



The Entrance Public School

Rethinking break times has reduced food waste at the school and created a more focused environment for students.

Project overview

The Entrance Public School (TEPS) was inspired to adopt its 'Play First, Eat Second' initiative based on the successful implementation and positive outcomes seen at Narara Public School, who introduced the concept in 2018.

TEPS' decision to implement the initiative in 2022 was also informed by desktop research, including a newspaper article about Brookvale Public School and their success implementing the same program, and an investigation of children's dietary routines.

By rethinking traditional break times, The Entrance Public School (TEPS) has created a more focussed yet relaxed and socially enriching environment for its students. This initiative has reduced food waste and set an excellent example for other schools.

"We were crunching data on behaviour and came up with the idea or at least the question, 'Why is it that we eat first and play second?' It didn't seem to make sense as in most other areas you play/work first and then eat."

Principal Dave Stitt on the motivation behind the initiative

Benefits

Environmental

- **Reduced Food Waste:** with students no longer rushing through their meals to return to play, there is a reduction in food being thrown away, left in the playground, or taken home uneaten.
- **Simplified Waste Management:** recycling and sorting waste are easily managed in the classroom.
- **Composting and Chickens:** food scraps are collected and repurposed for composting or feeding the school's chickens, reinforcing sustainability practices.
- **School Tidiness:** school grounds are noticeably cleaner, and fewer wrappers and rubbish are found in the playground during playtime.

“As a result of the initiative we found some interesting by products. One surprise was the reduction in waste and tidiness of the school. It supported our compost/chicken program well.”

Social

- **Relaxed Eating Environment:** eating has become a more relaxed and social time, allowing students, particularly slow eaters, to finish their food without the pressure of returning to play. This period also allows teachers to begin lessons if needed.
- **Healthy Eating Habits:** teachers and adults can guide students toward healthier food choices that optimise learning and concentration throughout the day.
- **Post-Play Reflection:** after outdoor play, students have the opportunity to discuss any issues with their teacher during eating time, ensuring that playtime concerns do not disrupt instructional time.
- **Increased Appetite:** physical activity during play increases students' appetite, leading to better food consumption during the eating period.
- **Support and Monitoring:** teachers can monitor students' eating habits more closely, identifying those who may need additional support or might not have sufficient food.

Behavioural

The rate of student behavioural incidents has significantly decreased since starting the program.

“Kids are more active, and behaviour is significantly down. We have fewer children going home with full lunch boxes. Kids are hungrier after play and are keen to eat their lunch.”

Wider community

The initiative has facilitated knowledge-sharing between schools, fostering a community of learning and continuous improvement among schools.

“Recently we had a number of schools visit us around Explicit Teaching and we shared our play first, eat second journey. As a result, Windsor South Public School approached us around the idea and just this term implemented the approach with instant success.”



A dedicated 15-minute eating time follows a 30-minute break for play. Eating has become more relaxed and social.



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Teacher feedback

“From a wellbeing perspective, when the children are seated in classrooms, after physical activity they are more willing to sit at a table with classmates and eat. The monitoring of food availability and food types is more regularly accessible for CTs, as well the organisation of lunch boxes being returned to bags and the correct disposal of food scraps and rubbish.”

“The benefits have exceeded our expectations. By playing first then eating it allows teachers to monitor more closely the food being eaten and what type of food being provided by families. The food wastage has lowered considerably because the students are not in a rush to play, which always resulted in them throwing away their food to go play. Lastly, the rubbish and cleanliness of our learning and play environments has improved because students are not wandering around with food, but rather sitting and eating as a class/grade.”

Student feedback

“Because we play first and eat second, we can make sure we organise our compost in eating time, and we don't lose play time.”

“I think playing before eating is important because we build up an appetite, can socialise with our friends and the playground is much tidier.”

Changes implemented

- Two 30-minute play breaks were introduced.
- A dedicated 15-minute eating time follows the first break.
- Classes have a fruit break in the morning, which can be extended if needed.
- Students eat their lunch in class or outside if the weather permits.
- The canteen closes during the first break and encourages classes to eat lunch together.

Considerations for implementation

- **Canteen Operations:** schools may need to adjust canteen preparation times, particularly if operating on a recess-then-lunch schedule.
- **Program Timings:** consider the timing of Release from Face-to-Face (RFF) programs and how they fit into the revised daily schedule.
- **Community Communication:** clear messaging to the school community about the changes is essential to ensure understanding and support.
- **Eating Locations:** based on weather conditions and available space, decide whether students will eat inside, outside, or use a hybrid approach.
- **Monitoring Hunger:** Some students may need additional food, especially during the long morning session, so it's important to monitor their hunger.



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