
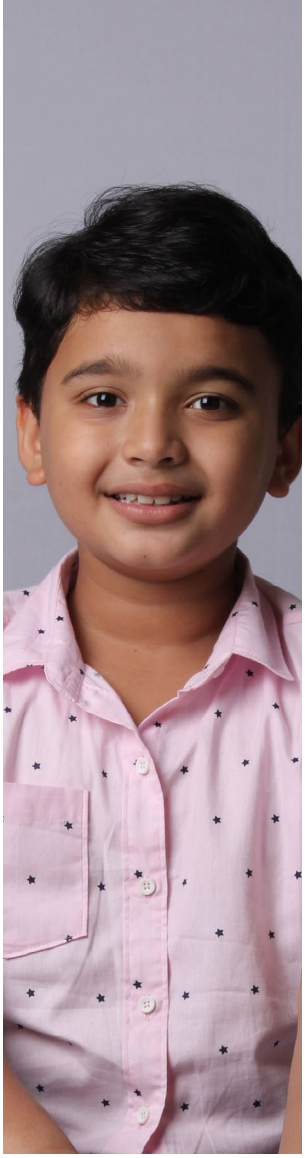
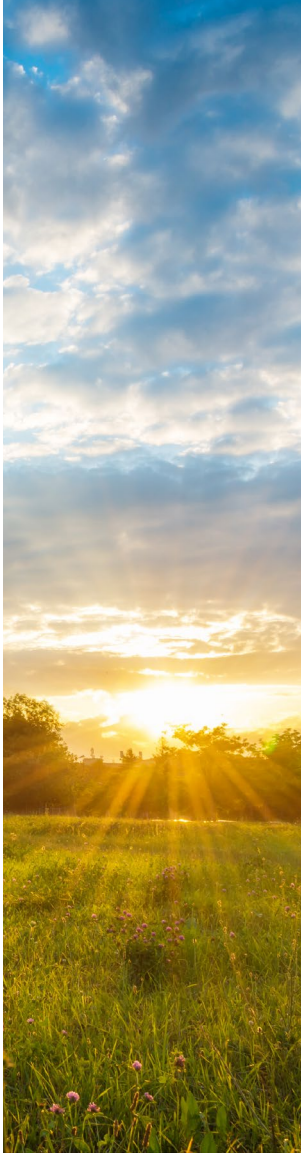
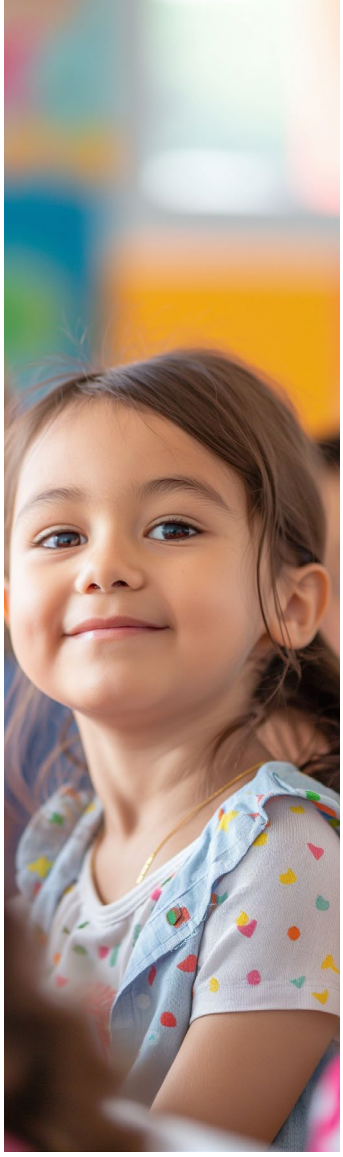
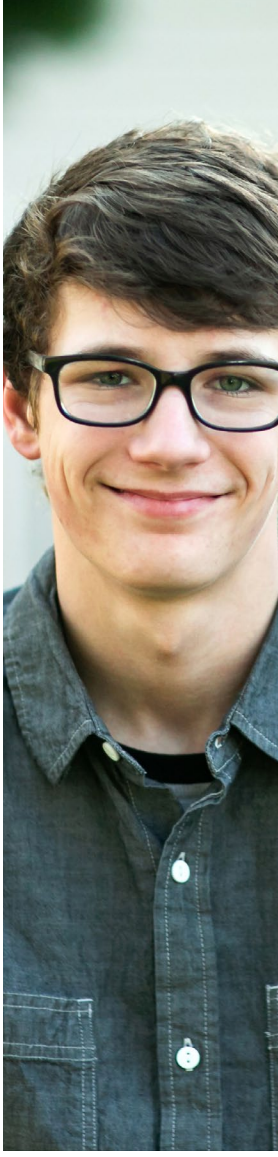

