

New York State School Safety Group 491

Safe Schools Agenda

____ School Business Off.
____ Athletic Director
____ Supt. Bldgs/Grounds
____ Site Administrators
____ Transportation Dir.
____ Lunch Director
____ Classroom Teachers

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A monthly service provided to help you with your efforts to make your school safe for students, staff and the public

The New Form of Bullying

There has always been bullying and threats in schools, but it is only recently that we have realized that they can create a climate of serious violence. The “new bullying”, as reported in the New York Times, takes the form of “Hit Lists”.

“Hit Lists” are showing up in schools across the country on hallway and bathroom walls, falling out of lockers, and on MySpace. “Hit Lists” express anger toward fellow students in the form of “kill/hurt” or “protect” fellow students. Some students defend “Hit Lists” as being a harmless outlet for anger, and even a sign of popularity, but there have been cases where the writers of “Hit Lists” have made plans to bring weapons to school to implement the Hit plan.

The U.S. Education Dept advises schools to have zero tolerance for “Hit Lists”, pointing out that the writing of “hit lists” is a violation of the law and would certainly add to a climate conducive to violence.

Lessons on Bus Safety

The most recent National School Bus Loading Survey shows that student fatalities decreased by 35 percent from the previous year. Significantly, all 7 deaths involving school buses in 2005-2006 occurred at the rear-wheels of the buses. No deaths were reported as occurring at the front of the buses. Six students were killed by other motor vehicles. The most obvious lesson from the data is that drivers have to be especially aware of the dopey things that youngsters do. For Instance,

- Two students were killed by their own bus while picking up dropped objects
- Four students were killed while loading.
- One student died at the afternoon bus stop

- Five deaths occurred while walking or running to the morning bus stop
- Eight students were unloading when struck.

Afternoon trips are especially dangerous. The data over the years shows that more accidents happen during those times. Youngsters are just not focused on their safety after a long day in classrooms.

What to do About Weight of Football Players?

A study of NFL players in 2005 revealed that 56 percent of NFL players were considered to be medically obese. Since then, two 300 lb. plus players have died in training camps. Concern is now rising about the potential for weight abuse at the high school level. The Jan. 24 issue of JAMA, the Journal of the American Medical Association, includes a report on a study that looked at the body mass index (BMI) of 3,683 linemen who played for Iowa high school teams in 2005.

Forty-five percent of the players were found to be overweight, with BMI's at or above the 95th percentile, including nine percent who met adult standards of severe obesity. Twenty-eight percent were classified as at risk of being overweight, between the 85th and 95th percentile.

Add it up and you find that nearly three fourths of the players were overweight or at risk of being overweight. And how many of them were using steroids to help build body mass?

The rise in obesity of children in our culture is well documented. High school football players are likely to emulate NFL players, especially if they have dreams of college football scholarships. Coaches and administrators need to avoid putting pressures on athletes to gain weight.

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On Playground Safety

We have been reminded that each year over 200,000 children visit hospital emergency rooms with injuries sustained on playgrounds. Even worse, about fifteen die each year because of playground injuries. The figures have not changed much over the years, despite significant efforts nationally and in many schools to make playgrounds safer.

Is this a good reason to do away with recess, as recommended by a retired teacher in the March/April issue of the American Teacher? We don't think so. Play is an important aspect of learning for young children, and they need the break from classroom seats. If children are being injured on our school playgrounds, then it is our responsibility as adults, and as professional educators, to do everything in our power to make playgrounds as safe as possible.

The issue of liability is sometimes used as an excuse for reducing or eliminating play opportunities for children, but the reality is that the law does not require schools to protect children from all harm. It does require us to take reasonable precautions to prevent foreseeable accidents.

National Playground Safety Week is April 21-25. It presents an opportunity to focus on the importance of safe play for children by evaluating our playground safety program. Think of it as having four areas: Supervision, Age-Appropriate, Falls and Equipment.

Supervision

Supervisors should be present and actively observing children - not sitting on a bench talking to other adults. They should conduct a safety check of the area and equipment before allowing children to begin play. They should make sure that none of the children have loose strings on their clothing that could catch on equipment. They should be prepared

for emergencies. They should be trained - it is really negligent to send untrained supervisors to the playground.

Age-Appropriate

Playgrounds should include separate equipment and play areas for children ages 6 months - 23 months, ages 2-5, and ages 5-12. They have developmental differences, and those differences pose significant opportunities for injury when on inappropriate equipment.

Falls

Seventy percent of all playground injuries are related to falls, so the first line of defense is to make sure that surfaces beneath and around equipment are energy absorbing and at depths appropriate to the height of the equipment. Asphalt, cement, dirt, and grass are not acceptable. Loose fill materials such as hardwood wooden fiber, shredded rubber, sand, pea gravel, rubber tiles and mats and synthetic poured surfaces are acceptable. The choice of surface should be made carefully based on the characteristics of the individual playground, and whether it meets ASTM (American Society for Testing & Materials) and CPSC (Consumer Product Safety Commission) guidelines.

Equipment

Equipment, in addition to being age-appropriate, should be in good repair and well maintained. Hazards should be corrected immediately. There should be a routine inspection and maintenance plan for each playground based on its equipment and usage pattern.

Terrific materials are available at www.playgroundsafety.org, the website of the National Program for Playground Safety. Also see www.nsc.org, the National Safety Council, and www.cpsc.gov, the Consumer Products Safety Commission.

