

Correspondence from:

The "Shepherds of the Valley" local clergy group & The Richland Community Family Coalition

January 10, 2013

Dear Superintendent Matthew Dill and the Clear Fork Valley District School Board,

THE ISSUE: Thank you for your dedicated commitment to our future generation of leaders. It is our understanding that in a poll conducted by the high school administration, ninety-three students indicated they currently experiment with drugs and alcohol while three hundred seventy-four students do not.¹ Several drug search dog teams have detected illicit drugs on campus and fifteen students have been caught for drug violations since April of 2012.² It is also our understanding that under current school policy, the district cannot test a student suspected of being under the influence of drugs.³

INTRODUCTION: The local Body of Christ is no stranger to the substance abuse problem. In the fall of 2007, citizens representing at least 38 different local Christian congregations marched in downtown Mansfield to show their solidarity in the war against illegal substance abuse in Richland County. This initiative, nicknamed "Project Turn Around," occurred during a season where: new drug treatment ministries were created,⁴ where newfound awareness on the problem of drug addiction took place,⁵ where an increase in citizen involvement in the public arena was observed,⁶ where increased drug testing in public institutions occurred,⁷ and when a dramatic decline in violent crime was detected.⁸

Additionally, two years ago, Richland County Board of Health officials announced they would no longer donate needles to a syringe exchange program after receiving a letter of objection by pastors representing seventy-two local congregations.⁹ One year later, in the Spring of 2012, the Richland County Fair Board decided to cancel a scheduled beer garden at the advice of a local clergy group composed of seven area pastors.¹⁰

Compelled by the love of Christ, our congregations have addressed the drug and alcohol addiction head on through treatment, counseling and deliverance. But through our combined efforts, our congregations have also fallen prey to criminal acts that according to authorities were the result of drug addiction. In just one recent crime spree that involved drug abuse, eleven area churches were robbed costing tens of thousands of dollars.¹¹ We are determined not to sit idly beside the anvil of ideas as others shape public policy.

With this in mind, a contingent of local pastors from eleven local congregations called the "Shepherds of the Valley," partnered with the Richland Community Family Coalition, both concur that the implementation of a random drug-testing policy is needed for the Clear Fork Valley School District, testing all students in extra-curricular activities and students who park on school grounds from grades seven thru twelve based on the following rationale:



POINT ONE: We believe that there is a national substance abuse epidemic and that Richland County, Ohio and the Clear Fork Valley School District are not isolated from this deadly contagion. According to Sheriff Steve Sheldon, up to seventy percent of all crime in Richland County is either directly or indirectly connected to the abuse of illegal drugs.¹² Just this past August before school started, in a marijuana eradication operation, local and state authorities confiscated illegal plants in agricultural and wooded areas throughout Richland County worth approximately \$60 thousand.¹³ One month earlier, one local Butler village man was arrested for conducting an *indoor* marijuana operation, where seventy-two pot plants were seized.¹⁴

The drug epidemic has hit home, *and also the classroom*. Recently the high school was put in lockdown because of a student bringing firearms on the school premises. According to a local media report, the school administration “denied a drug-connection to the firearm incident.”¹⁵ On the contrary, this statement is not accurate.

According to the Richland County Sheriff’s incident report, “One of the student suspects obtained the handgun so that he could have protection due to concerns he had after stealing a blunt marijuana cigarette from subjects in Mansfield. The student later changed his story and advised that he wanted the handgun since he and the other student suspect had planned on selling marijuana to kids and that the sale of marijuana was to be sold off school property.”¹⁶

By the grace of our Heavenly Father, tragedy was averted. But we must be honest with ourselves, according to the student, drugs were involved and therefore we must deal with this ongoing issue. According to Proverbs 28:13, “He who conceals his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses finds mercy.”

POINT TWO: We believe that there is credible evidence that student random drug testing can act as a deterrent to reduce the use of illegal substances and is also being actively implemented in the region.

There is no question that drug-testing students can bring accountability to young people, just “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” Proverbs 27:17.

Through random drug testing of students, multiple studies show that reduced incidence of drug use can result, that a student’s substance abuse problems can be identified, paving the way for counseling and treatment if needed. In fact, schools have been observed to be safer, with random testing acting as a deterrent to criminal activity associated with drugs.



