

RECESS

before

LUNCH



Optimizing School Schedules to Support Learning

RECESS BEFORE LUNCH

Optimizing School Schedules to Support Learning

This guide, also available electronically on the Montana Team Nutrition Program website, www.montana.edu/teamnutrition/smartpleasantmeals/rbl.html, provides information, tips, and best practices for schools interested in using Recess Before Lunch to maximize learning and optimize meal time.

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Acknowledgments

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This project has been funded at least in part with federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture; nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

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We know that Recess Before Lunch is best for our students and we see how it improves the learning environment in the afternoon. It's a schedule shift for our staff and we continually refine our approach with their input."

Montana School Administrator



INTRODUCTION

In 2003, the Montana Team Nutrition Program published *Recess Before Lunch: A Guide for Success*. After working closely with several schools to promote and assist in the implementation of a Recess Before Lunch (RBL) schedule, the Montana guide was published to help other schools and districts learn how to implement a RBL policy at the elementary level.

While the practice is now sometimes called “Play, Then Eat” or “Play Before Lunch,” the basic concept of RBL has not changed since the publication of the original guide:

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.

During the 14 years since its publication, the Montana RBL guide has been used throughout the state, across the country and around the globe. It has served as the basis for toolkits developed by Hawaii, Iowa, Missouri, Vancouver (Canada) and others. The U.S. Department of Defense’s Healthy Base Initiative also used the guide in a demonstration project to reduce the prevalence of obesity at military installations worldwide.

Since 2005, the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) has collected yearly data on the use of a Recess Before Lunch schedule in Montana schools. The rate has remained consistent at 30 to 34 percent of elementary schools implementing RBL for some or all students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The nationwide [2014 School Health Policies and Practices Study \(SHPPS\) survey by CDC](#) reported that about 62 percent of elementary schools offer RBL to some students, with 11 percent scheduling it for all students.



*Students are not rushing through lunch to get out to recess.
They are hungrier when it’s time for lunch, so they eat better.”*

Montana Teacher



RECESS AND LUNCH WITH THE WHOLE CHILD AND COMMUNITY IN MIND

Over the past ten years, the role of school health, especially the importance of nutrition and physical activity, has continued to evolve. The original coordinated school health model from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) was expanded to the [Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child](#) (WSCC) model. According to the CDC, this model (illustrated above) “focuses its attention on the child, emphasizes a school-wide approach, and acknowledges learning, health, and the school as being a part and reflection of the local community.”

In the Whole Child Model, the scheduling of recess and lunch is important because of the numerous connections among school success, nutrition and physical activity. Recess and lunch are also part of another important discussion in America’s schools: food waste. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has recognized that schools have a special role in “reducing, recovering, and recycling food waste.” [The U.S. Food Waste Challenge](#) specifically recommends Recess Before Lunch and extending lunch periods as two important strategies for reducing food waste in schools.

This guide focuses on the many benefits of an active recess and a comfortable lunch period, preferably in that order.

BENEFITS OF ACTIVE RECESS

Planned periods of physical activity and play, also known as recess, have impressive and well-documented benefits. According to the CDC, an effective recess period is monitored by adults and allows children to engage with their peers in activities they choose. Regular recess is a win-win for students and educators since it provides health, cognitive, educational and social benefits including:

- Increased levels of physical activity
- Improved memory, attention, concentration and classroom on-task behavior
- Reduced disruptive behaviors in the classroom
- Improved social development (e.g., learning how to share and negotiate)

Regular recess periods during the school day contribute to the 60 minutes of daily physical activity recommended for youth today. **Based on the strength of research connecting activity to learning, health experts and educators are joining forces to help all students be more active.** For example, the Tennessee Departments of Education and Health have joined together to provide resources for schools, families and communities on an [Active Students, Active Learners website](#).



