Student Drug Testing

Effective Deterrent or Expensive Failure?

This research paper provides information on current drug testing strategies, research, funding, and attempts to provide the reader with information to answer the question, is student drug testing effective at reducing drug use, or is it an expensive waste of taxpayer funding.

Why Drug Test?

According to the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) student drug testing "creat[es] a culture of disapproval toward drugs in the communities where it is employed, student drug testing also achieves three public health goals: 1) it deters children from initiating drug use; 2) it identifies children who have just started using drugs so that parents and counselors can intervene early; and 3) it helps identify children who have a dependency on drugs so that they can be referred to effective drug treatment.

Drug Testing Methods

There are four major drug testing methods-urine, hair, saliva, and sweat patch testing-each carrying varying costs and risks.

Drug Testing Cost

According to *Making Sense of Student Drug Testing,* published by the Drug Policy Alliance, "saliva tests are inexpensive at roughly $10 per test but only detect very recent use and a limited number of drugs; hair testing checks for use of a wide variety of drugs over a much longer time window, but can cost upwards of $65 per test. Urine testing, by far the most common, fluctuates widely. A test for marijuana, cocaine, opiates, and amphetamines can cost as little as $10. Additional testing for drugs such as LSD and MDMA can bring the price of testing above $60 per student, with an additional $10 to $20 for alcohol and nicotine testing. Cheaper tests often mean more false positives and false negatives, necessitating retesting and additional violations of student privacy. False positives are often caused by over-the-counter pain medications, such as ibuprofen. Alcohol is the most frequently used drug by high school students, but is not detected by many drug tests and raises the costs of testing significantly.

A recent study by the U.S. Department of Education of nine schools with testing programs revealed an average cost of $42 per tested student. A high school of 1,000 students that randomly tests 50% its students at this cost per test spends $21,000 on preliminary testing alone, not to mention subsequent tests throughout the year. More expensive lab-based follow up testing for initial positive tests raises total costs significantly.

Schools in Dublin, Ohio, ended their drug testing program after spending $35,000 a year and having only 11 of 1,473 students test positive, a cost of over $3,100 to identify each user. Similarly, Elkhart, Indiana spent $8,000 to identify six marijuana users, spending over $1,300 per student."[1]

The Law

The Supreme Court ruled in 2002, that random testing of student athletes and others in competitive extracurricular activities did not violate the students' privacy rights.

US Government Spending

The White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) have asked Congress for $15million dollars for drug testing in public schools in 2007, up 45% from 2006. This is up 665% since 2002.[2]

ONDCP and the U.S. Department of Education announced the release of $7.2 million in Federal grants for schools to implement student drug testing programs in October 2005. Fifty-five grants were awarded to fund random student drug testing programs in 352 schools.

In the 2005-06 school year, 373 public secondary schools got federal money for testing, up from 79 schools two years ago, U.S. Department of Education records show. The government has not tracked the rise of locally funded programs as closely, but the White House estimates that an additional 225 schools have them. [3]

US Government/Corporate Partnerships

According to the ONDCP's web site, the Bush administration has made testing middle- and high-school students a priority.

The Office of National Drug Control Policy sponsored four student drug testing regional summits in 2006. The summits were designed to inform community leaders and local school officials about the issues surrounding student drug testing and promote discussion of this issue at a local level. Information was presented to attendees about existing programs, research, technology, and legal issues related to student drug testing. The summits were held in, Orlando, FL on January 19, 2006, San Diego, CA on February 22, 2006, Falls Church, VA on March 15, 2006, Milwaukee, WI on April 25, 2006.

In 2005, ONDCP sponsored eight successful regional summits in Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, Fresno, Dallas, St. Louis, Portland, and Pittsburgh.

Presentations given at the Drug Testing Summit was limited to those who have a favorable position on student drug testing.

A typical agenda included presentations on:

- Legal history and current legal issues drug testing in public schools, presented by an attorney
- Research on student drug testing, presented by a professor of Educational Leadership
- Drug testing technology, presented by corporate executives of drug testing laboratories

- Developing a drug testing program, presented by a district attorney
- Student assistance programs, presented by the director of a non-profit drug rehabilitation organization
- How to write a grant, presented by a program analyst from ONDCP

The drug testing summits did not include researchers from any government organization, or university who specialize in studying the efficacy of student drug testing programs to deter student drug use, and future drug abuse.[4] No papers were presented to attendees on the efficacy of student drug testing to deter current and future drug use.

Do Drug Tests Deter Student Drug Use?

What the Researcher are Reporting

According to Ryan Grim, in *Why Random Drug Testing Doesn't Reduce Student Drug Use*, "there have been two major studies of student drug testing conducted at the University of Michigan which also produces Monitoring the Future, the university's highly regarded annual survey of student drug use, which is funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and whose numbers the White House regularly cites.

