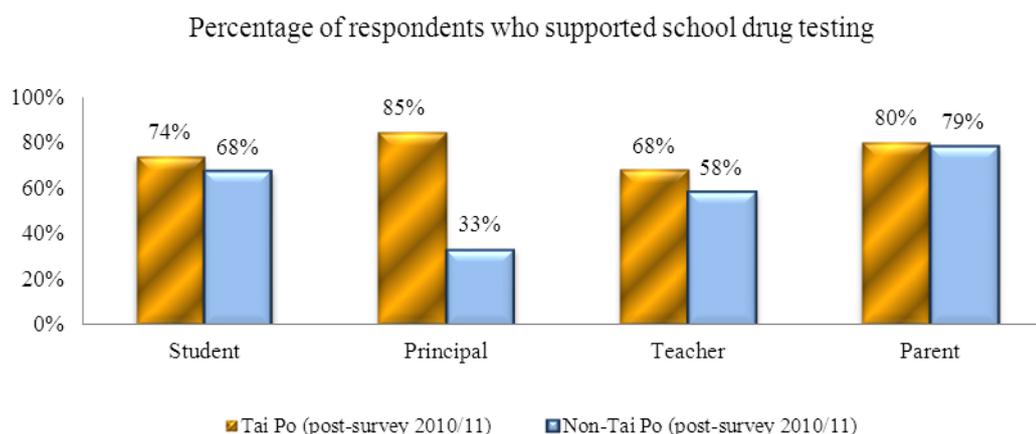


## V. School Drug Testing: The Way Forward

### Chapter 13 Support of school drug testing

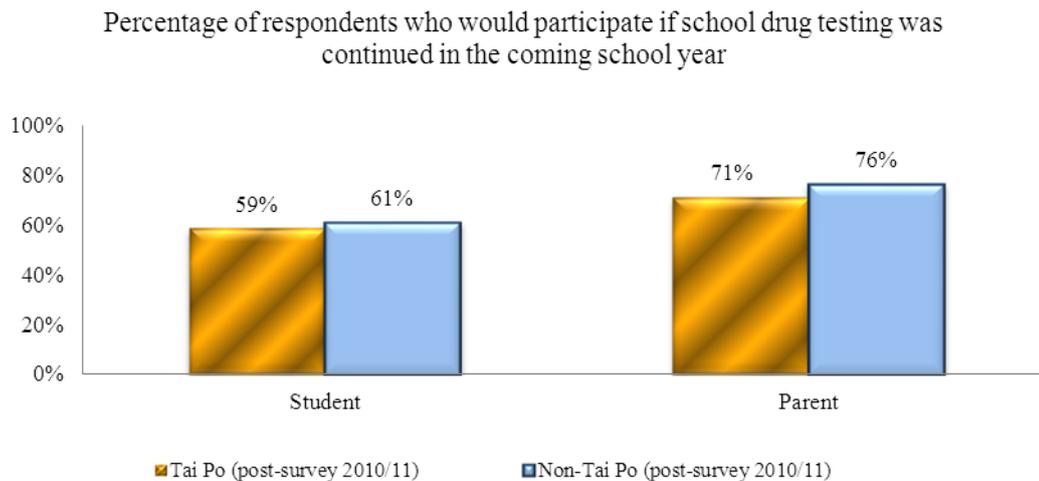
13.1 According to findings of the June 2011 post-survey, the majority of Tai Po students and their parents, and principals supported the continuation of school drug testing in the coming school year. For students attending secondary schools in Tai Po and those outside, as high as 74% and 68% respectively supported the continuation of school drug testing. For their parents, the percentage supporting school drug testing was even higher.



13.2 While 85% of Tai Po principals supported the continuation of school drug testing in the coming school year, only 33% of non-Tai Po principals indicated their support. As regards Tai Po teachers and non-Tai Po teachers, more than half of them supported the continuation of school drug testing. In short, most school stakeholders of secondary schools, including principals (other than non-Tai Po principals), teachers, students and parents supported the continuation of school drug testing.

13.3 If school drug testing continued to be implemented in the coming

school year, 59% of Tai Po students and 61% of non-Tai Po students indicated that they would participate. For their parents, 71% of Tai Po parents and 76% of non-Tai Po parents indicated that they would allow their children to participate in school drug testing if it was implemented in the coming school year.



13.4 Most of Tai Po teachers voiced support of the continuation of the present Scheme. They considered that the Scheme neither had not increased teacher workload nor affected learning and teaching at schools. To reinforce the impact of the Scheme, some teachers suggested that students should be asked to make a pledge of not abusing drugs. Besides, efforts should be made to encourage students to participate in the Scheme, with teachers assuming a more active role in promoting the Scheme and winning the support of students.

13.5 A number of teachers also suggested that the Scheme should be extended to schools in other districts and not just confined to schools in Tai Po. Nevertheless, some teachers considered that resources devoted to the Scheme were not proportional to the impact of the Scheme. A few teachers even remarked they did not much expectation of the Scheme. Most teachers considered that the Scheme had the support of parents. Though a few parents

might not fully understand details of Scheme, they believed the Scheme would help bring a correct, anti-drug message to students.

13.6 A number of Tai Po students indicated that they supported the Scheme. The reasons were that they believed the Scheme had strengthened the resolve of students who had abused drugs to quit drugs. They explained that students often abused drugs because of peer pressure. The Scheme would have a deterrent effect on these students, helping them to resist such peer pressure. They suggested that more anti-drug talks be organized to deliver positive messages to students.

13.7 During discussions with social workers, several of them opined that drug testing was not in line with the principles cherished by social workers. They suggested that more resources should be devoted to providing counselling services to students, by say providing additional social worker support to schools. They believed that social workers would not like to be involved in drug testing. They also expressed concern over the resource implications and whether resources similar to those provided to schools in Tai Po under the Scheme would be available to schools if the Scheme was extended to more schools in districts outside Tai Po.

## Chapter 14 Implementation modalities

### *Anti-drug educational and promotional activities*

14.1 As pointed out in the earlier part of the report, apart from the 2009/10 and 2010/11 Schemes implemented in secondary schools in Tai Po which comprised drug testing and the various support programmes, there were also a host of educational and promotional anti-drug activities. In particular, the 2010/11 Scheme was implemented in Tai Po schools as part of the healthy school policy aimed at instilling positive values on students, helping them develop healthy lifestyles, in addition to anti-drug education.

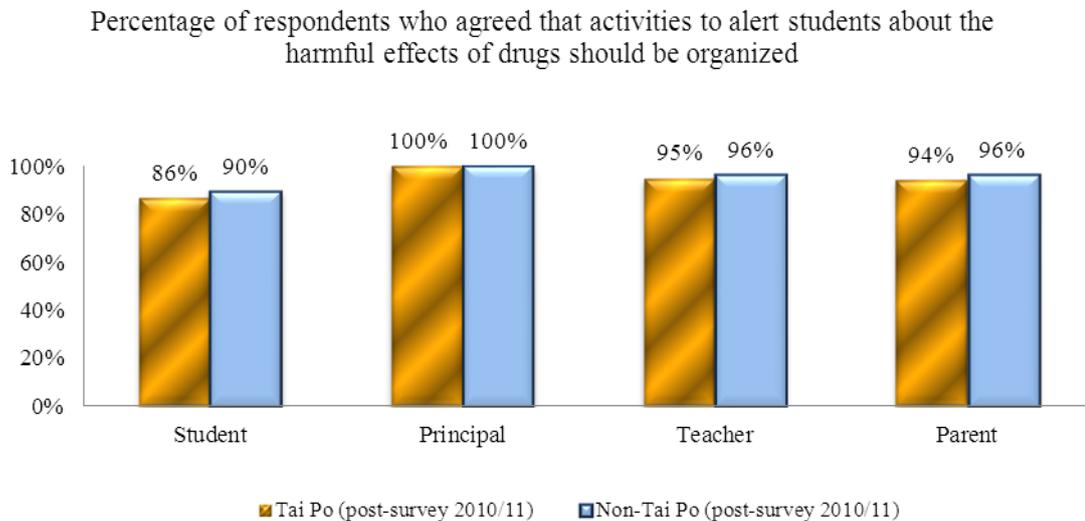
14.2 There are already a number of programmes organised by different organisations which aim at helping students develop positive attitude and healthy lifestyle and to strengthen students' resolve to refuse drugs for schools with or without drug testing. For example, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust had supported a seven-year project known as 'P.A.T.H.S. (Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social programmes) to Adulthood: A Jockey Club Youth Enhancement Scheme'. This project "is pioneering and groundbreaking in Hong Kong and other Chinese contexts in many aspects" to promote the holistic development of adolescents in Hong Kong.<sup>37</sup>

14.3 Findings of the June 2011 post-survey showed that the great majority of Tai Po students (86%) and non-Tai Po students (90%), Tai Po parents (94%) and non-Tai Po parents (96%), Tai Po teachers (95%) and non-Tai Po teachers (96%) as well as Tai Po principals (100%) and non-Tai Po principals (100%) agreed that activities designed to alert students about the harmful

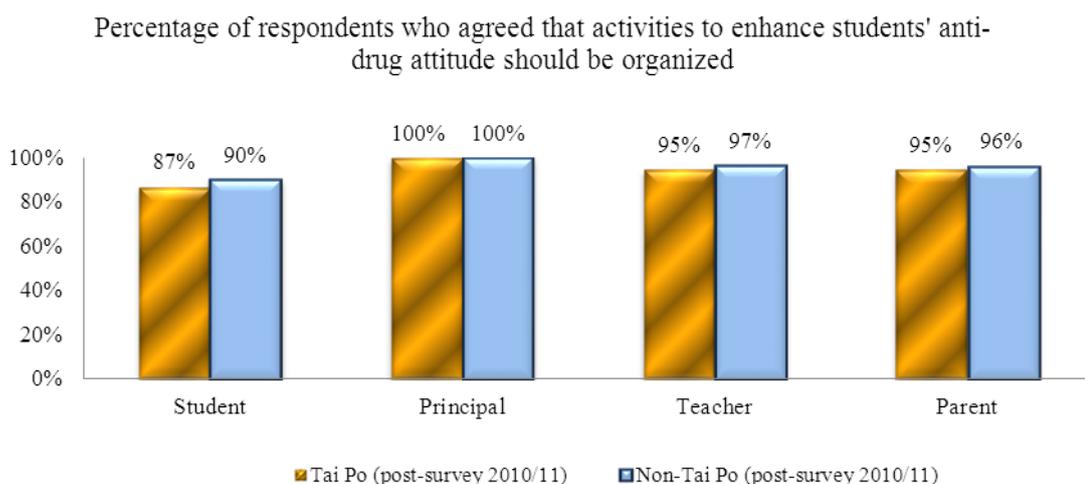
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<sup>37</sup> Shek, Daniel T L (2008), "Evaluation of Project P.A.T.H.S. in Hong Kong: triangulation of findings based on different evaluation strategies", in *The Science World Journal*, 8: 1- 3.

effects of drugs should be organized.

