FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING WOODWARD’S
STUDENT DRUG TESTING POLICY and ALCOHOL POLICY

Note: This document has been created to help foster dialogue with Woodward students and their families regarding the Student Drug Testing Policy and the Student Alcohol Policy. This document does not, however, constitute or amend the policies. To the extent there is any actual or perceived conflict between the contents of this document and the contents of the actual policies, the language of the policies, as interpreted by Woodward, will control.

What is the purpose of adding a student drug testing program at the Academy?

Our decision to introduce student drug testing came after very careful deliberation. We received input and presentations by Woodward families, some current and some former, regarding their experiences with illegal drug use by students. These families reported a firmly held belief that the existence of student drug testing would have provided a helpful tool for their students to use as an explanation when saying no to peers who are encouraging drug use. In reviewing the practices of other schools which have drug testing programs, we have heard repeatedly from administrators and students how important the drug testing program has been in deterring drug use. We also know from research that the longer a person delays experimentation with drugs, the less likely that person is to develop an addiction to them. Despite our best efforts at education, long-serving administrators at Woodward are of the opinion that the addition of drug testing is the one tool in our tool kit we have lacked to reinforce our commitment to be a drug-free school and to provide an additional reason for a student to say “NO” to drug use.

Does the use of a drug testing program mean that Woodward has a drug problem?

We know both anecdotally, and through a review of medical and educational literature, that many students in the United States experiment with illegal drug use prior to graduating from high school. We do not have reason to believe the issue at Woodward is worse than at any other independent or public school in Atlanta. The unfortunate fact, however, is that we have received reports and anecdotal information, from students and parents, suggesting that an unknown percentage of Woodward students experiment with illegal drug use while enrolled at the Academy. Our adoption of a drug testing program reflects our strong institutional commitment to eliminate drug use by all students in our community.

Why is Woodward doing drug testing when some believe that this is something parents should do, if they are so inclined?

We agree that parents have the greatest potential to influence a child’s attitude toward the use of illegal substances. That said, Woodward’s policy attempts to supplement, and, we hope, help parents’ oversight of their child’s behavior. Some parents have reported to us that they want us to do drug testing so that they don’t have to do it.
These parents believe drug testing by Woodward allows them to maintain an open and honest relationship with their child, without the sometimes complex burden of the parent requiring the child be tested.

It may appear that testing is a violation of one’s privacy or smack of Big Brother, and is a slippery slope to other possible intrusions in a student’s life. Were these concerns considered in developing the policy?

The concerns regarding privacy and Big Brother were very much present in the deliberations regarding drug testing. In an ideal world, we would not have a testing program. However, our year-long study, which focused—among other things—on research about the irreparable harm to brain development even casual drug use can cause in the teenage years, led us to the strong conclusion that privacy concerns are far outweighed by the benefits of the program we will implement. We understand the initial negative reaction some may have to a testing program; however, we hope families who feel this way will be open-minded enough to try to understand what we wish to accomplish with the program and why we are doing it. We have found that once families reflect for a while on the merits of the program they will at least be tolerant of it, if not embrace it.

How many other schools are doing drug testing?

Several Atlanta-area independent schools have drug testing programs for certain groups of students, such as athletes. At least one school (Wesleyan) has implemented a random testing program for all high school students. A number of public and private schools throughout the country now have some version of a drug testing program.

We disagree with the drug testing policy. What options do we have for not participating?

All Woodward students will be required to participate in the testing program as a condition of enrollment. There will be no exceptions. One of the reasons for allowing a one-year period before implementation of the new program is to provide adequate time for families in disagreement with the policy to find another school for their child.

The tests for drugs are preceded by questions to the students about whether the test will show evidence of use. Because you are administering the test anyway, what is the purpose of the questions?

The drug tests are intended to help students make responsible decisions regarding the non-use of these chemicals, and the tests will, indeed, show whether a student has used them. An additional component of a Woodward education is to instill character in students. One of the ways we demonstrate this is by asking students two questions in advance of these tests, giving them a chance to own responsibility for their actions. This is why there are different consequences for a first positive test result depending upon the answer the student has given to the questions.
All students will individually and privately be asked the questions: “You are about to give a urine sample for the purposes of a drug test. Have you taken anything illegal? Have you taken medication NOT prescribed to you by a doctor?”

