

Press Release
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Proposed Drug Testing Policy

The Comfort ISD Board of Trustees reviewed the proposed Drug Testing Policy for students participating in extra-curricular activities at the last board meeting. The following article provides a broad overview of the proposed policy.

The proposed policy would require mandatory drug testing of any student in grades 9-12 who chooses to participate in school-sponsored extra-curricular activities or requests a permit to park a vehicle on school property. School-sponsored extracurricular activities for which testing is required include athletics, band, FFA, HOSA, NHS, Skills USA, student council, cheerleading, and robotics. A student participating in these activities or requesting a parking permit shall be tested for the presence of illegal drugs and alcohol on a random basis. In addition, students shall be randomly tested throughout the school year.

The purposes of the drug-testing program are to prevent in-jury, illness, and harm resulting from the use of illegal and performance-enhancing drugs or alcohol; help enforce a drug-free educational environment; deter student use of illegal and performance enhancing drugs or alcohol; and educate students regarding the harm caused by the use of illegal and performance-enhancing drugs or alcohol.

The District will provide each parent and student a copy of the drug-testing policy and consent form prior to the student's participation in an affected activity or receipt of a parking permit. The District will conduct meetings with parents and interested student participants prior to the beginning of the fall practice period. Student attendance at the orientation meeting is mandatory. Parent attendance at an orientation meeting is mandatory for a minor student's parent. If a student and a minor student's parent fail to attend the orientation meeting, the student will not be allowed to participate in extracurricular activities or to receive a parking permit.

Before a student is eligible to participate in extracurricular activities or to receive a parking permit, the student will be required annually to sign a consent form agreeing to be subject to the rules and procedures of the drug-testing program. If the student is under the age of 18, the student's parent or guardian shall also sign a consent form. If appropriate con-sent is not given, the student shall not be allowed to participate in extracurricular activities or to receive a parking permit.

Drug-testing results will be confidential and will be disclosed only to the student, the student's parents, and designated District officials who need the information in order to administer the drug-testing program. Drug test results will not be maintained with a student's academic record. Results shall not be otherwise disclosed except as required by law.

The proposed policy allows for as many as ten random test dates throughout the school year. No less than eight percent and no more than 10 percent of the students participating in the program will be randomly selected for each random test date. The proposed policy outlines the collection procedures and consequences for students who refused to be tested.

Upon receiving results of a positive drug test, the District will schedule a meeting with the student, the student's parent if the student is under the age of 18, and the coach or sponsor of the extracurricular activity, as applicable, to review the test results and discuss consequences. The student or parent will have five school days following the meeting to provide a medical explanation for a positive result.

Consequences for a positive test include suspension from any extracurricular activity, and the student's parking permit shall be suspended for thirty calendar days. During the period of suspension, the student may participate in practices but not in any competitive activities or performances. Upon a second offense, the student will be suspended from any extracurricular activity, and the student's parking permit will be suspended for 365 calendar days. If a student tests positive for a third time, the student will be suspended from any extracurricular activity or performance, and the student's parking permit shall be suspended, for the remainder of the student's enrollment in the District.

The proposed Drug Testing Policy may be viewed on the Comfort ISD website, comfort.txed.net, on the front page under *Latest News*. There is also a frequently asked question document on the subject. Listed below are three of the most commonly asked questions.

Why do some schools want to conduct random drug tests?

Schools that have adopted random student drug testing are hoping to decrease drug abuse among students via two routes. First, schools that conduct testing hope that random testing will serve as a deterrent, and give students a reason to resist peer pressure to take drugs. Secondly, drug testing can identify adolescents who have started using drugs so that interventions can occur early, or identify adolescents who already have drug problems, so they can be referred for treatment. Drug abuse not only interferes with a student's ability to learn, but it can also disrupt the teaching environment, affecting other students as well.

If a student tests positive for drugs, should that student face disciplinary consequences?

The primary purpose of drug testing is not to punish students who use drugs but to prevent drug abuse and to help students already using become drug-free. The results of a positive drug test should be used to intervene with students who do not yet have drug problems, through counseling and follow-up testing. For students that are diagnosed with addiction, parents and a school administrator can refer them to effective drug treatment programs, to begin the recovery process.

Why Test Teenagers at all?

Teens are especially vulnerable to drug abuse, when the brain and body are still developing. Most teens do not use drugs, but for those who do, it can lead to a wide range of adverse effects on the brain, the body, behavior and health.

Short term: Even a single use of an intoxicating drug can affect a person's judgment and decision-making—resulting in accidents, poor performance in a school or sports activity, unplanned risky behavior, and the risk of overdosing.

Long term: Repeated drug abuse can lead to serious problems, such as poor academic outcomes, mood changes (depending on the drug: depression, anxiety, paranoia, psychosis), and social or family problems caused or worsened by drugs.

Board procedures require that a policy be read at two separate meetings before the board may act on a proposed policy. The Board is scheduled to act on the proposed policy at the next regular meeting scheduled for June 12 at 6:00 pm in the Comfort ISD Central Office.