

## Inside This Issue

Back to School .....	1
From the Director .....	1
Higher Grades Seen Among Students Who Avoid Drugs and Alcohol .....	3
Celebrating Recovery Month In September.....	4
SBIRT: Reducing Substance Abuse On Campus .....	4



## Office of National Drug Control Policy

Office of Intergovernmental and  
Public Liaison

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*ONDCP seeks to foster healthy individuals and safe communities by effectively leading the Nation's effort to reduce drug use and its consequences.*

## Back To School: Helping Kids Lead Healthy, Safe, and Drug-Free Lives

In the next few weeks, more than 20 million American teenagers will head back to school, carrying with them their parents' hopes and expectations for a successful academic year. Many young people, however, will face challenges to their success and well-being, challenges such as the threat of alcohol and drugs, both legal and illegal.

Substance abuse puts teens at risk for school failure and for an array of health, social, and legal consequences. As shown by the 2009 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (see article, page 3), students who do not use marijuana, drink alcohol, or take prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription receive higher

*See School, page 2*

From the Director

### New Experiences, New Challenges for Returning Students

With the new school year comes new experiences, environments, friends, and, at times, new challenges.

Some grade-school children will be pressured to experiment with drinking or drugs for the first time. Middle school students, dealing with the transition to high school and the peer pressure to fit in, may be susceptible to the negative influences of alcohol and drugs. College students will encounter various temptations, such as abusing or misusing prescription drugs, perhaps believing this will help them get through the semester. Others, experiencing freedom from their parents for the first time, may be tempted by illicit drugs and alcohol.

The new school season also presents challenges in our collective efforts to keep young people healthy and drug free. No matter the situation or the student's age, it is important that parents, friends, teachers, counselors, and community members discuss the dangers of drug abuse and underage drinking and watch for warning signs.

Parents should also take the following actions to prevent prescription drug abuse:

- ❖ Monitor your medications.
- ❖ Lock up your prescription drugs.
- ❖ Discard unneeded and expired prescription drugs properly.

In these weeks before classes begin, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) is focusing on back-to-school issues for parents, adolescents, college students, and those who influence young people.

We want to engage the public on important concerns such as the link between drug use and high school dropout rates, the relationship between substance abuse and participation in extracurricular activities, and indicators of potential drug use.

Young people need positive influences, and ONDCP's National Anti-Drug Youth Media Campaign plays an important role in this regard. The campaign's

*See Director, page 3*

*SCHOOL (continued from page 1)*

grades than their classmates who do engage in those behaviors.

While rates of teen drug and alcohol use have remained flat over the past few years, on any given day more than 4,000 teens will use an illicit drug for the first time. Almost 7,000 will drink alcohol for the first time, and more than 2,000 will, for the first time, use a prescription pain reliever without a doctor's prescription.

According to the 2009 *Monitoring the Future* study, 30 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 44 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported current (past 30-day) use of alcohol.

Current use of marijuana is comparable to that of cigarettes among 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> graders. In recent years, girls have caught up with boys in their drug use, including the use of prescription drugs without a prescription.

Unfortunately, teens' perception of the harm of drug use, especially use of marijuana, is softening, a trend that generally signals higher drug use rates in the future.

Summer, when most students are away from school, is the peak time of year for young people to begin using drugs (see figure 1). Parents, teachers, and school officials should be mindful of this summertime spike in drug initiation as teens return to class in the coming weeks.

Why do teens start using drugs? Some do so in an attempt to "fit in" to new social situations, including the school setting. Others overestimate the proportion of their peers who use drugs and mistakenly believe they need to use drugs to become socially acceptable.

Many parents believe they are powerless to influence their teens. However, research makes clear that parents remain the single most

powerful influence in their kids' lives. Quality, evidence-based drug education in schools and well-designed after-school activities can reduce the risk that teens will get into drugs, but parents remain the first line of defense.

