

Trial Scheme on School Drug Testing in Tai Po District (School Year 2009/10)

Evaluation Research

*Executive
Summary*

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Commissioned by
Narcotics Division, Security Bureau

 Policy 21 Limited
政策二十一

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in Tai Po District
(School Year 2009/10)**

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November 2010

Executive Summary

Introduction

1. In July 2009, the Chief Executive set out directions to tackle the youth drug abuse problem. One of the key strategies is drug testing to be spearheaded by the carrying out of the Trial Scheme on School Drug Testing in Tai Po District in school year 2009/10 (“Scheme”). Development of the Scheme, which was launched in December 2009, is guided by the following principles:

- a) Helping students in their best interest;
- b) Voluntary participation;
- c) Keeping personal information strictly confidential; and
- d) Professional testing and support services for students.

2. At an early planning stage of the Scheme, there were expectations in the community that drug testing could serve as a tool for identifying student drug abusers early. At the same time, however, there were also many expressing grave concerns about the privacy and human rights issues of students. After taking into account views expressed by the community, it was finally decided that the Scheme would be run on an entirely voluntary basis with consent to participation to be given by both students and their parents. The purposes of the Scheme are as follows:

- a) For prevention – it will enhance the resolve of those students who have not taken any drugs to continue to stay away from drugs; and
- b) For rendering assistance to students – the Scheme will trigger the motivation of those students abusing drugs to quit drugs and seek help, especially those who are trying drugs at an early stage.

3. Most often, young drug abusers have little motivation to seek help. Added to the hidden nature of psychotropic substance abuse, they may remain hidden from the usual help networks for quite some time until they are trawled by social workers or arrested by the police after they have abused drugs for a number of years when serious damage has already been done to their body and spirit. Apart from enhancing the resolve of those students who have not taken any drugs to continue to stay away from drugs, it is believed that by triggering the motivation of those students who have abused drugs to seek help, school drug testing would facilitate their early identification and guide them towards counselling or treatment.

4. The present research, which was conducted during the period from February to October 2010, involves the following:

- a) To conduct a comprehensive assessment of the Scheme focusing on both the process and outcome;
- b) To review other local and overseas experience of drug testing in schools; and
- c) To suggest refinements and revisions to the Scheme and map out a practical course of action for further developing school drug testing in the territory based on findings of a) and b) above.

Research Methodology

5. The impact of the Scheme was assessed by examining the inputs, process, outputs and outcomes of the Scheme, making use of both quantitative and qualitative information gathered in the study. For quantitative information, statistics on students' awareness of drugs, attitude towards fighting drugs, drug taking behaviour and perceived effectiveness of the Scheme, as well as views of principals, teachers and parents on the Scheme were collected through a questionnaire survey of 23 secondary schools in Tai Po conducted in June 2010, covering 13,110 students, 2,494 parents, 1,034 teachers and the principals of the 23 schools. In addition, a random sample of 102 secondary schools outside Tai Po was also enumerated, covering 6,926 students, 4,979 parents, 4,227 teachers and 95 principals.

6. For qualitative information, it was gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted with principals of secondary schools in and outside Tai Po, teachers and students of secondary schools in Tai Po, parents, social workers and other stakeholders such as medical practitioners and legal professionals to solicit their views on the Scheme and suggestions for possible improvements. References were made, through literature research and overseas visits, to practices of and research on school drug testing in other countries.

7. Apart from statistics collected from the June 2010 survey mentioned above, the Project Team has also examined statistics obtained from the 2008/09 survey commissioned by Narcotics Division, Security Bureau (ND), covering a random sample of 112 secondary day schools and 83,605 Secondary 1 – 7 students in Hong Kong, and a December 2009 survey conducted by ND, covering all 23 secondary schools and 19,121 Secondary 1 – 7 students in Tai Po. Notwithstanding the limitations posed by differences in the survey designs of the three surveys and the inability to match individual students enumerated in different surveys, by comparing findings of the 2008/09, December 2009 and June 2010 surveys, an indication of changes in students' awareness of drugs, attitude towards fighting drugs and drug taking behaviour over time may be obtained, though the data could not be conclusive for an assessment of the impact of the Scheme on students, following the usual pre-post design.

Trial Scheme on School Drug Testing in Tai Po District

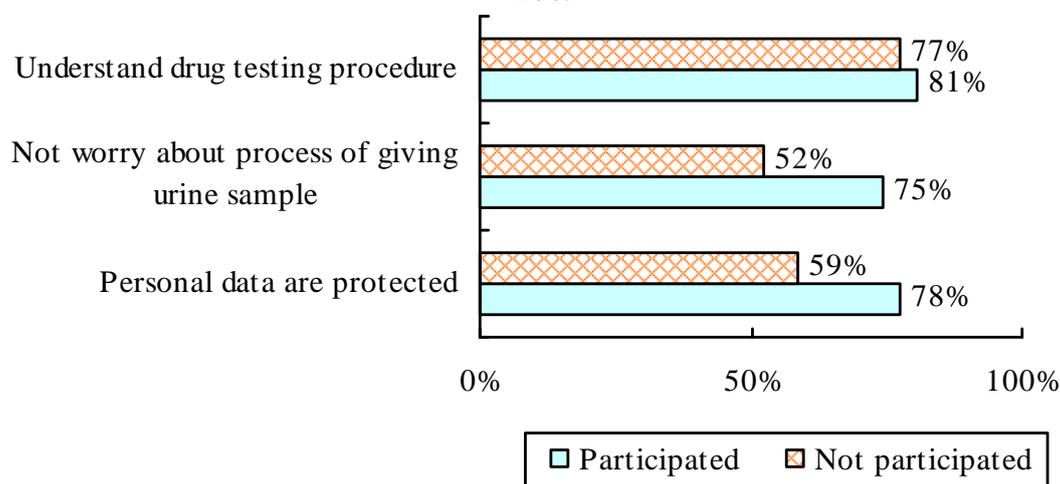
Overview

8. While school drug testing is highly controversial, it is heartening to note that both proponents and opponents of the Scheme share the same common ground, namely effective actions must be taken promptly to abate the rising trend of drug abuse by children and adolescents. Many principals, teachers, social workers and medical practitioners interviewed by the Project Team were content that the launch of the Scheme had helped galvanize cooperation between education, social work and medical professions as well as members of the community in a concerted effort to help students stay away from drugs and those who have abused drugs to quit drugs. It is also noted that the Scheme is only one component of the multi-pronged approach of government in combating drug abuse among secondary school students.

The process

9. The study findings showed that drug testing had been implemented professionally, with utmost care and caution. Teachers, students and parents were briefed on the purposes and arrangement for drug testing. The majority of students understood the drug testing procedure (79%), believed that their personal data would be protected (70%) and were not worried about the process of giving their urine sample (66%). For those students who had participated in the Scheme, they had better understanding of the drug testing procedure, were less worried about the process of giving urine sample and had more confidence that their personal data would be protected, as compared with those who had not participated.

Proportions of views of students on the operation of the Scheme by whether participated in the Scheme, December 2009



10. The majority of students (72%) discussed with their parents whether to participate in the Scheme, facilitating parent-child discussions on drug abuse problems among youth. For students who had taken drug tests, the great majority (88%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the drug testing arrangement. Among parents whose children had taken drug tests, the great majority (90%) were totally not worried or not worried that drug testing would have negative impact on their children.

Inputs and outputs

11. The cost of conducting drug testing, including staff costs and costs of materials used, is estimated to be around \$3.3 million. Additional funding totalling \$8.0 million was provided to the Counselling Centre for Psychotropic Substance Abusers (CCPSA) in Tai Po (\$2.2 million), the 23 secondary schools (\$2.3 million) and NGOs providing school social work services (\$3.5 million) for providing preventive education and support services to students and parents. In addition,

stakeholders in and outside Tai Po and members of the community participated actively in discussions on issues related to school drug testing.

12. More than 12,400 students joined the Scheme, representing some 61% of the student population. A total of 2,495 students were randomly selected for drug testing, representing about 20% of those who had participated in the Scheme. 1,975 students took the test and no confirmed positive case was found. In addition, numerous briefings, workshops and consultation and counselling sessions were organized for school personnel, students and parents. Some 80 students troubled by drugs have referred themselves to the CCPSA and benefited from the support programme of the Scheme.

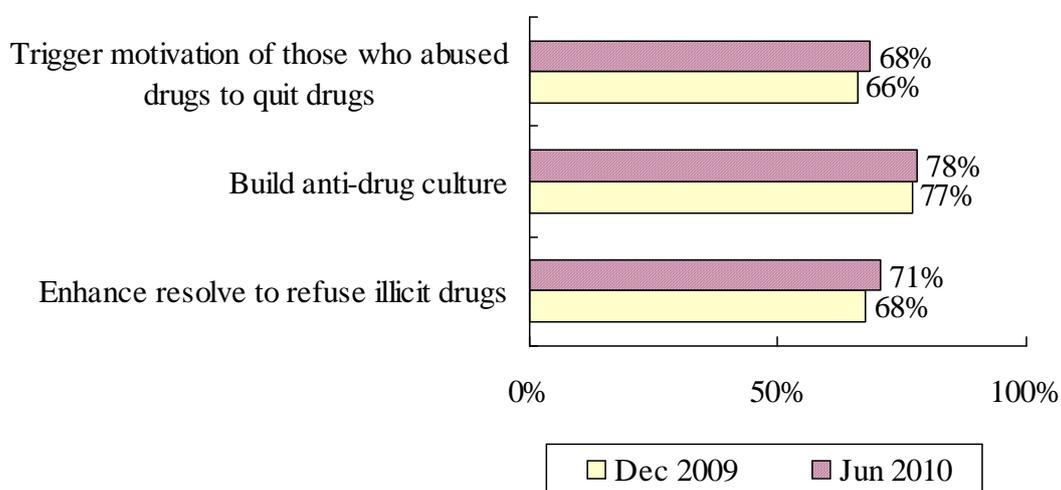
13. The Scheme also generated heated discussions in the community over school drug testing. Students of schools inside and outside Tai Po, and their parents, were inevitably affected, drawing their attention to and raising their awareness of drug abuse problems. Apparently, the outputs of the Scheme were more than just the number of students sampled for drug testing. Besides, the Project Team notes that the Scheme comprises a package of programs for students and their parents and drug testing is only one of its components, and is largely educational in nature. Thus, it is not appropriate to directly compare inputs with outputs or interpret outputs simply in terms of the number of students tested for drugs.

