

For Parents: The Pennsylvania Department of Education Nutrition Standards for Classroom Parties & Holiday Celebrations

Your school has adopted The Pennsylvania Department of Education Nutrition Standards. The nutrition standards require that fewer (up to three) high-sugar foods be served at classroom parties (such as cupcakes). Also, parties must have fruits and vegetables and healthy drinks like water, milk or juice.

By following these standards, your school will receive extra money and help promote good nutrition. Here are some tips to follow if you are asked to bring food to your child's classroom party.



Safe Fruits and Vegetables for Classroom Parties. Your school food service may provide the fresh fruits and vegetables. However, if you are asked to bring them, be sure to wash your hands before handling fruits or vegetables, wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly (unless they are ready-to-serve) and use clean counters, utensils and cutting boards. Keep fruits and vegetables refrigerated until they are served.

Share the Load. Multiple parents may be asked to bring food items. For example: one parent can bring a bag of pre-sliced apples, one parent can bring a bag of broccoli florets. A third parent can bring a bottle of low-fat ranch dressing as a vegetable dip. Cost is distributed among several parents instead of one!

Best Values. Bananas, apples, carrots and grapes can usually be purchased at a low cost. Consider purchasing farm stand, weekly special or generic produce. Here is a partial list of in-season produce:

January: Mangos, Oranges, Peppers, Cucumbers
February: Apples, Potatoes, Bananas, Mushrooms
March: Cauliflower, Cabbage, Celery
April: Artichokes, Avocados, Pineapple, Grape Tomatoes
May: Asparagus, Spinach, Rhubarb, Strawberries
June: Green Beans, Peaches, Apricots, Lemons, Limes
July: Sweet Corn, Blueberries, Cantaloupe, Watermelon
August: Papaya, Honeydew, Nectarines, Raspberries
September: Radishes, Zucchini, Tomatoes, Plums
October: Carrots, Grapes, Jicama, Apples
November: Pumpkins, Pears, Sweet Potatoes, Cranberries
December: Broccoli, Tangerines, Kiwi, Grapefruit

100% canned juice or juice as frozen concentrate is less expensive than the carton variety. Children can drink tap water if it is drinkable. A few parents can each bring a gallon jug of a beverage and another parent can provide small cups.

Check into money rebate programs (such as General Mills' Box Tops for Education) or a local grocery store rebate program that can earn money to be used to buy items for your school parties.

How Much Is Enough? Parties should provide the amount of fruit, vegetables and milk, juice or water for all students to select the healthier option if they so choose. If each student is served a 6-ounce beverage, three one-gallon jugs will be enough to supply 30 secondary school students; if each student is served a 4-ounce beverage, two one-gallon jugs will supply 30 elementary students.

Resources ... read the full-text Nutrition Standards at:

http://www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition/site/default.asp click School Nutrition Incentive & download [PDE's Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools](#) ... need fruit and vegetable themes or ideas on how to prepare fruits and vegetables in clever ways? See PDE's [Nutrition Education Resources to Help Promote Healthier Foods](#) handout for a recently updated list of online resources at http://www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition and follow the link to the School Nutrition Incentive Program.

Classroom Parties/ Holiday Celebrations

If we provide all required items at planned parties, but a parent brings in cupcakes on another day, what should we do? We would not want to send the parent away with cupcakes that they spent time baking.

Schools should inform parents through newsletters or other means that treats should only be brought in when requested for scheduled parties. We encourage schools to have scheduled parties once per month for all birthdays in the month, rather than every birthday. If a parent still brings in the treats on an unscheduled party day, you should inform the parent of the policy for future reference. We suggest that you provide the parent with a note thanking them for the treats that you will share, but letting the parent know the policy for the future. You may serve the treat, preferably after lunch is served, or at the end of the day for students to take home.

How does PDE define "moderate in sodium" under the "Classroom Parties/Holiday Celebrations"?

There is no standard definition for "moderate in sodium". For the purposes of these standards, entrees such as pizza should be less than 600 mg sodium per serving. Snack foods such as pretzels should be less than 480 mg sodium per serving (3). Compare labels to look for foods and snacks that are even lower in sodium. Most snacks should be less than 200 mg sodium per serving (1).

Do we need to keep any records of items served at parties (i.e., for the purposes of PDE monitoring)?

No, but you need to have record of how you communicated the policy to families and what your procedure is if a family does not comply.

Can birthdays be celebrated on a monthly basis in the cafeteria instead of individual classroom parties?

Yes, with the following stipulations:

- Treats must be available to all students (*Keep in mind students with special dietary needs.*)
- The treat must be provided after the meal (so students are not eating the treat instead of the meal).
- Fruits, vegetables and water, juice or milk must be available (which shouldn't be a problem due to the requirements of the reimbursable meal).

Can soda be provided at classroom parties?

