This document provides a summary of a discussion delivered to the PTA Council meeting on February 24, 2019 by Mariana Bedetti, Deb Shell, and Chris Aitken, parents at Malcolm X Elementary School.

The slides were not designed to be standalone but rather presented. This document includes summary speaker notes however it is not a complete record of the discussion.

This study examines differences in the lunch time programs and operating arrangements across a small number of elementary schools in the Berkeley Unified School District ("BUSD").

Due to the sample sizes collected, results should be interpreted as providing directional guidance and could inform decisions to complete a more comprehensive, system-wide study to address parents’ concerns regarding the operation of lunch times across BUSD elementary schools.
Study Overview

- Parent volunteers
- 69 lunch period observations
- Malcolm X; Rosa Parks; Washington; and Thousand Oaks
- Other schools ‘blocked’ from participating (why?)

Methodology

A paper-based survey was designed by a group of BUSD parents and distributed to the district’s 11 elementary schools via the BUSD PTA Council. For reasons that are unclear, a number of schools were not allowed to participate by their schools’ administrations despite parent interest in collecting data for this study.

As a result, the following 4 schools participated:

- Malcolm X
- Rosa Parks
- Thousand Oaks
- Washington

These schools provided 69 lunch period observations across a range of dates in January and February 2019. Four specific observation dates were chosen to control for the impact of different menus and weather.

This initial study is based on analysis of this dataset.
Profiles of Participating Schools

- Malcolm X
- Rosa Parks
- Washington
- Thousand Oaks

Malcolm X (Does NOT employ recess before lunch)
- Size: Largest elementary school in BUSD, with 566 students
- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged: 26.1% of the student population
- ESL: 6.4% of the student population
- Foster Care: 0.5% of the population
- Lunch Periods: Three 20-minute lunch periods per bell schedule for TK/K (131 students), Gr. 1/2/3 (234 students), Gr. 4/5 (201 students)

Rosa Parks (DOES employ recess before lunch)
- Size: 448 students
- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged: 24.5% of the student population
- ESL: 11.2% of the student population
- Foster Care: 0.2% of the population
- Lunch Periods: Five lunch periods of varying time per bell schedule for K (25min-69 students), Gr. 1 (25min-69 students), Gr. 2/3 (20min-161 students), Gr. 4 (20min-68 students), Gr. 5 (15min-81 students)

Thousand Oaks (DOES employ recess before lunch)
- Size: 413 students
- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged: 44.9% of the student population
- ESL: 17.7% of the student population
- Foster Care: 0.9% of the student population
- Recess Before Lunch: Thousand Oaks does employ recess before lunch
- Lunch Periods: Four 20-minute lunch periods per bell schedule for K (64 students), Gr. 1/2 (126 students), Gr. 3 (81 students), Gr. 4/5 (142 students)

Washington (Does NOT employ recess before lunch)
- Size: 443 students
- Socioeconomically Disadvantaged: 32.4% of the student population
- ESL: 13.6% of the student population
- Foster Care: 0.2% of the student population
- Lunch Periods: Three 20-minute lunch periods per bell schedule for K/1 (134 students), Gr. 2/3 (163 students), Gr. 4/5 (146 students)

SOURCES: February 2019 School Enrollment Data; California School Dashboard Data (2018); School Bell Schedules.
Parents were physically present in the lunchroom area of each school to observe and capture the following information:

- **Date** - date of the observation (e.g., "2019-01-16")
- **School** - name of the school being observed (e.g., "Rosa Parks")
- **Period** - class (or classes) present in the lunchroom during the time being observed (e.g., "TK / K" would be a lunch period shared by children from both the TK and Kindergarten classes)
- **Rainy Day** - whether a "rainy day" schedule was in effect (i.e., "Yes" or "No")
- **Scheduled Start** - scheduled start time (i.e., bell time) for that particular lunch period (e.g., "11:15am")
- **Actual Start** - actual time the *first class* arrived to the lunch room/area (e.g., "11:17am")
- **Scheduled End** - scheduled end time (i.e., bell time) for that particular lunch period (e.g., "11:35am")
- **Actual End** - actual time students were being dismissed (e.g., "11:34am")
- **Recess Before Lunch?** - whether or not the students had recess *before* they ate lunch (i.e., "Yes" or "No")
- **Time Last Class Arrived** - actual time the *last class* scheduled for that lunch period arrived (e.g., "11:19am")
- **Time in Line** - average time students were observed waiting in line; (e.g., "90 seconds"). Observers tracked 2-3 children through the serving line in each period.
- **Time Last Child Sat Down** - actual time the *last child* sat down after being served (e.g., "11:21am")
- **Number of Children in Cohort** - total number of children in particular lunch period (e.g., "75")
- **Number of Lunch Servers** - total number of servers on duty (e.g., "2")
- **Number of Adults Monitoring Lunch** - total number of adults monitoring lunch, includes staff monitors and other adult helpers (e.g., "4")
- **Run Out of Supplies** - did the lunch period run out of any food or drink supplies (i.e., "Yes" or "No") – if so, what (i.e. "pizza")
- **Did Any Children Stay to Eat** – Children who stayed to eat after the period was dismissed (i.e., “2 children”)
- **Food Waste** - average amount of food being tossed into trash bins (e.g., "1/4 tray")
- **Other Notes** - other comments/notes from the parents observing (e.g., "Very loud in here!")
Parents provided feedback on helpful processes and ideas they observed during lunch periods, such as:

- Pre-plating of food helps reduce waiting times in line.
- Reconfiguration of line flow to make lines more efficient (e.g., recent changes at Malcolm X).
- Recess before lunch – our data shows that classes arrive much closer to start times and thus receive more of the lunch period time to eat.
- Newly formed “Wellness Committee” is revising the district’s Wellness policy and developing a more holistic Wellness approach for BUSD.
- One school noted that children who finished their lunches quickly read books while others continued eating.
- Microphones are helpful for making announcements in the lunchroom without yelling, making for a calmer lunch atmosphere.

In addition, one school appeared to stagger the arrival time for the two grades sharing one lunch period – this helped with reducing line wait time, however, it also meant that the second class to arrive received less time to eat.
Most elementary schools have 20-minute lunch periods, however, a 20-minute lunch period does not equal 20 minutes of time to consume food. The actual time for eating is less when factoring in the time it takes to travel to the cafeteria, wait in line for hot lunch, use the bathroom before eating, and when classes arrive late.

One particularly telling data point collected was the time the LAST CLASS arrived to lunch versus the Scheduled Start Time. Comparing schools with Recess BEFORE and Recess AFTER, the Recess AFTER schools on average arrived 5-6 minutes late compared with the Scheduled Start Time - this equates to 25-30% of eating time “lost.” Recess BEFORE schools generally arrive closer to start time (less than 2 minutes late on average).

Recess AFTER: Last CLASS amount of time LEFT to eat before dismissal ... 14 mins, 20 secs average time (worst case scenario observed only 9 mins)

Recess BEFORE: Last CLASS amount of time LEFT to eat before dismissal ... ~18 mins average time (worst case scenario observed 10 mins)

**Worst case scenarios** of Last CLASS arriving late observed:
Recess AFTER worst case: 10 mins late (i.e., 50% of eating time lost)
Recess BEFORE worst case: 5 mins late (i.e., 25% of eating time lost)

**Note:** The orange bar on the Recess AFTER line reflects that classes were observed to dismiss slightly earlier than the scheduled end time.

*Summary notes; not a complete record of the discussion.*
The available eating time is further reduced when tracking the LAST CHILD – specifically, how much time the LAST CHILD out of the lunch line has to eat from the moment he/she sits down until actual dismissal occurs.

Recess AFTER: Time LAST CHILD has left to eat before dismissal ... 9 mins, 12 secs on average (worst case scenario observed 4 mins!!!) [versus 14:20]

Recess BEFORE: Time LAST CHILD has left to eat before dismissal ... 17 mins, 22 secs on avg. (worst case scenario observed 9 mins) [versus ~18:00]

Why is the LAST CHILD getting so little time at Recess AFTER schools? Some of the factors include already arriving late to lunch, then entering a lunch line that is now backed up, the nature of the food taking longer to serve, food running out and having to wait for it to be ready (which was observed, for example, at Washington).
Observations / Anecdotes

- Kids feeling rushed, pressured to eat quickly
- ‘Clean Up’ announced 3-5 mins before dismissal
- Students complaining of hunger after lunch
- Parents exiting lunch program
- Food waste

Anecdotal Info Noted by Parent Observers

Rosa Parks:
- I asked two kids whether they felt like they had enough time to eat, and they said no. One student says she is still hungry after. Another says she will be hungry again soon.
- [5th grade] 11 minutes from first kid showed up to when kids were told to clean up. Every child I spoke with felt there wasn’t enough time to eat and said they felt pressure to eat quickly. Two girls ate their lunch at recess so that they could have more time.
- Kids feel rushed. “Packies” say they don’t have enough time.
- They felt rushed eating. Some said they eat during recess.
- The 4/5 graders had minimal time to eat. Students were very quick to share this. Some said they start their lunch at recess. I even watched a girl walking and eating as they were leaving the cafeteria.
- Very wasteful! Too large portion size for age? [K lunch]
- Five minutes stagger worked to avoid back up for school lunch eaters [Gr. 2/3 lunch]. Some of the third graders said they felt that the additional five minutes of recess was not worth a shorter lunch [re: staggered arrival to lunch after 2nd graders].
- 3rd graders feel they don’t have enough time to eat.
- Food was put away before lunch was over (at 12:53pm – 8 min. into 5th lunch)
- All students I asked said they don’t have enough time to eat and said they are hungry later. Trays are not used for lunch - paper “boats” used for pizza, and students have to choose to get another for salad bar. 90% students with hot lunch didn’t get a drink, multiple trips are required if students want salad, fruit, or drinks.
- Having observed lunch, I decided that my daughter will get better nutrition (and the time to consume it) with home lunches. Though the lunch line goes fast, having to get up multiple times or having to juggle multiple cartons really takes away from the students’ abilities to get food and eat it before the lunch period ends.

