

# Reverse Lunch Toolkit:

## Play Before Lunch!

Reverse lunch, sometimes called recess before lunch, is a change to the traditional approach to lunchtime. Elementary schools who adopt reverse lunch have students play and be active first, and then come in to eat lunch.

### Possible benefits

Schools that implement the reverse lunch hour may observe benefits such as:

- better behavior on the playground, in the lunchroom, and in the classroom
- students eating their lunch and waste less as they are not rushing to eat to get outside
- less litter on school grounds and inside the school
- calmer transition from lunch to classroom activities. Students have time to wind down after playing and more students are ready to learn when class starts.



### Steps to make it happen

**Build support** - Talk to staff about reverse lunch, its benefits, and possible challenges that might come up for your school. Consider any students with special medical needs. Share the program with parents at parent council meetings, send a letter or email home, or include information in the school newsletter. Talk about the program with students so they understand the change in schedule and the links with healthy living.

**Develop a schedule** – Meet with staff and your school community to collect feedback and identify challenges and solutions. Develop a schedule that will work for your school. Schedule at least 20 minutes for students to eat their lunches from the time they sit down. Younger students may need more time.

### Sample schedule

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| 12:00 PM | Play time                              |
| 12:30 PM | Bell to use washroom and wash hands    |
| 12:35 PM | Bell to go to classrooms and eat lunch |
| 12:55 PM | Afternoon classes start                |

Remember that the new schedule is a work in progress and can be changed as needed.

Don't forget handwashing! Include time for students to wash their hands before eating.

### Promote a healthy eating environment -

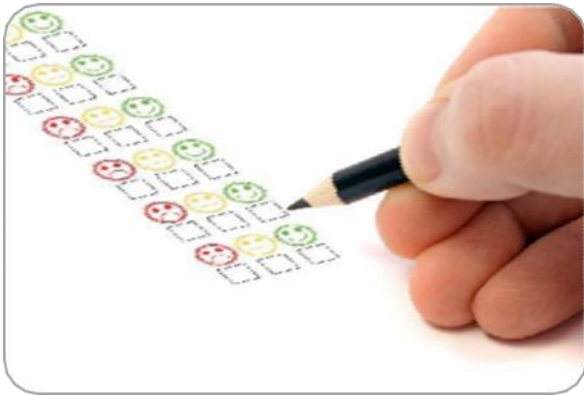
Students may be hungrier and thirstier after playing. Consider allowing students to keep a healthy snack and a water bottle at their desk during the day. Provide information about the importance of healthy breakfasts and a morning snack to help fuel play and learning.

**Evaluate** - Talk with staff, students, families and others during and after a trial period. Survey your school community to assess the program and identify possible changes.

## Things to consider

**Start slowly** - Change can be hard. Inform your school community about reverse lunch well in advance of the change to reduce worries. Get input before developing the new schedule. See the sample memos on page 3. Decide how long you want to trial the new schedule.

**Get feedback** - Let staff, parents and students know they will be able to provide feedback during and after the trial period. Decide how to collect feedback in a way that works for your school. If you like to use surveys, see the samples on pages 4-6 for some ideas. You may want to make your own surveys to ask the questions you want answers to.



**Communicate the benefits** - Educate others about the benefits of reverse lunch, so that they understand the reason behind the change. Reassure your school community by sharing success stories from other schools that have reverse lunch.

**Make it work for your school schedule** - Be flexible and creative in developing a schedule that works for your school. Contact other schools that have successfully started reverse lunch to talk about their experiences. Some schools let the students finish up their lunch for a few minutes into the afternoon. Other schools have tried to pilot the reverse lunch with only one or two grades at first. Do what works for your school.

