

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.



Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods in Pennsylvania Schools Fact Sheet for Parents



Your school has chosen to follow the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods. By following these standards, your school will earn extra money to help buy healthier foods. This fact sheet will tell you more about these standards and how they benefit your child.

What are competitive foods?

Competitive foods are foods and beverages in schools that are not part of the federally reimbursed school lunch or breakfast meals. They include a la carte food or beverages from the school cafeteria (sold separate from the school lunch or breakfast meal), vending, fundraisers, school stores, classroom parties, or food rewards.

Why does my school need nutrition standards for competitive foods?

All schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program are required by law to have nutrition standards to help promote good health and prevent obesity. Many children eat too much junk food and not enough fruits, vegetables, milk, and whole grains. More children are becoming overweight or getting diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes that may be partly caused by poor eating. Schools can help keep children healthier by offering and promoting nutritious foods in schools.

How will the PDE Nutrition Standards for Competitive Foods benefit my child?

The PDE Standards will make it easier and more appealing for your child to choose healthy foods. Children who eat well are healthier and do better in school. Your school will offer and promote more fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lower fat milk and dairy foods. Your school will decrease foods and beverages that are high in calories from fat and sugar, and oversized portions.

Will soda (pop), candy, cookies, chips and other treats still be offered or sold in schools?

Your school may still choose to offer or sell some types of cookies, candy, and chips. They may not offer or sell soda, chewing gum, and certain types of candies during the school day. Healthier foods should always be available and promoted as an alternative.

Can we still bring in treats for birthdays and other celebrations?

Check with your school before providing treats. Most schools will only allow treats on certain days when parties are scheduled. Parties may include up to three treats with sugar as the first ingredient. But, the parties must also include fresh fruits and vegetables and water, milk or 100% juice to drink. In some schools, the school food service can help provide these items for a small fee. Soda or "pop" is not allowed at parties.

Do the standards affect foods sold at sporting events, fundraisers, or other after school activities?

The PDE Standards only apply to foods and beverages on the school grounds during the school day. However, we still encourage healthier items at after school events. Check your school's policy about after-school events, because your school may have a stricter policy.

Do the standards affect the lunches or snacks that we pack for our children?

PDE encourages students to participate in the school meals. If your child(ren) choose(s) to pack, try to provide a healthy lunch with foods like whole grains, fruits, vegetables and low fat dairy products. However, the standards do not affect any lunches or snacks that you provide for your child only.

What can parents do to help?

Check your school's policy before providing foods or beverages to the school students. This will help your school follow required policies. Also, some students may have serious food allergies.

How can I get more information?

Go to the PDE Food and Nutrition Website www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition/. Click on the link that says "School Nutrition Incentive." You will be able to view the nutrition standards document, and other information such as handouts for parents on classroom parties and healthy snacks.

Nutrition Standards Fact Sheet: Parties and Celebrations

For Schools Participating in Pennsylvania's School Nutrition Incentive: Effective July 2008

Classroom Parties and Holiday Celebrations (during the school day):

- You may offer up to 3 treats such as cake, cupcakes, or chocolate that have added sugar^{***} as the first ingredient. These foods may not be Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV)^{**}
- Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV)^{**} such as soda/pop are not allowed at parties.
- You must offer fresh fruits and vegetables.
- You must offer plain water, milk, or 100% juice to drink. (Drinkable tap water is fine.)

Food service must offer parents and teachers a list of party items that meet the criteria below:

- Moderate in sodium (most snacks should contain less than 200 mg. sodium per serving)
- Minimal to no trans fats (zero grams trans fat on the label)
- Include items that contain > 2 grams fiber per serving
- Offer fresh fruits and vegetables
- Offer water, 100% juice, or milk to drink
- No Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV)^{**}

Parents and teachers should be encouraged to purchase items on this list. If possible, food service should offer to sell these items to parents and teachers for the parties.

****FMNV include:** carbonated beverages, water ices, chewing gum, hard candy, jelly/gum candy, marshmallow, candy corn, mints, licorice, cotton candy, candy coated popcorn.

