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PAMPHLET

SCHOOLYARD ACTIVITIES AND LAYOUTS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The schoolyard is the place where students are sent at recess, lunchtime and before or after school. Time spent in the schoolyard is particularly important because it meets the needs of students by allowing them to be outside, renew their energy, move around and play with their friends. It also helps them develop a physically active lifestyle and predisposes them to better learning.

In order to preserve and promote opportunities for play, schools may need to review their schoolyard's layout. Some may feel they have already maximized their schoolyard's potential, while others may find they need to make certain improvements. This pamphlet is intended for individuals who are responsible for schoolyard activities and is designed to support schools in organizing the layout of their schoolyard.

For more information, please consult the following:

- > www.kino-quebec.qc.ca/publications/MieuxVivreCourEcole.pdf
- > www.observatoirede-lenfance.org/pdf/Numero_74.pdf



A. PLANNING

In order to properly organize a schoolyard, its layout and activities must be planned. Below is a list of elements to consider when planning improvements to a schoolyard. The process may be adapted depending on the extent of the changes. For example, in the case of a simple review of the existing planning, the procedure may be simplified.

- > Obtain an official commitment from the school administration and governing board.
- > Form a committee composed of school staff members, students, parents and community partners.
- > Determine shared orientations and goals.
- > Identify needs, develop a preliminary plan and implement a concerted plan, etc.

B. CONSULTATION

Improving the quality of life of students in the schoolyard entails considerable challenges, such as promoting spontaneous games and the desire to move. Consulting the various stakeholders (e.g. school staff, parents, students, members of the community) can help gather ideas and identify means and resources. Such consultation can take place through:

- > In-class discussions on the students' needs and experiences in the schoolyard
- > Questionnaires for staff members, parents, students, organizations and target community members to identify needs (games, equipment, material, personnel, etc.) and to confirm their commitment to the project
- > Meeting(s) with students, staff members, parents and community partners to clarify decisions, issues and choices to be made, etc.

C. SCHOOLYARD LAYOUT

Schoolyards generally consist of a specially designated area for team games (e.g. ball games, cooperative games) and individual or small group games (e.g. hacky-sack, skipping, hopscotch), which allow all students to be active and have fun. Other schoolyard areas usually include a playground area (e.g. swings, slides, climbing structures) and rest areas.

At certain times of the day, such as recess, the schoolyard may accommodate several groups of students at the same time. The layout must therefore provide at least one play area for each class and, if space permits, additional areas in order to offer even more possibilities for play. Organizing the layout of a schoolyard generally entails:

- > Evaluating surfacing materials, infrastructure (e.g. drainage, fill, freeze resistance) and protective surfaces.
- > Organizing play areas, green space and rest areas and installing different types of equipment (e.g. climbing structures, swings, slides).
- > Identifying play areas (e.g. markings, shrubs), etc.

For more information, please consult:

- > www.evergreen.ca/en/lg/lg.html
- > www.nb.lung.ca/schools/3000f/ehi_sgg_e.htm

D. EQUIPMENT

Students must have access to equipment (e.g. balls, cones, flags, crazy carpets) that is readily available and in good condition:

- > Implement a system for managing equipment (loan service).
- > Put individuals in charge of the equipment.
- > Set up a storage area that is easily accessible.
- > Provide access to equipment during recess and other breaks.
- > Draw up an inventory of equipment, plan purchases, etc.

E. ACTIVITIES

The schoolyard is one of the few places where children can engage in undirected play and yet remain under adult supervision. During play, children create and maintain relationships with one another, which contribute greatly to the development of certain skills (e.g. identity building, cooperation, development of a healthy lifestyle). Schoolyard animation must therefore encourage physical activity while preserving the opportunity for play and freedom. By providing a variety of opportunities for play, schools can encourage students to move, which not only develops their motor skills but also meets their interests and needs. To do so, specific action may be required:

- > Help those in charge of recess, of lunchtime and of daycare services to reach agreements with respect to leading and supervising activities.
- > Encourage a variety of activities that are appropriate for each season and that correspond to the students' interests and abilities.