Outcomes

Perceived Effectiveness of the Scheme

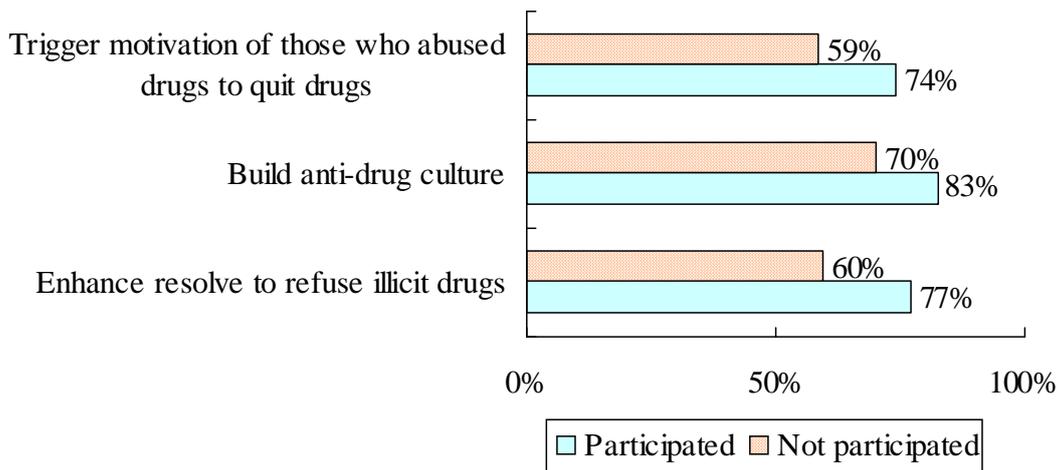
14. The research findings showed that in June 2010 the majority of students considered that the Scheme had enhanced their resolve to refuse illicit drugs (71%), helped build an anti-drug culture (78%) and triggered motivation of those who abused drugs to quit drugs (68%). The proportions of students holding such views were slightly higher than the corresponding percentages in December 2009.

Proportions of students by views on impact of the Scheme



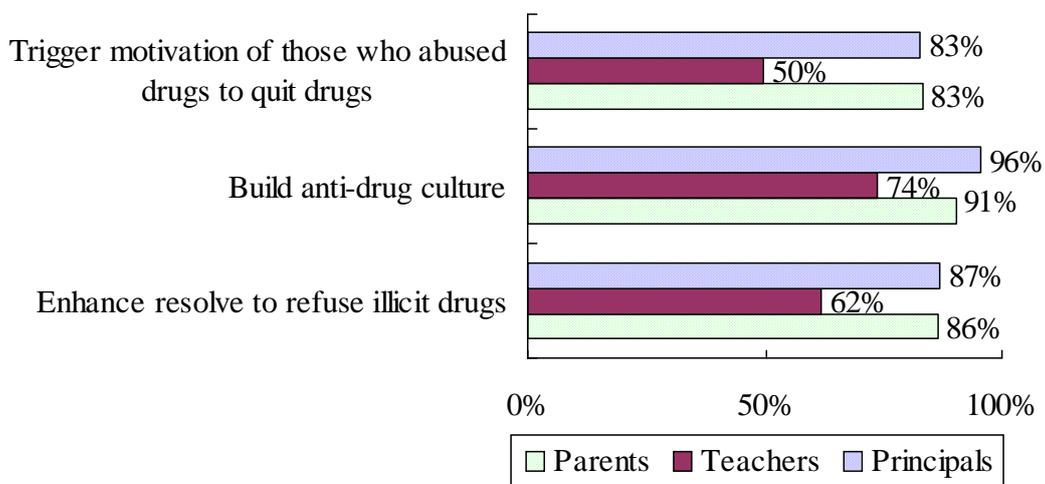
15. For those who had participated in the Scheme, a higher proportion of them considered that the Scheme had enhanced their resolve to refuse illicit drugs (77%), helped build an anti-drug culture (83%) and triggered motivation of those who abused drugs to quit drugs (74%) as compared with those who had not participated in the Scheme.

Proportions of students in Tai Po by views on impact of the Scheme, June 2010



16. The majority of parents, teachers and principals in Tai Po also considered that the Scheme had enhanced students' resolve to refuse drugs and helped build an anti-drug culture. The proportion of parents and principals sharing this view was much higher than that of teachers. While most parents and principals believed that the Scheme helped trigger motivation of those students who abused drugs to quit drugs, only about half of teachers thought so.

Proportions of parents and teachers by views on impact of the Scheme



17. During discussions with parents, teachers, principals and social workers, they pointed out that the Scheme had a deterrent effect on students to refuse drugs,

especially for students who were occasional drug abusers and those who were likely to be influenced by bad peer pressure to try abusing drugs, even though they had not done so previously. For these students, they still cared about their study. For many of them their relationship with their family was still good, and they participated in the Scheme in order to satisfy their parents, to demonstrate that they had not taken drugs or to show their support of school policies. For many students, their participation in the Scheme amounted to a pledge by the students to themselves, their parents and their schools that they would stay away from drugs. The fact that they had participated in the Scheme also gave them an excuse to refuse drugs when offered by friends.

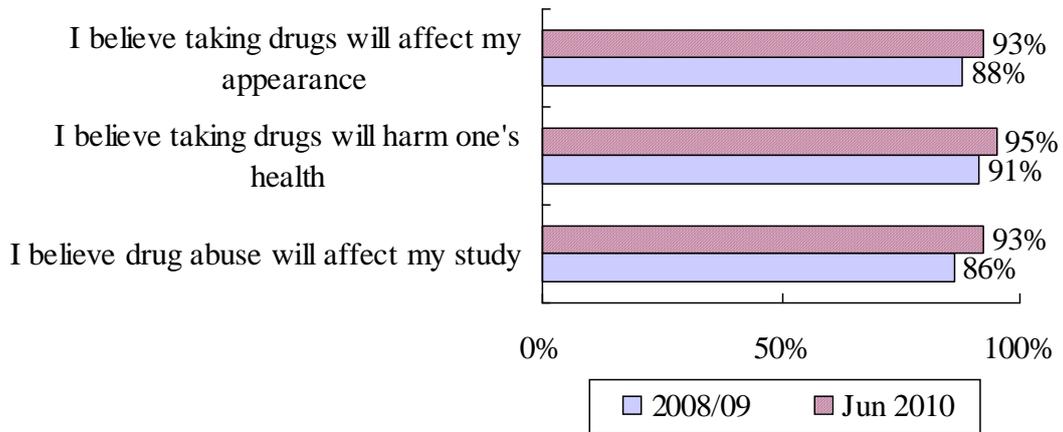
18. In short, based on views expressed by students, parents, teachers and principals, the Scheme had a positive impact on students and schools, by building an anti-drug culture, triggering motivation of those who had abused drugs to seek help and enhancing their resolve to refuse illicit drugs, with more prominent effect on students who participated in the Scheme than those who did not.

Other Supporting Evidence

19. On top of the assessment on the perceived effectiveness of the Scheme as described above, the Project Team also conducted rigorous quantitative analyses on the data collected in the June 2010 survey and those of the 2008/09 survey with a view to assessing the impact of the Scheme on students' awareness of drugs, attitude towards fighting drugs and drug taking behaviour. A comparison of data obtained from 2008/09 survey and June 2010 showed that there was improvement in students' awareness of drugs, attitude towards fighting drugs and drug taking behaviour for those in Tai Po as well as outside Tai Po, even after allowing for sampling fluctuations.

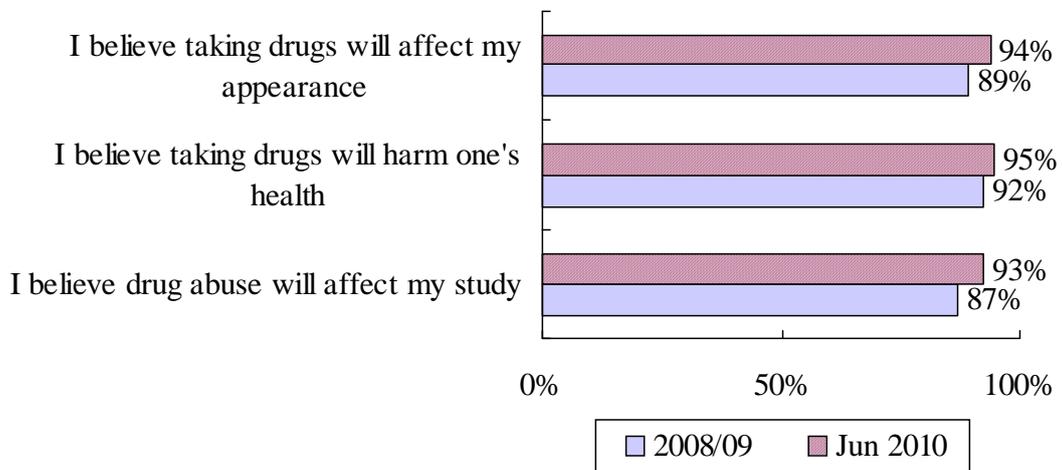
20. As an illustration, in both the 2008/09 and June 2010 surveys, three questions were asked purporting to measure the underlying factor on students' awareness of drugs. For students in Tai Po, as shown in the chart below, the great majority believed that taking drugs would affect their appearance, harm their health and affect their study. Compared with 2008/09, a higher proportion of students in June 2010 were aware of the adverse effects of taking drugs. Indeed, from discussions with students, most of them indicated that they were aware that taking drugs was not good and was harmful to them. Views of teachers and social workers were similar: students knew fairly well that there were undesirable consequences of drug abuse.

