

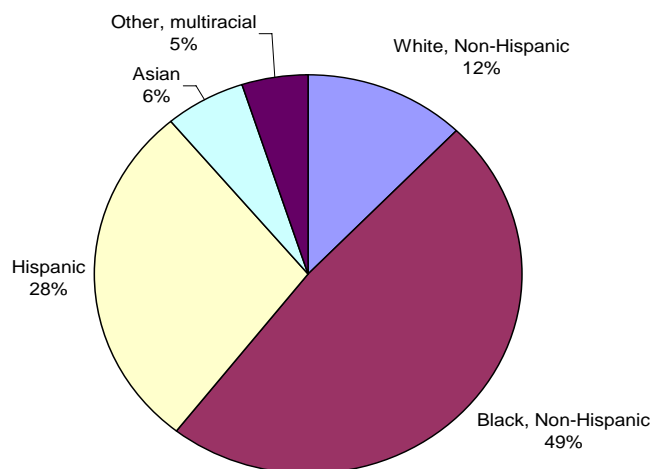


2006 Boston Youth Survey Highlights

This report presents results from the 2006 Boston Youth Survey (BYS), a biennial survey administered to a representative sample of high school students in Boston Public Schools. The BYS is one component of the Boston Data Project, a partnership between the City of Boston Office of Human Services, Boston Public Health Commission and the Harvard Youth Violence Prevention Center, that tracks factors affecting youth well-being in Boston. The BYS covers a comprehensive range of topics including education, mental health, service use, nutrition and physical activity, with a particular emphasis on violence perpetration, witnessing violence, and violence victimization.

1,233 students, from 18 BPS high schools participated in the 2006 BYS. Students came from neighborhoods throughout the city, and represent the Boston Public Schools considerable racial and ethnic diversity. Thirty percent were born outside the U.S, and for over half both of their parents were born outside the U.S.

Boston Youth Survey Respondents by Race



The first representative BYS was conducted in 2004. Compared to 2004, students in 2006 reported feeling safer, were less likely to carry guns or to have had contact with the police and were more likely to trust the police. The next BYS will be conducted in 2008. For more information, visit <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hyvpc/>.

Resources for Youth

A key strategy for supporting teens is to ensure they have places to go and things to do after school and during the summer. Most survey participants said a variety of resources were available to them in their schools or neighborhoods, and most (74%) said they took advantage of at least one of these opportunities sometimes or often. In addition, students said they would like to participate in a wide range of activities if they were offered in their school or neighborhood.



- 72% said there was a community center for teens near their school or neighborhood. 26% of those said they use it sometimes or often.
- 64% said there were academic programs offered after school at school or in their neighborhood. 33% reported using them sometimes or often.
- 74% said there were sports or recreation programs offered after school at their school or in their neighborhood. 41% said they participate in them sometimes or often.
- 28% said they attend religious services at least once a week. Black students were more likely than students of other races to attend this often (34%), as were girls compared to boys (32% vs. 24%), and immigrants compared to U.S. born youth (Four years or less: 42%; five or more years: 37%; U.S. born: 24%).
- 62% participated in some type of organized activity after school at least once a week. Immigrants were more likely than U.S. born youth to be involved in an organized activity (68% vs. 59%). 33% of those who said they did not participate in after school programs gave lack of interest in available programs as their reason for non-participation.
- The following activities were most popular in terms of student interest: driver's education (53%), dance (47%), basketball (38%), SAT prep (36%), swimming (33%), photography (30%) and fashion design (30%).
- **Any changes since 2004?** The percentage of students who reported having jobs was slightly lower in 2004 (32%) than 2006 (36%). Other questions in this section were not comparable between the two survey years.

Relationships with Others

Having trusting relationships with supportive adults is a vital developmental asset for high school aged youth. The Boston Youth Survey tracks this asset in a variety of ways.

