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OBSERVATIONS ON OHIO'S IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS AND
COMMUNITIES ACT

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SUMMARY OF GAO TESTIMONY
BY MR. JOHN H. LUKE ON
OHIO'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES ACT OF 1986

The Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986 seeks to help educate children about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. GAO's testimony discusses early observations about the initiation of programs and activities in Ohio funded under the act. Ohio is one of several states involved in a larger GAO review.

Since the passage of the act in 1986, states have received grants amounting to about \$633 million. These funds are allocated to each state according to its share of the nation's school age children. Since the inception of the program, Ohio has received about \$28 million in Drug-Free Schools funds.

Most of the funds in Ohio are distributed to the local school districts. Each district is allowed to decide how it will spend its Drug-Free Schools funding. Most school districts spend the bulk of their funds to train school personnel to deal with drug and alcohol abuse problems; a relatively small amount is used to purchase materials or supplies. GAO reviewed in more detail how Cleveland and Hamilton school districts use Drug-Free Schools funds.

Cleveland employs two primary approaches to carrying out its drug and alcohol education programs: (1) training teachers to use commercially developed curriculum packages in the classroom and (2) training school officials and community members to act as a team to develop and implement programs. Hamilton used most of its funding to employ a chemical abuse coordinator. One of the coordinator's primary functions is to train administrators, teachers, and counselors from the district's schools who volunteer to serve as members of school core teams. These core teams organize support groups in which high-risk students with similar problems can meet and share their concerns. Alcohol education is included in the curriculum and/or related activities of both districts.

Drug-Free Schools is a relatively new program; accordingly, to date, the effectiveness of Ohio's programs is largely unknown. Neither the state nor the school districts we contacted had yet attempted to evaluate program effectiveness.

A sample of students and teachers with whom GAO spoke, generally gave the Drug-Free Schools programs passing grades. Particularly, the message of the dangers of drugs and alcohol appears to be reaching the children. Both teachers and students believe that drug and alcohol abuse would be worse without drug education.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss preliminary results of our work on the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986 whose major provisions seek to help schools and communities educate children about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. Mr. Chairman, you asked that we initiate a multi-state review to

- identify how funds provided under the act are used,
- examine the extent to which educational programs include alcohol abuse,
- determine how program effectiveness is assessed, and
- obtain views of students and teachers on the drug education being provided.

My remarks today are focused on our preliminary findings in Ohio, which is one of a number of states included in our overall review. We obtained information from the U.S. Department of Education, the Ohio Governor's Office and State Education Agency, and the Cleveland and Hamilton school districts. We also discussed the Drug-Free Schools program with principals, teachers, and students at several schools in these districts.

The drug problem in the United States is a profound one with no easy solutions. The federal Drug-Free Schools program is one of a number of efforts directed at this problem. The two Ohio school

districts we visited used most of the Drug-Free Schools funds to train school personnel in various aspects of drug and alcohol abuse education, thereby enhancing their (1) knowledge of the problem and (2) ability to counsel and educate students. This is a relatively new program; accordingly, the effectiveness and payoff of such activities are to date unknown. On the basis of our discussions with a limited number of students and teachers, however, the message of drug and alcohol dangers is reaching the children; both students and teachers believe that drug and alcohol abuse would be worse without the Drug-Free Schools program.

BACKGROUND

The Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act provides federal financial assistance to establish programs for drug abuse education and prevention. Programs funded are to clearly convey the message that the use of illegal drugs and the abuse of other drugs and alcohol is wrong and harmful.

States have received grants amounting to about \$633 million since passage of the act in 1986. These funds, which first became available to states in fiscal year 1987, are allocated to each state according to its share of the nation's school age children. Since the inception of the program, Ohio's share of these funds amounted to about \$28 million.

There are various requirements associated with obtaining and using Drug-Free Schools funds. For example, states must apply to the U.S. Department of Education for the funds and then allocate 30 percent to the Governor for discretionary programs and 70 percent to the state education agency. In turn, the state education agency must distribute at least 90 percent of its Drug-Free Schools funds to the school districts on the basis of each district's share of school-age children. Of the remaining funds, up to 2 and 1/2 percent can be used for state administrative costs and the balance for discretionary programs.

