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They're toking up for algebra class. Teenagers need incentives to keep it clean

Will today's grade-school students be the potheads and coke fiends of the early 21st century? That's the fear of crime watchers, who see few good new ideas to stop the drug abuse numbers from creeping upward. A new federal report says drug use among secondary-school students

American Alliance for Rights and Responsibilities. As he envisions it, schools would require or at least encourage students to take drug tests. The schools would be scored, and those posting the best records would get awards—something akin to the hoopla that surrounds National Merit Scholarships. The psy-



More teens are inhaling, and neither preaching nor punishment is dissuading them.

rose again last year, including a near doubling in the total who smoke marijuana daily. While "get tough" advocates continue to lobby for stiffer penalties—as Bob Dole did during the presidential campaign—supporters of prevention efforts emphasize the need for speedy treatment and preaching against the perils of narcotics. Those policies all have merit, but largely missing from the debate are practical, positive incentives for teens to take a pass.

One emerging idea is to use drug tests as the basis for competitions that would recognize teens who stay clean. "Let's generate social pressure in schools to reward non-drug use instead of focusing on penalizing abuse," suggests Roger Conner of the Washington, D.C.-based

chology is to emphasize group pride—much the way builders promote safety by calling attention to sites' injury-free streaks. But individuals could profit, too.

Modest experiments are underway. In a Dallas program called D-FY-IT (Drug Free Youth in Texas), 10,000 students have taken drug tests voluntarily. Those

Drug testing in the schools gives fence-sitters an excuse to fend off peer pressure to get high.

who pass get cards entitling them to discounts of 10 to 50 percent at 150 local businesses. Working with leaders of the Rotary Club, coordinator Gloria Terrell is talking to firms about providing college scholarships for students at the cleanest schools. Little Rock, Ark., Rotarians plan their own discount program soon.

At least two incentives are at work, experts believe: Students who are enticed by merchandise discounts and help with college might nudge fence-sitting friends away from drugs. Similarly, the threat of tests might help students fend off peer pressure to get high. "Students tell friends, 'Our school tests for drugs, so I can't try this or I'm going to get caught,'" says Raymond Kubacki, whose Boston-based Psychomedics Corp. has contracts with 21 schools to test hair samples for drug use. Terrell cites examples of impact in Dallas, such as a high school boy

who once belonged to a youth gang but who credits D-FY-IT with getting him on track to attend college. An evaluation should show in a few years whether D-FY-IT has brought drug abuse down.

Roadblocks ahead. Costs and civil liberties concerns may hold back significant expansion of these pilot programs. It's not clear right now who would pay for the tests—not to mention the treatment and counseling that would be offered to those who failed. Hair can be analyzed for drug use patterns for as little as \$40; urine, for as little as \$5. Advocates argue that the costs, paid by Rotarians in Texas, are modest compared with the damage that drug addicts do.

The legal concerns about mandatory drug testing await a test case. It could happen in New Orleans, where District Attorney Harry Connick has called for drug tests in local schools. Students who tested positive would be offered treatment but would not be prosecuted. Still, educators are balking, afraid that families and civil libertarians will object to the intrusion on students' privacy. But the Supreme Court has approved compulsory drug tests for student athletes, and Connick believes the principle could be extended. A possible compromise might be mandatory but anonymous tests, which would provide schoolwide incentives without risking false accusations against individuals. Only more experiments will show whether incentives tied to drug tests can help turn the narcotics plague around. When you're losing a war, no strategy should go untried. ■

BY TED GEST