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NEWS

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## **Central Catholic High School and the Diocese of Pittsburgh Announce Wellness Initiative**

***Focus is on Preventing Substance Abuse,  
Protecting Students' Health and Well-being***

PITTSBURGH – February 2020 - Central Catholic High School and the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh today announced plans to launch a wellness initiative which will focus on keeping Central Catholic students well and substance-free through a combination of education, assessment and support.

This initiative, which will include periodic random drug assessment of students, will begin at Central Catholic High School at the beginning of the 2020-21 school year. All eight diocesan high schools are committed to protecting students' health and well-being and preventing substance abuse. The other diocesan high schools will be evaluating similar drug assessment policies and updated substance abuse prevention programs that may enhance their current efforts.

Central Catholic High School will join several other public and private high schools in the area that have already implemented periodic random drug assessment policies. These schools include St. Joseph's Preparatory School (Philadelphia), Cathedral Prep and Villa Maria Academy (Erie), Bishop Guilfoyle High School (Altoona), Bishop McCort High School (Johnstown) and Kennedy Catholic High School (Hermitage).

"This pilot program is one more reason why Catholic schools are so important in nurturing the development of the mind, body and spirit of our students. The well-being of our students is of utmost importance. Anything that helps to keep our students drug-free protects their freedom, their future and their families," Bishop David Zubik said.

Central Catholic High School has retained the services of Psychomedics Corporation of Boston to conduct periodic drug assessment of students (grades 9-12), using a non-invasive hair sampling procedure. The process of sampling will begin at Central Catholic next fall, followed by periodic random tests throughout the school year.

This wellness initiative is designed as a proactive prevention and intervention strategy, rather than a punitive measure. By identifying students at risk, high schools can work with students, parents and health professionals to get them the help they need and re-direct their path.

If a student tests positive, the school is committed to working with the student and his parents to identify resources to address the issue. Counselors at each of the seven schools have identified community resources to make sure students who have substance abuse issues can get the help they need.

Central Catholic announced the initiative to its community today and explained the reasons for the focus on wellness and substance-abuse prevention. The letter was signed by Brother Tony Baginski, FSC, principal of Central Catholic High School. Following are themes from his letter:

- Drug abuse is probably the largest single threat to high school student achievement facing our country today. While we have no evidence that the use of illegal substances at our school is higher or lower than at other schools, we want to do everything we can to keep our students well and safe.
- According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, drug-related deaths have more than doubled since the early 1980s. There are more deaths, illness, and disabilities from substance abuse than from any other preventable health condition.
- We know that substance abuse often begins with casual drug and alcohol use during the teen years. We believe this testing will give students an acceptable way to resist peer pressure and remain drug-free. Teens are under enormous pressure and need help making good decisions. Our students will be able to say “no” and tell their friends it’s because their school tests and they will be caught.
- Since the actual process of testing will not be conducted until the fall term, students who might have issues with illegal drug use have an opportunity for a negative test – and, frankly, we hope that all of the samples will be substance-free.

Central Catholic will hold Q&A sessions, held by school administrators, Diocese representatives, and representatives from Psychmedics Corporation, with students, faculty and staff during the spring 2020 semester.

For more information on this upcoming initiative, visit [centralcatholichs.com](http://centralcatholichs.com)