HOW DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS
FUNDS ARE USED IN OHIO

Ohio received about \$8.4 million in Drug-Free Schools funds for the 1988-89 school year. These funds were divided between the Governor and the state education agency. The Governor, who received \$2.5 million (30 percent of the total), spent about 85 percent on programs targeting high-risk youth.¹ The act requires that governors spend at least 50 percent of their Drug-Free Schools funds on high-risk youth. An example of one of the Governor's programs is the Urban Minority Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Outreach Program. This program targets high-risk African-American youth and uses a multidisciplinary team approach, including community

¹High risk youth are individuals under 21 years of age, who are at high risk of becoming or who have been drug or alcohol abusers and who, among other things, may be school dropouts, have committed violent or delinquent acts, or have attempted suicide.

education, prevention, consultation, media development, and professional training to combat drug and alcohol abuse. The Governor has provided over \$225,000 for this program. The Governor used the remaining portion of his federal Drug-Free Schools funds for other drug and alcohol programs that were not specifically directed at high-risk youth.

The state education agency, as required by the act, provided 90 percent (\$5.3 million) of its funds directly to the local school districts, on the basis of their share of Ohio's total student enrollment. On this basis, in school year 1988-89, each of Ohio's 2 million school-age children generated \$2.63 in Drug-Free Schools funds. The state education agency used most of the remaining 10 percent of the funds on efforts to (1) inform school district personnel about available drug education materials and how to use them and (2) train teachers and police officers in various education and intervention techniques for drug and alcohol abuse. Administrative funds of \$147,000 were used by the state to pay for staff and related expenses to administer the programs.

Each Ohio school district is allowed to decide how it will spend its Drug-Free Schools funds. Ohio's state education agency requires that districts apply for the funds, comply with the act's requirements, and submit an annual report on the use of these funds. Most Ohio school districts, a state education agency official said, spend the bulk of their funds to improve the

knowledge and capabilities of school personnel to deal with the drug and alcohol abuse problem, and a relatively small amount to purchase materials or supplies. As agreed with your office, we reviewed in more detail how the Cleveland and Hamilton school districts use Drug-Free Schools funds.

Cleveland School District

During school year 1988-89, the most recent year for which complete data are available, Cleveland's school-age population of 91,238 students was housed in 128 public and 58 private schools. Cleveland's public school students generated Drug-Free Schools funds totaling \$192,000 for the 1988-89 school year; an additional \$54,000 went to private schools.²

Cleveland employs two primary approaches to carrying out its drug and alcohol education programs: (1) training teachers to use commercially developed curriculum packages in the classroom and (2) training teams of school officials and community members to develop and implement school and community programs tailored to their needs. The Cleveland school district also purchases some commercially developed curriculum packages for use in certain grades. The Cleveland school district requires that these packages be taught only by teachers who have received special training.

²Cleveland's 1988-89 school year funds were based on its previous year's public and private school student count of 93,378.

These curriculum packages include Children Are People, targeted for kindergarten through fifth grade; ME-LOGY, for sixth grade; and Clear Choices, for ninth grade. Each package provides a structured teaching agenda and workbooks for the students. For example, the Children Are People curriculum includes about 15 weeks of instruction. In the fifth grade, this curriculum is broken down into five basic segments:

- 3 weeks on building self-image,
- 5 weeks on decision making,
- 3 weeks on drug and alcohol abuse,
- 2 weeks on family dynamics, and
- 2 weeks on self-esteem.

The other packages also provide instruction in these areas, but are directed at different grade levels.

The school team training approach is used primarily for the seventh and eighth grades and tenth to twelfth grades. School and community officials are trained to analyze the school and community drug prevention needs and design new drug and alcohol prevention or intervention programs or modify those already in operation.

A sufficient number of trained teachers are not available to teach the commercially developed curriculum packages or participate in the school teams. Consequently, all students do not receive the benefit of the Drug-Free Schools funded programs. Overall,

Cleveland officials reported that for the 1988-89 school year, Drug-Free Schools programs were implemented in 109 schools, covering over 34,000 of Cleveland's 72,000 public school students. An example of the gap in coverage is the Children Are People program. District officials told us about 550 teachers of kindergarten through fifth grade in the district had been trained to teach it. These teachers cover about 16,000 of the district's 37,000 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Teachers of the remaining 21,000 students have not received training under this program. The district hopes to train more teachers as additional funds become available in future years.

Hamilton School District

The Hamilton School District, with about 12,500 public and private school students, received \$33,000 in Drug-Free Schools funds during the 1988-89 school year. Hamilton's approach to using these funds was different from Cleveland's. The district used most of the funding to pay the salary of a chemical abuse coordinator. An additional \$5,200 went to private schools, which used funds for drug prevention materials, films, and a parents' workshop.

A primary function of the chemical abuse coordinator is to train administrators, teachers, and counselors from the district's four junior and senior high schools who volunteer to serve as members of a school "core" team. These core teams organize support groups in

which high-risk students with similar problems can meet and discuss personal concerns such as problems involved in living with an alcoholic family member or relationships with friends who use drugs. The coordinator also assists principals, counselors, teachers, and parents in interventions with suspected student users; organizes and coordinates peer counseling groups; organizes Say No clubs; presents lectures to classes, assemblies, and parent groups; and serves as a resource and coordinator of drug education activities with community groups and agencies.

