



RECESS before lunch

Physical activity -- during recess, in the classroom or during physical education class -- improves school performance and achievement.

A best-practice wellness strategy is scheduling recess prior to lunchtime. Research shows that when students engage in physical activity prior to lunch, they tend to consume a more nutritionally balanced meal. Scheduling a morning recess reaps huge **BENEFITS**, including:

- » Reduced plate waste, due to enhanced appetite from physical activity
- » A more relaxed lunch because students are not hurrying to get to recess
- » Increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, and milk, improving intake of vitamins and minerals such as calcium, iron, and vitamin A
- » Increased water consumption
- » Decreased snacking on unhealthy foods after school
- » Increased participation in the National School Lunch Program
- » Decreased discipline problems on the playground, in the cafeteria, and in the classroom
- » Enhanced attention and ability to learn, resulting in 5-15 additional minutes of productive instructional time in the afternoon
- » Decreased nurse visits

KSDE Fiscal Auditing School Term Audit Guide pertaining to recess

- » A mid-morning and/or mid-afternoon recess not to exceed 15 minutes each may be included as part of the school day.
- » A recess period immediately before or after the lunch period is not included in the school day.
- » For recess periods that exceed 15 minutes, only 15 minutes may count toward the instructional time of the school day.

Due to its benefits to student health, recess before lunch is addressed in two of the modeling level statements in the Kansas School Wellness Policy Model Guidelines.*

- » *"Students are offered recess before lunch and at least 20 minutes seat time to eat."*
- » *"Elementary school students have two supervised recess periods per day, totaling at least 30 minutes (not including time spent getting to and from the playground), with one being offered in the morning. Supervisory staff encourage moderate to vigorous physical activity."*

Solutions to Perceived Challenges

| Challenges | Solutions |
|---|--|
| Loss of Instructional Time as defined by the KSDE Fiscal Auditing School Term Audit Guide | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Try to have a morning recess as close to the lunch period as possible. This ensures a morning recess with minutes counted as instructional time. Many schools already schedule recess immediately after lunch, which is not counted as instructional minutes. |
| Scheduling Issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Start with one or two grades to pilot, and document positive changes » View schedules as a “work in progress”; it may take 2-3 revisions to develop a final schedule. » Involve all appropriate people in planning. » Educate students, teachers, and parents regarding change; allow time for them to adjust. » Schedule extra time early in the school year for younger students to eat, since they are still learning lunchroom procedures. |
| Hand Washing After Recess and Before Eating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Add 5-10 minutes before each lunch period for students to use the restroom and wash their hands. » Provide additional supervision for children to wash hands in the restrooms. Consider asking for parent volunteers to supervise. |
| Staff, Parent, or Student Resistance to Change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Present research touting benefits of recess before lunch to gain buy-in.* » Involve all stakeholders in the decision making process. » Communicate early and often, and solicit feedback. |
| Storage of Outerwear in Cold Weather | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Designate a spot to place coats, hats, and gloves as students enter the lunchroom. |
| Students Used to Eating Fast, so Finishing Lunch Early | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Teach and encourage students to slow down, try each food on their tray, chew food thoroughly, and use all of the available time to finish their lunch. » Provide conversation starters or word puzzles on cafeteria tables to encourage socialization and engage students as they finish their meal. |
| Students Hungry at Recess Due to Not Consuming Breakfast | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Encourage participation in the School Breakfast Program. » Consider alternate service options such as Breakfast in the Classroom or Second Chance Breakfast if a number of students do not start the day with breakfast. |

Additional Implementation Tips:

- » Visit a school that has successfully implemented recess before lunch
- » The best time to implement is at the beginning of the school year
- » Have a plan that outlines the procedures and processes in place
- » Determine the metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of the change
- » Be flexible and patient; new programs take time to implement
- » Commitment of leadership is key to overcoming initial resistance
- » Encourage creativity and flexibility in scheduling

*For more information, contact Child Nutrition & Wellness at 785-296-2276

This project was funded using U.S. Department of Agriculture grant funds. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

