

Recess Before Lunch

Overview

Did you know that it's best practice to shift the school schedule so students [play at recess](#) first, then eat lunch? Schools that have adapted this model report that students eat more fruits and vegetables, drink more milk, [waste less food](#), and are better behaved on the playground and classroom. Put simply, students feel like they have more time to eat lunch, and have worked up an appetite to eat all the major food groups.



Take Action

The recipe to having students eat healthy during lunch and be more alert during class is as easy as holding recess before lunch. Research has shown that recess before lunch has numerous positive effects on student's overall health and wellness. Here are some steps to get started:

- Build support within your school:
 - Discuss and research successful recess before lunch programs with school administrators.
 - Educate staff on the benefits of recess before lunch and make a commitment to adopt recess before lunch at your school. There may be resistance, but remind school staff of the overall goal of student wellness and improved behavior and learning.

- Educate parents about the positives of recess before lunch. If there is a schedule change mid-year, communicate to parents in advance so they are aware of the change.
 - Seek teacher and parent input about switching the schedule. Discuss the benefits of the program, and the impact it can have both in the classroom and at home.
 - Create a plan to schedule recess before lunch, and garner input from school staff, including teachers, lunch monitors, food service workers, etc. Make sure they understand that the initial schedule may need to be revised.
 - Consider the potential barriers to changing the schedule. Determine ways to rearrange the schedule so recess is before lunch. While the concept sounds simple, policy change requires careful planning and efficient communication.
 - Inform students about recess before lunch. Post flyers and information in the classroom and cafeteria.
- Consider a trial run of the new schedule and identify any issues. Principals and other key administrators should spend as much time in the lunchroom during the first few weeks of the routine. This allows extra support during transition times, as well as experiencing first hand any concerns.
 - Include a hand-washing plan in the schedule. Hand-washing is important for food safety. Students should wash hands before eating, especially during cold and flu season.
 - Provide the recommended 20 minutes of time for children to eat lunch from the time they sit down with their tray.
 - Review the schedule after a few weeks. What is working? What is not working? Make note of the positive changes, and its impact in the classroom. Share results with staff, teachers, and parents. Modify the schedule as needed.

Tips



Be patient. Any new program takes time to implement



Scheduling is often the biggest hurdle. Get creative and flexible with your planning. Remind all involved that the goal and

successfully, especially when it impacts scheduling.

INVOLVED THAT THE GOAL AND

change is for the best interest of the kids.



Communicate early and often! It is important to get buy in from teachers and parents early on. Report out on the statistics and research on why recess before lunch is the best model. Continue to inform teachers and parents throughout the process and after the schedule has been implemented.



Students are more likely to be hungrier and thirstier with the change. Consider having a morning snack option.



Determine an easily accessible location for cold lunches.

Additional Resources

[Recess for Learning Tip Sheet \(ENGLISH\)](#)
([Action for Healthy Kids](#))

[Recess for Learning Tip Sheet \(SPANISH\)](#)
([Action for Healthy Kids](#))

[Recess before Lunch \(Peaceful Playgrounds\)](#)

[Play first Lunch Toolkit \(Vancouver Coastal Health\)](#)

Related Activities

Active Indoor Recess

Active Outdoor Recess

Are your students restless from being cooped up inside due to rain or cold? Active indoor recess is a great way to get physically moving, regardless of space or equipment constraints.

Elementary schools should incorporate a minimum of 20 minutes per day of recess for all grades and 30 minutes for primary grades. The benefits of recess also extend to secondary grades, too!

Open Gym

Is your school looking for ways to increase physical activity before or after school? Consider hosting open gym!

Time to Eat

Do students have enough time to eat enough food to meet their nutritional needs? Student lunch is also about having time to talk, laugh and socialize with friends. Does your school provide adequate time to eat?