

Research Brief Drug Testing

Question: How effective is drug testing in school?

Summary of Findings:

In 2002, the United States Supreme Court confirmed that in the school's role of in loco parentis, drug testing of students who were involved in athletics and extracurricular activities was constitutional. In a state of the union address, George W. Bush stated that drug testing in schools had been effective and was part of "our aggressive community-based strategy to reduce demand for illegal drugs" (*Let the love flow: Student drug testing*). In an effort to help inhibit and dissuade drug use, Federal funding has been made available to help schools pay for drug testing, which depending on the type of test used, can range from \$20-\$60 per student. The results of drug testing programs at best, are mixed. According to some research: the "strongest predictor of student drug use is the student's attitudes toward use and perceptions of peer use" (*Largest ever federally-funded study of student drug testing shows it does not deter drug use among teens*); at a school with a mandatory drug testing program, the use of drugs, but not alcohol, was lower; and there was no association between school-based drug testing and students' reports of drug use. According to the majority of literature in this field, the primary purpose of drug testing is "...to deter use and guide those who test positive into counseling or treatment" (*Drug testing in schools*). The American Academy of Pediatrics has trepidations about drug testing adolescents at school or home. They highly recommend that instead of punitive measures, there be more adequate resources for assessment, treatment and earlier rehabilitation measures. It was also recommended that schools look for signs of drug use in their students in areas such as truancy, erratic behavior and failing grades. It was found that students who are involved in extracurricular activities and were not using drugs and/or alcohol tended to support drug testing programs.

To test or not to test? Each side has their own perspective. The risks of testing include:

- creating an environment of distrust
- being invasive as well as embarrassing
- having student/teacher relationships that can become distrustful
- guarding the school's legal liability
- having a false positive result
- lacking 100% accuracy
- protecting the tested student's confidentiality
- challenging students to try drugs
- cheating on drug tests so those with serious drug problems are not identified

The benefits of testing include:

- alerting parents early to potential problems
- giving students a good reason to say "No" to peers about taking drugs
- increasing the number of students screened
- encouraging students not to do drugs and/or alcohol for fear of being tested
- providing support and education to students early
- creating a safe environment

Determining if there should be a drug testing program is a complex and complicated process. If a school decides to do drug testing, it was highly recommended that it should be a component of a total program to reduce students' use of drugs. Aspects to consider when determining the type of program that should be implemented include:

- involving all stakeholders and listening to all perspectives
- ascertaining if there is a need for testing. This can be done through conducting surveys, using reports by teachers and staff about drug use, and/or determining what drug paraphernalia, etc. has been found at school and surrounding neighborhoods
- checking with the district's attorney regarding legal rights and procedures
- deciding for what drugs and/or alcohol will be tested and what test(s) will be used
- determining:
 - which students would/should be tested?
 - who will conduct the tests?
 - how will the tests be verified?
 - what will the consequences be?



- how will the tests be paid for?
- who will see the results?
- how will parents be contacted?
- what if a student refuses to be tested?
- how will a student contest test results?

Online Resources:

- Adolescent substance abuse knowledge base
This is the home site that includes active links to information on adolescent substance abuse information.
<http://www.adolescent-substance-abuse.com/resources.html>
- American Academy of Pediatrics reaffirms their opposition to random drug testing
A summary of the American Academy of Pediatrics' stance on not drug testing adolescents is provided in this article.
<http://www.drugpolicy.org/news/pressroom/pressrelease/030607aap.cfm>
- Constitutional issues when testing students for drug use, a special exception, and telltale metaphors
A detailed report on the Constitutional issues of drug testing is provided in this article.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3994/is_200601/ai_n17180010/print
- Drug testing students raises hope, alarm
Different perspectives on drug testing students are briefly given in this piece.
<https://www.avitarinc.com/pdf/news-events/Metrowest-Daily-News9.22.05.pdf>
- Drug testing is no “silver bullet”
This article describes four summits that were held to discuss drug testing.
http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20060222/news_lz1e22rosenba.html
- Having schools test kids for drug use is a bad idea, doctors' group says
The position of the American Academy of Pediatrics on drug testing is given.

<http://www.adolescent-substance-abuse.com/blog/labels/American%20Academy%20of%20Pediatrics.html>

- Largest ever federally-funded study of student drug testing shows it does not deter drug use among teens
Several reasons why drug testing may not be helpful are reported in this piece.

<http://www.drugpolicy.org/news/pressroom/pressrelease/pr051903b.cfm>

- Let the love flow: Student drug testing
A synopsis of G. W. Bush's State of the Union speech regarding drug testing is provided in this article.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1568/is_1_36/ai_n6006286/print
- Library Watch
An annotated list of references on substance abuse and adolescents is given.
http://www.projectcork.org/newsletters/library_watch/2006/fall/pdf/Adol.pdf
- Pequannock HS to test students for alcohol
A brief explanation of an alcohol testing program at a school in New Jersey is given in this piece.
<http://www.dailyrecord.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?Date=20070131&Category=COMMUNITIES39&ArtNo=701310340&SectionCat=&Template=printart>
- Put to the test: Do drug tests violate kids' rights?
A brief description of different perspectives on the possibility that student rights are violated when drug tested is provided in this piece.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0EPF/is_6_106/ai_n16864793/print
- Relationship between student illicit drug use and school drug-testing policies
“...the essay recommends that schools consider implementing a random drug testing program for all students, regardless of their involvement in extracurricular activities.”
<http://www.criminology.fsu.edu/journal/schooldrug.htm>
- Student drug testing is no 'silver bullet'
This article, written by a parent who is a director of a drug education project, stresses the importance of using caution in drug testing students.

http://www.signonsandiego.com/uniontrib/20060222/news_lz1e22rosenba.html

- Student drug testing gathers prominent support
Reasons to support drug testing are given in this article.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2003/09/17/03drugtest.h23.html?print=1>

- Testing for drugs of abuse in children and adolescents: Addendum-Testing in schools and home
Information on the position of the American Academy of Pediatrics about drug testing on adolescents is provided in this article.
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/119/3/627>
- The case of the random student drug test
This is a brief description of the 2002 Supreme Court ruling on drug testing.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0EPF/is_6_106/ai_n16864799/print
- U.S. plans controlled evaluation of student drug testing
This is a summary of a Federal grant program to evaluate drug testing effectiveness.
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2006/06/07/39drug.h25.html?qs=drug+testing&print=1>
- What you need to know about drug testing in schools
This is a thorough description of the necessary components of a drug testing program in schools.
<http://www.criminology.fsu.edu/journal/schooldrug.htm>

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