

Report Summary & Highlights

The National Rural Education Association (NREA) is proud to release *Why Rural Matters 2025*—the 11th edition in a long-standing series of reports that examine the contexts and conditions of rural education across all 50 states. This report continues the critical mission of drawing attention to the urgent need for policymakers, educators, and communities to address rural education challenges and opportunities within their own states.

Since its inception, the *Why Rural Matters* series has sought to make publicly available data more accessible and actionable. The overarching goal remains clear: to promote informed, civil dialogue about our shared civic responsibility to ensure that every student—rural or urban—has access to high-quality educational opportunities.

Why Rural Matters 2025 evaluates the condition of rural education through five gauges:

1. Rural Education Footprint
2. Student and Family Characteristics
3. Educational Policy Context
4. Educational Outcomes
5. Access to Supports for Well-Being

Each gauge is assessed through five equally weighted indicators, yielding 25 indicators in total. States with higher rankings face more pressing rural education needs. Where data were unavailable, the report denotes these instances as “N/A.”

New in this edition is the inclusion of *Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)* schools. In his topical essay, Alex Red Corn provides critical insights into the significance of BIE schools, which educate students from multiple tribes and nations with unique histories and cultures. The report carefully distinguishes between “states” proper and BIE schools while underscoring their shared place in the broader rural education landscape.

The analyses and data presented in *Why Rural Matters 2025* are intended to inform policy discussions, guide decision-making, and inspire action. The report highlights states that have demonstrated measurable progress over time, showcasing examples where thoughtful policy interventions have led to improved outcomes for rural students. These stories of progress offer valuable lessons and serve as evidence that strategic, context-sensitive policies can make a tangible difference in the lives of rural learners.

Key Findings



Changes in how rural is defined and calculated, and perhaps other reasons, mean that states will have to adjust policy and resources



Data from Bureau of Indian Education Schools demonstrate dire needs and challenges



The rural population across the United States is racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse



Students in rural areas have fewer health care supports than their peers across the United States



Lower mobility and housing insecurity reflect rural community resilience



NAEP scores highlight rural successes amidst continuing challenges