

Santa Clarita, California

Population	151,088 (2000 U.S. Census)
Development pattern	Edge city
Population density	3,159 per square mile
Median household income	\$79,004
Partners involved	Santa Clarita Valley Boys & Girls Club William S. Hart Union High School District Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation City of Santa Clarita Parks and Recreation Department

Santa Clarita is the fourth-largest city in Los Angeles County, located about 35 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles. About ten years ago, as the student population was growing and facilities were becoming crowded, the Santa Clarita Valley Boys & Girls Club partnered with the William S. Hart Union High School District to construct and share a new 27,000-square-foot building with classrooms and a gymnasium.

Both the nonprofit and the school district are “entrusted with a lot of kids,” says Jim Ventress, executive director of the Santa Clarita Valley Boys & Girls Club. “We all agreed that these were *our* kids, it’s *our* community.”

The Boys & Girls Club had already been partnering, since 1982, with the city and county parks and recreation departments for access to park facilities. The nonprofit owned a satellite building near the junior high school, but the building was getting too small to accommodate the club’s after-school programs. “We had to grow,” Ventress says. “Our building was only 2,800 square feet. You’d get 30 to 40 kids in there and you’d be full.”

The Boys & Girls Club had always included the school superintendent on its local advisory board (as well as the highest-ranking law enforcement and parks and recreation department staff), so the partners had a strong working relationship from the start. In fact, the superintendent’s role on the board provided the critical impetus for the decision to build the facility on the middle school campus. “As a board member, he was also on the facilities committee, and we instructed the committee to go out and find a location,” says Ventress. They looked at various sites, some of which were smaller than what the club wanted and others that were way out of its budget.

Meanwhile, the school district – outgrowing its own facilities – had set up portable classrooms on the middle school campus, and the superintendent discovered that his middle school gym didn’t meet state criteria for a school gymnasium, Ventress recalls. “So we sat down and started talking with a couple other board members from the Boys & Girls Club, the school board, the principal, and eventually some state architects to see if we could put this building with classrooms and a gym on the school property.”

A combination of funding made the \$6 million project possible. The school district received money from the state (\$1.3 million in construction



bond money) and matched it with \$1.1 million of its own. The district also used more than \$1 million in state funds earmarked for public-private partnerships (via SB 1795), and secured almost \$1 million of additional funding from several local private foundations to support the project. The local chapter of the American Youth Soccer Organization (drawing funds from the national chapter) also provided funds to support the project, as did the PTA, which also wrote letters of support to the school district and the foundations the partners had approached for grants.

The new building opened six years ago. The school now uses the classrooms and gym at the new facility during school hours, and the Boys & Girls Club operates its own programs after school. The club and the middle school students have separate entrances to the facility – one part of the building is owned by the club, and the other part is jointly owned – but the school has access to the club portion of the facility when needed.

Besides constructing the new building, this joint use project included renovating and “unlocking” outdoor athletic facilities at the middle school, making them available for unstructured community use during non-school hours. Restrooms were also built for community use; they are attached to the new gymnasium but can be left open even if the rest of the building is locked.

In 2007, the school district’s Citizen’s Oversight Committee in Santa Clarita – a cross-section of the community, including school district staff as well as parents and other residents – issued a report calling the partnership with the Boys & Girls Club “a model for joint use,” citing examples of how the project has reduced the schools’ overall costs.

Ultimately, the partnership was just “common sense,” Ventress says. “Why put a Boys & Girls Club five miles away because that’s where the property is cheap? The kids are already there at school. If you give them a big clubhouse on campus, they’ll show up.”