Child's Play

What your school board should know about playground supervision and safety.


As a school board member or administrator, you devote a lot of time and resources to your classrooms – your indoor classroom. But have you thought much about the classrooms outside?

Studies show that playgrounds are a fundamental part of the elementary school curriculum: They enhance children’s physical, emotional, social, and intellectual skills. But to meet these developmental needs, “outdoor classrooms” must receive the same care and attention as indoor classrooms, and that is not always the case.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, 45 percent of all injuries on public playground equipment happen at school. Further, a comprehensive study by our organization, the Iowa-based National Program for Playground Safety (NSSP), found that school playgrounds on average rate a safety grade of just C+ in terms of having adequate supervision, good maintenance, age appropriate design of equipment, and proper surfacing under and around equipment. Clearly, more must be done to provide safe play environments at school.

Many school districts don’t have the money to transform their playgrounds overnight, but they can still improve safety and educational value. It is estimated that nearly 40 percent of all the playground-related injuries can be attributed to inadequate supervision. But studies show that when children and playground supervisors receive training in safe playground practices, the number of playground-related injuries drops dramatically.

School boards can help make playgrounds safer by plans. These plans should include playground rules, emergency procedures, ratios of supervisors to children, and procedures for filing injury and maintenance reports. In addition, boards should require schools to create a curriculum for training playground supervisors.

These procedures are crucial to providing safe play environments and reducing injuries, but there is little research on what is taking place in public elementary schools. We do not know, for example, if most schools separate equipment for different grades, or just assume that first- and fifth-graders have the same developmental needs.

And what about training? Is it assumed that anyone can watch children without knowing what to look for or how to move about the playground? Do most districts know how many supervisors should be on the playground at once?

To answer these and other questions, NPPS conducted a study last year to assess the supervision practices in public elementary schools. Surveys were sent randomly to principals at 105 of the more than 800 public elementary schools in Iowa. About 50 percent responded. The surveys asked about playground demographics, supervisors and their training, playground maintenance, and the supervision plan.

Creating a safe environment

A playground’s layout can affect the supervisor’s responsibility. For example, if the playground has a road running next to it, adults will need to supervise in a way that prevents children from running into the street. Other common layout issues include closed crawl tubes and the “blind spots” they create. These and other playground elements need to be discussed before adults go out to supervise.

The playground also needs to be suitable for the school’s enrollment. For example, if your school serves a range of children from preschool through upper elementary school, your playground must accommodate these different ages and ability levels.

Schools may even want to think about designating specific play areas for different grades. In its 1997 Handbook for Public Playground Safety, the Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends that playground equipment be separated for children ages 2 to 5 and ages 5 to 12. But our study found that 70 percent of the schools had only one playground, suggesting that all children use the same type of equipment, regardless of age and developmental ability.

Of the schools that had more than one playground,
67 percent separated the playground sites by grades. Yet there was no common pattern for separating playgrounds, suggesting that there had been little or no systematic planning based on known national guidelines for developing play sites. Rather, playground equipment had been chosen from catalogs based on other factors, such as cost and comparisons with equipment at other schools.

With so many children playing on the same playground, supervisors need to direct children to the correct playground equipment. An overhead ladder may be appropriate for fourth-graders but too challenging for younger children. Since children have different developmental abilities, a playground with a one-size-fits-all philosophy is hard for supervisors to manage.

Instead of such all-purpose playgrounds, schools should develop age-appropriate environments that meet the specific developmental needs of each age group. Even though the guidelines say playgrounds should be divided into areas for ages 2 to 5 and ages 5 to 12, we recommend three separate play areas covering grades K-2, 3-4, and 5-6. This will help with supervision and, as a result, reduce the potential for injury.

**Supervising and training**

Not only does the playground itself need to be safe, the adults need to become active supervisors. The mere presence of an adult does not guarantee quality supervision. Administrators cannot assume that teachers, teacher aides, and volunteers know how to be playground supervisors: They need to be trained.

In our survey, only 19 percent of elementary schools required supervisors to have playground safety training. The majority seem to think that teachers trained to manage indoor classrooms will know how to supervise children on the playground. Unfortunately, court cases have shown that this assumption can lead to serious liability for schools. In 1998, for example, a $100,000 lawsuit was filed in the Midwest after a child was injured on the playground at school. The district lost the lawsuit, with lack of proper supervision cited as a major factor, largely because the school’s principal said teachers are not trained to watch over students on the playground.

