



SEATTLE

County: King

Population: 608,660 (2010 U.S. Census)

Population density: 7,361/sq mi

Median household income: \$45,736 (2000 U.S. Census)

Partners involved: Seattle Public Schools and many community organizations

“The goal of the Community Alignment Initiative is to get programs to help get the most out of school time.”

– Susan Hall, Alignment Coordinator,
Seattle Public Schools

Seattle Public Schools (SPS) launched the Community Alignment Initiative in 1998 to support academic success among its students by partnering with community organizations. Through the Initiative, SPS devised a system for setting up shared use. When space becomes available in a school, program providers submit an application and are chosen based on compatibility with the school’s site and needs. Once selected, providers complete a School/Provider Alignment Agreement and sign a formal lease.

The Alignment Agreement forms the basis of the relationship between the school and the provider and specifies how they will work together to support the developmental needs of children and youth. Additionally, the agreement outlines the use of spaces and other resources such as staff. The formal lease also describes the facilities within the school that can be used by the provider for the specific program. For example, the provider may have exclusive use of a certain classroom for the entire school year, but non-exclusive use of the gym and library.

The YMCA of Greater Seattle is one of many organizations that work with SPS and is committed to strengthening the community through programs and services. Through the Community Alignment Initiative, SPS and the YMCA have successfully implemented shared use. The YMCA operates licensed child care in six Seattle schools and runs three Head Start classrooms, a federal program for preschool children from low-income families. The YMCA also directs a number of afterschool programs that include homework help, chess club, art and music, leadership programs, and cultural clubs. Furthermore, afterschool programs offer a wide variety of sports and recreation activities, such as dance, tennis, basketball, and dodgeball. Whenever the YMCA has an opportunity to implement a program in a new school, the first step is to work with the principal to determine what spaces are appropriate and available.

Erica Mullen, YMCA Associate Executive Director for Education Initiatives, cited SPS’s Community Alignment Initiative and the Alignment Agreement as key because the process and procedure are clearly laid out for organizations that are interested in participating in shared use. Erica also expressed that sometimes it is unclear how to pursue shared use, so having a system in place relieves the burden of having to negotiate or create the shared use agreement. Even though the YMCA and SPS have an established relationship, the YMCA continues to work on ways to show respect for the space and to be a good partner to work with.

Susan Hall, SPS Alignment Coordinator, also emphasized the importance of relationship-building. It’s important for organizations that wish to work within the schools to understand the goals of the district and specific school and to be able to show the ability to sustain the relationship and program.