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**Newspaper Coverage of Student Drug Testing:  
A Case Study**

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In what became a closely watched case after it was filed in August 2001, the Supreme Court of the United States on June 27, 2002, ruled that blanket, suspicionless drug testing of public school students engaged in extracurricular activities was constitutional.<sup>1</sup> The 5-4 decision came seven years after an earlier Supreme Court decision<sup>2</sup> on this topic opened a Pandora's box of conflicting lower court decisions that fostered an ever-widening philosophical gap between supporters and opponents of student drug testing.

After the Supreme Court's 1995 drug-testing decision, many Arkansas school districts embraced student drug testing as a perceived deterrent to student drug use; one even survived a student's federal court challenge to its policy of testing students in extracurricular activities.<sup>3</sup> Still, student drug-testing programs continued to constitute a controversial approach to reducing the youth drug culture, and they raised a variety of concerns. Through content analysis of local news articles, this research examined newspaper coverage of drug-testing programs in Arkansas middle schools and secondary schools; the goal was to determine the types of information that local newspapers in Arkansas provided the public concerning student drug testing before local school boards adopted drug-testing policies.

**Literature Review**

In 1972, McCombs and Shaw<sup>4</sup> posited the notion that media have an agenda-setting function which tends to make certain issues more prominent than others in the minds of media consumers. Additional research, however, has shown that the news media do more than merely bring items to people's attention;<sup>5</sup> indeed, news media can influence policy by framing issues in certain ways, omitting information, overusing certain descriptors, and supporting government-inspired programs. For example, Reynolds<sup>6</sup> found that members of Congress were unduly influenced by the way the Medicare Catastrophic Coverage Act of 1988 was framed in the *Washington Post*, thereby allowing themselves to assume a grass-roots understanding of the issue and support for the bill, both of which turned out to be illusory. A day<sup>7</sup> studied newspaper coverage of children's television programming and found that newspapers generally overlook children's programming in their entertainment sections, and that television critics pay scant attention to the subject.

Additionally, Danner and Carmody<sup>8</sup> reviewed major newspaper coverage of infamous school violence, and they concluded that the relative absence of attention to the gendered nature of school violence encourages incomplete explanations and ineffective policies. Also, in a study of newspaper fairness and balance, Fico and Soffin<sup>9</sup> determined that fewer than 10 percent of the

stories they reviewed were evenly balanced.

Further, Altheide and Michalowski<sup>10</sup> analyzed a decade of news coverage in a variety of major American news media and discovered that the word "fear" is appearing more frequently, especially in headlines and in reports about children. They also noted that the use of "fear" is consistent with a popular culture oriented to pursuing a "problem frame" format that the authors said has implications for social policy and reliance on formal agents of social control. Wong and Jain<sup>11</sup> looked at newspaper coverage of education reform in Chicago and found that the two major Chicago newspapers demonstrated a strong unitary tendency in news reporting on this subject, supporting the mayor-led reform movement.

Given the expanded understanding of media content's power, it would seem desirable that local news media provide accurate and complete coverage of important issues facing the communities they serve. As noted above, one such issue is suspicionless drug testing of public school students, which generally has been in the national spotlight since a controversial 1995 U. S.. Supreme Court decision, and which specifically has received recent national media attention after a new student drug-testing case came before the Court in August 2001; therefore, before local school boards make public policy decisions affecting what could be thousands of students, one would expect local news media to present in some way all important aspects of such policies.

### **Background on Student Drug Testing**

Spurred on by the National Collegiate Athletic Association's 1986 adoption of drug testing to support fair and equitable competition among athletes,<sup>12</sup> and by the various national and state survey results showing drug use among students in grades 7-12 had reached significant proportions,<sup>13</sup> public schools across the nation<sup>14</sup> and in Arkansas implemented various types of drug-testing programs for their student populations. The trend, and indeed the prospect of drug testing in general, led commentators, health professionals, and researchers to identify the salient issues related to student drug testing. These include the following:

1. Rationale for implementing a student drug-testing policy.
2. Reliability and accuracy of self-report drug-use surveys.
3. Necessity that drug-testing program targets students most likely at risk.
4. Interrelationships among drug testing, extracurricular activities, and drug use.
5. Accuracy of drug tests.
6. Protocol of drug-testing programs.
7. Legal implications of student drug testing.
8. Efficacy of drug testing as a deterrent to targeted behaviors.
9. Alternatives to drug testing.

One frequently cited rationale for employing the drug testing option is the perceived high incidence of drug use by school-aged children,<sup>15</sup> although sometimes an administrator will admit that he or she just wants to appear to be doing "something" to combat drug use by students.<sup>16</sup> Alternatively, one commentator has suggested that because the drug-testing industry is a billion dollar business, those with a financial stake in the business may promote it as a solution to

drug-abuse problems.<sup>17</sup> This same author also suggested that a herd mentality exists among those with the power to implement drug testing, and thus when one administrative body begins it, others nearby tend to follow suit.

