

To: Editor
Letter to the Editor: Commentary

Does Marijuana Impact Education?

Written by: Dr. Paul Tighe, Superintendent
Mingus Union High School District

We are hearing considerable propaganda that marijuana is harmless and should be legalized. In November of 2010, Arizona voters legalized the medical use of marijuana and several states have recently legalized recreation use of marijuana. So does this impact education?

First, let's address the myth that marijuana is not harmful. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (September, 2012) published, "A major new study provides objective evidence that, at least for adolescents, marijuana is harmful to the brain." The study concluded that persistent cannabis users had significantly more memory and attention problems. Dr. Stephen Dewey of the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research has compiled considerable evidence of the adverse impact of marijuana on brain functioning. Furthermore, marijuana is addictive. In fact, 16% who start smoking marijuana as a teen become addicted (MATFORCE, 2013).

With the legalization of medical use of marijuana in Arizona in 2010, there has been a significant increase in marijuana use among youth. There are some alarming statistics from the 2012 AZ Youth Survey. In Yavapai County:

- 17% of 8th graders say they have used marijuana and 8% say they used it in the past 30 days
- 22% of 10th graders say they have used marijuana in the past 30 days, up from 18% in 2010
- 26% of 12th graders say they have used marijuana in the past 30 days, up from 19% in 2010

The Office of Applied Studies published a National Survey on Drug Abuse Report (2002) that showed youth with an average grade of D or below were more than four times as likely to have used marijuana in the past year than youth with an average grade of A. Those who used cannabis heavily in their teens and continued through adulthood showed a permanent drop in IQ of eight points (Meier, 2012).

The future of our community rests on our youth and the education of our youth is paramount to their success. There are already documented increases in marijuana use among youth following the legalization of medical use of marijuana. We need to protect our youth from the harmful, addictive effects of marijuana. We need to be informed of the facts about marijuana as we face attempts to legalize marijuana drug use.
