

Midday Meal with Music

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Midday meal constitutes a significant part of the diet of children, studying in primary and upper primary classes (Classes I to VIII) in all government and government-aided schools of the country. The meal is freshly cooked and served warm to the students. The Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS), one of the largest school children feeding programmes in India, caters to their nutritional needs.

The National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (commonly known as the Mid Day Meal Scheme) was launched on 15 August 1995. The programme was formally started at the Kavishreekalapi Primary School in Dahyapark, Varachha, Surat, Gujarat, in January 2015.

However, it was distressing for teachers and other staff members to note that the programme was not being implemented the way it was conceived. The students moved about in a haphazard manner during recess.

It was difficult to control them or direct them back to their respective classrooms after the recess. A discussion with the teachers helped identify the problems. Some of the problems identified were as follows.

- Lack of discipline
- Dislike for the food served
- Lack of appropriate and adequate infrastructure
- Time mismanagement

A solution had to be found. A meeting was organised, in which all school teachers and staff members participated. It was decided that a music system would play a hand wash song and relevant *shlokas* for 30 minutes during the recess.

TEAMS FORMED

For the effective implementation of the midday meal programme, three teams (namely, 'Annapurna', 'Anasuya' and 'Arundhati'), consisting of all school

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students, were formed so as to ensure that everybody gets the meal during recess. Students of Classes I–III were part of the Annapurna team, Classes IV and V of the Anasuya team and Classes VI–VIII of the Arundhati team.

Each team was allotted a place in the playground, where they would sit and eat the meal. All team leaders had to make seating arrangements, ensure that members of their respective teams washed their hands appropriately and keep the meal distribution counters ready before recess.

MAINTAINING CLEANLINESS

It was ensured that, as per the guidelines of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, food distributors wore apron, headgear and gloves while serving the meal. Besides, the vehicles and containers, in which the food was supplied, had to be clean. A water purifier was also installed in the kitchen area and the water quality was tested quarterly.



Figure 1: Food distributors, wearing apron, headgear and gloves, ready to serve the meal

PRAYER RECITATION

The playing of the hand washing song indicated the beginning of the recess. As the song played, the students washed their hands with soap and water. They, then, queued near the food counters with their plates. After taking the food, they would sit down in a line meant for their respective teams, recite a short prayer and eat the meal. After finishing the meal, they washed their hands and plates. All through the process, the teachers would be standing in the playground and at the food counters. They would supervise the food distributors, and help the student team leaders make seating and water arrangements, etc.



Figure 2: Students standing in a queue near a food counter to collect their meals

MAINTAINING DISCIPLINE

The students were given the following instructions to maintain discipline.

- Move in a line.
- Do not push each other.
- Wait for one's turn patiently.
- Wash the hands before taking and eating the food.
- Throw the litter in dustbins and not in washbasins.

- Do not waste water and food.
- Wash the plate, after finishing the food.

WASHING ARRANGEMENTS

The Ministry has advised all schools to have adequate water facilities for washing purposes. But many States cannot afford this. This school, too, had less number of taps. To overcome this problem, water tubs were used. In order to check overcrowding of students and wastage of water, there were only three dishwashing counters. Each counter had three tubs. The first tub contained water for rinsing the used plates; the second, soapy water to wash the plates; and the third, water to clean the plates of soapy water.

OBSERVATIONS

After music, indicating the recess and serving time of midday meal, was introduced, the following changes were observed.

- All children became alert to the music, as it indicated the recess time.
- In 30 minutes, 540 children would eat the meal.
- The children willingly maintained discipline, stood in queues and did not jostle.

- Minimal wastage of time was observed contrary to the chaos that existed earlier.
- The children got nutritious and sufficient food. So, they were less inclined towards eating junk food.

CONCLUSION

As a result of this innovative move, the school gained recognition. This programme was selected by the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), Surat, for the District Innovation Fair, and also for the State Level Innovation Fair by the Gujarat Council of Educational Research and Training (GCERT). The school stood first in the Surat District Innovation Fair. Moreover, it was selected by the Akshaypatra Foundation, New Delhi, for a documentary film. The documentary, titled *Best Kitchen, Best Transportation and Best School Environment* was released in the year 2016. The District Regulatory Board suggested the management of each school to emulate and implement the innovative programme in their respective schools. As a result, the programme was started in more than 10 government schools run by the Surat Municipal Corporation on a voluntary basis.