

# The surprising things Seattle teachers won for students by striking

By [Valerie Strauss](#) September 25, 2015 *The Washington Post*



*Striking Seattle School District teachers and other educators walk a picket line Sept. 10 near Franklin High School in Seattle. (Ted S. Warren/AP)*

Seattle teachers went on strike for a week this month with a list of goals for a new contract. By the time the strike officially ended this week, teachers had won some of the usual stuff of contract negotiations — for example, the first cost-of-living raises in six years — but also less standard objectives.

For one thing, teachers demanded, and won, guaranteed daily recess for all elementary school students — 30 minutes each day. In an era when recess for many students has become limited or non-existent despite the known benefits of physical activity, this is a big deal, and something parents had sought.

What's more, the union and school officials agreed to create committees at 30 schools to look at equity issues, including disciplinary measures that disproportionately affect minorities. Several days after the end of the strike, the Seattle School Board voted for a one-year ban on out-of-school suspensions of elementary students who commit specific nonviolent offenses, and called for a plan that could eliminate all elementary school suspensions.

Other wins for students in Seattle's nearly 100 traditional public schools include:

Teachers won an end to the use of student standardized test scores to evaluate them — and now, teachers will be included in decisions on the amount of standardized testing for students. This evaluation practice has been slammed by assessment experts as invalid and unreliable, and has led to the narrowing of curriculum, with emphasis on the two subjects for which there are standardized tests, math and English Language arts.

Special education teachers will have fewer students to work with at a time. In addition, there will be caseload limits for other specialists, including psychologists and occupational therapists.

Seattle teachers had said they were not only fighting for pay raises but to make the system better for students. It sounds like they did.