We recommend that adults learn about supervisor responsibilities, various supervision practices, hazard identification, and the importance of playground rules. Supervision training should also include specific emergency procedures for various playground injuries, including how to fill out detailed injury reports. (For more information about training playground supervisors, call the National Program for Playground Safety, 800-554-PLAY.)

All supervisors should also carry an emergency kit - 71 percent in our study did. These kits contain everything from standard first aid supplies to hall passes, a whistle, and sunscreen for the supervisor. Supervisors should be familiar with what’s in the kit and know how to use the materials.

Continued on page 3
Staffing the playground

Another safety step is determining the ratio of adult supervisors to children. While there are no federal or state mandates in this area, schools should be consistent. NPPS suggests that the playground supervision ratio be identical to the ratio in the indoor classroom. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) also has guidelines for the recommended ratio of supervisors to children, which are used by some child care centers (see table).

Interestingly, every state has guidelines that address playground supervision ratios for preschool children but not children of kindergarten age or older. And while many school districts have kept their indoor classroom ratios low, they have not addressed the outdoor ratio.

The largest ratio we found was one supervisor to 125 elementary school children. The most common was one to 50. Both ratios are extremely high compared with our recommendations and those of NAEYC. Lowering them would help control inappropriate behavior and reduce injuries.

In addition to considering supervisor-to-student ratios, schools should have at least two supervisors on the playground at all times. That way, one supervisor can attend to an injured child while the second adult manages the other children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER OF CHILDREN</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>24</th>
<th>30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 year olds</td>
<td>1:8</td>
<td>1:9</td>
<td>1:10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergartners</td>
<td>1:10</td>
<td>1:11</td>
<td>1:12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8 year olds</td>
<td>1:10</td>
<td>1:11</td>
<td>1:12</td>
<td>1:15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12 year olds</td>
<td>1:12</td>
<td>1:15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NAEYC

Reducing injuries, cutting costs

When children are hurt on the playground, the ramifications extend beyond the injury of the child, traumatic as that can be. Playground accidents take time, energy, and follow-up work on the part of playground supervisors, nurses, and school secretaries. The federal Office of Technology estimates that more than $1.2 billion is, spent each year on playground injuries, not including possible legal expenses. If a lawsuit ensues, it could cost schools more.

A school with 350 students averages 540 minor playground injuries each school year. Dealing with those injuries requires about 135 hours of staff time. If the number of injuries can be reduced, the savings are substantial.

Using a combined safety training program for school children and a program for supervisors, injury rates for a school of this size can be reduced to as low as 44 per year, requiring about 11 hours of staff time, according to a study by Larry Bruya of Washington State University. At an estimate of $25 per hour, the reduced injury rate represents a savings of $3,100 over a single school year. If more severe injuries are prevented, the savings increase exponentially.

Making it safe

School boards can be instrumental in preventing playground injuries, but first they must take a leadership role in creating safe playgrounds. Two key steps, which we mentioned earlier, are requiring schools to have playground supervision plans and curricula for training playground supervisors.

School boards should also make sure that their schools have consistent supervisor/student ratios-ratios we believe should be similar to those in indoor classrooms-and clear playground emergency procedures. By enacting appropriate policies in all these areas, school boards can provide the leadership needed to create safe outdoor classrooms for all children.

(Editor’s note: This article was originally written for elementary school board members and administrators. But, the information it contains is excellent and can be very useful to many CDC Directors. Please use this information in your centers.)
Playground Equipment

Playground Safety
Suggested Singage Wording

For your safety, please obey the following or you may cause injury to yourself or others around you.

• No pets allowed.
• No bicycles, roller skates, or skateboard use within the fenced play area.
• Inspect play area before starting to play and remove litter.
• Children 7 and under must be accompanied by an adult.
• This playground is designed for ages _______ to _______.
• If the playground is locked, this means it is closed to visitors, even if accompanied by an adult.
• Entering the locked playground is trespassing, punishable by law.

Caution
• Bare feet, dress shoes, cowboy boots, or sandal-type shoes may cause injury. Fully enclosed, rubber soled shoes are recommended.
• Throwing sand or any other objects within play area may cause injury.
• Playing on equipment when wet may cause injury.
• Playing on equipment when a metal apparatus has been exposed to the sun’s heat may cause injury.

Swings
• Hold on with both hands.
• Children must sit on their bottoms while on the swings.
• One person per swing.
• Standing on swings may cause injury.
• Stop swinging before getting off.
• Never swing or twist empty seats.
• Stand clear of moving swings to avoid contact and possible injury.