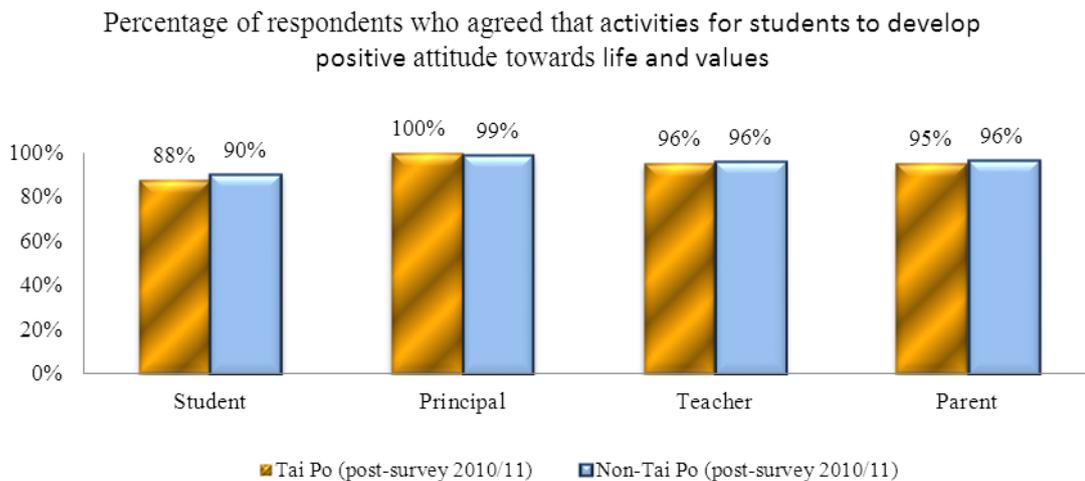


14.4 In addition, the great majority of Tai Po students (87%) and non-Tai Po students (90%), Tai Po parents (95%) and non-Tai Po parents (96%), Tai Po teachers (95%) and non-Tai Po teachers (97%) as well as Tai Po principals (100%) and non-Tai Po principals (100%) agreed that activities to enhance students' anti-drug attitude should be organized.



14.5 Apart from enhancing students' anti-drug attitude and their awareness of the harmful effects of drugs, it is also desirable to help students develop

positive values and healthy lifestyle. Findings of the June 2011 post-survey showed the great majority of students (88% for schools in Tai Po and 90% for schools outside Tai Po), school principals (100% and 99% respectively), teachers (96% and 96%) and parents (95% and 96%) agreed that activities should be organized for students to help them develop positive attitude towards life and value.



14.6 All of Tai Po principals pointed out that drug testing was only one of the component of the Scheme. The focus of the Scheme was to help students develop healthy lifestyles and positive life values. The Scheme also aimed at raising anti-drug awareness among students and their parents, and in the community. Indeed, in both the 2009/10 and 2010/11 Schemes, schools had organized a variety of anti-drug activities including talks, workshops, drama, games and other interest groups as well as other out-of-school activities to help students raise their awareness of the harmful effects of drugs, strengthen their resolve to refuse drugs and develop healthy lifestyles and positive life values. In organizing such activities, teachers and other professionals such as social workers were also involved. These anti-drug activities were part of activities organized under their healthy school programmes.

14.7 A number of Tai Po teachers commented that publicity through posters and anti-drug leaflets were not quite effective. Students did not pay much attention to these printed publicity materials. They also cautioned that too much anti-drug publicity would be counter-productive. Group activities organized by social workers, on the other hand, were considered more useful. They suggested more educational and preventive activities could be arranged through morning assemblies and sharing sessions. A number of them suggested that Government should step up moral education and deploy more social workers to help students. In addition, anti-drug activities should be organized for students at risk in order to raise their self-esteem and self-concept, strengthening their resolve to refuse drugs. More resources should be provided to social workers in providing counselling and support services to students.

14.8 Some of the Tai Po students also remarked that there were already many anti-drug publicity activities to the extent that these activities were boring and had become less effective. They pointed out that the publicity materials were not quite useful as they seldom read them.

14.9 In addition, according to social workers interviewed in the course of the research, anti-drug activities were organized by the CCPSA in Tai Po including lunch time activities where students were asked to make a pledge to stay away from drugs, experience sharing, watching of anti-drug movies, etc. Small group activities were also organized for students at risk who were referred to the CCPSA by teachers or school social workers. Such activities were considered as an effective means to engage students.

14.10 Most social workers interviewed also opined that with additional social workers provided to schools that had participated in the Scheme, more

anti-drug activities could be organized for students. The stationing school social workers could then spend more time and establish rapport with students. The anti-drug culture at schools had strengthened and there were more discussions among students on drug-related issues.

14.11 Nevertheless, it was cautioned by social workers that most students did not like to join activities that were labelled as "anti-drug", especially for schools where the drug situation was not serious. Students were bored by so many anti-drug activities that were organized over the past few years. Besides, social workers also found it difficult to approach and engage students if the social workers were identified with anti-drug programmes. Students, on the other hand, were more receptive to activities that were designed to help them develop healthy lifestyles and positive values.

14.12 Looking ahead, most of Tai Po principals suggested that the Scheme should be continued, because they believed that the Scheme had helped schools develop anti-drug culture and helped students stay away from drugs. There should be a sustained effort to help students stay away from drugs. Besides, the Scheme had little impact on the day-to-day operations of schools. They suggested that the emphasis should be shifted from drug testing to cultivating an anti-drug culture in schools. Efforts to promote anti-drug attitude and culture among students should be sustained. A few principals suggested that the Scheme should be extended to schools in other districts, and not just confined to those in Tai Po. In addition, as part of the Scheme, a number of school principals suggested that students should be asked to make a pledge to stay away from drugs.

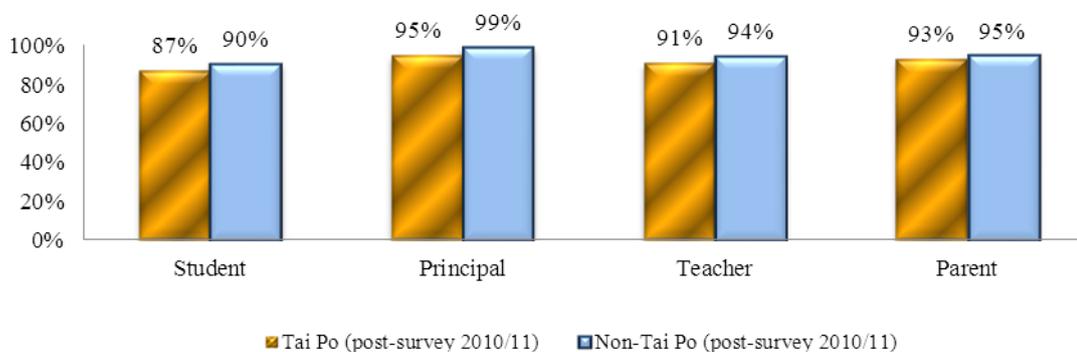
## *Early identification and intervention*

### *Physical fitness tests*

14.13 Apart from educational and promotional anti-drugs, a number of schools visited by the project team have introduced measures that facilitate early identification of students who have abused drugs or at risk of abusing drugs and provided timely intervention and assistance. In some schools, physical fitness tests and mental health screening are conducted by a team of medical professionals and social workers. Through these tests and screening, students with physical health, emotional and drug abuse problems are identified and timely intervention and assistance are provided to these students. During discussions with the social workers and nursing staff concerned, they pointed out that this approach was more acceptable to students, with little labelling effects, if any, on them. Needless to say, given the hidden nature of drug abuse, not all students who have abused drugs could be identified by teachers and social workers. Several school principals, teachers and social workers commented that some students who have abused drugs performed equally well as other students who had not in these physical fitness tests.

14.14 Findings of the June 2011 post-survey showed that the great majority of Tai Po students (87%) and non-Tai Po students (90%), Tai Po parents (93%) and non-Tai Po parents (95%), Tai Po teachers (91%) and non-Tai Po teachers (94%) as well as Tai Po principals (95%) and non-Tai Po principals (99%) agreed that activities like physical fitness test designed to trigger students' motivation to quit drugs should be organized. It is worth noting that the proportion of non-Tai Po students, parents and teachers holding such a view was slightly higher than those in Tai Po.

Percentage of respondents who agreed that activities like physical fitness tests should be organized to trigger motivation to quite refuse drugs



14.15 A number of Tai Po principals agreed that physical fitness tests currently adopted by a number of schools in Hong Kong could be used as a means to engage students. They suggested that the Scheme should be modified and strengthened, with a view to encourage participation by students. Physical fitness tests could be used as one of the means to engage students and increase participation.

14.16 Besides, for those who had abused drugs, they should be asked to undergo regular health checks to assess the impact of drugs on their health. Nevertheless, a few principals cautioned that physical fitness tests alone might not be able to help identify students who had abused drugs, especially those who were occasional drug abusers and had not abused drugs for a long time. Furthermore, for students who had health problems, they might not be suitable to undergo physical fitness tests.

14.17 Several non-Tai Po principals also supported the arrangement of physical fitness tests currently adopted in a number of schools in Hong Kong. They were of the view that schools should in any case pay attention to students' health problems, apart from drug abuse behaviour. It was also

suggested that consideration should be given to providing schools with nursing support services such that advice and guidance could be given to students on a whole range of problems related to physical and mental health.

14.18 A number of Tai Po teachers interviewed in the course of the study voiced their support of physical fitness tests as a means of engaging students. In fact, some schools had conducted simple physical fitness tests for their students. A few teachers nevertheless commented that activities like physical fitness tests could not replace drug testing as a means of identifying students who had abused drugs. They also cautioned that there would be a lot of follow up actions on students' health, after physical fitness tests, which might not be drug related.

14.19 Sharing their experience in conducting physical fitness tests with students, several social workers commented that this approach was quite successful in identifying students at risk, including those who had abused drugs. Students were asked to undergo different types of health checks and psychological tests. During individual interviews with social workers on the results of the health checks, a number of students admitted that they had abused drugs and were willing to accept treatment. The names of students so identified were not disclosed to their schools and hence the students were not afraid that they would be expelled from schools. The social workers reckoned that information obtained during the interviews from students was very useful in designing follow up counselling services to the students concerned, and was more valuable than drug test results.