WHY rural MATTERS 2025

PEOPLE, PLACE, & POSSIBILITY

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THE NATIONAL RURAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

WHY rural MATTERS 2025

PEOPLE, PLACE, & POSSIBILITY

ABOUT THE REPORT

The National Rural Education Association is proud to launch the 2025 *Why Rural Matters* report, a project with a more than 20-year history of shaping the conversation about rural education. First conceptualized by the Rural Schools and Community Trust, the report has evolved into a vital resource for policymakers, educators, and communities. Today, NREA carries this important work forward, ensuring that the voices, needs, and strengths of rural schools and students remain at the forefront of education policy and practice nationwide. We are also grateful to the Rural Schools Collaborative, whose continued support strengthens NREA's work on behalf of rural schools, educators, and students across the country.

THE RURAL SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY TRUST

RURAL SCHOOLS COLLABORATIVE

ABOUT THE NATIONAL RURAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (NREA) is the voice of all rural schools and rural communities across the United States. NREA was originally founded as the Department of Rural Education in 1907. It is the oldest established national organization of its kind in the United States. Through the years, it has evolved as a strong and respected organization of rural school administrators, teachers, board members, regional service agency personnel, researchers, business and industry representatives, and others interested in maintaining the vitality of rural school systems across the country. Learn more at nrea.net.

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Showalter, D., Hartman, S.L., Eppley, K., Johnson, J., & Klein, B. (2025). Why rural matters 2025: People, place, and possibility. National Rural Education Association.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Why Rural Matters 2025, the 11th in the series, is being released during a period of significant change across the country and the world. Many of these shifts influence rural education in the United States. The 2025 report highlights key trends and conditions as a foundation for discussion and action on issues affecting nearly 10 million students across the United States.

As *Why Rural Matters 2025* is released, the United States federal government and some state governments are engaged in intentional global and domestic disruption on a scale unimaginable to many even a year ago. It is not the place of this report or its authors to engage in partisan or other forms of judgment about the ethics of this direction. The goal of *Why Rural Matters* reports has always been to present publicly available data regarding the condition of rural education in the United States in service to the broader goal of our civic responsibility to engage in informed and civil discussion about a common commitment to the education of all our students.

The questions arising from the extent and speed of changes at the federal level, including the mass dismissal of United States Department of Education staff and the pausing or significant reduction of funding previously designated for research, reporting, infrastructure, and other funding streams have already had significant impacts felt well beyond state and federal capitals, into our classrooms. Some things previously not questioned, like local control or food aid, now seem open to debate even as new policies roll out at a pace that precludes debate. *The Why Rural Matters 2025* report uses data that were downloaded mere weeks before the National Center for Education Statistics dismissed nearly all its staff. The future is also uncertain given that, at the time of this writing, the Institute of Education Sciences has been directed to stop reporting and housing new data in its data repositories.

What has not changed in the two decades of *Why Rural Matters* reporting is our shared belief that rural schools and communities are important to the future of the United States and that we have an ethical and pragmatic collective duty to provide rural students with a quality education without which a democratic society is impossible.

Why Rural Matters 2025 shows that roughly 7.8 million public school students are enrolled in rural school *districts*—more than one in every six students across the United States.

Challenges experienced by rural students and their communities are persistent and significant: 1 in 7 rural students experiences poverty, 1 in 15 is uninsured, 1 in 10 doesn't graduate from high school, and 1 in 13 has changed residence in the previous 12 months.

Rural communities continue to struggle with challenges related to economic outcomes, unemployment, and access to school-based mental health services. The well-being of families, schools, and communities is deeply interconnected, and supporting one means supporting all. The choice of our 25 indicators and five gauges is far from an exhaustive list of important measures offering insight into rural students' readiness for learning or the school's ability to provide services. But each of these measures has been chosen to reveal spaces for action on the part of policymakers, families, caregivers, and concerned citizens.

