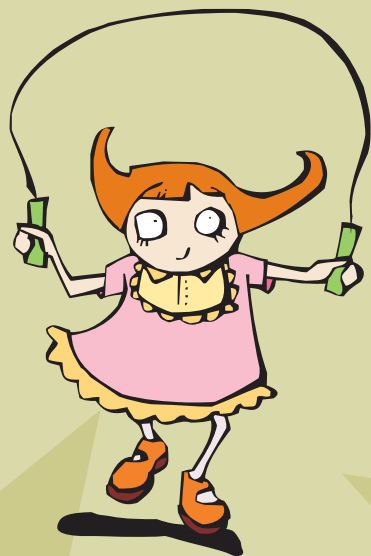


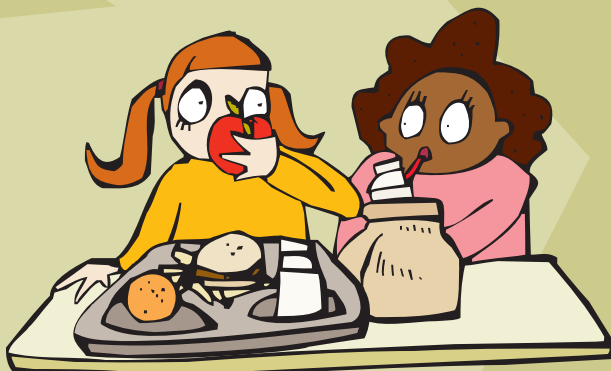
# Recess



# Before Lunch



# A Guide for Success



Linda McCulloch, Superintendent  
Montana Office of Public Instruction  
PO Box 202501  
Helena, Montana 59620-2501  
[www.opi.state.mt.us](http://www.opi.state.mt.us)

# A Recess Before Lunch Policy Implementation Guide

By the Montana Team Nutrition Program  
Office of Public Instruction School Nutrition Programs  
September 2003



Linda McCulloch, Superintendent  
Montana Office of Public Instruction  
PO Box 202501  
Helena, Montana 59620-2501  
[www.opi.state.mt.us](http://www.opi.state.mt.us)

This booklet, also available electronically on the Montana Office of Public Instruction School Nutrition Programs Web site, [www.opi.state.mt.us/schoolfood/index.html](http://www.opi.state.mt.us/schoolfood/index.html), provides a variety of information to assist schools in initiating a Recess Before Lunch (RBL) policy. Please use the information as you see fit. Camera ready promotional materials are included. State agency staff is willing to assist you in learning more about RBL. Please contact either of the following offices for assistance.

## For more information contact

### Montana Team Nutrition Program

Montana State University  
202 Romney Gym, P.O. Box 173360  
Bozeman, MT 59717  
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Katie Bark, RD, [kbark@state.mt.us](mailto:kbark@state.mt.us)

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## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Montana pilot schools staff and students for their cooperation and willingness to share their experiences and advice on the initiation and completion of a Recess Before Lunch policy.

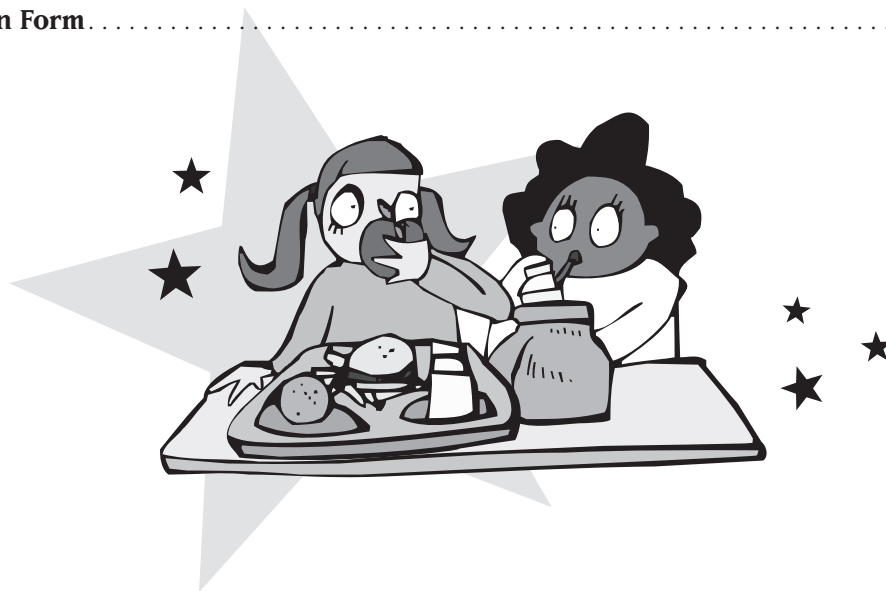
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## Developed by

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Montana Team Nutrition Program  
September 2003

# Table of Contents

<b>1. General Information and Introduction</b> .....	1
What is it? Why do it? .....	3
Quotes from Montana School Staff, Parents, and Students .....	4
<b>2. How to Implement a Recess Before Lunch Policy</b> .....	5
Steps to Implementing a Recess Before Lunch Policy .....	7
Practical Tips and Advice from Montana Schools .....	9
<b>3. Assistance from Montana Schools</b> .....	11
List of Montana Schools with a Recess Before Lunch Policy .....	13
Examples of schedules from Montana Schools .....	14
A Recess Before Lunch Information Packet .....	17
<b>4. Resources, Research and Supporting Information</b> .....	23
<b>5. Montana Team Nutrition Pilot Project Report</b> .....	25
Plate Waste Figures/Graphs .....	31
<b>6. Educational and Marketing Materials</b> .....	33
Recess Before Lunch tri-fold brochure .....	35
Recess Before Lunch PowerPoint Presentation .....	39
Recess Before Lunch Overhead Transparencies .....	43
Recess Before Lunch Handout-How to get started .....	53
Example of Letter to Parents .....	55
"Making Mealtime Pleasant" article .....	56
"Reverse Order" from <i>School Foodservice &amp; Nutrition</i> .....	57
Recess Before Lunch Press Releases .....	62
<b>7. Evaluation Form</b> .....	65





# What is Recess Before Lunch?

Why do it?



# Introduction and General Information

The Montana Team Nutrition Program has been working closely with schools to promote and assist in the implementation of a Recess Before Lunch (RBL) policy. This guide was published to serve as a tool to help other schools and communities learn how to implement a RBL policy at the elementary level.

## What is it??

Recess Before Lunch is simply a change in the traditional scheduling order of lunchtime and recess. As the name implies, RBL allows students to go to recess first, and then eat lunch. While it sounds simple in theory, schools often find that this policy change requires careful planning and efficient communication, as well as a strong commitment from school administrators, educators, and food service staff to make the change successful. Montana schools have found the effort in making the change is beneficial to the students and staff in creating a better eating environment: one that is conducive to improved food intake through a "more relaxed" eating experience.

From Spring 2002-Spring 2003, Montana Team Nutrition worked with four Montana schools to implement a RBL policy. We are happy to share the results and, more importantly, the advice/tips/insight from Montana schools on how to initiate a RBL policy.

## Why do it??

Montana schools are reaping the benefits of Recess Before Lunch!

- ★ The teachers notice that the kids are more settled upon returning to the classroom after lunch, and are ready to start afternoon classes. Principals and teachers also note decreased behavioral problems on the playground, in the lunchroom and in the halls.
- ★ Plate waste studies have shown that the children waste less food and drink more milk. The decrease in food and milk waste has been dramatic in some cases.
- ★ The atmosphere in the lunchroom is more conducive to eating and is much more relaxed, as the kids are not rushing through lunch to get outside. The kids are amazingly quiet and calm in the lunchroom. They are actually eating, while socializing amongst themselves.



# Quotes from Montana School Staff, Parents, and Students

Candy Johnson, Principal-Lower Grade Hellgate Elementary, Missoula Montana

- ★ "It's working great. The kids take more time to eat and we have less discipline problems on the playground."

Carolyn Koch, Supervising Teacher-Rau School, Sidney Montana

- ★ "I think they are eating better and so do the kids. The kids like it as they don't feel sick on the tire swing now. The noise level hasn't been reduced but we will keep the policy. The teachers like it as they can get some stuff done before going to lunch with the kids and the kids seem to make better use of the time before lunch because they know they want to get to recess. The kids also feel they are hungrier for lunch now."

Sharon Redfern, Principal-Highland Park School, Lewistown, Montana

- ★ "At Highland Park Elementary, we have noticed less time wasted in transition. Students are calmer, more settled, and ready to begin learning than when they come in off the playground. This certainly results in more time on task, which provides greater opportunity for improved academic performance and behavior."

Mr. Kim Anderson, Principal-Whitefish Central School, Whitefish, Montana

- ★ "My 5th period teachers love it!"
- ★ "Benefits that we have seen at Whitefish Central are:
  - ✓ Less conflict on the playground and in the lunchroom
  - ✓ Improved behavior in afternoon classes
  - ✓ Students are eating better and wasting less food"

Teachers support the change to RBL for the following reasons:

- ★ "Children are settled down and ready to learn when they return to the classroom."
- ★ "Less fights on the playground and better classroom behavior."
- ★ "Students are not rushing through lunch to get out to recess."
- ★ "Students are hungrier when it's time for lunch, so they eat better."
- ★ "More uninterrupted teaching time as students return to class more settled and don't lose the last 10 minutes of morning class time for hand washing."

School Food Service Staff report:

- ★ "It's better when they go out to recess first. They have better appetites and are a lot quieter. They eat more of their lunch."
- ★ "Kids want to play, not eat. This way they are not in a hurry to get outside."

Parents report:

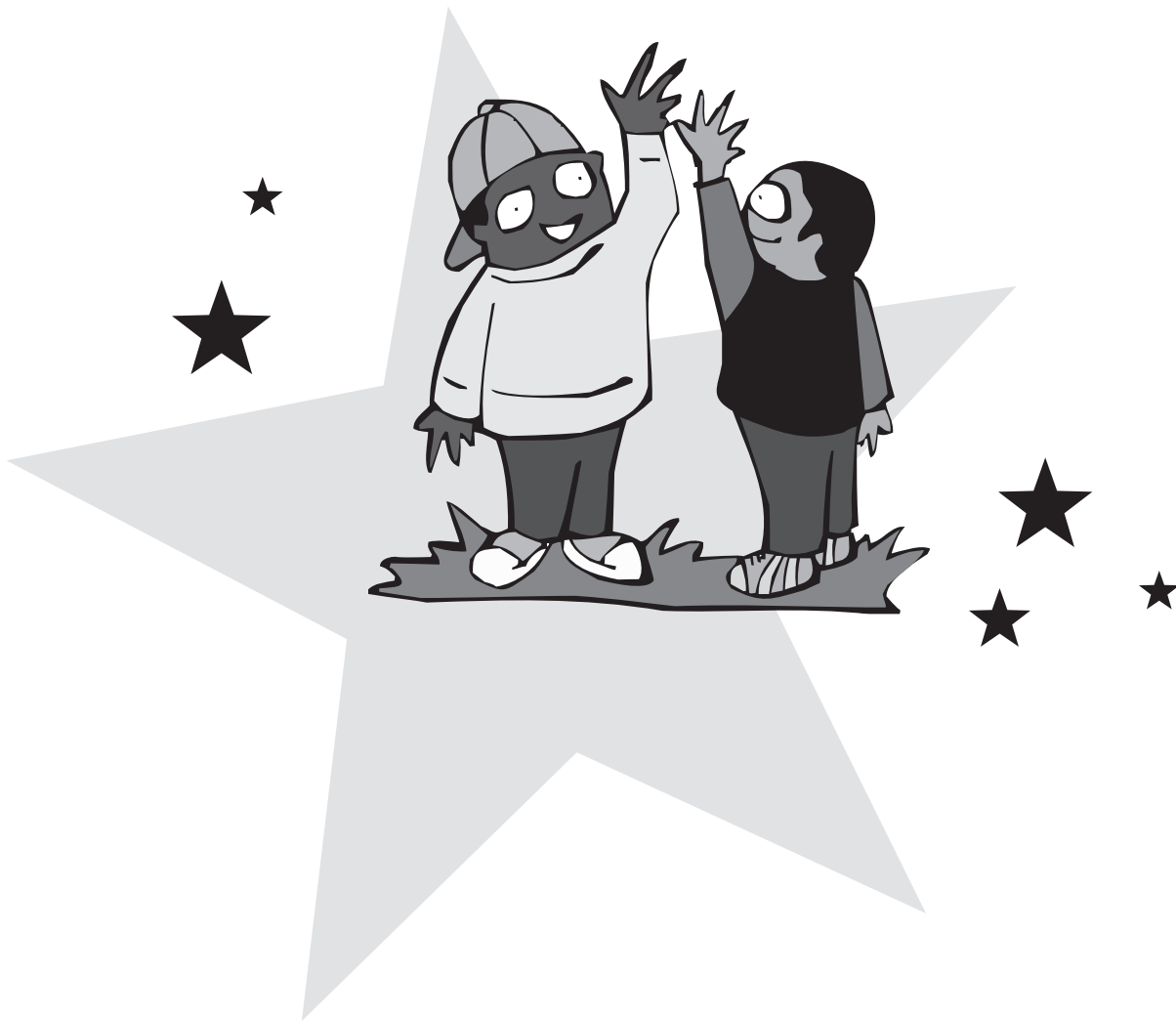
- ★ "This policy is helping my child to eat better and enjoy his lunch more."
- ★ "I appreciate and am glad that our school made this change."

