

# HIGH SCHOOL GAMBLING: A problem at Conestoga, a problem nationwide

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## AT CONESTOGA

The school administration denied The Spoke's requests for details into this school year's most recent gambling case. After repeated attempts at acquiring information, requests were filed under Pennsylvania Open Records Law. The school cited student confidentiality laws in its denial. A student, who police said in early January was under investigation, had not been charged by that point, a juvenile court legal supervisor said. The legal supervisor later refused to provide information into the case.

But despite limited official details into this case, it is clear from The Spoke's investigation that Conestoga students did bet on sports.

Students said they mostly bet in smaller groups or among friends, though some did confirm that a more organized sports betting ring existed. And as March approaches and March Madness for college basketball begins, many students fill out brackets, placing bets on their predictions.

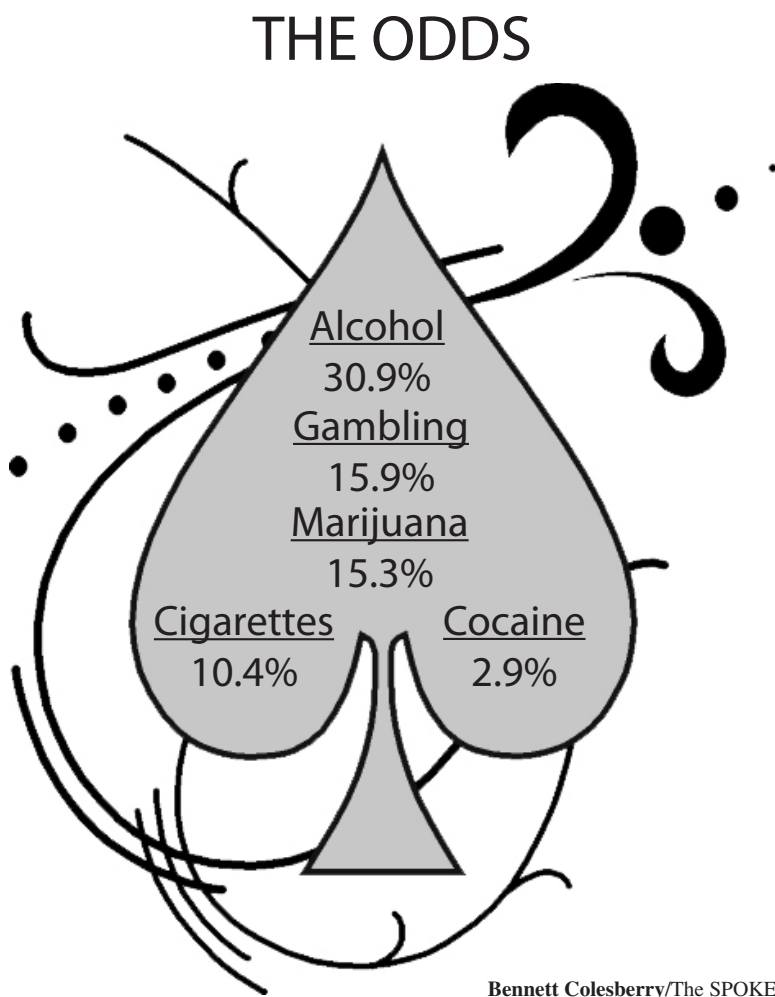
It's all gambling, and it's all illegal.

The students The Spoke interviewed said it was easy to start gambling. One student said getting involved was as simple as just knowing someone, and then contacting them with the bet. One Conestoga student said he started sports betting last year. He said that gambling, for him, has "nothing to do with enjoyment or fun." And despite the fact that unlicensed gambling is explicitly prohibited by law, he said that "you would never get caught, [and it's] not a big deal [if you are]."

But in any case, whether in larger groups or among a small group of friends, any form of gambling, without a license, is illegal in Pennsylvania, said Lauren Bozart, Assistant Press Secretary of the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office.

Students caught gambling at school could be subject to disciplinary action. While Principal Tim Donovan would not confirm that gambling had occurred in the past school year, he did say that "if the exchange of money took place, then that would automatically be a suspension."

Conestoga does not explicitly mention gambling in the Code of Conduct, though Donovan said that as with any issue, an addition to it is not out of the question.



Bennett Colesberry/The SPOKE

Statistics are averages from previous 30 day category for grades 6, 8, 10 and 12 from the 2005 Pennsylvania Youth Survey

Similarly, West Chester B. Reed Henderson High School does not mention gambling in its policies but participating in illegal activity is against school policy, Principal Marc Bertrando said.

Unlike Conestoga and West Chester B. Reed Henderson, some other area schools do address gambling in policies.

Radnor High School's Code of Conduct contains mention of gam-

broadly how to deal with different scenarios they encounter.

"Conestoga students and T/E students are very well educated on a variety of issues, and what it comes down to is choice," Donovan said.

However, statistics and interviews show that some Conestoga students are making the wrong choice.

