

**Testimony in Opposition to Sections 6 and 7 of  
An Act Concerning Relief of State Mandates On School Districts  
Raised Bill 1142**

March 23, 2009

Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Amanda Gebicki, and I am the mother of a child who became ill during her occupancy in King's Highway Elementary School ("KHS") in Westport, CT.

My biggest regret, as a parent, is that I did not remove my daughter sooner from an environment that was making her sick.

I strongly believe that my primary responsibility as a parent of young children is to gather and assess all of the information available to me and make informed decisions regarding their health, safety and education. In that regard, I am diligent and careful in my research. I am never afraid to ask questions. I am tireless in putting the pieces together and evaluating the information I have. I trust my instincts and consult with experts, when necessary. I am well-educated and hold two advanced degrees. All of these efforts and attributes are worthless, however, when I am not given the information I need to make informed decisions for my children.

During the year and a half in which my daughter attended KHS, I was continuously disappointed and dismayed at our school district's failure to provide vital information to parents regarding the conditions at KHS. For example, our superintendent withheld a report documenting extensive mold contamination and unacceptable fungal growth in one of the school's classrooms for over six months – only disclosing the report after parents questioned why a wall was built over the entrance to the classroom. Several of the porous materials that had been in the contaminated classroom were moved to my daughter's classroom without any efforts made to clean or decontaminate them. In my daughter's class – 14 out of 19 children and the teacher exhibited symptoms consistent with exposure to mold. The asthma rate in her class was 41%.

After she attended KHS for a year and a half, my daughter's physicians all recommended that she not return to KHS for the following school year. As a prudent parent, I followed their recommendations and petitioned our district to move her to another school within our district. The district did not grant her that option, so my husband and I enrolled her in a nearby private school. She has been healthy since she left KHS.

I am thankful that I was able to help my daughter regain her health; however, as I stated above, I deeply regret that it took me 18 months to gather the information necessary to make that decision, and I am angered that crucial information about her school building was withheld.

Based on my testimony as set forth above, I respectfully request that this Committee take the following actions:

**(1) Throw out Section 6.** Connecticut is one of the only states in the U.S. with a law protecting indoor air quality in our schools - CT Gen. Stat. Section 10-220. Regular reporting of the conditions present in our schools is a critical part of that law. Parents who face situations like I did in Westport need access to information on the conditions present at their children's schools in order to make informed decisions. School districts need to be aware of and accountable for the condition of their schools.

Currently, school districts are required to report on the conditions of their schools on a biennial basis using Form ED050. Form ED050 is a single page report with two sections. Section 1 requests general information about the facility which generally does not change from year to year. Section 2 requires a school district to rate the conditions in various areas of the school on a scale from 0 to 4. School districts with accurate and current documentation on the condition of their facilities should be able to fill out Section 2 quickly and easily. The importance of having current information on the condition of a school far outweighs the minimal time and effort necessary to complete and file this simple form every other year.

**(2) Throw out Section 7.** Regular communication between parents and teachers is essential to advancing a child's education and addressing educational issues quickly and effectively. Both informal and formal communication between parents and teachers including the communication of homework assignments, classroom projects and individual student issues facilitates the smooth operation of a classroom and enhances a child's educational experience. In this instance too, receiving timely information regarding issues and activities in the classroom allows parents to make informed decisions for their children.

For example, when my daughter was repeatedly absent from school last year due to recurring respiratory infections, her teacher immediately informed me that she was struggling to catch up in math. Together, we were able to formulate a plan combining at-home supplemental math problems with one-on-one classroom instruction to ensure that my daughter was able to learn the concepts she missed during her extended absences from school and not fall even further behind. It is important to note that formal communication – such as a scheduled teacher conference or report card – would likely either not have revealed that information or would have alerted me to the issue too late.

Finally, many families – like ours – have two working parents. School districts must adapt to this modern reality and adopt policies and procedures which allow and encourage working parents to regularly communicate with their children's teachers.

Education works best when teachers and parents act as a coordinated team. School districts should encourage parent-teacher communication in all forms. The provision sought to be removed by Section 7 does not require that any costly or specific policies and procedures be adopted – but rather demonstrates the legislature’s intent to encourage parent-teacher communication. Parents need teacher feedback to make informed decisions for their children and assist teachers in their efforts to educate.

As representatives of parents of school-aged children in your districts, I strongly urge you all to oppose Sections 6 and 7 of Raised Bill 1142.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully,

Amanda Gebicki  
3 Cherry Lane  
Westport, CT 06880  
(203) 227-7552