



# Insight

A Publication for Child Nutrition Professionals from the National Food Service Management Institute

## School Professionals Identify Best Practices for Recess Before Lunch

**O** Increasing focus on wellness issues has prompted many school nutrition (SN) professionals and school administrators to explore innovative ways of creating a healthful wellness environment in school settings while utilizing existing school resources. Several studies have suggested that scheduling recess before lunch (RBL) is one way to increase children's food and nutrient consumption at lunch and reduce plate waste. The RBL approach provides students with an opportunity for physical activity and social interaction prior to lunch and to experience a nutritionally balanced lunch in a safe and secure environment. School professionals understand the impact of students' nutritional intake, physical activity, cognitive development, and behavior on their well-being. SN professionals acknowledge their role in RBL by implementing and assessing successful practices that relate to the nutrition services provided. Two studies conducted by the

Applied Research Division (NFSMI, ARD), provided insight into RBL as a multi-faceted approach.

The first study, *Investigation of School Professionals' Perceptions and Practices Regarding Issues Influencing Recess Placement in Elementary Schools* examined the perceptions of school professionals (SN directors, school administrators, and teachers) regarding the issues to consider when scheduling recess in relation to lunch in elementary schools. It also asked them to describe practices and policies related to successfully implementing an RBL program. This study identified five categories of issues important to consider when determining how recess should be scheduled in relation to lunch in elementary schools. Issues important for successfully implementing an RBL program were also identified in this study (Bounds & Nettles, in press).

The second study, *Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools: Development of a Best Practice Checklist*, determined the best

practices (quality indicators) related to recess placement before lunch in elementary schools, and compiled a best practices checklist that can be used as an assessment tool for SN programs. Following a best practice research model, this study was built on the five categories identified in previous research and practices related to issues to consider for successful implementation and evaluation of RBL programs. SN directors, principals, and state agency personnel provided input and confirmed the best practice statements associated with RBL programs, and categorized the statements under supporting goals. Three of the five research-based practice categories, "Personnel Support and Workload", "Logistics", and "Scheduling", formed the framework for grouping the best practice statements, while statements associated with "Child Feeding Implications" and "Behavior" were subsumed within the three prevailing categories. From this information, a best practice checklist for recess placement was drafted, evaluated, and pilot tested via e-mail by a national review panel of SN directors and state agency personnel from six USDA regions. The *NFSMI Best Practice Checklist for School Nutrition Professionals Implementing or Assessing Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools* is a user-friendly, Web-based resource designed around three practice categories, four goals, and 39 best practices and standard supporting practices. This checklist



can be used as a self-assessment tool for school professionals who wish to implement or assess RBL in elementary schools (Rainville, Lofton, Carr, in press).

## OBJECTIVES

### The objectives of these studies were to:

- Examine the perceptions of SN directors, principals/assistant principals, and teachers regarding issues important to consider when scheduling recess in relation to lunch;
- Describe practices related to successfully implementing an RBL program;
- Determine the best practices or quality indicators related to the practice categories identified in previous research; and
- Compile a best practice checklist that can be used as a guide or an assessment tool for school professionals in elementary schools.

## METHOD

### Phase I

- In 2007, the NFSMI, ARD conducted a study to examine the perceptions of SN directors, principals/assistant principals, and teachers regarding issues important to consider when scheduling recess in relation to lunch, and to describe practices related to successfully implementing an RBL program.
- Eight nationwide focus group discussions were conducted on recess placement. Participants included SN directors, SN managers, principals and assistant principals, teachers, and other SN and teaching staff.
- The qualitative information gathered from the focus group discussions was used to develop a survey related to recess placement.
- The survey was mailed to 2,100 SN directors, principals/assistant principals, and teachers.
- This study identified five major categories of issues to consider when determining how recess should be scheduled in relation to lunch in elementary schools: “Personnel Support and Workload”, “Logistics”, “Scheduling”, “Child Feeding Implications”, and “Behavior” (Bounds & Nettles, in press).