While national and local surveys of student drug-use can be the impetus for consideration of a student drug-testing policy, a variety of research shows that such self-report surveys sometimes suffer from over-reporting of drug use, under-reporting of drug use, and inconsistency among individuals' answers.<sup>18</sup> Other researchers have raised concerns about the validity of self-reported drug use among various sub-populations.<sup>19</sup>

The third and fourth issues associated with student drug-testing policies are related. One is whether or not the proposed drug-testing policy targets the group of students most likely at risk; the other identifies interrelationships among drug testing, extracurricular activities, and illicit drug use. Concerning the former, various substance abuse experts and school administrators' groups have indicated that targeting the correct student group is important both for a program's credibility and for its legality.<sup>20</sup> Concerning the latter, a primary interrelationship involves the potential unintended consequences of drug-testing. For example, Munro<sup>21</sup> points out that drug shifting to more exotic and dangerous drugs may occur among students who wish to avoid detection by the inexpensive tests generally employed by school districts. Also, Bailey<sup>22</sup> and Taylor<sup>23</sup> note that some drug-using students who are marginally interested in athletics or other activities may choose not to participate in such activities if it means being tested for drugs. The National Federation of State High School Associations<sup>24</sup> points out another interrelationship, which is that students who participate in athletics and other extracurricular activities are less likely to be involved in illicit drug use.

Two other issues associated with drug testing in schools have to do with the accuracy of the test chosen by the school district and questions about drug-testing protocol. Bailey<sup>25</sup> identifies the types of tests available and notes the low accuracy of the fairly inexpensive immunoassay test chosen by some school districts. Such tests may fail to detect drug use (false negatives); identify as drug use the ingredients in poppy seed pastries, over-the-counter diet pills, and some over-the-counter cough medicines (false positives); or be easily "beaten" by over-the-counter products designed to confound drug-test results. Bailey<sup>26</sup> and Munro<sup>27</sup> both point out that false positives may result in embarrassment and humiliation of students, as well as expensive and emotionally draining law suits. Concerning drug-testing protocol, Bailey<sup>28</sup> and Munro<sup>29</sup> note that credible and accurate tests require direct observation of those providing samples, refrigeration of samples, labeling of samples, and more extensive analysis of samples testing positive during an initial immunoassay screening.

Legality of drug testing in schools has been another major issue, as prior to the U. S. Supreme Court's most recent decision about the constitutionality of student drug testing, there had been disagreement among various courts as to what constitutes a violation of students' Fourth Amendment right against unreasonable searches and seizures. Since 1995, drug-testing policies have been predicated on the Court's decision in *Vernonia School District v. Acton*,<sup>30</sup> in which the Court upheld a drug-testing policy for athletes who were known leaders of the student drug culture on campus and also leaders of a student rebellion on campus.

Various authors have analyzed court cases dealing with student drug-testing, and several concluded that the U. S. Supreme Court merely needed to clarify the ways in which the *Vernonia*

decision should be applied.<sup>31</sup> Others concluded that the *Vernonia* decision should be conservatively enforced,<sup>32</sup> while still others reasoned that *Vernonia* should be extended to include the right to test all students from grades 6-12.<sup>33</sup> In a more narrow analysis of the legality of student drug testing, Flatt-Moore<sup>34</sup> analyzed public schools' drug-testing policies in Indiana to determine which, if any, would pass muster under the *Vernonia* ruling, and she concluded that the completely voluntary policy of one school was the only one that would withstand a challenge under the *Vernonia* guidelines.

The eighth identifiable issue related to student drug testing is the efficacy of such policies, i.e., do they have the desired results? An exhaustive search of the literature indicated that there is no published research involving randomized sampling and experimental controls concerning the effects of drug testing on any population. The lead researcher associated with one such study being conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University's School of Medicine confirmed that this study was the first to scientifically examine the effects of student drug testing.<sup>35</sup> Results of this long-term research should be available within several years. Thus at present, there is no documented support for the theory that drug testing of students either prevents initial drug use or reduces drug use among current users.

An issue peripherally related to drug testing in schools is drug testing in the work place. While some parallels can be drawn between these two environments, much of the research concerning work-place drug testing is based upon self-report surveys and concludes that it is not an effective means of reducing drug use among employees or work-place injuries and accidents caused by drug users.<sup>36</sup> The authors note that drug users tend not to work for companies with drug-testing programs, and that there are no scientific studies tying work-place accidents or injuries to drug use.

