

# "Play First Lunch" Toolkit



Adapted from: "Recess Before Lunch: Kids Play and Then Eat!" The Montana Office of Public Instruction. Accessed from: <http://www.opi.state.mt.us/schoolfood/recessBL.html>, August 2006.

Acknowledgements: Thank you to Ridgeway, Blueridge and Seymour Heights Elementary Schools in North Vancouver, British Columbia for sharing their experiences and evaluation results

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# “Play First Lunch” Toolkit



This toolkit is designed to assist schools in initiating a “Play First Lunch” schedule.

## What is it?

“Play First Lunch” is a change in the traditional scheduling order of lunchtime and playtime. As the name implies, students go out to play first and then eat lunch. To be successful, this change requires careful planning, communicating with everyone affected and a strong commitment from school administrators, staff and parents.

## Benefits!

North Shore schools that have tried this notice:

- Improved student behaviour on the playground and in the classroom
- Fewer accidents during the lunch break
- Students are more relaxed and focused on eating rather than thinking about getting outside to play
- Less litter on the school ground and inside the school
- More food eaten; increased fluid intake
- Students return to the classroom more quickly and are settled and ready to learn

## Sample Schedule:

12:00	Play time
12:25	Bell to enter to use the washroom and wash hands
12:30	Bell to go to classrooms and eat lunch
12:50	Music appreciation/silent reading
1:00	Afternoon classes start



## Quotes and Comments from North Vancouver Elementary School Staff and Parents:

**Ridgeway Principal, Lanny Young** – “What I like about having students play first before eating their lunch is the quiet, calm way the students enjoy their lunch. The students were eager to go out to play and similarly, just as eager to come in at the lunch bell.”

**Seymour Heights Principal, Nadine Bisset** – “We experienced fewer accidents in the school yard and parents let us know that their children were able to wait for dinner and ate better at dinner.”



**Blueridge Principal, Arlie Thompson** – “The students are definitely eating better and there is less arguing over playground equipment and a better play attitude. We allowed children to take a small snack out with them to begin the lunch break in the playground because of hunger, especially with the intermediate students.”

**Parent** - “My son ate more of his lunches- much less was coming home uneaten.”

**Parent** - “Both my daughters love it! They get to burn off their energy before they eat. They are hungrier for lunch and eat better.”

**Parent** - “When I joined my daughter in the classroom for lunch, the atmosphere was a lot quieter! The kids were focused on eating rather than rushing through lunch to get outside to play. The kids ate better.”

**Parent** – “The first few days my kids complained that they were really hungry by lunchtime. This was resolved by eating a bigger breakfast and a bigger snack at midmorning recess.”

### **Comments from the Ridgeway Elementary School Evaluation**

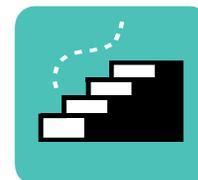
- Lunches were eaten and students requested more food for their lunches
- Less food thrown in the garbage
- Less litter on the school ground and inside the school
- Students were quieter and calmer while eating lunch
- Students appeared more focused for afternoon studies
- Students take less time to come in from the playground when the bell rings

## Steps to Implementing a “Play First Lunch” Schedule:

### 1. **Build support within your school and community:**

#### A. **Within the school**

Educate yourself and your staff, including teachers, aides, secretaries, janitors, staff who serve subsidized lunches, etc. It may be helpful to contact another school administrator who has successfully implemented a “Play First Lunch” schedule change at their school.



#### B. **Educate the parents**

Present the idea at a PAC meeting and discuss with the volunteer parents who organize school lunches. Include information in the school newsletter and send a letter to parents (sample in Appendix A).

#### C. **Within the Community**

Share your experience with the “Play First Lunch” schedule with other schools, your local newspaper, health department and other community members who may be interested. A sample promotional flyer is included in Appendix B.

#### D. **Educate the students**

Involve students in the process so that they understand the reasons for the initiative and the change in the schedule.

