



Administrator Guide to Recess Before Lunch



Introduction

In 2010, Congress passed the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act which held child nutrition as a focal point. Part of the Act called for schools participating in National School Lunch Program (NSLP) to provide more fruit and vegetable options during lunch periods.¹ However, it is not enough to provide these alternatives if the majority of the food goes to waste as students rush out to get to their well-deserved recess. Adequate nourishment will help support children's health and academic success and we propose shifting the long standing lunch scheduling at schools.

Enter, Recess Before Lunch (RBL) in which, as the name states, the lunch schedule is shifted to follow recess activities. Nationally, this movement has gained momentum as we begin to see a growing number of schools shifting away from the traditional lunch schedule. Locally, in Orange County, several schools are actively participating or have participated in RBL.

Currently, RBL programming is not implemented through district policy rather integrated at the site level and is conducted on a school by school basis. Our goal at OC Food Access Coalition is to help foster the environment in which students are provided the opportunity for healthier life choices through their active participation during school lunch. RBL policy changes, can help create and sustain positive changes in the consumption of these fruits and vegetables and begin to address the health needs of our students.

Studies conducted in schools participating in RBL have displayed an increase in nutrient intake as well less food waste. Children build up an appetite during their physical activities during recess and come into lunch hungrier and thirstier. There are also positive behavioral changes, improved socialization and less trips to the nurse's office for students participating in RBL.

This toolkit has been provided to you by OC Food Access Coalition which has a primary mission to work as a catalyst to support and expand accessibility to healthy foods for all residents of Orange County. We are committed to providing School Districts and School Sites interested in Recess Before Lunch with the necessary resources to help ensure a successful program. Included is the Recess Before Lunch Toolkit which will provide you with the valuable resources and information to assist you as you begin to implement Recess Before Lunch at your school site.

¹ <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/healthy-hunger-free-kids-act>

What is Recess Before Lunch?

Recess Before Lunch (RBL) programming shifts the traditional lunch schedule to include recess *prior* to the traditionally acquired time for lunch eating. As the name suggest RBL promotes recess and physical activity time prior to the nutritional break. This programming is innovative and backed by research and best practice models throughout the nation.

The Benefits of Recess Before Lunch

National case studies have suggested that there are several benefits derived from RBL implementation including more fruit and vegetable consumption, less food waste and less visits to the nurse's office. Aside from national studies, this report reflects schools throughout Orange County participating in RBL. Administrators from these schools were contacted and surveyed and their feedback also provides interesting results.

Schools that Participate in Recess Before Lunch have found the following:

- 54% increase in fruit and vegetable consumption
- Decrease in food waste
- Decrease in Discipline Referrals
- Increased positive social interactions during meal time

National Case Studies of Schools Participating in RBL

Utah, 2011: In a study involving seven elementary schools, plate waste and fruit and vegetable consumption were measured in schools with RBL and schools without RBL. The switch to Recess Before Lunch resulted in a 45% increase in students eating at least one serving of fruits and vegetables. There was a 54% difference in fruit and vegetable consumption between participating and non-participating schools. Students consumed significantly more food when they had worked up an appetite after recess and did not feel rushed.²

Hawaii, 2005: In a pilot study at Kaneohe Elementary School, 5th and 6th graders in different lunch periods were selected to participate in Recess Before Lunch. The results were a remarkable decrease in discipline referrals as well as decreased student visits to the health room for stomach aches. The lunch line wait was reduced by more than two minutes, and plate waste also decreased slightly. According to teacher surveys, some were initially confused about the logistics but supported the change after RBL was implemented. The schedule change was

² <http://foodpsychology.cornell.edu/discoveries/recess-swap>

actually beneficial for the entire school because less students shared the playground at one time.³

Montana, 2003: The results of the Recess Before Lunch switch were studied in four Montana Schools. Teachers observed that students were more settled and ready to learn in the afternoon. The lunchroom atmosphere was also more relaxed, as students were not itching to get to the playground. There was an overall decrease in behavioral problems and a decrease in food and milk waste. Teachers supported and recommended the new Recess Before Lunch structure, and many students were also satisfied with the change.⁴

Central Washington, 2004: According to a study of two elementary schools, food waste decreased from 40.1% to 27.2% with the scheduling of recess before lunch. With Recess Before Lunch, there was a significant increase in the intake of macronutrients, Vitamin A, iron, and calcium among students. Highlighting the 86% free and reduced lunch participation in both schools, the study emphasizes the need for promoting and enabling optimal nutrient consumption during the school day.⁵

What School's in Orange County Are Saying about RBL

Monroe Elementary, Santa Ana: Four years ago, Principal Rios decided to switch to Recess Before Lunch because “students rushed to play and always threw food away because they were more interested in playing than eating.” She shared her observations with her staff and decided to implement Recess Before Lunch. After RBL, Principal Rios noticed that the kids “were hungry and thirsty because they had already exercised”, and they “made better use of their eating time”.

Eastshore Elementary, Irvine: According to Administrative Assistant Ms. Bertone, “the beauty of RBL is that kids were actually eating their lunch.” There was “less food waste, and kids enjoyed eating while talking with their friends. Supervisors at the school also approved of the new structure “because kids are less rambunctious.”

