BENEFITS OF HEALTHY CELEBRATIONS  
(Connecticut State Department of Education)

- **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's 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. School staff and parents need not worry that children will be disappointed if typical party foods are not served in the classroom.

- **Protects children with food allergies**: when parents send in food, it is difficult to ensure the safety of children with food allergies. Schools can protect these students by providing nonfood celebrations.
HEALTHIER SCHOOL PARTIES

Classroom parties-like birthday and holiday celebrations-help kids relax, socialize, and have fun. There are plenty of ways to plan and organize parties and events that can teach kids healthy habits. Hosting healthier parties helps to teach children to enjoy celebrations that do not always involve a lot of sweet treats. Healthy school celebrations also promote positive lifestyle choices and reinforce good habits such as eating healthy food and being active. Avoid making refreshments the “main event” at parties. Don’t use food as a reward or prize.

Here are some ideas!

- **Activity is rewarding:** Let the birthday boy or girl be the teacher’s assistant for the day. He or she could walk deliveries to the office, lead the line or start an activity.

- **Giving is fun:** Turn a regular party into a special community service project. Invite senior citizens for lunch, or make blankets for rescue dogs. Parents can plan the events and bring materials.

- **A sweet story:** Rather than baking sweets, suggest that parents donate a book in their child’s name to the classroom or school library. Invite the parent to read the book to the class.

- **Celebration dance:** Have a celebration dance for the school and utilize songs like “YMCA, Macarena, the Chicken Dance, and Shout.”

- **Extra recess time:** Instead of an indoor party, give children extra recess time. At birthday parties, let the birthday boy or girl pick an active game for everyone.

- **Obstacle course:** Set up an obstacle course that is engineered for multiple participants.

- **Special walk:** Take a walk with the principal.

- **Movement:** Have fun with movement! Put on some great music and dance/move!

- **VIP Badge:** Single child out with a VIP button/badge or crown.

- **Sing:** Sing the birthday song.

- **Miniature golf:** Set up a miniature golf course.

- **Sleep-over:** Have a staged sleep-over; children bring in sleeping bags/pillows and lie on the floor telling stories.

- **Different Drinks:** Serve low-fat (1%) or nonfat milk (plain or flavored), 100% juice and water at parties.

- **Chip-less:** Substitute pretzels, low-fat popcorn, rice cakes, bread sticks, graham crackers or animal crackers.

- **Healthy Pizza:** When the party calls for pizza, try low-fat toppings like vegetables, lean ham or Canadian bacon, or serve pizza dippers with marinara sauce.
HEALTHIER FOOD IDEAS

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

Fresh fruit assortment, fruit and cheese kabobs, fruit salad, fruit with low-fat whipped topping

Dried fruit (raisins, cranberries, and apricots) 100% fruit snacks

Vegetable trays

Whole grain crackers with cheese cubes, string cheese, hummus

Waffles or pancakes topped with fruit

Pretzels, low-fat popcorn, rice cakes, bread sticks, graham crackers, animal crackers

Angel food cake, plain or topped with fruit

Bagels slices with peanut butter or jam, fruit or grain muffins, hot pretzels

Pizza with low fat toppings (vegetables, lean ham, Canadian bacon) pizza dippers with marinara sauce

Ham, cheese or turkey sandwiches or wraps

Low-fat pudding, low-fat yogurt, squeezable yogurt, yogurt smoothies, yogurt parfaits or banana splits (yogurt and fruit topped cereal, granola or crushed graham crackers)

Build your own salad bar-set out veggies and then build your own salad

Low-fat breakfast or granola bars, trail mix, cereal

Low-fat tortilla chips with salsa or bean dip

Nuts and seeds

Tip: Serve with fun plates, napkins, and cups

This publication was made possible through SHIP funding from the Minnesota Department of Health.