

# Drug Test...from Page 1A

teachers and administrators from the middle school,” said Dr. Fred Rayfield, Union County Schools Superintendent. “They looked at what the high school is doing and said that this is a proactive approach and decided to ask the board if it’s acceptable for it be done at the middle school as well.”

The board voted unanimously on the policy during its monthly meeting held last week at Union County Board of Education headquarters.

According to Dr. Rayfield, the decision to approve the policy was a no-brainer for the board members as all want to discourage student drug use as much as possible.

Similar to the high school’s drug policy, only students who are involved in extracurricular activities and have a signed permission slip from a parent or legal guardian will be subjected to the random testing.

The policy will include sports and other after-school activities, such as band, FFA and 4-H, and will go into effect at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year.

“The first week of school there will be a consent form that goes home,” said Dr. Rayfield. “If the kid is going to be involved in any kind of extracurricular activity, and that extracurricular really touches probably over 90 percent of the population that’s involved in something; the form goes home, the parent says yes or no on whether they want to allow their child to be

## Blimpies hosts fundraiser

Blimpies is hosting a fundraiser on Friday, July 7th at which a portion of the day’s sales will be donated to help “Change” combat suicide among young people. “Change” is a local nonprofit striving to strengthen our community and young people. For more information feel free to call Rebecca Brendle at 706-994-2305.

## Retired Firefighters Breakfast

The Retired Firefighters Breakfast is held the first Friday of each month, 9 a.m. at Cook’s Country Kitchen, Blairsville, GA.



Board members Janna Atkins and Tony Hunter. Photo/Lily Avery

enrolled in the random drug-testing program.

“The parents do have the right to say no but that’s also going to be a requirement of the student doing an extracurricular. So, that’s really the only negative consequence for saying no, is that it would limit their participation.”

If a student tests positive for drug use, disciplinary actions will be taken by the school that range from limited participation in the extracurricular to expulsion from the program, not to include any action taken by the parent or guardian.

However, the severity of the discipline depends on the number of failed drug tests administered over a specific period of time, something Dr. Rayfield hopes will be a discouraging factor for student drug use.

“In terms of the drug testing, the real carrot out there is that these kids are going to realize that there’s a chance they would have to give up a lot of their privileges,” said Dr. Rayfield. “And, most importantly, they could give up a sport or band or drama or something that they want to stay involved in for the rest of high school and maybe in college.”

While some may find concern with middle school aged students being subjected to random drug testing, this is not something unheard of in middle schools across the state. Although more high schools implement the program than middle schools, the continuous effort to combat student drug use has found its way to other school systems across the state as well.

“There are some other districts across the state that are doing drug testing at both the high school and the middle school,” said Dr. Rayfield. “However, the high school web of drug testing is very widespread among high

schools in Georgia. There are a lot of high schools that have the policy in place.”

And while the program in Union County is strictly a proactive approach that parents and guardians can absolutely refuse, Dr. Rayfield said he has found that most support the program and are willing to be cooperative to have their children enrolled.

“I’ve found that a strong majority of parents say that they’re actually pleased when their child ends up getting picked out of the random list of numbers and they have a drug test and it’s clean,” said Dr. Rayfield. “It gives them some assurance as well. So, the majority of parents are supportive of the concept.”

Though UCMS does not currently struggle with student drug use, it is a concern for many of the faculty and staff who continue to see the rise in students partaking in drugs at younger ages, not only in the state of Georgia but also across the country.

So, for the faculty and staff at Union County Middle School, and for the BOE and Dr. Rayfield, this decision was much more than a push against drugs, but also a step toward making students more aware of the impact of the positive and negative choices they make on a regular basis.

“Middle school is a place where the students go through a lot of changes, psychologically, physically and otherwise, it’s a real transition time for our students,” said Dr. Rayfield. “This is the time when they’re trying to identify who they are and what they’re going to be involved in and what they’re going to do. They make a lot of decisions there.

“This is a support program to create an awareness for the kid and the parent if there’s a problem. And I think that’s the goal, is to identify the problem and to get the students back in the right direction.”