

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: THURSDAY, MAY 4

Media contact:

Cha Cha Sawyer
King County Play Equity Coalition
info@kcplayequity.org | 206-321-9751

Landmark School Recess Bill Signed Into Law in Washington State
New Law Will Guarantee 30-Minute Elementary School Recess;
Legislation Aims to Address Youth Mental and Physical Health

SEATTLE—May 4, 2023—Washington state students in grades K-5 will be guaranteed at least 30 minutes of recess beginning in the 2024-2025 school year, thanks to a new law signed today by the Governor.

[Senate Bill 5257](#) and its companion House bill were championed by Sen. T'Wina Nobles (D-Fircrest) and Rep. Sam Low (R-Lake Stevens). The final version of the bill passed the House with a bipartisan 81-15 vote in March.

"Recess isn't just a fun break from class, it's an essential part of a child's development," said Nobles. "Science has shown us that it helps build vital social skills and problem-solving abilities, while also improving concentration and stress management. As educators, parents and former kids ourselves, we know firsthand the benefits of recess. By ensuring every child has access to high-quality play, we can set them up for success in the classroom and beyond, while building a stronger and healthier community for generations to come."

This legislation is now one of the strongest recess/physical activity laws in the country. Under the new Washington law, elementary school students must receive a minimum of 30 minutes of recess on days longer than five hours. It defines recess as supervised and student directed; must be held outside whenever possible; and the use of computers, tablets or phones should be avoided. The law also directs the Washington State School Directors Association to create a model policy that must be adopted by local school boards that encourages physical activity breaks for middle and high school, encourages schools to hold recess before lunch in elementary school, prohibits the use of physical activity as punishment and discourages withholding recess for disciplinary or academic reasons.

"Educators have seen first-hand the effects on student learning when kids don't have adequate time for movement and unstructured play," said Larry Delaney, President, Washington Education Association. "We also know that students of color are disproportionately impacted by schools' inadequate time for recess. This bill is a balanced, thoughtful solution and WEA is proud to have helped get it done."

Recess counts as instructional minutes in Washington state public schools, so additional recess time does not require lengthening the school day.

(more)

“Youth in our state are facing dual crises of physical inactivity and mental health challenges,” said Dr. Julie McCleery, with the King County Play Equity Coalition and Center for Leadership in Athletics at University of Washington. “With this legislation, Washington state has the opportunity to be a national leader in addressing these crises. Ensuring equitable access to recess is a research-based, community-driven approach that will benefit students throughout our state.”

The components of the law were drafted to reflect national best practices on physical activity in schools and extensive research that demonstrates the benefits of sufficient daily recess, including:

- Lower cortisol levels and reduced stress/anxiety
- Better social skills and problem-solving
- Improved physical health
- Improved memory, attention and concentration
- Improved time on-task and reduced disruptive behavior while in the classroom

"Having equitable recess in all elementary schools gives children across our state, regardless of their family or community circumstances, daily opportunities to move their bodies, get outdoors, engage in child-directed play and return to classrooms less stressed and more ready to learn," said Dr. Pooja Tandon, pediatrician and researcher at Seattle Children's and Associate Professor at the University of Washington.

According to recent research by the King County Play Equity Coalition, wide disparities exist between the amount of recess Washington state elementary school students receive. The survey of 580 elementary and middle school parents across 16 counties was conducted in 2022.

Findings from that survey include:

- 75 percent of parents believe their child does not receive enough recess.
- Amounts of elementary school recess ranged from fewer than 10 minutes to more than 50 minutes daily; 35 percent of elementary school students receive 30 minutes or less of daily recess, according to parents surveyed
- 41 percent of parents surveyed said their child's school withholds recess; an additional 31 percent were unsure if the practice of withholding was happening at their school
- 72 percent of elementary school parents surveyed think students should have at least 40 minutes of recess

A report by the King County Play Equity Coalition in 2019—[the State of Play Report](#)—found that only 19 percent of youth in King County regularly receive 60 minutes of daily physical activity, which is below the national average. The Centers for Disease Control recommends 60 minutes of moderate to rigorous physical activity daily for youth ages 6-17. For many youth, school is the best or only place to receive physical activity.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, “Recess is a necessary break in the day for optimizing a child’s social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. In essence, recess should be considered a child’s personal time, and it should not be withheld for academic or punitive reasons. To be effective, the frequency and duration of breaks should be sufficient to allow the student to mentally decompress. Recess can serve as a counterbalance to sedentary time and contribute to the recommended 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per day, a standard strongly supported by AAP policy as a means to lessen risk of overweight.”

(more)

Organizations part of the Recess for Washington coalition include:

- Action for Healthy Kids
- Active Schools
- All Girl Everything
- BestStart Washington
- Bras for Girls
- Communities in Schools Washington
- Defending the Early Years
- Global Recess Alliance
- Girls on the Run Puget Sound
- King County Play Equity Coalition
- One Roof Foundation
- PlayWorks
- Seattle Children's
- Special Olympics Washington
- Sports in Schools
- Successful Healthy Children
- The Sports Institute at UW Medicine
- TiPlus
- Upower
- Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
- Washington Education Association (WEA)

Individual supporters include:

- Mandy Manning, 2018 National Teacher of the Year
- Dr. Pooja Tandon, MD, Seattle Children's Hospital and University of Washington
- Dr. Rebecca London, UC Santa Cruz, Author of *Rethinking Recess: Creating Safe and Inclusive Playtime for All Children in School*
- Dr. William Massey, PhD, Associate Professor, Oregon State University
- Dr. Monique Burton, MD, Medical Director of Sports Medicine, Seattle Children's Hospital
- Denisha Jones, PhD, J.D., Executive Director of Defending the Early Years
- Dr. Julie McCleery, PhD, University of Washington
- Anna Beresin, PhD, Professor Psychology and Folklore, the University of the Arts, author of *Recess Battles: Playing, Fighting, and Storytelling*; and *The Art of Play: Recess and the Practice of Invention*
- Elizabeth Weybright, PhD
- Dr. Samuel Browd, MD, PhD, Director of The Sports Institute at UW Medicine and Pediatric Neurosurgeon at Seattle Children's Hospital

See full list of individual supporters at: recessforwa.org/supporters

About Recess for Washington

Recess for Washington is a statewide grassroots coalition made up of researchers, parents, educators, advocates and community-based organizations advocating for policy changes that ensure all students receive equitable recess access during the school day. The coalition champions recess because it has been proven to support the mental, physical and emotional health of our kids. The King County Play Equity Coalition provides primary leadership. Learn more and get involved at recessforwa.org.

About the King County Play Equity Coalition

The King County Play Equity Coalition is a network of Seattle-area cross-sector organizations engaged in collective action to transform our region into a place where all youth—especially youth from historically underserved groups furthest from play equity—experience the physical, social and emotional benefits of play, sports, outdoor recreation and physical activity. The coalition includes more than 115 members representing nonprofit and community-based organizations, school districts, neighborhood groups, businesses, government agencies and professional sports teams. Learn more at kcplayequity.org.

Photos and B-roll [are available here](#).