

**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**  
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**Testimony Re: H-7644 An Act Relating to Education – Free Play Recess**  
**House Committee on Health, Education, and Welfare**  
**March 9, 2016**  
**Jim Beasley, Policy Analyst**

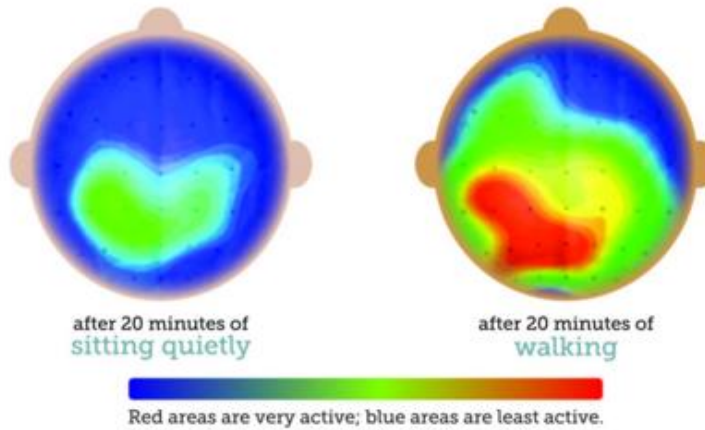
Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT offers its strong support for House Bill 7644, which would require public schools to provide students in kindergarten through grade five with at least 20 consecutive minutes of free-play recess per day, which may not be withheld for academic or punitive reasons.

**Physical Activity and Recess Have Numerous Documented Benefits**

As outlined in our [Promoting Increased Physical Activity in Schools Policy Brief](#) released in January 2016, regular physical activity, including recess, has been shown to have numerous physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and academic benefits for children and youth. Not only does recess provide students with an ongoing opportunity to get part of their recommended daily amount of physical activity, but it also provides them with opportunities to learn valuable communication, problem solving, coordination, and social-emotional skills. Some recess programs have also been shown to increase feelings of safety at school, reduce bullying, and enhance readiness to learn. In addition, recess and physical activity have also been shown to help make children more attentive and productive in the classroom as well as increase their overall neural activity and academic achievement.

**physically active kids have more active brains**

**BRAIN SCANS OF STUDENTS TAKING A TEST:**



Graphic Source: Hillman, C. H. et al. (2009). The effect of acute treadmill walking on cognitive control and academic achievement in preadolescent children. *Neuroscience*. 159(3): 1044-1054.

**Recess Varies in Rhode Island**

Despite numerous well-documented benefits, recess policies across the state vary by age, grade, school, and district. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT applauds the 10 school districts that require 20 minutes or more of daily recess (Burrillville, Chariho, Coventry, Cumberland, Foster, Lincoln, New Shoreham, Smithfield, Tiverton, & Woonsocket) and the 13 districts that prohibit withholding recess (Barrington, Burrillville, Central Falls, Cranston, East Greenwich, Foster, Lincoln, Newport, North Providence, Providence, Smithfield, Tiverton, & Woonsocket).

**Benefits of this Legislation**

This important piece of legislation would help the remaining Rhode Island school districts align their school policies to ensure that a minimum of 20 minutes of consecutive recess is offered daily and not withheld for academic or punitive reasons, which are both recommended practices put forth by the Institute of Medicine, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Association for Sport and Physical Education.

**Additional Language Could Further Strengthen This Bill**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT recommends this Committee and its legislative sponsors consider adding legislative language that would direct and support the Rhode Island Department of Education to monitor and assist school districts in adopting this policy. This would help ensure that all districts are compliant with this regulation and that best practices regarding indoor/outdoor recess, safety, and scheduling are consistent among all districts.

**Closing**

The Rhode Island General Assembly has shown strong support for child-well being and academic achievement. This legislation is another important positive step toward achieving those goals and promoting optimal social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development of all elementary school age children in Rhode Island. We urge to you to support this bill and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.