

Evaluation Brief

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Academic Achievement and Risk Behaviors Among High School Students

1997 North Carolina Youth Risk Behavior Survey

The biennial Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was developed by the Centers for Disease Control to monitor the prevalence of behaviors that contribute to the leading causes of morbidity, mortality, and social problems among youth in the United States (Kann et al., 1997). This report is based on self-report data from a sample of 2,343 public high school students from across North Carolina who participated in the 1997 YRBS.

Self-Reported Achievement

In addition to questions about various risk behaviors, high school students from North Carolina who participated in the 1997 YRBS were also asked about the grades they had received on their most recent report card. Based on their responses to this question, the students can be grouped according to the following criteria:

- ***High Achieving*** (Student reported obtaining “As” or “As & Bs” on last report card)
- ***Medium Achieving*** (Student reported obtaining “Bs”, “Bs & Cs” or “Cs” on last report card)
- ***Low Achieving*** (Student reported obtaining “Cs & Ds” or “Ds or below” on last report card)

The data below show the percentage of North Carolina high school students who comprise these three groups:

High	48%
Medium	38%
Low	14%

Self-Reported Achievement and Demographic Characteristics

The following tables describe the gender, ethnicity, and grade level of the students who are classified as high, medium, and low achieving based on the 1997 YRBS data. Among high school students, students whose self-reported achievement is in the “low” category are somewhat more likely to be male. Hispanic students are also over-represented among low achievers, while Asian/Pacific Islanders are significantly under-represented. Fewer students reporting low grades are found in the 12th grade, perhaps a reflection of lower-achieving students dropping out during high school.

Gender	High	Medium	Low	Total
Female	56%	33%	11%	100%
Male	39%	43%	18%	100%
Overall Sample	48%	38%	14%	100%

Ethnicity	High	Medium	Low	Total
Black	38%	45%	17%	100%
White	53%	34%	13%	100%
Hispanic	41%	37%	22%	100%
Asian/Pacific	62%	35%	3%	100%
Native American/Alaskan	41%	45%	14%	100%
Other	46%	38%	16%	100%
Overall Sample	48%	38%	14%	100%

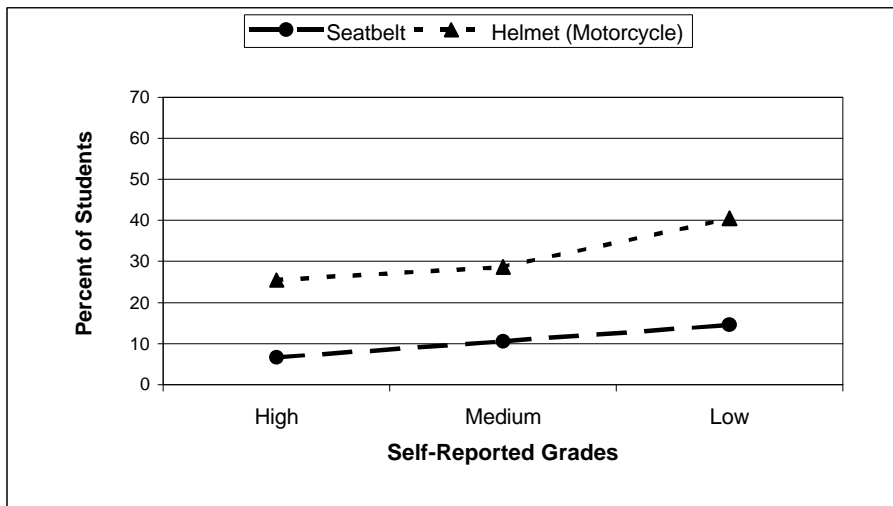
Grade	High	Medium	Low	Total
9 th	46%	37%	17%	100%
10 th	46%	39%	15%	100%
11 th	46%	39%	15%	100%
12 th	55%	36%	9%	100%
Overall Sample	48%	38%	14%	100%

