

## AB 292 (Santiago) Time to Eat: Lunchtime Supports Learning

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### Research & Policies on School Meal Time

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School lunch is an essential part of the school day. Since 1975, California has required public schools to provide a nutritious, free or reduced-price meal to each needy student every school day.

#### Having Time to Eat is Essential for Student Health and Learning

Time is a valuable commodity during a busy lunch period. Many students will grab a snack instead of lunch, eat only part of their meal, or skip lunch entirely when short on time- even if they're hungry.

- ➔ **Minimizing wait time for meals and providing time for students to enjoy a meal** with friends are two of the top factors that health experts identify as **essential for healthy eating** in schools.<sup>i</sup>
- ➔ The **length of lunch periods and the amount of time students spend waiting** in lunch lines have a **significant impact on participation** in the school lunch program.<sup>ii</sup>
- ➔ Providing enough time to eat can **increase student consumption of the most nutrient-dense and under-consumed foods**, such as fruits, vegetables, and milk.<sup>iii,iv</sup>
- ➔ Fewer than 6% of children eat the recommended amount of vegetables each day. Research has found **even an additional 1/4 cup per day of vegetables for children can significantly improve metabolic health**, including lower insulin levels and fewer "bad fats" in the body.<sup>v</sup>
- ➔ Elementary school **students who have 30-minute lunch periods consume significantly more nutrients than those with 20-minute lunch periods-** and less food is wasted.<sup>vi</sup>
- ➔ Studies indicate that **elementary school children may spend a major part of the lunch period waiting in line** for food, which can significantly decrease the time available to eat.<sup>vii,viii,ix</sup>
- ➔ A **shorter lunch period is associated with the probability of being overweight.**<sup>x</sup>
- ➔ Scheduling **recess before lunch is a simple, no-cost solution** that gives students more time at the table to eat. It has been shown to **increase consumption of fruits and vegetables by 54%**, and **significantly reduce food waste.**<sup>xi</sup>

#### How Does Lunchtime Affect California Students?

Research that shows that students need a minimum of 20 minutes of seated time to eat lunch.<sup>xii</sup> Despite the California Department of Education (CDE) recommendation that schools should provide all students with this minimum time, a 2013 CDE survey of over 1,000 school principals found:<sup>xiii</sup>

- ➔ Only **28% of California elementary schools and 45% of middle and schools reported that all students had at least 20 minutes to eat** after being served lunch.
- ➔ Only **25% of elementary schools and 8% of middle/high schools have policies** at the district or school level specifying an amount of time to eat.

A recent UC Berkeley study of California middle and high school students found that a **longer lunch period was the only factor that increased both fruit and vegetable consumption** during lunch at school. Students with longer lunch periods were 40% more likely to eat fruit and 54% more likely to eat vegetables.

A survey of California students found that they **often skip lunch due to time pressures**. Of students with lunch periods of 30 minutes or less, **69% feel rushed and 43% say they don't have enough time to eat** their meal. Most of these students feel tired (62%) and hungry (54%) during afternoon classes.<sup>xiv</sup>

## How Can Schools Ensure Students Have Time to Eat?

### School Bell Schedules Should Allow Adequate Time for the Lunch Period

When students don't have time to eat, the health and academic benefits of school meals are lost. When lunch is cut short, valuable resources- including state and federal funds- are lost. California can commit to the health and well-being of its students by ensuring that they have time to eat during the school day.

### Students' Time to Eat Can Increase Without Lengthening the Lunch Period

- ➔ Many factors can increase the amount of time students have to eat without lengthening the lunch period. Increasing service areas, making all food choices available at each line, training staff to provide more efficient service, and utilizing a cashless-only point of sale system can all provide students with more time to eat.<sup>xii</sup>

A survey of 150 California schools found that many missed opportunities to provide more time to eat:

- ➔ Multiple points of meal service reduce wait times for food and time spent finding a place to sit. Only 47% of middle schools and 53% of high schools served lunch any place other than the cafeteria.
- ➔ Cashless school cafeterias increase efficiency through reduced transaction time, while eliminating the stigma associated with low-income students receiving free and reduced-price meals. Only 24% of elementary schools, 16% of middle schools and 3% of high schools eliminated cash sales.
- ➔ Staggered lunch periods reduce crowding and wait times, giving students more time to eat a full meal. Of high schools surveyed, over 33% scheduled more than 1000 students per lunch period, with 15% scheduling more than 2000 students in a single 30-40 minute period.

