



Communications Toolkit





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About This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to provide education leaders and practitioners, policymakers, researchers, funders, and others who are passionate about advocating for and improving rural education, with resources to be able to consistently communicate about the *Why Rural Matters 2023* report.

Who Should Use This Toolkit?

This toolkit is designed for anyone seeking to share information, research, and data about the contexts and conditions of rural education in the United States. Whether you are a superintendent, principal, school board member, policymaker, community leader, researcher, or funder, the resources are designed to provide you with templates and allow for flexibility as you customize your communication efforts to your stakeholders.

What's Included in This Toolkit?

- Report Summary & Highlights
- Report Logos
- Sample Press Release
- Sample FAQs
- Sample Social Media Content & Graphics
- Sample PowerPoint Slide Deck

Where Can I Access Sample Resources?

To access the report, resources, and templates, go to www.nrea.net/why-rural-matters.

Ouestions?

Contact Allen Pratt, Executive Director, NREA at allen-pratt@utc.edu.

How You Can Use the Resources

We've created resources that are easy to use and/or insert into your organization's existing publications or communication channels, or share with your key stakeholders.

Following are a few suggestions on how you can use the attached resources:

- Share a copy of the **complete report, report summary and highlights, and/or FAQs** with state government and elected officials
- Push social media content and icons through your organization's social media channels
- Customize and distribute the sample press release to local media
- Customize and share the **PowerPoint slide deck** in a meeting with colleagues





Report Summary & Highlights

The National Rural Education Association is proud to release Why Rural Matters 2023—the 10th in a series of reports analyzing the contexts and conditions of rural education in each of the 50 states and calling attention to the need for policymakers and others to address rural education issues in their respective states.

This report is not simply an updating of data from earlier editions. This report comes in the wake of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which has impacted the rural United States in many and varied ways that we are only beginning to understand. Where does rural education currently stand, and where should we focus efforts on improving it? What specific populations within rural areas should policymakers and educators pay closer attention to?

Considering questions such as these, Why Rural Matters 2023 includes new indicators related to well-being and equity, and two special topic sections on the impact of the pandemic on rural areas and alignment of the report with the National Rural Education Association's Rural Research Agenda. The analyses and data presented can inform policy discussions on these and other important issues as they manifest in rural settings. The report also includes examples from states that have shown notable, positive changes over time in terms of policy measures linked to desirable outcomes for rural students—i.e., states that demonstrate a marked improvement in specific elements of their policy contexts.

Data used in Why Rural Matters 2023 come from public sources: the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Census Bureau. For this report, rural is defined using the three rural locale codes as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Key Findings



More access to psychologists and guidance counselors is needed



Most rural gifted and talented programs demonstrate gender equity in gifted education programs



More gifted and talented program access is needed for Black and Hispanic students in rural districts



Rural areas appear to offset some of the impact of poverty on educational outcomes



Many rural areas continue to lack basic internet access



Students in rural school districts are more likely to graduate high school than their non-rural counterparts





Five Gauges

This report uses five gauges to describe the condition of rural education in each state, and each gauge includes five equally weighted indicators, for a total of 25 indicators. States are ranked from highest priority to lowest priority for attention on each indicator and gauge. The higher the ranking, the more important or urgent rural education matters are for that particular state.



GAUGE 1: IMPORTANCE OF RURAL EDUCATION (national results)

Percent rural schools	29.3%
Percent small rural school districts	50%
• Percent rural students	15.7%
• Number of rural students	. 7.3 million
Percent of state education funds to rural districts	16 2%



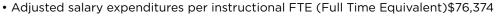
GAUGE 2: STUDENT AND FAMILY DIVERSITY (national results)

• Rural diversity index	33.4%
• Poverty level in rural school communities	. 291%
$ullet$ Percent rural students with IEP (Individualized Education Plan) $\dots \dots$	15.0%
• Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	.13.6%
Percent rural household mobility.	9.7%



GAUGE 3: EDUCATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT (national results)