Percentage of students in Tai Po by awareness of drugs



21. For students attending schools outside Tai Po, the great majority of them also believed that taking drugs would affect their appearance, harm their health and affect their study. Compared with 2008/09, the proportion of students outside Tai Po who believed that taking drugs would affect their appearance, health and study was higher in June 2010. This may possibly suggest that the Scheme had an impact on students in Tai Po as well as those outside Tai Po in enhancing their awareness of drugs.

Percentage of students outside Tai Po by awareness of drugs



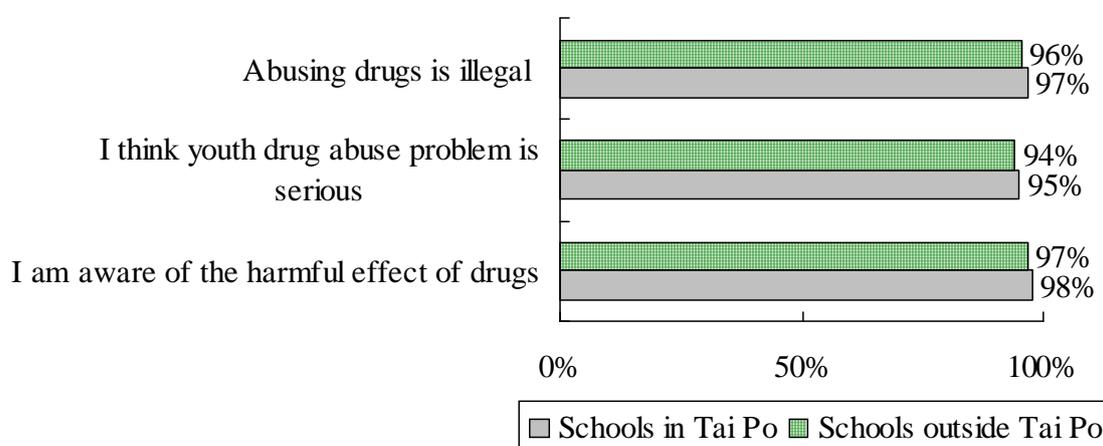
22. Although there was some evidence suggesting the positive impact of the Scheme on students' awareness, attitude and behaviour, the Project Team notes that such improvement may be due to the launch of the Scheme, including drug testing and various educational measures. It may also be the impact of media coverage of the Scheme, resulting in increased awareness among parents and students. In view of the limitations of this research study (e.g. short time span of the Scheme and inherent constraints in the research design), the Project Team considers it not advisable to draw definitive conclusions from the comparative analysis of questionnaire survey results

presented above that the Scheme has a positive impact on awareness, attitude and behaviour of drugs.

Views of Parents

23. In the June 2010 survey, views of parents were also gathered. It may be noted from the chart below that most parents of students attending secondary schools knew that abusing drugs was illegal and were aware of the harmful effect of drugs. The percentage was slightly higher for parents of students attending schools in Tai Po, as compared with those of students outside Tai Po. The great majority of parents also considered that the youth abuse problem was serious. The percentage for parents of students in Tai Po was slightly higher than those of students outside Tai Po.

Percentage of parents by views on drugs



Support Programme

24. An integral part of the Scheme is the provision of a dedicated support programme to provide for timely guidance and treatment for students identified to have abused drugs. Although no students have been tested positive under the Scheme, some 80 students troubled by drugs have volunteered themselves or accepted referrals to the CCPSA to seek help, joining the support programme and receiving services. According to the CCPSA, this represented a marked increase over the number of young people seeking help in the corresponding period before the Scheme was launched. The effectiveness of this support programme, which will go on until the end of 2010, is the subject of a supplementary part of this research for completion in early 2011.

Local and Overseas Experience

25. In Hong Kong, some international schools have made “drug testing” a condition for admission. Students/parents who do not agree to drug testing may be denied enrolment. Students are selected for testing on random or suspicion basis, and for those tested positive, support and counselling services will be provided by the schools. Very recently, one local Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) school has on its

initiative also run random, suspicion-less drug testing, where participation is on a voluntary basis and individual test results are only made known to parents, but not the school. Another local DSS school is also planning to introduce drug testing on a voluntary basis.

26. In the US, the Supreme Court rulings in 1995 and 2002 allowed schools to conduct random drug testing on student athletes and those participating in competitive extracurricular activities. The practices of school drug testing vary from states to states. In some states drug testing is allowed while in others it is considered violating states' constitutions. There are also different practices in drug testing in different schools. For students tested positive, some schools adopt punitive measures such as suspension from schools, while others provide counseling and treatment services to students and allow them to continue to stay in schools. In 2008, 16.5% of US public school districts had random drug-testing programs, as part of their school-based drug prevention strategies, aiming at, among other things, improving students' connectedness to schools and establishing norms for appropriate behaviour.

27. In the UK, schools are allowed to conduct drug testing in discharging their pastoral responsibility to create a supportive school and in consultation with stakeholders like parents and teachers. Random drug testing is quite widespread among independent boarding schools with three-quarters of them having some drug tests. While parental and/or student consent of testing is required, this may be obtained as a condition of enrolment and/or re-admission after suspension.

28. In Australia, a review conducted by the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction in 2007 considered that a strong case may be made against school drug testing on the grounds that drug testing was not reliable, the financial burden was heavy, there are moral and legal concerns, other effective alternative school-based preventive interventions were available, etc. It is noted that the legal system in Australia applies a more stringent standard of privacy and reasonableness than that in the US. Furthermore, unlike the US and Hong Kong, the duty of care of an Australian school does not normally extend to activities outside school hours.

29. Although there were a number of research studies, conducted mainly in the US, on the effectiveness of school drug testing, many were of poor quality or the findings of which were inconclusive or even conflicting. While concerns had been raised on the potential adverse effects of school drug testing, such as breakdown in parent/child or school/student relationship, few studies had been conducted to evaluate the validity of such concerns, or otherwise.

Lessons learnt

30. Schools overseas and some local schools have responded to drug abuse problems among students by adopting various strategies to help students stay away from drugs, including drug testing. While overseas experience is useful, it should not be relied upon to support or oppose school drug testing. The finding that drug testing is not effective in some overseas schools should not preclude the possibility that it is effective in schools in Hong Kong. Much depends on how drug testing is

implemented by schools concerned and received by the local parent-student population.

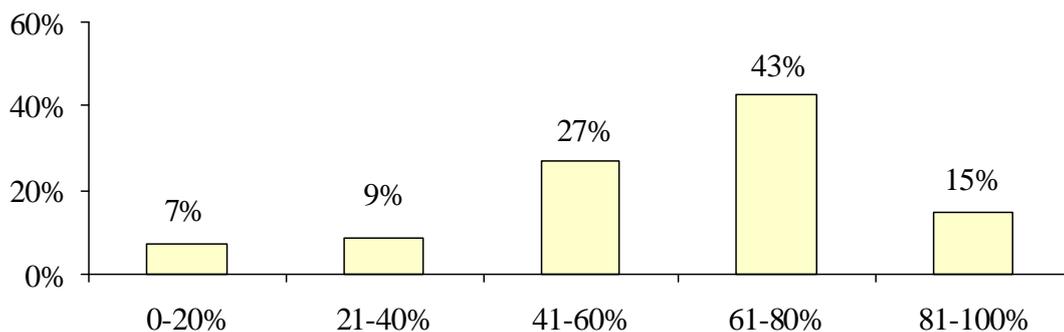
Pertinent Issues and Concerns

Children's rights

31. In designing the Scheme, much effort had been made in protecting children's right to express their opinion, to autonomous choice and decisions, as stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). But the UNCRC also requires that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. Students' rights to autonomous decisions are not absolute and have to be balanced against other rights such as the right to protection.

32. Furthermore, the study findings indicated that some students might not be making an informed decision on whether or not to participate in the Scheme, even though their decision might be genuine. As shown in the chart below, while the overall participation rate in the Scheme was around 60%, 15.7% of classes had an overall participation rate of 40% or below and around 14.8% of classes had an overall participation rate of more than 80%. It is likely that students in making up their mind to participate or not were influenced by views of their classmates. There is thus doubt as to whether all students have made an informed decision. Besides, the June 2010 survey showed that only about 25% of teachers indicated that some of their students had proactively approached them to discuss the Scheme. Apparently, simply asking students to make a choice without providing assistance may not be in their best interests.