Students report:

- ★ "It makes me hungrier and I like to eat."
- ★ "I can play soccer sooner; we get to play before we go to lunch."
- ★ "If you eat lunch before recess, you get a tummy ache."
- ★ "It takes off all your energy, so you're not moving around at lunch."



# How to Implement a Recess Before Lunch Policy



# Steps to Implementing a Recess Before Lunch Policy

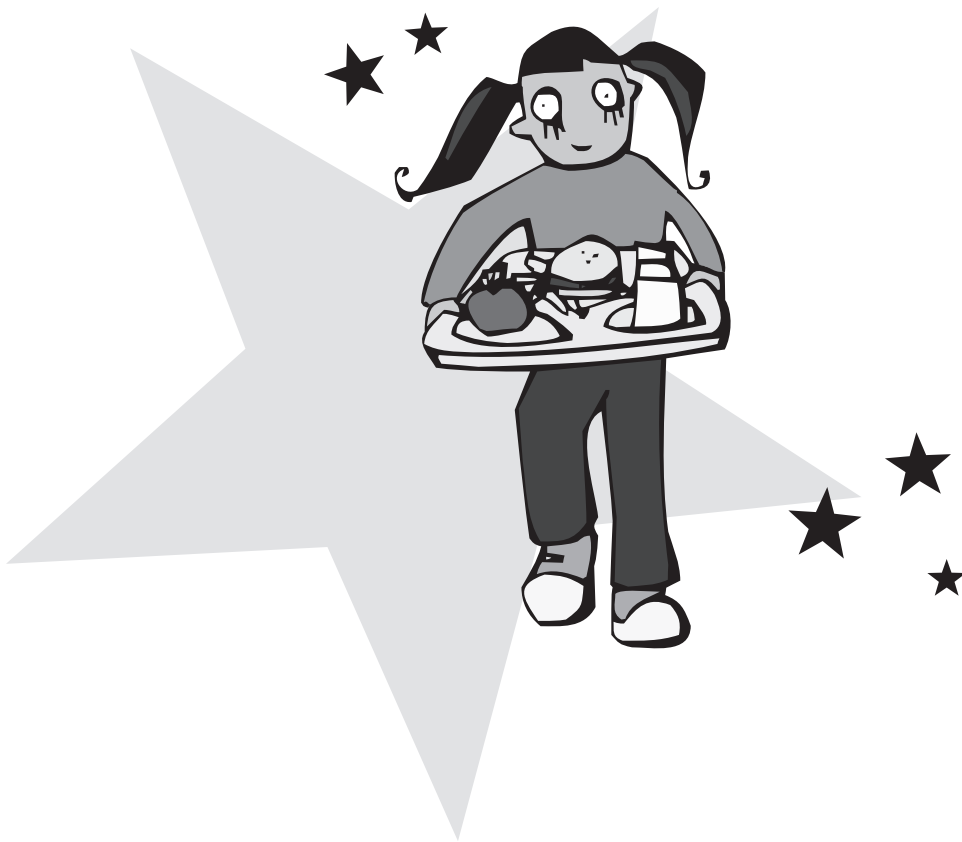
## I. Build support within your school and community.

- A. **Within the School**-Educate yourself and your staff, including teachers, aides, secretaries, food service, staff, janitors, etc. It is beneficial to visit firsthand, or at least make contact, with another school administrator that has successfully implemented Recess Before Lunch at his/her school. See the list of Montana schools using RBL in Section 3. Educate staff on this policy through a school staff meeting. Utilize the teaching materials in this guide for a staff in-service. See Section 6 for ready to use materials. Make a commitment to stick with it and ride out the first couple of months. School food service staff should be involved from the beginning, as they are key members to accommodating the change. Be ready for some resistance to change and small problems that arise. Keep the benefits in mind-enhanced nutrition, which supports improved behavior and learning.
- B. **Educate the Parents**-Place a RBL promotional article in the school newsletter (example provided in Section 6) or send a letter to parents (see parent letter in Section 6). Sprinkle RBL information/benefits/tips into the monthly school lunch menu that is provided to parents.
- C. **Within the Community**-Share the benefits/concept of RBL at a Parent Advisory Council Meeting, or run an article in the local and school newspaper. Use the sample press release, promotional articles, and/or the camera ready RBL brochure found in Section 6.
- D. **Educate the 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) to work out the kinks. 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 it as needed.
- 3. **Include a hand washing plan in the lunch schedule.** Hand washing is an important food safety issue that should not be overlooked. Most school schedules are written so that the children come in from recess, put coats away, wash hands, and then enter the lunchroom as a group. Other schools send children directly to the lunchroom from the playground, and provide them a disposable handy wipe or provide access to an instant sanitizer dispenser to cleanse their hands before eating.

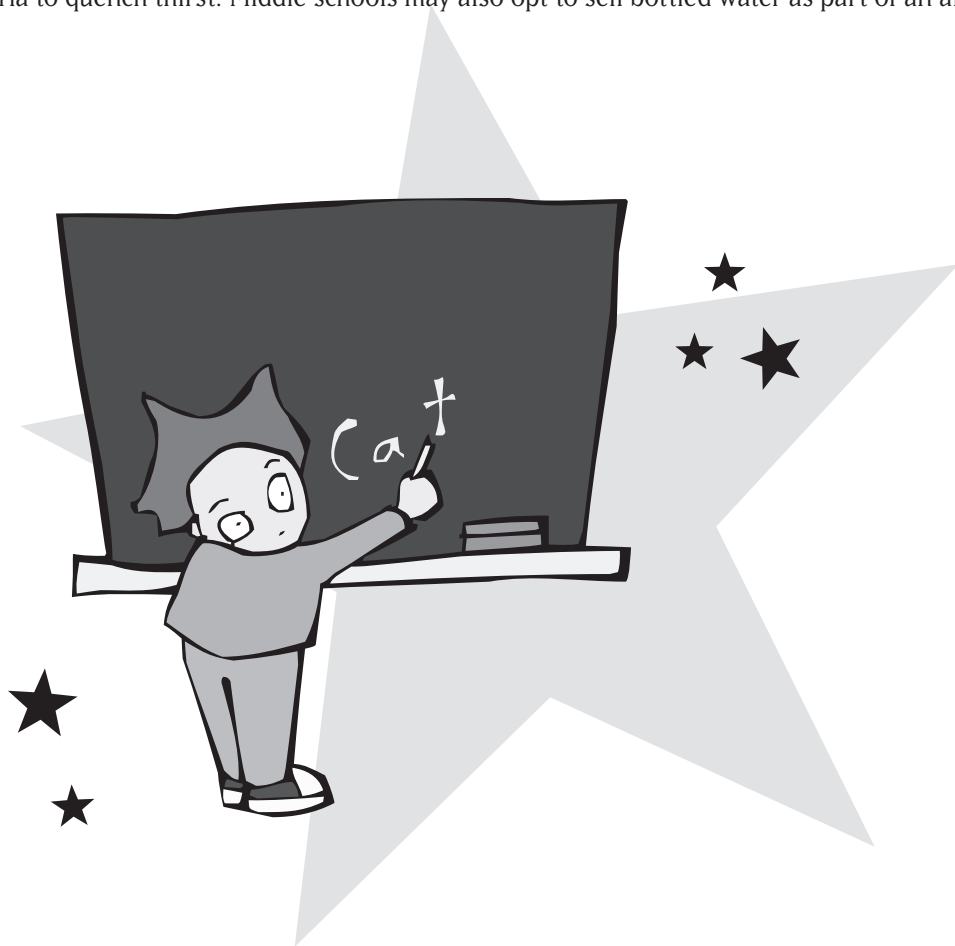


4. **Allow adequate time for the children to eat lunch.** It is recommended that children have at least 20 minutes from the time they sit down with their tray. Most Montana schools allow 25-30 minutes. Keep in mind that the younger students require more time to get through the serving line and to eat. Students must also 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 into 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.



# Practical Tips and Advice from Montana Schools

1. Scheduling tends to be the biggest hurdle to overcome. It is do-able; it just takes some creative planning and flexibility. Expect the schedule to be a work in progress. No extra staff has been required as a result of the change. See examples of schedules from Montana schools included in section 3.
2. Montana administrators, who have been successful in implementing RBL policies, recommend looking past the logistics of the scheduling change and concentrating on what is best for the kids.
3. It's important to get teachers' input and "buy-in" from the start. Really promote the improvement in children's behavior on the playground and in the classroom, as well as more teaching time in the morning.
4. Younger kids (K-2) tend to "accept" the change in scheduling better than the older kids initially. Focus groups with Montana students have shown that the younger kids "perceive" the change in a more positive way.
5. Feedback from food service staff from all of the schools has been positive with no problems reported from their end.
6. Decide where to store cold lunches and lunch tickets/punch cards for easy access.
7. Some schools opt to take care of lunch money prior to recess. Others keep the accounting procedure the same. This has not been identified as a potential problem area.
8. Kids are likely to be hungrier and thirstier with this change. Schools may opt to offer a mid-morning snack, along with promotion of the school's breakfast program. Schools are having dispensers of ice water available in the cafeteria to quench thirst. Middle schools may also opt to sell bottled water as part of an ala carte program.



# Assistance from Montana Schools



# Montana Schools with a Recess Before Lunch Policy

List as of September 2003

Schools across Montana are implementing a Recess Before Lunch policy. Please contact any of these schools directly for details and/or advice on changing to a Recess Before Lunch Policy.

## Western Montana Region

Whitefish Central School (grades 5-8), Whitefish, MT  
Hawthorne School (grades K-5), Missoula, MT  
Lewis and Clark School (grades K-5), Missoula, MT  
Paxson School (grades preK-5), Missoula, MT  
Russell School (grades K-5), Missoula, MT  
Hellgate Elementary (grades K-2), Missoula, MT  
Seeley Lake Elementary (grades 1-8), Seeley Lake, MT  
Potomac Elementary (grades 1-8), Bonner, MT  
Frenchtown 7-8 (grades 7-8), Frenchtown, MT  
Asa Wood School (grades K-3), Libby, MT

## Central Montana Region

Highland Park School (grades K-2), Lewistown, MT  
Radley Elementary School (grades 3-5),  
East Helena, MT  
Gallatin Gateway Elementary (grades 1-4),  
Gallatin Gateway, MT  
Arrowhead Elementary School, Pray, MT  
Ridgeview Elementary School (grades 2 and 4),  
Belgrade, MT  
Heck/Quaw Elementary School (grades 3 and 4),  
Belgrade, MT

Broadwater School (grades PK-5), Helena, MT  
Bryant School (grades K-5), Helena, MT  
Central School, (grades K-5), Helena, MT  
Kessler Elementary School (grades K-5), Helena, MT  
Four Georgians School (grade 5), Helena, MT  
CR Anderson Middle School (grade 6), Helena, MT  
Helena Middle School (grades 6-8), Helena, MT

## Eastern Montana Region

Central Heights School (grades K-6), Billings, MT  
Melstone Public Schools, (grades K-6), Melstone, MT  
Rau Elementary School (grades K-6), Sidney, MT

## Northern Montana Region

Meadowlark School (grades K-2), Conrad, MT  
Prairie View School (grades 3-5), Conrad, MT  
Valier School (grades K-6), Valier, MT  
Havre Public Schools, Havre, MT  
a. Highland Park Early Primary (grades K-1)  
b. Lincoln McKinley Primary (grade 2)  
c. Sunnyside Intermediate (grades 4-5)  
Belt Public Schools, Belt, MT  
Mountain View School (grades K-5), Great Falls, MT



# Examples of Schedules from Montana Schools

Montana Elementary School Schedule  
Grades K-2 600 Students

Kindergarten Morning Session  Class 8:30-10:25	Grade 1  Class 8:30-10:05	Grade 2  Class 8:30-10:05
	Recess 10:05-10:20	Recess 10:05-10:20
Recess 10:25-10:40	Class 10:20-11:30	Class 10:20-11:30
Class 10:40-11:00		
	Recess 11:30-11:45	Recess 11:30-11:45
	Lunch 11:50-12:10	Lunch 11:45-12:10
	Recess 12:10-12:30	Recess 12:10-12:30
	Kindergarten Afternoon Session  Class 12:30-2:15	Class 12:30-1:30
	Recess 1:30-1:45	Recess 1:30-1:45
	Class 1:45-3:00	Class 1:45-3:00
Recess 2:15-2:30		
Class 2:30-3:00		

Montana Elementary School Schedule  
Grades K-2 140 Students

K-Grade 2  Class 8:35-10:15
Recess 10:15-10:30
Class 10:30-11:25
Recess 11:25-11:45
Wash Hands Lunch 11:45-12:20
Class 12:20-2:00
Recess 2:00-2:15
Class 2:15-3:15

