

Washington State Department of HEALTH

COZY CLASSROOMS:

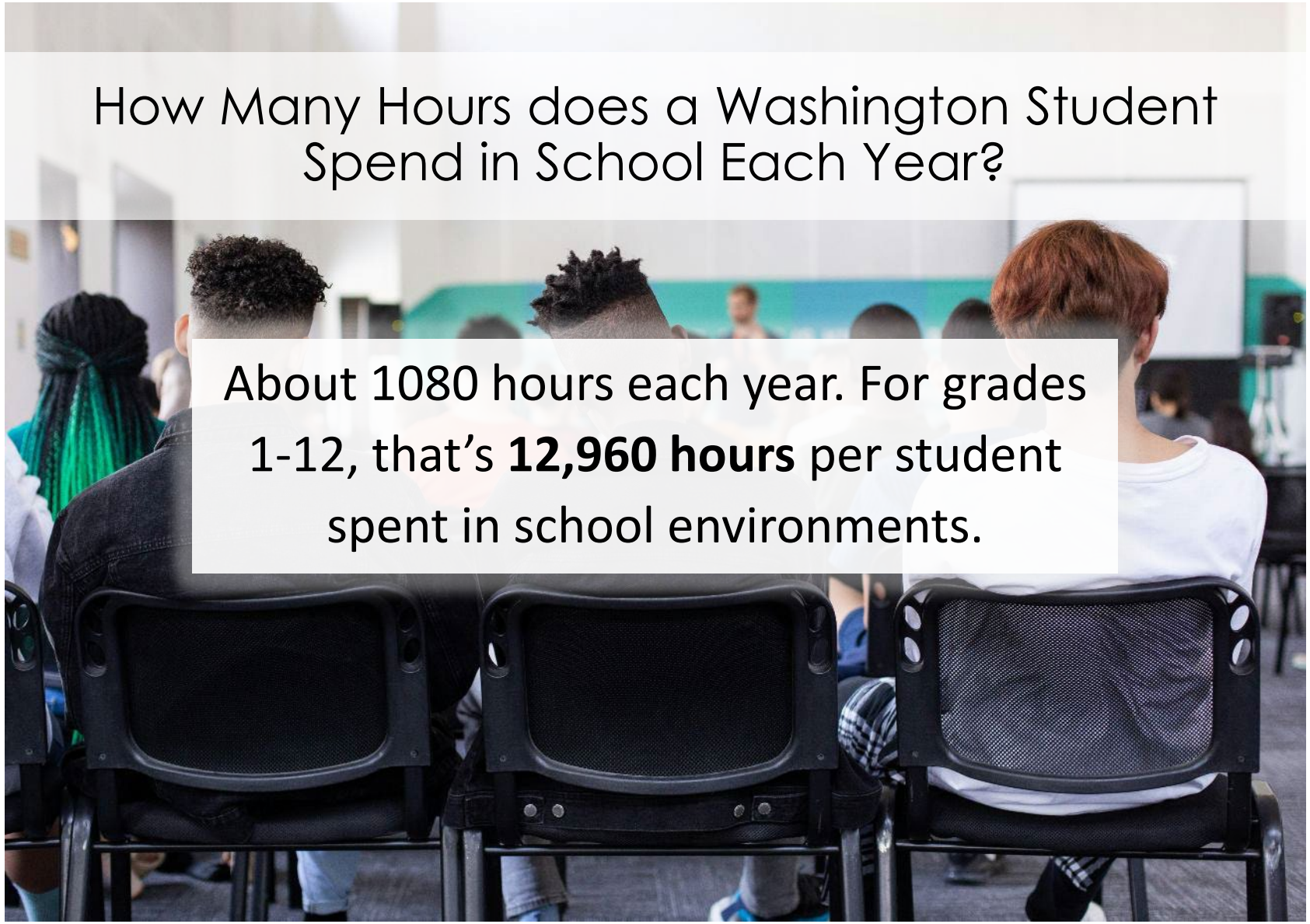
HOW TO KEEP THEM CLEAN AND HEALTHY

School EH&S and IAQ Program

How Many Hours does a Washington Student Spend in School Each Year?



How Many Hours does a Washington Student Spend in School Each Year?