Another set of information related to drug-testing's efficacy shows that no educational organizations officially endorse or even recommend drug testing as a measure to prevent drug use among students in grades 7-12. For example, the National School Boards Association, the American Association of School Administrators (superintendents), and the National Association of Secondary School Principals have preferred to leave drug-testing decisions up to individual schools and school districts.<sup>37</sup> In fact, the National School Boards Association has warned its members that the district must have a compelling or very important need to test the targeted group and that mandatory consent to drug testing greatly increases a district's risk of being sued on an unreasonable search claim.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, and of note, is that the National Education Association, an organization of teachers, joined other groups in submitting an *Amici Curiae* brief supporting the students' anti-drug-testing position in the 2002 Supreme Court case dealing with this issue.<sup>39</sup>

The ninth and final issue that has been identified concerns alternatives to drug-testing programs. For example, a variety of research-based drug education programs have been shown to be effective in schools,<sup>40</sup> and a number of guides are available for caregivers concerning drug-use prevention among children.<sup>41</sup>

### **Focus of the Study**

Clearly, when local school board members consider student drug testing as a means of

grappling with student drug use, they and parents in the community need ample knowledge of the issues listed and discussed above. Overall, the media have a Herculean task to complete if they wish to fully cover the issues associated with drug testing of students in public school systems. This research looks at how well local newspapers in Arkansas have explained drug testing issues to their readers, prior to policy implementation.

### **Methodology**

To determine how Arkansas newspapers covered the development and implementation of drug-testing policies in the state's public schools, a list of public high schools and a list of principals' office phone numbers were obtained from the Arkansas Department of Education. This list was expanded by using the public high school listings in the 1995-1996 *Arkansas Activities Association Directory*,<sup>42</sup> such that ultimately, all of the state's 310 school districts were represented. Each school was contacted by telephone in May, June, or August of 2001 to determine 1) if the school had a drug-testing policy in effect, 2) when the policy was instituted, 3) which students were covered under the policy, and 4) what local newspaper(s) reported the school's news. In addition to the state's 310 school districts, three state-run schools (the Arkansas School for the Blind, the Arkansas School for the Deaf, and the Arkansas School for Mathematics and Sciences) also were contacted.

Of the 310 school districts in Arkansas, contact persons in 101 districts indicated there were student drug-testing policies in place, while contact persons in nine other districts said implementation of such a policy was being discussed. No student drug testing was being conducted at either of the three state-run schools. The 110 contact persons for districts with a policy or contemplating a policy identified 73 newspapers that served the local areas. In turn, names, circulations, and coverage areas of these 73 newspapers (23 dailies and 50 weeklies) were verified by using the 2000 edition of *Editor and Publisher Yearbook*<sup>43</sup> and by contacting the Arkansas Press Association. Using the Associated Press Managing Editors Association categories for categorizing Arkansas newspapers for contest purposes, publications with circulations of less than 8,000 were designated as small newspapers; publications with circulations from 8,000 to 15,000 were designated as medium-sized newspapers; and publications with circulations of more than 15,000 were designated as large newspapers.

The accessible on-line archives of identified newspapers were searched using appropriate keywords, and relevant articles were downloaded. The parameters of on-line searches were defined by the dates of policy implementation reported by school district contacts, with searches beginning in January of the year a policy was said to have been implemented and ending on August 31, 2001. For the purposes of this study, four newspapers maintained complete on-line archives. Letters to the editor were not included in this analysis, but editorials were included.

The 69 newspapers that were not on-line or which maintained only partial archives were contacted by mail, e-mail, or telephone, and contacts were asked to copy and forward to the researchers all relevant articles published during the specified time frames. Follow-up mailings were sent to 51 newspapers that did not respond to the initial request. Due to the inability of many of these 69 newspapers to assist in this research, mostly because their archives were not indexed and they did not have sufficient staff to search such archives, one administrator from each

of the 82 schools covered by such newspapers was contacted by mail or e-mail and asked to copy and forward all stories on file pertaining to student drug testing at the school. Another technique used to obtain articles for the study was to search the Arkansas Historical Commission's microfilmed archives of newspapers relevant to this study (12 in all).

Articles that dealt directly with local policy adoption and implementation were coded according to a pre-determined set of 13 categories, eight of which related to content presented and five of which related to sources quoted. The latter categories also were coded as to their positive, neutral, and negative tones. All categories were pre-tested and refined several times. Two coders, working independently, coded each designated article, and results were then tallied and compared. A trend analysis of the relationship between newspaper size and content covered also was performed. Articles that did not deal with policy adoption and implementation, articles that dealt with nonlocal issues, and all editorials were qualitatively analyzed jointly by the two coders.

## **Results**

Overall, 18 newspapers yielded 86 items related to student drug-testing in 27 school districts. Of these 18 newspapers, five were small, five were medium-sized, and eight were large. Further, 16 of these 18 newspapers published 65 articles that dealt directly with local student drug-testing policy adoption or implementation, and these 65 articles were analyzed independently by two coders; the chronological distribution of articles was as follows: one in 1993, five in 1995, seven in 1997, 10 in 1998, 17 in 1999, eight in 2000, and 17 in 2001. Two papers published 43 percent of the stories located.