Analysis of the most recent Pennsylvania Youth Survey avail-

**one student said he bet \$500  
on sports over the years**

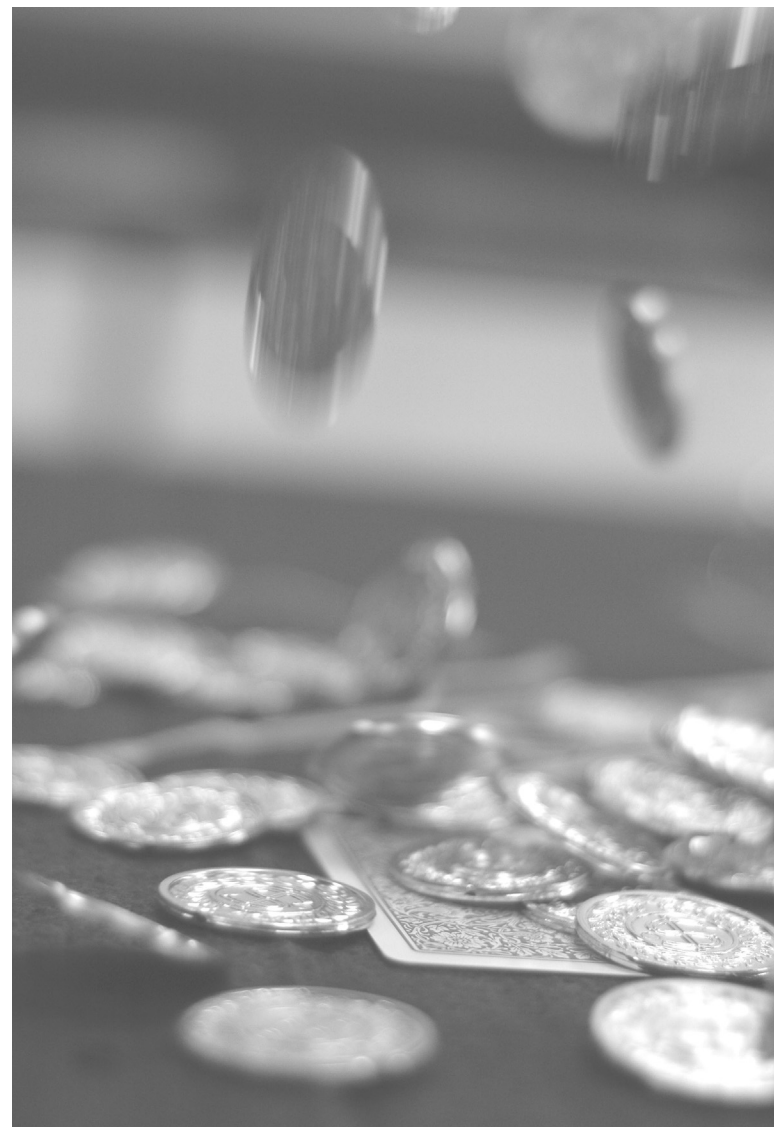
bling, Radnor Assistant Principal Jeffrey Smith said.

Malvern Preparatory School also addresses gambling in its rules and regulations. According to the school's website, gambling warrants "five demerits and five detentions," which is on the same level as cutting class for the first time or forgery.

There is also no specific mention of gambling in the Conestoga curriculum, though Donovan said that Conestoga is teaching students

able (2005) shows that while gambling in the Tredyffrin/Easttown School District is not nearly as prevalent as alcohol use, it rivals other addictive activities such as cigarette smoking and cocaine and marijuana use.

The 2005 survey asked students several gambling-related questions ranging from whether students had "gambled for money in [the] past year" to whether they had "spent more than meant on gambling in [the] past year."



The Spoke compared "gambling for money in the last 30 days" survey results with the drug and alcohol use in the last 30 days survey results, and found that gambling is rivaling other addictive drugs at Conestoga.

According to the survey, gambling for money is significantly more prevalent than cocaine. At Conestoga, nearly 22 percent of seniors reported to have gambled in the last 30 days, as opposed to only 7 percent of this group that reported to have used cocaine in that same time frame.

The use of marijuana, statistically the most prevalent drug in T/E behind alcohol, on average also falls slightly below student gambling, according to averages of results from grades 6, 8, 10 and 12.

The 2005 survey marked the first year the survey included questions about gambling. The gambling questions were added to "establish a base-line of adolescent gambling behaviors which could be monitored over time and serve as sound measurements," said Dawn Petrosky, a spokesperson for the state Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the group that runs

the survey.

## A NATIONWIDE TREND

Across the country, studies show that adolescent gambling has grown at alarming rates.

"There is ample research demonstrating that 80 percent of teenagers gamble," reads the Web site of the International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Behavior, based at McGill University in Canada.

A 2006 study published in the journal *Psychiatry* also found that unlike adult gambling, teen gambling is largely centered around socializing rather than making money. The Spoke's interviews confirm that among some, socializing is a main motivation.

The fact that gambling among teenagers can be a social activity makes it less of a big deal, especially if the participants are having fun, some say. Not so, say the experts.

"Public perception and

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