BENEFITS OF BALANCED SCHOOL MEALS

Nutrition and physical activity go hand-in-hand helping children to be fit, healthy and ready to learn. School meals (lunch, breakfast, snacks and suppers) are planned to provide the key nutrients that many students are missing, including calcium, potassium, vitamin D and dietary fiber. The balanced meals mandated by the [U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\) Meal Patterns](#) provide the fuel students need to learn in school. Students who eat school meals:

- Consume more milk, fruits, and vegetables during meal times
- Have better intake of certain nutrients, such as calcium and fiber

In numerous studies eating breakfast at school has been associated with better attendance rates, fewer missed school days, and better test scores. While the impact of school lunch has not been studied as thoroughly as breakfast, ongoing research shows that overall dietary intake has an impact on school performance. Students who are poorly nourished and/or food insecure are at greater risk for problems at school. According to the 2017 [Hunger in Our Schools Report](#) from No Kid Hungry, educators recognize that some children are too hungry to learn.



My son ate more of his lunches – much less was coming home uneaten.”

Vancouver, Canada Parent

It’s obvious that their brains have been fed and hydrated.”

Hawaii Teacher

BENEFITS OF RECESS BEFORE LUNCH

Active recesses and balanced school lunches are good for students and educators. By switching the usual order to recess **before** lunch, many schools have multiplied the benefits and added another strategy to optimize learning for children. However, to maximize the benefits, sufficient time needs to be scheduled for both recess and lunch. Playground and lunchroom environments also need careful planning.

The benefits of RBL have been confirmed in a number of research studies since the original 2003 Montana Guide for Success was published. These additional benefits—on top of the normal benefits of recess and lunch—fall into four main categories:

- **Improved consumption of school lunch:** Studies have shown that children waste less food, drink more milk and eat more fruits and vegetables when they have recess first. The decrease in food and milk waste has been significant in some studies and less dramatic in others.
- **Improved atmosphere in the lunchroom:** Since students are not rushing to get outside, the atmosphere in the lunchroom/cafeteria/dining area is more relaxed, and thus more conducive to eating slowly. Children are generally calmer, quieter and able to socialize as well as eat their meals.
- **Improved classroom behavior after lunch:** Teachers report that students are more settled when they return to their classrooms and better able to focus. Administrators and educators report better learning readiness and small, but important, increases in teaching time (even 5 to 10 minutes makes a difference).
- **Improved behavior overall:** Anecdotally, administrators report fewer discipline problems in dining areas and hallways. Some also report that there are fewer conflicts on the playground and that fewer children get sick from playing hard right after eating quickly.

A one-page handout summarizing these benefits is available for downloading, sharing and printing at <http://www.montana.edu/teamnutrition/documents/RecessBeforeLunchWellnessPolicyHandout%20final%201%2026%2018.pdf>

For many schools in Montana and around the country, RBL is now the normal scheduling. For some others, the barriers seem nearly insurmountable. What makes the difference?

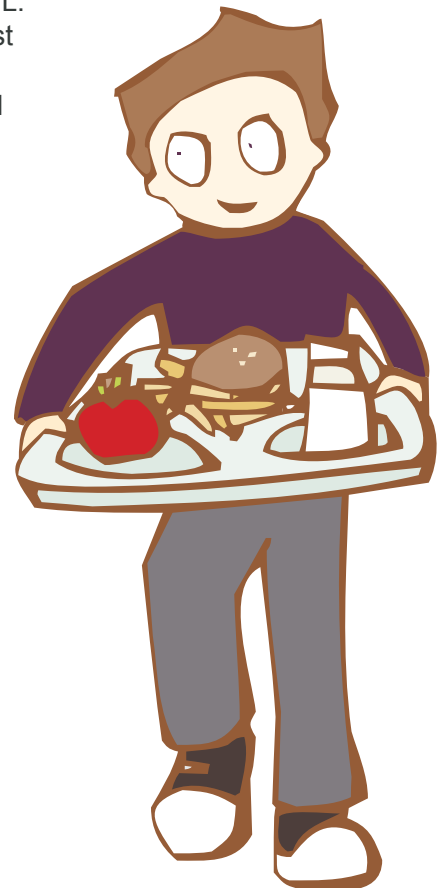
For Irving School Principal Adrian Advincula, Bozeman, Montana, where all 276 students K-5 enjoy RBL, the key is to have an open mind.

