



National Food Service Management Institute  
The University of Mississippi



# NFSMI Best Practice Checklist

for School Nutrition Professionals Implementing or Assessing  
Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools



Applied Research Division  
The University of Southern Mississippi

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.

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# **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 Information Services 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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# NFSMI Best Practice Checklist for School Nutrition Professionals Implementing or Assessing Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools

**Recess before lunch (RBL)** is an approach in which schedules are modified, allowing for students to participate in recess before the lunch period. Several studies have found that scheduling RBL has many benefits critical for growing children.

Some of the benefits of RBL in elementary schools have been determined to:

- Create a wellness environment for children
- Increase milk, fruit, and vegetable consumption
- Decrease plate waste
- Reduce reports of stomach illnesses by children
- Reduce fewer disciplinary problems and referrals in the cafeteria and classroom
- Support an environment where children are more relaxed
- Provide an environment for appropriate socialization
- Provide an environment where children are more focused on eating
- Ensure that children returning to the classroom are calmer and ready to learn

The rise in childhood obesity has prompted many school nutrition professionals and school administrators to explore innovative ways of creating a healthful wellness environment while utilizing existing school resources. Many believe RBL is one approach to influence a healthful wellness environment. The RBL approach provides elementary 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. School nutrition professionals understand the impact of students' nutritional intake, physical activity, cognitive development, and behavior on their well-being. School nutrition professionals also play an active role in RBL by implementing and assessing successful practices that relate to the nutrition services provided.

This RBL resource, *NFSMI Best Practice Checklist for School Nutrition Professionals Implementing or Assessing Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools*, was designed with the assistance from school nutrition professionals, school administrators, and school staff who have actively been a part of the implementation and assessment of an RBL program. Based on their recommendations, the resource is designed as a Web-based, self-assessment checklist developed around three of the five practice categories identified in previous NFSMI research. The three main practice categories forming the framework for grouping the best practice statements are Personnel Support and Workload, Logistics, and Scheduling, while statements associated with Child Feeding Implications and Behavior are subsumed within the





three prevailing practice categories and standard supporting practices. Standard supporting practices also include necessary reminders of important actions that could successfully influence an RBL program. Additional resources for review are listed in the reference list at the back of the checklist.

The RBL best practice checklist follows a user-friendly format designed around 39 best practice statements and standard supporting practices that contribute to the achievement of four prevailing goals listed under the three research-based practice categories. It is recommended that each statement be reviewed and determination made through the self-assessment process regarding the stage of implementation or assessment associated with the practice. The three response options to consider regarding the stage in which one has implemented or assessed an RBL program include: “Not Addressed”, “Partially Addressed”, and “Fully Addressed.” Space is provided for the user to include additional best practices, standard supporting practices, and comments/action steps that are specific to their RBL program being implemented or assessed.

Listed below are suggested ways to use the checklist.

- Determine if the self-assessment process is a function of implementation or assessment of services provided by the school nutrition program
- Identify school nutrition program standards and practices needed for a successful RBL
- Identify supportive roles for school nutrition professionals
- Evaluate the role and contributions of the school nutrition program as a component of RBL
- Identify specific roles for stakeholders and resources necessary for planning, implementing, or assessing RBL policies and practices in elementary schools
- Establish goals for continuous quality improvement



## ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

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**Additional Best Practices** – Measureable best practices the school nutrition professional may want to include based on specific needs and procedures of the school/district program.

**Additional Standard Supporting Practices** – Standard supporting practices the school nutrition professionals may want to include because the positive contribution made to a successful RBL.

**Best Practices** – Measurable practices that define what is achievable, effective, and efficient strategies for school nutrition professionals desiring superior performance

**Comments/Action Steps** – Information included by the school nutrition professional assessing or implementing an RBL program.

**Goals** – Broad objectives that provide the context for what is to be accomplished under each practice category

**Key Stakeholders** – School nutrition directors, principals, teachers, school health staff, school nutrition managers and staff, custodial staff, parents, students, and community members

**NFSMI, ARD** – National Food Service Management Institute, Applied Research Division

**Practice Categories** – Research-based categories (Personnel Support and Workload, Logistics, and Scheduling) influencing RBL identified in a previous NFSMI study

**RBL** – Recess Before Lunch is an approach in which schedules are modified allowing students to participate in recess before the lunch period

**RBL Team** – Team members could include school nutrition director, manager and staff, school staff, custodial staff, parents, and students

**SN** – School Nutrition

**Standard Supporting Practices** – School nutrition program practices that contribute to the operation of the school nutrition program and set the foundation for a successful RBL





## PERSONNEL SUPPORT AND WORKLOAD

In this section, you will consider the goal and practice statements related to support for recess before lunch (RBL) from school administrators, school nutrition staff, and school staff, and items related to the associated workload for these personnel.

