

Dear Food Allergy Task Force Members,

I am very excited to see some action being taken regarding, the investigation of schools and their treatment of children with food allergies. As the mother of a child with multiple life threatening food allergies, I have been battling with the public school system for over 10 years. My oldest daughter, Carlese, had been in the Wallingford Public School System from the age of 4 years old, as a kindergarten student to the age of 14, as a freshman. Carlese, now 16 years old, has life-threatening food allergies to goat's milk, cow's milk, eggs, peanuts, hazelnuts, almonds, beef, peas, sesame, mustard, lentils and avoids all tree nuts and some spices. She was diagnosed with multiple life-threatening food allergies at the age of 10 months old. This testing was done initially in Denver, Colorado, our home at the time, after a severe allergic reaction to scrambled eggs. Carlese has a contact, inhalation and ingestion reaction to her life threatening food allergens.

As the parent of a child with life-threatening food allergies, I have been threatened and bullied by the school administrators on many occasions. It is also concerning to me as a parent, the repeated negligence the Wallingford School District has displayed in their treatment of Carlese and her multiple life-threatening food allergies over our 10 years in the district. The Wallingford School System's negligence has put Carlese's life at risk on multiple occasions.

I will be addressing some of these negligent acts. While at Dag Middle School in Wallingford, on a field trip, the leader of the trip allowed students to carry ice cream onto all of the field trip buses. I was a chaperone on the field trip and kept my daughter close to me, as hundreds of kids loaded onto to the buses with various milk products. Not only would the buses now be contaminated with the allergens on three buses which would be transporting other students at the end of the day, but Carlese was at risk by just sitting on the bus with students and their milk products all around her.

I strongly feel that whether it's a field trip or any school event utilizing the buses which will be transporting children at a later time, there should not be any food allowed on any buses transporting students. Food on the buses can put a child, like my daughter at risk for an allergic reaction. It has been a constant battle for me as a parent to make sure that no food is consumed on the buses which Carlese will be traveling in.

On another field trip at Dag Middle School, I pleaded with the nurse of the school district, asking that ice cream not be eaten on the Lyman Hall field trip due to Carlese's life-threatening food allergies. The nurse for the district said, they would not change the trip which has been a

tradition. I then asked that the students wash or wipe their hands after eating any milk products. She continued to state that, it was not possible to do that.

After this response, I contacted the Superintendent of the Wallingford School District and he said, he would support the District nurse's decision and there would not be any modifications to the field trip. Carlese did have an allergic reaction from another student who brushed up against her with her ice cream while on the field trip, despite my pleas to modify the trip due to Carlese's multiple life-threatening food allergies.

In another incident at Dag Middle School, a teacher brought in cupcakes with unsafe ingredients for a food celebration for her class. When Carlese arrived in her classroom, remnants of the food was everywhere on the floor and on her desk. I addressed this issue in one of many 504 Accommodation Plan meetings and the district nurse stated that, Carlese could use wipes on any areas which she felt could be covered with allergens. This type of statement from the district nurse regarding allergens, suggests to me that food allergy education needs to be done.

My recommendation is that there should not be any food allowed in the classroom due to food allergies. Food in the classroom puts each child at risk, like my daughter to touch a desk that has been contaminated with allergens.

We did change schools due to Carlese being bullied from other students while at Dag Middle School. We switched Middle Schools and she began at the Moran Middle School in 8th grade, still in the Wallingford School District. While at Moran, there was again, negligence displayed. I emailed the assistant principal regarding Carlese's food allergies and my concern that there may be food in her classroom. I was told in the emails that the teacher was very aware of Carlese's food allergies and there would not be any unsafe/allergen type of foods in her class. However, her science teacher did bring chocolate and cheese type of foods into the classroom for the students on two different occasions. This resulted in two 911 calls and hours in the Yale emergency room, while Carlese was in school, as she had two anaphylactic reactions from these negligent actions spaced months apart, by the same teacher.

