



WSPTA recognizes that access to adequate nutrition and healthy eating habits are a cornerstone to health, well-being, learning, and academic achievement. Breakfast at school can improve attendance and academic achievement, but is not widely available.¹ Current Washington law (WAC 392-157-125 "Time for Meals") does not clearly define the minimum amount of time for students to eat a meal, and many students do not have adequate time, based on the national standard. Additionally, some school districts subject students to shaming practices if they have meal debt.

Background

One in every five (20%) of children in Washington struggle with hunger¹

- **Washington ranks 45th out of 50 states** in reaching low-income students with nutritious school breakfasts²; 67% of eligible low-income students do not eat school breakfast, due to transportation schedule or social stigma. Without a healthy breakfast, a student's chance of success is drastically reduced.¹
- **OSPI included longer lunch and recess times in the 2017 long term vision.**³
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) both recommend **20 minutes of seated time for school lunch.**^{4,5}
- In 2015, the University of Washington (UW) School of Public Health Nutritional Sciences found that **NONE** of the elementary schools observed in their study achieved 20 minutes of seated time. **The average was 13 minutes**, and many students had much less time.⁶
- The CDC, USDA and UW School of Public Health Nutritional Sciences recommend **Recess Before Lunch (RBL)**. The UW study found when RBL is in place, **students consume 67% more food, 54% more fruits and vegetables, and both plate waste and discipline referrals decreased.**⁶
- Meal debt is a challenge for districts and policies for dealing with meal debt vary widely. Some school districts engage in "**meal debt shaming**": students have been humiliated with a hand-stamp or sticker proclaiming, "I need lunch money," or have been served a meal only to have it taken away and dumped in the garbage when they get to the register.⁷ **The USDA has developed best practices for dealing with meal debt**, including adoption of policies that allow children to receive the nutrition they need to stay focused during the school day, and to minimize identification of children with insufficient funds to pay for school meals, in order to avoid embarrassment and stigmatization.⁸

Proposed Solutions

The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation or policies that:

- Use CDC and USDA recommendations to clearly define a minimum lunch period for students as a minimum of 20 minutes of *seated* time. **Amend WAC 392-157-125 "Time for Meals" to define a minimum of 20 minutes of seated time**, in line with national standards as well as RCW 28A.405.460⁹, WAC 296-126-092¹⁰, and WAC 296-125-0285¹¹.
- **Promote Recess Before Lunch.**
- **Prohibit meal debt policies that shame or punish students.** Communications regarding finances should be directed to the parents and guardians, not the children.
- **Promote policies that increase access to school breakfast**, including Breakfast after the Bell.

For More Information

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Citations

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7. Food Research and Action Center. Establishing Unpaid Meal Fee Policies: Best Practices to Ensure Access and Prevent Stigma. <http://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/frac-unpaid-meal-fees-policy-guide.pdf>
8. USDA Food Nutrition Services (May 2017) Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP29-2017a1.pdf>
9. <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.405.460>
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11. <http://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=296-125-0285>

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