

Safe and Drug Free Schools and First Alert Voluntary Drug Testing Program: 2006-07

Steven R. Wolfson, J.D., Ph.D.

Department of: Evaluation and Accountability

EA07-180-4

At a Glance

The Dallas Independent School District is the recipient of two Title IV (A) grants under the No Child Left Behind Act to prevent violence and drug use among students, and to foster safe and drug free schools. To accomplish this, Dallas ISD has taken a two pronged approach. First, the administration, by and through its Safe and Drug Free Office, seeks to instill in students positive life values by imbuing them with inner strengths they need to resist risky behaviors and to develop lofty ideals. Second, the Safe and Drug Free Office has adopted a somewhat more practical approach to the drug problem by implementing a voluntary drug testing program called First Alert.

Both of these approaches are designed to complement each other by respecting students as individuals responsible for their own lifestyle decisions, yet providing them guidance and supervision necessary to encourage beneficial, rather than harmful, choices. The first approach – to instill positive life values – prompted the Safe and Drug Free Office to adopt the Forty Developmental Assets of the not-for-profit educational organization, The Search Institute. Adolescent developmental research has shown that the more of the Forty Developmental Assets a young person possesses, the more likely that person is to mature into a well developed, responsible adult. The Safe and Drug Free Office is committed to the mission of imbuing Dallas ISD students with the Forty Developmental Assets.

The second approach may be described as a “booster effect” to reinforce students in their war against drugs. This is the First Alert voluntary drug testing program. At the beginning of each school year, students and their parents or guardians commit to allow the Safe and Drug Free Office to administer an unobtrusive saliva test for five identified drugs. Parents or guardians of students who test positive for drugs are notified of the result, and the students are referred to counseling, which the Dallas ISD provides through licensed chemical dependency counselors (LCDCs). Students need

not fear legal or academic repercussions, since neither school administrators nor the police are notified. Results are not reported on a student’s permanent record. Retribution is not the goal; early positive intervention is.

For academic year 2006-2007, the first year of testing, patterns of drug use were sketchy due to the scarcity of data. Nevertheless, initial indications are that marijuana use starts as early as the ninth grade, after which a tendency toward other drugs becomes evident. Thus, marijuana appears to be a gateway to other drugs. Boys tend to use drugs more than girls. Although Hispanics reported drug use more than other racial/ethnic groups, the data still are inconclusive as to drug use by race. Recommendations include more and improved data collection, as well as allocation of scarce resources toward wider and deeper community engagement in the war against drugs in our schools.

Dallas ISD First Alert Lab Results	
Drug	Number Positive
THC (marijuana)	255
Cocaine	35
Amphetamines (including 7 confirmed prescriptions)	30
Opiates (e.g., heroin, cheese)	25
Poly drugs	28
PCP	12
Self-Disclosure	3
Total Positive	388
Total excluding confirmed prescriptions	7 381
Total Tested	12,541
Percent Tested Positive	3%

For more information, see EA07-180-2, available at www.dallasisd.org/inside_disd/depts/evalacct/, or contact Steven R. Wolfson at 972-925-6427.