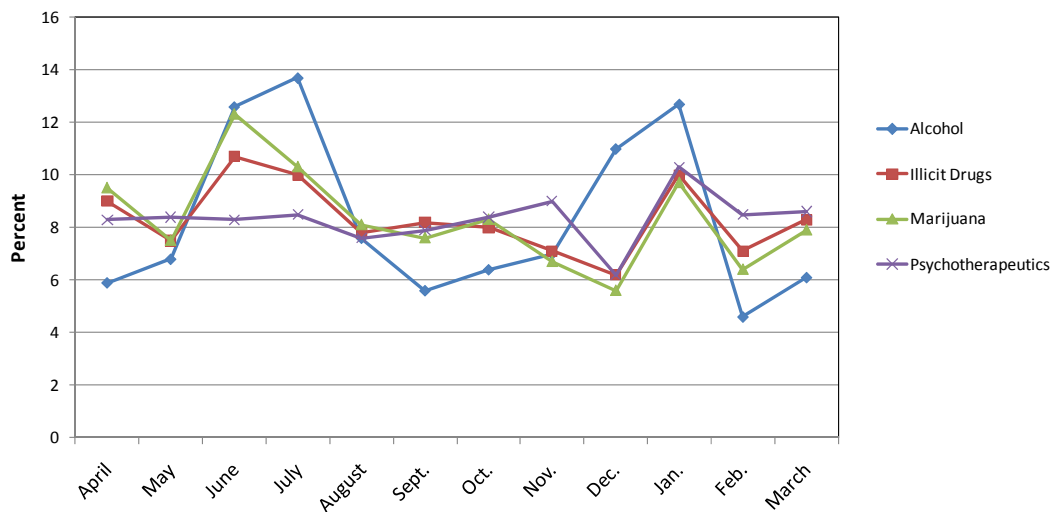
Parents should know the warning signs of possible drug use. These include:

- ❖ Skipping classes or not doing well in school;
- ❖ Significant mood changes;
- ❖ Loss of interest in personal appearance;
- ❖ A change in friends;
- ❖ Heightened secrecy about actions or possessions; and
- ❖ A lack of interest in activities.

Parents can learn more about the risks of specific drugs – as well as how to reduce the chances their teen will become involved with drugs or alcohol – at the website for ONDCP's Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, at [www.TheAntiDrug.com](http://www.TheAntiDrug.com).

Summertime, when many kids are out of school, have free time on their hands and job money in their pockets, is the peak time of year for young people to begin drinking alcohol and using illicit drugs. Consequently, a number of students come back to school with substance abuse experience. Alcohol and illicit-drug initiation rates also spike in December and January, when many students are out of school on winter break.

**Figure 1**  
**Recent Initiates Among Persons Who Started Using Drugs Before Age 18**  
(Annual Averages Based on 2006-2008)



NOTE: Recent Initiates are defined as persons who indicated an age of first use that was equal to or one year less than their current age. Non-medical use of prescription-type psychotherapeutics includes the non-medical use of pain relievers, tranquilizers, stimulants, or sedatives and does not include over-the-counter drugs.

