

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.

