



Promoting Health in Minnesota Schools:

HEALTHY CLASSROOM SNACKS & CELEBRATIONS

As society becomes more aware of and concerned with children's health issues, communities are turning to schools to provide a school environment that promotes both healthy eating and physical activity.¹ School policies supporting healthy eating and physical activity are an important component of school efforts to promote the health and well-being of school children. Evidence shows that good nutrition and physical activity are linked to academic achievement.² Providing healthy snacks and celebrations in the classroom is an important opportunity to reinforce healthy eating behaviors in children.

What are healthy classroom snacks and celebrations?

With daily snacks and frequent holiday and birthday parties, many snacks and celebratory foods are served in schools. Usually, though, foods served as snacks and during classroom parties are unhealthy, such as pizza, sugary drinks, cake, ice cream, or candy.³ Offering healthier or non-food options is a way to take advantage of snack time and parties as opportunities for students to learn about healthy eating.⁴

Why are healthy classroom snacks and celebrations important?

Many children consume more than half their daily calories at school.⁵ Snack time and birthday celebrations can serve to undercut nutrition education if lessons are contradicted by rewards of candy, sweets, and junk food. Unfortunately, unhealthy snacks and party foods that are low in nutrients and high in fat, added sugars, and sodium are the norm rather than the exception in the classroom. Rewarding children with junk food teaches them to prefer unhealthy foods and to eat when they are not hungry as a reward to themselves. This can contribute to the development of unhealthy eating habits.⁶

However, classroom snacks and celebrations can also provide a unique opportunity for children to learn about nutrition and health. Serving healthy foods to children reinforces nutritional education, helping schools provide a comprehensive learning environment that can influence children's choices about their

health and well-being into adulthood. Bringing healthy food into parties and celebrations can make eating well fun and exciting for children.⁷

What are examples of healthy classroom snacks and celebrations?

Children can be served healthy snacks and celebratory foods in the classroom, such as:⁸

- Fresh fruit
- Fresh vegetables w/ low fat ranch dip
- Low fat cottage cheese
- Low fat or nonfat yogurt
- Sweet potato muffin
- String cheese
- Black bean & corn salad
- Cereal bar
- Cheese cubes
- Carrot salad
- Fruit muffin
- Whole grain crackers
- Whole grain tortilla chips and fresh salsa
- String cheese
- Applesauce
- Plain low fat milk/nonfat chocolate milk

Schools can also avoid serving food as part of classroom celebrations altogether, which also makes parties more inclusive for children with food allergies. Non-food items that can be given to children as part of a celebration include bubbles, stickers, temporary tattoos, erasers, silly straws, and mini cans of Play-Doh.⁹ Children can also be recognized on their birthdays by being given special privileges, such as:¹⁰

- Wearing a sign, sash, crown, button, or badge
- Being the teacher's assistant for the day; doing special tasks like making deliveries to the office or being the line leader
- Choosing an activity or game for the class to play
- Picking a book that the principal or a parent can come in and read

Do any federal or Minnesota laws require a healthy classroom snacks and celebrations policy?

Yes, federal law requires that local education agencies include standards in local school wellness policies for all foods and beverages provided to students during the school day for any school participating in the national school meals program.¹¹ This includes any classroom snack and/or food provided during classroom celebrations that are not sold. Minnesota law follows these federal requirements.

Does the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA)¹² Model Wellness Policy¹³ address healthy classroom snacks and celebrations?

Yes. MSBA Model Policy 533, Part IV(D)(1) addresses foods offered to students on the school campus, including foods provided through celebrations and parties and classroom snacks brought by parents:

Students' wellness will be a consideration for all foods offered, but not sold, to students on the school campus, including those foods provided through:

- a. Celebrations and parties. The school district will provide a list of healthy party ideas to parents and teachers, including non-food celebration ideas.
- b. Classroom snacks brought by parents. The school district will provide to parents a list of suggested foods and beverages that meet Smart Snacks nutrition standards.