### State Policy Can Ensure That Students Have Adequate Time to Eat at School

Providing 20 minutes of 'table time' is the evidence-based recommendation for the minimum time needed for children to eat lunch.<sup>11</sup> Since 2006, the California Department of Education has recommended schools to follow this guideline.<sup>xv</sup> This recommendation is also promoted by USDA and many nutrition experts.<sup>xvi</sup>

- ➔ Nine other states and the District of Columbia already have policies in place that require all schools to provide students with adequate time to eat.<sup>xvii</sup>

There are a variety of ways to provide students with adequate time to eat- even within tight scheduling constraints. By recognizing that sufficient lunch periods are an essential part of the school day, we can help ensure that students have what they need to learn, grow, and achieve.

### Additional Resources

California Department of Education- Ensuring Adequate Time to

Eat: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/timetoeat.asp>

California School Nutrition

Association: <http://www.calsna.org/documents/PositionPapers/PositionPaperMealtimeManagement.pdf>

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- <sup>i</sup> American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Dietetic Association, National Hispanic Medical Association, National Medical Association, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). (2000). Prescription for change: Ten keys to promote healthy eating in schools. In USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Changing the scene: Improving the school nutrition environment, Washington, DC: Author.
- <sup>ii</sup> Marples, C., & Spillman, D. (1995) Factors affecting students' participation in the Cincinnati public school program. *Adolescence*, 30, 745-754.
- <sup>iii</sup> Guthrie, J., & Buzby, J. (2002). Several strategies may lower plate waste in school feeding programs. *FoodReview*, 25, 36-42.
- <sup>iv</sup> Gosliner, W. (2014), School-Level Factors Associated With Increased Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Among Students in California Middle and High Schools. *Journal of School Health*, 84: 559–568
- <sup>v</sup> Cook LT, O'Reilly GA, Goran MI, Weigensberg MJ, Spruijt-Metz D, Davis JN. Vegetable Consumption Is Linked to Decreased Visceral and Liver Fat and Improved Insulin Resistance in Overweight Latino Youth. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2014 Nov;114(11):1776-83.
- <sup>vi</sup> Bergman, EA; Buerger, NS; Englund, TF; Femrite, A. (2004) The relationship between the length of the lunch period and nutrient consumption in the elementary school lunch setting. *J Child Nutr Manag*. Issue 2, Fall 2004.
- <sup>vii</sup> Bergman, E., Buerger, N.S., Joseph, E., & Sanchez, A. (2000). Time spent by schoolchildren to eat lunch. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 100, 696-698.
- <sup>viii</sup> Buerger, N.S., Bergman, E., Knutson, A., & Lindaas, M. (2002). Students consuming sack lunches devotes more time to eating than those consuming school lunches. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 102, 1283-1286.
- <sup>ix</sup> Sanchez, A., Hoover, L.C., Sanchez, N.F., & Miller, J.L. (1999). Measurement and evaluation of school lunch time elements in elementary, junior high, and high school levels. *The Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*, 23, 16-21.
- <sup>x</sup> Bhatt, R.R. The Impact of School Lunch Length on Children's Health. Working paper, Andrew Young School of Policy Studies Research Paper Series No. 09-07., Georgia State University, 2009.
- <sup>xi</sup> Price J, Just DR. Lunch, recess and nutrition: Responding to time incentives in the cafeteria. *Prev Med*. 2014 Nov 29; 71C:27-30.
- <sup>xii</sup> Conklin, MT; Lambert, LG; Anderson, JB. A summary of three studies: How long does it take students to eat lunch? *The Journal of Child Nutrition and Management*. Issue 1, Spring 2002
- <sup>xiii</sup> California Department of Education. Time to Eat Survey Results. December 2013. Available at: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/documents/timetoeatsurvey.pdf>. Accessed Dec. 9, 2014
- <sup>xiv</sup> PerryUndem Research/Communication. California Students' Voices on School Meal Time: Results from a Survey of California Middle and High School Students. 2013. Available at: [http://cfpa.net/ChildNutrition/ChildNutrition\\_CFPAPublications/Student%20Meal%20Time-%20Final%20Report-2013.pdf](http://cfpa.net/ChildNutrition/ChildNutrition_CFPAPublications/Student%20Meal%20Time-%20Final%20Report-2013.pdf)
- <sup>xv</sup> School Nutrition...by Design! Report of the Advisory Committee on Nutrition Implementation Strategies, California Department of Education, 2006. Available at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/he/nutredres.asp>
- <sup>xvi</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2000). A guide to local action. In *Changing the scene: Improving the school nutrition environment*, 22. Washington, DC: Author.
- <sup>xvii</sup> National Association of State Boards of Education. State School Health Policy Database. Available at: [http://www.nasbe.org/healthy\\_schools/hs/bytopics.php?topicid=3110](http://www.nasbe.org/healthy_schools/hs/bytopics.php?topicid=3110). Accessed Jan. 6, 2014.