*****Names for sugar include:** brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, glucose, high fructose corn syrup, honey, invert sugar, lactose, maltose, molasses, raw sugar, sucrose, sugar, syrup.

IMPORTANT: Make sure students do not have allergies or dietary restrictions to the foods served.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) recommends:

- Parents and teachers should purchase party items from food service (rather than preparing them themselves) to help prevent food safety and allergy concerns.
- Schedule birthday parties once per month, rather than every birthday.
- Plan parties that focus on activities, rather than food. For ideas, go to:
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhardhealthy/lifestyle/QuickandEasy/celebrations.pdf>

Great resources on the PDE website www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition. Click on "School Nutrition Incentive" and look for:

[PDE Nutrition Standards for Classroom and Holiday Parties \(PDF\)](#)
For Food Service Professionals

[PDE Nutrition Standards for Classroom and Holiday Parties \(PDF\)](#)
For Parents

What if a parent brings in treats when schools don't have the required fruits and vegetables?

Inform parents through newsletters, websites, etc. that treats should only be brought in when requested for scheduled parties. If a parent still brings in the treats on an unscheduled party day, inform the parent of the policy for future reference. We suggest providing a note thanking them for the treats, but letting them know the policy for the future. You may serve the treat, preferably after lunch is served.

Can we provide birthday treats in the cafeteria?

Yes, but the treat must be available to all students. It must be provided after the meal, so students are not eating the treat instead of the meal. Fruits and vegetables and water, 100% juice or milk must be available. This should not be a problem since reimbursable meal rules already require offering most of these items.

Q&A

School Wellness Policies Parent Fact Sheet

Fact: Many children
● have poor
● eating habits.

Fact: Many children
● are not
● physically active.

Fact: There has been
● a major increase
● in the number
of children who are overweight or obese.

Finding solutions to these problems is not an easy task. It involves many areas of our society, including schools. Schools can play a key role in addressing the nutrition, health and weight issues affecting children today.

The good news is that schools are making changes. Schools now have wellness policies that encourage good nutrition and physical activity habits. Wellness policies promote student health, now and into the future. And they can help students reach their full academic potential – because healthier students are better learners.

Q *What is a wellness policy?*

● Federal law requires schools that take part in the National School Lunch Program to have a wellness policy.

● A wellness policy helps promote student health and encourages children to eat healthy foods and be more active.

Q *Who writes the wellness policy?*

● Parents, students, school foodservice staff, school board members, school administrators, and the public must be involved in creating the school wellness policy.

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Q&A

School Wellness Policies

Parent Fact Sheet

Q **What must be included in the wellness policy?**

- Goals for physical activity, nutrition education and other school activities.
- Nutrition guidelines for all foods available during the school day.
 - À la carte items.
 - Foods and beverages in vending machines and school stores.
 - Foods and beverages for fundraising activities.
 - Rewards and foods served at school parties.
- A plan to measure how the school is putting the policy into action.
 - One or more persons who ensure that the school follows the policy.

Q **Who determines what foods and beverages are available in schools?**

- Foods served as part of the lunch and breakfast programs must meet Federal guidelines. Each school's foodservice department decides what foods to serve.
- The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) wrote Nutrition Standards for all other foods available in the school. A school may use these standards or develop its own. You can read these standards online at www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition.
- If a school uses PDE's Nutrition Standards, the school can receive extra money from the state for each meal served through the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program.

Q **Where can I find more information about wellness policies?**

- Visit the following Web sites for more information about wellness policies.
 - PDE Division of Food and Nutrition
www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition
 - Project PA
<http://nutrition.psu.edu/projectpa>

These resources include items such as:

- Snack ideas for classroom parties.
- Ideas for fundraising activities.
- Examples of how Pennsylvania schools put their local wellness policy in action.
- Examples of how schools can encourage nutritious eating habits.

For more information:

Pennsylvania Department of Education
Division of Food and Nutrition
333 Market Street, 4th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333
Phone: 1-800-331-0129
Web: http://www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition