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THIRD PLACE, GRADES 9-12: Schools have duty to keep kids safe

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The problem of drug testing in schools is a thorny one. Schools face everything from opposition by parents and students, to the lack of resources to test all students. However due to the prevalence of substance abuse among high school students, some form of random drug testing is necessary to ensure the health and safety of all students.

Critics of drug testing argue that it violates a student's right to privacy; or that it tests for substances consumed outside of school hours. However, the fact that students are taking controlled substances is cause for the school's concern. During school hours, schools function in the place of a student's parent or guardian, and thus, have to duty to make sure students have not consumed anything that could potentially be harmful to themselves or others.

Clearly, random drug testing is highly beneficial - even crucial. How best to go about it is the other side of the coin, and a problem just as murky as the first.

One way of randomly drugs testing students is to only select the students that have something to lose - such as those participating in a sport or other after-school activity than can be taken away as a punishment. However, that method is not totally effective. Most of the students participating in these activities do not get drunk or high every weekend - they do not want to risk putting their place on a team or club at risk.

Schools should cast a wider net, then, and subject all students in the school to random drug testing. The selection process would be by lottery, and the school could test a set number of students per week. This will insure that all students are being treated equally and the school is more efficient in discovering which students are abusing drugs or alcohol.

A school's job is partly to keep students safe - and letting students abuse controlled substances does no constitute that. Random drug testing, then, is a regrettable, but necessary choice most schools have to make. It will help keep the student body as whole healthier, safer, and ready to learn. Schools who fail to drug test all of their students are doing their schools, and communities, a disservice.