

A CASE FOR OPEN COMMUNITY USE OF HIGH SCHOOL TRACK & FIELDS OUTSIDE  
OF SCHOOL HOURS, SAN JUAN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Project

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by

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## ABSTRACT

of

### A CASE FOR NON-PERMITTED COMMUNITY USE OF HIGH SCHOOL TRACK AND FIELD FACILITIES OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL HOURS IN SAN JUAN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

Jodi Mulligan-Pfile

Executive Summary: This paper comprehensively examines the potential impact of open community use of high school track and field facilities in the San Juan Unified School District (SJUSD). By integrating Kotter's 8-step Change Model, a SWOT analysis, and a Theory of Change development framework, the study aims to provide a structured approach to evaluate the feasibility and implications of allowing non-permitted public access to these facilities during non-school hours. By analyzing stakeholder perspectives, existing policies, and community feedback, the paper seeks to inform decision-makers within SJUSD about the advantages and challenges of opening track and field facilities to the public.

Statement of Problem: The primary concern addressed in this paper is the potential impact of opening SJUSD high school track and field facilities to the public during non-school hours. The study evaluates the balance between enhancing community engagement, promoting equity, ensuring safety, and addressing concerns related to liability, vandalism, and maintenance costs. By examining data from stakeholder surveys, existing literature, and national surveys on school security and vandalism, the paper aims to provide insights into the implications of this policy change for SJUSD.

Sources of Data: Data for this analysis are sourced from stakeholder surveys conducted within the SJUSD community, national surveys on school security and vandalism, academic literature on theories of change, change management models, and the role of public schools in the community. Additionally, insights from interviews conducted with SJUSD Facilities Committee members, district administrators, and community members involved in the discussion on open facility use are incorporated to provide a nuanced understanding of the issue.

Conclusions Reached: Through the integration of Kotter's Change Model, a SWOT analysis, and a Theory of Change framework, this paper concludes that while opening track and field facilities for public use presents opportunities for enhanced community engagement, social cohesion, and recreational opportunities, there are notable challenges related to safety, liability, and maintenance costs that must be addressed. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of stakeholder involvement, transparent

communication, and continuous monitoring in implementing and evaluating the proposed policy change. Ultimately, the conclusions drawn in this paper aim to guide the SJUSD School Board in making informed decisions regarding using high school track and field facilities during non-school hours, balancing the benefits of community engagement with the need for safety and security within the district.

\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Chair  
Robert Wassmer, Ph.D.

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## INTRODUCTION

There are eight high schools and five special high school programs in the San Juan Unified School District (SJUSD). The school district was considering plans to open the eight high schools' track and field facilities and one of the special high school program sites for community use during non-school hours. The SJUSD Facilities Committee (FC), comprised of community members appointed by the SJUSD Board of Education (School Board), recommended how the School Board should move forward with these plans.<sup>1</sup> On February 6, 2024, the SJUSD Facilities Committee voted on and approved the following recommendation to the School Board:

SJUSD high school track and fields shall be available to the public for non-permitted use during non-school hours, except when the track and fields are used for high school activities or other permitted events. The track and fields may be closed without notice if the High School Principal and Deputy Superintendent of Schools determine that there are documented incidents of vandalism that necessitate locking the gates during non-school hours (Avey et al., 2024a).

The topic was subsequently agendaized, and on April 9, 2024, the board heard a presentation from the Chief Operations Officer and the staff liaison to the FC. After a

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<sup>1</sup> I am currently serving a two-year term on the SJUSD Facilities Committee, ending in 2025. This paper is a reflection of my own research and not a reflection of the school district or Facilities Committee.

lengthy discussion during which the School Board heard from many staff members, including principals and coaches, as well as community and other board members, the School Board instructed Superintendent Melissa Bassanelli not to proceed with the exploration of the non-permitted use of facilities and decided to take no further action (San Juan Unified School District, 2024).

In this paper, I examine the potential impact of open community use of high school track and field facilities in the San Juan Unified School District (SJUSD). By integrating Kotter's 8-step Change Model, a SWOT analysis, and a Theory of Change development framework, I aim to provide a structured approach to evaluate the feasibility and implications of allowing non-permitted public access to these facilities during non-school hours. I draw on data from SJUSD community stakeholder surveys, national surveys on school security and vandalism, academic literature on theories of change and change management models, and literature on the role of public schools in the community. I also rely on insights from interviews conducted by SJUSD Facilities Committee (FC) members, SJUSD Board of Education meeting minutes, and FC committee meeting minutes, and incorporate comments from district administrators and community members involved in the discussion on open facility use to provide a nuanced understanding of the issue.

I conclude that while opening track and field facilities for public use presents opportunities for enhanced community engagement, social cohesion, and recreational opportunities, there are notable challenges related to safety, liability, and maintenance costs that must be addressed. Furthermore, I underscore the importance of stakeholder

involvement, transparent communication, and continuous monitoring in implementing and evaluating the proposed policy change. Ultimately, the conclusions drawn in this paper aim to guide the SJUSD School Board in making informed decisions regarding using high school track and field facilities during non-school hours, balancing the benefits of community engagement with the need for safety and security within the district.

