

DRUG-FREE PROJECTS COALITION, INC.

PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES TO PREVENT AND REDUCE DRUG USE

Student drug-testing programs: do these programs negatively impact students?

Adapted from a research report (unpublished) of Christina Steffner
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July 2008

Making the decision to add a student random drug-testing program (RSDT) to existing prevention programs should be based upon factual and accurate information, while also benefitting from the experience of more than 16 percent of U.S. secondary school districts that have implemented student drug testing programs.¹ Factual information on student drug-testing programs is widely available, yet districts and parents considering such programs continue to be subjected to a litany of claims that RSDT programs negatively impact student morale and behaviors without any supporting evidence. When closely examined, these claims are found to be conjecture or worse, opinion offered as fact and unsubstantiated by data.

In a review of data from the New Jersey Department of Education and individual school districts with similar demographics for the 2006–2007 school year, conducted by Christina Steffner, it was found that when comparing schools with RSDT programs to schools without programs, claims of negative impacts were unsupported. At least three additional studies have also found no evidence that RSDT programs negatively impact students.²

Many school districts across the U.S. have access to state report-card data similar to what is available in New Jersey. Such data can be compiled and analyzed to determine if student morale and behaviors have been negatively impacted in those districts with RSDT programs while considering the following list of frequently-cited and unsubstantiated claims of negative impacts.

¹See: “Student random drug-testing prevention programs: do these programs work?” C. E. Edwards, May 2008 and “How many public school districts *currently* test students for illicit drugs on a random basis?” C. E. Edwards, June 2008, <http://www.studentdrugtesting.org>

²Joseph McKinney, JD, Ed.D, “Effectiveness of random student drug-testing programs,” Ball State University, August 2005. This study found that the majority of responders reported that student drug use *decreased* and that the RSDT programs did not affect student activity participation levels adversely. In fact, almost one-half of principals reported *increases in participation levels for athletic programs*. The reported per-test cost of a RSDT program was \$30 or less for 91% of the 54 high schools with RSDT programs. 100% of principals responding stated that they observed no evidence of a negative impact of the prevention program upon the classroom. High schools with RSDT programs exceeded the state average for test scores on the state-mandated graduation test as well as exceeding the state average for graduation rates. Another study: Linn Goldberg, MD, FACSM et al., “Student Athlete Testing Using Random Notification Study (SATURN),” Oregon Health Sciences University, 2000–1. This study not only found no decreases in sport-activity participation by students subjected to RSDT, but that there was an 11% increase in participation following implementation of RSDT programs. Additional study: Joseph McKinney, JD, Ed.D, “It’s My Call/It’s Our Call (IMC/IOC) Random Student Drug Testing Program: Major Results of Year One Study,” Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School System, 2006, unpublished. Preliminary results demonstrated that students in the program were far less likely to have used marijuana, flunked a year of school, less likely to have been expelled, suspended or truant. Students in the program made better grades in school.

Those opposing RSDT programs conjecture that such programs will:

- Decrease levels of participation in extra-curricular and after-school activities
- Create distrust between students and teachers
- Create distrust between students and administrators
- Create distrust between students and parents
- Create a school atmosphere of resentment, suspicion and alienation
- Increase truancy rates
- Cause drug-use diversion to less-detectable drugs
- Breach student confidentiality if prescribed medications used
- Invade student privacy rights
- Provide a false sense of a drug-free environment
- Allow for identification of drug use without providing for a remedy
- Use school resources that should be used for education

Are these opinions supported by fact? A review of school data in New Jersey clearly demonstrates such claims of negative impacts are unsupported. In reality, the data review provides evidence to the contrary, supporting clear evidence of a positive impact at those schools with RSDT programs.

