

Making the Connection: Academic Grades and Substance Use

Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey 2015

Research shows there is a strong relationship between health-related behaviors and educational outcomes. Students with lower grades are more likely to engage in health risk behaviors than students with higher grades, while students with higher grades report more protective factors.¹ In addition, less engagement in risk behaviors during adolescence is associated with higher achievement later in life while academic achievement during this period leads to fewer health risk behaviors.^{1,2} Results from the 2015 YRBS show similar trends among Vermont high school students.

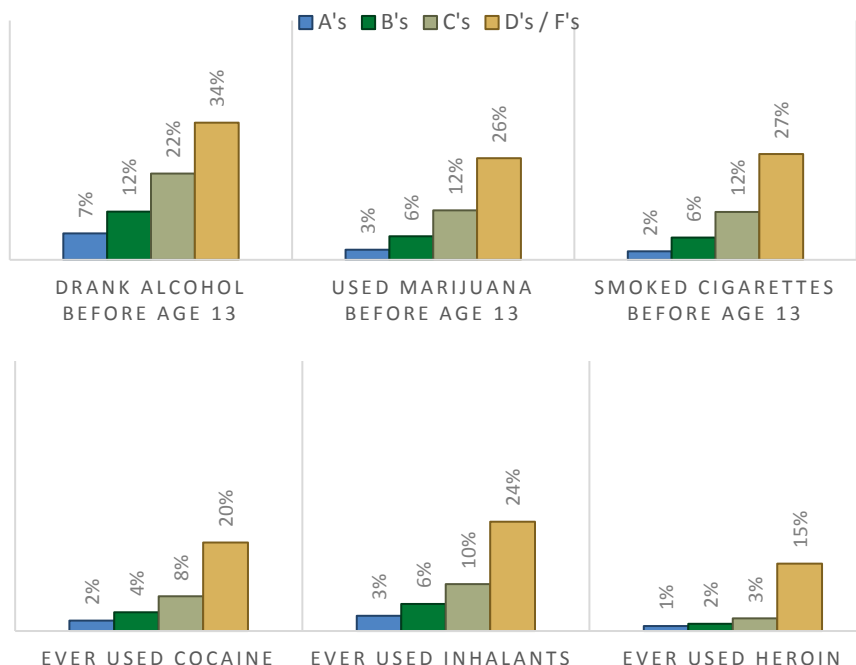
In Vermont, high school students with lower grades are more likely to report substance use than their peers with higher grades.

Early substance use. With each decrease in grades earned, early marijuana and cigarette use doubles. While increases in early alcohol use do not double with each decrease in grades earned, the differences are still significant. More than a third of students with D's and F's drank before age 13 and a quarter used cigarettes and marijuana.

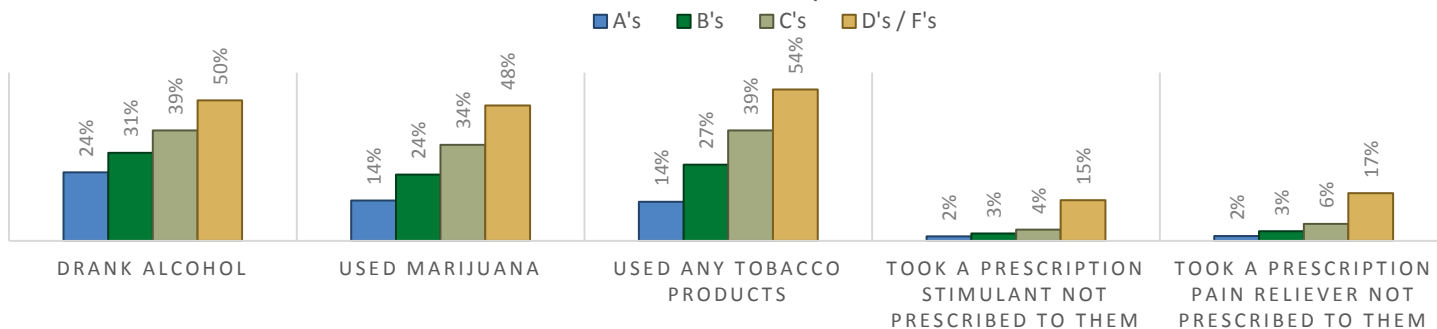
Lifetime Use. Use of cocaine and inhalants also doubles as grades earned decrease. While heroin and methamphetamine use significantly increases as grades decrease, differences between students with A's, B's, and C's are smaller; those with mostly D's and F's are at least five times as likely as other students to have used heroin and methamphetamine. Lifetime use of heroin was identical to use of methamphetamine (not shown).

Current Use. Substance use during the previous 30 days significantly increases as grades decrease. Overall, one in two students with mostly D's and F's reported using alcohol, marijuana, or tobacco products during the past 30 days. Students earning mostly D's and F's were more than five times as likely as those with mostly A's and B's to misuse prescription medicine.

LIFETIME SUBSTANCE USE & USE BEFORE AGE 13, BY GRADES EARNED



CURRENT SUBSTANCE USE, BY GRADES EARNED



¹ Rasberry CN, Tiu GF, Kann L, et al. Health-Related Behaviors and Academic Achievement Among High School Students — United States, 2015. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2017;66:921–927. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6635a1>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health and Academics. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/index.htm

Students with higher grades in school are more likely to believe it is wrong for someone their age to use alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana products and are more likely to believe their parents think it is wrong as well. Grades earned is also associated with perceived risk of harm from substance use.

