



PARKS AND RECREATION ONTARIO

Date: November 8, 2024
To: EDULABFINANCE@ontario.ca
From: Parks and Recreation Ontario
Subject: Optimizing Community Use of Schools

Dear Minister Dunlop:

Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) is a strong advocate for accessible and affordable community-based recreation. For this reason, PRO applauds the Government of Ontario's ongoing investments in community use of schools. Across Ontario, school facilities supply a vital segment of the province's recreation and sport infrastructure.

In 2019, funds to support Community Outreach Coordinators and the Priority School Initiative were discontinued. As a result, school boards have been forced to increase community user fees to rates that are no longer affordable for community groups. Without access to affordable facilities, community groups will have to increase participant fees or cancel programming. Insufficient access to affordable recreation spaces jeopardizes the health and wellbeing of communities. Ontario's recreation sector is already experiencing significant challenges due to capacity constraints and aging facilities. As Ontario's communities continue to grow, it is crucial that all recreation and sport infrastructure is utilized to its full potential.

While we acknowledge that the Ministry has implemented year-by-year increases to the Community Use of Schools Component, these increases have not kept pace with inflation. To rectify funding discrepancies between Community Use of Schools and rising costs, we recommend the following:

- \$3 million increase to the Community Use of Schools Component;
- \$7.04 million to support school board-led community outreach;
- \$8.25 million to support free/low-cost permits in equity-deserving neighbourhoods; and
- \$1.15 million increase to Focus on Youth program;
- A dedicated fund to retrofit aging school facilities to meet current accessibility standards.

Schools have always been more than centres for education. These publicly owned assets are essential community hubs. Increased investments in the Community Use of Schools Component and related programs will ensure that school boards are able to maintain quality and accessible sport and recreation spaces for decades to come.

Sincerely,

Kim Gavine
Chief Executive Officer
Parks and Recreation Ontario

prontario.org

1 Concorde Gate, Suite 302, Toronto ON M3C 3N6