Percentage distribution of participation rate by class

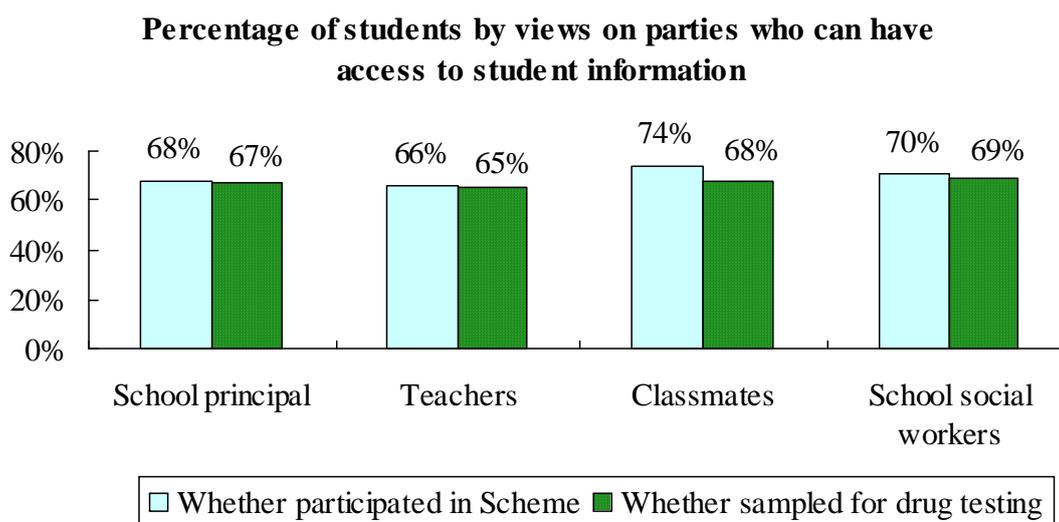


Privacy of children

33. In preparing for and implementing the Scheme, Government, schools concerned and the SDT team have meticulously drawn up a protocol, made available to all students and their parents, explaining in detail how the Scheme, including drug testing, should be conducted, and have taken steps to ensure that privacy of students participating or not participating in the Scheme are protected. In short, utmost care and efforts were made to protect the privacy of students participating in the Scheme.

34. In connection with the Scheme, a legal expert opined that while the lists of students participating in the Scheme were personal data, the fact that the identity of students participating in the Scheme would be revealed when they were asked to leave the classroom to take the drug tests did not amount to disclosure of personal data, though it was related to the privacy of the students concerned. In his view, in considering the privacy of students sampled to take the drug tests, one had to take into account whether the students had a reasonable expectation that they should not be seen by other students when they were asked to take the drug tests.

35. However, the study showed that most students did not consider that there was a need to keep information related to their participation in the Scheme or their having been sampled to take drug tests confidential. The study also showed that students' participation or non-participation in the Scheme had no labelling effect on the students. As shown in the chart below, most students agreed that their classmates could be informed of whether they had participated in the Scheme (74%) and whether they were sampled for drug testing (68%). More than half of students also agreed that such information could be made available to school principals, teachers and school social workers.



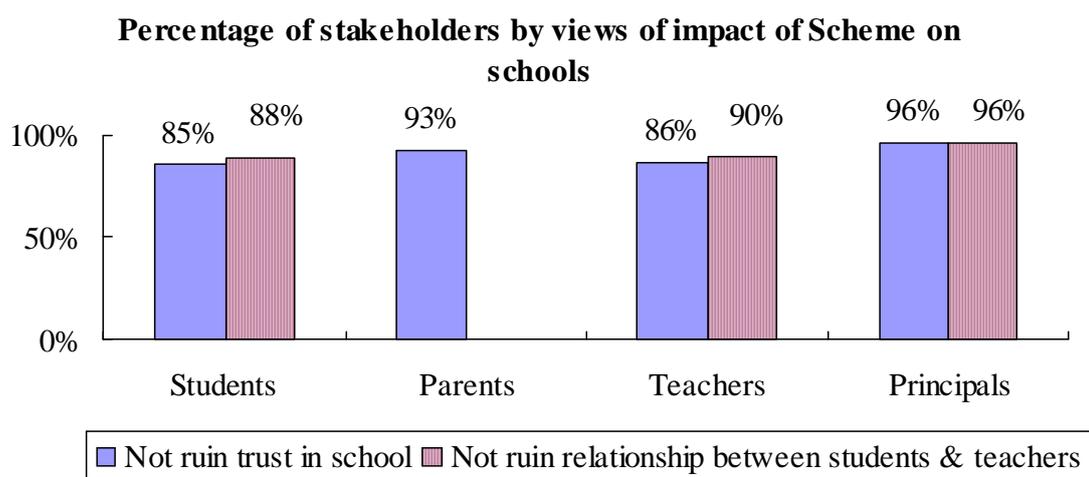
36. As a matter of fact, it is exceedingly difficult for students' participation in various learning and teaching activities which have to be geared to the diverse and different needs of students not to be seen by other students or school staff in the school setting. From discussions with principals and teachers, it transpired that teachers were not expected to "hide" students with special needs and treat all students as if they belonged to a homogeneous group. While acknowledging the need to respect students' privacy and take care to avoid stigmatization which might cause emotional distress to students concerned, differential care and education had to be delivered to students. The Scheme, which may be considered as an educational process aimed at the whole person development of students, is no exception, though the results of drug tests should be kept strictly confidential as a matter of principle.

37. Summing up the views of a number of legal experts, the focus should be placed on putting extra efforts to convey the message to students that participation or

not in the Scheme does not mean that the students concerned have or have not abused drugs. In other words, attempt should be made to remove labelling effect, if any, resulting from students' participation or non-participation in drug testing. In addition, drug testing should be regarded as one of the regular activities of schools, with the necessary precautionary measures that are normally in place to protect personal data and privacy of students. Admittedly, the specimen collection process warrants more stringent privacy protection measures and has to be conducted for individual students alone in a venue with absolute privacy. Of course, drug testing results must be kept confidential.

Impact on families and schools

38. The study findings showed that the great majority of students (90%) considered that the Scheme had not damaged their relationship with their parents. Nearly all parents (95%) also had similar views. In addition, the great majority of parents (94%) considered that the Scheme had not adversely affected parental trust on schools. Furthermore, as shown in the chart below, the great majority of students, parents, teachers and principals were of the view that the Scheme had not ruined students' trust in school and student/teacher relationship.



39. Indeed, mutual trust between parents and children or between schools and students has to be cultivated over a number of years through different measures instituted by parents or schools to help students. What counts most is not only the measure itself, but also how the measure is implemented and the intention of schools or parents. If principals, teachers and parents care about the well-being of students and the measure, including drug testing, is designed to help the students, it would be appreciated by the students concerned.

40. During discussions with principals, many of them stressed that drug abuse among students was not more serious in Tai Po compared with some other districts in Hong Kong. Their schools were willing to launch the Scheme on a trial basis because they believed that drugs had an irreversible, detrimental impact on students' physical

and mental health and that schools should act decisively to protect students from drugs.

41. Noting that a number of international schools, ESF schools and a DSS school in Hong Kong had also introduced drug testing, apart from secondary schools in Tai Po, the Project Team believes drug testing has no labelling effect on schools. Given that there were lifetime drug-testing students reported in 99% of secondary schools in Hong Kong, according to the 2008/09 survey, schools may decide to introduce drug testing to help students stay away from drugs, regardless of whether there is or the extent of drug abuse among students of the schools concerned. Some may decide to take a slower pace before introducing drug testing, or adopting other anti-drug measures. In short, conducting school drug testing or not does not imply that drug abuse among students of the schools concerned is more or less serious.

Recommendations

Overview

42. The research findings showed that the Scheme was perceived by students, parents and teachers to be effective in building anti-drug culture, triggering motivation of those who had abused drugs to quit drugs and enhancing students' resolve to refuse drugs. Besides, the Scheme did not have an adverse impact on students' trust in schools and teacher-student relationship. Furthermore, more than half of students, parents, teachers and principals in Tai Po were of the view that school drug testing should be conducted.

43. In addition, it is noted that the total number of reported drug abusers in Hong Kong aged under 21 in first half of 2010 had decreased by some 20% as compared to the same period of last year, representing a reversal of a rising trend since 2004. This may be a result of the much escalated anti-drug efforts in recent years in preventive education and publicity, treatment and rehabilitation, legislation and enforcement, evidence-based research, and external cooperation, a five-pronged approach coupled with collaborative endeavours across different sectors of the community. In this regard, school drug testing has played a major pioneering part in Tai Po.

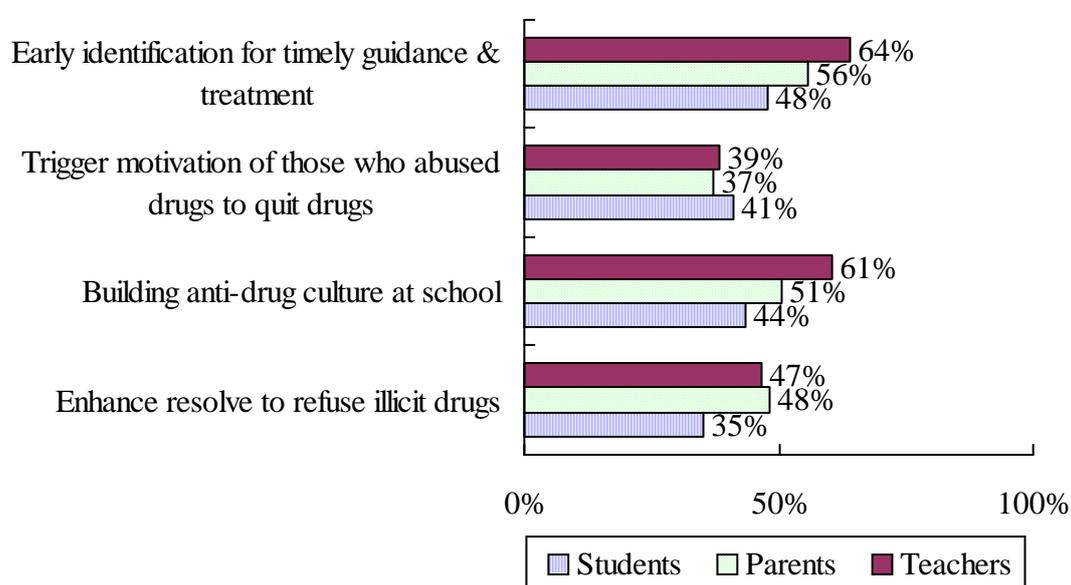
44. In the circumstances, it is desirable to continue implementing the Scheme in secondary schools in Tai Po for the current school year, to reinforce grounds gained last school year and to sustain the overall momentum of school drug testing. The experience to be gained will be valuable for further developing school drug testing in secondary schools in Tai Po or those in other districts.

