

Recess Before Lunch

Supporting Students' Health and Learning

What is Recess Before Lunch?

Recess Before Lunch (RBL) is just as it sounds; students go out to recess before they eat lunch.



Benefits of Recess Before Lunch

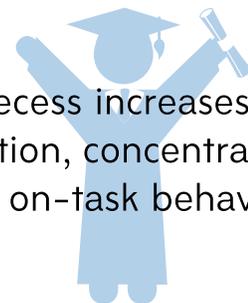
- Recess Before Lunch is a cost effective way to improve the health and well-being of students.
- Students eat more of their food, waste less, and eat more fruits and vegetables. One study in Utah found a 54% increase in fruit and vegetable consumption.*
- Teachers report that after adjusting to the change, students are more settled when they return to class and better able to focus because they have an opportunity to wind down after being physically active.
- Teachers report that students are ready to eat and not rushing to get outside.
- Teachers have more instruction time in the morning, because they do not have to allow time for hand washing before lunch.
- Students spend less time waiting in line for lunch.



Balanced meals lead to better academic performance



Recess increases attention, concentration, and on-task behavior



Resources

*<https://www.smarterlunchrooms.org/articles/recess-before-lunch-research-tested-parent-approved>
Recess Before Lunch: Optimizing School Schedules to Support Learning
Recess Before Lunch in Hawaii Schools



Steps to Implementing Recess Before Lunch*

1. Build support within your school and community.

A. Educate Staff

Educate yourself and all your staff (including teachers, aides, secretaries, food service, janitors, etc.) through a school staff meeting. School food service staff should be involved from the beginning, as they are key to accommodating the change. Be ready for some resistance to change and small problems that may arise. Keep the benefits front and center. Remember that enhanced nutrition supports improved behavior and learning. Make a commitment to stick with it the first year of the schedule change. Try and visit firsthand, or at least make contact with, another school administrator that has successfully implemented recess before lunch.

B. Educate Parents

Place a RBL promotional article on the school website, in the school newsletter, and/or in a letter sent home to parents. Put RBL information, benefits, and tips into the monthly school lunch menu that is provided to parents. Emphasize that RBL will be equally beneficial to students who bring a lunch from home.

C. Educate the Community

Share the benefits/concept of RBL at a School Community Council meeting, PTA/PTO meeting, and/or run an article in the local newspaper.

D. Educate Students

Educate the students so that they understand the policy and schedule change.

2. Plan the new recess and lunch schedule.

Meet with all of the staff involved, especially those directly affected by the schedule change (teachers, janitors, aides, food service, etc.) to work out the new schedule. Realize that the schedule is a work in progress which may need to be revised several times. Many schools conduct a trial run for several weeks to identify scheduling issues, and then modify as needed. Plan procedures for all cafeteria/lunchroom needs, like how to bring cold lunches from classrooms or lockers, where to store them during recess, hand washing, and the process for handling winter clothing and boots.

*These steps are adapted from the Team Nutrition Montana RBL Toolkit



3. Include a hand washing plan in the lunch schedule.

Hand washing is an important food safety issue that should not be overlooked. A hand washing routine allows students to wash their hands after playing outside and before eating, especially during the cold and flu season. Most school schedules are written so that the children come in from recess, put coats away, wash hands with soap and water, and then enter the lunchroom as a group. Some schools send children directly to the lunchroom from the playground, and then provide them with a disposable handy wipe or provide access to an instant sanitizer dispenser to cleanse their hands before eating.

4. Allow adequate time for the children to eat lunch.

It is recommended that children have at least 20 minutes to eat from the time they sit down with their lunch. Keep in mind that the younger students require more time to get through the serving line and to eat. Students will need to adapt to being in the cafeteria for 20+ minutes. Many schools find it helpful to use the score clock, if available, to count down the minutes until the students are released back to their classrooms. This helps students gauge how much time they have left. Practice this change with the kids. Initially, the noise in the lunchroom may increase as the students learn to make this behavior change. Over time, schools have noticed an improved atmosphere in the cafeteria as children relearn to eat slowly, relax, and socialize more during lunch.

5. Increase the presence of school staff in the lunchroom initially.

Principals and other school staff should spend as much time as possible in the lunchroom, especially during the first couple of weeks, to practice this new routine with the students. This helps ease the transition in and out of the lunchroom and allows extra supervision as the students learn a new routine. This presence demonstrates support of the RBL policy and the school lunch program, while enhancing the atmosphere of the lunch period. Continually provide students with clear and simple directions and show them how to meet expectations.

