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This year, a New Jersey middle school began random drug tests for students as young as 12 years old, both sending a message and making a statement about teen drug use in the state. Many high schools throughout the state – and country – have drug testing policies in schools. Courts have determined that as long as a student participates in activities outside regular school attendance – such as sports, clubs, and even a parking permit – it is legal to conduct random drug tests on him or her for drug use. Opponents argue that random drug testing of students is intrusive, but intrusion is necessary to keep teenagers safe in today’s world and combat the growing drug problem in society.

This growing drug problem leads to addiction, and schools need to help fight this serious disease. One study conducted in 2014 estimated that 28,000 12-17-year-olds had tried heroin within that year, and an estimated 16,000 were current heroin users (McIntryre). Those numbers are dangerously high and a clear indication that this country has a drug problem that begins long before adulthood. A similar study conducted stated that 1 in every 12 high school seniors reported trying Vicodin for recreational use (McIntyre). Prescription pain killers. such as Vicodin, lead to eventual heroin addiction. This addiction could be stopped before it begins if pro-active schools caught the problem in its early stages.

High schools, and in some cases middle schools, need to drug test students in order to protect the schools’ interests. The overdose problem has become so severe that Pennsylvania schools are now making the life-saving drug Narcan available to school officials (PR, Newswire). An overdose in school has the potential of creating issues not just for the drug user, but for the district and other students. In defense of the drug testing policy, one New Jersey superintendent stated, “It is our responsibility to use every means available to discourage students from coming to school activities under the influence” (Brady). Unfortunately, in today’s world, schools’ first priorities are often safety-related and often liable for the actions of its students. Drug testing students is an important step in keeping schools safe and reducing the legal liability for problems that arise from rampant drug use on campuses.

Additionally, random drug testing is a deterrent for many students who feel pressured to experiment with illegal drugs. Hunterdon Central School District reported a “significant” decrease in student drug use since implementing the program (Brady). Student who believe they might get caught are likely to abstain from illegal drugs, lessening the number of student users. The superintendent in Hunterdon has seen a positive change on campus, stating that the message sent by drug testing “has a direct impact on school climate and culture, palpable to all of us on campus” (Brady). The positive climate change sends a message that schools should be a drug-free environment. That climate is contagious and spreads across campus, deterring others from using drugs.

Drug testing students is an important step in improving school climate and public safety. Schools will see the short- and long-term effects of a safer school, which is more conducive to learning. Additionally, the policy will prevent addiction in students, which transfers into saved lives and safer communities. Without a clear policy and a clear statement against drug use, this growing state and national trend will continue to plague this country’s schools and communities.

**Work Cited**

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