“ We are continually educating our staff and fine tuning our schedule. If something is not working, we look at the process and figure out ways to make it work better. We want everyone on board and need to educate our staff and parents on research based benefits to student learning and the overall school environment. It is an ongoing process but it is now one of our core values. We know it is best for our kids.”

Don Christman is the Director of Special Programs for Lockwood, Montana, Schools where all 1,146 students K-7 have RBL every day. His view is much the same:

“ We focus on the needs of our students. Recess before lunch is the way we do things because it is best for students, especially high need students. They are calmer in the cafeteria, they eat better at lunch, and they are more relaxed going back to the classroom. While administration provides the leadership, we invite staff to participate in finding solutions to the details of scheduling, handwashing and where to put coats and boots.”

Both of these administrators hit on several key points that have helped schools across the U.S. successfully enjoy the benefits of RBL. As many experienced school staff know, RBL is more than just a simple flip-flop in the schedule. It works best when schools make sure that both recess and meal environments work well for both students and staff.



RECESS BEFORE LUNCH

A Wellness Policy Strategy

32%

of Montana Elementary Schools¹
use Recess Before Lunch (RBL) scheduling
for all or some of their students.

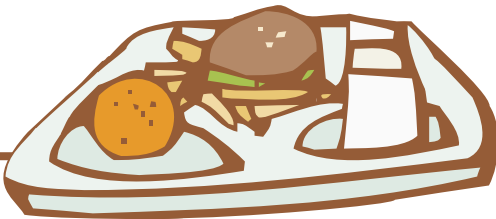
Greater nutrient consumption

with less food and beverage waste

Data from a Montana RBL pilot project³ shows an overall decrease in average food and beverage waste after implementation of a RBL policy.

Additional findings included:

- Fewer unopened milk cartons = more students opening and drinking milk which nourishes the body and brain.
- Lunchrooms were more relaxed, quiet and conducive to eating, as students were not rushing to get outside.
- Children returned to class more settled, calmer and ready to learn. Because they had eaten well, they tended to stay focused throughout the afternoon.



80%

of Montana Principals
surveyed² report

- Improved student behavior on the playground, in the lunch room and in the classroom.
- Increased lunch consumption.
- Decreased food waste.



Time to eat matters!

Scheduling lunch periods to be at least



20-30 minutes

decreases food waste⁴ and allows students enough time to eat a balanced meal. Schools can also stagger grades into the lunchroom to minimize time spent waiting in the lunch line and maximize time to eat.

Experts recommend that children have at least 20 minutes of seated time (once they sit down with their meal) to enjoy a complete school lunch or a lunch from home.

Learn more from Montana's Recess Before Lunch Guide, published 2018 www.montana.edu/teamnutrition/smartpleasantmeals/rbl.html

For more information: Montana Team Nutrition, www.montana.edu/teamnutrition, (406) 994-5641; kbark@mt.gov or stenberg@montana.edu

Recess Before Lunch: A Wellness Policy Solution references:

1. Montana Department of Public Instruction (OPI) School Nutrition Programs, National School Lunch Program data for Montana Schools. (2005–2016)
2. The Montana Office of Public Instruction School Nutrition Programs [Principals Survey](#). Published 2008. Accessed October 26, 2017. <http://www.montana.edu/teamnutrition/documents/RBLSurveySumRpt%20new%20opi%20logo.pdf>
3. [A Recess Before Lunch Policy in Four Montana Schools: Pilot Project Report](#). Published 2003. Accessed October 26, 2017. <http://www.montana.edu/teamnutrition/documents/RBL%20pilot%20project%20report.pdf>
4. Bergman, E.A., Buergel, N.S., Femrite, A, Englund, T.F. (2003). [Relationships of Meal and Recess Schedules to Plate Waste in Elementary Schools](#). (R-71-03). University, MS: National Food Service Management Institute. Accessed October 26, 2017. <https://edu.wyoming.gov/downloads/nutrition/plate-waste-and-recess-schedule.pdf>