*In addition to drug testing, what education are you offering to students and parents/guardians regarding the negative effects of drug use?*

Beginning in 7th grade, we will offer a course to support the values and expectations of the Woodward community. The course will focus on alcohol and drug prevention and the dangers of usage. It will also focus on helping parents communicate effectively with their teens regarding illegal drug use in a factual, non-threatening way long before a problem occurs. To this end, we will offer a REQUIRED course for parents/guardians of all 7th grade students and all families new to the Academy after 7th grade. At least one parent/guardian in the student’s family will be expected to attend the course.

*Which drugs is the urine test intended to detect?*

We will reserve the right to test for any illegal use of drugs, and will consult with outside experts to guide the decision making on this point. Urine analysis will likely include, but not be limited to, testing for: Marijuana (including synthetic marijuana), Cocaine, THC, Opiates, Amphetamines, Methamphetamine, Phencyclidine (PCP), Barbituates, Benzodiazepine, and Methylene dioxythamphetamine (MDMA).

*My child takes medication for a legitimate diagnosed medical condition. What assurance do I have that my child will not test positive for illegal drug use due to his or her prescription medication(s) and, therefore, suffer negative consequences?*

When students provide the test sample they will not be asked to provide any information about medications they may be taking. Only if the test result is positive will the parent be contacted by the third-party Medical Review Officer (MRO) who will explain the results of the test and inquire if legitimately prescribed medication may have led to the result. If medication is judged to be the cause, the parent/guardian will be asked to provide the contact information for the pharmacy where the prescription was secured, documentation from a physician, or other relevant information, so that the MRO may verify that the student is legitimately taking the drug in question. It is, therefore, likely that parents of students who are taking a prescribed medication, which may yield an initial “positive” result, will be contacted by the MRO. Once a legitimate prescription is verified by the MRO, the student’s results will be reported as “negative” and no further action will be taken. This process will occur before the Academy receives any information from the MRO regarding the student’s test result. The MRO will notify Woodward of a positive test only when and if it is determined that there is no legitimate medical explanation for the test results.
How are positive test results determined?

All tests are conducted by a federally-certified lab in Minnesota. If the initial test shows a positive result, the sample undergoes a second and more rigorous test to verify another positive result. A sample is considered positive only if both tests show an affirmative result. The double testing method assures that the information reported to the Medical Review Officer is highly accurate.

What should parents know about prescription medications?

Taking prescription drugs that are not prescribed to you—or taking them in any way other than what is prescribed—can be as dangerous as taking an illegal drug. In addition to ensuring that students do not have access to prescription medications in the home, parents should avoid sharing, or disallow sharing with a sibling, any prescription drugs not legitimately prescribed to the child.

Is it possible that second-hand marijuana smoke or poppy seeds could cause a positive test result?

Federal guidelines which govern the manner in which tests are conducted make it impossible for a student to test positive for second-hand marijuana smoke or poppy seeds. It is certain that a student testing positive for either marijuana or opiates will have directly ingested these chemicals.

What are the consequences for positive test results?

Prior to testing, each student will be asked if the result of the drug test will likely reveal signs of drug use.

Consequences for positive test results fall into three main categories:

A: A positive result (first offense) following a prior admission (answering “yes” to above question)
   * Parents/guardians will be notified.
   * Student must provide a medical release for participation in co-curricular activities.
   * Student must receive an assessment by a qualified mental health professional.
   * Student should provide verification by letter of assessment within 30 days.
   * Student will be randomly tested every semester for the remainder of their WA enrollment (at parents’/guardians’ expense).