Source: SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2006-2008

## Students Who Avoid Alcohol and Drugs Likely to Have Higher Grades, Study Shows

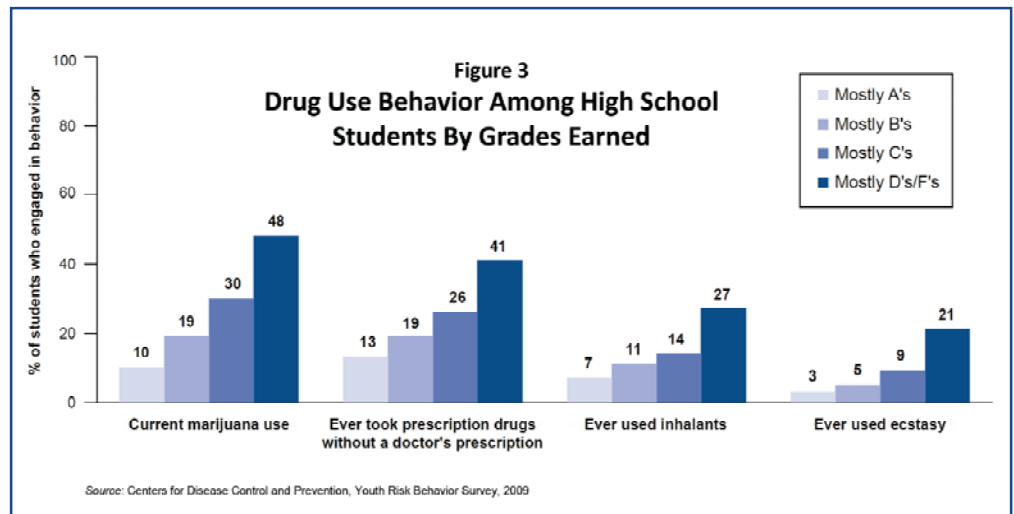
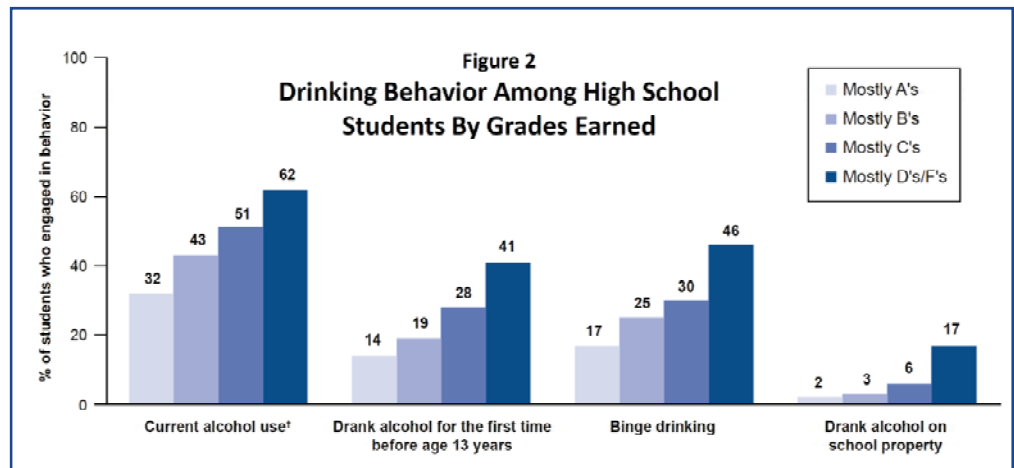
Data from the 2009 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), after controlling for sex, race/ethnicity, and grade level, show a negative association between alcohol and other drug use and academic achievement.

This means that students with higher grades are less likely to engage in alcohol and other drug use behaviors than their classmates with lower grades (see figures 2 and 3).

These associations, though compelling, do not prove causation. Further research is needed to determine the exact nature of the link between poor academic performance and the use of alcohol and drugs, and whether one leads to the other.

According to the YRBS, students with higher grades are significantly less likely to have engaged in these behaviors:

- ❖ Current alcohol use (having at least one drink on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey).
- ❖ Binge drinking (having five or more drinks in a row within a couple of hours on at least 1 day during the 30 days before the survey).
- ❖ Drinking alcohol for the first time before age 13 years (other than a few sips).



- ❖ Current marijuana use (using marijuana one or more times during the 30 days before the survey).
- ❖ Ever taking prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription (taking prescription drugs [e.g., OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin, Adderall, Ritalin, or Xanax] without a doctor's prescription one or more times during their life).
- ❖ Ever using ecstasy (using ecstasy [also called MDMA] one or more times during their life).

### DIRECTOR (continued from page 1)

*Above the Influence* initiative seeks to empower young people to create, embrace, and strengthen anti-drug beliefs.

As parents and students prepare for school, ONDCP is participating in events around the country to raise awareness of substance abuse, and engaging with college students and administrators to discuss substance abuse on campus.

I encourage you to visit ONDCP's "Of Substance" blog (<http://www.ofsubstance.gov>) to read posts from others who are concerned about the challenges facing students going back to school. For information on how parents can reduce the risk of youth substance abuse, visit [www.TheAntiDrug.com](http://www.TheAntiDrug.com).

A number of organizations, such as the National Parent Teacher Association (<http://www.pta.org>), offer resources for parents preparing to send their children back to school. The National

Institute on Drug Abuse (<http://www.nida.nih.gov>) provides information to help parents talk to their children about drug and alcohol abuse, and a "Parent Tool Kit" developed by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America (<http://www.drugfree.org/Parent/Home>) offers advice from parenting and health experts on raising drug-free kids.

