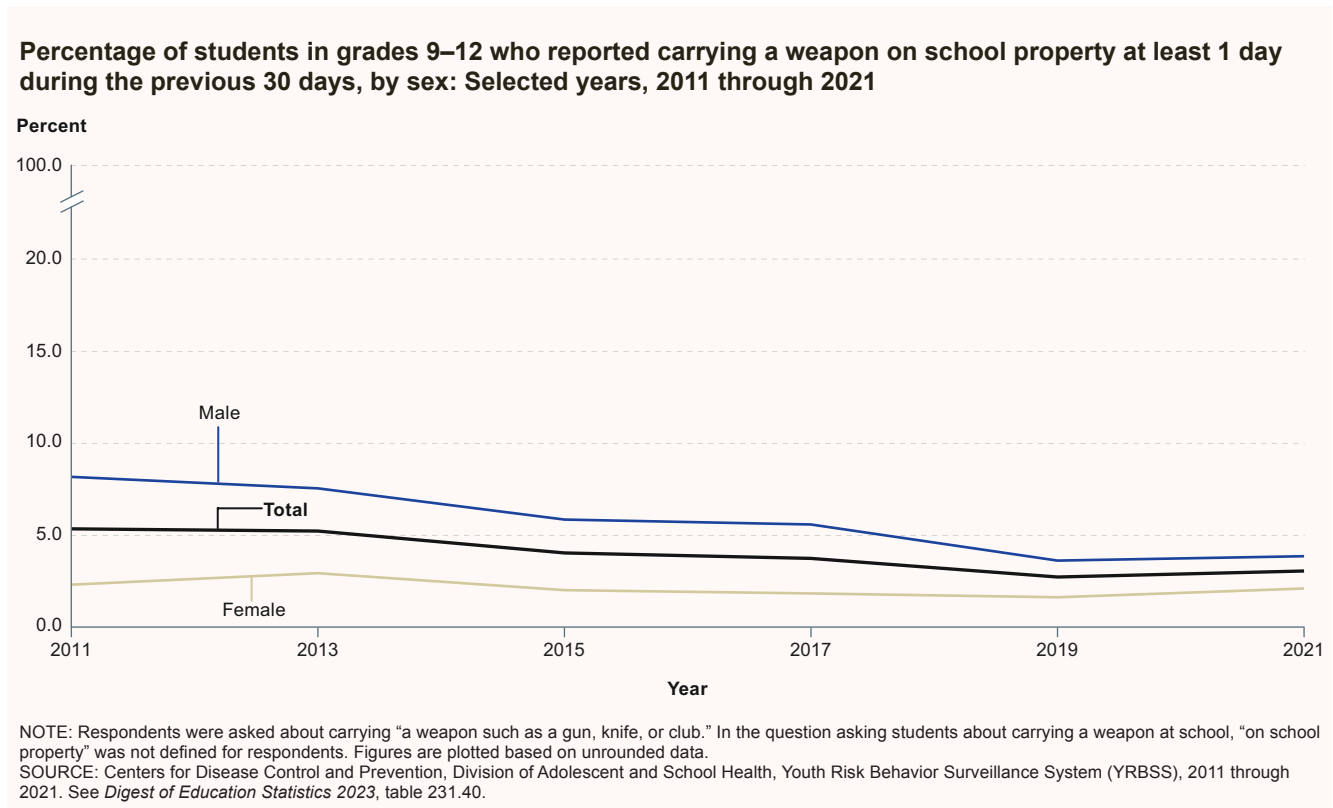


## Students Carrying Weapons and Students' Access to Firearms

***The percentage of students in grades 9–12 who reported carrying a weapon on school property at least 1 day during the previous 30 days decreased from 5 percent in 2011 to 3 percent in 2021. In every survey year from 2011 to 2021, a higher percentage of male students than of female students in grades 9–12 reported that they had carried a weapon on school property during the previous 30 days.***