14.20 Indeed, many social workers interviewed in the course of the research agreed that the use of physical fitness tests, preferably by medical personnel, was useful in engaging students and alerting them of the adverse impact of

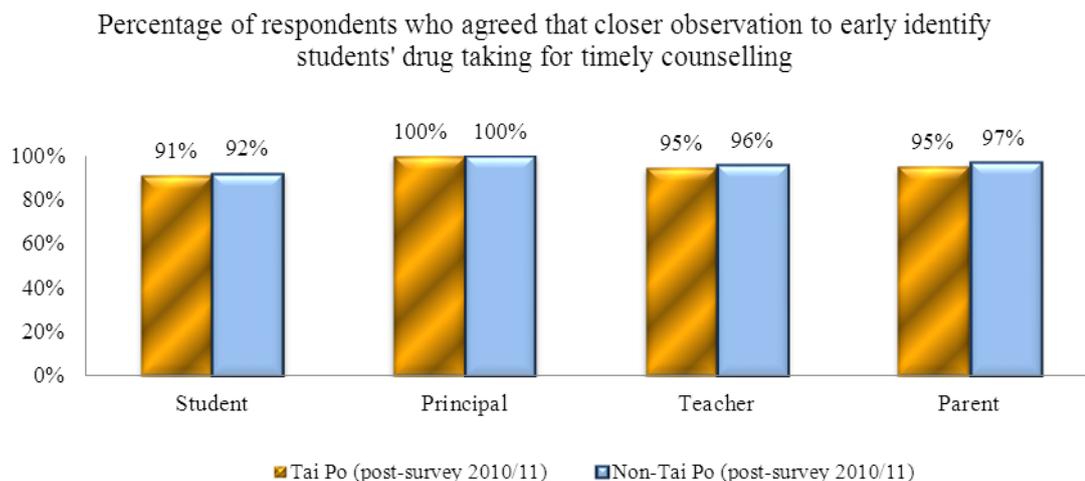
drugs on their health. Physical fitness tests, as part of the healthy school programme, could also increase students' awareness of their health status. Care should be taken to avoid any labelling effects on students identified to have abused drugs. Several social workers also cautioned that some student drug abusers might not easily identified through a simple physical fitness test. A few social workers added that for some schools conducting physical fitness tests for their students, the school principals did not mind if the test results including the names of students identified to be at risk or to have taken drugs, were not disclosed to the schools, as long as timely counselling and treatment were provided to the students concerned.

14.21 Sharing their experience on conducting physical fitness tests on youth, including students, at risk, several medical practitioners interviewed in the course of conducting the research opined that in conducting the tests, the care and attention given to youth, including students, by medical practitioners and social workers were an important factor facilitating subsequent engagement of the students concerned. If the students felt that other cared about their wellbeing, they would more willing to receive counselling and treatment. The medical practitioners emphasized that early identification and timely intervention were important. For those identified to have abused drugs through the tests, follow up counselling by social workers was required to help them quit drugs. The identity of students identified should not be disclosed to schools.

#### *Other means of early identification and timely intervention*

14.22 Findings of the June 2011 post-survey showed that the great majority of Tai Po students (91%) and non-Tai Po students (92%), Tai Po parents

(95%) and non-Tai Po parents (97%), Tai Po teachers (95%) and non-Tai Po teachers (96%) as well as all Tai Po principals and non-Tai Po principals agreed that steps should be taken to closely observe indication of drug taking by students for the purposes of early identification and timely counselling. It is worth noting that the proportion of non-Tai Po students, parents and teachers holding such a view was slightly higher than those in Tai Po.



14.23 In some schools visited in the course of the research, additional social workers are deployed to proactively engage students, especially those who have emotional or behavioural problems and considered to be at risk by teachers or school social workers. A number of school principals and social workers commented that it was not too difficult for experienced teachers and social workers to detect changes in students' behaviour that could be related to drug use. Once rapport was established with and trust obtained from the students concerned, it would not be too difficult to engage the students, finding out from them whether they had abused drugs and persuading them to receive assistance and treatment. Needless to say, given the hidden nature of drug abuse, not all students who have abused drugs could be identified by teachers and social workers.

14.24 During discussions with social workers, several of them stressed that the Scheme was only effective as a preventive tool. In order to provide timely assistance to students who had abused drugs, school social workers, social workers of outreach teams and those of CCPSA should step up efforts to early identify students who had abused drugs or at risk of doing so and provide timely intervention and assistance. The use of hair drug testing, for example, which had a longer detection window than urine drug testing, should also be explored.

14.25 Several social workers remarked that after spending sufficiently long time with students, they could identify those who were at risk, including risk factors might not be drug related. Through different group activities or individual counselling, social workers could build up good relationship with students and win their trust. For students concerned, many of them would voluntarily disclose their behavioural problems, including drug abuse, to social workers. With the consent of the students who had abused drugs, the social workers would refer them to CCPSA for further counselling and treatment. It should also be noted that students who were at risk were not confined to or necessarily those who performed less well at schools. Some students who seemed to be behaving well could also be at risk.

14.26 Many social workers pointed out that most secondary school students were aware of the harmful effects of drugs. However, they did not feel the impact of drugs on their health when they started or occasionally abused drugs. From their experience, students would seek help from them only when they had serious health problems due to the effects of drugs. However, by that time it was too late, although it was better than not seeking help. While recognizing the desirability for early identification and timely intervention, several social workers cautioned that the resources required for early

identification and timely intervention was quite significant and should not be under-estimated. Effective intervention required sustained efforts for a fairly long period of time. After successful treatment, some students might relapse to taking drugs, when they faced difficulties or had emotional problems.

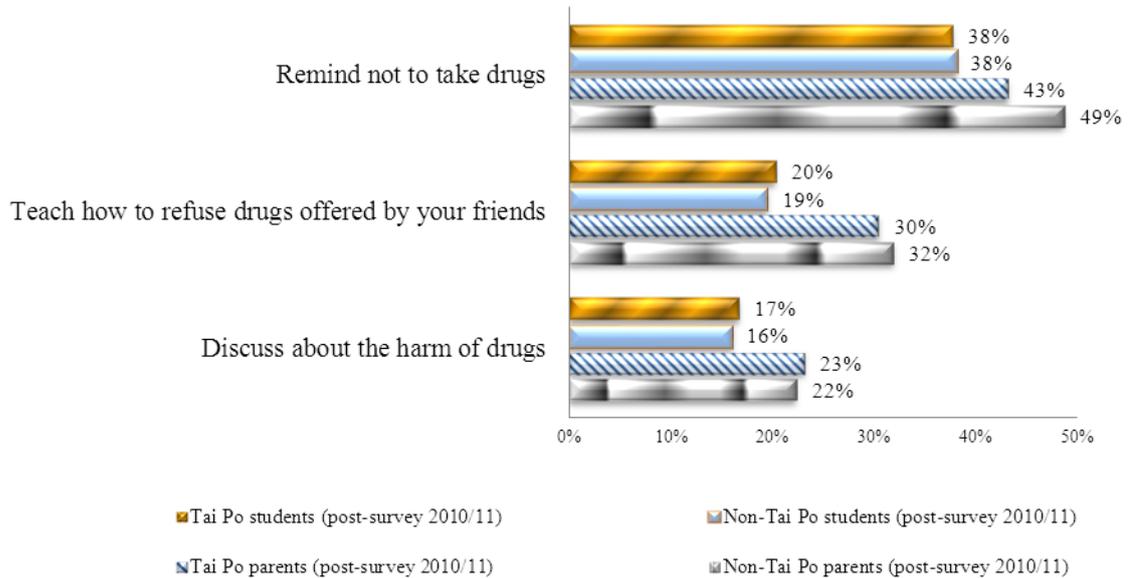
14.27 Several social workers outside Tai Po shared their experience of providing nursing service to schools. A nurse from their organization would visit schools for a few days in a month, offering counselling services to students on a whole range of health related issues, including health problems arising from abusing drugs. Such service was welcome by students, though concern was raised by a few other social workers that this might have significant resource implications. Other social workers also shared their experienced of involving medical doctors to provide treatment services to students who had abused drugs during lunch hours. Such arrangement was also welcome by the students. As some student drug abusers preferred to go to private clinics rather than public hospitals on drug related health problems, it was suggested that medical practitioners in private practices should be encouraged to work closely with social workers to provide timely counselling and assistance to student drug abusers.

### ***Support to parents***

14.28 Parental involvement in anti-drug education of their children is weak as revealed in the June 2010 survey and June 2011 post-survey. For example, less than half of the parents (43% for schools in Tai Po and 49% for schools outside Tai Po) reminded their children that they should not take drugs. Less than one third of the parents (30% and 32%) often taught their children how to refuse drugs offered by friends. Less than one quarter of the parents (23%

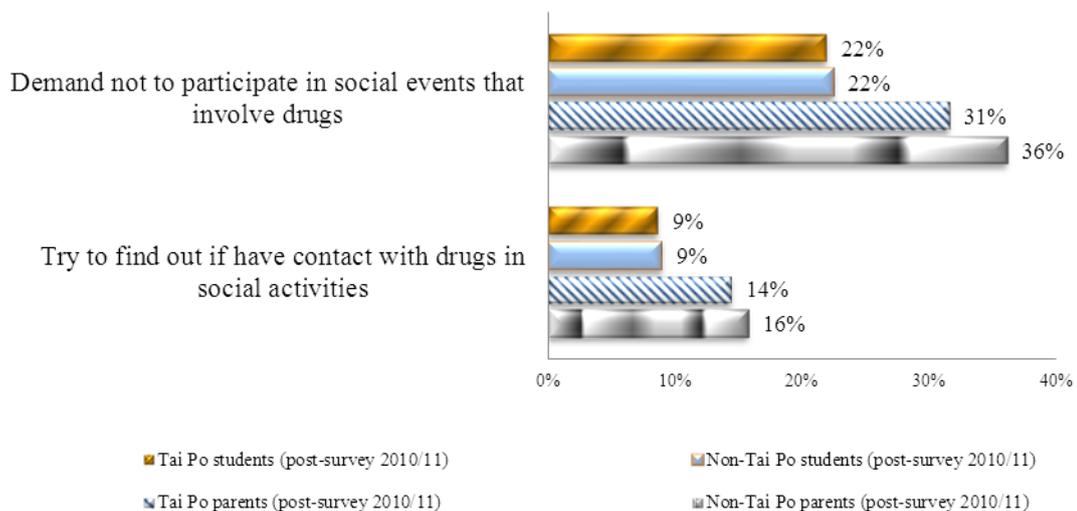
and 22%) discussed with their children about the harmful effects of drugs.