- 61% believed most people would try to take advantage of them if they could.
- 65% reported they could talk to an adult at home about their problems at least sometimes. U.S. born youth were more likely than immigrant youth to indicate this (67% vs. 60%).
- Youth who felt unable to talk to someone at home were more likely to report more depressive symptoms (47% vs. 36%), but not more aggression.
- 74% said there was at least one adult at school who would help them if they had a problem or were upset. Girls were more likely than boys to report such adult support (76% vs. 70%).
- 77% indicated there is at least one adult they could talk with about personal problems.
- 46% said they trust the police a lot (13%) or some (33%). Black youth were less likely than others to trust the police a lot or some (37%). The longer students had lived in the U.S., the less likely they were to trust the police a lot or some (Four years or less: 57%; five or more years: 53%; U.S. born: 44%).
- 43% reported having contact of some sort with the police (e.g. asked for directions, questioned about a crime) during the previous year, with boys more likely than girls to have had contact (48% vs. 40%). Of those who had police contact, 38% said they were treated with respect always or most of the time.
- **Any changes since 2004?** There was a five percent decrease in police contact, from 48% in 2004 to 43% in 2006, but a six percent increase in trusting the police a lot or some, from 39%



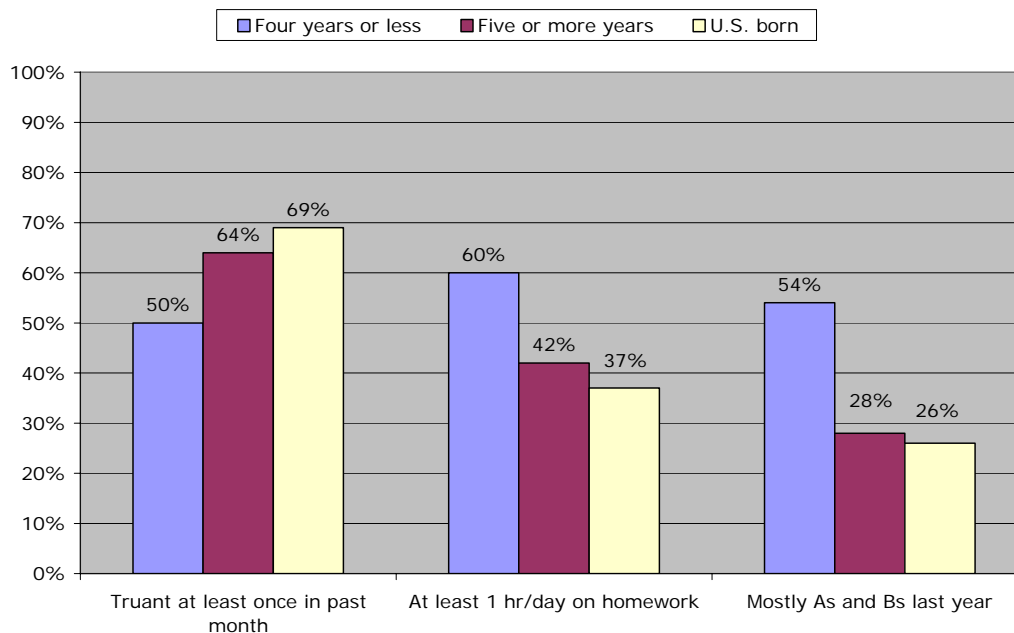
in 2004 to 45% in 2006. There was a 16% increase in the percentage of students who believed most people would try to take advantage of them, from 45% in 2004 to 61% in 2006.

School Performance and Education Plans

Boston youth care about school, and have high expectations regarding their future educational attainment. These expectations, however, are not always linked to strong school performance and academic work habits.

- 72% stated that grades were “very important” to them.
- 91% aspired to continue their education beyond high school.
- 29% reported receiving mostly As and Bs over the past year. 33% reported receiving mostly Cs, Ds, or Fs.
- 59% reported that they spent less than an hour per school day on homework.
- 66% reported they were truant (absent from school when not sick) at least once in the previous month. 28% were truant three or more days during this time.
- Girls were more likely than boys to report receiving mostly As and Bs (34% vs. 23%), and to spend at least an hour per day on their homework (48% vs. 32%), but they were also more likely to be truant (69% vs. 63%).
- Asians were more likely than others to receive mostly As and Bs (58%), more likely to spend at least an hour a day on their homework (71%), and less likely to be truant (37%). Blacks were less likely than others to receive mostly As and Bs (25%).
- The longer students lived in the U.S., the worse their academic performance in terms of grades, truancy, and time spent on homework.

School Performance and Years Lived in the U.S.



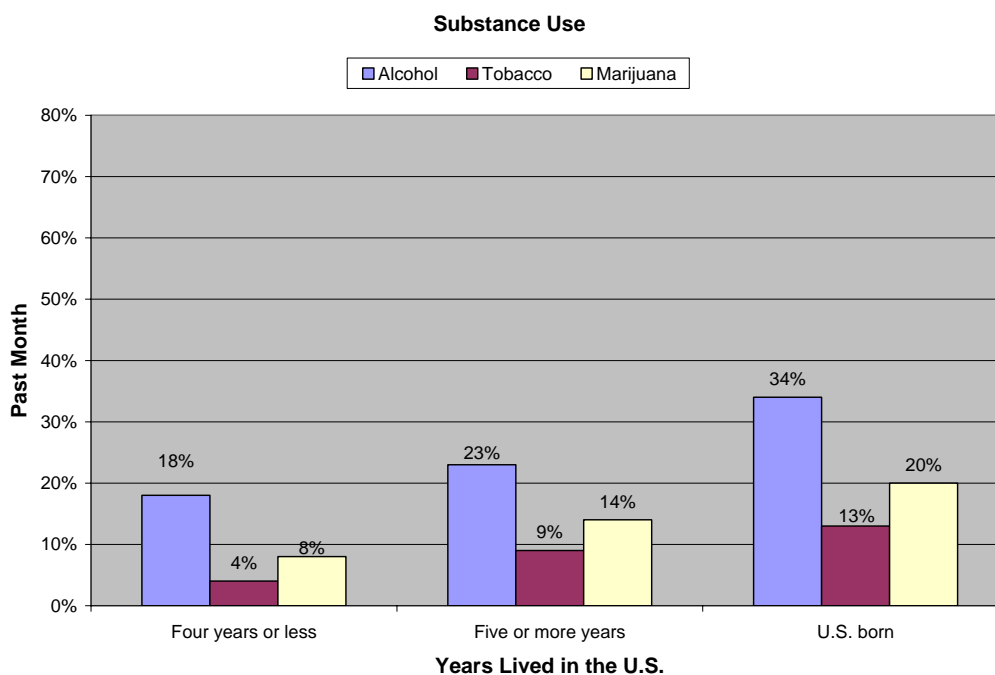
- **Any changes since 2004?** Educational aspirations and performance were stable from 2004 to 2006.



Mental Health/Substance Use

Data from the Boston Youth Survey supplement information on youth substance use and mental health from the bi-annual Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Data from the BYS confirm that Boston youth use drugs and alcohol at rates lower than the national average.

- In the past month, 30% reported drinking some form of alcohol at least once, 11% reported using tobacco at least once, and 18% used marijuana at least once.
- While there were no gender differences in alcohol or tobacco consumption, boys were more likely than girls to report marijuana use (21% vs. 15%).
- Whites were more likely than others to drink alcohol (51%) or use tobacco (29%).
- The longer students had lived in the U.S., the more likely they were to report drinking alcohol, using tobacco products, or marijuana use.
- Girls were more likely than boys to exhibit a higher number of depressive symptoms (48% vs. 28%).
- Girls were more likely than boys to report having seriously considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months (11% vs. 5%).



- **Any changes since 2004?** Reports of depressive symptoms remained the same. Other questions in this section were not comparable between the two survey years.

Health and Physical Activity

Increasing opportunities for youth to participate in physical activities is an important citywide goal.

- 39% of youth exercised four or more days per week. Boys were more likely than girls to exercise this often (54% vs. 28%), as were U.S. born teens compared to non-U.S. born teens (41% vs. 36%).
- 46% were either overweight or at risk for overweight, based on their body mass index.



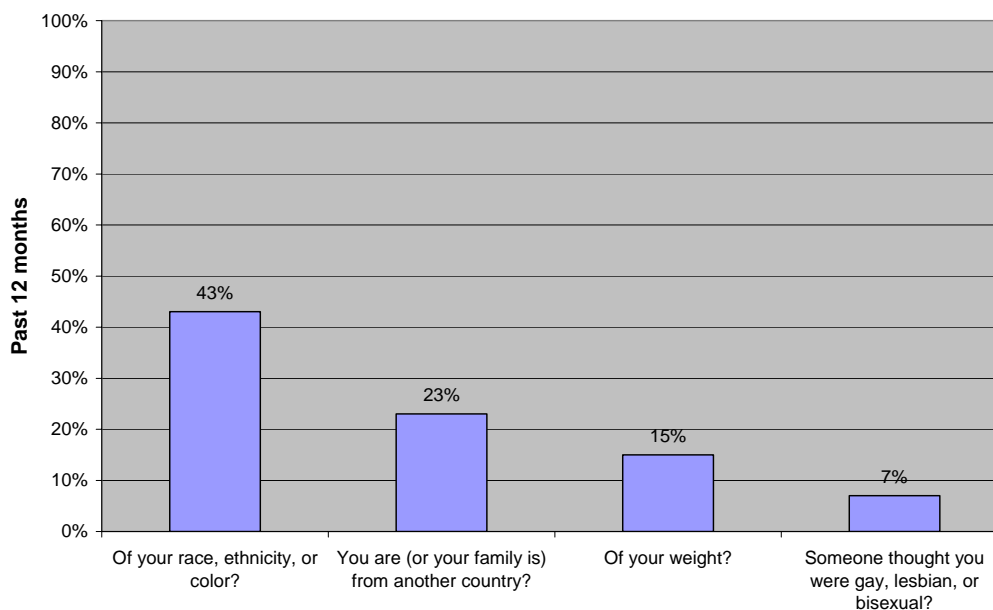
- 83% reported that they had a physical exam in the previous year, and 76% saw a dentist. U.S. born youth were more likely than immigrants to have had a physical (85% vs. 80%) or dental (78% vs. 69%) exam in the previous year.
- Asians were less likely than others to have had a physical exam (74%), less likely to exercise (22%), and less likely to be overweight or at risk for overweight (31%). Blacks were less likely to have seen a dentist (69%).
- **Any changes since 2004?** The percent who had a physical exam was slightly higher in 2004 (87%); dental exam was exactly the same, as was exercise. The percent overweight or at risk for overweight was almost the same (48%).

Discrimination

Perceptions of being discriminated against may lead to both physical and mental health problems. More respondents experienced racial discrimination than other forms of discrimination.

- 55% said they felt they were discriminated against during the past 12 months. Whites were less likely than other races to say they were discriminated against (47%).
- Students were discriminated against for a variety of reasons:

"Have you felt discriminated against because..."



- Those who report a higher amount of depressive symptoms were more likely than those reporting a lower amount to have been discriminated against (64% vs. 48%), as were those who: were truant in the past month (57% vs. 49%), witnessed violence (62% vs. 45%) or were themselves victimized (65% vs. 51%) in the past year.
- Those who were discriminated against were more likely than those who were not to be more aggressive (16% vs. 12%), to believe that most people would take advantage of you if they got a chance (69% vs. 52%), and to carry a knife (37% vs. 25%). They were less likely to have confidence in their ability to stay out of fights (82% vs. 88%).



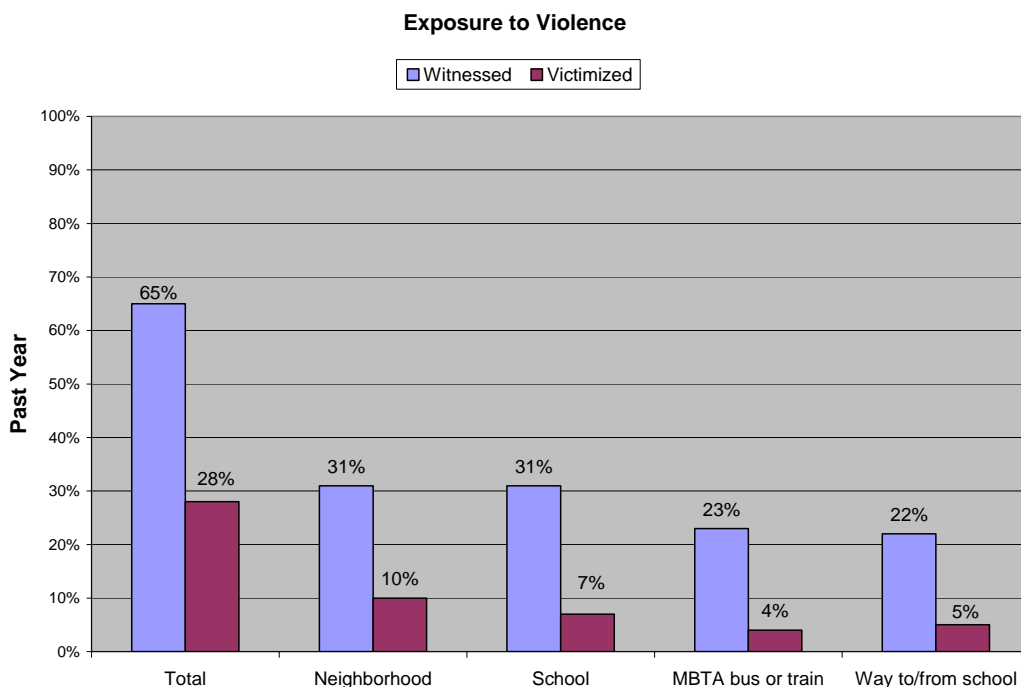
- **Any changes since 2004?** Discrimination questions from 2004 were not comparable to 2006.