# Examples of Schedules from Montana Schools

Montana Elementary School Schedule  
Grades K-5 370 Students

Breakfast 7:50-8:20	Breakfast 7:50-8:20	Breakfast 7:50-8:20	Breakfast 7:50-8:20	Breakfast 7:50-8:20	Breakfast 7:50-8:20
	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Kindergarten Morning Session  Class 8:35-10:15	Class 8:35-10:15	Class 8:35-10:15	Class 8:35-10:35	Class 8:35-10:35	Class 8:35-10:35
Recess 10:15-10:30	Recess 10:15-10:30	Recess 10:15-10:30			
Class 10:30-11:00	Class 10:30-11:10	Class 10:30-11:25	Recess 10:35-10:50	Recess 10:35-10:50	Recess 10:35-10:50
			Class 10:50-11:35	Class 10:50-11:50	Class 10:50-12:00
	Recess 11:10-11:30				
	Lunch 11:30-12:00	Recess 11:25-11:50	Recess 11:35-12:05		
		Lunch 11:50-12:15		Recess 11:50-12:15	Recess 12:00-12:25
	Class 12:00-1:45	Class 12:15-1:45	Lunch 12:05-12:25	Lunch 12:15-12:40	Lunch 12:25-12:50
			Class 12:25-2:05	Class 12:40-2:05	Class 12:50-2:05
Recess 1:45-2:00	Recess 1:45-2:00	Recess 1:45-2:00			
Class 2:00-3:00	Class 2:00-3:00	Class 2:00-3:00	Recess 2:05-2:20	Recess 2:05-2:20	Recess 2:05-2:20
			Class 2:20-3:00	Class 2:20-3:30	Class 2:20-3:30

Montana Elementary School Schedule  
Grades K-6 115 Students

Kindergarten- Grade 4  Class 8:25-10:50	Grade 5-6  Class 8:25-10:50
Recess 10:50-11:15	Recess 10:50-11:15
Lunch 11:15-11:45	Lunch 11:15-11:45
Class 11:45-2:00	Class 11:45-3:30
Recess 2:00-2:15	
Class 2:15-3:30	

# Examples of Schedules from Montana Schools

Montana Elementary School Schedule  
Grades 3-5 150 Students

Grade 3 Class 8:25-10:15	Grades 4-5 Class 8:25-11:40
Recess 10:15-10:30	
Class 10:30-11:30	
Recess 11:30-11:55	
Lunch 11:55-12:25	Recess 11:40-12:00
Class 12:25-2:00	Lunch 12:00-12:25
Recess 2:00-2:15	Class 12:25-2:00
Class 2:15-3:15	Recess 2:00-2:15
	Class 2:15-3:15

Montana Middle School Schedule  
Grades 5-8 680 Students

Grade 5 Class 8:40-9:45	Grade 6 Class 8:40-10:00	Grade 7 1st Period 8:40-9:32	Grade 8 1st Period 8:40-9:32
Recess 9:45-10:00		2nd Period 9:37-10:24	2nd Period 9:37-10:24
Class 10:00-11:20	Recess 10:00-10:15		
	Class 10:15-11:20	3rd Period 10:29-11:16	3rd Period 10:29-11:16
Recess 11:20-11:42	Lunch* 11:20-11:42	4th Period 11:21-12:08	4th Period 11:21-12:08
Lunch* 11:42-12:03	Recess 11:42-12:03		
Classes 12:03-3:22	Classes 12:03-3:22	Recess 12:08-12:31	Lunch** 12:08-12:31
		Lunch** 12:31-12:53	Recess 12:31-12:53
		5th Period 12:58-1:45	5th Period 12:58-1:45
		6th Period 1:50-2:37	6th Period 1:50-2:37
		7th Period 2:44-3:22	7th Period 2:44-3:22

\*5th grade has 1st lunch during 1st & 3rd quarters. 6th grade has 1st lunch during 2nd & 4th quarters.  
\*\*7th grade has 1st lunch during 1st & 3rd quarters. 8th grade has 1st lunch during 2nd & 4th quarters.

The following pages contain a Recess Before Lunch Information Packet developed by Sharon Redfern, principal at Highland Park School in Lewistown, MT. Ms. Redfern has generously given permission to share this information. Feel free to modify or reproduce it to fit your needs.

# Recess Before Lunch

(i.e. Play first, then eat.)



Sharon Redfern, Principal  
Highland Park Elementary  
Lewistown Public Schools  
Phone 406-538-2555  
sredfern@lewistown.k12.mt.us

MAEMSP State Convention  
Great Falls  
February 7, 2003

# Highland Park Elementary

May 7, 2002

Dear Parents:

Beginning next week, Highland Park will be trying a new schedule during our lunch break: "Recess Before Lunch." Several Montana schools have already implemented this type of lunch hour, and others will also be trying a new schedule for the next year. Before eating lunch, our students will be dismissed to the playground for play and then be brought in to eat. Following lunch, students will return to class, ready to learn. Students will have the same play time and will have a slightly longer time in the lunchroom for eating during the new schedule.

There are many benefits to this type of program. Schools report greater nutrient consumption, as children eat a more balanced diet; less plate waste or food thrown away, as children are more ready to eat and are not in a hurry to get outside to play; better classroom performance, as children pay more attention when they are not hungry; better lunchroom and classroom behaviors, as children are focused on lunch rather than the playground and return to class feeling more full and settled.

We hope that this new schedule will promote better nutrition and student achievement for all of our students. We will try this schedule for two weeks, and if successful, will implement it for the next school term. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Also, we have gathered quite a collection of Lost and Found items. Please feel free to stop at the front office to look for clothing or other articles that may belong to your children.

Thank you for supporting Highland Park. It's been a great year!

Sincerely,

Sharon Redfern,  
Principal

# Highland Park Elementary

## Lunch Schedule

### 2002-03

<b>First grade-Group 1</b>			
	Recess 11:00-11:20	Wash & Dine 11:20-11:50	
		Hall/lunchroom duty for teacher	
<b>First grade-Group 2</b>			
	Recess 11:05-11:25	Wash & Dine 11:25-11:55	
		Hall/lunchroom duty for teacher	
<b>Second grade-Group 1</b>			
		Recess 11:30-11:55	Wash & Dine 11:55-12:20
		Hall/lunchroom duty for teacher	
<b>Second grade-Group 2</b>			
		Recess 11:35-12:00	Wash & Dine 12:00-12:25
		Hall/lunchroom duty for teacher	
Playground Assistants			
			Lunch & Hall Assistants

# Recess Before Lunch

## Key Points

The concept of eating lunch after recess is based on research data. References are attached.

### Expected benefits of the program

- ★ Less classroom discipline problems – children are more settled when they return to class after eating.
- ★ Better classroom performance – children pay more attention to the lessons when they are not hungry.
- ★ Better cafeteria behavior – children are ready to eat and not eager to leave lunch to go outside and play.
- ★ Greater nutrient consumption – children are ready to eat, and they eat more of the foods. Foods served but not consumed are of no nutritional benefit.

### Additional benefits noted at Highland Park

- ★ Teachers have more instructional time before lunch because they don't have to allow time for hand washing.
- ★ Children consume more food and drink more milk than before.
- ★ Students spend less time waiting in lines.
- ★ Teachers can give children extra help with their classroom skills before both go to lunch.

### Tips for success

- ★ Develop a system to promote hand washing before lunch.
- ★ Inform children where to place coats and belongings during lunch (classroom, lockers, etc.)
- ★ Decide where to store cold lunches for easy access.
- ★ Take care of lunch money before recess.
- ★ Be sure children have enough time to eat.
- ★ Share the benefits of the program with your staff. A trial period can help to work out scheduling and duty issues and allows for staff input.

# Highland Park's Recess Before Lunch Program

1. Our Food Service Director provided informational materials for our staff, and we reviewed them in 2001-02. After several staff discussions, we agreed to give the program a two-week trial period in May, 2002. The schedule had to be "tweaked" several times; we developed one that worked well.
2. Five minutes was added to the lunch time to ensure that students would have at least twenty minutes to eat. Staff duty time was increased slightly (five minutes).
3. A "plate waste" study was done in May, 2002, by Team Nutrition personnel. All food and milk that was thrown away was weighed and measured. Ten second graders were surveyed to determine how they liked playing before eating, and the staff was surveyed regarding their feelings about the new program.
4. Highland Park was one of four schools awarded a grant as a Pilot School for full implementation of the Recess Before Lunch program for 2002-03. A second plate waste study was done in September, 2002, using the same menu as last spring. Results showed that plate waste was reduced from 4.5 oz. per student to 2.98 oz., a total of about ten pounds less waste for the whole group. Beverage waste was similar in both studies with less than 1 ounce of beverage waste per student.
5. In the student survey, all second grade students who were surveyed preferred having recess before lunch. Teacher surveys were also very positive.
6. Parents are very supportive of this type of lunch hour, noting that it is a sensible approach for increasing nutrient consumption by students.

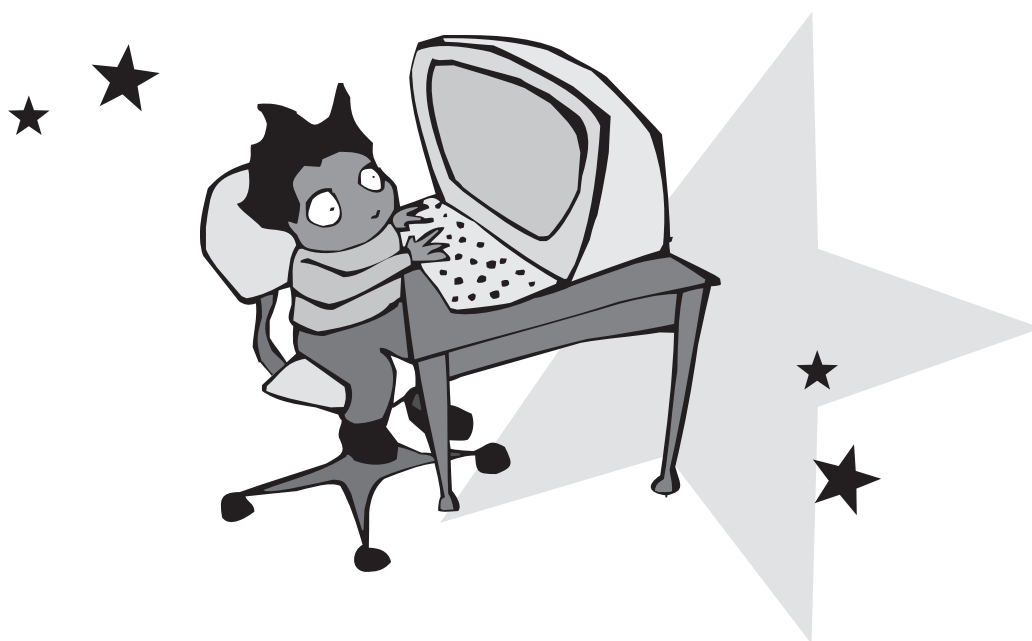



Highland Park's kitchen staff.

# Resources, Research, and Supporting Information

The following list contains research articles and/or other publications related to Recess Before Lunch.

1. White, Patrick. Reverse Order. School Food Service and Nutrition. August 2003. v. 57 (7) p. 36-42.
2. Montana Team Nutrition Recess Before Lunch Pilot Project Summary-Plate Waste Results, April 2002-May 2003. (See Section 5)
3. Getlinger, M.J., et al; Food Waste is Reduced When Elementary-School Children Have Recess Before Lunch. Journal of the American Dietetic Association. Sept 1996.v.96 (9) p. 906-908.
4. Read, M.H. & Moosburner, N. The scheduling of recess and the effect on plate waste at the elementary school level. School foodservice research review. 1985. v. 9 (1) p. 40-44.
5. Smith, Thomas R. Play First, Eat Last! School foodservice Journal. Nov/Dec 1980. v. 34 (10) p. 54-55.
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The Montana Office of Public Instruction  
School Nutrition Programs

Pilot Project Report



A Recess Before Lunch Policy in Four Montana Schools  
April 2002-May 2003



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# Pilot Project Report: A Recess Before Lunch Policy in Four Montana Schools

## Purpose

In order to promote healthy eating, while improving the atmosphere of school meals, the Montana Team Nutrition Program has been working with four schools to evaluate implementation of a Recess Before Lunch (RBL) policy. This pilot project was developed to evaluate the following components of Recess Before Lunch policy implementation in Montana schools:

1. Determine if there is an improvement in food and beverage waste, and
2. Acceptance and effectiveness of the policy, based on principal, educators, food service, and student feedback.

## Methodologies

Four Montana Schools served as pilot schools for the Recess Before Lunch policy. The pilot project started in the spring of 2002 and was completed in May 2003. The four schools that participated were:

1. A K-2 school in central Montana with an enrollment of 204 students.
2. A K-2 school in northern Montana with an enrollment of 102 students.
3. A K-8 school in northern Montana with an enrollment of 132 students.
4. A 5-8th middle school in western Montana with an enrollment of 674 students.

## Study Design

The study consisted of 3 phases. Each phase consisted of a plate waste study, a focus group to gather student feedback, and a survey of staff (administrators, teachers, and food service staff) comments regarding the RBL policy.

Phase 1: conducted in Spring 2002, prior to the school implementing a RBL policy.

Phase 2: conducted in Fall 2002, after the initial implementation of the RBL policy.

Phase 3: conducted in Spring 2003, after the RBL policy in use for one year.

## Plate waste studies

The menu and portion size was consistent within each school throughout the 3 plate waste studies. Total food and beverage waste collected included waste from hot lunch program trays, foods/beverages purchased through other school avenues (vending/snack bar) and lunches (food and beverages) brought from home. The total amount of food and beverage waste was measured in pounds and ounces, respectively. Amount of waste per student was calculated by dividing total waste by the total daily attendance. Keeping the plate waste studies unannounced to students and staff minimized interfering factors.

## Focus groups

A standard focus group questionnaire (Attachment A) and similar procedure was used for all 3 phases. Each group (per phase) consisted of 10-12 randomly selected students. The questions were developed to gather information regarding the timing of mealtime and recess, menu preferences, and overall opinions of the school food service program.

## Administrator, Teacher and Food Service Staff surveys

Surveys were left at each school visit, to be filled out and returned. A similar survey was distributed each time (Attachment B). The survey questions were written to determine general opinion of the RBL policy and the school food service program, any advantages/disadvantages of the RBL policy, and how it is working within each school.

