

Additional ADA Surfacing Options:

1. Engineered Wood Fiber (EWF)

EWF is the most economical alternative to PIP, particularly from an initial installation standpoint. It is a loose-fill material specifically processed for playground use and can meet accessibility requirements when properly installed and maintained.

The primary consideration is ongoing maintenance. EWF moves under heavy use, particularly beneath swings, at slide exits, around climbers and at other high-traffic locations.

For a public playground, I would therefore describe EWF as:

Lower initial cost + higher ongoing maintenance.

EWF will cost approximately \$12,000–\$14,000 installed for your planned SF, depending on site conditions, with periodic top-off and raking required.

Maintenance will be approximately \$4-\$5 per SF for top off depending on the amount needed to maintain 12 inches.

2. Synthetic Turf with a Cushion System

Synthetic turf can provide a very attractive, accessible, seamless-looking playground surface, provided that the complete system, including the underlying impact-attenuating pad, is installed to the required standards.

This can be particularly attractive for an inclusive playground because it provides a relatively smooth route throughout the play area and eliminates many of the displacement issues associated with loose-fill surfaces.

The tradeoff is that the system generally carries a higher initial investment than EWF and has its own maintenance requirements, including grooming, cleaning, seam inspection and maintenance of the underlying cushioning/infill system. Repairs are also more difficult as the new turf won't match the existing turf and is more labor intensive to repair and routine maintenance requires that you keep organic material off the turf regularly.

Moderate-to-high initial cost + good accessibility + moderate ongoing maintenance.

The cost of this type of system will be approx. same as the PIP system we quoted.

I do not have a solid gauge for maintenance costs for this type system.

Clarifying the PIP Maintenance Question

PIP maintenance does NOT mean “resurface every two years.”

The statement that PIP has a two-year maintenance cycle should be interpreted as a recommendation for regular inspection and maintenance—not necessarily a full resurfacing or recoating every two years.

The maintenance issues that are typically observed tend to occur in high-use locations such as swings, transfer areas and slide exits, and included cracking, buckling, openings or wearing of the top

granular layer. Our proposal includes the smaller granule PIP, we discussed, to be placed in the high use areas under swings, slide exits, and around inclusive whirl.

That means a reasonable maintenance plan would be:

- Year 0: Installation
- Years 1–2: Routine inspections and cleaning; address any localized issues
- Year 2: Recommended formal condition assessment/maintenance review
- Years 3–4: Continue routine inspections and address localized wear as needed
- Year 4–5+: Depending upon usage and condition, potential rejuvenation/recoat or localized repairs may become appropriate

In other words, the two-year interval should not be presented as an automatic expenditure.

The actual service life and maintenance interval will depend on:

- Amount of daily/annual use
- Number and age of users
- Swing and slide traffic
- UV exposure
- Freeze/thaw conditions
- Snow and ice management
- Drainage
- Quality of the installation
- Binder and wear-course specifications
- Vandalism
- Landscaping/maintenance equipment around the surface
- Whether the surface is inspected and minor issues addressed early

Therefore, I would characterize 4–5 years as a reasonable potential interval before significant maintenance may be required at a moderately used site, rather than establishing it as a guaranteed maintenance schedule.

Routine maintenance: Inspection, cleaning, addressing small areas of wear or damage, checking transitions and high-use areas. This should occur regularly regardless of the age of the surface.

Preventative maintenance: A more detailed assessment of the wear course and high-use areas, potentially including localized repairs or rejuvenation. A two-year review is a prudent planning benchmark, but it does not mean the entire surface needs to be resurfaced at that time.

Major rehabilitation/resurfacing: A larger investment that becomes necessary when the wear course has deteriorated sufficiently that localized repairs or preventative maintenance are no longer adequate. Depending on usage and site conditions, this could potentially occur significantly later than two years.

For budgeting purposes, I would not recommend putting “PIP maintenance = every 2 years” into the project budget as a mandatory recurring resurfacing expense.

Instead, I would recommend:

- Annual: Routine inspection/cleaning — relatively minimal operating expense
- Year 2: Budgeted condition assessment and allowance for preventative maintenance
- Years 3–5: Monitor condition and perform repairs only if warranted
- Year 4–5+: Reasonable planning window for potential more significant maintenance, subject to actual condition and usage

Bottom line:

If the decision is primarily about lowest upfront cost, EWF will likely win.

If the priority is accessibility + durability + low routine maintenance, PIP and synthetic turf system are stronger options.

And if the concern is specifically the perceived “every two years” PIP maintenance expense, I would clarify that two years should be viewed as a maintenance/condition-review benchmark—not an automatic resurfacing interval. The actual timing of significant PIP maintenance should be determined by the condition of the surface and the amount/type of use.