### 2. **Plan the new lunchtime schedule**

Meet with all of the staff involved and parents, especially those directly affected by the schedule change (teachers, aides, student monitors, janitors, parents and staff who serve school lunches, extra-curricular staff e.g. band teacher) to help develop a schedule that will work for your school. Recognize that the schedule is a work in progress, which may need to be revised. You may want to take the class attendance when the students come in to eat to ensure that all of the students who stayed for lunch have come back to class. Some schools conduct a trial period to identify scheduling issues and then modify it as necessary. It takes time to adjust to this change. You may need at least a 1 month trial period to allow people to make the necessary adaptations e.g. packing a portable food item that can be taken out by hungry intermediate students at the beginning of the lunch break.

### 3. **Include a hand-washing plan in the schedule**

Hand washing is an important food safety and health issue that should be included in the schedule. Develop a schedule so that the students come in from recess, go to the bathroom, wash their hands and then enter their classrooms to eat lunch. See Appendix C for more information on hand washing.



**4. Allow at least 20 minutes for students to eat lunch**

It is recommended that students have at least 20 minutes to eat from the time they sit down with their lunch<sup>1</sup>. Younger students may need more time to eat their lunch. Initially, the noise in the classroom at lunch may increase as the students adapt to the change in schedule. Over time, schools have noticed an improved atmosphere in the classrooms as children learn to eat slowly, relax and socialize during lunch.

**5. Increase monitoring in the classrooms during lunch initially**

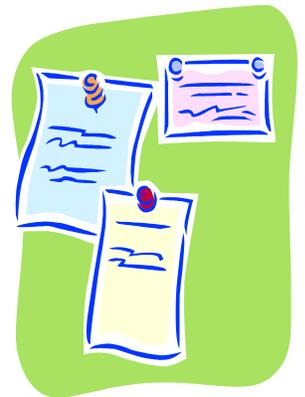
Spend as much time as possible in the classroom at lunch, especially during the first couple of weeks, to practice this new routine with the students. This will help with the transition period as students learn the new routine.

**6. Set aside time after a trial period to evaluate how things are working**

Survey staff, parents, and students. Sample surveys are included in Appendices D, E and F. Decide whether adjustments need to be made. Also make note of improvements due to the change. Be sure to share the results with parents and staff through newsletters and staff meetings.

## Practical Tips and Advice from Schools

1. Scheduling tends to be the most challenging part of the change. It takes creative planning and flexibility. For example, at Ridgeway School, the band schedule had to be revised.
2. Other administrators suggest that you focus on what is best for the kids when dealing with the logistics of scheduling.
3. It's important to get teachers' and parents' input and support at the beginning of the planning stage. Promote the improvement in children's behaviour in class and on the playground to help gain their support.
4. Primary grade students may accept the schedule change better than the intermediate grade students initially.
5. Students are likely to be hungrier and thirstier with this change. Snack and lunch ideas are included in Appendices G and H. Recommend that students have breakfast and a hearty midmorning snack. Some schools allow students to take a snack outside with them at the beginning of the lunch break.



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<sup>1</sup> "How Long Does it Take Students to Eat Lunch? A Summary of Three Studies." *Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*, Issue 1, Conklin, MT et al., Spring 2002.

## "Play First Lunch" Resource List

1. *"The Relationship Between the Length of the Lunch Period and Nutrient Consumption in the Elementary School Lunch Setting"*  
Bergman, E.A., et al., Journal of Child Nutrition and Management. 2, Fall 2004.
2. *"Relationships of Meal and Recess Schedules to Plate Waste in Elementary Schools"*  
National Food Service Management Institute. NFSMI Item Number R-71-03, 2003 (36 pages). Available from [www.nfsmi.org](http://www.nfsmi.org).
3. *"Reverse Order"*  
White, P. School Food Service and Nutrition. v. 57 (7), p.36-42, August 2003.
4. *"Play first, Eat Last!"*  
Smith, T.R., School Foodservice Journal. v. 34 (10), p. 54-55, Nov/Dec 1980.
5. *"A Participative Management Approach to the Revision and Implementation of a Lunch Schedule in an Urban Elementary School"*  
Reams, B.P. ERIC #ED2061110, Pub Date: Mar 1980.
6. *"Found: A Neat Little Way to Improve Lunchtime Discipline"*  
Sellers, J. American School Board Journal. 165(7): 29 Jul 1978.