Exposure to Violence

The survey asked three questions about exposure to violence. Each question was asked twice: once to ascertain whether the respondent witnessed violence inflicted on someone else and once to ascertain whether the respondent was personally assaulted. The questions were:

“In the past 12 months, have you been/have you seen someone:”

- Punched with a fist, kicked, choked, or beaten up?
 - Attacked with a weapon other than a gun- like a knife, bat, bottle, or chain?
 - Shot or shot at?
-
- 65% of respondents reported witnessing one or more acts of violence in the past year; 28% reported being assaulted.
 - Boys were more likely than girls to report being assaulted in the past year (39% vs. 23%).
 - Immigrants were less likely than those born in the U.S. to report witnessing violence (59% vs. 68%), but no more or less likely than U.S. born youth to report being assaulted.
 - While there were no racial differences in victimization, blacks were more likely than others to witness violence (69%), while Asians were less likely to witness violence (38%).
 - 60% reported they had seen someone punched, kicked, choked or beaten up in the past year, and 20% said this had happened to them in the past year. Boys were more likely than girls to report this type of victimization (26% vs. 16%). The longer students had lived in the U.S., the more likely they were to report this (Four years or less: 7%; five or more years: 17%; U.S. born: 21%).
 - 24% reported seeing someone attacked with a weapon other than a gun in the past year, and nine percent said this had happened to them. Boys were more likely than girls to report this type of victimization (14% vs. 6%).
 - 18% reported seeing someone shot or shot at in the past year, and four percent said they themselves were shot or shot at in the past year. Boys were more likely than girls to report this type of victimization (8% vs. 2%).
 - 31% reported witnessing violence in their neighborhood in the past year, and one in ten students reported being assaulted in their neighborhood in the past year. Violence at school was also witnessed by 31% of respondents.

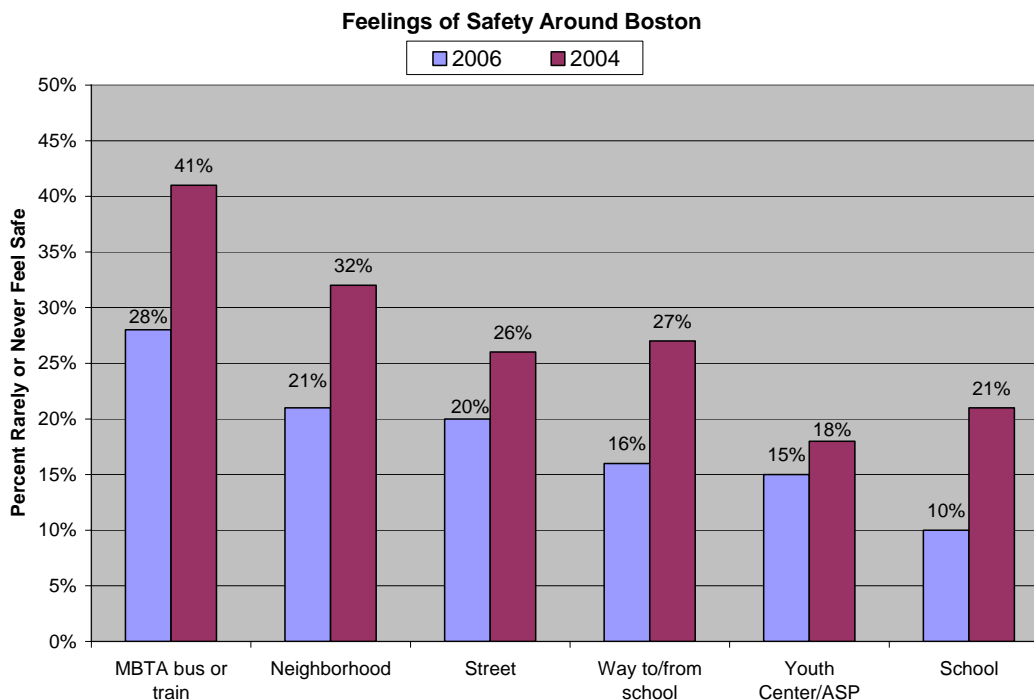


- Any changes since 2004?** The percent of students who witnessed someone being attacked with a weapon other than a gun decreased from 40% in 2004 to 24% in 2006, and the percent themselves attacked with a weapon other than a gun also decreased from 13% in 2004 to 9% in 2006. Those who were shot or shot at decreased from 11% in 2004 to 4% in 2006. Other exposure to violence questions were not comparable between the survey years.

