

## Sample Op-Ed on Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities

### **Prevent Now or Pay Later**

Most Americans believe that illegal drugs and violence are serious problems facing our children. Unfortunately, our nation's first line of defense for dealing with those issues is threatened by the proposed elimination of the State Grants portion of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities (SDFSC) program.

Today, the SDFSC program is the only source of federal funding for school-based drug and violence prevention that directly targets all of America's youth in grades K-12.

Recent data confirms that up to 37 million youth are served annually by the SDFSC program. The program has amassed an impressive record of positive impacts and documented successful outcomes. According to the 2008 *Monitoring the Future* survey, nationally there has been a 25% drop in youth drug use over the past seven years.

The SDFSC program is a smart investment for the future of our children, families, communities and the nation. It has proven that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The savings per dollar spent on substance abuse prevention are substantial, ranging from \$2.00 to \$19.41.

Drug and alcohol use by youth have a devastating impact on the learning environment and the educational performance of students. A study by the University of Washington documented the tremendous negative effect of drug and alcohol use on standardized test scores. The study linked substantially lower reading and math scores on standardized tests to peer substance use. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administrations (SAMHSA), "Each year costs associated with drug, alcohol and tobacco use add 10% or \$41 billion to the already strained budgets of schools across the nation."

Eliminating the State Grants portion of the SDFSC program would be an example of being penny wise and dollar foolish. Cutting a program that provides essential services such as; K-12 drug and violence prevention programming, social skills training, peer mediation, student assistance, parent education and school and community partnerships would be a huge mistake and would reverse years of progress in reducing youth drug use and violence. The result will be an increase in the number of youth who use drugs, commit crimes, drop out of school and have trouble finding good jobs. This will cost all of us much more that what we are currently spending on the program.

Every child in America must have the benefits of prevention efforts to insure that drug and violence rates continue to decrease. The progress in reducing drug use did not happen overnight. It is the result of schools and communities working together to help our children become healthier, more capable and better-educated.

We can't afford to lose the SDFSC program. It's essential to the health and academic success of all our students. The future of our nation depends on a healthy and positive learning environment that is as free from violence and drugs as we can provide. It is an important investment for the future of our children, families, communities and America.