



PINELANDS
PRESERVATION
ALLIANCE

Bishop Farmstead
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August 15, 2025

Re: Finding a Safer Playing Surface Alternative for Southampton Children

Dear Southampton Township Officials,

We write with deep concern regarding the planned installation of an artificial turf field at one of Southampton's elementary schools. We strongly urge you to reconsider this decision—especially in light of the potential health and safety risks it poses to young children.

We understand that this project was part of a larger referendum package. However, the risks specific to this portion of the plan may not have received the scrutiny they deserve. Industry marketing is persuasive—yet often misleading. Promises of low maintenance, improved playability, and safety don't hold up under long-term analysis or independent review.

An additional referendum to amend the previous spending package may not be palatable or feasible at this point. However, there may be flexibility on how to spend the money for a field within the current funding framework—either by considering a hybrid turf option, or working with a firm that offers a range of products including natural grass athletic fields that have been designed for high use. We would like to provide whatever support we can as an organization to help your town find a safe alternative.

The safety risks are serious and immediate.

I recently recorded a 30-minute webinar on this topic, which you can [find on our YouTube channel](#). Artificial turf surfaces can reach temperatures up to 72°F hotter than grass, and 60°F hotter than the surrounding air on sunny days, even in spring and fall. That puts young children at real risk of heat exhaustion, dehydration, and skin burns. Unlike older students, young children often don't recognize the warning signs of overheating or speak up when they feel unwell—making these risks especially acute at the elementary level.

Just as concerning is the **chemical exposure**. Turf fields are made of plastic and synthetic infill, often including materials with known or suspected toxins. Volatile organic compounds and microplastics can be released into the air children breathe, the water they drink, and the soil they play on. Long-term safety testing for these exposures is lacking, especially for early-childhood populations. In other words, placing plastic turf at an elementary school asks our youngest learners to participate in an uncontrolled health experiment without their consent or protection.

These students are not miniature adults—their bodies are still developing, and they are more vulnerable to environmental exposures and extreme conditions than older youth. Despite the increasing installation of turf fields across New Jersey, **the vast majority are located at high schools**, not elementary schools.

Even if a field is considered necessary for your town, we ask: why place it at an elementary school? If nothing else, please consider relocating it to a high school setting, where students are less vulnerable. Better yet, delay installation until safer alternatives are properly explored. The youngest children should not be first in line for exposure to intense heat, toxic chemicals, or microplastics—yet that is exactly what this plan would do.

Artificial turf is not safer. It is not cheaper. And it is not necessary.

Over a 20-year period, natural grass fields—when professionally designed and maintained—are typically **2.5 times less expensive** than synthetic turf. They do not reach dangerous temperatures, they do not leach chemicals, and they can be repaired without full replacement every 8–10 years. There are also hybrid or enhanced natural options that combine durability with environmental responsibility.

Other New Jersey communities—including **Princeton and Verona Townships**—have studied this issue carefully. They rejected artificial turf based on the same safety and environmental concerns now facing Southampton. By considering all of your options, you can choose to invest in high-performance natural grass systems that meet athletic needs without compromising children's health.

Should the district decide to move forward with artificial turf despite these risks, we urge you to implement the strongest possible protections:

- Prohibit play during peak heat hours
- Provide shaded rest areas and enforce hydration breaks
- Require children to change clothes and shower immediately after use
- Post clear signage warning of known hazards

But again, these are only **mitigation measures**—not solutions. The safest and simplest choice is to avoid artificial turf entirely.

We urge you to put safety first, especially when it comes to young children. Let Southampton be a model for evidence-based, child-centered decision-making. There is still time to pursue a solution that is healthier, more fiscally sound, and more environmentally responsible. **The best way to prevent the harms of artificial turf is not to install it at all.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Heidi Yeh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'H' and 'Y'.

Heidi Yeh