## Exception

The northern MT K-8 School had started the RBL policy prior to Phase 1 of the study. Therefore, plate waste studies were not completed at this site. Focus groups and evaluations were collected and comments summarized.

## Plate Waste Results

- ★ **The average amount of food waste per student (average total of all three schools) decreased after implementation of the RBL policy.** The biggest decrease was noted in phase 2 (October 2002, first study after the RBL policy was started). Average food waste decreased in phase 3 (May 2003) to a lesser degree. See Figure 1.
- ★ **The average amount of beverage waste per student (average total of all three schools) decreased after implementation of the RBL policy.** The biggest decrease was noted in phase 2 (October 2002, first study after the RBL policy was started). Average beverage waste decreased in phase 3 (May 2003) to a lesser degree. See Figure 2.
- ★ **The beverage waste per student decreased by 67% (phase 2) and then 79% (phase 3) at the northern MT K-2 school.** This school also began offering extra water during lunchtime. They found that the children were thirstier as a result of going to recess before eating lunch especially during warm weather months.
- ★ The small sample size prohibited the completion of formal statistical tests to measure statistical significance. T tests did not show a statistical significance. **The data does appear to show an overall decrease in average food and beverage waste after implementation of a RBL policy.** A larger sample size (more schools) would be beneficial for future studies.

## Additional Findings

(based on subjective comments from pilot school staff and students)

- ★ The atmosphere in the lunchroom was more relaxed, quiet, and conducive to eating, as the children were not rushing to get out to the playground. The children have adjusted to being in the lunchroom longer, allowing them more time to eat and visit before returning to class.
- ★ Comments from administrators and teaching staff indicated a dramatic decrease in discipline problems on the playground, in the lunchroom and in the classroom. The principal from the northern MT K-2 school reported in May 2002 they have not had a single lunchroom referral to the office since starting the RBL policy.
- ★ Children return to class more settled, calmer, and ready to learn. Because they have eaten well, they tend to stay focused throughout the afternoon.
- ★ Teachers gain more teaching time before lunch, as they don't have to allow time for hand washing. Teachers also have the option to keep a student in for a few minutes of extra help before the child goes to recess.

- ★ Student focus groups indicated that the children like being able to play first.
- ★ Schools benefit more from their food dollars when students consume the food instead of throwing it away. The food is not being thrown into the garbage; but is fueling students.

## Considerations

- ★ A decrease in the number of unopened milk cartons was noted at all schools after implementation of RBL. This indicates that more children are opening their milk and consuming it, rather than leaving it unopened on their trays. This may assist them in meeting their calcium needs for growing bones and also provides a good source of protein.
- ★ Many factors, some of which cannot be accounted for, affect how children eat. The decrease in food and beverage waste per student was the greatest between the first (May 2002) and second (October 2002) phases of the study. The average waste per student was the lowest in October 2002.
- ★ It was noted that it would have been beneficial to separate out milk waste from other beverages, especially in the middle school, where the vast majority of the beverage waste consisted of beverages other than milk, such as sports drinks, soft drinks, juice, etc.
- ★ Participation in the schools' National School Lunch Program indicates how many children eat the traditional hot lunch. A low participation would indicate that the majority of the waste collected is not from the hot lunch line, but from foods purchased at the snack bar and/or brought from home. A high participation rate would most likely indicate that the majority of the waste collected is from the hot lunch line. Participation rates for the pilot schools ranged from 18% to 94%.

## Conclusion

The positive results in the pilot schools support further implementation of a RBL policy based upon decreased plate waste, creation of a more relaxed eating environment, and improved student behavior. This policy helped to decrease the amount of food and beverage waste per student per day. **The average amount of food and beverage waste per student (average total of three schools) decreased after implementation of the recess before lunch policy.** Of equal importance, is the **improvement in the mealtime atmosphere**, which allows students the time and opportunity to relax and enjoy their meals, without rushing to get outside, and the **improvement in students' behavior**. Administrators and teachers indicated that the students' behavior improved and that the students are more able to focus on learning as a result of the recess before lunch policy. Teachers have benefited from more uninterrupted teaching time. Enhanced nutrition and improved behavior go hand in hand. This policy offers an opportunity for students to achieve both.

## Future Direction

The state agency will be sharing this information with school administrators, school staff and community members to educate them on the benefits of a Recess Before Lunch policy in helping to enhance the cafeteria atmosphere and decrease food waste in lunch programs. Information will be published in a Recess Before Lunch Implementation Guide to assist school staff when considering this policy and to aid with implementation steps. The state agency will also be monitoring the number of Montana schools implementing this policy in the future along with the acceptance level from staff and students and the impact upon the lunch program.

## For more information contact

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## Description of Attachments\*

### Attachment A: Focus Group Questionnaires

Focus Group questionnaires were designed for two age levels, 2nd graders (used in the K-2 schools) and 3rd-8th graders (used in the K-8 and middle schools). The questionnaires were adapted for each phase of the study

Phase 1: Spring 2002, Recess After Lunch (before implementation of Recess Before Lunch policy)

Phase 2: Fall 2002, after initial implementation of the Recess Before Lunch policy

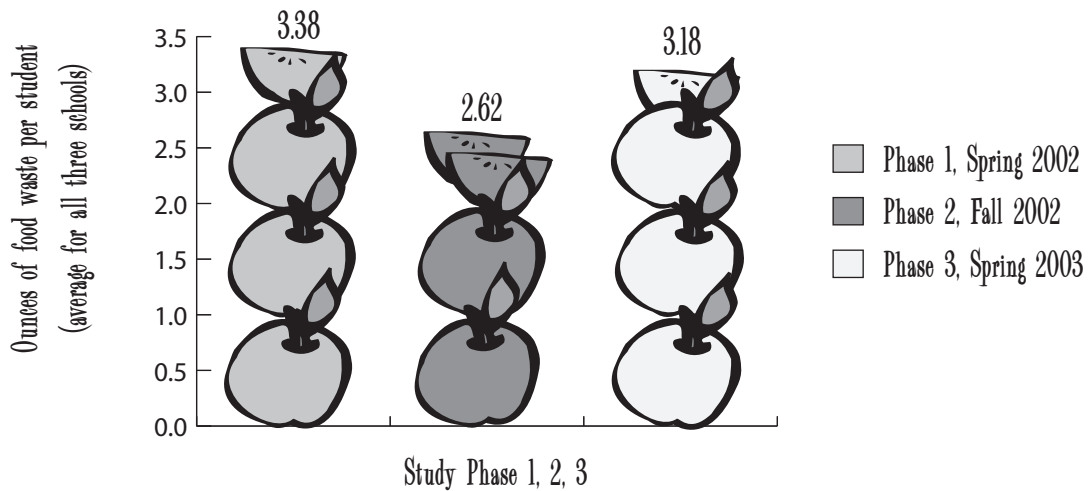
Phase 3: Spring 2003, Recess Before Lunch policy in place

### Attachment B: Teacher and Food Service Staff Surveys

Teacher and food service staff surveys were designed to collect feedback both prior to Recess Before Lunch policy implementation (phase 1) and then after Recess Before Lunch policy implementation (phases 2 and 3.)

**\*Please contact the Montana Team Nutrition Program if you would like to receive a copy of the referenced attachments.** The attachments are also available on the Montana Office of Public Instruction School Nutrition Programs Web site [www.opi.state.mt.us/schoolfood/index.html](http://www.opi.state.mt.us/schoolfood/index.html).

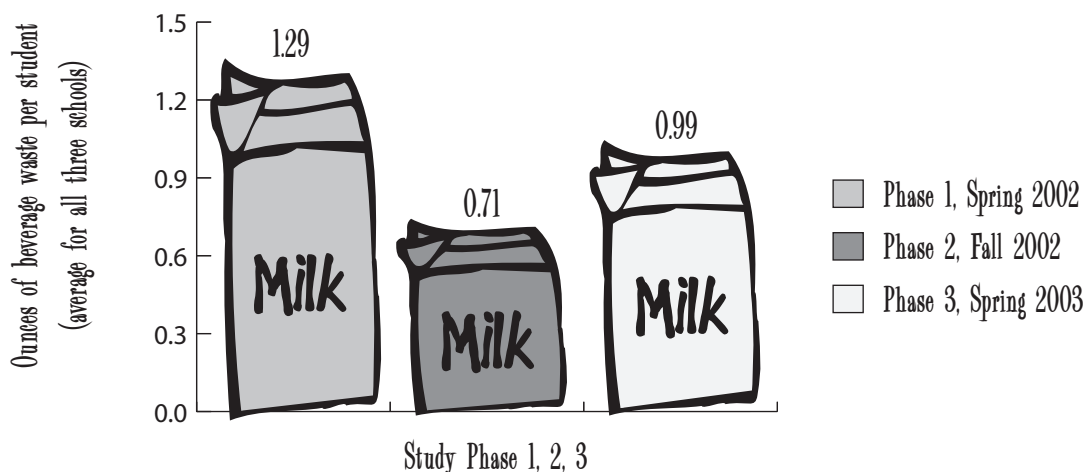
Figure 1: Average food waste per student decreases



Implications: This study demonstrates the decrease in food waste per student as a result of implementing a Recess Before Lunch policy.

Source: Montana Office of Public Instruction School Nutrition Programs Recess Before Lunch Pilot Study, data from 3 Montana schools, April 2002-May 2003.

Figure 2: Average beverage waste per student decreases



Implications: This study demonstrates the decrease in beverage waste per student as a result of implementing a Recess Before Lunch policy.

Source: Montana Office of Public Instruction School Nutrition Programs Recess Before Lunch Pilot Study, data from 3 Montana schools, April 2002-May 2003.

★  
What is a  
Recess Before Lunch  
Policy? ★

Where students go to  
recess first, then eat lunch.

Montana schools are reaping  
the benefits:

- ★ Improved student behavior on the playground, in the cafeteria and the classroom.
- ★ Students waste less food and drink more milk. This leads to increased nutrient intake.
- ★ Improved cafeteria atmosphere.
- ★ Children are more settled and ready to learn.



Tips For Getting Started:

- ★ Build support within your community and school staff.
- ★ Realize that adapting the schedule is a work in progress.
- ★ Develop a hand washing routine.
- ★ Schedule adequate time for students to eat (at least 25-30 minutes.)
- ★ Decide where to store cold lunches for easy access.
- ★ Take care of lunch money prior to recess.
- ★ Practice this new routine with the students. Spend as much time in the lunchroom as possible during first few weeks.
- ★ Be committed, even through a trial period, to stick with it. Expect some resistance.

For More Information:  
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Nutrition Programs web site:

[http://www.opi.state.mt.us/  
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- ★ Examples of schedules from Montana schools using **Recess Before Lunch**
- ★ Resources, supporting information and research articles
- ★ A list of Montana schools using **Recess Before Lunch**
- ★ A summary of Team Nutrition **Recess Before Lunch** 2003 Pilot Project Results
- ★ Quotes from Montana School Administrators, Teachers and Students
- ★ Highland Park School's, Lewistown, MT, **Recess Before Lunch** Information Packet (parent letter, schedule, benefits and tips)



## Comments from Montana School Principals, Teachers and Students:

### Principals report:

- ★ "At Highland Park Elementary, we have noticed less time wasted in transition. Students are calmer, more settled, and ready to begin learning than when they come in off the playground. This certainly results in more time on task, which provides greater opportunity for improved academic performance and behavior."
- ★ "Be willing to make a commitment to the recess before lunch change, and ride it through. Expect a small amount of resistance at first. "
- ★ "Benefits that we have seen at Whitefish Central are:
  - Less conflict on the playground and in the lunchroom
  - Improved behavior in afternoon classes
  - Students are eating better and wasting less food"

### Teachers report:

- ★ "We have more uninterrupted teaching time."

### Students report:

- ★ "It makes me more hungry and I like to eat."
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Developed by:  
Molly Stenberg, RD  
Montana OPI School Nutrition Programs  
Montana Team Nutrition Program  
June 2003

# Recess ★ Before ★ Lunch



Kids Play and Then Eat!



★  
**What is a  
Recess Before Lunch  
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Where students go to  
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Montana schools are reaping  
the benefits:

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- ★ Improved cafeteria atmosphere.
- ★ Children are more settled and ready to learn.



