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Steroid Education Programs Are Available, But Most School Districts Still Do Not Test

at a glance

The Department of Education and the Florida High School Athletic Association have taken steps to educate student athletes, coaches, and district administrators about the dangers of steroid use. While no statutory changes have been implemented requiring student steroid testing to date, related legislation has been and continues to be introduced for debate. While some individual school districts test student athletes for drugs using federal grants or private funding, few include steroids. Student drug testing policies may restrict a district's ability to test student athletes suspected of steroid use, as the definition of testing for cause or suspicion does not include steroid use outcomes. Currently, only one state, New Jersey, has a statewide student athlete drug testing program to detect steroid use.

Scope

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Department of Education and the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSA) in response to OPPAGA's 2004 report on high school student athlete steroid use and related school district programs and policies.^{1,2} This report presents our assessment of the extent to which the department and association have addressed the findings and recommendations included in the initial report.

Background

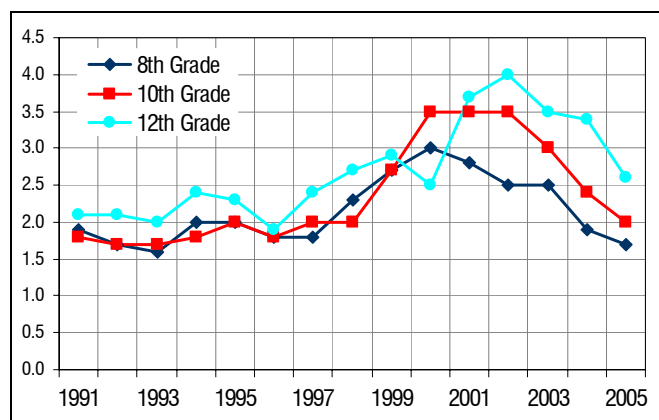
Anabolic steroids is the familiar name given to synthetic substances related to male sex hormones. Athletes may take steroids to gain a competitive performance edge, but these drugs pose serious short- and long-term health dangers.

National surveys over the past 15 years have estimated the prevalence of steroid use by high school students. As shown in Exhibit 1, student steroid use peaked in 2000 for the 8th and 10th grades and in 2002 for 12th grade. However, since 2002, estimated usage rates have declined for each grade. National studies report that steroid availability also has declined in recent years.

¹ Section 11.51(6), F.S.

² Information Brief: *Though the Option Is Available, School Districts Do Not Test Students for Steroids*, [OPPAGA Report No. 04-72](#), October 2004.

Exhibit 1 National High School Student Steroid Use Has Declined in Recent Years

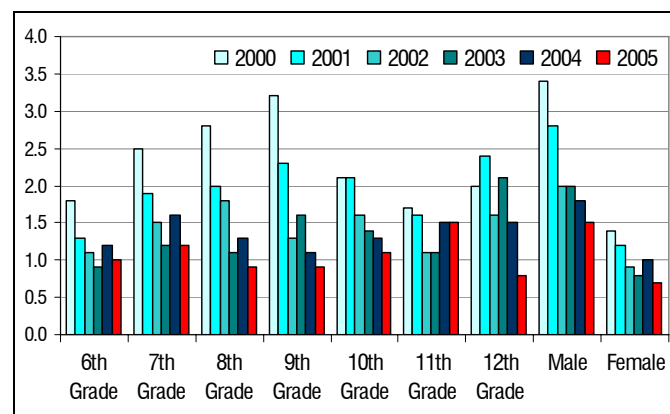


Source: Monitoring the Future; National Results on Adolescent Drug Use, 2005.

Steroid use in Florida has tracked national trends. To estimate drug use by Florida youth, the state conducts an annual Youth Substance Abuse Survey of a sample of students in the 6th through 12th grades. Overall, the percentage of students reporting steroid use is relatively low. The 2005 survey found that 1.1% of surveyed students reported using steroids at any time in the past, and less than 1% reported using steroids in the past 30 days. However, applying these percentages to the 1.4 million students who were in grades 6 through 12 in fall 2005 indicates that approximately 15,500 Florida students used steroids at some time in their lives while approximately 5,700 students used steroids in the last 30 days.

As illustrated in Exhibit 2, reported steroid use by Florida students has declined in recent years. It should be noted that steroid use among student athletes is likely higher than among the general student population. The Florida survey data does not identify athlete respondents. While usage rates declined among all student groups, males and students in the 11th grade were the most frequent steroid users in 2005. Male usage rates reached a high of 3.4% in 2000 and declined to 1.5% in 2005.

Exhibit 2 Florida High School Student Steroid Use Has Declined Over the Past Five Years



Source: 2005 Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey.

Few Florida schools have student drug testing programs. State and federal law authorizes school districts to conduct student drug testing. Florida's school districts exercise local authority in deciding whether to implement a student drug testing policy based on perceived need and community input. At the time of our 2004 report, 11 of the state's 67 school districts tested some students for use of illicit drugs. These districts varied in the student populations who were subject to drug testing and the cost of these tests. However, no district tested students for steroid use. Also, the criteria established by these districts to identify and test students suspected of drug use were not designed to address steroid use. The criteria generally sought to identify students who exhibited deteriorated performance that could be due to drug use. However, these criteria likely would not trigger testing of steroid use, which can produce significantly increased performance.

The Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSA), which includes all public high schools, has a by-law prohibiting the use of steroids.³ School districts or governing boards must abide by the association's by-laws as a condition of membership and school faculty and staff are expected to familiarize themselves with the policies so they can accurately inform students. By signing the membership agreement, each

³ FHSA Bylaw 11.11.4, 2006-07 FHSA Handbook.

school principal is held responsible for enforcing the FHSAA's by-laws and rulings.