Fifteen other articles were related to student drug testing but did not deal with either policy adoption or implementation, and six other items were editorials. Eighteen of the 65 articles came from six small newspapers (distributed/paper as 1, 1, 2, 4, 4, and 6 articles), 19 came from three medium-sized newspapers (distributed/paper as 2, 2, and 15 articles), and 28 came from seven large newspapers (distributed/paper as 1, 1, 2, 2, 3, 6, and 13 articles). A trend analysis (described below) of the interaction between newspaper size and content categories was performed, but no statistical analysis was employed because the numbers were too small to yield meaningful statistical results.

Coders marked a total of 324 content-related and source-related items in the 65 articles, and they agreed 289 times (89.2 percent of the time). Coders also marked 169 source-related tones (positive, neutral, and negative), and they agreed 121 times (71.6 percent of the time). Agreement ratings for tone were highest for school administrators' comments (83.9 percent agreement rate), for students' comments (80.0 percent agreement rate), and for teachers' comments (72.7 percent agreement rate); agreement ratings for tone were lowest for parents' comments (59.1 percent agreement rate) and for comments from sources outside the school districts (48.7 percent agreement rate).

In the eight content categories, results showed that 29.7 percent of the content dealt with announcements of administrators' policy consideration, policy implementation, or policy change, and that 28.7 percent of the content dealt with factual information about the specifics of policy implementation. Additionally, 19.8 percent of the content dealt with impetus or justification for

creating a student drug-testing policy, although no stories suggested that drug-testing programs should target students most likely at risk or discussed the interrelationships among drug testing, extracurricular activities, and drug use. Another 12.4 percent of the content dealt with legal background or legal issues related to drug testing. The remaining content dealt with perceived problems with drug testing (5.4 percent), alternatives to drug testing (3.5 percent), and repercussions related to actual failed drug tests (.5 percent). There was no content concerning research on the effects or effectiveness of drug testing or the accuracy of self-report surveys of drug use.

Some of the information related to student drug-testing policies was minimal. For example, the only reference to student drug testing that appeared in one school board meeting story was a bulleted item (among other bulleted items) that said, "heard a report from Supt. Danny Stanford regarding the committee's work on a drug-testing policy for school [*sic*] participating in AAA-sanctioned events."<sup>44</sup> Other stories focused on passage of drug-testing policies and gave factual information about the policies. The lead in one such story said, "[The] Trumann school board approved a measure Monday night to allow random drug testing of all students in athletics at Trumann High School."<sup>45</sup> There were no quotes in the story.

Sometimes, news stories reflected an administrative outlook about drug testing, although no foundations for such outlooks were provided. One story said, "Conway school officials said the policy will create a safer environment for students and give them a legitimate reason to say no to their peers if pressured to use drugs."<sup>46</sup>

Another quoted an administrator as saying, "Hopefully, the parents will work with us to help stop drug use by our children. By signing their consent forms for random testing on [*sic*] the students, they are helping to curtail the drug problem in our schools."<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, administrative concern sometimes was portrayed, as was the case when a local board member was described in the following manner: "Board president Charles Henry wanted to think about the policy some more. He expressed worry that a false-positive test could cause harm to people."<sup>48</sup> Then, too, school boards sometimes were portrayed as having no real reason to adopt drug-testing policies; one reporter described such a situation when she quoted a school superintendent commenting on the district's newly adopted drug-screening policy for athletes and cheerleaders. She wrote, "The district has not experienced any problems with athletes or cheerleaders using drugs, but the school board felt it was a good addition to policies for students."<sup>49</sup>

In the five source-related categories, results showed that 57.7 percent of the quoted source material came from school administrators, and 20.0 percent came from outside sources such as lawyers, organization spokespeople, and governmental personnel. The remaining source-related content came from parents and other community members (8.8 percent), teachers (6.6 percent), and students (6.6 percent). In the two source-related categories where intercoder agreement for tone was at least 80 percent, administrator comments concerning drug testing were primarily neutral (56.2 percent) and favorable (39.7 percent), while few of such comments (4.1 percent) were rated as negative; similarly, student comments were primarily neutral (50.0 percent) and favorable (37.5 percent), and relatively few (12.5 percent) were negative.

An analysis of content categories, as related to size of newspaper circulation, also revealed several trends. In reviewing the percentage of stories carrying specific content, high percentage

was defined as at least 70 percent and low percentage was defined as 30 percent or less. It was observed that a high percentage of stories in all categories of paper size both contained announcements that school districts were considering or implementing drug-testing policies and gave specifics about such policies. Additionally, it was clear that a low percentage of stories in all categories of paper size discussed alternatives to drug testing, perceived problems with drug testing, repercussions of failed drug tests, research on the effects of drug testing, or effectiveness of self-report surveys. Finally, it was observed that in the categories of impetus/justification for policy creation and legal background, the trends were that a small percentage of stories in small papers and a high percentage of stories in large papers addressed these topics, while the percentages of stories carried in medium-sized papers and containing such content fell between 30-70 percent.

