



SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 48

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NEWS RELEASE

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"PLAY FIRST EAT LATER" PROGRAM BENEFITS STUDENT HEALTH, PARTICIPATION AND INTERACTION

What do you do when young students are in such a hurry to get outside and play during their lunch hour. They aren't eating all their lunch, with the result that they're getting hungry in the late afternoon and thinking more about food than learning. That was the dilemma facing Spring Creek Elementary School situated in one of the world's great natural playgrounds, Whistler, BC.

What did the school do? It developed a pilot project called "Play First Eat Later". Not only did it achieve its intended goal, but it also unexpectedly improved student activity and interactions on the playground and participation in the classroom.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Rick Erickson commended staff and parents at the school for their innovative approach to a common problem. "It is amazing how a little ingenuity can have so many benefits," he said.

School Principal Gerri Galloway said the program was instituted after a few parents approached her and expressed a concern that lunches were coming home uneaten. "The school nurse also informed me that this topic had been discussed at a PAC meeting last year, and that she had heard about a "Play First Eat Later" program that had proven successful in other schools. So we introduced it to parents and staff and everyone agreed that it was worth trying."

A three-week pilot this spring exceeded our expectations, Ms. Galloway said, " Student behaviours on the playground and in the classroom improved. There were fewer accidents during lunch break. Students were more relaxed and focused on eating rather than thinking about getting outside to play. There was more food eaten and increased fluid intake and students returned to the classroom more quickly and were more settled and ready to learn. An unexpected benefit has been created by both students and Teacher Assistant's (TA's) coming off the playground to eat at the same time. TA support is not needed right away. Before, students would come in to work and be without TA support while TA's ate their lunch. Another unexpected benefit for Primary classes was that the afternoon snack time was unnecessary and classes had more learning time. The program has been such a success that it will continue next year.

Ms. Galloway said the program was adapted from "Recess Before Lunch: Kids Play and Then Eat!", a program developed by The Montana Office of Public Instruction. Our local program was developed with the help of Vancouver Coastal Health."

For Further Information, contact Superintendent of Schools Dr. Rick Erickson (604-892-5228) or School Principal Gerri Galloway (604-935-3822)