

# PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Work in progress: Audit description

## School Nutrition: Following up on lunch scheduling guidance

Research has found that the way schools schedule lunch can significantly affect students' eating habits. Students who have more time to eat consume more nutritious food and waste less food. Education and nutrition groups suggest a minimum of 20 minutes of seated lunchtime. In addition, students who have recess before lunch also eat more healthfully, waste less food and display better overall behavior.

Washington's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is the primary agency charged with oversight of K-12 public education, as it works with the state's 295 public school districts to administer basic education programs and implement education reform on behalf of students. Each school district is an independent local government with elected school board members. While OSPI's responsibilities include ensuring schools adhere to nutrition standards for serving food, school boards have the authority to determine district policies, which often govern school lunch schedules.

Our 2019 performance audit compared the lunch practices of Washington elementary schools with nationally recognized leading practices that, when followed, promote learning, reduce behavioral issues and encourage students to eat more nutritious food. The audit found most schools we surveyed or observed did not implement either 20 minutes of seated lunchtime or schedule recess before lunch. Principals cited scheduling conflicts and limited facilities as some of the reasons for this. The audit also found that schools and students would benefit from additional guidance from OSPI. We recommended that OSPI update its regulations, and collaborate with schools and other stakeholders to address barriers to implementing both leading practices.

### Preliminary scope and objectives

This audit will follow up on earlier findings to determine whether OSPI has updated its regulations and worked with schools to address barriers to implementing leading practices. This audit seeks to answer the following question:

- What steps has the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction taken since our 2019 audit to implement recess before lunch and a 20-minute minimum seat time for lunch?



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