



Amount of Time Needed to Eat Lunch

How much time students have to eat lunch appears to have an impact on how much food is wasted.



A 2012 survey of schools in Minnesota revealed that student noon hour times run from 30 to 60 minutes. This includes time in line, eating time, and time outdoors.

School Nutrition Association Releases “State of School Nutrition 2011”

A new national survey by the School Nutrition Association shows elementary kids have about 25 minutes for lunch; middle school and high school students about 30 minutes. That includes the time to go to the restroom, wash hands, walk to the cafeteria and stand in line for their meals. Many students may have only about 10 to 15 minutes left to eat their meals. The government recommends students should have at least 20 minutes to eat their lunch.

(Minneapolis Star Tribune Article, Friday, April 1, 2011)

The average elementary school student gets about 20 minutes to eat lunch. That 20 minutes isn't just devoted to sitting down and eating; it includes washing hands, walking to the lunchroom, waiting in line, paying, eating, socializing and bussing the lunch tray. To put that into perspective, the average adult gets 30-60 minutes to do the same thing.

“Plate waste” is a term that describes how much food was left on a lunch tray and tossed in the trash. When length of time to eat is increased, a decrease in plate waste is also shown. One study found that food waste decreased from 43.5% to 27.2% when students had a thirty-minute lunch period versus 20 minutes. This thirty-minute window allows for 20 minutes alone for eating and socializing at

the table with plenty of extra time for traveling to the cafeteria and waiting in line.

Question: If students had one half hour for lunch and one half hour for play time, would we see a reduction in the amount of food waste generated each day?