

The Forgotten Link Drug and Alcohol Use and Academic Performance

Student Drug Use and Academic Performance

- Student substance use precedes, and is a risk factor for, academic problems, such as lower grades, absenteeism, and high dropout rates.¹
- Alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs can interfere with a student's ability to think, making learning and concentration more difficult and impeding academic performance. The more a student uses alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, the lower his/her grade point average is likely to be and the more likely he/she is to drop out of school.²
- Poor performance in school has been associated with marijuana use, as youths with an average grade of D or below were four times more likely to have used marijuana in the past year than youths with an average grade of A.³
- Adolescents who use alcohol may remember 10% less of what they have learned than those who don't drink.⁴
- Compared to non-drinkers, heavy and binge drinking students are more likely to say that their work is poor and up to five times more likely to report skipping school.⁵
- According to recent research, 16% to 18% of teen drinkers have missed school or work because of alcohol use.⁶

Student Drug Use and Level of Schooling

- Youth who initiate marijuana use by age 13 report less schooling than those who never use marijuana and those who begin using after age 13. Those who begin using marijuana before age 13 usually do not go to college, while those who have abstained from marijuana use, on average, complete almost three years of college.⁷
- Even if they decrease their usage later in life, those who begin using marijuana by age 13 are more likely to report lower income and lower level of schooling by age 29.⁸

¹ Dewey, J.D. (1999). "Reviewing the relationship between school factors and substance use for elementary, middle and high school students." *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 19(3), 177-225.

² Dewey, J.D. (1999). "Reviewing the relationship between school factors and substance use for elementary, middle and high school students." *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 19(3), 177-225.; Johnston, L.D., O'Malley, P.M., & Bachman, J.G. (1998) *National survey results on drug use from the Monitoring the Future study, 1975-1999, Volume I: Secondary school students*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Public Health Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse.

³ Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). *SAMHSA's National Household Survey on Drug Abuse Report—Marijuana Use among Youths*. July 19, 2000. Available at www.samhsa.gov/oas/nhsda.htm

⁴ Brown, S.A., Tapert, S.F., Granholm, E., et al. (2000). "Neurocognitive functioning of adolescents: Effects of protracted alcohol use." *Alcoholism: Clinical and experimental research*, 24(2).

⁵ Greenblatt, J.C. (2000). *Patterns of alcohol use among adolescents and associations with emotional and behavioral problems*. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services and Administration, Office of Applied Studies.

⁶ Ellickson, P.L., McGuidan, K.A., Adams, V., Bell, R.M., & Hays, R.D. (1996). Teenagers and alcohol misuse in the United States: By any definition, it's a big problem. *Addiction*, 91(10), 1489-1503.

⁷ Eisner, Rober. (2005). "Marijuana Abuse: Age of Initiation, Pleasure of Response Foreshadow Young Adult Outcomes." *National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)Notes*. 19 (5).

⁸ Ibid.

Student Drug Use and High School Completion

- Students who use marijuana before the age of 15 are three times more likely to have left school by age 16 and two times more likely to report frequent truancy.⁹
- Compared to their non-using peers, high school students who use alcohol or other drugs are up to five times more likely to drop out of school.¹⁰

Peer Drug Use and Academic Performance

- Study findings link lower reading and math scores to peer substance abuse. On average, students whose peers avoided substance use had test scores (measured by the Washington state reading and math assessments) that were 18 points higher for reading and 45 points higher in mathematics.¹¹
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⁹ Fergusson, D.M., Lynskey, M.T., & Horwood, L.J. (1996). "The short-term consequences of early onset of cannabis use." *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 24(4), 499-512.

¹⁰ Lane, J., Gerstein, D., Huang, L., & Wright, D., (1998) *Risk and protective factors for adolescent drug use: Findings from the 1997 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse*. [Online]. Available at www.samhsa.gov/hhsurvey/hhsurvey.htm;

Bray, J.W., Zarkin, G.A., Ringwalt, C., & Qi, J. (2000). "The relationship between marijuana initiation and dropping out of high school." *Health Economics*, 9(1), 9-18.

¹¹ Bence, M. Brandon, R., Lee, I., & Tran, H. University of Washington. (200). *Impact of peer substance use on middle school performance in Washington: Summary*. Washington Kids Count/University of WA: Seattle, WA. Available: http://www.hspc.org/wkc/special/pdf/peer_sub_091200.pdf.