



"We've Always Done it This Way," Said No Innovator Ever!



HFCA students show clean plates after Academy scheduled recess before lunch.HFCA Staff

Holy Family Catholic Academy

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Problem solving is more than finding the right answer-- it is focusing on asking the right questions. And sometimes, those questions require an open mind to challenge long held traditions. Recently, Holy Family Catholic Academy (Inverness) set out to solve a problem and ended up questioning an age-old tradition.

Last year, HFCA's middle school student organization Genesis One, began a campaign to encourage students to become better stewards of the environment by reducing more, reusing more,

and recycling more. By sorting waste, HFCA was able to redirect 70 pounds of weekly cafeteria waste from the landfill to the compost pile. This effort resulted in HFCA earning the 2019 Keep Northern Illinois Beautiful Earth Day Hutchcroft Youth Award. While composting food waste was a mighty first step, the larger issue was to reduce total food waste that was exceeding one ton of food annually.

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Problem solving is a hallmark of HFCA's nationally and internationally recognized curriculum. As the only International Baccalaureate World School (IB) in the northwest suburbs, HFCA teaches its over 500 students in preschool through grade 8 to ask questions, build knowledge, and solve authentic, real world problems. Authentic problem solving opportunities present themselves all the time--even in the operation of their own Academy.

"As an IB world school, we embrace a learner profile that includes ten attributes that foster global citizenship. One of these attributes is being open minded," states Principal Kate O'Brien. "Being open minded means looking at a problem from different perspectives and considering new ideas even if those ideas challenge long standing traditions." One such tradition is scheduling students' lunch before recess.

Studies have shown that children who played before eating lunch ate more food and drank more milk and water than those that ate before recess. Scheduling recess first also resulted in less trips to the nurse's office for stomach aches and a better transition back to the classroom.

HFCA began piloting recess before lunch during its first week of school, and the results were promising. Cafeteria food waste was reduced by almost 40%. States parent Donna Madel, "I was amazed when my son, Atticus asked me to pack more in his lunchbox when much of his lunch went uneaten last year."

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Teachers also noticed the difference. Explains Mrs. Susan Marinelli, HFCA second grade teacher, "The switch from "play then eat" has actually produced more classroom instruction time. Rather than time being taken up cooling down from the excitement of recess, students have returned to the classroom much calmer and ready to learn."

Implementing this change is a clear example of how problems are solved by asking the right questions and keeping an open mind to consider all perspectives. HFCA develops students to be creative and innovative problem solvers. As an organization, HFCA models the same.

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