57,174
11.09
2,651
\$1.18





GAUGE 4: EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES (national results)

• Rural NAEP poverty difference in math (Grade 8)	22.0
• Rural NAEP poverty difference in reading (Grade 8)	18.2
• Overall rural NAEP performance in math (Grades 4 and 8)	255.9
• Overall rural NAEP performance in reading (Grades 4 and 8)	238.3
• Rural advantage for high school graduation rate	2.6%



GAUGE 5: ACCESS TO SUPPORTS FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT (national results)

• Students per psychologist or guidance counselor
• Percent of rural households without broadband access
• Percent of school-aged children without health insurance coverage 6.7%
• Percent rural enrollment in public preschool
• Percent of rural students in gifted programs who are female50.4%





Top 10 Highest Priority States in Rural Education

The Why Rural Matters report researchers combined the five average gauge rankings for each state to determine an overall average ranking, which we term the Rural Education Priority ranking. Following are the top 10 highest priority states in rural education:



To access the report, resources, and templates, go to www.nrea.net/why-rural-matters.

QUESTIONS?

Contact Allen Pratt, Executive Director, NREA at allen-pratt@utc.edu.





Report Logos & Color Palette



FULL COLOR LOGO



ONE-COLOR LOGO



TWO-COLOR LOGO



THREE-COLOR LOGO

COLORS



FONTS

#009B88

#A8C985

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 0123456789\$%

#209EBB

#90C8E5

Rockwell Regular

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 0123456789\$% Rockwell Bold ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 0123456789\$% Gotham Book

#F2F9FF

#120D02

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz 0123456789\$%

Gotham Bold





Sample Press Release

PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE (PLACE ON YOUR ORGANIZATION'S LETTERHEAD)

For Immediate Release ADD DATE

Media Contact ADD MEDIA CONTACT NAME **PHONE EMAIL**

NEW RESEARCH SHOWS CRISES FACING RURAL STUDENTS, LOOKS CRITICALLY AT DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

Why Rural Matters 2023 Highlights Need for National Discourse on All Aspects of Rural Education, including Poverty, Inequities, and Students' Mental, Emotional, and Physical Well-Being

CITY, STATE - The Why Rural Matters 2023 report examines the needs and inequities affecting 9.5 million students attending public schools in rural areas - more than one in five students nationally. The question examined critically in research for the report is how are educational supports and resources for rural student well-being distributed?

"For more than 20 years, the Why Rural Matters series of reports has been the go-to resource for policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and others who want to understand the contexts and conditions of rural education in the 50 states," said Dr. Jerry Johnson of East Carolina University, researcher, and co-author of the Why Rural Matters report.

Many rural communities are still facing multiple crises in educational loss, economic outcomes, unemployment, and mental health in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Any issue impacting rural families and communities also affects rural children, including all aspects of education, mental health, and physical well-being.

"The Why Rural Matters report arms NREA state leaders, legislators, and communities with the information and data needed to take action in their state capitals, advocating for the needs of rural students and highlighting strengths in rural schools," said Allen Pratt, Executive Director, National Rural Education Association (NREA).

The Rural School and Community Trust produced the first Why Rural Matters report in 1999. Research and publication of the report transitioned to the NREA in 2023.

"ADD CUSTOMIZED QUOTE ABOUT YOUR STATE DATA."

More students attend rural schools than attend the 100 largest U.S. school districts combined. Nearly one in seven rural students experiences poverty, one in 15 lacks health insurance, and one in 10 has changed residence in the previous 12 months. The issues impacting rural families and communities extend to rural children. This larger picture signals the importance of including all aspects of students' mental, emotional, and physical well-being in the national discourse.

(more)





Yet, rural schools and students often seem invisible because many policymakers lack personal experience in rural schools and have not yet developed a complete understanding of the spatial inequities faced by rural communities. Spatial and educational equity is conceptualized in two ways in the National Rural Education Research Agenda:

1) spatial inequity, or how equity challenges are related to place, and 2) how equity, or rather, inequity relates to diverse identities and social circumstances present within the rural school and community.