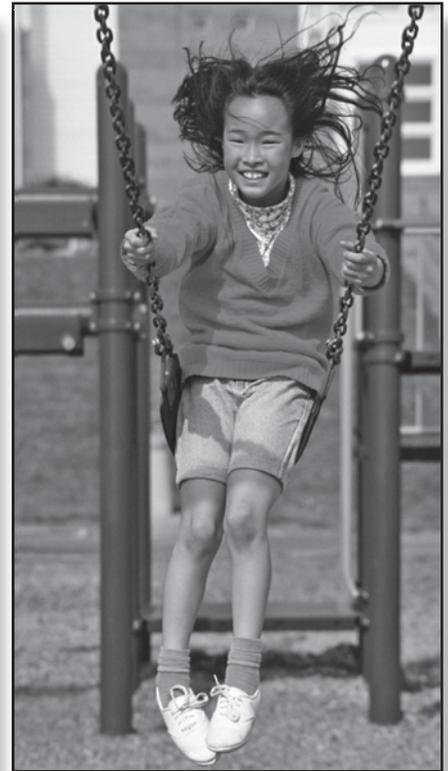
### Phase II

- A new study was conducted to identify and confirm best practices for implementing or evaluating RBL programs in elementary schools. The research study was to be conducted in two phases.
- Using a best practice research model for guidance, draft best practice statements were established using the five practice categories identified in the 2007 study. Other publications such as RBL checklists and RBL education and training resources were also reviewed to capture best practices highlighting the successful practices and benefits of RBL programs.

- An expert panel of SN directors, principals, and state agency personnel convened to evaluate and confirm best practice statements and categorize the statements with supporting goals.
- Three of the five practice categories, “Personnel Support and Workload”, “Logistics”, and “Scheduling”, formed the framework for grouping the best practice statements, while statements associated with “Child Feeding Implications” and “Behavior” were subsumed within the three prevailing categories.
- The expert panel categorized goals, best practice suggestions, and professional reminder practices, and discussed the format of the RBL resource. Expert panel participants recommended that the RBL resource be developed using a checklist format. Expert panel participants also recommended an assessment scale to evaluate best practices at the implementation of an RBL program or assessment of practices of an existing RBL program. The assessment scale was anchored to best practice statements with three response options (*no, needs attention; partially addressed; and yes, fully operational*).
- The comments and suggestions from the expert panel were used to draft the best practice checklist to be evaluated by a review panel.
- The draft best practice checklist and evaluation form was then sent to a review panel of twenty-five participants consisting of SN directors and state agency personnel from six USDA regions.
- The draft RBL best practice checklist contained an RBL research overview, definitions of RBL terms, three practice categories, goals, best practice statements, suggestions, and professional reminder practice statements.
- Review panel participants were asked to complete an evaluation form to assess their level of agreement with the placement of goals, best practice statements, and standard supporting practices under the three practice categories as suggested by the expert panel. Additional space was provided for their comments regarding the draft checklist.
- Upon review of all comments and suggestions made by the review panel, several revisions were made to the RBL best practice checklist. The assessment scale was revised: *not addressed, partially addressed, and fully addressed*. The researchers combined the suggestions and professional reminder practices into one practice section, titled “Standard Supporting Practices”, as all of these practices were important actions that could successfully influence an RBL program. Review panel participants provided comments and suggestions for formatting the appearance and the introduction of the RBL best practice checklist as an easy-to-use, Web-based resource with references and resources for school professionals. Review panel participants also gave suggestions for revisions to listed best practice statements and provided additional best practice statements.

Evaluation Statements	Personnel Support and Workload <sup>a</sup>	Logistics <sup>a</sup>	Scheduling <sup>a</sup>
The goal and best practices under this practice category are clearly stated.	3.44	3.52	3.48
All of the best practices under the goals and practice category are measurable.	3.30	3.33	3.48
The best practices listed under the goal identify performance standards needed to implement RBL.	3.26	3.42	3.37
The best practices listed under the goal identify performance standards needed to assess RBL.	3.26	3.37	3.46
The best practices will help achieve the goal under this practice category.	3.44	3.44	3.46
All of the best practices listed are applicable to RBL.	3.44	3.48	3.44

<sup>a</sup>4= Strongly Agree, 3= Agree, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree



## RECESS BEFORE LUNCH PRACTICE CATEGORIES WITH GOALS AND SELECTED BEST PRACTICES

### *Personnel Support and Workload*

The goal and best practices in this category relate to support for the recess before lunch (RBL) program from school administrators, teachers, and school nutrition staff as well as items related to the associated workload for these personnel.

