



Pretty Beach Public School

Adopting the 'Play First, Eat Later' approach at meal breaks delivered unexpected benefits beyond reduced food waste.

Project overview

In 2023, Pretty Beach Public School (PBPS) took a bold step by adopting the 'Play First, Eat Later' initiative, inspired by Pasi Sahlberg's research. The idea was simple but effective: let students play before eating to reduce food wastage, improve concentration, and enhance overall well-being.

School context

PBPS is a small school with 175 students spread across 7 classes. They originally had a traditional timetable with a long 55-minute lunch at 11 am and a short 20-minute recess at 1:15 pm. This setup posed challenges, especially with limited teacher availability for duties, therefore limited capacity to open alternative spaces, and some students, particularly those with ADHD, not eating properly.

Project goals

- Increase student focus and concentration during meal times.
- Reduce food wastage and playground rubbish.
- Improve student engagement and behaviour in class.
- Ensure equity and efficiency in teacher duties.

Changes implemented

- Shifted to a 40-minute timetable with two even breaks.
- Each break consists of 30 minutes of play followed by 10 minutes of eating.
- Eating supervised by teacher pairs.

Key Outcomes

The new schedule led to remarkable improvements: students focused better during meals, food wastage decreased, teacher duties became more manageable, and overall student well-being improved.

Benefits

For students

- Increased focus on eating, particularly among boys.
- Enhanced physical activity with students running and playing before eating.
- Better identification and support for students with eating issues.
- Increased engagement and settled behaviour upon returning to class.

For teachers

- The new system ensured fair duty distribution and reduced the overall duty load.
- With duty-free days, teachers could effectively manage alternate play spaces.

In general

- Reduction in playground rubbish and lost property.
- Decreased food wastage as uneaten food is taken home.
- Successful implementation of Bokashi bins for organic waste.

Project challenges

- Initial adjustment period for both students and teachers.
- Managing canteen snack sales at the second break.

What students are saying

“I love that I can run around and get really hungry, then go eat! I don’t waste any food because I eat it all.”

“Playing first means I don’t mind having to sit down and focus on eating my food.”



Introducing bokashi bins simultaneously means food waste ends up in the right place for composting, not in regular waste bins.



The ‘Play first, eat later’ initiative has seen an increased focus on eating, particularly among boys.

Teacher feedback

“Implementing ‘Play First, Eat Later’ at Pretty Beach Public School has significantly improved students’ attentiveness and ability to come into class more settled and ready to learn. And, lunchboxes go home empty.”

“I am so hungry for my lunch after playing football.”

“I was always in a hurry to eat my food so I could go and play. Now that we play first, it’s nice to sit down at the end and eat lunch with my friends.”