According to one study of Indiana high schools, principals were asked to compare drug and alcohol activity during the 1999-2000 school year when drug testing policies were in effect, with the 2000-2001 school year when schools were not allowed to continue their random drug testing. Eighty-five percent of the high school principals reported an increase in drug and alcohol usage after the drug-testing program stopped.¹⁷ When random drug testing policies reconvened after the State Supreme Court ruled in favor of random drug testing, eighty-eight percent of the school principals that responded (52) reported re-implementation of random drug-testing in their respective districts.¹⁸

Nonetheless, Crawford County is considered a hot bed for drug addiction, with the third highest rate of unintentional drug overdose deaths in the state.¹⁹ Consequently, five of the six school districts in Crawford County: Bucyrus, Colonel Crawford, Crestline, Galion, and Wynford School districts all have random drug testing policies in place for students involved in extra-curricular activities and who drive to school.

According to Superintendent Kevin Kimmel of Bucyrus City Schools, the school board pays for the initial drug test and the subsequent random tests. “We sample between twelve and fifteen students for each random sampling. We believe this program gives the opportunity and excuse for a student to resist negative peer pressure. I believe that drug use would be much higher if we did not have this program, no question.”²⁰

POINT THREE: We believe the implementation of a student random drug-testing program can prepare students for the future work force. If we “train up a child in the way he should go, then when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6).

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, drug use costs employers between \$75 billion and \$100 billion each year in lost time, accidents, health care, and workers' compensation costs.²¹ Meanwhile, it is reported that sixty-five percent of all accidents on the job are related to drugs or alcohol, and employees who abuse substances cause forty percent of on the job injuries.²²

As a response to these escalating costs to the employer, many in the workforce are now required to be drug tested. Moreover, some contracts and grants with government entities may require drug free workplaces and drug testing for employees. If employees in the workforce are being required to test for drugs for their jobs today, would it not be plausible to think that drug testing students in school will prepare them for the job world tomorrow?

For what it's worth, this past fall, a large gathering of employers attended the Richland Community Development Group Workforce Summit. Local employers who participated in a survey expressed concern over an increased need for recruitment. These positions of employment were not being filled because many of these potential job candidates were failing their tests: *their drug tests*.²³ Clearly, these job candidates have not been prepared starting at an early age for the real world of employment.



CONCLUSION

Our school district has come to a fork in the road where we must decide what is right for our next generation of leaders. With two states legalizing the use of marijuana in the elections of 2012, it is evident that our society is on the brink of moral bankruptcy. At the nexus of the popular drug culture and our local community values are our students.

As clergy in the community, we are all too cognizant of this predicament. Drugs can be extremely addictive and one experiment by a student could lead to a lifetime of addiction. Nevertheless, making a decision based on current convenience will only later be dwarfed in the shadow of tomorrow's inconvenience. As administrators and school board members, you are keenly aware how precious the life is of even one student; this is the very reason why you serve our community for such a lofty endeavor.

Because of this, we as the "Shepherds of the Valley" are convinced that implementing a random drug testing program for the students of Clear Fork in grades seven thru twelve is morally the right thing to do. May our Heavenly Father grant you wisdom as you govern. Our hopes are that you "trust in the LORD JESUS CHRIST with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." Proverbs 3:5-6.

Sincerely,

Reverend El Akuchie, Richland Community Family Coalition

Reverend Bill Lewis, River of Life Community Church

Reverend Mike Stine, Clear Fork Alliance Church

Reverend Patrick Bailey, North Bend Church of the Brethren

Reverend Micah Pelkey, CitiChurch

Reverend James Spencer, Peoples' Baptist Church

Reverend Mike Cloud, Impact Community Church

Reverend Beverly Hall, Chapel Hill United Methodist

Reverend Eric Byrum, Grace Fellowship

Reverend Bill Henderson, First Baptist Church

Reverend Jon Priebe, Three Crosses Methodist

Elder Walter Knuckles, Perry Church of Christ

Reverend Matt Merendino, Clear Fork Alliance Church, Youth Pastor

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- Photos from www.google.com

APPENDIX

All five school districts use Sportsafe as vendor. Following drug-testing policies can be found at:

Bucyrus City Schools: http://www.bucyrusschools.org/documents/contentdocuments/document_23_5_834.pdf

Colonel Crawford Schools: <http://www.cck12.org/attachments/athletics/200910drugtestingpolicy.pdf>

Crestline:

Galion City Schools: http://www.galionschools.org/Downloads/Random_Drug_Policy_final210Feb223.pdf

Wynford Schools <http://www.wynford.k12.oh.us/Documents/hs%20student%20handbook.pdf>

According to one Crawford County athletic director who also served as the varsity basketball coach, the first year the random drug testing program was implemented, he lost forty-five percent of his team from failing their drug tests. The following year, every player on the team passed their drug tests. He believes that drug testing provides an incentive for students to make better decisions. Phone interview with Ben Mutti, 1.10.13