

QC orders drug tests in public schools

BY GLEE JALEA

STUDENTS in public high schools and colleges in Quezon City will undergo mandatory drug tests, according to Vice Mayor Joy Belmonte.

Citing data from the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), Belmonte said in a TV interview on Friday that drug use is already prevalent in the city's schools.

"We will establish a selection

board which will be headed by the school president, the principal, the head of the faculty department and the head of the parent-teacher's association who will come up with a list of the names of the students who will be included in

the drug testing," Belmonte said. The vice mayor added that they will have a massive information dissemination campaign and orientation to explain the process of drug testing to the students and parents.

"If the local government will administer the school selection board, we will have to meet and come up with guidelines based on the recommendations of the school's authorities to maintain the privacy and security of the children because we do not want

to traumatize them or stigmatize them," Belmonte said.

Should parents refuse, selected students will still have to undergo the drug test as mandated by Republic Act 9165 or The Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002, she added.

Part of the protocol is to take the test in a Department of Health (DoH)-accredited laboratory. A student who tests positive will have a case interview with school authorities who will explain the repercussions and an accredited

physician who will evaluate his level of dependency.

"If the student just tried it once, there will be school-based counseling. But if he fails in another random drug test, he will be institutionalized in a rehabilitation facility," Belmonte said.

National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) chief Guillermo Eleazar, who reiterated the need for such drug tests, cited in an earlier interview the case of a Grade 6 student who was caught with 22 sachets of marijuana in his bag

last year. A follow-up operation eventually led to the arrest of his drug suppliers.

Meanwhile, Education Secretary Leonor Briones previously said that she is set to meet with police officials about the random inspection of bags and lockers in schools as part of the drug testing protocol.

She also assured that the results will not serve as basis to kick out students or even faculty members who will test positive.

"It will be a basis for treatment if treatment is necessary," Briones said.