

Katie Quirk
Orono Middle and High School
LD 823

Dear representatives,

As a middle and high school teacher in Orono, I consider the Maine State Science Fair to be one of the most rewarding and educational experiences my students engage in each year. I say this as a teacher with a background in the humanities and in narrative writing, who has, in the last two years, overhauled one of my English language arts classes in order to make space for a science writing unit, just so that a large number of students can participate in the fair.

What do I love about science fair? It provides students with an authentic audience (not just the teacher) of real-world scientists (the judges) who ask great questions and who engage with the students as professionals. Science fair also engages students in real scientific thinking--not rote worksheets or labs where everyone gets the same exact results. Instead, students learn how to develop their own topics of inquiry and study design; they implement data collection, which is a great challenge of executive functioning for all; and then they learn all sorts of skills in data analysis and presentation of their work (statistics, critical thinking, efficient writing, public speaking).

Finally, students love competition. More than you would realize. Science fair motivates kids to learn and to engage. I've been doing science fair for only four years and I already have students who are winning full, four-year scholarships to college for the research work. Last month I had a student go on a fully-funded trip to Washington, D.C., based on the merits of research he conducted and shared at the Science Fair and the Junior Science and Humanities Symposium.

More kids should have access to science fair and more teachers should be trained in how to get them there. Thank your your generous legislative service, and thank you for considering this bill.

Sincerely,
Katie Quirk
Orono Middle and High School