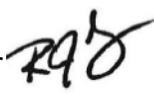


MEMORANDUM

TO: County Superintendents
County Nutrition Directors

FROM: Richard J. Goff, Executive Director 
Office of Child Nutrition

SUBJECT: West Virginia Board of Education Policy 4321.1, *Standards for School Nutrition* –
Organized food events and celebrations in schools

RE: **OCN Guidance Memo 86 –5.2 – School Parties**

DATE: December 4, 2013

This memo provides clarification on the nutrition standards governing organized food events and celebrations held in schools during the instructional day, as specified in West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) Policy 4321.1, *Standards for School Nutrition*, Section 5.2. This section of the policy addresses issues relating to foods and beverages brought or delivered to schools for consumption by the general school population.

The number of students with food allergies and special dietary needs is on the rise. Schools must exercise caution when allowing food and beverages into classrooms. While many students can manage their food allergies without the oversight of teachers and school nurses, students as young as four years old in pre-K classrooms depend on school authorities to act on their behalf. Schools have a responsibility to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for all students. This can only be accomplished by requiring food coming into the classroom to be individually packaged and properly labeled so that school personnel can examine the foods and decide if it is safe for all children.

Food safety is an equally important issue with regard to food brought into classrooms by well-meaning parents for consumption by the general student population. Traditionally, some parents have enjoyed baking and bringing homemade treats to school for classroom parties. It is a way for these parents and caregivers to participate in school activities and enjoy sharing their favorite party foods with their children's classmates and teachers. Safe food handling practices are rarely a consideration and children assume the same food safety standards are observed in homes as in school cafeterias. School cooks receive rigorous food handling training and their cafeterias are inspected by the county health department; home kitchens are not. Those who consume foods prepared outside of the school must rely on the food safety practices of parents, caregivers, teachers, and outside vendors, who may or may not be trained in safe food handling procedures. The foods may have been improperly stored or held before being eaten, may not have been cooked or cooled properly, or may not have been reheated to proper temperatures because of lack of knowledge, time, or proper facilities.

Finally, schools have a responsibility to help students develop lifelong habits of healthy eating patterns and regular physical activity. By establishing healthy habits early in life, children may dramatically reduce their health risks and increase their chances for longer, more productive lives. The promotion of a healthy school environment encompasses classroom parties and school celebrations, not just the food served in the school cafeteria.

Birthday parties and holiday celebrations at school provide a unique opportunity for teachers and parent-helpers to model good nutrition by making healthy eating fun and exciting for children. It is also an opportunity to remove the emphasis from food and place it on fun activities. When foods are a part of classroom celebrations, they must meet the nutrition standards outlined in Policy 4321.1, Section 5 – *Nutrition Standards for Other Foods and Beverages*, as well be commercially-prepared, individually-wrapped and properly labeled. The school must designate a responsible individual to monitor and assume responsibility for the food offered to school children. This designated person must ascertain that the foods meet all requirements of the policy and are safe for all children in the classroom.

The WVBE values parental involvement at all levels of the education process and would like to maintain and nurture that engagement at school parties and celebrations. To that end, the Office of Child Nutrition has developed a publication called “Let’s Party.” This resource contains practical ideas, recipes and advice for teachers, parents and caregivers who plan classroom parties. It is available in hard copy format for \$5.00 each. Contact Teresa Counts at 304-372-7876 to order a copy. The booklet can also be downloaded at no cost at <http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/WestVirginia/LetsParty.pdf>.

To review the nutrition standards established in WVBE Policy 4321.1 – Standards for School Nutrition on our website, go to <http://wvde.state.wv.us/policies/p4321.1.pdf>. The nutrition standards are outlined in Section §126-86-5 – *Nutrition Standards for Other Foods and Beverages*. For questions and/or further clarification, contact the Office of Child Nutrition at 304-558-3396.