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Recess more than just fun and games

By CATHERINE BAUM
Staff Writer

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Tuesday, December 8, 2009

NORTHAMPTON - Elementary schoolchildren typically vote recess their favorite subject, and despite suggestions across the nation to replace the precious minutes outside with test preparation inside, many local teachers and school administrators support the break, too.

Ryan Road School Principal Margaret Riddle said she favors recess because the children learn in an environment they enjoy. A playground can be its own kind of classroom. At Ryan Road, students ask questions like: Where does the water go once its in the storm sewer? How does it find the sewer? Why is the little pond OK to skate on but not the big one? Where do the pigeons go when they leave school?

"There's always this talk about cutting recess," Riddle said. "But it feels to me like recess is a really important part of school."

Last week, a first grader stood on a little pond and stretched her arms out, claiming the territory as her skating rink. Riddle and the student had a discussion about why the bigger pond was off limits. The student proudly pointed out she wouldn't fall through solid ice on the little pond, but she would fall through the bigger pond's ice because it had more liquid than solid matter.

"A big part of the science frameworks has to do with the changing states of matter and there it is right in front of their eyes," Riddle said.

Teachers at Ryan Road report they see improvement in their students' ability to learn after getting fresh air, particularly in younger grades.

"They're so eager to get out there, and they'll play so actively through the whole recess," Riddle said. "You see how much they need to get out and run around."

###

Ski sale nets \$40K

The annual Lions ski and skate sale raised \$40,000 over the weekend at Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School.

The sale location moved from Florence Community Center to the school this year to avoid overcrowding issues. Event organizer Richard Rescia reported the space was more convenient this year because the sale was held in one space. Clean up at the new location finished two hours earlier than previous years, he added.



CAROL LOLLIS

Fourth-graders at the R.K. Finn Ryan Road School, from front left, Elyssa Rodriguez, middle, Ben Pion and Spencer Miller, play soccer during recess Friday.



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Northampton High School and Smith Voke students volunteered to help out at the sale, which raised about 20 percent more for Lions donations and activities than last year. A \$1,000 scholarship from the sale is to be awarded to a Smith Voke senior in the school's health and technology department.

###

Financial aid night

The Northampton High School Guidance Department is offering a financial aid workshop Thursday at 7 p.m. in the Little Theater to discuss with seniors and their families all aspects of the financial aid process, timelines, and forms that must be filled out.

Dave Belanger, director of student financial services at Smith College, will present information and then offer ample time for questions and clarifications.

###

Budget news

Schools Business Manager Susan Wright will report the school district's end of fiscal 2009 budget, the current fiscal year's budget and the preliminary projection for fiscal 2011 at the School Committee meeting Thursday at 7 p.m. at the JFK Middle School.

"We're looking at a very preliminary shortfall of \$1.1 million" in fiscal 2011, Wright said. "It's not too good."

Last spring the School Department caught a break when city voters approved a \$2 million Proposition 2½ override on property taxes in which \$1 million went to city schools. In addition, school employees agreed to a two-day furlough this school year while families paid more money for bus fees and sports.

A new bus fee was given to elementary school students of \$300 per student and \$500 for two siblings. Last spring, officials projected the additional bus fee would net \$41,700 for fiscal 2010. But the increase Wright reported at the last School Committee meeting was nearly half of that at \$19,289. Only 70 elementary school students paid to ride the bus this school year.

"This saved us a lot of money by eliminating another bus but it didn't bring in the revenue that we thought it would," Wright said.

Meanwhile, the number of free and reduced lunch students increased by 4.1 percent this year. Those students are eligible to ride the bus for free.

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it has happened in other communities

I know that some Springfield schools eliminated recess because of low test scores and the recess time was used for more instruction. I think that there is a lot of pressure on schools to raise/maintain test scores and it forces educators to squeeze in every single moment as learning. There is very little "down" time in schools anymore. This is especially true in districts that are labeled as failing.

However, there have been studies done that show children do learn better when given a break and some free time in between learning. I imagine that Northampton educators understand that and they are just emphasizing the importance of free time to process and make connections to things learned in the classroom.

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Tue, 12/08/2009 - 06:34 — [mamacate](#)

Who is proposing doing away with recess?

Sure, there's lots of (pretty good) evidence for an increase in instructional time, but I've never heard that proposed as a replacement for recess for early elementary kids. Usually it's a discussion of longer school days. Who is this mysterious

villain who wants to take away our kids' recess?

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