Although 7.8 million students attend a rural district, many children attend rural schools in districts that are not designated rural by the United States Census Bureau. A more representative measure is the 9.7 million students who attend rural schools in the United States, which is more than one in five students in the United States. This means that more students in the United States attend rural schools than attend the 100 largest U.S. school districts combined.

When not otherwise specified, “rural student” in this report refers to a student attending a school located in a rural district.

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. 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 and the topical report on changes to this definition in particular.) 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.”

New to this report is the inclusion of Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools. Alex Red Corn’s topical essay included in *Why Rural Matters 2025* gives an important analysis of why this group of schools is an important part of rural education in the United States, even though BIE schools educate students from multiple tribes and nations with distinct histories and cultures. The report attempts to distinguish between “states” proper and BIE schools specifically in analyses.

Rural schools and students often seem invisible because many policymakers lack personal experience in rural communities and/or have not yet developed a full understanding of the spatial inequities experienced by rural communities in the United States. The majority of rural students attend a school district in a state where they make up less than 25% of total public-school enrollment. About one in five rural students lives in a state in which rural students constitute less than 15% of overall enrollment.

Roughly half of all rural students in the United States attend school in just 11 states, including some of the most populous, metropolitan states. Texas has the largest number of rural students, followed by North Carolina, Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Alabama, Indiana, Virginia, and Tennessee. Texas itself has more rural students than the 16 states with the fewest rural students combined and more than its four bordering states combined.

Many rural school districts across the United States are small: median enrollment for U.S. rural districts is 526 students, and at least half of rural districts in 22 states enroll fewer than 526 students. In Montana and BIE schools, at least 90% of rural districts are designated as small. West Virginia, where most public schools are rural, has no small rural school districts because all 55 districts are countywide systems. Florida, Maryland, and Delaware also have no small rural school districts.

Nine out of 10 BIE schools are rural. In Montana, Vermont, and South Dakota, at least 75% of schools are rural. In 11 states, at least half of public schools are rural: Maine, North Dakota, Alaska, Mississippi, Oklahoma, West Virginia, New Hampshire, Nebraska, Iowa, Wyoming, Arkansas, and Kansas. In 13 other states, at least one-third of all schools are rural.

More Key Findings from this Edition of Why Rural Matters

CHANGES IN HOW RURAL IS DEFINED MEAN THAT STATES WILL HAVE TO ADJUST POLICY AND RESOURCES

Of the 13,401 school districts in the United States, 337 districts (roughly 2.5%) previously classified as rural were reclassified as another locale. Similarly, 943 districts (7%) previously not classified as rural are now rural. These reclassifications led to the increase of over half a million students in rural districts. The topical essay on the change to locale code definitions (page 57) analyzes changes in schools' classifications, what we can say about the 1.6 million students newly classified as rural, and how this may connect to shifts seen in the indicators and gauges. It further lists the states seeing the greatest impacts of these changes.

DATA FROM BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION SCHOOLS DEMONSTRATE DIRE NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

BIE funds 183 schools on 64 reservations in 23 states from the Miccosukee Indian School in Miami, Florida to the Quileute Tribal School in Seattle, WA. Of these 183 schools, 156 are rural. BIE schools are ranked as the number 1 or 2 concern in 9 of the 13 indicators (69%) for which data exist. So, while BIE is not given an overall priority ranking, because of data availability, the need for intervention is urgent. Around 90% of its rural districts are small, with two-thirds of its rural students attending remote rural districts. Poverty and educational outcomes are critical, with just under two-thirds of BIE students graduating from high school. Just under 15% of BIE students are unhoused compared to the United States rural average of an already concerning 2.7%. Guest author, Alex Red Corn, provides more in-depth analysis in his topical essay.

THE RURAL POPULATION ACROSS THE UNITED STATES IS RACIALLY, ETHNICALLY, AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE

With a U.S. rural diversity index of 34.3%, there is a better than one-in-three chance that two students randomly chosen from the same rural school have different identified races or ethnicities. Further, one in 20 rural students across the U.S. is a multilingual learner. These figures directly confront the prevailing stereotype of the rural United States as white and English-speaking.

