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Stopping Steroids in Our Schools

JEFFERSON CITY — We've all seen the stories of our favorite sports heroes, who have hit the winning jumpshot, made the game-saving tackle, or hit the record-breaking homerun, only to find out they cheated. They took some kind of banned substance that has helped them get bigger and stronger than the old-school method of pumping iron. What's worse, now our high school students are starting to copy that behavior, not only giving them an unfair advantage on the field of play but also endangering their health and in some cases, their lives.

A recent national survey says 3.5 percent of all high school seniors admit to using steroids. While the drug might give them a temporary boost in performance, the damage to their bodies (including heart and liver damage) can last long after they leave the field of play. Furthermore, the "roid rage" many steroid users experience can make them a danger to everyone around them. It's time we took action to stop this destructive trend. I have introduced a measure that will do just that.

[Senate Bill 736](#) requires schools to adopt policies for the testing of students participating in interscholastic athletics for the unlawful use of a controlled substance, including, but not limited to, anabolic steroids. If a student tests positive, they're out of interscholastic or intramural sports for the rest of the school year and the next school year as well.

The bill in its current form is a work in progress as we try to find the best approach. Language will be added to ensure that local schools and parents don't have to pick up the financial cost. It is also likely that athletes will be randomly tested so that the overall cost of the program stays low.

Some schools are already testing their athletes for some of the obviously banned substances, such as marijuana, cocaine, and methamphetamines. It's time we update these policies so that they also make sure our kids are free of the scourge of steroids and the long-lasting effects from these so-called "performance-enhancing" drugs. The real enhancement will come when they've achieved glory in their sport through hard work and dedication.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.