B: A positive result (first offense) following a prior denial
   * Same consequences as (A)
   * In addition, Student will be assigned 15 hours of community service, in addition to his or her required 20-hour community service commitment.
C: A positive result (first offense) following a testing due to reasonable suspicion
* Same consequences as (B)

D: A positive result (2nd offense)
* Student will be offered a chance to withdraw from the Academy. If he or she does not withdraw, the student will be dismissed

Who will know about positive test results?

Drug test results will be strictly confidential. In addition to the student and parents, the only Woodward personnel who will know about a positive test result will be the Dean of Students, the grade level counselor, and the Upper School nurse.

If I believe my child’s positive test result is inaccurate, what options will I have for an “appeal”?

All drug testing will be conducted by a federally-certified third party, as coordinated by Spec Group, Inc. Once confirmation of a sample is given, the student will have five business days from the date of notification from the school to request an appeal (or “re-test”) of the sample. Confirmation of a second test of the sample will be considered final. Failure to request an appeal on a timely basis will render the original confirmation final for purposes of Woodward’s policies.

Do appeals typically lead to a change in outcome?

Woodward’s outside firm, Spec Group, Inc., has told us that appeals themselves are rare. To ensure the integrity of the re-test following an appeal, the original urine sample is sent to a second and separate federally-approved laboratory for analysis. (Spec Group, Inc. also reports that in their twenty years of facilitating drug-testing programs, they are unaware of an appeal ever being overturned.)

Will records of positive drug test results be in my child’s file, and might this information be reported to prospective colleges?

No. Woodward will treat any such information as confidential medical information. Records of the drug test results will not be kept at Woodward after the Dean of Students has informed parents. Records of the drug test results will be treated as confidential and kept at the third party vendor.

Will positive results be reported to the authorities?

No. All drug test results will be treated as confidential medical information. We are, however, required to report possession of drugs or alcohol to the authorities. Further information about possession may be found in the Student Handbook.
Exactly how is urine testing conducted?

Students will be tested discreetly and in gender separated groups by the third party testing firm, Spec Group, Inc. Prior to testing, all students will be given an opportunity to disclose any substance abuse. The Dean of Students’ office will notify selected students on the morning of the test date to meet the Woodward Academy representative at a designated time and location. The collector from the testing firm will instruct the student to empty pockets and personal belongings. Each student will be escorted to a private (single stall) bathroom to provide a urine sample. Students will be alone while they are providing the urine sample in a sterile cup. The collector will obtain the specimen after the student exits the bathroom, verify temperature of the urine, and seal the sample in a plastic bag which will then be initialed by the student to protect against misidentification. Chain of custody procedures will be maintained throughout the process to ensure the correct identification of the urine sample and test results. Students will then be dismissed back to class. All urine samples and results will be identified by a unique individually coded number of the student. No names will be recorded on the specimen cup or test results. In most instances, testing will occur during the one hour lunch break. The goal is for students not to miss class time, if at all possible.

My child suffers from Shy Bladder Syndrome. How will her/his condition be impacted by the testing method using urine?

We understand there may be times when a student may have difficulty producing a urine sample on demand. In those instances, students will be provided water to consume and as much time as needed to produce the sample. The student will remain under supervision of an adult until a sample can be provided. As noted, however, students will be afforded privacy when producing the sample.

How often might a student expect to be tested during the random testing each year?

The testing program will be conducted by Spec Group, Inc. – a firm with considerable experience and expertise in conducting reliable drug tests. The firm will use a “blind” process of selecting the students to be tested. Because student ID numbers will be randomly selected, it is difficult to predict precisely how often any particular student may be tested during an academic year. Our goal is to have at least 40 percent of the high school population tested each year. Once a student is tested, the student’s ID number goes back into the pool for possible selection again, meaning a student may be selected for testing more than once in a given year. So, some students may be tested twice or more in a given year and some may not be tested at all. This methodology will require each Upper School student to understand that the chance of being tested will exist throughout each school year – even if he or she was tested previously that year.
How will students’ names be chosen for random testing?

The testing program will be conducted by a firm with considerable experience and expertise in conducting reliable drug tests. The firm will use a “blind” process of selecting the students to be tested by generating a computerized random student list for each testing. Woodward administrators will play no role in choosing specific students to be tested in the random tests unless there is reasonable suspicion.

