

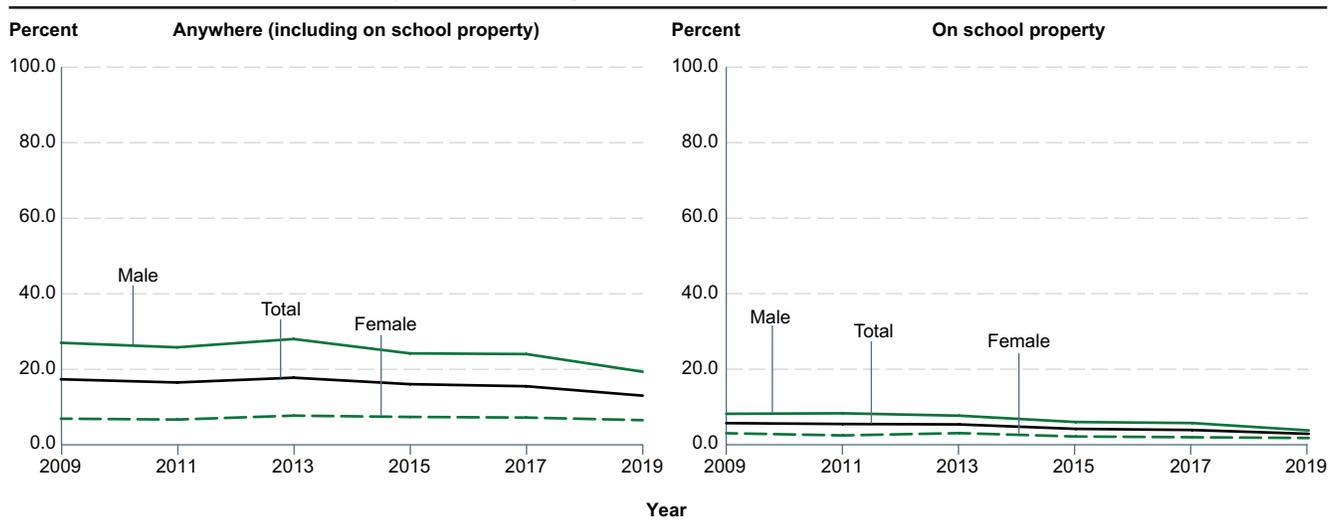
# Students Carrying Weapons on School Property and Anywhere and Students' Access to Firearms

The percentage of students in grades 9–12 who reported carrying a weapon anywhere during the previous 30 days decreased from 17 percent in 2009 to 13 percent in 2019. Similarly, the percentage of students who reported carrying a weapon on school property during the previous 30 days decreased from 6 to 3 percent during the same period.

This indicator uses data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) to examine the percentages of students in grades 9-12 who reported carrying a weapon on school property and anywhere during the previous 30 days. Then, using data from the ED Facts data collection, the indicator presents, by state, the numbers of public school students reported by schools to have

possessed firearms during the school year. It concludes with a discussion of data from the School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey on students ages 12-18 who reported having access to a loaded gun at school or away from school during the school year without adult permission. Readers should take note of the differing data sources and terminology.

**Figure 1. Percentage of students in grades 9–12 who reported carrying a weapon at least 1 day during the previous 30 days, by location and sex: Selected years, 2009 through 2019**



NOTE: Respondents were asked about carrying “a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club.” The term “anywhere” is not used in the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) questionnaire; students were simply asked how many days they carried a weapon during the past 30 days. In the question asking students about carrying a weapon at school, “on school property” was not defined for respondents.  
 SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), 2009 through 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 231.40.

In the YRBSS, students in grades 9-12 were asked if they had carried a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club<sup>1</sup> anywhere during the previous 30 days and if they had carried such a weapon on school property during the same time period.<sup>2</sup> In this indicator, the percentage of students carrying a weapon “anywhere”<sup>3</sup> is included as a point of comparison with the percentage of students carrying a weapon on school property.