45. Drug testing should not be seen as a standalone panacea, but it can be a key preventive / deterrent part of a comprehensive programme to implement the healthy school policy. In addition, through a comprehensive healthy school programme, teachers, school social workers, parents and students of the participating schools should be engaged in enhancing their ownership of and involvement in school drug testing, with every effort made to enhancing effectiveness school drug testing, while minimizing impact on learning and teaching. These are discussed in the paragraphs below.

Meeting the expectation of stakeholders

46. There is a general perception and expectation among teachers, students and parents that the Scheme should enable early identification of students who had abused drugs. The June 2010 survey findings showed that a higher proportion of students (48%), parents (56%) and teachers (64%) expected that school drug testing should enable early identification of students who had abused drugs for timely guidance and treatment, as compared with other purposes of the Scheme, such as triggering motivation of those who had abused drugs to quit drugs.

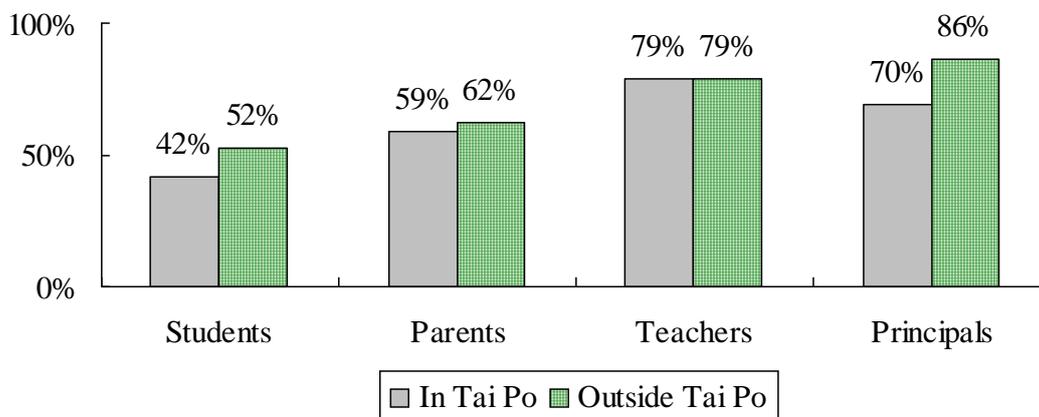
Percentages of stakeholders in Tai Po by expectation on school drug testing



47. In light of such expectations, many teachers, students and parents expressed the views that the Scheme was not effective because no student was tested positive. They pointed out that early identification of students who had abused drugs was not possible given that participation in the Scheme was voluntary. While no student was so identified under the Scheme, the Project Team recognized a substantial increase of self-referral cases to seek help in Tai Po pursuant to the implementation of the Scheme. The Team believed that by triggering motivation to seek help, early identification was facilitated.

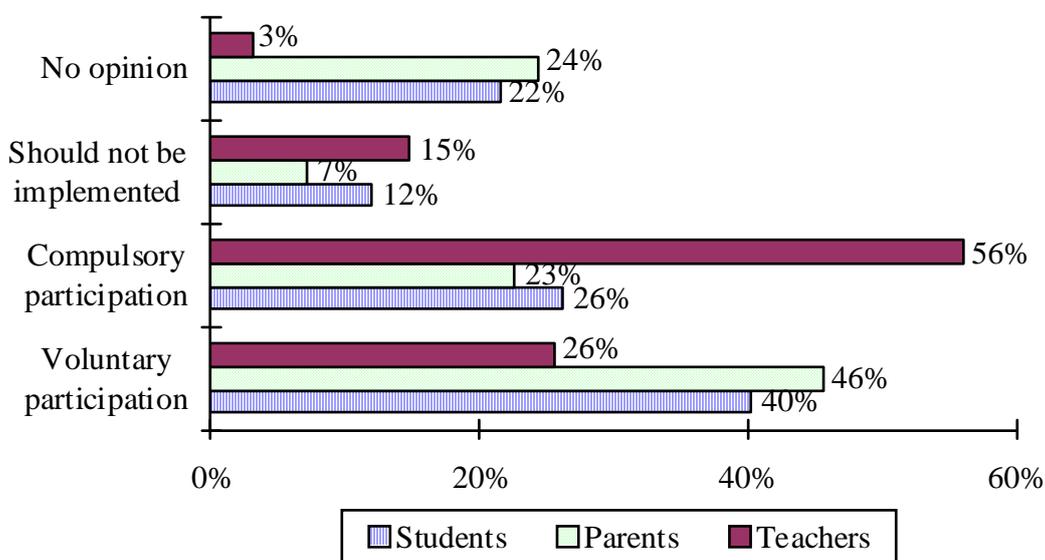
48. For early identification of students who had abused drugs, several principals consulted in the survey suggested that drug testing should be conducted on suspicion. Results of the June 2010 survey also showed that most principals and teachers, especially those of schools outside Tai Po, supported the idea of selecting students for drug test based on reasonable suspicion. More than half of parents of students in Tai Po and outside Tai Po as well as students outside Tai Po also supported drug testing based on reasonable suspicion.

Percentage of respondents who agreed that school could select student for drug test based on reasonable suspicion



49. Some stakeholders, including some principals, teachers and students advocated that early identification could only be achieved through compulsory drug testing in schools. On the other hand, a number of social workers cautioned that compulsory drug testing might risk alienating the students. Even though the students were tested positive, if the students were not willing to receive guidance and treatment, not much help could be offered to the students concerned. Findings of the survey conducted in June 2010 revealed that more than half of students (66%), parents (69%) and teachers (82%) were of the view that school drug testing should be conducted. In addition, a clear majority of parents (46%) and students (40%) supported voluntary drug testing, compared with those supporting compulsory participation (23% parents, 26% students), objecting to drug testing (7% parents, 12% students) or having no opinion (24% parents, 22% students). As regards teachers, the majority (56%) supported compulsory participation.

Percentages of stakeholders in Tai Po by future arrangement for school drug testing



50. The Project Team believes that at the moment it may not be the right time to pursue compulsory drug testing in schools as only about a quarter of students and parents support this approach. Compulsory drug testing is highly controversial and requires sound justifications. Besides, voluntary school drug testing has just been introduced to local secondary schools in December 2009 in the form of a trial scheme only. Obviously, it takes time for stakeholders concerned to have a better idea of what voluntary school drug testing could achieve and its possible drawback. While early identification is important, engaging those who have abused drugs and triggering their motivation to seek help are equally important. On balance, the Project Team believes that voluntary drug testing supplemented by other proactive measures in engaging those at risk should be actively pursued at this moment.

51. Separately, the Project Team noted that some international and ESF schools in Hong Kong conduct drug testing based on contractual agreement with parents and students. It appears that there may be scope for local schools enjoying similar autonomy in student admission (e.g. private schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools), other than following a voluntary approach, to explore and consider such an arrangement, but only if they find it appropriate in their own circumstances.

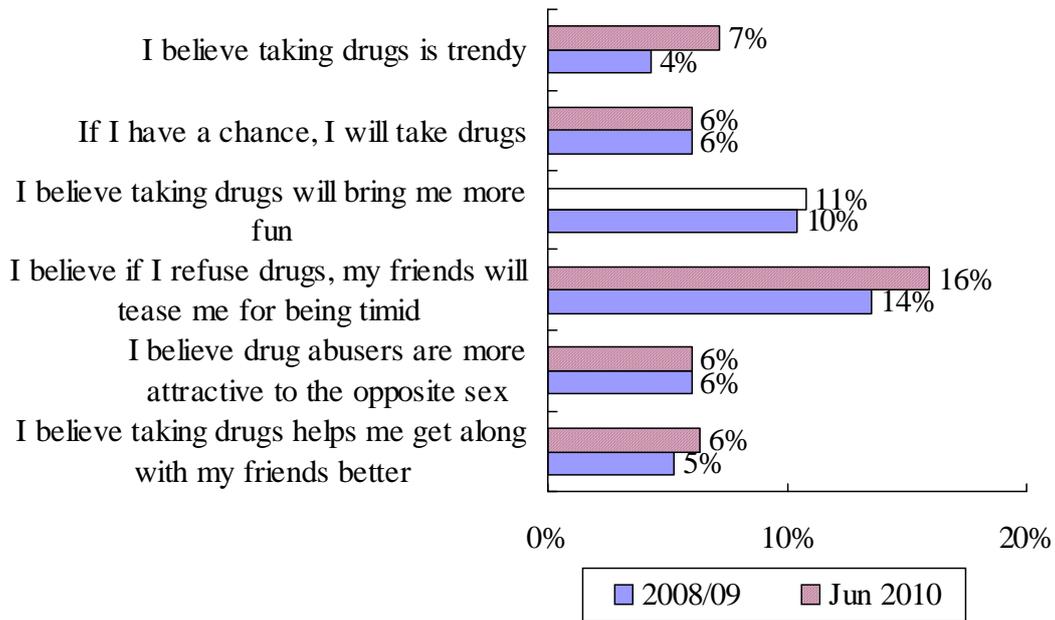
52. *In short, the Project Team recommends that given the positive results revealed in the research, its contribution to entrenching an anti-drug culture now taking root in schools and the community, and stakeholders' support, as highlighted above, school drug testing should be further developed in Hong Kong as a pioneering and innovative part of government's overall anti-drug efforts, following a voluntary approach.*

Attending to the diverse and different needs of students

53. In order to ensure that students are making genuine and informed decisions, the mere holding of briefing sessions for all students, treating them as if they belong to a homogeneous group, and waiting them to approach teachers and social workers for help is not sufficient. This may be against the spirit of putting students' interests as the foremost consideration and is not in line with the expectation on teachers to attend to students' diverse needs.