Pendleton Elementary, Buena Park: Principal Jeffrey shared, “I am a health nut which is why I decided that this would be a great idea. There were issues at lunch with kids taking two bites of their food and heading to recess so we thought it would be good to try and implement this program.” When the school started RBL, there was resistance from students and parents

³ cjhpc.fullerton.edu/Volume3_2005/Issue4-Hawaii/01-07-tanaka.pdf

⁴ <http://www.opi.mt.gov/pdf/SchoolFood/RBL/RBLGeneral.pdf>

⁵ <http://docs.schoolnutrition.org/newsroom/jcnm/04fall/bergman/bergman1.asp>

because of lost play time and dirty hands. The administration “fought hard against this resistance and through time, we started getting buy in.” She says, “Teachers like RBL because they dismiss from the classroom to go directly to recess, and no longer do they deal with the process of lining up before lunch. Also, there used to be a higher rate of problems with students getting in trouble during the lining up process prior to RBL. Teachers would have to sort out those problems as they came up. We do not deal with that issue with RBL.”

San Juan Elementary, San Juan Capistrano: Principle Pule decided that RBL would be beneficial because she observed that with recess after lunch, students “would go out to play on a full stomach and would have a lot of children in the nurse’s office.” The staff felt that this new structure was better for students, and they communicated about the procedure in order to make the transition work. There were no complaints, and the change “was not a problem at all”.

Implementing Recess Before Lunch

Adapted from the Montana Team Nutrition Program Guide⁶

Build Support for Recess Before Lunch with School and Stakeholders

1. **School Site:** Do your research! Educate yourself and your staff as to the benefits of RBL. Information should be distributed to: teachers, aides, secretaries, food service directors, playground supervisors, janitors, etc. Provide materials through staff meetings in order to educate staff on RBL. All members of the school team will be important to the success of the policy change so get everyone in on the conversation. Prepare in advance for the potential barriers and challenges by addressing these issues in your meetings with staff. It will be important to keep school food service staff involved as well as they will be key to the success of the implementation. Stick with it! Make that commitment to stick with the plan as it will take a while to get used to the changes
2. **Parents:** Information to parents early on is as important as you can avoid any potential barriers if you get the information out early and often enough. Promote the benefits of RBL in school newsletters, websites and social media campaigns. Provide blurbs of information in any article that goes home to parents involving food such as monthly food menu items. Be proactive! Make this a topic of conversation with your champion parents and create a buy in early on.
3. **Students:** Information to students is also important as integration into RBL begins. Students will relay information to parents so it is important to understand the significance of letting them know early and often enough. There are several methods to promote RBL including the use of nutritional education which could provide a focus on the value of eating a healthy meal. Be prepared for a few bumps in the road early on. With staff support, you should be able to transition with a few hiccups along the way. Be persistent! Students are always learning and this will take a few tries to get going.
4. **Community:** Present information through social media, local newspapers or bulletins, school marquee advertisement. Provide information at school board meetings, PTA, School Site Council and other community based organizations. Promote RBL with your School Wellness Policy Committee at your district in order to build support from partners or staff with resources regarding RBL.
5. **Plan and Prepare Your School Lunch Schedule:** Do not go at this alone, remember that you will need to get input from key stakeholders in order to have a successful follow through and outcomes. Receive input from staff, teachers, lunch supervisors, janitors,

⁶ <http://www.opi.mt.gov/pdf/SchoolFood/rbl/RBLGeneral.pdf>

and cafeteria food staff regarding scheduling. Remember that this will be a work in progress and that it will take a few tries before you get things working. Be persistent and stick to the plan!

6. **Provide Adequate Time for Handwashing:** Many of the concerns raised against RBL programming have been issues concerning hygiene and handwashing after recess. Solutions include setting time in the schedule to allow students to wash with soap and water prior to entering the lunchroom area. Others have set up hand sanitizing stations at several locations before and after the lunch line and throughout the lunchroom area.
7. **Provide Visual Aids:** Visual cues such as signs, cones or posters are recommended in order to assist students as they become accustomed to the new schedule. Particularly as students line up for food and as they head back to class after the lunch period is over.
8. **Get Everyone Involved:** At least during the first couple of weeks. You will need to have as much support staff as possible in order to help direct traffic. Students are quick learners they will get used to the new schedule, they just need a little guidance. After a few weeks (or as you see students managing themselves), you can start to relieve staff and allow lunch supervisors to work on their own.
9. **Stick with the Change:** A change from the traditional method of lunch programming may not be without its challenges. As a Champion Administrator leading the change to RBL the best advice is to follow through and focus on the goal. As one principal stated, "It is about a shift in the culture, the first year that we changed to Recess Before Lunch was the most difficult, after that, it is part of the expectation and part of the school culture."

Link to Principle Renee Jeffrey's article on Recess Before Lunch:

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/dec09/vol67/num04/First-Steps-to-a-Healthier-School.aspx>

Cover Page Images Used

<http://www.better-ed.org/blog/recess-gap>

<http://www.startribune.com/support-seesaws-for-recess-consultant-at-2-edina-elementary-schools/330529851/>