



Why Recess Before Lunch?

CREATING A HEALTHIER CLASSROOM

2017-2018

Introduction

In 2010, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act authorized funding for school nutrition programs as a means to improve student nutrition, reduce childhood obesity, and encourage a positive trend in student health by reforming and revitalizing school lunch and breakfast programs.¹ Access to healthy foods for all students, including students of low income, strengthened as a priority with the understanding that many students consume the majority of their daily food intake at school.¹ Additionally, there is a growing concern to reduce food waste and increase food consumption.^{1,2} Many schools are implementing strategies to adjust the lunch environment, including reversing the typical lunch and recess times in elementary schools, in order to minimize waste and encourage consumption.²

Research Suggests:

- Reverse recess is associated with increased fruit consumption²
- Reverse recess is associated with increased milk consumption³
- Students are 1.5 times more likely to meet nutrition guidelines for calcium intake when recess occurs before lunch³
- Students return to class more relaxed and ready to participate in classroom activities when recess occurs before lunch³
- Students have fewer behavioral infractions with reverse recess^{3,4}
- Reverse recess decreases (moderately) milk waste⁴
- Reverse recess encourages students to consume their lunch slowly, without feeling like they are missing recess time⁵
- Reverse recess encourages consumption of fruits and vegetables during lunchtime⁵
- Reverse recess reduces plate waste⁶
- Reverse recess encourages general consumption of more food and nutrients⁷

Considerations

- Research is mostly supportive of recess before lunch when applied to National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participating schools, but not necessarily for lunches brought from home.⁵
- Increased fruit and vegetable consumption in young children encourages positive long term health⁵
- Plate waste may be caused by lack of appetite/minimal energy needs⁶
- Plate waste is often influenced by insufficient amount of time to eat⁶
- Adequate nutrition is necessary for cognitive development, prevention of health problems, and malnutrition⁴
- Few children consume the daily recommended amounts of fruits and vegetables⁸
- Inadequate consumption of fruits and vegetables increases the risk for obesity⁸
- Eating patterns formed during childhood typically continue into adulthood⁸
- Obesity is found to be easier to prevent than reverse⁸
- Early interventions help students shift their ideas about “healthy eating”⁸
- Lunchtimes of at least 25 minutes (sit down time) appear to encourage overall food consumption and decrease plate waste⁹

Potential Hurdles

- Scheduling³ (Academic Priorities)¹⁰
 - Student/Lunch
 - Cafeteria Staff
- Hand Washing³
- Supervision¹⁰
- Tradition¹⁰

Resources

- Action for Healthy Kids – [Recess Before Lunch](#)
- Peaceful Playground Foundation – [Recess Before Lunch](#)
- Education World – [Recess Before Lunch Can Mean Happier, Healthier Kids](#)
- Vancouver Coastal Health – [Play First Lunch Toolkit](#)

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