

# Marion County

## A Healthier Way to Celebrate

### Summary

Sometimes a cupcake is more than just a cupcake, especially when classmates Emery and Caleb have the same birthday—February 14th—a day that also happens to be Valentine’s Day.

The health of our children is closely linked to their ability to learn and grow into thriving, productive adults. Three school districts in Marion County answered the call to make critical system changes with regard to classroom celebrations and rewards.



### Challenge

A shared concern of three community coalitions—Creating Healthy Communities, Pioneering Healthier Communities and the Marion County School Nurse Coalition—is the alarmingly high rates of childhood obesity in Marion County. A shared goal throughout all coalitions is to create system and environment changes that will help children live the healthiest life possible.

Schools are one of the most influential systems in the life of a child and thus a logical area to focus change initiatives. Classroom celebrations rose to the surface as a primary issue for Marion health coalitions to address. A single birthday celebration can result in large quantities of sugar consumed by students. Still, when surveyed, the vast majority of elementary teachers in Marion County were against policy changes limiting classroom celebrations.

### Your Involvement is Key

Help is needed to further the steps already taken with regard to healthy school environments. Community members can get involved to advocate for school policies addressing healthy behaviors both inside and outside the classroom.

Ensuring the healthy future of today’s children is vital in reversing projections that the current generation of children will have a shorter life expectancy than their parents.

### Solution

Since support for policy change was lacking, the coalitions opted to pursue the adoption of guidelines to suggest and support healthy options in classroom celebrations. A document entitled “Guidelines for Healthy Celebrations and Classroom Rewards” was created. Coalition members worked through several drafts to ensure suggested measures were in line with current health standards and best practices. The intention was for local schools to adopt the guidelines and implement them as routine practice in each of their buildings.



## Results

The “Guidelines for Healthy Classroom Celebrations and Rewards” document was presented to area school boards in May, 2012 and a resolution in support of the guidelines was requested. Three Boards of Education voted to support the guidelines. As a result, more than 6,000 children in Marion County returned to school in the fall of 2012 with a greater ability to make healthy choices while celebrating in the classroom setting.

Implementation of the guidelines is in process. Some schools declared themselves “cupcake-free zones” while other schools have reported elimination of food-based classroom parties.



“I am privileged to work in a district where the staff and the school board support every effort to keep kids healthy, which in turn allows them to be better students.”

- Kelly Wagner, BSN, RN, NCSN, School Nurse, River Valley

## Future Directions

Developing strong partnerships between public health and public school systems is key to creating a healthy community. Relationships locally have been strengthened by aligning agendas and being flexible in pursuit of “big picture” changes for one common goal: healthy, bright futures for our children.

Next steps include working together to address ways to make fundraising in Marion’s public school systems profitable, while focusing on healthy offerings. Additionally, physical activity offerings will be addressed through collaboration

with local non-profits, such as the Marion Family YMCA, to offer extra-curricular activities and after-school programs.

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