Ps for 3/21/91

GEO Report Proves School Drug Courses are a Cheat

Congress's watchdog agency, the General Accounting Office, recently released a report (GAO/HRD-91-27) to the Senate on the impact of school-based drug education funded under the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986. Since the passage of this act, $1.1 billion has flowed to the states in the form of grants.

So what have we got for our money? The result was summed up in two words used on the cover of the report: "Impact Unknown."

Here is what the GAO concluded: "Little is known about the effectiveness of the various drug education programs or curricula in preventing: or reducing drug and alcohol abuse among students. Program evaluations have provided little useful information on what actually reduces -student drug or alcohol use."

In other words, more than a billion dollars, generously provided by the American taxpayers, have gone through the hands of the public schools earmarked for the specific purpose of drug prevention, and. the General Accounting Office cannot uncover any evidence as to whether the "impact" is positive, negative, or a zero. All we get for our money is some pious hopes.

The Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act requires all public schools to teach that, "the use of illicit drugs and the unlawful possession and use of alcohol is wrong." The GAO report lists 21 classroom drug curricula commonly used in public schools today.

The GAO descriptions of these 21 drug courses clearly show that they are all variations of the same theme: "kid, make your own decision; the school is not, going to tell you what is wrong; it's up to you to decide whether or not to use illegal drugs."

Again and again, the curriculum presents the student with a process of "decision-making" based on "nonjudgmental information" and considering the "alternatives." Although a couple of courses talk vaguely about "refusal skills," not a single course listed in the GAO report is described as stating that illegal drugs are WRONG, or that the student may NOT consider the "alternative" of using illegal drugs.

The GAO description of the course called “Me-ology" is typical. It has 6th grade students spend 17 hours of class time “choosing actions that conform to personal beliefs after considering alternative choices.”

This means that alternative choices are presented to the child without telling him that any one is right or wrong; then he can choose whatever he wants according to his own “personal beliefs.” So, if he chooses cocaine as the alternative that conforms to his personal beliefs, that would be OK because he made his own decision.

It's no wonder that classroom drug education does NOT reduce the use of illegal drugs.

The GAO descriptions of the 21 drug curricula shown that most of the courses spend most of their class tine playing psychological games under the rubric of “enhancing students’ self-awareness and self-esteem.” We can discuss another day the pros and cons of “self-esteem” courses, but it certainly is a cheat on the taxpayer to spend Drug-Free Schools and Communities money for this purpose.

The Detroit school district used all of its Drug-Free Schools funds to buy a controversial course called the “Michigan Model” and train teachers in its use. Only one of its 10 segments pertains to drugs; the rest of it is on such items as safety, first aid, nutrition, personal- health, and sex.

Likewise, the GAO found that the Los Angeles school district used its Drug-Free Schools funds to purchase “Second Step.” This program “does not specifically mention drugs or alcohol, but covers empathy training, impulse control, and anger management.”

The Cleveland school district used its funds to buy “Children Are People,” a program that addresses drug and alcohol abuse in only 5 of 30 lessons. The other 25 lessons are spent on such topics as “self-image, decision-making, and family dynamics.”

The Cleveland course makes clear why the use of the term “drug abuse” has become so prevalent instead of “drug use.” The Cleveland course does not teach teenagers that the “use” of alcohol is wrong; instead it teaches what it calls the “responsible” use of alcohol.

Since the use of alcohol by teenagers is illegal, there is no way it can be "responsible," and furthermore federal law explicitly requires schools to teach that the unlawful use of alcohol is wrong. It's no wonder that teenagers get the idea that illega1 drug use is OK when they are taught that only the "abuse" is unacceptable, not the "use."

The GAO report states that "Districts and states should be held accountable for conducting the most effective programs possible." Indeed they should. But there isn't a shred of evidence in this 29- page GAO report, after a year's investigation, that the expenditure of $1 billion produced an "effective" program.