Percentage of respondents by whether parent often used the following means to help student stay away from drugs

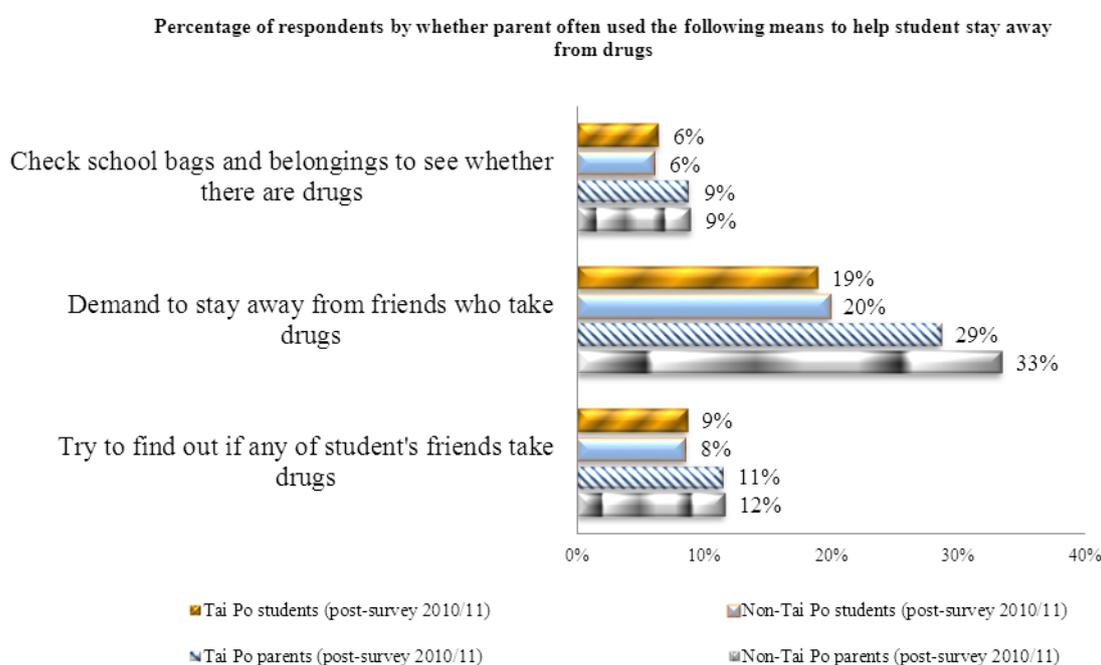


14.29 Furthermore, only about one third of the parents (31% and 36%) often requested their children not to participate in any social activities which would expose them to drugs. As low as 14% of the Tai Po parents and 16% of non-Tai Po parents often tried to find out whether any of their social activities would expose them to drugs.

Percentage of respondents by whether parent often used the following means to help student stay away from drugs



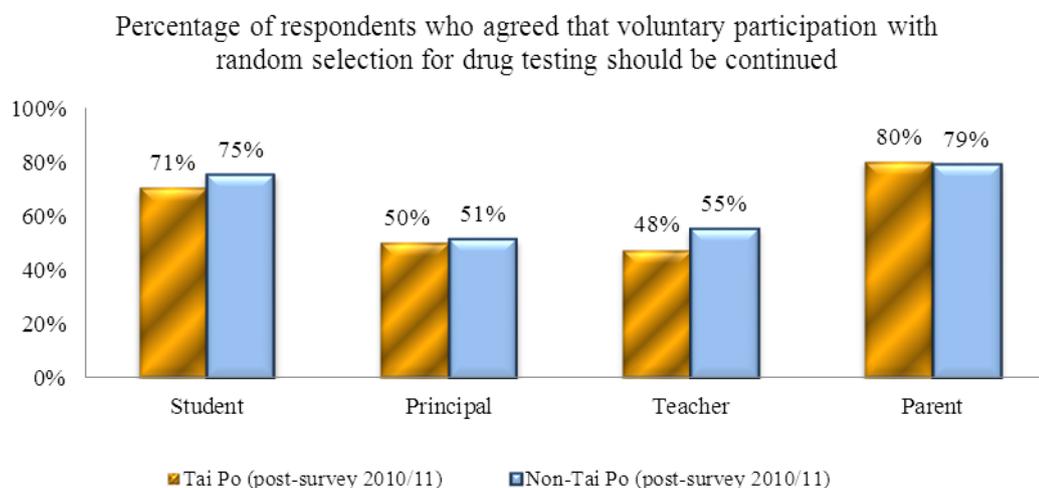
14.30 In addition, only about 29% of Tai Po parents and 33% of non-Tai Po parents often requested their children to stay away from their friends who had taken drugs, Slightly more than one tenth of the parents (11% for Tai Po parents and 12% for non-Tai Po parents) often tried to find out if any of their children’s friends had taken drugs. Less than one tenth of the parents (9% and 9%) searched their children’s school bags or other belongings to check if there was any drug.



14.31 The research findings presented above point to the need for providing support to parents in helping them to deal with drug-related problems of their children. In connection with the Scheme, parents could also play a more active role in encouraging their children to participate in the Scheme, and in various anti-drug education activities organized by schools.

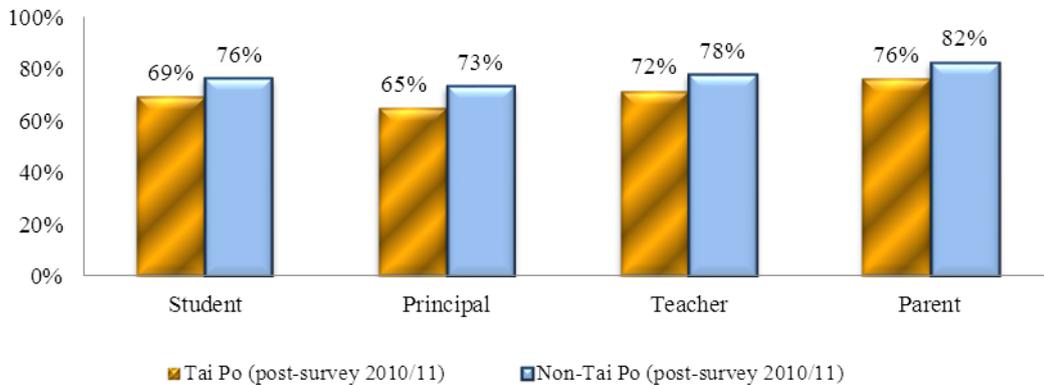
### *School drug testing: voluntary or compulsory*

14.32 For the Scheme in Tai Po, participation is voluntary and written consent from both parents and students is required. As discussed above, students participate or not in drug testing for a variety of reasons not related to whether or not they have abused drugs. Findings of the June 2011 post-survey showed that the majority of Tai Po students (71%) and non-Tai Po students (75%) and Tai Po parents (80%) and non-Tai Po parents (79%) supported voluntary participation with random selection of students for drug testing, same as the Scheme in Tai Po. However, slightly less than half of Tai Po teachers (48%) and principals (50%) supported this arrangement, and slightly more than half of non-Tai Po teachers (55%) and principals (51%) of secondary schools supported this approach.



14.33 On the other hand, most of Tai Po students (69%) and non-Tai Po students (76%) and Tai po parents (76%) and non-Tai Po parents (82%), Tai Po teachers (72%) and non-Tai Po teachers (78%) and Tai Po principals (65%) and non-Tai Po principals (73%) supported compulsory. In particular, the proportion of students, parents, teachers and school principals in favour of compulsory drug testing was higher than the corresponding percentage for those in favour of voluntary drug testing.

Percentage of respondents who supported compulsory drug testing either by random selection OR based on reasonable suspicion



14.34 Most of Tai Po principals were of the view that school drug testing should be compulsory. They believed that teachers, parents and other school stakeholders (e.g. school management committees) would also support compulsory drug testing. A few school principals commented that if participation in the Scheme was voluntary, or if students who had participated were allowed not to undergo drug testing if sampled to do so, the Scheme would be less effective. Several principals added that if abusing drugs was illegal and had serious adverse impact on students, students should not be given a choice not to participate in drug testing which was designed to help them stay away from drugs.

14.35 While they were aware that compulsory drug testing was not allowed under current laws, most principals hoped that this would be changed through amending existing legislation. With legal backing, schools could either random sample or select with reasonable suspicion students for drug testing. Drawing an analogy between drug testing and other school regulations such as wearing of school uniforms, several school principals were of the view that making school drug testing compulsory should be acceptable to students and their parents.

14.36 School principals were not worried that students would drop out from schools if drug testing became compulsory. Students dropped out from schools for a variety of reasons. On the contrary, many students hoped to remain in schools and this was also the wish of their parents even though they had misbehaved. This explained why students and their parents did not want their drug taking behaviour known to schools for fear that schools would try to expel them from schools.

14.37 If students did drop out of schools, teachers and social workers would try out to find out why the students dropped out and offered whatever assistance required. After all, one of the tasks of schools was to cultivate a caring and inviting school environment such that students wanted to remain in schools and experienced the joy of learning. Trying not to find out delinquent and unruly behaviour of students and to provide timely assistance, for fear that students would be alienated and drop out from schools, was obviously not a correct approach if protection of students' interests was one of schools' priorities.

14.38 Nearly all of non-Tai Po principals were of the view that school drug testing should be made compulsory. A few of them believed that if the Scheme was voluntary, it would not be effective. This was because for students who had abused drugs, they could choose not to participate in the Scheme. Even though they had participated in the Scheme and selected for drug testing, they could choose not to produce their urine samples for drug testing.

14.39 Most school principals expected that the Scheme should aim at early identification and timely intervention as one of its objectives, which could only be effectively achieved through compulsory drug testing. With

compulsory drug testing, it also helped remove labelling effects, if any, on schools that had implemented drug testing. Random selection of students for compulsory drug testing was probably the best approach, as it had no labeling effect on students. While selection of students for compulsory drug testing based on reasonable suspicion was likely to be more cost effective, it might result in unnecessary argument on the basis of reasonable suspicion, between teachers on the one hand and students and their parents on the other.

14.40 A few of Tai Po principals and non-Tai Po principals cautioned that there might be opposition from some members of the community against compulsory drug testing. Besides, if compulsory drug testing was allowed through legislation, this should not be confined to students at schools. Thus, they recognized that currently it was not the right time to introduce compulsory drug testing as there had not been sufficient discussions over the issue. However, they hoped the government should start thinking about this and engage relevant stakeholders and the community in a series of meaningful discussions.

14.41 Parents and educationalists interviewed in the course of the study also suggested that Government should consider amending the law to allow compulsory drug testing. Students could be randomly selected or selected based on reasonable suspicion for drug tests, though some parents were not in favour of the latter as this might give rise to arguments between schools on the one hand and students and their parents on the other. It was also essential that schools should inform students that they would not expel from schools students identified to have abused drugs. Schools should provide counselling and support services to the students concerned to help them quit drugs. To avoid labelling effects on schools, the Scheme should be extended to all schools in Hong Kong. Several parents anticipated that some students might

drop out from schools to avoid compulsory drug tests. However, they reckoned that those students at risk would drop out from schools for other reasons, or later when drugs had seriously impaired their health.

14.42 Several students interviewed in the course of conducting the study, on the other hand, did not think that students would drop out from schools simply to avoid compulsory drug testing. Students dropped out probably for other reasons like lack of interest in schooling. Several students interviewed considered it acceptable to introduce compulsory drug testing, which they considered as more effective. This would have a greater deterrent effect on students. For students who had not abused drugs, this would give them an opportunity to prove they had not abused drugs. For those who had abused drugs, it would strengthen their resolve to quit drugs. These students should not object to compulsory drug testing because the purpose was to help them stay away from drugs. Most students would not discriminate against those who had taken drugs, because they knew that students abused drugs due to bad peer pressure. They believed students abused drugs in order to relieve pressure, and Government should address this problem.