STUDENTS IN RURAL AREAS HAVE FEWER HEALTH CARE SUPPORTS THAN THEIR PEERS ACROSS THE UNITED STATES

Access to health care is strongly linked to improved educational outcomes, yet *Why Rural Matters 2025* highlights persistent challenges in accessing services for rural students. School counselors and school psychologists are an important support for students in any locale, yet the ratio of psychologists/school counselors in rural schools is 297:1 as compared to 277:1 in non-rural districts. Additionally, a greater share of rural students is uninsured (6.4%) compared to the U.S. average (5.7%), and the most recent data (2021) show a ratio of 322 rural students per primary care clinician.

LOWER MOBILITY AND HOUSING INSECURITY REFLECT RURAL COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

A defining characteristic of many rural communities is their strong commitment to supporting children and families, even when resources are limited. This is evidenced in two related indicators in *Why Rural Matters 2025*. First, rural areas show greater residential stability, with 7.8% of rural households moving in the past year compared to 9.7% across the United States. Second, the percentage of unhoused students in rural areas is slightly lower (2.7%) than the U.S. average (3.0%). These patterns suggest that rural communities often rely on strong local networks and wraparound supports to assist families and children experiencing adverse situations. While these lower numbers reflect the strength and resilience of rural communities, they remain a significant concern at any level, as both housing instability and high mobility are strongly correlated with negative outcomes in student health, academic achievement, and long-term well-being.

NAEP SCORES HIGHLIGHT RURAL SUCCESSES AMIDST CONTINUING CHALLENGES

Did the COVID-19 pandemic impact educational outcomes? The 2024 NAEP scores used in *Why Rural Matters 2025* provide data on reading and math learning. In Grade 4, rural students performed 3.4 points lower on reading than they did in 2019 even though there was a 0.3 point increase in math. However, non-rural Grade 4 students fared even worse, with an average decrease of 5.2 points in reading and a decrease of 2.7 points in math. At the Grade 8 level, it is worth noting that rural students outscored their non-rural peers in both reading (0.8 points) and math (1.5 points).

Key Changes in this Edition of Why Rural Matters

In *Why Rural Matters 2025*, we maintain many of our yearly updates from the most recent edition of *Why Rural Matters* (such as the diversity index, adjusting teacher salaries to reflect local wages, and our two-fold method to measure poverty). However, this version also includes some changes in indicators. We added percent rural students in a remote rural district to the *Rural Education Footprint* gauge (formerly the *Rural Education Importance* gauge). In the *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge (formerly the *Student and Family Diversity* gauge), we continue the report's long history of reporting on the percentage of rural multilingual learners. We replaced the previous special education proportional enrollment indicator with the percentage of instructional salary spent on special education teachers. The *Educational Outcomes* gauge has been significantly revised to include a new indicator tracking changes in Grade 4 reading and math performance before and after the pandemic, as well as separate rural Grade 8 NAEP scores for math and reading. Lastly, the *Access to Supports for Well-Being* gauge updates measures of rural school counselor and school psychologist availability, health insurance coverage, and public preschool enrollment, while introducing two new indicators: the percentage of rural children who are unhoused and the ratio of rural students to primary care clinicians.

Why Rural Matters 2025 also includes standalone pieces investigating the changes due to the revised definition of rural, the status of Indigenous rural education, the impact of charter schools on rural students and communities, and changes in teacher preparation policies that have the potential to impact teacher quality in rural schools.

Top 10 Highest-Priority States in Rural Education

1. Oklahoma

Oklahoma's rural districts are ranked as our highest overall priority in the United States—up from 8 in *Why Rural Matters 2023*. Since we began ranking states in 2005, Oklahoma has ranked between 4 and 9. Almost 60% of all public schools serve rural communities, and its students are among the most racially diverse in the United States. Students have high rates of household mobility, with nearly 1 in 10 students changing primary residence in the past 12 months. Only three states rank below Oklahoma's $6,262 instructional expenditure per rural pupil, and adjusted teacher salaries are more than $13,000 below the U.S. average. Academic performance is lower than average on all indicators, with substantial decreases in rural NAEP Grade 4 Reading and Math scores and Grade 8 Reading and Math rural scores in or near the lowest-performing quartile among states. Access to supports for well-being is a critical concern, with among the highest state rates of uninsured rural children (6th highest), and unhoused rural children (9th highest). Overloaded ratios of students per psychologist/guidance counselor and students per primary care clinician suggest that access to key supports is critical.

