

Making the Connection: Drug Use and Academic Grades

Data from the 2015 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) show that students with higher academic grades are less likely to engage in drug use, such as using marijuana, taking prescription drugs without a prescription, or using heroin. It is important to remember that these associations do not prove causation. School health professionals, school officials, and other decision makers can use this information to better understand the associations between drug use and grades, as well as to develop and reinforce policies, practices, and programs that support healthy behaviors.

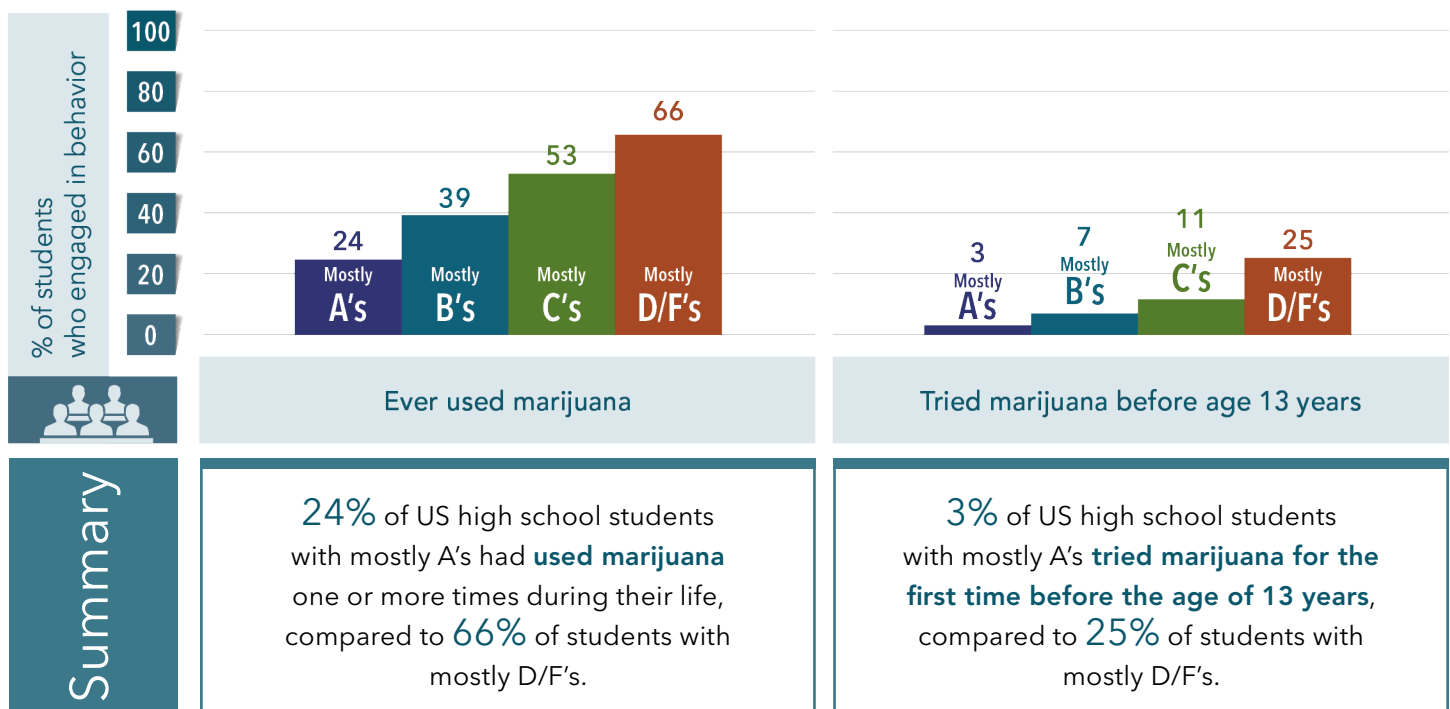
Key findings

Compared to students with lower grades, **students with higher grades are**

less likely to have:

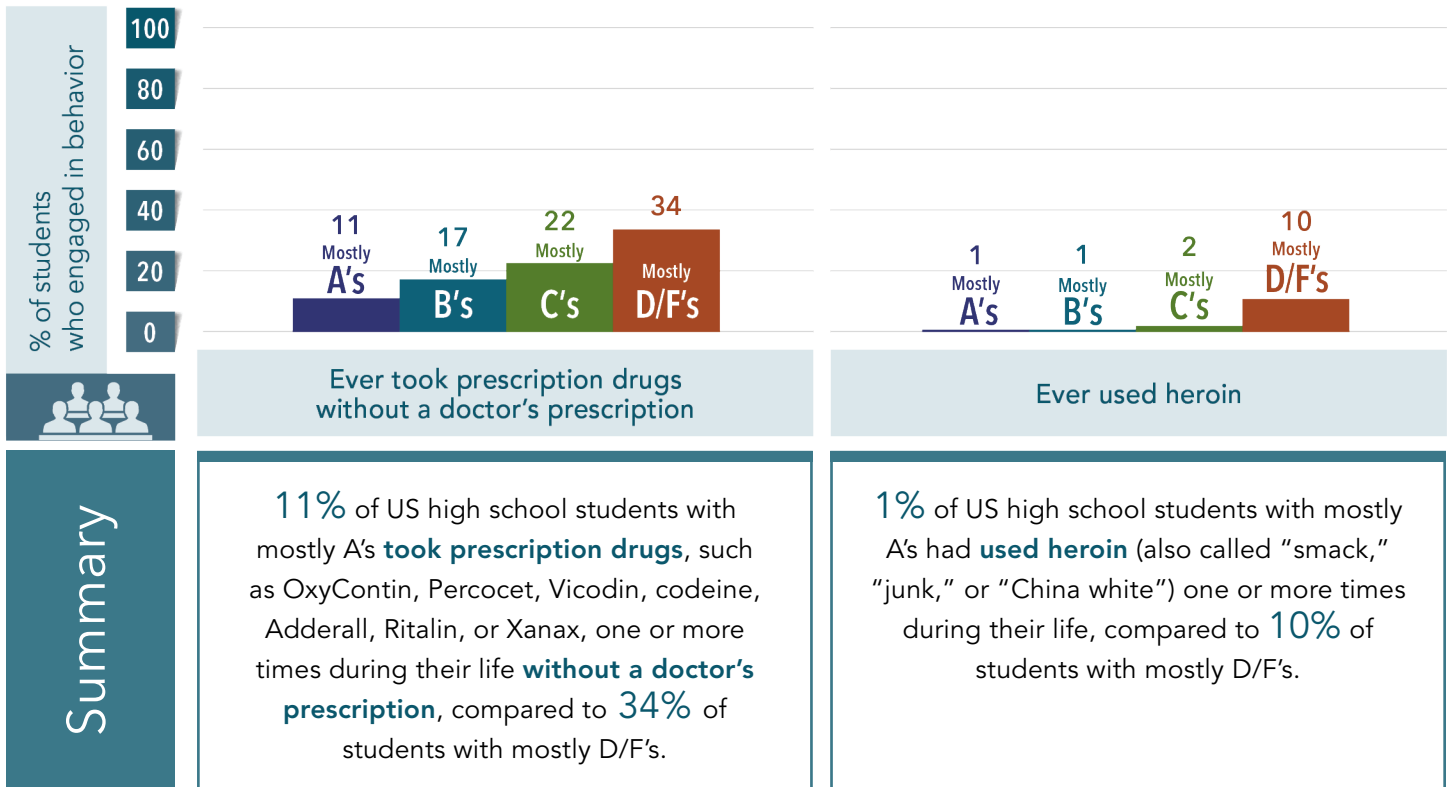
- Ever used marijuana.
- Tried marijuana before the age of 13 years.
- Ever taken prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription.
- Ever used heroin.

FIGURE 1A Drug Use Behaviors, by type of academic grades earned
- United States, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2015



*Figure 1^a and Figure 1^b illustrate the percentage of students who engaged in each risk behavior, by type of grades mostly earned in school (mostly A's, B's, C's, D's/F's) (row proportions). The percentage of students who did not engage in each risk behavior are not shown. However, the percentages of students who did and did not engage in each risk behavior, by type of grades mostly earned in school, sum to 100%. Logistic regression analyses (not shown) controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade in school confirmed a significant association between drug use behaviors and academic grades. You can also view data from other [2015 YRBS drug use variables](#).

FIGURE 1B Drug Use Behaviors, by type of academic grades earned
- United States, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2015



Conclusions

These results from the YRBS provide evidence of a significant association between academic grades and using drugs. Further research is warranted to determine whether higher grades in school lead to lower drug use, if lower drug use leads to higher grades, or some other factors lead to these drug-related behaviors.

There is a close relationship between health and education. By working together, education and health agencies, parents, and communities can ensure that students are healthy and ready to learn in school.

About the Data

The National YRBS monitors priority health-risk behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States. It is conducted every 2 years during the spring and provides data representative of 9th through 12th grade students in public and private schools throughout the nation. In 2015, students completing the YRBS were asked, "During the past 12 months, how would you describe your grades in school?" and given seven response options (Mostly A's, Mostly B's, Mostly C's, Mostly D's, Mostly F's, None of these grades, Not sure). In 2015, 32% of students received mostly A's, 38% received mostly B's, 20% received mostly C's, 6% received mostly D's or F's, and 4% reported receiving none of these grades or not sure.

For more information, visit the [CDC's Healthy Youth website](#), or call 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).



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