

**Barriers to Recess Placement
Prior to Lunch in Elementary Schools**



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

2005

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

National Food Service Management Institute The University of Mississippi

Building the Future Through Child Nutrition

The National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) 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.

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**BARRIERS TO RECESS PLACEMENT
PRIOR TO LUNCH IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Studies have shown children who have recess placement prior to lunch instead of after lunch consume significantly more food and nutrients and waste less food (Bergman, Buerger, Englund, & Femrite, 2003; Getlinger, Laughlin, Bell, Akre, & Arjmandi, 1996). Yet, according to the School Health Policies and Programs Study, only 4.6% of elementary schools schedule recess prior to lunch (Wechsler, Brenner, Kuester, & Miller, 2001). Therefore, based in part on this evidence, it is important to investigate the barriers to recess placement prior to lunch.

Using focus group research methodology, the National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI) Applied Research Division conducted a study to determine barriers to scheduling recess prior to lunch in schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). After pilot focus groups in a Midwest district, focus group meetings were conducted with homogenous groups of school administrators, school nutrition personnel, teachers, and parents from three school districts. The school districts were selected based on U.S.D.A. region (Mountain Plains, Southeast, Northeast) and current recess placement after lunch in the elementary schools. Foodservice directors in these regions were contacted via phone and electronic mail to determine current recess placement and willingness to host the focus groups in their district. Focus group participants were invited by the researcher and/or the school personnel in the district. There were four focus groups (one with each group) held on the same day in each district with 21-26 participants in each district.

Each focus group meeting was tape-recorded and transcribed to make a complete record of the discussion available. The strength of this study approach was the diverse group of school personnel and parents who shared their experiences in an open-ended discussion format.

Participants shared a variety of barriers to the placement of recess prior to lunch.

The barriers most frequently mentioned by administrators included: a) preservation of morning hours for academics, b) logistical concerns of supervision, hand washing, and cold weather clothing, c) possible resistance by faculty, staff, and parents, and d) tradition. The barriers most frequently mentioned by school nutrition personnel included: a) supervision, b) movement of children on and off playground, c) scheduling, and d) winter clothing. The barriers most frequently mentioned by teachers were: a) logistics, b) academic priorities, c) willingness of administrators, d) exercise, e) weather, f) scheduling blocks, and g) tradition. The barriers most frequently mentioned by parents were: a) logistics such as scheduling, staffing, and space b) winter clothing, c) nutrition beliefs, d) previous experiences with a family member, e) tradition; f) behavior, and g) communication.

There were positive outcomes predicted for recess prior to lunch including a) food wastage will decrease as children do not race to recess, b) students will eat better, not just run to recess, c) behavior improvement and d) conflict management of recess issues occurring outside of classroom time. Participants felt the most important topics discussed were student learning and behavior, nutrition, scheduling, hand washing, operational procedures, and timing of lunch.

To convince school administrators to schedule recess prior to lunch, participants recommended research that demonstrates that students' readiness for class is better when recess is prior to lunch and awareness of model programs that are successful.

More research studies regarding recess prior to lunch are needed to validate these results. Financial studies would be beneficial to assess actual costs of supervision, a concern of administrators. Educational and training resources for school personnel and parents are needed. The results of this qualitative study provide useful information to school personnel, parents, and state agency personnel to effectively consider implementing and promoting recess prior to lunch.