R E D U C I N G

FOOD WASTE

WHAT SCHOOLS CAN DO TODAY



USDA's Economic Research Service estimates

31%

of the overall food supply at the retail and consumer level **went uneaten** in the U.S. in 2010



Scheduling recess before lunch can **reduce plate waste by**

AS MUCH AS 30%



Extending lunch periods from

20 TO 30

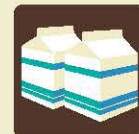
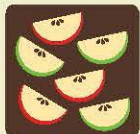
minutes reduced plate waste by nearly one-third



SMARTER LUNCHROOM STRATEGIES,

such as **how foods are named and where they are placed in the cafeteria,** can facilitate healthy choices and increase fruit and vegetable consumption by

UP TO 70%



SCHOOLS ACROSS THE COUNTRY ARE STEPPING UP TO THE CHALLENGE WITH INNOVATIVE NEW STRATEGIES, SUCH AS:

- Allowing students to keep a lunch or breakfast food item for consumption later in the school day
- Using techniques listed on the **Smarter Lunchrooms Self-Assessment Score Card** to help reduce food waste
- Setting up a table for kids to place items they are not going to consume (packaged or pre-portioned items)
- Letting kids self-serve
- Composting food waste for school gardens
- Collaborating with local farmers on composting or food-scrap projects
- Collecting excess wholesome food after mealtimes to donate to charitable organizations
- Sign up for the **U.S. Food Waste Challenge** to share your story on how you are reducing, recovering, or recycling food waste

GAINING SUPPORT FOR RBL

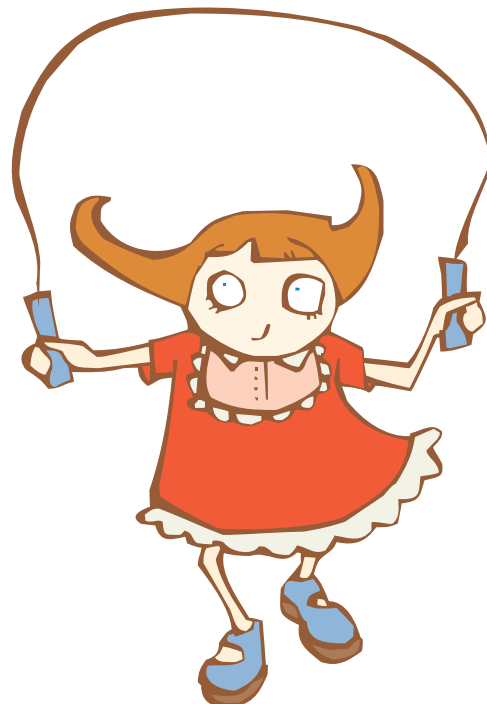
Educate staff:

- Educate yourself and your staff, including teachers, all aides, secretaries, nutrition staff, and custodians on the potential benefits of RBL. If possible, visit firsthand, or at least contact, another school that is using RBL. Share information and discuss concerns at a staff in-service. Share a [handout on RBL benefits](#).
- Make a commitment to give a [RBL schedule](#) a fair chance; commit to staying with it for at least a year. Be ready to make adjustments as needed in the first few months. Involve staff in identifying areas of concerns and brainstorming solutions.
- Involve school nutrition staff at every step of the process. They will need to make adjustments and will be key to the success of any meal service.
- Expect some resistance to change and be ready for the small problems that arise. Always keep the benefits front and center: More activity and better nutrition enhance learning environments and improve behavior.

“

Recess before lunch benefits everyone. Once you get the process in place, it becomes second nature to the students.”

