Student Drug Testing Survey – Narrative Essay, Research Paper

Student Drug Testing Survey – Narrative

Schools from 11 states known to have a student drug testing program were surveyed. Of the 26 schools reporting a current student drug testing program, 15 (58%) report having a mandatory student athletes program while 2 (8%) have a mandatory all co-curricular student program. Seven (27%) have a voluntary drug testing program and 2 (8%) have a reasonable suspicion program only.

For the mandatory athletes testing programs, most policies have been in place for 2-3 years. The majority of programs (71%) only do random testing during the season while the others (29%) test all the athletes at the beginning of the athletic season. All schools report only urine as the tested substance. It appears there is no clear pattern on the frequency tests are done with 53% testing weekly, 13% testing bi-monthly, 7% testing monthly and the remaining 27% testing frequency of several times each season. The average number of students tested per session was 18 or about 12% of the student athletes in season. Most schools averaged over 300 tests per year, with the Winter Semester being the lightest season.

The schools reporting a voluntary drug testing program have had their programs in place an average of four years. Testing frequency is different in that 43% test weekly, 29% bi-montly and the remaining 29% test a set number of times during the school year.

What Drugs are tested for?

As expected, the majority of schools with mandatory programs tested routinely for marijuana and cocaine (93%) with only 57% testing for alcohol and only 4% testing for LSD or nicotine. This is interesting since most of these schools ban use of tobacco by their students and nicotine is a gateway drug. The use of tobacco products will cause the most long term ill health effects on these students. Those schools having voluntary programs report more frequent testing for alcohol (57%), LSD (29%) and nicotine (29%). The most obvious reason for this difference is the fewer number of annual tests being done resulting in more funding being available to test for more types of drugs.

Are Certified Labs being used?

Of all the schools surveyed, 41% know for sure they use a SAMHSA certified laboratory and an alarming 59% said they didn’t know. If a lab is not certified by SAMHSA, then any result they report could be subject to legal challenge. If a legal challenge should arise from results of a student drug test processed by a non-certified laboratory, this could be considered a significant deviation from normal practice and leave the school district liable.

Positive Results

There has never been clear data on the actual positive result level for a student drug testing program. I have seen it discussed by experts in the field to be about 3%. The primary goal of this study was to look at this very fact in an attempt to qualify the expected rate of positive drug tests for a new program and one that has been in effect for several years. This study finds that for the mandatory drug testing programs and the voluntary programs, the rate of positive results for the initial year of the program ranges from 1% to 10% with an average of 2%. After the initial year of the program, the positive rate appears to drop down to \*1%.

Is it helping?

One cannot totally evaluate the effectiveness of a student drug testing program by the drop in levelof positive drug tests. In an effort to understand better how schools view the total affect of their testing program on the drug use behavior of their students, schools were asked to rate the drug use patterns of their students prior to initiation of a testing program and currently. For the school with mandatory athlete program, prior to testing, 60% percent describe their drug problems as “bad as most” and 13% “worse than most.” For those school with voluntary drug testing programs, 86% say their drug problems are “bad as most.” However, after a mandatory program’s first year, 27% report less use, 27% report significantly less use and 7% report markedly less use. The voluntary program schools also report “significant less use” (57%), and significantly less use (14%). Thus the far majority of schools who institute either a mandatory or voluntary drug testing program, 93% and 85% respectively report less use of illicit drugs by the groups tested. A mandatory program has always been thought to be more deterrent and has an impact on a greater number of students. Most schools also indicated an expectation of even greater deterrence to drug use in the future as the program becomes more ingrained in the culture of the student body. Many felt that as middle school students, who naturally look up to high school athletes as role models, would avoid drug use because of this positive peer pressure and the knowledge they too will be held accountable to drug-free participation when they reach high school. Many middle school students already are included in the school’s drug testing program. If a school can somehow influence the behavior of the “leaders” of the students, many of which are athletes, they can have a great impact on the rest of the student body.

Benefits and Problems

The biggest benefit of the student drug testing programs reported from the various schools, besides the obvious less illicit drug use, is the fact that now students have a ligament reason to say “No!” when offered illicit or banned substances. The desire to play sports or continue driving to school does have a powerful influence in helping our students ward off peer pressure. There also was mention of how student pride increased and teams came together in greater unity because there was no longer a division within the team of drug users and non-users. Drug testing seems to level the playing field for no longer can star athletes get away with breaking the no drug use rules.

