

Pot edibles sold at Coal Ridge High; adult arrested; 9 students involved

Nine students have admitted being involved in marijuana-infused edibles being distributed and used at Coal Ridge High School, and one of them involved in sales told authorities he aspired to be a businessman.

Hector Manuel Ruiz, 21, of Rifle, was arrested last week after a Garfield County Sheriff's investigation indicated he had purchased marijuana edibles that were later distributed at the school.

Authorities first became aware of the situation Feb. 4, after a student reported feeling sick after eating part of a cookie and tested positive for marijuana on a home drug test. The girl told police that said she had been given the cookie at school and didn't know it was drugged.

After interviews and discussions with several students in the presence of their parents or guardians, it was determined that a total of nine students had been involved in distributing, purchasing or consuming the edibles.

A 16-year-old student ultimately admitted to paying Ruiz \$60 to purchase some marijuana-infused cookies and gummies at a dispensary in Silt, then providing the edibles to two other students for sale at the school. According to Ruiz's arrest affidavit, the student told police that he "wanted to start his own business to prove that he could be a good businessman and make money."

Police confiscated \$76 from the student, which he told police he had intended to use to purchase more marijuana for further sale.

Theresa Hamilton, director of districtwide services for Garfield County School District RE-2, declined to comment on specific sanctions that might arise from the case.

District policy prescribes three-day suspension for possession or consumption of alcohol or other drugs by a student, and a 10-day suspension with a recommendation for expulsion in cases involving distribution or sale.

Underage pot use appears to be rising in the area. Last week a 16-year-old Aspen High School student was arrested for possession in an incident caught on video in which police forced him into submission after the teen resisted.

Aspen Superintendent John Maloy told the Aspen Times that drug use in the schools is a growing concern.

"We have students who have a privilege, and that privilege is an open campus, and they're choosing to abuse that privilege by leaving campus and smoking pot. That's not OK," he said.

“That, to me, is unacceptable because students are under our care during the day and it’s unfortunate that some kids are making poor choices. To go smoke marijuana and return to school with that mindset is not conducive for learning. ... Studies have shown that it’s difficult to focus and learn while you’re high.”

Underage marijuana citations were also up in 2014 in both Glenwood and Rifle.

“This would not be the first time we’ve enforced our policy against drug and alcohol involvement by students,” Hamilton said. “We continue to cooperate with local law enforcement to try to keep our students healthy and safe.”

A review of surveillance footage from both of Silt’s marijuana dispensaries turned up footage of Ruiz making a purchase on Feb. 1. His arrest affidavit said that Ruiz admitted to providing the edibles but said he had only intended it for the first student’s personal use. According to the affidavit, he “felt it was the same as alcohol ... that kids could drink at home.”

He was arrested on Feb. 6 on charges of possession of marijuana or marijuana concentrate in excess of the legal limit and contributing to the delinquency of a minor, both felonies, and later released on a \$10,000 bond.