



Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

350 Main Street, Malden, Massachusetts 02148-5023

Telephone: (781) 338-3000
TTY: N.E.T. Relay 1-800-439-2370

Mitchell D. Chester, Ed.D.
Commissioner

Homelessness in Massachusetts Public Schools

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE), in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control, biannually administers the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in randomly selected high schools across the Commonwealth. In 2005, 2007 and 2009, the survey included a housing status question. The eight possible responses include being permanently housed and seven other responses that reflect the definition of homelessness* under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, 2002, Title X, Part C, NCLB.

Consistent with the earlier results, the responses on the 2009 YRBS indicate that:

- 4.3%, or approximately 12,541, high school students were homeless.
- 2.0%, or 5,920 were unaccompanied youth.

Annual ESE data collection shows that in 2009 homeless high school students made up one-third of all identified homeless students, resulting in an estimate of 50,164 homeless students enrolled in Massachusetts public schools.

Disaggregating the data by housing status, the YRBS allows us to look at the protective factors homeless students are able to access and the risk behaviors in which they engage. When compared to their housed peers, homeless students have lower access to the protective factors that can help improve their lives. At the same time, homeless students are participating in risk behaviors at a higher rate than their housed peers. This combination can result in significant barriers to enrolling, attending, and being successful in school.

	% of Homeless Students	% of Housed Students
Protective Factors		
Have an adult they can talk to at school	58	72
Earn good grades (A, B, or C)	69	89
Participate on a sports team in the past year	52	59
Eat breakfast each morning	18	37
Risk Behaviors		
Members of a gang	23	6
Had alcohol in the past 30 days	68	43
Used marijuana in the past month	52	26
Ever used heroin	18	1
Felt sad or hopeless for 2 or more weeks	50	23
Made a suicide attempt that resulted in injury	17	2
Had sexual contact against their will	38	10
Ever been or gotten someone pregnant	25	5

* ESE has adopted Section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, 2002 (Title X, Part C, *No Child Left Behind*) regarding the definition of homeless children and youth.