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Nutrition for Health

FOOD IN SCHOOLS: NOT JUST IN THE CAFETERIA!

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Most activities and events go well with food, even in schools. Food is often used as a reward and for classroom celebrations. Teachers, coaches, and parents want to provide treats for hard working students, and for events like holiday and birthday parties. Plus, who can forget the numerous fundraising events featuring candy bars and cookies? But with the emphasis on healthy environments in schools other non-food options should be explored.

Rewards: Candies and sweets are often used as rewards for good behavior and academic achievement. However, these items should be avoided, and the focus should be on non-food rewards instead. For example, students can be recognized with stickers, pencils, erasers, puzzles, coupons for extra computer/reading time, passes to a skating rink or bowling alley, or gift certificates from local merchants. Students could also earn points to purchase unique rewards, such as lunch with the teacher or a special friend, being allowed to listen to music while working at their desk, or pedometers. These and other non-food rewards might be identified in school wellness policies.

Distribute lists with "acceptable" foods/items for treats for school birthday parties. Classrooms can "save up" and celebrate all birthdays once a month. This also reduces loss of teaching time.

Celebrations: Music, balloons, dancing, and games will make any celebration a success! Schedule the event on a Friday at the end of the day. Allow students to plan the music and games. With all the excitement and fun, no one will miss the sweets.

Fundraising: Traditional school fundraising often involves candy and other dessert food items. There are many profitable fundraising activities that do not involve food. For example, schools could sponsor read-a-thons, walk-a-thons, and student/staff plays, talent shows, or musical performances. Schools could also sell pre-packaged school supplies at the beginning of the school year and then single items during the year.

Dr. Cullen is an expert in health promotion and education, specifically student lunch selection and food sales in schools. She currently is evaluating the effect of Texas school food policy changes on food selection in middle schools.

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Got a "minute"
for some important ideas about wellness?!