Self-Reported Achievement and Other Risk Behaviors

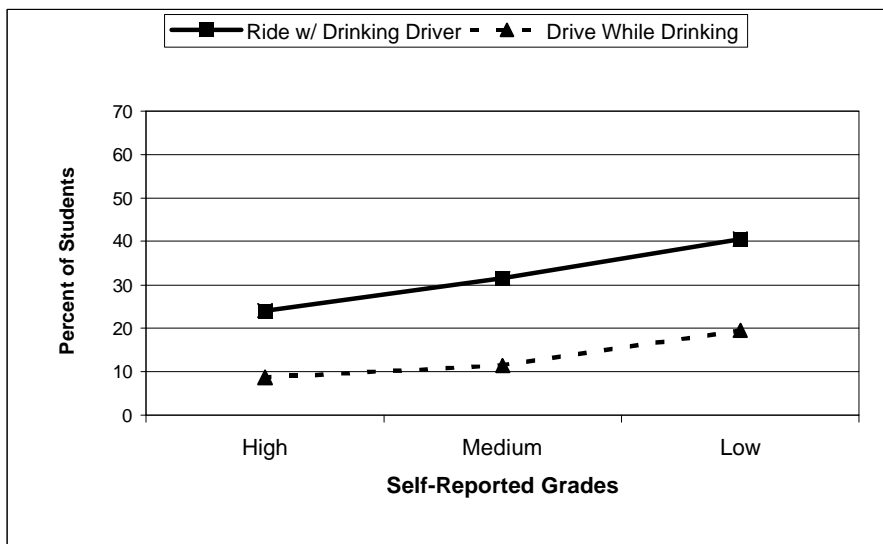
Research has linked a variety of risk behaviors with lower academic achievement, including smoking (Bewley & Bland, 1977; Hover & Gaffney, 1988; Hu, Lin, & Keeler, 1998), drug use and violent behavior (Beauvais, Chavez, Oetting, Deffenbacher, & Cornell, 1996; Murguia, Chen, & Kaplan, 1998; Paulson, Coombs, & Richardson, 1990), drinking and driving (Williams, Lund, & Preusser, 1986) and sexual activity (Brook, Balka, Abernathy, & Hamburg, 1994; Ohannessian & Crockett, 1993). The following charts based on 1997 YRBS data provide a descriptive look at some potential relationships between self-reported academic achievement and the prevalence of various risk behaviors among North Carolina high school students.

Vehicle Safety

Percentage of high school students who reported “never” or “rarely” wearing a seatbelt in a car or a helmet while riding a motorcycle during the past year:

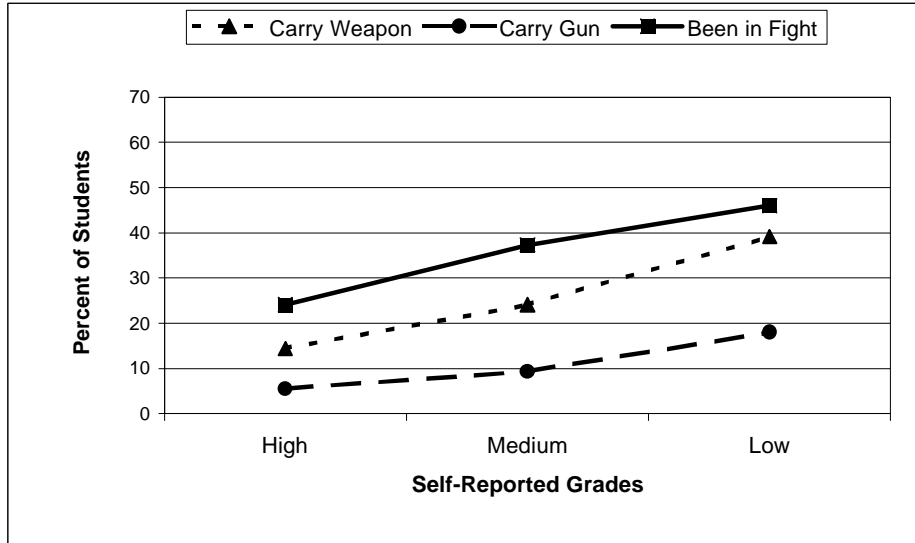


Percentage of high school students who reported that they had ridden in a car with a drinking driver or drank before driving during the past month:



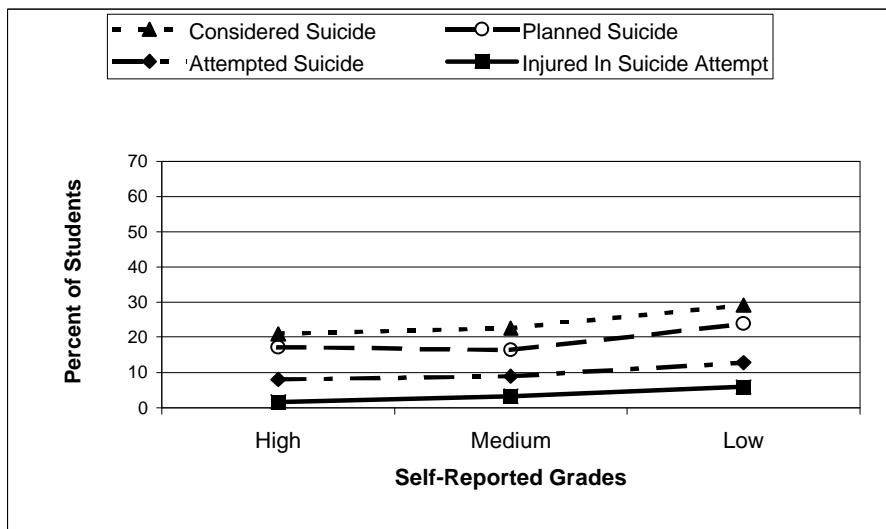
Violence

Percentage of high school students who have been in a fight in the past 12 months, and percentage of students who carried a gun or other weapon in the past 30 days:



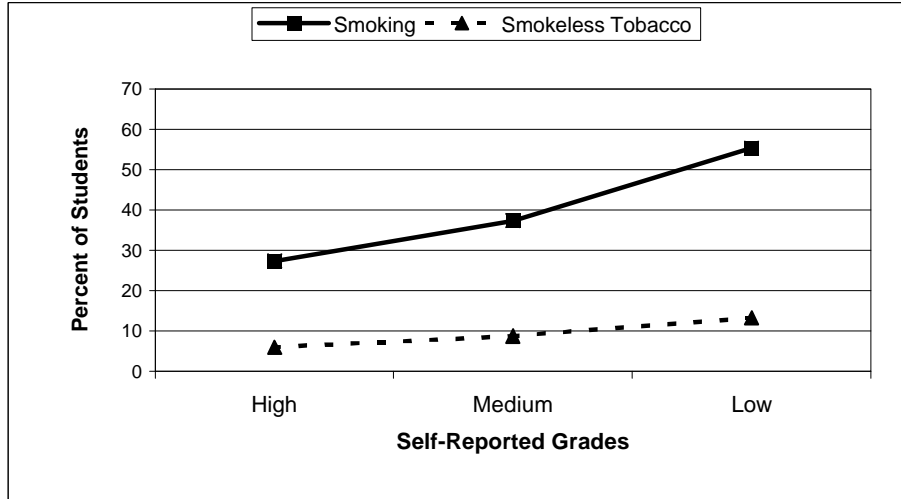
Suicidal Behavior

Percentage of high school students who considered suicide, planned suicide, attempted suicide, or were injured in a suicide attempt in the past year:



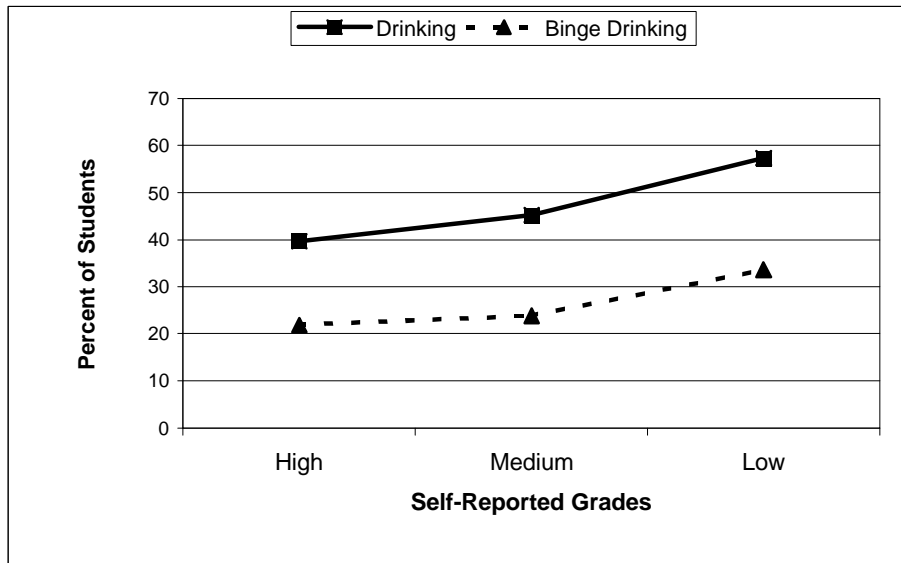
Tobacco Use

Percentage of high school students who reported that they had smoked a cigarette or used smokeless tobacco in the past month:



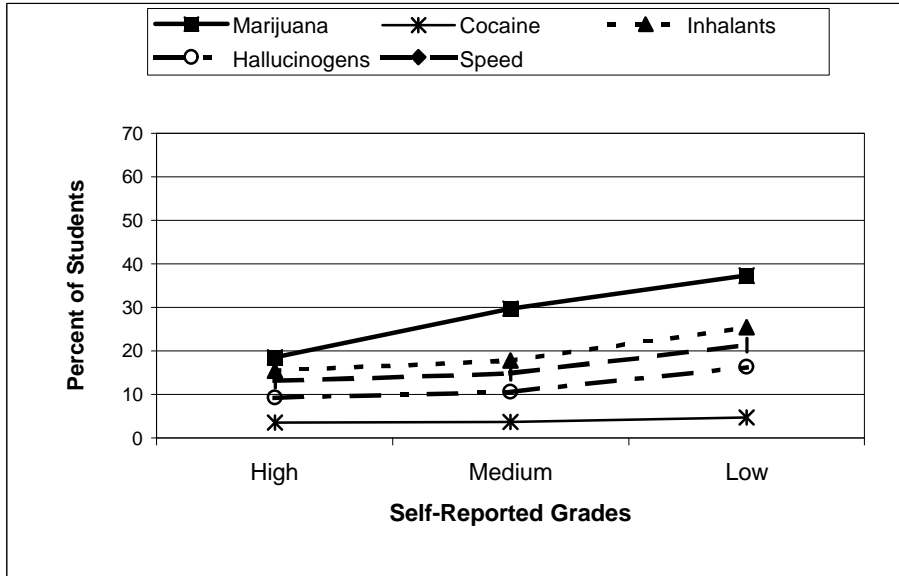
Alcohol Use

Percentage of high school students who drank alcohol or engaged in “binge drinking” (having 5 or more drinks in a row) at least once in the past month:



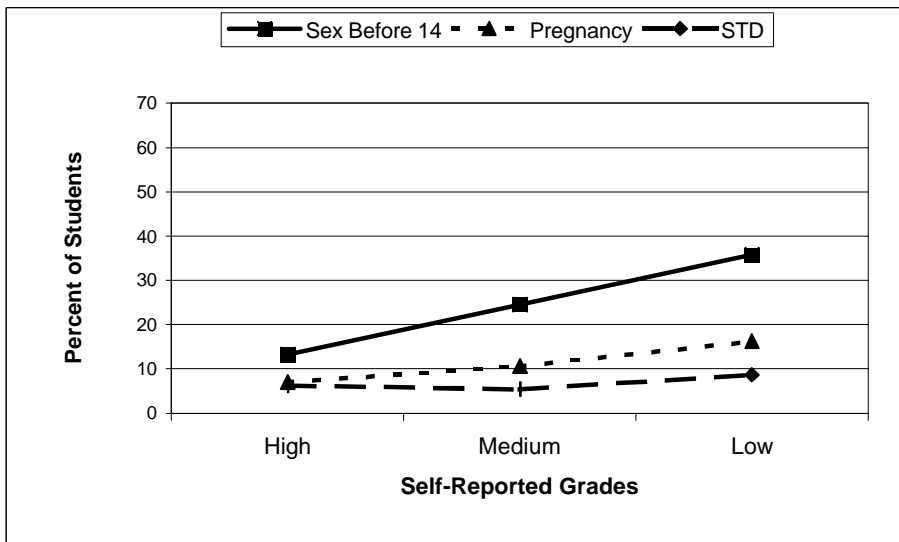
Other Drug Use

Percentage of high school students who reported using marijuana or cocaine in the past month, and percentage of students who reported having ever used inhalants (such as glue, paint or spray cans), hallucinogens, or speed:

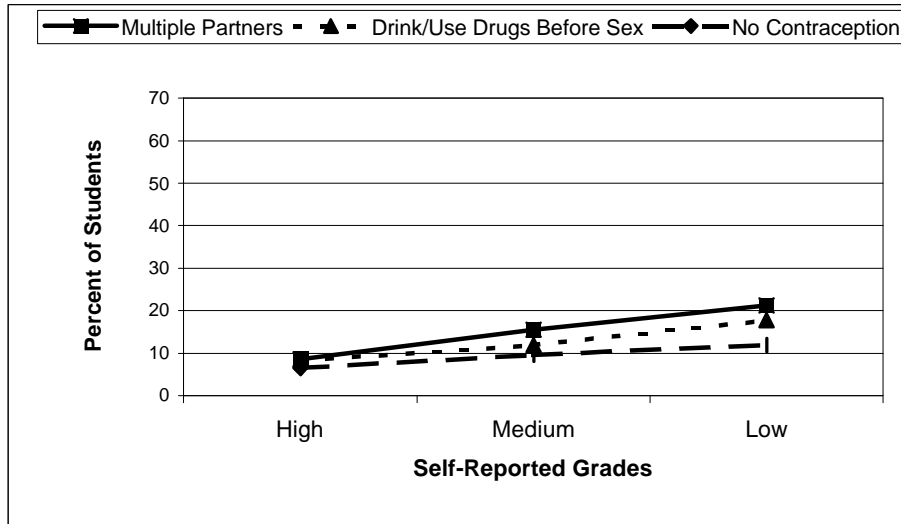


Sexual Behavior

Percentage of high school students who reported having sexual intercourse before age 14, having been involved in a pregnancy, and having been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease:



Percentage of high school students who reported having multiple sexual partners in the past 3 months, percentage of students who drank or used drugs prior to the last time they had sexual intercourse, and percentage of students who failed to use contraception the last time they had sexual intercourse:



Summary

Data from the 1997 Youth Risk Behavior Survey help to shed light on relationships between academic achievement and other risk behaviors among North Carolina high school students. Specifically, these data indicate that:

- High school students who report that they received poor grades on their last report card are more likely to be male and Hispanic.
- High school students who report that they received poor grades on their last report card may be more likely to engage in risk behaviors, including neglecting safe driving/riding practices, fighting, carrying weapons, suicidal behavior, drug use, and risky sexual behavior.

In addition to focusing on academics, identification and remediation efforts targeting low achievers may also need to consider behavioral risk factors which tend to co-occur with poor school performance. While low achievement itself puts students at risk of school failure, low-achieving students who are also engaging in risky behaviors in the non-academic areas of their lives will be at even greater risk for a variety of negative outcomes. For students who are already struggling in school and/or engaging in risk behaviors, intervention efforts are likely to be more effective if they address social and behavioral concerns as well as academics.

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