



School board considering drug dog searches of high school parking lots

By: Polly Keary | March 18, 2014 | Monroe News News | 7415 Views



Should drug-sniffing dogs be routinely used in Monroe schools for random searches?

That is a question the Monroe Community Coalition, an organization devoted to reducing substance abuse in youth, posed to the Monroe School Board at the regular Monday meeting March 10.

The coalition, made of representatives from schools, churches, service agencies and the Monroe police, noted the results of a Washington Department of Health "Healthy Youth Survey" of Monroe teens that found a higher level of depression in Monroe than in other parts of the county.

Depression is a risk factor in drug use.

Monroe kids surveyed also indicated higher-than-average levels of belief that their parents were tolerant of drug use and a lower-than-average belief that local police enforce drug laws.

Also, 56 percent of 10th graders said they intend to use drugs, up from 46 percent in 2010.

Further alarming statistics from other sources show that in recent years, the number of teens entering treatment programs who report that their primary drug of choice is alcohol has dropped from a high of about 29 percent in 2007 to about seven percent in 2013. And kids whose drug of choice was heroin rose from zero percent in 2007 to above eight percent last year.

"We need to make a clear, bold statement that drugs will not be tolerated to turn that tide," said Monroe School Board member Nancy Truitt Pierce in a Facebook comment. "Having drug sniffing dogs come on campus a couple or three times per year as a deterrent has been effective in other schools so they recommended this as one tool to use to curb drug use in our schools."



How searches are conducted

The Monroe Police Department is volunteering to conduct parking lot searches two or three times a year, using non-aggressive, drug-detecting Labradors. The dogs are trained to smell heroin, methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine and ecstasy.

Typically, students are told weeks in advance that a drug search using dogs will take place at some point in the near future. When the search is taking place, the school is placed on lockdown so kids can't leave class while

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the officers and dogs are in the parking lot.

If a dog identified a car as smelling of drugs, the police would tell school personnel. School administrators would then decide if they think there's a good reason to investigate further.

The staff would first talk to the student associated with the car. If there were drugs in the car, the penalty would depend on the seriousness of the offense. Small amounts might lead to an attempt at intervention and counseling. Larger amounts might lead to suspension or more.

Police are not necessarily told the identity of the student associated with the drug-suspected property, nor what and how much drugs were found.

Controversy and legal rulings

The long-contested question of whether drug-sniffing dogs in schools are a violation of the constitutional amendment against search without probable cause may have been settled last year.

The Eighth District Court of Appeals ruled that a student's rights had not been violated when one child's parents sued a Missouri school after their child's belongings were subjected to a search in which all the children were told to leave their belongings in a room, whereupon drug-sniffing dogs were led through the room.

The court ruled that that the search was a reasonable procedure to maintain safety and security.

And the Monroe Police Department, in an email to the school board, emphasized that searches are only one piece of a larger effort to combat substance abuse.

But it is considered a violation of the Fourth Amendment to use a dog to sniff a person.

And if a dog indicates that a vehicle smells of drugs, it does not constitute probable cause for a police search. However, school officials may search the car, as school officials have more authority than police to search on school property.

The use of dogs is controversial, and not just in schools.

In 2011, the Chicago Tribune studied data from dog-assisted traffic stops and found that dogs were strongly biased by the biases of their handlers. While a positive alert from a dog resulted in the discovery of drugs 47 percent of the time overall, positive alerts only resulted in the discovery of drugs eight percent of the time when the subject was Hispanic. Since dogs have no racial bias, the paper concluded that the dogs were reflecting the biases of the handlers.

And in Nevada in 2012, police officers alleged that some dogs were intentionally trained to give false positive alerts.

One piece of the puzzle

Even if the school does decide to use dogs, they aren't meant to solve the entire problem of youth substance abuse, said both police and school board members.

"I want to stress the use of narcotic detection K-9s on school campuses are only part of a greater picture when combating substance abuse. Education, prevention, intervention, therapy, legal consequences with illicit use of controlled substances, and other components all comprise to fight this battle," wrote Officer Justin Springer.

