

# School partnership bringing more parks to San Diego



SAN DIEGO, CA - MARCH 23, 2017 - The Wegeforth Elementary Joint Use Park in Serra Mesa is among one of the first of 32 new parks the city is planning to build on school district property through a new joint-use partnership. (Photo by K.C. Alfred/The San Diego Union-Tribune) (K.C. Alfred / San Diego Union-Tribune) (K.C. Alfred / San Diego Union-Tribune)



By **David Garrick**

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**S**an Diego has found a faster and cheaper way to open parks in neighborhoods that lack them, including many older communities and lower-income areas south of Interstate 8.

Through a partnership with the [San Diego Unified School District](#) over the next five years, the city is building 32 new joint-use parks on school campuses that will be open to the public on weekends and during weekday hours when schools aren't in session.

The parks, three of which have already opened, are cheaper for the city because the school district is covering the bulk of construction costs from the Proposition Z facilities bond.

The program, called "Play All Day," will also allow parks to be built much faster because the biggest hurdle the city typically faces, especially in parks-deficient communities, is finding available land in suitable locations.

"We typically develop two to three joint-use sites every year, so we make headway in each community," said Robin Shifflet, the city's manager for park planning. "But with 'play all day' we will be able to do 32 in five years, which is just incredible."

The parks will be relatively small at 2 to 4 acres, but most will be large enough for soccer and softball practices and some will even be able to accommodate games, Shifflet said.

But there will also be areas for children and families to simply relax and enjoy rural surroundings, she said.

Studies show such opportunities are crucial for communities because regular physical activity boosts health while reducing obesity and the risks of heart disease, hypertension, [colon cancer](#) and diabetes.

Physical activity also relieves symptoms of depression and anxiety, improves moods and enhances psychological well-being, city officials said.

But a recent survey by the Trust for Public Land found that 23 percent of San Diego residents live farther than a 10-minute walk away from a local park or recreational facility.

So whether a community is parks-deficient was a key factor in a complicated matrix the city used to select the 32 schools that will get parks as part of the play all day program.

Other factors include the visibility of the available land from the street, how much parking is available and how many acres the school can contribute to the park.

The biggest winners are Clairemont and Serra Mesa, which will each get four new joint-use parks on school campuses.

In addition, three each will be built in Mira Mesa and Skyline-Paradise Hills and two each are slated for Encanto, Southeastern San Diego, University City, Linda Vista, Uptown, Navajo and Eastern neighborhoods.

The remaining four parks will be built in North Park, City Heights, Barrio Logan and the College Area.

Eden Yaege, incoming president of the Clairemont Town Council, said it's great news that her community will be getting four new parks so quickly.

"One of the things we're focused on Clairemont is more open space and places where people can walk," she said. "Any time we can be more efficient with resources it's a great thing, especially with the shortage of land for parks."

The first three parks — at Montgomery Middle School, Wegeforth Elementary and Angier Elementary — are already open, and a fourth — McKinley Elementary — is scheduled to open this spring.

Construction is slated to begin on seven additional parks this year at: CPMA Middle School, Cubberley Elementary, Gage Elementary, Encanto Elementary, Linda Vista Elementary, Marvin Elementary and Horton Elementary.

Another 11 are scheduled for 2019 construction: Marie Curie Elementary, Innovation Middle School, Holmes Elementary, Paradise Hills Elementary, Audubon Elementary, Rolando Park Elementary, Taft Middle School, Wangenheim Middle School, Salk Elementary, Spreckels Elementary and Standley Middle School.

Public input will begin in 2018 on the next four: Rowan, Lafayette, Sandburg and Johnson elementary schools.

And public input will begin in 2021 on the final six: Logan K-8, Grant K-8 and Perkins, Tubman, Florence and Webster elementary schools.

Shifflet said public input gathered at a series of neighborhood meetings prompted the city to decide that none of the parks will have lights, sports leagues won't be allowed to use megaphones and each park will be locked from sunset to sunrise.

While residents want additional parks, they expressed concerns about noise, lighting and after-hours loitering and crime, she said.

"We've gone out to do a lot of community workshops and there are some common themes at the different sites," she said.

Each park will also be closed to dogs and be open on school days from dawn until half an hour before school starts, and then from half an hour after school ends until dark.

The city and the school district have agreed to 25-year operating agreements at each site. The school district will contribute roughly \$2 million in bond funds for construction of each park, and the city has agreed to cover each park's annual maintenance costs of about \$100,000 per year.

San Diego opened its first joint-use park 1948 and now operates 76 with the school district. San Diego also operates several more with other school districts that serve the city.

For details, visit the [play all day](#) site.

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