Could existing MSBA policies be used to support healthy classroom snacks and celebrations?

Yes. The MSBA has several policies that could be used, with additional language, to support the creation and management of a healthy classroom snacks and celebrations initiative, including:

- 511 (Student Fundraising)
- 533 (Wellness)
- 601 (School District Curriculum and Instruction Goals)

How can healthy classroom snacks and celebrations be incorporated into a school wellness policy?

Below is language that can be incorporated into a school board policy modeled after the MSBA's model policy. This language can also be individually tailored to fit into a school board policy that does not follow the MSBA's model.

Addition to the MSBA School Wellness Policy

533 WELLNESS

IV. STANDARDS AND NUTRITION GUIDELINES

D. Other Foods and Beverages Made Available to Students

1. Students' wellness will be a consideration for all foods offered, but not sold, to students on the school campus, including those foods provided through:
 - a. Celebrations and parties.
 - i. The school district will provide a list of healthy party ideas to parents and teachers, including non-food celebration ideas.
 - ii. Parents will be instructed to "Please refrain from sending/bringing in any food/candy/drinks unless specifically requested by your teacher or room parent." This will include items to be sent home with the students. "Goody bags" that contain only non-edible items (e.g., erasers, stickers) will be allowed.¹⁴
 - iii. Celebrations that involve food during the school day will be limited to no more than one party per class per month.¹⁵ Each party should include no more than one food or beverage that does not meet the USDA's Smart Snack nutrition standards.¹⁶
 - b. Classroom snacks brought by parents.
 - i. The school district will provide to parents a list of suggested foods and beverages that meet Smart Snacks nutrition standards.
 - ii. Snacks served during the school day or in after-school programs should make positive contributions to children's diets and health, with an emphasis on serving fruits and vegetables as the primary snacks and water as the primary beverage.¹⁷

What other ways can schools support healthy snacks and celebrations?

In Minnesota, the superintendent is responsible for implementing and enforcing school board policy. Additionally, school districts participating in the national school meals program must designate one or more school district official to ensure that each participating school complies with the local school wellness policy.¹⁸ This official may or may not be the superintendent of the school district.

Superintendents issue protocols, procedures, and guidelines to help implement the school board's policies. The following language can be incorporated into existing guidelines. However, as school boards and superintendents may adopt more specific or general guidelines based on their needs and goals, policy language can be interchangeable with the guidelines listed below.

Healthy Classroom Snacks & Celebrations Guidelines

- In an effort to preserve instructional time, birthdays will be recognized once per month in each classroom. July and August birthdays will be recognized either mid-year as “half birthdays” or near the end of the school year.¹⁹ Refreshments should complement the fun, not become the “main event.”²⁰
- The superintendent, with the assistance of the School Health Council, will provide a list of foods and beverages that are acceptable for snack food and celebration use in the classroom. Listed healthy foods will meet the USDA's Smart Snack nutrition standards.²¹
- The superintendent, with the assistance of the School Health Council, will develop an implementation plan to ensure parents/legal guardians are provided with the list.
- The superintendent, with the assistance of the School Health Council, will develop and promote school-wide guidelines for teachers and other school staff to appropriately implement this policy, including tools to respond when students and/or parents do not comply with the healthy snack policy.

Last updated June 2017.

This publication was prepared by the Public Health Law Center at Mitchell Hamline School of Law, St. Paul, Minnesota, made possible with funding from the Minnesota Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Public Health Law Center provides information and technical assistance on issues related to public health. The Public Health Law Center does not provide legal representation or advice. This document should not be considered legal advice. For specific legal questions, consult with an attorney.



The Public Health Law Center thanks Terri Swartout from the Minnesota Department of Education and Cathy Miller from the Minnesota School Boards Association for their assistance in reviewing and providing feedback on this document.

