

Community Use of Schools Effective Practices Survey Summary

Background:

In order to gain a better understanding of successful school board practices in the Community Use of Schools program, in spring 2007, the Ministry of Education contracted the Council of Ontario Directors of Education to conduct a survey of school boards.

Results

The survey shows that the Community Use of Schools program has been effective in making schools more accessible to community groups. Most school boards are very satisfied with the program and 35 of the 39 school boards surveyed say that their experience with Community Use of Schools has been a positive one.

Effective Practices:

School Boards across the province have implemented many effective practices that can help community groups using the Community Use of Schools program:

- **Strive to make access free-of-charge for not-for-profit groups**
 - Not-for-profit groups benefit from reduced rates to use school facilities after-hours while commercial organizations pay the full rate.
 - Some boards are now making access completely free-of-charge to not-for-profit groups.
- **Help users with insurance requirements by including them in the school board's existing liability insurance policy**
 - Securing liability insurance for community activities taking place after-hours in schools can be complicated and expensive for not-for-profit groups.
 - This makes it easier and more affordable for users.
 - Some boards even pay the small extra fee for the groups.
- **Use specialized software to manage the Community Use of Schools program**
 - School boards can use specialized software to book facilities, track usage and produce reports.
- **Make fee payment as easy as possible for users**
 - Consider how to make it easier for local users to pay fees.
 - Allow users to pay by credit card over the phone.

- **Add the full list of available facilities to the board’s website**
 - Post the availability of facilities on the board’s website to help users plan their activities
 - Boards should already be posting information about their policies and fees
- **Consult with other boards to benefit from their experience**
 - Learn from other school boards about making after-hours use of schools as easy and affordable as possible for community groups.
- **Work with other local school boards to standardize program policies and fees**
 - It is easier for users when neighbouring school boards from all publicly-funded education systems work together to adopt similar policies, procedures and cost structures.
- **Develop reciprocal agreements with municipalities**
 - Some boards have agreements with municipalities where the municipalities assume the day-to-day operation of the program, including the allocation of facilities.
 - Agreements between school boards and municipalities make it possible to provide a seamless offering of facilities across all boards to area residents.
 - Provides one-stop shopping for both municipal and school board facilities.

Survey Methodology:

- Interviews were conducted with thirty-nine school boards between June 15, 2007 and July 6, 2007.
- School boards selected for interviews represented all school board types (Catholic, public, French, English, large, small, urban, rural, northern).
- On-site interviews took place at seven school boards with the remaining thirty-two taking place by telephone (in all cases, questions were provided in advance).
- The survey focused on four aspects of the Community Use of Schools program:
 1. permitting systems
 2. agreements with co-terminous boards and municipalities
 3. definition of “not-for-profit”
 4. space allocation decisions
- In addition, a general sense of boards’ overall experience with the program since its inception in 2004 was noted.