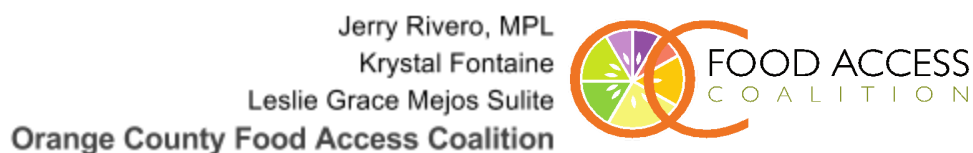

Recess Before Lunch: Revere Elementary School Case Study



Recess Before Lunch (RBL) programming is creating a shift in traditional thinking of lunch scheduling and becoming a national movement in which schools switch from the ever-so-common lunch before play schedule. Students who participate in RBL are eating and drinking more during their lunch time and returning to class ready to learn. In a whole child approach to student learning, this becomes an important component as nutrition and student wellness play an important role in the development and learning of elementary school students. Research, practice and common sense tell us that Recess Before Lunch can be an important tool in addressing nutrition needs of students along with behavioral, social-emotional and even environmental concerns. Then the questions becomes, why has this not been done before? It can be best answered in one word, change. Changing from a well known format of lunch then play may seem a bit daunting, but then again any type of change can be intimidating. Ultimately the focus should be the students and the benefits that they will gain from the change. What this case study aims to provide is sufficient evidence to parallel the empirical research which provide the aforementioned results from schools participating in RBL.

Currently, in a traditional lunch format, we see students take a bite of food and perhaps a chug of milk in order to get out to the playground in order to grab the first kickball. This creates unintended plate waste as well as visits to the health office with students with stomach aches (Tanaka et al., 2005). The concept behind the RBL program is simple, provide students with the appropriate amount of time for physical activity in which they build a thirst and an appetite and thus transition into their normally allotted lunch time in which they would be more inclined to eat a balanced meal. A student who is well

nourished has proven to yield greater mental, physical and social benefits yet we are still using the traditional lunch format which stands to be challenged.

With the traditional eat-before-play schedule, studies have shown that kids that are hungry after lunch are associated with irritability and decreased levels of focus during class and consequently poorer academic performance (Kleinman et al., 2002) (Florence et al., 2008). Scheduling lunch before recess has also been associated with decreased consumption in both macro- and micronutrients (Bergman et al., 2004). However, based on previous case studies, it is understood that RBL has been associated with increased food consumption, therefore an increase in nutrient intake (Robinson, 2003). The RBL schedule allows for an appropriate amount of time for students to eat so they do not rush through their lunch to maximize their playtime. Overall, there is an increased consumption of nutrient dense food, thus improved diet quality and improved health (Robinson, 2003). Because students are consuming more food there is also a decrease in food waste (Bergman et al., 2004) (Getlinger et al., 1996). Lastly, along with this improvement in health is improved academic performance, and improved social behavior as seen with lower incidents of discipline referrals (Ramstetter et al., 2010). There are a number of benefits for both the students and faculty with this change in schedule.

Case Study

Paul Revere Elementary School (Revere Elementary) began implementing RBL midway through the 2015-16 school year and as of the writing of this paper has fully integrated the program into the current 2016-2017 school

year. This school was chosen as an ideal case study do to the large student enrollment as well as the population demographics that this school serves. Currently, the school has 870 students enrolled from grades TK through 6.

Located in the heart of the Anaheim, California, Revere Elementary serves a high density, low income community just minutes away from the Disneyland Resort. 2015 Census Tract data from the American Community Survey, estimates that over 30% of children living in the area surrounding Revere Elementary between the ages of 0-18 are living below the poverty level (Census, 2017). Eighty eight percent of students enrolled qualify for free or reduced lunch at Revere (Cal Dept. of Education, 2017).

“It is better for the children to play first and then eat...[they] will more likely eat a variety of food, thus, will help them get a more well-balanced diet. When children are healthy, they will do better in school.”

