



November 16, 2023

Dear Early Childhood Education Center Families,

The ECEC believes healthy children are ready to learn. Healthy eating habits begin early in a child's life. This message is to remind families of the ECEC's practices related to classroom celebrations, outside foods, and the safety and wellness of our children. **The ECEC prohibits parents/guardians and staff from bringing outside food into the classroom for activities or parties. This includes sending food items home with children.** You can find this directive in the Salt River Schools Student and Parent Handbook (page 28). ECEC families may provide an age appropriate and non-food goody bag in lieu of a food item. Read below for more information about why this policy is in place:

Oral Health and Healthy Weight Status

- Diet and nutrition are key influencers to oral health.
- Good oral hygiene and regular visits to the dentist, combined with a healthy lifestyle and avoiding risks like excess sugar, help to avoid periodontal disease and tooth decay.
- Oral health hygiene starts at an early age; eating foods low in sugar is a great way to prevent tooth decay.

Prevention of Food Borne Illness

- The Center for Disease Control reports that at least 1 in 6 people get sick from foodborne illness.
- Classroom staff must take the Food Handler's Safety Course as part of their professional development every year to ensure food safety guidelines are followed.
- Children under 5 are more at risk for foodborne illness, because their immune systems are still developing.
- Staff preparing and serving children food must understand how to properly wash hands, avoid cross-contamination, cook to proper temperatures, and maintain proper temperatures.
- The ECEC cannot oversee proper handling of foods when brought from home.

Special Dietary Needs

- Thirty ECEC children require special menus due to dietary needs, including food intolerances, food allergies, and prescribed meal plans.
- Foods purchased from vendors have specific food safety laws they must follow to ensure children are not exposed to allergens. Products must be properly labeled.
- Common food allergies that require accommodation are wheat and gluten allergies, dairy allergies, peanut and nut allergies, fish, and shellfish.

Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)

- Foods offered at the ECEC must be nutrient-dense and low in salt, fat, and sugar. HSPPS 1302.44(a)(2)(iii)
- Family support services include opportunities for parents to collaborate with staff on the importance of physical activity, healthy eating, and the negative consequences of sugar-sweetened beverages. HSPPS 1302.46 (b)(ii)



If you'd like to bring non-food items for goody bags, here are some suggested alternatives: Stickers, pencils, art supplies, craft projects, classroom activities, books, and bookmarks. Let us know if you want other suggestions. Thank you for adhering to our handbook policies. If you have any questions, call the ECEC at 480-362-2200.

Sincerely,

Tami Brungard, ECE Leader