About 1080 hours each year. For grades 1-12, that's **12,960 hours** per student spent in school environments.

Sources:
Chapter 28A.195 RCW
180-Day School Year Waivers, OSPI

Adding a Little Perspective

Authority and Purpose

Authority: Washington's School EH&S Rule



- Requires local health to inspect, review sites and plans
- Specific EH&S requirements like heating, noise, and lighting.
- **WAC 246-366-140** (1): *The existence of unsafe conditions which present a potential hazard to occupants of the school are in violation of these regulations.*
- Also see the K-12 Guide (PDF)

WHEN?
Updates are planned for the 2027-28 school year!

School EH&S Rule Review, State Board of Health

Square Peg in a Round Hole

Rules and best practices are often written in response to a specific incident or risk

Consider their *intent* for new situations

Consider risk: Is this safe and reasonable? What are the alternatives?

Work with school, district, risk managers



Square Peg Round Hole – Photo by Jeff Sandquist on Flickr Creative Commons CC BY 2.0

Supporting Educators Who Support Our Kids

"…The topic of "cozy classrooms" can be sensitive at times, because I know that it comes from a good place with our educators trying to make school more comfortable for everyone."



Goal: Collaborate for health and comfort

- Share concerns, focus on "why"
- Allow for questions
- Provide handouts

Changing School Environments

- Recognition that **mental health affects student success**
  - Different learning styles
  - ~20%[1] of children may not be "neurotypical"
- **Classrooms may be adjusted** to support
  - "Trauma informed design", "multisensory spaces"
  - Regulating sensory input
  - Different spaces for deep focus, group work, collaboration
  - Acoustics, lighting, tactile, visual, air quality
- **Screens** may be increasing near-sightedness[2]
  - Students should spend time outdoors, away from screens

[1]Walters, Anne (2024) *Child & Adolescent Behavior, 41*(1). https://doi.org/10.1002/cbl.30840.
[2]Prescription for Keeping Children Out of Glasses: Sunshine - American Academy of Ophthalmology

Principles of Trauma Informed Design
for General Architecture

1. **Empowerment and Personal Control** – furniture types, hands-on activities
2. **Security, Privacy and Personal Space** – refuge spaces, clear wayfinding
3. **Sense of Community** – gathering areas, living room style furniture, subdividing
4. **Beauty and Meaning** – natural or soft furniture and flooring, storage for reduced clutter, color schemes
5. **Dignity and Self Esteem** – personal storage, flattering lighting, staff amenities
6. **Stress Management** – natural lighting, easily cleanable surfaces, acoustic mitigation, seating near windows, calming colors, soft forms

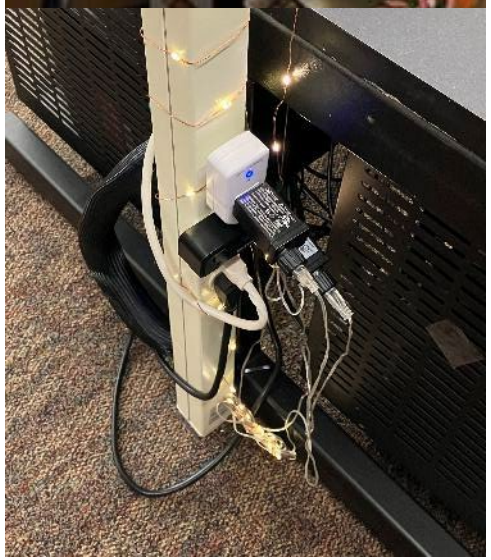
Through the Lens of Trauma Informed Design, Association for Learning Environments – white paper

Common Cozy Classroom Elements

Concerns, Strategies, and Guidance to Support Changes







String Lights and Lamps

…schools turning off all of the lights in the classroom, bringing in "party/Christmas" lights instead.

