

Superintendent Update

March 3, 2020

Wellness Initiative Report



Overview

- In the fall of 2019, Anchorage School District piloted a Wellness Initiative in 21 elementary schools to promote healthy eating habits and physical activity in schools.
- 21 schools were selected as pilot sites, 19 continued the pilot through the whole school year.
 - Airport Heights, Alpenglow, Aurora, Bowman, Campbell STEM, Chinook, Girdwood, Gladys Wood, Kasuun, Kincaid, Lake Hood, Northwood ABC, Orion, Rabbit Creek, Ravenwood, Rogers Park, Russian Jack, Sand Lake, Trailside (Ocean View and Ursa Major discontinued)

Source: Cohen Report, page 6



Project Goals

- 10 minutes of *seated* time to eat breakfast
- 20 minutes of *seated* time to eat lunch
- 54 minutes of physical activity (90% of the CDC recommendation) provided every day, including 30 minutes of recess and a combination of physical education, school-wide activities and in-classroom activities
- Maintain the overall integrity of K-5 ELA/Reading intent

Cohen Report, page 6



How We Started - Lunch

- Prior to implementing the Wellness Initiative, the participating schools had 20-25 minute lunch periods. Because these lunch period lengths also included the time to walk to the cafeteria and waiting in line for lunch (among those receiving a school meal), *seated* time was less than 20 minutes in all of the participating schools.
- To align with the Wellness Initiative's goals of 20 minutes of seated time, pilot schools implemented increased school lunch lengths that varied from 25 to 30 minutes.

Source: Cohen Report, page 7



How We Started - Recess

- Prior to implementing the Wellness Initiative, participating schools had 20 minutes for recess.
- To align with the Wellness Initiative's physical activity goals, pilot schools implemented increased recess that varied from 25 to 30 minutes. Schools varied in student's access to additional equipment (e.g. sleds, basketballs, footballs) during recess.

Source: Cohen Report, page 13



How We Started – Movement Breaks

- Movement breaks (frequently called “brain breaks”) were physical activity opportunities to enable students to get to the 54 minutes of physical activity as part of the Wellness Initiative. In previous years, some teachers provided some movement opportunities to students while others did not.
- During the pilot initiative, principals typically gave teachers some flexibility to meet the movement requirements and therefore implementation varied widely within and between schools.

Source: Cohen Report, page 15



How We Started – Schedule Changes

- All pilot schools adjusted their school schedule and transition times to accommodate longer lunch and recess times.
- Five schools took time away from social studies, science, or language arts instruction time to accommodate the longer lunch and recess schedule.
- Many schools also had to make use of additional spaces for lunch, such as classrooms and libraries, to handle the increased number of students dining at the same time.

Source: PAN Executive Report, page 2



How We Evaluated – Student Survey

- Nineteen Wellness Initiative pilot schools and eleven matched control schools administered anonymized surveys to all third and fourth graders in the fall of 2019 and again in the winter of 2019.
- The surveys included questions on the student grade level (3rd or 4th) and gender, as well as questions regarding perceived feelings of happiness, calmness, and satiety in the cafeteria, and hunger, energy levels and mood at the end of the day.
- A total of 5,107 surveys were collected and analyzed by Dr. Juliana Cohen.

Source: Cohen Report, page 6



How We Evaluated – Principal Interviews

- The State of Alaska Physical Activity and Nutrition unit oversaw key informant interviews with the 19 principals participating in the Wellness Initiative during the 2019-20 school year.
- These interviews focused on why principals participated in the Wellness Initiative, what feedback they had received from parents, staff, and teachers, what lessons they had learned from implementation, and what impact there may have been on ELA.
- All interviews took place between November 11, 2019 and December 15, 2019 and occurred by telephone or in-person. Interviews lasted 30-60 minutes and followed a set of scripted questions written by the state staff and approved by the ASD Evaluation Team.