Regarding past experiences with food in school, I feel the only place food should be eaten is in the cafeteria. Children walking around with Starbucks coffee or foods containing allergens while walking in the hallways, is also a risk factor for not only my daughter, but other children with food allergies. Hallways can be tight, especially in high school and kids are carrying various drinks in the hallway which can be easily spilled on Carlese. If this were to occur, it could cause

her to have an allergic reaction. Not to mention the fear this can evoke, knowing that at any moment, that drink could end up on you and put your life at risk.

While in the Wallingford Public School District, not only was my daughter bullied by other students and staff, but I was bullied by the administrative staff in my efforts to keep Carlese safe. The 504 Accommodation Plan meetings were not routinely productive. But more of an opportunity for the administrative staff to demonstrate their power. I hope that some changes are made and that no one has to endure the struggle and negligence we endured while attending this school district for 10 years.

Fortunately, we have moved and are currently in the Cheshire Public School District. Although there have been some challenges, my requests for change have been received well and the support of the school district is wonderful overall. The school district cares about Carlese and her safety as well as support her inclusion. Inclusion is key to children with food allergies.

We did face a challenge regarding segregation on one occasion. While attending a class which was changed to the cafeteria, Carlese was pulled out and taken to the library, where she was told to sit in the far back corner by herself until the class was over. The regular teacher was not in that day, so she was put in the library. Isolation and segregation were used due to her food allergies. The staff didn't want her around the other kids in the cafeteria for study hall because they would be eating. This was very upsetting for Carlese, as you can imagine. It was like she had a disease or something. This type of food allergy management is not acceptable and can be traumatizing, both emotionally and socially to a child with food allergies.

I did address this issue with the vice principal at the time, and asked that her 504 Plan state, Carlese will not be excluded from her class. If her class is in the cafeteria, then she would also be in the cafeteria and the proper supervision would take place. Inclusion is the answer, not exclusion when it comes to children with food allergies. This was added with full support to her 504 Accommodation Plan.

There was also an issue

concerning the cleaning of the cafeteria tables which has come up recently. The cafeteria staff were cleaning the tables with buckets of water and a rag. When it comes to removing the allergens from tables, a bucket of water was used to clean ten other table. I voiced my concern that this is not a safe cleaning method when it comes to cleaning Carlese's tables, due to cross-

contamination. A spray bottle with the proper cleaning solution and a clean cloth should be used on any tables in which children with food allergies will be sitting or eating at.

After addressing my concerns of cross-contamination when the cafeteria tables are cleaned, the staff ordered spray bottles for cleaning and the proper cleaning method for the allergy tables has been addressed.

In conclusion, I have consolidated recommendations in the list below, through my many years of struggle and experience of negligence in the public school system. It is my hope that some change will take place and schools will be a safer place for children with food allergies.

Food should not be allowed in the classroom. If food is brought in, the students or teachers should dispose of it and wash or wipe their hands.

Staff should not eat at their desk due to the risk of cross-contamination.

The proper cleaning of cafeteria tables with a spray bottle and a clean cloth or wipes should be used to clean any tables, which children with food allergies will be sitting. A bucket of water and a dirty rag should not be used due to the risk of cross-contamination.

Inclusion of children with food allergies should be the practice, not isolation and exclusion.

Food should not be allowed on school buses.

Bus drivers should be trained on all buses on the signs of an allergic reaction and the administration of an Epi-pen.

Food should only be allowed in the cafeteria during breakfast and lunch during school hours.

Drinks and food should not be allowed by students in the hallways.

When there are school events, food should not be involved as well. Keeping food out of the public school events, can help keep children with food allergies safe.

There should always be a trained medical professional in the school building during the same hours that the students are in school.

I hope my experiences and recommendations will help in educating others when it comes to children with food allergies. Having a safe school environment without negligence and isolation is critical for my daughter and other children with food allergies. By putting laws in place to protect children with life threatening food allergies, you have the power to save the life of my daughter, Carlese, and many other children just like Carlese who struggle with food allergies every day.

Thank you

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