

Lunch Time at School

UW School of Public Health

Nutritional Sciences Program, 2015 Public Health Nutrition Course



Background

Proper nutrition and adequate time to eat support intellectual development.

Positive school environments promote healthy eating behaviors which allow for optimal intellectual development.¹ Providing adequate time for lunch leads to increased nutritional status which is directly tied to academic achievement, conduct, and overall school performance.²⁻⁵ Nutritional status is also related to physical well-being, growth, development, and readiness of a child to learn.⁶

Adequate time to eat increases consumption and decreases waste.

Longer lunch periods allow students to consume more nutrients, food, and calories while shorter lunch periods produce more waste than longer lunch periods.⁷

Undernourished children are 1.4x more likely to have repeated a grade.⁵

Recommendations

Policies to maximize the time available to eat lunch during a student's lunch period:

- Schedule recess before lunch, if feasible. If recess cannot be scheduled before lunch, encourage supervisors to use more discrete recess cues and encourage students to remain seated until the end of the lunch period.
- Encourage teachers to provide students with adequate time to travel from their classroom to the lunchroom.

Findings

Seated Time

- Official stated lunch times averaged 20.71 minutes.
- Average seat time was 12.69 minutes. No schools met the mandatory Seattle School District 20-minute seat time.
- The number of supervisors positively correlated with average seated time.

Plate Waste

- On average, students wasted 82.8% of their vegetables, 50% of fruit, and 19.9% of the starch entrée they selected.
- Older students tended to waste less food than younger students.
- Waste decreased with increased seated time.

Kitchen Manager Surveys

- Managers reported students had less than 20 minutes to eat.
- 17% of managers reported students had less than 10 minutes to consume their lunches.

Principal Interviews

- Most agreed that a 20-minute lunch period is sufficient for students.
- Most acknowledged that they could not extend lunch time without being out of compliance for instructional time requirements.

Reference List:

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4. Kleinman RE, Murphy JM, Little M, et al. Hunger in children in the United States: potential behavioral and emotional correlates. *Pediatrics*. 1998;101(1):e3-e3.
5. Kleinman RE, Hall S, Green H, et al. Diet, breakfast, and academic performance in children. *Annals of nutrition & metabolism*. 2002;46 Suppl 1:24-30.
6. USDA. Changing the scene: Improving the school nutrition environment. *A Guide to Local Action*. U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. 2000.
7. Kleinman RE, Murphy JM, Little M, et al. Hunger in children in the United States: potential behavioral and emotional correlates. *Pediatrics*. 1998;101(1):e3-e3.