**GOAL I:** A team approach (school administrators, school personnel, school nutrition [SN] staff, students, and parents) is utilized when implementing RBL.

BEST PRACTICES	NOT ADDRESSED	PARTIALLY ADDRESSED	FULLY ADDRESSED
A school administrator or designee establishes and supervises an RBL team, if necessary, to develop and assess the implementation of RBL.			
A school administrator consults with the RBL team or key stakeholders (e.g., school staff, SN staff, students, if age-appropriate, and parents) to accomplish changes in RBL.			
The benefits of RBL are provided to principals, school staff, parents, and community media outlets.			
The RBL team obtains and reviews current resources and seeks information from other school districts who have implemented RBL ( <i>see References and Resources</i> ).			
SN staff, school staff, and the RBL team obtain samples of policies and schedules for RBL ( <i>see References and Resources</i> ).			
SN staff and members of the RBL team address potential barriers of RBL and offer opportunities for input.			
The SN director/manager and the RBL team allow time for SN staff, school staff, and students to adjust to changes for implementing RBL or RBL changes.			



ADDITIONAL BEST PRACTICES	NOT ADDRESSED	PARTIALLY ADDRESSED	FULLY ADDRESSED

**COMMENTS/ACTION STEPS:**



## PERSONNEL SUPPORT AND WORKLOAD

STANDARD SUPPORTING PRACTICES	NOT ADDRESSED	PARTIALLY ADDRESSED	FULLY ADDRESSED
Implementation of RBL includes pilot testing procedures to address issues and make adjustments related to student feeding implications and the cafeteria environment.			
An adequate period of time is allotted for pilot testing, implementing, assessing, and making schedule changes and other adjustments to RBL.			
SN directors and managers assess their level of productivity for meal service to ensure service to students is on time and efficient.			
SN staff communicates with school staff and students with a positive attitude during the implementation of RBL.			
SN staff cooperates with members of the RBL team to resolve issues related to providing meals to students and the cafeteria environment.			
SN staff and school staff assist with the supervision of the recess and lunch periods.			



ADDITIONAL STANDARD SUPPORTING PRACTICES	NOT ADDRESSED	PARTIALLY ADDRESSED	FULLY ADDRESSED

COMMENTS/ACTION STEPS:



## LOGISTICS

In this section, you will consider the goals and practice statements associated with the logistics of recess, lunch, and class schedules. Logistics also includes best practices for gaining support for RBL, addressing facility needs, and managing tasks such as handwashing and storing students' belongings and lunches from home.

**GOAL I:** School administrators, teachers, SN staff, students and parents establish and maintain continuous communication regarding RBL implementation.

<b>BEST PRACTICES</b>	<b>NOT ADDRESSED</b>	<b>PARTIALLY ADDRESSED</b>	<b>FULLY ADDRESSED</b>
A plan and procedures are in place to communicate and promote RBL to key stakeholders (i.e., school administrators and staff, SN staff, students, and parents).			
Key stakeholders (e.g., school administrators, SN staff, school staff, students, and parents) have opportunities to provide input and participate in RBL prior to and during implementation.			
School staff, parents, and students are informed of all changes necessary to accommodate an RBL schedule.			
Periodic evaluation of RBL is conducted during the first year of implementation and revisions are made based on the evaluation.			



ADDITIONAL BEST PRACTICES	NOT ADDRESSED	PARTIALLY ADDRESSED	FULLY ADDRESSED

COMMENTS/ACTION STEPS:



## LOGISTICS

**GOAL II:** Provisions are incorporated into the plan and procedures are in place to ensure a safe and successful transition to RBL.

<b>BEST PRACTICES</b>	<b>NOT ADDRESSED</b>	<b>PARTIALLY ADDRESSED</b>	<b>FULLY ADDRESSED</b>
Students have a designated area to store personal belongings (e.g., clothing, cash, cards, tickets, lunches from home, etc.) before lunch.			
A handwashing plan is included in RBL procedures.			
Students have access to water, milk or other approved fluids to drink during lunch.			
Adequate numbers of SN staff and school staff are on duty in the cafeteria during the recess and lunch periods to assist students with staying on schedule.			
The SN manager and staff make changes to the cafeteria environment to reduce distractions and the time required to consume meals.			
The SN program has provisions in place to manage issues associated with feeding students with special needs during the implementation of RBL.			
Serving lines and dining areas of the cafeteria are arranged to decrease lunch line wait time.			