Concerns:

- Low light levels—eye health, performance
  - Glare, shadows, lighting color
- Fire hazards
  - Extension cords—UL, LNI
  - Trip hazards—egress
- Clutter—dust, cleaning

String Lights and Lamps

Strategies:

- Follow electrical and fire safety codes—no extension cords or linking together, lighting levels, regular dusting
- Remove or limit, use natural light, update lights—glare reduction or dimming, overhead lights for most activities, task lighting

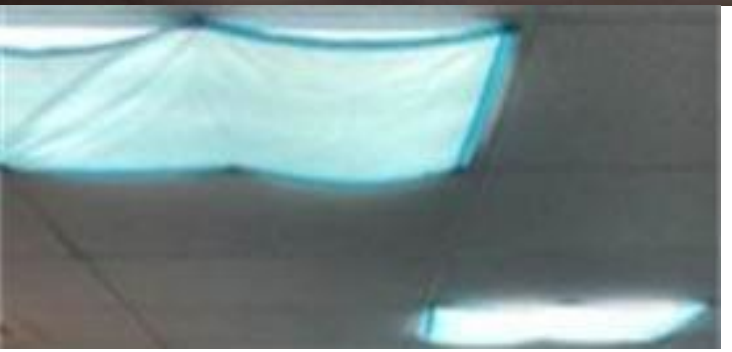
Rules and Guidance: WAC 246-366-120, K-12 Guide Sect. I, F 012a, new lighting guidance!

Studies indicate that the correct light intensity has a positive impact on student performance, behavior, and wellbeing.

Light Covers







Sometimes teachers install loose fire resistant fabric type covers similar to what is offered on this [special needs products] website.

Concerns:

- Fire hazards—heat dissipation, flammability
  - Fire code standards –see local fire marshal
- Low light levels—eye health, performance, safety
  - Minimum lighting levels, excessive brightness, glare, shadows
- Dust collection—rarely washed
- May impede inspection, servicing, maintenance

Light Covers

Strategies:

- Check with fire marshal and district, minimum lighting, clean regularly, must be removable
- Remove and use natural light, update lights–dimming and glare reduction, overhead lights for most activities, task lighting

Rules and Guidance: WAC 246-366-120, K-12 Guide Section I, F 012a, local fire safety guidance—Clark-Cowlitz, Spokane, new lighting guidance!

Lighting levels may be adjusted in some cases to better support students with special needs. They must meet requirements when students need to read or do similar tasks.

Seeing Outside

…Shade covers are being used all day, all year, even in wet winter months, when it's cloudy.

The windows are papered over or the blinds are always shut so the kids can not see to the outside … Teachers say it is a "security issue" so that people can not see into the classroom.





Concerns:

- Not seeing outside >50% of school day
  - Natural light and seeing outside both beneficial
- Light levels—eye health, performance, safety
  - Minimum lighting levels, shadows
- Fire hazards—flammability
- Dust collection, difficulty cleaning



Seeing Outside

Do not permanently cover windows. WAC 246-366-050 states that no student shall occupy an instructional area without windows more than 50 percent of the school day.

Natural light enhances student learning, comfort, mood, and helps set circadian rhythms that affect sleep quality.

Strategies:

- Move classrooms or move activities
- Work to open shades
  - Work with school on security policies
  - Partial or angle opening
  - Replace shades
  - Open some of day—heat, glare

Rules and Guidance: WAC 246-366-050(8), K-12 Guide Sect. I, B 009, F 012a, new lighting guidance!

Furniture, Plush Stuff from Home





Large pillows in the sensory classrooms that never get cleaned.

Concerns:

- Dust collection—asthma, allergies, sensitivities
- Inadequate cleaning—pests
- Egress
- Folding chairs, tables—pinch, cut, puncture

Strategies:

- Launder hot water every 2 weeks
- Replace with cleanable, remove or limit
- District approve instruction or therapeutic use

Rules and Guidance: WAC 246-366-140(1), K-12 Guide F 012a, Healthy Air Quality in Schools

Asthma is one of the leading causes of school absenteeism.









