

Food in the Classroom Policy – FAQ

What is the actual policy wording?

In an effort to maximize instructional time and create a more optimal learning environment, and in response to the presence of food-based allergies, parent/guardians should refrain from sending in outside food/candy/drinks to share with the class. As part of the district-wide initiative to discourage the use of food as a reward, both teachers and parent/guardians are encouraged to recognize and celebrate students by methods that do not involve food.

For celebrations that do involve food, teachers will work with room parents to ensure that healthy options are available at these celebrations in compliance with Arlington School Board Policy 25-3, "Support for Students--Wellness" (<http://www.apsva.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=3160>).

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.

Classroom guests who bring in snacks are encouraged to help create and maintain a healthy learning environment that closely follows APS policy on wellness. For a list of appropriate snacks, please refer to the APS Healthy Snack Chart (<http://www.apsva.us/page/1298>).

Why are we implementing this policy now?

Our teachers and administration strive to provide a healthy and productive learning environment for our students. Policies and practices are regularly evaluated and updated as necessary to ensure that the school is continuously evolving to best meet the needs of our growing student population. In keeping with the national movement to improve school nutrition, the most recent version of the APS Wellness Policy states that "Schools will encourage the inclusion of healthful food choices for celebrations where food is served" and "Schools will provide nutrition education and physical education to foster lifelong habits of healthy eating and physical activity." The additional APS documents referenced in this communication ("Alternative Ideas to Using Food as a Reward" and "Healthy Snack Chart") provide further guidance on this matter. Taken as a whole, the PTA Health & Wellness Committee and NES Administration worked together to interpret APS policy in a manner that balances our desire to celebrate our students and their accomplishments with our need to maximize instructional time and promote healthy eating habits.

What are some ways to recognize and celebrate students without food?

Please see the attached APS document entitled, "Alternative Ideas to Using Food as a Reward."

How will birthdays be recognized under this new policy?

Your child's teacher will provide you with classroom- specific information regarding birthday celebrations at Back to School Night. If your child has a birthday in September, please contact your teacher for information regarding the date and manner in which the class will celebrate September birthdays.

In general, classrooms will celebrate birthdays once per month with the specific date to be determined by the teacher/grade level team. Birthday celebrations will be either food-free *or* will include healthy snacks per the previously referenced APS Healthy Snack Chart. Again, the specifics will be at the discretion of the teacher/grade level team.

My child's birthday is during the summer break – will he/she be recognized as well?

Children with birthdays that fall during the months of July and August will be recognized through a celebration either at the mid-point of the school year (“half birthday”) or on a designated date at the end of the school year. Again, your teacher will provide you with specific information regarding this celebration.

Can I send in “goody bags” or “treats” to be brought home?

Please refrain from sending/bringing in any food/candy/drinks unless specifically requested by your teacher or room parent. This includes items to be sent home with the students. “Goody bags” that contain only non-edible items (e.g., erasers, stickers) are fine.

Will my child be recognized on his/her actual birthday?

Teachers are encouraged to recognize individual student birthdays in a creative manner that is meaningful to the child but does not include food or infringe upon instructional time (e.g., a special privilege such line leader or lunch with the teacher, special sticker/crown, etc.). Each student will be recognized on his/her birthday via morning announcements and will receive a pencil and card from the front office.

Will there be any change to the food served at class holiday parties?

For many classes, there will be no change to the food served at holiday parties. The APS Wellness Policy requires that healthy alternatives be provided at any events where food is served. Room parents will work with teachers to ensure that if a “treat” (e.g., a cupcake or a cookie) is served at the party that they provide balance with healthy alternatives such as water, vegetables/fruits, pretzels, etc.

Will food be served at academic celebrations such as Publishing Parties?

At the teacher’s discretion, academic celebrations such as Publishing Parties will either be food-free or include only healthy foods and drinks.

In what other instances will my child be provided food (outside of the school lunch program)?

Students may also be provided with food during school-wide events or as part of an educational unit in the classroom (e.g., concluding a unit on Greece with a lunch comprised of Greek food). While some of these events may include foods that do not appear on the APS Healthy Snack Chart, healthy food and drink alternatives will be provided at these events as well.

In addition, some teachers (particularly in the younger grades) keep healthy snacks on hand in the event that children forget their daily snacks from home.

Does this policy apply to special visits such as VIP and Parent Reader?

Yes, those events will be food-free. Please refrain from bringing in food or candy to share with the class.

Will teachers be providing snacks or candy in the classrooms as a reward for performance, achievement, good behavior, etc.?

No. Food will not be used as a reward. Please see the attached APS document entitled, “Alternative Ideas to Using Food as a Reward,” to review the disadvantages of using food as a reward and to see an extensive list of non-food reward ideas for both parent/guardians and teachers.

My child has a food allergy (e.g., peanuts and/or tree nuts) or a dietary restriction (e.g., gluten-free, Kosher, Halal) – how will this be addressed?

While this new policy reduces the amount of food being offered to your child in the classroom, it does not eliminate it. Please notify your teacher and the school nurse as soon as possible if your child has any food allergies or dietary restrictions. Your teacher and the school nurse will work with you to develop a plan that meets your child’s individual needs.

Does this policy have any impact on the food that is served as part of the school lunch program?

No. This policy relates only to food that is brought/sent into school by teachers and parent/guardians to be shared with other students. The school lunch program is managed at the district level by APS Food Services.

Questions?

Please feel free to address inquiries that cannot be answered by your child’s classroom teacher to Assistant Principal John Koutsouftikis at john.koutsouftikis@apsva.us or (703) 228-5290.