The remainder of this paper unfolds as follows. I will touch on the background, history, and current issue of community non-permitted use of public school track and field facilities. Following this, I will explore theory of change development at SJUSD, share research and data on this topic, and look at public schools as standalone entities. In the final sections, I will explain Kotter's 8-Step Change Model as a theory of change that provides a structured framework for managing organizational transformation at SJUSD and test the model with a SWOT analysis. Finally, I will conclude with recommendations.

## BACKGROUND

The communities within SJUSD have used track and field facilities outside of school hours in an unofficial capacity throughout its history. Some campuses used to allow it, others tried to mitigate it, and the outcomes were mixed. After school closures due to the pandemic, all schools had to institute continuously changing rules and regulations, and the campuses were locked with strict guidance for no outside community use (Morrar, 2020). Since the campuses have reopened, however, the rules and regulations surrounding nonpermitted community use have not, and campus track and field facilities remain officially closed to outside community use after school hours. The school district does, however, allow the public to apply for permitted use of school facilities (San Juan Unified School District, 2023). At the beginning of 2023, the School Board tasked the FC with exploring the possibility of opening track and field facilities, specifically for non-permitted public use during non-school hours.

In parallel to these discussions, SJUSD is updating its facilities master plan and creating a new strategic plan, signaling a pivotal moment to adopt a structured approach to community engagement regarding community use of school facilities. The district has openly recognized the importance of integrating feedback from stakeholders, such as students, staff, families, and neighbors, into the planning process to ensure that the new master plan aligns with the needs and aspirations of the community (San Juan Unified School District, n.d.-a)

Also of note, a recent study was conducted by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz, & Associates, Inc. (FM3 Research) in December 2023, which sought to evaluate SJUSD Voter Attitudes Toward a Local School Funding Measure. The study also provided valuable insights into the sentiments and priorities of the local community regarding school infrastructure, safety, and funding. The survey results revealed a strong consensus among respondents about the importance of security enhancements for school campuses, including measures such as emergency lighting, fencing, locks, alarms, and surveillance cameras, to ensure the safety and well-being of students (Avey et al., 2024b).

Moreover, the survey findings highlighted concerns about the aging and deteriorating condition of neighborhood schools, with a significant percentage of respondents expressing the need for critical repairs and upgrades to address these issues. While 56% of respondents felt that SJUSD had made much progress in updating local schools, 44% either did not know what was going on with their local schools or disagreed. Moreover, while 55% agreed that their neighborhood schools are aging, deteriorating, run-down, and in need of repair, there were still 18% who did not know (Avey et al., 2024b).

Notably, a majority of respondents emphasized the significance of citizen oversight in decision-making processes related to school facilities, indicating a desire for increased community involvement and transparency in shaping policies and initiatives within the school district, which would also serve to lessen the gap for community members who seemed disconnected from what was going on in their district. These findings underscore the importance of collaborative efforts between the school district



and the community to address infrastructure needs, enhance safety measures, and foster greater community engagement in shaping the future of local schools (Avey et al., 2024b).

## HISTORY

Historically, open campuses have been a valuable resource for neighborhoods to remain active and be outdoors for walks, running, or playing sports. For some communities, they have become an extension of the built environment that adds to their community's list of civic amenities (Lee et al., 2008). This amenity offers many benefits, including promoting health and wellness, fostering connections between community members, and building a strong sense of community pride and togetherness (Vey & Morales, 2022).

Public schools play a critical role in driving the economic prosperity of American communities and the nation, underscoring their historical significance (Barrett et al., 2019). Public schools also play a crucial role in shaping the built environment and impacting the surrounding community in various ways. They influence the physical landscape and contribute to the social and environmental characteristics of the areas they serve (Graziose et al., 2016). By considering the design, function, and integration of schools within the broader built environment, planners, policymakers, and community stakeholders can work together to create inclusive, vibrant, and sustainable communities that support the well-being and success of residents (McKoy et al., 2011). The physical infrastructure of public schools, including buildings, playgrounds, sports facilities, and parking lots, plays a significant role in shaping the surrounding built environment's aesthetics, functionality, and character (Barrett et al., 2019).

Moreover, the location of public schools can impact pedestrian and traffic patterns in the area, influencing transportation infrastructure, traffic flow, and pedestrian safety measures (La Vigne et al., 2007). Understanding these dynamics is essential for creating inclusive and well-integrated communities where public schools play a central role in supporting residents and contributing to the overall quality of life.

Public schools frequently share other resources with the community beyond sports facilities, such as libraries, auditoriums, and event spaces, providing valuable educational and recreational opportunities for residents of all ages. Beyond formal education, schools offer various programs like ESL classes, STEM courses, and vocational skills training that enrich the lives of community members and contribute to the overall quality of life in their districts and regions (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020). Public schools can also offer challenging environmental implications to the built environment, affecting energy consumption, water usage, waste generation, and green space preservation (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2011). However, sustainable design practices, such as those already offered or in development by SJUSD (San Juan Unified School District, n.d.-b), can help minimize the environmental footprint and promote ecological sustainability within the community.

