



## School Based Student Drug Testing Programs

### Background

School based student drug testing has been in effect for almost three decades. The war on drugs prompted drug testing in various settings like the private and public work sectors in the 1980s.<sup>2</sup> Then, school based student athlete drug testing arose in the late 1980s.<sup>2</sup> In 1995, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Vernonia v Acton* that drug testing high school student athletes at random is constitutional.<sup>3</sup> The ruling prompted schools across the nation to adopt student drug testing not only for athletes but for other subpopulations including students participating in extracurricular activities and student drivers.<sup>2</sup> Then in 2002, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Board of Education v Earls* that drug testing middle and high school students in extracurricular activities is constitutional.<sup>3</sup> Currently, the practice of drug testing within schools has decreased due to budgetary constraints.<sup>6</sup>

Biological samples that can be tested are: blood, breath, hair, saliva, sweat, and urine.<sup>1</sup> Urine is the most common sample tested in the school setting.<sup>1</sup> For accurate results it is recommended that the sample be directly viewed exiting the body or collected following strict collection and site guidelines.<sup>1</sup> Though not required by law, a complete medical history including current prescriptions should be taken into account when evaluating test results to rule out false positives.<sup>1</sup> Confirmatory testing should be carried out to confirm a positive result.<sup>1</sup> Students who test positive should not be punished by any means but should be provided with the resources to seek treatment.<sup>1</sup>

### Effective Research Findings

Some studies have shown that school based drug testing practices may have some benefits. Studies have found that testing is associated with lower rates of tested drug use within students.<sup>4,5,6</sup> For example, if marijuana is part of the drug panel, then marijuana use is likely to decrease among tested students. In a Florida high school survey, 74.1% of students

believed the practice would discourage drug use if applied.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the practice is associated with decreased use in females attending schools with positive environments.<sup>7</sup> In alignment with federal guidelines, 91.9% of surveyed

administrators reported referring students with positive test results to counseling services.<sup>8</sup> Some studies have reported no adverse changes in risk factors associated with drug use in participating schools.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, the median cost of drug testing is roughly \$5,800 which can be lowered if schools partner with local organizations.<sup>6</sup> Overall, school based drug testing has been reported as an effective preventive strategy **within** a prevention initiative.<sup>6</sup>

*"A positive test result does not diagnose a substance use disorder or indicate that a specific intervention is needed, and a negative drug test result does not rule out a substance use disorder."<sup>1</sup>*

### Ineffective Research Findings

Some studies have also shown that drug testing practices are ineffective. Studies have found that decreased rates of drug use can only be found in the tested subpopulations, while the remaining student body is unaffected.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, students have reported higher untested illicit drug use in schools with drug testing in place.<sup>4</sup> Though marijuana use among adolescents has risen, current drug panels typically do not screen for other popular drugs used by teens such as: alcohol, ecstasy, and inhalants.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, drug testing within a negative school environment



adversely affects female students use and has no effect on male students use regardless of school environment.<sup>7</sup> **Under federal guidelines, a positive result should not lead to punitive actions.**<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, over half of surveyed administrators reported opposing this guideline in practice.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, effectively drug testing students following federal guidelines is projected to be too costly to schools who would benefit more from a school-wide prevention strategy.<sup>1</sup> Overall, school based drug testing has been reported as a weak prevention strategy.<sup>7</sup>

## Recommendations

Though school based drug testing has taken place in our country's schools for almost thirty years, studies have continuously produced inconsistent results. If a school is to implement this strategy it is imperative that the school follow all federal guidelines including: obtaining and securing medical history, following strict collection procedures, employing secondary testing of positive results, providing access to non-punitive actions for positive results, maintaining separation of academic, behavioral, and results records, and destroying results and related files upon student leaving the school under any circumstance. It is strongly advised that schools allocate their resources to an evidence-based prevention strategy to mitigate risk factors, drug use, and associated outcomes. Some evidence-based programs for the middle or high school settings are Lifeskills Training, Positive Action, and Project Towards No Drug Abuse (blueprintsprograms.com). Communities are advised to intentionally choose evidence based programming that is intended both for the populations and desired outcomes. Research and third party counsel may be helpful in choosing the appropriate programming.

## References

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<sup>2</sup>Drug testing: Background information. (2013). *FindLaw.com*. Retrieved from: [http://files.findlaw.com/pdf/education/educat.findlaw.com\\_student-rights\\_drug-testing-background-information.pdf](http://files.findlaw.com/pdf/education/educat.findlaw.com_student-rights_drug-testing-background-information.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>DuPont, R. L., Merlo, L. J., Arria, A. M., and Shea, C. L. (2012). Random student drug testing as a school-based drug prevention strategy. *Addiction*, 108, 839-834.

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<sup>1</sup>Levy, S., and Schizer, M. (2015). Adolescent drug testing policies in schools. *American Academy of Pediatrics*, 135(4), 1107-1112.

<sup>8</sup>Ringwalt, C., Vincus, A. A., Ennett, S. T., Hanley, S., Bowling, M. J., Yacoubian, G. S., & Rohrbach, L. A. (2009). Responses to positive results from suspicionless random drug tests in US public school districts. *Journal of School Health*, 79(4), 177-184.

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