance of a CSP success when matched with a greening project. Together, they offer an enormous opportunity to change both the quality of their education and their community's health.

The three LAUSD offices and divisions discussed in this section are all equally important to the efforts and, ultimately, the success of the CSP program. The goals of education, sustainability, health, fitness, and public open space all have strong alignment and should be addressed in the proposed JPA.

8.2 City of Los Angeles, Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP)

RAP is managed by a general manager and board of commissioners appointed through the Office of the Mayor, who the City Council then confirms. Like LAUSD, multiple divisions/branches are involved in the CSP program, with primary involvement by the Planning and Recreational Branches. Like LAUSD, RAP is not immune from the communication challenges that large organizations face given the fact that they are two of the largest organizations in their respective fields anywhere in the nation. The good news is that both organizations and their respective elected officials support the creation and growth of the CSP program.

In January 2024, RAP took a significant step in institutionalizing the CSP program by creating a staffed management structure within their recreational Services Branch. A team of recreational professionals now exists to handle the day-to-day operations of this program. They are responsible for planning and making recommendations for opening a CSP. It is essential this organizational structure was created to allow for streamlining communications with LAUSD, developing staffing and budget plans, supervising programs, and maintaining dialogue with the school's principal and the surrounding community.

Another significant accomplishment of this group has been the part-time hiring of existing LAUSD staff and utilizing existing RAP part-time staff in need of hours for the CSP program. Most CSP

staffing efforts will likely be done by a part-time workforce. However, it is crucial to recognize that as the CSP program grows, additional full-time field operational staff and management staff will be needed to execute all of the operational requirements that an average city park requires.

It is also essential to recognize that RAP has a unique operational structure that differs from many park agencies across the Nation. They provide every aspect required to run an extensive park system. Recreation, maintenance, planning, and construction are all RAP's responsibilities. Few park agencies are better equipped to grow their system through the CSP program than Los Angeles. But again, that growth will depend on the support and funding of the elected officials to support the operational needs of the CSP program.

However, RAP has an enormous opportunity to expand its athletic and fitness programs on the LAUSD property through its agreement with LA28 (2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, CA). In preparation for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games, RAP is receiving up to \$160 million to provide very low-cost athletic and fitness programs in underserved communities to all children of all abilities. These funds can only be used to offset the cost of participation in those programs and are prohibitive from being used for capital improvements or full-time staffing. The parent or guardian can receive the full support needed for their child's participation, receiving uniforms, equipment, trophies, field space, transportation, sports officials, etc., at an extremely low cost of \$10 per participant and made free if unable to afford the participatory fee.

This program has proven highly effective by eliminating cost as a barrier, with sports and fitness participation rates soaring to as much as three times historical levels. The potential for growth in this program is immense, with the opportunity to reach extraordinary levels in communities where both able-bodied and children with disabilities can attend a community school park. Importantly, no child is turned away from this program.

These funds cover a critical portion of the funding and resources needed for the CSP program. However, additional funding strategies are required to address capital improvements, maintenance, and recreational operations, which we discuss in more detail later in the report.

Many factors go into prioritizing which schools should be included in the program. Any school in an underserved community with available programmable green space should be highly considered for immediate implementation. Benefits include:

- Available funding for instructional staff, coaching, equipment, sports officials, uniforms, etc... free of charge or a minimal \$10 fee
- Focus on the children within the school to provide easy access to after-school fitness and sports programs
- Provides immediate fitness activities that likely translate to improved academic performance
- Provides additional supervised activities that help fill common voids in childcare
- Provides a means of gaining principal and community support

However, it is important to note that many of the available fields within elementary and middle schools have existing external permits. These permits may prevent access to a CSP program. It is recommended that these permits be analyzed within LAUSD for levels of participation, including gender and the cost of participation. The goals of both agencies should prioritize free or low-cost

programming opportunities along with gender parity goals, which should include partnering with non-profit agencies. Regardless of who is operating these programs, LAUSD should prioritize the organization that can serve the most children in a free or low-cost manner.

8.3 Non-profits and Organized Community Groups

These groups and organizations play a significant role in supporting access to parks and programs across the city. The work necessary to improve the quality of life in Los Angeles cannot be accomplished without their involvement.

The proposed JPA must contain language to allow these partnerships to grow with RAP as the CSP program grows. Again, sought-after partnerships must be independent of city funding or at least minimalized to allow for expansion of the CSP program. These partnerships should offer free or very low-cost programming independent of RAP's budget. However, RAP should be responsible for managing these partners to streamline access to CSP sites. Consideration of RAP paying any associated LAUSD fees should be given if the non-profit or community organization is staffing the site and taking on all LAUSD requirements of a CSP site.