Another significant aspect of public schools is community engagement and gathering, where public schools actively engage with the local community through initiatives, programs, and events. Schools often serve as venues for community meetings, cultural activities, and recreational events, fostering social connections and community togetherness. Additionally, studies have shown that the presence of public schools can

contribute to a neighborhood's character and livability, influencing property values and residential development patterns (Savageau, 2023). Schools that are well-maintained, aesthetically pleasing, and integrated into the surrounding landscape can enhance the appeal and sense of place within the community (Hope, 1980)

Lastly, for this section, it is essential to quickly note the potential impacts of opening school facilities for unpermitted community use, especially in the context of after-school programs, which play a significant role in youth development and crime prevention. Investing in after-school programs effectively reduces youth violence and promotes positive social outcomes (Newman et al., 2000). Afterschool programs provide a significant return on investment by improving school performance and reducing crime and juvenile delinquency (*Youth.gov*, n.d.). A meta-analysis of afterschool programs serving children five to 18 years of age found that children attending afterschool programs when compared to nonparticipating children, had higher levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, school bonding (positive feelings and attitudes toward school), and positive social behaviors (Durlak et al., 2010). Attending after-school programs is associated with reduced aggression, noncompliance, conduct problems, and drug use (Sparr et al., 2020). These insights underscore the broader societal benefits of providing safe spaces and structured activities for youth outside of regular school hours, reinforcing the importance of exploring alternative solutions to enhance community well-being and engagement.

## CURRENT ISSUE

In the dynamic landscape of educational institutions, the development and implementation of a theory of change can play a pivotal role in shaping the future trajectory of school district policies (Resch et al., 2014). For SJUSD, a theory of change about the non-permitted community use of track and field facilities outside of school hours could serve as a roadmap for navigating complexities and driving positive transformations within the current strategic plan update (San Juan Unified School District, n.d.-d). By outlining clear objectives and strategies, a theory of change provides a structured approach to address challenges, enhance effectiveness, and promote continuous improvement in school operations and outcomes.

Furthermore, the Kotter 8-step Change Model integration emerges as a strategic framework tailored to instigate and sustain change initiatives within educational settings. As envisioned by John Kotter, this model emphasizes creating a sense of urgency, forming a guiding coalition, and communicating a compelling vision to drive organizational change effectively (Mouazen et al., 2023). Within the context of SJUSD, the Kotter model offers a systematic methodology to mobilize stakeholders, facilitate communication, and catalyze sustainable change efforts (Bedard, 2023) that align with the district's overarching goals and priorities (San Juan Unified School District, n.d.)

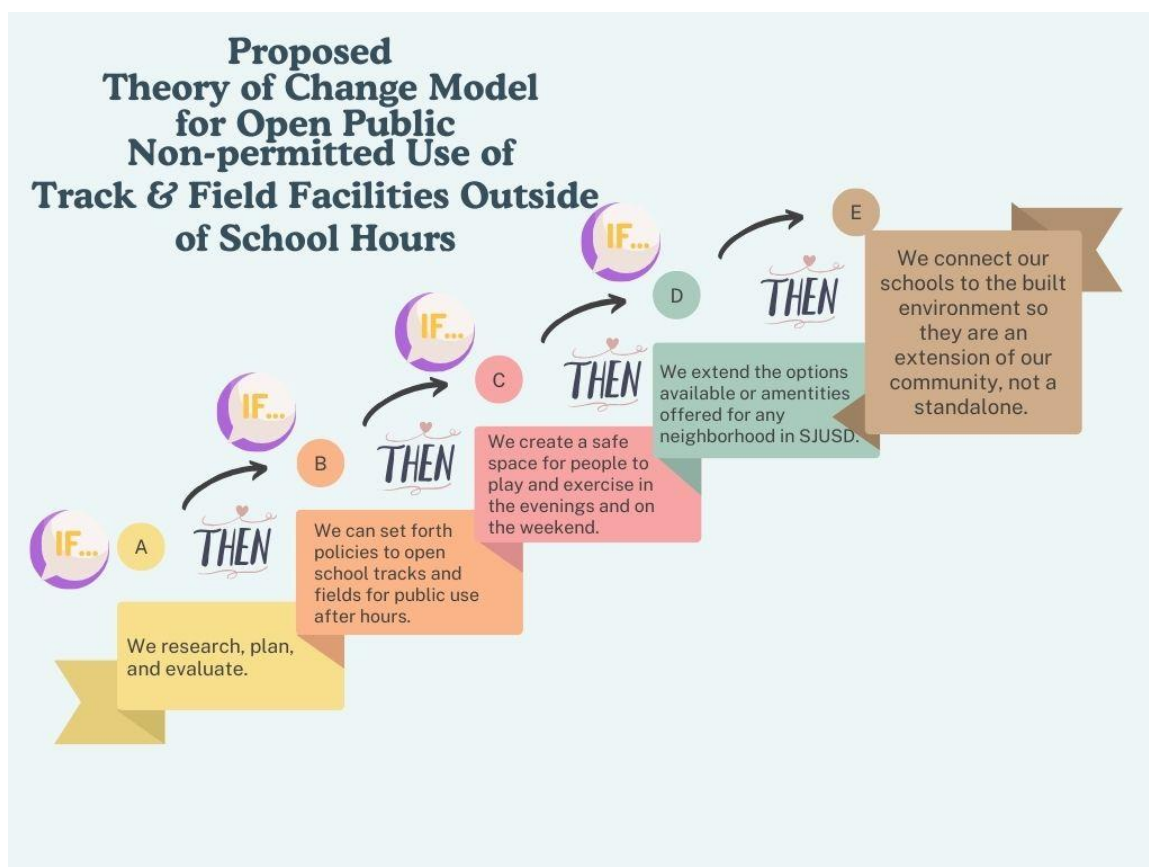
Moreover, applying a SWOT analysis holds significant value in assessing the internal strengths, weaknesses, external opportunities, and threats pertinent to the proposed theory of change. By conducting a comprehensive strengths, weaknesses,

opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis, SJUSD could gain insights into its organizational capabilities, areas for improvement, potential avenues for growth, and external factors that may impact the implementation of the theory of change (Teoli et al., 2023). This strategic evaluation tool is a foundation for informed decision-making, enabling the district to refine and optimize its change strategies in alignment with the identified SWOT parameters (Benzaghta et al., 2021).

Here, I explore some research focusing on key elements of concern that would prevent a theory of change from being adopted. I discuss Kotter's 8-step Change Model and use a SWOT analysis to propose a structured approach to open community use of school facilities during non-school hours, aligning with the district's new master plan and promoting equity, safety, and community engagement. The convergence of a well-defined theory of change, the Kotter 8-step Change Model, and a strategic SWOT analysis forms a mutualistic approach that empowers SJUSD to navigate strong feelings on both sides of an issue, foster innovative strategies that work for everyone, and drive sustainable transformation in educational practices and outcomes.

## THEORY OF CHANGE DEVELOPMENT AT SJUSD

Figure 1: Theory of Change Model for Open Public Non-Permitted Use of Track & Field Facilities Outside of School Hours



Author's adaption based on Transforming Youth Outdoors (Lemke, 2017).

Theories of change are often expressed as “if/then” statements. If I/we do x (action), Y (change) will happen. Underlying this are our assumptions or logic explaining the “because” (Creating a Theory of Change | CVE Reference Guide For, n.d.-a). In a proposed TOC model for open public non-permitted use of track and field facilities outside of school hours, if the school district researches, plans, and evaluates, it can set

forth policies to open school track and field for public use outside school hours. If it opens school tracks and fields for public use, it can create a safe space for people to play and exercise in the evenings and on the weekends. If the school makes a safe space for people to play and exercise in the evenings and on the weekends, it will extend the options available or amenities offered for any neighborhood in SJUSD. Suppose it extends the options available or amenities provided throughout the school district. In that case, it can connect the schools to the built environment so that they are an extension of the community, not a standalone. All along the way, the underlying assumption is that the school district does all of these things because the assumed outcome would be a healthier, happier, and more connected community for its students, families, and neighbors.

A change theory and a theory of change are related but distinct concepts in the field of organizational and social change. A change theory is a broad, overarching explanation of how and why change happens in a particular context, and it provides a framework for understanding the drivers, processes, and outcomes of change (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020). Change theories are often based on research and empirical evidence from various disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, and organizational studies. Examples of change theories include Lewin's Three-Stage Model, the Transtheoretical Model, and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Glanz, 2021).

A theory of change is a more specific, practical tool used to plan, implement, and evaluate a particular change initiative or program. It outlines the steps and mechanisms by which a desired change is expected to occur, including the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020). A theory of change is typically



developed through a participatory process involving stakeholders and is tailored to the specific context and goals of the initiative. Theories of change are often informed by/integrate change theories to structure their approach to organizational change. It is important to note that while Kotter's 8-Step Change Model is a widely used and effective change theory, there are many other methods and frameworks for developing a theory of change, such as the Aspen Institute's Community Builder's Approach (*Theory of Change Archives*, n.d.), the Outcomes Chain Model (Stem et al., 2016), and the Logic Model (Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape, 2018). The choice of method depends on the specific context, goals, and preferences of the organization or group leading the change initiative.

## RESEARCH

Another critical principle is adopting evidence-based strategies to underpin the TOC with internal and external research and data gathering and a comprehensive collection of best practices. By grounding the interventions in empirical data, research findings, and evidence-based approaches, SJUSD can ensure that the proposed changes are informed by past experiences and proven methodologies, thereby enhancing the likelihood of successful and sustainable outcomes (*Anne E. Casey Foundation, 2022*).

On October 30, 2023, a member of the FC held a meeting via Zoom with principals and athletic directors from Rio Americano, Bella Vista, El Camino, and Del Campo High Schools. The Chief Operating Officer organized the meeting, and it served as a way for principals and athletic directors to share their opinions and concerns regarding reopening their track and field facilities for non-permitted community use during non-school hours. The group did not support the idea of opening the fields for non-permitted community use, citing concerns about vandalism, turf damage, shortened lifespan of the fields, trash, liability, and the workload of the custodial staff (Avey, 2024a).