And dogs could help identify kids who need intervention, said school board member Nancy Truitt Pierce.

"This still seems like a powerful and visible way to send a message to our kids that we do plan to take action if anyone brings drugs on campus," Pierce commented in a spirited Facebook debate on the topic. "It won't be the only thing we need to do but I think it could be a help in both deterring drug abuse and finding and helping kids who have started down that road. The sooner we catch them, the better chance we have of helping them before it's too late. I don't want to lose even one!"

The Monroe Community Coalition and the school board plan to continue exploring the possibility before coming to a final decision.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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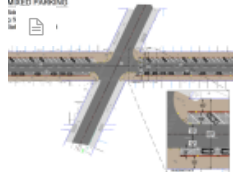
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13 COMMENTS



Jacque

March 18, 2014 at 9:32 pm

If kids are suffering depression in Monroe, does the school need extra programs to teach kids to recognize their own depression, teach self-help controls & involve parents with information and classes with this district-wide problem (if that is as stated cause of drug use). That is long lasting support that could follow students through adulthood. Treating students as suspects, might that add to a general feeling of depression...will it add users?

In researching more about drug sniffing dogs, there seems to be a high error rate. What type of counseling will be given to children who are humiliated or angered by false alerts..and hurt by rumors that would follow them and their families. Will parents understand that false positives are possible and not look at their innocent child differently or deny the truth in a child that uses. Does it go on children's school record?

Washington's privacy rights are even stricter than Federal. Since the ACLU is willing to go after schools that use drug sniffing dogs in Wa; how will Monroe handle that? This isn't a free program at all in so many ways.

There is no question that if this City has a depression problem, not only schools, but City, County should address what is wrong.

Reply ↩



Corey O'Gorman

March 19, 2014 at 1:39 am

Assist the children, do not make them criminals. Maybe drug programs, therapy, and counseling but not the police...has anyone ever heard of labeling theory? Also, even though the car is on school property, you need a warrant for the kid to open the car, remember there is a Constitution.

Reply ↩



Cristal

March 19, 2014 at 10:20 am

Enforcement is a proven prevent strategy to deter kids from using drugs. Research shows us that if a student feels like they "might" get in trouble for using or being in possession of drugs, then they will less likely use or be in possession. We have to utilize

all resources to keep our kids healthy and safe. It really does take a village. To learn more about effective and proven substance abuse prevention strategies, I encourage you (all) to attend a Monroe Community Coalition meeting. I commend the work of this coalition! Here is a good read for those who want to learn more:
http://www.drugabuse.gov/sites/default/files/preventingdruguse_2.pdf

Reply ↩



Corey O'Gorman

March 19, 2014 at 10:53 am

"Enforcement is a proven prevent strategy to deter kids from using drugs. Research shows us that if a student feels like they "might" get in trouble for using or being in possession of drugs"—Lets see the scientific journal this is stated in, I teach criminal justice at a major university and I have never read in any journal where putting children in jail makes them abstain from drug use. Actually by bringing in law enforcement,you do more harm than good for the child, we have evidence based research today that shows children respond better to therapy, peer modeling, and community outreach programs. Law enforcement should handle real crimes and leave our children alone (unless of course they are dealing).

