Testimony of Kevin J. Smith, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools / Wilton Public Schools
In Support of HB 7250
An Act Concerning the Improvement of Child Development through Play

Education Committee – Public Hearing
March 6, 2019

Chairman McCrory, Chairman Sanchez and members of the Education Committee:

Please accept this testimony in support of HB 7250 – An Act Concerning the Improvement of Child Development through Play. Not only do I support this proposed legislation, but I celebrate it!

The research on the importance of play is irrefutable. Through undirected play opportunities children enhance the development of the part of their brain responsible for executive function. During these opportunities children learn to negotiate, reason, problem solve, manage emotions, resolve conflict and many other critically important life skills.

For today’s generation of young people much of their lives is scheduled and/or managed by adults. Though well-meaning, because of the overscheduling and over-structuring, adults unwittingly limit children’s opportunities to develop many of the skills noted above. This has had disastrous consequences for some. Researchers like developmental psychologist Peter Gray, attribute the dramatic increase in anxiety in young people to a loss of play. Across our nation, schools are reporting epidemic levels of stress and anxiety in young people. Indeed, many colleges and universities report their inability to keep up with student demand for counseling services.

Two years ago, Wilton Public Schools partnered with Lenore Skenazy and the Let Grow project to promote increased opportunities for undirected play. Led by our courageous elementary principals and teams of willing teachers, we found several new and innovative ways to introduce time for more undirected play during the school day. In January of this year each of our elementary schools introduced Free Play clubs to further promote the experience outside the school day. For many of our students these moments serve as the most joyous.
I support this bill because it is good for children. In doing so, I also recognize that the current educational standards have pressured schools into filling every moment with structured instruction, especially in reading and mathematics. The caution here is that while most schools have admirably responded to new mandates for curriculum and instruction, very few have actually changed the boundaries of the school day. In effect, we do more with the same amount of time. While applauding the intent of this piece of legislation, I also encourage the members of the Education Committee to consider the total impact of instructional mandates and corresponding high stakes testing.