

Activities/athletic, random drug test policies reviewed

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Proposed revisions to Holyoke School District's activities/athletic handbook and random drug test policy were the focus of continued discussion at the April 20 meeting of the Re-1J School Board.

Both will return to the May 4 and May 18 board meetings for first and second readings, in preparation for completion of the 2010-11 handbooks.

Revisions for the activities/athletic handbook have been proposed by a committee that reviewed the handbook policies in detail in a seven-meeting process since January.

Handbook changes were presented by this committee at the school board's April 6 meeting.

A violations committee has been proposed for when there is an alleged major violation of participation rules. In addition, consequences for violations of major offenses in activities and athletics are defined specifically.

The committee also suggested use of the word "involvement" at an activity involving alcoholic beverages to replace "attendance" or "participation."

Reviewing the committee's recommendations last week, board member Jeff Tharp said the proposal is a much-improved document. He cited the great steps made towards fairness.

Dan Kafka referenced the value of having so many on the policy study committee share their opinions in order to arrive at a fair proposal.

While some reportedly expressed the policy was going backwards, Kafka said the result was a good, collaborative effort. He said it emphasizes the district's philosophy. "We don't excuse bad behavior, but we don't make bad kids out of good kids."

Kris Camblin added support for the changes, noting the value of the detail in the policy. "It's a

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step forward.”

Looking at the district’s mission statement, Tharp referenced the emphasis on rewarding the good and dealing with the bad. “It’s not anti-punitive, it provides a process.”

Supt. Bret Miles mentioned Principal Susan Ortner’s comment when the revisions were proposed. She had said the revisions are not put before the board as a perfect document, but as the best thinking of the study group at this time.

Further discussion was conducted last week on the subjects of dual-sport athletes and whether cheerleading is considered a sport. These are two questions the study committee had asked for board consideration.

While there was some interest in allowing participation in two sports at a time, it was not a consensus, and there was no desire for the study committee to research it further.

“As a board, our primary role is to educate kids,” said Kafka, noting if there’s not some mitigating reason to change a policy, why would they change it?

Random drug test policy changes proposed

Changes in the district’s random drug test (RDT) policy were recommended by a study committee which met each week for three months last fall.

Proposed changes were presented at the Dec. 15 school board meeting and reviewed at the Jan. 19 meeting.

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With the proposed changes having been available for public comment for several months, the board will move forward with first and second reading on the policy during its May meetings.

Revisiting the philosophy of the RDT program, the study committee focused on it serving as a deterrent, not as a fail-safe way to catch everyone.

A major proposed change in the RDT policy notes a lesser consequence for a first positive test. A student will still be required to provide a clean or lower-level test, to go through the intake process with Centennial Mental Health (CMH) and follow the activities/athletic handbook consequences after a first positive test. However, there will be no requirement for monthly follow-up tests for that first offense.

Proposed changes also include stipulation for no instant results, with all tests to be sent to the lab. Records will be retained for a period of seven years and refusal to submit to testing is treated the same as a positive test.

Further question was raised in January on whether the policy really needs to state an audit is required every year.

At last week's meeting, the board agreed for policy wording to note: "A third party audit of the program, policy and procedures shall be conducted as directed by the board." This allows for the audit, but doesn't require it annually.