The first, in early 2003, compared the rates of drug use, as measured by Monitoring the Future, in schools that did some type of drug testing to schools that did not. The researchers controlled for various demographic differences and found across the board that drug testing was ineffective; there was no statistically significant difference in the number of users at a school that tested for drugs and a similar school that didn't.

The White House criticized the Michigan study for failing to look at the efficacy of random testing. So, Yamaguchi, Johnston, and O'Malley added the random element and ran their study again, this time adding data for the year 2002. The follow-up study, published later in 2003, tracked 94,000 middle- and high-school students. It reached the same results as its precursor. Even if drug testing is done randomly and without suspicion, it's not associated with a change in the number of students who use drugs in any category. The Michigan follow-up found one exception: In schools that randomly tested students 12th-graders were *more* likely to smoke marijuana."[5]

Abstract from the first study:

Relationship Between Student Illicit Drug Use and School Drug-Testing Policies
Yamaguchi R, Johnston LD and O'Malley PM
The Journal of School Health, 73(4): 159-164, April 2003

Most courts, including the Supreme Court of the United States, have found school drug-testing policies legally permissible. Yet little evaluation has been conducted to assess the efficacy of such programs, apart from their legal and moral implications. The authors of this study sought

to ascertain any trends in drug-testing policy enactment and to examine the association between drug testing and student-reported drug use. They drew data pertaining to students and drug use from the Monitoring the Future study; and they drew data on school characteristics, including drug-testing policies, from the Youth, Education, and Society study of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The authors' conclusions may run counter to many widely-held perceptions. They found that only a minor proportion of schools tested for drugs (about 18 percent), and the bulk of that proportion occurred in high school, not middle school. **They also failed to find any association between drug testing in schools and the prevalence or frequency of marijuana or other illicit drug use.**[6]

Second Michigan Study

Drug Testing in Schools: Policies, Practices, and Association with Student Drug Use.
Yamaguchi R, Johnston LD and O'Malley PM, University of Michigan
YES Occasional Papers, Paper No. 2, 2003

This paper examines drug testing in schools as a means of preventing student drug use, which is one aspect of the "war on drugs," a public and policy response to the growing problem of drugs in schools. To explore this issue, researchers used school-level survey data about drug testing from 894 schools participating in two related studies: the Youth, Education, and Society study and the Monitoring the Future study. Using cross-sectional data, they used descriptive analyses and logistic regression to examine how the presence of drug testing relates to 12-month use of marijuana and any other illicit drugs by students. The study also sought to determine how many schools use drug testing, the characteristics of these schools and which students are tested for drugs. The study does not use a pre-post design nor does it have random assignment to treatment conditions, both of which would be desirable for an ideal evaluation of an intervention program. The research showed that relatively few schools report testing students for drug use. **Data suggest that drug testing, as practiced in recent years in American secondary schools, does not prevent or inhibit student drug use.** The two forms of drug testing that are generally assumed to be most promising for reducing student drug use - random testing applied to all students and testing of athletes - did not produce encouraging results.[7]

Other Social Research Papers[8]

American Academy of Pediatrics, "Testing for Drugs of Abuse in Children and Adolescents," Pediatrics Vol. 98 No. 2 August 1996: The AAP writes in opposition to non-suspicion-based screening for drug use among adolescents as a prerequisite to participation in school activities, stating: "Notwithstanding the Supreme Court ruling [in Vernonia School District 47J v. Acton], students and student athletes should not be singled out for involuntary screening for drugs of abuse. Such testing should not be a condition for participation in sports or any school functions except for health-related purposes. Suspicion of drug use warrants a comprehensive evaluation by a qualified health professional."

Dr. William Bailey, Indiana Prevention Resource Center, 1998 Survey of "Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use by Indiana Children and Adolescents,": Results from the Indiana survey, relating reported drug use by various adolescent groups with the potential that a particular drug will be detected, suggest that "many random school drug testing programs are unlikely to detect much drug use, since they often target the lowest risk students with tests that are unlikely to detect use of anything other than tobacco or marijuana use."

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, "Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1997 Update on Violence," Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1995. Data provided by the Justice Department reveals that the peak hours for violent juvenile crime are 3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., the period when millions of young people are left without adult supervision or constructive activities. The sharpest increase in juvenile crime occurs between the hours of 3:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m., when the rate nearly triples.

Robert Taylor, "Compensating Behavior and the Drug Testing of High School Student Athletes," The Cato Journal Vol. 16 No. 3: "Civil Liberties issues aside, the random drug testing of athletes may be a very risky policy innovation, few people would question the desirability of minimizing the use of drugs among minors. The use of random, suspicionless drug testing of school athletes as a means to achieve this end is more open to question, however. Not only does this policy invade the privacy of a group of students who are relatively unlikely to use drugs, but it also discourages athletic participation and may actually lead to an increase in overall drug use."