**Goal:** A team approach (school administrators, teachers, school nutrition [SN] staff, students, and parents) is utilized when implementing recess before lunch.

**Best Practices:**

1. A school administrator or designee establishes and supervises an RBL committee to develop and assess the implementation of RBL.
2. The RBL committee seeks information from other school districts who have implemented RBL.

### *Logistics*

The goal and best practices in this category relate to logistical concerns associated with recess schedules and managing tasks like hand washing and storing students' belongings and lunches from home.

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

**Best Practices:**

1. A plan to inform and promote RBL to key stakeholders (i.e., school administrators and staff, SN staff, students, and parents) is developed and implemented.
2. Students have a designated area to store personal belongings (clothing, cash, cards, tickets, lunches from home, etc.) before lunch.

### *Scheduling*

The goal and best practices in this category relate to the scheduling of lunch periods, recess, and classes.

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

**Best Practices:**

1. If possible, RBL is provided to all classes in the school.
2. RBL schedules are flexible within the recess and lunch time period to allow for a minimum of 20 minutes for eating lunch from the time students are seated.



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## 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

## FINDINGS

- The *NFSMI Best Practice Checklist for School Nutrition Professionals Implementing or Assessing Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools* follows a user-friendly format and is readily accessible online. The introduction to the RBL checklist defines RBL, provides a brief overview of RBL research, and outlines the benefits of implementing an RBL program. The introduction also provides guidance and suggestions on how to use the RBL checklist.
- The RBL checklist is designed around a total of 39 best practices and standard supporting practice statements that contribute to the achievement of four prevailing goals listed under three research-based practice categories. It is recommended that each statement be reviewed and a determination be 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".
- Additional space is provided for the user to include additional statements that may be needed that are specific to the RBL program being implemented or assessed. Also included is space for comments or notes regarding action steps.
- The *NFSMI Best Practice Checklist for School Nutrition Professionals Implementing or Assessing Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools* also includes an extensive list of references and resources. This information is divided into three categories: "RBL Checklist, Sample Brochures, Handouts, Letters and Press Releases"; "RBL Education and Training Resource"; and "RBL Research and Support References".

## PRACTICAL USE OF THIS INFORMATION

The NFSMI Best Practice Checklist for School Nutrition Professionals Implementing or Assessing Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools was designed with the assistance from SN professionals, school administrators, and school staff who have been an active part of the implementation and assessment of RBL programs. The RBL best practice checklist will assist SN professionals and stakeholders in implementing services for a new RBL program or serve as an assessment tool for evaluating an existing RBL program in elementary schools.

LOGISTICS			
GOAL II: Provisions are incorporated into the plan and procedures are in place to ensure a safe and successful transition to RBL.			
BEST PRACTICES	NOT ADDRESSED	PARTIALLY ADDRESSED	FULLY ADDRESSED
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.			

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### Suggestions and Implications for Using this RBL Best Practice Checklist:

- The RBL best practice checklist can be used by school professionals, such as SN directors, SN managers, SN staff, superintendents, principals, teachers, and school nurses, as well as students and parents.
- Additional resources in the reference list at the end of the RBL best practice checklist can be used to assist with implementation and assessment of RBL programs.
- The RBL best practice checklist can be used to identify SN program standards and practices needed for successful RBL programs and be used to evaluate the role and contributions of the SN program as a component of RBL.
- The RBL best practice checklist can identify supportive roles for SN professionals and specific roles for stakeholders in planning, implementing, or assessing RBL policies and practices in elementary schools.
- The RBL best practice checklist can be used to establish goals for continuous quality improvement.

## For More Information

Bounds, W., & Nettles, M. F. (in press). *Investigation of school professionals' perceptions and practices regarding issues influencing recess placement in elementary schools* (R-120-08). Oxford, MS: National Food Service Management Institute.

Rainville, A. J., Lofton, K. L., Carr, D. H. *NFSMI Best Practice Checklist for School Nutrition Professionals Implementing or Assessing Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools*. Retrieved May 12, 2009, from <http://nfsmi-web01.nfsmi.olemiss.edu/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=302>

Rainville, A. J., Lofton, K. L., Carr, D. H. (in press). *Recess Before Lunch in Elementary Schools: Development of a Best Practice Checklist* (R-142-09). Oxford, MS: National Food Service Management Institute.



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