Twenty-one items concerning student drug testing were analyzed qualitatively because they did not deal with policy adoption and implementation, because they dealt with nonlocal issues, or because they were editorials. Sixteen of these items were articles and five were editorials. Ten newspapers published the 16 articles and four newspapers published the five editorials. Two of the stories and two of the editorials were published in large newspapers, five of the stories and one of the editorials were published in medium-sized newspapers, and three of the stories and one of the editorials were published in small newspapers.

Several articles highlighted the findings of the U. S. Supreme Court in the *Vernonia School Dist. 47J v. Acton* (1995) case, which involved testing of student athletes, and one story presented a debate about the case's legal implications. Stories also briefly covered drug-testing company procedures, administrative reminders to athletes to bring testing consent forms to school and to be screened for drugs on a specified date, and updates on the success of drug-testing programs. Drug testing also was discussed as one of a list of safety precautions taken by schools and in reference to school board nominees' election positions.

Of the editorials, five specifically addressed student drug testing in public schools, and one merely commended a school board for its decision to delay implementation of its drug-testing policy until the Supreme Court, in *Board of Education of Independent School District No. 92 of Pottawatomie County, et al. v. Lindsay Earls, et al.* (2002), ruled on the constitutionality of testing all students in extracurricular activities. Three editorials supported drug testing, noting that it would be a deterrent to drug use and would increase school safety. Two of these three cited the Supreme Court's ruling in *Vernonia* as a reason for testing; however, one editorial mistakenly said that the Court ruled it was constitutional to test all students in extracurricular activities. In fact, the *Vernonia* case dealt with the constitutionality of testing only high school athletes.

Two editorials opposed student drug testing. One reasoned that because most students do not use drugs, forcing either entire student bodies or specific groups of students to be screened for drugs was a violation of students' constitutional rights. It asserted that searches of any nature should be conducted only when there was individualized suspicion. The other opposed drug testing of student athletes on grounds that these students were the least likely of all students to be involved in drug use. Rather than screening students, the editorial said, teachers and administrators should communicate their concerns about students to the parents.

## Discussion

While it was possible to locate news stories for analysis in only 16 of the 73 newspapers identified as potential sources for news about student drug testing in the 101 school districts with student drug-testing policies, drug-testing content trends among newspapers of varying circulation size support the argument that even if additional stories had been located, the information they most likely would contain would differ little from the material already analyzed. Large-circulation newspapers, seven out of eight of which did yield articles for this study, generally carried more information than did other-sized newspapers, with small-circulation newspapers generally carrying the least amount of information. Of the 57 newspapers not yielding news stories, 49 were small-circulation papers. Additionally, across newspaper size, the consistently covered information frequently told the public only what could be described as general information, while information consistently covered infrequently or not at all deprived the public of what published experts consider crucial information.

More specifically, the dominant content of student drug-testing news stories that did cover student drug testing concerned administrative consideration of or basic facts about drug-testing policies. As noted in the results, content related to policy consideration, implementation, or changes, combined with content dealing with specific information describing the policy or its implementation, accounted for just under 60 percent of all coded content related to student drug testing. This was true despite the fact that a wealth of information about drug testing can be easily accessed in a minimal amount of time using scholarly data bases and the World Wide Web.

Coverage of two extremely relevant issues, the accuracy of self-report drug-use surveys (the results of which frequently are used by school districts as a rationale for implementing drug-testing policies) and research on how well drug testing works as a preventive measure, was nonexistent. While lack of coverage concerning the latter issue could have resulted from the lack of empirical evidence about student drug-testing's efficacy, noting that student drug testing is not a proven means of reducing drug use is integral to a full and comprehensive account of such a controversial subject.

Similarly, it would seem that a comprehensive account of drug testing in public schools would include discussion of topics such as interrelationships among drug testing, extracurricular activities, and drug use; perceived problems with drug-testing programs; and alternatives to drug testing. These issues, however, also were underreported, with "perceived problems" garnering the highest percentage of coded content (5.4 percent) among them; the small amounts of copy devoted to these topics may have contributed to the formation of inaccurate public perceptions about student drug testing. For example, discussions of alternatives to drug testing constituted only 3.5 percent of the coded content, so drug testing may have been viewed by readers as the preferred option for dealing with student drug use in their communities.

Possibly, the fact that an Arkansas student had sued a school district over suspicionless drug testing raised some local reporters' consciousness concerning drug testing. This could account for the finding that 12.4 percent of the coded copy dealt with legal issues related to drug testing. The case remained in the federal court system for about 14 months and evidently was closely watched by some school administrators. The case's trip through the court system also may account for the fact that 54 of the 65 articles located and analyzed for this study occurred after

this case was initially filed. Perhaps drug testing of students was a low visibility issue prior to this case.

