



Staff Participation in Sports

Whether it is a physical education class, recess activity, end-of-year party, or team sport, the primary roles of staff are to teach, coach, and supervise, not engage in the activity as a participant. Limiting or prohibiting staff from acting as a participant provides safety for both staff and students.

Impact on Workers' Compensation

It is not uncommon for school district employees, particularly certificated personnel and aides, to become injured as a result from their participation in physical/athletic activities. Staff have sustained injuries because of their participation in the following:

- Jogging
- Snow skiing
- Roller skating
- Playing Frisbee
- Basketball
- Demonstrating athletic/sport event



Injuries mostly involve sprains and strains, but also include more serious injuries such as ligament tears and broken bones. Some of these injuries have been quite serious and have resulted in some level of permanent disability.

Impact on District Liability

Several litigated cases in SISC member districts provide a clear message regarding the responsibility of teachers, coaches, and school district personnel regarding sports/physical education liability.

One case involves a wrestling incident in which the instructor injured a high school student while attempting to show him a wrestling move.

Other cases involve injuries resulting from a tag game, a touch football game, and a basketball game.

All of these incidents involve the supervising adult as a participant.

Supervision may be general or specific, and often includes directing, teaching and demonstrating proper techniques. In considering allegations of negligent supervision, the courts have been consistent in determining whether the teacher or coach acted as a reasonably prudent person would have acted in similar circumstances. **The courts have not supported supervisors who have engaged in active participation that rose to the level of one-on-one competition.** In such situations, the teacher or coach may have abandoned his role of supervisor and become an equal competitor with the participating student.

Although quality instruction can involve “hands-on” techniques, the teacher or coach must be mindful of the distinction between instruction of technique versus participation. It is inappropriate for a teacher, coach, or other adult supervisor to engage a student in a physical activity as an equal participant or peer*.

A student should never be injured because of competition/participation with an adult coach or teacher.

Adults are charged with the duty to properly supervise students. They should not put themselves or students in jeopardy because they are acting as a participant where they may overpower and injure a student, or where their attention may be diverted and therefore are not providing proper supervision for the activity.



*Some exceptions apply to alumni exhibition games. Contact SISC Risk Management Services for details.