
SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1504

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2023 Regular Session

By House Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Low, Alvarado, Eslick, Fosse, Donaghy, Cortes, Harris, Leavitt, Taylor, Duerr, Schmidt, Goodman, Graham, Volz, Doglio, Pollet, Macri, Reed, Riccelli, and Callan)

1 AN ACT Relating to ensuring elementary school students receive
2 sufficient daily recess for mental and physical health; adding a new
3 section to chapter 28A.230 RCW; adding a new section to chapter
4 28A.210 RCW; and creating a new section.

5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature recognizes that recess
7 is an essential part of the day for elementary school students. Young
8 students learn through play, and recess supports the mental,
9 physical, and emotional health of students and positively impacts
10 their learning and behavior. Given the state's youth mental health
11 and physical inactivity crisis, as well as learning loss due to the
12 COVID-19 pandemic, recess is vital to support student well-being and
13 academic success.

14 (2) The legislature also acknowledges that the amount of time
15 spent on recess varies throughout the state; therefore, youth do not
16 have equitable access to opportunities for physical activity, self-
17 directed play, and time outdoors. The legislature intends to set a
18 minimum requirement for daily recess to ensure that all students have
19 equal access to recess, but school districts are encouraged to exceed
20 this requirement.

1 (3) Further, the legislature intends to clarify that recess may
2 not be withheld as a disciplinary or punitive action or to have a
3 student complete academic work. The legislature believes that these
4 clarifications and other policies will help make elementary school
5 recess safe, inclusive, and high quality for all students.

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.230
7 RCW to read as follows:

8 (1)(a) Beginning with the 2024-25 school year, public schools
9 must provide daily recess for all students in grades kindergarten
10 through five and for students in grade six if they attend an
11 elementary school. Public schools must provide a minimum of 30
12 minutes of daily recess within the school day if the school day is
13 longer than five hours.

14 (b) Public schools may provide additional recess before or after
15 the school day, but this time does not count toward the requirements
16 in this section.

17 (c) Time spent dressing or undressing for recess does not count
18 toward the requirements in this section.

19 (2)(a) Recess must be supervised and student directed. It may
20 include organized games, but schools should avoid the use of
21 computers, tablets, or phones.

22 (b) Recess must be held outside whenever possible. If recess is
23 held indoors, schools are encouraged to provide it in a space that
24 promotes physical activity.

25 (3) The daily recess required under this section may not be used
26 to meet the physical education requirements under RCW 28A.230.040.

27 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.210
28 RCW to read as follows:

29 (1)(a) By April 1, 2024, the Washington state school directors'
30 association, with the assistance of the office of the superintendent
31 of public instruction, must review and update a model policy and
32 procedure regarding nutrition, health, and physical education.

33 (b) The model policy and procedure must:

34 (i) Strive to make elementary school recess safe, inclusive, and
35 high quality for all students;

36 (ii) Encourage physical activity breaks for middle and high
37 school students;

38 (iii) Align with the requirements of section 2 of this act;

1 (iv) Encourage elementary school recess to be scheduled before
2 lunch, whenever possible, to reduce food waste, maximize nutrition,
3 and allow students to be active before eating;

4 (v) Discourage the practice of withholding recess as a
5 disciplinary or punitive action except when a student's participation
6 in recess poses an immediate threat to the safety of the student or
7 others, and create a process to find and deploy alternatives to the
8 withholding of recess;

9 (vi) Discourage the withholding of recess to have a student
10 complete academic work; and

11 (vii) Discourage using physical activity as punishment such as
12 having students run laps or do push-ups as a punitive action.

13 (2) By the beginning of the 2024-25 school year, school districts
14 must adopt or amend if necessary policies and procedures that, at a
15 minimum, incorporate all the elements described in subsection (1) of
16 this section.

--- END ---