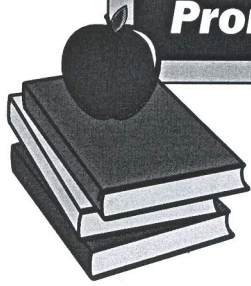


Healthy Celebrations



Promoting a Healthy School Environment

Birthday parties and holiday celebrations at school provide a unique opportunity to help make healthful eating fun and exciting for children. Schools can take advantage of classroom celebrations to serve food that tastes good, is nutritious, and provides students with an opportunity for nutrition education experiences.

But It's Just a Cupcake...



Typically, foods for school celebrations include cupcakes, candy, cookies and soda. So what's the harm? There is nothing wrong with an occasional treat, but unhealthy choices have become the norm rather than the exception. Parties, treats used as classroom rewards, food fundraisers, vending machines, snacks and school stores constantly expose children to high-fat, high-sugar, low-nutrient choices.

Overall, our children's eating habits are poor. Only two percent of children meet all Food Pyramid recommendations. Most children do not eat enough fruits, vegetables or whole grains. Obesity rates among children are on the rise, with serious health consequences. Constant exposure to low-nutrient foods makes it difficult for children to learn how to make healthy food choices. By providing students with nutritious choices wherever food is available (including the classroom), schools can positively influence children's eating habits.

Benefits of Healthy Celebrations

Healthy Kids Learn Better: Research clearly demonstrates that good nutrition is linked to better behavior and academic performance. To provide the best possible learning environment for children, schools must also provide an environment that supports healthy behaviors.

Provides Consistent Messages: Providing healthy classroom celebrations demonstrates a school commitment to promoting healthy behaviors. It supports the classroom lessons students are learning about health, instead of contradicting them. Healthy celebrations promote positive lifestyle choices to reduce student health risks and improve learning.

Promotes a Healthy School Environment: In order to positively change eating behaviors, students need to receive consistent, reliable health information and ample opportunity to use it. Healthy celebrations are an important part of providing a healthy school environment.

Creates Excitement About Nutrition: Children are excited about new and different things, including fun party activities and healthy snacks (see back for ideas). School staff and parents need not worry that children will be disappointed if typical party foods aren't served in the classroom. Holiday treats and traditional birthday parties with cake will still be available at home.

Protects Children with Food Allergies: When parents send in food, it is difficult to ensure the safety of children with food allergies. Schools can protect food allergic children by providing nonfood celebrations or, if food is served, obtaining it from known sources such as the school food service program.



How-To's for Happy Healthy Parties¹

- Variety is the "spice of life" and the "life of the party." Plan several contrasting activities – active and quiet, indoor and outdoor, individual and group.
- Try something new. Children like adventure. In addition to familiar games and foods, offer something different.
- Plan creative experiences such as art, music and cooking.
- Involve children in planning and preparing the party. Let them make decorations and favors.
- Put food in its proper place. Refreshments should compliment the fun, not become the "main event."
- Be sure that each child receives a prize or favor, if such awards are given.
- Don't use food as rewards or prizes.
- Choose foods for fun, good taste and health. Parties that feature healthful foods provide opportunities for children to practice making wise food choices.



¹ Printed with permission from *Let's Party: Party Ideas for School and Home*. West Virginia Department of Education, 1994. Ordering information at: <http://wvde.state.wv.us/ctrc/materials.html>.

What Schools Can Do

Ideas for Alternatives to Using Food as a Reward ^{5,6}

Schools can help promote a healthy learning environment by using nonfood rewards. The ideas below are just a beginning and can be modified for different ages. Be creative, and don't forget the simple motivation of recognizing students for good work or behavior.

Elementary School Students

- Make deliveries to office
- Teach class
- Sit by friends
- Eat lunch with teacher or principal
- Eat lunch outdoors with the class
- Have lunch or breakfast in the classroom
- Private lunch in classroom with a friend
- Be a helper in another classroom
- Play a favorite game or do puzzles
- Stickers, pencils, bookmarks
- Certificates
- Fun video
- Extra recess
- Walk with the principal or teacher
- Fun physical activity break
- School supplies
- Trip to treasure box filled with nonfood items (stickers, tattoos, pencils, erasers, bookmarks, desktop tents)
- Dance to favorite music in the classroom
- Paperback book
- Show-and-tell
- Bank system - Earn play money for privileges
- Teacher or volunteer reads special book to class
- Teacher performs special skill (singing, cart wheel, guitar playing, etc.)
- Read outdoors or enjoy class outdoors
- Have extra art time
- Have "free choice" time at end of the day or end of class period
- Listen with headset to a book on audiotape
- Items that can only be used on special occasions (special art supplies, computer games, toys)



Middle School Students

- Sit with friends
- Listen to music while working at desk
- Five-minute chat break at end of class
- Reduced homework or "no homework" pass
- Extra credit
- Fun video
- Fun brainteaser activities
- Computer time
- Assemblies
- Field trips
- Eat lunch outside or have class outside



High School Students

- Extra credit
- Fun video
- Reduced homework
- Donated coupons to video stores, music stores or movies
- Drawings for donated prizes among students who meet certain grades standards



Share what works! Let us know your strategies to motivate students so we can share with others.

For more information on a healthy school environment, contact Susan Fiore, MS, RD,
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Bureau of Health and Nutrition Services and Child/Family/School Partnerships



September 2004