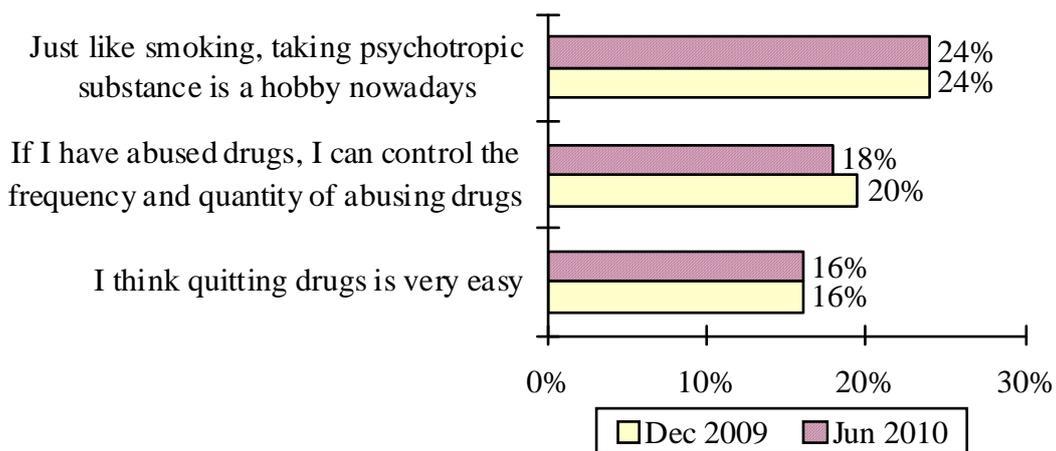
54. Besides, the research findings showed that in June 2010, a higher proportion of students believed that (a) taking drugs was trendy, (b) if they refused drugs, their friends would tease them for being timid, (c) if they abused drugs, it would bring more fun, help them get along with friends better and become more attractive to opposite sex, as compared with 2008/09. In other words, peer influence on students' drug taking had increased, even though the percentage of students holding such a view was still quite low.

Percentage of students in Tai Po by views on drugs



55. Furthermore, a sizable proportion of students had misconceptions about drugs, as revealed from the December 2009 survey and the June 2010 survey findings. It may be seen from the chart below that about 24% of students in Tai Po were of the view that taking psychotropic substance, just like smoking, was a hobby nowadays. 20% of students in December 2009 (18% in June 2010) believed that if they had abused drugs, they could control the frequency and quantity of abusing drugs. 16% thought that quitting drugs was very easy.

Percentage of students in Tai Po by misconceptions about taking drugs



56. There is thus an urgent need to address misconceptions about taking drugs and peer influence, especially for students in need. Given that students spend most of their day time at school, teachers and school social workers are in a very good position to offer guidance and support to students and in enhancing their resolve to stay away from or to quit drugs. In particular, teachers and school social workers

should offer advice and guidance to students in making their decision to participate or not in drug testing, especially to those who are in need. After students decide to participate or not in drug testing, they may change their mind. It is desirable that teachers and school social workers should continue to proactively provide advice and assistance to students.

57. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that concerns may be raised that teachers may in the process exert pressure on students, resulting in “false voluntary consent” by students. As such, it may be advisable that any intervention by teachers and school social workers be conducted in groups, with both students who are participating in the Scheme and those who are not, and without identifying the participating and non-participating students.

58. *It is recommended that teachers and school social workers should proactively approach students in groups, without identifying students who have participated or not in drug testing, to offer advice and assistance, before and after they have decided to participate or not in drug testing.*

59. *It is also recommended that teachers should be empowered to take up a proper role in school drug testing. Schools should make extra efforts to explain to students and parents the advisory and support role played by teachers in school drug testing, assuring students and parents that their decisions to participate or not in drug testing will be respected by teachers. Furthermore, appropriate training will have to be provided to teachers on anti-drug education in general and drug testing in particular.*

Fostering a harmonious relationship

60. In view of the worrying sign of increasing peer influence on taking drugs, efforts should be made to engage students, strengthening peer support among students, turning peer pressure to try drugs to peer pressure to quit drugs. An inclusive school environment is also desirable in order to help students who had abused drugs by ensuring that their linkage with schools and families was maintained.

61. Furthermore, despite the controversial nature of school drug testing the Scheme could help school foster a harmonious relationship among students and between students and schools. There are four steps leading to social harmony, namely toleration, civility, social inclusion and social cohesion. In the context of the Scheme, toleration basically refers to refraining from interference with another student’s participation or non-participation in the Scheme. Civility means respecting other students’ different views and decisions on drug testing. Social inclusion refers to a sense of “we-ness” among students, including those who have or have not participated in the Scheme, and those who have or have not abused drugs. Social cohesion is characterized by trust in school, a sense of belonging to school and the willingness to participate in school activities and help other students in need.

62. The mentorship programme runs by many schools in Hong Kong, with students from the higher forms acting as mentors for students in the lower forms, can be an effective means to strengthen peer support and foster a harmonious relationship

among students, and reinforce students' ability to withstand peer pressure on taking drugs. Feedback from students interviewed in the course of the study who had participated in such mentorship programmes, as mentors or mentees, was highly positive.

63. *It is recommended that consideration should be given to encouraging schools to implement similar mentorship scheme if they do not have one, or strengthening the existing mentorship scheme if one is already in place, as part of the healthy school programme with an anti-drug focus.*

Enriching the educational contents of the Scheme

64. Given the focus of the Scheme should be placed on the educational process it should not be void of any core values it embodies. In the course of conducting the research, the Project Team has the impression that much has been said about students' rights to the neglect of protection of students' interests. But core values are more than rights and interests.

65. During discussions with principals and teachers, it transpired that while students' rights were given full attention, little was mentioned of essential core values like "responsibility", "self-respect", "tolerance of others" and "harmony with others". Students should be made aware that they have a responsibility to themselves, their parents, their classmates and their schools to behave well, including staying away from drugs.

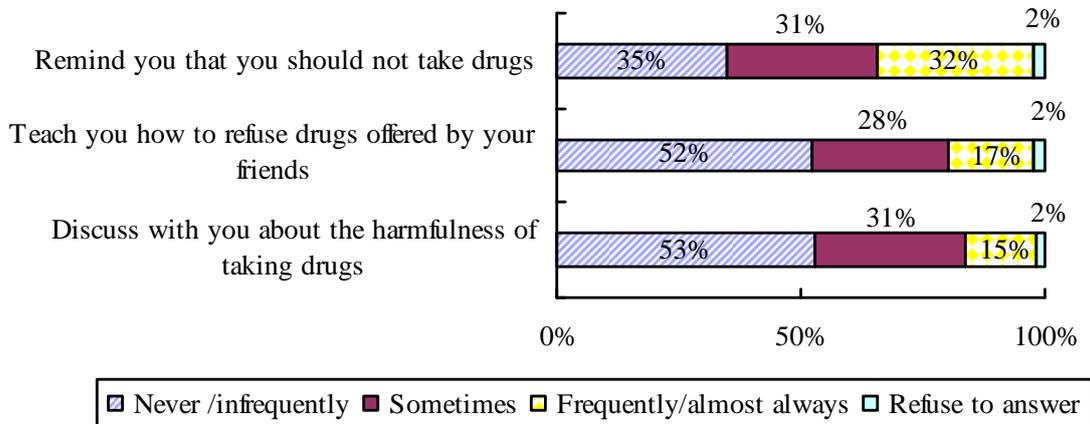
66. *It is recommended that in conducting education and publicity programmes for students on the Scheme, more efforts should be made to include teaching of core values such as "responsibility" and "self-respect", in addition to explanation on students' rights.*

Strengthening support to parents

67. In launching the Scheme, a number of briefing sessions had been organized for parents to explain to them the purposes of the Scheme. However, several teachers and social workers interviewed in the study cautioned that parents who were most in need usually did not participate in activities organized for them. In other words, schools' efforts to providing advice and assistance to parents might not reach those parents who were most in need.

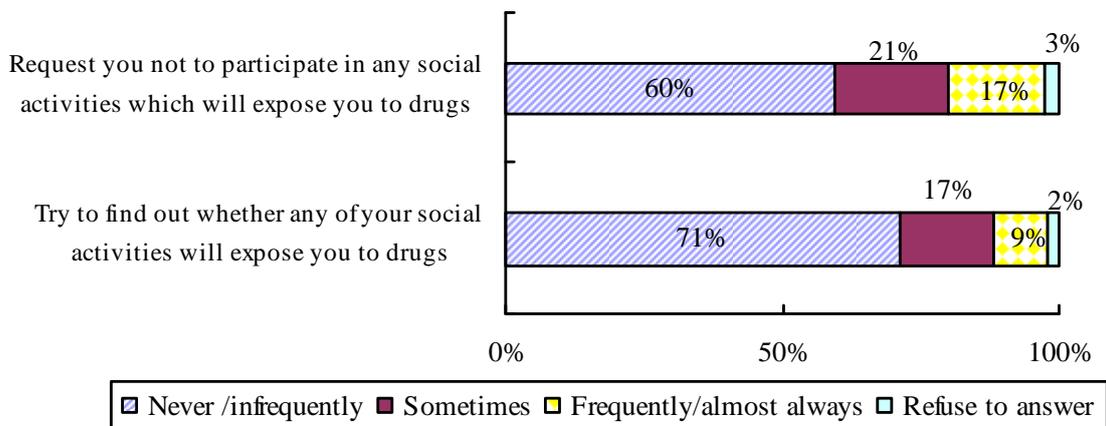
68. The June 2010 survey showed that parents' involvement in anti-drug education of their children was sadly lacking. For example, more than half of parents never or infrequently discussed with them about the harmful effect of taking drugs (53%) or taught their children how to refuse drugs offered by friends (52%). About one third (35%) never or infrequently reminded their children that they should not take drugs.

