

## TOPIC: Community Use of Schools

### TREND/ISSUE

The Government of Ontario recently announced a funding program of \$20M to support increased access to schools for community use. The focus of the program is three-fold:

- increase access to schools, and hence participation, for community sport and recreation provided by non-profit groups and organizations
- decrease fees for access to community use of schools
- enhance relationships between District School Boards and Municipalities through the development of reciprocal use agreements

### BACKGROUND

Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) has been monitoring the issue regarding the decrease in community use of schools for the last several years. Changes to the funding formula used by the Ministry of Education have created some challenges with respect to user fees and access to schools for non-academic use.

PRO has continued in a leadership role by communicating needs, providing suggested solutions, and coordinating with others to influence government change and support for this funding program. Activities included a meeting with the Honourable Jim Bradley, Minister of Tourism and Recreation, to discuss emerging issues facing the sector, with Community Use of Schools being a prime focus of discussion.

PRO is included in a group of stakeholder organizations providing input into development of guidelines and the funding program launch.

PRO is also a partner with Ophea in the "Living School" initiative, which is coordinating pilot projects in nine communities in Ontario, exploring a number of creative partnerships. This project will be monitored, with opportunities to build on best practices.

### CURRENT STATUS

The Ministry of Tourism and Recreation is the lead Ministry for this program, developing funding agreements with up to 72 District School Boards across the Province. A number of criteria will have to be met to enter into the funding agreement, including an indication of how the District School Boards will meet the three objectives, and an agreement to provide performance data regarding usage and participation numbers, fees and charges, and the existence of existing or developing reciprocal agreements.

### LINKS

Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (Ophea), Space Coalition, District School Boards and PRO website for speaking notes from the launch [www.prontario.org](http://www.prontario.org)

### IMPACT/IMPLICATIONS

The announcement of the funding program, and the subsequent flow of funding to District School Boards, should provide enhanced access to schools for community use. Exact use of the funds will be determined at a local level, and parks and recreation clients should be contacting their respective School Board colleagues to discuss local priorities. Some suggested opportunities include:

- increased access to schools for weekend use, where custodial fees have either made school access cost-prohibitive, or non-existent
- increased access to schools during weekdays; extending hours later in the evening or opening up more time slots for community use
- increased school access where schools have not generally been available
- decrease in existing user fees, and costs associated with insurance or weekend use

*It should be noted that the exact use of funds will be determined at the District School Board level, in conjunction with MTR, and will vary throughout Ontario.*

## POSSIBLE SECTOR POSITION

- Continued support of the program; PRO will participate in future stakeholder initiatives
- PRO has offered to assist with data collection and best practices
- Encouragement and support for MTR regarding their discussions with AMO and the need for close Municipal / District School Board relationships
- Potential to provide training regarding the development of Reciprocal Agreements
- Continued support of the partnership with OPHEA for the "Living School" initiative

## CONTACT

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