Montana School Nutrition Staff



Educate parents:

- Share RBL benefits and links through all the channels that you currently use to educate parents, including school website, newsletters, bulletin boards, teacher conferences and meetings.
- Include RBL information in your social media postings using #recessbeforelunch as a hashtag. Here are two sample messages that can be used on any channel:
 - *Our school has #recessbeforelunch, students play then eat. This way they consume more nutritious @SchoolLunch & more milk*
 - *Our #recessbeforelunch schedule means that students play first. They eat better @ SchoolLunch & lunches from #home too*
- Emphasize that RBL will be equally beneficial to students who bring a lunch from home. When students have a more relaxed atmosphere in which to eat lunch, they are likely to bring less uneaten food home.
- Include RBL information/benefits/tips with all school lunch menus provided to parents.

Educate students:

- Any change in scheduling can be successful if students understand the reasons and process.
- Engage student leaders to promote the new schedule on campus and ask for student feedback when appropriate. Student council members and other leaders can also be involved in trouble-shooting minor glitches to help the process run more smoothly.

Educate the community:

- Share the benefits/concept of RBL at a Parent Advisory Council Meeting, or in an article in the local and school newspaper. Share a [handout on RBL benefits](#).



If you eat lunch before recess, you get a tummy ache."

Montana Student

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL SCHEDULING

Plan your schedule carefully

- Meet with all of the staff involved, especially those directly affected by the schedule change (teachers, aides, school nutrition and custodians) to work out any possible kinks.
- Plan procedures for all cafeteria/lunchroom needs, like how to bring cold lunches from classrooms or lockers, where to store them during recess, and process for handling winter clothing and boots.
- Realize that any schedule is a work in progress, which may need to be tweaked several times. Some schools conduct a trial run or pilot for several weeks to identify issues, and then modify it as needed.
- See examples of [schedules from Montana schools](#).

Allow adequate time for recess, lunch and transitions

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other national organizations recommend giving elementary school students at least 20 minutes of recess daily. Successful recess requires planning, supervision and support. Read more about [Strategies for Recess in Schools](#).
- Scheduling a minimum of at least 20 minutes for lunch from the time they sit down with their tray (i.e. seat time) is recommended, but the actual amount of time needed is dependent on the age and number of students being served in the school. Many Montana schools allow 25–30 minutes total for lunch, especially for younger students who generally require more time to get through the serving line and to eat.
- Try to maximize time to eat while minimizing the time spent waiting in the lunch line.
- Students may need time to adapt to longer lunch periods and to eat more slowly. Having adult mentors eat with students and practice conversations can help. Read more about Creating Comfortable Cafeterias on [Montana Team Nutrition's](#) website.

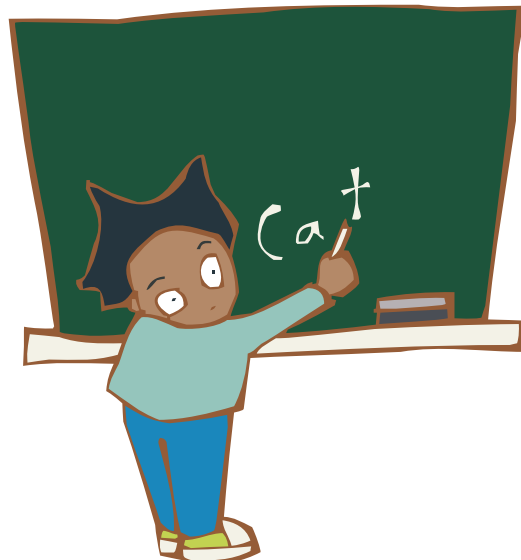
Create positive transitions

- Schools know that transition times, especially those involving going outdoors, coming indoors and moving as a group into other spaces, have the potential to be disruptive.
- There are plenty of ways to get students focused for lunch and back into learning mode in the classroom. The key lies in creating structured, orderly routines and providing engaging, calming tasks that work for various grade levels. For example, using a rotation of student leaders or singing a special song.
- Invite experienced teachers and other staff to share their ideas for effective transitions and to mentor others in routines that work.

