

Conclusion

Drugs are a significant barrier to learning, and the use of drugs by even a small number of students can affect the entire atmosphere of a school. Recognizing this, many administrators, parents, and students appreciate having a tool as powerful as student drug testing available as an additional component in their school's comprehensive drug-and-alcohol prevention and early intervention program.

Drug testing may not always be the solution to drug use by young people, nor is it right for every school. But for those schools that have determined that drug use is a significant problem and that testing is an appropriate response, it is



important to keep in mind that the purpose is not to punish students who use drugs. The goals are to deter non-using students from ever using drugs, to encourage non-dependent users to stop before they get into more serious trouble with drugs or encourage others to follow suit, and to identify those who need early intervention, recovery support, and/or clinical treatment services.

Drug testing reinforces all other drug-prevention strategies and is a vital part of a comprehensive approach to preventing adolescent drug use. Because drug testing detects use at every level, it can identify not only those users who are dependent on drugs, but also those who have just begun using or who have not yet experienced the negative effects of their use. Knowing which students are using drugs makes it much easier for parents, counselors, and others to step in with early intervention, provide the care these kids need, and put them on the road to better health.

Student drug testing should not be used just on a hunch or the assumption that drug use is a problem. Rather, it should be implemented only when a specific threat has been identified, and when the evidence, carefully collected over time, reveals a genuine need. A successful testing program involves extensive pre-planning, which must include every effort to enlist the support of school officials, parents, students, and anyone else who would be affected by it. Before testing begins, some sort of student assistance program should be in place to provide help to students who test positive for drugs. Every step of the program should be designed to ensure fairness, accuracy, and respect for confidentiality.

For schools with successful drug-testing programs, the rewards can be abundant. With declining drug use comes less disruption in the classroom and in the community, fewer health problems, higher productivity, better academic performance, and, for students, the promise of a healthier, brighter future.