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June 2003

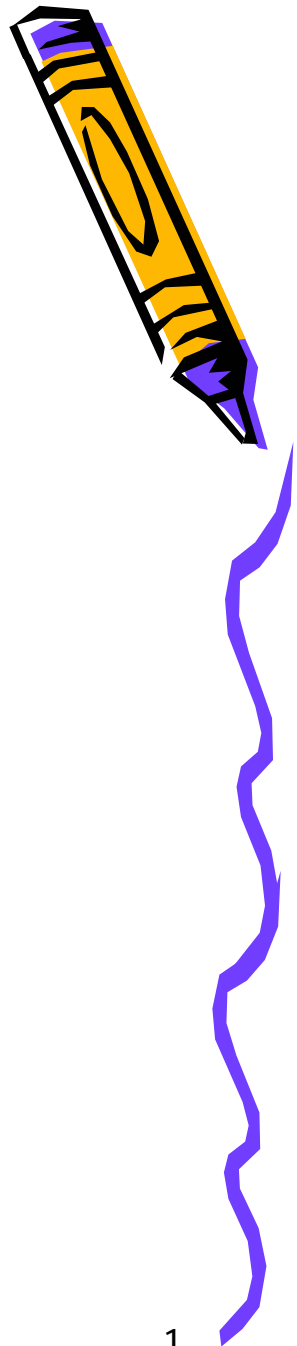
# Recess Before Lunch



## Kids Play and Then Eat!



# RECESS BEFORE LUNCH



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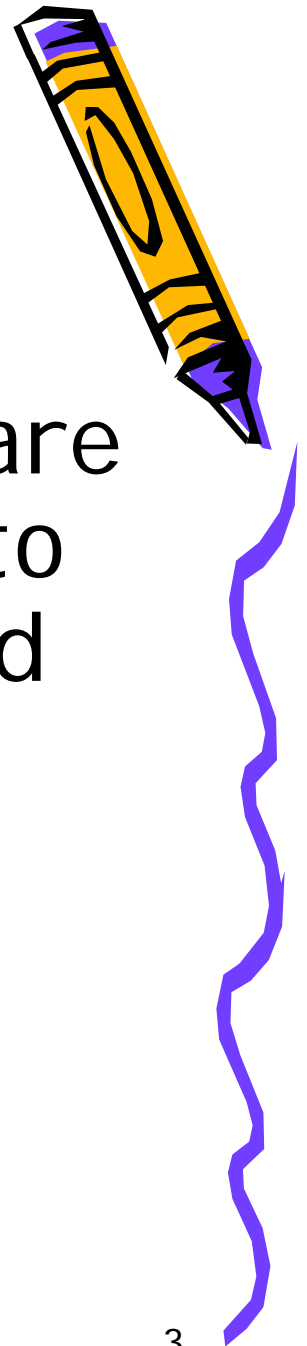
# What is Recess Before Lunch?

Kids Play,  
And Then  
Eat!



7/7/2005

# Why do it?

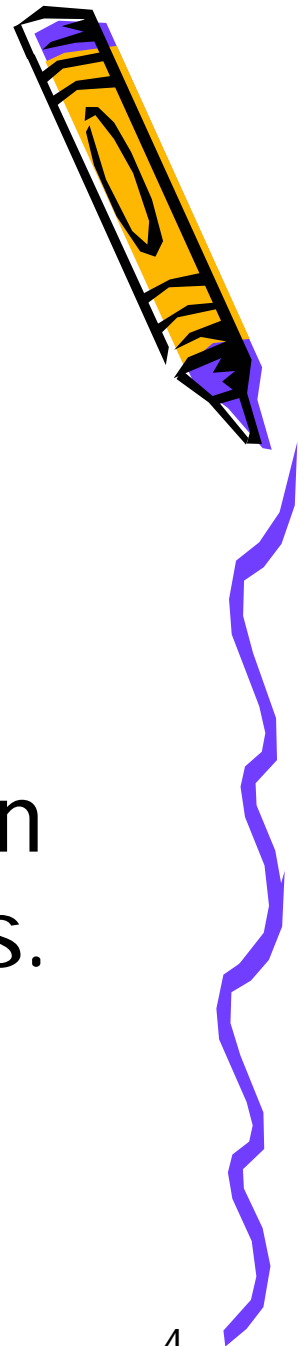


- Teachers note that the kids are more settled upon returning to the classroom after lunch, and ready to start afternoon classes.



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# Why do it?



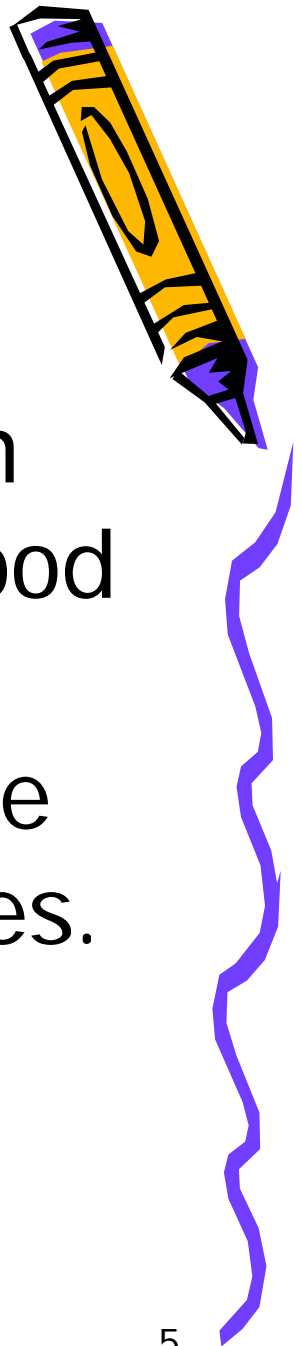
- Principals and teachers also note decreased behavioral problems on the playground, in the lunchroom and in the halls.



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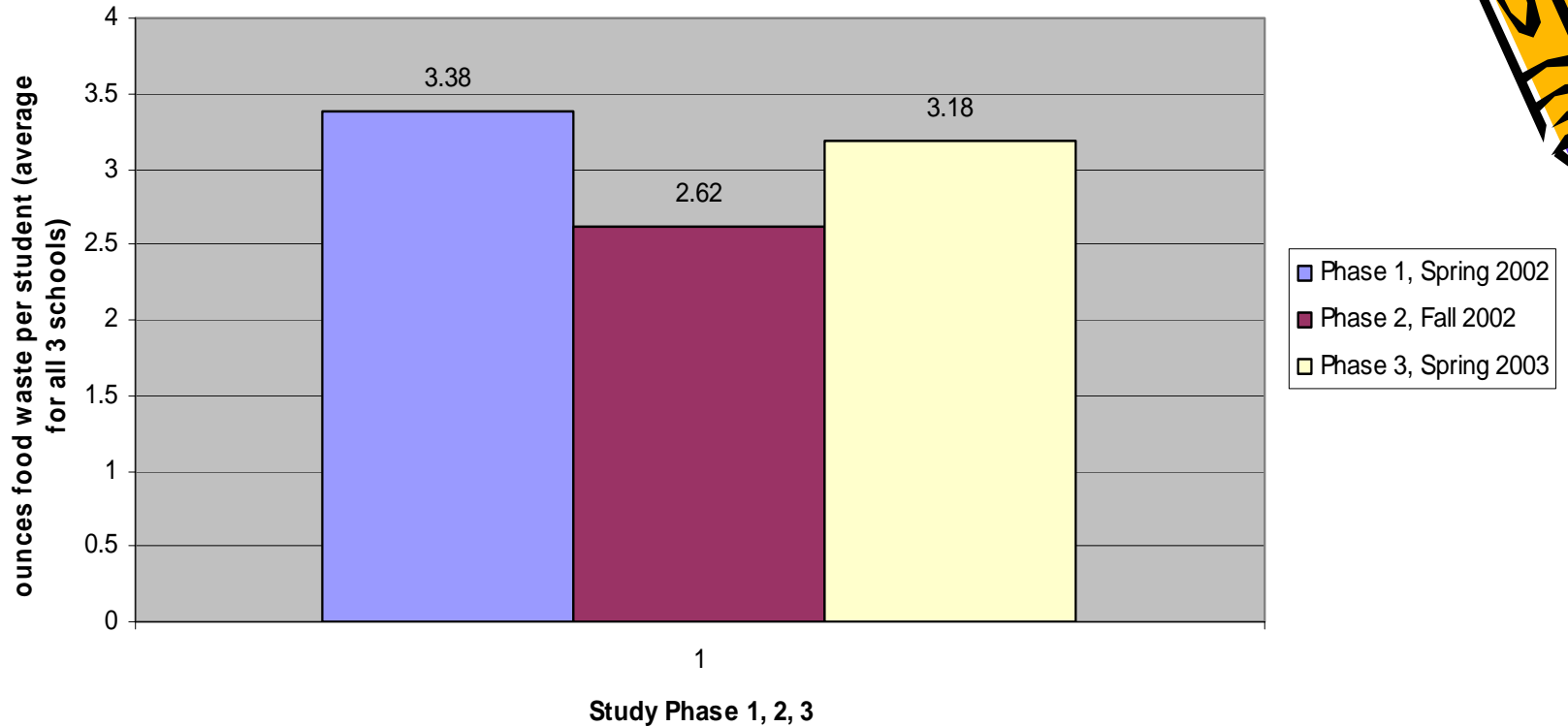
# Why do it?

- Plate waste studies have shown that the children waste less food and drink more milk. The decrease in food and milk waste has been dramatic in some cases.



7/7/2005

Figure 1: Average Food Waste per Student Decreases

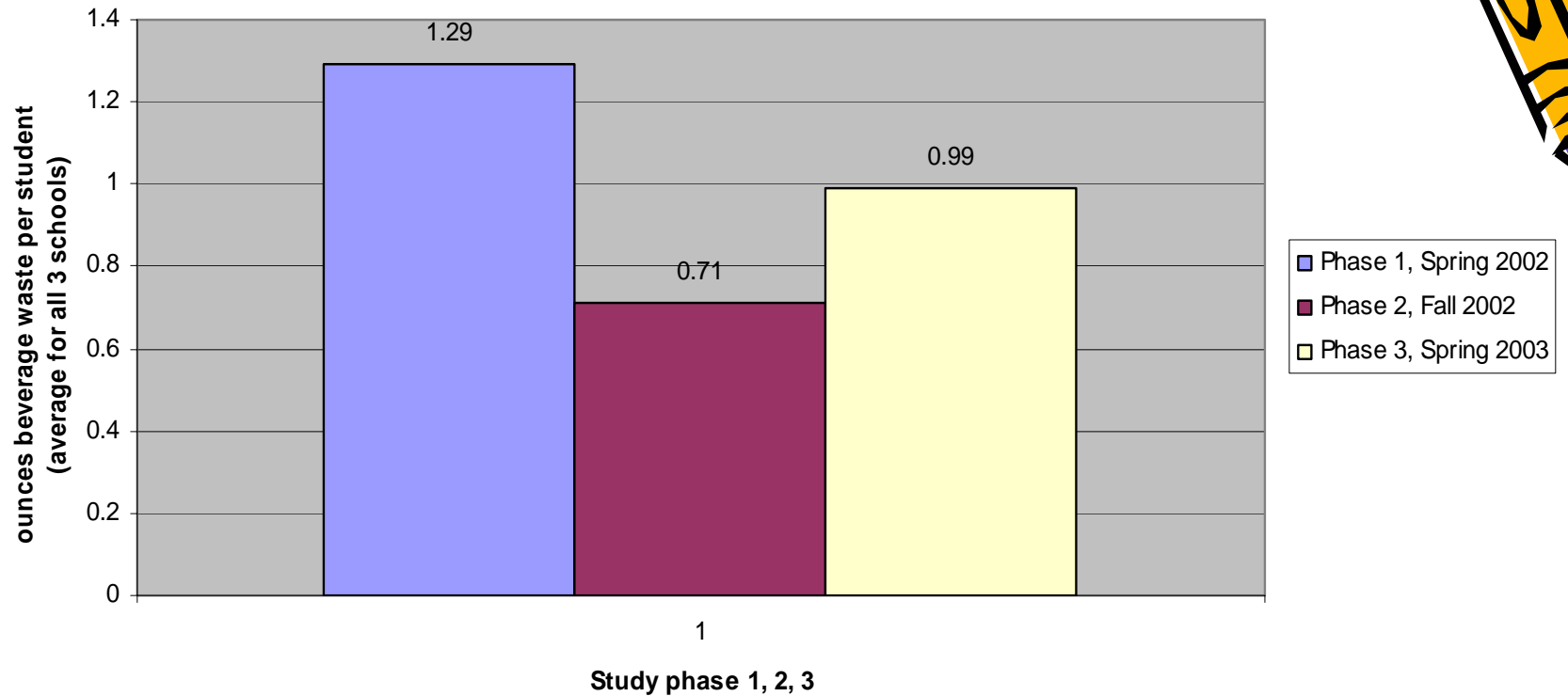


Implications: This study demonstrates the decrease in food waste per student as a result of implementing a Recess Before Lunch policy.

Source: Montana Office of Public Instruction School Nutrition Programs Recess Before Lunch Pilot Study, data from 3 Montana schools, April 2002-May 2003.

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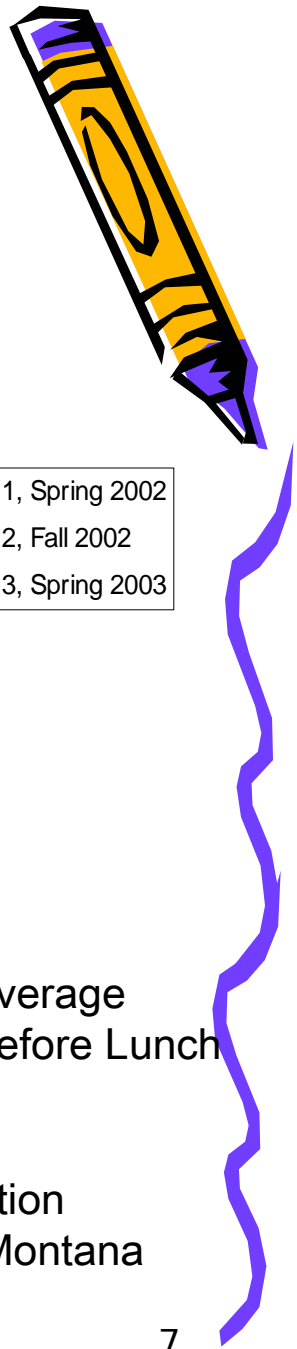
Figure 2: Average Beverage Waste per Student Decreases



Implications: This study demonstrates the decrease in beverage waste per student as a result of implementing a Recess Before Lunch policy.