Practical Tips and Advice for Success

- Scheduling changes are do-able; but may take some creative planning and flexibility. Expect the schedule to be a work in progress.
- No extra staff should be required as a result of the change.
- Look past the logistics of the scheduling changes and focus on what is best for the students.
- It's important to get teachers' input and buy-in from the start. Promote the improvement in children's behavior on the playground and in the classroom, as well as more teaching time in the morning.
- Decide where to store cold lunches and lunch tickets/punch cards.
- Have a system to help students calm down before they enter the cafeteria.
- Having students line-up outside and washing hands before entering the cafeteria helps them transition more smoothly.

"Expect the schedule to be a work in progress after the schedule is in place."

"It's important to get teachers' input and buy-in from the start."

Tips from Utah Schools

- The layout of your lunchroom and the correct logistics matter.
- Talk to all stakeholders and get their buy-in and input before you implement.
- Know the RBL research and the benefits of the change.
- Be flexible and willing to try different things.
- Every little change has a ripple effect on a lot of people- make and let everyone know what it going on (music and art teachers, custodians, teachers, parents, etc.).
- Have an organized map of the logistics of lunch time and a master schedule you can use to make decisions.
- Having a Playworks coach helps to encourage you to keep going.

"Be flexible and willing to try different things."

"Have an organized map of the logistics of lunch time..."

Helpful Resources - Toolkits

Hawaii: Recess Before Lunch in Hawaii Schools

Iowa: Recess Before Lunch Guide

Missouri: Recess Before Lunch Toolkit for Missouri Schools

Montana: Recess Before Lunch: Optimizing School Schedules to Support Learning

Playworks Utah- <https://www.playworks.org/utah/>



Recess Before Lunch Readiness Checklist

This checklist is adapted from the Team Nutrition Montana RBL Toolkit

	Yes	No	Maybe
Are school administrators supportive?			
Are teachers and aides supportive?			
Is the school nutrition program supportive?			
Would current school nutrition staffing schedule work with RBL?			
Have you contacted nearby schools with RBL for best practices?			
How will students and parents have a chance to provide input on RBL?			
How will affected staff be able to provide input on RBL?			
Will students have at least 20 minutes of seated time to eat lunch?			
Is there a plan for adequate staff coverage of recess, lunch, and transitions?			
Is there a plan for storage of coats, boots, etc?			
Is there a plan for handwashing procedures?			
Is there a plan for the safe management of lunches brought from home?			
Is there a plan for the management of students with food allergies and other special medical needs?			

Next Steps:



Sample Schedules

Sample 1

All Grades	Recess: 10:50-11:15 am	Lunch: 11:15-11:45 am
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Sample 2

Grades: 1st/2nd grade 3rd/5th grade K/4th grade	Recess: 11:15-11:35 am 11:40-12:00 pm 12:05-12:25 pm	Lunch: 11:35-12:00 pm 12:00-12:25 pm 12:25-12:50 pm
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Sample 3

Grades: 1st grade 4th/5th grade 3rd grade 2nd grade	Recess: 12:10-12:30 pm 12:20-12:40 pm 12:50-1:10 pm 1:00-1:20 pm	Lunch: 12:30-12:50 pm 12:40-1:00 pm 1:10-1:30 pm 1:20-1:40 pm
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Sample 4

Grades: Kindergarten 1st grade 1 1st grade 2/2nd grade 1 2nd grade 2 3rd grade 1 3rd grade 2/4th grade 1 4th grade 2 5th grade 6th grade	Recess: 11:15-11:30 am 11:30-11:45 am 11:40-11:55 am 11:45-12:00 pm 11:55-12:10 pm 12:00-12:15 pm 12:05-12:20 pm 12:10-12:25 pm 12:15-12:30 pm	Lunch: 11:30-11:50 am 11:45-12:05 pm 11:55-12:15 pm 12:00-12:20 pm 12:10-12:30 pm 12:15-12:35 pm 12:20-12:40 pm 12:25-12:45 pm 12:30-12:50 pm
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Sample 5

Grades: 2nd grade 5th grade 3rd grade 4th grade 1st grade	Recess: 11:05-11:20 am 11:20-11:35 am 11:35-11:50 am 11:50-12:05 pm 12:05-12:20 pm	Lunch: 11:20-11:40 am 11:35-11:55 am 11:50-12:10 pm 12:05-12:25 pm 12:20-12:40 pm
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Sample 6 *mixed schedule

Grades: K-2nd grade (Lunch first) 3rd-5th grade (Recess first)	Recess: 11:45-12:00 pm 11:30-11:45 am	Lunch: 11:00-11:30 am 12:00-12:30 pm
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