In 1975, the New Jersey Department of Education began using District Factor Groups (DFG) to classify school districts based upon socioeconomic status (SES). The DFG scale designates districts with the lowest SES as “A” and those with the highest SES as “J”. The DFG scale is also used to analyze student performance on statewide assessment examinations to allow for comparisons of student performance between districts with similar characteristics. In this study, the DFG scale is used as well as enrollment data so that where possible schools with similar enrollment levels could be compared. The review also compared schools within the same region. All data was obtained from the 2006-2007 school report cards and appropriate district personnel. Of the 52 school districts chosen, representing 70,107 students included in this review, one-half or 26 have RSDT programs that generally include 50% to 88% of students in the testing pools and 26 do not have RSDT programs. Additionally, the 52 school districts are located throughout the state; have designated different test pools of students when there is a RSDT program; demonstrate a range of student performance; and represent all SES levels. Detailed data tables are provided in the Appendix to this paper.

The overall findings in New Jersey demonstrated that daily attendance rates at schools with RSDT programs (94.8%) were higher than at non-RSDT schools (89.8%). Graduation rates were also higher at schools with RSDT (96%) than for students enrolled at non-testing schools (95.4%). Students subject to RSDT scored higher, on average, on the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) and the SAT. The data also demonstrates that more students from RSDT districts go on to higher education (90.9%) as compared to their counterparts in non-testing districts (89.3%). Suspension and drop-out rates were lower at schools with RSDT programs. While there was only one (1) expulsion at a RSDT school, non-testing schools had 14 expulsions. This data clearly refutes assertions that students attending schools with RSDT programs experience a loss of connectedness with their schools as measured by indicators such as student performance on standardized tests, daily attendance, graduation, suspension, expulsion and drop out rates.

Hunterdon Central Regional High School, randomly drug testing students since 1996, has an enrollment of just under 3200 students in grades 9–12. The statistical data from Hunterdon Central Regional High School, as well as that for the other 25 RSDT New Jersey high schools, clearly demonstrates that student participation in athletics or extra-curricular activities did not decrease. This data also serves to refute the related conjecture that risky behaviors, resulting from decreased participation, will increase.

Student participation in activities was consistent among schools of similar demographics and locales with non-RSDT schools reporting similar levels of participation. It was found that in New Jersey districts, the level of participation was more likely to be impacted by the DFG where it was observed that there was greater participation in school districts with a higher DFG rating.

As to creating an environment of resentment, distrust and suspicion between parent-child and/or school-child relationships leading to a loss of school connectedness and runaway behavior, the schools with RSDT programs showed no increase in runaway or truancy behaviors when compared to schools without programs.

New Jersey school districts, through the use of research based studies such as the Rocky Mountain Behavioral Science Institute American Drug and Alcohol Survey, did not experience drug-use diversion to less detectable or non-tested drugs. Most districts construct RSDT policies that permit testing for a variety of substances and modification of the drug-test panels. Many districts also allow for a variety of specimens that may be collected and tested, randomly selecting specimen type when the student reports for testing. Students, therefore, cannot be certain what drugs will be included in the test, nor do they have the opportunity to substitute specimens.

Using proven and generally-accepted procedures and practices for any drug-testing program prevents breaching student confidentiality and privacy. Standard procedures include un-observed collections when the specimen is urine. Many districts contract for specimen collection with a third party. A necessary part of any correctly-structured RSDT program is the use of a Medical Review Officer (MRO). A licensed physician, the MRO is specifically trained to interpret drug-test results and reviews all positive test results. Where there is a question of legitimate use of a prescription drug, the MRO makes direct contact with a parent and obtains prescription medication information. The MRO verifies legitimate use of the substance and reports the drug-test result as ‘negative’ to the school representative.

U. S. public school districts with RSDT programs must adhere to specific requirements of student confidentiality as dictated by The Federal Privacy Act (P.L.93-575), The Federal Alcohol and Drug Abuse Act (P.L. 92-282) and Federal Regulation (42 CFR-Part 2). Students are not identified by name, social security number, or student identification number for drug-test purposes. All drug-testing records are maintained separate from permanent records and must be destroyed upon graduation. School district officials may not share information of a positive screen with local law enforcement agencies. Information on drug-test results may only be given to the student and the parent. Only individuals authorized to administer the program are permitted access to drug-test results.