8.4 Data and Analytics

Utilizing data-driven analytics and key metrics to make better-informed decisions and support those decisions is critical to ensuring an equity-focused approach. Simple metrics such as participation and gender data of each site should be tracked and regularly communicated to the public, LAUSD, Board of Commissioners, and elected City officials. Other important metrics to highlight and support decisions for opening a CSP are rates of childhood diabetes, obesity, family poverty level, needs related to heat, climate, health, housing, and new population served by a CSP, to name a few.

A set of standardized metrics for each CSP site should be created and included to support the reasons why the community should support these sites and consider funding them within RAP's annual budget. They should further create supporting documentation to enhance grant or philanthropic requests.

Lastly, it is imperative to demonstrate the impact of opening a CSP. Having baseline data and tracking year-to-year would allow comparisons showing improvement or the need for improvement that would justify any capital or operational investment.

Examples of available and well-presented data are available through Playcore's Center for Outreach, Research, and Education (Core). CORE is committed to sharing validated research and building informed advocacy to help empower communities to create great play, recreation, and outdoor spaces. A sample report is included below for Leo Politi Elementary School located at 2481 W 11th St, Los Angeles, CA 90006.

The following report demonstrates the types of reports that would help provide the necessary justification for opening this school as a CSP.

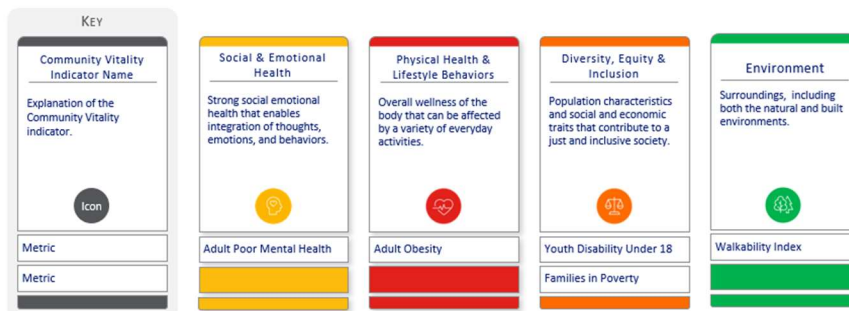


Our Data Driven Approach to Support Community School Parks

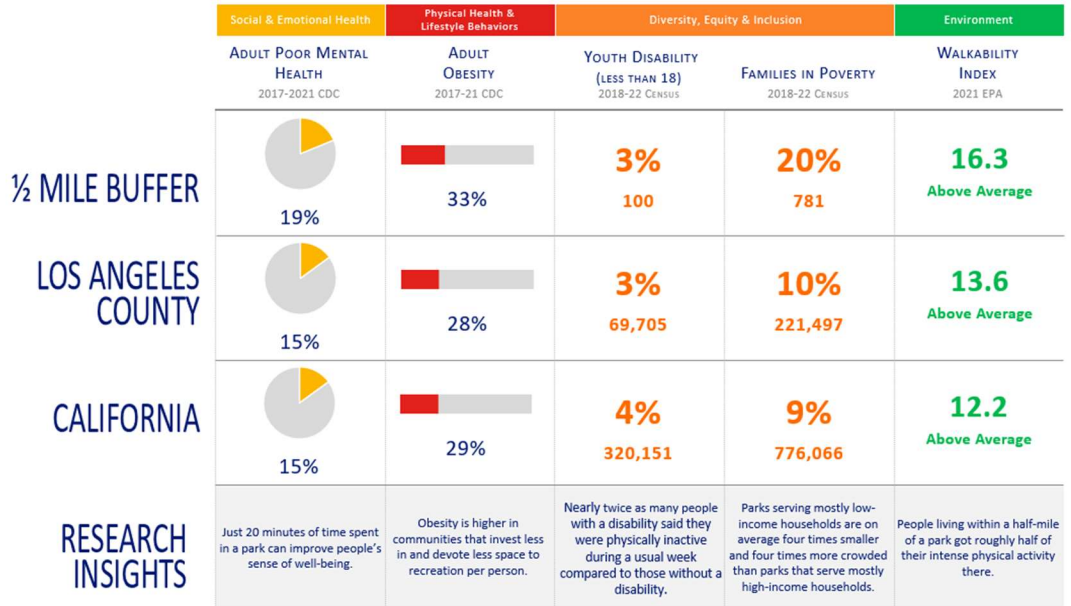
Leo Politi Elementary | Los Angeles, CA



GOAL: Look at your community through the lens
of several key indicators.....



