


**leave air pollution unchecked****fight global warming.com**ROBERTSON
FOUNDATIONENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE
finding the ways that work

This is a printer friendly version of an article from www.southbendtribune.com
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

For a printer friendly version that includes the article's **picture** click here:  [Print Story with picture](#)

[Back](#)

Article published Mar 7, 2010

Elsie Rogers Elementary School students have recess before lunch

By **KIM KILBRIDE** *Tribune Staff Writer*

This story was originally posted at 6:20 a.m. March 7, 2010.

"Recess time!" a little girl in a pink and white jacket screamed as the side doors at Elsie Rogers Elementary School were flung open for second- and third-graders to take over the playground at 11:40 a.m. Friday.

At this Penn-Harris-Madison school in Mishawaka, kids play first and then eat lunch.

It's an intentional arrangement that was established about four years ago, said Principal Bob Thompson.

By late morning, "the kids are ready to expend some energy," Thompson said. "They can work up a hunger."

Allowing kids to play before they eat has resulted in some academic and behavioral benefits, he said. Students transition back to their studies more easily when their adrenaline and energy levels are lower, he said.

And that also means teachers have to deal with fewer discipline problems in the classroom.

Elsie Rogers, a smaller school, is the only P-H-M elementary that has recess before lunch, spokeswoman Teresa Carroll said. Because of the bigger size of some of the district's other elementaries, along with the way the school day is scheduled to accommodate various programs and services, it likely would be logistically difficult to pull off in larger schools.

Over at School City of Mishawaka, Gregg Hixenbaugh, a spokesman for the school corporation, acknowledged the idea of having kids play before they eat is intriguing.

Though it's something that likely won't happen within the next year or two, he said, the strategy is something that's been discussed and could be implemented in the future. Marianne King, a second-grade teacher at Stanley Clark School in South Bend, said the establishment of recess and lunch times are up to each teacher's discretion.

For her students, playing before eating makes sense.

"I think it does make a difference," she said.

"If they eat before (they play), the goal is to eat fast to get outside."

Playing first means the kids have a chance to calm down before the lunch period ends. "We clean up and they're ready to go for academics," she said.

Nutritional advantages

In addition to the academic and behavioral gains realized, staff members from schools employing the tactic say kids who play first will also eat better at lunch time.

Deb New, a spokeswoman for Action for Healthy Kids, a national nonprofit organization that works with schools to improve kids' nutrition and physical activity, said research shows that when students have recess first, they'll eat better at lunch.

And that means they concentrate better. "Healthy kids learn better," she said.

One of the biggest challenges for schools interested in incorporating a recess-before-lunch strategy, New said, is the potential difficulty in accomplishing hand washing when kids come inside from the playground.

Some schools have added hand-sanitizer stations and even hand-washing stations, she said, near the cafeteria area.

At Elsie Rogers, kids and staff members seem to have the routine down pat.

During the winter, Thompson said, students coming in from recess have to take off boots, coats, hats and gloves anyway. It doesn't require more time to have them do that and then wash their hands before they eat. "The biggest (benefit)," the principal said, "is when kids are taking their trays up (after they eat), they're empty."

Staff writer Kim Kilbride:
kkilbride@sbtinfo.com
(574) 247-7759
