

Drug testing in schools will let students be accountable

By Kyle Brown

Reprinted here, in part, is an opinion piece published June 23, 2004, in the Fort Wayne, Indiana, Journal Gazette. Its author, then a rising senior at Homestead High School, wrote the article in response to an editorial in the newspaper urging Southwest Allen County Schools to reject drug testing.

I applaud Southwest Allen County Schools for taking the initiative to stop drug and alcohol use in my school. The party atmosphere at Homestead continues to grow every year, and the present methods of education and prevention are proving to be ineffective. A new way of thinking has to be developed to curb the trend, and that's what Superintendent Brian Smith and his administration have put together: a well-thought-out program designed to help students rather than punish them.

Monday's editorial stated that random drug tests are too expensive, of questionable deterrent value and a violation of privacy rights. Let me dispense with those objections quickly. My school is considering drug tests that cost \$15 each. The first three years of this program will be financed entirely from private donations, local foundations and government grants. If drug testing works during its three-year trial, then the tests would cost my school and the two middle schools \$54,000 annually. That's just \$18,000 per school per year. When you consider the costs of students missing school because of drugs and alcohol and the lost revenue to the school system resulting from their absences, this is a no-brainer.

Monday's editorial said drug testing violates my privacy rights. This assumes that my fellow students and I value our privacy over the lives of our friends. I would assert that it is just the opposite: We want accountability. It seems the only reason to deny drug testing in the schools is to protect underage drinking and drug use. And, frankly, I give up my privacy every time I change clothes in the locker room.

Let me give you three reasons why I support drug testing in my school. First, the program will encourage students to make constructive decisions rather than destructive ones. Second, it gives teeth to the drug-free promise that athletes and other students participating in extracurricular activities currently sign. (Currently, most of my peers just consider that promise a joke; there's simply no means to keep students accountable to it.) Finally, the new drug testing program will give students a reason to say no to drugs and alcohol. It will give students an opportunity to say “no” to drugs and alcohol and “yes” to athletics, band, show choir, journalism and all the activities that make school a complete experience.

The program Dr. Smith and other members of the community have developed will make the schools safer and stronger. Students will knowingly or even unknowingly help themselves by participating. Grades will increase, athletes will perform better and students will be able to learn in a safer environment.

Furthermore, the program will keep students and athletes accountable for their actions. The contractual promise every athlete and extracurricular participant signs will no longer be worthless. By establishing this program, we may never know all the good that will come from it because of all the bad that is stopped before it gets started.

As a member of a new generation who embraces accountability rather than the gross indulgences of personal freedoms that previous generations have embraced, I would urge you as a reader of this paper to lend your support for a safer and stronger school community by becoming a vocal advocate for random drug testing.