14.43 On the other hand, a few students interviewed in the course of the research indicated that they opposed to compulsory drug testing because it would not be welcome by students. They feared that some students might not attend schools in order to avoid drug testing. A few also raised the concern that this might result in an invasion of the privacy of students if students were compelled to take drug tests.

14.44 Most of Tai Po teachers expressed support of compulsory drug testing. They also believed that most students and parents would support compulsory drug testing. They considered such an arrangement would be fair to all

students. Without compulsion, the Scheme would not be effective in serving the purposes of early identification and timely intervention for students who were at risk. They also suggested that adequate resources should be made available to provide counselling and treatment to students identified to have abused drugs. While noting that the present voluntary approach was not effective as students could through various means avoid drug testing, the Scheme was still useful in promoting a drug-free culture at school. Nevertheless, several teachers admitted that if students were unwilling to participate in the Scheme, it was very difficult to compel them to do so. They also cautioned that some members of the community might not support compulsory drug testing.

14.45 During discussions with social workers, several of them pointed out that they noticed some students who had abused drugs did not participate in the Scheme. These students admitted to social workers that they had various means to convince their parents that it was not necessary to participate in the Scheme. Some students even signed the consent documents not to participate on behalf of their parents. If students insisted not to participate in the Scheme, their parents would usually not force the students to participate. For this group of students, given the voluntary nature of drug testing, the Scheme was not effective at all.

14.46 Most social workers opined that from their experience student drug abusers usually did not seek help voluntarily. This was partly because, unlike adult drug abusers, the health conditions of student drug abusers had not yet deteriorated to the extent that would prompt them to seek help. Students took drugs, in particularly for the first time, mainly out of curiosity and/or under peer pressure. Many of them knew about the harmful effects of drugs, but had no time to think about it when they were offered drugs. In general, student

drug abusers sought help from social workers mainly when their drug taking behaviour was found out by their parents, schools or other friends and were forced to seek help.

14.47 In the circumstances, most social workers admitted with compulsory drug testing would be more effective. A few remarked that if the purpose of the Scheme was mainly educational and promotional, then whether drug testing was compulsory or not was immaterial. It should be clearly understood by all concerned that voluntary drug testing would not be effective for the purposes of early identification. A few social workers suggested that the Government should make up their mind about the purpose(s) of the Scheme, whether it was for prevention or early identification, or both.

14.48 Several social workers voiced support of compulsory drug testing. As students at risk, including those who had abused drugs, would usually not seek help voluntarily, compulsory drug testing would facilitate early identification and timely intervention. This was in the best interest of students. It would not be desirable for students who had abused drugs to wait until their health had been adversely damaged by drugs to seek help. Nevertheless, a few social workers, while agreeing that compulsory drug testing would be more effective, feared that there might be great resistance from students. If students identified to have abused drugs through compulsory drug testing were not willing to accept treatment, it would be more difficult for social workers to engage these students and provide assistance to them. There should be adequate follow up services and sufficient resources to cope with students identified through compulsory drug testing, including those required to tackle more difficult cases arising from students who were not willing to receive treatment after having been identified to have abused drugs or who dropped

out from schools in order to avoid drug testing.

14.49 Other social workers interviewed in the course of conducting the study explained that while they did not support compulsory drug testing, they were not against it. Their main concern was whether sufficient support services were available to deal with problems arising from compulsory drug testing, including counselling and treatment services to students identified to have abused drugs. Schools and NGOs should be adequately prepared to deal with students identified to have abused through compulsory drug test, including those who were reluctant to receive counselling and treatment, especially if the number of students so identified was not small. There should also be adequate medical support services.

14.50 However, a number of them feared that if drug testing became compulsory, some students might choose not to attend schools. Thus, it was essential that support services should be available to deal with such or other related problems arising compulsory drug testing. Schools in cooperation with NGO should be prepared to provide adequate support services to students who had abused drugs, while allowing these students to maintain their linkage with schools and continue their schooling. To reduce resistance to compulsory drug testing from parents and students, consideration could be given to not disclosing to schools the names of students identified to have abused drugs through drug testing. There should be sufficient safeguards to ensure the students identified would not be expelled from schools.

14.51 A few social workers cautioned that compulsory drug testing was quite controversial and might have a negative impact on students. Some members of the community might find it unacceptable. There should be sufficient justifications to support the introduction of compulsory drug testing.

They appreciated the concerns of principals, teachers and parents and their wish that students who had abused drugs should be identified at an early stage and provided timely counselling and treatment. However, some students, especially those who had not abused drugs, might not accept compulsory drug testing. Obviously, situations in different schools were different and it was difficult to generalize. Most social workers interviewed that it was the right moment to discuss about these issues, including issues related to legal aspects of compulsory drug testing.

14.52 There were social workers interviewed in the course of the research, on the other hand, who were against compulsory drug testing. In their opinion, compulsory drug testing would ruin relationship between schools and students, and between social workers and students. As a result, it would be difficult for schools and social workers to engage students and effectively provide counseling and assistance to them. If students dropped out from schools, social workers would have to devote more time to locate and contact these students and to offer assistance.

14.53 These social workers were of the view that there were methods other than drug testing that could help students quit and stay away from drugs. Social workers should have little difficulties identifying students at risk, including those who had abused drugs. For these students, counselling and treatment services could be provided to them, individually and/or in small groups. Once mutual trust was established between social workers and the students concerned, social workers would be in a position to help them.

## Chapter 15 Observations

### *Effectiveness of the Scheme*

15.1 This is an extended research to evaluate the 2010/11 Scheme. The Project Team found that the 2010/11 Scheme is effective as a preventive measure to enhance the resolve of most students to stay away from drugs. It has enhanced their resolve to refuse illicit drugs, helped build an anti-drug culture in schools and triggered the motivation of those students who had abused drugs to quit drugs. Even among students who had not participated in the Scheme, more than half of them shared similar view.

15.2 Apart from the subjective perspective of stakeholders, there are also objective indicators suggesting that the Scheme has been effective. The Scheme is found to be effective in raising the knowledge of drugs for Tai Po students, regardless of whether or not the students have participated in the Scheme, while the impact is not significant for non-Tai Po students (please see para. 10.4 – 10.6). The self-efficacy for drug avoidance has increased for both Tai Po and non-Tai Po students after the completion of the 2010/11 Scheme, but the extent of improvement is greater for Tai Po students (please see para. 11.17). Nevertheless, it is also noted that students' misconception about drugs has worsened (please see para. 11.6).

15.3 In addition, based on the self-reports of students, while the percentage of Tai Po students who admitted to have abused drugs in June 2010 was higher than that for non-Tai Po students, the corresponding percentage in June 2011 was lower for Tai Po students, as compared with that for non-Tai Po students. In June 2011, the percentage of non-Tai Po students who admitted to have started taking drugs during the previous 6 months was more

than double the corresponding percentage for Tai Po students. The findings serve as an indication that the Scheme has played an effective role in preventing students from starting drugs taking.

15.4 Based on views obtained through in-depth interviews, social workers were of a view that school drug testing was effective as a deterrent measure for students participating, especially for those who had abused drugs out of curiosity and whose resolve in refusing drugs was less strong. On the whole, most Tai Po social workers were of the view that although the Scheme had not identified any drug taking students, the Scheme had achieved its intended educational effects. With increased level of awareness of the harmful effects of drugs and more frequent discussions among students themselves and between students and teachers or social workers, students would try to stay away from drugs, or at least reduce the frequency of abusing drugs, according to the views of several social workers interviewed.

15.5 Several social workers also noted that the Scheme had conveyed a firm and clear anti-drug message to students. Some students had, as a result, reduced the frequency of or avoided completely going out with peer groups to activities that might involve drugs taking. From the perspective of anti-drug prevention and education, many social workers noted that it was better to continue implementing the Scheme rather than discontinuing it. Several social workers were of the view that implementing voluntary drug testing in schools in other districts was worth trying. Students should also be informed of the positive outcomes of the Scheme.

15.6 Parents and educationalists interviewed in the course of the research also agreed that the Scheme was effective from a preventive and educational perspective. Parents had also benefitted from the anti-drug activities

organized for them. They suggested that the Scheme should be extended to schools in other districts, in order to achieve its intended preventive and educational impact.

15.7 In short, Tai Po principals, teachers, students and parents opined that the Scheme was effective, as evidenced by the significant improvements in students' knowledge of drugs, efficacy to avoid drug and drug taking situation as compared with those outside Tai Po. Findings of the research also indicated that most of Tai Po principals, teachers, students and parents supported the continuation of voluntary school drug testing in the coming school year. For non-Tai Po teachers, students and parents, the majority of them also shared similar view.

### *Acceptability of drug testing*

15.8 Findings of the research showed that most students were not worried about the process of drug testing. Most school principals, teachers, students and parents believe that personal data of students were protected. Most students and parents were also satisfied with drug testing. In particular, increasing proportions of school principals, teachers, students and parents had a positive view of drug testing.

15.9 Furthermore, the great majority of students and parents believed that drug testing does not have a negative impact on family relationship, students' trust in schools and teacher-student relationship. The percentage holding such a view is higher for the 2010/11 Scheme, as compared with that for the 2009/10 Scheme.

15.10 In short, thanks to efforts of schools, the SDT team and government departments concerned, the Scheme was implemented smoothly, to the satisfaction of students and parents concerned. In the words of most Tai Po principals, drug testing had become part of school life with minimal disruption to other aspects of the school operation.

15.11 Admittedly, school drug testing in Tai Po has come a long way in overcoming opposition and dispelling misconception, before it was accepted by students and their parents. Tremendous success has been achieved by Tai Po schools in allaying concerns over privacy and students' rights, ensuring that voluntary participation in drug testing by students and minimizing embarrassment to students selected for drug testing and disturbances to school work. For schools outside Tai Po that plan to implement drug testing, they will inevitably have to tackle similar issues and make adjustments to the drug testing procedures in response to feedback from students, parents, teachers and social workers. The experience of drug testing in schools in Tai Po will offer valuable references. The Project Team believes that as long as drug testing is implemented with care and caution, taking into account the specific circumstances of schools and needs of students, schools outside Tai Po planning to introduce drug testing should have little difficulty winning the support of students, parents, teachers and social workers.

### ***Enhancing the effectiveness of the Scheme***

#### *Preventive education and counseling services*

15.12 A number of suggestions were put forward by school social workers on further refinements to the operational arrangement of the Scheme. For

example, in the 2010/11 Scheme, school social workers were informed of seven days in advance the date selected for drug testing. This had affected scheduling of activities organised by school social workers. In the Scheme, anti-drug education and promotional activities were conducted by the SDT team while school social workers provided separately anti-drug preventive education and counseling to students. Due to the need to protect privacy of students, there was little communication between the SDT team and school social workers on the needs of individual students.

