



Steroids And Students: What Boards Need To Know

This briefing is intended for use for board members to help them gain a better understanding of the issues surrounding steroids prior to adopting their board policy.

In May 2005, the California Interscholastic Federation amended its bylaws dealing with student use of steroids and performance-enhancing supplements. These new CIF bylaws impose the following four major requirements on districts:

1. Beginning with the 2005-06 school year, districts participating in the CIF must adopt a policy prohibiting the use and abuse of steroids by student athletes.
2. Prior to participating in athletics, student and parents/guardians must sign an agreement that the student will abide by the district's steroid prohibition.
3. Districts must prohibit school personnel and coaches from selling, promoting and distributing performance-enhancing supplements to students and the school or district cannot accept sponsorships from companies that manufacture products that promote or market muscle-building.
4. By December 31, 2008, all coaches, paid and unpaid, must have completed a coaching education program, including training on the harmful effects of steroids.

Senator Jackie Speier (D-Hillsborough) has introduced SB 37 which would prohibit students participating in athletics from using dietary supplements, as defined by federal law, and require the state Department of Health Services to provide to the California Department of Education, by July 1, 2006, a guide on prohibited substances. The CDE is then required to notify districts of the guide's availability. The proposed legislation would also codify most aspects of the CIF bylaws into the Education Code. As of this writing, the bill is in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

In its July 2005 policy update, CSBA revised BP/AR 5131.63 - Steroids to reflect the new CIF bylaws. CSBA also developed a sample agreement for students and

parents/guardians. However, these samples may be revised again in early 2006 if SB 37 becomes law.

Steroids Background

What's the issue?

Steroid use and abuse is a growing problem among California's students. According to the CIF, in 2003 close to 30,000 students in California had used steroids and over 9,000 students had used steroids in the past month. The problem is especially acute among high school athletes — the estimated number of CIF athletes using steroids is 20,315. Shockingly, many of the students stated that they knew of coaches who had distributed and promoted the use of steroids and other performance-enhancing supplements. The CIF survey revealed that 18% of the boys and 7% of the girls surveyed were personally aware of coaches or other sports-related staff promoting the substances to student athletes.

Steroid abuse by teenagers is part of a larger societal problem. News headlines have been full of stories about steroids — Olympic athletes being stripped of medals and grand jury investigations of BALCO and superstar athletes. In response to these media reports, Congress held hearings in March 2005 about steroid abuse by professional athletes, many of whom are regarded as role models by high school students. Along with testimony from sports executives and players, the committee also heard from medical experts and parents whose children committed suicide after using steroids.

Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-CA.), ranking Democrat on the House Government Reform Committee, said the main motivation for the investigation was the rising use of steroids among the country's children. "Kids are dying from the use of steroids. They're looking up to these major league leaders in terms of the enhancements that they're using. And we have to stop it," Waxman said in an interview March 13, 2005, on NBC's "Meet the Press."

According to the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, teenagers are especially vulnerable to the damaging message that is pervasive in our society — that

bigger is better, and being the best is more important than how you get there.

What are steroids?

Steroids are synthetic substances related to the male sex hormone. The proper medical term is anabolic/androgenic steroids, but anabolic is most commonly used. The substances promote growth of skeletal muscle (anabolic effect) and the development of male sexual characteristics (androgenic effect).

Steroids refer to a class of drugs. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, steroids are available legally only by prescription, to treat conditions that occur when the body produces abnormally low amounts of testosterone, such as delayed puberty and some types of impotence. They are also prescribed to treat body-wasting conditions in patients with AIDS and other diseases that result in loss of lean muscle mass.

Today, athletes and others abuse anabolic steroids to enhance performance and also to improve physical appearance. Anabolic steroids are taken orally or injected, typically in cycles of weeks or months (referred to as “cycling”), rather than continuously. Cycling involves taking multiple doses of steroids over a specific period of time, stopping for a period, and starting again. In addition, users often combine several different types of steroids to maximize their effectiveness while minimizing negative effects (referred to as “stacking”).

How are steroids different from performance-enhancing supplements?