All schools included in this review, as well as most others in the U.S., recognize that RSDT is only one part of a comprehensive prevention strategy that should also include drug and alcohol education programs. New Jersey public schools with RSDT programs continue to utilize multi-

faceted prevention strategies to meet the annual state-mandated 10 hours of drug and alcohol education for grades K-12. Campuses are not promoted as drug-free environments—but those with RSDT programs are certainly shown to be environments that maintain a clear and strong message that drug use by students is unacceptable.

New Jersey schools offer Student Assistance Programs and Student Assistance Counselors on staff as a remedy and support when there is student drug use. These professionals provide education and counseling for students who test positive. While most students do not require treatment, district policies require students who have a positive-test result to be evaluated by a licensed drug addictions counselor and to follow any recommendations made by the counselor.

Those schools not using a third-party collector, train school nurses or designated staff to administer the RSDT program. Teachers continue their work as educators and are not generally involved in RSDT programs. The cost of a RSDT program can be budgeted to meet the needs of the school district without taking time or funds from the primary role of education. School districts in New Jersey and across the U.S. have found ways to raise or re-allocate funds, obtain grant funding or other means of supporting RSDT programs. School time and resources are not diverted from the primary mission of education to administer a RSDT program.

The use of research-based and local Organizational Health Inventories (OHI) satisfaction tools, review and analysis of state report-card data used to measure performance indicators of schools and discussion with school officials in New Jersey provide clear evidence that refutes the claims of negative effects of RSDT on students and school culture. Schools with RSDT programs send a clear message about drug and alcohol use, provide students with opportunities to avoid drug and alcohol use, provide a means for identification and early intervention in student drugs and alcohol use. These programs contribute to a nurturing environment that allows students to flourish and to participate in the educational process.

APPENDIX
New Jersey school district report-card data 2006–2007

Summary data table

DFG	RSDT schools	Non-testing schools
Total number of schools	26	26
Total enrollment	37,923	39,184
Daily attendance rate	94.8%	89.8%
Graduation rate	96%	95.4%
Suspension rate	11%	15.9%
Drop-out rate	0.9%	1.1%
Expulsion rate	1	14
% of students passing state standardized tests	95.2%	91.6%
Average math, language arts, SATs	511/496	505/489
% of students going on to higher education	90.9%	89.3%

Individual district data

DFG (B)	North Bergen	Plainfield
Total enrollment	2421	1799
Daily attendance rate	92.4%	91.8%
Graduation rate	90.6%	85.4%
Suspension rate	19.8%	32.0%
Drop-out rate	2.1%	1.7%
Expulsion rate	0	2
% of students passing state standardized tests	83%	61.6%
Average math, language arts, SATs	449/434	390/381
% of students going on to higher education	80.1%	76.8%
% of students included in the testing pool	30% *A	

DFG (CD)	Bayonne	Clifton
Total enrollment	2458	3397
Daily attendance rate	92.2%	93.4%
Graduation rate	96.3%	84.8%
Suspension rate	23%	20%
Drop-out rate	1.5%	5.1%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	84.8%	85.6%
Average math, language arts, SATs	459/442	482/460
% of students going on to higher education	95%	89.9%
% of students included in the testing pool	49.9% *A/EC/V	

*Student groups included in the testing pool: A=athletes year-round; AIS=athletes in athletic season only; EC=extra-curricular activities; P=parking; V=voluntary sign up.