Develop a detailed hand washing plan in the schedule

- Hand washing is an important food safety issue and disease prevention strategy. It is one of the most frequently identified barriers to implementing RBL.
- The following procedure has been approved by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services Registered Sanitarians:

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. Washing hands with soap and water is the recommended method for cleaning hands. The use of a hand sanitizer is not effective in cleaning hands. Hand sanitizers are designed to work in addition to hand washing when applied to already clean hands. For more information, contact the local county sanitarian at the health department.



Increase the presence of staff when initially implementing a RBL

- Increase the presence of adults on the playground and in the cafeteria as RBL is being implemented. This helps ease the transition into and out of the cafeteria and provides extra supervision as the students learn a new routine.
- Administrators, other school staff and trained volunteers (like parent volunteers, aides and curriculum/education coaches) should spend as much time as possible in the lunchroom and hallways, especially during the first couple of weeks of RBL.
- Students need to practice new routines and they need supervision during transition times. The presence of adults demonstrates support for RBL and the school lunch program, while enhancing the atmosphere of the lunch period.
- Continually provide students with clear and simple directions and show them how to meet expectations.



Children seem to be less antsy, tend to eat more, and waste less."

Hawaii Teacher

They have better appetites and are a lot quieter. They eat more of their lunch."

Missouri School Nutrition Staff

Advice from RBL Schools

- Scheduling changes are do-able; they take some creative planning and flexibility. Expect the schedule to be a work in progress. After the schedule is in place, no extra staff should be required as a result of the change.
- Look past the logistics of the scheduling change and focus on what is best for the students. Collect and share examples of positive changes seen on the playground, in the dining areas, and in the classroom.
- Students may be hungrier and thirstier with this change. It is a good opportunity to promote a school breakfast program or to temporarily offer a second chance breakfast service or morning snack. Since school nutrition programs are required to have water accessible in areas where meals are served, this is an excellent time to check the availability and replenish water as needed.
- Since younger students (K-2) may accept the change in scheduling better than the older kids, pilot RBL with younger grades first.
- RBL can be implemented in a variety of ways. Schools in Montana have RBL schedules during all lunch periods or some lunch periods, with students in all grades or selected grades only. Some schools switch in the middle of year, so grades/classes have RBL during the first semester and others have it during the second semester.



RECESS BEFORE LUNCH CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to consider all the issues involved in the successful scheduling of Recess Before Lunch. *Adapted from Iowa Recess Before Lunch Guide produced by the Iowa Team Nutrition Program.*

Key issues for RBL success	Yes	No	Maybe
Are school administrators supportive?			
Are teachers and aides supportive?			
Is the school nutrition program supportive?			
Would current school nutrition staffing schedule work with RBL?			
Have nearby schools with RBL been contacted for best practices, sample schedules, etc.?			
How will students and parents have chance to provide input on RBL?			
How will all affected staff (teachers, school nutrition, aides, custodians) be able to provide input on RBL?			
Is there a plan to assess success pre- and post- RBL with data collection of food/ beverages consumed vs. wasted?			
How much seated time will students have to eat lunch (at least 20 min.)?			
Is there a plan for adequate staff coverage of recess, lunch and transitions?			
Is there a plan for storage of coats, boots and other outdoor gear?			
Is there a plan for effective handwashing procedures (page 12)?			
Is there a plan for the safe management of lunches brought from home?			
Is there a plan for the management of students with food allergies and other special medical needs?			

Next steps:

HELPFUL TOOLKITS AND SAMPLE RBL SCHEDULES

These three toolkits provide additional information and tips for implementing Recess Before Lunch.

Hawaii: Recess Before Lunch for Hawaii Schools

Iowa: Recess Before Lunch Guide

This guide reports the details of a Recess Before Lunch pilot in three Iowa schools, as well as a section on how to conduct a plate waste assessment.

Missouri: Recess Before Lunch Toolkit for Missouri Schools



“

Recess Before Lunch has eliminated the ‘rush to eat and get outside.’ Students enter the cafeteria more calmly, they eat more calmly and they have fewer office referrals once they return to the classroom.”

