

JENNIFER CONNELLAN: FUTURE FOCUSED

Student Drug-Testing... Just Say Yes!

There was a big feature article in the OC Register two Sundays ago, reporting on the controversial decision to expand the drug-testing program in the Capistrano Unified School District.

The program began at San Clemente High School in 2002, and is now being rolled out at all eleven middle schools and six high schools in the district. Although the drug-testing is absolutely voluntary on behalf of the parents, it is still quite a contentious issue.

The program is costly and as yet, is not scientifically proven to work.

Greg Wolfe, a consultant for the Orange County Department of Education says, "There is no compelling and convincing research that we know of to show that drug testing is effective." Experts like Linda Kearns, the Coordinator of Prevention Programs at the Orange County Department of Education, feel that the money would be better spent on programs to teach children in the classroom how to say no.

In response to this I wonder, what exact-



ly is the scientific proof they are looking for? Is it not scientific proof that kids feel the drug testing gives them one very solid response to fall back on in a peer pressure situation? From what I see, the deterrent effect of this program has been incredibly successful. I cannot tell you the number of students who have told me their main defense in a peer pressure situation is, "I get drug tested."

Kelley White, founder of the San Juan Capistrano sober day school and wilderness program, Coastal Mountain Youth Academy, agrees. She says, "The drug testing program is excellent. It provides students an out, an easy way to say no. It is probably the number one thing kids say when they are being pressured." How much more 'compelling and convincing' does research get?

So if the question is, "Should I enroll my student in the random drug-testing program at the school?" my answer is, "Yes."

However, I also would like to emphasize that it should not be the only step you take.

If you suspect that your student is doing drugs, do not wait to see if the school randomly tests him before you take action. It is possible that your student did not actually turn in the permission slip you signed... One student told me that none of her friends turned in the actual slips their parents had signed. They got new forms, checked the 'No' box, and forged their signatures.

Clearly the drug testing program is not an end-all solution. Parents need to set strong boundaries, be proactive in talking to your kids about drugs, and take notice and act quickly if there is a sudden drop in grades or change in attitude. Err on the side of caution, and know that MANY students right here in Orange County are using drugs and alcohol.

In fact, the 2006 Safe and Healthy kids survey results for drug and alcohol use in Orange County are staggering. Among 11th graders in the Capo Unified School District, 40percent consumed alcohol and 18percent smoked marijuana in the past 30 days. So take advantage of the drug testing program, but make it just part of what you do to keep your kids safe and drug-free.

JENNIFER CONNELLAN IS THE NEW COLUMNIST FOR THE SCHOOL

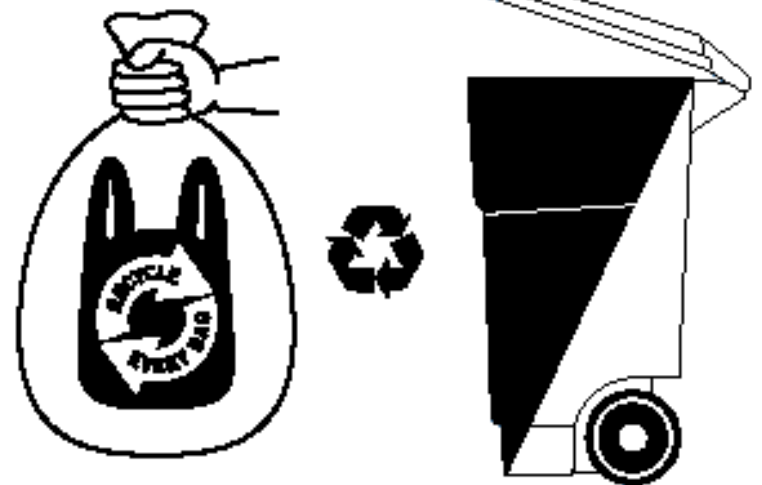
SECTION OF THE CAPISTRANO DISPATCH. SHE IS THE CO-FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF SAN JUAN-BASED FUTURE FOCUSED. FUTURE FOCUSED HAS BEEN OFFERING HIGHLY EFFECTIVE LIFE COACHING AND TUTORING SERVICES FOR TEENAGERS SINCE 2003. SHE HAS TWO MASTER'S DEGREES IN PSYCHOLOGY AND YEARS OF EXPERIENCE DEALING WITH ADOLESCENT ISSUES.

REACH HER BY EMAILING JENNIFER@FUTUREFOCUSED.COM

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