

Proponent Testimony of SB 339
For the Kansas Senate Committee on Education
Thursday, 1/22/26
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Chair Erickson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in support of Senate Bill 339.

My name is Jessica Kilby, and I am an elementary instructional coach who works closely with teachers and buildings across kindergarten through fifth grade. Before becoming a coach, I was a classroom teacher myself. I am offering this testimony as a proponent of Senate Bill 339 because I have seen firsthand the critical need for increased recess time for Kansas students. This is legislation that would positively affect students across our state.

When I was a classroom teacher, I consistently observed how recess positively impacted my students' ability to focus, regulate their emotions, and engage in learning. On days when students had adequate time to move, play, and interact socially, they returned to the classroom more ready to learn. Having taught multiple grades at both the primary and intermediate levels—1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th grade—I observed that this need for movement and play was consistent across the entire elementary experience.

I also had the unique opportunity to be part of the Kansas Can School Redesign Project, as my building was one of the original Mercury 7 schools. As a pilot lead, we collected data from students, parents, and staff. Increased time for movement and recess was requested across all groups. After reviewing both research and our in-person data, we recognized increased recess as a critical lever for student success, particularly in mitigating attention and behavior challenges and improving readiness for learning.

As part of that work, our building implemented a 60-minute recess model. While this was initially challenging due to restrictions on how recess minutes could count toward instructional time, we saw clear benefits. Students were more focused during academic instruction, behavior concerns decreased, and teachers reported stronger engagement throughout the day. We also recognized that meaningful learning was occurring during play, even if it was not traditionally categorized as instructional minutes. All of this contributed to fewer office referrals, fewer nurse visits, increased time-on-task during core academic blocks, and smoother transitions within the classroom.

Now, as an instructional coach, I continue to see these same patterns across multiple schools and classrooms. Teachers are working harder than ever to meet academic expectations while also supporting students' increasing social and emotional needs. Increased recess time is not a break from learning; it is a necessary support that allows students to be more focused and successful during instructional time. Contrary to some beliefs, recess does not reduce academic learning time; it improves it by allowing students to be more productive during core learning times.

As I continue to work with teachers and school administrators, one topic that comes up often is teacher retention. From a teacher perspective, adequate recess time supports classroom management and sustainability. When students' movement and social needs are met in a proactive manner, the need for later behavioral interventions and disciplinary actions is reduced, and teachers are better able to teach effectively and remain in the profession. Administrators also benefit, as they are better able to support their teachers and students and keep their focus on being academic instructional leaders for their buildings, rather than behavior managers.

The need for this legislation is even more urgent given the current youth mental health crisis. In *The Anxious Generation*, Jonathan Haidt outlines how reduced opportunities for free play and physical activity have contributed to rising anxiety, depression, and emotional distress among children. Senate Bill 339 addresses this challenge in a practical, research-aligned way by ensuring students have regular opportunities for movement, play, and social connection during the school day.

Senate Bill 339 supports all Kansas students' physical health, mental well-being, and academic readiness, regardless of zip code. It provides educators with an essential tool to help students reset, refocus, and return to learning in a healthier state. Recess and play are not "extras"—they are critical learning opportunities that support the whole child. This is a practical, evidence-aligned step that the Legislature can take now to support students across the state.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to support Senate Bill 339. Thank you for your time, your service, and your continued commitment to Kansas students and educators.

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica Kilby
Elementary Instructional Coach