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Fayetteville Parents Want More Recess For Children State House Expected To Take Up Issue Today

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The Morning News

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Of all the votes taken during the current legislative session, none could be more important than one expected today -- at least to many of the state's 450,000 schoolchildren.

House Resolution 1023 urges school districts to provide a midmorning and a midafternoon recess at least 10 minutes long to all students in kindergarten through sixth grade.

The nonbinding resolution cites the additional recess period as a way to attack a growing obesity problem while giving youngsters an unstructured play time during the structured school day in which stronger social skills can be developed.

The resolution received a unanimous "do pass" recommendation from the House Education Committee and is expected to go before the full body today.

Rep. Lindsley Smith, D-Fayetteville, sponsored the resolution after more than a year of conversation with a Fayetteville couple who want the Fayetteville School Board to consider more free play time.

Daniel and Julia Kennefick want the board to follow the House with a resolution of its own, encouraging district and building level administrators to add a second recess period to the existing school day.

The Kenneficks, who have two children at Leverett Elementary School in Fayetteville, established a Web site several weeks ago to get other parents on board. So far, the response has been encouraging, Julia Kennefick said Friday.

Their children have a 15-minute recess period followed by lunch, Kennefick said. Other schools, like Parson Hills Elementary School in Springdale, also include the recess as part of the lunch period but it is after students eat.

"It's actually a building level decision," Kennefick said. That means principals have the say--so when fitting recess into an already full day.

State standards prescribe six hours of instruction time daily that is to include

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a minimum of 30 minutes of activity time.

Recess and physical education can be counted as part of the mandatory activity time, said Julie Johnson Thompson, spokeswoman for the Arkansas Department of Education.

Adding a second 10-minute recess to an already full day is not as easy as it sounds, principals say, unless time is added to the school day.

"Two 10-minute (recess periods) is really two 20-minute periods," said Sharon Pepple, principal at Happy Hollow Elementary School, noting the time needed for students to prepare for recess, putting on jackets or coats, and resettling into the classroom afterward.

More than half of the six-hour day is devoted to language arts, and the math curriculum requires at least 55 minutes of daily instruction, Pepple said.

Students at Westwood Elementary School in Springdale have a physical education class every day and students in kindergarten through third grade have a 15-minute recess every day, said Principal Jerry Rogers. Fourth- and fifth-graders have one recess a week, which is being increased to twice a week as learning objectives are accomplished.

"We're in the business of teaching kids," Rogers said, acknowledging the role of recess in the school day. "Play helps develop social skills but we have to make choices."

"Students need the opportunity to get up and move," said Cathy Ramsey, principal at Reagan Elementary School in Rogers where students have a 20-minute recess daily. But, like other building administrators, Ramsey said a second recess period would be difficult to fit into the school day without lengthening the day.

Smith said recess is good for children in the development of their creativity, critical thinking skills and interpersonal communication and relationships.

The resolution, modeled after a similar document passed in North Carolina, is on the House calendar today and, if it passes, as Smith expects, it will be furnished to all school administrators in the state.

At A Glance

Web Watch

<http://web.mac.com/kennefick/iWeb/FairPlay/>

Reader Comments (6)

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I agree wrote on *March 12, 2007 6:05 AM*:

"The children need more recess. When I was in elementary school we had a morning, after lunch, and afternoon recess and all of the kids weren't on ADHD and ADD medicine. Obesity isn't the only problem this could help eliminate or at

least reduce the number of children afflicted."

Let 'em play! wrote on *March 12, 2007 7:53 AM*:

"Kids need to expend energy during playtime to be able to sit and pay attention during learning time. I also recall three recesses per day in 1st to 6th grade. Of course, I also recall splitting the classrooms so the more advanced kids did not get bored while the teacher spoon-fed the slower kids."

Dad wrote on *March 12, 2007 8:06 AM*:

"This should be policy in every grade school statewide. You can't expect children to sit there like little robots while facts and figures are poured in their heads. They need time to play and be kids. In my school, we had 2 breaks, in addition to lunch. "

lifelongcitizen wrote on *March 12, 2007 8:34 AM*:

"I understand choices, but kids need and miss the recess time that has been taken away, and most of the parents that I know have not been very happy about it...not to mention how the kids feel about it. All kids in Springdale elementary schools need a daily recess."

get moving wrote on *March 12, 2007 8:45 AM*:

"Not only do kids need unstructured playtime, but they also need structured playtime. (Remember all your friends that would sit and visit during recess?) We need more emphasis on P.E. classes to teach kids how to exercise. They need to know how to stretch, jump, do a push-up, do a sit-up. Other activities, like yoga, would also help the kids to focus on tasks."

Thomas C. Kennedy wrote on *March 12, 2007 10:28 AM*:

"We are already sliding into obesity as a national norm. Kids as well as adults need to be more active. One reason for the cutting back on recess times is the looming threat of the standardized test, which may be more a national threat than obesity. These ill-conceived instruments are causing American education to march lock-step backwards. They force teachers to cram students full of answers without having time to ask about the questions. Fundamental literacy is being challenged. Ask University teachers who are forced to deal with students with high test scores who cannot write a coherent sentence in the English language. Give the kids a few more minutes to play and a lot more time to think."

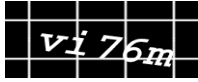
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