

TOPIC: Community Use of Schools

TREND/ISSUE

Access to schools has been challenging over the past few years due to changes in the Student-focused funding formula implemented by the Ministry of Education. The funding formula has impacted District School Boards in their ability to cover costs associated with after-school and weekend use of schools. Impacts in some instances from collective agreements has also affected access. Access to affordable recreation traditionally offered in schools has been impacted as a result. Associated impacts include:

- ensuring comparability among municipalities
- development of and access to school properties, including sports fields and related amenities
- status of joint-use and reciprocal agreements; many are null and void, or in varying stages of re-development
- loss of opportunity for volunteer participation as leaders, due to restricted facility access to deliver programs
- impact on neighbourhoods and 'sense of community' particularly where the school has served as the hub for activity and community participation
- changes to administration at the Board and School level is impacting decision making for local communities, access and timely decision making
- loss of opportunity to maximize participation in physical activity and community sport

BACKGROUND

PRO has been monitoring this issue for the last several years, as the changes to the funding formula used by the Ministry of Education, created some challenges with respect to user fees and access to schools for non-academic use. A variety of initiatives have been undertaken throughout Ontario to foster partnerships and options to continue to provide access to schools for recreation activity. Access has been restricted however, resulting in community concern regarding best use of publicly funded facilities, access on user fees, hence, affordability, decline in participation, loss of volunteer opportunity and other related issues.

CURRENT STATUS

While the current Government has not indicated any intention to change the funding formula, there has been interest expressed through the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Tourism and Recreation and Ministry of Children and Youth regarding this subject, and opportunities to provide creative solutions that enhance best use of, and access to, schools.

Recently PRO had the opportunity to meet with the Honourable Jim Bradley, Minister of Tourism and Recreation, to discuss a number of current and emerging issues facing the sector, and Community Use of Schools was discussed at length. PRO is also a partner with Ophea in the "Living School" initiative, which is coordinating pilot projects in 9 communities within Ontario, exploring a number of creative partnerships. This project will be monitored, with opportunities to build on best practices.

PRO has offered to assist with creating an inventory of best practices, as well as a to be a lead in an effort to define all the restrictions affecting community use of schools, and then the development of short and long term solutions possible.

LINKS

Ontario Physical and Health Education Association, Space Coalition, Ministries of Tourism and Recreation, Education, Health, and Children and Youth

IMPACT/IMPLICATIONS

3 Major Issues:

- Access
- Affordable Access
- Diminishing role in community infrastructure

These impacts continue to be an issue, with a variety of approaches being piloted in Ontario. There is a need to identify best practices and propose creative solutions, share with the sector and partners. Longer term impacts include: joint school/park developments, access to indoor and outdoor campus facilities, impact on our ability to increase participation in physical activity for children and youth, impact on volunteer development and recruitment, impact on aging infrastructure

and limited funding for new infrastructure, impact on “living school” concept. The required infrastructure investment which will be required to replace or compensate for loss of access to schools and school campuses, is significant.

POSSIBLE PRO POSITION

- continue to support partnership with OPHEA regarding the “Living School” initiative
- approach MTR to offer to be project lead to a) inventory challenges, and b) create database of best practices
- continue to work with Government regarding current school funding formula, and impact of contractual relationships within District School Boards
- share with sector through Public Affairs, Professional development opportunities

CONTACT

Jennifer Reynolds
905 878-7211 x 2180
jennifer.reynolds@milton.ca