Slides
• In order to see where they are going and what is in their pathway, the children must go up the steps and then slide down.
• Slide feet first only.
• Quickly move away from slide exit to avoid injury from other descending individuals.
• No running or walking up slides.

Climbers
• Adult supervision is necessary.
• For safety reasons, children should not be allowed to stand or sit on the very top of any apparatus.
• No pushing, running, or shoving.
• Play safely, be patient, and act kindly towards others.

Riding Equipment
• Stay in designated areas only.
• Use the equipment in the way and for the purpose for which it is designed.
• Return the equipment to its proper place and park it neatly for storage.

If you notice broken equipment or anything that requires immediate attention, call_________________.
Thank you and we appreciate your cooperation.

WHY YOUNG CHILDREN GET IN TROUBLE ON PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT

• A tendency to focus on only one aspect of a situation. For example, intent on climbing to the top of a playground structure, a child is unlikely to see the danger he might be creating for other children (e.g., pushing another child out of the way).
• Difficulty judging spatial relationships. Young children may incorrectly estimate the height of a piece of equipment and injure themselves jumping. Or they may think they are driving their tricycle to the side of another child, when in reality they are headed straight for that child.
• Lack of attention to what is going on around them. Young children may not notice a nearby moving swing or another child sliding down towards them. Careful adult supervision and constant reminders of major hazards and rules for safe play is essential in order to prevent accidents and injuries.

© The Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood, p. 338-339
Regular inspection and maintenance can help prevent injuries. CDC staff should check for the following on a daily basis:

- Is the area free of litter, broken glass and debris?
- Is there any evidence of animal attendance such as holes or feces?
- Is there any damage to equipment or other play ground features caused by wear or vandalism?
- Are there any broken or missing components to equipment?
- Is there any deterioration of equipment, including rust, cracks or splinters?
- Does all equipment have adequate protective surfacing?
- Are there any hazards such as sharp edges, protrusions, pinch points, and clothing entanglement hazards, such as an open “S” hooks?
- Are children likely to trip on exposed footings on anchoring devices or on large rocks, roots, and other environmental obstacles?
- Is there any entrapment danger in the play yard?
- Is all hardware secure? Are connecting, covering, or fastening devices in good shape? Are moving parts, such as swing hanger mechanisms, worn out?

Daily inspection and maintenance of the playground is essential to safe play.

- Is the First Aide box properly supplied? Does each teacher have access to her own First Aide kit or “fanny pack”?
- Is there water available to children and adults out on the playground in warm weather? A cooler or washed out milk jugs with water in them works well for keeping water on the playground.
- Are all the children properly attired for the season? Is extra clothing available?
- Are there “Ouch” and “Accident” reports available in the First Aide kits for staff to utilize as needed versus coming indoors to write one out?

AT THE END OF THE DAY....

- Have all the toys, riding equipment, and water containers been put away for the day?
- Have the playground(s) been properly locked and secured?
- Has the playground key been turned into the office in the evening?
- Have any necessary repairs been written down and placed in the Director’s mailbox for the administration to take care of in the morning?

The Pacific Union Conference Office of Education is making an effort to help child development centers and preschools find quality teachers and directors with an Early Childhood Education background. If you are relocating to the West Coast, or would be interested in working in our territory, our office would like to hear from you. We have established a brand new centers in need of quality people. The Pacific Union Conference includes Arizona, Nevada, Utah, California and Hawaii.

Please visit our web-site at: http://www.puconline.org/services/services/education.html

Contact Information:
Christine Gillan, M.A.
Coordinator for Child Development Centers
Pacific Union Conference
2686 Townsgate Road
Westlake Village, CA 91361
(805) 497-9457 ext 300
chgillan@juno.com

ACCN Mailing List

We would like to hear from you! Our mailing list is several years old and we are attempting to update it and create a new directory. Please e-mail us at chgillan@juno.com or call our office at (805) 497-9457 ext 300 and let us know whether or not you would like to continue getting these quarterly newsletters.