## Websites

7. Healthy Eating At School  
[www.healthyeatingatschool.ca](http://www.healthyeatingatschool.ca) . Resources for "Play First Lunch" including a video clip from a school in Victoria who tried this change in schedule.
8. "Recess Before Lunch: Kids Play and Then Eat!"  
The Montana Office of Public Instruction.  
[www.opi.state.mt.us/schoolfood/recessBL.html](http://www.opi.state.mt.us/schoolfood/recessBL.html).
9. Dietitians of Canada [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca). Lunch and snack ideas.
10. Canadian Health Network [www.canadian-health-network.ca](http://www.canadian-health-network.ca). Lunch and snack ideas.

Appendix A  
Letter to Parents

**“Play First Lunch”**

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Our school will be trying a new schedule during our lunch break that will allow students to play first and then eat. The “Play First Lunch” schedule has been tried by several schools on the North Shore and the United States with many benefits including:

- Improved student behaviour on the playground and in the classroom
- Fewer accidents during the lunch break
- Students are more relaxed and focused on eating rather than thinking about getting outside to play
- Less litter on the school ground and inside the school
- More food eaten; increased fluid intake
- Students return to the classroom more quickly and are settled and ready to learn



Before eating lunch, students will be dismissed to the playground to play followed by time for going to the washroom and washing their hands and then sitting down to lunch in their classroom.

The sample schedule that we will be trying is:

12:00	Play time
12:25	Bell to enter the school to use the washroom and wash hands
12:30	Bell to go to classrooms to eat lunch
12:50	Music appreciation/silent reading
1:00	Afternoon classes start

We hope that the “Play First Lunch” schedule will promote healthy eating and improve student achievement. Schools who have tried this schedule change have found that students are hungrier and thirstier at school. To prevent your child from becoming too hungry, encourage them to eat breakfast and send a midmorning snack. Snack and lunch handouts are available from the school for those who are interested.

If you have any questions or comments about this new initiative, please contact

\_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

Principal

## Appendix B

# “Play First Lunch”



### **What is the “Play First Lunch?”**

Students have playtime first and then eat lunch.

### **Benefits!**

North Shore schools that have tried this notice:

- Improved student behaviour on the playground and in the classroom
- Fewer accidents during the lunch break
- Students are more relaxed and focused on eating rather than thinking about getting outside to play
- Less litter on the school ground and inside the school
- More food eaten; increased fluid intake
- Students return to the classroom more quickly and are settled and ready to learn

### **Tips for getting started:**

- Build support within your school community
- Recognize that adapting the schedule is a work in progress
- Establish a hand washing routine
- Schedule enough time for students to eat (at least 20 minutes after they have their food<sup>1</sup>)
- Expect children to be hungrier at lunch and provide parents with tips on healthy snacks and lunches and remind them about the importance of breakfast
- Practice this new routine with the students. Spend as much time observing this new routine as possible during the first few weeks.
- Change can be challenging and you should expect some resistance. Be willing to stick with it through a trial period.

Adapted from: “Recess Before Lunch: Kids Play and Then Eat!” The Montana Office of Public Instruction. Accessed from:

<http://www.opi.state.mt.us/schoolfood/recessBL.html>, August 2006.

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## Appendix C

# Hand Washing

### *How to wash your hands:*

- Use soap and water. Rub your hands together for 20 seconds with soap and rinse for 10 seconds.
- Do not use antibacterial soap. These products lead to antibiotic resistance.
- Dry your hands with a towel.