DFG (DE)	Hackettstown	Roselle Park
Total enrollment	949	676
Daily attendance rate	94.4%	93.8%
Graduation rate	96.6%	98.3%
Suspension rate	4.3%	4.7%
Drop-out rate	.5%	.9%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	96%	87.5%
Average math, language arts, SATs	492/490	469/457
% of students going on to higher education	85.3%	91.2%
% of students included in the testing pool	73% *A/EC/P/V	

DFG (DE)	West Deptford	Willingboro
Total enrollment	1068	1122
Daily attendance rate	92.6%	86.0%
Graduation rate	90.7%	96.0%
Suspension rate	12.1%	25.7%
Drop-out rate	3.0%	4.0%
Expulsion rate	0	2
% of students passing state standardized tests	96.3%	65.7%
Average math, language arts, SATs	498/478	420/413
% of students going on to higher education	92.0%	81.7%
% of students included in the testing pool	56% *A	

DFG (DE)	Brick Township	North Plainfield
Total enrollment	1586	1436
Daily attendance rate	91.2%	93.9%
Graduation rate	91.8%	95.9%
Suspension rate	5.5%	12.9%
Drop-out rate	1.8%	.3%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	92.2%	83.8%
Average math, language arts, SATs	492/480	465/449
% of students going on to higher education	89.8%	77.4%
% of students included in the testing pool	30% *AIS/P	

*Student groups included in the testing pool: A=athletes year-round; AIS=athletes in athletic season only; EC=extra-curricular activities; P=parking; V=voluntary sign up.

DFG (DE)	Brick Memorial	Jackson
Total enrollment	1923	2257
Daily attendance rate	89%	92.8%
Graduation rate	94.8%	96.9%
Suspension rate	8.4%	10.1%
Drop-out rate	2.3%	.8%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	94.6%	91.7%
Average math, language arts, SATs	496/477	499/484
% of students going on to higher education	81.8%	87.1%
% of students included in the testing pool	25% *AIS/P	

DFG (DE)	Secaucus	Belvidere
Total enrollment	575	557
Daily attendance rate	95%	93%
Graduation rate	97.5%	93.8%
Suspension rate	2.4%	6.3%
Drop-out rate	.2%	2.2%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	92%	93%
Average math, language arts, SATs	479/462	477/475
% of students going on to higher education	91.3%	86.9%
% of students included in the testing pool	70% *A/EC/P/V	

DFG (DE)	Sterling	Audobon
Total enrollment	973	907
Daily attendance rate	97.1%	94.2%
Graduation rate	94.3%	93.3%
Suspension rate	20.1%	17.3%
Drop-out rate	2.0%	.7%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	87.5%	95.8%
Average math, language arts, SATs	496/487	514/489
% of students going on to higher education	90.3%	89.1%
% of students included in the testing pool	61% *A/EC/P/V	

*Student groups included in the testing pool: A=athletes year-round; AIS=athletes in athletic season only; EC=extra-curricular activities; P=parking; V=voluntary sign up.

DFG (FG)	Nutley	South Plainfield
Total enrollment	1367	1224
Daily attendance rate	93.6%	94.8%
Graduation rate	95.8%	95.9%
Suspension rate	12.9%	20.9%
Drop-out rate	.4%	1.1%
Expulsion rate	0	4
% of students passing state standardized tests	98.5%	92.9%
Average math, language arts, SATs	516/499	491/472
% of students going on to higher education	92.5%	95.8%
% of students included in the testing pool	72.5% *A/EC/P/V	

DFG (FG)	Clearview	Kingsway Regional
Total enrollment	1497	1456
Daily attendance rate	94.6%	93.2%
Graduation rate	96.6%	98.2%
Suspension rate	9.1%	21%
Drop-out rate	.8%	.9%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	99.3%	98.8%
Average math, language arts, SATs	512/504	517/499
% of students going on to higher education	95%	81.1%
% of students included in the testing pool	80% *A/EC/P/V	

DFG (FG)	Fort Lee	Monroe
Total enrollment	1096	1470
Daily attendance rate	94%	93.9%
Graduation rate	97%	95.2%
Suspension rate	14.7%	22.9%
Drop-out rate	.3%	1.0%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	93%	94.5%
Average math, language arts, SATs	546/499	522/495
% of students going on to higher education	96.1%	91.3%
% of students included in the testing pool	70% *A/EC/P/V	

*Student groups included in the testing pool: A=athletes year-round; AIS=athletes in athletic season only; EC=extra-curricular activities; P=parking; V=voluntary sign up.