The problems expressed centered about time and money. Many student drug testing programs require inordinate amounts of time from the athletic director or principal, two individuals whose plates are always filled. Schools also expressed the impact of limited financial resources for such a program often dictated how many students were tested and the frequency of testing, both having a direct impact on the overall deterrence of the program.

Several schools expressed concern over the failure of the families to follow through with the required intervention program when a student is found to be using drugs or the total lack of this student. This points to the need for all schools to have strong intervention programs with a series of checks and balances to make sure treatment requirements are met before a student is allowed to return to participation in the co-curricular activity.

Some schools noted that when drug testing began, the students were able to quickly figure out the testing cycles or what drugs were being testing for and thus have an idea of what drugs were NOT being looked for. Thus they saw an increase usage of those drugs not routinely tested for like LSD, nicotine and alcohol. To combat this problem, schools have worked with their medical vendors to provide testing on weekends to help deter alcohol use and added LSD and nicotine testing on a more regular basis.

Students attempting to adulteration their specimen until recently has never been considered a big concern if the collections are being done by experienced technicians. However, a simple search of the world wide wed will give any student thousands and hits each describing or selling products designed to block or otherwise cover up a positive drug test. A popular product called Klear is potassium nitrite crystals that are sold in breakable vials that are easily hidden in the socks or pockets. When added to a freshly voided urine specimen, the crystals quickly dissolve and do not affect the specimen temperature or color. The potassium nitrite blocks the confirmation test for marijuana only and most larger laboratories test for the presence of nitrites routinely. However, if you use a smaller hospital lab for your testing, students may get off with an adulterated specimen. This author has actually dealt with a student selected randomly, being escorted from class by the athletic director to the collection point, never having the opportunity to go to a locker, being able to use Klear in his specimen. The only logical explanation is that he carried the product with him every day in preparation of being called for a drug test. This desire to hide one’s use indicates a higher level of drug abuse than occasional recreation use.

Other students will employ simpler methods of hiding their drug use like the waiting game they sometimes play with the collector. The students learn quickly that if they cannot go to the bathroom right away, they possibly will be released from that day’s collection and added to the next session that may be a month or weeks away. By then they will have the time needed to clean up their systems so to pass the test. However, a good collector will win this battle and insist upon the collection that day and note this behavior on the Chair of Custody form for the MRO to review. More times than not students exhibiting such stalling behavior will have a positive drug test. A clear policy needs to be in place that allows students unable to produce an adequate urine specimen to drink up to 40 ounces of water and wait up to 2 hours to product the specimen. Any student, unless severely dehydrated, should be able to produce 30 cc of urine in two hours with that intake of water.

Other problems:

Most of our students know that drug use is wrong and are willing to avoid such behavior. However, most of them could easily point out to you who the users are. The CASA study tells that by age 14 the average student will not turn in a drug user or seller to school officials. When asked why, many students confide that they don’t know what to do when faced with such a problem. They lack the skills needed in intervene on another student’s behalf when they are thought to be involved in illicit drug use. They usually turn to a classmate for advise for have no more skills then they do in such an area. Occasionally another adult will be consulted who, for fear of getting involved in a bad situation, punts the request for help to someone else. The bottom line is our students don’t know what to do when faced with the situation of dealing with a friend who has moved from experimentation to heavier use of drugs. They don’t know who to go to, who to ask help from, or what their level of responsibility should be. It is only when a tragic event occurs that we try and second guess the actions of the friends and say “If only they would have told someone!”

Unfortunately, this same scenario applies to many adults today who as supervisors must address drug use problems with their employees and often forced to fire an employee found to be using during random drug testing. Development of such skill training is vital in equipping our students and future business leaders to handle all the problems they will face as adults. Teaching students how to take responsible action when a problem is discovered is vitally important. They must learn to weigh the consequences of saving a friendship verses ultimately helping a friend in trouble, the former being their main choice now. Once equipped to take action when trouble is discovered, more student referrals can be expected at school, allowing for earlier intervention and a greater chance of life without drugs.

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