During the April 9, 2024 School Board meeting, there were many who showed up to make public comments in regard to this year-long inquiry. The principal of Del Campo High School, provided comments on behalf of the comprehensive high school principals and athletic directors, noting that the schools oppose the non-permitted use of facilities. The Chief Operating Officer of the Sacramento Taxpayers Association, expressed

opposition to the non-permitted use of facilities, noting the additional time and money involved. A coach from Mira Loma High School expressed opposition to allowing the non-permitted use of high school tracks and fields. And another coach from both Del Campo and Mesa Verde High Schools, expressed opposition to allowing the non-permitted use of high school tracks and fields (San Juan Unified School District et al., 2024).

Additionally, a representative from the California Chronic Disease Prevention Leadership Project expressed support for shared use of school facilities and commented on student wellness, along with other voices from the FC that were in support. A School Board member also expressed the need to explore this further and gather more information (San Juan Unified School District et al., 2024). These kinds of opposing views drive home a main point that the collaborative and consultative process of forming a consensus TOC can help bridge gaps in understanding and find a middle ground.

Sociologist and professor Paul J. Hirschfield summed up public schools and these kinds of opposing views quite nicely with the observation that “like all institutions, schools are places with dynamic social interaction wherein functions are continuously negotiated, structural constraints subjectively interpreted, proper responses hotly contested and inconsistently implemented—and the results of this cacophony of conflicting forces are never completely certain” (2008). In other words, schools are complex. By proxy, they have become intensely regulated places, are constantly under scrutiny, and consistently have to shift and change due to legislation and fluctuating economies.

A primary concern regarding opening school track and field facilities for unpermitted public use centers on vandalism. From July 26 to August 28, 2023, a survey was distributed online to assess community support for the nonpermitted high school track and field use during non-school hours. The survey was shared on various platforms, including parent pages, community outreach, and word-of-mouth advertising, to engage parents, school staff, students, and community members from all corners of the district (Avey, et al., 2024a). Out of 300 responses, the overwhelming majority were in support of allowing unpermitted public use of school track and field facilities; however, of the 6% that said no, the main reasons cited were vandalism, increased cost to maintaining fields, and potential damage to sports equipment (Avey et al., 2024a).

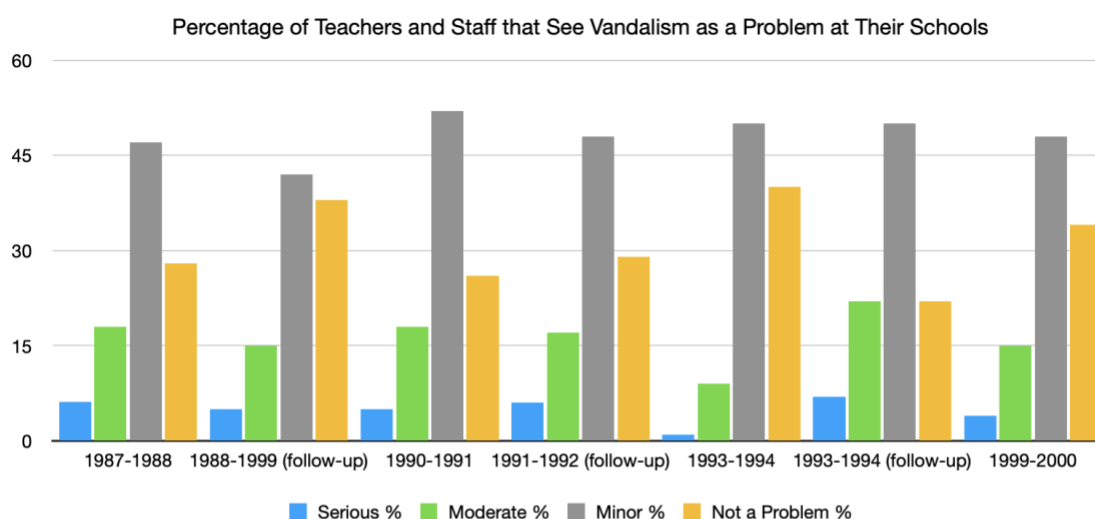
There isn't a repository of vandalism data to pull from with regards to public schools or SJUSD. However, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), during the 2017-18 school year, reported that about 27,500 schools (28% of all public schools) had at least one incident of vandalism. These schools reported a total of approximately 88,400 vandalism incidents. The most common types of vandalism were destruction, damage, or theft of school property (71%) and graffiti (41%) (Wang et al., 2022).

National surveys such as the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and its evolution into the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) have provided valuable insights into the educational landscape over the years (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). The SASS was an integrated study of public and private school districts, schools, principals, and teachers designed to provide descriptive data on the context of elementary and secondary education. SASS covered a wide range of topics from teacher

demand, teacher and principal characteristics, general conditions in schools, principals' and teachers' perceptions of school climate and problems in their schools, teacher compensation, district hiring and retention practices, to fundamental characteristics of the student population (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

The following graph and table refer to one question asked, out of many, on each SASS: "Do you see vandalism as a problem at your school?" Each survey was sent to schools in the fall.

Table 1: Percentage of teachers and staff that see vandalism as a problem at their schools,  
Schools and Staffing Survey, US Department of Education, National Center for  
Education Statistics, 1987-2000



Do you see vandalism as a problem at your school?

