



## Public School Leaders Reluctant To Drug Test Students, New Study Finds

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Despite U.S. Supreme Court decisions supporting mandatory random drug testing of public school students, superintendents across the country have been reluctant to adopt such policies, according to a new study by University of New Hampshire researchers.

"There has not been an avalanche of drug testing policies following the two Supreme Court decisions. The superintendents are seemingly reluctant to adopt such policies just because the court has given a green light to such tests," says Todd DeMitchell, lead researcher and professor of education and justice studies.

And it's more likely that small and rural school districts drug test their students than large and urban school districts.

"While the United States Supreme Court has affirmed that mandatory, random, suspicionless drug testing of students who participate in extracurricular activities passes constitutional muster, large numbers of school superintendents have not taken advantage of this open policy window by adopting drug testing policies," according to the study.

The study was carried out by DeMitchell; the late Thomas Carroll, superintendent of the Oyster River School District (Durham, NH) and instructor of administration and supervision; and Thomas Schram, associate professor of educational research. The researchers published their results, "Student Drug Testing Policies: The Superintendent and the Courts," recently in *Education Law Reporter*.

Researchers surveyed superintendents nationwide from school districts ranging from small and rural districts to large, urban districts with more than 20,000 students. Of the more than 200 superintendents who responded, only 25 -- about 12 percent -- said their school districts drug tested students involved in extracurricular activities. An additional 10 percent are considering adopting such policies.

Of those 25 school districts that drug test students, the majority -- almost 71 percent -- were small and/or rural school districts with student populations under 5,000. "High school athletes and cheerleaders are the major targets of the drug testing policies," according to the researchers.

The low rate of drug testing exists despite recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings giving the green light to more expansive drug testing of public school students. The court has upheld the constitutionality of drug testing students, broadening the conditions under which students can be tested, from testing only those students reasonably suspected of drug use to conducting random, suspicionless, mandatory testing of targeted student groups.

The Supreme Court has progressively expanded the population of students who constitutionally can be tested, from only athletes and cheerleaders who are considered role models to all students involved in extracurricular activities, including academic teams, marching bands and the Future Farmers of America.

“The superintendents in this study believe that the student drug problem in their school districts is moderate to substantial. However, they do not agree that drug testing students who participate in extracurricular activities is effective in combating drug use in their schools,” DeMitchell says. “Furthermore, slightly less than 17 percent of the superintendents agree or strongly agree that their community supports mandatory drug testing policies of students. We suggest that this perceived lack of support may act as a break on drug testing policy development.”

According to the researchers, superintendents first rely on their personal viewpoint, and second on a political lens to ascertain the views of their school board and community when it comes to drug-testing students. The third major influence is their professional understanding of the issue.

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