Below are the results of two similar surveys designed to identify factors related to how much time students have to eat during the lunch period. The anonymous responses were collated and not tied to a single respondent. The first survey was sent to 5,668 elementary school principals; 699 completed the survey, resulting in a 12.3 percent response rate. The second survey was sent to 3,131 middle and high school principals; 317 completed the survey, resulting in a 10.1 percent response rate.

Respondent Grade Levels

Elementary Schools

Kindergarten through Fifth	39.5%
Kindergarten through Sixth	37.5%
Kindgergarten through Eighth	16.6%
Other	6.4%

Middle/High Schools

Sixth through Eighth Grade	30.3%
Seventh and Eighth Grade	14.8%
Ninth through Twelfth Grade	35.3%
Tenth through Twelfth Grade	5.7%
Other	13.9%

Total Student Enrollment

Elementary Schools

Less than 100 students	3.6%
100–249 students	6.3%
250–499 students	32.2%
500–749 students	41.5%
750–999 students	14.2%
1,000 or more students	2.3%

Middle/High Schools

Less than 100 students	7.6%
100–499 students	24.3%
500–999 students	33.4%
1,000–1,499 students	13.9%
1,500–1,999 students	9.8%
2,000–2,499 students	6.3%
2,500–2,999 students	2.8%
3,000 or more students	1.9%

Free or Reduced-price Meal Eligibility

% of total student population	Elementary Schools	Middle/High Schools
0–9%	6.6%	4.4%
10–24%	10.7%	8.8%
25–49%	12.9%	21.5%
50–74%	20.9%	26.5%
75–99%	39.2%	31.5%
100%	9.7%	7.3%

School Lunch Program Participation

% of total student population	Elementary Schools	Middle/High Schools
0–9%	0.9%	1.6%
10–24%	6.6%	5.4%
25–49%	17.3%	27.8%
50–74%	22.7%	24.0%
75–99%	49.8%	36.9%
100%	2.7%	4.4%

Total Number of Lunch Period(s) Scheduled Daily

Elementary Schools

1 period	7.6%
2 periods	19.6%
3 periods	32.6%
4 periods	15.2%
5 periods	11.3%
6 or more periods	13.7%

Middle/High Schools

1 period	58.4%
2 periods	33.8%
3 or more periods	7.9%

Total Amount of Time for the Lunch Period

	Elementary Schools (includes eating time and recess/play time during the lunch period)	Middle/High Schools
Less than 20 minutes	0.3%	0.0%
20–24 minutes	1.3%	3.2%
25–29 minutes	1.0%	1.9%
30–34 minutes	7.6%	42.6%
35–39 minutes	7.9%	24.3%
40–44 minutes	39.6%	20.5%
45–49 minutes	34.3%	7.6%
50 minutes or more	8.0%	0.6%

Lunch Period Minutes Dedicated to Eating Versus Recess/Play in Elementary Schools

	Eating	Recess
Less than 10 minutes	0.1%	1.6%
10–14 minutes	2.4%	6.4%
15–19 minutes	22.2%	20.3%
20–24 minutes	53.2%	47.8%
25–29 minutes	14.9%	13.6%
30–34 minutes	4.9%	7.0%
35–39 minutes	0.4%	1.1%
40 minutes or more	0.6%	0.3%

Recess Scheduling	
Immediately after lunch	75.8%
Immediately before lunch	10.6%
Alternating*	12.9%
Other	0.7%

* Most schools that employ an alternating eat/play pattern at lunch said they have older students play then eat, and the younger students eat then play so they can have extra time to eat if necessary.

Current District or Site Level Policy Specifying Amount of Time for Lunch Period and/or Eating

Elementary Schools

	Lunch Period	Eating
Yes	51.1%	24.9%
No	48.9%	75.1%

Middle/High Schools

	Lunch Period	Eating
Yes	43.8%	8.2%
No	56.2%	91.8%

Estimated Amount of Time Last Student in Line Has from Lunch Served Until End of Eating Period

	Elementary Schools	Middle/High Schools
Less than 3 minutes	2.1%	0.3%
3–5 minutes	3.3%	1.6%
6–9 minutes	8.6%	4.1%
10–14 minutes	27.2%	14.2%
15–19 minutes	30.8%	34.7%
20–24 minutes	18.9%	27.4%
25 minutes or more	9.2%	17.4%

Types of Lunch Service Offered

	Elementary Schools	Middle/High Schools
Traditional cafeteria line	90.0%	89.9%
Salad bars	46.9%	34.4%
Grab and go meals	16.9%	38.8%
Food carts	5.7%	32.5%
Sandwich bars	0.6%	10.7%
Vending machines	N/A	23.0%
Other**	4.1%	18.6%

** *Responses included fruit bars, fruit and veggie bars, potato bars, refrigerated cases, fruit and vegetable carts, preordered vended meals, and outdoor barbecue stations (weather permitting).*

Lunch Time Point of Service Totals

(A point of service [POS] is defined as the place where a student receives their meal and may be a cafeteria line, window, food cart, salad bar, etc.)