	Serious %	Moderate %	Minor %	Not a Problem %
1987-1988	6	18	47	28
1988-1999 (follow-up)	5	15	42	38
1990-1991	5	18	52	26
1991-1992 (follow-up)	6	17	48	29
1993-1994	1	9	50	40
1993-1994 (follow-up)	7	22	50	22
1999-2000	4	15	48	34

Source: Tables made by author, data derived from the ICPSR website, Schools &  
Staffing Surveys, US Dept. of Education, NCES, SASS Series, 1987-2000

Although there could be a few different inferences made from the outcomes of this survey, this particular question yielded similar answers over 20 years. Most who took the survey saw vandalism as a minor problem, or not a problem at all, on their campus. Of course, it is necessary to go back and research whether or not those surveyed worked on campuses with track and field facilities that were open outside of school hours, however, these survey results shed some light on the general feelings of school staff across the state on the topic of school vandalism.

In their study *Race, Poverty, and Exclusionary School Security: An Empirical Analysis of U.S. Elementary, Middle, and High Schools*, authors Kupchick and Ward argue that although the firm rule of enforcement is essential both for student safety and for academic outcomes, an overreliance on exclusionary security practices may contribute to school disengagement and social disintegration in many interrelated ways (2013). School security measures can reflect both an ethos of exclusion and an ethos of inclusion, or some combination of both (Kupchik & Ward, 2013). Regardless, exclusionary measures uniquely aim to disengage offending students from school and, in doing so, can often disengage everyone else. Additionally, research shows that school districts incur additional indirect expenses for insurance, security guards, and other presumed deterrents to vandalism. These expenses appear to exceed the cost of repairing the effects of vandalism (Mayer et al., 1996).

Lastly for this section, it is important to note that vandalism has been something public schools have grappled with since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Scribner, 2022). How schools choose to respond to vandalism, however, doesn't have to equate to removing

freedoms and expanding surveillance; it could also involve promoting autonomy and student and community growth (Scribner, 2022).



### SCHOOL TRACK AND FIELD FACILITIES AS THIRD PLACES

Another important idea and a newer area of study is the concept of third places, physical locations outside of home and work that serve as opportunities for social interaction and support. Sociologist and author Ray Oldenburg coined the phrase third spaces, an informal public gathering places, derived from considering our homes to be the “first” places and our workplaces the “second” (Oldenburg, 1993). A national U.S. survey was conducted in 2009 to identify various third places in communities, including community centers, coffee shops, parks, restaurants, and schools; this study highlighted the importance of creating inviting environments that foster community and communication outside of home and work (Jeffres et al., 2009). While some relationships were found between population diversity and the popularity of certain third places, the most significant finding was the confirmation of a relationship between the accessibility of third places in a community and the perceived quality of life (Jeffres et al., 2009). These third places enhance social connections, community building, and overall well-being, and their absence also raises concern about potential negative consequences on public health, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized populations (Finlay et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, there are declining trends in third places in the United States and disparities in the availability of such (Rhubart et al., 2022). There are negative implications associated with these closures on access to essential services, goods, and recreational facilities and individuals’ ability to socialize, connect, and receive support (Rhubart et al., 2022). In a post-pandemic reality, bringing focus to third places could

help upstream to improve neighborhoods and public health and, in turn, overcome barriers to health and build resiliency downstream (Finlay et al., 2019).

## PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS STANDALONE ENTITIES

To close out this section on research, it is also important to look at public schools as a separate standalone entity. There are approximately 100,000 public schools across the nation (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.-a). An estimated \$1.15 trillion is spent nationwide on education at all levels for schools, with a majority coming from State, local, and private sources (US Department of Education, 2021). Public education is primarily a State and local responsibility in the U.S., and it is States and communities, as well as public and private organizations of all kinds, that establish schools and colleges, develop curricula, and determine requirements for enrollment and graduation (US Department of Education, 2021). The institutional boundaries of public schools include distinct governance structures that separate them from the broader community. Operating under the jurisdiction of school districts, public schools have their own administrative staff, policies, and decision-making processes. So, while public schools are interconnected within neighborhoods, they maintain institutional autonomy and separation to distinguish themselves as distinct entities. This balance is crucial for fostering positive relationships, collaboration, and a relationship based on mutual support between public schools and their communities (Pont et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the primary mission of public schools is to provide formal education to students, serving the community's educational needs. This academic focus and emphasis on student achievement may create a perception of schools as separate entities with priorities and agendas. The Mission of the California State Board of Education is to "Create strong, effective schools that provide a wholesome learning environment through

incentives that cause a high standard of student accomplishment as measured by a valid, reliable accountability system” (California State Board of Education, 2023). California’s public schools and SJUSD’s schools must adhere to state and federal education regulations, which may occasionally conflict with community preferences or priorities. Mandates related to curriculum standards, standardized testing, and student discipline can sometimes lead to tensions between the school administration and community stakeholders. Balancing regulatory compliance with community needs is essential for public schools to fulfill their educational mission while effectively engaging with and serving their communities.

