

December 2, 2009

Contact:	Jennifer Mastro 559-230-2103 jennifermastro@ercgrants.com	Armen D. Bacon, Administrator PR/Communication Department Fresno County Office of Education 1111 Van Ness, Fresno 93721 559-265-3012
----------	---	--

FRESNO COUNTY INITIAL DRUG-TESTING RESULTS SHOW HUGE SUCCESS

The Fresno County Office of Education (FCOE) Department of Safe and Healthy Kids has learned the results from its school-based Voluntary Drug Testing Program (VDTP), and—thankfully—they're not positive.

Of the consortium of six participating districts—Central, Clovis, Kingsburg, Fowler, Laton, and Washington Union—and their 18 high schools, only 3% of students tested and participating in the program showed positive results for drug use. The VDTP is a collaborative effort among these high schools and districts to reduce the incidence of drug use among students and promote conversations about drug use in the home.

"Through consortium support, our drug prevention program proved to be an excellent tool in enhancing dialogue between students and parents," said Vince Wesson, FCOE Safe and Drug Free Schools Coordinator, who lead the consortium and oversaw the daily activities of the drug testing program. "It is imperative to instill in our children the importance of being drug free."

The program has 5,552 students enrolled and 1,190 students have been tested. Students were tested by Central Drug Systems, who partnered with FCOE. Besides offering parents an opportunity to dialogue with their children about drug use, VDTP works as a student "excuse" to not succumb to peers pressuring them to use prescription or other types of drugs.

"My child did not hesitate to participate in the program," said Suzie Barela, a parent from Fowler Unified School District who has a child enrolled in VDTP. "The drug testing program allows my daughter to use it as an escape if she should get into a situation where peer pressure is involved. She could easily respond with an answer like, 'I can't because my mom signed me up for this program.'"

Self-report surveys given to a random sample of students and parents, another element of VDTP, showed that almost half (49%) of participating students reported using the program as a tool to avoid using drugs. Fifty-two percent (52%) of parents whose students enrolled in VDTP reported using the program as a tool to communicate with their children about drug use.

MORE

"When my family received the letter requesting our participation, we sat down and had a great conversation on why this was important for our daughter and for the safety in her school," said Barela. "The program has benefitted my family by allowing the topic to come up without my daughter feeling accused of something. I felt reassured by having that accountability of the program."

Students who enrolled in the program were also 12% less likely to report using drugs (like marijuana, weed, hash, and pot) in the past year than students who did not enroll.

Interestingly, students that did not enroll in the program also benefitted from it. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of students who did not enroll in the program at participating schools and districts reported using the program as a tool to avoid using drugs.

"We see that by having this program on Fresno County high school campuses, students are impacted whether they participate in the program or just witness its effect on their peers," said Randy Mehrten, the Director of the Safe and Healthy Kids Office at FCOE.

The VDTP is a major systematic effort in the region to combat drug use among high-school age children through voluntary drug testing. Parents and students both agree to have the student participate in potential monthly drug-testing.

Testing is also random, meaning that students do not know which months they will be tested and which months they will not. Individual testing results are kept confidential; parents are notified directly by Central Drug Systems if their student tests positive.

The program was initiated and developed in response to former Fresno Mayor Alan Autry's call for a random voluntary drug-test program to help decrease drug use among high school students. FCOE was given the task of organizing and implementing this project, and based its endeavors on the successful school-based drug-testing program at Capistrano Unified School District in Orange County.

"The program has broad community support, including support from parents," said Wesson. "Students have a risk-reduced opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns on drug use at a time when they are under extreme peer pressure, and parents have an opportunity to dialogue with their children about this important issue."

"I believe that this type of program keeps children from using drugs because at any time they can be tested," said Barela. "If we can prevent kids from using drugs, we might be able to decrease the violence or any other misbehavior in our schools. I commend the Fresno County Office of Education for their commitment and efforts to prevent drug use among today's local youth."

For more information, please contact Vince Wesson 265-3098 ext.3423, or vwesson@fcoe.org.

END