

Rebecca Kirgan  
Portland  
LD 156

Testimony of Rebecca Kirgan and  
Jackson Champion, Lincoln Middle School  
In Support of LD 156

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Rebecca Kirgan . I am a resident of Portland and a parent of Jackson Champion, who is in 6th grade at Lincoln Middle School.

Today, we are submitting testimony in support of LD 156 “An Act to Require Outdoor Recess Time For Students From Grade 6 To Grade 8”. Jackson and I are writing this testimony together as we feel recess is an essential part of school, and imperative for learning, growth, development and social-emotional wellness.

In Jackson’s first five months of middle school, he has experienced a lot of changes. Many of these changes have been positive, such as having multiple teachers, changing classrooms and increased personal responsibility regarding class work. Some of the changes have been really hard. One of the most challenging changes has been the absence of recess. At Lincoln, the children are allowed to be outside for 5-10 minutes of their 25 minute lunch. To put this in perspective, they are allowed to be outside for at most 10 of the 390 minutes that they are required to be at school each day. Another way to look at this is that 97.44% of the school day is spent indoors and at most 2.56% of their school day is spent outside. Jackson did the math... That is very little fresh air, sunshine, laughter, and far too little movement.

Jackson has really struggled with the absence of recess. He expresses that he feels cooped up, and that he struggles to manage excess energy. He feels that this lack of activity inhibits his ability to focus and pay attention. He has mentioned many times that he feels sad that he is no longer given the opportunity to connect with his friends and enjoy just a little bit of time to be a kid.

As a doctor of physical therapy with graduate level focus in exercise physiology the connection between physical activity and learning is clear and well documented . There are a multitude of studies that demonstrate the link between increased physical activity and enhanced cognitive function (particularly executive function). We know that increased physical activity promotes focus, alertness and motivation. But most notably, physical activity has been directly linked to neuron proliferation in the Hippocampus which is the region of the brain responsible for verbal memory and learning.

Here in Maine, where many of our days are both short and cold, midday provides the most ideal time to get outdoors and get some exercise. Many children do not have the opportunity to get outside before and after school. Additionally, many children’s circumstances do not afford them the opportunity to have physical activity due to familial and personal responsibilities.

In closing, we appeal to the kind hearts and sensible minds of the committee and co-chairs. We ask that they please pass this bill for the physical wellness, academic success and happiness of our children. We ask that you all keep in mind that 2.54% of the school day is not enough time to boost developing minds and eager spirits. We thank you for your commitment to our children and their overall wellbeing.

Rebecca Kirgan and Jackson Champion  
Portland