

Johnson City Press

Pot legalization could boost education

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According to U.S. News, the state of Tennessee ranks 31st in the country in K-12 education. In recent years Tennessee has made strides in education but not reached even the upper half of states in the country in terms of quality of education Tennessee students are receiving.

A study in Wisconsin and Texas found significant evidence that spending more money on education improves the overall quality of the education and a correlation to rising test scores of students and increased college enrollment. For example, the best states in the country for K-12 education, such as New Jersey, spend over \$22,000 per student whereas Tennessee spends roughly \$11,000 per student, which is almost \$4,000 below the national average. More money in the education system means better paid teachers, newer equipment and more funding for extracurriculars.

Research points to spending more money on education will improve the education system here in Tennessee. But some may ask where the funding increases would come from without raising taxes. The solution is to legalize cannabis.

According to the Pew Research Center, nearly 70% of Americans are in favor of the legalization of cannabis. According to government websites for the state, there are just over 935,000 students enrolled in Tennessee schools.

The legalization of cannabis brings in almost \$470 million in tax revenue in the state of Washington per year. This could mean raising our education spending on a per-pupil basis by roughly 4%.

Opponents of cannabis legalization argue that it will raise crime and drug use among minors, but according to the Cato Institute, “Overall, violent crime has neither soared nor plummeted in the wake of marijuana legalization.”

Because we have data from other states to base this decision off of, we can see that cannabis legalization hasn't changed violent crime in states that have legalized it. When it comes to youth usage of cannabis, The Cato Institute said this "adolescent use reportedly decreases in the years immediately prior to legalization and then returns roughly to prior use rates. The available data show no obvious effect of legalization on youth marijuana use."

Not only would the legalization of marijuana in Tennessee mean a freer state allowing Tennesseans to make choices for themselves, but it would also improve the education Tennessee students receive. Cannabis legalization is a win for all Tennesseans.

Colin Wagner is a Milligan student. He wrote this opinion piece for his State and Local Government class and submitted it to the Press for publication.