



# HEALTHY SCHOOL CELEBRATIONS

Recognition Program  
Resource Guide



January 2025

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# ABOUT US

The San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative (COI) Schools & After-School Domain is promoting healthy school celebrations and celebration policies through this recognition program.

The Domain includes public health, community organizations, health advocates, and school and after-school representatives that support schools in establishing and implementing policies and programs that foster a healthy, active, thriving, and academically successful school culture, climate, and community.

# OUR GOALS



## Goal 1

Uplift classroom or school examples that demonstrate healthy celebrations



## Goal 2

100% adoption of health-centered celebrations in all schools

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

COI seeks to recognize schools and districts that have adopted and implemented a healthy celebrations policy or procedure for their students and/or staff.

The goal is to spotlight these best practices and inspire other schools and classrooms to adopt healthy celebrations.

San Diego County schools, districts, and parent groups are encouraged to:

- Nominate a school or district implementing a healthy celebrations policy or procedure.
- Share details of their success with healthy celebrations.

Nominated classrooms and schools will receive:

- A certificate of recognition from COI recognizing them as a Health Celebrations Champion.
- A copy of the certificate will also be sent to the school principal, district wellness lead, the nominator, and district (see example on the next page). superintendent.
- A social media post on COI's social media platforms.



Nominate a school or district here!



# RESOURCES

Healthy Celebrations resources from the San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative and our partners.

If you would like to share additional resources, please contact us @ [sd-coi@ucsd.edu](mailto:sd-coi@ucsd.edu)

The following pages show examples from San Diego Unified School District on ways to communicate to the school community about healthy school celebrations.





SAN DIEGO COUNTY  
CHILDHOOD  
OBESITY  
INITIATIVE

recognition certificate

The San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative's  
Schools & After School Domain recognizes

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San Diego Unified School District

as a

**HEALTHY CELEBRATIONS  
CHAMPION**

for its commitment to promoting student health and wellness.

*Blanca Meléndrez*

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**BLANCA MELÉNDREZ**  
UCSD Center of Community Health  
Executive Director



social media  
recognition

**Congratulations**  
HEALTHY CELEBRATIONS CHAMPION



In recognition of your commitment to promoting  
health and wellness in your [school/district]





# SCHOOL WELLNESS COMMITTEE'S GUIDE TO HEALTHY SCHOOL CELEBRATIONS

Healthy celebrations emphasize non-food rewards and, when food is served, provide students with nutritious alternatives to typical party "treats." Celebrations are an important part of school culture. They're also great opportunities to incorporate more physical activity into the school day and promote healthy eating habits!

## HEALTHY SCHOOLS = HEALTHY STUDENTS

When schools implement a healthy celebration policy:

- Students learn better – research shows that good nutrition is linked to better behavior and academic performance.
- Students build healthy habits and get excited about healthy foods. Students with food allergies are better protected.

## HEALTHY STAFF MEETINGS

Staff health is just as important as student health. Prioritizing healthy staff gatherings will improve the overall culture of wellness at your school. Don't know where to start? By adhering to the Meet Well Pledge, your school can empower employees to truly live well.

[MEET WELL HEALTHY  
MEETING PLEDGE](#)

With a few changes, schools can shift the focus of celebrations from unhealthy food to healthy fun!

## FOCUS ON FUN, NOT THE FOOD



## SMART SNACKS: nutritious alternatives

All foods offered or provided on the school campus, including in celebrations, classroom snacks, and student rewards must comply with the federal Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards (charter schools) and the California Smart Snacks in School Competitive Food and Beverage nutrition standards (non-charter schools).

[SEE SDUSD APPROVED FOOD LIST  
\(SMART SNACKS\)](#)

## SPREAD THE WORD!

- **COMMUNICATE** your celebration policy to everyone – including staff, students, and families.
- **ANNOUNCE** the policy at the beginning of the year.
- **REMIND** your community throughout the school year that parties and celebrations should center around non-food activities or serve only foods and beverages that meet Smart Snacks standards.

## DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START?

Use these letter templates to inform Parents & guardians of your Healthy Celebrations School policy.

[ENGLISH](#)

[SPANISH](#)

[SOMALI](#)

[VIETNAMESE](#)

[TAGALOG](#)

[ARABIC](#)

[CAMBODIAN](#)

## MORE RESOURCES

- [SDUSD Wellness Policy and Guidelines on Food](#)
- [Healthier Generation - Healthy Celebrations](#)
- [Resources Action for Healthy Kids: Ideas for Birthdays, Celebration, and Family Events](#)

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# IDEAS FOR HEALTHY SCHOOL CELEBRATIONS

## HEALTHY WAYS TO CELEBRATE

Classrooms have many celebrations throughout the year from birthday celebrations to holiday parties. However, food need not be part of school parties. Remember the idea is to take the emphasis off of food and place it on fun. There are alternative ways to recognize the student(s), celebrate them, and make them feel special.

### BIRTHDAYS

- Play active games related to your party theme, inside or out.
- Give students extra recess time.
- Have a dance party Make a party theme-related craft

### CLASS PARTIES

- Make the birthday student feel special with a sign, sash, button, or badge
- Let the birthday student pick a game to play with the class TIP: Set aside one day each month to celebrate all the birthdays in that month

## EFFECTIVE & HEALTHY REWARDS FOR STUDENTS

While it is important to reward and recognize accomplishments, it is important to keep in mind that the ultimate goal of rewarding students is to help them internalize desirable behaviors and encourage its repetition. Therefore, using alternatives in place of food as a reward is highly encouraged.

### RECOGNITION

- Ribbon/certificate in recognition of achievement Sticker with affirming message (e.g. "Great job!") Phone call, email, or letter sent to parents or guardian
- of student Recognizing a student's achievement during school-wide announcements and/or school website

### PRIVILEGES

- Go first Be the line leader for the day
- Choose a class activity
- Sit with a friend Take care of class animal for the day
- Get "free choice" time at the end of day

### NON-FOOD REWARD ITEMS

- School supplies Sports equipment Books Stickers
- Extra credit Fidget toys
- Token or point system (accumulate points towards bigger prizes)

## STAFF APPRECIATION

Showing appreciation for staff can also be an opportunity to promote wellness and implement the SDUSD wellness policy at your school. There are alternative ways to show appreciation in place of food.

- Certificate of Appreciation/Recognition
- Gift cards
- Recognizing a staff member during school-wide announcements and/or school website or during staff meetings
- Hand-written card expressing appreciation

SDUSD Wellness Policy and Guidelines on Food Healthier Generation - Healthy Celebrations Resources Action for Healthy Kids: Ideas for Birthdays, Celebration, and Family Events

**CLICK [HERE](#) FOR MORE SEASONAL HEALTHY CELEBRATION IDEAS!**



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# CALIFORNIA SMART SNACKS IN SCHOOL NUTRITION STANDARDS

**California Nutrition Regulations require** the following for foods sold and/or distributed outside of the school meal programs:

1. Food restrictions are effective during school hours and 1/2 hour after school.
2. Applies to **ALL** foods sold to students by student organizations and outside groups (such as PTAs and Foundations).
  - A. Snack must be:
    - ≤ 35% calories from fat, **and**
    - ≤ 10% calories from saturated fat, **and**
    - ≤ 35% sugar by weight, **and**
    - **250 calories** per item/container.
  - B. Entrees must be:
    - ≤ 400 calories, **and**
    - ≤ 4 grams of fat per 100 calories, and must either consist of:
      - Two or more food groups: meat/ meat alternate, fruit/vegetable, and/or grain/bread (such as turkey sandwich, baked potato with chili, fruit and cheese platter.), or
      - A meat/meat alternate alone (such as sausage patty or scrambled eggs).
  - C. No added fats or sugars; No artificial/added trans fats.
3. Allowed items that are **exempt** from the above restrictions must be sold in individual, one portion packages:
  - Exempt from total fat and saturated fat restrictions:
    - Eggs
    - Cheese
    - Seeds
  - Exempt from sugar restriction:
    - Fruit
    - Legumes
    - Non-fried Vegetables
4. Exempt foods can not be mixed with non- allowed foods (i.e. trail mix with candy or nuts).

