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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. Since 2005 the survey has 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 previous results, the responses on the 2013 YRBS indicate that:

- 3.3%, or approximately 9,493 high school students were homeless.
- 1.4%, or approximately 4,085 were unaccompanied youth.

Annual ESE data collection shows that in 2013 homeless high school students made up approximately one-quarter of all identified homeless students, resulting in an estimate of over 37,000 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		
Believe teachers care	46	71
Earn good grades (A, B, or C)	71	91
Participate on a sports team in the past year	47	61
Eat breakfast each morning	25	41
Risk Behaviors		
Members of a gang	28	6
Had alcohol in the past 30 days	53	35
Used marijuana in the past month	49	24
Ever used heroin	9	1
Felt sad or hopeless for 2 or more weeks	35	21
Made a suicide attempt that resulted in injury	8	2
Had sexual contact against their will	19	8
Ever been or gotten someone pregnant	19	2

* 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.