

Healthy Schools Program Healthy Celebrations Let's Celebrate!

Why does it matter?

It is important to provide consistent messaging around foods and beverages and healthy eating throughout your school building or out-of-school time program. Promoting healthy options during meal or snack times while allowing foods high in calories, fat, sugar and sodium at celebrations sends youth conflicting messages. Celebrations can include healthy options, but holidays and birthdays can also take on a non-food focus and instead provide opportunities for more play and time to enjoy music, dance, games, sports and other fun activities. Evolving policies and standards around foods and beverages allowed in schools and out-of-school time programs creates the opportunity for starting new traditions to celebrate special days throughout the school year or during out-of-school time.

What can you do?

- Include language in your district, school or program wellness policy regarding celebrations. Use language from the Healthy Schools Program or Healthy Out-of-School Time Frameworks as your policy statement.
- Promote the policy change on the school's website, in newsletters, on bulletin boards, during wellness fairs or on social media.
- Provide letters to parents explaining the policy around celebrations and why it is being implemented. Explain that only foods and beverages that meet the USDA Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards will be allowed.

Give me some examples!

*Non-Food Celebrations**

- Games or crafts – ask parents to bring supplies for a game or craft project
- Let's trade! Ask parents to bring small items to trade, such as pencils, stickers or erasers
- Dance party
- Extra recess or play time
- Special book
- Guest readers
- Activity time
- Overnight stuffed animal or item from class or program
- Special show and tell
- Special time with principal, teacher or site staff – take a walk around the school or playground
- Organize a community project
- Have a themed scavenger hunt around the school or site
- Stock a treasure chest – ask parents to bring items such as pencils, stickers and erasers or other small trinkets to fill the chest
- Allow the birthday child to be the class or site assistant for the day to help with special tasks, such as making deliveries around the school or site or lead the line
- Make it an event! Allow the birthday child to wear a special sash and crown or carry a special item

*For birthday celebrations, allow the birthday child to choose the game, activity, music, item, book, etc.

Healthy Celebrations

*Healthy Snack and Beverages Ideas**

- Water
- 100% fruit juice with no added sugar
- Fat-free or low fat milk
- Fruit smoothies (made with frozen fruit with no added sugar and fat-free or low fat yogurt)
- 100% fruit juice slushes with no added sugar
- Fresh fruit – trays, salads or kabobs
- Fresh vegetables – trays, salads or kabobs
- Fat-free or low fat yogurt (alone or as dip for fruits or vegetables)
- Yogurt parfaits (fat-free or low fat yogurt, fruit and whole grain cereal or granola as topping)
- Canned fruit or fruit cups (in water, 100% fruit juice or light syrup)
- Frozen fruit or fruit cups (in water, 100% fruit juice or light syrup)
- Frosty fruits – freeze your own fruit (frozen grapes make a great summer treat!)
- Dried fruit with no added sugar
- Nut or seed butter (serve with fruit or whole grain crackers)
- Nuts or seeds
- Trail mix made of nuts or seeds and dried fruit with no added sugar
- Whole grain crackers
- Low-fat cheese (serve with fruit or whole grain crackers)
- Hummus (serve with vegetables or whole grain crackers)
- Small whole grain waffles or pancakes topped with fruit or nut or seed butter
- Whole grain pretzels (soft or crunchy)
- Low-fat or air-popped popcorn (no added butter or salt)
- Graham crackers
- Nut or seed butter and jelly sandwiches on whole grain bread
- Small whole grain bagels or English muffins with nut or seed butter or jelly
- Pizza (on whole grain crust with low fat cheese and lean protein or vegetable toppings)
- Roll-ups on whole grain tortillas (fill with a lean protein such as ham or turkey, low fat cheese, hummus, nut or seed butter and jelly or vegetables)
- Fat-free or low fat pudding
- Bean quesadillas or burritos made with whole grain tortillas with salsa
- Whole grain cereal bars
- Baked whole grain tortilla chips with salsa or bean dip
- Baked chips (small portions)

*Check ingredient statements and nutrition information to ensure items meet the USDA Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards. Ensure food allergies of any participants are known before serving any food item.

Healthy Celebrations

Engaging Parents and Students

- Create a party idea book or menu to send home at the beginning of the school year or program start date – allow students to choose their celebration activity
- Provide a healthy snack list to parents
- Let the students plan a healthy party menu and prepare the food for their celebration – ask parents to bring ingredients
 - Snacks such as smoothies, yogurt parfaits, trail mix, roll ups or other items that young people can assemble are great ways to get students involved in the preparation.
- Allow students to use cookie cutters to make foods into fun shapes
- Plan theme menus – use monthly, seasonal or holiday themes
 - For example, serve warm apple cider (100% juice) in the fall, toasted pumpkin seeds October, or turkey roll-ups in November. Make red and green fruit kabobs in December, fill green peppers with fat-free or low fat yogurt dip in March, or hand out frosty fruits in the summer.

For more information on healthy celebrations or finding healthy snacks and beverages, contact Jill Turley, National Nutrition Advisor at the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, at jill.turley@healthiergeneration.org.