As funding increases, the district plans to add commercially developed curriculum packages to its Drug-Free Schools program. In school year 1990-91, it plans to add a classroom program for the 7th grade called Skills for Adolescence, which covers basic skills in problem solving, communication, increasing self-esteem, and conflict resolution.

ALCOHOL EDUCATION INCLUDED IN DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Programs funded by Drug-Free Schools in both Cleveland and Hamilton covered alcohol as well as drug abuse. The ME-OLGY program, for example, which Cleveland uses in the sixth grade, devotes two of 17 lessons to teaching students about the effects of alcohol on the body and how to deal with peer pressure to drink. The alcohol education curriculum conveys the message that the abuse of alcohol is harmful, but that alcohol may be used

responsibly. For example, the fifth grade Children Are People curriculum discusses placing "responsible use" on one end of a continuum and "dependency" on the other, with "abuse" in the middle, suggesting that some alcohol use may be acceptable. In addition, the sixth grade ME-ODOGY program suggests that teachers introduce the curriculum by telling students that most adults drink alcohol at least occasionally and that students should know about the responsibility that goes along with drinking.

Our discussions with sixth grade students in Cleveland indicated the primary messages they were being taught were "Don't drink and drive" and that alcohol abuse is bad for your body. When asked what they believed about alcohol, some said:

- "It's cool."
- "It's not even a drug."
- "Grown ups are doing it."
- "It won't hurt you."

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS GENERALLY UNKNOWN

The Drug-Free Schools program is relatively new; accordingly, the effectiveness of Ohio's Drug-Free Schools programs is largely unknown. Although the Ohio state education agency requires school districts to submit annual reports on their Drug-Free Schools programs, the information in these reports primarily addresses school policy, participation levels, and budget. Neither the state

education agency nor the school districts we contacted had formally evaluated program effectiveness.

Under provisions of the 1989 amendments to the act, effective December 1989, states are required to submit a biennial effectiveness evaluation to the U.S. Department of Education. Ohio officials said they have not yet determined how they will comply with this requirement.

Although new requirements for state reporting on program effectiveness have been imposed, there are inherent difficulties in making such assessments. That is, over time it will be difficult to accurately isolate the effect of the Drug-Free Schools programs from other ongoing efforts and activities. There are many other factors which have an impact on students and may influence their decisions to use or not use drugs, including, for example, parents, peers, religious beliefs, and the media.

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS VIEW PROGRAMS POSITIVELY

As part of our effort, we discussed drug and alcohol education with 43 randomly selected sixth-grade students and seven teachers at the three elementary schools we visited in Cleveland. The Drug-Free Schools program was generally given passing grades by the students and teachers with whom we spoke; particularly, the message that drugs are dangerous appears to be reaching these children.

The students' comments were generally positive on the overall drug education they were receiving. Although students said they believed that many students would eventually try drugs, they said that without the drug education, more students would abuse drugs. Students at the three schools said that the programs were most helpful for students not yet using drugs, and indicated that the education does little good for those already using drugs. They told us that these students "don't listen in class...they hear only what they want to hear." At the same time, it was clear that students would be concerned if drug education classes were eliminated; they seem to view the classes as helping them deal with issues of peer pressure and learn the consequences of drug and alcohol abuse. They believe things would be much worse without such classes. Some specific statements made by students included

- "its good to learn about drugs,"
- "drug education is making a difference. Keep doing it."
- "Drug education is working for some kids. They can see what drugs do--they kill."

The students also commented about the effectiveness of the different means being used to inform them about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. For example, sixth graders at a school that had lost its only sixth-grade teacher trained in the Drug-Free Schools program said they were bored with the informal, make-shift drug education program they were currently receiving--they

were tired of hearing "Just say no." In addition, they told us that they found teachers and police officers to be believable sources of drug information. Students also made it clear, however, that teachers untrained or naive in the area of drugs quickly lose credibility.

Each of the teachers we spoke to in Cleveland told us that substance abuse education had increased significantly since inception of the Drug-Free Schools programs. Most teachers believed the curricula were reaching the students and that, through district-provided training, they themselves had been well-prepared to use the curricula materials in the classroom.

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In closing, Mr. Chairman, from our limited review of the efforts in Ohio, it is clear that efforts to educate children about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse have increased with the institution of the Drug-Free Schools programs. Many different approaches are being used to pass this important information along to the children and both students and teachers believe the message is being heard.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or Members of the Committee may have.