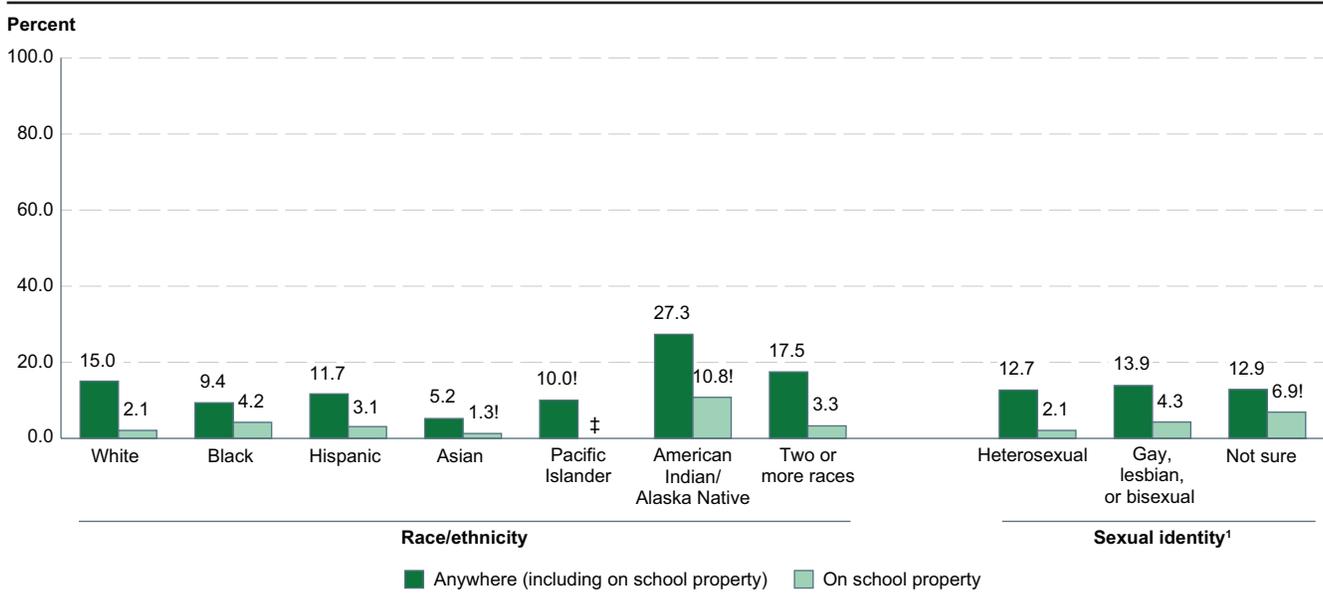
In 2019, the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who reported having carried a weapon anywhere at least 1 day during the previous 30 days ranged from 10 percent in Massachusetts to 23 percent in Montana.<sup>4,5</sup> Overall, 13 percent of students reported having carried a weapon anywhere during the previous 30 days, including 6 percent who reported carrying a weapon anywhere on 6 or more days, 5 percent who reported carrying a weapon on 2 to 5 days, and 3 percent who reported carrying a weapon on 1 day.<sup>6</sup> The percentage who reported having carried a weapon on school property at least 1 day during the previous 30 days was 3 percent overall, and it ranged from 1 percent in Pennsylvania to 9 percent in Alaska.<sup>7</sup> Considering student weapon

carrying on school property by frequency, more than 1 percent of students (1.4 percent) reported carrying a weapon on 6 or more days, and less than 1 percent (0.7 percent each) reported carrying a weapon on 2 to 5 days and on 1 day during the previous 30 days.

Overall, the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who reported carrying a weapon anywhere during the previous 30 days decreased from 17 percent in 2009 to 13 percent in 2019. Similarly, the percentage of students who reported carrying a weapon on school property during the previous 30 days decreased from 6 to 3 percent during the same period.

