

MIDDLETOWN TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Health and Nutrition Initiatives

Several changes are being made this school year to procedures that relate to our students' health. Below is a description of these initiatives put forward to better safeguard our students as well as to promote their health and well-being.

The building and district administrative team, along with our district's medical professionals, with review by our legal counsel, have developed procedures to ensure student safety as it relates to food brought into the classroom by parents for classroom celebrations. The number of children with allergies is substantial and increasing every year, and the ingredients that students react to are quite varied. Food brought in for distribution is very difficult to monitor. There is a significant risk that the food brought in may contain an ingredient that causes a severe reaction in a child with food allergies. Our elementary schools have had a "no share" rule in place to ensure that students only eat what their parents/guardians pack for them to eat. We have built on that concept by changing the focus of classroom celebrations from food to an activity that is meaningful for the students. Each school has developed activities, such as birthday bingo with the Principal or other activities/games, to ensure special occasions are celebrated in a fun and memorable manner.

In addition to student safety, the classroom celebration procedure is consistent with the intent of the State of New Jersey Department of Agriculture's Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value/Wellness Policy. The State developed the policy to combat childhood obesity and promote healthy eating. Although celebrations with foods that meet the *Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value* requirement are permitted, it is difficult to monitor foods brought in by parents to determine if they meet these standards. This is not unique to Middletown—the State strongly recommends that all school districts find alternatives to food used in the classroom as rewards or incentives. The new procedures, although new to our district, have been in place in many districts throughout the state, with more and more districts adopting similar plans. This ensures that students receive a consistent message throughout the school environment regarding healthy eating. Frequent celebrations, such as birthday celebrations, centered around food, send the wrong message. Eliminating food from classroom celebrations will help to promote the proper message of healthy eating.

Please understand that these new procedures do not eliminate classroom celebrations. These celebrations will continue in new and meaningful ways. The new procedures do not eliminate food during school-wide celebrations. Celebrations, such as a Thanksgiving feast or a holiday festival, may still include food. Most importantly, the new procedures provide a safer environment for our students.

Another initiative to promote student health was put forth by our school nurses. We will institute a Body Mass Index (BMI) screening program this year for students in grades 1, 4, 7, and 10. Currently the State requires our children to be screened for height and weight. The nurses will be using this information to calculate each student's BMI. They will use the Center for Disease Control guidelines and only inform parents if the student is in the top 5% or bottom 5% of the scale. All notifications will be confidential, and will be delivered home through the mail. Parents will have the opportunity to opt out of the program by completing a form and returning it to the Health Office of their school.

Thank you for your attention to this important information.