2. Arizona

Only once has Arizona not been in the top 10 of our overall rankings (it ranked 11 in *Why Rural Matters 2018-19*). Twenty-two percent of Arizona's schools are rural, and 70.6% of those schools are classified as small rural schools. Arizona's students are racially and linguistically diverse. Rural communities exhibit high levels of poverty, ranking 11 overall. Moreover, one in five students experiences poverty. Only four states had higher rates of mobility. Per pupil instructional expenditures are lower than all but six states even though adjusted instructional salaries are slightly above the U.S. rural average. While changes in rural Grade 4 NAEP scores are around the middle of all states, rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading and Math Scores rank 12 and 11 respectively. At the same time, 15% of rural high school students don't graduate (rank 11). Access to supports for well-being is critical, with extremely high rates of children without health insurance (12.2%, rank 2), and high ratios of students per psychologist/school counselor (374:1, rank 10). Only six states spend proportionally more on transportation relative to instructional costs.

3. Mississippi

The 2025 report marks only the second time that Mississippi was not ranked as the highest-priority state for rural education (in the 2009 report it ranked 3rd). This kind of consistency, even while indicators and gauges are changed from report to report, suggests that the issues for Mississippi's rural schools and communities are both persistent and pervasive. Nearly one quarter million students in Mississippi attend rural school districts, representing about 40% of the state's students and 60% of the state's schools overall. Almost one quarter of the state's rural students experience poverty and only six states and BIE schools had greater levels of rural community poverty. Equity is a serious issue, with the per pupil instructional spending at $2,200 less than the U.S. rural average and adjusted teacher salaries $13,000 below the U.S. rural average. Educational outcomes were mostly in the middle of other states, with the exception of rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading scores (only nine states and BIE schools had lower averages). Greater access to supports for well-being is needed for Mississippi's rural children, with only one psychologist or school counselor for every 395 children (rank 7) and just one in three rural children enrolling in public preschool (rank 10). Mississippi's rural education remains an urgent and persistent concern.

4. Florida

As a percentage of the state overall, Florida has among the lowest percent rural schools (rank 49) and percent rural students (rank 48). Nevertheless, Florida's 124,389 rural students rank among the very highest priority in this report. Only four states had more racial and ethnic diversity among rural students and Florida was in the top third of states for percentage of multilingual learners. One in nine rural students in Florida has changed primary residences in the past 12 months (rank 3) and community poverty levels are topped only by BIE and New Mexico. Compounding this problem, nearly 1 in 10 rural students lacks health insurance (rank 4) at the same time 4% of Florida's rural students are unhoused. Additionally, just three states have higher ratios of students per psychologist/school counselor, with 432 students for every psychologist. At $2,200 less than the U.S. rural average, Florida spends less on per pupil instruction than all states except Idaho and Mississippi. While rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading and Math scores fared better than most states compared to 2019 scores, Grade 8 Reading scores were the 9th lowest and Grade 8 Math scores were the 14th lowest. Only eight states and BIE schools graduate students from high school at lower percentage rates.

5. Idaho

In the previous two decades of *Why Rural Matters* rankings, Idaho has never risen above 13 in concern, most recently ranking 23rd in the 2023 report. Idaho educates fewer rural students than all but 12 states and BIE, though almost half of rural students attend school in a *remote* rural district. That remoteness may explain ranking 5th for poverty levels in rural school communities and 42nd for the percent of students experiencing poverty–dwellings closest to schools are not where the students live. No state spends less per pupil on instruction: $2,400 less than the U.S. rural average. Adjusted teacher salaries are just outside of the lowest 10, at almost $10,000 less than the U.S. rural average. Graduation rates are lower than all but four states and BIE schools. Only Nevada ranked higher in concern for *Access to Supports for Well-Being*, with Idaho having high caseloads for psychologists, school counselors, and primary care clinicians. Percent rural enrollment in public preschool is lower than all but two states, and 1 in 11 rural students lacks health insurance.