Safety

Between 2004 and 2006 there was an increase in the percent of students who felt safe. The MBTA remained the location where the greatest number of students felt unsafe.

- The percent who rarely or never felt safe on an MBTA train or bus decreased from 41% in 2004 to 28% in 2006. One-fifth (21%) reported feeling unsafe in their neighborhood, and ten percent felt unsafe at school.



- Girls were more likely than boys to rarely or never feel safe in multiple places (40% vs. 33%). The longer students had lived in the U.S., the less likely they were to report feeling unsafe in multiple locations (Four years or less: 47%; five or more years: 43%; U.S. born: 33%).
- The vast majority felt gang activities in their school or neighborhood were somewhat (32%) or very (49%) serious/dangerous. Immigrants were more likely than U.S. born youth to view local gang activities as serious (86% vs. 80), as were girls compared to boys (83% vs. 78%). Whites were less likely than their peers to feel gang activity was serious (68% vs. 84%).
- **Any changes since 2004?** About the same percentage felt school or neighborhood gang activities were somewhat or very serious dangerous in 2004 (78%) as 2006 (81%). A higher percentage of 2006 than 2004 respondents felt safe in most places (63% vs. 54%).

Aggression, Violence Perpetration and Weapons Use

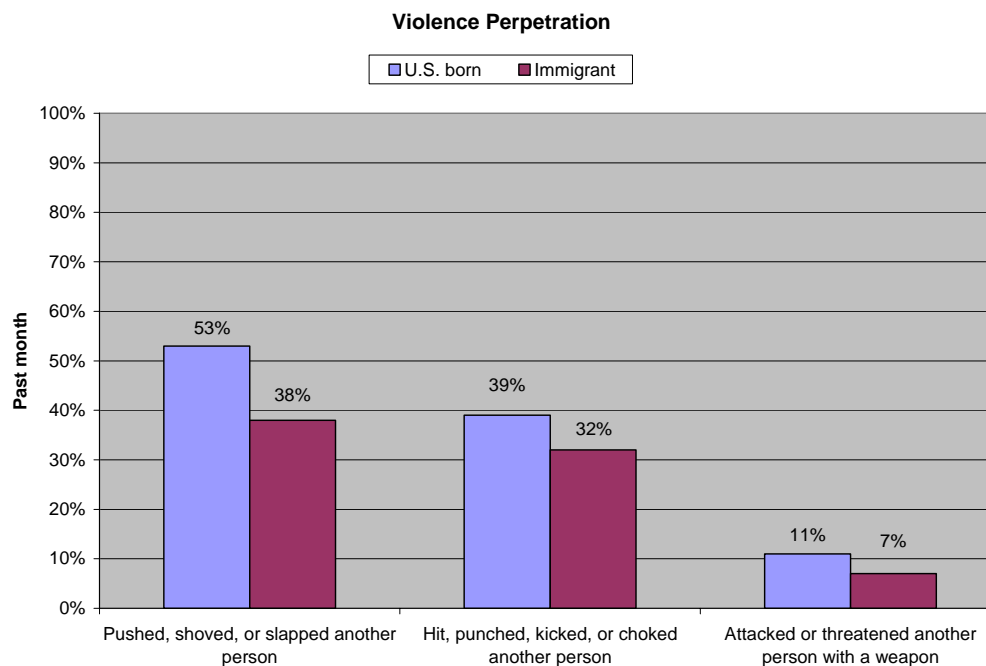
Creating safe schools and communities for youth is a priority for many organizations in the city. Understanding youth aggression and the reasons why youth report carrying and using weapons provides important data for informing this work. The survey asked three questions about violence perpetration:

“In the past month, have you...”

- Pushed, shoved, or slapped another person
 - Hit, punched, kicked, or choked another person
 - Attacked or threatened another person with a weapon, like a bat, bottle, knife, or gun?
- 69% reported having a yelling argument with someone outside their family in the past month. U.S. born youth were more likely than immigrants to report this (72% vs. 62%).
 - 11% said they were bullied or assaulted because of their race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, weight, or because they or their family was from another country.



