

Nothing found in SKHS drug sweep

South Kitsap High School's high-pressure measure to keep drugs out of the school may already be a success — but some say the problem wasn't in the school building to begin with.

Either way, the first sweep of a drug-detecting canine was completed last Wednesday without anything but some possible residual scents to show for it.

"This is a real surprise," said High School Principal Ernie Noack after nothing but some suspicious-smelling clothing was found in the locker rooms at the school. The lockers were checked along with regular book lockers to try and track the substances kids might be carrying on them. All of their clothes — jackets and purses included — are left in the lockers during gym class.

Noack had the SK School Board of Directors approve the new program intended to discourage kids from bringing drugs onto school grounds. The students aren't told when the dog will be brought to the school, so it's assumed they'll keep their drugs off campus to avoid being caught.

The program has been successful in Clover Park schools, Noack said.

"I'm betting he's not going to find much of anything here," said Mona Johnson, the substance abuse counselor at the high school. "It mostly goes on in cars and parking lots."

Students were relatively unconcerned with the pooch's presence.

"I don't care," said senior Neal Rosenquist. "They're not searching, they're just sniffing."

But more than sniffing went on in the sweep despite Noack's presentation saying that students would be contacted and present before the locker was even unlocked.



Steve Wilkowske photo

The first visit of a drug detecting dog to South Kitsap High School turned up nothing but a few suspicious scents. School administrators were surprised, but the area drug counselor and students were not.

But last Wednesday, lockers were opened and the contents pulled out and laid on the floor. A lunch was searched, as was a student's gym bag. Despite the dog's indications, no drugs were found.

"We found out that's not the way the search is conducted," said Keith Canton, one of the school's three vice principals. "We cannot go into the purse if there's a purse, that's invasion — the gym bag for whatever reason is not

the same as a purse or a wallet," he said.

The search was conducted by Ron Pace of Canyon Crest K-9 in Tacoma. Pace, a trainer for 13 years, has helped in the training and set up of canine programs for the Washington State Patrol and other agencies.

He brought with him a lively two-year-old mixed chocolate and yellow lab named Opie. It was Opie's first official sweep after preparing under Pace for four months.

Practice runs in other schools showed Opie can find a substance about 90 percent of the time. He's trained to detect marijuana, hashish, cocaine, heroine and speed. Last Wednesday he found each of the three packages of hashish planted in the areas he searched — a method that not only proves the dog's ability, but makes the search good training as well.

Canton said the dog will be brought back.