Healthy Celebrations

Focus on the activities and not just the food!

Celebrations are a great way for children to feel part of the school community because the learning environment is festive and children, teachers, and parents can come together to enjoy a break from the routine. Many questions about school parties have been echoing throughout the state.

Can children still have parties at school? YES, ABSOLUTELY. The new nutrition policy does not restrict schools from having parties. It does give specific guidance to help protect the health and safety of children in regards to sanitation issues and dietary restrictions.

Can I send homemade foods to school? Schools are responsible to ensure a healthy and safe learning environment. Therefore, all items brought for the children’s consumption must be commercially packaged from a reliable provider. Nutrient labels and ingredient lists must be available for teachers to determine if the item is safe for all children. Food and drinks need to meet the state’s nutrition standards (See box below). Parents may certainly send homemade items for their own children’s consumption. However, if a child brings in a food or a beverage from home or an outside source, that food or drink cannot be given to other students due to food safety or special diet issues.

Are candy and other “sweets” really an issue at school? You might be surprised at how many celebrations involving food that schools host throughout the school year. The truth is that most of the children want to participate in activities and play; it is the parents who associate food with a celebration. With West Virginia a national leader in childhood obesity, it is essential for teachers and parents to model the behaviors we want our children to follow. The West Virginia Department of Education has one of the strongest policies in the country to help combat the problem, but we need everyone’s help to ensure our children grow up to be healthy and productive citizens. Over the past year, children around the state have experienced FUN school parties including lots of activities and healthy snacks. We appreciate our parents’ involvement and cooperation in planning these fun events.

All foods and beverages made available to students during the school day (sold, served, or distributed) must meet certain requirements per product/package:

- Total calories no more than 200;
- Total fat no more than 35% of calories, excluding nuts, seeds or cheese;
- Saturated fat less than 10% of the total calories;
- Trans fat less than or equal to 0.5 grams per product/package;
- Reduce sugar content of food items to no more than 35% of calories excluding fruits and yogurt;
- Limit sodium to no more than 200 mg;
- Serve only water, 100% fruit and/or vegetable juice (no added sugar, 4 ounces for elementary and 8 ounces for secondary), and non-fat and/or 1% low-fat milk, flavored or unflavored;
- No candy, soft drinks, chewing gum or flavored ice bars, caffeine beverages, foods with non-nutritive/artificial sweeteners.

To learn more about the state’s school nutrition policy (4321.1), see the WV Department of Education’s website at http://wvde.state.wv.us/policies or contact your local school system’s child nutrition office.
Did You Know?
If you are overweight or obese as a child or adolescent, you are more likely to become overweight as an adult, which puts you at an increased risk for developing serious health conditions. (American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Vol. 76, No. 3, 653-658)

Important suggestions for the Parent/Caregivers:
Ways to decrease the amount of saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol in your diet include:
- Cut back on fried foods
- Limit drinking whole milk—choose fat-free or low fat instead
- Hold the mayo on sandwiches and burgers—try ketchup and mustard instead
- Limit high-fat snacks
- Remove skin from chicken
- Eat smaller portions of processed and fast foods

Party Ideas:
Fun with Balloons!

Round-Up: Mark off an area with tape to serve as a corral or use a large tub. Toss balloons outside the play area and have students round them up into the corral without using their hands. The object is to get as many balloons as possible into the corral before time has expired.

Bust the Bronco: Have students tie one end of a string or ribbon to a balloon and the other end to one ankle. Then using their free foot, players try to safely burst others’ balloons. The last player with a balloon is the winner.

Tip: Check for any students with latex allergies before using balloons.

Healthy Snack: Wagon Wheels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredients</th>
<th>Nutritional Information Per Serving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8-ounce package fat-free cream cheese, softened</td>
<td>calories 57, fat 16 g, cholesterol 0 mg, sodium 183 mg, fiber 1 g, calcium 33 mg, vitamin A 27 RE, vitamin C 3 mg, protein 3 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 ounces turkey breast, thinly sliced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-inch flour tortillas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cups spinach leaves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 cups apple juice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 8-ounce package fat-free cream cheese, softened</td>
<td>calories 57, fat 16 g, cholesterol 0 mg, sodium 183 mg, fiber 1 g, calcium 33 mg, vitamin A 27 RE, vitamin C 3 mg, protein 3 g</td>
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Note: As a classroom activity, the teacher or designated adult can purchase the ingredients. Have students wash their hands and then work in groups to prepare the wagon wheels the day before. May want to serve apple juice or water with snack.

WV School Wellness Success Story: Lincoln County Panthers

Lincoln County began using team nutrition training grant funds in 1996 to develop ways to improve the school nutrition environment. Through Team Nutrition Activities, Lincoln County High School saw an increase in breakfast participation by nine percent and twenty-two percent more students drank milk during the 2007-2008 school year. During the high school’s grand opening, healthy snacks which included school grown spices and herbs were offered to over 1800 people. Digital message boards introduce nutrition and physical fitness tips each week and market the daily menu with healthier choices. Taste testing foods allowed students to have input into which food products they preferred. The after-school health program targets obesity prevention. Healthy refreshments are a must for school parties, including the concert series where refreshments are sold to the public.

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