15.13 A number of school social workers suggested that there should be a closer collaboration between the SDT team and school social workers in providing preventive education and counseling services to students, especially those who are likely to be identified in the course of drug testing. Several social workers suggested that schools should establish a comprehensive drug policy, including measures to protect students and deal with students identified to have abused drugs. Such policy should be drawn up with participation of parents and NGO involved.

#### *Support to parents*

15.14 As noted by the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse, “the importance of parents in preventing youth drug abuse cannot be over-emphasised. The Task Force fully supports enhancement of preventive education programmes for parents through different channels and means.” A variety of anti-drug activities for parents, including workshops and seminars have been organised by ND, SWD, EDB, Parent-Teacher Associations and NGOs.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Report of the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse (November 2008), p.38.

15.15 Findings from the June 2010 survey and June 2011 post-survey showed that for students who had discussed with their parents about their participation in the Scheme, a higher proportion of them had eventually participated in the Scheme, as compared with those who had not discussed with their parents. It follows that parental involvement in anti-drug education of their children would lead to a more positive attitude towards the Scheme and participation.

15.16 However, parents were not keen to get involved in anti-drug education of their children. For example, less than half of the parents reminded their children that they should not take drugs and less than one quarter of the parents discussed with their children about the harmful effects of drugs. Furthermore, only about one-third of the parents often requested their children not to participate in social activities that might expose them to drugs. As low as 14% of the Tai Po parents and 16% of the non-Tai Po parents often tried to find out whether any of their children's social activities might expose them to drugs. Slightly more than one-tenth of the parents (11% for Tai Po parents and 12% for non-Tai Po parents) often tried to find out if any of their children's friends had taken drugs.

15.17 If parents did not cooperate with schools in helping students stay away from drugs, as remarked by a number of school principals, the effectiveness of schools' efforts would be much reduced. It was also noted that there was not much discussion between students and their parents on the Scheme, even though most parents should be aware of it. Some parents simply did not have time for such discussions with their children. Several principals were also of the view that based on their observations and interactions with parents, when students were suspected to have abused drugs, some of their parents were unable to handle the problem properly and to offer

the much needed help to the students concerned. Some parents might even be reluctant to seek help from schools for fear that doing so would jeopardise the schooling of their children.

15.18 As suggested by principals, specific support should be provided to parents helping them to strengthen family relationship and encourage them to seek help if required. If resources permit, as suggested by teachers and social workers, more activities should be organised targeting families. Some students abused drugs because of problems arising from their family relationship. It would be helpful if more efforts be directed towards poor family relationship and other family situations, in particular for families with students at risk.

15.19 It was noted that a number of programmes funded by BDF had been organised by NGO in cooperation with schools, to provide anti-drug education to parents and to equip parents with the necessary knowledge and skills to help their children understand the harmful effects of drugs, strengthen their children's resolve and guide them how to refuse drugs and to identify at an early stage their children who were at risk of drug abuse. Through a parent support network, parents are empowered not only to protect their children from drugs but also to offer help to other parents in need. If such programmes are implemented in conjunction with school drug testing, it would help parents to play a more active role in encouraging students to participate in drug testing, and better prepare parents to deal with situations when their children refuse to undergo drug testing or when their children were identified to have abused drugs.

### *Support to teachers*

15.20 While students are at schools, teachers are in frequent contact with them. As pointed out by the Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications, apart from learning and teaching, teachers have to handle a wide range of responsibilities essential to the whole-person development of students, including moral, social and civic education, guidance and counseling.<sup>39</sup>

15.21 Teachers' involvement in the Scheme was minimal. They were mainly responsible for collecting consent forms from students, which did not significantly increase teachers' workload. Nevertheless, teachers are responsible for the actual delivery of anti-drug education to students. For example, in delivering life education classes, teachers would discuss with students about the harmful effects of drugs. Teachers also work closely with social workers to identify signs of delinquent and unruly behaviour of students, including drug abuse, and take immediate, remedial actions where appropriate. In case a student sampled for drug testing refuse to undergo drug testing, either the school principals or teachers responsible will have to inform the students' parents.

15.22 In connection with providing assistance to students who have abused drugs, findings of both the June 2010 survey and June 2011 post-survey showed that the majority of school principals (June 2010: 83%; June 2011: 85%) and teachers (June 2010: 83%; June 2011: 84%) of Tai Po considered that teachers should follow up with students who were found to have abused drugs to offer help and advice.

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39 Advisory Committee on Teacher Education and Qualifications (2003), *Towards a Learning Profession*, p.9.

15.23 As pointed out by the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse, “many teachers are not that well-equipped with knowledge and skills in delivering drug education to students and handling drug cases effectively.”<sup>40</sup> A number of measures are now in place to help teachers, including training courses and resource kits. As recommended by the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse, structured professional training for teachers should be enhanced to reinforce teachers’ competence and knowledge in delivering drug education and in handling at-risk students.<sup>41</sup>

15.24 During discussions with social workers, a number of them pointed out that teachers, through their day-to-day contact with students, would be able to identify students who were at risk. They could refer these students to social workers for follow up counselling and treatment. Drug abuse was related to or caused by other behavioural problems, which could be identified, without much difficulty by teachers or social workers. It was suggested that more training should be provided to teachers on how to deal with students suspected to have abused drugs.

15.25 For schools implementing the Scheme, it provides a unique opportunity for teachers to engage students, in meaningful discussions over drug testing, the harmful effects of drugs as well as ways and means of resisting bad peer influence and refusing drugs when offered. As pointed out in the research finding presented above, some students may have misconception about drugs. Some parents’ involvement in the Scheme and anti-drug education is weak or almost non-existent. Through interactions with parents and by observing students’ attitudes and behaviour and their changes during the year, as the Scheme and the various anti-drug education programmes are implemented, teachers would be in a better position to

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40 *Report of the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse* (November 2008), p.46.

41 *Report of the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse* (November 2008), p.54.

identify students, including those who have and have not participated in the Scheme, likely to be at risk or in need of advisory and counseling services from teachers and social workers, and take early remedial actions. Needless to say, extreme care has to be exercised by teachers in engaging students on matters related to the Scheme, to ensure that participation in the Scheme by students is entirely voluntary. Care should also be taken to avoid any labeling effects on students for their participation or non-participation in the Scheme. For schools implementing drug testing, apart from briefing provided to teachers on the Scheme, additional training to teachers on drug related issues would definitely be helpful.

#### *Support to students*

15.26 It is observed that the misconception about drugs, though at a low level, has increased between October 2010 and June 2011 for Tai Po students as well as non-Tai Po students, and the extent of deterioration is worse for non-Tai Po students. Furthermore, the percentage of students who have abused drugs was higher in June 2011, as compared with October 2010.

15.27 There is thus an urgent need to help students, especially those at risk, to correct their misconception about drugs. It is noted that as part of the Scheme, more anti-drug preventive educational activities have been arranged for students, through the provision of additional social workers by additional funding to schools. Activities involving small groups or individual students identified to be at risk have also been arranged, which are considered as more effective in helping students at risk to stay away from drugs.

15.28 This research showed that the Scheme is effective through its

educational and deterrent effect. It also helps foster and nurture schools' anti-drug culture. In particular, given the voluntary nature of the Scheme, opportunity should be taken to further strengthen its effectiveness by stepping up anti-drug education and counseling services targeting students at risk. In short, with the implementation of drug testing conveying a loud and clear message to all students on schools' anti-drug commitment, sensitising students on issues related drugs, anti-drug programmes targeting students at risk will likely to enhance the effectiveness of the Scheme.

### *Increasing drug testing effectiveness*

15.29 It is noted that the purpose of the Scheme in general, and school drug testing in particular, is for preventive and educational purposes. However, teachers, students and parents expressed the wish that the deterrent effect of school drug testing should be strengthened. Several school social workers also pointed out that some students might be able to escape from drug testing by saying that they had taken medications. It is also noted that with the present urine testing method using Point of Collection Test (POCT), the detection window is quite short. For students who have taken drugs a few days before the test, they might not be identified through drug testing. Thus, consideration could be given to enhance drug testing effectiveness. For instance, students who claim to have taken medications may still be required to produce their urine samples which will then be taken to the laboratory for drug testing. The use of other bodily samples, such as hair, which has a longer detection window, should be considered for future drug testing schemes.

15.30 Findings from the June 2011 post-survey showed that the great majority of students (Tai Po 88%; non-Tai Po 89%), school principals (85%

and 95% respectively), teachers (90% and 90%) and parents (92% and 93%) agreed that other drug testing methods, such as hair drug testing, could also be considered. As discussed above, a number of drug testing methods are available. For instance, urine samples collected from students can be tested in the laboratory instead of on the spot using POCT. Alternatively, hair samples instead of urine samples may be used.

15.31 Several Tai Po school principals opined that they had no objection to the use of hair to conduct drug testing in principle. However, they cautioned that students should be informed the amount of hair required for drug testing and its potential impact on their appearances. They suggested the students should be consulted when conducting the use of hair drug testing.

15.32 Several parents interviewed in the course of the study shared principals' views. All Tai Po students interviewed also indicated that it would not be acceptable to them if a large amount of hair was required for hair drug testing.

15.33 By following a simple instruction guide, staff with basic training would have little difficulty collecting hair samples from students. With hair drug testing, a longer detection window of several days to several months is possible, as compared with one to several days for urine drug testing. The cost of conducting drug tests using hair sample can be reduced considerably if more NGOs or schools adopt hair drug testing allowing economies of scale in conducting laboratory tests.

15.34 Admittedly, there are pros and cons for the use of different drug testing methods such as urine and hair drug testing. For example, urine screening test using POCT is cheaper and easier to administer. Students being

tested could be informed almost immediately the results of the preliminary test. However, urine drug test using POCT is less reliable compared with laboratory testing and has a short detection window. For hair drug test, which has to be conducted in the laboratory, is reliable and has a longer detection window compared with urine drug test. However, it is more expensive and the students have to wait for a few days before they are informed of the test results.

15.35 It is noted that drug testing in the Scheme is part of a whole range of preventive and educational measures aimed at deterring students from abusing drugs and giving them a reason to refuse drugs when persuaded by peers. Thus, apart from sensitivity and specificity of drug testing in the Scheme, it is also necessary to consider other factors such as the need to minimise disruptions to school activities, to secure acceptance of drug testing by students and to keep resources devoted to drug testing to an absolute minimum thus freeing resources for other preventive and counseling work. Besides, it should not be forgotten that there is arrangement in place to avoid any false-positive case through a follow-up confirmatory laboratory test. Naturally, circumstances differ from schools to schools, and a school-based approach is probably the best way forward.

