



# What Every Parent | Caregiver Needs to Know About Food Celebrations in Our Elementary Schools

**Our aim at Paramus Public Schools is to foster a healthy and safe learning environment for both students and staff.** To achieve this, we have established comprehensive policies and procedures focused on food safety and promoting healthy habits and inclusivity. Additionally, we collaborate closely with parents to ensure that all celebrations and events align with our goals. Below, you'll find a list of questions and answers to provide clarification concerning food-related celebrations.

**Q** What are our protocols for food celebrations in elementary classrooms?

**A** Food can only be included in the celebration of holidays (such as Halloween or Valentine's Day) if all students participating in the celebration bring in their own food from home, similar to how snack time and lunch are managed. Food is not permitted for birthday celebrations. Please remember that Paramus elementary schools are peanut and tree nut-free environments.

**Q** What are the positives of these practices?

**A** This practice resolves the exclusion of students with dietary restrictions or allergy concerns, as well as any unintended perceptions of exclusion of students with special circumstances. Furthermore, it promotes the idea of enjoying celebrations without the reliance on sugary treats, which would otherwise be a frequent occurrence during food-centered birthday celebrations. Instead, students engage in special activities and receive gifts.

**Q** Are there any exceptions?

**A** **Food served en masse will only be permitted when there is an instructional/curricular connection, following these guidelines:** If a student in the class has a food allergy, the school must adhere to the guidelines outlined in Board Policy 5141.20. The parent of the food-allergic student will provide a pre-packaged, pre-approved safe snack. Any food served as part of a classroom event or celebration will not be distributed to students who have been identified as having life-threatening food allergies. The student may only eat the food being served to the whole group if the parent agrees to come in and check the food on-site. Otherwise, the student must eat a pre-approved, safe snack. The school will never serve a food-allergic student. Additionally, "goody bags" or treats intended to leave the classroom are always prohibited. (4th-grade year-end events are considered curricular.)

**Q** Who approves what snacks are safe for a food-allergic student?

**A** The responsibility for approving snacks for students with food allergies lies solely with their parents. School nurses do not monitor or check these snacks. Additionally, there are no universally approved safe snacks that teachers or the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) can provide to an entire classroom. According to our policy, schools will not serve students with food allergies unless the food is provided by the parent or the parent is present to serve the student directly. During classroom events or celebrations, any food served will not be distributed to students identified as having life-threatening food allergies. Instead, the food-allergic student will use their safe snacks. This policy is in place to ensure the safety and well-being of all students with food allergies.

**Q** Why is food safety in school so important?

**A** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other sources, food allergies are increasingly prevalent and pose a significant food safety and public health concern. They affect an estimated 1 in every 13 children, which equates to approximately two children in every classroom. Furthermore, Food Allergy Research & Education (FARE) reports that over 40% of children with food allergies will have experienced a severe allergic reaction, such as anaphylaxis. It is estimated that 25% of first-time anaphylactic reactions reported in schools occur in students with no known history of allergies.

## Resources | References

- [PBOE Policy 5141.20: Food Allergies](#)
- [PBOE Administrative Procedures 5141.20: Life-Threatening Allergies / Food Allergies in School Grades K-4](#)
- [Center for Disease Control: CDC Healthy Schools - Food Allergies](#)
- [Facts and Statistics: FoodAllergy.org](#)
- [Allergic Living: Exclude the Treats, not the Allergic Child at School](#)