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7/7/2005



# Why do it?



- The atmosphere in the lunchroom is more conducive to eating and is much more relaxed, as the kids are not rushing through lunch to get outside.



7/7/2005

# Why do it?



- The kids are amazingly quiet and calm in the lunchroom. They are actually eating, while socializing amongst themselves.



7/7/2005



# Quotes from MT Schools

Whitefish Central School, Whitefish, Montana-  
Mr. Kim Anderson, Principal

"Benefits that we have seen at Whitefish Central are:

- Less conflict on the playground and in the lunchroom
- Improved behavior in afternoon classes
- Students are eating better and wasting less food"
- "My 5th period teachers love it!"



7/7/2005



# Quotes from MT Schools

Teachers support the change to RBL for the following reasons:

- "Children are settled down and ready to learn when they return to the classroom."
- "Less fights on the playground and better classroom behavior."



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# Quotes from MT schools

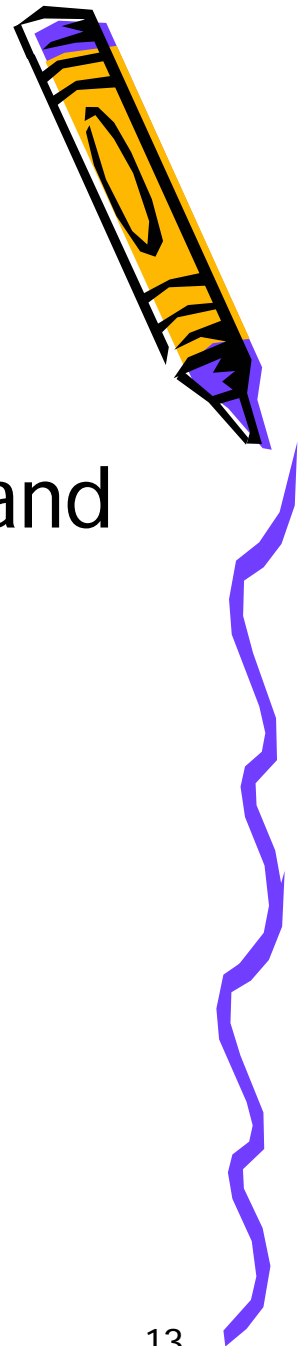


## Students report:

- "I f you eat lunch before recess, you get a tummy ache."
- "I t takes off all your energy, so you're not moving around at lunch."



7/7/2005

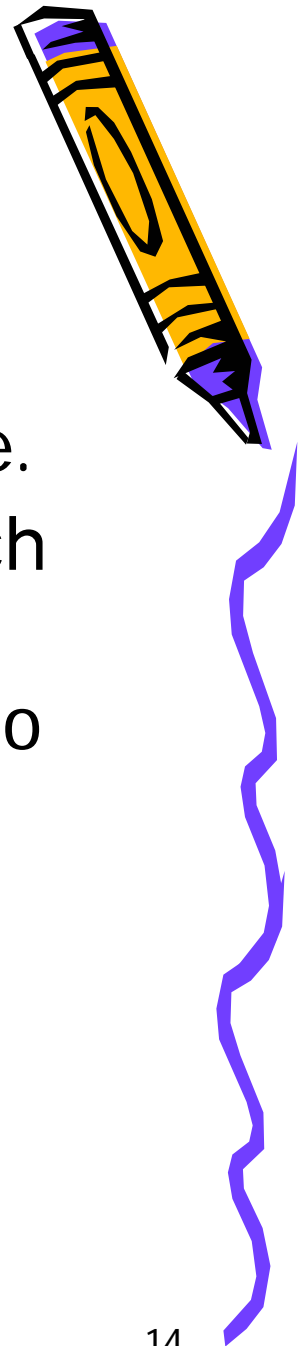


# How to start a RBL Policy

- Build support within your school and community.
  - Within the School
  - Educate the Parents
  - Within the Community
  - Educate the Students



7/7/2005



# How to start a RBL Policy

- Plan the new recess and lunch schedule.
- Include a hand washing plan in the lunch schedule.
- Allow adequate time for the children to eat lunch.
- Increase the presence of school staff in the lunchroom initially.



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# Practical Tips

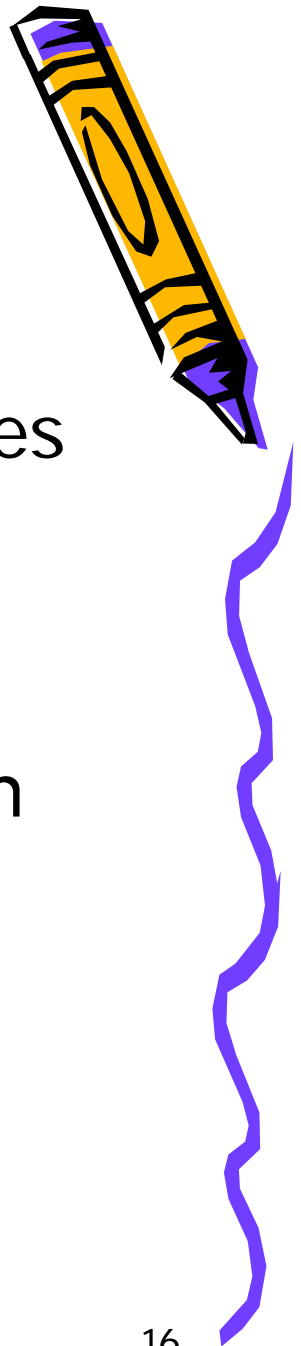
- Scheduling tends to be the biggest hurdle to overcome. Expect the schedule to be a work in progress.
- Get teachers' input and "buy-in" from the start.
- Younger kids (K-2) tend to "accept" the change in scheduling better than the older kids do initially.



7/7/2005

# Practical Tips

- Decide where to store cold lunches for easy access.
- Some schools opt to take care of lunch money prior to recess.
- Kids are likely to be hungrier with this change. Schools may opt to offer a mid-morning snack, along with promotion of the school's breakfast program.



7/7/2005

# A Recess Before Lunch Implementation Guide

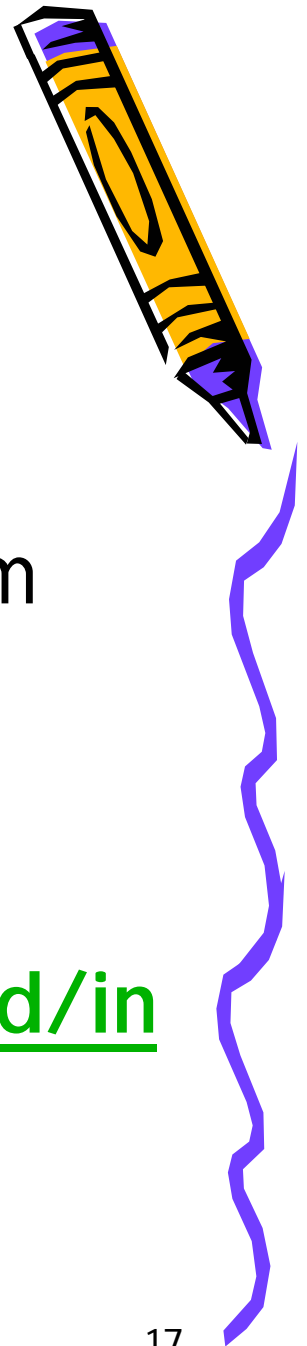
is available from the Montana Team  
Nutrition Program

Or, access the guide online at:

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7/7/2005



# Contact Information

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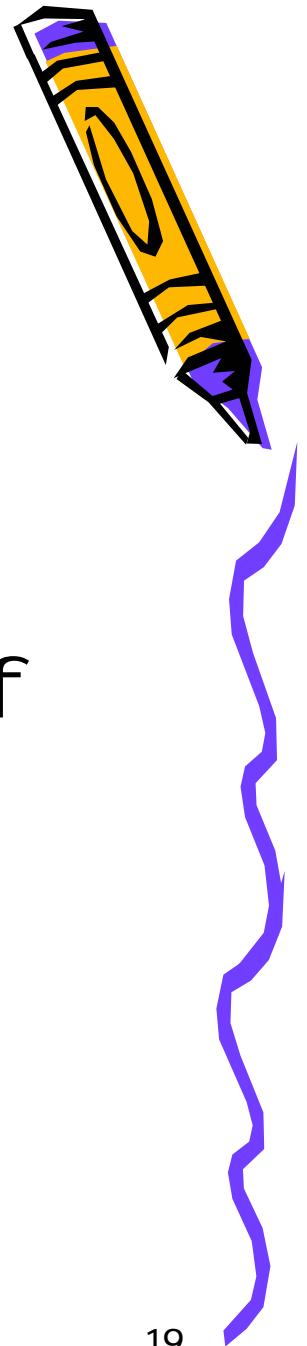
Chris Emerson, MS, RD-Director

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7/7/2005

# In summary, Recess Before Lunch:



- Helps students eat better
- Helps students behave better
- Benefits teachers and school staff
- All of which lead to healthier families, schools and communities!



7/7/2005

# Recess Before Lunch

## Expected Benefits of the Recess Before Lunch Policy

- ★ **Fewer classroom discipline problems.** Children are more settled when they return to class after eating.
- ★ **Better classroom performance.** Children pay more attention to the lessons when they are not hungry.
- ★ **Better cafeteria behavior.** Children are ready to eat and not eager to leave lunch to go out and play.
- ★ **Greater nutrient consumption.** Children are ready to eat, and they eat more of the foods.
- ★ **Improved cafeteria atmosphere.** Students spend time eating and visiting, not rushing to get outside.

# Recess Before Lunch

## Montana Schools Are Reaping the Benefits of a Recess Before Lunch Policy

- ★ The teachers feel that the kids are more settled and ready to start afternoon classes. Principals and teachers also note improved behavior on the playground, in the lunchroom and in the halls.
- ★ Kids eat better! Plate waste studies have shown that the children do eat better (waste less food) and drink more milk. The decrease in food and milk waste has been **dramatic** in some cases.
  - ✓ Paxson School, Missoula, MT, food waste (garbage cans dropped from 12 to 3!)
- ★ The atmosphere in the lunchroom is more conducive to eating and is much more relaxed, as the kids are not rushing through lunch to get outside. The kids are actually **eating**. Most schools allow 25-30 minutes to eat.

# Recess Before Lunch

## Steps to Implementing a Recess Before Lunch Policy

- ★ Build support within your school and community.
  - i. Within the School
  - ii. Educate the Parents
  - iii. Within the Community
  - iv. Educate the Students
  
- ★ Plan the new recess and lunch schedule.
  
- ★ Include a hand washing plan in the lunch schedule.
  
- ★ Allow adequate time for the children to eat lunch.
  
- ★ Increase the presence of school staff in the lunchroom initially.

# Recess Before Lunch

## Practical Tips and Advice from Montana Schools

- ★ Scheduling tends to be the biggest hurdle to overcome. It is do-able; it just takes some creative planning. Expect the schedule to be a work in progress. No extra staff has been required as a result of the change.
- ★ Montana administrators, who have been successful in implementing Recess Before Lunch policies, recommend looking past the logistics of the scheduling change and concentrating on what is best for the kids.
- ★ It's important to get teachers' input and "buy-in" from the start. Really promote the improvement in kid's behavior on the playground and in the classroom, as well as more teaching time in the morning.
- ★ Food service staff from all of the schools has provided positive feedback and reported no problems from their end.

# Recess Before Lunch

## Practical Tips and Advice from Montana Schools

- ★ Younger kids (K-2) tend to “accept” the change in scheduling better than the older kids initially. Focus groups with Montana students have shown that the younger kids “perceive” the change in a more positive way.
- ★ Decide where to store cold lunches and lunch tickets/punch cards for easy access.
- ★ Some schools opt to take care of lunch money prior to recess. Others keep the accounting procedure the same. This has not been identified as a potential problem for scheduling in Montana schools.
- ★ Kids are likely to be hungrier with this change. Schools may opt to offer a mid-morning snack, along with promotion of the school’s breakfast program.



# Steps to Implementing a Recess Before Lunch Policy

1. **Build support within your school and community.**
  - A. **Within the School**-Educate yourself and your staff, *including teachers, aides, secretaries, food service, staff, janitors, etc.* It is beneficial to visit firsthand, or at least make contact, with another school administrator that has successfully implemented Recess Before Lunch at his/her school. Educate staff on this policy through a school staff meeting. Make a commitment to stick with it and ride out the first couple of months. School food service staff should be involved from the beginning, as they are key players in accommodating the change. Be ready for some resistance to change and small problems that arise. Keep the benefits in mind-enhanced nutrition, which supports improved behavior and learning.
  - B. **Educate the Parents**-Place a RBL article in the parent newsletter or send a letter to parents. Sprinkle RBL information/benefits/tips into the monthly school lunch menu that is provided to parents.
  - C. **Within the Community**-Share the benefits/concept of RBL at a Parent Advisory Council Meeting, school board meeting, or run an article in the local and school newspaper.
  - D. **Educate the 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) to work out the kinks. 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 it as needed.
3. **Include a hand washing plan in the lunch schedule.** Hand washing is an important food safety issue that should not be overlooked. Most school schedules are written so that the children come in from recess, put coats away, wash hands, and then enter the lunchroom as a group. Other schools send children directly to the lunchroom from the playground, and provide them 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 from the time they sit down with their tray. Most Montana schools allow 25-30 minutes for the lunch period. Keep in mind that the younger students require more time to get through the serving line and to eat. Students must also 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 into and out of the lunchroom and allows extra supervision as the students learn a new routine. This exemplifies staff support of the RBL policy and the school lunch program, while enhancing the atmosphere of the lunch period.