*For related publications, visit
www.publichealthlawcenter.org*

Endnotes

- ¹ See *Local Wellness Policy Law*, MINN. DEP'T OF EDUC. (2017), <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hpcd/chp/cdrr/nutrition/schoolwellness/localwellnesspolicy.html>.
- ² Health and Academic Achievement, CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (May 2014), https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/pdf/health-academic-achievement.pdf.
- ³ *Healthy School Celebrations*, CENT. FOR SCIENCE IN THE PUB. INTEREST (Mar. 16, 2016), http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/healthy_school_celebrations.pdf.
- ⁴ *Healthy Celebrations: Promoting a Healthy School Environment*, CONN. DEP'T OF EDUC. (Nov. 2011), http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Student/NutritionEd/Healthy_Celebrations.pdf.
- ⁵ *Improve the Health of Schools*, LET'S MOVE!, <https://letsmove.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/improve-health-schools> (last visited Jun. 26, 2017).
- ⁶ *Alternatives to Food as Reward*, HEALTHIER SAN FRANCISCO (Feb. 2007), http://www.healthiersf.org/nutrition/Action6/1-Teach_Students/docs/Alternatives%20to%20Food_As_Reward.pdf.
- ⁷ *Healthy Celebrations: Promoting a Healthy School Environment*, CONN. DEP'T OF EDUC. (Nov. 2011), http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Student/NutritionEd/Healthy_Celebrations.pdf.
- ⁸ Smart Food Planner, ALLIANCE FOR A HEALTHIER GENERATION (2017), <https://foodplanner.healthiergeneration.org/menu-plans/its-snack-time/>.
- ⁹ Aviva Goldfarb, *Healthy Treats for Class Celebrations*, PBS KITCHEN EXPLORERS (Feb. 14, 2012), <http://www.pbs.org/parents/kitchenexplorers/2012/02/14/healthy-class-birthday-celebrations/>.
- ¹⁰ *Healthy Celebrations: Promoting a Healthy School Environment*, CONN. DEP'T OF EDUC. (Nov. 2011), http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Student/NutritionEd/Healthy_Celebrations.pdf.
- ¹¹ 7 CFR 210.31(c)(3) (2016).
- ¹² LEAGUE OF MINNESOTA CITIES, HANDBOOK FOR MINNESOTA CITIES 16:13 (Nov. 2016), *available at* <https://www.lmc.org/media/document/1/intergovernmentalcooperation.pdf> (“The Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) supports, promotes and enhances the work of public school boards. MSBA is a private nonprofit organization that provides technical assistance; cost-saving programs; and advocacy, training, research, and referral services for all of Minnesota’s public schools. Membership in MSBA is voluntary.”).
- ¹³ *MSBA/MASA Model Policy 533: Wellness*, MINN. SCHOOL BOARD ASS'N & MINN. ASS'N OF SCHOOL ADMIN. (2017).
- ¹⁴ *Food in the Classroom Policy – FAQs*, ARLINGTON, VA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (2011), <http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/1219/11-FoodPolicyFAQ--0921.pdf>
- ¹⁵ *Model Local School Wellness Policies on Physical Activity and Nutrition*, NAT'L ALLIANCE FOR NUTR. & ACTIVITY 13 (Mar. 2005), <http://www.schoolwellnesspolicies.org/resources/NANAWellnessPolicies.pdf>.
- ¹⁶ 7 CFR 210.11 (2016).
- ¹⁷ *Wellness Policy*, TURLOCK SCHOOLS CHILD NUTRITION (2017), <https://cnd-turlockusd-ca.schoolloop.com/wellnesspolicy>.
- ¹⁸ 7 CFR 210.31(e)(1) (2016).
- ¹⁹ *Food in the Classroom Policy – FAQs*, ARLINGTON, VA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (2011), <http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/1219/11-FoodPolicyFAQ--0921.pdf>.
- ²⁰ *Healthy Celebrations: Promoting a Healthy School Environment*, CONN. DEP'T OF EDUC. (Nov. 2011), http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Student/NutritionEd/Healthy_Celebrations.pdf.
- ²¹ 7 CFR 210.11 (2016).