#### *Encouraging participation - teachers' involvement*

15.36 Though the percentage of students participating in the 2010/11 Scheme, at around 57% based on the findings of the June 2011 post-survey, is not low, it is lower than that for the 2009/10 Scheme, at around 64% based on the June 2010 survey. Furthermore, research findings showed that about 15% of students who had participated in the 2009/10 Scheme did not participate in

the 2010/11 Scheme. For students who had not participated in the 2009/10 Scheme, only 9% participated in the 2010/11 Scheme. A number of Tai Po school principals anticipated that if the Scheme continued to be implemented in 2011/12 following largely similar format, the participation rate would likely to be lower.

15.37 Findings suggested that the Scheme has a beneficial impact on students regardless of whether the students participate or not in the Scheme especially for those who have participated in the Scheme. Realising the beneficial impact of the Scheme and the importance of creating an atmosphere conducive to nurturing an anti-drug culture, a number of schools indicated that they will take active steps to encourage students participate in the Scheme. For example, proper recognitions were given to classes with higher participation rates. Proactive steps had also been taken to consult stakeholders including members of student organisations to solicit their support on school drug testing. These students would in turn help promote school drug testing to other students.

15.38 Tai Po school principals suggested that publicity of the Scheme should be stepped up. Briefing sessions should be organised for all students and their parents, and should not be confined to Secondary 1 students. The purpose was to ensure that both students and their parents got the message that schools still regarded anti-drug activities as always been one of their priorities, and to raise students' and their parents' concern on the gravity of drug abuse.

15.39 In both the 2009/10 and 2010/11 Schemes, teachers did not have an active role to play. Teachers revealed that since participation in drug testing was voluntary, they would only discuss with students on their participation if

students approached them for advice. However, only about 16% of students in 2009/10 and 11% students in 2010/11 noted that they had proactively discussed with teachers about the Scheme.

15.40 The Project Team believes that teachers who know their students well could, during their day-to-day contacts with students, provide advice and assistance to students to ensure that students are making an informed decision on their participation. Findings from both 2009/10 and 2010/11 showed that the majority of Tai Po school principals (83% - 95%) and Tai Po teachers (69% - 71%) were of the view that teachers should proactively discuss with students on any questions they might have on the Scheme. It may be worth noting that the percentage of school principals and teachers supporting this was higher in 2010/11 Research as compared with that in 2009/11 Research.

15.41 A number of Tai Po school principals commented that the participation rate was influenced to a certain extent by how teachers promoted the Scheme to their students. For most schools, they did not have any specific requirements on how teachers should promote the Scheme. But several principals believed that if the class teachers discussed the Scheme with students and encouraged them to consider participating in the Scheme, the participation rate might be affected.

15.42 It was suggested that schools should carefully conduct consultation with students to understand their concern, to listen to students' suggestions on how drug testing should be conducted and to solicit their support. Some students did not support drug testing because there was no mutual trust between students and schools. Once students realised that schools cared for their wellbeing and were doing whatever possible, including conducting drug tests, to help them, especially students at risk, and protect their interests, they

would be more willing to go along with this school policy.

### *Students' perception on privacy*

15.43 In addition, findings of the June 2011 post-survey showed that the majority of Tai Po students did not mind if their schools knew whether they were selected for drug testing (82%) and did not mind if their classmates knew that they had participated in the Scheme (84%), and the percentage was much higher than the corresponding percentage in June 2010 (68% and 74% respectively). Indeed, most students did not think that participation in the Scheme or not had any labeling effect on them, as revealed from focus group discussions with students.

15.44 Some of Tai Po students pointed out that when a student was asked to leave the classroom, they would be able to guess that the student concerned had been sampled to undergo drug testing. Many students were aware that the SDT team had come to their schools to carry out drug tests, because they could notice changes that had taken place in their schools (e.g. partitioning off certain parts of schools that were close to students) in preparation for drug testing. Some of them also indicated that although their decision to participate or not in the Scheme would not be influenced by classmates, they would let some of their classmates know about their decision. They also did not mind sharing their drug test experience with their classmates and did not consider this was an invasion of their privacy.

15.45 Several social workers interviewed in the course of the study also commented that schools had taken every measure to protect the confidentiality of students sampled for drug testing and had ensured that drug

testing was conducted without being noticed by students.

15.46 Needless to say, every step should be taken to ensure that students' participation in school drug testing is entirely voluntary and their decision to participate or not in school drug testing is respected. Indeed, based on findings of the June 2011 post-survey, only a small proportion of school principals (35%) and about 55% of teachers agreed that teachers should proactively look into the concerns or misunderstanding of students who had not participated in the Scheme and offered help or advice if necessary.

15.47 Tai Po teachers opined that students knew among themselves which students had participated in the Scheme and/or sampled for drug testing. Most students did not mind letting their classmates know about their participation in the Scheme. Due to the fact that the names of students participating or not in the Scheme were not known to teachers and teachers were advised not to discuss with students about their participation, there was little teachers could do in helping students make an informed decision, taking into account the different needs of students. They considered those opposing the Scheme had given too much weight to children's rights and privacy to the neglect of other rights of children (e.g. protection of children's interests).

15.48 Several teachers indicated that they would provide guidance to students suspected of abusing drugs, and if required, refer these students to social workers. For students in general, they would incorporate anti-drug messages in learning and teaching. They considered that their present role was appropriate and were not afraid that this would ruin teacher-student relationship. On the other hand, a few teachers opined that they would like to use the Scheme as a means of engaging students, encouraging students to participate in the Scheme or clarify any misunderstanding students might

have on the Scheme. However, most teachers had not done so and tried not to assume an active role in the Scheme in order to avoid any possible misunderstanding.

15.49 A few social workers pointed out that one of the weaknesses of the Scheme was the inability to provide counselling services to students who had not participated in the Scheme, to understand why they did not participate in the Scheme and to provide assistance, if required, to those in need.

15.50 Nevertheless, during discussions with school principals, teachers and social workers, they were worried that targeting students who had not participated in the Scheme by teachers in offering help and advice might be misunderstood by students that teachers were exerting pressure on students to persuade them to participate in the Scheme. Most of them were of the view that any promotional efforts by teachers should be directed to all students, regardless of whether these students had participated or not in the Scheme.

### *Test results*

15.51 Many of Tai Po school principals were of the view that schools should be informed of the test results so that school staff including teachers could provide assistance to the students who were tested positive, in collaboration with social workers. Schools also had to provide support to the students' families. A few principals added that they had very good relationship with students. Students would without hesitation seek the help of teachers if they had encountered any problems. Teachers and other students were all willing to offer a helping hand. If schools were not informed of the test results, the participation rate might be increased. However, schools

would not be in a position to help students who were tested positive and their families.

15.52 On the other hand, most of Tai Po students and their parents preferred not to inform schools the names of students identified to have abused drugs through drug tests. They feared that schools might try various means to expel these students from schools. Social workers might be informed such that they could provide counselling and support services to the students concerned. Nevertheless, several parents agreed that there should be close cooperation and better communications between parents and schools on matters related to the wellbeing of students.

15.53 Several social workers interviewed in the course of the study also voiced their concern that if schools were informed of the drug test results, they might exert pressures on students who were tested positive discouraging them from continuing their studies in their schools. They were aware that students who had abused drugs would likely to have other unruly and delinquent behaviour and that their academic performance was likely to be rather poor. Thus, schools could find a host of reasons other than drug abuse to penalise these students and discourage them from attending schools. Nevertheless, from discussions with social workers of schools in Tai Po and those outside, the project team has the impression that the level of trust between social workers and schools implementing drug testing is in general higher than that for schools not implementing drug testing. Apparently by working together in implementing the Scheme, schools and social workers have had a better understanding of others' approach adopted in helping students who have abused drugs.

15.54 It may be worth noting that while most school principals still insisted

that they should be informed of the drug test results, a few school principals indicated that they were prepared to accept the arrangement whereby only the social workers were informed of the drug test results. They were of the view that as long as drug abusing students were provided necessary assistance by social workers, they would not insist on having access to the drug test results.

15.55 Findings of the June 2011 post-survey showed that only about one-third of school principals (30% for schools in Tai Po and 33% for schools outside Tai Po) and teachers (37% and 33% respectively) supported the arrangement that whether schools were informed of the drug test results should be left to the decision of students and parents. On the other hand, more than half of the students (69% and 61% respectively) and their parents (64% and 60% respectively) considered that whether schools were informed of the drug test results should be decided by them. Based on views expressed by social workers, students and parents during discussions, the project team is of the view that if schools were not informed of the drug testing results, the participation rate could be higher.

#### *Fostering anti-drug culture*

15.56 The 2009/10 and 2010/11 Schemes in Tai Po comprise a variety of anti-drug activities in addition to drug testing. Feedback from school principals, teachers, students and parents showed that the great majority hoped that such anti-drug activities should be continued to remind students about the harmful effects of drugs. In fact, the 2010/11 Scheme was implemented in Tai Po schools as part of the healthy school policy aimed at instilling positive values in students, helping them develop healthy lifestyles, in addition to anti-drug education.

15.57 Most of school principals, teachers, students and parents were of the view that other efforts should be made to facilitate early identification of students at risk and provide timely assistance to them. Indeed for a number of schools outside Tai Po which have not implemented school drug testing have introduced a number of measures such as physical fitness test to help schools or social workers to early identify students at risk. In a number of schools outside Tai Po, additional social workers were deployed to proactively engage students, especially those who have emotional or behavioural problems and considered to be at risk by teachers or school social workers.

15.58 Research findings also showed that a great majority of school principals, teachers, students and parents agreed that activities like physical fitness test designed to trigger students' motivation to quit drugs should be organised. Majority of them also agreed that steps should be taken to closely observe indications of drug taking by students for the purposes of early identification and timely counselling.

15.59 Several of social workers outside Tai Po pointed out that in organising anti-drug activities for students, they would usually give such activities a more positive name like beauty class, leadership training camps. Small group activities, rather than talks given to a large number of students, were considered more effective, as the latter was largely one-way communication with social workers giving anti-messages without knowing how much students had received and understood. Through such activities, they would take the opportunity to convey messages on the harmful effects of drugs on one's appearance and health. Sharing sessions with previous drug abusers would also be arranged.

15.60 Several social workers stressed that anti-drug activities had to be sustained and organised in a variety of formats catering the different interests and needs of students. One or two programs conducted in an ad hoc manner would not be effective. Different activities had to be organised to help students develop healthy lifestyles and positive values, learn how to care for their community and to love their families. Some of them noted that currently there were many NGOs involved in anti-drug work. If they approached schools to organise anti-drug activities at the same time, schools and students concerned might not be able to cope with. Such anti-activities had to be organised in a systematic, coordinated and sustained manner.