Steroids are distinct from steroidal supplements. In the United States, supplements such as dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) can be purchased legally without a prescription through many commercial sources including health food stores. Supplements are often taken because the user believes they have anabolic effects and are often considered a pre-cursor to steroids.

What are the health effects of steroid abuse?

Studies have shown that, over time, steroids can have adverse effects on a person’s health. Steroid abuse is associated with increased risk for heart attacks, strokes and liver problems. Steroids can also cause long-term body changes such as enlarged breasts in men, shrinking of the testicles, impotence and reduced sperm production. In addition, research has revealed that high doses of anabolic steroids can increase irritability and aggression.

What are the symptoms of steroid abuse?

In boys, common symptoms include:

- Rapid muscle growth
- Severe acne on shoulders, neck and face
- Premature balding
- Abnormal breast development
- Rage, aggressive behavior, violent temper and depression

Symptoms of steroid abuse in girls are:

- Rapid muscle growth
- Masculine features such as a deeper voice and an increase in body hair
- Severe acne and cysts
- Smaller breasts
- Fewer menstrual cycles
- Rage, aggressive behavior, violent temper and depression

Policy Considerations for Boards

CSBA’s sample board policy and administrative regulation (BP/AR 5131.63 - Steroids) reflect the new CIF bylaws. However, districts are strongly encouraged to tailor policies to meet their local needs and values. Policy development on this issue should be done in close cooperation with the superintendent and should provide opportunities for input from coaches and other athletic staff, teachers, health professionals, parents and students.

When developing, reviewing, or revising policy related to steroids, the governing board might consider the following questions:

- Does the board’s drug education curriculum include information about the harmful effects of steroids?
- Does the board currently accept sponsorships from companies that promote or market performance-enhancing supplements to students? What resources

are generated by existing arrangements? What is the board's existing process for reviewing requests for sponsorships? How will the superintendent ensure that no new sponsorships are accepted?

- Does the board provide staff development or orientation for coaches? If so, how will the policy be made part of the orientation process? How will the policy be communicated to coaches — both paid and unpaid?
- How will the policy be communicated to student athletes and parents/guardians?
- Does the board require students to have medical clearance prior to participating in athletics? Should testing for or identification of steroid use be part of the medical clearance?
- Does the district require random drug testing for athletes? Is it advisable to make steroids part of the testing program?
- Will the student and parent/guardian agreement and the board's policy be included as part of the information packet for athletes?
- What are the board's, staff's and community's expectations with regard to steroids? How will the board prioritize student health over the principle of winning? How will coaches communicate the board's priority on student health?
- How will students be disciplined if found to have violated the board's policy? Removal from athletics? From other extracurricular activities? Suspension?

The board should also examine other policies that may be affected by the new CIF requirements, including:

BP/AR 4127 – Athletic Team Coaches
(to be revised by CSBA in 2006)

BP/AR 5144.1 – Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process

BP/AR 6142.8 – Health Education

BP/AR 6145.2 – Athletic Competition
(to be revised by CSBA in 2006)

What else can boards do?

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the following strategies have proven to be successful.

- Most adolescents know that anabolic steroids build muscles and can increase athletic prowess. Research has shown that failure to acknowledge these potential benefits creates a credibility problem and can actually make students more likely to try the drugs. The instructor should present a factual and balanced picture of what these drugs can do for students and emphasize the hazards that come with their use.
- Make use of the authority of coaches and the team ethos. In the most promising program currently under study, coaches and team leaders are trained to educate team members about the effects of anabolic steroid use in the general context of training. The training also provides information to students about nutrition, exercise, and other training techniques for improving performance without abusing steroids. This program was found to reduce steroid abuse by as much as 50% and also to reduce alcohol abuse among team members.

Additional Resources:

CSBA: www.csba.org

GAMUT Online: www.gamutonline.net

California Interscholastic Federation:
www.cifstate.org

National Institute on Drug Abuse, steroid information: www.steroidabuse.gov

NIDA Community Drug Alert Bulletin: Anabolic Steroids: www.drugabuse.gov/SteroidAlert/Steroidalert.html

NIDA Research Report on Anabolic Steroids:
www.drugabuse.gov/ResearchReports/Steroids/Anabolicsteroids.html