

Introduction

School administrators faced with the task of keeping their students drug-free have used a variety of prevention and education programs. A precipitating event—a tragic drug-overdose death or an alarming escalation in the level of drug use, for example—will often spur a school to seek additional means of reducing the drug problem. Now, as a result of a 2002 Supreme Court decision (*Board of Education of Independent School District No. 92 of Pottawatomie County vs. Earls*), public middle and high schools are free to use a powerful new tool for deterring and detecting drug use: random drug tests. Drug testing previously was available only for students involved in sports. In the 2002 ruling, however, the Court broadened the scope of testing to include all students who take part in after-school activities—teams, clubs, and other organizations—in which the participants compete against students at other schools.



Student drug testing is but one part of a comprehensive drug and alcohol prevention, intervention, and treatment program. Prevention messages will keep many students from using drugs, and they may also prompt some who experiment with drugs to stop. There are others, however, who have begun using alcohol or drugs and who are not responsive to prevention messages. Many of these users have not yet experienced adverse health effects of their drug use, nor have they faced criminal or social sanctions. It is through this group of users that a serious community drug problem spreads.

Early intervention

One of the best ways to block the spread of drug use is through an approach called early intervention, which encourages friends, family, care-givers, and others to get actively involved in the lives of drug users—and the sooner the better. The idea is to identify nondependent users, through drug testing and other means, then steer them from drugs and into counseling, if necessary, before they become addicted or entice others to use drugs. Kids whose drug use has already progressed to abuse and dependence may require more intense or clinical intervention, such as specialty treatment. Drug testing not only helps identify students who use drugs, it also creates a deterrent to use. It helps young people cope with peer pressure, giving them a convenient reason to say “no” to drugs, and it underscores the message that drugs are a barrier to achieving one’s full potential.

Student drug testing has proven to be effective in schools that have tried it. For example, Hunterdon Central Regional High School in Flemington, New Jersey, experienced an overall decrease in student drug use between 1997 and 2000. The only change in the school’s substance-



abuse program during that three-year period was the implementation of random drug tests for student athletes. In September 2000, Hunterdon suspended all random drug testing after the American Civil Liberties Union filed a lawsuit in New Jersey state court on behalf of students who claimed

their 4th Amendment rights were violated. Over the next two years, during which the school made no other changes in its substance-abuse program, the level of drug use at Hunterdon increased.

In a similar scenario, 85 percent of schools in Indiana that suspended their drug-testing programs during a court challenge by the Indiana Civil Liberties Union found that drug use increased during the suspension, then decreased when testing resumed.

Results such as this show the power and the promise of student drug testing. It is important to note, however, that drug testing may not be appropriate for every school. An earlier ONDCP publication, *What You Need to Know About Drug Testing in Schools*, provided an overview of the complex issues involved in student drug testing, and it raised some important issues that parents and administrators must consider before starting such a program. For example: Will your school and community support such a program? What are the legal requirements? Which students should be tested? What kinds of tests are available, and which are best suited for your school?



As that booklet cautions, random drug testing should never be used to punish students. Rather, it should be used to deter young people from using drugs, or to identify current drug users so they may be referred to counseling or treatment. And because no two communities face exactly the same drug problem, each school must develop its own unique drug-testing program, carefully tailored to its particular needs and circumstances.

What You Need to Know About Starting a Student Drug-Testing Program is meant to complement and build on the information provided in the earlier publication. This booklet assumes that you, as a school administrator, staff member, or parent involved in the decision, have considered all the issues, weighed the pros and cons, collected data, and are now ready to put together a plan for starting a drug-testing program in your school. It reviews the steps you need to take before implementing a testing program, such as conducting a needs assessment, consulting legal counsel, enlisting the support of both the school and the local community, developing a written policy, and providing access to student assistance. It offers guidance on how to find funding for your program, and it also includes a discussion of how some schools select students for testing and what types of tests they use. A list of resources includes Web sites and contact information for agencies and other organizations that can answer any further questions you may have about student drug testing.

The benefits of drug testing

Drug use can turn to dependence and addiction, trapping users in a vicious cycle that destroys families and ruins lives. Students who use drugs are statistically more likely to drop out of school than their peers who don't.

Drugs and alcohol not only interfere with a student's ability to learn, they also disrupt the orderly environment necessary for all students to succeed. Studies show that students who use drugs are more likely to bring guns and knives to school, and that the more marijuana a student smokes, the greater the chances he or she will be involved in physical attacks, property destruction, stealing, and cutting classes. Parents and students expect schools to offer protection from violence, racism, and other forms of abuse. It is likewise their right to expect a learning environment free from the influence of illegal drugs.



As a parent or school administrator, you have a responsibility to ensure that student drug use does not become a barrier to learning. *What You Need to Know About Starting a Student Drug-Testing Program* can help you meet that responsibility. If you conclude that drug testing would be an effective method of detecting, confirming, and deterring drug use among the young people under your care, this booklet offers valuable advice and information that can guide you in the development of a program that is effective, confidential, and compassionate.