Another finding worth commenting on is that two newspapers accounted for 43 percent of the articles located. The most reasonable explanation for this finding concerns the coverage areas of these two newspapers: one of the two newspapers is the only statewide daily newspaper in Arkansas (a large newspaper), and thus its coverage area included nearly every school district in the state; the other of the two (a medium-sized paper) covered four school districts that discussed or implemented student drug testing after the 1995 *Vernonia* case.

Findings also showed an overall lack of balance related to sources, with more than half of the quoted material being derived from school administrators who rarely were critical of proposed drug-testing policies. While one might expect that administrators would be the primary sources for quotes in stories involving school board meetings, one also would hope that reporters would seek out comments from health professionals who could cast an informed light on health issues such as student drug use and what to do about it. Stories rarely quoted students, who would be most affected by drug-testing policies, and they rarely quoted parents, teachers, and other community members. When students were quoted, their statements were predominantly neutral, but the positive-to-negative ratio of their remaining comments was 3:1; to those reading the stories, it would appear that students were generally supportive of the policies as written.

Of the articles not related to policy adoption and implementation (those generally published after policies were adopted and implemented), several touched upon issues not dealt with prior to policy adoption. Although their numbers were small, some of the information contained in such articles could have helped clarify suspicionless drug testing for communities struggling with policy creation, adoption, and implementation. On the other hand, the small number of editorials were of little value to their communities, for most contained small amounts of useful information. In fact, the three supporting drug testing misled readers either by voicing an unsupported administrative line that drug testing would reduce drug use or by misinterpreting the earliest U. S. Supreme Court ruling on student drug testing.

### **Conclusions**

It would appear that the vast majority of Arkansas newspapers providing stories about school districts' implementation of student drug testing failed to adequately inform their communities about issues surrounding policies being implemented in their schools. Given that two newspapers published 43 percent of the stories located for analysis, and given that the data show a small likelihood that existing stories not located would contain substantially different information about drug testing, it could be said that most of Arkansas' local newspapers have provided little or no meaningful information about localized student drug testing. It is clear from the results of this study that reporters and editors need to do a much more complete job when they cover complicated health issues in their communities, both for the sake of the community and for the sake of individuals directly affected by such issues.

Future research could examine coverage of other education-related issues, to determine if the poor coverage of the drug-testing issue was an anomaly. Additional research also might examine public knowledge of student drug testing, to evaluate whether community residents had

used other sources to obtain a more comprehensive knowledge of student drug testing than was presented by their local newspapers.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Earls v. Board of Education of Independent School District No. 92 of Pottawatomie County*, 70 *United States Law Week* 4737 (June 27, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> *Vernonia School District v. Acton*, 515 U.S. 646 (1995).

<sup>3</sup> *Miller v. Wilkes*, 172 F.3rd 574 (8th Cir. 1999), *vacated as moot* (1999).

<sup>4</sup> Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 176-187.

<sup>5</sup> Some authors have concluded that by emphasizing certain attributes of an issue, the media tell us how to think about this issue. See Sei-Hill Kim, Dietram A. Scheufele, and James Shanahan, "Think About It This Way: Attribute Agenda-Setting Function of the Press and the Public's Evaluation of A Local Issue," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (spring 2002): 7-25.

<sup>6</sup> Sandra L. Reynolds, "The Print Media and Aging Policy: How Differing Coverage of Medicare Catastrophic Led Congress Astray," *Journal of Aging and Social Policy* 6, no. 4 (1994): 53-71.

<sup>7</sup> Sean Aday, "Newspaper Coverage of Kids' TV," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 557 (May 1998): 96-104.

<sup>8</sup> Mona J. E. Danner and Dianne Cyr Carmody, "Missing Gender in Cases of Infamous School Violence: Investigating Research and Media Explanations," *Justice Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (March 2001): 87-114.

<sup>9</sup> Frederick Fico and Stan Soffin, "Fairness and Balance of Selected Newspaper Coverage of Controversial National, State, and Local Issues," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 72, no. 3 (autumn 1995): 621-633.

<sup>10</sup> David L. Altheide and Sam R. Michalowski, "Fear in the News: A Discourse of Control," *The Sociological Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (summer 1999): 475-503.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth K. Wong and Pushpam Jain, "Newspapers as Policy Actors in Urban School Systems: the Chicago Story," *Urban Affairs Review* 35, no. 2 (November 1999): 210-245.

<sup>12</sup> See John M. Evans, "The NCAA Drug Program: Out of Bounds but Still in Play," *Journal of Law and Education* 19, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 161-191. For a comparison of organized drug-testing programs, see Brian Lee, "Drug Testing and the Confused Athlete: A Look at the Differing Athletic Drug Testing Programs in High School, College, and the Olympics," *Florida Coastal Law Journal* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 91-112.

