

# The Luck of the Draw



Random drug tests happen every six weeks. But students aren't sure how well they work.

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[reporter]

The voice over the intercom crackles.

Sophomore Josh Nelson listens in, expecting to hear his name. After being selected six times since the program was started when he was in middle school, Nelson just figures his name will be called yet again. While all he has to worry about is missing a lesson or two, he wonders how he's been chosen so many times.

"I always thought they just chose names out of a hat," Nelson said. "It seems weird that I have been drug tested more than anybody else in the school, but it doesn't really bother me."

## Taking the Test

Once every six weeks, the drug testing company Southwest Consortium arrives unannounced from Saint Angelo, Texas, to test 40 of the 640 students that are in the testing pool. Students in the pool are involved in UIL activities or have a parking permit.

The drug testing program has been in effect for two-and-a-half years now, ever since Dr. Todd Williams was hired as the superintendent. That's been more than enough time to figure out if the program has been beneficial, and if it's been fair.

A computer randomly generates students' identification numbers for each test, which are then sent to the drug testing coordinator, vice principal Kelly Kenny. Despite the drug testing program being attributed as Dr. William's idea, he said he is almost completely in the dark about the specifics of the test.

"It's confidential, and I don't even know, because we set it up so that I was left out of the loop," Dr. Williams said. "We have one person that administers the program, that keeps up with all that. I don't know when they're coming, and they don't notify me when the next test will be."

According to Mr. Williams, the lab communicates with Mr. Kenny, who keeps track of all the testing times, dates, and specifics, and is the only person at the school allowed to know the

details about the testing.

The testing company did not reply to questions about the selection process.

## A Chance in a Million

With the testing selection being entirely computer generated, there is some question as to how a select few students have been chosen more than once. In some cases the same students have been chosen over five times. According to a statistical calculation, the probability of a student being picked out of the testing pool even one time is .15 percent.

The chances of being chosen multiple times just goes up from there. The probability of being tested three times is .000005268 percent and when you add just one more selection the probability is .000000009166 percent.

However, administrators assure students that the testing is random.

"You're just at the mercy of the computer," Dr. Williams said. "If we changed our methods it might seem like we're targeting somebody, but if you rely on the computer every time, it's a mathematical possibility. I've heard of it before, and I'm not saying I'm comfortable with it because I'm not. But it can happen and it has happened."

Just because it's a mathematical possibility doesn't mean the students find it fair. Many feel as though the students aren't selected randomly, and some even believe the testing pool may be rigged.

"I don't think it's random at all," sophomore Gracie Williams said. "They choose the people they know don't do drugs and won't be tested positive. The kids who actually do drugs never seem to get picked."

Of course, not all students feel the selection is unfair. According to an Edge survey, 63 percent of students said that they believe the tests are computer generated, and there's no reason to believe there is a bias.

## At Your Own Risk

While there are students who have been tested

multiple times, the number of students who have never been tested is much higher so there is some question as to whether or not the program is actually a disincentive towards drug use.

"We haven't seen the level of drug use that we thought we'd find," Williams said. "That's been very good, because we were worried that we'd find high levels of students using and abusing drugs and alcohol, and that has not been the case. I'm glad to report that."

Some students, like sophomore David Mejia, believe that the program is a good way to control drug use, as long as the consequences are harsh enough to prevent students from using drugs.

"The bad kids will get in trouble with their parents," Mejia said. "If the parents' punishments are strict enough, the kids will never do it again."

The question then is, how strict does the punishment have to be to be effective?

According to the student handbook, the first time someone is caught with drugs in their system, administrators notify parents and retested for the remainder of the school year.

The next punishments, offenses two through four, deal with suspension from extracurricular activities, revocation of parking privileges, and eventually, expulsion from both for the remainder of the year.

But according to Dr. Williams, very few students have been subject to the consequences.

"We've kind of confirmed that we don't have as big of a drug problem as we thought," Williams said. "I think the students here are responsible with that kind of stuff, and I'm proud of that."

"The kids who actually do drugs never seem to get picked."

-Gracie Williams (11)

