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**October 28, 2009**

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## **Report Ties Health Risks to Grades**

*Study shows risky health behaviors hurt student achievement at all grades*

**OLYMPIA** — Smoking. Drinking more than two cans of soda a day. Not eating enough fruits and vegetables.

While all pose health risks, a new report links those risks to lower grades for students. [“Research Review: School-based Health Interventions and Academic Achievement.”](#) released this month, is a joint report by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Washington State Department of Health and the Washington State Board of Health.

“This report contains both bad and good news,” said Randy Dorn, state superintendent of public instruction. “It’s discouraging that so many kids live unhealthy lives. But it gives us a link to student success. It means if we can help them live healthier lives, they will be more successful students.”

The report is based on data from the 2006 Healthy Youth Survey. Students who participated in the survey were asked to give their average grades, which were compared with the number of risk factors students admitted to.

Results from the research were stark: the more health risks a student has, the more likely he or she will be at “academic risk” (reporting an average grade of C, D or F). Specifically, about 10 percent of those with a single risk factor were at academic risk. But about 50 percent of students with six health risk factors were at academic risk, and more than 67 percent of students with at least nine risk factors were at academic risk.

“We’re learning that health and education are closely connected. This new report shows that,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “When kids get enough sleep, eat a balanced diet, and have limited stress, they’re healthier and do better in school.”

Researchers also found that a few single risk factors dramatically affected student success. More than 50 percent of students who reported using either cigarettes or marijuana also reported academic risk, while about 40 percent who reported either alcohol use or consuming two or more

cans of soda per day also reported academic risk.

Research into academic achievement has shown that students often do not have equal chances at success. Poverty, racial and ethnic discrimination, and varied access to information and services all affect student success. The report shows that the same factors affect student health. The report also concludes that health interventions may be one strategy to close the disparities. It examines a number of research-based interventions that have shown positive results in affecting both health and learning outcomes.

“This report reveals a similar pattern between health disparities and the achievement gap based on race and poverty,” said Frankie Manning, member of the Washington State Board of Health. “Addressing the needs of the whole child is key in narrowing that gap.”

The report analyzed 13 risk factors:

- Cigarette smoking
- Alcohol use
- Marijuana use
- Obesity
- Severe asthma
- Not eating breakfast
- Insufficient fruits and vegetables
- Two or more soda pops a day
- Insufficient exercise
- Three or more hours of TV per day
- Feeling unsafe at school
- Depression
- Less than eight hours of sleep per night

The Healthy Youth Survey is given in even years to students in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12 in public schools. In 2006, about 200,000 students participated.

#### **About OSPI**

*The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is the primary agency charged with overseeing K-12 education in Washington state. Led by State School Superintendent Randy Dorn, OSPI works with the state's 295 school districts and nine educational service districts to administer basic education programs and implement education reform on behalf of more than one million public school students.*

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#### **About Department of Health**

*The Department of Health works with federal, state and local partners to help people in Washington stay healthier and safer. Our programs and services help prevent illness and injury, promote healthy places to live and work, provide education to help people make good health decisions, and ensure our state is prepared for emergencies. For more information, visit the Department of Health Web site at [www.doh.wa.gov](http://www.doh.wa.gov).*

**About Washington State Board of Health**

*The Washington State Board of Health's mission is to provide statewide leadership in advancing policies that protect and improve the public's health. It does this by reviewing and monitoring the health status of all people in Washington; analyzing policies, providing guidance, and developing rules; promoting system partnerships; and encouraging public engagement in the public health system. For more information, visit the board's Web site at [www.sboh.wa.gov](http://www.sboh.wa.gov).*

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