

Study: Longer school lunch is healthier

By Karen Kaplan, Los Angeles Times

In the continuing quest to improve the health quotient of school lunches, experts have proposed fancy chefs, cutesy lunch boxes and smiley-faced stickers. Now comes a more straightforward suggestion – just make the lunch period longer.

The idea that schools could persuade kids to eat better without making a single change to their cafeteria menus may sound like pie in the sky, but its proponents have some data to back them up. After analyzing the eating habits of 1,001 elementary and middle school students in Boston-area schools, researchers found that the more time students had to finish their lunches, the more fruits and vegetables they ate and the more milk they drank.

One of the six schools that participated in the Modifying Eating and Lifestyles at School – or MEALS – study gave students as little as 20 minutes for lunch. Some of that time had to be spent getting to the cafeteria and standing in line when they got there. By the time they finally sat down with their trays, some kids had only 10 minutes to eat.

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