Testimony in Support of HB7250: AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPROVEMENT OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PLAY

Dear members of the Education Committee:

I am a parent of two children, ages 4 and 7, at Columbus Family Academy in the New Haven Public Schools and write to offer my strongest possible support for HB6202: AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPROVEMENT OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PLAY. I am a longtime resident of New Haven, graduate of Yale University, and editor at Yale University Press.

My children’s school is a neighborhood PK-8 school located in New Haven’s landed-immigrant neighborhood, Fair Haven. Our student body is primarily Hispanic, with a large number of English language learners and lower-income families. We chose this school for our family because it is our neighborhood school, we believe in public education, and we embrace it's dual language Spanish-English curriculum, which aims to graduate all students fluent in English and Spanish.

As part of researching school options, we visited not only several New Haven Public Schools, but also the principal private schools in our area. The first thing we noticed at every private school was the frequency of recess for elementary students -- at most schools, two or three times each day. At public school, we observed the opposite: very limited free time for elementary children. I didn't realize how problematic this was until our oldest son entered kindergarten and started coming home extremely antsy and frustrated. I began to research the essential, yet seemingly forgotten, role of structured and unstructured play in the development of young children.

The research is abundantly clear: we know that play is the work of children. Play is the way in which children conduct primary research about the world and is essential to their healthy social, emotional, and academic development. In Arizona, a bill similar to the one proposed here led to decreased discipline problems, increased attendance, and improved test scores. It is not difficult to see how Connecticut could achieve similar results. Yet today, in New Haven, only the children privileged to attend private school have access to developmentally appropriate learning. The majority black and brown students in the New Haven Public Schools and other public schools around the state have a very short 20 minutes of recess within a six hour period, and this puts them at a profound disadvantage in countless ways.

This bill extends what should be basic rights to all children in our state. Thank you to the sponsors and supporters. Let's make longer recess the right of all children, rather than the privilege of a few.

Sarah Miller
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