In the last few pages, I have shared some views on both sides of this issue, as well as some views of social scientists and scholars on public schools, vandalism, rules of enforcement, and the difference between inclusionary and exclusionary practices. This sets the stage for further inquiry. In the next section, I will discuss using a SWOT analysis to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with opening the track and field facilities to the public outside of school hours, which will further inform Kotter’s 8-Step Change Model.

## EVALUATING THE PROPOSED THEORY OF CHANGE

Figure 2: SWOT Analysis & Evaluation of the Proposed Theory of Change for Schools in the SJUSD



Note: Author's adaptation from Oakland University (n.d.).

A comprehensive SWOT analysis is essential in evaluating the proposed theory of change for schools in the SJUSD because it would serve as a way to test the idea of opening track and field facilities for non-permitted public use outside of school hours. This type of analysis assesses the internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats, that may impact the successful implementation of the theory of change (Orr, 2013). Understanding these factors is crucial in gaining insights into areas of improvement and potential risks that need to be addressed.

One *internal strength* of the SJUSD lies in its established governance structures and administrative staff, providing leadership and guidance for effective change initiatives. The district's commitment to high expectations and academic excellence, as outlined in the Draft Strategic Directions and Priority Outcomes ((San Juan Unified

School District, n.d.-b) sets a solid foundation for positive educational goals. Moreover, the existing infrastructure of schools, including modernized facilities, new tracks and sports fields, new educational spaces for Science, Tech, Engineering, and Math (STEM), and workforce development in the trades, as well as collaboration and community engagement, can support the proposed TOC by enhancing education quality, promoting equity, and facilitating community involvement.

However, *internal weaknesses* such as bureaucratic obstacles, resistance to change, limited resources for capacity building, and inadequate communication strategies could impede the successful implementation of the TOC (Zakaria, n.d.). Overcoming these weaknesses is essential to fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration within the district.

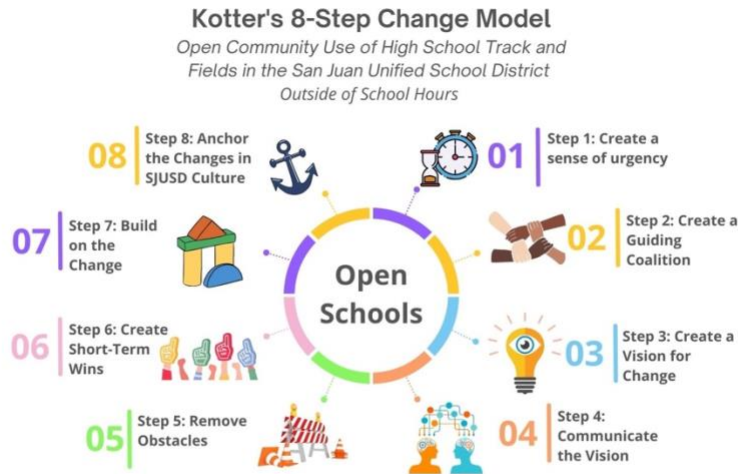
*External opportunities* for the SJUSD include community partnerships, bond measures, grant funding, and existing policy support in the form of the updated Facilities Guide, which can reinforce the TOC and align with the district's goals. Collaborating with local organizations, government agencies, and educational institutions like Sac State and the Los Rios Community Colleges can provide additional resources and expertise for sustainable transformation.

On the other hand, *external threats* such as regulatory changes, budget constraints, community resistance, and socio-economic factors could hinder the implementation of the TOC. Addressing these threats proactively and developing contingency plans are crucial to mitigating risks and ensuring the successful execution of proposed changes.

Ultimately, by leveraging internal strengths, addressing weaknesses, capitalizing on external opportunities, and mitigating threats, the SJUSD can enhance its capacity for change, drive innovation, and positively impact student learning outcomes and community engagement. Strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and continuous monitoring are vital in navigating challenges, seizing opportunities, and achieving sustainable growth and improvement in educational practices and outcomes.

## KOTTER'S 8-STEP CHANGE MODEL

Figure 3: Kotter's 8-step Change Model



Note: Author's creation based on Kotter (2022).

Utilizing Kotter's Change Model provides a comprehensive and structured framework for implementing organizational change within SJUSD. The 8-step process of Kotter's Change Model starts with creating a *Sense of Urgency* (Kotter, 2022), which is crucial in addressing the need for change in opening school track and field facilities for public use. This step emphasizes the importance of establishing a policy to allow the community access to tracks and fields outside of school use, enhancing safety, equity, and community relations by providing safe and accessible recreational spaces for the community members, students, and staff at SJUSD. By establishing a sense of urgency, the district can effectively communicate the necessity of this change and generate momentum for the initiative. An example of this would be relating the reopening of schools to students and the reopening of schools to the broader community.



The second step involves *building a guiding coalition comprising key stakeholders* at SJUSD, such as community members, school staff, and the school board (Kotter, 2022). This step is essential for driving the change process and garnering support from various perspectives. Next is *Developing a Clear Vision and Strategy*, i.e., creating a framework for open facility use that prioritizes safety, equity, and positive community engagement (Kotter, 2022). A well-defined vision will enable stakeholders to understand the goals and benefits of this initiative, fostering alignment and commitment to the change effort, and creating a sense of shared ownership (Kotter, 2022).