6. New Mexico

New Mexico ranks 6th on the *Why Rural Matters 2025* priority list, marking its first return to the top 10 since it ranked 5th in 2009. In the years since, the state consistently fell just outside the highest-priority tier, ranking 14th in 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2023. Several critical factors contribute to New Mexico's elevated priority in 2025. Nearly half (48.5%) of the state's rural students attend schools in remote rural districts, making access to resources and services especially challenging. The state's students also experience some of the highest child poverty rates in the country, and its rural high school graduation rate remains troublingly low, with one in five students not completing high school. Additionally, New Mexico has the highest percentage of rural multilingual learners in the United States, with over 30% of rural students classified as MLs. These overlapping challenges underscore the urgency of targeted support for rural education in New Mexico.

7. Missouri

Missouri makes its second appearance in the top 10 of the *Why Rural Matters 2025* priority list, ranking 7th overall. A convergence of urgent rural education challenges contributes to this ranking. Nearly one quarter (23.3%) of the state's students attend school in a rural district, underscoring the broad impact of these issues. Missouri provides just 71 cents in state revenue for every local

dollar invested in education, among the lowest in the United States, leaving rural districts heavily dependent on local funding. Rural teacher salaries are also among the lowest in the country. Student well-being indicators paint an even more serious picture—Missouri has the worst ratio in the United States of students to primary care clinicians, and one in every 25 rural students is unhoused. These conditions highlight the pressing need for state and federal attention to support Missouri's rural students and communities.

8. South Carolina

South Carolina continues its long-standing presence on the *Why Rural Matters* priority list, remaining in the top 8 for two decades, indicating persistent and urgent rural education needs. With a high level of diversity among rural students, the state ranks 5th on the *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge. Rural South Carolina schools face significant funding and performance challenges. Adjusted for cost of living, South Carolina's rural teacher salaries fall $11,000 below the U.S. average. Student outcomes also raise concern, with particularly low performance on 8th Grade NAEP reading and math assessments and a high school non-graduation rate of 15%. These longstanding challenges underscore the need for sustained attention and investment in South Carolina's rural education systems.

9. South Dakota

South Dakota ranks 9th on the *Why Rural Matters 2025* priority list, returning to a position in the top 10 that it last held in the 2018–2019 and 2015–2016 editions. The last time the state scored above the top 20 highest priority states was in 2009. This year's placement reflects persistent and pressing challenges in the state's rural education landscape. More than 75% of South Dakota's schools are rural, and over 77% of its school districts are classified as small. The state provides just 58 cents in funding for every local dollar raised, placing an outsized burden on rural communities to fund their schools. Educational and health outcomes are also areas of concern—17% of rural students do not graduate from high school, and 9% of children are uninsured, placing the state among the highest in the country on that indicator. These data point to ongoing needs for greater support and investment in South Dakota's rural schools and communities.

10. Montana

Montana appears in the top 10 highest-priority states for rural education in *Why Rural Matters 2025* for the first time in the report's history, marking a notable shift from previous rankings. Its highest ranking was 17th in the 2009 report. The state's rural landscape is distinct with more than 93% of Montana's school districts classified as small, the highest percentage in the U.S., and nearly 60% of its rural districts are located in remote areas. Nearly 10% of Montana's rural students are multilingual learners, the 7th largest in the United States. Montana's rural student population faces multiple challenges, including one of the highest rates of unhoused students (over 6%), and the country's lowest enrollment of children in public preschool (just 20.1%). Additionally, nearly 15% of rural students in Montana do not graduate from high school. These data reflect both the unique context of rural education in Montana and the urgent need for targeted support.

Additional State Highlights

- Our "Leading" category and the top 10 priority states have been relatively stable across reports despite changes in more than half of the indicators over the two decades of publication. *Why Rural Matters 2025*'s top 10 states of concern include two states new to the top 10: Idaho (rank 5) and Montana (rank 10). Both Idaho and Florida (rank 4) are new to the top 5. Only Oklahoma (rank 1) and Mississippi (rank 3) have been in the top 10 across every *Why Rural Matters* report.

- While no state ranks among the highest-priority states on all five of our gauges, Arizona and Oklahoma are among the highest-priority states on four of the five gauges. Five states—California, Florida, Missouri, Mississippi, New Mexico—are ranked among the highest priority on three gauges.

