

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

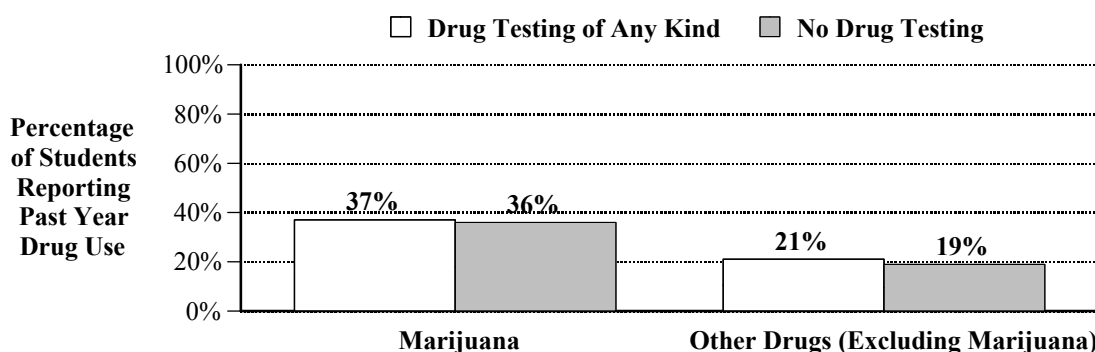
University of Maryland, College Park

Study Finds Schools With Drug Testing Do Not Have Less Student Drug Use; Study Limitations Reduce Study Usefulness

Approximately 18% of high schools in the United States drug test their students, according to a recent study of national trends in school drug testing between 1998 and 2001. Twelfth grade students at schools that had drug testing policies had virtually identical rates of past year marijuana use and other drug use as seniors at schools that did not have drug testing policies (see figure). Similar results were found for 8th and 10th grade students as well as for experienced marijuana users. Student athletes at schools that drug tested athletes also had similar rates of past year marijuana and other drug use as athletes at schools that did not drug test athletes. The authors conclude that “while lack of evidence for the effectiveness of drug testing is not definitive, results suggest that drug testing in schools may not provide a panacea for reducing student drug use” (p. 164). They suggest that school policies that address students perception and attitude towards use may be more effective than drug testing in preventing drug use.

CESAR believes that there are several limitations of this study that should be considered. According to the authors, it is possible that “schools that instituted drug testing initially had higher use, and drug testing reduced those levels to levels similar to those at other schools” (p. 164). In addition, the most prevalent reason for drug testing in these schools was for cause or suspicion, not random testing.* Finally, there were no data presented in the study on the schools’ responses to positive drug tests (e.g., sanctions, counseling, parental input), which may greatly affect the efficacy of drug testing programs.

Percentage of U.S. 12th Grade Students Reporting Past Year Marijuana and Other Drug Use by Presence of Drug Testing in School, 1998-2001



*A forthcoming publication will include an expanded analysis of schools with random drug testing. (Yamaguchi, R., Johnston, L.D., and O'Malley, P.M. "The legal and educational issues behind drug testing in schools," Youth Education, and Society Occasional Paper No. 2, University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, Forthcoming.)

NOTE: The study was conducted using an analysis of data from the national Monitoring the Future and the Youth, Education, and Society studies.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Yamaguchi R., Johnston L.D., O'Malley P.M. "Relationship Between Student Illicit Drug Use and School Drug-Testing Policies," *Journal of School Health* 73(4):159-64, 2003. For more information, contact Lloyd Johnston at lloydj@umich.edu.

• 301-403-8329 (voice) • 301-403-8342 (fax) • CESAR@cesar.umd.edu • www.cesar.umd.edu •

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