Elementary Schools

1 POS	58.7%
2 POS	31.6%
3 POS	7.4%
4 +	2.3%

Middle/High Schools (317 respondents)								
Point of Service Type	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7+
Traditional cafeteria line	32	120	72	29	27	13	10	14
Percent reimbursable*	--	100.0	100.0	86.2	100.0	84.6	90.0	85.7
Salad bar	208	88	20	--	1	--	--	--
Percent reimbursable*	--	88.6	80.0	--	100.0	--	--	--
Grab and go meals	194	47	24	18	15	8	4	7
Percent reimbursable*	--	80.9	91.7	83.3	86.7	75.0	100.0	85.7
Food carts	214	54	22	13	8	6	--	--
Percent reimbursable*	--	46.3	72.7	46.2	100.0	66.7	--	--
Sandwich bar	283	23	8	1	1	--	--	1
Percent reimbursable*	--	69.6	87.5	0.0	100.0	--	--	0.0
Vending machines	244	20	23	9	10	11	--	--
Percent reimbursable*	--	5.0	13.0	0.0	20.0	18.2	--	--
Other	--	43	5	4	5	1	--	1

* Percent of the listed POS offering a federally reimbursable lunch that meets National School Lunch Program requirements as defined in Title 7, *Code of Federal Regulations*, Section 210.10.

Students Detained in the Classroom During Lunch Period as a Disciplinary Measure

	Elementary Schools	Middle/High Schools
Yes	33.6%	53.6%
No	66.4%	46.4%

Elementary School Cafeteria Exit Policy

A student finishes their lunch before the eating period is over. This student is allowed to leave the dining area when they are finished eating and proceed to recess or back to the classroom	10.6%
A student finishes their lunch before the eating period is over. This student is required to wait in the dining area until the eating period is over or until they are dismissed by staff	89.4%

Open or Closed Campus During Lunch in Middle and High Schools

Percent of open campus student population participating in school lunch program.

			0–9%	10–24%	25–49%	50–74%	75–99%	100%
Closed:	**86.8%**							
Open:	**13.2%**		4.8%	4.8%	31.0%	31.0%	28.6%	0.0%

Scheduling Lunchtime Activities in Middle and High Schools

	Never	Infrequently (1–5x year)	1–2x month	1–2x week	3–5x week
Student government (elections, debates)	60.1%	33.3%	4.0%	2.6%	0.0%
Spirit events (pep rallies, contests)	40.9%	31.7%	18.5%	8.7%	0.3%
Fundraisers (bake sales, walk-a-thons)	71.7%	23.7%	3.5%	1.2%	0.0%
Student club or organization meetings	46.9%	12.7%	12.7%	19.8%	8.0%
Intramural sports or games	71.6%	10.6%	3.8%	5.3%	8.8%
Other	65.6%	18.1%	5.8%	5.5%	4.9%

Procedures for Middle and High School Students to Get Lunch Before Lunch Activities (optional)
(e.g. scheduling rallies or meetings to begin 10 minutes after the start of the lunch period, allowing students to leave class early to get their lunch, etc.)

151 respondents have procedures in place	
Delayed start to lunchtime activities	109
Students are allowed to go to lunch early/move to front of line	54
Lunch period is extended for entire school	10

Procedure for Students Not Finished Eating When Lunch Period Ends (optional)

	Elementary Schools (534 responses)	Middle/High Schools (207 responses)
Allowed to finish eating	478	146 *
Move to finish table	78	1
Move outside to be supervised	18	--
Move to the office	15	5
Timed limit	16	--
Conditional (why aren't they finished?)	6	--
Take food back to class	15	18
Finish at the door of the classroom	--	4
Not allowed to finish	10	4
No procedure; not an issue	45	57
Working on a procedure	1	--

* Of these 146 responses, 60 stated this was not a regular occurrence.

Challenges and Barriers to Providing Adequate Time to Eat (optional)

	Elementary Schools (165)	Middle/High Schools (24)
Long lines	48	10
Inadequate point of service	21	5
Large student population	23	1
Scheduling	42	9
Not enough time	5	--
Lunch periods	10	1
Minimum days	6	2
Instructional minutes	4	--
Teacher contracts	1	2
Not enough cafeteria space and/or seating	39	6
Insufficient student supervision	22	--
Food service staffing issues	18	6
Student behavior	18	3
Pizza day (long lines due to popular items)	16	2
Lack of funding and/or budget difficulties	8	--
Kitchen delays (slow prep, running out of food)	5	1
Poor food quality or palatability	3	1

Submitted Best Practices for Lunch (optional)

Points of Service
- Upgrading or adding points of service to speed up or shorten the lunch line (10)
- Rearrange or spread points of service out for better access (3)
- Speeding up service with barcode scanners, photo IDs, lanyards with lunch cards, etc.
- Students line up alphabetically

Lunch Periods
- Add a lunch period or institute staggered, overlapping lunches (22)
- Lengthen lunch by adding time at the end of the school day (2)
- Discontinue morning recess and add that time to the lunch period

Supervision at Lunch
- Adding additional staff to supervise in the cafeteria or on the lunch line (3)
- Parents on campus help provide lunchtime supervision
- Principal does daily lunch duty to promote good behavior and improve morale
- Assigned tables

Recess or Free Time
- Recess before lunch (37)
- Alternate lunch and recess; some students are out playing while others eat (6)
- Students have a 15 minute recess, eat lunch, and then have another 15 minute recess
- Free time 5 minutes before lunch to allow older students to expend some energy before eating

Cafeteria Exit Policy
- Students must be dismissed instead of just getting up to leave when finished (15)
- Require a specific amount of time for sitting and eating before going out to play (14)
- A few minutes of quiet at the end of the lunch period to encourage children to finish eating (4)
- Timers in the cafeteria start when the last student in line sits down

Miscellaneous
- Teamwork between school administration and nutrition staff at the school and district level (6)
- Front of the lunch line passes for students at the end of the line or as an incentive (2)
- Extra time added onto a lunch period for a reward (2)
- Improved food quality, variety, and attention paid to student preference (2)
- Fruit should be cut when served; packaged or whole fruit takes too long to consume
- Local school wellness policy supports time to eat and nutritional quality