

TAKE  
A SIDE

## Debate

**Directions:** Read the article. Study the facts. Decide what you think. Write an opinion essay.



# Should Sweets Be Banned From School Birthday Parties?

More schools are cutting out cupcakes and other goodies, but not everyone thinks it's a healthy move **By Lauren Tarshis**

It's Julia's 10th birthday, and her mom has come to her classroom to join the celebration. Her teacher leads the class in spirited rounds of "Happy Birthday" (first in English, then in Spanish). When the singing is done, Julia's mom passes out the birthday goody she has brought. Every year since kindergarten, Julia's mom has concocted ever-more dazzling birthday treats—cupcakes crowned with Oreos, cookies iced like soccer balls, cake balls studded with M&Ms.

But this year, Julia's mother brought a treat somewhat less delicious than usual: birthday pencils.

### Improving Kids' Health

Julia's Connecticut school, like many around the country, has banned sweet

treats from birthday parties and other school celebrations. Fewer cupcakes and cookies in school, experts say, will help improve the health of American kids. One third of American kids are overweight or obese, conditions that can lead to serious health problems like type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure.

"Times have changed," says nutritionist Sally Kuzemchak. "It makes sense to improve nutrition for kids any way we can, and school is a perfect place for that."

In addition, parties with messy foods and drinks require too much set-up and clean-up time, some say, distracting teachers and kids from learning.

There's also the problem of allergies. With 10 percent of today's kids suffering from food allergies—some life threatening—it's simply too dangerous to allow parents to bring foods into the classroom.

Not surprisingly, most kids aren't happy with the ban.

"What's fun about a party if





there's no cupcakes?" asks Georgia fifth-grader Kate.

Many parents are also grumbling about these bans. "I want my kids to be healthy," says one Arizona mother. "But it's an important tradition. It makes me sad to think my kids will miss something I enjoyed so much when I was their age."

### Safe Cupcakes

Critics of banning treats also point out that for some families, the school birthday party is the only chance a child might have to blow out birthday candles as friends cheer them on. Many families don't have space at home for large celebrations, and hosting a party at a

restaurant, gym, or arcade can cost hundreds of dollars.

Parents in Texas felt so strongly about this issue that they convinced their government to pass the "Safe Cupcake Amendment," which requires schools to allow parents to bring frosted treats into school for birthday celebrations. But in most states, the bans are becoming more common.

How does Julia's mom feel about all this?

She was disappointed when she heard that she couldn't bring in baked goods. But in the end, Julia's classmates liked the pencils. And now Julia's mom feels a bit relieved.

"It was a lot of pressure," she admits, "coming up with something new every year." ■

**WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

## Should schools ban sweets from class parties?

Go back to the article and find information to support each side. Write the information on the lines below.

**YES** Health comes first!

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**NO** They're part of the fun!

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Study the points on both sides of the argument—and think about your own opinion. State your opinion in one sentence below. It can become the thesis statement for an opinion essay on this topic.

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