



Urge the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the US Department of Education, in collaboration with School Food Authorities (SFAs), to develop guidance on ensuring students have adequate time to eat healthy school meals.

Short lunch periods are a concern for all students – especially millions of food-insecure children who depend on school meal programs as a primary source of key nutrients. Research demonstrates that school [breakfast](#) and [lunch](#) programs support obesity prevention, student health and academic achievement. Schools must ensure students have adequate time to consume these meals.

School meals include more fresh produce, and these high-fiber, crunchy foods take more time to eat. Short lunch periods cause many students to discard the nutrient dense fruits, vegetables and milk that they don't have time to finish.

[Research](#) shows student consumption of school meals is “significantly associated” with the amount of time to eat. Students with shorter lunch periods were less likely to select fruit and ate less of their vegetables, milk and entrees. Researchers concluded that “school policies that encourage lunches with at least 25 minutes of seated time may reduce food waste and improve dietary intake.”

As part of their “[Making Time for School Lunch](#)” research brief, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended that schools “ensure that students have at least 20 minutes once they are seated (seat time) to enjoy their meal and socialize.”

Any effort to address time to eat must focus on “seat time,” as lunch periods also require adequate time for students to get to the cafeteria and receive their meals. School cafeteria professionals minimize time spent in line by streamlining the serving process, offering grab-and-go options or establishing multiple points of sale, including hallway kiosks or healthy vending machines. However, in overcrowded schools or those that establish single lunch period schedules (often called “Power Hour”), school meal programs often struggle to serve students in a timely fashion. School nutrition professionals must be included in scheduling decisions to ensure students have adequate time to eat.