# Practical Tips and Advice from Montana Schools with Recess Before Lunch Policies

- ★ **Scheduling tends to be the biggest hurdle to overcome.** It is do-able; it just takes some creative planning and flexibility. Expect the schedule to be a work in progress. No extra staff has been required as a result of the change. See examples of schedules from MT schools included in this guide for ideas.
- ★ Montana administrators, who have been successful in implementing RBL policies, recommend **looking past the logistics of the scheduling change and concentrating on what is best for the kids.**
- ★ **It's important to get teachers' input and "buy-in" from the start.** Really promote the improvement in children's behavior on the playground and in the classroom, as well as more teaching time in the morning.
- ★ **Younger kids (K-2) tend to "accept" the change in scheduling better than the older kids initially.** Focus groups with Montana students have shown that the younger kids "perceive" the change in a more positive way.
- ★ **Feedback from food service staff from all of the schools has been positive** with no problems reported from their end.
- ★ **Decide where to store cold lunches and lunch tickets/punch cards for easy access.**
- ★ **Some schools opt to take care of lunch money prior to recess.** Others keep the accounting procedure the same. This has not been identified as a potential problem area.
- ★ **Kids are likely to be hungrier and thirstier with this change.** Schools may opt to offer a mid-morning snack, along with promotion of the school's breakfast program. Schools are having dispensers of ice water available in the cafeteria to quench thirst. Middle schools may also opt to sell bottled water as part of an ala carte program.



# Highland Park Elementary

May 7, 2002

Dear Parents:

Beginning next week, Highland Park will be trying a new schedule during our lunch break: "Recess Before Lunch." Several Montana schools have already implemented this type of lunch hour, and others will also be trying a new schedule for the next year. Before eating lunch, our students will be dismissed to the playground for play and then be brought in to eat. Following lunch, students will return to class, ready to learn. Students will have the same play time and will have a slightly longer time in the lunchroom for eating during the new schedule.

There are many benefits to this type of program. Schools report greater nutrient consumption, as children eat a more balanced diet; less plate waste or food thrown away, as children are more ready to eat and are not in a hurry to get outside to play; better classroom performance, as children pay more attention when they are not hungry; better lunchroom and classroom behaviors, as children are focused on lunch rather than the playground and return to class feeling more full and settled.

We hope that this new schedule will promote better nutrition and student achievement for all of our students. We will try this schedule for two weeks, and if successful, will implement it for the next school term. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Also, we have gathered quite a collection of Lost and Found items. Please feel free to stop at the front office to look for clothing or other articles that may belong to your children.

Thank you for supporting Highland Park. It's been a great year!

Sincerely,

Sharon Redfern,  
Principal

# Making Mealtime Pleasant and Decreasing Food Waste in School Lunch Programs

Would you like to improve the mealtime atmosphere at your school, while encouraging elementary students to eat better? Implementing a Recess Before Lunch Policy can help you do this! The Montana Team Nutrition Program is working with 4 Montana Schools that are piloting a Recess Before Lunch (RBL) Program. As the name implies, the students go to recess first and then eat lunch. Proposed benefits to the RBL program are: decreased food waste and better student behavior in the cafeteria and classroom.

I would like to share with you the preliminary findings from the schools. Feedback thus far has been overwhelmingly positive from principals, teachers, food service staff, and students. They report that the children are eating better (wasting less food). Plate waste studies have confirmed this. Even more impressive is the change in the cafeteria- it is so quiet! The kids are actually eating and visiting with each other, not in such a hurry to get outside for recess. The atmosphere is more relaxed and conducive to eating.

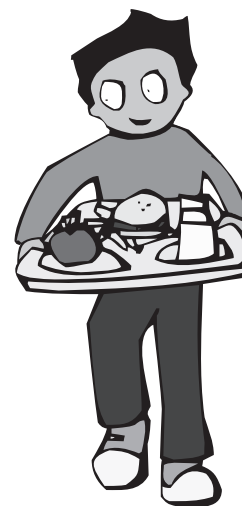
Teachers support the change to RBL for the following reasons:

- ★ Children are settled down and ready to learn when they return to the classroom.
- ★ Fewer fights on the playground and better classroom behavior.
- ★ Students are not rushing through lunch to get out to recess.
- ★ Students are hungrier when it's time for lunch, so they eat better.

Students report:

- ★ "It makes me more hungry and I like to eat."
- ★ "I can play soccer sooner; we get to play before we go to lunch."
- ★ "If you eat lunch before recess, you get a tummy ache."
- ★ "It takes off all your energy, so you're not moving around at lunch."

If you would like more information on how to start a Recess Before Lunch Policy, or if you'd like supporting information to share with your school administrator please contact Molly Stenberg with the Team Nutrition Program at 406-994-5641 or e-mail [stenberg@montana.edu](mailto:stenberg@montana.edu).



**W**ITH RISING DEMAND for diversified class offerings, an increase in state and federal testing requirements and a growing student population, the science of constructing a school day has become akin to building a house of cards on a moving train. When the entire house of cards is finally assembled, the natural inclination is to avoid even breathing, lest the entire structure come crashing down. So, what's the builder's reaction when someone—perhaps a well-meaning fellow passenger—wanders by and suggests switching the placement of two cards in the teetering construction? If it were you, likely you would pay little attention to such a suggestion, fearing the need to rebuild the entire house from scratch—because even seemingly unrelated cards are dependent upon each other.

Likewise, school administrators who piece together educational mandates, requirements in teacher's contracts and numerous other “cards” required to create the schedule for the school day are often understandably skeptical when approached about changing that schedule.

But a growing number of school foodservice operators are making the case that much can be gained by switching the position of two key components (and student favorites) in the elementary

## **School administrators and child nutrition professionals reap benefits from swapping lunch and recess schedules.**

school day: lunch and recess. And a number of administrators are keeping an open mind to the idea. The traditional—almost sacrosanct—ordering of lunch before recess *is* being swapped, sometimes carefully and intentionally, and other times on a “let's try it and see” basis.

Why are child nutrition professionals interested in taking on this cause? And why have a surprising number been successful in convincing their elementary schools to schedule recess before lunch (RBL)? A mix of scientific data supports this position, and practical logistical benefits plus teacher backing for the concept also are helping to sell the idea to school administrators. Of course, each school is certain to develop its own list of pros and cons when contemplating this issue, and not all those that experiment with such an arrangement will stick with it, for a variety of reasons, such as practical problems and administration changes. But it seems that those who have made a commitment to RBL are prepared to tout its numerous benefits, including a decrease in behavior problems, increases in student appetite and improvements in classroom performance.

# REVERSE

By Patrick White

# ORDER





## Why not?

Outsiders might not see any obvious impediments to a simple swap of time slots. But looking deeper does reveal a few potential challenges associated with RBL. As a practical matter, bringing students into the lunch area immediately after recess raises a few problems. Consider the lack of enthusiasm of one school foodservice professional in Iowa, who has firsthand experience with RBL scheduling: “Our lunchroom is small and crowded. Imagine the smell in there when all the kids—about 85—were hot and sweaty. Also, it seemed like the kids didn’t eat as much because they were tired.”

A more common concern expressed by school foodservice operators—as well as by teachers and administrators—is the logistical challenge of getting students coming in from the playground to wash their hands prior to eating. Constance Mueller, RD, SFNS, director of foodservice for Bloomington (Ill.) Public Schools, convinced one elementary school in her district to try RBL scheduling, only to encounter the handwashing dilemma. After a one-year trial, the school decided to return to the more traditional schedule until a solution for efficient handwashing is implemented. “Schools need to lead the way in reminding people the importance of handwashing—and we had some parents who brought this point up,” Mueller explains. “When you bring 30 students in from recess, you can’t send them all to the restrooms at once. And we didn’t have

handwashing sinks in the cafeteria,” although she notes that the school is considering adding these.

Of course, even in traditional lunch-before-recess scheduling, Mueller says that student handwashing is performed “willy-nilly,” with many, but not all, classrooms featuring handwashing facilities. And when students—frequently dirty after play—come from recess directly to the cafeteria, that hit-or-miss success rate breaks down even more. “It’s almost not even an issue of the time constraint,” notes Mueller. “You just don’t have the supervisory capacity to monitor all of the kids in the restroom.”

## Trying something new

Despite barriers like efficient handwashing, Mueller remains supportive of RBL, which she first read about in a research paper by Mary Jane Getlinger, et al., published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* (September 1996). The article inspired her to approach each of the elementary school principals (who, under the district’s site-based management structure, had the final say on scheduling decisions) to see if any would be interested in pilot-testing this approach in their respective schools.

One principal, characterized by Mueller as having a reputation for a willingness to try new things, gave the project the green light. The principal sold the school’s teachers on the idea, and after the trial year, the teachers were active

proponents of the new schedule. “We had really positive feedback from teachers, who said that when kids came back into the classroom *following recess*, much of the first half-hour was spent acting as a referee for ‘fusses’ that had started outside on the playground,” Mueller reports, adding, “But when students came back to the classroom *after lunch*, they were calmer.”

The Bloomington director goes on to recount that the child nutrition staff at the trial school observed students eating and drinking more during lunch as a result of already having played outside. “A lot of times, when recess is scheduled after lunch, the kids rush to get outside, and they don’t spend very much time eating,” she explains.

With such good reports, Mueller is eager to solve the handwashing dilemma and resume RBL scheduling. She currently is weighing the option of purchasing a portable handwashing sink and pilot-testing this unit directly in the cafeteria so that students can use it as they enter the lunch line. However, she points to high cost and a limited water capacity as drawbacks of such systems. As an alternative, she has experimented with purchasing and distributing disposable “handy-wipes” but remains concerned that this is not a comparable alternative to effective handwashing. “I think there’s a lot to be said for the concept,” Mueller concludes, adding, “It’s just a matter of working out the details.”

## Take the Initiative

Regardless of whether your school schedules recess before lunch, or the more traditional lunch before recess, there is a growing link between these two important parts of the school day. According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), during the 1990s, the percentage of students participating in a daily physical education class dropped from an already low 42 percent to a dismal 29 percent. What's more, Dr. Julie Magri of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned elementary school principals in the January/February 2003 issue of *Principal*, NAESP's official publication, that 30 percent of elementary schools don't have a regularly scheduled recess period.

The elimination of both required and optional physical activity surely contribute to the recent rise in childhood obesity. It's a frustrating setback, particularly in light of the efforts school nutrition programs have taken to improve the nutrition and lower the fat content of meals served to students.

One way child nutrition professionals can take the initiative to promote a turnaround in school policy related to physical activity is to call attention to the link between good nutrition and exercise in raising healthy students. If you work in a school with no recess periods, push your school administrators to consider adding one, in conjunction with school lunch. There doesn't need to be an official link between the two activities, but discussing the virtues of each together can help make the argument that a nutritious school lunch and an opportunity for students to exercise can make the midday hours the healthiest part of the school day. You won't need to convince the students: Recess and lunch have long been *their* two favorite parts of the school day.

### Waste not, want not

Getlinger's 1996 research (similar to an earlier study by Read and Mooseburner, published in a 1985 *School Food Service Research Review*) focused on the reduction of food waste in RBL environments. The researchers found that overall food waste decreased from 34.9 percent to 24.3 percent, and they credited this to students feeling less rushed through the meal. With more traditional scheduling, the study noted, "Students exert strong influences on each other to be ready to participate in playground activities."

In addition, the research highlighted the common complaint that "taking recess after lunch often causes stomach discomfort and dizziness, which may contribute to higher food waste." In both of these situations, RBL scheduling helped to solve the problem, allowing students to finish their meals because they're not hurrying to get outside.

Not only does RBL appear to influence decreases in food waste, but schools that have tested this approach also report students demonstrate better behavior, both in the cafeteria and when returning to the classroom—perhaps once again owing to the fact that students don't feel rushed during their meal. One

National Food Service Management Institute study on a related topic found that "students need approximately 10 minutes just to consume their lunch," and that the remainder of the lunch period is filled with serving and socializing. The researchers asserted, "Socializing is an important aspect of [school] dining because allowing students sufficient time to relate to others provides a break in routine and refreshes them for afternoon classes." Flipping the order of lunch and recess may allow for more relaxed play, less panic to complete lunch prior to socializing and a smoother transition back to the classroom.

Real-life experience seems to back up these research-based assertions. Angela Haney, director of student nutrition services at Central Consolidated School District #22 in Shiprock, N.M., has one school in her district using RBL—with impressive results. "One of our elementary schools switched to recess before lunch because the school nurse pushed it through with the principal. The teachers say that the kids are calmer and are ready to get to work immediately instead of needing a cool-down time," Haney reports. "The kitchen manager and custodians have noticed less food is going through the trash," she adds. As for the handwashing issue, Haney reports that the school nurse used her own budget to purchase instant hand sanitizer. "The kids line up to use the sanitizer and then go on into the lunch line. So far it is working very well," she says.

### Everything old is new again

With traditional school schedules so ingrained in our culture, RBL may seem like fairly innovative idea, but the concept definitely is not a new one. As early as 1978, *School Food Service Journal* published an article profiling an RBL experiment at La Tercera Elementary School in Petaluma, Calif. The article noted that students and parents had "expressed approval for the system," though no mention is made of operational challenges, such as those involving handwashing.

