



Office of the Washington State Auditor

Pat McCarthy

Pat McCarthy

Washington State Auditor

Director of
Performance Audit

Scott Frank
(360) 902-0376

Scott.Frank@sao.wa.gov

Principal Performance Auditor

Melissa Smith
(360) 725-5579

Melissa.Smith@sao.wa.gov

Lead Performance Auditor

William Wright
(360) 725-5416

William.Wright@sao.wa.gov

Performance Auditor

William Clark
(360) 725-5362

William.Clark@sao.wa.gov

Performance Auditor

Jolene Stanislowski
(360) 725-5374

Jolene.Stanislowski@sao.wa.gov

Office of the Washington
State Auditor

P.O. Box 40021
Olympia, WA
98504-0021

www.sao.wa.gov
[@WAStateAuditor](https://twitter.com/WAStateAuditor)

October 2018

School Nutrition: Evaluating Elementary School Lunch Scheduling Practices

Background

Schools are expected to provide an environment conducive to learning. Children focus and learn better when they have adequate time to eat lunch. However, scheduling elementary school lunchtimes can be a challenge. Children might have inadequate time to eat for several reasons, including that the scheduled time is too short, the line for food is too long, or the urge to rush out to recess is too strong. Rushed children are more likely to waste food, eat less nutritious food, and return to the classroom hungry and excited from time spent on the playground.

Although no laws specifically address how much time would be considered adequate for lunch, guidelines by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the United States Department of Agriculture do recommend children be allowed 20 to 25 minutes to eat. In addition, OSPI and other stakeholders, such as the Washington State Parent Teacher Association, recommend children go to recess before they eat lunch, citing benefits such as improved attention in classes that follow the break.

School principals are responsible for scheduling lunch and recess, and must balance schoolwork, lunchtime and play. One example of a challenge facing some principals is that schools with limited facilities must use the same space as both cafeteria and gym, producing scheduling conflicts. Others, with even greater space constraints, send children back to their classrooms to eat, which reduces the time available for students to eat.

Auditors will interview school and district administrators across the state to understand lunchtime scheduling practices, struggles and successes. The audit will consider which best practices Washington schools can implement to achieve better student outcomes, such as improved behavior and increased consumption of healthy foods.

Scope and objectives

This performance audit will seek to answer the following questions:

- What lunch scheduling practices could schools implement to achieve better student outcomes, such as improved behavior and increased consumption of healthy foods?
- What barriers prevent schools from implementing these practices?

Timing

We expect to publish the results of this audit in early summer 2019.