

Opening the Gate

A resource to support Victorian schools
to activate school grounds and open
spaces for community use



About

This resource provides practical tips to support school leaders to activate their open spaces after hours and on weekends, unleashing the many benefits for schools and communities.

Drawing on experience

We've surveyed:

250

kids

35

parents

12

School Leaders

This resource draws on the experiences of ten leading Victorian government schools who have all successfully and safely opened their school gates to benefit their school and wider communities.

Schools told us that opening their gates and inviting the community to share their open spaces and school facilities was a positive and rewarding experience and a win-win for both their school and local community.

“If you’re considering opening up your school grounds to the community, just do it! You won’t believe what community groups and connections will flourish and how much respect, ownership and volunteerism toward your school will grow.”

School Leader

Did you know

1 in 4



Australian kids are not doing enough physical activity
creating long term impacts on their health and wellbeing.

By activating your open spaces, you and your school community can become part of the solution.



Benefits for your school

Like our leading schools, there are many benefits you can derive from opening your school gates and inviting the community in.

1

Greater community ownership of your school and increased volunteerism: Families and community members are incentivised to care for the spaces they use. Having them look out for your school grounds is an active protector against vandalism.

2

Relationships within your school community are stronger: By opening school grounds to the community, schools can build stronger relationships with parents, local businesses, and other community members.

3

The school's role as a community hub is extended: Open schools become community hubs, by providing places and spaces to meet enhancing social connection and recreational activity within their community.

70%

of the **35 parents & carers** we surveyed were motivated to go to the school for social connection



Feeling **connected** and having space to **stay active** were the most cited benefits

"The school yard has been a place of joy and play for my kids since they were very little. I'm so glad its open and available after hours and on the weekends."

Parent

"Having school grounds open to community really helps the entire family to access open space and the outdoor facilities were so important during covid lockdowns."

Parent



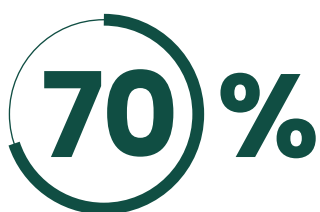
Benefits for your community



- 1** Access to green space and recreational facilities: Improves access to green space and recreation facilities for families and community members that may otherwise not have access.
- 2** Encourages physical activity: Providing access to school grounds enables and encourages community members to spend more time outdoors being active.
- 3** Builds social connectedness: Opening school grounds creates more opportunities for social connection. This helps to reduce social isolation, particularly for vulnerable families.
- 4** Provides a safe environment: School grounds are often seen as safe meeting places, providing a secure place for community members to engage in a diverse range of activities.
- 5** Provides a venue for community events: School grounds can be used as venues for community events such as fetes, markets, and concerts. This provides more opportunities to bring the community together.



of the **250 kids** we surveyed use the school grounds after hours and on the weekend



of these kids said they **spent more time outdoors** because they could access the school grounds



The most popular activities were to **play** on the equipment, or **ride** a bike or scooter



Two best things about visiting the school grounds were **meeting friends** and being **close to home**



Practical tips for life in an open school



Leading schools had lots of tips about how to make life in an open school easier.

The message from school leaders was clear; the benefits for their school and community far outweighed any of the challenges that arose in enhance community access to their grounds.

Security, safety and minimising anti-social behaviour on school grounds



Having school community members on school grounds after hours was highlighted as the single most effective security measure and many schools noticed a reduction in vandalism.

The impact of passive security was enhanced when:

- there are clear communication channels in place, so school and community members could contact school staff after hours if they observed any issues.
- the school creates a strong sense of community ownership and belonging. As the sense of shared ownership grows, so too does care and consideration for the school grounds.
- any damage to school grounds is rectified quickly, so that the school grounds continue to feel safe and respected; because this promotes respectful behaviour.

Rubbish removal and clean up



Schools minimised issues with rubbish by:

- educating community users about the school expectations with signage
- placing additional bins that are accessible for community users
- building systems for routine check/clean up prior to school commencing each week.

Managing mixed use of school grounds



Many schools benefited from having a mix of informal and formal use, (e.g. fundraising events, community markets and hiring spaces for sports clubs and events).

They found that formal use often boosted the informal use of the grounds.

To make these partnerships a success schools recommended looking for:

- partnerships with local councils and organisations to share administration and management, and even subsidise the costs of facility upgrades
- share management and/or administration across small schools
- utilise the Department of Education's Joint Use Agreement resources and advice.



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VicHealth acknowledges the Traditional
Custodians of the land. We pay our
respects to all Elders past, present
and future.

