Do students have enough munch time at lunch time?

Recent research conducted by Deakin University's Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition (IPAN) and School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences (SENS) has revealed some interesting information about kids and their lunchtimes.

Most primary-aged kids only receive around 10 minutes to eat their lunch at school, despite the fact that many parents and teachers agree that this is not enough time.

The Deakin University study showed that most parents believed children needed at least 15 minutes to each their lunch before being permitted to go outside to play.

"Our research found that some parents also believe that limiting eating times influences the types of food their children wanted to take for lunch," SENS' Dr Melissa Burton says.

"For example, with less time to eat, children are more likely to prioritise the most appealing foods in their lunchbox, such as the treats, which are often nutrient poor.

"These findings not only have implications for children's health but also their ability to learn, as research tells us that good nutrition is necessary to help children thrive academically."

IPAN's Dr Claire Margerison said that though research revealed parents reporting their children would be more likely to finish the contents of their lunch box with more time, there are mixed views on whose responsibility it is to encourage healthy eating, among other things. "About half of the parents and teachers surveyed said only parents and children should choose what food they eat at school, while one quarter of parents and one third of teachers believed that schools should have a responsibility to monitor food brought from home," Dr Margerison says.

Research has shown that giving school children an extra five minutes to eat their lunch before play is likely to benefit them in a variety of ways. (iStock)

"Criticising individual children's lunchboxes was generally viewed as inappropriate among both parents and teachers."

However, the study also showed that parents were open to general suggestions and feedback about the contents of kids' lunchboxes.

"Many parents thought teachers should eat their own lunch with the children, believing this would be a good opportunity to role model healthy eating to children," Dr Margerison says.

This sentiment wasn't as popular with teachers as it was with parents.

"Children spend so much of their time at school, the lines between what is the parent's responsibility and what is the teacher's responsibility is often blurred, and these research findings certainly highlight some of those grey areas," Dr Margerison says.

The study clearly shows that giving children an extra five minutes to eat their lunch will be beneficial and has the potential to increase children's ability to focus and learn.

"How we find that extra five minutes is what we want to look at next," Dr Margerison says.

"Do we take it from play time or class time, or could we have an educational lunch and teach about nutrition at the same time?"

Ideas to keep your kids busy and the planet happy

With the next round of school holidays quickly approaching, many parents and guardians may be scratching their heads trying to think of activities to keep their kids occupied.

Read on to find out a few fun ideas to keep the kids busy in a sustainable way:

Make your own backyard games: rather than buying new toys for the holidays, use a few common household items to create some fun games. For example, find empty plastic bottles, paint them white with red stripes and use tennis balls to make your own pin bowling set.

Go on an insect scavenger hunt: create a checklist of insect pictures of the bugs and other critters found in your backyard. Go outside with the kids and a magnifying glass and teach them about the little beasties around your home.

Build a little veggie garden: Pick up a small garden bed from your local hardware store, along with enough bags of soil, manure and other products to fill it. Plant some easy veggie seedlings and use some icy pole sticks to write the name of the plants in the garden.

Not only will these activities keep your kids entertained and happy for some time over the holidays, they will also benefit the planet!

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Prepare yourself with a variety of fun kids activities for the next school holidays! (iStock)

MEET THE PRINCIPAL

Glenn Davey

Geelong High School

Glenn Davey has been in the government education system for almost 50 years - 20 of those years as a principal and the last 10 years as principal at Geelong High School. According to Mr Davey, the challenges faced by teachers and support staff in the first 40 years of his career pale in significance compared with the challenges of these last few years. Parents and families are looking to schools to provide support for their children's learning and wellbeing, in equal parts. The growing inequity in our society has compounded these challenges, according to Mr Davey. As inclusive establishments, government schools play a valuable and unique role in addressing these inequities. "At Geelong High School, we are proud of the fact that regardless of family circumstances, students get a high quality education. We have outstanding teachers who deliver a high-quality learning program that is differentiated to the students' points of need," Mr Davey says.

Erin Wright

Surf Coast Secondary College

Erin Wright has been the Principal of Surf Coast SC since 2020; having stepped up from the Assistant Principal role at the College to assume leadership as principal during a very challenging time for us all. Since Surf Coast Secondary College opened its doors in 2012, we have focused on shaping and maintaining a culture where all members of our community are positive, supportive, kind and open minded. I am proud to be the principal of this wonderful school where we support the young people in our community to challenge themselves to grow not only in their learning, but also to develop a well-rounded sense of self and the world that they live in. We are so lucky to be situated in the wonderful Surf Coast Shire in Torquay. Being active and positive contributors to our community is important, and a large part of that is developing an appreciation for diversity. We pride ourselves on being an inclusive school community where ALL young people are welcomed, accepted, supported and included.