

## 11.29 School Nutrition, Breakfast and Lunch Policies

*Resolution passed 2020; amended 2025*

**Whereas**, nutrition is a cornerstone to the health, well-being, development, and academic achievement of children and youth; and

**Whereas**, 1 in 6 households with children in Washington face food insecurity and struggle to buy enough food for their families; and

**Whereas**, children and youth facing food insecurity are at increased risk of falling behind their peers academically and socially; food insecurity is linked to lower reading and mathematics test scores and increased behavioral issues, creating equity issues that contribute to opportunity and achievement gaps; and

**Whereas**, children in Washington state that participate in the Breakfast After the Bell program experience reduced disruptive behavior, reduced instances of absence and tardies, and increased academic achievement; and

**Whereas**, the need to promote healthy eating habits and food choices has intensified with the national epidemic of obesity, and consumption of nutrient-dense foods correlates with the amount of time children and youth have to eat; and

**Whereas**, studies by the United States Department of Agriculture measured that students who eat school lunches are more likely to consume milk, fruits, and vegetables than students who ate meals from home or other places; and

**Whereas**, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the United States Department of Agriculture recommend that schools ensure sufficient time for students to receive and consume a meal, with at least ten minutes for eating breakfast and twenty minutes for eating lunch after being seated; and

**Whereas**, scheduling recess before lunch and promoting a positive school lunch environment lead to increased healthy food choices and consumption, and decreased food waste and discipline referrals; and

**Whereas**, Washington state law, known as the Hunger-Free Students' Bill of Rights, says, "School personnel, school district personnel, and volunteers are prohibited from taking any action that would publicly identify a student who cannot pay for a school meal or for meals previously served to the student, including requiring the student to wear an identifying marker or serving the student an alternative meal" and this should apply to all students; and

**Whereas**, Universal Free Meal programs decrease stigma and increase student participation in school meal programs; decrease school districts' resources expended on tracking and collecting meal debts and reduce negative interactions between families and schools.

**Therefore, be it**

**Resolved**, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils will advocate for funding and policies at all levels regarding school nutrition, breakfast and lunch policies to:

- Expand equitable access to school meals, including Breakfast After the Bell, with the goal of providing Universal Free Meals for all students
- Include measurable goals and standards regarding child nutrition to include an emphasis in meeting or exceeding the national time standard of 20 seated lunch minutes and implementation of recess before lunch for elementary students; and be it further

**Resolved**, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils:

- Advocate for the high-nutritional quality of meals served and other food available in schools (such as vending machines, student stores, student fundraising projects, and classroom snacks) to ensure the best nutrition for our state's children and youth, and foster good habits that will contribute to a lifetime of good nutrition
- Encourage meal providers to review meals in consultation with a nutrition professional, and stakeholders for feasibility of farm to school and/or organic ingredient meal planning
- Encourage development of nutritionally complete and palatable components that include whole grains and fresh fruits and vegetables as well as limit the use of excessive additives and preservatives; and be it further

**Resolved**, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils work with districts and school staff to develop best practices for:

- Mealtime hygiene and nutrition habits
- Respectful and supportive mealtime environments, including the elimination of silent lunch periods
- A minimum of the national standard of 20 seated lunch minutes - in addition to the time required for the acquisition of meals; and be it further

**Resolved**, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils will advocate for the removal of meal debt policies that:

- Shame or humiliate students
- Prevent students from receiving and consuming a full meal equivalent to their peers
- Withhold diplomas, graduation experiences, or other privileges extended to their peers
- Result in punitive financial or other consequences for students or families.