Bill No.: HB-7250
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPROVEMENT OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PLAY.
Vote Date: 3/15/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/6/2019

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SPONSORS OF BILL:
Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:
The bill requires the board of education to allow 20 minutes of undirected play as an alternative to 20 minutes of physical exercise. Nothing in this bill prohibits a board from offering more than 20 minutes a day of undirected play or physical exercise. It has been reported that with a decline of play in schools there has been an increase of depression, anxiety, narcissism and behavior issues. Undirected play is reported to promote social-emotional and cognitive skills. Providing ample outlets for energy also allows students to better focus in the classroom.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE LCO No. 6080:

Line 8 adds the option of giving 20 more minutes of undirected play, rather than extending the time given for physical exercise.

Line 9 removes requirement that physical exercise must be divided into two blocks of time.

Lines 16-19 of the substitute language for this bill changes the original from requiring fifty minutes of physical activity or undirected play to allowing more than twenty minutes of physical activity or undirected play at the discretion of the local or regional board of education.

Section 2 of the bill is struck, which removes the undirected play requirement from preschool programs.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:
Commissioner Dianna R. Wentzell, State Department of Education: The Department does not support expanding the allowed activity from physical activity to physical activity OR undirected play, as undirected play is undefined and may include sedentary activity. “This change in statute may promote the elimination of daily physical activity, which a body of evidence shows positively impacts the brain and improves cognition, mood, attention and academic achievement.” They are also concerned with fitting additional recreation time into the current school day.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:
Katherine Field, Teacher Development Specialist, Connecticut Education Association (CEA) Ms. Field and CEA strongly support this bill as a start, but hope to see more bills which revisit our early education standards. They attest that play is the primary way children develop problem solving skills and empathy, release stress and develop imagination. They lament the unintended results of Common Core as a narrowed curriculum, focused on math and literacy with little room for socialization and expression. They also express concern that more play time will take time away from subjects such as art or music. It is their hope that “playtime will supplant some of the time spent on core ‘academic’ subjects, which would ultimately promote stronger child development”.

Representative Lucy Dathan, 142nd District: Representative Dathan, a co-sponsor of H.B. 7250 expressed strong support for the original bill as drafted. She has found in her own research that with a decline in play in the classroom there has been an increase in depression and anxiety, suicide rates in ages 15-24 doubling, a rise in narcissism with a decline in empathy and over diagnosis of ADD and other behavioral issues. She cited a New York Times article in which she discusses the bill specifically, and the behavioral, educational and social results in Arizona who just enacted similar law.

Representative Geoff Luxenberg, 12th District: Representative Luxenberg, also a co-sponsor of H.B. 7250 expressed strong support for the original bill as drafted. He claims this bill will result in less disciplinary actions taken on children, improved exam results and academic outcomes with an improvement in physical health. He cites Finland as an example of a nation which gives their 1st grade students ninety minutes of recess per day while also earning consistently high educational outcomes. He also insists there is enough time to give students 50 minutes of recess per day and meet the pre-existing instructional requirements.

Julie Corbett & Sarah LeMieux, Norwalk Board of Education: They support increasing recreational time for elementary school students, citing improvement to social and cognitive development, increased collaborative problem-solving skills and physical health benefits. They did express cost concern over cutting into current instructional time or lengthening the school day in order to comply with the 50 minutes required in the bill as originally written.

The Education Committee received approximately 110 similar pieces of testimony in support for H.B. 7250. They 1) cited The American Academy of Pediatrics which recommends children participate in 60 minutes of “moderate to vigorous activity per day”, 2) expressed children’s need for unstructured play time in order to build social-cognitive skills, and 3) expressed concern over rising rates of anxiety, depression, suicide and narcissism in children.
NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc: CABE opposed the specific time suggestion (50 minutes) in the original language, which mirrors the change in the substitute language.

Reported by: Garnet McLaughlin       Date: 3/26/19