How We Evaluated – Parent, Teacher, and Staff Interviews & Focus Groups

- Six schools were selected for interviews and focus groups with teachers, principals, cafeteria staff, and parents. This set of interviews and focus groups were conducted by Dr. Juliana Cohen in person at the participating schools.
- Individual interviews were conducted with principals (6) and cafeteria staff (6).
- Focus groups were conducted with parents (30; 6 groups) and teachers (39; 6 groups).
- Schools were selected to ensure representation of the diverse school district with varying student bodies (based on student race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and school size), and Title I, non-Title I, and language immersion schools.



What We Learned – Positives for Students

- In the student surveys, students at pilot schools reported being happier in the cafeteria and having lower levels of hunger at the end of lunch, at a statistically significant level.

Table 1. Results from n=5,107 surveys among 3rd and 4th grade students attending a Wellness Initiative or control school in Anchorage School District	Control Mean (SE)	Pilot Mean (SE)	p-value (* <.05)
How often do you feel happy in the cafeteria? (1= Never; 4 =Very Often)	2.86 (0.05)	3.01 (0.04)	0.02*
How do you usually feel when you finish lunch at school? (1= Very Hungry; 4=Very Full)	2.55 (0.03)	2.65 (0.03)	0.01*
How hungry did you feel right after lunch today? (1= Very Hungry; 4=Very Full)	2.61 (0.03)	2.71 (0.02)	0.004*



What We Learned – Positives for Students

- Based on interviews and focus groups with Staff and Parents at pilot schools, longer lunch periods appeared to benefit most students, especially younger children, students with special needs, and students from lower-income families.
 - *Cafeteria staff quote: “Last year they had to rush...Now they can eat everything and relax for a bit. Especially the little ones. 30 minutes is just right.”*
 - *Cafeteria staff quote: “With the share cart now, there usually isn’t anything left. The kids who need it are getting it.”*

Source: Cohen Report, page 7



What We Learned – Positives for Students

- Parents and Staff at pilot schools also perceived improvements in the amount of lunch consumed and opportunities for social and emotional learning during lunch.
 - *Parent quote: “My three kids come home with empty lunchboxes. That’s never been the case.”*
 - *Cafeteria staff quote: “They get to talk to their friends. If they finish early, they have time for friendship.”*

Source: Cohen Report, page 7/8



What We Learned – Positives for Students

- Teachers and Staff at pilot schools frequently reported that recess before lunch appeared to reduce disruptive behavior.
 - *Teacher quote: “We switched recess before lunch and it made a huge difference in behaviors. Not as much drama. They sit, they eat, they socialize.”*
 - *Teacher quote: “There is less carryover from playground issues into the classroom because teachers can deal with issues in the cafeteria. We do problem solving in the middle of the cafeteria instead of during WIN.”*

Source: Cohen Report, page 10



What We Learned – Positives for Students

- Teachers and Staff at pilot schools also reported that activities for children who finished quickly and developing strong expectations in the cafeteria appeared to reduce disruptive behavior.
 - *Teacher quote: “In the past it’s been chaos. Now we set expectations. Kids know they don’t get up. We don’t let kids take trash around. In the past there was yelling, humiliation. Now they sit there calm, not in a rush.”*
 - *Cafeteria staff quote: “The principal was in there [the cafeteria] sporadically and that would help. An authority figure makes a difference on behavior.”*

Source: Cohen Report, page 9



What We Learned – Positives for Students

- The majority of teachers noted that “brain breaks” had a positive impact on student’s behaviors and the ability to focus, especially with flexibility to implement breaks as needed. Teachers also noted that opportunities to go outside were especially beneficial even if just for a brief period of time.
 - *Teacher quote: “In the morning we do a dance break with music. In the afternoon we do Cosmic Yoga to relax. They are so happy.”*
 - *Teacher quote: “After the break, the kids are more eager to learn.”*

