

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School

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To: All Parents/Guardians of students at Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic School
From: Jo Mathieson, Principal
RE: Food Allergies and Food Safety

At St. Thomas Aquinas School we are concerned about creating the safest possible environment for our students. One area that has become an increasing concern in schools across the world is the growing number of young people with serious, and often life-threatening, food allergies. We are fortunate to have the services of two school nurses provided by the Town of Fairfield to help us when there are health-related issues during the school day. However, when it comes to food allergies, it is important for parents, teachers, school staff and volunteers to form a partnership to assist our students.

As you may have noted in the current school handbook, our school has made provisions to be an *allergy friendly school*. Research indicates that milk, egg, peanut, tree nut, fish, shellfish, soy, and wheat are the most common forms of food allergies in children. It is impossible to avoid all of these items in a school environment where lunch is served or brought in from individual homes. However, we can take some universal precautions and then follow more specific procedures for the most common life-threatening allergies.

Teachers will be going over the following guidelines with students during the first few days of the new school year. We encourage each family, even those without children who have food allergies, to review them at home:

- Students are only to eat food brought from their own home or provided by the School Lunch Program. You will be given ample notice of any exceptions to this policy.
- Students **MAY NOT** share food or drink with other students.
- We will celebrate the birthday of each student with special recognition in the classroom, over the intercom system and by a simple gift from me to the student. Teachers will make sure that birthdays are acknowledged in an age-appropriate way but we will not distribute any birthday items (including food *or* non-food treats). We respectfully ask parents to save food and other birthday treats for celebrations among family and friends that are held off campus.
- We will continue to *limit* the practice of celebrating special holidays with food treats that are often related to instruction. While there will still be some days

when we celebrate with food, all parents will have ample notice so that they may send in a healthy or more appropriate snack for their child.

- The gym and all classrooms, including those used for special subjects, will have an allergy friendly policy for school events. Signs indicating this are posted outside of each room. Students who bring snacks to school to eat in their classrooms **may not** bring snacks that contain nuts or have been processed with nuts or nut oil. The list of ingredients should be checked on food labels. Please note that nuts **MAY** be contained in school lunches but not school snacks.
- During lunch, we will continue the practice of having a nut-free table. If your child has a friend with a nut allergy and you send a note to his/her homeroom teacher **guaranteeing** that your child will carry a safe, nut-free lunch to school, he/she may sit at the nut-free table. A list of those who are expected and permitted to sit at that table will be available in the MPR (Multi-Purpose Room). *We sincerely hope that some parents will consider this option so that students with nut allergies do not have to sit by themselves!*
- Since there are now some products (soy nut butter, sunflower butter) that imitate peanut butter, we ask that parents sending in a lunch with these products to take the extra time to use a marker on the lunch bag to write that this is a safe product. If a product looks and smells like peanut butter, and we don't know that it is an imitation, the student may be asked to sit at another table.
- Special care will be taken to clean all tables between lunch periods.
- The Religious Education Coordinator is willing to work with us by asking the students/teachers in that program to promote allergy friendly classrooms as well.
- In some of the classrooms where students have severe allergies that could lead to anaphylaxis or death from contact with allergens, the teacher may ask students to wash their hands with a wipe before entering the classroom in case they ate nut products or came into contact with them between home and school. Please understand that this precaution may be necessary to save the life of a classmate.
- Please contact the school nurse if your child is diagnosed with any food allergies or conditions that need special attention. We will make every effort to be vigilant and to help your child be safe in school.

Thank you, in advance, for your cooperation in these important matters which will keep our students safe and encourage healthy habits for a life-time.