

## **Selecting a Service Provider for your RSDT program.**

A guide for School Administrators.

The decision has been made by your School Board to establish a random student drug testing program for your school. You have a policy in place and the decision to utilize a “Third Party Service Provider” has been made. Now what? This is an area very few School Administrators have any exposure to. Unlike required US Department of Transportation (DOT) testing for bus drivers, there are many more considerations to address with an RSDT program. What type of testing methodology will you use? Which one is best? Who will you contract with to provide the collection and Laboratory services? How do you know who is qualified? And these questions are just the beginning.

The information to follow will hopefully answer some of these questions and provide you with adequate information that will allow you to make a more informed decision. From state to state the regulations that oversee drug testing providers vary greatly. Some states may have no regulation or oversight at all. The decision you will make including the type of drug test used, the service provider and the laboratory will all have an effect on the overall quality of your program. I would also suggest that you compare bundled pricing for Laboratory and collection services from a service provider and pricing directly from a laboratory and collection services from the service provider. In many cases you may be able to reduce the laboratory fees by contracting these from a service provider due to the fact that they may be able to provide you pricing based on the total volume of tests they run thru a lab as opposed to the lower volume of testing your program will utilize. Compare both options to reduce your cost.

First let’s address testing methodology. There are only three choices to look at; hair, urine or oral fluid (saliva) tests. With oral fluid and urine tests, you also have an option for “point of collection” (POCT) which are rapid on- site tests or laboratory based tests. Each testing method has its distinct advantages and disadvantages. Hair testing has gained a lot of popularity with courts and employers because it can give a detection window of up to 90 days, depending on hair length. Each ½ inch length of hair represents approximately 30 days. It can not detect drug use within about five days and does not detect the active ingredient in marijuana (THC) very well. It also can only detect chronic use. This means, such as in the case of marijuana use, that a person would have to use marijuana at least two to three times per week to detect the drug. Hair testing is also quite expensive.

Urine testing is known as the gold standard due to the fact it was the first method to be widely used. It is also used for all federally mandated drug testing such as DOT testing, although there are changes to allow other testing methodologies being developed. Urinalysis can detect most drugs from 24 to 72 hours, and marijuana from 24 hours to 3 weeks for heavy users. However, there are draw backs to urine including that it is easy to adulterate (pass by false means) and is the most invasive to collect. In order to detect drugs such as Heroin and Oxycodone a more involved laboratory test known as an expanded opiate panel must be done at added expense. If you are in a geographical area that has issues with “Cheese Heroin” you must also use a much lower cutoff, around 750 ng /ml to 1000 ng /ml for testing opiates or you will not be able to detect this drug. Urine

can undergo lab based testing or tested with a with a Point of Collection test which can yield negative results in just a few minutes. When using a Point of Collection device FDA 510 K regulations must be followed and non – negative (positive) test results be sent to a lab for confirmation and medical review. POC urine tests give false positive results which is why confirmation steps are so important.

Oral fluid testing is rapidly gaining popularity. Saliva is fast to collect and can not be adulterated. It provides similar detection windows as urine with the exception of marijuana, in which you lose a few days of detection time. It has greater sensitivity to drugs such as heroin, ecstasy and oxycodone. There is POC devices for oral fluid but it has such a short window of detection it may not be useful in the arena we are discussing. To find a laboratory you can search key words on line such as “hair drug test” or “saliva drug test” and easily find web sites of labs.

Always use a Medical Review Officer (MRO) to review all non - negative results. This is critical in not only staying compliant with confidentiality laws and Department of Education recommendations but in assuring the accuracy of your testing.

The service provider is the next challenge. Depending on which state you are in, there may be regulation and oversight of the providers or none at all. Check with your state regulatory agency. If providers are regulated you should be able to get a list of qualified providers. If there are no state regulations you may have to play detective a bit. First check for providers through trade organizations such as the Drug & Alcohol Testing Industry Association (DATIA) or the Substance Abuse Program Administrators Association (SAPAA). They have training requirements and a code of ethics their members follow. A service provider that is serious about their work will be able to provide you with training credentials for their staff.

It is also advisable to make sure the collector is trained for the specific type of test method you will be using, such as saliva or hair. This will assure better quality in the testing process. Always ask for references, and follow up with them. As an experienced member in the field of drug testing, my main concern with outside vendors is making sure schools know the credentials of the vendor's staff. I suggest that the school district have the service provider furnish a current criminal history check on the collectors that will service the school. While your school's good intention of creating and maintaining a drug free environment for your students is admirable, you do not want to allow unknown and / or potentially dangerous people into your school. I also suggest that school officials familiarize themselves with the collection and testing processes and provide oversight for them. A service provider should have no problem answering questions or having the collection process monitored. I always have a school representative present during the entire collection process so the school knows what the providers are doing and so they can provide assistance in ensuring student cooperation.

In closing I would like to remind you that a well designed and managed RSDT program can provide a school community with a very useful deterrent against teen drug use. RSDT programs also provide early identification of students currently using drugs and

when combined with a well designed Student Assistance Program (SAP), can prevent a life of addiction for a child.

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**List of resources**

- 1. The Drug & Alcohol Testing Industry Association – [www.datia.org](http://www.datia.org)**
- 2. Substance Abuse Program Administrators Association -[www.sapaa.org](http://www.sapaa.org)**
- 3. Student Drug Testing Coalition – [www.studentdrugtesting.org](http://www.studentdrugtesting.org)**
- 4. National Student Assistance Association- [www.nasap.org](http://www.nasap.org)**