Doctors Mishandling Student Drug Tests, Study Finds by Sharon Levy, MD,et al. Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine
A study conducted by Harvard Medical School and Children's Hospital in Boston found that most doctors administering drug tests to students don't have enough training to ensure test results are correct and unadulterated. [9]

"Random drug testing of schoolchildren" by Neil McKeganey. This report from the United Kingdom draws on evidence from the United States and examines the complex ethical and practical issues associated with student drug testing. The author systematically debunks a myriad of popular assumptions about youth and drug testing.[10]

What the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy is Reporting

"Drug testing has been shown to be an effective tool in preventing student drug use. The expectation that they may be randomly tested is enough to make some students stop using drugs—or never start in the first place. Drug testing is also an excellent tool for identifying drug-dependent students so they can be referred to treatment and get the help they need.

…random student drug testing is effective at deterring drug use. Most students don't use drugs, but they are constantly subject to peer pressure and are bombarded with messages from movies, music, television, and the Internet that drug use is okay and even a rite of passage for teens. To the relief of teens, drug testing removes the tug of peer pressure. It provides a way to shift the burden of deciding not to use drugs from themselves to the adults in their lives.

After two years of a drug-testing program, Hunterdon Central Regional High School in New Jersey saw significant reductions in 20 of 28 drug use categories; e.g., cocaine use by seniors dropped from 13 percent to 4 percent. And a study from Ball State University showed that 73 percent of high school principals reported a reduction in drug use among students subject to the drug testing."[11]

There is no citation on the ONDCP web site for this study.

What the Drug Testing Industry is Reporting

Elements of a Successful School-Based Student Drug Testing Program
Robert L. DuPont, M.D., Teresa G. Campbell, Ph.D., and Jacqueline J. Mazza.

The studies lead author is Robert DuPont, a former White House drug official. DuPont is also a partner at Bensinger, DuPont & Associates. The company web site states: "BDA offers a range of products designed to help employers establish and manage workplace drug and alcohol testing programs."

With funding from the U.S. Department of Education, the Institute for Behavior and Health conducted a survey of nine schools that have been pioneers in the field of student drug testing (SDT). The study was conducted during the 2001-2002 school year and included a telephone screening survey to identify nine schools with successful SDT programs for participation in an indepth survey that was mailed to the designated representative of each school's SDT program.

The study concluded that "student drug testing program's [have] apparent success." Since this study was a telephone survey, its results are based on whether or not a school principal thought his program was successful. It's doubtful any principal would say "no" since their grant funding may be in jeopardy. The authors are completing a new study due out in late 2006.

Public Opinion Survey Results

The Drug Policy Forum of Kansas (DPFKS) contracted with Jayhawk Consulting Services of Overland Park to conduct a drug policy survey in May of 2006. The state-wide telephone poll surveyed 500 Kansans who are frequent voters, hence older and more conservative than the general public. The polling results were broken down by congressional district.

> On the question: *After school extracurricular activities are usually viewed as a special privilege for junior and senior high school student. Do you think students should have to pass a drug test before being allowed to participate in after school programs?*

Seventy-three percent of frequent voters agreed that students should be drug tested before being allowed to participate in after school programs.

Twenty-two percent disagreed, and six percent were undecided.

By Congressional District:

	#1	#2	#3	#4	Total
Yes	66	72	80	71	73%
No	27	20	14	25	22%
Undecided	7	8	6	4	6%

The ONDCP reports on their web site: CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup Poll from June 21–23, 2002, showed that 70 percent of Americans said school districts should be allowed to test public school students for illegal drugs before those students can participate in non-athletic activities. [12]

Conclusion

Student drug testing does not appear to deter students from using drugs, nor is student drug testing found to be an indicator of deterring adult drug use. Drug testing is expensive to already cash strapped school districts, when other methods of deterring drug use, such as Reality-based Drug Education[13], counseling, and access to health-care professionals are more effective and less expensive to administer.
School districts would be wise to consider a wide range of options before implementing a drug testing program.

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[1] http://www.drugtestingfails.org/costs.html
[2] Numbers. 2006. *Time Magazine.* 24 July.
[3] http://pushingback.com/blogs/pushing_back/archive/2006/07/12/357.aspx
[4] http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/news/press05/122805.html
[5] http://www.slate.com/id/2138399/
[6] http://www.monitoringthefuture.org/pubs/text/ryldjpom03.pdf
[7] http://www.rwjf.org/research/researchdetail.jsp?id=1234&ia=
[8] http://www.aclu.org/drugpolicy/testing/10843res20020315.html
[9] http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/160/2/146
[10] http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/0095.asp
[11] http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/studentdrugtesting/faq.html
[12] http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/studentdrugtesting/faq.html
[13] http://www.safety1st.org/beyondzerotolerance.html