Reply ↩



Todd Racki

March 21, 2014 at 5:27 am

Corey – If you teach criminal justice at a major university then you should know that a student's right to privacy diminishes when he/she is on school grounds and the Supreme Court has ruled that school staff can conduct warrantless searches of a student and/or their property if they have reasonable suspicion that illegal activity exists. This includes back packs, lockers and vehicles if on school grounds. See *Burlison v. Springfield Public Schools*, *New Jersey v. T.L.O.* and *Horton v. Goose Creek Independent School District* for further. The police role here is only to assist school staff to locate illegal narcotics by way of utilizing a trained police narcotic detection K9. If a police K9 alerts then school staff will conduct the search and police probably won't even be there when this occurs. If staff recovers contraband then they will handle internally and call the police to collect and destroy any substance recovered. As far as the "real crimes" you speak off, what exactly do you consider a real crime? Would drug possession be a real crime? How about when students bring heroin to school. I know it's scary to believe that someone that young would consume heroin or other dangerous drugs other than marijuana but the truth is that this is the world we live in today. Monroe is a peaceful community for the most part however there is a lot of drugs here and everywhere else for that matter. The people who are abusing drugs are the same people who are breaking into your cars when you are sleeping or your homes when you're at work in order to steal the things you paid for by working an honest job in order to pay for their habit. And some of these perps are in fact high school aged kids or the ones barely out of high school who may have never been caught at an early age. "Real crimes", well these are the real crimes in our community. Fortunately we don't have homicides every day out here, but we do have an enormous amount of property crimes fueled by habitual drug users who need your stuff to sell, trade for dope. And if we can address this drug problem at an early age, at the high school level then the school or PARENTS can get them into a drug program, therapy, and counseling like you said. Can't get them there if you don't know about it.

Reply ↩



DG

March 19, 2014 at 7:20 am

Maybe the school could call the parents to come and search their child's car. Then maybe parent's would wake up to how serious the drug problem has become in Monroe. Sign up for the daily Monroe police reports and see what is happening around your schools.

Reply ↩



Jacquie

March 19, 2014 at 6:59 pm

<https://aclu-wa.org/blog/drug-sniffing-dogs-schools-make-every-student-suspect>
Why not send drug sniffing dogs around all cars parked on public streets, Parks, City Hall, shopping malls, work places. Then grill the owners of the cars, and put them through a help program.

Oh, dog picked out you by mistake, well how can you prove that? Your parents, all your friends really believe you are innocent (what do they know) the dog said otherwise.

Please look at the accuracy of the dogs in link, do some research for sake of children. My husband's luggage in a customs line was alerted by a dog...he had chocolate in his luggage. The inspector laughed because that dog "always did that". But if that happened in Monroe School, the student will get labeled period. There will be no search of car, verification of inaccuracy. And is this kid the owner of all that is in or was in the vehicle? In most cases, he probably isn't the legal owner.

Please also talk to the ACLU and see what action they will take against Monroe School District. Dog sniffing accuracy report. <https://aclu-wa.org/blog/drug-sniffing-dogs-schools-make-every-student-suspect>

Reply ↩



Danielle

May 13, 2014 at 12:34 am

Check out the 2002 yearbook. They labelled all the kids anyways. Its like a theme here. Put people in boxes and judge them

Reply ↩



Eriks Skujins

March 21, 2014 at 11:02 am

Imagine you buy a used car. The previous owner (or previous, previous) used and/or sold drugs. They hid some contraband in a deep nook within the car and forgot about it. Your new, used car is targeted by a drug-sniffing dog. Police find a felony amount of narcotics after ransacking your new, used car. You (or your teen child) is doing prison time and making new "friends" at Twin Rivers. Enjoy!

Reply ↩



JAxel

March 21, 2014 at 2:34 pm

How does this show loving kindness to humanity?

Reply ↩



JBR

March 21, 2014 at 6:13 pm

Is this really necessary? The strengthening of our "police state" just continues. We put more and more money towards law enforcement and they spend all day trying to come up with what to do with their time. I'd rather they were out responding to normal criminal activity than wasting their time trying to bust poor high school students.

Reply ↩



Danielle

May 13, 2014 at 12:30 am

Consider the source of the surveys. This group makes connections with information from questions specifically designed to fool the public.

Real issue causing depression since I was a teenager and graduated Monroe HS in 2002, is that there is nothing to do here that is not outdoors. So half the year there is no activities, especially positive ones.

Second Heroin use started as pharmaceuticals as early as 2000. By 2008 pharmaceuticals became too expensive for teens and they went to heroin.

Want to stop drugs? Then let's walk down the street between 2-4am and I will show you every drug dealer between 179th and Kelsey and Blueberry Lane and Main Street. They aren't hard to find.

Reply ↩



Concerned Parent

June 6, 2014 at 5:03 pm

Monroe has just decided to begin the drug-sniffing dog program, announcing it in this week's newsletter. Bad idea, which I will work to change.

Reply ↩

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