- Asians were less likely to have had a yelling argument in the past month (43%), but more likely than others to have been bullied or assaulted (15%).
- 49% pushed, shoved, or slapped someone at least once in the past month. 37% hit, punched, kicked, or choked someone, and 10% attacked or threatened another person with a weapon.
- Overall, boys and girls were equally likely to perpetrate violence. However, boys were more likely than girls to attack or threaten another person with a weapon (13% vs. 8%).
- U.S. born youth were more likely than immigrants to perpetrate violence:



- Blacks were more likely to have pushed, shoved, or slapped someone (52% vs. 46%), and to have hit, punched, kicked, or choked someone (41% vs. 34%). Asians were less likely to have done these (pushed: 21% vs. 51%; hit: 21% vs. 39%) or to have attacked or threatened someone with a weapon (1% vs. 11%).
- 31% of respondents carried a knife in the previous 12 months. Six percent reported carrying a gun, a decline from eight percent in 2004. Boys were more likely than girls to carry a knife (43% vs. 23%) or gun (10% vs. 3%).
- U.S. born youth were more likely than immigrants to carry either weapon type (knife: 36% vs. 19%; gun: 7% vs. 3%), while Asians were less likely (knife: 7% vs. 33%; gun: 0% vs. 6%).
- Nearly a third of gun carriers carried because they felt unsafe in their neighborhood. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of them carried because someone threatened to hurt them. While most gun carriers were male, the majority of those who said they were carrying a gun for someone else (26% of carriers) were female.
- 42% said it would be very or fairly easy for them to get a gun (49% of boys vs. 37% of girls). But when asked whether they preferred to live in a world where it is easy or hard to get a gun, the vast majority (78%) prefer a world in which it was hard or impossible for them to get a gun. This was true for gun carriers (76%) and non-gun carriers (79%) alike.



- **Any changes since 2004?** Gun access remained the same, while gun carrying decreased by two percent, from 8% in 2004 to 6% in 2006. Other questions were not comparable between the two surveys.

Responses to Crime

The Mayor's Office has focused, in the last several years, on increasing the number of youth willing to report criminal activity to the authorities and to counter youth social norms that stigmatize "snitching." The 2006 BYS provides baseline data for the City's efforts.

- 72% said they would disclose having seen a crime; 61% said they would "Call 911". However, 28% said they would "not tell anyone". Reasons for not telling can be classified into three categories: (1) "Don't want to be a 'snitch'", (2) Fear of getting hurt, and (3) Belief that it's not his or her concern.
- 80% of girls and 92% of Asian students said they would tell someone if they had seen a crime. Those who have strong family ties and who are active in school and their community were also more likely to say they would disclose having seen a crime. On the other hand, students who are Black/African-American, who have been involved with the juvenile justice system, who report feeling disrespected by the police, and who have had personal experiences with violence are less likely to disclose having witnessed a crime.
- This question was not asked on the 2004 survey.



2006 Boston Youth Survey Supplementary Information

Editorial Note

The 2006 *Boston Youth Survey (BYS)*, is a biennial survey of high school students (9th-12th graders) in selected Boston Public Schools. We used a two-stage, stratified random sampling strategy. The first sampling frame consisted of all 38 high schools in the Boston Public School system. Thirty schools were randomly selected for the survey, with a probability of selection proportional to each school's enrollment size. One school was not invited because it was comprised primarily of adult students. Eighteen schools agreed to participate. Headmasters' main reasons for not participating related primarily to scheduling, logistics, and coordinating end-of-year standardized academic testing. A comparison of the demographic composition between our student sample and that of the overall Boston Public Schools population showed no statistically significant differences.

Among the 18 participating schools, we generated a numbered list of unique homeroom classrooms within each school. First, classrooms comprised of students with severe physical or cognitive disabilities were excluded. Next, classrooms were stratified by grade, and then randomly selected for survey administration within each grade. Those classrooms that listed fewer than five students were skipped and the next randomly selected classroom was chosen. Selection continued until the total number of students to be surveyed ranged from 100-124 per school. In the two selected schools that had total enrollments close to 100, all students in the school were invited to participate.

The data collection instrument covered a range of topics (e.g., health behaviors, use of school and community resources, developmental assets, risk factors), and had a particular emphasis on violence and developmental assets. The paper-and-pencil survey was administered in classrooms by trained staff in the spring of 2006. Adults who were not affiliated with the schools administered the surveys so as to lessen the potential for social presentation bias. Survey administrators completed a brief training program prior to going into the schools. All personnel underwent training in the ethical treatment of human subjects at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Surveys were not marked with any information that could identify an individual. Passive consent was sought from students' parents prior to survey administration. Any student whose parents sent back a form denying permission for the student to participate in the survey was not given one; this was the case for less than 1% of students. Survey administrators read an introduction and the informed consent statement prior to distributing the survey. Seventy of the 1,323 invited students (5.3%) declined to participate. Survey administrators remained in the room and were available to answer questions throughout the 50 minutes allotted for the survey. The Human Subjects Committee at the Harvard School of Public Health approved all procedures for this research project.

