



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association In Support of:  
LD 655: An Act To Require at Least a 30-minute Lunch Period for Students**

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Room 208, Cross State Office Building  
Wednesday, March 24, 2021

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association. I am here today in support of LD 655: “An Act To Require at Least a 30-minute Lunch Period for Students.”

MPHA is the state’s oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 500 individual members and 30 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of all people in Maine through health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of health equity. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges, aiming to improve the policies, systems, and environments that underlie health inequities – but which also have potential to improve health outcomes for all people in Maine. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine’s communities and we take that responsibility seriously.

This bill aims to allow at least 30 minutes for students’ lunch period; unless the school’s governing body deems it impracticable, per a public hearing and vote.

According to a 2016 study, students with fewer than 20 minutes to eat lunch consumed 13% less of their entrée, 10% less milk, and 12% fewer vegetables, than those who had at least 25 minutes to eat. There were non-significant differences in their selections of entrée, milk, or vegetables; yet those with more time to eat were more likely to also choose fruit (57% vs. 44%).<sup>1</sup> Another report from *Bridging the Gap* (2014) supports the positive impact that a longer lunch period has on nutrient consumption: students who had a 30-minute lunch period consumed more foods with nutrients such as calcium and vitamin A, than students with a 20-minute lunch period.<sup>2</sup> Plate waste also decreases when students’ lunch time increases from 20 to 30 minutes. A 2004 study showed a decrease in food waste from 43.5% to 27.2%, with just 10 more minutes for lunch.<sup>3</sup> These findings are further explained by a 2018 study, which showed even when a 25-minute lunch period is offered, there are variations in mealtimes among students such that students entering the meal line first had significantly more time to eat (mean = 17.8 minutes, SD = 1.8) compared to students who entered the meal line last (mean = 12.4 minutes, SD = 1.8,  $p \leq 0.001$ ).

It is also worth noting that data suggest that when students have recess before lunch, they have fewer disciplinary issues,<sup>4</sup> and eat more of their meal because they aren’t rushing to play. In fact, studies show that students consume 67% more food, including fruits and vegetables, and reduce food waste (40.7% to 27.2%) when recess is scheduled before lunch.<sup>5</sup> Reconsidering the timing of recess and duration of lunch offers

multiple benefits: it boosts healthful dietary intake and physical activity, decreases disciplinary concerns, and improves academic behaviors, such as on-task behavior.

We believe the provisions in this bill will improve diet quality, health equity and health outcomes for Maine students. Thus, MPHA supports LD 655, and we respectfully ask you to vote “Ought to Pass.” Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Cohen JF, Jahn JL, Richardson S, Cluggish SA, Parker E, Rimm EB. Amount of time to eat lunch is associated with children's selection and consumption of school meal entrée, fruits, vegetables, and milk. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*. 2016 Jan;116(1):123-8.

<sup>2</sup> Turner L, Eliason M, Sandoval A, Chaloupka F. Most US public elementary schools provide students only minimal time to eat lunch. *A BTG Research Brief*. Chicago, IL: Bridging the Gap Program, Health Policy Center, Institute for Health Research and Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago; 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Bergman EA, Buergel NS, Englund TF, Femrite A. The relationship between the length of the lunch period and nutrient consumption in the elementary school lunch setting. *The Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*. 2004;28(2).

<sup>4</sup> Hunsberger M, McGinnis P, Smith J, Beamer BA, O'Malley J. Elementary school children's recess schedule and dietary intake at lunch: A community-based participatory research partnership pilot study. *BMC Public Health*. 2014;14(156).

<sup>5</sup> Bergman EA, Buergel NS, Englund TF, Femrite A. The relationship of meal and recess schedules to plate waste in elementary schools. *The Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*. 2004;28(2).