Despite the large student population enrolled at Revere Elementary, through great consideration and meticulous planning, the administration has successfully incorporated the program into their everyday schedule. The administration, faculty and staff at Revere provide a best practice example to other elementary schools interested in integrating the RBL program into their own bell schedules and greater benefitting both their students and staff.

Methodology

Participants of the study were all part of Paul Revere Elementary School's faculty, staff, and student body. This included students in grades 1 through 6, as well as lunch supervisors and teachers. The demographics of Revere Elementary indicate that over 88% of the students enrolled are eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch.

An observation study was performed from 12:45PM - 2:30PM, analyzing the process of two lunch periods: grades 1-3 and 4-6. The study began upon release of the students to recess in the first lunch period, and ended at the student pick up after the lunch of the second lunch period. Important time slots and activity duration in the schedule were tracked. Placement of major areas on the

playground where the students would play, line-up, receive their lunch and sit down at their designated tables were also noted.

Qualitative data was collected through conversations with school administrators, lunch yard supervisors and nutritional aides. An online survey was sent out to classroom instructors to best understand their assessment of Recess Before Lunch.

RBL Process

Lunch periods are divided into 2 time slots divided by grade levels: 1st-3rd grade and 4th-6th grade. PreK and Kindergarten classes eat separately in their own designated lunch areas in a traditional lunch format thus were not accounted for in the RBL activities. Students are released directly from the classroom to the playground where recess takes place. One student from every classroom takes with him/her a class roster indicating the name of the classroom teacher which is left at their designated classroom lunch table. The 1st-3rd grade students are released to play for an allotted time and are then alerted to start lining up for lunch. Through a systems of signals and audible alerts, the students line up by classroom and in alphabetical order. The first student in line is in charge of carrying with him/her the classroom roster which identifies the group by teacher name.

Schoolyard aides direct the flow of students by directing 2 classes at a time towards the cafeteria area. Students line up for their lunch and are accounted for through an easy-to-use touchscreen device displaying the student's name and an image of the child. Students will then move from the cafeteria area and return to the designated lunch tables according to classroom. At the end of their lunch time, students are either picked up at their designated line up spot for that class. Teachers will pick up the students to take back to class and resume classroom instruction. There is a gap of 15 minutes between the next lunch period for which the 4th-6th grade classes repeat the process.

Results & Discussion

Survey Results from Teachers

A survey questionnaire was conducted and presented to the teachers of Paul Revere Elementary School. They were able to report evident changes that Recess Before Lunch had on their students. The questionnaire covered topics of RBL related to: student behavior, student focus in the classroom, number of discipline referrals and nurse visits, as well as the difficulty of RBL transition from the standard lunch before recess.

After the implementation of the RBL program, faculty and staff have noted an improvement on students' behavior and academic performance. Of the teachers surveyed, over two-thirds of the teachers surveyed noticed an improved difference in the level of student behavior. The results also indicated that over three-quarters of the teachers noticed a significant improvement in student focus in the classroom after lunch. Since students are calmer when re-entering the classroom after lunch, there has been a notable improvement in student focus and classroom behavior.

In regards to discipline referrals, more than half of the teachers surveyed noticed a difference in the number of students sent to administration on behalf of behavioral incidences after lunch. Therefore students spend more time in class after lunch instead of in the disciplinary office.

Almost all of the teachers surveyed thought there was little to no difficulty in the transition to the Recess Before Lunch scheduling. It should also be noted that almost two-thirds of the teachers preferred the Recess Before Lunch schedule compared to traditional school lunch. It was noted that with the appropriate support and cooperation of all staff, transitioning was easier for students as well.

Discussion

The punctuality and efficiency of the RBL program at Revere Elementary displayed the full cooperation of both the students and staff, making the program a successful. Administrators at Revere Elementary stated that the development of Recess Before Lunch required adjustments over the transition period and have seen several improvements including additional recess time gained by the students.

Teachers commented on the likes and dislikes of the RBL implementation. Mostly positive feedback was received; one teacher's testimonial mentioned, "I like that they are able to take their time to eat instead of skipping half of their lunch to hurry and play."

