

Recess Before Lunch

Overview



- **Program Objective:** Improve child nutrition and foster the development of healthy eating habits
- **MTF:** Yokota AB
- **Implementation Dates:** 2011 – Present
- **To reach local point of contacts, visit [Military Installations](#)**
- **Total Force Fitness Domains:** Nutritional, Behavioral, Social

Program Description



- CDC-endorsed best practice that shifts elementary school schedules so that students have recess before lunch, instead of the other way around; as a result, students eat more of their lunch and throw away fewer healthy, nutrient-rich foods
- Additional program benefits include increased student focus during class, decreased visits to nurse for stomach aches, better cafeteria behavior
- 100% of students at YWES (Yokota West Elementary School) and Joan K. Mendel Elem. School (JKMES), as well as Darby Elementary School, located in Sasebo Naval Station, Japan, have recess before lunch.

Evidence of Program Effectiveness



- At Darby Elementary School, weight of trash following lunch was **reduced by 35% (40 lbs pre-program vs. 26 lbs. post-program implementation)**
- At YWES, trash from student lunches now fills **only two bags instead of five**, and there are **fewer milk cartons left on tables**
- **50% reduction in number of students reporting to nurse with stomach ache following lunch** (11 students 8/13-10/13 pre-implementation vs. 6 students 8/14-10/14 post-implementation)
- Cafeteria staff report students are eating **more fruits and vegetables** and asking for second servings

Costs and Required Resources



- 1 volunteer to coordinate the initial schedule shift
- Planning related to communicating change to parents, students, teachers, staff
- **\$0 in program costs**

Lessons Learned



- Cafeterias should have access to **water or hand sanitizer**, as students coming into lunch immediately following recess should wash their hands
- **Open communication** with parents, students, and staff about rationale for schedule change is key; planning ahead for revised class schedules and adequate student supervision during recess and lunch is also necessary
- Overall, this is an easy-to-implement, essentially cost-free program that can help improve child health and nutrition

Measuring the Impact of Recess Before Lunch (RBL)

Program Impact at Yokota and Darby

Waste Reduction

- Following program implementation, Darby Elementary School reported a waste reduction of **over one-third**¹



Word in the hallways...

Teachers:

Students are **more calm and focused** in the classroom when recess is before lunch

School Nurses:

Since the schedule change was made, there has been a **50% decrease** in the number of students reporting to the school nurse with stomach aches following lunch.¹

Staff:

Improved student behavior in the cafeteria, with quiet time being implemented for students to eat their foods

Academic Evidence of Program Success



- The Journal of Child Nutrition and Management reports that students who have recess before lunch **eat more fruits and vegetables, drink more milk, waste less food, and are better behaved on the playground, in the lunchroom, and in the classroom** when compared to other students²
- One study found that **calcium intake was 35% higher and fat intake was significantly lower** for students in schools with RBL³
- Reduction in plate waste** ranges from 11-14%³
- In a study of over 650 school principals in Montana, the percentage of survey respondents indicated below associated the various benefits with RBL³

Increased student consumption of lunches **86%**

Improved student behavior in afternoon classes **85%**

Decreased discipline referrals **82%**

Increased student consumption of healthful foods **71%**

- Numerous studies have noted that the length of the lunch period plays a role in regulation of satiety cues for children – the school lunch schedule may **affect life long eating behaviors of children**³

¹ Data collected by Ms. Jonalyn Yu, school nurse at Darby Elementary School. Trash weighed before and after program implementation (on 6/9/14 and 9/4/14, respectively). Report last revised 10/31/14.

² <http://www.nea.org/home/43158.htm>

³ Scheduling Recess Before Lunch: Exploring the Benefits and Challenges in Montana Schools. Bark et al. School Nutrition Associations 34.2 (2010).