DFG (FG)	Washington Township	Old Bridge
Total enrollment	2991	3080
Daily attendance rate	94.9%	94.4%
Graduation rate	95.6%	96.4%
Suspension rate	16.2%	14.7%
Drop-out rate	1.0%	.8%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	95.6%	93.8%
Average math, language arts, SATs	501/496	502/483
% of students going on to higher education	93.3%	85.8%
% of students included in the testing pool	55% *A	

DFG (FG)	Collingswood	Haddon
Total enrollment	807	725
Daily attendance rate	93.6%	93.5%
Graduation rate	90.2%	98.5%
Suspension rate	24.7%	20.4%
Drop-out rate	1.5%	.7%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	95.9%	96.5%
Average math, language arts, SATs	483/486	504/504
% of students going on to higher education	85.2%	92.7%
% of students included in the testing pool	60% *A	

DFG (FG)	Warren Hills	Hamilton North
Total enrollment	1475	1374
Daily attendance rate	93.2%	92.5%
Graduation rate	90.8%	92.3%
Suspension rate	5.4%	10.6%
Drop-out rate	3.0%	1.8%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	97.4%	85.5%
Average math, language arts, SATs	511/504	459/455
% of students going on to higher education	78.8%	79.1%
% of students included in the testing pool	74.4% *A/EC/P/V	

*Student groups included in the testing pool: A=athletes year-round; AIS=athletes in athletic season only; EC=extra-curricular activities; P=parking; V=voluntary sign up.

DFG (GH)	South Hunterdon	Highland Park
Total enrollment	341	441
Daily attendance rate	98.8	94.4%
Graduation rate	96.7%	98.3%
Suspension rate	5%	10%
Drop-out rate	.4%	.2%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	100%	96%
Average math, language arts, SATs	517/519	563/564
% of students going on to higher education	96.6%	96%
% of students included in the testing pool	71% *A/EC/P/V	

DFG (GH)	Shore Regional	Delaware Valley
Total enrollment	746	952
Daily attendance rate	94.8%	94.8%
Graduation rate	100%	97.9%
Suspension rate	5.9%	6.6%
Drop-out rate	.2%	.4%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	96.1%	98%
Average math, language arts, SATs	506/499	534/533
% of students going on to higher education	99.7%	90.5%
% of students included in the testing pool	88% *A/EC/P/V	

DFG (GH)	Pequannock	Parsippany
Total enrollment	774	965
Daily attendance rate	94.1%	95.5%
Graduation rate	100%	95.5%
Suspension rate	25.3%	28.3%
Drop-out rate	.3%	.8%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	98.9%	98%
Average math, language arts, SATs	500/485	540/502
% of students going on to higher education	91.2%	94.1%
% of students included in the testing pool	75.6% *A/EC/P/V	

*Student groups included in the testing pool: A=athletes year-round; AIS=athletes in athletic season only; EC=extra-curricular activities; P=parking; V=voluntary sign up.

DFG (GH)	Hanover Park Regional	Freehold Boro
Total enrollment	890	1399
Daily attendance rate	97.5%	94.4%
Graduation rate	97.4%	95.8%
Suspension rate	2.6%	10.9%
Drop-out rate	.7%	.6%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	94%	97.9%
Average math, language arts, SATs	524/515	559/526
% of students going on to higher education	95.1%	93.6%
% of students included in the testing pool	82% *A/EC/P/V	

DFG (GH)	Morris Knolls	Edison
Total enrollment	1600	1990
Daily attendance rate	96.7%	96.6%
Graduation rate	97.3%	96.2%
Suspension rate	9.1%	43%
Drop-out rate	.5%	1.1%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	97.5%	91.6%
Average math, language arts, SATs	536/512	536/502
% of students going on to higher education	91.7%	86.7%
% of students included in the testing pool	74% *A/EC/P/V	