### *When to wash your hands:*

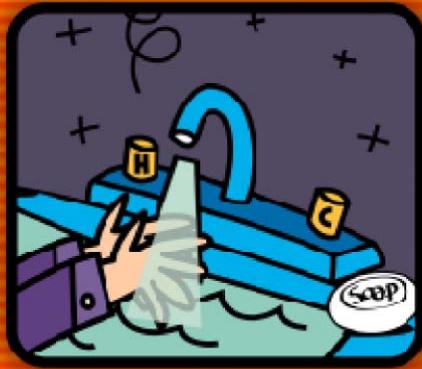
- Before meals
- After using the toilet
- After playing outside
- After blowing your nose
- After playing with shared toys



### *Tips*

- Make sure soap and paper towels are available for students and staff
- If soap and water aren't available, use gel hand sanitizers or alcohol-based hand wipes. If using a gel sanitizer, rub your hands until the gel is dry. You don't need to use water; the alcohol in the gel kills the germs on your hands.
- Teach by example
- Remind students to wash hands before they eat on a regular basis, lunch time monitors can help with this
- Post hand washing signs in washrooms and by sinks where students was their hands. (See attached sample from Do Bugs Need Drugs website)
- Use a chart for primary grades to record hand washing, e.g. get students to record hand washing by drawing a happy face symbol daily by their name on the posted classroom list

Source: Do Bugs Need Drugs, [www.dobugsneeddrugs.org](http://www.dobugsneeddrugs.org)  
BC HealthGuide, "Hand Washing", [www.bchealthguide.org](http://www.bchealthguide.org)



**Wet hands**



**Apply soap**



**Rub hands together**



**Rinse your hands**



**Dry your hands**

Source: Do Bugs Need Drugs, [www.dobugsneeddrugs.org](http://www.dobugsneeddrugs.org)

## Appendix D

# "PLAY FIRST LUNCH" SURVEY FOR STAFF

We would like to get feedback from staff, parents, and students to help us decide how well the "Play First Lunch" initiative worked and whether we should implement this permanently.

The benefits we hope to achieve with the "Play First Lunch" initiative are:

- Improved student behaviour on the playground and in the classroom
- Fewer accidents during the lunch break
- Students are more relaxed and focused on eating rather than thinking about getting outside to play
- Less litter on the school ground and inside the school
- More food eaten; increased fluid intake
- Students return to the classroom more quickly and are settled and ready to learn



Please answer the following questions.

1. Do you think that the "Play First Lunch" initiative at lunchtime helped achieve the above benefits?

Yes

No

If no, why not: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. List any positive or negative outcomes that you have noticed for you or for students:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you think the "Play First Lunch" initiative should be implemented on a permanent basis?

Yes

No

If no, why not: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. If we were to implement this, do you have any suggestions for this initiative?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

# "PLAY FIRST LUNCH" SURVEY FOR PARENTS

We would like to get feedback from parents, staff, and students to help us decide how well the "Play First Lunch" initiative worked and whether we should implement this permanently.

The benefits we hope to achieve with the "Play First Lunch" initiative are:

- Improved student behaviour on the playground and in the classroom
- Fewer accidents during the lunch break
- Students are more relaxed and focused on eating rather than thinking about getting outside to play
- Less litter on the school ground and inside the school
- More food eaten; increased fluid intake
- Students return to the classroom more quickly and are settled and ready to learn



Please answer the following questions.

1. Do you think that the "Play First Lunch" initiative helped to achieve the above benefits?  
 Yes                       No

If no, why not: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Did this change in schedule cause any difficulties to your child or family?  
 Yes                       No

If yes, what: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you think the "Play First Lunch" initiative should be implemented on a permanent basis?  
 Yes                       No

If no, why not: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. If we were to implement this, do you have any suggestions for this initiative?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## "PLAY FIRST LUNCH" SURVEY FOR STUDENTS

Please answer the following questions.



1. Did you like to play first and eat later?

Yes                       No

If not, why not: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Did you eat more lunch when you played first?

Yes                       No

3. Do you want to continue the "Play First Lunch"?

Yes                       No

If no, why not: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## "PLAY FIRST LUNCH" SURVEY FOR STUDENTS

Please answer the following questions.



4. Did you like to play first and eat later?

Yes                       No

If not, why not: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Did you eat more lunch when you played first?

Yes                       No

6. Do you want to continue the "Play First Lunch"?

Yes                       No

If no, why not: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_