Will parents/guardians be notified when their child is tested, and will we be made aware of the results of the testing?

Parents/guardians will be notified via email of testing on their student’s test day, immediately following testing. The length of time will vary for receiving results, but the goal will be to have the testing firm perform its analysis promptly. For all tests that are negative (i.e., show no evidence of illegal drug use), results will be communicated by email from the Dean of Students Office. The Medical Review Officer of the testing firm will contact the parents/guardians of any student whose test reveals a non-negative result, and we expect that this contact will be made within 72 hours.

How do you respond to critics of drug testing who claim that the implementation of the program will only drive students to experiment with and use alcohol?

In our research for designing our program, we heard these claims, but could not find them to be valid. Generally, alcohol use is easier to detect than drug use, if for no other reason than the odor most alcohol produces on a person’s breath. Still, to be certain we take the concern seriously, we are increasing our efforts of detecting alcohol use by having available a breathalyzer at school functions, on and off-campus. When we have reasonable suspicion to do so, we will test students for alcohol using the breathalyzer.

What does “reasonable suspicion” mean when it comes to subjecting a person to a breathalyzer test?

Any student who is at a Woodward event and is observed by trained administrators to be exhibiting signs of alcohol use will be subject to testing. Reasonable suspicion can be said to exist when a student smells of alcohol, has atypical slurred speech, atypical compromised gait, or is known to be in possession of alcohol.

What are the consequences for positive breathalyzer results?

The consequences are the same as for a positive drug test result: A student’s admission of alcohol use in advance of taking a breathalyzer will determine the exact punishment on the first offense. A second offense will result in immediate dismissal from Woodward if the student does not withdraw voluntarily.
How much will the drug testing program cost, and will our tuition increase as a result?

We expect the cost of the entire testing program to be approximately $15,000 annually. We do not expect to increase tuition to cover the cost, but to manage it through a redirection of program resources. Random testing will be at the school’s expense, except for additional testing required as a result of an initial positive test, a student’s refusal to participate in testing when called, or at the request of a family. All subsequent tests are at the families’ expense. Individual tests are approximately $35.

Who else is subject to drug testing besides students?

Drug testing has been a condition of employment for any new hire to the Academy. In addition, employees who drive buses for Student Transport are subject to subsequent random testing in compliance with company policy and applicable law. With the advent of this student drug testing policy, the Governing Board has decided to require all Woodward employees and Governing Board members to participate in random drug testing as a reflection of their strong commitment to this important issue. Whereas an initial positive test result for a student will be addressed therapeutically (that is, will not lead to automatic dismissal) given the age of our students and our desire to educate them appropriately, the policies will be stricter for employees and Governing Board members.

If the addition of drug testing to the school’s anti-drug philosophy is so important, why is Woodward waiting a year to implement it?

We believe it is only fair to families and employees to allow ample time for persons who may have a philosophical disagreement regarding the policy change to find alternatives for the following year. Any families who wish to begin a program of drug testing without this delay, however, may consult with Nurse Cheryl Minor about where to obtain urine testing kits so that they may initiate testing on their own.

Are you concerned that students and employees may leave Woodward as the result of the new drug policy?

We realize the addition of drug testing may be unsettling for some students and employees. We hope that upon reflection, students and employees will see the wisdom of the program and the concern Woodward has for the well-being of all people associated with this community. We hope we do not lose students or employees. We have been encouraged by reports from other schools that have implemented similar programs and experienced little attrition. In fact, most schools have reported that any students lost because of the program were more than offset by the addition of new students to their schools whose families wanted to be identified with, and part of, a school that was committed to adopting all possible means of eliminating drug use within its community.
I believe my child may be experimenting with drugs and/or alcohol now, and I am concerned. Where might I turn for help?

Our grade-level counselors are seasoned professionals at providing advice and direction to parents concerned about drug and/or alcohol use by their child. You are encouraged to seek out your child’s grade-level counselor for advice. The information you share with them will be held in the strictest confidence.