# CALIFORNIA SMART SNACKS IN SCHOOL NUTRITION STANDARDS

5. Allowed beverages: (effective 1/2 hour before, during and 1/2 hour after school)

- Fruit or vegetable juice (☑ 50% juice and no added sweeteners)
- Milk
  - Cow's or goat's milk, **and** 2%, 1%, or nonfat, **and** contains Vitamins A and D, and  $\geq 25\%$  of Daily Value for calcium per 8 fl oz, **and**  $\leq 28$  grams of total sugar per 8 fl oz.
- Non-Dairy Milk
  - Contains Vitamins A and D, **and**  $\geq 25\%$  of Daily Value for calcium per 8 fl oz, **and**  $\leq 28$  grams of total sugar per 8 fl oz, **and**  $\leq 5$  grams fat per 8 fl oz.
- Water (no added sweeteners)
- Electrolyte replacement beverages that contain no more than **2.1 grams of added sweetener per fluid ounce**, lists water as the first ingredient, **contain 10-150 milligrams of sodium, and 10-90 milligrams of potassium per 8 ounces** and contain **no added caffeine**.

## Student Organizations and Others

(PTAs, Foundations, etc) can sell food, but must meet the following:

1. Up to three **food or beverage** items per sale.
2. Items for sale must be preapproved by the school administration.
3. Items for sale cannot be prepared on campus.
4. On a **daily basis only one organization may sell** approved foods and beverages.
5. **Except for four days a year when any number of student organizations may sell** approved foods and beverages.
6. Items for sale cannot be the same item sold in the food service program that same day.

## Consider Alternative (Non-Food) Fundraisers:

- Activities You Can Do: Fun runs, Dances, Recycling of cell phones or ink cartridges, Auction, or Teacher/Principal does some- thing special with students.
- Items for Sale: seeds or plants, safety or first aid kits, school promoting clothing items, student artwork, etc.



# SDUSD GUIDELINES FOR FOODS SOLD AND DISTRIBUTED ON CAMPUS

## Healthy Celebrations and Classroom Parties

Food should not be used as a reward nor should withholding food or physical activity be used as a punishment.

Other ways to recognize students and non- food rewards:

### For Individual Student

1. A note from the teacher to the student commending his or her achievement.
2. A phone call or email sent home to par- ents/guardians commending a student's achievement.
3. "No homework" pass.
4. Reading the school wide morning announcements.

### For Classroom

1. Holding class outdoors or in garden.
2. "Free choice" time at end of day.
3. Have special music or book reading.
4. Class field trip.

Because of possible food allergies or dietary restric- tions parents need to check with classroom teacher before bringing food.

For more non-food reward ideas go to [COI](#)

## Guidelines for Foods Sold and Brought to School Campuses

Middle & High School Campuses (Grades 7-12)

CONSISTENT MESSAGES FOR HEALTHY LIVING AT SCHOOL AND AT HOME

Additional Information Contact Food Services: 858-627-7305 or

District Wellness Coordinator: Vanessa Forsythe 858-627-7580

Go to [www.californiaprojectlean.org](http://www.californiaprojectlean.org) and use Middle/High School Competitive Foods Calculator to determine if individual food item/entree meets requirement according to package nutrition facts.



