

# **Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools: Development of a Best Practice Checklist**



National Food Service Management Institute  
The University of Mississippi  
1-800-321-3054

**2009**

This publication has been produced by the National Food Service Management Institute - Applied Research Division, located at The University of Southern Mississippi with headquarters at The University of Mississippi. Funding for the Institute has been provided with federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, to The University of Mississippi. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of The University of Mississippi or the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

The information provided in this publication is the result of independent research produced by NFSMI and is not necessarily in accordance with U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) policy. FNS is the federal agency responsible for all federal domestic child nutrition programs including the National School Lunch Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the Summer Food Service Program. Individuals are encouraged to contact their local child nutrition program sponsor and/or their Child Nutrition State Agency should there appear to be a conflict with the information contained herein, and any state or federal policy that governs the associated Child Nutrition Program. For more information on the federal Child Nutrition Programs please visit [www.fns.usda.gov/cnd](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd).

# **National Food Service Management Institute The University of Mississippi**

## **Building the Future Through Child Nutrition**

The National Food Service Management Institute was authorized by Congress in 1989 and established in 1990 at The University of Mississippi in Oxford. The Institute operates under a grant agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of NFSMI is to improve the operation of Child Nutrition Programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination. The Administrative Offices and Divisions of Technology Transfer and Education and Training are located in Oxford. The Division of Applied Research is located at The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg.

### **MISSION**

The mission of the NFSMI is to provide information and services that promote the continuous improvement of Child Nutrition Programs.

### **VISION**

The vision of the NFSMI is to be the leader in providing education, research, and resources to promote excellence in Child Nutrition Programs.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

### **Headquarters**

The University of Mississippi  
Phone: 800-321-3054  
Fax: 800-321-3061  
[www.nfsmi.org](http://www.nfsmi.org)

**Education and Training Division  
Information Services Division**  
The University of Mississippi  
6 Jeanette Phillips Drive  
P.O. Drawer 188  
University, MS 38677-0188

**Applied Research Division**  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
118 College Drive #10077  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001  
Phone: 601-266-5773  
Fax: 888-262-9631

# **Acknowledgments**

## **WRITTEN AND DEVELOPED BY**

**Alice Jo Rainville, PhD, RD, CHE, SNS**  
**Professor**  
**Health Sciences**  
**Eastern Michigan University**

**Kristi L. Lofton, PhD, RD**  
**Research Scientist**  
**Deborah H. Carr, PhD, RD**  
**Director**  
**Applied Research Division**  
**The University of Southern Mississippi**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
**Charlotte B. Oakley, PhD, RD, FADA**

## **Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools: Development of a Best Practice Checklist**

---

---

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The rise in childhood obesity has prompted many school nutrition (SN) professionals and school administrators to explore innovative ways of creating a healthful wellness environment while utilizing existing school resources. Many believe recess before lunch (RBL) is one approach to influence a healthful wellness environment. The RBL approach provides students with an opportunity for physical activity prior to lunch and then the opportunity to consume a nutritionally balanced lunch in a safe and secure environment. SN professionals understand the impact of students' nutritional intake, physical activity, cognitive development, and behavior on their well-being. SN professionals also play an active role in RBL by implementing and assessing successful practices that relate to the nutrition services provided.

In 2007, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), a federally assisted meal program, served nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to more than 30.5 million children daily (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2008). However, serving children a school lunch is only the first step. If children are to realize the full benefits of the NSLP meal, they must choose to eat the food served. Studies have shown that students often do not finish their school lunch for a multitude of reasons, including recess placement within the school day. The School Health Policies and Programs Study 2006 found that 96.8% of elementary schools provided recess during the school day for at least one grade. However, only 10.4% of elementary schools

provided recess immediately before lunch for students in all grades (Lee, Burgeson, Fulton, & Spain, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to determine the best practices (quality indicators) related to recess placement before lunch in elementary schools, to compile a best practice checklist that can be used as an assessment tool for SN programs, and to validate and evaluate the usefulness of the best practice checklist. This study is based upon previous research that explored recess placement and will provide a valuable resource for school professionals implementing and maintaining RBL programs in elementary schools.

This study was conducted in two phases. In Phase I, researchers drafted 107 best practice statements from previous research, research literature, and standards of practice for the NSLP. These statements were evaluated in a two-day workgroup meeting with an expert panel of SN directors, principals, and state agency personnel representing five USDA regions. Expert panel members provided input and confirmed the practice categories and the best practice statements, and then categorized the statements with supporting goals and standard supporting practice statements. Three of the five research-based practice categories identified in previous research (“Personnel Support and Workload”, “Logistics”, and “Scheduling”) were confirmed by the work group, as well as the three goals, 18 best practice statements, and 18 considerations and professional reminder practice statements. A summary of the agreed upon practice categories, supporting goals, best practice statements, and standard supporting practice statements was e-mailed to expert panel members to confirm placement of goals and practice statements, and to provide additional comments and suggestions on formatting the best practice checklist. Comments and suggestions from expert panel members were used to draft the best practice checklist for evaluation in Phase II of the study.

In Phase II, the draft checklist was further evaluated and pilot tested via e-mail by a national review panel of SN directors and state agency personnel from six USDA regions. Based on the review panel's comments and suggestions, the best practice checklist was revised and formatted as a Web-based, self-assessment tool. The *NFSMI Best Practice Checklist for School Nutrition Professionals Implementing or Assessing Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools* resource has a user-friendly format designed around three practice categories, four goals, and 39 best practices and standard supporting practices that contribute to the achievement of four prevailing goals listed under the three research-based practice categories. The checklist could be used as a self-assessment tool for school professionals who wish to implement or assess RBL in elementary schools.