ADDITIONAL BEST PRACTICES	NOT ADDRESSED	PARTIALLY ADDRESSED	FULLY ADDRESSED

COMMENTS/ACTION STEPS:



## LOGISTICS

STANDARD SUPPORTING PRACTICES	NOT ADDRESSED	PARTIALLY ADDRESSED	FULLY ADDRESSED
Supervision is increased at recess and in the cafeteria to assist students with transitions in the initial stages of implementation.			
School administrators, school staff, and SN staff ensure that federal/state/local guidelines are met when implementing RBL.			
Procedures are in place to streamline lunch payments to decrease lunch line wait time.			
The SN staff rearranges serving and seating in the cafeteria to support healthy eating and socialization.			
No fundraising or selling of competitive food items occur during the recess and lunch periods.			



ADDITIONAL STANDARD SUPPORTING PRACTICES	NOT ADDRESSED	PARTIALLY ADDRESSED	FULLY ADDRESSED

COMMENTS/ACTION STEPS:



## SCHEDULING

In this section, you will consider scheduling issues associated with recess, lunch, and class instruction periods. Scheduling also includes transition time between lunch periods and time logistics such as handwashing.

**GOAL I:** Recess and lunch schedules are flexible, do not interfere with classroom instruction time, and provide adequate time for students to consume lunch.

<b>BEST PRACTICES</b>	<b>NOT ADDRESSED</b>	<b>PARTIALLY ADDRESSED</b>	<b>FULLY ADDRESSED</b>
Key stakeholders (i.e., school administrators, SN staff, school staff, students, and parents) have opportunities to provide input on schedules prior to and during RBL implementation.			
An adequate period of time is allotted for pilot testing procedures and implementing RBL schedules.			
Recess, lunch, and classroom schedules include all classes in the school to implement RBL.			
RBL schedules are flexible within the recess and lunch time periods to allow for a minimum of 20 minutes for eating lunch from the time students are seated.			
Periodic assessment of RBL schedules is conducted during the first year of implementation.			

ADDITIONAL BEST PRACTICES	NOT ADDRESSED	PARTIALLY ADDRESSED	FULLY ADDRESSED

COMMENTS/ACTION STEPS:



## SCHEDULING

STANDARD SUPPORTING PRACTICES	NOT ADDRESSED	PARTIALLY ADDRESSED	FULLY ADDRESSED
SN staff and/or members of the RBL team consider the time it takes students to prepare for lunch (e.g., storing belongings, washing hands, and walk to the cafeteria) as a factor in determining the total lunch period.			
Recess and lunch are an important part of the school day and are not used for instruction, punishment or reward.			
School staff ensures that students arrive to the cafeteria as scheduled.			
SN staff serves meals promptly so that students' lunch period does not interfere with classroom instruction time.			
Lunch schedules comply with USDA requirements to serve lunches during the time frame of 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. unless a waiver has been submitted to and approved by the state agency for lunches served before or after this time frame.			



ADDITIONAL STANDARD SUPPORTING PRACTICES	NOT ADDRESSED	PARTIALLY ADDRESSED	FULLY ADDRESSED

COMMENTS/ACTION STEPS:





## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

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For more information about Recess Before Lunch, please visit the following web sites:

### **RBL Checklist, Sample Brochures, Handouts, Letters and Press Releases**

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Action for Healthy Kids Washington. (n.d.). Recess before lunch fact sheet. Retrieved May 29, 2008, from [http://www.eatsmart.org/client\\_images/recess\\_before\\_lunch\\_wa\\_final.pdf](http://www.eatsmart.org/client_images/recess_before_lunch_wa_final.pdf)

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### **RBL Education and Training Resource**

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Pellegrini, A. D. & Bohn, C. M. (2005). The role of recess in children's cognitive performance and school adjustment. *Educational Researcher*, 34(1): 13-19. Retrieved May 29, 2008, from [https://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Publications/Journals/Educational\\_Researcher/3401/2672-03\\_Pellegrini.pdf](https://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Publications/Journals/Educational_Researcher/3401/2672-03_Pellegrini.pdf)

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*Please Note: The above Websites were verified as active resources in October 2008 and may expire without notice. The contents within these references do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of The National Food Service Management Institute.*





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Item Number R-132-08 (GY06)