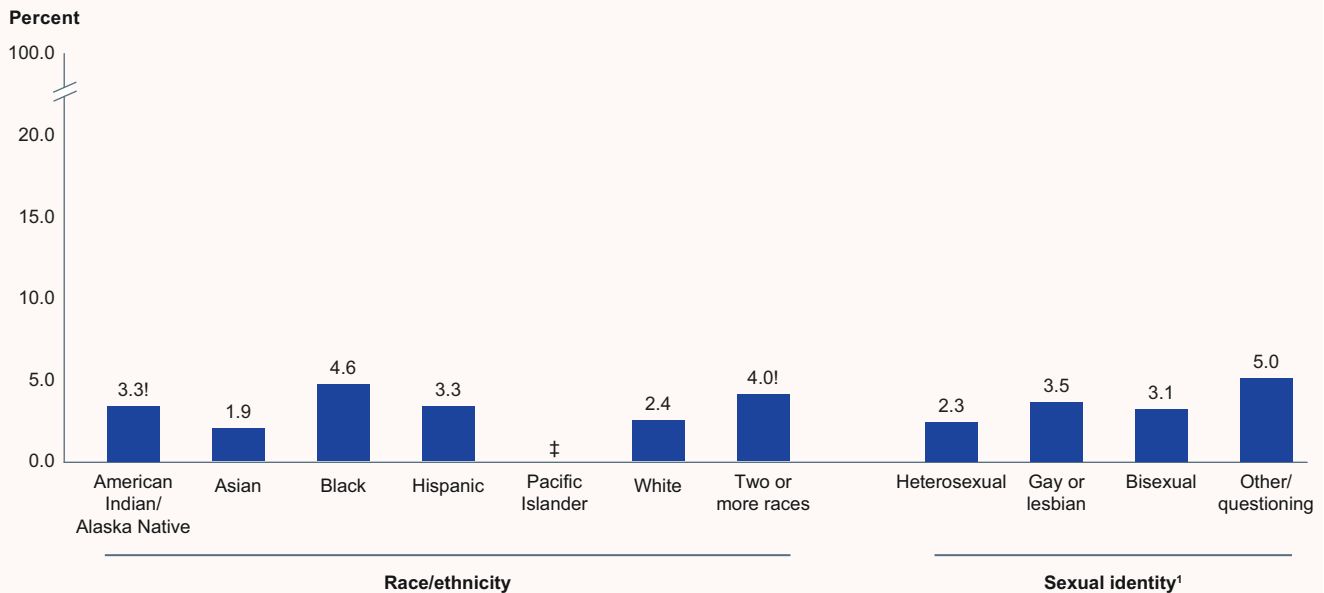
This indicator uses data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) to examine the percentages of students in grades 9–12 who reported carrying a weapon on school property at least 1 day during the previous 30 days. Then, using data from the ED*Facts* data collection, the indicator presents state-level data on public schools' reports of the number of students who 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 during the school year—either at school or away from school—without adult permission. The latest data for each of these sources generally corresponds to the 2021–22 school year. Overall, these data show lower percentages of students who reported carrying weapons at school in 2021 and having access to a loaded gun without adult permission in 2022 than in 2011.<sup>1</sup> However, public schools reported higher incident rates of firearm possession in the 2021–22 school year than in any other year over the previous decade. While contrasting, these results are not necessarily contradictory. Readers should take note of the differing data sources, which measure different phenomena (e.g., carrying any weapon vs. finding firearms) for different populations (students in particular grades vs. school-level incidents) over different reference periods (previous 30 days vs. entire school year). In combination, these different sources offer a more complex understanding of the issue of weapons at school.

**Student Weapon Carrying****FIGURE 1.**

In the YRBSS, students in grades 9–12 were asked if they had carried a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club<sup>2</sup> on school property at least 1 day during the previous 30 days.<sup>3</sup> In 2021, the percentage of students in grades 9–12 who reported having carried a weapon on school property at least 1 day during the previous 30 days was 3 percent overall, with 1 percent of students each reporting that they carried a weapon with the following frequencies: 1 day, 2 to 5 days, and 6 or more days. The overall percentage ranged from 1 percent in Delaware to 9 percent in Montana among states and jurisdictions with state-level data available.<sup>4</sup>

Overall, the percentage of students in grades 9–12 who reported carrying a weapon on school property at least 1 day during the previous 30 days decreased from 5 percent in 2011 to 3 percent in 2021.<sup>5</sup> This overall decrease was driven by a decline among male students, from 8 to 4 percent. Among female students, 2 percent reported that they had carried a weapon on school property at least 1 day during the previous 30 days in both 2011 and 2021. In every survey year from 2011 to 2021, a higher percentage of male students than of female students in grades 9–12 reported that they had carried a weapon on school property at least 1 day during the previous 30 days.

FIGURE 2.

**Percentage of students in grades 9–12 who reported carrying a weapon on school property at least 1 day during the previous 30 days, by race/ethnicity and sexual identity: 2021**

! 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," "I am not sure about my sexual identity (questioning)," "I describe my sexual identity in some other way," or "I do not know what this question is asking"—best described them. Students who selected "I do not know what this question is asking" are considered to be missing the sexual identity data.

NOTE: Respondents were asked about carrying "a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club." 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. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Adolescent and School Health, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 231.40.

