# Kids shuffle lunch seats as part of "No One Eats Alone" campaign

(Group Green)



"I am uncomfortable. I am not used to this," said Kyle Johnson, 14, who cringes as he realizes his blue card does not match the purple color of his usual lunch table friends at Rogers Middle School in Affton, Missouri. The school participated in No One Eats Alone Day by encouraging students to talk to kids outside of their immediate social circle by switching up lunch seating. Photo: Laurie Skrivan/St. Louis Post-Dispatch/TNS

Ugh, middle school.

Notes on my thoughts, reactions and questions as I read.

There’s awkwardness, cliques and bullying. The challenges of preadolescence. Low-self esteem, or maybe too much self-esteem.

It can all collide in the cafeteria and leave some kids feeling invisible if they don’t fit in at any one particular table.

What difference could it make if students themselves tried to encourage a change in the lunchroom?

That’s the idea behind a national campaign called “No One Eats Alone Day,” a student-led program that takes aim at social isolation among middle schoolers.

Schools are picking up on the idea. More than 300,000 students across the country signed up to participate. Participation grew from 35 schools in 2014 to more than 700 this year.

The program was created by Beyond Differences, a national nonprofit group whose mission is to change the culture in middle schools to be more inclusive.

With social isolation and bullying now considered a chronic problem in schools, this program seeks to reverse these trends by asking students to engage in simple and fun ways to include others during lunchtime — making sure no one eats alone, said Laura Talmus, the founder of Beyond Differences.

Middle school was a rough couple of years for Talmus’ daughter, Lili Smith. Lili was born with a cranial facial syndrome.

“She would call me almost daily, ‘Mom, I have nobody to eat with, and the girls don’t want me to sit with them,’” Talmus said, who said her daughter would finish her lunch and call her from the restroom crying. “Lili was never teased or bullied, but was almost suffering as much because she felt invisible.”

Lili died at the age of 15 from medical complications of her syndrome. Afterward, a group of teens from the community banded together to bring change to their local schools.

It’s not an easy task.

At Rogers Middle School in Affton, Missouri, resistance to No One Eats Alone Day began after students learned of it through the morning announcements. The student organizers heard that a lot of students were worried that they wouldn’t get to sit next to their friends.

On Friday, the student members of the school’s Mistreatment Leadership Team placed ice-breakers and conversation starters on the round tables in their cafeteria. Questions like, “Who is your favorite celeb?” and “Who is your role model?”

Notes on my thoughts, reactions and questions as I read.

The students waited nervously with pieces of paper to hand out to classmates, color-coded to randomly assign them to tables.

When the lunch bell rang, there was audible disappointment among those who were separated. Others ran and hugged their friends when they realized they would be at the same table.

Some tried to make the best of what they said was an uncomfortable situation.

“I would much rather sit alone than with people I don’t know, to be honest,” said Cori Caby, a seventh-grader who was at a table with some students she usually sits with and some she doesn’t.

Some switched cards before others noticed so they could sit with their friends.

Then there was the distraction of cellphones, an easy way to get out of talking to people you don’t know.

No one was saying the kids were going to become best friends after just one lunch.

It was more about being aware of other people’s feelings, and encouraging students to reach out and start a conversation with someone they normally don’t talk to, said Reece Black, an eighth-grader and one of the organizers. Reece called out at least one table of kids sitting with their usual group.

But he saw successes, too.

Sixth-graders Jenna Walden and Avarry Wilkerson ended up at a table by themselves, and they noticed that Alexander Scherer, a new student at school, was alone. They moved over to sit with him. As he ate his chicken patty sandwich and french fries, he and the girls talked about Six Flags.

“By the way, I’m Avarry,” she said, just as lunch was wrapping up.

Reece and the other student leaders say they saw other examples of kids reaching out.

“So that was pretty cool,” Reece said.

Comprehension Questions:

1. Select the sentence from the article that BEST shows one of the shortcomings of the "No One Eats Alone Day" campaign.
2. The students waited nervously with pieces of paper to hand out to classmates, color-coded to randomly assign them to tables.
3. When the lunch bell rang, there was audible disappointment among those who were separated.
4. Then there was the distraction of cellphones, an easy way to get out of talking to people you don't know.
5. No one was saying the kids were going to become best friends after just one lunc
6. Select the sentence from the article that describes the underlying idea behind the "No One Eats Alone Day" campaign.
7. It can all collide in the cafeteria and leave some kids feeling invisible if they don't fit in at any one particular table.
8. At Rogers Middle School in Affton, Missouri, resistance to No One Eats Alone Day began after students learned of it through the morning announcements.
9. The student organizers heard that a lot of students were worried that they wouldn't get to sit next to their friends.
10. It was more about being aware of other people's feelings, and encouraging students to reach out and start a conversation with someone they normally don't talk to, said Reece Black, an eighth-grader and one of the organizers
11. Read the first three paragraphs of the article. What is the meaning of "cliques" as used in the following sentence?

There's awkwardness, cliques and bullying.

1. a group that doesn't allow others to join
2. socially awkward people
3. victims of bullying
4. a gang
5. Which of the following sentences from the article contains a word that has the SAME meaning as "persistent"?
6. The program was created by Beyond Differences, a national nonprofit group whose mission is to change the culture in middle schools to be more inclusive.
7. With social isolation and bullying now considered to be a chronic problem in schools, this program seeks to reverse these trends by asking students to engage in simple and fun ways to include others during lunchtime ? making sure no one eats alone, said Laura Talmus, the founder of Beyond Differences.
8. Lili died at the age of 15 from medical complications of her syndrome. Afterward, a group of teens from the community banded together to bring change to their local schools.
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