Percentage distribution of students by views on parental guidance



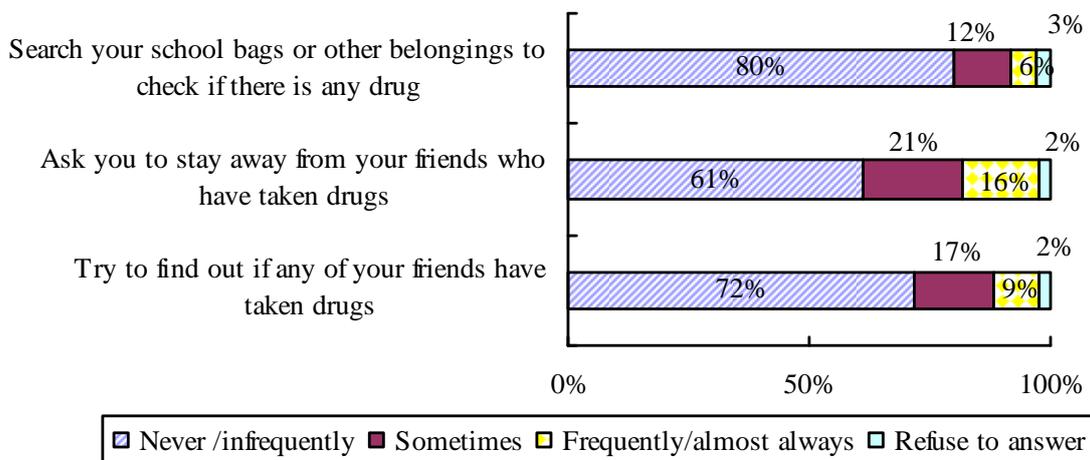
69. Furthermore, more than half of parents never or infrequently requested their children not to participate in any social activities which would expose them to drugs (60%) or tried to find out whether any of their social activities would expose them to drugs (71%).

Percentage distribution of students by views on parental control



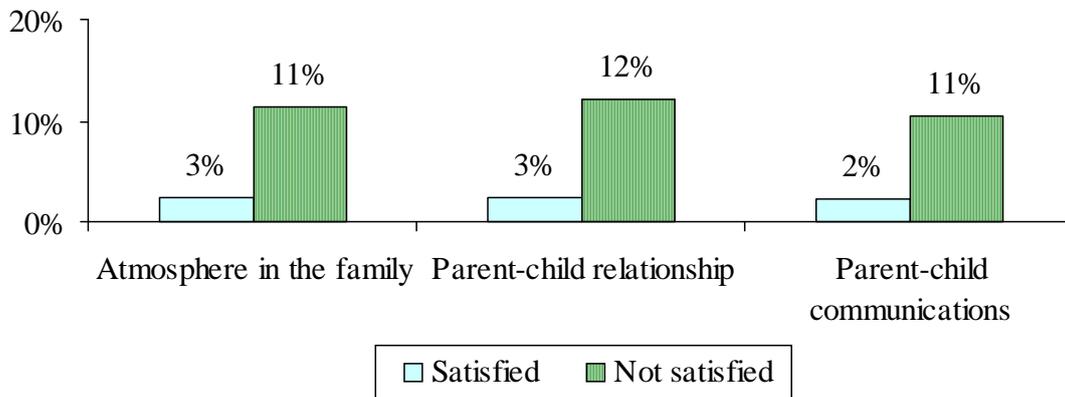
70. In addition, the majority of parents never or infrequently tried to find out if any of their children’s friends had taken drugs (72%), asked them to stay away from their friends who had taken drugs (61%) or searched their school bags or other belongings to check if there was any drug (80%).

Percentage distribution of students by views on parental guidance



71. Besides, the June 2010 survey also showed that for students in Tai Po who were not satisfied with their family atmosphere, parent-child relationship or parent-child communications, a higher proportion of them approved others abusing drugs, as compared with those who were satisfied with their family atmosphere, parent-child relationship and parent-child communications. In other words, family factors and parental guidance or control have an important bearing on students' attitude towards fighting drugs.

Percentage of students in Tai Po who approved others taking drugs



72. *It is recommended that counselling and support services to parents should be stepped up, in a proactive manner, to help them provide parental guidance and advice to their children.*

Engaging students likely to be at risk

73. While secondary schools in Tai Po have introduced voluntary drug testing, a number of schools outside Tai Po have implemented a variety of programs to engage

students at risk, for the purposes of facilitating early identification and timely intervention. In one program, a group of medical practitioners partnered with an NGO to engage youth at risk for initial screening by social workers and nurses, body check-up and motivational interviewers by medical practitioners with follow-up counselling and group work activities by social worker. In another program, a group of community leaders, medical practitioners, academics and social workers joined together to deliver a host of physical fitness test, risk taking behaviour screening, mental health assessment, and memory and eye/hand coordination assessment for students of several schools.

74. Such programs were being organized in a number of districts in Hong Kong, including Wong Tai Sin, North District, Kwai Tsing, Yuen Long and Ma On Shan. By engaging students through these programs, principals, social workers and medical practitioners involved believed that it would help trigger students' motivation to seek help. Through these programs, students who were identified to be at risk would be identified and early guidance and intervention would be provided to the students. The Project Team believes that cross-disciplinary team involving medical practitioners, social workers, education professionals and community leaders would be effective in tackling drug abuse behaviour of students.

75. *It is recommended that programs to engage students at risk, similar to those pioneered by schools and district organizations involving social workers, medical practitioners and other community stakeholders, should be encouraged and supported, and where applicable, included as part and parcel of school drug testing.*

76. It is noted that while the various programs described above are considered effective by principals, social workers, medical practitioners and other community stakeholders involved in engaging students at risk, no systematic, evidence-based research has been conducted to evaluate their effectiveness, strengths and weaknesses. *The Project Team recommends that if such programs are included as part and parcel of drug testing and funded, the effectiveness of these programs should be evaluated.*

An anti-drug healthy school program which is school-based and student-oriented and with community participation

77. The success of the Scheme, as evidenced from the research findings, owes not only to the fact that the Scheme has been carefully drawn up and professionally implemented by the SDT team and schools, but also to the dedication and hard work of school staff, especially school principals. Without the wholehearted support of school management and staff, the Scheme, however well designed, will not be effective. If schools concerned do not have a caring culture, students will not be receptive to the Scheme and the effectiveness of the Scheme will be much reduced. In other words, bottom-up initiatives, rather than top-down directives, are the key to the successful implementation of school drug testing. This is essentially the spirit of school-based management. Moreover, participation should be voluntary for schools, allowing flexibility in the grouping of schools to join hands in a scheme apart from a district-based arrangement (e.g. a cluster of schools under the same school sponsoring body, or schools served by the same NGO in the provision of school social work services). NGO responsible for implementing the program may be CCPSA located in

the same district of the participating schools, or non-CCPSA NGO in collaboration with CCPSA concerned.

78. Drug testing should also be implemented with the students' interests in mind. The purpose is to help students rather than punish those who have abused drugs. Given that there are a number of personal and interpersonal factors that might contribute to drug abuse, which in turn are related factors at the school, family and societal levels, in order to tackle the youth abuse problem at root, it is necessary, among other things, to enhance the culture of care for young people in the community. It is essential that for students at risk, including those who have abused drugs, their linkage with schools should be maintained, such that these students could continue to be benefited from the care and attention of teachers, in order to minimize risk factors and reinforce protective factors, helping them to stay away or quit drugs. Of course, the provision of a professional support programme to provide timely guidance and treatment to those troubled by drugs, who are identified by drug testing or other means or who volunteer themselves for help, is important. In short, the Scheme has to be "student-oriented".

79. In addition, schools alone cannot tackle students' drug abuse problems, which are related to students' personal and interpersonal problems, and problems in the family and the community. Community involvement is crucial to the implementation of drug testing schemes. As exemplified by the experience of the Scheme in Tai Po, close cooperation between social workers and schools is important. Programs being tried out in other districts in engaging students at risk have demonstrated that community support and participation is important. Furthermore, school drug testing involves the delivery of cross-disciplinary services, involving the education, social work and medical professions. To deliver such services effectively requires close cooperation among parties concerned.

80. *In short, it is recommended that drug testing should be school-based and student-oriented and with community participation. Apart from a district-based arrangement, individual groups or a cluster of schools across different districts, e.g. under the same sponsoring body, may join hands in a scheme in a way that may best suit their circumstances.*

81. Drug abuse is one of students' behavioural problems which also include gambling, bullying, smoking and prostitution. These are unhealthy lifestyles of students. Anti-drug education involves learning and teaching inside and outside classrooms, including meaningful life-wide, out-of-school activities, designed to help students develop healthy lifestyles and positive attitudes and values, and enhance their life skills and skills in resisting temptations. This is in fact the healthy school programme being promoted to and implemented by schools. For better coordination and effective implementation, any anti-drug activities including drug testing should become part of the healthy school programme of schools.

82. To summarize from the above discussions, anti-drug activities should cover preventive education for students at large, early identification of students at risk, including those who have not yet abused drugs, in collaboration with community partners, and timely guidance and treatment for students who have abused drugs. As

parents play an important role in anti-drug education, prevention and treatment, the Project Team believes that support and assistance to parents are also essential.

