

SCHOOLS – VITAL TO THE SOLUTION!

By Roger Morgan

Schools are vital to the solution, by virtue of the fact they deal with almost all children. Parents are considered number one in terms of the problem of at-risk behavior, followed by school environment. **But schools are number one in terms of the solution**, since problems that originate in the family will not go unsolved without outside intervention. For all practical purposes, schools are the only safety net.

Even if they don't cherish the task, schools are surrogate parents while children are in their domain. They have a responsibility to provide a safe and drug-free environment, and **schools cannot optimize academic achievement when large percentages of students are using alcohol, tobacco and other illicit drugs all of which diminish one's capacity to learn.** The other reality is that since almost all addiction starts with kids 11 to 17 years old, and schools house over 98% of kids in this age range, **schools are effectively the only place where prevention programs can be implemented to protect all kids.**

Parents are hugely important in a child's risk level of substance abuse. But, it is clear in today's society, that parents alone cannot withstand the forces of a \$500 billion illicit drug trade, in addition to alcohol and tobacco industry pressure, focused on inflicting the disease of addiction of children. Without help from the school system particularly, and community in general, 56% of kids will remain at moderate to high risk of substance abuse. We cannot expect a different result if we don't do something different.

Given the state of the American families in general today, with 50% divorce rate, single parenting, two parents working, child abuse, substance abuse, even parents who try but are outclassed by the competition of peers and the drug trade young people, all young people, need the best protection that we adults can all provide. The average child uses drugs for two years before their parents find out. Too often they find out from the school, police, or morgue. Then it is too late. **Protective school policy focused on prevention, with parental support, is the key.**

Schools can do many things to enhance the chances of getting kids to adulthood intact, but the following are of vital importance:

- 1) **Get alcohol, tobacco and other illegal drugs off campus** by use of the best known technologies. Currently, that may include sniff dogs. If drugs are kept, sold or used on campus, kids are four or five times more likely to use them. (CASA)
- 2) Implement **non-punitive random student drug testing (NPRSDT)** for the maximum number of kids possible. The Supreme Court allowed random drug testing for all kids involved in extra-curricular activities, and our suggestion is that every school implement that program, however, many schools are reluctant to do so because of pressure from parents (44% in the low risk category normally find it demeaning), the threat of ACLU lawsuits (however bogus, they cost money to fight) and/or budget constraints.

We propose the following program which **will cost the schools nothing**, get the **maximum deterrent effect for all kids** and be totally defensible against threats from the ACLU.

- A) **Offer a voluntary program for parents and kids using hair analysis.** Hair gives a 90 day window and its impossible to cheat the test. The cost is \$59, which includes \$5 for taking the sample and communicating the results. This is the best deterrent; it gives parents the comfort of added protection; and gives kids a reason to say no to peer pressure.

B) Ask the school to implement a program based on suspicion. **If a child indicates any cause for concern (i.e. truancy, disciplinary problems, falling grades, friends are concerned), they will call for a hair test.** If it yields a positive result, the parents/child will bear the cost (\$59) and the parents will be called into action, and the child will be automatically enrolled in the voluntary random drug testing program through the remainder of high school. Other conditions, like participation in a treatment program, community service, restriction for participation in sports/extra-curricular activities, etc can be defined. But of great importance, **REDEFINE ZERO TOLERANCE so that it continues to make kids accountable for their own actions but keeps them in school,** instead of flushing them out and setting them further behind through expulsion. Ask (or insist) that the parents to sign The Parent Pledge and stay engaged until their child finishes high school.

C) If a child tests positive more than once, they should be tested quarterly, or more often using urine or saliva tests as required. Hair analysis is the best tool, but can't detect drug use in the last few days, or if a child has no hair, use of all drug testing tools may be necessary. If they have a problem, they should be enrolled in a treatment program. Other consequences, such as withholding driving privileges, doing community service, getting recommendations and withholding scholarships for upper education, and/or own student loans could be tied to continued use. On the flip side, local merchants might give discounts to student leaders who participate in the program, newspapers give recognition, yearly awards banquets, et al.

D) If possible, ask the school to enroll all athletes and those engaged in extra curricular activities in the voluntary random drug testing program. Emphasize the non-punitive aspects of the program, designed to keep kids in the system, not flush them out under "zero tolerance" policies. If a hair test is required when school resumes in the fall, that will help keep them clean throughout the summer.

3) Provide hard hitting factual education from grades 1 through 12 to heighten the perception of harm from tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. Even "*just marijuana*" because of its long staying power, and high THC content, can cause permanent brain damage, birth defects, addiction, cancer causing and very detrimental to short term memory and the learning process. The brain is not fully developed until the mid twenties. Whatever harm occurs during the teenager years from alcohol or drugs will in large part determine the quality of the rest of one's life.

4) Offer **Student/Parent Assistance Programs** that work closely with the students and parents, but fill the void that stems from today's family situation, with 50% divorce rate, two parents working, single parenting, drug using parents, etc.

This program is intended to provide a concise and complete package for schools to enable them to implement a random drug testing program quickly, easily and with no cost to the school, drawing on the experience of other schools in the nation that have working programs. Hair testing has virtually eliminated drug use in some private schools that had a major problem, like De La Salle High School in New Orleans.