

11.30 Equitable Access to Recess, Play, Unstructured Time, and Physical Activity

Resolution passed 2020

Whereas, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), all children and youth ages 6-17, regardless of ability, should engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day, and because children and youth spend a large portion of their awake hours at school, and for many students, school is their only opportunity for physical activity; and

Whereas, schools in lower-income neighborhoods and those serving a higher percentage of students of color often schedule significantly less recess than schools in affluent and often white neighborhoods; and

Whereas, elementary school children who have more recess time have been found to have better classroom behavior, and OSPI states that recess should not be viewed as a reward, but as a necessary educational support component for all children; and

Whereas, physical fitness and engagement in physical activity are associated with greater academic achievement and cognitive functioning, and increased physical activity during the school day does not adversely affect student academic achievement; and

Whereas, research on the neuroscience of learning suggests that students of all ages need brain breaks, physical activity, creative movement, and unstructured time; benefits include improved mood, conflict resolution, enhanced problem-solving, creative thinking, and memory; and

Whereas, recess provides unstructured play opportunities that allow children to engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity and should not replace physical education classes that provide sequential instruction to enhance the development of motor skills, movement concepts, and physical fitness; and

Whereas, more than 30 minutes of recess per day (and ideally more than 45 minutes) provides the most benefit, and longer recess periods (more than 20 minutes in one period) have increased benefits over shorter recess periods; and

Whereas, middle and high school students also benefit from unstructured breaks and physical activity, and teenagers who engage in more physical activity have better physical and mental health and are more likely to have an active lifestyle in adulthood; and

Whereas, although schools are required to comply with the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and provide appropriate physical education and physical activity opportunities for students with disabilities, the CDC reports that only 24% of children and adolescents with disabilities are meeting the recommended time for daily physical activity.

Therefore, be it

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils advocate for equitable access to adequate recess for elementary school students and unstructured physical activity and creative movement throughout the school day for all K-12 students, especially for students of color, students from low-income households, and students with disabilities; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils advocate for legislation and policies that provide:

- Each elementary student each day - at least one period of recess for a minimum of 30 minutes (45 minutes recommended), or a minimum of five minutes per hour of daily instruction
- Each middle and high school student each day - at least one unstructured break in addition to the lunch period and passing periods; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils oppose the practice of the denial of school recess as a disciplinary measure or for additional instruction time and recommend that the practice be abolished; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils strongly recommend that school districts provide ADA-compliant new and replacement playgrounds, develop and implement inclusive policies for school recess that include unstructured outdoor play suitable for students with disabilities and unstructured alternative play for inclement weather days, educate students on safe playground rules, and ensure the safety of ADA-compliant playgrounds, by providing staff training and ensuring an adequate adult to student ratio.