No, soda is a Food of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV). PDE standards do not allow FMNV to be consumed by students on school grounds during the school day.

The classroom party standards require food service to offer party lists/menus that include food and beverage choices that meet certain criteria. Is food service required to actually sell these items, or can they just provide the list to guide choices?

At a minimum, Food Service must provide parents and teachers lists of party items that meet the criteria listed in the Standards. Parents and teachers should be encouraged to buy foods and beverages that are on the list. We would prefer that parents and teachers buy these party items from food service (rather than preparing them themselves) to help prevent food safety and allergy concerns. In addition, this can be an additional source of revenue for school food service. Therefore, we strongly suggest, but do not require, that food service also offer to provide/sell these items to parents and teachers for classroom parties.

1 Nutrition Standards Frequently Asked Questions 11 September 2008
For more information, visit PDE Website at
http://www.homelandsecurity.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/national_school_lunch/7487/psba_administrative_regulations_for_local_wellness_policies_step_2/509219



Healthy Snack Ideas

Try out some of these nutritious (and delicious) foods at your next event.

by Patti Ghezzi

Since the dawn of curriculum night, parent groups have lured families to school with pizza, spaghetti, sweetened beverages, and rich desserts. Now, many groups are shifting to healthier fare at their events, like fruit and whole-grain baked goods.

The push for healthier foods at school comes in response to an alarming rise in childhood obesity. Many school districts have created rules about what kinds of food can and can't be offered to students on school grounds. PTOs have adapted by changing recipes and introducing new snacks at family events. But that doesn't mean pizza is completely off the menu.

At its annual carnival last year, the Oak Knoll Elementary PTO in Williamstown, N.J., offered

fresh whole fruit such as apples and oranges, fruit salad (purchased frozen from a warehouse club), tubes of yogurt, and bottled water and juice bags at a chill table (a table kept cold with ice inside it). The PTO also offered the standard carnival fare of pizza, hot dogs, and popcorn.

All of the fruit and yogurt sold out, says PTO vice president Deborah Doyno. The yogurt tubes were especially in demand. "The kids would buy one and then come back later for another," Doyno says. She attributes part of the healthier table's success to its location. The kids saw the fruit before they saw other foods. Last year was a trial run, and this year the PTO will offer even more healthy options.

Oak Knoll PTO leaders have learned that kids

and parents will eat healthy food if it's offered. It's a lesson other groups have discovered as they discreetly add healthy options or swap out notoriously fattening food for lighter alternatives. Here are some ways you can make your family events healthier without alienating your audience.

Healthy hydration: The Oak Knoll PTO stopped offering soda several years ago, but leaders wanted to have more than bottled water at events. The solution was to sell sugar-free powdered drink packets that could

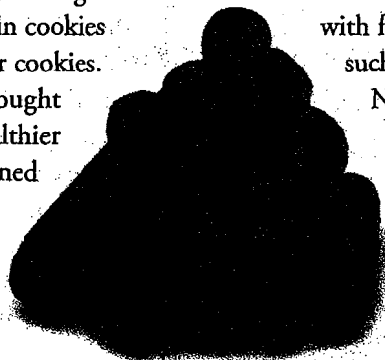


be added to bottles of water. Other lighter beverage offerings include low-fat milk, diluted juice, and seltzer spiked with

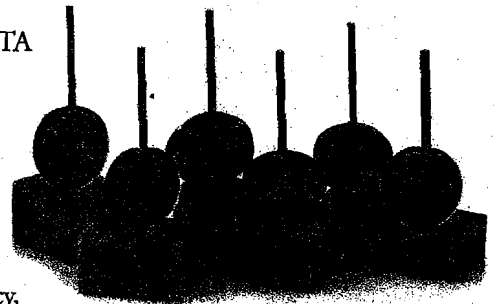
fruit juice. Don't underestimate the popularity of bottled water. Some parent groups have sold reusable water bottles with the school's logo, which buyers fill from a water cooler.

Waste not: A primary concern about serving fresh fruits and vegetables is fear that unsold items will go to waste. At Oak Knoll, the PTO donates leftover perishable items to the janitorial staff. They have found, however, that there usually is little waste to worry about and kids will eat what they are offered.

Better baked goods: The baked goods table is a staple of family events everywhere. Many sweet treats can be lightened up by altering the recipes. Common substitutions include using applesauce instead of vegetable oil, egg whites instead of a whole egg, or whole wheat flour instead of white flour. In many recipes, the sugar can be cut by one-third. Oatmeal raisin cookies have a fiber kick compared with other cookies. If you're required to provide store-bought treats, you can check the label for healthier ingredients. Many families are concerned about high-fructose corn syrup, preferring less-processed sweeteners like cane sugar or molasses. Look for prepared foods with few ingredients:



Thinking fancy: The PTA at Holiday Hill Elementary in Jacksonville, Fla., served toothpicks with cheese



cubes and grapes at its annual "Night of the Arts" event. The goal was to offer something a little more fancy, like what you might see at an art gallery opening. "The response was great," says president Jennifer Rees. "No one asked for a cookie or candy, and no one really even mentioned that it was a 'healthy' snack." Other healthy snacks that can be served kebab-style include olives, turkey meatballs, banana slices, cubed pineapples, apples and melon, berries, and grape tomatoes.

