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Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent

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BULLETIN NO. 025-24 ELEMENTARY, EARLY LEARNING, AND FEDERAL PROGRAMS/CHILD NUTRITION SERVICES/SECONDARY EDUCATION AND PATHWAY PREPARATION

TO: Educational Service District Superintendents
School District Superintendents
Educational Service District Assistant Superintendents
School Building Principals
Child Nutrition Directors
Business Managers

FROM: Chris Reykdal, Superintendent of Public Instruction

RE: Recess Requirements for School Year (SY) 2024–2025 and Seated Lunch Duration

CONTACT: Elizabeth Beechler, Director of School Meal Programs
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Ken Turner, Associate Director of Content – Physical Education
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PURPOSE

The purpose of this bulletin is to inform you about:

1. Changes regarding public elementary students' access to recess, as outlined in [ESB 5257](#) and [RCW 28A.230.295](#), including information about the SY 2024–2025 Recess Waiver.
2. Rulemaking regarding seated lunch duration.

BACKGROUND

Student Access to Recess

The legislature recognizes that recess is an essential part of the day for elementary school students. The legislature also acknowledges that the amount of time spent on recess varies

throughout the state. The legislature's intent is to set minimum requirements to ensure that all students in elementary school have equal access to daily recess.

Recess Requirements

Starting with the 2024–25 school year (SY), public schools must provide at least 30 minutes of daily recess within the school day for all students in grades kindergarten through five and students in grade six who attend elementary school.

- Public schools may offer extra recess before or after school, but this time cannot fulfill the daily 30-minute requirement during the school day.
- Time spent changing clothes for outdoor play cannot count towards the mandated recess duration.
- Recess must be supervised, and student directed, aiming for safety, inclusivity, and quality. It may include organized games but should avoid the use of computers, tablets, or phones.
- Recess should be held outdoors whenever possible. If indoors, schools should use appropriate spaces promoting physical activity.
- Daily recess cannot substitute for meeting physical education requirements outlined in [RCW 28A.230.040](#).
- Recess should be scheduled before lunch whenever possible.
- Recess should not be withheld as a disciplinary action except when there is an immediate threat to safety.
- Recess should not be withheld as an academic intervention or support.

Seated Lunch Duration

The State Auditor's Office conducted a [Child Nutrition Performance Audit](#), revealing that Washington schools are falling short of the recommended best practice of providing students with 20 minutes of seated lunchtime. Following the audit, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) reviewed regulations and procedures concerning the duration of seated lunches and will proceed with rulemaking.

SCHOOL DISTRICT POLICY AND PROCEDURES CONSIDERATIONS

Recess

The Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA), with the assistance of OSPI, has issued [Policy 6701](#) and [Procedure 6701P](#) related to recess and physical activity.

By the beginning of the 2024–25 SY, school districts must adopt or amend, if necessary, policies and procedures that WSSDA will be releasing for elementary recess for the 2024–25 SY.

Recess Waiver for SY 2024–25

In accordance with [RCW 28A.230.295](#), public school districts with elementary schools unable to comply with this requirement may apply for a waiver from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction for the 2024–25 SY year. District leaders are required to complete the [Waiver Application: Recess Waiver for 2024–2025 SY](#) and submit waiver via email to recess.waiver@k12.wa.us. Waiver submissions should be submitted by October 1st.

Seated Lunch Duration

Information on seated lunch duration rulemaking will be posted on the [OSPI Rulemaking Activity](#) page. The rule-making process will include multiple public hearings, with opportunities for comments. Seated lunch duration refers to the time students have for lunch consumption after going through the lunch line and sitting down to eat. This time is distinct from the overall scheduled lunch period. Any requirements will not take effect until the 2025–2026 SY or later.

RESOURCES

- [Strategies for Recess in Schools](#) SHAPE America website.

INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

For questions regarding this bulletin, please contact Elizabeth Beechler, Director of School Meal Programs, at 360-522-2103 or email elizabeth.beechler@k12.wa.us or Ken Turner, Associate Director of Content – Physical Education, at 206-617-0288 or email ken.turner@k12.wa.us.

This bulletin is also available on the [Bulletins](#) page of the OSPI website.

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