Rugs

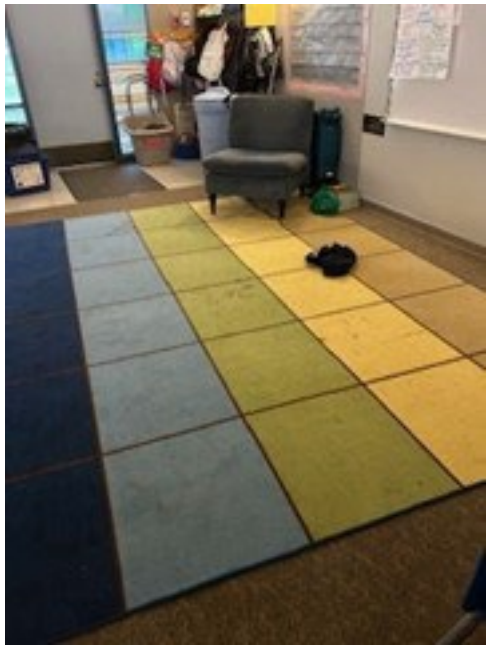
Rugs on rugs that never get cleaned.



Concerns:

- Dust collection—asthma, allergies, sensitivities
- VOCs from new rugs
- Inadequate cleaning - pests
- Trip hazard





Strategies:

- Launder hot water every 2 weeks
- Replace with cleanable, remove or limit
- District approve instruction or therapeutic use

Rules and Guidance: K-12 Guide B 005, Healthy Air Quality in Schools





Wall and Ceiling Decorations

…Paper lanterns, snowflakes and other paper items hanging from the ceiling…

Concerns:

- Fire hazard—sprinklers, fire spreading, egress
- Dust collection—asthma, allergies, sensitivities
  - Hanging from asbestos or crumbly ceiling tiles
- Trip hazard, eye injury hazard—falling stuff
- Light levels and shadows







Wall and Ceiling Decorations

…Paper lanterns , snowflakes and other paper items hanging from the ceiling…

Strategies:

- Limit amount and area, limit time up, less flammable

Rules and Guidance: K-12 Guide B 005, Healthy Air Quality in Schools, local fire marshal guidance – Clark-Cowlitz, Spokane



K-12 Guide B 003a: Limit combustible artwork and teaching materials to no more than 20% of the walls of corridors and no more than 50% of a classroom wall. Check with your local fire marshal for more specifics.

Clutter

…Too many items and clutter in a classroom (ex: lots of couches, lamps, decorations to an excessive degree)…

Concerns:

- Dust collection—asthma, allergies, sensitivities
- Pest-conducive conditions
- Fire or egress hazard
- Stressful environment



Clutter

Strategies:

- Off floors and walls for cleaning
- Find storage space
- School sharing or disposal opportunities

Rules and Guidance: WAC 246-366-050(5), K-12 Guide F 012a, Healthy Air Quality in Schools, School IPM, local fire safety guidance—Clark-Cowlitz, Spokane



Food in the Classroom

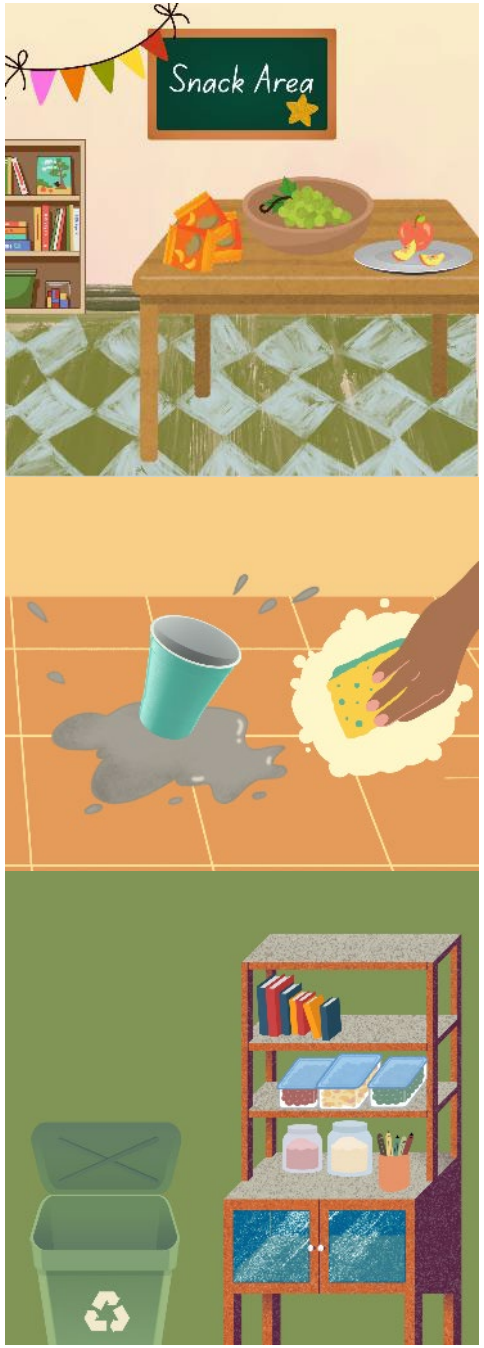
The kids are eating snacks on … rugs and at their desks. The resulting crumbs get ground into the carpet, attracting ants and other pests. If water is spilled on the carpet or rug, then the food + water + mold environment can be enhanced.

