

Random Student Drug Testing Adopted at Hackettstown High

Hackettstown, N.J.—To combat the threat of drug use among students, the Hackettstown Board of Education adopted Random Student Drug Testing (RSDT). The RSDT policy is directed at the district's only high school, Hackettstown High School. RSDT affects about three-quarters of the student body. It applies to students who are engaged in athletics, take part in extracurricular activities, or have campus parking permits. These students must return a form signed by their parents consenting to random drug tests. Students who do not consent to the tests may not participate in athletics or student clubs or park their cars at school.

Few students are actually tested. Each week, a computer randomly selects about six students, who are summoned to the guidance office. From there, a counselor takes students to the nurse's office where they supply a urine sample. The sample is tested immediately. If positive, it is sent to a medical lab to verify the results.

Then the principal notifies the parents. The student will be removed from athletics, extracurricular activities, and parking at school and may not return to these until passing a subsequent drug test. The student must also undergo counseling and a treatment program. Everything is done in confidence, and the school does not notify the police.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act authorizes spending federal education funds on random student drug testing. About 7 percent of public schools across the nation have adopted random drug testing.

The purpose of the program, according to a school counselor, is “to deter, delay and detect use.” So far, she reports, it has worked. In the first three years, only two students have tested positive for drug use. The costs of the program are relatively low. The initial screening costs \$18 and a verification costs another \$25. The school pays about \$3,000 per year for RSDT.

Drug-testing programs often face legal challenges. But two recent U.S. Supreme Court cases have ruled that programs similar to RSDT do not violate the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. In some states, these programs have been challenged as violating the state's constitution. In Washington state, for example, the state's highest court ruled that the state's Constitution did not allow random drug testing. A similar challenge was rejected in New Jersey, where Hackettstown High is located. The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that students have a lesser expectation of privacy at schools and that properly conducted testing may be done.

In Hackettstown, many parents, members of the community, and school officials support the drug testing program. Opposition, however, comes from some parents and students. They think it invades students' privacy, makes them less trusting of parents and the school, and does not work. One student stated: “There were some kids who just switched to drinking. And some kids drank to rebel, because they were upset about the tests. Kind of like, ‘Oh yeah? We'll show you!’ ”