

TESTIMONY

In support of

LD 655: “An Act to Require at Least a 30-minute Lunch Period for Students”

Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs March 22nd, 2021

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

My name is Grace Leavitt. I am a Spanish teacher on leave from Greely High School while serving as President of the Maine Education Association. The MEA has nearly 24,000 members—faculty and staff in our pre-K-12 public schools, our institutions of higher education, and many dedicated retired educators.

I am speaking on behalf of our members in support of LD 655: “An Act to Require at Least a 30-minute Lunch Period for Students”.

Every year the Maine Education Association holds its Representative Assembly. This is when delegates from our local associations across the state conduct the annual business of the MEA, including voting on our positions on topics affecting educators and public education, including topics that affect our students.

At our Representative Assembly last year, our delegates adopted a resolution in support of a 30-minute lunch for students as well as a 30-minute recess or non-instructional time for students during the school day.

A quick search on the topic of how long students should have for a lunch break results in the recommendation that it be at least 20 minutes *once the student has sat down to eat*. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the United States Center for Disease Control, and the School Nutrition Association all state at least 20 minutes should be allowed for students to eat.¹

So, why the proposed legislation for at least 30 minutes?

I would ask when was the last time you were in a school cafeteria during lunchtime? In my own school, while the food service staff offered meals that were both nutritious and appetizing, even

with changes made to try to speed up the lunch lines, there could still be quite a bit of time that students would spend in those lines which of course impacted the time they had to actually consume the food at a healthy pace. There would often be just a few minutes left in the lunch period when the last students were through the line and then had to quickly wolf down their food. And some meals just can't be consumed quickly—especially some of the healthier offerings like salads and fruits.

Add to the lunch break a stop at the restroom—hopefully to wash hands!—and even just the time to get to the cafeteria, and the break is shortened even more.

The lunch break is also a time for students to relax and to socialize—if they have the chance to do that during lunch, there is less ‘socializing’ that would interrupt instructional time and maybe even fewer other disruptive behaviors.

I confess, having had ‘lunch duty’, I do know that some students will be done eating much more quickly than others, and that some students will be ‘mischievous’ (I am being kind) when they have any amount of ‘free time’.

And I understand the limitations that things like space and class schedules place on schools which often result in having to have multiple shorter lunch periods in order to get all students to even have a lunch break. Depending on the schedule in any given year in my school, sometimes the ‘lunch break’ was as early as 10:30 in the morning because of such limitations. So I understand how difficult it is to do the right thing. But the bottom line is that the best thing to do regarding a lunch break for students in terms of their health is to provide at least 30 minutes for them to get to the lunchroom, get their food, and still have time to eat a nutritious meal during the school day.

We urge your support of LD 655.

Thank you for your time, and I am glad to answer any questions.

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¹<https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/activity/time-to-eat/#:~:text=The%20American%20Academy%20of%20Pediatrics,provide%20adequate%20time%20to%20eat%3F>

https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/school_lunch.htm

https://schoolnutrition.org/uploadedFiles/5_News_and_Publications/4_The_Journal_of_Child_Nutrition_and_Management/Spring_2002/3-conklin.pdf

<https://www.edweek.org/leadership/why-20-minute-lunch-periods-arent-good-for-students/2019/10>

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