There were some differences—by race/ethnicity, sexual identity,<sup>6</sup> and grade level—in the percentages of students who reported carrying a weapon on school property at least 1 day during the previous 30 days. For students of all racial/ethnic groups and sexual identities, and 9th- through 12th-graders, the percentage of students who reported carrying a weapon on school property was 5 percentage points or less in 2021. Specifically, these percentages were

- lower for Asian students (2 percent) than for Hispanic students (3 percent), students of Two or more races (4 percent), and Black students (5 percent);
- lower for White students (2 percent) than for students of Two or more races (4 percent) and Black students (5 percent);
- lower for students who were heterosexual (2 percent) than for students who defined their sexual identity as "other/questioning" (5 percent);
- lower for 9th-graders (2 percent) than for 11th-graders and 12th-graders (4 percent each); and
- lower for 10th-graders (2 percent) than for 12th-graders (4 percent).

### Student Possession of Firearms by State

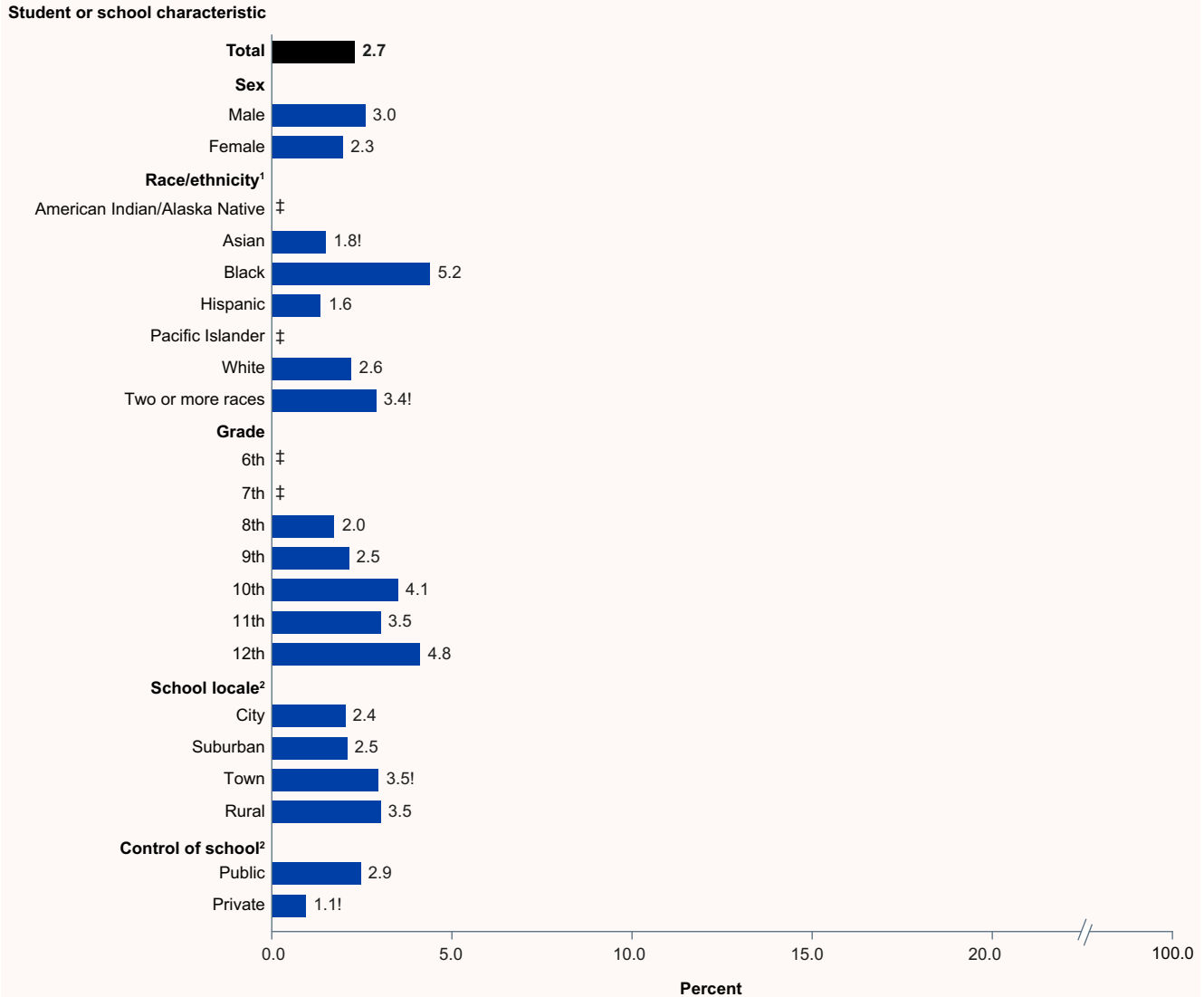
In addition to the YRBSS collecting student reports about carrying weapons, *EDFacts* collects state reports of school and district counts of public school students known to have brought firearms to or possessed firearms at school. During the 2021-22 school year, 5,000 public school students from kindergarten to 12th grade were reported to have possessed firearms at schools in the United States.<sup>7</sup> This translates to an overall rate of 10 firearm possessions per 100,000 students, which was higher than in any other school year over the previous decade (ranging from 2 to 7 possessions per 100,000 students). Across the United States in 2021-22,

