School Safety in California

What It Is

On kidsdata.org, indicators of school safety are based on student reports regarding:

- Their perceived level of safety at school, from very safe to very unsafe
- The number of times in the previous year they were afraid of being beaten up, were in a physical fight, carried a gun, and carried a weapon other than a gun at school

Also available are data from school staff on the extent to which:

- Their school is a safe place for students and staff
- Physical fighting between students and student weapons possession are problems at school

Why This Topic is Important

The safety and supportiveness of children's school environments play a crucial role in their development and academic success. Students who feel safe and supported at school tend to have better school attendance and achievement, and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Exposure to violence at school is associated with many negative outcomes for students, including depression, suicide, substance use, truancy, academic problems, and violent behavior. The fear of violence alone can affect young people's development, concentration, and ability to learn.

School safety often is compromised by bullying and harassment, which affects more than a quarter of U.S. middle and high school students each year. In addition to the risk of physical injury, victims of bullying are at increased risk for emotional and physical health problems as well as poor academic achievement. Any young person can be bullied, but certain groups are more likely to be victimized, such as LGBTQ youth, students with disabilities, and African American/black youth.

How Children Are Faring

According to 2015-2017 estimates, less than a quarter of California public school students in grades 7, 9, 11, and non-traditional programs felt very safe at school. Overall, boys were more likely to feel very safe at school than their female counterparts, as were students whose parents had a college degree. Among racial/ethnic groups with data, 25% of white students who feel very unsafe at school.
Students Who Physically Fought at School 4 or More Times in the Previous Year, by Race/Ethnicity: 2015-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Definition: Estimated percentage of public school students in grades 7, 9, 11, and non-traditional programs who were in physical fights at school in the previous year, by number of occasions and race/ethnicity (e.g., in 2015-2017, an estimated 2.2% of Hispanic/Latino students in grades 7, 9, 11, and non-traditional programs in California were in physical fights at school four or more times in the previous year).

Data Source: WestEd, California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) and Biennial State CHKS, California Dept. of Education (Mar. 2019).

Students Who 4 or More Times in the Previous Year Feared Being Beaten Up, by Sexual Orientation: 2015-2017

![Graph showing percentages of students who feared being beaten up]

Definition: Estimated percentage of public school students in grades 7, 9, 11, and non-traditional programs who were afraid of being beaten up at school in the previous year, by number of occasions and by sexual orientation (e.g., in 2015-2017, an estimated 75.1% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in grades 7, 9, 11, and non-traditional programs in California had not been afraid of being beaten up at school in the previous year).

Data Source: WestEd, California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) and Biennial State CHKS, California Dept. of Education (Mar. 2019).

Across measures, it is more common for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students and those with low levels of school connectedness to feel unsafe, fear victimization, and engage in violence-related risk behaviors when compared with other youth. For example, in 2015-2017, the percentage of gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth who on four or more occasions in the previous year were afraid of being beaten up at school was 6%, compared with 2% of straight youth. In the same period, an estimated 6% of students with low school connectedness were in four or more physical fights in the previous year, compared with 1% of students with high levels of connectedness.

Statewide in 2015-2017, an estimated 6% of students in non-traditional programs carried a gun at school at least once in the previous year, and 10% carried another type of weapon at least once. By comparison, 2% of students in traditional 11th grade carried a gun and 5% carried another type of weapon at school in the previous year. Across all student groups, less than 8% of youth carried a gun at school in the previous year and less than 12% carried a weapon other than a gun.

View references for this text and additional research on this topic: https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/70/school-safety/summary