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PAMPHLET

## SCHOOLYARD ACTIVITIES AND LAYOUT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

To get the greatest number of students moving and grab the attention of those who are usually inactive, schools need to offer activities that correspond to students' preferences, interests and needs (please see Pamphlet 7). However, simply offering various activities is not always enough to get adolescents moving. To give students added incentive, schools should plan and animate areas where students will gather informally to engage in their favourite physical activities. In many secondary schools, schoolyards are ideal places for physical activity, particularly since gymnasiums are often very busy places. Maximizing opportunities offered by the schoolyard provides added value to Physical Education and Health classes as well as to extracurricular and free-time activities.

This pamphlet offers several suggestions on how to plan a schoolyard layout that is safe and encourages spontaneous physical activity. It also discusses ways of organizing activities in order to promote increased participation.



## A. PLANNING AND CONSULTATION

Schoolyards possess specific characteristics related to their size and their sometimes undefined borders. Even if a schoolyard's layout can present certain challenges, its potential in helping adolescents become more active should not be underestimated. An appropriate layout and planned activities can meet the interests and preferences of adolescents. Below are some steps on how to plan a schoolyard's layout and animation:

- > Obtain an official commitment from the school administration and governing board.
- > Appoint an individual to coordinate all of the steps in the process.
- > Form a committee composed, preferably, of teachers (particularly a physical education teacher), school board representatives, parents, local partners and, above all, students of different ages representing both genders.
- > Conduct a survey among staff and students to find out their points of view, needs and interests.

Students, particularly those who seldom use the schoolyard, should be part of the planning process. Generally, existing layouts promote the practice of traditional sports that are popular among more active students but are of little interest to less active or sedentary students.

- > Analyze the existing layout and activities.
- > Identify available resources in the area.
- > Find out what other schools are doing and get ideas from them, if applicable.
- > Make an inventory of the students' needs, develop a preliminary plan and implement it together with local partners.

Several municipalities have facilities near the school that could be used as additional areas for physical activity. Many young people already benefit from partnership agreements between schools and municipalities regarding the sharing of sports facilities. For example, certain municipalities allow students to use their facilities (e.g. pools, arenas, sports fields) during school hours, while some schools open up their schoolyards to the community outside of school hours.

## B. SCHOOLYARD LAYOUT

A schoolyard should be an integral part of school life. A well-designed layout and a program of varied, interesting activities are part of a winning strategy to help students adopt a physically active lifestyle. Planning the schoolyard layout generally entails the following technical considerations:

- > Evaluating surfacing materials, infrastructure and protective surfaces.
- > Planning green areas (schoolyard naturalization).
- > Planning rest areas (with tables and benches).
- > Evaluating and improving existing areas.
- > Planning new activity areas.
- > Adapting lighting, if necessary.
- > Planning year-round use of the schoolyard.

Canadian safety standards apply to all sports equipment and facilities. The school board's material resources department or any specialized business will be able to recommend adequate protective surfaces and ground coverings (e.g. sand, wood chips, synthetic surfaces) to meet different needs.

The *Guide de bonnes pratiques – acquisition, installation et entretien de l'équipement sportif des commissions scolaires* [a good practices guide for purchasing, installing and maintaining sports equipment for school boards] can help secondary schools plan the layout of their schoolyard. It is available on-line at: [www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/dgfe/Publications/Guide\\_de\\_bonnes\\_pratiques\\_1.pdf](http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/dgfe/Publications/Guide_de_bonnes_pratiques_1.pdf).

## C. EQUIPMENT

The equipment required for physical activities should be in good condition and readily available. A student-run loan counter that allows students to borrow sports equipment at lunchtime, after school or on weekends is an interesting option. Equipment such as ice skates, in-line skates or rackets need not be new—used equipment may fit the bill. Here are some tips on how to implement an equipment loan system:

- > Find and set up a room that is easily accessible.
- > Put individuals in charge of the equipment.
- > Implement an equipment management system and loan service.
- > Draw up an inventory of the equipment and plan purchases.
- > Organize drives to collect used equipment on a regular basis.
- > Make equipment available after school and on weekends.

#### D. ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Cycling is one of the most popular activities among twelve- to seventeen-year-olds. It is likely to become even more popular as active transportation gains acceptance in communities. To promote active transportation, secondary schools could:

- > Provide safe areas in which to park bicycles.
- > Work together with the communities to make sure that the school surroundings are safe (e.g. appropriate signs, access to safe routes, traffic regulations).

Review the schoolyard layout in order to increase its use. Consider adding:

- Sand beach volleyball court
- Area for in-line skating
- Designated area for hackysack
- Loudspeakers to animate the schoolyard
- Lighting and benches close to the site
- Snowboarding area and skateboarding ramps
- Area for cooperative games
- Bicycle stands
- Storage area for snowboards, skateboards, in-line skates, etc.

#### E. ACTIVITIES

Few secondary schools organize schoolyard activities at lunchtime and after school, and most simply employ monitors for safety reasons. However, the benefits of organized activities are numerous: they help reduce behavioural problems (e.g. violence, teasing, discrimination), improve the quality of life and contribute to the school's positive image. When properly organized, these activities enhance the schoolyard and make it more attractive. Below are some tips on how to plan schoolyard activities:

- > Offer non-traditional or non-competitive activities in order to reach the greatest number of students (e.g. hackysack tournaments, aerobics sessions, in-line skating to music, ultimate frisbee, or other activities such as those listed in Pamphlet 7).
- > Plan activities that allow students to stay active, even in winter:
  - Organize outdoor aerobics sessions (outdoor cardio concept).
  - Propose softball or golf games in the snow.
  - Build a snow mound for sliding or snowboarding.
  - Organize snowshoeing or cross-country ski clinics, etc.
- > Train young leaders who can stimulate students and encourage them to express what they want and need, forge meaningful interpersonal relations and deepen their sense of belonging to the school. Young leaders can get involved by:
  - Choosing and designing schoolyard activities.
  - Acting as organizers (e.g. give aerobics classes, referee a softball game, lead a cheerleading squad).
  - Taking care of recreational equipment.
  - Ensuring safety, etc.

## F. SOURCES OF FUNDING

Improving the schoolyard and its equipment entails costs. To absorb these costs, schools will need to make budget decisions and raise funds. They may also seek financial support from local partners (e.g. financial institutions, private enterprise, Knights of Columbus, Optimists Club) and apply for grants. Below are some of the programs that can help schools obtain the funds they need:

- > *Kino Québec's Active School Contest*. Public and private elementary and secondary schools may submit proposals for projects involving the installation or purchase of equipment to foster physical activity and good eating habits, or to promote safety or ethics in physical and sports activities.

[www.kino-quebec.qc.ca](http://www.kino-quebec.qc.ca)

- > *Programme d'embellissement des cours d'école du ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (mesure 50530)* [MELS schoolyard beautification program]. This information is sent annually to school boards.

- > *Financial support program for sports and recreational facilities of the Sports and Physical Activity Development Fund*. This program provides financial support for building, renovating, equipping and upgrading sports and recreational facilities. However, an educational institution may submit a proposal only if it has signed a service agreement with a municipal body in its territory allowing the general population access to the facilities.

[www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/lancement/fond\\_developpement](http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/lancement/fond_developpement)

## G. PROMOTION AND FOLLOW-UP

Once a project has been completed, an official inauguration ceremony as well as an ongoing campaign to promote the new facilities and the opportunities they provide can help increase the students' participation and feeling of belonging to the school. Moreover, an evaluation will also make it possible to determine whether the new facilities have indeed increased participation and physical activity, whether students are satisfied and whether improvements are still needed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONSULT:

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