While the actual proportion of students who believe it is wrong to use alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana varies, similar trends for all three substances by grades earned are reported. Students with higher grades are significantly more likely than those with lower grades to view their peers using alcohol (A- 56% vs D/F- 44%) or cigarettes (A- 87% vs D/F- 55%) as wrong. With marijuana use, students with mostly A's are nearly two times as likely to believe it is wrong to use it compared to students with D's and F's (64% vs 34%). (not shown)

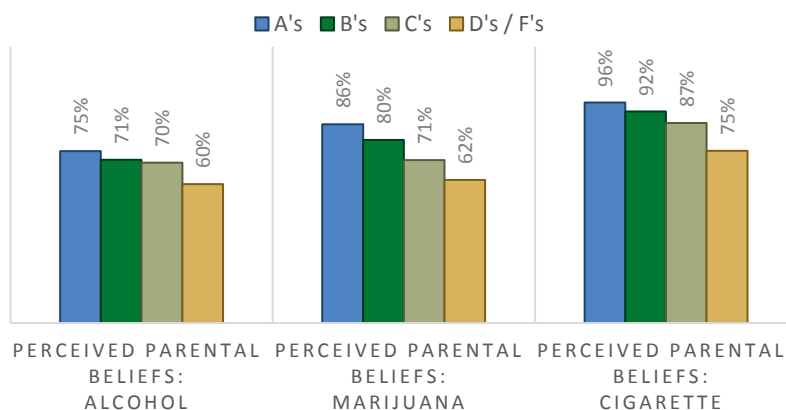
Similarly, as grades in school decrease students are significantly less likely to believe their parents would think it was wrong or very wrong for someone their age to use alcohol, marijuana, or cigarettes.

Students with higher grades are significantly more likely to think people their age greatly risk harm if they binge drink one or two times per weekend, smoke a pack of cigarettes per day, or use marijuana regularly compared to those with lower grades.

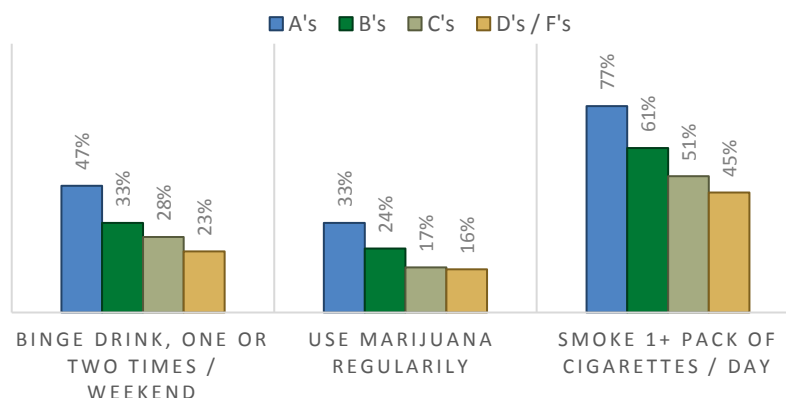
Grades earned in school is not always associated with how easy students believe it would be to access substances if they wanted to.

As grades decrease significantly more students believe that accessing marijuana or cigarettes would be easy or very easy. However, the relationship with access to alcohol is less clear; regardless of grades earned students are equally likely to believe that alcohol would be easy or very easy to get if they wanted it.

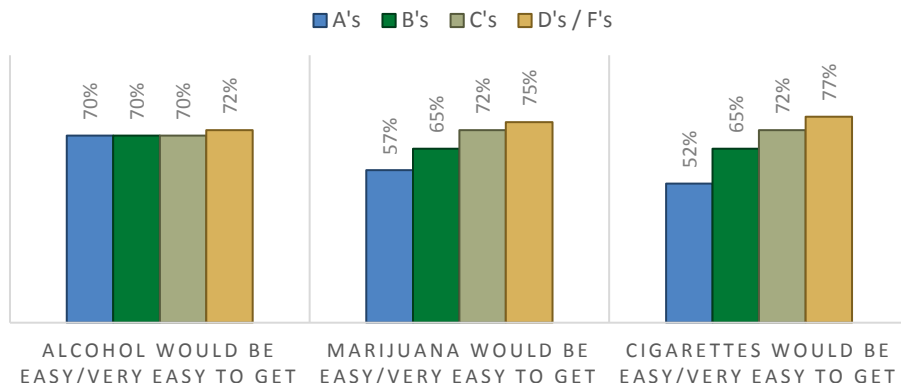
BELIEVE THEIR PARENTS THINK IT IS WRONG OR VERY WRONG FOR SOMEONE THEIR AGE TO USE, BY GRADES EARNED



BELIEVE SOMEONE THEIR AGE RISKS GREAT HARM, BY GRADES EARNED



BELIEVE IT WOULD BE EASY OR VERY EASY TO GET, BY GRADES EARNED



ACCESS TO ALCOHOL

Students who earn mostly A's and B's believe it is just as easy to get alcohol if they wanted it as their peers who earn mostly D's and F's.

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For past data briefs, statewide and local reports: please see the YRBS website at: <http://healthvermont.gov/research/yrbs.aspx>