

# Making the Connection: Other Health Behaviors and Academic Grades

Data from the 2019 national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) show that students with higher grades are less likely than their peers with lower grades to suffer from certain health conditions. Students with higher grades are also more likely to receive certain types of care, like dental care. It is important to remember that these associations do not prove causation. The information presented here is intended to help school health professionals, school officials, and other decision makers better understand the associations between grades and these behaviors and conditions. Greater understanding will help in developing and reinforcing policies, practices, and programs that help students achieve their maximum potential and lower their risk for poor health outcomes.

## Key Findings

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

**more likely to**



Get 8 or more hours of sleep.

**less likely to**

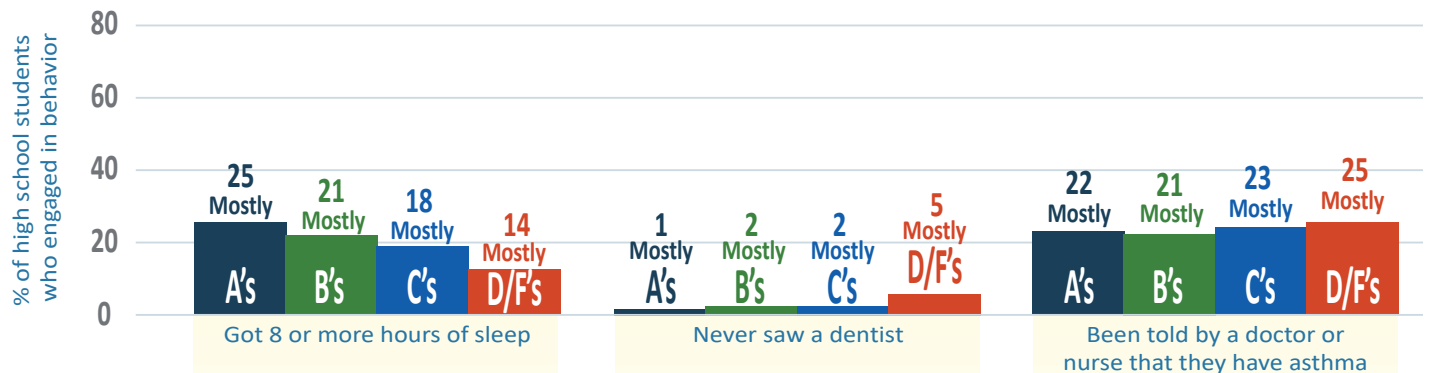


Never see a dentist.

The findings do not show that academic grades are associated with being told by a doctor or nurse that they have asthma.

## FIGURE 1

**Other Health Behaviors, by Type of Academic Grades Earned**  
- United States, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2019



## SUMMARY



**25%** of US high school students with mostly A's **got 8 or more hours of sleep**, (on an average school night) compared to **14%** of students with mostly D/F's.

**1%** of US high school students with mostly A's **never saw a dentist** (for a check-up, exam, teeth cleaning, or other dental work), compared to only **5%** of students with D/F's.

**22%** of US high school students with mostly A's **had ever been told by a doctor or nurse that they had asthma**, compared to **25%** of students with mostly D/F's.

\*Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of students who engaged in each health-related 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 health-related behavior are not shown. However, the percentages of students who did and did not engage in each health-related 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 health behaviors/conditions and academic grades.

## Conclusions

These results from the YRBS provide evidence of a significant association between academic grades and some health behaviors and conditions. Further research is warranted to determine whether lower grades in school lead to these health behaviors and conditions, if these health behaviors and conditions lead to lower grades, or some other factors lead to these health behaviors and conditions.

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. Find out more about the connection between health and academic achievement on [CDC's Healthy Schools Health and Academics website](#).

## About the Data

The [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System](#) (YRBSS) monitors priority health-related 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 2019, 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 2019, 38.0% of students received mostly A's, 37.1% received mostly B's, 16.0% received mostly C's, 4.6% received mostly D's or F's, and 4.3% reported receiving none of these grades or not sure.



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