# HEALTHY FUNDRAISING, CELEBRATIONS, AND REWARDS!

COI Healthy Fundraising Resources	<a href="#"><u>Listing of unique fundraising sources including local companies.</u></a>
COI Healthy Fundraising Champions	<a href="#"><u>Highlights 18 healthy fundraisers from 11 local districts.</u></a> Contact Deirdre Kleske deirdre.kleske@sdcounty.ca.gov
California Smart Snacks in Schools Compliance Calculator	<a href="#"><u>Tool to help parents and others determine if a food or beverage meets California Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards.</u></a> Only compliant items may be on sold on campus during the school day.
Healthy Classroom Party Pledge	<a href="#"><u>Allows parents to show their commitment to support classroom parties that include physical activity, nonfood treats, and nutritious snacks.</u></a>
Healthy Celebrations (Team Nutrition, United States Department of Agriculture)	<a href="#"><u>Classroom party ideas including non-food activities and a list of healthy snacks.</u></a>
Healthy Celebrations (Cooperative Extension System)	<a href="#"><u>Classroom party ideas and links to additional resources.</u></a>
Healthy Celebrations (Birthday Carts)	<a href="#"><u>Healthy Celebrations Birthday Carts idea</u></a>
Healthy Classroom Party resources	<a href="#"><u>From Greeley school district in Colorado - lots of great ideas!</u></a>
Healthy Rewards (Live Well San Diego)	<a href="#"><u>Tools for Schools Toolkit includes ideas for non-food rewards (pp. 42-43).</u></a>

# SDUSD FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES SMART SNACKS FOOD LIST AND INFORMATION

In July 2014, the Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards were implemented, and in 2017 California adopted the state's ruling within the federal rules to cover competitive food sales on school campuses. The USDA's Smart Snacks in School refer to the national nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold outside of the federal reimbursable school meal programs during the school day.

Since its implementation, all competitive foods and beverages sold during the school day must meet or exceed the Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards. This includes foods and beverages sold in school stores, vending machines, fundraisers, a la carte items, and any other food sold from midnight until 30 minutes after the school bell rings. This list is not all inclusive and you can find items outside of this list if they meet regulations with these provided resources on your own.

**Step 1:** To identify if a food or beverage is compliant, check the California Department of Education's Competitive Food Reference guides for public, charter, and private schools.

- o Public Schools (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/he/compfoodsrefpub.asp>)
- o Charter/Private Schools (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/he/compfoodsrefcharter.asp>)

**Step 2:** Use either of the following calculators to determine if the food or beverage you want to sell is compliant.

- o Project LEAN (<https://www.californiaprojectlean.org/doc.asp?id=180&parentid=95>)
  - Project LEAN created a simple and easy-to-use California Competitive Food Standards Compliance Calculator for public non-charter schools to help you identify if a food/beverage item is compliant.
- o Healthier Generation (<https://foodplanner.healthiergeneration.org/>)
  - Healthier Generation has an easy-to-use calculator for only **charter/private schools** as they follow different guidelines than public non-charter schools.

Encourage your staff, parents, and students to use these tools when deciding on an item to sell on campus. Keep in mind that food items sold on campus by student organizations **cannot** be the same as the menu items sold in the food service program at school during the same school day. The California Department of Education resources for public non-charter schools were last reviewed in May 2023 and the resources for charter/private schools were last reviewed in January 2023. The California Smart Snacks list provided by San Diego Unified was updated in November 2023. If you have additional questions, please contact the Food and Nutrition Services Department at (858)-987-5377.

Last updated November 2023





# BIRTHDAY MENU

In addition to healthier lunch choices and increased physical activity during our school day, we are also beginning a healthier birthday initiative. Instead of birthday snacks like cupcakes, we are offering students an opportunity to choose an item from this menu as a way to celebrate their special day.

Please read through the choices in this menu and help your child decide which he/she would like to do for his/her birthday celebration. We want to honor each student in a special way! If there is something your child would like to do that is not listed here, please contact the teacher. Most activities that can be completed within a 15 minute time frame are fine!

Please return this completed sheet showing your choice for your child's celebration at least two weeks prior to your child's birthday. Thank you!

Happy Birthday to \_\_\_\_\_ . My birthday is on \_\_\_\_\_ .

I'd like to celebrate my birthday on (date): \_\_\_\_\_ .

For my special day, I am choosing: \_\_\_\_\_ .

My family will supply: \_\_\_\_\_ .

