

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. VASA 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 MyPyramid 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.

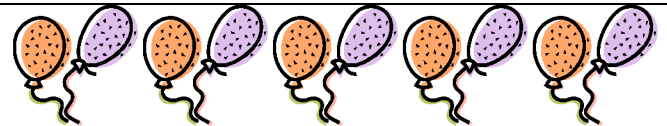
Benefits of Healthy Celebrations

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).



How-To's for Happy Healthy Parties

- 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 complement the fun, not become the “main event.”
- Be sure that each child receives a prize or favor, if such rewards are given.
- Don't use food as rewards or prizes.
- Choose foods for fun, good taste and health. Parties that feature healthful food provide opportunities for children to practice making wise food choices. 

VASA's Birthday Celebration Policy

VASA can help promote a positive learning environment by providing healthy celebrations that shift the focus from the food to the child. Choose a variety of activities, games and crafts that children enjoy. When food is served, make it count with healthy choices! Parties can even incorporate a fun nutrition lesson by involving children in the planning and preparation of healthy snacks. The ideas below are VASA approved fun activities and healthy foods at school for parties and other celebrations.

Activities to Celebrate the Child (last 15 minutes of school day)

- Plan special party games and activities. Parents/Guardians can provide game supplies, pencils, erasers, stickers and other small school supplies instead of food.
- Extra recess time, let the birthday child choose and lead an active game for everyone.
- Instead of food, Parents/Guardians can purchase a book for the classroom or school library in the birthday child's name. The Parent/Guardian can read it to the class or the teacher can read it to the class.
- Create a "Celebrate Me" book. Have classmates write stories or poems and draw pictures to describe what is special about the birthday child.
- The birthday child visits the Executive Director's office for a special birthday surprise.

Healthy Food Ideas (if it is not listed below it must be approved by calling the office at 559-497-8272)

- Low-fat or nonfat plain or flavored milk, 100% juice, water, flavored/sparkling water (without added sugars or sweeteners), sparkling punch (seltzer and 100% fruit juice)
- Fruit smoothies (blend berries, bananas and pineapple)
- Fresh fruit assortment, fruit and cheese kabobs, fruit salad, fruit with low-fat whipped topping
- Dried fruit (raisins, cranberries, apricots, banana chips), 100% fruit snacks
- Vegetable trays with low-fat dip
- Whole-grain crackers with cheese, string cheese or hummus
- Pretzels, low-fat popcorn, rice cakes, bread sticks, graham crackers and animal crackers
- Angel food cake, plain or topped with fruit
- Bagel slices with jam, fruit or grain muffin (low-fat), whole wheat English muffin, hot pretzels
- Pizza with low-fat toppings (vegetables, lean ham, Canadian bacon)
- Ham, cheese or turkey sandwiches or wraps (with low-fat condiments)
- Low-fat pudding, low-fat yogurt, yogurt smoothies, yogurt parfaits or banana splits (yogurt and fruit topped with cereal, granola or crushed graham crackers)
- Quesadillas or bean burrito with salsa
- Low-fat breakfast or granola bars
- Low-fat tortilla chips with salsa or bean dip
- Trail/cereal mix (whole-grain, low-sugar cereals mixed with dried fruit, pretzels, etc.)

*Check for food allergies before serving.

VASA's Party Celebration Policy

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