Why Are More Kids Using Drugs?

Sept. 5, 1996 by Phyllis Schlafly

The alarming rise in illegal drug use by teenagers is big news. Although drug use by adults has leveled off and is actually down since 1985, drug use (mostly in marijuana) among teens aged 12 to 17 is increasing every year, doubling since 1992 to eleven percent in 1995.

Marijuana damages the memory, energy and general learning power of children. Children who start out on marijuana are 17 times more likely to progress to hard drugs than if they had never used marijuana.

The drug experts call this "very scary." Their explanations include neglect by parents, the misleading messages from political leaders, the glamorization of drugs by the entertainment industry, the failure of the media to cover the issue, and denial of the problem.

There is another reason they are overlooking: the failure of drug education in the schools. So-called drug education may even be counterproductive.

Congress has poured billions (not just millions) of taxpayers' dollars into drug education in public schools. In 1991, Congress's watchdog agency, the General Accounting Office (GAO) reported to the Senate on the $1.1 billion that had been spent on drug education up to that date. The cover of the report summed up the result: "Impact Unknown."

The GAO report listed 21 classroom drug curricula commonly used in public schools. They typically presented students with a lot of "nonjudgmental information" combined with a process of "decision making" that urged students to consider the "alternatives."

A couple of courses vaguely described "refusal skills," but not a single course was based on a "just say no" approach, or stated that illegal drugs are wrong, or warned students that they must not consider the "alternative" of using illegal drugs. The courses did not comply with the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act which requires all public schools to teach that "the use of illicit drugs and the unlawful possession and use of alcohol is wrong."

Teaching students that anything is "wrong" is so anathema to public school curriculum writers that they

simply ignored the law's mandate. Under prevailing public school methodology, all teaching (especially about sex and drugs) is "non-directive."

For example, the GAO report described a drug education course called "Me-ology." It called for sixth grade students to spend 17 hours of class time "choosing actions that conform to personal beliefs after considering alternative choices." The course did not teach that it would be wrong to choose cocaine as the "alternative" that conforms to their personal beliefs.

The GAO descriptions of the 21 drug curricula show that most of the courses spend most of their class time playing psychological games under the rubric of "enhancing students' self-awareness and self-esteem." The education theorists have convinced themselves that drug abuse is caused by students' lack of self-esteem.

Subsequent investigations of drug education courses have produced similar disappointing results. The National Institute of Justice, the research arm of the Department of Justice, commissioned a $300,000 three-year study of the popular course called DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education).

The Research Triangle Institute of Durham, NC, which did the investigation, concluded in 1994 that the effect of the DARE program is statistically insignificant in preventing drug use. Yet, DARE has been spending $750 million a year.

In 1995, the Michigan State Senate exposed a giant scandal in the use of federal anti-drug funds by the Michigan State Department of Education. The bureaucrats had illegally diverted more than $50 million of federal anti-drug funds into pressuring local school districts to adopt the bureaucrats' pet project: a controversial health, sex and psychological curriculum called the "Michigan Model."

Some diverted funds were spent on an organized campaign to discredit and intimidate parents by keeping files on parents, making photos and videos of them, training coordinators how to "handle" parents, having a computer bulletin board to exchange information on parents, labeling them with epithets, and inviting People for the American Way to assist in the anti-parent campaign.

Meanwhile, Michigan Drug Control Director, Robert Peterson, was reporting alarmingly high drug-use rates among Michigan youth. Maybe the teenagers wouldn't have fared any better if the money had been spent on non-directive drug education (instead of sex and psychology), but the illegal diversion of funds shows that the educators just weren't interested in addressing the increased use of drugs by teenagers,

even when they were given plenty of funds to deal with the problem.

According to the GAO report cited above, federal drug education funds were also diverted to psychological and attitudinal "touchy-feely" courses in Los Angeles and Cleveland. Nancy Reagan's "just say no" campaign never made it into the classroom.

The scandal of what is called drug education is ripe for a thorough Congressional investigation. Exposing the misuse of the funds already spent will not only help us to tackle increased drug use by teenagers, but it will go a long way toward showing parents that the public schools have taught children it's okay to make their own behavioral choices without regard to standards of right and wrong.