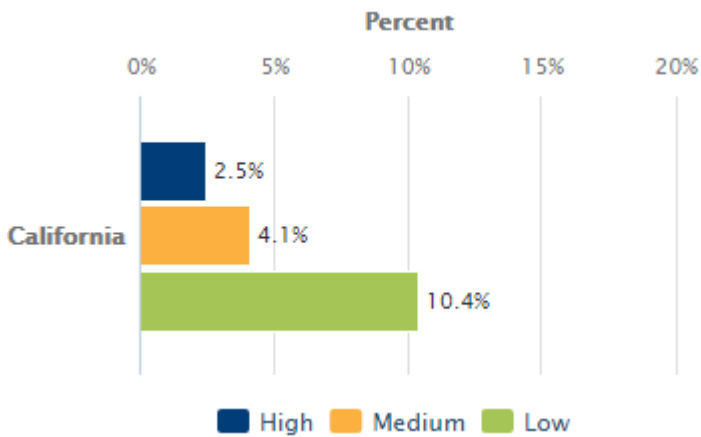


## Student Gang Involvement in California

9th Graders Who Consider Themselves Gang Members: 2017-2019; Showing Counties  
 Students Who Consider Themselves Gang Members, by Level of School Connectedness: 2017-2019



**Definition:** Estimated percentage of public school students in grades 7, 9, 11, and non-traditional programs who consider themselves gang members, by level of school connectedness (e.g., in 2017-2019, 10.4% of California students in grades 7, 9, 11, and non-traditional programs with low levels of school connectedness considered themselves gang members).

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

### 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

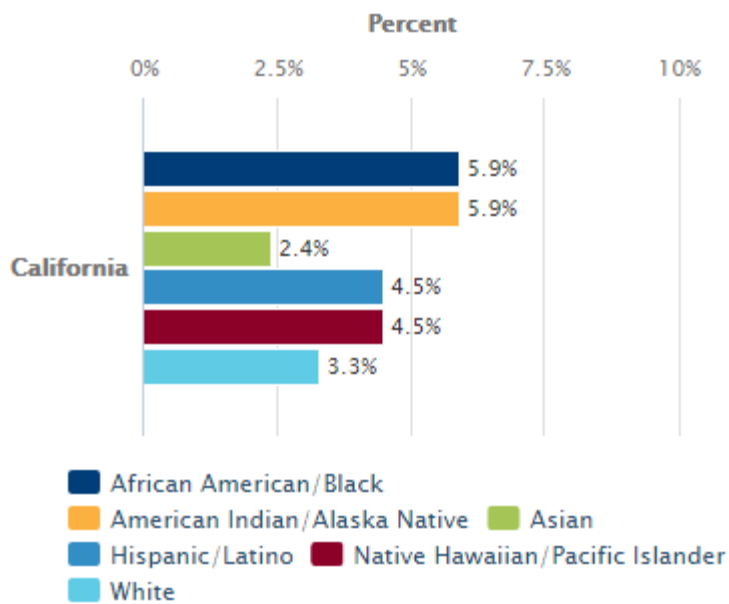
When youth feel disconnected from family, school, community, or future work possibilities, they may view gangs as viable opportunities for support, respect, protection, or income. While youth involved in gangs comprise only a small portion of the adolescent population, they are disproportionately involved 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 among children is critical, along with cross-sector efforts that 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



**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

California	Percent			
	Insignificant Problem	Mild Problem	Moderate Problem	Severe Problem
Elementary School	91.9%	6.4%	1.2%	0.5%
Middle School	68.8%	22.6%	6.5%	2.0%
High School	56.4%	31.3%	9.7%	2.6%
Non-Traditional	41.6%	30.6%	17.8%	10.0%

**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).

lowest rates of gang involvement (2%) among racial/ethnic groups with data in 2017-2019, while African American/black and American Indian/Alaska Native youth had the highest (6%). Estimates of gang membership also were higher for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students (6%) when compared with straight students and those unsure of their sexual orientation (4%).

School staff reports from 2017-2019 show that gang-related activity was a moderate or severe problem according to 2% of responses by elementary school staff, 9% of responses by middle school staff, 12% of responses by high school staff, and 28% of responses by non-traditional program staff statewide.

*View references for this text and additional research on this topic:*

<https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/73/gang-involvement/summary>



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