Playground Safety Helpful Links

Handbook for Public Playground Safety
1-800-638-2772

Standard Consumer Safety Performance Specification for Playground Equipment for Public Use
ASTM - American Society of Testing and Materials www.astm.org
1-215-299-5585

CPSC Playground Audit Guide
1-717-966-0444

Playground Test Kit
http://www.nrpa.org
1-800-875-6772

National Program for Playground Safety
University of Northern Iowa School for Health, Physical Education and Leisure Services Cedar Fall, IA 50614 Phone: 800-554-PLAY
Fax: 319-273-7308 www.uni.edu/playground

US Access Board www.access-board.gov

IPEMA – International Playground Equipment Manufacturers Association 8300 Colesville Road, Suite 250 Silverspring, MD 20910 Phone: 800-395-5550 Fax: 301-495-3330 www.ipema.org

National Playground Contractors Association www.playground-contractors.org
Greetings to all Adventist Child Care Providers from Lincoln, Nebraska!

We would like to share with you the scope of what our business entails and what we can provide for you on a national basis as members of the SDA organization.

The primary focus of our organization is to furnish materials to public and parochial schools, child care centers and preschools, with a wide range of indoor classroom furniture/equipment, and outdoor playground equipment. This includes, but is not limited to, chairs, desks, tables, rest mats, cots, storage cabinets, computer furniture, marker boards, easels, lunch room folding tables, library furniture, lockers, bleachers, auditorium seating, playground equipment, and bike racks.

University Pub can coordinate the sale and service of these types of materials on a national basis for the Seventh-day Adventist organization. We have contacted a number of national playground equipment fabricators and indoor furniture factories willing to provide us with the best combination of quality, competitive pricing, transportation costs, and customer service support that is a necessity.

In order to command significant discounts, it is imperative that we be able to coordinate several orders from the different entities within the SDA organization. Specifically, communication and coordination between School Principals and Center Directors, with the help of Conference Superintendents and Associates when placing orders and purchasing will help orders for individual conferences to be grouped together in order to maximize the volume and minimize the shipping cost per school/center. In other words, the more people ordering at one time in a given region/conference, the lower the price and shipping costs.

All orders will still be dealt with on an individual basis, including shipping to each specific destination, and customer service. I, Dan Gill, will personally be involved with each and every customer order and will be available to discuss any question, concerns, or matters that need to be resolved on an individual basis.

The basis to our philosophy in this business is to provide dependable service and products to our customer base, this being educational institutions, Preschool, K through 12, and the University/Collegiate level. We feel it is not only important but necessary to offer the educational market the best quality products available and the personal attention and service our customers have been accustomed to receiving from our organization. This is my personal mission as well, as I feel the education of our children is of utmost importance in the overall development of their mental, spiritual, and physical well being.

If you will be ordering any furniture or large equipment in the near future, University Pub, Inc. would be a very good place to begin looking. The prices are competitive, the products are of good quality, and the customer service is ideal. The information needed for catalogues and purchasing follows:

University Pub, Inc.
Dan Gill, Sales & Consulting
P.O. Box 22890
1700 West “O” Street – Suite B
Lincoln, NE 68542-2890

Phone: (402) 474-7300
Cell: (402) 525-4464
Fax: (402) 474-7329
E-mail: unipub@alltel.net

Thank you and may God bless your ministry to children and families,

Dan Gill

**ACCN Editor’s note:**

Dan Gill and his wife, Leslie, are current clientele of Kiddie Kollege Child Development Center on the campus of Union College, a liberal arts Seventh-day Adventist College in Lincoln, Nebraska. His personal commitment to meeting the needs of Kiddie Kollege has been a blessing to the center, staff, and families served. We have every confidence that he will do the same for your center or school.
Benefits of Joining ACCN:

- Quarterly Newsletter
  - Latest educational practice
  - Latest administrative helps
  - Updates on laws & regulations
  - Job line
  - Profile on centers
  - Reviews of new books
  - Reviews of new curriculums
  - Ideas for in-services
  - Network discussion of solutions to center problems
- Meetings held in conjunction with the NAEYC annual conference
- Directory of Child Care Centers throughout U.S.

**ADVENTIST CHILD CARE NETWORK MEMBERSHIP FORM**

Membership Year: November 1 - October 31, 20 _____

Please print the following information:

Name_______________________________________________________

Street_______________________________________________________

City________________________  State__________ Zip______________

Country_____________________________________________________

Choose either individual or center membership:

- Center Membership ($25.00)  
- Individual Membership ($10.00)

**Mail to:** ACCN  
c/o Coordinator for Child  
Development Centers  
Pacific Union Conference  
P.O. Box 5005  
Westlake Village, CA 91359

I want to be a member of the Adventist Child Care Network.  
I have enclosed a check or money order in the amount of $___________

Make checks payable to: ACCN