15.61 It is noted that different anti-drug activities are organised by schools without drug testing. Feedback from school principals, teachers, social workers and medical practitioners are highly positive. Through such activities, social workers are able to engage the students, establish mutual trust with the students and identify students at risk. Students who voluntarily disclose their drug abuse behaviour are more likely to be willing to receive counseling and treatment from social workers and medical practitioners. The educational and deterrent effects of school drug testing will be greatly enhanced if various anti-drug activities designed to engage students at risk including physical fitness tests are organised in conjunction with drug testing. Those students who do not participate in drug testing, for example, could still be engaged through those activities. In short, a package of anti-drug activities and drug testing should be able to cater for the different and diverse needs of students, helping them to stay away drugs. It may be worth noting that the above observations echo the recommendations of the government in its submission to the Legislative Council Panel on Security in November 2010.<sup>42</sup>

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42 Narcotics Division, Security Bureau and Education Bureau (2010), "School drug testing", information paper submitted to the Legislative Council Panel on Security dated 11 November 2010 (LC paper no. CB(2)197/10-11(01), p. 4.

### *Further research on the effectiveness of the Scheme*

15.62 In view of the effectiveness of the Scheme, implemented by all secondary schools in Tai Po, as revealed from the research findings, the Scheme will likely to be implemented in 2011/12 and subsequent years by schools in and outside Tai Po. In order to encourage more participation by students, to enhance the effectiveness of the Scheme and to engage students at risk, the Scheme will be modified and adapted by schools, taking into account the different circumstances facing schools. The participation rate by students in different schools adopting different versions of the Scheme may vary significantly between schools.

15.63 While the effectiveness of the Scheme, as it is implemented by all secondary schools in Tai Po, has been confirmed, the effectiveness of a modified Scheme, implemented by a few or even one school in districts outside Tai Po, with different levels of participation by students, has yet to be verified. In particular, as pointed out by researchers interviewed by the project team in the course of the research, although feedback from stakeholders on a number of anti-drug programmes like physical fitness test is positive, the effectiveness of these programmes has not been confirmed in a scientific manner. Not only is public money involved, much time and efforts are devoted by school principals, teachers, students, parents and social workers in preparing for and implementing the Scheme. If a modified Scheme is not as effective as the Tai Po Scheme, it should be further modified to enhance its effectiveness; and if a modified Scheme is found to be more effective, it should be promoted and its experience shared by other schools, as the interests of students are at stake.

## Chapter 16 Recommendations

### *Continuation of the Scheme*

16.1 As discussed above, subjective and objective indicators compiled from the research findings showed that the Scheme is effective. Most Tai Po principals, teachers, students and parents supported the continuation of the Scheme in the coming school year. The majority of non-Tai Po teachers, students and parents also shared similar views.

16.2 In addition, drug testing is increasingly accepted by students and their parents. Majority of them believe that drug testing does not have a negative impact on family relationship, students' trust in schools and teacher-student relationship. They are also satisfied with the drug testing process. From the perspectives of Tai Po school principals, drug testing has become part of normal activities, creating minimal disruption to school work and unease among students.

*16.3 It is recommended that the Scheme in Tai Po should be continued to help students stay away from drugs. It is also recommended that the government should continue to support and fund initiatives of schools outside Tai Po to introduce the Scheme.*

### *Enhancing the effectiveness of the Scheme*

#### *Support to students: preventive education and counseling services*

16.4 The Scheme comprises not just drug testing, but also preventive

education and counseling services provided by social workers of the CCPSA in Tai Po, the SDT team and school social workers. As discussed above, it is desirable that there is close cooperation between social workers of the SDT and CCPSA on the one hand and school social workers on the other, especially in providing timely assistance and intervention to students likely to be at risk. For example, with the consent of students concerned, those students identified by the SDT team to be in need of anti-drug education and counseling services could be referred to the school social workers for follow up action.

16.5 Research findings showed that students' misconception of drugs, though at a low level, has increased between October 2010 and June 2011. There is thus an urgent need to help students, especially those at risk, to correct their misconception of drugs. Given that the focus of the Scheme is on education and prevention, it is desirable that more resources be devoted to anti-drug preventive and education programmes, as well as counselling and treatment services, to foster or further strengthen an anti-drug culture at school. It might not be a bad idea if the Scheme could be re-named, removing any emphasis on "drug testing", by using a more neutral term.

*16.6 It is recommended that schools implementing the Scheme should enhance the preventive anti-drug education and counseling component of the Scheme, targeting in particular, students likely to be at risk, and encourage closer cooperation between the SDT team and school social workers, underpinned by a comprehensive drug policy to be drawn up by schools, in consultation with teachers and social workers.*

### *Support to parents*

16.7 While findings of the research showed that parental involvement in the anti-drug education of their children would encourage their children to participate in the Scheme, the research findings also showed that parents were not keen to get involved in anti-drug education of their children. It is noted that parental involvement is important, in addition to schools' efforts, in helping students stay away from drugs. Furthermore, if students are suspected to have abused drugs, parents should be able to handle problem properly and seek help from schools and social workers. Feedback from school principals and teachers indicates that some parents are not adequately prepared to help their children stay away from drugs.

*16.8 It is recommended that as part of the Scheme, resources should be provided to enhance anti-drug education and support services to parents, in order to enable parents play a useful role in providing anti-drug education and guidance to students, and in encouraging their children to participate in the Scheme.*

### *Support to teachers*

16.9 Through their frequent contact with students, teachers are in a good position to identify students likely to be at risk and offer timely guidance and assistance to these students. In fact, teachers are already involved in providing anti-drug education to students, as part of the learning and teaching process in helping students develop healthy lifestyle and positive life values.

16.10 Findings of the research showed that majority of Tai Po school

principals and teachers considered that teachers should follow up with students who were found to have abused drugs to offer help and advice. In particular, the implementation of drug testing in schools offers a unique opportunity for teachers to engage students, in meaningful discussions over drug testing, the harmful effects of drugs as well as ways and means of resisting bad peer influence and refusing drugs when offered. Nevertheless, not all teachers are adequately prepared in delivering anti-drug education, as noted by the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse.<sup>43</sup>

*16.11 It is recommended as part of the Scheme resources should be provided to support teachers, in terms of say training, to help them deliver anti-drug education and guidance to students, especially those who are likely to be at risk.*

#### *Increasing drug testing effectiveness*

16.12 It is desirable that the deterrent effect of school drug testing be enhanced in order to strengthen the preventive element of drug testing. Apart from the present urine testing method using POCT, the detection window of which is quite short, a number of drug testing methods are available. For instance, urine samples collected from students can be tested in the laboratory instead of on the spot using POCT. Drug tests using hair samples, which have a longer detection window, may also be considered.

16.13 Furthermore, under the present arrangement of the Scheme, students sampled for drug testing would not be asked to take the drug test if they indicated that they had taken medications. If other methods of drug testing,

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<sup>43</sup> Report of the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse (November 2008), p.46.

such as drug tests by the laboratory instead of using POCT or drug tests using hair samples, are used, students who claimed to have taken medications could still be tested. Indeed, the research findings showed that most school principals, teachers, students and their parents agreed that other drug testing methods, such as hair drug testing, should also be used.

*16.14 To increase the effectiveness of drug testing, it is recommended that the present arrangement should be modified such that those students who claim to have taken medications should still be tested with their urine samples taken to the laboratory for screening and confirmatory tests. Furthermore, other methods of drug testing such as the use of hair sample should be explored and adopted in future, having considered the unique situation of each school.*

#### *Encouraging participation*

16.15 Though the percentage of students participating in the 2010/11 Scheme, at around 57% based on the findings of the June 2011 post-survey, is not low, it is lower than that for the 2009/10 Scheme, at around 64% based on the June 2010 survey. Since the research findings showed that the Scheme has a beneficial impact on students, especially for those who have participated in the Scheme, the Project Team concerned the decrease in the participation rate.

16.16 As discussed above, from feedback of principals, it transpires that students' participation in the Scheme is to a certain extent influenced by how the Scheme is promoted to students. Some teachers also indicated that they would like to use the Scheme as a means of engaging students, encouraging

them to participate in the Scheme or clarify any misunderstanding they might have on the Scheme. Research findings also showed that majority of the school principals and more than half of the Tai Po teachers were of the view that teachers should proactively discuss with the students any questions they might have on the Scheme. A number of social workers also pointed out that one of the weaknesses of the Scheme was the inability to provide counselling services to students who had not participated in the Scheme, to understand why they did not participate in the Scheme and to provide assistance, if required, to those in need.

*16.17 It is recommended that, following a school-based approach, teachers and social workers should be encouraged to assume a more active role in providing advice and counseling services to students on matters relating to the Scheme, with a view to encouraging students participate in the Scheme, while maintaining the voluntary nature of drug testing.*

16.18 As discussed above, while most school principals were of the view that schools should be informed of the test results, most students and their parents interviewed in the course of research preferred not to inform schools the names of students identified to have abused drugs through drug tests. Findings of the research showed that more than half of students and their parents considered that whether schools were informed of the drug test results should be decided by them.

*16.19 It is recommended that schools implementing the Scheme may review the arrangement on whether schools should be informed of the drug test results, in consultation with teachers, parents and students.*

### *Fostering anti-drug culture*

16.20 The 2009/10 and 2010/11 Schemes in Tai Po comprise a variety of anti-drug activities in addition to drug testing. Feedback from school principals, teachers, students and parents showed that the great majority hoped that such anti-drug activities should be continued to alert students about the harmful effects of drugs. In fact, the 2010/11 Scheme was implemented in Tai Po schools as part of the healthy school policy aimed at instilling positive values in students, helping them develop healthy lifestyles, in addition to anti-drug education.

16.21 Findings of the research also showed that the great majority of school principals, teachers, students and parents agreed that activities designed to trigger students' motivation to quit drugs should be organised. The great majority of them also agreed that steps should be taken to closely observe indications of drug taking by students for the purposes of early identification and timely counselling.

*16.22 It is recommended that as part of the Scheme, different anti-drug activities designed to engage students at risk should be organized for all students, including those who have or have not participated in the Scheme, with a view to facilitate early identification and timely intervention.*

### *Study on the implementation of the Scheme*

16.23 The Scheme will likely to be implemented in 2011/12 and subsequent years by schools in and outside Tai Po. Some schools may introduce modifications to the Scheme, with a view to encouraging participation from

students, to enhance the effectiveness of the Scheme and to engage students at risk. While the effectiveness of the Scheme, as it is implemented by all secondary schools in Tai Po, has been confirmed, the effectiveness of modified schemes, implemented by a few or even one school in districts outside Tai Po, with different levels of participation by students, need to be closely monitored. Not only is public money involved, much time and efforts are devoted by school principals, teachers, students, parents and social workers in preparing for and implementing the different modified schemes. It would be desirable if the implementation of the modified scheme(s) could continue to be monitored, such that the more successful schemes could be shared and replicated, while the less successful ones could be further reviewed and enhanced.

*16.24 It is recommended that study / monitor should be conducted on the modified Scheme(s) to be implemented by school(s) in 2011/12.*