Missouri School Administrator

Examples of Montana School Schedules

Grades K-5

280 students

K	1	2	3	4	5
8:30 a.m. Class Starts					
Recess 9:45 – 10:00	Recess 9:45–10:00				
	Recess 10:15 – 10:30			Recess 10:00 – 10:15	
					Recess 10:30 – 10:45
	Recess 11:15–11:35				
	Lunch 11:35–12:00		Recess 11:40 – 12:00		Recess 11:40 – 12:00
Recess 12:05 – 12:25			Lunch 12:00 – 12:25	Recess 12:05 – 12:25	Lunch 12:00 – 12:25
Lunch 12:25 – 12:50				Lunch 12:25 – 12:50	
	Recess 1:15 – 1:30				
		Recess 2:00–2:15			
Recess 2:45 – 3:00				Recess 2:30–2:45	
3:30 p.m. Class Dismissed					

Grades K-6

115 students

K-4	5-6
8:25 a.m. Class Starts	
Recess 10:50–11:15	
Lunch 11:15–11:45	
Recess 2:00–2:15	

Examples of Montana School Schedules

Grades 3–5

150 students

3	4–5
8:25 a.m. Class Starts	
Recess 10:15 – 10:30	
Recess 11:30 – 11:55	Recess 11:40 – 12:00
Lunch 11:55 – 12:25	Lunch 12:00 – 12:25
Recess 2:00 – 2:15	

Grades 5–8

680 students

5	6	7	8
8:40 a.m. Class Starts			
		1st Period 8:40–9:32	
Recess 9:45–10:00			
		2nd Period 9:37–10:24	
		Recess 10:00 – 10:15	
		3rd Period 10:29–11:16	
Recess 11:20–11:42			
		4th Period 11:21–12:08	
Lunch 11:42–12:03			
		Recess 12:08–12:31	
		Lunch 12:31–12:53	
		5th Period 12:58–1:45	
		6th Period 1:50–2:37	
		7th Period 2:44–3:22	
<p><i>5th and 7th grades have first lunch during 1st and 3rd quarters.</i></p> <p><i>6th and 8th grades have first lunch during 2nd and 4th quarters.</i></p>			

CREATING CHILD-FOCUSED RECESS AND LUNCH ENVIRONMENTS

Positive recess and lunch experiences do not happen by accident. Like any other aspect of CDC’s **Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child** (WSCC) model, both require planning and support to be successful. Fortunately, there are resources to help schools in the process. Whether your school uses a Recess Before Lunch schedule or not, these resources can help your leadership team and school wellness council create plans and develop policies that are focused on children’s needs.



This policy is helping my child to eat better and enjoy his lunch more.

Montana Parent

I can play soccer sooner; we get to play before we go to lunch.

Montana Student

Strategies for successful recess

The 2017 Strategies for Recess Success from CDC and Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE) outlines five categories of strategies, including Recess Before Lunch. It also provides a recess planning template and detailed instructions for how to implement each of the strategies at [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\): Recess](#).

Make Leadership Decisions

1. Identify and document recess policies.
2. Put documented recess policies into practice and revise as needed.
3. Develop a written recess plan.
4. Designate spaces for outdoor and indoor recess.
5. Establish weather guidelines to ensure student safety.
6. Train school staff and volunteers for recess.

Communicate and Enforce Behavioral and Safety Expectations

7. Establish and communicate behavior management strategies.
8. Teach conflict resolution skills.
9. Ensure that recess spaces and facilities meet recommended safety standards.

Create an Environment Supportive of Physical Activity during Recess

10. Provide adequate physical activity equipment.
11. Add markings to playground or physical activity areas.
12. Create physical activity zones.
13. Provide planned activities or activity cards.
14. Provide a combination of recess strategies.

Engage the School Community to Support Recess

15. Establish roles and responsibilities for supervising and facilitating recess.
16. Involve students in planning and leading recess.
17. Mobilize parents and others in the school community to support and sustain recess at school.

Gather Information on Recess

18. Track physical activity during recess.
19. Collect information on recess to show the effect on student and school outcomes.