In every survey year from 2009 to 2019, a higher percentage of male students than of female students in grades 9-12 reported that they had carried a weapon, both anywhere and on school property, during the previous 30 days. In 2019, for example, 19 percent of male students reported carrying a weapon anywhere, compared with 7 percent of female students. Similarly, 4 percent of male students reported carrying a weapon on school property, compared with 2 percent of female students.

**Figure 2. Percentage of students in grades 9–12 who reported carrying a weapon at least 1 day during the previous 30 days, by race/ethnicity, sexual identity, and location: 2019**



! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.  
 ‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.  
<sup>1</sup> Students were asked which of the following—"heterosexual (straight)," "gay or lesbian," "bisexual," or "not sure"—best described them.  
 NOTE: Respondents were asked about carrying "a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club." The term "anywhere" is not used in the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) questionnaire; students were simply asked how many days they carried a weapon during the past 30 days. In the question asking students about carrying a weapon at school, "on school property" was not defined for respondents. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.  
 SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 231.40.

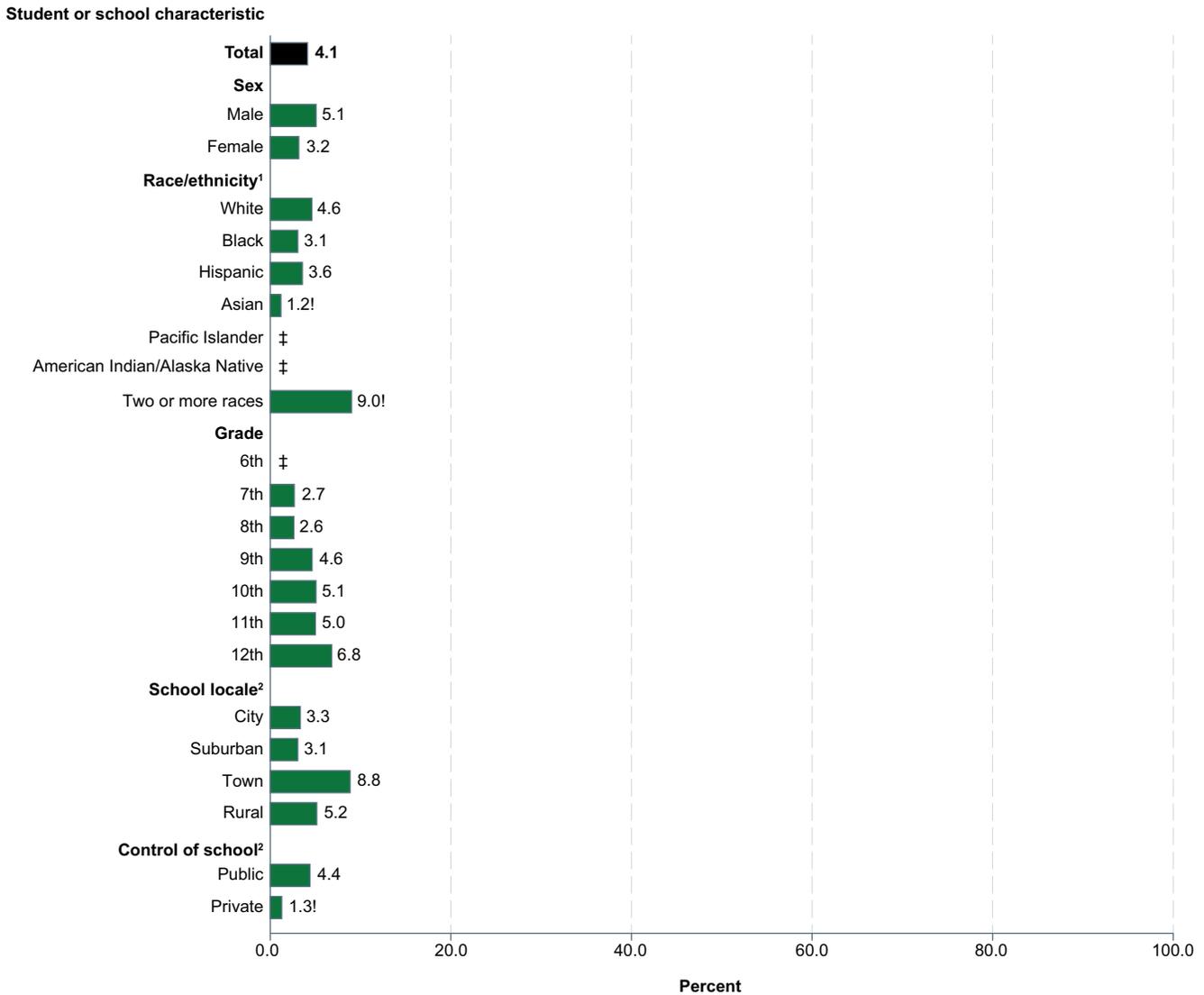
In 2019, the percentage of students in grades 9–12 who reported carrying a weapon anywhere during the previous 30 days was lower for Asian students (5 percent) than for students of most other racial/ethnic groups (ranging from 9 percent for Black students to 27 percent for American Indian/Alaska Native students); the only exception was that the percentage for Asian students was not measurably different from that for Pacific Islander students (10 percent). In addition, the percentages of students who reported carrying a weapon anywhere were lower for Black students and Hispanic students (12 percent) than for students who were White (15 percent), of Two or more races (17 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Native. Considering student weapon carrying on school property, the percentage was lower for Asian students (1 percent) than for Hispanic students (3 percent), students of Two or more races (3 percent), Black students (4 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Native students (11 percent). This percentage was also lower for White students (2 percent) than for Black students and American Indian/Alaska Native students.