Source: Cohen Report, page 15



What We Learned – Positives for Teachers

- Many teachers in pilot schools who only had *some* additional responsibilities felt positively about implementing longer lunch periods. These teachers frequently noted the benefits of the positive interactions with students at lunch, which enabled them to get to know their students better.
 - *Teacher quote: “We really get to know them as people. We enjoy it”*
 - *Teacher quote: “We get to meet the kids and establish a rapport with kids in younger grades.”*

Source: Cohen Report, page 10



What We Learned – Obstacles for Students

- While longer lunch and recess appeared to benefit students at pilot schools, there were often concerns about disruptive behavior among older children who finished meals quickly and were more sedentary outside.
 - *Teacher quote: “I like longer lunches BUT the kids finish and don’t have an activity and it gets to be chaos with not enough noon duties.”*
 - *Principal quote (referring to 5th/6th graders): “The playground equipment isn’t made for them. They don’t go down the slides or spin the spinners...They just sort of ‘wander.’”*

Source: Cohen Report, page 9&14



What We Learned – Obstacles for Students

- Teachers and parents noted substantial increases in behavioral issues during and after school on days when students had indoor recess, most often due to weather. Indoor recess typically did not involve physical activity and instead included more sedentary activities such as arts and crafts.
 - *Teacher quote: “Behavior problems are through the roof when they don’t have the ability to get outside and run.”*
 - *Teacher quote: “When they can’t go outside they have a harder time.”*

Source: Cohen Report, page 13



What We Learned – Obstacles for Teachers

- Many teachers at pilot schools who were required to cover the longer lunch periods had a negative response. These teachers frequently described the added responsibilities as exhausting, perceived they had less time for teacher development, and were less likely to volunteer for other activities for students during or after school.
 - *Teacher quote: “We are mandated to have duty in the lunchroom so professional work time is impacted. It’s impacting our collaborative time.”*
 - *Teacher quote: “There isn’t coverage for the kids so teachers are feeling more burnt out...teachers are doing less for other things [like 1 on 1 or small group activities] because they are doing so much more.”*



What We Learned – Obstacles for Staff

- The need for more noon-day help to assist with implementation of longer recess at pilot schools was a consistent theme at schools. Staffing issues were perceived to be a problem due to lower wages and aids having to spend several hours outside in the cold weather.
 - *Teacher quote: “We are usually short on noon supervisors so areas are closed at recess and sometimes there is no equipment.”*
 - *Teacher quote: “It’s hard to staff. You need someone who is kind, caring, and responsible, who passed a background check, who are willing to segment their day to work 2 hours, and then be paid \$10 an hour.”*

Source: Cohen Report, page 13; PAN Executive report, page 2



What We Learned – Adaptive Implementation

- While 63% of Principals interviewed would continue the pilot at their school next school year, 16% would not, 16% were undecided, and 5% would only continue the recess portion of the pilot.
- Reasons for not continuing or being undecided were the additional time burden on teachers and staff, lack of flexibility in implementation, and wanting to have more time to see outcomes at their schools.

Source: PAN Executive Report, page 1



What We Learned – Adaptive Implementation

- Principal, Teacher, and Staff engagement with the pilot was crucial to the success of the Wellness Initiative pilot.
- Engagement was improved when schools had positive communication, teacher flexibility with the curriculum, advanced strategic problem-solving, and a balanced role of teachers in regard to student lunch/recess supervision.
- Each school is a unique environment, with a diversity of student and staff backgrounds and needs. Principals and staff having the power to be flexible and adaptive to the needs of their schools will be crucial to the continuation and success of the Wellness Initiative.

Source: PAN Executive Report, page 1-4 ; Cohen Report page 3, 19



What's Next?

- Share the findings of the Wellness Initiative with our community
- Develop an implementation guide in collaboration with successful pilot schools. A guide with supportive strategies will help other schools interested in the Wellness Initiative.





Educating All Students for Success in Life

