



August, 2016

**PLEASE READ:  
Changes in Elementary Food-at-School Practices**

Dear Worthington Families,

Nationwide, the number of students whose lives are affected by nut/dye/dairy/gluten allergies or intolerance is steadily on the rise. For some students, these allergies are so severe that even the presence of the odor of an allergen could have life-threatening consequences. In addition, there are a growing number of students who deal with medical issues, such as childhood diabetes. For these students, food rewards and events with food in the classroom can affect their well-being.

***Our students' health, safety, and well-being is our number one priority!*** As a district, we have discussed the latest research with our Wellness Committee, our school nurses, and parents/community members to consider the BEST steps to take in keeping EVERY child healthy, happy, and well cared for. In addition, we have examined the practices already adopted by other Central Ohio School Districts. To begin, with the start of the 2016-2017 school year, we will discontinue the sale of peanut butter products in our elementary cafeterias.

After careful consideration, we are writing to you to make you aware of some adjustments to our policies and practices related to consuming food during school hours (outside of the scheduled lunch periods during which parents either prepare their student's food, or rely upon the school food services to provide healthy lunches).

The following practices will be put into place for the 2016-2017 opening of school on August 17. We appreciate your attention to and support with making these practices consistent for all students and classrooms.

### **Student Rewards**

Encouraging and motivating students to stretch their learning and rewarding their efforts is important. Teachers and parents use a variety of incentives to motivate and prompt student effort. While at school, our staffs will no longer use food as a routine incentive for students. We will discontinue the use of candy and other treats as rewards during class. Principals and teachers will work together to identify alternatives to food-as-rewards. Students themselves may also participate in identifying motivators with their teachers.

With principal approval, whole class or whole school rewards for attaining big goals may include food, so long as parents/guardians are notified in a reasonable timeframe which allows them to alert the school about individual student food allergies/restrictions, and for appropriate alternative plans to be made. (ie: "If the grade level reads 1000 books by [date], a pizza party will be awarded.) Such instances are occasional.

### **Celebrating Student Birthdays**

**Acknowledging and celebrating each student's birthday is an important activity. We see doing so as an expression of celebrating each child's special place in the world and in the school community.**

Worthington Schools will continue to partner with parents in celebrating the special gift of each child.

With the start of the 2016-2017 school year, we will ask your cooperation in celebrating birthdays without food of any kind. (ie: cupcakes, brownies, chips, etc. will not be permitted.)

Once again, with the growing presence of food-borne allergies and student medical limitations, this move ensures each child's well-being.

In our schools, principals and teachers will work cooperatively to develop unique ways that the school can celebrate a child's birthday. This can include special announcements, bulletin boards, certificates, etc.

We understand that parents often like to aid their child in celebrating at school. We encourage and support that! We ask that parents consider any reasonable non-food alternative, including but not limited to the following:

- Pencils
- Stickers
- A book to add to the classroom or school library with their name in it (which can be shared as part of the celebration of the day)
- Erasers
- Dollar-store word games or puzzles, etc.

### **School/Classroom Parties**

In Worthington Schools, we continue to believe that learning to celebrate is part of learning about real life. To that end, we will continue to work with parents and PTAs in facilitating school parties that share the fullness of living in community with our students. Elementary schools will continue to plan for parties (ie: Fall/Harvest/Halloween, Winter Holidays, Valentines' Day, and/or end-of-year celebrations.) Parties naturally include food. Principals are encouraged to work with their PTA and parents to provide a balance of party activities/crafts, games, and foods that are thoughtfully provided with awareness of healthful choices related to food allergens and conditions such as diabetes. With the wide variety of allergies we encounter, we encourage the use of pre-packaged food items that contain a list of ingredients.

It will be the practice and responsibility of principals and teachers to provide parents with reasonable advanced notice of food intended to be served at parties such that parents/guardians have time to provide alternatives for their child where necessary.

### **Parent-Provided Snacks during the School Day**

Because parents provide and control the preparation of individual student's snacks for consumption at school, we do not plan to restrict or eliminate daytime snacks. We do ask that parents be aware of and responsive to any notice of the presence of nut or other allergies that may be present in the classroom, knowing that for some students, even the smell of such allergens can cause serious health issues.

Because our Worthington community is one of caring and compassion, we thank you in advance for your support of these decisions. For many of us, the effects of life/ health-threatening food-related conditions are not a concern. For others, it is a daily worry. Partnering for the health, safety and well-being of ALL of our children is one small way of living with compassion, and helping each child grow successfully to change the world.

Please contact your building principal or one of us with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

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