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NORTHWEST ARKANSAS TIMES

Local organization believes recess is a must

BY BRETT BENNETT Northwest Arkansas Times

Posted on Sunday, February 25, 2007

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Two Fayetteville parents, Dan and Julia Kennefick, are on a mission to encourage schools to provide adequate recess time for elementary school students.

Their children attend Leverett Elementary, where they have been active supporters of the school. However, they are concerned that schools in Fayetteville typically have only one recess, which lasts about 15 minutes, per day.

" It'd be nice to have two breaks per day, " Dan said.

With the demands schools face, recess time has been cut to fill other requirements.

" There's a great deal of time pressure, " he said. " When I was a student, we had more than that. "

The couple have started an organization, " Fair Play for Recess, " and have set up a Web site at [web. mac. com / kennefick / iWeb /](http://web.mac.com/kennefick/iWeb/)

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FairPlay. Most of their activity has been developing the Web site and speaking about the importance of recess to local legislators, school board members and school administrators.

Judy New, assistant superintendent, said that with six hours of instruction time now required in the school day, one 15- to 20-minute recess is the most they can do. New said when she was a teacher, elementary schools typically had two 15-minute recesses, one in the morning and another in the afternoon.

The six hours of instruction time is an increase that changed not too long ago, when it was only 5.5 hours.

Among the other demands she noted was that the district must provide 150 hours of some sort of physical activity for students. Recess does not count because it has to be a structured activity, New said.

New said she is not sure where the schools could fit in another recess without extending the length of the school day. Dan said he is not ready to advocate that measure yet. There might be too much temptation to extend it every time someone wants to add a requirement. The Kenneficks consider recess to be unstructured free time, Dan said, so physical education time should not count as recess.

Joey Folsom, Butterfield Trail Elementary principal, said she believes recess time is important, but it is hard to fit in more than one recess period. With the instructional time requirements, the spare time left over is used for lunch and recess.

" They definitely need the time, " Folsom said. " I definitely think it helps. "

Some classes, such as the first grade, structure recess after lunch, she said. This way they can leave the cafeteria early if they finish eating within the 30-minute lunch period.

" That's where we have a little bit of leeway, " Folsom said.

As a visiting assistant professor in astronomy at the University of Arkansas, Dan is a believer in high academic standards. At the same time, students need a break here and there, he said.

Another important aspect to recess is the social interaction, Dan said. He said during his 50-minute classes at the UA, some college students start " phasing out " towards the end of the class. It must be even harder on those younger students, he said.

Dan hasn't found much definitive research to say whether having more or less recess can raise test scores, but some schools in the

nation have cut it altogether. There was probably a temptation for already poorly performing schools to cut recess so they could concentrate harder on academics, he said. However, Dan said he believes there needs to be something that affirms the children's right to recess so schools must incorporate it.

Some other school districts near Fayetteville also do not offer multiple recesses in their elementary schools. Greenland Elementary has one 15-minute recess, and Prairie Grove has one 20-minute recess. Farmington elementary schools also have one recess. Elkins' schools have one 15-minute recess, but they have another 20-minute recess-like period where students do organized activities.

West Fork Elementary does not have recess but a "gross motor development" period that lasts 30 minutes, Principal Pat Thaler said. The period was developed to address the requirement of 150 minutes of physical activity per week. West Fork students have physical education in addition to the gross motor development period.

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