

# Drug Testing in Schools

**Issue: The Beckley-Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce supports random drug testing for secondary education students participating in extracurricular activities or those that accept the privilege of driving to school.**

- The Beckley-Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce believes that random drug testing of students involved in extracurricular activities at the secondary school level will empower our teens to resist peer pressure to take drugs. The Chamber is not seeking mandatory drug testing of every student.
- Drug testing of students is legal. In June 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court broadened the authority of public schools to test students for illegal drugs. Voting five to four in *Pottawatomie County v. Earls*, the court ruled to allow random drug tests for all middle and high school students participating in competitive extracurricular activities.
- While the courts have limited the scope of drug testing in schools to those participating in extracurricular activities, the Chamber believes that drug testing would provide all students with a powerful tool to resist peer pressure to take drugs. The parents of students not participating in extracurricular activities should be given the option to voluntarily enroll their children in the program.
- The primary purpose of drug testing is not to punish students who use drugs but to prevent drug abuse and to help students already using become drug-free. The results of a positive drug test should be used to intervene with students who do not yet have drug problems, through counseling and follow-up testing. For students who are diagnosed with addiction, parents and a school administrator can refer them to effective drug treatment programs to begin the recovery process.
- Opponents of drug testing will argue that students involved in extracurricular activities are the better students and are unlikely to put their standing at risk by using drugs. Unfortunately, drug abuse in southern West Virginia is affecting all age groups and people from all economic, social and educational backgrounds.

It is naive to assume the starting quarterback or star point guard of a school is any less likely to use drugs than other students. The fact that they don't want to put their standing at risk by using drugs is exactly why testing is a good idea. By creating the potential to be caught, you are providing these student leaders a reason to resist peer pressure to take drugs and to use their influence within the schools to help other students stay drug free as well.

- Drug testing does cost money. However, the cost is greatly reduced by implementing random drug testing limited to those students participating in extracurricular activities. In fact, the Beckley-Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce believes that drug testing could have a positive financial benefit for the Raleigh County school system. Statewide, more than 20 percent of students drop out of school prior to graduation. The state school aid formula funds county schools based on the number of students enrolled in each county. If we can successfully reduce dropouts attributable to drug usage, the Raleigh County school system will increase its state funding and the drug testing program could actually benefit our schools financially.

- About 70 percent of the property taxes paid by businesses in Raleigh County go to the school system. The Beckley-Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce wants to make sure those tax dollars are used where they belong – in our classrooms. While we do not think that implementation of random drug testing for students should be delayed while awaiting other funding streams, the Chamber supports the inclusion of drug testing funding in future excess levies to ensure program costs do not take away from funds otherwise designated for classroom use.
- The Beckley-Raleigh County Chamber of Commerce and its members consider every business in our community to be a partner with the Board of Education in developing an educated, trained and capable workforce for Raleigh County. One of the greatest challenges faced by our members is securing a drug-free workforce. Employers regularly interview dozens of job applicants only to later learn that merely a small percentage can pass the required drug screenings. By working in cooperation with the Raleigh County Schools to empower our students to resist pressure from their peers to use drugs, we hope to reduce drug abuse, create more jobs and grow our local economy.