Policy options to address student steroid use and testing. Our 2004 review identified several options to address steroid use by high school students. Among them were to (1) require steroid abuse to be included in class curricula; (2) require student athletes and/or students in extracurricular activities to attend a drug, steroid lecture as a condition of participation; (3) require development of a statewide coaches' code of ethics for public school employees that includes a requirement to report suspected steroid use; (4) require the FHSAA to develop high school drug prevention and control guidelines that school districts would need to adopt as a condition of membership; (5) establish incentives to encourage school districts to establish steroid and illicit drug testing programs; and (6) require school districts to implement a drug testing program for steroids and illicit drugs.⁴

Current Status

Consistent with our recommendations, both the Department of Education and the FHSAA have taken steps to increase education about the dangers of steroid use. The Legislature also has considered policy options and in 2006 appropriated funding for steroid testing, but this appropriation was vetoed by the Governor. Three school districts have begun steroid testing programs supported by federal grants.

The Department of Education has required that steroid abuse be discussed in health science curriculum and by coaches. The department has added a requirement that schools address steroid abuse. Specifically, the department added the statement, "Discuss the adverse effects of the use of alcohol, illegal drugs, and steroids on the human body," to the core curriculum for health science and education frameworks at high schools, career and technical schools, and community colleges.

In 2005, the State Board of Education broadened an administrative rule to require coaches to provide pertinent, important information about the effects and dangers of performance enhancing drugs, including, but not limited to steroids.⁵ The rule does not, however, require that coaches report suspected steroid use.

The FHSAA has increased efforts to educate students about steroid abuse. In 2005-06, the FHSAA began an educational campaign called "Nothing Beats Hard Work". The program stresses to student athletes that they can achieve their goals without the use of steroids or other supplements. The association distributed program posters, pamphlets, and other promotional materials to all member schools, and, in the 2006-07 school year, provided additional steroid educational materials for distribution to students, coaches, parents, and faculty. Schools are not required to use these training materials as a condition of FHSAA membership. Likewise, students are not required to complete an educational lecture on steroid use as a condition of participating in sports and/or extracurricular activities.

Beginning in the 2007-08 school year the FHSAA will implement a voluntary coaches' education program that will outline required coaching credentials, including steroid and supplement education.

Florida schools were selected to participate in a *Sports Illustrated* steroid education program. Florida was one of four states chosen to host a *Sports Illustrated* ATLAS (Athletes Training and Learning to Avoid Steroids) and ATHENA (Athletes Targeting Healthy Exercise and Nutrition Alternatives) Conference on drug prevention and health promotion in sports. At the conference in May 2006, four FHSAA member high schools were selected to become *Sports Illustrated* schools. These schools will receive the ATLAS and ATHENA training free of charge and will be recognized by *Sports Illustrated* for their commitment to improving the health of young athletes. These programs are gender-specific

⁴ The Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) is the governing body for interscholastic activities in Florida.

⁵ Rule 6A-4.0282, F.A.C., Specialization Requirements for the Endorsement in Athletic Coaching Academic Class.

(ATLAS for males and ATHENA for girls) and provide nutrition and strength training alternatives to performance enhancing and body shaping substances. Thirteen additional Florida high schools have received funding to participate in the program. The FHSAA is in the process of surveying coaches and student athlete participants about the program and its effects.

Several school districts have received federal funds to begin steroid testing. The U.S. Department of Education has provided grants for student athlete drug testing to six Florida school districts. In 2003, the Polk County School District was one of seven in the nation to receive a grant to plan, implement, and evaluate a mandatory random student drug testing demonstration project. This program randomly selects student athletes for drug and steroid testing. This grant will expire at the end of the 2006-07 school year. The district is exploring alternative funding options to continue the program. The district reports that it has never had a positive steroid test.

Five additional districts were awarded federal drug testing grants in the 2005-06 school year. The Jackson and Marion County school districts have established programs to randomly test students for drugs, including steroids. In Jackson County, students involved in any extracurricular activity may be subject to testing while, in Marion County, the program tests students involved in weightlifting, football, and basketball. The Collier County school district is currently designing its student drug testing policy but will not include steroid testing due to the high cost of these tests. The remaining two districts, Citrus and Hernando, chose not to accept the federal grant funds after their respective school boards voted not to implement a student drug testing program.

The Florida Legislature has considered steroid testing funding and legislation. The 2006 Legislature appropriated \$200,000 to the FHSAA for random steroid testing. However, the Governor vetoed this appropriation. The Legislature also has considered, but has not passed, bills that would require the FHSAA to facilitate a one-year drug testing program to randomly test certain students for steroid use and require schools to consent to the provisions of the program as a prerequisite for membership in the organization.

One state has established a steroid testing program. In 2006, New Jersey became the first state to screen high school athletes for performance enhancing drugs. The New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association implemented the drug testing policy in fall 2006. Under this policy, students and teams who qualify for a state championship, tournament, or competition (including both public and private high school students) are subject to random drug testing. All student athletes must sign a consent form for random testing prior to participating in high school athletics. Both the State of New Jersey and the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association will give \$50,000 to test approximately 500 student athletes for steroid use in the 2007 school year. The New Jersey Interscholastic Athletic Association estimates that the cost per test will range from \$150 to \$200.

OPPAGA supports the Florida Legislature by providing evaluative research and objective analyses to promote government accountability and the efficient and effective use of public resources. This project was conducted in accordance with applicable evaluation standards. Copies of this report in print or alternate accessible format may be obtained by telephone (850/488-0021 or 800/531-2477), by FAX (850/487-3804), in person, or by mail (OPPAGA Report Production, Claude Pepper Building, Room 312, 111 W. Madison St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-1475). Cover photo by Mark Foley.

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