## Websites:

Alberta Teachers Association:

<https://www.teachers.ab.ca/Publications/ATA%20Magazine/Volume%2090/Number3/Pages/TheReverseLunchHour.aspx>

For information on healthy eating and lunch ideas:

- [healthyeatingstartshere.ca](http://www.healthyeatingstartshere.ca)

<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page2925.aspx>

For information on physical activity and recreation:

- Ever Active Schools

<http://www.everactive.org>

For information on the comprehensive school health approach:

<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/csh.aspx>

*Adapted from: Play First Lunch Toolkit, Action Schools! BC,*

<https://healthyschoolsbc.ca/media/22416/asbc-play-first-lunch-toolkit.pdf>

# Sample Memo Home

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Re: Reverse Lunch Program

Our school will be trying a new schedule that will allow students to play and be active first, and then eat their lunch. This is called reverse lunch. By starting this program, we hope to see students:

- Behave better on the playground, in the lunchroom and in the classroom.
- Eat lunch and waste less food as they won't be rushing through lunch to get to the playground.
- Litter less on school grounds and inside the school.
- Have a calmer transition from lunch to classroom activities. Students are ready to learn after lunch.

Before eating lunch, students will be dismissed for recess to play. After playtime, students will have time to go to the washroom and wash their hands before returning to the classroom to eat lunch.

The new schedule is:

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| 12:00 PM | Play time                              |
| 12:30 PM | Bell to use washroom and wash hands    |
| 12:35 PM | Bell to go to classrooms and eat lunch |
| 12:55 PM | Afternoon classes start                |

Encourage your child to eat breakfast and send a healthy morning snack with them to school. For a list of healthy snack ideas visit the <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/nutrition/Page2914.aspx>.

This new schedule will be piloted for up to (insert number) months. After the pilot period, we will be evaluating the program to consider whether we should continue it in the future. We hope the reverse lunch schedule will contribute to a positive environment at our school.

If you have any questions or comments about this new program, please contact the school.

# Sample Reverse Lunch Survey for Staff

We would like your feedback to help us decide how well the reverse lunch program worked at our school and whether we should continue it in the future.

The goals of reverse lunch are that students:

- Behave better on the playground, in the lunchroom and in the classroom.
- Eat lunch and waste less food as they won't be rushing through lunch to get outside.
- Litter less on school grounds and inside the school.
- Have a calmer transition from lunch to classroom activities. Students are ready to learn after lunch.

Please answer the following questions:

Rate your perception of how the reverse lunch program helped achieve the above goals:

| Goal  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| Better behaviour on the playground, in the lunchroom and in the classroom.                          |                |       |         |          |                   |
| Eat more of their lunch and waste less food as not rushing through lunch to get outside.            |                |       |         |          |                   |
| Litter less on school grounds and inside the school.  |                |       |         |          |                   |
| Calmer transition from lunch to classroom activities. Students are ready to learn work after lunch. |                |       |         |          |                   |

1. List any positive or negative outcomes you noticed for you or for students:

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2. Do you think the reverse lunch program should continue in the future?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes      \_\_\_\_\_ no  
If no, why not?

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3. Do you have any suggestions to improve the reverse lunch program?

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Thank you for your feedback!

# Sample Reverse Lunch Survey for Families

We would like your feedback to help us decide how well the reverse lunch program worked at our school and whether we should continue it in the future.

The goals of reverse lunch are that students:

- Behave better on the playground, in the lunchroom and in the classroom.
- Eat lunch and waste less food as they won't be rushing through lunch to get to the playground.
- Litter less on school grounds and inside the school.
- Have a calmer transition from lunch to classroom activities. Students are ready to learn after lunch.

Please answer the following questions:

1. Do you think the reverse lunch program helped achieve the goals above?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes          \_\_\_\_\_no          \_\_\_\_\_unsure

Please explain?

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2. Did this change in schedule cause any difficulties to your child or family?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes          \_\_\_\_\_no

If yes, why?

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3. Do you think the reverse lunch program should continue in the future?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes          \_\_\_\_\_no

If no, why not?

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4. Do you have any suggestions to improve the reverse lunch program?

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Thank you for your feedback!

## Sample Reverse Lunch Survey for Students

We would like your help to decide how well playing first and eating lunch later worked at our school and whether we should keep it in the future.

Please answer the following questions:

1. Did you like to have recess first and eat lunch later?

\_\_\_\_\_yes

\_\_\_\_\_no

Why?

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2. Do you have any ideas of how to make our lunch program better?

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Thank you for your help!