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

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

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

(2) The legislature also acknowledges that the amount of time spent on recess varies throughout the state; therefore, youth do not have equitable access to opportunities for physical activity, self-directed play, and time outdoors. The legislature intends to set a minimum requirement for daily recess to ensure that all students have equal access to recess.

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

NEW SECTION. Sec. 2. A new section is added to chapter 28A.230
RCW to read as follows:
(1)(a) Beginning with the 2024-25 school year, public schools
must provide daily recess for all students in grades kindergarten
through five and for students in grade six if they attend an
elementary school. Public schools must provide:
   (i) A minimum of 45 minutes of daily recess within the school day
       when the school day is longer than five hours; or
   (ii) A minimum of 30 minutes of daily recess within the school day
       when the school day is shorter than five hours.
   (b) Public schools may provide additional recess before or after
       the school day, but this time does not count toward the requirements
       in this section.
   (c) Time spent dressing or undressing for recess does not count
       toward the requirements in this section.
   (2)(a) Recess must be supervised and student directed. It may
       include organized games, but schools should avoid the use of
       computers, tablets, or phones.
       (b) Recess must be held outside whenever possible. If recess is
           held indoors, schools are encouraged to provide it in a space that
           promotes physical activity.
   (3) The daily recess required under this section may not be used
       to meet the physical education requirements under RCW 28A.230.040.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 3. A new section is added to chapter 28A.210
RCW to read as follows:
(1)(a) By August 1, 2024, the Washington state school directors'
association, with the assistance of the office of the superintendent
of public instruction, must review and update a model policy and
procedure regarding nutrition, health, and physical education.
   (b) The model policy and procedure must:
       (i) Aim to make elementary school recess safe, inclusive, and
           high quality for all students;
       (ii) Promote physical activity breaks for middle and high school
           students;
       (iii) Be aligned with section 1 of this act;
(iv) Require elementary school recess to be scheduled before lunch, whenever possible, to reduce food waste, maximize nutrition, and allow students to be active before eating;

(v) Strongly discourage the practice of withholding recess as a disciplinary or punitive action except when a student's participation in recess poses an immediate threat to the safety of the student or others and create a process to find and deploy alternatives to the withholding of recess;

(vi) Strongly discourage the withholding of recess to have a student complete academic work; and

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

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

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