DFG (GH)	Morris Hills	Manasquan
Total enrollment	1131	1029
Daily attendance rate	96.7%	94.7%
Graduation rate	97.8%	97.7%
Suspension rate	15.4%	11.8%
Drop-out rate	.4%	.6%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	95.1%	97.3%
Average math, language arts, SATs	516/499	515/507
% of students going on to higher education	87.9%	93.7%
% of students included in the testing pool	76% *A/EC/P/V	

*Student groups included in the testing pool: A=athletes year-round; AIS=athletes in athletic season only; EC=extra-curricular activities; P=parking; V=voluntary sign up.

DFG (GH)	Middletown North	Piscataway
Total enrollment	1655	2145
Daily attendance rate	94.1%	90.7%
Graduation rate	100%	96.6%
Suspension rate	14.2%	16.4%
Drop-out rate	.1%	.8%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	96%	94.6%
Average math, language arts, SATs	508/495	500/473
% of students going on to higher education	89.9%	94.3%
% of students included in the testing pool	74% *A/EC/P/V	

DFG (GH)	Middletown South	Wall
Total enrollment	1413	1348
Daily attendance rate	94.4%	89.6%
Graduation rate	98.8%	95.9%
Suspension rate	6%	11.5%
Drop-out rate	.2%	.8%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	99.5%	94.1%
Average math, language arts, SATs	530/514	514/498
% of students going on to higher education	90.1%	94.1%
% of students included in the testing pool	73% *A/EC/P/V	

DFG (I)	Hillsborough	Watchung Hills
Total enrollment	2331	2008
Daily attendance rate	94.8%	93.6%
Graduation rate	98.4%	98.1%
Suspension rate	4%	12%
Drop-out rate	.5%	.4%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	96.5%	98.8%
Average math, language arts, SATs	550/520	551/536
% of students going on to higher education	96.5%	91%
% of students included in the testing pool	73% *A/EC/P/V	

*Student groups included in the testing pool: A=athletes year-round; AIS=athletes in athletic season only; EC=extra-curricular activities; P=parking; V=voluntary sign up.

DFG (I)	Hunterdon Central	South Brunswick
Total enrollment	2892	2643
Daily attendance rate	96.8%	94.9%
Graduation rate	97%	94%
Suspension rate	5.6%	8.7%
Drop-out rate	.6%	.7%
Expulsion rate	0	6
% of students passing state standardized tests	99.6%	94.7%
Average math, language arts, SATs	553/544	550/517
% of students going on to higher education	91.9%	91.6%
% of students included in the testing pool	74% *A/EC/P/V	

DFG (I)	North Hunterdon	Colts Neck
Total enrollment	1764	1792
Daily attendance rate	98.9%	94.5%
Graduation rate	97.8%	97.3%
Suspension rate	5.6%	4.4%
Drop-out rate	.5%	.6%
Expulsion rate	0	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	98.9%	98%
Average math, language arts, SATs	574/549	531/509
% of students going on to higher education	93.9%	93.3%
% of students included in the testing pool	77% *A/EC/P/V	

DFG (I)	Voorhees	Indian Hills
Total enrollment	1200	992
Daily attendance rate	98.5%	93.7%
Graduation rate	98%	97.7%
Suspension rate	10.8%	10.5%
Drop-out rate	.7%	.5%
Expulsion rate	1	0
% of students passing state standardized tests	98.3%	95.5%
Average math, language arts, SATs	544/531	542/535
% of students going on to higher education	93.5%	97%
% of students included in the testing pool	75% *A/EC/P/V	

*Student groups included in the testing pool: A=athletes year-round; AIS=athletes in athletic season only; EC=extra-curricular activities; P=parking; V=voluntary sign up.