*Communicating the Vision* is the fourth step and is crucial for securing buy-in and addressing concerns surrounding safety, liability, and community relations (Kotter, 2022). SJUSD can build trust and engagement among stakeholders by ensuring transparent and consistent communication and promoting a shared understanding of the benefits of opening track and field facilities for public use. It must be emphasized here that this is a critical step in this process because under-communicating and not adequately communicating can both lead to a stalemate in the process (Pollack & Pollack, 2014). However, they are both different things. It is essential to repeat messaging and tell the story that matters in a way that moves people to action.

The fifth step – *Removing Obstacles*, is crucial in addressing potential challenges and barriers that may arise during the implementation process. By proactively identifying and mitigating obstacles, SJUSD can create a supportive environment for change and sustainable success. The SJUSD FC formed an ad-hoc committee that interviewed many staff members in the community about nonpermitted community use of tracks and fields

(FC Packet, March 2024). The interviews yielded many different perspectives and valid concerns about the potential of something like this for the school district. What was not transparently available was a repository for all of the potential issues that have or could happen. District-wide tracking of things like vandalism or incidence reports would give everyone involved an accurate picture of the real risks.

The sixth step, *Creating Short-term Wins*, allows the district to demonstrate the immediate benefits of open facility use, such as increased community access and positive outcomes for students and residents. These early wins can build momentum and generate enthusiasm for the change effort, encouraging continued support and participation (Pollack & Pollack, 2014). This is a long process, and these short-term wins empower the community to act, aligning with the district's goal of fostering community involvement and engagement in decision-making processes related to facility use. By involving community members in the change effort, SJUSD can leverage local knowledge and expertise to enhance the initiative's effectiveness and relevance (Kapanowski, 2022).

The last steps are *Building on the Change* and *Anchoring the Change in SJUSD Culture*. These are essential for ensuring the initiative's sustainability and long-term success. By embedding the values of safety, equity, and strong community relations in SJUSD's culture, the district can institutionalize changes by opening track and field facilities for public use (Pollack & Pollack, 2014). This cultural transformation could reinforce the district's commitment to providing safe, inclusive, and community-oriented educational environments, reflecting the core values and priorities of SJUSD within the broader community.

By following this TOC, based on Kotter's 8-step change model, the school district can effectively plan, implement, and sustain the initiative to open its track and field facilities to the public. This will lead to improved community health and stronger school-community relationships.

## CONCLUSION

After extensive analysis and development of a theory of change for SJUSD, several key findings and insights have emerged regarding the potential implementation of open, non-permitted community use of track and field facilities outside of school hours. Through a thorough examination of the current situation, stakeholder perspectives, theories of change principles, and change management models, a framework has been established to guide the SJUSD in fostering a culture of community engagement, equity, and safety.

The theory of change development process highlighted the importance of stakeholder involvement, evidence-based decision-making, and continuous learning and adjustment. By grounding the proposed changes in robust evidence and involving key stakeholders throughout the process, the SJUSD can ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of the proposed open facility use policy.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the theory of change development and analysis, the following recommendations are proposed for the SJUSD School Board to consider in implementing the proposed changes and fostering a culture of community engagement and equity through open facility use:

1. **Establish a Guiding Coalition:** Form a team of critical stakeholders, including students, district staff (to include maintenance and janitorial staff, teachers, and administrators), community representatives (to include students' families as well as community members at large), a Sacramento County Parks and Recreation representative, a Sacramento County Board of Supervisors representative, and school board members, to lead and support the implementation of the open facility use policy. This coalition should provide strong leadership, visibility, and communication to drive change effectively.
2. **Communicate the Vision:** Clearly articulate the vision and strategy for open community use of track and field facilities to all stakeholders. Regular and transparent communication about the policy change's benefits, goals, and expected outcomes is essential to garnering support and alignment across the district. The SJUSD Facilities Committee could fulfill this role by creating a detailed recommendation for the Board of Education.
3. **Develop a Comprehensive Implementation Plan:** Create a detailed plan outlining the steps, timeline, and responsibilities for implementing the open facility use

policy. This plan should address logistical considerations, resource allocation, risk mitigation strategies, and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.

4. **Address Concerns and Obstacles:** Proactively identify and address potential obstacles and concerns related to liability, safety, security, and community engagement. Develop contingency plans and mitigation measures to ensure a smooth and successful transition to community use of track and field facilities.
5. **Empower Community Engagement:** Encourage active participation and feedback from community members, students, and staff in the implementation process. Establish channels for ongoing input, dialogue, and collaboration to ensure that the policy aligns with the needs and values of the broader community.
6. **Monitor Progress and Adapt:** Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the implementation progress and outcomes of the open facility use policy. Regularly assess the policy's impact, effectiveness, and challenges to make informed adjustments and improvements as needed.

By following these recommendations and leveraging the theory of change framework, the SJUSD can transform its track and field facilities into inclusive, safe, and vibrant community spaces that promote equity, engagement, and well-being for all stakeholders. The successful implementation of the proposed changes can strengthen relationships between the district and its community, enhance student experiences, and contribute to the overall health and vitality of the Sacramento region.

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