

# The Morning News

## Local News for Northwest Arkansas

Print Page

### Squeezing Few More Minutes Into Recess May Be Possible, Teacher Says

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FAYETTEVILLE -- A first-grade teacher at Leverett Elementary School in Fayetteville thinks she can eke out a few more minutes in the school day for recess, to the satisfaction of parents who want children to have more unstructured play time during the day.

Jackie Curington said Monday she is willing to try shorten the transition from instruction to recess to get more time on the playground every day before her students eat lunch.

She promised to talk to her colleagues about recess time while Assistant Superintendent Judy New indicated she will talk with principals on the same topic. Their comments came Monday during a Zone 3 patrons' meeting at Ramay Junior High School.

Students are required by state law to receive six hours of classroom instruction every day. The elementary school day is seven and a half hours long to accommodate a 30-minute lunch for teachers and an hour for students' lunch, recess and transition for moving to other classrooms or the library.

Curington said her students have a 15-minute recess before lunch every day. Research has shown a recess period tends to improve eating and helps children better settle in to the afternoon.

The veteran teacher said it may be possible to get as much as 10 more minutes for recess by shaving a few minutes from the instruction period right before lunch.

Another strategy would be for students to thoroughly wash their hands before recess and then use a hand sanitizer before sitting down to eat lunch.

New said all schools in Fayetteville have a 15-minute period for recess but some have recess after lunch, rather than before.

But, the two educators said, students are not sitting at their desks the rest of the time. Students in Curington's class change activities every 20 minutes.

"We're really tight. We don't get everything in," she said, describing a typical school day. "More and more is put in the curriculum. What I taught (in first grade) 15 years ago is now (taught in) kindergarten. The pressure is on to get everything in."

Arkansas law does not define transition time, also known as passing time, New said.

"It makes it more challenging," she said.

Curington's willingness to try to put a few more minutes into recess met with satisfaction for Daniel and Julia Kennefick, who were among the 10 patrons at Monday's meeting.

The Kenneficks established a Web site to raise awareness about recess and worked with State Rep. Lindsley Smith, D-Fayetteville, on passage of a nonbinding House resolution in the Arkansas General Assembly to encourage school districts to add a second recess period to the school day.

The Kenneficks have two children at Leverett.

"We have to recognize recess has value, the same as we do for art, and children need that," Julia Kennefick said.