Snapshots

Fast Fact: On average, kids spend

RESEARCH ROUNDPUP

Managing Students’ Food Allergies and Asthma

For kids with food allergies, peanuts (or shellfish or wheat) may be the problem, but a smart school health management plan can be part of the solution. That is, if schools are prepared to handle allergy emergencies—and a new study indicates that perhaps too few are.

Chronic medical conditions affect up to a quarter of American children, with asthma and food allergies topping the list. Between 4 and 6 percent of American children have food allergies—and that number has been on the rise since 1997, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). A third of children with food allergies also have asthma, which increases their risk of experiencing a severe allergic reaction.

The CDC recommends that schools develop an individual plan for each child with allergies in order to manage and reduce the student’s risk. Plans should include treatment, contact information for parents and doctors, and history of the child’s reactions and symptoms. Northwestern University researchers recently explored whether Chicago’s 650 K-12 schools are prepared with these health management plans. Their findings, published this September in Pediatrics, indicate that only one in four students with asthma and half of students with a food allergy had a school health management plan. The researchers note that Chicago is likely representative of other districts; studies from other states and districts also indicate inconsistent use of health plans for students with allergies.

MY TWO CENTS

What’s one way your school gives back to your community during the holidays?

Paul Anderson (@scprincipalpa): Each classroom makes tied fleece blankets. Collectively, we donate around 80 blankets to the local homeless shelter!

Lisa Trewhitt Earby, via Facebook: The E.L. Ross Elementary Show Choir goes out to different places in our city (Cleveland, Tennessee) to sing Christmas carols.
Why, then, do so few students have a health plan on record? One problem may lie in the process for verifying conditions. In Chicago, parents submit forms to document a child’s health conditions, but a doctor must verify the information before it can be entered into the district’s database. Once entered, families are then invited to develop a health management plan or 504 plan.

Minority and low-income students are less likely to have a plan on file at school, and the researchers speculate that this may be because lower-income families may have difficulty visiting a health care provider to get this verification.

One potential solution: parent education, such as reaching out to parents who do not complete the doctor verification, and teaching parents about food allergies generally. The researchers point to their companion project, presented at the 2014 National Food Allergy Conference in June, exploring how schools can educate parents about chronic condition reporting and verification through in-person meetings, print materials, and an online toolkit.

Visit cdc.gov to read guidelines on managing food allergies and crafting health plans.

**Spotlight on Best Practices**

**Bright Ideas from 2014 National Distinguished Principals**

**FAB Families**

FAB Families are small, multi-age groups of students assigned to a staff member—their FAB “parent.” FAB Families meet monthly for lunch and conversation while doing character- and team-building activities and playing games. Through FAB Families, we give students a positive adult contact that remains constant throughout their time at our school, build multi-age friendships among students, foster school pride, and enhance leadership skills among staff and students. We’ve also curbed bullying incidents. Our students and staff simply can’t get enough of their FAB Families!

—Paul Erickson, principal of Inman Elementary in Inman, Kansas

**Staff Attendance Incentives**

Over the past three years, we’ve had steady improvement in employee attendance at Gladden Middle School. Employees with perfect attendance for the month are rewarded in ways they choose, which have included banana split parties, taco bars, blue jean passes, dessert parties, afternoon coffee/tea, etc.

—Ardith Bates, principal of Gladden Middle School in Chatsworth, Georgia

**School Branding 101**

For National Principals Month in October, NAESP teamed up with the Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association (TEPSA) for a tweetchat on school branding. Principals from across the country swapped branding strategies, from designing logos to crafting messaging. Visit NAESP’s Storify page (storify.com/NAESP) to see the chat’s top tweets.

**Buzzword: Metacognition**

**What it means:** Put simply, it’s thinking about one’s thinking. Metacognitive practices help students transfer and adapt their learning to new contexts, and understand their strengths and weaknesses.

**In the classroom:** These four activities help students with metacognition, according to San Francisco State University researcher Kimberly Tanner: pre-assessments; identifying the “muddiest point,” or the material they find most confusing; retrospective post-assessments (asking, “Before this unit, I thought…”); and reflective journals.

**Key practice:** Talk through problems. Students can learn how to approach problems if they hear their teacher work through complexities and mistakes.

Shauna Carter (@DrCarterCMS): We give wish lists to our families in need and obtain items—food, clothing, toys, gift cards—through donations.

Patrick Schumaker, via Facebook: We do a Family Fun Night where students and parents make scarves and blankets for a homeless shelter, and bring toys to donate to a charity. They write letters and send puzzles to orphans overseas.