

False Positives

April 25, 2006

Today, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) is hosting a student drug-testing summit in Milwaukee as part of a nationwide campaign to encourage school administrators to embrace student drug testing. As juniors at Francis W. Parker School who do not condone drug use, we are resolved that student drug testing does not adequately address the problem of teenage drug use. In fact, it has many adverse consequences.

We refrain from using illicit substances because we have caring and involved parents who began informing us about the perils of drug use at an early age. We are lucky to attend a school that does not rely on drug testing. We know that drug testing fails students, schools, and taxpayers alike. We are worried about what will happen if Midwestern communities turn to simplistic solutions that are doomed from the start.

Currently, before the general assembly in Illinois sits HB3554, which would permit public schools to drug test students involved in extra-curricular activities, without any probable cause that links the students to destructive behavior. Many parochial schools in Illinois and around the country have already begun testing, and drug testing could soon make an appearance more broadly in both public and private schools. The tests are designed to detect use of marijuana, cocaine, opiates, amphetamines, and PCP. However, they detect neither alcohol nor tobacco, the most frequently abused drugs, and they are known to be easily manipulated.

These tests are embarrassing and invasive - who feels good about peeing in a cup in front of teachers? They are also dangerous in that they may tempt students to use the harder drugs that are most quickly metabolized and thus go undetected. These tests are prone to false positives, attaching a long-lasting stigma to kids who have done nothing wrong. Consequences for a positive test result are usually tied to a ban on a student's participation in extra-curricular activities like athletics and clubs - the very types of enrichment that has the best chance of deterring kids from drug use. Drug tests erode our constitutional right to privacy as stipulated in the Fourth

Amendment - we don't agree with the ignoble court decisions that opened the door to drug testing. If educators aim to teach us about our citizenship, they also need to honor our rights.

Aside from the fact that drug tests are ineffective, these tests are expensive, costing from \$10 to \$30 per student tested. The money spent on drug tests should go towards enhancing health education. It is wrong to invest in drug testing the Chess Club when some schools cannot afford adequate materials for all of their students. With many states' current inauspicious financial condition, taxpayers should be outraged that the ONDCP wants their money thrown away on drug testing students and not on improving the education of future generations of Americans.

Perhaps most poignantly, the tests are proven to have no positive effect in deterring drug use among students. The most comprehensive study of student drug testing (*Journal of School Health*, April 2003) found that education is more influential in deterring students from using drugs than drug tests. Parents and schools derive a false sense of security from drug tests. The best way to effectively reduce the harms of teenage drug use is via proactive educational initiatives and parental involvement in our lives.

In coming to Milwaukee, the ONDCP aims to convince Midwestern school boards to adopt drug testing programs. We stand opposed, and we will be in attendance at today's conference to stand up for the rights of students all over the region who know that drug testing is *not* the proper means of addressing drug abuse in our schools. We've collected hundreds of signatures from Chicagoans against student drug testing, and have found that people who initially support testing often change their position upon considering the facts. The ONDCP will tell their side of the story, but we'll be there to make the case that a generation of Midwestern students should not grow up under a misguided regime of drug testing that is doomed to failure.

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