The feedback from teachers provided information regarding initial and final thoughts on RBL that have led to noticeable improvements in student behavior and focus. It has also led to noticeable differences in the amount of food waste due to the fact that students work up an appetite after playing and are eating more of their food. Another noteworthy improvement that teachers mentioned is the reduced amount of discipline referrals, resulting in students spending more time in the classroom than in the disciplinary office. One teacher disclosed,

“There are less discipline referrals now. They are able to get all of their energy out first, so they are calmer when eating lunch after.”

When prompted about the transition process of the RBL program, almost all of the teachers surveyed expressed that the transition to RBL scheduling took little to no difficulty. One teacher commented, "They have 45 minutes total, so they flipped the schedule to RBL. This isn't difficult in my mind."

This positive feedback would not be without the appropriate support and cooperation from all teachers and staff to make the transition easier for the students. "We established the system and the students followed it," one teacher testified. Despite mostly positive feedback, some concerns still arose. Some teachers reported concerns with hygiene and time of lunch. However, Revere Elementary has provided resources and solutions to address these setbacks. The concern with hygiene, for example, has been resolved by implementing portable hand sanitizing stations at cafeteria doors so students can have a form of clean up before grabbing their lunch. With clear communication and support overcoming obstacles is possible.

With the successful implementation of the RBL program, Revere Elementary has displayed a variety of benefits. Although the program was a work in progress for over 12 months, with support from dedicated faculty and staff the RBL integration has been successful. With multiple adjustments to the schedule, Revere has produced an efficient process that operates smoothly for their campus.

Schoolyard Staff Reflections

The observation at Revere Elementary also allowed for the opportunity to speak with the Lunch Yard Supervisors and Nutrition Service Assistants on site. One-on-one informal questioning provided the opportunity for schoolyard staff input regarding RBL. On the day of observation there were fourteen Lunch Yard Supervisors and two Nutrition Service Assistants present.

Overall, staff members expressed a welcome to the change in the lunch schedule. Lunch Yard Supervisors mentioned that it was much easier to supervise the students during RBL, adding that they were able to manage students easier while they were all eating or playing at once. "It is easier because we can all watch the students while they are in recess...before it was more

difficult because we [Lunch Yard Supervisors] were split, some of us watched them while they ate and others were out on the field watching them play. This was difficult because some of the kids who were eating wanted to be out playing on the field, and they would often get up and try and sneak off and play.” One Lunch Yard Supervisor, who has been with the district for 20 years, said she was encouraged by the change in lunch pattern, “Although you cannot make the student eat, I can see that this new change is good for them so that they can eat better, at least.”

We also had the opportunity to speak with the Nutrition Service Assistants. They spoke of the process of students going through the lunch line: “This is the best here; it works so well at this school. The kids have gotten so much better at moving through the line. They will still have their days, when they don’t do as well through the line but those are days when it is hot outside.”

The importance of communication of programing changes with staff was also indicated by Nutrition Service Assistant on site. The change from the traditional lunch system to RBL was, “Simple...The office will tell us what is going to happen; they have been very helpful in telling us what the changes are.” “It has been a really easy process on our end as well; we have our system that helps make the line move through quickly”, said a Nutrition Service Assistant on site.

Conclusion

With the implementation of the RBL program, students are both increasing consumption and the consumption of more nutrient dense food, therefore improving aspects of student health, academic performance, and social behavior. Teachers have reported that students are calmer when returning to class, resulting in less discipline referrals after lunch. There has been a notable difference in academic performance due to the increased focus in the classroom. The multifaceted benefits of RBL in multiple sites emphasizes the importance of nurturing the student as a whole (Price, J. & Just, D.R., 2015).

The implementation of RBL at Revere Elementary School is a continuous process. However, the outcomes have proven that it can be accomplished in other schools. Although there may be setbacks for certain schools depending on factors such as school layout, number of students enrolled, etc., it can be accomplished with time and the appropriate amount of parent, faculty and staff support as a foundation for the Recess Before Lunch program.

The Administrators at Paul Revere Elementary have been champions for this change based on their systematic organization of the lunch time schedule. This, along with their effective communication to faculty and staff, has proven to be a helpful step in the effectivity of implementing and sustaining the RBL program.

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