Fewer measurable differences were observed by students' sexual identity<sup>8</sup> or by grade level. In 2019, there were no measurable differences by sexual identity or grade level in the percentages of students who reported carrying a weapon anywhere during the previous 30 days. However, the percentages of students who reported carrying a weapon on school property during the previous 30 days

were higher for students who were not sure about their sexual identity (7 percent) and who were gay, lesbian, or bisexual (4 percent) than for students who were heterosexual (2 percent). A higher percentage of 11th-graders than of 9th-graders reported carrying a weapon on school property during the previous 30 days (3 vs. 2 percent).

Besides student-reported data on carrying a weapon, states also report data on public school students' possession of weapons—specifically firearms—at school. As part of the *EDFacts* data collection, state education agencies report the number of public school students from kindergarten to 12th grade known to have brought firearms to or possessed firearms at school. State education agencies compile these data based on student counts that were reported by their schools and school districts. During the 2018–19 school year, about 2,900 public elementary and secondary students were reported to have possessed firearms at schools in the United States.<sup>9</sup> This translates to an overall rate of 6 per 100,000 students who possessed firearms at school. When the rates are examined by state, the data reveal that the majority (45 states and the District of Columbia) had rates between 1 and 20 per 100,000 students. Three states—New Jersey, Missouri, and Idaho—had rates below 1 per 100,000 students, while two states had rates above 20 per 100,000 students: Louisiana and Arkansas.

**Figure 3. Percentage of students ages 12–18 who reported having access to a loaded gun, without adult permission, at school or away from school during the school year, by selected student and school characteristics: 2019**



! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.  
 ‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.  
<sup>1</sup> Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.  
<sup>2</sup> Excludes students with missing information about the school characteristic.  
 NOTE: Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey, 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 231.70.

Information about students' access to firearms can provide context for student reports of carrying a weapon anywhere and on school property. In the SCS survey, students ages 12-18 were asked if they could have obtained a loaded gun without adult permission, either at school or away from school, during the current school year.

In 2019, about 4 percent of students ages 12-18 reported having access to a loaded gun without adult permission during the school year, either at school or away from school; this was lower than the percentage reported in 2009 (6 percent).

