

Random drug testing summarized as first year ends

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

After a year of random drug testing for Holyoke students in grades 7-12, no positive tests were reported.

Principal Susan Ortner presented the year's summary to the Re-1J School Board at its May 19 meeting.

With the testing pool including those involved in extra-curricular activities, Ortner noted it represented 62 of 82 7th and 8th grade students or 76 percent and 130/156 of students in grades 9-12 or 83 percent.

A total of 203 tests, averaging 5.48 per week were administered during the school year. This included 126 five-panel dip tests (test for cocaine, amphetamines, opiates, marijuana and PCP), 77 Etg tests (test for alcohol up to 80 hours after consumption) and also two hair tests (test for drugs listed above, up to three months after use).

Twelve students were selected and tested twice first semester, 10 during second semester and 35 over the course of the entire year. Thirty-two students were not selected at all.

Total cost to the district was \$3,335. This included \$1,260 for Dip tests at \$10 each, \$1,925 for Etgs at \$25 each and \$150 for hair tests at \$75 each.

Only one alteration in practice from policy was initiated—the principal took a bottle of water to each student selected for testing 30 minutes prior to the test.

Ortner emphasized the results were always confidential, just the testing selection was not.

In one recommendation for policy change, Ortner suggested when students request a hair sample test rather than a Dip or Etg, the family would be required to make up the \$50 difference in cost.

She also reported she has been called by a community group and another school district in Colorado, asking for a copy of the district's random drug testing policy.

Clarification asked for selection procedure

Just for clarification, Ortner was asked to review the procedure for student selection for random drug testing.

Centennial Mental Health has the numbers, which they've generated for testing through a computer program. They call Ortner with the student ID numbers to be tested. Ortner then matches names with the numbers to determine who will be tested. A half-hour prior to the testing, she takes a bottle of water to those students.

Afterwards, on the records, Ortner marks the test date and kind of test and stores the info in a locked file cabinet. She noted test results for the 2008-09 school year will be shredded the week after school is out.

Board member Dan Kafka noted he understands the security of the test after it's administered, but said he didn't remember talking about privacy of who would be tested.

Board members questioned why there would be a stigma for being selected for testing, as fellow students know who's in the testing pool.

Michelle Van Overbeke said the accountant in her is coming out, but she sees there being a weakness in that there's no protection for the random drug testing officer, who is Ortner in this case.

There's no accountability to know that the students who were selected were actually the ones who were tested. "It has nothing to do with questioning her, just for protecting her," said Van Overbeke.

Supt. Stephen Bohrer said there's implication the students are being hand-picked for testing.

Board members acknowledged if the records are opened for more scrutiny, they're just

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subject to less confidentiality. Suggestion was made for someone independent from the school system to provide the accountability back-up.

Ortner said, "There isn't anything I'm going to do to corrupt the policy."

Van Overbeke again said you audit people to protect yourself. She noted the person in charge of matching the student numbers to names needs protected from the accusation of hand-picking them.

Board president Kendon Olofson said the idea of an independent auditor of student selection in random drug testing is something to explore.