Budgeting time and money: Offering healthier snack alternatives can be more expensive, Rees says. The cost for the grape-and-cheese appetizer was about \$150. "With cookies, we would have only spent about \$50," she says. It also takes longer to wash and cut fresh fruit. Parent groups may need to budget more money and volunteers if they shift toward healthier food. Rees found that providing individual servings rather than free-for-all, self-serve trays cut down on cost a bit. The Holiday Hill PTA believes healthy food should be a priority. "This year we are working to offer cheese, yogurt, whole-grain crackers, or fruit at every event," Rees says. "Some of this will be alongside the more traditional snacks of cookies, popcorn, or pretzels."

Healthier trade-off: Often the healthier version of a junky food will appeal to kids. At Greenbrook Elementary in Kendall Park, N.J., baked chips and a lighter, more natural version of cheese curls went over well, along with fruit and finger-food veggies such as baby carrots. At Dean A. Naldrett Elementary in New Baltimore, Mich., the parent group served all-beef hot dogs at its field day event, along with watermelon and milk. And the PTSA at Newcastle (Wash.)

PROMOTE HEALTHY EATING

More ways PTOs can encourage good nutrition. ptotoday.com/magazine

Elementary sold cheese pizza instead of pepperoni at its Health and Family Fitness Night. Other small shifts include hearty trail mix instead of empty-calorie chips, reduced-sugar granola bars instead of cookies, fruit-based ice pops instead of ice cream, and whole-grain muffins instead of cupcakes.

Salad days: Newcastle Elementary ventured where some school groups fear to tread. At the PTSA's annual winter and spring events, it sold Caesar salad as an entree alternative or a side option to pizza. "At both events, the salad sold

out," says cotreasurer Lisa Vold. "We haven't made huge changes, but little changes have added up."

Reaching out to farmers:

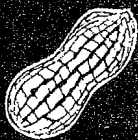
At Longfellow Elementary in San Francisco, the school nutritionist arranged produce donations from local organic farmers. The farmers donated fun foods such as yellow carrots. The PTA led a walk-to-school program on Wednesdays and used the opportunity to teach kids about a vegetable from the farm. "Our nutritionist would give me some [information on] the fruit or veggie of the week, and I would tell the kids what this fruit had in vitamins, what parts of our body it was good for, and how you can make other choices besides sugary cereal," says PTA president Jacquie Chavez. "All of the fruits and veggies could be eaten on the go." Many farmers already connect with schoolchildren through field trips and partnerships with school cafeterias. Teaching children where food comes from can win over even picky eaters.

Portion control: Something as simple as cutting a pie into 16 slices instead of eight can make a difference. Many parents have already switched from giant cupcakes to two-bite treats. A traditional spaghetti dinner can be made healthier by serving a smaller portion of spaghetti and a larger portion of salad, then skipping the garlic bread.

Switching to healthier foods is a delicate subject for some school communities. Different parents have different ideas for how healthy food should be. Many want to hold dear to school traditions and fear the food police will try to run out all the fun along with the sugar and fat. By making changes gradually, parent groups can assure everyone that a trend toward healthy food doesn't mean an all-out ban on cupcakes. And by serving healthier fare that looks and tastes great, you might find out that no one really misses the cupcakes, after all. ■

Food Allergies 411

Food allergies are a growing concern. It's important to prominently list all ingredients for anything you offer at a school event. Here are some tips for keeping kids safe and still serving great food.



Nut Allergies

Many schools have gone peanut-free in response to the large number of kids with peanut allergies. Some kids with peanut allergies can eat sunflower seeds and have sunflower butter as an alternative to peanut butter. But others cannot eat these products because of concerns about cross-contamination or because of sensitivities. Going nut-free is a safer bet for some school communities.



Gluten Sensitivity

Many children are sensitive to gluten, a protein found in wheat and other grains. Consider offering gluten-free baked goods alongside conventional cookies and brownies. Many grocery stores now sell gluten-free products. But be sure to read labels carefully. If you have questions, seek help from a parent of a gluten-sensitive child or from a health professional.



Lactose Intolerance

Kids who can't eat dairy products because of lactose intolerance sometimes have to pass by the bake sale table. Include a couple of items for dairy-sensitive kids and parents, such as pumpkin bread, oatmeal cookies, or vegan brownies. Your volunteer bakers may need to experiment in the kitchen a bit to find the right recipes.

