

*WSPTA recognizes that schools play a critical role in providing access to adequate nutrition and formation of healthy eating habits that are a cornerstone to health, well-being, learning, and academic achievement. For too many Washington students, meals at school are their only food for the day. Without adequate time to enjoy a complete meal, students may be prevented from reaching their full potential.*

### Background

- The current regulation Time for Meals (WAC 392-157-125)<sup>1</sup> does not specify a minimum amount of time to be designated for school lunch, and many students do not have adequate time to eat, based on the national standard.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)<sup>2</sup> and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)<sup>3</sup> both underscore the important role schools play in developing healthy nutrition habits and recommend **20 minutes of seated time** for school lunch.
- A recent University of Washington School of Public Health Nutritional Sciences (UW-SPHNS) study<sup>4</sup> found:
  - **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.
  - Fruit, vegetable and milk intake increased with increased seated time.
- Guidelines from the CDC, USDA, and UW-SPHNS indicate that **scheduling recess before lunch** and providing at least 20 minutes of seated time to eat increases consumption of fruits and vegetables, decreases food waste, reduces student discipline referrals, and increases student academic performance.<sup>2,3,4</sup>
- OSPI included longer lunch and recess times in its 2017 long-term vision.<sup>5</sup>

### Proposed Solutions

The Washington State PTA shall support legislation or policies that:

- Modify WAC 392-157-125 “Time for Meals” to define a minimum lunch period for students. Language should be added to **specify a minimum of 20 minutes to eat lunch, after being seated**, with additional time scheduled to move through the lunch line;
- Promote **recess before lunch** for elementary students;
- Promote healthy and respectful eating environments and discourage practices such as silent lunch.

### For More Information

Nancy Chamberlain, WSPTA Advocacy Director  
[ptaadvocacydir@wastatepta.org](mailto:ptaadvocacydir@wastatepta.org)

Marie Sullivan, WSPTA Legislative Consultant  
[legconsultant@wastatepta.org](mailto:legconsultant@wastatepta.org)

*For more information on the WSPTA advocacy program, please visit our website ([www.wastatepta.org](http://www.wastatepta.org))*

## Citations

1. Washington Administrative Code 392-157-125 Time for Meals  
<http://app.leg.wa.gov/WAC/default.aspx?cite=392-157-125>
2. Centers for Disease Control. *MMWR Recommendations and Reports vol 60 (5); 2011.*  
School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity  
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/npao/pdf/mmwr-school-health-guidelines.pdf>
3. USDA. Healthy Meals Resource System, Child Nutrition Programs, Montana Team Nutrition Program.  
How Positive Mealtimes Can Set the Stage for Better Learning, Behavior and Health in Children,  
<https://healthymeals.fns.usda.gov/hsmrs/Montana/PPMeals/PositiveMealtimesHandouts.pdf>
4. University of Washington School of Public Health Nutritional Sciences Program. (2015)  
Lunch Time At School: How Much is Enough?  
[http://depts.washington.edu/nutr/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Time-For-Lunch-FINAL\\_NUTR531-winter2015-1.pdf](http://depts.washington.edu/nutr/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Time-For-Lunch-FINAL_NUTR531-winter2015-1.pdf)
5. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (May24, 2017). Superintendent Reykdal's K-12 Education Vision & McCleary Framework  
[http://www.k12.wa.us/AboutUs/Priorities/SuptReykdalVision\\_Narrative.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/AboutUs/Priorities/SuptReykdalVision_Narrative.pdf)