- > Consider the individual and common needs of boys and girls.
- > Alternate activities and play areas regularly.
- > Post information related to games and play: schedules, enrollment, availability of play areas, lists of persons in charge of activities and equipment, a good sportsmanship charter, game rules, etc.
- > Organize special activities: theme weeks, tournaments, extended recess, etc.
- > Recruit, train and guide young leaders, especially older students who can lead activities with younger children.
- > Set aside class time, during Physical Education and Health activities, or during daycare, for students to choose or create games.
- > Create a games bank.
- > Provide training and materials to support staff (daycare, Physical Education and Health teachers, classroom teachers and others) in supervising and leading schoolyard activities by placing the animation tools and training material at their disposal.
- > Use the school radio to energize the schoolyard, where permitted by municipal bylaws and neighbours.
- > Teach and demonstrate new games (e.g. during Physical Education and Health activities, in class with the teacher, in the schoolyard with young leaders)

For more information, please consult:

- > www.sportetudiant.qc.ca/programmes/acti_midi
- > www.cslaval.qc.ca/Prof-Inet/anim/jfd/jeux

F. RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STUDENTS

Having many students in the schoolyard at the same time can cause organizational problems (e.g. allocation and size of play areas, variety of games) and may sometimes strain relations among students. However, it has been shown that when children take part in games, the risk of conflict is markedly reduced. In addition to encouraging participation in games, certain actions can promote harmonious, peaceful relations:

- > Recognize the value of and encourage participation in schoolyard activities.
- > Adopt and promote a code of conduct or a charter of good sportsmanship.

- > Recruit and train young leaders and adults so that they can act as mediators in case of conflict.
- > Introduce students to the principles of peaceful conflict resolution.
- > Teach the rules of the game and the importance of respecting them.
- > Reach an agreement among adults on the rules to observe regarding daycare, lunchtime and recess supervision, etc.

For more information, please consult:

- > www.circm.com/en/pacific_path.php
- > www.vousnousils.fr/informations_education/en_pratique/5_questions_julie_delalande_cour_4657.htm

G. SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Playing in the schoolyard (e.g. running, jumping, throwing, catching, climbing) can result in generally minor accidents or injuries (e.g. bruises, cuts, scrapes). Playgrounds may also pose certain hazards related mostly to falls, being hit by a moving swing or having clothing, drawstring or part of the body caught in openings.

In addition to preventing and reducing hazards, a safe environment must create a climate of trust, encourage children to play, put parents at ease, make supervisors feel more comfortable in their role and encourage their participation in the schoolyard. Providing a safe environment for students means:

- > Training staff and students in first aid and in playground and equipment safety.
- > Conducting regular inspections, repairing and replacing equipment that does not meet safety standards, and providing adequate supervision in order to comply with the Children's Playspaces and Equipment standards from the Canadian Standards Association (CAN/CSA-Z614-03).
- > Organizing a campaign to promote schoolyard safety.
- > Encouraging children to play in areas that are appropriate for their age.
- > Teaching children to play safely.
- > Ensuring safe numbers of users on playground equipment and in the play areas.

- > Ensuring that children do not wear clothing that can get caught in equipment (e.g. scarves, clothing with drawstring, bike helmets).
- > Avoiding using playground equipment in unfavourable weather conditions, particularly in winter.
- > Posting rules regarding the use of playground equipment, etc.

For more information, please consult:

- > www.inspq.qc.ca/pdf/publications/395_AiresAppareilsDeJeu.asp (July 17, 2007)

David Fortier, *Guide des aires et des appareils de jeu - Incluant une grille d'inspection basée sur la norme canadienne CAN/CSA-Z614-03* (Québec: Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2005).

H. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The schoolyard may be used for different activities outside of school hours. Partnerships between the school and the community can help maximize physical activity opportunities in order to better meet the needs of children and thus promote a more active lifestyle.

Community partners may therefore be asked to:

- > Participate in a schoolyard committee.
- > Facilitate safe, active transportation to school by providing appropriate signs, access to safe routes, traffic regulations, etc.
- > Provide bicycle stands at or close to school.
- > Participate in resurfacing the schoolyard or in improving its infrastructure (e.g. drainage, fill, freeze resistance).
- > Participate in training young leaders (e.g. *Acti-midi* program of the Fédération québécoise du sport étudiant, municipal recreation programs).
- > Allow the school access to municipal facilities, such as a park.
- > Support the school in fundraising activities for schoolyard improvements, etc.

I. 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

- > *Programme d'embellissement des cours d'école du ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (mesure 50530)* [MELS schoolyard beautification program - Measure 50530]. The 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

J. 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:

MELS

www.mels.gouv.qc.ca