



February 1, 2016

The Honorable Eliot Engel
United States House of Representatives
2462 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Engel:

On behalf of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA, www.aafa.org), I am writing to you as a member of the Congressional Allergy and Asthma Caucus to express concern about two recent asthma emergencies in Texas schools. In both cases, students were suspended for taking action to assist classmates suffering from asthma attacks. It seems that lives were saved due to the students' quick actions, but both were disciplined for acting in good faith to save a classmate.

At Schrade Middle School in the Garland Independent School District, two girls were suspended after one student loaned her asthma inhaler to another student who was gasping and wheezing for breath¹. At Gateway Middle School in the Killeen Independent School District, a student was suspended because he walked out of class to help a fellow student having an asthma attack². A classmate had fallen to the floor gasping for breath, and the suspended student ignored his teacher's instructions to wait while she emailed the school nurse. Instead, he carried his friend to the nurse because he feared for the girl's life.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 4 to 5 children die every week due to asthma³. While AAFA understands that schools need to establish rules and policies, there must be room for common sense. Certainly, saving another person's life is a priority. Schools need up-to-date and appropriate asthma management programs. Schools should have asthma emergency protocols in place, and the state should have a specific asthma program with policies, procedures, and resources for schools to manage students with asthma. Teachers and other school personnel need to be able to recognize an asthma attack and know what to do in case of emergency. Students should not have to worry about a classmate dying from asthma or being punished for helping to save a life.

AAFA publishes an annual report—our State Honor Roll^{TM4}—that evaluates state policies based on recommendations we believe represent best practices for school management of asthma and allergies. Unfortunately, Texas is not included on our honor roll. This means that the state does not have policies that: require schools to have emergency protocols for asthma (our policy 10), or assure that the state has (or is preparing) a specific asthma program with policies, procedures and resources for schools to manage students with asthma (our extra credit policy B).



Texas can also take advantage of the new federal law (Every Student Succeeds Act) that allows school districts to access federal grants to develop and put in place asthma management plans to support their students.

The resources to empower educators and keep children healthy exist. However, they only work if the leaders of those school districts use them. AAFA hopes that both school districts will immediately reconsider their suspension policies, and establish robust asthma management programs that keep students healthy and alive. We need to improve policies and school regulations in Texas. It is our hope that these incidents will help propel future state and school system efforts to change laws and regulations that place students at risk, both in Texas and across the nation. As members of the Congressional Allergy and Asthma Caucus, we hope that you will bring attention to these recent events and use them as a call to action to improve asthma emergency protocols around the country.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me at mbloomrosen@aafa.org or (202) 466-7643 ext. 223, if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

Meryl Bloomrosen, MBI, MBA
Senior Vice President of Policy, Advocacy, and Programs
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

¹ Maxwell, Dani. (2016, January 19). 2 girls suspended after one shares inhaler during asthma attack. Retrieved from: <http://www.wkow.com/story/30997406/2016/01/19/2-girls-suspended-after-one-shares-inhaler-during-asthma-attack>

² Shaw, Rissa. (2016, January 21). Student suspended after carrying classmate having asthma attack to nurse.

Retrieved from: <http://www.wfaa.com/story/news/crime/2016/01/21/student-suspended-after-carrying-student-having-asthma-attack-nurse/79105014/>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Most Recent Asthma Data. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/most_recent_data.htm. Published 2015. Accessed January 25, 2016.

⁴ <http://www.aafa.org/page/state-honor-roll.aspx>