We want to know what works in your schools and communities. To share your community's story or discuss activities aimed at reducing substance abuse in your area, visit our website at [http://ofsubstance.gov/blogs/pushing\\_back/archive/2010/06/18/51397.aspx](http://ofsubstance.gov/blogs/pushing_back/archive/2010/06/18/51397.aspx).

Together, we can prepare our children for the challenges of the new school year and make this a safe and healthy school season for all our young people.

– Gil Kerlikowske

## Celebrating Recovery Month in September by Working to Help Those Struggling with Addiction

For two decades, September has been designated National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month and celebrated as an opportunity to raise awareness about drug addiction, share inspirational stories of those in recovery, and give hope to those who are beginning to free themselves from the stranglehold of addiction. The observance brings together community leaders, policy makers, researchers, service providers, persons in recovery, and their families to join in the effort to remove barriers to recovery and help people reclaim their lives.

Recovery Month activities are a way of showing appreciation for the many provider organizations, professionals, and volunteers who help others make the transition from addiction to recovery. Through public education and celebration, these activities also help reduce the stigma associated with addiction and treatment.

This year's theme – "Join the Voices for Recovery: Now More than Ever!" – is a rallying cry and an urgent plea for all to get involved and help those in need. President Obama has issued a Proclamation hailing September as Recovery Month and expressing his Administration's support for those on the road to recovery. This year's signed Presidential Proclamation can be viewed online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/proclamations>.

Throughout the Nation, thousands of communities observe Recovery Month with rallies, festivals, walks, symposia, open houses, documentaries, public service announcements, and other activities. ONDCP officials are often invited to participate in locally sponsored events, and this year is no exception. National Drug Control Policy Director Gil Kerlikowske, Deputy Director Tom McLellan, Deputy Director for Demand Reduction David Mineta, and Deputy Director for State, Local, and Tribal Affairs Benjamin Tucker will participate in a variety of activities as they spread the message that recovery is possible. For more information about ONDCP participation in Recovery events, please visit our website at [www.WhiteHouseDrugPolicy.gov](http://www.WhiteHouseDrugPolicy.gov).

This year, working with a variety of Federal partners, ONDCP is co-sponsoring several national summits on Addiction Recovery. Representatives from ONDCP and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) will meet in September with substance abuse experts and leaders from the addiction and mental health community, and with service providers, researchers, and Federal and State policymakers to exchange ideas about recovery and healthcare reform. In addition, ONDCP will co-sponsor a summit with the Department of Education on the role high schools can play in supporting recovery for youth with substance use and co-occurring mental health disorders. Another summit, to be held in October, will explore the role institutions of higher education can play in recovery.

Recovery Month affords every family, community group, faith-based organization, employer, and government agency a platform for supporting successful recovery. A diverse group of public and private organizations, coordinated by SAMHSA, is working to promote recovery and Recovery Month around the country.

The website [www.RecoveryMonth.gov](http://www.RecoveryMonth.gov) is a great resource for information on past and present Recovery Month activities, local and national events, and local treatment and recovery support providers, as well as for Recovery Month materials for event planners.

## SBIRT: A Program to Help Reduce Substance Abuse on Campus

Health professionals at a number of colleges and universities are using Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) to help divert students from risky behaviors that can lead to dependence and other harmful consequences.

The SBIRT program, which uses questionnaires to screen for possible drug or alcohol problems and prompts physicians to discuss substance abuse with their patients, is a powerful and effective approach for reducing drug use both on campus and in regular health settings.

SBIRT began on college campuses in 2003 through a program administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). In FY 2005, grants were awarded to 12 colleges and universities for SBIRT programs. Although SAMHSA grant funding has ended, some programs, including the one at SUNY Albany, continue to implement SBIRT through additional funding.

College health clinics are encouraged to use SBIRT to address substance abuse among young people who have left the more protective home and high school environments and now face the many pressures – and temptations – of college life.

More information about SBIRT programs can be found online at [www.sbirt.samhsa.gov](http://www.sbirt.samhsa.gov) and [www.drugabuse.gov/nidamed](http://www.drugabuse.gov/nidamed).

Join the Voices for  
**RECOVERY**

**now  
more than  
ever!**



september 2010  
National Alcohol  
& Drug Addiction  
**Recovery Month**