

Lunch, Nutrition and Diet at West

Here are some ideas, questions and links to spark conversation at the next meeting.

What is the role of the school in educating children about nutrition, diet and eating? Beyond the classroom instructional environment, students routinely consume snacks and lunch within the context of the school day. They are also presented with special opportunities to eat at school, including birthdays, holidays and some school events, such as the Welcome Back BBQ. Is there a consistent pedagogical approach to nutrition, diet and eating across these experiences, in principle or in practice? Should there be? What should it be?

Lunch is the only formal meal students experience within the context of school. Beside the obvious requirement to provide an opportunity for students to eat a meal, should lunch serve other, i.e., pedagogical, purposes? Is the *social experience* of eating within the school's pedagogical purview? Should it be? Is that responsibility purely negative (sanctioning students who are disruptive) or are there positive requirements as well, e.g., actively teaching children proper behavior when eating? And beyond that—skill at dining conversation?

Given that, students in the lower grades are constrained from socializing for part (all?) of their lunch through a policy called Quiet Dining. What purpose does this policy serve in theory, and in practice? Is it in harmony with educational goals, to the extent they exist, and with the natural development of that social component of eating? Some schools enforce Quiet Dining during only part of the lunch period. Would that be an improvement or not?

There is also a growing national conversation about the shrinking *time* given to school lunch, and concerns about how rushing children through meals may be associated with obesity. For example, see [USA Today](#) and [The Iowa City Gazette](#).

Some programs have discovered significant benefit from shifting the lunch recess to before the lunch period. Students are better able to settle down and eat after a period of play rather than rushing through eating to get out to play. Should that be considered here? The shift, along with a number of other interesting ideas, were implemented at [John Muir Elementary](#) in Berkeley.

Lastly, there is an emerging consensus that poor diet in childhood has significant long term health effects. From the [CDC](#):

“Schools play a particularly critical role by establishing a safe and supportive environment with policies and practices that support healthy behaviors. Schools also provide opportunities for students to learn about and practice healthy eating and physical activity behaviors”

One related issue that you may not have been aware of is the potentially negative interplay of the school environment with the modern American diet to create chronic constipation in children. From the [New York Times](#).