Data Measures Around Leo Politi Elementary



Potential Area of Impact within a Half-Mile

Recognizing Leo Politi Elementary School as a CSP Site would provide playspace access to:

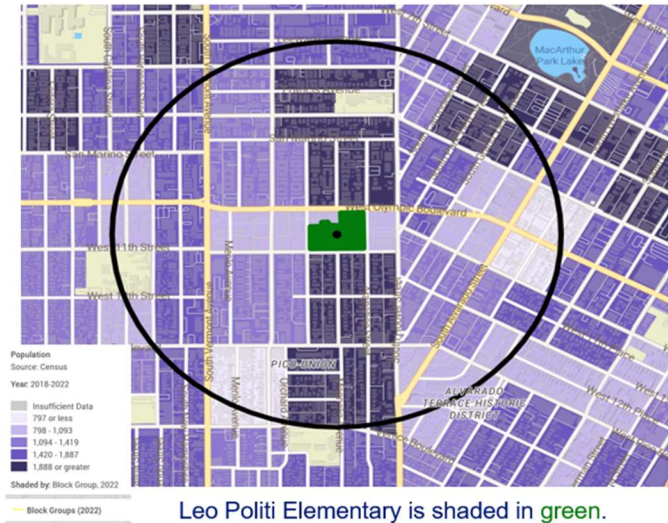
Over 34,000 total residents

12,000 new residents

Almost 6,500 youth

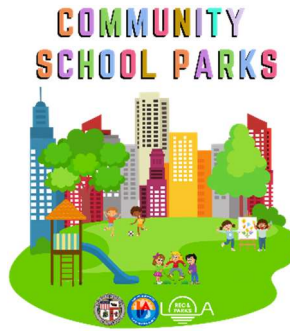
Residents with higher rates of poor mental health and obesity compared to citywide rates.

Leo Politi Elementary



This report and data provided by RAP show that approximately 12,000 new residents with new park access would be served within a ½ mile walk of their homes. It helps provide the necessary justification for Leo Politi Elementary being one of the first CSP sites opened.

8.5 Marketing and Community Communications



A recent CSP logo designed by RAP.

A joint marketing and communications plan between LAUSD and RAP is needed to show the benefits and importance of a CSP. The plan should clearly show both the educational and public recreation value. RAP has developed an effective marketing plan that promotes recreational activities that engage the students, parents, school administration staff, and local community. However, a strategy that also includes the benefits to the student's health and education and the general health of their local community would strengthen that plan.

LAUSD's involvement and endorsement of a marketing strategy that shows value to their student's education would significantly strengthen the support of the parents and local community. In addition, utilizing LAUSD's communication resources via the web and other tools would demonstrate that the CSP program is more of a partnership.

9.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is universal support to provide park equity in areas of the City that have been fully built without provisions for local parks or open space that would permit residents to access a park within a half-mile walking distance of their neighborhoods. Health data and studies have documented greater incidence of diabetes, morbidity, and obesity in primarily black and brown, low-income communities. Approximately one-third of the residents of this City do not live within a half-mile walking distance to a park, which is the single most significant issue that can only be addressed through the CSP program.

RAP's Strategic Plan documents this problem and identifies LAUSD elementary and middle school campuses that would help solve the park access problem. Reviewing the RAP school database on park access reveals that opening 100 CSPs could increase park access to nearly 650,000 residents within a half mile walk of their homes. That could change park access from approximately 64% to over 80% of the City's population living within a half-mile walk. If RAP is provided with adequate recreational and maintenance operational staff, the elected leadership of both agencies should plan to open 10-20 CSP sites per year.

Park access deficiencies have been well documented in Los Angeles, and it is time to prioritize the primary solution contained within the CSP program. The CSP program can dramatically improve park access in many communities.

Although the partnership between RAP and LAUSD is moving positively, including LAUSD's plan to green elementary and middle schools, coupled with the CSP program, funding to support capital and operational needs has yet to be addressed. This collaboration creates the single most important effort that could

dramatically influence the social, mental, physical, and educational value of families in underserved, vulnerable communities. The health and public safety cost benefits must make the CSP program a priority

The City and LAUSD stand at a pivotal point where their elected officials and administration staff strongly support community school parks. It is essential that deeper operational planning occurs between both agencies to set up at least a 5-10-year plan for operational staffing and funding this program for a minimum of 125 schools. It should be understood that the goal should be to reach at least 75-100 of those schools since the expectation of many falling out due to various complications discussed throughout this report. This plan should have strong community support and be adopted by the LAUSD Board of Education, the Mayor of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles City Council, and the RAP Board of Commissioners.

