



PTA Newsletter May: Make Eating Enjoyable

Making Eating Enjoyable in the School Cafeteria

Most students look forward to lunchtime as a break from classroom work and a time to chat with friends. It is also a time to refuel for the rest of the day.

Unfortunately, lunchtime at school can be rushed and anything but relaxing for students and teachers. In most cafeterias, a student can be left with about 10 minutes to eat if he or she chooses the school meal. After standing in line to select a meal and finding a place to sit, half of the lunch period has passed. With very little time left to eat, students often have to gobble their food down. This can lead to lifelong problems since people who eat quickly are more likely to be overweight.

In addition to eating lunch, students need time to socialize with their friends. This time allows students to relate to each other, provides a break in routine, and refreshes them for afternoon classes. But many students do not have enough time to both eat and socialize during lunch.

Making the cafeteria a place that students want to eat can help, too. Cleaning the tables and chairs between lunch periods ensures that each student has a clean place to eat. Adding decorative and colorful posters can improve the atmosphere of the lunchroom. Round tables encourage students to talk to one another more than long rectangular ones. It is also important to ensure every student has a place to sit.

Your school can set guidelines about the amount of time allotted for lunch and about lunchtime rules. Encourage your administrators to add specific guidelines to their Local Wellness Policy about lunchtime. The amount of time spent in lunch should account for students to travel to and from the cafeteria, choose from the serving line, socialize with friends, and return their trays for cleanup. Most schools could greatly benefit from a 20 minute increase in current lunchtime schedules.

In addition, lunch should not be used as a punishment. Requiring students to “eat in silence” denies them time needed to socialize.

Including lunch time guidelines in your Local Wellness Policy helps ensure that your children are allowed a healthy, relaxing lunch so they can return to the classroom refreshed and ready to learn.

For more information:

www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/programs_tools/school/successful_students.html

www.nutritionnc.com/ResourcesForSchools/index.htm

www.actionforhealthykids.org