

*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> U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA),<sup>3</sup> and a recent report by the Washington State Auditor<sup>4</sup> 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>5</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 has demonstration projects under way and plans to update the lunch WAC to require 20 minutes of seated lunch and recess before lunch in elementary schools.<sup>6</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

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*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. Washington State Auditor. Schools Can Influence Healthy Eating Habits Through Lunch Scheduling Practices (August 28, 2019). [https://www.sao.wa.gov/performance\\_audit/schools-can-influence-student-eating-habits-through-lunch-scheduling-practices/](https://www.sao.wa.gov/performance_audit/schools-can-influence-student-eating-habits-through-lunch-scheduling-practices/)
5. 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)
6. OSPI was directed through a proviso in the 2019-21 operating budget to convene six pilot projects in schools to identify challenges and opportunities associated with 20 minutes of seated lunch time. Following the release of the State Auditor’s Office report in August, OSPI announced it will start the rule-making process to update the WACs regarding school lunch, starting implementation in the 2023-24 school year. In addition to 20 minutes of seated time, the proposed rule change will direct lunch before recess in elementary schools.