

Business/Non-Instructional Operations

School Facilities – Playground Equipment

The Board of Education recognizes that playground equipment is an essential part of a complete school facility. Playgrounds allow children further exploration, in the context of play, to stretch their physical and intellectual abilities, social and emotional skills and to learn some basic principles that can be applied to life in the world. Playgrounds are defined as designated areas where stationary and manipulative play equipment is located to facilitate a child's physical, emotional, social and intellectual development.

All playground equipment, whether purchased by the District or donated by a community or school-related group, must be assessed in terms of suitability for the age level to use the equipment in the school setting and for durability and possible health or safety hazards. Consideration shall also be given to potential hazards when the playground is unsupervised during non-school hours.

The Superintendent or his/her designee shall develop specifications for playground equipment and related play surfaces that meet the recommendations of the National Program for Playground Safety, the standards of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and the Americans with Disabilities Act. These specifications shall serve as criteria for the selection of playground equipment. Selection and installation of playground equipment shall be based upon safety and contribution to child development.

Legal Reference: Handbook for Public Playground Safety, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Publication No. 325

Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities, Sections 4.19 through 4.8.7, and Sections 7.4.3 and 7.4.4

Policy adopted: October 19, 2015

THOMASTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Thomaston, Connecticut

Business/Non-Instructional Operations

School Facilities – Playground Equipment

In order to foster safety in the design and use of playground equipment on District property, it is important for the District to provide proper supervision, design age-appropriate playgrounds, provide proper surfacing under and around playground equipment and to keep playground equipment properly maintained. To accomplish these goals, the following guidelines are established:

Actions to Provide Proper Supervision on Playgrounds:

1. Conduct an appraisal of supervisory needs.
2. Create a supervisory blueprint for each playground.
3. Educate children and adults about the safe use of playground equipment.
4. Inform the general public about proper supervisory practices.
5. Monitor current supervisory practices to determine areas where improvement can occur.
6. Share data concerning effective supervisory practices with the National Program for Playground Safety.

Actions to Design Age-Appropriate Playgrounds:

1. Assess current playgrounds for age-appropriate design.
2. Review the United States CPSC's "Handbook for Public Playground Safety" for guidance in determining the correct size of equipment and appropriate physical layouts for playgrounds.
3. Consult various publications for information concerning the developmental needs of children.
4. Consider criteria for purchasing and selecting equipment.
5. Compare selection criteria with manufacturer's description of equipment.
6. Conduct regular evaluations of playgrounds to determine needed improvements.
7. Develop a written plan for the a) retention, b) modification and c) acquisition of playground equipment.

Actions to Provide Proper Surfacing Under and Around Equipment:

1. Conduct an on-site investigation of current surfaces found under and around playground equipment.
2. Examine all surfacing for depth, contamination, coverage and compaction.
3. Advocate for safe surfaces under and around playground equipment.
4. Consider necessary criteria for selection of new surfaces.
5. Help provide data concerning proper surfacing to the National Program for Playground Safety.

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School Facilities – Playground Equipment (continued)

Actions to Keep Playground Equipment Properly Maintained:

1. Develop written maintenance and inspection policies for the ongoing maintenance, repair and replacement of playground equipment and surfacing.
2. Develop joint maintenance agreements between agencies who share playground facilities.
3. Review maintenance practices and procedures.
4. On an ongoing basis, provide maintenance personnel with training on playground assessment, inspections, and maintenance procedures.
5. Maintain documentation for all playground equipment and surfaces.

Playground Equipment

Equipment shall be properly located, installed and supervised:

1. Selection and installation of playground equipment based upon safety and contribution to child development.
2. All equipment designed for climbing or hanging activities provided with a resilient surface underneath, such as a rubberized safety cushion or several inches of pea gravel.
3. Instruction about the proper use of equipment and safety measures relevant to each piece of equipment provided at the beginning of each school year.
4. Playground equipment and surfacing inspected monthly for wear or damage.
5. Supervision provided on playgrounds and around equipment.
6. Fencing provided where playgrounds are adjacent to streets or highways.
7. Barriers installed and maintained to prevent people from damaging turf and playground equipment
8. Signage posted reminding adults of the need to provide appropriate supervision when the equipment is being used before and after school hours.

Public Playground Safety Checklist

1. Make sure surfaces around playground equipment have at least 12 inches of wood chips, mulch, sand, or pea gravel, or are mats made of safety-tested rubber or rubber-like materials.
2. Check that protective surfacing extends at least 6 feet in all directions from play equipment. For swings, be sure surfacing extends, in back and front, twice the height of the suspending bar.
3. Make sure play structures more than 30 inches high are spaced at least 9 feet apart.
4. Check for dangerous hardware, like open “S” hooks or protruding bolt ends.
5. Make sure spaces that could trap children, such as openings in guardrails or between ladder rungs, measure less than 3.5 inches or more than 9 inches.
6. Check for sharp points or edges in equipment.
7. Look out for tripping hazards, like exposed concrete footings, tree stumps, and rocks.
8. Make sure elevated surfaces, like platforms and ramps, have guardrails to prevent falls.
9. Check playgrounds regularly to see that equipment and surfacing are in good condition.
10. Carefully supervise children on playgrounds to make sure they’re safe.

Source: Consumer Product Safety Commission, CPSC Document #327

School Playground Planning

In order to reduce risks of injury on school playgrounds, it is necessary to consult with teachers, parents, playground consultants and students in order to determine wants, needs and ideas. Careful planning and consultation can significantly reduce injuries, vandalism, maintenance and other costs by building a sense of school community ownership of the playground.

The following questions should be asked before the planning process begins in order to identify the criteria that the school playground needs to meet:

- What age group will use this play area?
- Is the play area easily accessible to students?
- Does it allow easy supervision for teachers/staff?
- Is there enough room to accommodate all the children using the play area?
- Are there areas for quiet play as well as for active play?
- How much shade do existing trees provide and can natural features of the play space be incorporated to provide opportunities for creative play?
- Will the play area be used before and after regular school hours?
- Does existing playground equipment meet current safety standards?
- What are the requirements for the planned new playground equipment?
- Does the playground offer play and creative opportunities as well as being safe?
- Can the playground be modified to make it useable for disabled children?
- Does the playground challenge physical skills – balance, flexibility, strength and coordination?