I need you to supply: \_\_\_\_\_ .



# BIRTHDAY MENU IDEAS

## **Dance party**

The birthday boy or girl may bring a favorite CD from home (ALL SONG LYRICS AND TOPICS MUST BE APPROPRIATE) or choose a classroom favorite to play while the class dances.

## **Extra recess**

The class will enjoy 15 minutes of extra outside recess (weather permitting).

## **Game time**

Kindergarten uses many games for learning opportunities. During Game Time, the class will have 15 minutes to play some of their favorite math and literacy games. The birthday girl or boy is also welcome to bring a favorite board or card game from home to share.

## **Guest Read aloud**

The birthday boy or girl may choose a special guest and/or a special book to be read aloud to the class. This is a great time to share a favorite story! The guest reader could be a family member or a school staff member.

## **Indoor free time**

The class will enjoy 15 minutes of extra indoor free time. This includes classroom toys, blocks, the home-living center, etc.

## **Lunch with the teacher**

The birthday boy or girl may spend lunchtime eating in the classroom with his/her teacher. This is an opportunity for some special teacher time!

## **Over-night stuffed animal**

The birthday girl or boy may choose a stuffed animal from the classroom to take home and enjoy over-night!

## **Painting**

The birthday girl or boy may choose for the class to have a special painting time. This could be marble painting or a free-choice painting project.





# BIRTHDAY MENU IDEAS

## **Show-and-tell**

The entire class can have a special show-and-tell time. Each student may bring an item from home to share with their friends.

## **Special craft**

The birthday girl or boy may choose a special craft that she or he would like to lead the class in creating. This could be a beaded necklace, foam bookmark, sun-catcher, etc. Please remember that the project should be able to be completed in approximately 15 minutes. The birthday child's family is responsible for sending all necessary supplies. Typical classroom items (such as glue or yarn) can be provided by the teacher.

## **Teacher helper**

The birthday girl or boy may choose to be the "Teacher Helper" for the day. That means she or he is designated to help with tasks like passing out papers, carrying clipboards, erasing whiteboards, and can even sit in the teacher's chair!

## **Healthy snacks**

If the birthday boy or girl would like to choose to bring a special healthy snack for his or her birthday, here are three suggestions:

- **Fruit kabobs**
  - Supply skewers and washed, cut fresh fruit like grapes, strawberries, and pineapple for the kids to use to make and enjoy a fruit kabob.
- **Fruit pizza**
  - A thin crust (preferably whole grain), fat-free or low fat cream cheese "icing" and fresh fruit make this a tasty treat! There are several recipes online with specific baking instructions.
- **Popcorn party**
  - Popcorn is a special yummy snack. When butter and salt are kept at a minimum (or not used) it is healthy, too.



# SCHOOLS RECOGNIZED

Congratulations to these schools for their commitment to promoting health and wellness! Check out the schools that have been nominated [here!](#)

(add link to website?)



# SAN DIEGO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

## **Healthy Celebrations Policy/Procedure**

Ensure all foods offered or provided on the school campus, including in school-sponsored extended learning programs, celebrations, parties, classroom snacks, and student rewards for performance or behavior, comply with the federal Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards (charter schools) and the California Smart Snacks in School Competitive Food and Beverage nutrition standards (non-charter schools). Provide teachers and other relevant staff information on non-food, healthy celebrations and rewards.

## **Describe how the policy or guidelines about healthy celebrations is communicated to the district community (students, families, staff, etc.).**

We share information about Healthy Celebrations thru our Healthy Schools Program. Thru this program a school wellness coordinator at every school site in the district receives training and resources on adopting Healthy School Celebrations. The Nursing & Wellness Department also coordinates with our Food & Nutrition Services Department on resources to support Healthy School Celebrations, including Suggested Smart Snacks handouts for parents.

## **What is allowed at the school celebrations within the district?**

- ✓ Only healthy food based on specified criteria
- ✓ Non-food activities (free time, games, giveaways, etc.)
- ✓ Physical activities (dancing, extra recess, etc.)
- ✓ Schools have local control to determine guidelines for healthy celebrations, so long as they meet the minimum requirements to provide Smart Snacks in Schools compliant snacks.

