



February 22, 2008

President Monica Garcia
Honorable Members of the Board of Education
Superintendent David Brewer
Los Angeles Unified School District
333 Beaudry Street
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Re: Support Joint Use of Schools, Pools, and Parks

Dear President Garcia, Honorable Board Members, and Superintendent Brewer:

We join People for Parks and others in urging the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) to support the shared use of schools, pools, and parks.

The City Project has long advocated for the shared use of parks and schools to optimize the scarce use of land and public resources in Los Angeles and to provide places for physical activity to help children and youth move more, eat well, stay healthy, and do their best in school and in life. We support the development of a master joint use agreement for parks, schools, and pools between the City Recreation and Parks Department and LAUSD. Making school fields and pools available after school, on weekends, and during breaks can provide additional places for physical activity in a region that is park poor. Providing park facilities for public school use during the day can provide needed places for physical activity.

Los Angeles lacks parks and school fields and there are unfair park, school, and health disparities. The evidence and authorities in support of the statements below can generally be found in the Policy Report by Robert García and Aubrey White, *Healthy Parks, Schools and Communities: Mapping Green Access and Equity for the Los Angeles Region (2006)* at pages 8-10, 19-24, Maps 801, 901, and 903, and Charts 801C and 901C (available on the web at www.cityprojectca.org).

The shared use of parks and schools can provide more places to play and engage in physical activity to help reduce diabetes, obesity, and diseases related to inactivity. Unfortunately, only 103 out of 605 LAUSD schools have five acres or more of playing fields. Those schools tend to be located in areas that are disproportionately white and wealthy and have greater access to parks. LAUSD provides 71% more play acres for non-Hispanic white students than for Latino students in elementary schools. There were only 30 joint use agreements between LAUSD and the City of Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Department as of April 2006. The classic 1930 Olmsted Report and the 2006 audit by City Controller Laura Chick calling for improved parks and recreation in every neighborhood both call for the shared use of parks and schools.

The human health implications of the lack of place for physical activity in parks and schools are profound. In California, 73% of fifth, seventh, and ninth graders did not achieve minimum physical fitness standards in 2004. In LAUSD, 87% of students were not physically fit. Yet in 2006, 51% of school districts studied in California, including LAUSD, did not enforce statutory physical education requirements. At LAUSD's South Gate High School, 1,600 children took the state Fitnessgram test and not one passed. Forty schools did not have a single physically fit student. Less than 10% of students were physically fit in nearly one-third of the 605 schools in LAUSD. Only eight schools had student populations that are more than 50% physically fit.

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There are unfair park, school, and health disparities by school district. Thus, for example, District 1 (LaMotte) in South Los Angeles has 1.05 net acres of urban parks per thousand residents, compared to 9.94 net acres in District 3 (Lauritzen) in the San Fernando Valley. The disparities are even more dramatic if total acres of parks are included. There are 1.59 acres of total parks per thousand residents in District 1 (LaMotte), and 69.71 in District 6 (Korenstein) in the Valley. District 1 is disproportionately populated by people of color and low income people, while Districts 3 and 6 are disproportionately white and wealthy.

The levels of childhood obesity are intolerably high throughout Los Angeles, ranging from 18.1% in City Council District 5 (Weiss) in West L.A. to 29.3% in District 9 (Perry) in South Los Angeles. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology, *Preventing Childhood Obesity: the need to create healthy places. A Cities and Communities Health Report* (October 2007), www.flickr.com/photos/cityprojectca/1959948417. District 5 is disproportionately white and wealthy compared to District 9, which is disproportionately populated by low income people of color.

Evidence-based research published by the California Endowment and others documents the importance of physical education and healthy eating to improve student health, youth development, and academic performance, and documents unfair health disparities. Increased physical activity is associated with improved academic performance. *See, e.g.,* San Diego State University, Physical Education Matters 1 (California Endowment Policy Brief 2007) (“Physical Education Matters”); UCLA Center to Eliminate Health Disparities and Samuels & Associates, Failing Fitness: Physical Activity and Physical Education in Schools (California Endowment Policy Brief 2007). *See* www.cityprojectca.org/blog/archives/601.

There are unfair park, school, and health disparities by Los Angeles City Council District. Thus, for example, District 13 (Garcetti) in Central Los Angeles and District 10 (Wesson) in South Los Angeles each has .35 net acres of urban parks per thousand residents, compared to 15.86 net acres in District 12 (Smith) in the West San Fernando Valley. The disparities are even more dramatic if total acres of parks are included. There are .43 total acres of parks per thousand residents in District 10 (Wesson), and 57.68 in District 11 (Rosendahl) in West Los Angeles, as reported in the Los Angeles Times. Deborah Schoch, *How can L.A. create better places to play?*, L.A. Times, June 1, 2007. Central and South Los Angeles are disproportionately populated by people of color and low income people, while the West San Fernando Valley and West Los Angeles are disproportionately white and wealthy.

The children of the Pico Union District in one of the most park-poor parts of Los Angeles were denied the use of the Olympic size pool at Miguel Contreras High School because the pool was closed for the long hot summer because neither the City of Los Angeles nor LAUSD provided \$13.85 per hour to open the pool. This has subjected Los Angeles to extensive and embarrassing news coverage in print and on the web. YouTube videos and media coverage are available on the web at www.cityprojectca.org/ourwork/schools.html#miguelcontreraspool.

We join People for Parks and others in urging LAUSD to support joint use of parks, schools and pools to help achieve healthy, livable communities for all.

Sincerely,

Robert García
Executive Director and Counsel

cc: Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa
City Controller Laura Chick
City Council President Eric Garcetti