- Importantly, 36 states and BIE schools are among the highest priority on at least one gauge, showing that nearly every state has rural education issues that need to be addressed.

- California, Idaho, and Montana saw their priority rankings rise substantially for this report, showing new urgency for attention to rural education issues. Alabama saw the biggest drop in priority rankings, moving from 2 to 29. Louisiana dropped 19 positions to 25, but still ranks in the second-highest overall priority category, highlighting the ongoing need for increased support of its rural students.

The Five Gauges

1. Rural Education Footprint Gauge

2. Student and Family Characteristics Gauge

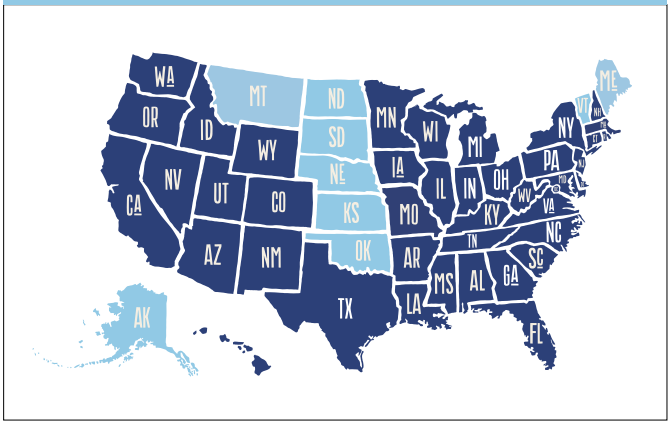
3. Educational Policy Context Gauge

4. Educational Outcomes Gauge

5. Access to Supports for Well-Being Gauge

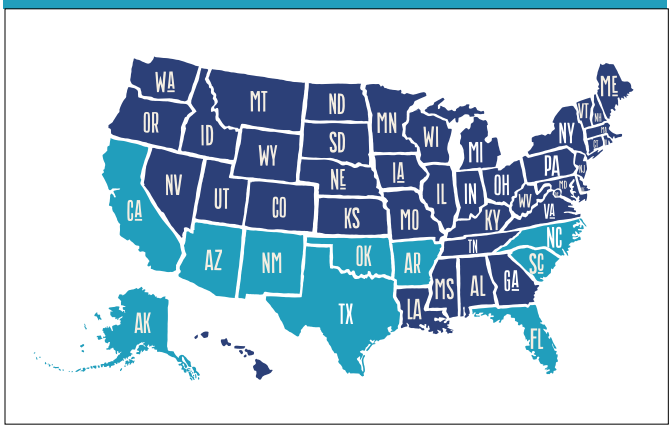
Highlights from the Five Gauges

RURAL EDUCATION FOOTPRINT GAUGE



The 10 highest-priority states and BIE schools on this gauge that examines the prevalence of rural schools and districts in a state and related measures are **Montana**, **Bureau of Indian Education**, **South Dakota**, **Oklahoma**, **North Dakota**, **Maine, Nebraska**, **Vermont**, **Alaska**, **Kansas**. Three of these states were not in the top 10 in the last report, although the two states that moved into the top 10 for the first time each only moved five or fewer spots (i.e., Nebraska from 11th to 7th and Kansas from 15th to 10th). The biggest increase in priority was Alaska (from 20th to 9th). Over half of all rural students (about 4.4 million) are in states in the most pressing quartile for rural student numbers, but many of these states rank lower on the overall gauge. In fact, eight of the 12 states with the largest rural student populations (Georgia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, New York, Indiana, Virginia, Tennessee, and Michigan) rank below the median in overall *Rural Education Footprint* due to low rankings on other indicators, including the percent of rural schools.

STUDENT AND FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS GAUGE



The *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge compares key sociodemographic characteristics across states. The highest-priority states on this gauge are **New Mexico**, **Florida**, **Arizona**, **Oklahoma**, **South Carolina**, **North Carolina**, **Texas**, **Arkansas**, **Alaska**, and **California**. This list of highest-priority states looks similar to the last report, except that three states moved into the top 10 highest priority list (Texas, Alaska, and California) while three states moved out of the highest priority list (Delaware, Kentucky, and Louisiana). The most notable departures from the highest priority list include Delaware (moving 19 spots from 4th to 23rd) and Kentucky (moving 14 spots from 7th to 21st).

