

Sent: Wednesday, November 16, 2016 10:27 AM
To: Navarrete, Leslie
Subject: Food Allergy Testimony

To the members of the Task Force -

As a parent of a child with life threatening food allergies and an advocate and member of Food Allergy Education Network I have a perspective that could be of help to the work you are doing. I will try to make this brief but poignant.

As a parent, I have witnessed first hand the hard work we did as a small group of engaged parents advocating for creating consistent policies and procedures to keep our children safe and included in schools. I will share what I think has worked and what improvements could be made.

What we know works:

- * Classrooms are learning environments and should remain free of celebrations that include food. Local school board policies should reflect as such. No exceptions.
- * Children with food allergies should be identified by administration and provided the opportunity to be protected by a 504 plan.
- * Best practices must be consistent in each district, school to school. Classroom signage and other best practices in place should not be left up to building by building decisions.
- * Good policy and practice is very helpful in elementary schools while children are developing an understanding of their food allergies and where the numbers of children with food allergies are the highest.
- * No food should be used as rewards. There is no place for it in schools.

Improvements can be made in the following areas:

- * We need to improve communications and follow through of regulations.
- * Education of all staff must be improved to build understanding of the unique challenges that food allergy children experience, both emotionally and in what they do each day to keep themselves safe
- * Policy should be wrapped into a overall wellness policy and sub committees on a local level are helpful only if there is a complete understanding of the task at hand.
- * Intermediate schools and beyond are the wild wild west. Teachers are sending messages to children that are not helpful. They are giving out food and hiding it from administration, as well as telling the children not to tell their parents they are still using food or candy as a reward
- * PTA's and PTO's should be encouraged to work cooperatively with food allergy families, such as having a representative on all events that allow food, so that ALL children can be safe AND included. School leadership (principals and the like) should be respectful and not take a side one way or the other.
- * Once policy and regulations are made, regular yearly or bi-yearly reviews of said policy and best practices should be done.

As a member of Food Allergy Education Network I had a recent conversation with a school nurse from a regional school district in the state who seemed not only annoyed with what parents were requesting for their food allergic child, (a safe snack list) but also she was insensitive, dismissive and judgmental. This is certainly not acceptable. When I suggested that policy at a

district level should be developed and classrooms were for learning and birthday celebrations were unnecessary, her incredulousness was palatable. It was clear she had preconceived notions of what kept children safe and that food wasn't the problem, the parents/child was the problem.

I will close with another short personal story which shows what happens when parents advocate, even in an environment where policy is in place.

*Someone in close proximity to my child's elementary school was feeding the squirrels by placing piles of peanuts within 2 feet of the playground fence so it was brought to the attention of the school principal. The parents requested attention to this safety matter and requested additional signage to bring it to the attention of the person feeding the squirrels. After several emails back and forth, over a series of days, administration minimized our concerns, pushed back, denied responsibility for the property and even placed blame on the animals. FINALLY, they put up signs and the people stopped feeding the squirrels peanuts. Great right? Why should we complain about that? Well we didn't complain, we thanked them for doing what we had requested and moved on. HOWEVER, the problem as we saw it, was the 3 signs that were put up were SO large and overkill in number, as well as permanent. It message to the parents and children was to embarrass the parents and clearly a retaliatory move from one administrator. **This is just one example of what happens when schools don't have a clear understanding of food allergies, have no respect for parents and are left to figure out how to troubleshoot a problem on a school-by-school basis.***

Thank you for your attention to this important growing health crisis. I look forward to your recommendations.

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