83. *It is recommended that a host of educational, support and assistance programmes, for both parents and students, should be put in place to complement drug testing. The anti-drug activities, as part of the healthy school program should comprise a number of components including*

- a) Education and proactive support for parents;*
- b) Measures to cultivate mutual support and care among teachers and students;*
- c) Anti-drug activities inside and outside classrooms for students at large;*
- d) Drug testing as a preventive and deterrent measure;*
- e) Specific programmes such as physical and mental health screening and physical fitness tests to engage students at risk; and*
- f) Mechanism for timely guidance and treatment for students identified to have abused drugs.*

Fine-tuning the Protocol

84. Drug testing was implemented in Tai Po for six months. Students who were drug tested were largely satisfied with the drug testing process. The Scheme was found to be effective in strengthening students' resolve in refusing drugs and triggering motivation to seek help. There is no strong justification for significantly modifying the Protocol of the Scheme.

85. There is nevertheless room to fine-tuning the Protocol, based on experience gained in implementing the Scheme, with a view to increasing efficiency. The main features of fine-tuning are –

- a) The consent form will become a pledge made by students to adopt healthy lifestyle and stay away from drugs. Consent to take drug testing becomes part of the pledge, thus emphasizing the educational focus of drug testing.
- b) The process of drug testing can be streamlined, by eliminating the 5-minute session on providing anti-drug messages by the Student Drug Testing (SDT) team to the selected students (which can be provided through group briefings and counselling sessions conducted prior to the running of the drug testing at schools).
- c) Replacing the professional nurses of the SDT team under the Scheme by trained technicians.
- d) The role of the Project Officer (field by the Government for the Scheme) in observing the SDT team's drug testing process, providing advice to schools on data protection requirements, etc. to be taken up by "School Project Assistant" deployed by the participating schools jointly.
- e) Schools may choose different testing methods, namely, "urine testing with on-site screening and laboratory confirmation", "urine testing at laboratory only", and "hair testing".

- f) Direct laboratory confirmatory testing may be used, if there is valid concern about carrying out a screening test (e.g. where the result may be affected by medications taken lawfully).

86. In brief, the following drug testing arrangements are recommended for future school drug testing schemes –

87. A district-based consensual scheme (similar to the Trial Scheme in Tai Po)
- a) Suitable for a significant number of schools within a district (not necessarily the majority) sharing the same aspirations.
 - b) Formation of a Student Drug Testing (SDT) team by a designated NGO - for overall co-ordination of the drug testing schemes, management of the drug testing arrangements, receiving test results, providing on-the-spot counselling service for students (where appropriate), and assurance of quality;
 - c) Participation of the CCPSA serving the district in which the schools are located – for case management and counselling services for drug abusing students uncovered by the scheme (additional resources will be provided only when the CCPSA can show that the drug testing scheme has generated additional caseload over and above their current service capacity);
 - d) Enhancement of the school social work service - for providing counselling and education to participating / non-participating students, students in need and their parents / guardians; and
 - e) Administrative and logistics support for schools - including resources for the provision of School Project Assistants by schools to oversee all drug testing visits, arrange logistics support on drug testing day, assist the school principal in complying with the privacy requirements as set out in the Protocol, handle complaints/enquiries on drug testing and compile school visit reports to schools.

88. A consensual scheme for a cluster of schools across different districts

- a) Suitable for schools across different districts sharing the same aspirations, e.g. under the same school sponsoring body. Small sponsoring bodies with like minds may join hands to form a bigger cluster of schools, with assistance from EDB and ND as appropriate.
- b) Same arrangements as the district-based consensual scheme, except that more than one CCPSA will be involved in providing the counselling services to students in need (according to the districts where the participating schools are located).

Choice of testing methods

89. In the Scheme, Point of Collection Test (POCT) devices were used in the on-site initial screening to detect the presence of 5 drugs, namely ketamine, ecstasy, methylamphetamine, cannabis and cocaine, in a urine sample. If the results of the two

screening tests were positive, the same urine sample would be taken to the Government Laboratory for a confirmatory test, using sophisticated instruments, namely gas chromatography-mass spectrometry (GC-MS) or liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS).

90. While the use of POCT devices is more economical, the window to detect ketamine is small. Furthermore, there is considerable subjectivity in interpreting test results, leading to potential false-negative and false-positive errors. Alternatively, laboratory tests may be used, which has a longer detection window and is much more reliable, though laboratory tests are more costly. In addition, the Project Team also notes that following the Chief Executive's steer for the Government to take the lead in bringing in hair drug testing, Government Laboratory has successfully developed the hair drug testing method, obtained accreditation by the Hong Kong Accreditation Service, and launched a pilot scheme. Other than urine testing, hair testing may also be made use of for the benefit of a longer detection window, subject to considerations of higher costs and students' possible resistance. It is relevant that Government does not mandate any option that may discourage students' participation.

91. *It is recommended that in addition to urine testing, with on-site screening followed by laboratory testing for screened positive cases, more testing methods should be made available for participating schools to consider.*

Role of Government Bureaux and Departments

Narcotics Division (ND)

92. ND should continue to play a pivotal role in promoting drug testing as part and parcel of a healthy school programme that embodies drug testing and support services to both students and parents. ND should also be expected to provide advice to schools and NGOs concerned to ensure that the drug testing and complementary programmes are implemented with due care and caution over the protection of students' rights and privacy, as well as to perform an auditing role over the "quality" of future school-based drug testing.

93. Beat Drugs Fund (BDF) may serve as a major funding source for future school-based drug testing schemes. As most schools do not have experience in BDF procedures, ND may also be expected to provide necessary advice and guidance to them.

Education Bureau (EDB)

94. EDB (with support by ND, SWD and other relevant government departments), apart from promoting and coordinating healthy school activities, should through its Regional Education Officers act as advisors for schools to match their needs with available services provided by NGOs and other stakeholders, in implementing schools' healthy school programmes.

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

95. SWD should join hands with ND, EDB and Department of Health continuously to help schools in leveraging and coordinating support from its subvented NGOs in providing preventive, early identification, intervention and treatment services to students, as part of the healthy school programme of schools.

Department of Health (DH)

96. While Student Health Service (SHS) through its regular promotion and preventive activities could supplement anti-drug efforts by schools and NGOs, SHS should be better placed to perform the role of promoting anti-drug education for primary and secondary school students and should not be involved in school drug testing.

Police

97. Similar to the arrangement for the Scheme in Tai Po, personal data of students participating in drug testing, including those who are tested positive in drug testing, should not be provided to the Police, except aggregate, non-identifying statistics of the test results for the purpose of better focusing efforts to combat the drug problem in schools.

Government Laboratory (GL)

98. GL may provide drug testing services in support of schools and NGOs which require its assistance. GL could also consider organising technical seminars and workshops to share its expertise and experience in conducting drug testing in Hong Kong with a view to encouraging private sector laboratories with capabilities and accreditation to participate in drug testing schemes.

Department of Justice (DoJ)

99. DoJ may continue following a prosecution policy that a participating student who has been tested positive or who admits drug abuse pursuant to the school drug testing scheme will not be prosecuted for consumption of drugs contrary to section 8 of the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance.

Home Affairs Department (HAD)

100. HAD may review the experience gained from implementing the one year community-based mentoring scheme in the 18 districts and in-depth mentoring scheme for Tai Po, taking into account the results of a supplementary part of this current research on the support programme.

Resources

101. Estimating resources required for implementation of the above recommendations is not easy as it is difficult to project how many schools will implement an anti-drug healthy school programme which includes drug testing as one of its components. Furthermore, while a rough estimation of the cost of conducting drug testing may be drawn up based on experience gained from the Scheme, little information is available on the unit costs for other components. A cursory examination of projects funded by BDF that are related to physical and mental health screening and physical fitness tests shows that there are wide variations in the unit costs of different projects. Admittedly, much depends on the project contents, the extent of treatment and intervention provided to students and how these projects are implemented.

102. As a very rough estimate of cost on drug testing alone based on the Scheme in Tai Po, the cost may be \$350,000 per school per annum for schools adopting urine screening tests and laboratory confirmation, \$360,000 for schools adopting urine laboratory tests and \$400,000 for schools adopting hair laboratory tests. If Government enhances the provision of school social work services by 20% as announced by the Chief Executive in his Policy Address on 13 October 2010, the cost may be reduced by \$100,000 per school per annum for all three options. However, if schools planning to introduce school drug testing take up other components of the healthy school programme suggested above, including for example education and support to parents in need and specific programmes such as physical and mental health screening and physical fitness tests to engage students at risk, there will be an extra cost. It should also be noted that schools may find their own ways to pursue the healthy school policy according to their own circumstances (i.e. a school-based approach) and pursue complementary components in their own rights with or without other preventive / deterrent initiatives.

Limitations of the Research

103. The Project Team has attempted to make the best use of statistical information gathered in the 2008/09 survey, December 2009 survey and the June 2010 survey. However, the data were gathered from three independent surveys, adopting different sampling designs and questionnaires. Furthermore, it is not possible to match individual students enumerated in different surveys to allow precise analysis of change over time. Apart from these data limitations, the time is too short for the research to identify any impact of the Scheme, of practical significance, on students' knowledge of drugs, perception of drugs, attitude towards fighting drugs and drug taking behaviour. In short, this is not a pre-post design, rendering it impossible to draw any definitive inference on the impact of the Scheme from the data.

104. The original intent is to recruit samples outside Tai Po as control group of the study in order to examine the impact of the implementation of the Scheme. In the course of conducting the research, the Project Team realized that this was not possible. Principals, teachers, students and parents were watching closely what was happening to drug testing in schools in Tai Po. The survey findings, for example, showed that the

great majority (over 80%) of students, parents, teachers and principals of schools outside Tai Po had heard about the Scheme in Tai Po, and among them the majority (over 90%) knew something or a lot about the Scheme.

105. *In view of the above limitations and in order to better assess the impact of the Scheme, providing timely feedback on its implementation and identifying improvement measures required, it is recommended that further research should be conducted over a longer time frame on the scheme(s) to be implemented in future, e.g. the Scheme in Tai Po extended in school year 2010/11.*