After years of measuring racial diversity through the inadequate lens of "White and non-White," the researchers used the rural diversity index begun in the 2019 *Why Rural Matters* report. The index shows that when randomly choosing two students from a school in a rural district in the United States, there would be about a one-in-three chance that the students would identify as being from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. The most recent statistics describing that likelihood is 33.4% in 2023, up from 31.9% in the 2019 report, underscoring the steadily diversifying landscape of the rural United States. Additional key findings of the report are as follows:

Rural Schools

- At least half of public schools were rural in 13 states.
- At least one third of public schools were rural in 14 states.
- Roughly half of all rural students attended school in 10 states.

Access to School Counselors and Psychologists

- Rural school districts averaged 310 students served by one school counselor or psychologist compared to a 295 to 1 ratio in non-rural districts.
- Seven states had rural districts with ratios worse than 400 to 1 (Minnesota, California, Mississippi, Alaska, Louisiana, Indiana, and Michigan).
- Rural Michigan children had the highest ratio of an average of 574 students to every psychologist or school counselor.

Most Rural Gifted and Talented Programs Demonstrate Gender Equity

- Nationally, more than half of students in gifted and talented programs in rural districts were female. Rural Rhode Island had the highest percent of females in gifted and talented programs at 62.4%. However, variations across states showed more work is needed.
- In three states, females' participation in rural school gifted programs is at least eight percentage points lower than that of males: Alaska (40.0% vs. 60.0%), New Hampshire (45.4% vs. 54.6%), and Wyoming (45.7% vs. 54.3%). And females were heavily underrepresented in rural gifted math programs and math competitions.
- More pressing than gender equity was the absence of gifted and talented programs in some rural schools. Of the 24,736 public rural schools in the US, 10,071 (40.7%) appeared not to offer any program specific to gifted students.

More Gifted and Talented Program Access Needed for Black and Hispanic Students in Rural Districts

- Despite 17.1% of students in rural schools identifying as Hispanic, only 9.1% of the students in the gifted programs at these same schools were Hispanic.
- Similarly, 10.6% of the rural school population identified as Black, but only 5.2% of the gifted student population in rural schools was Black.
- In contrast, 64.8% of rural students were White, but 77.4% of the rural students enrolled in gifted programs were White.

(more)

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Additional themes found in the report include:

- Rural areas appear to offset some of the impact of poverty on educational outcomes.
- Many rural areas continue to lack basic internet access.
- Students in rural school districts are more likely to graduate high school than their non-rural counterparts.

ADD DATA BULLETS FROM YOUR STATE-LEVEL RANKING SHEET

Across 50 states, rural districts receive a disproportionately larger share of school funding because of the higher relative costs of running rural schools. Fourteen states, however, provided disproportionately less funding to rural districts: Nebraska had the most significant disparity, followed by Vermont, Rhode Island, Iowa, Delaware, South Dakota, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Minnesota.

Why Rural Matters was published by the NREA and its partners to examine how educational supports and resources for student well-being are being distributed, casting light on which rural children are most in need of additional support. For the complete report, including data on the condition of rural education in each state, visit the NREA website.

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Sample FAQs

How does this report define rural?

For this report, rural is defined using the 12-item, urbancentric NCES locale code system released in 2006. Rural schools and districts used in this report are those designated with locale codes 41 (rural fringe), 42 (rural distant), or 43 (rural remote).

What data sources are used to develop the report?

The data used for *Why Rural Matters 2023* were compiled from information collected and maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Census Bureau. All data used are available to the general public and may be downloaded directly from the sources above for further inspection and analysis.

How do you identify state ranking?

