Even the healthiest education budgets—whether they support K–12 public schools, community colleges, or universities—benefit when schools form strategic partnerships with their surrounding communities. Establish a relationship where an entire community can benefit from a new or renovated education building, and suddenly that capital investment has the visibility and support it needs to result in a valuable joint-use facility.

But while the potential benefits of joint-use are numerous, these partnerships can be challenging to implement. Partnership agreements must be carefully crafted to ensure fairness, equity, and benefit for all parties. From the start, critical issues need to be addressed, such as specific roles and responsibilities, facility and program supervision, and financial and in-kind support. In summary, an effective joint-use partnership agreement should include:

• clarification of the capital investment by the partners
• arrangements for maintenance and repair
• programs or activities covered by the agreement
• assignments of operational costs, such as utilities
• assignments for staffing and supervision
• access by the partners and hours of operation
• assignments for safety and security

Beyond making the most of the physical building as part of a joint-use partnership, there are perhaps even more important benefits to reap on behalf of the nation’s learners. A trend that has been building momentum in recent years is a joint-use partnership model where high schools are placed on college campuses. In addition to maximizing space, resources, and facilities, younger students have an intimate view of their post-secondary possibilities.

Designing a high school on a college campus offers a unique challenge compared to a stand-alone school. The process of working with two clients versus one adds a layer of complexity, but often the synergy between two very different organizations that share a common goal can lead to innovative design solutions. What makes these projects unique is the connection between the school’s facilities and the larger university campus, which is both physical and programmatic. Here are several examples of how design can support that connection.

Art for All
Managed by the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts opened on the campus of California State University Los Angeles (CSULA) in 1985. The high school specializes in dance, music, theater, and visual arts training, and has been named a California Distinguished School for Academic Excellence.

High school students may enroll in CSULA classes once they complete their graduation requirements, allowing them to become part of the university campus and transition to the college environment. Students also meet with CSULA counselors who help them plan college coursework. Once they’re enrolled in CSULA classes, students can also access the university’s library and athletic facilities. Overall, this partnership creates a feeder into CSULA’s fine arts programs.
program and supports the post-secondary aspirations of Los Angeles County students and their families.

In another similar example, the California State Polytechnic University, Pomona shares its campus with the Los Angeles County International Polytechnic High School. The high school aims to bridge its curriculum with areas of study at the post-secondary level, and, conversely, university students use the high school as a training ground. For example, university students studying to become educators fulfill in-class clinical hours at the high school.

“The concept was to create an environment for a transition that is seamless with no blurred lines for students,” says J. Michael Ortiz, president of California State Polytechnic University, noting that comprehensive collaboration between the university and the Los Angeles County Office of Education was a critical step toward a successful joint-use partnership.

New and Improved
For more than 20 years, Middle College High School operated in portable classrooms on the campus of Los Angeles Southwest College. Despite its subpar learning environments, the high school continued to produce some of the highest-achieving students in California.

Today, as a result of the unique collaboration between the Los Angeles Community College District, the Los Angeles Unified School District, and Los Angeles Southwest College, education leaders have started working toward new construction. The main goals are to expand the educational opportunities for the local community and provide a direct link to higher education for secondary students, many of whom are from low-income families.

The new high school will share athletic fields and other campus facilities at the college, which will in turn have access to the high school facilities for after-hours and weekend functions. The design creates a building that belongs to its college campus while acting as a distinct facility with its own identity.

The California Academy of Mathematics and Science (CAMS) is a comprehensive four-year public high school located on the campus of California State University, Dominguez Hills. In December 2007, Newsweek released the results of a two-year study to determine the 100 best high schools in the United States. Of the 18,000 schools reviewed, CAMS ranked No. 21. A truly unique joint-use partnership allows all students to become part of the university campus.

For example, students in grades 11 and 12 use advanced university science labs. Conversely, university students use CAMS classrooms in the evening when college enrollment is heavier. CAMS also shares many of the university’s facilities.

Room to Grow
Joint-use partnerships promote healthy growth for school districts, colleges, universities, neighborhoods, and communities. Their numerous benefits to students include expanded learning facilities and resources—and in the case of shared campuses with colleges, a leg up on succeeding after high school.

With these unique relationships and opportunities, school districts and higher education institutions will continue building educational programs that provide challenging curricula to students throughout their communities while maximizing limited resources such as space and construction dollars.

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