Nor is the RBL approach a new concept to school administrators. Also in 1978, an article published in the *American School Board Journal* describes RBL as "a neat little way to improve lunchtime discipline." In this piece, the practice of scheduling recess before lunch is credited with glowing reviews: "Pupils eat more slowly because they're in no rush to get outdoors to capture a spot on the noon-hour ball team. Lunch hours and kids are quieter because of the more relaxed classroom environment. Rowdy cafeteria lines have become only a bad memory. Instead of the odious duty of patrolling a noisy cafeteria, teachers now use the lunch hour to talk about nutrition, instruct students in table manners or simply read a story. And...the amount of food that's thrown away has fallen dramatically in schools that have switched to this program."

In short, RBL might seem to be one of the few good ideas to come out of that most forgettable of decades. Still, the article bemoans the fact that "ingenious as the [RBL] idea may be, it has caught on in only a few schools—probably because boards and administrators often are so tied up with curricular and managerial issues that they lack the time to worry about the languishing lunchroom."

Such administrative worries have only grown since the 1970s, a

relative “Leave it to Beaver” era compared to the challenges of the 21st century! But the promise of RBL remains, and its time seems to be coming around once again.

## RBL today

Perhaps the most comprehensive initiative to promote, institute, assist with and monitor RBL scheduling is taking place today in Montana. According to Montana Team Nutrition Program member Molly Stenberg, RD, LN, “We have been working with four schools in Montana to pilot a recess before lunch policy.” Stenberg reports that the results to date have been very encouraging. “The atmosphere in the lunchroom is more conducive to eating and is much more relaxed, as the kids are not rushing to get outside. The kids are amazingly quiet and calm in the lunchroom. They are actually eating,” Stenberg says.

Further, she reports that there has been a positive reaction among the teachers and principals in the schools participating in the RBL pilot. “The teachers feel that the kids are more settled and ready to start classes, and principals see less behavioral problems on the playground, in the halls and in the lunchroom,” Stenberg remarks.

Finally, from a dietitian’s perspective, Stenberg asserts, “Scheduling recess before lunch makes nutrition sense!” For one thing, the RBL pilot schools have seen a decrease in unopened milk containers—a sign students may be increasing consumption of valuable calcium and protein. The bottom line, according to Stenberg, is to “allow students to play, which is *their* priority, and then allow them to enjoy a nutritious lunch in a relaxed environment, which is *our* priority. Good nutrition goes hand-in-hand with improved behavior and learning. RBL gives students the opportunity to excel in both.”

Candy Johnson, principal at Lower Grade Hellgate Elementary in Missoula, one of the schools in the Montana pilot, agrees with Stenberg’s assessment. She heard about RBL at a development workshop and decided to give it a try. “It’s working great,” Johnson reports. “The kids take more time to eat and we have less discipline problems on the playground.”

At the Rau School in Sidney, Mont., Supervising Teacher Carolyn Koch also decided to participate in the RBL program. Her motivation was to reduce noise in the cafeteria. While she hasn’t seen a positive response to *that* hypothesis, she’s seen other benefits. “I think [the students] are eating better. And the kids like [the schedule swap], as they don’t feel sick when playing on the tire swing now,” says Koch. “Although the noise level hasn’t been reduced, we will keep the policy. The teachers like it as they can get more stuff done before going to lunch...and the students seem

## Advice for Administrators

The principals involved in Montana’s recess-before-lunch (RBL) pilot program offer fellow administrators the following pointers for getting started with RBL. Pass them along to decision-makers in *your* district!

- 1 Meet with all of the staff involved (teachers, janitors, aides, food-service personnel) to work out the kinks. Continue to adjust the schedule as needed.
- 2 Spend as much time as you can in the lunchroom, especially the first couple of weeks, to practice this new routine with the kids.
- 3 Take care to collect lunch money *prior* to recess.
- 4 Be committed to stick with the program, even through a trial period. Expect some resistance.
- 5 Kids likely will be hungrier with this change in schedule. Consider offering a mid-morning nutrition break.
- 6 Educate the community to help build support for the RBL program.

to make better use of the time in class before [the break], because they want to get to recess.”

Administrators in the Montana pilot program have found that RBL is effective with slightly older students, as well. At Whitefish Central School, Principal Kim Anderson instituted the scheduling change at her school of 680 5th-, 6th-, 7th- and 8th-graders. “The benefits that we have seen include less conflict on the playground and in the lunchroom; improved behavior in afternoon classes; and students eating better and wasting less food,” says Anderson.

## Beware resistance to change

“Expect a small amount of resistance at first, but be willing to make a commitment to the recess-before-lunch change and ride it through,” advises Anderson. The key is to look for solutions to potential barriers, such as the handwashing dilemma. For example, in Montana, some of the RBL pilot schools bring students from recess back to the classroom, where they drop off their coats and wash their hands before heading to the cafeteria.

Given the benefits being reported by researchers, school foodservice professionals, teachers and administrators, RBL may be a trend that’s likely to continue and grow. And it ties into the issue of adequate time to eat, which is also gaining increased attention. For example, a recent bill in Connecticut would require all districts in the state to provide a minimum 20-minute lunch break and, for children in Grades K-5, a minimum of 20 minutes each school day for physical activity.

And at Kettle Moraine Schools in Wisconsin, Foodservice Director Sharon Boos is preparing to switch to RBL at one of her schools for the coming school year. She’s confident it will be successful: “So far I have convinced one principal to try it. He is all for it and cannot come up with one reason not to try it. I think once he tries it, it won’t be long before the others follow.”

SF&N

*White is a freelance writer in Montpelier, Vt.*

READER  
e  
SOURCE

From jungle gyms to basketball courts, playground equipment can vary from region to region and even school to school. What are the top playground trends that keep kids moving during recess (before or after lunch)? Find out more at [www.asfsa.org/readeresource](http://www.asfsa.org/readeresource).

asfsa.org



**MOVE**  
301 W. Alder  
Missoula, MT 59802  
406-523-2883

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*Our community working together to increase healthful eating and physical activity  
Coordinated by the Missoula City-County Health Department*

**For Immediate Release**

January 21, 2003

<b>Contacts</b>	Ellen Brown <i>MOVE</i> Coordinator 523-2883	Joe Stauduhar Principal, Paxson School 542-4055
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**Less Waste in 2003  
At Local Elementary Schools**

It used to be that Missoula elementary students ate lunch before recess, often eating as fast as they could and tossing much of their lunches in the trash in order to race out to the playground. Now, at Paxson Elementary and many other elementary schools, students are on the playground before coming inside to eat lunch. With 25 minutes allocated just to lunch, students are eating more complete meals and wasting less before heading back into the classroom.

**Local:** Waste at Paxson was **reduced from 10-12 full trash cans after lunch to only 3-5 full cans.**

“The only regret I have is that we didn’t figure it out about 20 years ago,” says Joe Stauduhar, Principal of Paxson Elementary School. Principal Stauduhar goes on to say, “There have been far more positives than negatives.” Positives include enhanced supervision because of the lower numbers of children on the playground at any one time, less grade crossover, less waiting in lines, improved behavior in the cafeteria, and less food waste.

**State & Nation:** Similar results are seen at other schools in Montana and around the nation where recess before lunch policies are implemented. Highlighted improvements consistently include:

- Improved food intake & less food waste
- Increased milk consumption
- Improved behavior in the cafeterias and classrooms.

Montana’s Team Nutrition Program with the Office of Public Instruction offers materials and assistance for schools interested in making the lunch/recess switch. Contact Molly Stenberg, Project Coordinator, 406-994-5641.

**MOVE Project:** Recess before lunch is one strategy to bolster healthful eating, one of the goals of Missoula’s *MOVE* project. **Complete nutrition is related to overall health and improved test scores at schools.** *MOVE*, funded by a CDC obesity prevention grant distributed through Montana’s DPHHS, aims to increase healthful eating and physical activity in families of school-age children. Throughout the year *MOVE* will highlight activities that support these goals. The combined efforts of our community may reduce the continuing increase in overweight, which has nearly doubled in children in the last twenty years.



# NEWS

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## Nutritionists say scheduling recess before lunch is best for students, schools

10/1/03 Contact: Molly Stenberg (406) 994-5641

D,W, All local, Tribal On INN look for: Recess B4 lunch Keywords: Recess, MSU Nutrition Department  
Photos to accompany this story can be downloaded at: <http://www.montana.edu/commserv/csnews/nwarchive.php>

**Editor's note:** Recess Before Lunch makes a good local feature. Look at the list at the end of the story to see if a school in your area is involved.

For the sake of better student appetites and attention spans, more than two-dozen Montana elementary schools are revamping an elementary school tradition that is as well established as apples for the teacher and schoolhouse bells.

The schools are involved with the successful Recess Before Lunch policy that swaps the traditional order of lunch followed by recess. Montana Team Nutrition, a program overseen by the Office of Public Instruction, School Nutrition Programs is based at Montana State University in Bozeman. Nutritionists from Montana Team Nutrition say studies prove that students play, eat and study better if recess precedes lunch, instead of the other way around.

"Recess Before Lunch is a small change that nets huge rewards in children's behavior," said Molly Stenberg, a registered dietitian with the Montana Team Nutrition Program at MSU. Team Nutrition is working with the Office of Public Instruction to urge elementary schools statewide to implement the program. Stenberg said the program makes nutritional sense because students are hungrier and eat better if they play before they eat.

"Teachers feel that kids are more settled and ready to start afternoon classes if they have recess before lunch. The atmosphere in the lunchroom is more relaxed if students are not rushing through lunch to get outside."

That is the experience of Kim DeBruycker, principal of Gallatin Gateway School, who instituted Recess Before Lunch at her school a year ago for first through fourth grades. Finances were a key reason that DeBruycker made the change. She wanted to reduce expenses for playground aides. Whatever the initial reason, the switch to Recess Before Lunch for younger students has had a positive impact on the behavior of the entire school, DeBruycker said. "We really like it."

"When the younger kids go to recess before lunch, students solve many social problems that might have come up before they come back to class and don't bring arguments into the classroom. And, they don't take 10 minutes of class time to become settled after lunch. They get right to their work."

DeBruycker said she chose the younger students for the Recess Before Lunch policy because older students are better able to wait to get out on the playground and they also understand the importance of a good lunch. And even though she had to buy another oven to make the program work, the program has been economical for Gallatin Gateway.

"The students eat better and there's a lot less waste," DeBruycker said. Indeed, on one recent day

when scalloped potatoes were on the menu, there was little waste and many of the children went back for seconds.

Stenberg said the Recess Before Lunch policy was initiated in several pilot sites – including – Lewistown, Conrad and Whitefish– and the concept seems to be spreading by word of mouth.

“It usually takes schools a little effort to make the switch to Recess Before Lunch,” Stenberg said. “We’ve found it’s well worth the effort.”

Montana schools that have implemented Recess Before Lunch include:

**Belgrade:** Ridge View Elementary School (grades 2 and 4)

**Belt:** Belt Public Schools.

**Billings:** Central Heights School.

**Bonner:** Potomac Elementary.

**Conrad:** Meadowlark School (grades K-2).

**East Helena:** Radley Elementary School (grades 3-5).

**Frenchtown:** Frenchtown School (grades 7-8).

**Gallatin Gateway:** Gallatin Gateway Elementary (grades K-3).

**Great Falls:** Mountain View School.

**Havre:** Highland Park Early Primary (grades K-1); Lincoln McKinley Primary (grade 2); Sunnyside Intermediate (grades 4-5).

**Helena:** Helena Middle School (grades 6-8), CR Anderson Middle School (grade 6), Broadwater Elementary, Central Elementary, Bryant Elementary, Keesler Elementary, Four Georgians (grade 5 only).

**Lewistown:** Highland Park School (grades K-2).

**Melstone:** Melstone Public Schools (grades K-6).

**Missoula:** Hawthorne School (grades K-5); Lewis and Clark School; Paxson School; Russell School; Hellgate Elementary (grades K-2).

**Seeley Lake:** Seeley Lake Elementary.

**Sidney:** Rau Elementary School.

**Valier:** Valier School.

**Whitefish:** Whitefish Central School (grades 5-8).

Captions:

1. Students at Gallatin Gateway School who participate in Recess Before Lunch say they enjoy having time to take a swing on the playground before they eat. Photo by Stephen Hunts, MSU News Service.
2. Gallatin Gateway School students say they like having recess before lunch. Gateway principal Kim DeBruycker says the arrangement makes sense financially and students also are more attentive than they were with the more established routine of lunch before recess, Photo by Stephen Hunts, MSU News Service.



# A Recess Before Lunch Implementation Guide Evaluation

Please help us make this guide better in the future. After you have used this guide and the materials included within, please take a minute to fill out this evaluation form. Your input is important to us. Thank you for your time and suggestions.

1. School Name (optional) \_\_\_\_\_
2. School Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your present position? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Please tell us how you used the guide. Did you use any of the educational and marketing materials that were included? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. A. Please rate the usefulness of the guide on a scale of 1 (not useful at all) to 5 (very useful). \_\_\_\_\_  
B. What sections did you find the most helpful? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Did your school successfully implement a RBL policy? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No  
If yes, in what grades? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What are your observations with the pros and cons to implementing a RBL policy? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please return the completed evaluation form via fax (406-994-7300).

Or, simply fold, apply postage and mail.

The evaluation form is available online at [www.opi.state.mt.us/schoolfood/index.html](http://www.opi.state.mt.us/schoolfood/index.html).

Electronic replies can be sent to [kbark@state.mt.us](mailto:kbark@state.mt.us)

**Thank you.**

## **Montana Team Nutrition Program**

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