

Student Injured During Field Day Activities

Background

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), regular physical activity can help children and adolescents improve cardiorespiratory fitness, build strong bones and muscles, control weight, reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, and reduce the risk of developing serious health conditions. In fact, students who are physically active tend to have better grades, school attendance, cognitive performance (e.g. memory), and classroom behaviors.¹ Because physical education is so important to a student's development, school districts will typically have a greater appetite for risk when it comes to these types of activities. This increased appetite motivates school districts to engage in the risk management process on a regular basis. First identifying and examining the risks and implementing sound strategies to ensure the safety of the participants.

Scenario

The incident occurred during the school's scheduled and approved student field day. On the date of the incident, the weather was 73 degrees and partly cloudy with winds at 6 mph from the southeast. The field to be used was dry and had been recently mowed. The field day was part of the end of school year celebration and consisted of several scheduled events, including the "Dizzy Izzy" activity.

"Dizzy Izzy" is defined as an outdoor party activity where a cane or stick is given to the first player on each team. Upon the signal to go, the player places the end of the stick upon the ground, holding the stick in a vertical position, and places the center of the player's forehead on the upper end of the stick. In this position, the player circles around the stick three times and then runs forward to the distance line and returns, handing the stick to the next player behind the base line. The second player places their forehead upon the stick and repeats the performance of the first, as does every player on the team. "Dizzy Izzy" is recommended to be played in a large grassy area without any obstructions around for safety and players may wish to wear bicycle helmets for extra safety.

Each Field Day event was intended to be staffed by at least two (2) staff members. On the date of the incident, several staff members were "out of the office" and not in attendance. This resulted in staff levels being changed, specifically only one (1) staff member was assigned to the "Dizzy Izzy" activity. In addition, despite mild outdoor conditions, it was decided to move the game indoors to the school gymnasium.

The claimant was next in line and was handed the stick by another student. The claimant placed the stick on the ground, placed his head on the stick, and spun around the stick 10 times. After the tenth spin, he began to run to the "distance line." Being disoriented, the student veered off and began losing his balance, at which time he directly impacted the collapsed bleachers inside the gymnasium. The claimant was in immediate pain and was unable to get up. He was then transported by ambulance to the local emergency room, where he was treated for his injuries.

Injury and Damages

As a result of participating in the "Dizzy Izzy" activity, the claimant (student) ran into the front of the collapsed gymnasium bleachers. The resulting impact caused the claimant to suffer the following injuries:

- A black eye
- A moderate concussion
- A fractured knee that required surgery

The claimant's surgery did not produce a good result and his recovery was difficult. Additional surgeries and physical therapy were required. Prior to the incident, the claimant was very physically active; since the incident, he has been unable to participate in athletic activities. The claimant and his family filed suit against the school and the school district for negligence with an initial demand of \$600K.

Lessons Learned

The recommendations listed below can be included in your School District's Risk Management Program.

Consider the following:

- Conducting a complete review of the proposed activity and any recommended rules prior to including the activity as part of a field day or physical education curriculum.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/physicalactivity/facts.htm>

- Establishing guidelines for when an activity should not be used.
- Creating a process to evaluate and maintain proper supervision.
- Creating a process to evaluate and ensure that the space for the activity is within the recommended rules / area setup.

For more information on this topic, please contact your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant. Visit our training schedule at [CIRMA.org](https://www.cirma.org) for a list of current training programs.