Concerns:

- Pest-conducive conditions—asthma, allergies, disease transmission
- Damage to installed carpeting
- Eating in science, CTE spaces—ingestion of toxic substances

Strategies: Designated eating area or cafeteria, limited eating time with immediate cleanup, established rules for food in the classroom

Rules and Guidance: Chapter 246-366-050(5) WAC, K-12 Guide B 006, J 004, Pest Press—Food in the Classroom



Appliances

Concerns:

- Pest-conducive or hard-to-clean conditions
  - Encouraging eating in classroom
- Burn hazard—littler kids access to coffee pot
- Improper ventilation—particles, VOCs
- Trip, electrical, collapse hazard—extension cords, flimsy stands
- Food safety concerns
- Other district concern—energy, nutrition

…We are finding more "mini kitchen areas" in classrooms … These areas include microwaves, coffee pots, and hot pots intended for student use during class time.





Appliances



Strategies and Tools:

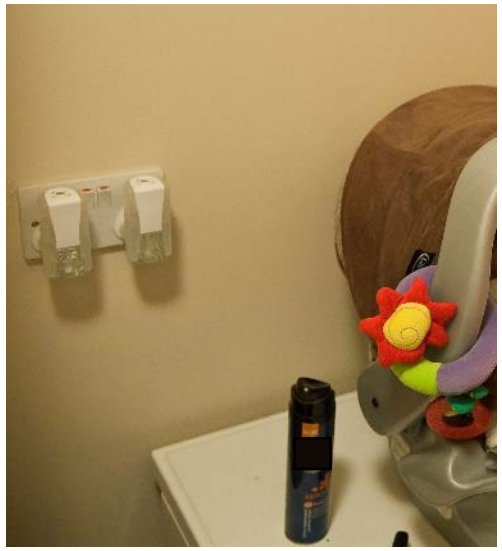
- Limit amount
- Regular cleaning—role designated
- Away from students
- Move to break room with ventilation
- Consult food safety

Rules and Guidance: Defer to food safety, Ch 246-366-050(5) WAC, K-12 Guide C 010, C 029, C 031, J 004, fire safety guidance SRHD

Fragranced Items







Some photos from CDC Unsplash

Concerns:

- Asthma, allergies, sensitivities
- Long-term health effects—repeat exposure
- Fire hazard—plug-ins, wax warmers, candles
- Burn hazard—wax warmers, candles



Fragranced Items

Strategies:

- Remove odor sources and use fresh air
  - Clean air smells like nothing!
- Just say no—adopt a fragrance free policy
  - Look for “fragrance free”
  - Avoid “fragrance” and “parfum”

Rules and Guidance: WAC 246-366-080, K-12 Guide F 001, Healthy Air Quality in Schools, essential oils handout, Healthy Air for Healthy Schools handout

Side Note: Likely School EH&S Rule Updates on Fragranced Items

WHEN?

Updates are planned for the 2027-28 school year!

School EH&S Rule Review, State Board of Health

A school official shall ensure: …

(3) The **use of fragrance-free and low-hazard cleaning and sanitation supplies** when available or ensure cleaning at a time and manner that would limit exposure to students;

(4) The **prohibition of air fresheners**, candles, or other products that contain fragrances;

K-12 School Environmental Health & Safety Workshop

Tuesday Nov. 3rd

Wednesday Nov. 4th

8:30 am to 12:30 pm

Online

Register now!

DOH School Environmental Health & Safety Team

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School EH&S page



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