

... drugs on the campus,” Gonzalez wrote.

Marijuana possession is considered a criminal offense, according to district policy, and administrators have discretion as to how cannabis possession is handled.

“Non-criminal matters that are reported are handled by school and district level staff,” said district spokesperson Campbell. “Criminal matters are handled by the school police department.”

Three points are mandatory, according to district rules, when drug possession is discovered: notification to school police, the school’s administrator, and the student’s parents.

When asked, a school district official said the district would like to explore the issue further.

“We don’t currently have a policy on student informants, and we thank you for bringing that to our attention,” said spokesperson Megan Downs. “This is something we would like to explore in the near future.”

It was, in fact, the district’s own documentation that brought the issue to light. When Ford gave back marijuana to a student, the act was memorialized by Gonzalez. Virginia Doran, the school district’s director of labor relations, Chris Reich, a school district attorney, and human resources employees, were all copied on the letter.

School officials did not elaborate on the district’s practice of using students as informants, but Natapoff said that, at the least, because of students being minors, the practice should have triggered a notification to parents.

“There has been outcry from parents (at the college level) who are appalled that their students, who they have entrusted to these institutions, have been put into compromised and dangerous situations,” she said. “I’m personally unaware of these practices at the high-school level, but it does not surprise me.

Such practices at educational institutions, Natapoff added, are “largely unregulated, secretive and lacking in accountability. The use of informant deals in schools raises its own highly troubling implications” that move schools more to a criminal justice model and away from educational goals.

Specific to the Washoe County School District, Natapoff further explained that “the fact that they are exercising their authority in these risky and problematic ways vis-à-vis with their own students without a policy is also unfortunately characteristic of the world of informants where institutions often make their own unregulated decisions about what kinds of deals to cut, what sorts of people to exert pressure on, and what kinds of information to gather without oversight or knowledge of best practices.

“Because it is such a secretive environment by its very nature, institutions often engage in policies that we would consider to be entirely unacceptable in other arenas of public policy,” she added. “These are children. I’m guessing they have policies about the materials used in the straws in the cafeteria.” □

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