

Schools are Still the Safest Place for Kids

America's public schools are still the safest place for our children. Recent research indicates that nationwide, fewer children suffer serious injuries while at school or while participating in school-related activities

than anywhere else in their lives. What's more, the possibility of someone introducing our children to drugs or alcohol, or that they will become involved in some type of violent action, is greater in a neighborhood setting than at school.

Why are schools safer for children? Because not only do public schools employ the greatest ratio of adults supervising young people, but they are also the most heavily regulated organizations in the country. There are rules and policies overseeing everything from what our children eat to the buses on which they ride.

There is frequently more than just one government agency involved in the safety planning of our schools; for example, the safety of

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playground equipment is governed by both OSHA and the school district's liability insurer. Only certain types of safety-approved equipment certified for use on playgrounds are allowed, and even then, installation procedures are strict. To minimize injury, the ground beneath equipment must be filled with wood chips, sand, or silica product. Failure to comply may result in substantial fines and penalties.

School construction and maintenance is also heavily regulated by federal, state, and local safety requirements. Schools must be equipped with both passive and active fire alarms, detectors, sprinklers, hoses, and extinguishers. Few family homes meet these same standards. Even fewer families have escape plans or practice emergency exit procedures, while our schools are required to conduct drills on a regular basis. All new school construction must be designed to meet the needs of individuals with physical disabilities, while older schools must be modified to provide access for those with handicaps.

According to one estimate, more than 24 million of our nation's children depend upon school buses to take them to and from school safely. School buses annually travel more than 4.3 billion miles, and yet,

according to the U.S. Department of Transportation, children riding in a school bus are four times safer than if they were traveling in the family car. From the way they are constructed to the training of the drivers, school buses must meet exacting standards before they are deemed safe for our children – standards that exceed those set for private vehicles.

The issue of safety extends beyond buildings and buses. It permeates every facet of the school experience. From the playground to the classroom, children are constantly supervised by an adult. As a result, fewer children are hurt at school than in the home.

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School nurses also play an important role in the well-being of children. Their duties are not limited to applying Band-Aids and checking temperatures. Nurses conduct a number of health screenings to ensure the general health of children including hearing, vision, and scoliosis testing.

The National School Lunch program is perhaps one of the most



closely regulated of all school operations. Not only must cafeteria personnel adhere to strict state and local cleanliness standards, but the type and quantity of the food served is rigidly governed by the Department of Agriculture.

Participating schools are required to serve balanced meals which meet federal standards for nutrition requirements. Each meal must include bread, a protein food, vegetables, fruit, and milk in age-appropriate proportions. Nutritionists are required to submit school meal plans for review by the federal agency.

Our children, by their own affirmation, feel safer at school than they do in many of their own neighborhoods. One of the first principles in providing a quality educational program is to ensure that our children have a safe, nurturing environment in which to learn and grow, and our public schools are doing just that.

"To the teacher American entrusts her most precious resource, her children."

-Shirley Hufstedler