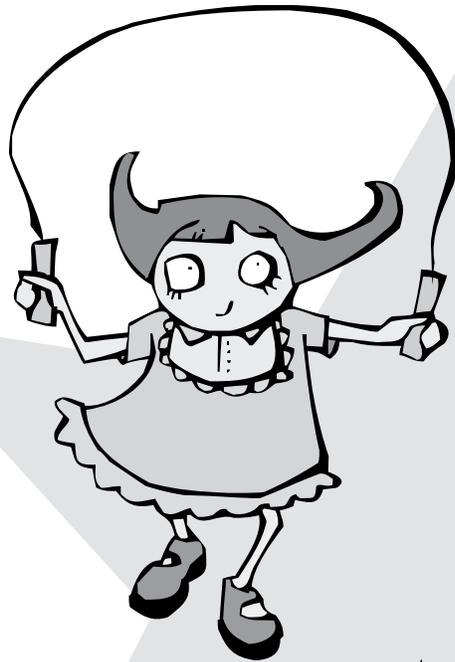


What is Recess Before Lunch?

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:

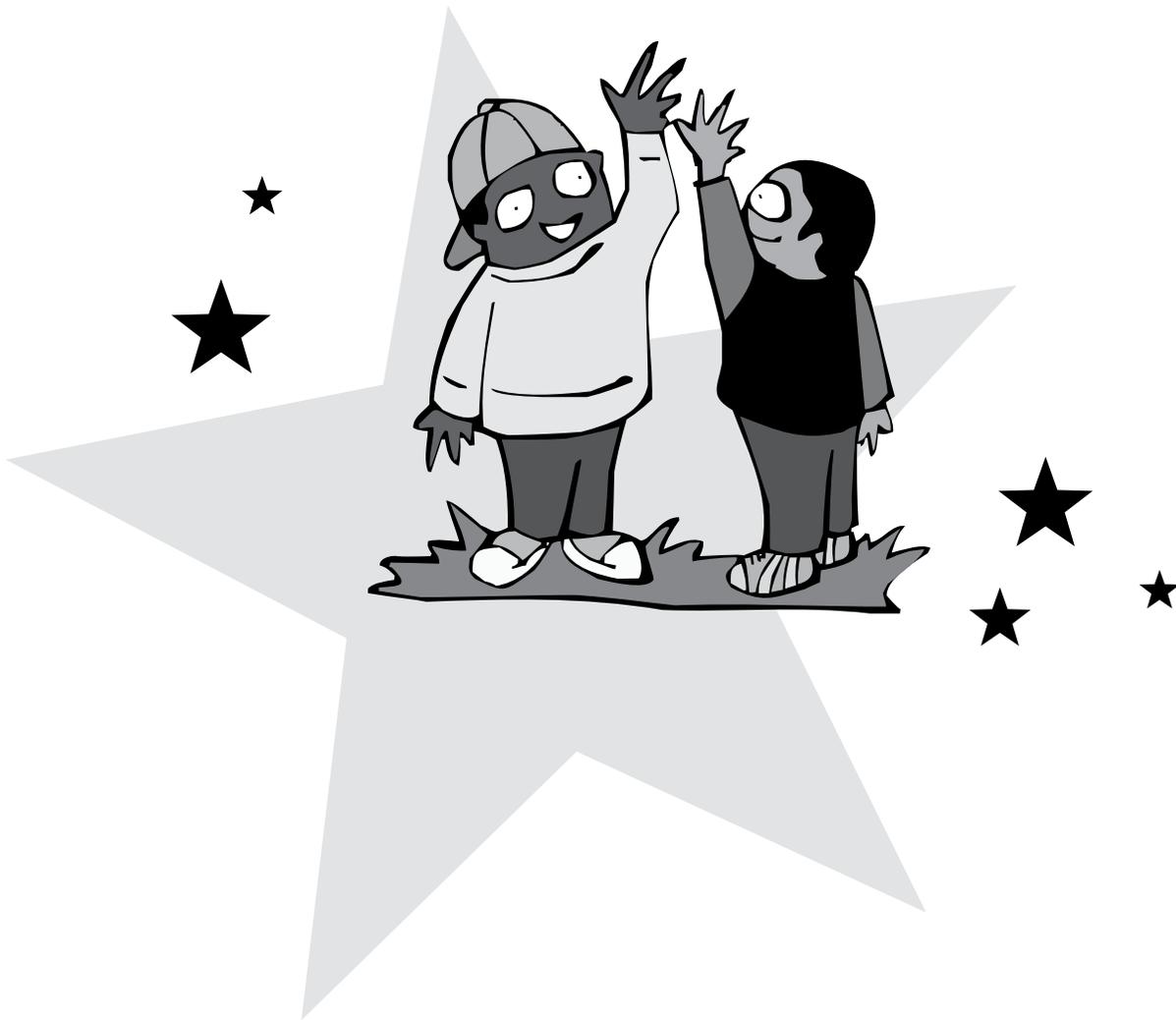
- ★ "This policy is helping my child to eat better and enjoy his lunch more."
- ★ "I appreciate and am glad that our school made this change."

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

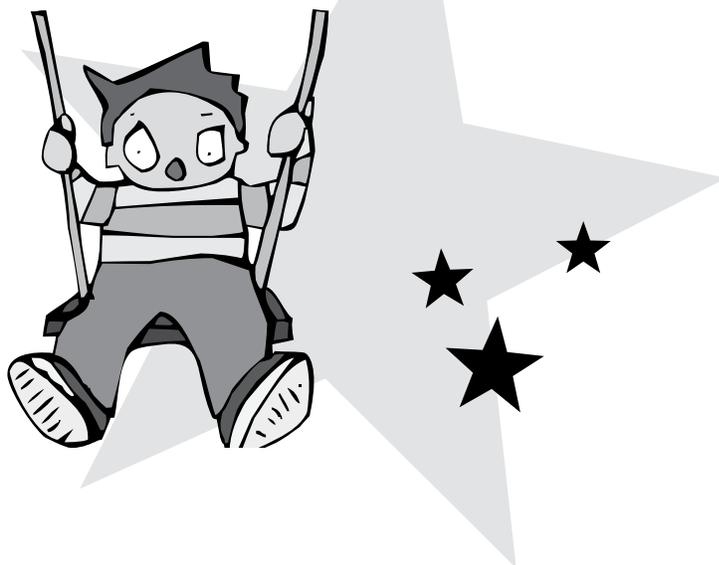


Steps to Implementing a Recess Before Lunch Policy

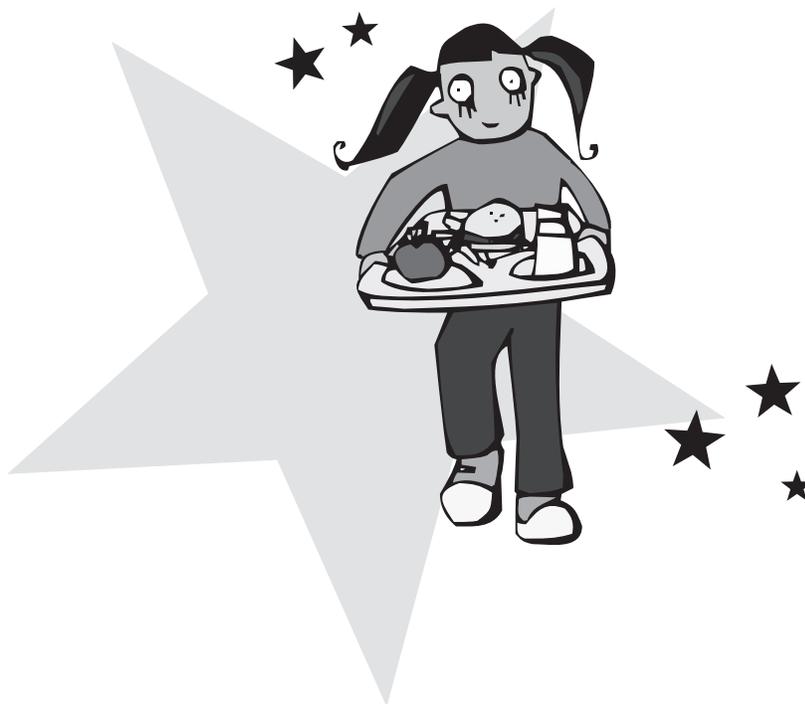
1. Build support within your school and community.

- 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. 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. A hand washing routine allows the students to wash their hands after playing outside and before eating, especially during the cold and flu season. Most school schedules are written so that the children come in from recess, put coats away, wash hands with soap and water, and then enter the lunchroom as a group. We realize some schools send children directly to the lunchroom from the playground, and provide them with a disposable handy wipe or provide access to an instant sanitizer dispenser to cleanse their hands before eating. **Please note: washing hands with soap and water is the preferred method; 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 additional information, contact your local county sanitarian at the health department.
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.

