Student Gang Involvement in California

9th Graders Who Consider Themselves Gang Members: 2017-2019; Showing Counties

Definition: Estimated percentage of public school students in grades 7, 9, 11, and non-traditional programs who consider themselves gang members (e.g., in 2017-2019, 4% of California 9th graders considered themselves gang members).


Students Who Consider Themselves Gang Members, by Level of School Connectedness: 2017-2019

What It Is
On kidsdata.org, indicators of gang involvement come from the California Healthy Kids Survey and California School Staff Survey; data are based on:

- Student reports of gang membership by grade level (7th, 9th, 11th, and non-traditional programs), gender, level of school connectedness, parent education level, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation
- School staff reports of the extent to which, at their school (elementary, middle, high, or non-traditional), student gang activity is a problem

Why This Topic Is Important
When youth feel disconnected from family, school, community, or future work possibilities, they may view gangs as viable opportunities for support, respect, protection, or income. While youth involved in gangs comprise only a small portion of the adolescent population, they are disproportionately involved in violent crime—both as perpetrators and victims. Youth involved in gangs also are more likely to drop out of school, abuse substances, engage in high risk sexual behavior, and experience other long-term problems such as employment instability. The effects go beyond those directly involved, as well. Communities also can be affected in terms of reduced quality of life, increased crime, families moving out of neighborhoods, and economic costs, e.g., losses in property values, local businesses, and tax revenue.

In 2019, 9% of U.S. students ages 12-18 reported a gang presence at their school. When youth are exposed to violence or feel unsafe at school, it can negatively affect their health, mental health, and academic performance. Because the majority of youth who join gangs do so between the ages of 11 and 15, early prevention is critical, along with cross-sector efforts that reach at-risk children and strengthen families, schools, and communities.

How Children Are Faring
In 2017-2019, around 1 in 25 California 7th, 9th, and 11th graders considered themselves gang members, down from more than 1 in 15 in 2011-2013. Students in non-traditional programs, students with lower levels of school connectedness, male students, and students whose parents did not finish high school are more likely to be involved with gangs than their peers in other groups. Asian youth had the...
### Students Who Consider Themselves Gang Members, by Race/Ethnicity: 2017-2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>2.5%</th>
<th>5%</th>
<th>7.5%</th>
<th>10%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **African American/Black**
- **American Indian/Alaska Native**
- **Asian**
- **Hispanic/Latino**
- **Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander**
- **White**

**Definition:** Estimated percentage of public school students in grades 7, 9, 11, and non-traditional programs who consider themselves gang members, by race/ethnicity (e.g., in 2017-2019, 4.5% of Hispanic/Latino students in grades 7, 9, 11, and non-traditional programs in California considered themselves gang members).

**Data Source:** WestEd, California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) & Biennial State CHKS, California Dept. of Education (Aug. 2020).

### Student Gang Activity Is a Problem at School (Staff Reported): 2017-2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Insignificant Problem</th>
<th>Mild Problem</th>
<th>Moderate Problem</th>
<th>Severe Problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>91.9%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>56.4%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Traditional</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Definition:** Percentage of responses by public school staff on the extent to which gang-related activity is a problem at their school, by type of school (e.g., in 2017-2019, student gang activity was a severe problem according to 2.6% of responses by high school staff in California).

**Data Source:** WestEd, California School Staff Survey, California Dept. of Education (Mar. 2021).

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