



# Research Review: School-based Health Interventions and Academic Achievement



*Research Review: School-based Health Interventions and Academic Achievement* confirms what educators and parents have suspected for a long time: Healthier kids get better grades. Issued jointly by the Washington State Board of Health, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Department of Health, the report analyzes data from Washington's 2006 Healthy Youth Survey. Findings include:

- ◆ **Health and education are linked.** For students in middle and high school, health risks and academic risks affect each other. The report examines 13 key physical and mental health risk factors and analyzes the relationship between these health factors and the grades students report getting in school.
- ◆ **Every health risk can affect academic success.** The more health risks students have, the less likely they will succeed in school or graduate on time. Each health risk that can be removed has the potential to positively influence academic behaviors.
- ◆ **Interventions can narrow disparities.** In addition to facing academic challenges, Washington's low-income students and students of color frequently have more health risks. Disparities in health may compound already existing disparities in academic achievement.
- ◆ **Health interventions can improve learning and health.** The report highlights 11 evidence-based interventions for health and achievement, including such programs as handwashing, parent/teacher communication skills, and school breakfast programs.
- ◆ **Comprehensive programs are better.** They address three key areas: 1) policies, procedures, and environments; 2) curriculum, instruction, and training; and 3) health services. Comprehensive programs that address these three areas are consistent with the Coordinated School Health approach developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

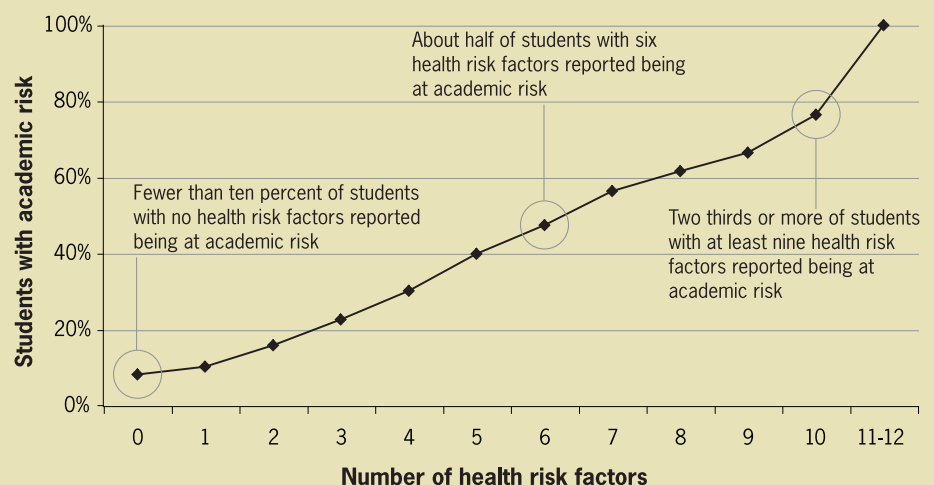
## 13 Health Risks Examined in the Report

From the Washington State  
Healthy Youth Survey

- Insufficient fruit and vegetable consumption
- Fewer than 8 hours of sleep at night
- Not eating breakfast
- Watching TV 3 or more hours on an average school day
- Depressed for at least 2 weeks in past year
- Insufficient exercise
- Feeling unsafe at school
- Alcohol use
- Drinking 2 or more soda pops per day
- Obesity
- Marijuana use
- Cigarette smoking
- Severe asthma

For more information about academic achievement and health, and to download the full report, go to the Washington State Coordinated School Health Web site: [www.HealthySchoolsWA.org](http://www.HealthySchoolsWA.org).

**Percent of Students at Academic Risk by Number of Health Risk Factors  
8th and 10th Graders in Washington State**



Data source: Washington State Healthy Youth Survey, 2006

# Examples of Successful School-based Interventions in Washington

## Classroom Activities Integrate Healthy Choices

**Vancouver** – Fifth grade teachers in Harmony and Riverview elementary schools collaborated to focus their instruction and activities on making “healthy choices.” The Fifth Grade Exit Project wove health into the whole year’s curriculum, from reading, math, and science to physical education, nutrition, and social skills. The idea came from an innovative physical education teacher. “Health shouldn’t be taught separately, but incorporated into all teaching.” The focus went beyond physical activity and good eating habits, and incorporated healthy choices into understanding every choice. The integration elicited a deeper understanding of issues and decisions. The cost of this project was primarily staff preparation and planning time. Students got a thorough orientation at the beginning of the school year. They each used a spiral notebook to record various learnings, activities, readings, and presentations. Parents of some 250 fifth graders gave enthusiastic feedback and reported many positive changes at home, including better food choices and less TV.

## Community Engagement Improves Opportunities

**Seattle** – Van Asselt Elementary School engaged parents from five ethnic communities to participate in school activities and increase educational opportunities for their children. The school is in a high needs area, with 85 percent of their students eligible for free or reduced lunches and many recent immigrant families with limited English proficiency. The typical PTA format was not attracting parents from these populations. The school applied for Healthy Schools Leadership funding to convene “parent panels” from their main ethnic communities—Somali/East African, Latino, Vietnamese, Filipino, and African American. Parent panels met throughout the school year with staff and students to provide overviews of their cultures, address important health and education issues, and share a meal of healthy foods from their cultures. The panels were a successful way to honor the concerns of ethnic communities, increase parent volunteers (particularly men), and improve communication with school staff. They also raised awareness about other community health needs.

## District Policy Review Renews Interest in Health

**Quincy** – During a summertime school health booster session, staff in the Quincy School District were urged to know what their policies said about health issues. There was no process to remind staff what they were or how to monitor and update them. The curriculum supervisor compiled every policy she could find that dealt with health—a large pile of paper. Policies were organized into folders based on components of school health. The district had a Wellness Advisory Council where each folder was handed to the person most knowledgeable about the topic. Council members reviewed the policies and made suggestions for revisions. Proposed changes to the policies stimulated discussions with stakeholders and decision makers. Everyone was given a chance to voice their opinions. Recommendations were forwarded to the school board and superintendent. It didn’t cost anything but time. This creative and inexpensive review refocused attention on school health and led to continuing improvements.

For more success stories, go to: [http://depts.washington.edu/waschool/wellness\\_policies/wa\\_policies.html](http://depts.washington.edu/waschool/wellness_policies/wa_policies.html).



### For More Information

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