For each of the five gauges, we added the state rankings on each indicator and then divided by the number of indicators to produce an average gauge ranking. Using that gauge ranking, we organized the states into quartiles that describe their relative position regarding other states on that particular gauge. For the *Importance* and *Educational Policy Context* gauges, the four quartiles are labeled "Notable," "Important," "Very Important," and "Crucial." For the Student and Family Diversity, Access to Supports for Learning and Development, and Educational Outcomes gauges, the four quartiles are labeled "Fair," "Serious," "Critical," and "Urgent." Finally, we combined the five average gauge rankings to determine an overall average ranking, which we term the Rural Education Priority ranking.

Which indicator or gauge is most important?

The report uses five gauges to describe the condition of rural education in each state: (1) the *Importance* of rural education, (2) the *Diversity* of rural students and their families, (3) the *Educational Policy Context* impacting rural schools and facing rural communities across the United States, (4) the *Educational Outcomes* of rural students, and (5) the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* of students in rural schools in each state. Each gauge includes five equally weighted indicators, for a total of 25 indicators. Using this information collectively, one gauge or indicator is not more important than another.

Did the pandemic have an impact on the data and report?

The greatest challenge in analyzing on any scale the effects of the pandemic on rural education is the lack of data and research on the subject. In the world of large-scale data sets, and especially publicly-available ones, a 2–3 year lag in availability means that as of the writing of this report, COVID-era data are only just now becoming available. As such, this essay on COVID-19 impacts included in the report draws on the limited research available, in some cases extrapolating from research on other similar situations (such as the 2005 Pakistan earthquake), to set the stage for the next round of *Why Rural Matters*, where we will have a more complete picture of pandemic impacts on education.

Who is the audience for the report and how can I use it to support my work?

Users of past reports include policymakers (who use the report to identify areas of greatest need and strengths to build upon when crafting policy), educational leaders (who use the report to enhance their understanding of contexts for practice), higher education faculty and other researchers (who use the report to identify research areas of need and as part of the rationale for externally funded research projects), and community activists (who use the report as part of their legislative outreach and advocacy work).





Sample Social Media Content & Graphics

Facebook f

- The National Rural Education Association, partnership with the Rural School & Community Trust recently released #WhyRuralMatters 2023—the 10th in a series of reports analyzing the contexts and conditions of rural education in each of the 50 states and calling attention to the need for policymakers and others to address rural education issues in their respective states. What does this report say about (ADD STATE) (link to report)
- Did you know that more students in the U.S. attend rural schools than attend the 100 largest school districts combined? Learn more about the condition of rural education across the U.S. and in (ADD STATE) in #WhyRuralMatters 2023—the 10th in a series of reports analyzing the contexts and conditions of rural education in each of the 50 states. (link to report)
- #WhyRuralMatters 2023—a new report from the National Rural Education Association—analyzes the contexts & conditions of #RuralEd in the 50 states & includes examples from states that have shown notable, positive changes over time in terms of policy measures linked to desirable outcomes for rural students. The analyses and data from this report can inform policy discussions on #RuralEd issues. Check out the complete report and what the data say about (ADD STATE) (link to report)

SAMPLE SOCIAL GRAPHICS









Twitter/X X

- The @nrea1, in partnership w/ the Rural School & Community Trust released #WhyRuralMatters 2023—a report that analyzes the contexts & conditions of #RuralEd in the 50 states. What does this report say about (ADD STATE) (link to report)
- Did you know that more students in the US attend rural schools than the 100 largest districts combined? Learn about the condition of #RuralEd across the US & in (ADD STATE) in #WhyRuralMatters 2023—a new report released by @nrea1. (link to report)
- #WhyRuralMatters 2023—a new report from @nreal—analyzes the condition of #RuralEd in the 50 states. The analyses and data from this report can inform important policy discussions on #RuralEd issues nationally and in (ADD STATE) (link to report)

SAMPLE SOCIAL GRAPHICS









Sample PowerPoint Slide Deck

This PowerPoint slide deck can be used in a variety of meetings with staff and stakeholders. It includes information about the report, report highlights, and slides for you to customize with your state-level data.