Twelve hundred fifty-three surveys were collected in the 18 schools. The surveys of 20 students were excluded from data analysis. Of those, 17 were excluded because students were missing as much as 80% of the items, and three were excluded due to erratic and questionable answering patterns.

The survey was administered during homeroom, the first period of the school day. Students who were tardy began the survey late (and often did not complete it), or missed it altogether. Additionally, students who were absent from school on the day of administration did not take the survey. This may have impacted the sample in that those students who were late or absent are not represented. Reported results are based on the answers of those who answered a given question, **not** on the sample as a whole.



Table 1. Selected Findings by Demographic Characteristics (%)

	Nativity		Sex/Gender		Ethnicity	Race (Non-Hispanic)			
	US Born	Immigrant	Male	Female	Hispanic/Latino	White	Black	Asian	Other*
<i>Aggressive Behavior, past month</i>									
Verbal conflict	72	62	67	70	69	71	71	43	82
Pushed, shoved, slapped someone	53	38	47	50	47	50	52	47	61
Hit, Punched, kicked, choked someone	39	32	39	36	35	35	41	21	47
<i>Substance Use, past month</i>									
Alcohol	34	22	29	31	32	51	24	32	33
Tobacco	13	7	11	11	10	29	6	5	20
Marijuana	20	12	21	15	17	23	19	4	22
<i>Academics</i>									
Spend >1/day on homework	37	48	32	48	31	41	42	71	44
Earn mostly As and Bs	26	37	23	34	28	33	25	58	24
Truant in the past month	69	59	63	69	74	69	64	37	63
<i>Mental Health</i>									
High number of depressive symptoms	41	36	28	48	41	38	41	32	38
Suicidal Ideation	9	7	5	11	10	9	8	6	13
Saw a therapist	12	9	8	14	10	14	10	10	19
<i>Physical Health</i>									
Visited a doctor, past year	85	80	82	85	85	87	83	74	84
Overweight	47	43	48	44	50	40	47	31	42
Exercise 4+ days/wk	41	36	54	28	43	45	38	22	42
Visited dentist, past year	78	69	76	75	80	87	69	79	77
<i>Out of School Time</i>									
3+ hrs of TV/day	46	41	51	42	54	27	49	25	46
Involved in after-school program	59	68	63	61	56	63	63	71	63
<i>Violence and Weapons</i>									
Carried a knife, past year	36	19	43	23	33	31	34	7	29
Carried a gun, past year	7	3	10	3	6	4	6	0	6
Ever in a gang	8	6	13	4	7	7	8	5	20
Have been assaulted, past year	29	23	37	22	24	33	27	21	44
Discriminated against/bullied, past year	57	54	56	57	57	48	57	59	69
Feel unsafe in neighborhood	19	25	18	22	19	9	26	14	22



Table 2. Selected Findings by Grade Level (%)

	Grade			
	9	10	11	12
<i>Aggressive Behavior, past month</i>				
Verbal conflict	72	67	69	65
Pushed, shoved, slapped someone	57	47	47	40
Hit, punched, kicked, choked someone	46	37	32	31
<i>Substance Use, past month</i>				
Alcohol	26	31	31	34
Tobacco	10	11	10	14
Marijuana	15	17	17	24
<i>Academics</i>				
Spend >1/day on homework	36	42	45	40
Earn mostly As and Bs	33	28	26	29
Truant in the past month	62	66	65	76
<i>Mental Health</i>				
High number of depressive symptoms	38	40	39	45
Suicidal Ideation				
Saw a therapist	8	13	9	15
<i>Physical Health</i>				
Visited a doctor in the past year	84	83	84	82
Overweight	51	46	40	46
Exercise 4+ days/wk	43	41	39	28
Visited dentist (past year)	78	78	75	68
<i>Out of School Time</i>				
3+ hrs of TV/day	54	43	41	43
Involved in after-school program	62	63	63	56
<i>Violence and Weapons</i>				
Carried a knife	29	29	36	28
Carried a gun	5	6	6	6
Ever in a gang	10	8	5	7
Have been assaulted, past year	35	26	25	19
Discriminated against/bullied, past year	53	54	57	63
Feel unsafe in neighborhood	24	19	16	27