- 30 states had rates below 10 firearm possessions per 100,000 students;
- 15 states had rates between 10 and 20 firearm possession per 100,000 students; and
- 5 states—Louisiana, South Carolina, New Mexico, Illinois, and Alabama—and the District of Columbia had rates above 20 firearm possessions per 100,000 students.

**Student Access to Firearms**

**FIGURE 3.**

**Percentage of students ages 12–18 who reported having access to a loaded gun without adult permission—either at school or away from school—during the school year, by selected student and school characteristics: School year 2021–22**



! 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: Excludes students who received any homeschooling education during the school year and students who only attended virtual public or private schools. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey, 2022. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 231.70.

Students who do not bring firearms to school may nevertheless have access to these weapons. In the SCS survey, students ages 12-18 were asked if they had access to a loaded gun without adult permission—either at school or away from school—during the current school year. In school year 2021-22, about 3 percent of students reported having such access, which was lower than the percentage reported in 2010-11 (5 percent) and in 2019 (4 percent).

In 2021-22, there was no measurable difference between the percentage of male students (3 percent) and female students (2 percent) who reported having access to a loaded gun without adult permission. This differed from most survey years over the previous decade, in which the percentage was higher for male students than for female students. Consistent with the pattern for students ages 12-18 overall, the percentage of male students who reported having such access to a loaded gun was lower in 2021-22 than in 2010-11 (3 vs. 6 percent), as was the percentage of female students (2 vs. 4 percent).

In 2021-22, there were some differences in the percentages of students who reported having access to firearms across student and school characteristics. Specifically, the percentages of students ages 12-18 who reported having access to a loaded gun without adult permission—either at school or away from school—during the school year was

- higher for Black students (5 percent) than for Asian and Hispanic students (2 percent each);
- higher for 12th-graders (5 percent) than for 9th-graders (3 percent) and 8th-graders (2 percent);
- higher for 10th-graders (4 percent) than for 8th-graders (2 percent); and
- higher for public school students (3 percent) than for private school students (1 percent).

There were no measurable differences in the percentages of students who reported having access to a loaded gun without adult permission by school locale (city, suburb, town, rural).

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> For general technical notes related to data analysis, data interpretation, rounding, and other considerations, please refer to the [Reader's Guide](#).

<sup>2</sup> The question on weapon carrying at least 1 day during the previous 30 days asked about these weapon types combined. Separate data on each type of weapon were not collected. For more information, see the questionnaire at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/2021/2021-YRBS-National-HS-Questionnaire.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> In the question asking students about carrying a weapon at school, “on school property” was not defined for respondents.

<sup>4</sup> In 2021, *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 33 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>5</sup> The national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is a component of YRBSS. The national YRBS is conducted biennially, typically during the spring (January-June) of odd-numbered years. However, the 2021 national YRBS administration was postponed until fall (September-December) 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to virtual and hybrid school instructional models and ongoing school closures during spring 2021. For more details, see [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/su/su7201a1.htm?s\\_cid=su7201a1\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/su/su7201a1.htm?s_cid=su7201a1_w).

<sup>6</sup> Students were asked which of the following—“heterosexual (straight),” “gay or lesbian,” “bisexual,” “I am not sure about my sexual identity (questioning),” “I describe my sexual identity in some other way,” or “I do not know what this question is asking”—best described them. Students who selected “I do not know what this question is asking” are considered to be missing the sexual identity data and thus excluded from the analyses.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. total includes the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, tables [231.40](#), [231.50](#), [231.65](#), and [231.70](#)

**Related indicators and resources:** [Criminal Incidents Recorded by Public Schools and Those Reported to Sworn Law Enforcement](#); [Serious Disciplinary Actions Taken by Public Schools](#); [Threats and Injuries With Weapons on School Property](#); [Violent Deaths at School and Away From School](#), and [Active Shooter Incidents](#); [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2019](#)

**Glossary:** [At/during 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 \(Youth Risk Behavior Survey System\)](#)