Washington:
- I liked the pizza but didn’t have enough time to eat.
- Ran out of pizza. Milk should be in a cooler, it’s just sitting in a crate... Kids still sitting down at 11:45 - at 11:45 teacher announces that he will soon announce time to clean up. 8 kids didn't get pizza, completely ran out. [Gr. 2/3 lunch]
- Pizza was not ready until 10 min into period. Ran out of pizza because it wasn't hot yet. Kids eventually got their food. [Gr. 4/5]
- We do have a microphone ... impossible to try to communicate with the lunchroom without the mic.
- Lunch line flow is super super fast. The kids don’t even stop at the point-of-service after they get their plates because our cashier does the checkout as the kids are in line.
- Very many said that it’s hard for students to relax and eat their lunch attentively.

Summary notes; not a complete record of the discussion.
Observations / Anecdotes (Notes continued)

- Kids feeling rushed, pressured to eat quickly
- ‘Clean Up’ announced 3-5 mins before dismissal
- Students complaining of hunger after lunch
- Parents exiting lunch program
- Food waste

Anecdotal Info Noted by Parent Observers

Malcolm X:
- Kid who was served last sat down at the table that was first to be dismissed - he had 5 minutes to eat.
- One staff member said it “feels rushed” and felt bad for the kids.
- Lots of kids getting up/down – they had small paper “boats” with no room to carry drinks or other items…so they spent a lot of time up/down which took away from eating time. [Pizza Day]
- We were told by one adult that not enough food/supplies are ordered (frequently).
- Per staff member, server refuses to give kids seconds, even if they accidentally dropped their food on the floor … doesn’t order enough food so they often run out of items before everyone has gotten their plates.
- Staff member told me that there have been times where she and other staff members have had to go and buy food with their own money so the kids had something to eat. Also, server often puts the milk away before lunch is over so kids can’t access it. When asked why, she never gives a clear answer.
- Per several parents, they have pulled out of the lunch program to give their children a few more precious minutes to eat and also because they feel they are not getting what they are paying for (i.e. buying their child a meal but the child doesn’t get time to eat it).
- Tons of food waste.

Thousand Oaks:
- Few are eating fruit or salad bar (holds for all grades).
- The kids who had school meals didn’t have to wait long mainly because there were not that many of them.
- Water ran out due to Garden teacher using it to give kids fruit/vegetables in water.
- Younger grades got to lunch either exactly at the designated time or within a minute on either side. The oldest group had more variance with 1 class arriving a bit later and one a bit earlier than the scheduled time.

*** NOTE: Many observers noted that “clean up” or “wrap it up” was announced 3-5 minutes before dismissal … this further affected how much time kids have to eat as this is a trigger to put things/throw things away, even less time to eat.
Standardize recess before lunch across schools
Our study bears out what academic literature already shows - that recess before lunch is a much better system for schools because:
1) It allows children to arrive at lunch hungrier which means they will eat more
2) Children are less fidgety and wiggly since they have just played outside
3) Less playground conflict spills over into the classroom
4) It ensures all children in a lunch/recess cohort get to lunch closer to the lunch period start time (takes away the variable of children and their teachers arriving late from classrooms)

BUSD should study Jefferson Elementary school as a case study – they implemented recess before lunch during this academic year. They reported that the first few weeks were difficult but once implemented it made a big difference and has been well-received.

Restore time taken away from lunch
With the addition of 15 instructional minutes to the school day this year but only lengthening the day by 5 minutes, many schools were left in the position of having to take time away from lunch and/or recess to make the schedules work. This took an already strained situation and made it worse at some schools. We ask that BUSD at the very least restore the time taken away.

In addition, BUSD should establish a base minimum time for lunch periods across all schools - for example, a 15-minute lunch period for 5th graders at one school is clearly not enough time for eating and also unfair when 5th graders get more time at other schools. A base minimum time for lunch periods also ensures lunch time is protected and minutes are not taken in order to make schedules work at individual sites.

Consider study with ALL schools
For reasons that are unknown, a number of schools were asked by the district not to participate in the lunch study despite parent interest. We ask that the district consider conducting a lunch study across all schools. Given time, money, and resources are tight, one suggestion is to enlist students from UC Berkeley’s School of Education as well as the Mathematics and/or Statistics departments to conduct the study district-wide – this would provide a free team of researchers while giving these students highly coveted real-world experience within their academic domains.