

## Wellness Principle: Healthy Food At School

### Promising Practice: Healthy Celebrations

**Aim:** Birthday parties and holiday celebrations at school provide a unique opportunity to help make healthful eating fun and exciting for students. 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.

### Healthy Celebrations

### Getting Started How To's :

#### “Its Only a Cupcake...”

Typically, foods for school celebrations include cupcakes, candy, cookies and soda. There is nothing wrong with an occasional treat, but unhealthy choices have become the norm rather than the exception. Constant exposure to low-nutrient foods make it difficult for children to learn how to make healthy food choices. By providing students with nutritious choices whenever food is available (including the classroom), schools can positively influence children's eating habits.

#### 1. Benefits of Making Healthy Celebrations Happen

- ❖ **Healthy Kids Learn Better:** Good nutrition is linked to better behavior and academic performance.
- ❖ **Provides Consistent Messages:** Providing healthy celebrations demonstrates a school commitment to promoting healthy behaviors.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **Creates Excitement About Nutrition:** Students are often excited about new and different things, including fun celebration activities.

#### 2. Food for Thought

Schools can help promote a positive learning environment by providing healthy celebrations that **shift the focus from the food to the child**. Examples include:

- ❖ When food is served make it count with healthy choices.
- ❖ Incorporate a fun nutrition lesson in the celebration by involving students in the planning and preparation of healthy snacks.
- ❖ Put food in its proper place. Refreshments should complement the fun, not become the main event.
- ❖ Don't use food as rewards or prizes.
- ❖ Choose foods for fun, good taste and health. Parties that feature healthful foods provide opportunities of students to practice making

wise food choices.

### 3. Healthy and Festive Foods

- ❖ Fresh fruit salads. Mix apples, bananas, or pears with acidic fruits like oranges, pineapple, or lemon juice to keep them from turning brown.
- ❖ Frozen juice bars (100% juice)
- ❖ Fun shaped fruit pieces (cut with cookie cutters)
- ❖ Snack mixes with dry whole-grain cereal, dried fruit and unsalted nuts or seeds.
- ❖ Fruit smoothies with fat-free or low-fat milk or yogurt with fresh or frozen fruit. Try bananas, peaches, strawberries, or other berries.
- ❖ Fruit with a dip or dressing. Try fat-free or low-fat yogurt as a dip for fruits like strawberries or melons.
- ❖ Fruit kabobs using pineapple chunks, bananas, grapes, and berries.
- ❖ Veggie pizza
- ❖ Vegetable trays with low-fat dip
- ❖ Celery and carrots with peanut butter and raisins.
- ❖ Use new shapes for sandwiches, vegetables, and fruits (for example, by using cookie cutters).
- ❖ Make a “float” by adding a scoop of sorbet or sherbet to club soda instead of serving soda pop.
- ❖ Make fun ice cubes by freezing fruit juice (using ice-cube trays with different shapes for the cubes) and then add cubes to club soda for a fizzy iced drink.

**Keys to Success:** Start with small changes at first and ease into the transition of making changes to what’s offered for celebrations. Remember the goal is to create a celebration that shifts the focus from the food to the child.

**More Information:** [United States Department of Agriculture My Plate](#)

[Create Healthy, Active Celebrations. Easy Ways To Eat Smart and Play Hard with Friends and Family. USDA 2008](#)

**References:** [Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Health and Nutrition Services and child/Family /School Partnerships. \*Healthy Celebrations\* \(2007\).](#)