March 4, 2019

Letter in SUPPORT of HB7250

Dear Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez and all of the esteemed members of the Education Committee,

I am writing today in support of HB7250 AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPROVEMENT OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PLAY. I support the bill because I am a mother of four children, three of whom are currently in the Westport Public Schools. My children are currently in 3rd grade, 1st grade and Kindergarten. I set my children on a bus shortly after 8am and see them home again at ten minutes of 4pm (we live three miles from the school and the bus runs direct from our house to school). In the nearly EIGHT hours that my children are in the care of the public schools, they are allowed 20, TWENTY, minutes of outdoor, unstructured play. That is of course assuming it doesn’t rain, snow, get cold, get hot, get windy or whatever all else too frequently stands in the way of the children getting outdoors. When indoor recess is called, the children are all too often put in front of a screen to watch a movie or otherwise sit still, don’t be too loud, don’t move too much, don't wiggle, don’t squirm = don’t be a child.

It seems inexcusable and illogical to expect children to be restricted to one 20 minute recess break and one 20 minute lunch break during an EIGHT HOUR DAY. Why do we do this?? Who does this benefit? Not the children! Not the teachers, who spend half their time reprimanding antsy, unfocused children. This is INSANITY. By the time the children line up and march down the halls to go out, and then line up, quietly and still and straight, they have FAR LESS THAN 20 MINUTES to release their energy and allow their bodies to move, process information, recover from stress, make personal connections and, well, act their age.

I BELIEVE THIS BILL IS A CHANCE FOR CONNECTICUT TO LEAD THE COUNTRY IN AN EFFORT TO BETTER MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR CHILDREN.

This bill is a call for sanity, a call to heed academic research that PROVES THE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, and yes, ACADEMIC BENEFITS OF UNSTRUCTURED [OUTDOOR] PLAY. More recess improves children’s ability to focus, retain information and perform better academically and classrooms see far fewer behavioral issues as outdoor play is increased. Through play, children learn valuable communication skills, negotiation skills, problem solving skills and emotional coping skills such as self-control. Our children NEED AND DESERVE meaningful breaks in their too long, too static and often very stressful days. That child who can’t sit still, can’t focus, can’t keep his hands to himself, acting out, acting distracted, having trouble processing his lessons, getting in trouble, suffering from emotional issues, etc etc, is NOT a bad student or a problem child. That child is reacting to an ill-conceived, ill planned day that does not take into account well known, well researched realities of child development and the very basic and very real needs of a growing child. ALL CHILDREN AT ALL INCOME LEVELS, ESPECIALLY AT RISK CHILDREN, NEED TIME TO PLAY. ‘PLAY’ IS SERIOUS BUSINESS. More play is the cheapest, easiest and most humane fix for many of the problems that plague every single one of our children. My children need this bill. Your children need this bill, Connecticut’s children NEED AND DESERVE THIS BILL! Please vote in favor of increasing recess time. 50 minutes in 8 hours is the least we can do for our children. Place Connecticut’s schools at the top of the nation, all of Connecticut’s schools from the urban to the rural to the suburbs.

Thank you,

Mary Ballantyne, Westport resident and mother of four children