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# NORTHWEST ARKANSAS TIMES

## Times Editorial : A right to recess

Northwest Arkansas Times  
 Posted on Wednesday, February 21, 2007  
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Fayetteville has been in a months-long discussion about how to plan the necessary infrastructure to support the school district's primary mission of educating the city's young people, specifically the kind of building needed for high school students. Thursday marks a big day, as a school district committee delivers its recommendations to the full School Board (see today's front page story ). In the wake of that moment, there is bound to be further discussion of this high-profile moment in the life of the school district and community. Building a new high school is a big, big decision. In recent coverage of discussion of the issue, however, we noticed a small concern that shouldn't go without a bit more attention. Deep within one of the recent stories about the future of Fayetteville High School were comments about recess made by Julia and Dan Kennefick, who spoke at a Fayetteville School Board Zone 3 meeting at Ramay Junior High. Yes, we're talking about that portion of the school day in which kids are allowed to be kids, free to run and play and interact with each other in a free setting in which they continue learning the art of human interaction. Recess, that seemingly unimportant symbol of childhood that, as adults, we can think back to with fond memories. Like so many parents of schoolchildren across the country, the Kenneficks have taken note of the fact that recess has been steadily cut back over the years to make room for more class time, and they're not very happy about it. In fact, the Kenneficks started a group called " Fair Play for Recess" to reclaim

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lost ground. Chances are this couple didn't attend last week's meeting with any intention of toppling the public school system; but, in fact, they got around to exploring some fairly revolutionary ideas. Among other things, Dan Kennefick asserted that expanding recess fits in with the school district's strategic goals; specifically, the one that lauds the promotion of ways for students to participate " in a variety of activities that develop a full range of life skills. " " It bothers me that they don't have a right to recess, " Julia Kennefick said. It bothers us, too. Not that we don't appreciate the immense pressures federal and state governments have put on the school districts, families and students in recent years with regard to academic standards. From President Bush's No Child Left Behind to what seems like an increase in standardized test-taking in recent years, many adults on the outside of classrooms don't always realize that going to school these days isn't the easiest thing to do. Just yesterday Northwest Arkansas enjoyed the first really warm day it has experienced in these parts in many a moon. It was great to get out of the office for a little while, breath in the fresh air and soak up some warm rays. By the time we got back to the office, we felt refreshed and ready to get after it again. And we're adults. The idea that kids (especially elementary children ) see their opportunities to break free into the sun and the breeze shrinking is just unsettling. We know, we know — kids have too much to learn, and too many educational standards to live up to, just to waste time on swing sets, jungle gyms or kicking a ball around. And yet, adults must fight to find a way to make fun, unstructured time as much of a requirement as excellent math and English scores. Recess can easily be viewed as expendable, much like some folks mistakenly consider music and arts programs as the first targets when funding cuts have to be made. And yet, the benefits of encouraging creativity and social interaction cannot be ignored. Are we against giving tomorrow's generation the tools to compete with Asia and Europe ? Of course not. And yet we're not crazy about the idea of coming out on top at the price of raising a bunch of dull, unimaginative grown-ups. What is math and science without creativity and health to back them up ?

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