## **Healthy Celebrations Resources**

List of approved snacks, letters for families and guidelines for allowable snacks can be found [here](#)  
[District Wellness Policy](#)

# EDISON ELEMENTARY

## Healthy Celebrations Policy/Procedure

Ensure all foods offered or provided on the school campus, including in school-sponsored extended learning programs, celebrations, parties, classroom snacks, and student rewards for performance or behavior, comply with the federal Smart Snacks in School nutrition standards (charter schools) and the California Smart Snacks in School Competitive Food and Beverage nutrition standards (non-charter schools). Provide teachers and other relevant staff information on non-food, healthy celebrations and rewards.

### **Describe how the policy or guidelines about healthy celebrations is communicated to the school community (students, families, staff, etc.).**

The policy and guidelines are given to parents at the beginning of the school year as part of our student handbook. It is also communicated to all families at the beginning of the year through Class Dojo with the attached list of approved snacks. All students are notified about it in our back to school assembly. All staff and new staff are reminded about the policy. The main office has copies of the policy and procedure to hand out to families as well.

### **What is allowed at the school celebrations?**

- ✓ Only healthy food based on specified criteria
- ✓ Non-food activities (free time, games, giveaways, etc.)
- ✓ Physical activities (dancing, extra recess, etc.)

### **Healthy Celebrations Resources**

- Class Dojo
- Handbook
- Prize wheel
- PERFECT ATTENDANCE letters for every classroom
- extra recess games and items
- collaboration with cafeteria staff
- ASB funds
- Celebration cart

# SDUSD HEALTHY CELEBRATIONS LETTER: EDISON ELEMENTARY

Dear Parent/Guardian:

At Edison Elementary we work hard to ensure that students' minds and bodies are ready for learning each day, but we need your help to make our school even healthier!

## Healthy Snacks and Celebrations at School

To support our student's health and wellness, our school district has established nutrition standards for all foods and beverages offered and sold in school by any group, including parent/student organizations, teachers, boosters, fundraisers, and food and nutrition services during the school day and up to one half hour after the school day. This includes celebrations, parties, classroom snacks, and student rewards for performance or behavior.

## Why offer healthy foods and beverages at schools?

Every day our teachers and staff prepare students for success in the classroom, as well as encourage healthy eating and physical activity, leading them to lifelong success. By helping them start healthy habits early in life, we can help reduce our children's health risks and increase their chances for longer, more productive lives.

In addition, our District Wellness Policy includes standards for snacks that are offered and sold in schools to meet federal requirements.

## How can I support these healthy changes at schools?

Parents/guardians should:

- Celebrate their child's birthday by sending non-food treats such as stickers, pencils or a gift to the classroom such as a book or playground ball (ask the teacher for suggestions).
- Ensure all food and beverages sent to school for birthday celebrations promote healthy food choices e.g. fruit cups, fresh fruits and vegetables, applesauce cups or pouches, popcorn, gogurt yogurts, granola bars, etc.
- Ask your child's teacher what non-food or healthy rewards/incentives they are utilizing in the classroom.
- Become involved in planning school holiday parties that include games, crafts and healthy foods and beverages.
- Avoid bringing junk food items such as chips, candy, soda, cupcakes, cookies etc. to school.

## How else can I help?

We invite you to join us in working with other parents, teachers, school staff and community groups through your site's School Wellness Committee. We welcome your ideas and support in creating a healthier school environment for our students.

Please contact Vanessa Mendez, School Counselor, with any questions and ideas you may have. For more information about Smart Snacks in school and the San Diego Unified Wellness Policy, visit: <https://www.sandiegounified.org/competitivefoods>.

Together we can teach our children healthy habits that last forever!





# GET IN TOUCH



[sd-coi@ucsd.edu](mailto:sd-coi@ucsd.edu)



<https://sdcoi.org>