

Ideas for Parents: **Non-food** Ideas for **Birthday Celebrations** at School

The Edgartown School's Wellness Committee has compiled this document from a few online sources in an effort to support and follow our Wellness policy/procedures. Below is a list of non-food ideas to recognize children, celebrate them and make them feel special.

Birthdays are important to every child and many kids like to celebrate with their classmates. However, sending in a food treat to the classroom to celebrate can exclude those children who have food allergies, diabetes or other dietary restrictions. According to the Centers for Disease Control (2011) allergies have increased more than 20% among American children since the mid 1990's.

There are many disadvantages to using food as a reward.

What is even more important to think about are the long-term psychological effects of using food for reward, comfort and instantaneous gratification. What many people don't realize is that the number of adults rewarding a child with food within a single day can be staggering in our culture. Even if your child or your children are not currently overweight, please consider the following:

It undermines nutrition education (our words do not match our actions)

It excludes some students who cannot (or should not) eat these foods – allergic and diabetic children cannot be at their best when they consume some of these foods.

It teaches kids to eat when they're not hungry as a reward to themselves.

In smaller children, the empty calories end up replacing higher nutrient-dense foods that would be eaten at the next mealtime. It is well known that children who suffer from poor nutrition score lower on tests.

Below are some suggestions for celebrating your child without food. Always check with your child's teacher first to see what he/she finds acceptable for their classroom and be sure to provide advanced notice (72) hours to make sure that they can fit the birthday plans into their schedule.

1. Come into the classroom and read a book to the class. (Must have a Cory with in the current school year).
2. Buy something for the classroom (books, games, music).
3. Decorate a box and send it into the classroom. Also send index cards or smaller pieces of paper.
ie; Have the teacher ask each child to use one sentence to write something nice about the birthday kid and put it into the box. The birthday kid gets to take the box home at the end of the day. You could also do the same thing using an autograph book.
4. Bring in something that all the kids can sign as a birthday treat for the birthday kid (shirt/sweatshirt, tote bag, autograph stuffed animal, pillow case, etc.).

5. Ask the teacher if you can have a show and tell time for your child on their birthday. They can make a poster, bring in some of their favorite things, bring pictures, tell the kids about their favorite things or life at their house, etc.

6. Ask the teacher if you can send in a dance song, and have the whole class do the hokey pokey, the chicken dance, or the booty slide, whatever is your child's favorite!

7. Donate a plant, seeds, or a bulb for the school garden. Pick your child's favorite vegetable to plant.

8. Donate a book to the school library in honor of your child. Maybe the librarian could read this book to your child's class during library time.

9. Melinda is always happy to set up a garden celebration in honor of your child's special day.

Promoting non-food celebrations & rewards in school can be a valuable opportunity to demonstrate that happiness & celebrations do not have to be associated with unhealthy eating.



Your Wellness Committee