Recommendations

1. Gather support to place a park measure on the 2026 election ballot to support CSP capital and staffing operations. Recognizing that such a measure will necessitate a 100% addition to the current park system, there is no room in RAP's current budget to support this program and the program cannot be successful if it is an unfunded mandate.
2. As additional CSP sites are added, RAP should create a new operational division within its operational structure to manage and oversee the CSP program.
3. Draft Joint Powers Agreement
 - a) The agreement should consider reciprocal use to exempt parks and schools from permit fees.
 - b) The agreement should acknowledge a deeper partnership that benefits the students and the surrounding community.
 - c) Establishing staffing requirements by the district for the CSP operations over ten years is impractical. RAP, who ultimately has the responsibility and expertise to do so, needs to be given flexibility.
 - d) Requiring specific staffing levels is not financially sustainable. RAP should be required to supervise each site, but it should be left to RAP to decide how best to do that.
 - e) The agreement proposes an allowance for outdoor use only and no use of the school's parking lots or indoor facilities. Assuming the CSP program would be limited to the outdoor recreation areas for the next ten years would preclude the possibility of achieving equity for the communities that are deficient in Parks and Recreation opportunities. This limitation would be particularly onerous given the issues with climate change, which could make the schoolyards unusable due to the high temperatures. RAPS's operational use of the school parking lot and gymnasium is essential for a successful CSP.
 - f) Currently, the agreement only allows for passive uses. It states that RAP shall not operate athletic practices, leagues, competitions, or other organized and competitive activities at a CSP. Including active recreation in the JPA is essential to the success of the CSP program, especially in light of available funding through the PlayLA program.
 - g) Section 6 should allow for seasonal adjustment of hours of operation as necessary to accommodate daylight availability, including daylight savings time.
 - h) Section 11. Indemnification. RAP and LAUSD have specialized personnel responsible for recommending risk management decisions. Language needs to be clarified to apply during CSP operational times. In addition, neither

party is the agent of the other and neither should be liable for the wrongful acts or negligence of the other. Each party should be responsible for negligent acts or omissions and those of its officers, employees, agents, or students.

- i) Section 13. RAP needs to be able to permit non-profits and other organizations to use the CSP under this agreement. Supporting non-profit community organizations' recreational uses is a valuable service, as community organizations often lack the resources to apply for civic center permits.
 - j) A 10-year term is too short. It would prohibit any significant investment from philanthropic, city, county, state or federal grant funds outside LAUSD. A minimum of a 20-year term for each agreement should be considered to minimize this issue.
 - k) The current draft of the proposed agreement states: *"In the event of a conflict, dispute, or situation related to the use of a CSP or CAMPUS; CITY will defer to DISTRICT's preference for such use to preserve or protect and/or minimize damage to the CAMPUS or minimize the risk of injury or death to persons."* It would not be expected that LAUSD policies and RAP operations policies would be coterminous. CSP program and infrastructure decisions might best be made with the input of recreation and education professionals, allowing the RAP risk management staff to participate in the decisions in this area when the Community School Park area of the school campus is under the management and control of RAP.
4. Equity – Include additional CSP site selection indicators such as park acreage per 1000 residents, income, health, environmental and climate-related burdens.
 5. Create and adopt a 5-10 year plan to open 100 CSP sites with community input, including operational staffing, non-profit and philanthropic support, and funding strategies to sustain the program. A large number of CSP sites are necessary to improve the percentage of residents living within half mile of a park.
 6. Hire a consultant to hold community input meetings on proposed sites in collaboration with LAUSD and RAP, draft the scope of improvements, provide preliminary designs and estimates, and propose recreational programming. This initial work will be critical to complete in advance should a future park measure be considered.
 7. For improved communication and collaboration, additional involvement, partnership, and collaboration with the LAUSD's Division of Instruction and Eco-Sustainability Office are needed. These divisions, along with the Facility Services Division and the City, are recommended to meet at least every quarter.
 8. The city should align priority CSP sites with existing or proposed city programs such as sidewalk repairs, street trees, street lighting, or other street improvement-related work. This would help strengthen the partnership and support of the local school administrations and community.
 9. Active recreational programming should be included at CSP sites funded by LA28 funding agreement through the PlayLA program, particularly at schools with existing green space. There is an enormous opportunity to include youth in the PlayLA program in areas of the city that lack access to park space.
 10. Creating a set of standardized metrics for each CSP site should be included to support why the community should support these sites and be considered for funding within RAP's annual budget.
 11. If there is a time when disagreement occurs at the site between members of the City and District, the resolution should be made available by arbitration.
 12. Recognize that the CSP program is a partnership between LAUSD and City that benefits both agencies
 13. The city should be given special status in providing programming for community school parks as a partner with LAUSD. As a partner, it should be given the latitude to operate the CSP program at the permitted sites under its management, employing the operating procedures and practices normal to the class of recreation and facility as designated by RAP during the periods when the facilities are under its responsibility and control. This would maximize the quality of the recreation and park experience in keeping with the equity objectives.