



## Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer  
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

### Testimony

#### In Support of

**LD 156: An Act to Require Outdoor Recess Time for Students from Grades 6 to 8.**

**Mallory Cook, Director of Training and Early Educator Engagement,**

**Maine Education Association**

**Before the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

**February 9, 2023**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and other esteemed members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Mallory Cook (pronouns she/her/hers), and I am the Director of Training and Early Educator Engagement at the Maine Education Association, and a certified English teacher and Building Administrator. I am here to provide testimony in support of LD 156: An Act to Require Outdoor Recess Time for Students from Grades 6 to 8.

MEA represents approximately 24,00 educators across the state. In 2020, delegates to our Representative Assembly, our largest democratic body, resolved to support a 30-minute lunch and 30-minute recess for Pre-K-12 students. Our members know that active students, who are afforded a break from the rigors of the classroom, are better equipped to learn and problem solve.

Students in grades 6-8 are between 11 and 14 years old. According to the 2021 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS), 43.4% of middle school students do not get the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day, while 35.1% reported being overweight or obese. 68.9% of students report three or more hours of screen time per day, while 71% spend at least two hours per day on social media. These statistics are startling. If we each think back to our own experiences at 11, 12, 13, or 14, we likely recall fond memories of playing foursquare, shooting hoops, or simply socializing with our friends, while phones were attached to walls, not our hands.<sup>1</sup>

All of this is to say, our middle school students need unstructured, supervised time to be children. They need physical movement to improve their concentration, memory, and behavior; some may argue that students are given plenty of opportunities for movement in their physical education courses; however, only 64% of students reported having PE at least once per week, while only 15% reported having PE daily. Furthermore, only 36.6% of middle school students reported involvement in an after-school extra-curricular opportunity, including sports. If the committee opts to move forward with this bill, students

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<sup>1</sup> Maine Department of Health and Human Services and Maine Department of Education. "Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey." Maine, 2021.



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would be granted an additional 60 minutes per week that could include opportunities for physical activity and movement.

Following the isolation and disruptions caused by the pandemic, our members have expressed concerns about students' executive functioning skills – namely their ability to regulate emotions, manage behaviors, and solve problems. A 2021 study of 7, 11, and 14 year olds revealed that physical activity was linked to emotional and behavioral regulation in middle childhood;<sup>2</sup> while our approach to helping students attain or enhance these skills will be multi-pronged, building time for movement and unstructured play during the school day will certainly help.

Even if students opt to use this time socially, they will continue to develop soft skills that have been hijacked by technology and the pandemic. They need the opportunity to build community outside of their coursework and outside of their cellphones. They deserve a break. They deserve the opportunity to be children.

Should the committee move forward with this bill, there will certainly be logistics that have to be explored by middle schools to ensure time is built into the schedule and that space is available; we believe the benefits on student physical health, executive functioning, and academics far outweigh those challenges, so we hope districts will make every effort to overcome them.

Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

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<sup>2</sup> Vasilopoulos, "Investigation of the associations between physical activity, self-regulation and educational outcomes in children."