Strategies for comfortable cafeterias

Use this list of best practices for school lunch to ensure children are ready to learn in the afternoon. This handout and other Comfortable Cafeterias resources are available at [Montana Team Nutrition's website](#).

1. Schedule meal times appropriately. It is recommended that lunch be scheduled between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Breakfast may be scheduled up to two hours before lunch in schools that provide a breakfast as part of the school day.
2. Insure that there is adequate time to eat. School nutrition professionals and educators recommend that children have at least 20 minutes to eat a lunch meal after sitting down. Children need at least 10 minutes after receiving a breakfast meal to eat.
3. Implement a Recess Before Lunch (RBL) schedule. Allowing elementary children to play first and then eat their lunch benefits students, teachers and administrators.
4. Follow the **“Division of Responsibility”** mealtime philosophy to help children develop healthy eating habits. In this approach:
 - Adults decide the what, when and where of feeding
 - Children decide the how much and whether of eating

Offer small portions when introducing new foods so children do not feel overwhelmed. Successful implementation of this philosophy includes education of staff, students and parents, as well as posting information in the cafeteria.

5. Train lunch aides and nutrition staff on mealtime philosophy each year. Staff will follow the Division of Responsibility philosophy and will not entice, persuade or force children to take food or eat food they don't want.



The health reason is important, but the reason why we have recess before lunch is that it helps with student behavior.”

Hawaii School Administrator

Both my daughters love it! They get to burn off their energy before they eat. They are hungrier for lunch and eat better.”

Vancouver, Canada Parent

6. Encourage teachers and other staff to eat with students. A study found that when a teacher is present during mealtime to encourage children to try new foods and select a variety of foods, food consumption and milk intake all improve.
7. Offer choices to children through menu selection. Children eat better when offered a choice, especially when it comes to fruits and vegetables. Try offering two choices of fruits and vegetables a day. It can be as simple as fresh grapes and applesauce or raw carrots and cooked whole kernel corn.
8. Create a pleasant and attractive eating environment. Survey teachers, parents and students about ways to make the eating experience more enjoyable. Possibilities include:
 - Playing music to alert the children to go outside; avoiding the use of whistles, traffic lights or eating in silence
 - Making cafeteria décor colorful and attractive with murals and student artwork
 - Posting signs to help direct children to menu choices and reinforce mealtime philosophy
9. Encourage adults to model healthy habits in the cafeteria. Encourage staff to eat school lunch with students as often as possible so children see them making healthy food choices. Every adult can be a positive role model by eating healthful foods or being physically active with children. School lunch is also a great opportunity to reinforce good table manners and socialize with the students.



RECESS BEFORE LUNCH RESEARCH BIBLIOGRAPHY

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It takes off all your energy, so you're not moving around at lunch."

Montana Student

With the evidence-based benefits and the testimonials of many professionals, it's no wonder that the list of U.S. governmental agencies and other national organizations supporting Recess Before Lunch as a best practice is extensive. Many of these groups (especially the ones listed below) also provide detailed information and resources for implementing RBL.

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\): Recess](#)
- [U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\): Team Nutrition Recess/Recess Before Lunch](#)
- [U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\): Food Waste Challenge K–12](#)
- [Action for Healthy Kids \(AFHK\): Recess Before Lunch](#)
- [Alliance for a Healthier Generation \(AHG\): Recess](#)
- [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\): The Crucial Role of Recess in School](#)
- [Institute for Child Nutrition \(ICN\): RBL Best Practice Checklist](#)
- [Playworks: Recess Before Lunch](#)
- [Smarter Lunchrooms Scorecard Strategies](#)
- [Society of Health and Physical Educators \(SHAPE\): Guide for Recess Policy](#)



“

We really see the positives of having lunch after recess. Children are no longer eating only part of their lunch to hurry to recess, plus they have worked up an appetite after playing outside.”

Missouri School Administrator

Children are settled down and ready to learn when they return to the classroom.”

Montana Teacher

