



*Bringing joy to learning*

## Q&A: Food Allergies in School

At the beginning of the 2018-2019 academic year, Plainfield students had a combined 90 known allergens that would put them in danger of serious medical conditions, including near-certain death.

Working with parents, we bring all parties together to ensure that school is a safe environment for students, including those with allergies. We include teachers, support staff, the school nurse, our counselors and the Transportation and Food Services staff in those conversations. Parents whose children are in a class with someone dealing with severe allergies are also made aware of the restrictions.

If you are a visitor to one of our elementary schools, you've probably noticed signs outside many classrooms indicating the space is allergen-free. Sometimes, it's as simple as "peanut-free." But in reality, there's nothing simple about it.

While peanuts are the most commonly-known allergen, and they are the #1 allergen with Plainfield students, there are others that we must protect against. Just a few examples include wheat, soy, dairy, chickpeas, egg and red dye.

But the risk isn't simply that a child could ingest an allergen. In some cases, even indirect contact (someone touching a table who just touched something containing the allergen) is enough to cause a severe reaction, including anaphylaxis and death.

One way we try to protect students with extreme allergies is by sanitizing desks, tables and materials they come in contact with frequently. This includes storing their electronic devices in separate cabinets and sanitizing them after every use.

In a busy cafeteria with hundreds of children enjoying their lunches, the efforts to protect students can be significant, but our team is up to the challenge. You'll find an "allergen-free" table, typically located on the perimeter of the room. While most children don't like to be singled out, children with severe food allergies are well aware of the importance of staying away from their friends' lunches. And their friends understand it as well!

This is simply another example of how we all work together in the best interests of our students. We want parents to feel comfortable with the steps we're taking on behalf of their children, and to know how seriously we take our responsibility.