

Random drug testing audit done

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Concerns were raised last spring about the integrity of the selection process used for random drug testing (RDT) of Holyoke students in grades 7-12 involved in extra-curricular activities.

As a result, the school district employed an outside firm, Keith Research & Evaluation, LLC, to perform an audit. A presentation of that audit report was given by Supt. Bret Miles at the Oct. 6 board meeting.

Miles noted the RDT committee has been reconvened for a thorough review of the policy and will also introduce all new procedures designed to meet the recommendations set forth in the report.

He pointed out the RDT committee will serve in an advisory capacity only. The committee is meeting weekly and intends to complete its work in November, then make recommendations to the board for proposed changes.

Miles emphasized right now they're focused on making the RDT program the best it can be. "Once it's the best, then we can revisit whether to continue it."

In the audit summary, Patricia Keith, Ph.D., said the Holyoke RDT program was built with integrity. She noted the Holyoke RDT Guidelines—Random Selection of Enrolled Students—describes a multi-step randomization process for selecting students for RDT.

This multi-step process was partially used by Centennial Mental Health (CMH). Their subsequent use of an in-house-developed method for randomly selecting students is what likely brought the integrity of the selection processes into question.

Problems with the student selection processes have been identified. Although method one had the potential to be reliable and valid, its implementation is not fully documented. It involved an online random number generator, which is a valid method.

Method two is inadequate for randomly selecting students, according to the audit report. With a change of personnel at CMH, a "close the eyes and point" method was used at CMH from

Random drug testing audit done

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

March 11-May 14 to provide student numbers to the school. This method is not considered valid.

Consistency in the practice of selecting students was not present, in part, because of the lack of written standard operating procedures (SOP). The absence of supervision and the informal communication patterns between the school district and CMH did not work to establish a high level of integrity for the program during its first year of operation either.

Recordkeeping by both parties was not at the level needed to document the integrity of the student selection process.

After the two-day site visit, interviews with seven community members with interests in the RDT program and reviewing existing documents, Keith Research and Evaluation concluded the RDT program needs to develop a formal plan for continuous quality improvement.

Recommendations reviewed

Supt. Miles reviewed the recommendations from Dr. Keith's report, as well as action progress on each.

The recommendation to discontinue method two for selection has been implemented. The audit also requested the CMH office manager no longer be responsible for selecting student numbers for RDT.

The establishment of written SOPs for the selection of students for RDT is in progress, with a new draft to be presented to the RDT committee Oct. 20.

Closer supervision at CMH was recommended, noting once the SOPs are developed, they can serve as a benchmark for all project-related responsibilities and activities.

Random drug testing audit done

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

It was suggested the CMH executive director or maybe regional director meet with its staff, at least twice a year, to ensure all work efforts, including paperwork, are done with consistency and integrity.

Keith Research recommended the principal should continue to be responsible for the RDT program at the school level, and should review, verify and if correct, sign the CMH semi-annual report each semester before forwarding it to the superintendent. A second RDT coordinator will be trained, as well.

It was noted an additional district staff person could be assigned to work with the principal for clerical involvement, and the superintendent should supervise the work done by the principal to maintain the integrity of the program.

The district will work at a balance of protecting information with layers of oversight to protect the RDT coordinator.

Additionally, it was recommended a plan for continuous quality improvement be developed, starting with a review of some items in the RDT guidelines. That policy review is under way, with recommendations for the school board and standard operating procedures to hopefully be ready by November.

In Dr. Keith's report to the district, it was noted there's been an estimated 16.5 percent of school districts in the United States which have adopted and implemented student random drug testing programs as of May 2008.

In August of 2008, Holyoke School District joined the ranks of over 2,000 other districts that conduct RDT of some students.