In every survey year from 2009 to 2019 (except in 2013 when there was no measurable difference), a higher percentage of male students than of female students ages 12-18 reported having access to a loaded gun without adult permission, either at school or away from school during the school year. For example, in 2019, about 5 percent of male students reported having access to a loaded gun without adult permission, compared with 3 percent of female students. Consistent with the pattern for students ages 12-18 overall, the percentages of male students who reported having such access to a loaded gun was lower in 2019 than in 2009 (5 vs. 8 percent). However, the percentage was not measurably different between 2009 and 2019 for female students.

In 2019, higher percentages of students ages 12-18 who were of Two or more races (9 percent), White (5 percent), and Hispanic (4 percent) reported having access to a

loaded gun without adult permission, either at school or away from school during the school year, compared with Asian students (1 percent). The percentage was also higher for 10th- (5 percent) and 12th-graders (7 percent) than for 7th- and 8th-graders (3 percent each).

When differences are examined by school characteristics,<sup>10</sup> the data show that a higher percentage of students enrolled in schools in towns (9 percent) reported having access to a loaded gun without adult permission, compared with their peers enrolled in schools in cities and suburban areas (3 percent each); the percentage was also higher for students enrolled in schools in rural areas (5 percent) than for those enrolled in schools in suburban areas. In addition, a higher percentage of public school students than of private school students reported having access to a loaded gun without adult permission in 2019 (4 vs. 1 percent).

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> The question on weapon carrying during the previous 30 days asked about these weapon types combined. Separate data on each type of weapon were not collected.

<sup>2</sup> The term “anywhere” is not used in the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) questionnaire; students were simply asked how many days they carried a weapon during the past 30 days. In the question asking students about carrying a weapon at school, “on school property” was not defined for respondents.

<sup>3</sup> “Anywhere” includes on school property.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. total data are representative of all public and private school students in grades 9-12 in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. U.S. total data were collected through a separate national survey rather than being aggregated from state-level data. In this indicator, all YRBSS discussions about weapon carrying, except those at the state level, are based on data from the national survey.

<sup>5</sup> In 2019, *state-level* data on the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who reported carrying a weapon at least 1 day during the previous 30 days *anywhere* were available for 25 states and the District of Columbia (for detailed information by state, see [the table on weapon carrying anywhere for all locations in the YRBSS Youth Online Data Analysis Tool](#)).

<sup>6</sup> Estimates by the number of days students reported carrying a weapon do not add up to the total because of rounding.

<sup>7</sup> In 2019, *state-level* data on the percentage of students in grades 9-12 who reported carrying a weapon at least 1 day during the previous 30 days *on school property* were available for 37 states and the District of Columbia (for detailed information by state, see [the table on weapon carrying on school property for all locations in the YRBSS Youth Online Data Analysis Tool](#)).

<sup>8</sup> Since 2015, the YRBSS has included a question on students' sexual identity by asking students in grades 9-12 which of the following best described them—“heterosexual (straight),” “gay or lesbian,” “bisexual,” or “not sure.” In this indicator, students who identified as “gay or lesbian” or “bisexual” are discussed together as the “gay, lesbian, or bisexual” group. Students were not asked whether they identified as transgender in the YRBSS.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. total includes the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

<sup>10</sup> Analyses by school locale and control of school exclude students with missing information about the school characteristic.

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**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, tables 231.40, 231.50, 231.65, and 231.70

**Related indicators and resources:** [Serious Disciplinary Actions Taken by Public Schools](#); [Threats and Injuries With Weapons on School Property](#); [Violent and Other Criminal Incidents Recorded by Public Schools and Those Reported to the Police](#); [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2019](#)

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**Glossary:** At school; Firearm/explosive device; Locale codes; On school property; Private school; Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic group; Sexual identity (Youth Risk Behavior Survey System); Weapon (Youth Risk Behavior Survey System)