

THE TOLEDO BLADE EDITORIAL

Saving young lives

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The Maumee school board has joined neighboring districts in implementing a drug testing program for students. It is a positive step taken with the welfare of students in mind, and it is a step that should be followed by districts that currently have no such program.

The board voted Monday night to begin next year testing students in grades seven through 12 who are in extracurricular programs or requesting a parking pass. Substances that could be tested for include marijuana, alcohol, LSD, amphetamines, methadone, anabolic steroids, and cocaine. In addition, Superintendent Todd Cramer has said that opiates could be part of the panel because of the statewide heroin and opioid crisis.

Perrysburg, Anthony Wayne, and Springfield schools have already enacted similar programs.

“I have had interaction with many parents in recent weeks, and I can tell you that the response to this idea has been overwhelmingly positive,” Mr. Cramer told The Blade’s editorial board. “Parents know the peer pressure their kids are under, and this will give students one additional reason to say no.”

Mr. Cramer said parents will have the opportunity to have their child opt-in to the program, even if that child is not in extracurricular activities or requesting a parking pass.

The important thing about this plan is that it is not a “gotcha” test designed to get a student kicked out of school. There are no academic consequences, and a student has a right to a one-time self-referral that will result in no penalties.

This could head off a potential problem before it becomes too big to handle for the student or his family. A positive test will result in the parents being notified, and that will be followed by a meeting with a drug and alcohol specialist, who will lay out a recovery plan.

Last year, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration released data that show alcohol and cigarette use among adolescents ages 12 to 17 is at a historic low, so most students today understand the dangers of putting toxic substances into their bodies.

But this program targets students who are dabbling with a drug that at some point could become life-altering, as well as teenagers who may already be in the grip of addiction but have not been able to reach out for help.

This is not about punishing the mistakes of youth, it is about saving the lives of youth, and there is no reason why every school district shouldn’t take the same approach.