

# Academic performance & substance use relationship

BOTH EDUCATION AND PREVENTION specialists recognize that a relationship exists between academic performance and substance use. Understanding the nature of that relationship can aid in informing both intervention/prevention strategies and policy development.

Figure 1 represents the relationship between self-reported

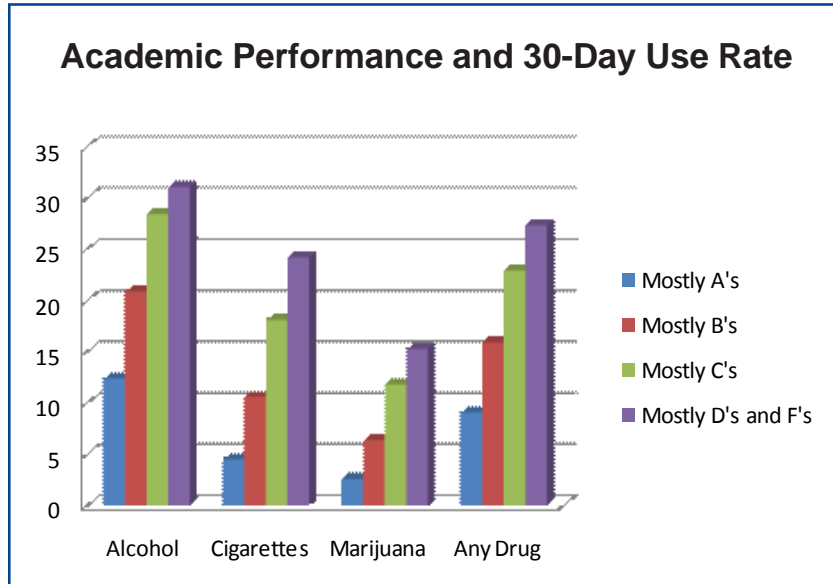
students as compared to A students was higher for cigarette and marijuana use with more than five times as many D/F students reporting cigarette or marijuana use in the previous 30 days.<sup>1</sup> As these data demonstrate, clearly a relationship exists between academic performance and substance use in Arkansas.

Researchers from the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at the University of Michigan used data collected through the Monitoring the Future Survey (MTF) from a nationwide random selection of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students over a 10-year period to study the relationship between educational success and substance use.

As a result of the analyses of these data, researchers concluded that, "In general, substance use appears to be largely a symptom, rather than a cause, of poor academic adjustment..." It should be noted that academic adjustment recognizes not only performance, (i.e., grades), but also attainment, (i.e., grade advancement), and other school-related problems (i.e., expulsion, suspension).

This conclusion was drawn in part from evidence that education failure tends to precede other problem behaviors including substance use. These researchers suggested that efforts at improving early academic performance may have a positive impact on reducing substance use.<sup>2</sup>

While the exact causal relationship between academic performance and substance use may be complicated, it is clear that a relationship does exist. Intervention and prevention efforts should include not only reducing and eliminating adolescent substance use but also addressing those issues that may express themselves in adolescent substance use.



academic performance and 30-day use rates for 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade Arkansas students who participated in the 2008 Arkansas Prevention Needs Assessment (APNA) Student Survey.

Two and a half times as many students making mostly D's and F's, as compared to those making mostly A's, reported consuming alcohol in the previous 30 days. The 30-day use rates for D/F stu-

Understanding the relationship between academic performance and substance use has much in common with trying to understand the relationship between the chicken and the egg: Does substance use "cause" poor academic performance or does poor academic performance "cause" substance use? Can changing one influence the other?

<sup>1</sup> 2008 Arkansas Prevention Needs Assessment Student Survey, [http://www.arkansas.gov/dhs/dmhs/adap\\_survey.htm](http://www.arkansas.gov/dhs/dmhs/adap_survey.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Bachman, J.G., O'Malley, P.M., Schulenberg, J.E., Johnston, L.D., Freedman-Doan, P., & Messersmith, E.E. (2008). *The Education-Drug Use Connection, How Successes and Failures in School Relate to Adolescent Smoking, Drinking, Drug Use, and Delinquency* (pp. 257-279). New York, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

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