

# Sample FAQs

## How does this report define rural?

For this report, rural is defined using the three rural locale codes as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau (see the main report for more details). There remains no single best definition of rural, but the NCES codes are widely used in public data reporting and funding criteria and therefore represent the most practical means of operationalizing “rural.”

## What data sources are used to develop the report?

Data used in *Why Rural Matters 2025* come from public sources: the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the United States Department of Education, the U.S. Health Resources & Services Administration, and the U.S. Census Bureau.

## How do you determine state ranking?

To produce an average gauge ranking for each of the five gauges, we added the state rankings on each indicator and then divided by the number of indicators for each state. The gauge rankings for each state were then organized into quartiles that describe their relative position with regard to other states on that particular gauge. For the *Rural Education Footprint* and *Educational Policy Context* gauges, the four quartiles are labeled “Notable,” “Important,” “Very Important,” and “Crucial.” For the *Student and Family Characteristics*, *Access to Supports for Well-Being*, and *Educational Outcomes* gauges, the four quartiles are labeled “Fair,” “Serious,” “Critical,” and “Urgent.” To help identify and quantify relationships between and among indicators, we also conducted bivariate correlation analyses for the indicators within each gauge. Finally, the five average gauge rankings are combined to determine an overall average ranking, which is the *Rural Education Priority* ranking.

## Which indicator or gauge is most important?

*Why Rural Matters 2025* uses five gauges to describe the condition of rural education in each state: (1) *Rural Education Footprint* (2) *Student and Family Characteristics* (3) *Educational Policy Context* impacting rural schools and communities across the United States (4) *Educational Outcomes* of rural students, and (5) *Access to Supports for Well-Being* of students in rural schools in each state. Each gauge includes five equally weighted indicators, for a total of 25 indicators. Instances where data were not available are denoted with “N/A.” The higher the ranking on a gauge, the more important or urgent rural education matters are for that state.

## 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).