

SB 6042 Recess Bill
Testimony February 21, 2007
Ian King

Good morning, Madame Chair and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Ian King. I live in Seattle, where my daughter is a first-grade student at Sacajawea Elementary School, and I am here today as a member of the Washington State PTA to testify in favor of Senate Bill 6042. I am aware of at least one other bill under consideration that purports to address the issue before us today, but it is my opinion that SB6042 directly addresses the concern of the PTA and its parents, which is the importance of unstructured playtime for our children. If we were talking about denying factory workers their regular breaks, there would be a thousand members of organized labor waving signs outside these windows. Today, WSPTA plays a similar role in speaking on behalf of our youngest citizens.

My first exposure to this topic actually predates my tenure as a parent by several years. I would like to quote from a 1992 paper by Dr. Harold Stevenson of the University of Michigan that was a comparative essay regarding primary education in American and Asian schools. We've long been concerned with the apparent performance gap between American and Asian children. In this analysis, he burst many myths, and I would like to quote from that article regarding the matter before us:

"...[C]ontrary to popular stereotypes the high levels of achievement in Asian schools are not the result of rote learning and repeated drilling by overburdened, tense youngsters. Children are motivated to learn; teaching is innovative and interesting. Knowledge is not forced on children; instead the students are led to construct their own ways of representing this knowledge. The long school days in Asia are broken up by extensive amounts of recess. The recess in turn fosters a positive attitude toward academics." Stevenson, Harold W. (1992, December). Learning from Asian schools. Scientific American 267(6), 70-76.

So it's great to quote professors of child psychology, but I have my own subject matter expert: my seven-year-old daughter. When she comes home and tells Daddy about her school day, I hear not only of the fascinating learning happening during class but also the equally important lessons she learns on the playground. There she learns collaboration, conflict management, making good choices, inclusion and exclusion, all in a diverse setting of both persons and situations that would be impossible to reproduce in the necessarily structured classroom setting. Recess is far more than just a break in the day; it's an essential part of child development, as supported by significant bodies of research [as cited by Kim Golding in her preceding testimony].

I respectfully ask that the committee move this bill upon its way with all dispatch to create a level playing field - yes, pun intended - for our state's children.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this issue today.