

I am writing to express support and gratitude to the individuals who are working to make our public schools safer for children with food allergies. I am also writing to add my voice to those expressing concern about current practice in school food allergy management.

In the interest of keeping this as brief as possible I want to state that I agree 100% with the comment submitted by Gina Menett Lee. That well thought out comment accurately reflects my concerns as a parent of a child with food allergies. I support the outlined measures of inclusion, prevention, and management as well.

A few real life examples from SmallTown, CT:

1. My daughter rides a bus to school where the only safety precaution is “No Eating Allowed on the Bus.” This week while riding the bus, my daughter found a pistachio shell on the bus floor. There was an incident last year of someone eating peanut butter on the bus. I also recently discovered that bus drivers are unaware of which children have known food allergies unless notified personally by parents. If a food allergy reaction occurs on the bus the bus driver can only pull over and call 911. Lives are lost by delayed Epinephrine administration.
2. During a grade-wide Thanksgiving Feast the only reason pumpkin bread (homemade by parent volunteers) containing walnuts was not handed out to all students at random was because I had declared myself in charge of all bread handling and serving and had inspected each loaf, throwing away the nut-containing loafs. I had previously been reassured by staff that all parents knew not to send in bread containing nuts. I personally know of 5 students’ lives who were put in danger by this celebratory event and those are only the students’ whose nut allergies I’m aware of.
3. My daughter was in a “Nut-Free Classroom” for Kindergarten. However, the children eat snack in the classroom and 4 & 5 year old children are responsible for going into their lunch boxes and determining what item was sent in as their classroom snack. The only day I was present during snack time I noticed that the child sitting next to my daughter was eating peanut butter crackers. I assume his parents meant those to be a part of his lunch and not his nut-free classroom snack. My daughter was not necessarily put at risk by this because she has been desensitized to peanuts. However, I include it as an example of the fragility of a “Nut-Free Classroom” approach.

4. After my daughter gleefully left the segregated “Nut-Free Table” in the lunchroom due to successful peanut desensitization, only one student was left sitting at the table. The district’s policy, as it was described to me, was that students who bought school lunches would be allowed to sit at the Nut-Free Table because the school’s lunches were always nut-free. Unfortunately, this is a hard distinction for Kindergartners to make and as a result most kids would avoid that table when eating school lunch because they had to avoid it on days eating bagged lunch. On two separate occasions I observed a student sitting completely alone at the table in an otherwise crowded lunch room. I was rarely in the cafeteria so I assume this likely happened more than twice. When I mentioned it to the lunch staff they told me that it was “because he has nut-allergies.” After I explained their own policy to them they recruited other Kindergartners to switch tables. Kindergartners are typically sweet little human beings who want nothing more than to be helpful and a good friend to classmates so recruitment was easy. I would have loved to see the adults have the same initial level of compassion as the children did once they were informed of the problem.

Thank you,
Amanda Cuevas