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MISD to examine playground safety

- Consultant may be brought in to help

Responding to some concerns raised about playground safety at some McKinney ISD schools, district officials are considering hiring a playground safety consultant to evaluate schools' for any possible hazards.

Wyndol Fry, executive director of construction and facilities services, said older schools' playgrounds are more pressing than newer schools'. More recently, schools have been coupled with a public park playground where children can play.

Fry said that a consultant would probably spend more time evaluating Burks, Caldwell, Webb and Finch elementaries because of their age.

Brian Stevens, director of maintenance for MISD, said maintenance personnel regularly inspect the playgrounds for upkeep issues. But, he said, the inspections don't look for hazards that have been built into the playgrounds.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends that, playgrounds have specific measures of fall surfacing, like wood chips, gravel or rubber mats; no exposed sharp objects or tripping hazards; proper guardrails to prevent falls; and adequate spacing of surfaces to prevent entrapment.

Hazards like these are sometimes built into both new and old playgrounds, said Sam DeFillippo, who is a managing partner with the New Mexico-based [PlaySafe](#). MISD is considering hiring [PlaySafe](#), a playground safety consulting firm, to inspect its playgrounds.

DeFillippo said his company, with its six certified playground inspectors, has inspected more than 400 playgrounds for clients throughout the Southwest, ranging from school districts to the National Park Service.

"Many school districts are beginning the process to recognize problems with safety on playgrounds," DeFillippo said. "It's sort of in its infancy right now."

He said the inspectors will come in, inspect the playgrounds, evaluate them according to national and state regulations and make recommendations to the district of what, if anything, should be done.

"The goal is to reduce injuries to children -- that's the bottom line," DeFillippo said.

There have not been any serious injuries to children on the MISD playgrounds for at least

five years, according to several administrators' memory.

But an ounce of prevention is worth it, Stevens said, adding that the consultant could possibly provide him with invaluable information.

"I want him to tell me exactly what his recommendations are. I want to make sure it's thorough," Stevens said. "We're hoping he sees something we don't."

Stevens said he knows something about parents' concerns on this issue.

"I have two children of my own, and by all means, I don't want them hurt."

Stevens is currently determining costs relating to hiring a consultant, which will be placed in a proposal to be reviewed by administrators and eventually by the school board.