<sup>13</sup> Lloyd D. Johnston, Patrick M. O'Malley, and Jerald G. Bachman, *Monitoring the Future: National Results on Adolescent Drug Use* (Bethesda, Md.: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2001); Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, *Summary of Findings from the 1999 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000); Lloyd D. Johnston, Patrick M. O'Malley, and Jerald G. Bachman, *Monitoring the Future: National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-1999* (Bethesda, Md.: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2000); and Arkansas Department of

Education, *Arkansas Youth Risk Behavior Survey* (Little Rock, Ark.: Arkansas Department of Education, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> See Jessica Portner and Mark Walsh, "Drug Testing Latest Tactic in Prevention," *Education Week* 18, no. 29 (April 7, 1999): 16, reporting that by 1999, at least 100 school districts in 20 states had adopted policies that subjected student athletes to suspicionless, randomized drug testing.

<sup>15</sup> Amanda E. Bishop, "Students, Urinalysis and Extracurricular Activities: How Vernonia's Aftermath is Trampling Fourth Amendment Rights," *Health and Matrix* 10, no. 2 (summer 2000): 217-247; National Association of Secondary School Principals, "Drug Testing: A Tool to Combat Drug Use Among Youth," *A Legal Memorandum* (May 1999): 1-4; Nancy J. Flatt-Moore, "Public Schools and Urinalysis: Assessing the Validity of Indiana Schools' Student Drug Testing Policies After Vernonia," *Brigham Young University Education and Law Journal* (1998): 239-268; and Eric N. Miller, "Suspicionless Drug Testing of High School and College Athletes After *Acton*: Similarities and Differences," *University of Kansas Law Review* 45, no. 1 (November 1996): 301-328. While medical opinion is conspicuously absent from most articles discussing rationales for drug testing, the American Academy of Pediatrics has since 1996 opposed drug testing of adolescents. See Committee on Substance Abuse, American Academy of Pediatrics, "Testing for Drugs of Abuse in Children and Adolescents (RE9628)," *Pediatrics* 98, no. 2 (August 1996): 305-307.

<sup>16</sup> Respondents in the *Earls* (2002) case, in their U.S. Supreme Court brief, point out "... as the record and decisions below document, the [student drug-testing] Policy's genesis was in demands that the School Board do more about perceived student drug use ..." (p. 2). Their brief in this case at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit notes that the school district openly admits as a reason for its drug-testing policy "...send[ing] a message to the community about the school's tough on drugs stance..." (p. 21).

<sup>17</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, "Your Urine, Please," *The Progressive* 64, no. 3 (March 2000): 15-16.

<sup>18</sup> Ismail H. Akinici, Ralph E. Tarter, and Levent Kirisci, "Concordance Between Verbal Report and Urine Screen of Recent Marijuana Use in Adolescents," *Addictive Behaviors* 26, no. 4 (July/August 2001): 613-619; Linda Richter and Patrick B. Johnson, "Current Methods of Assessing Substance Use: A Review of Strengths, Problems, and Developments," *Journal of Drug Issues* 31, no. 4 (fall 2001): 808-832; Lana Harrison, "The Validity of Self-Reported Data on Drug Use," *Journal of Drug Issues* 25, no. 1 (winter 1995): 91-111; Brenda G. Cox, Michael B. Witt, Mark A. Traccarella, and Angela M. Perez-Michael, "Inconsistent Reporting of Drug Use in 1998," in *Survey Measurement of Drug Use: Methodological Studies*, eds. C. Turner, J. Lessler and J. Gfroerer (Rockville, Md.: National Institute on Drug Abuse 1992), 109-153; Jerald G. Bachman and Patrick M. O'Malley, "When Four Months Equal A Year: Inconsistencies in Student Reports of Drug Use," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (Winter 1981): 536-548; Thomas P. Petzel, James E. Johnson, and Jack McKillip, "Response Bias in Drug Surveys," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 40, no. 3 (June 1973): 437-439.

<sup>19</sup> John M. Wallace and Jerald G. Bachman, "Issues and Concerns on Validity of Self-Reports in Student-Based Studies on Minority Populations," *Substance Use and Misuse* 32, no. 12 & 13 (October / November 1997): 1949-1954; Michael Fendrich and Xu Yanchun,

"The Validity of Drug Use Reports From Juvenile Arrestees," *International Journal of Addictions* 29, no. 8 (June 1994): 971-985.

<sup>20</sup> National Association of Secondary School Principals, "Drug Testing: A Tool to Combat Drug Use Among Youth;" Geoff Munro, "Drug Testing in Schools," Australian Drug Foundation, 1998, <a href="http://www.adf.org.au/cyds/papers/testing.html">http://www.adf.org.au/cyds/papers/testing.html</a> (21 July 2001); William J. Bailey, "Suspicionless Drug Testing in Schools," Indiana Prevention Resource Center, 1998, <a href="http://www.drugs.indiana.edu/issues/suspicionless.html">http://www.drugs.indiana.edu/issues/suspicionless.html</a> (15 May 2001); Missouri Principals Resource Center, "Student Drug Testing," March 1997, <a href="http://www.principals.coe.missouri.edu/legal\_stu-dentdrug.html">http://www.principals.coe.missouri.edu/legal\_stu-dentdrug.html</a> (24 July 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Geoff Munro, "Drug Testing in Schools."

