March 5, 2019

Dear Chairs Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Ranking Members and all of the esteemed members of the Education Committee:

I am writing today to express my opposition to proposed bill HB7250, AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPROVEMENT OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PLAY. I oppose this bill for three reasons.

1. School districts should have the authority to decide how much and when to schedule their own recesses. Local teachers and parents are best placed to decide how to use their school day, and they can choose to allocate more time to unscheduled play if they judge this is best for their students. By setting a blanket 50 minute recess requirement across schools, this bill takes a material portion of every school day out of their control. Such unjustified intervention sets a bad precedent, and it should be rejected on this basis alone.

2. A blanket requirement like this would cause more harm than good. As the bill does not provide funds to lengthen the school day, schools would have to drop some other subject or activity to make room for this free time. I lived in Korea, Hong Kong and China for many years, and it was obvious that their primary education system is far ahead of ours academically. Connecticut cannot and should not adopt an Asian education system, but if our children are to compete in a global marketplace they need more academic training, not less. Fifty minutes of unstructured recess every day will mean that our children will less time to learn, and will be less able to compete globally.

3. The bill’s sponsors claim that unstructured play will improve social skills and emotional well being. However, students already have time for unstructured play in afternoons and weekends – the elementary school day is not so long! The bill’s sponsors do not give evidence for the incremental benefit of requiring more unstructured play time during the school day. This is especially relevant since this time carries a high cost, since teachers will continue to be paid to stand by while their students play.

I do not oppose giving children more play time if the local school board believes this is the right thing to do. However, the proposed bill represents inadequately justified government overreach, undermines the authority of local decision makers, and reduces our children’s ability to compete globally. It has too many costs and negative side effects, and Connecticut cannot afford it. I urge you to reject this bill.

Thank you.

John Seel
Seeljoh17@gmail.com