<sup>22</sup> William J. Bailey, "Suspicionless Drug Testing in Schools."

<sup>23</sup> Robert Taylor, "Compensating Behavior and the Drug Testing of High School Athletes," *Cato Journal* 16, no. 3 (winter 1997): 351-364.

<sup>24</sup> "The Case for High School Activities...," National Federation of State High School Associations, 2002, <a href="http://www.nfhs.org/case.html">http://www.nfhs.org/case.html</a> (28 May 2002).

<sup>25</sup> William J. Bailey, "Suspicionless Drug Testing in Schools."

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Geoff Munro, "Drug Testing in Schools."

<sup>28</sup> William J. Bailey, "Suspicionless Drug Testing in Schools."

<sup>29</sup> Geoff Munro, "Drug Testing in Schools."

<sup>30</sup> 515 U.S. 646 (1995).

<sup>31</sup> Martha M. McCarthy, "Another High Stakes Test," *Principal Leadership* 1, no. 8 (April 2001): 14-19; Linda Oshman, "Public School Lessons: Setting Limits on Suspicionless Drug Testing After Vernonia," *Houston Law Review* 38, no. 4 (winter 2001): 1313-1342; Robert D. Dodson, "Ten Years of Randomized Jurisprudence: Amending the Special Needs Doctrine," *South Carolina Law Review* 51, no. 2 (winter 2000): 258-289.

<sup>32</sup> Amanda E. Bishop, "Students, Urinalysis and Extracurricular Activities: How Vernonia's Aftermath is Trampling Fourth Amendment Rights."

<sup>33</sup> Shannon O'Pry, "A Constitutional Mosh Pit: The Fourth Amendment, Suspicionless Searches, and the Toughest Public School Drug Testing Policy in America," *Texas Tech Law Review* 33, no. 1 (2001): 151-239.

<sup>34</sup> Nancy J. Flatt-Moore, "Public Schools and Urinalysis: Assessing the Validity of Indiana Schools' Student Drug Testing Policies After Vernonia."

<sup>35</sup> Beginning in July 2001, the lead researcher in the Oregon study, Linn Goldberg, M.D., explained in a series of personal communications that his team was studying the effects of drug testing on students in public schools. This randomized study includes analysis of immediate effects as well as longer term effects.

<sup>36</sup> John Hoffman and Cindy Larison, "Drug Use, Workplace Accidents, and Employee Turnover," *Journal of Drug Issues* 29, no. 2 (spring 1999): 341-364; Harrison M. Trice and Paul

D. Steele, "Impairment Testing: Issues and Convergence with Employee Assistance Programs," *Journal of Drug Issues* 25, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 471-503; Scott MacDonald, "The Role of Drugs in Workplace Injuries: Is Drug Testing Appropriate?" *Journal of Drug Issues* 25, no. 4 (fall 1995): 703-722; Jacques Normand, "Drug Use in the Workplace," *Issues in Science and Technology* 10, no. 4 (winter 1993/1994): 82-83.

<sup>37</sup> This was determined through personal e-mail communications with representatives of these organizations, in July 2001.

<sup>38</sup> National School Boards Association, *Legal Handbook on School Athletics*, (Alexandria, Va.: National School Boards Association, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> This brief was obtained from the American Academy of Pediatrics, 141 Northwest Point Boulevard, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098.

<sup>40</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse, *Preventing Drug Abuse Among Children and Adolescents: A Research-Based Guide* (Bethesda, Md.: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Keeping Youth Drug Free*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000); Ginna Marston and Sally Marshall (project directors), *Growing Up Drug-Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

<sup>42</sup> Arkansas Activities Association, *Arkansas Activities Association 1995-1996* (Little Rock, Ark.: Arkansas Activities Association, 1995).

<sup>43</sup> David Maddox (Editor), *Editor & Publisher International Yearbook* (New York: Editor & Publisher, 2000).

<sup>44</sup> "Hoxie School Board Fills Vacant Positions." *The Times Dispatch*, 16 July 1997, sec. 1, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Angel S. Parker, "Board Approves Drug Testing of Student Athletes," *The Trumann Democrat*, 12 May 1993, sec. 1, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> "Drug-Testing Policy for Conway District Put Off Till December," *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, 15 August 2001, sec. B p. 3.

<sup>47</sup> Wendy Campbell, "GCT Adopts Drug Policy During Recent Meeting," *Paragould Tribune*, 11-12 September 2001, p. 13.

<sup>48</sup> Ginnie Tyson, "Board Considers Policy for Drug Testing Students," *The Atkins Chronicle*, 13 December 2000, sec. 1, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Rose Ann Pearce, "School Districts Give Thumbs Up for Opening Day," *The Morning News of Northwest Arkansas*, 12 August 2001, sec. A, pp. 1, 5.