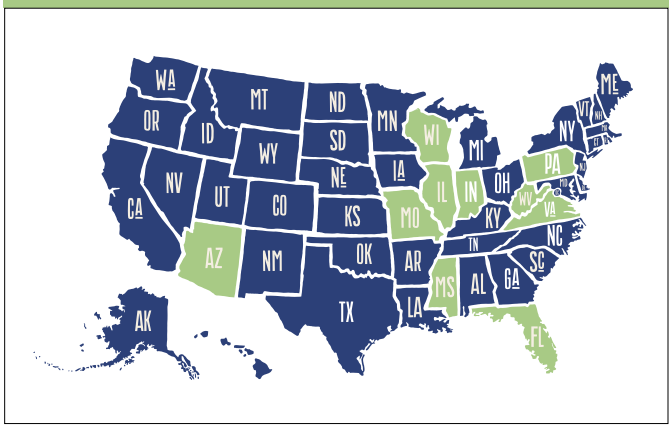
Rural school districts in the U.S. are increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, with a rural diversity index of 34.3%, meaning there's a one-in-three chance that two randomly selected students from the same rural school identify as different races or ethnicities—up slightly from 33.4% in the previous *Why Rural Matters* report. State-level racial and ethnic diversity varies widely, from 12.8% in West Virginia to 62.7% in Delaware. Other states with diversity indexes above 50% include Oklahoma, North Carolina, Nevada, and Florida. Higher levels of poverty within a state's school

communities correspond to a higher ranking on the poverty level in rural school communities indicator, one of the five indicators in the *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge. Across the United States, 1 in 10 rural school communities has an average income at or below 185% of the poverty line, with BIE schools and New Mexico being of most concern.

States with the highest levels of rural children experiencing poverty include New Mexico (30.2%), Mississippi (23.0%), South Carolina (21.9%), Louisiana (21.0%), Kentucky (20.5%), Arizona (20.2%), Arkansas (19.0%), Georgia (18.0%), Tennessee (17.8%), Oklahoma (17.7%), Alabama (17.4%), and West Virginia and North Carolina (both 17.0%). Conversely, the six lowest-ranking states are Connecticut (3.4%), Massachusetts (4.5%), Rhode Island (5.1%), Maryland (5.8%), New Jersey (6.1%), and New Hampshire (6.7%).

The number of multilingual learners (MLs) in rural districts shows a 42% increase over the past decade. Texas has the highest number at just under 90,000 while New Mexico had the highest percent with over 30% of rural students identified as MLs. Five other states (California, Alaska, Washington, Texas, and Delaware) also report high rates above 10%. Residential moves can create stressful and disruptive transitions for students, often affecting students' physical and mental health. Of the 10 states with the highest rates of rural student mobility, five also rank among the most urgent on the *Access to Supports for Well-Being* gauge (Florida, Texas, Arizona, Oklahoma, and New Mexico). Six states had mobility rates over 10%, with Hawaii having the highest rate at 15.3%. Only Massachusetts had a mobility rate lower than 5%.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT GAUGE



The *Educational Policy Context* gauge in *Why Rural Matters 2025* reflects how federal and state policies are shaping educational opportunities in rural communities. Together, this gauge's indicators paint a complex picture of how policy decisions shape the realities of rural education, from classroom funding and transportation costs, to teacher pay and special education services. The ten states identified as highest priority on this gauge are **Illinois**, **Missouri**, **Florida**, **West Virginia**, **Mississippi**, **Virginia**, **Indiana**, **Wisconsin**, **Arizona**, and **Pennsylvania**.

The rural instructional expenditures per pupil indicator enables state-to-state comparisons on the amount of funding allocated directly to teaching and learning in rural schools. The average rural instructional expenditure across the U.S. is $8,417 per student, which is about $600 less than the average in non-rural districts. Ten states spend less than $7,000 per rural pupil, including Idaho, Mississippi, Florida, Oklahoma, Indiana, Tennessee, Arizona, Missouri, Alabama, and Arkansas (listed from lowest to highest). In contrast, the states with the highest per-pupil instructional spending in rural areas are New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Alaska, Maryland, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Wyoming.

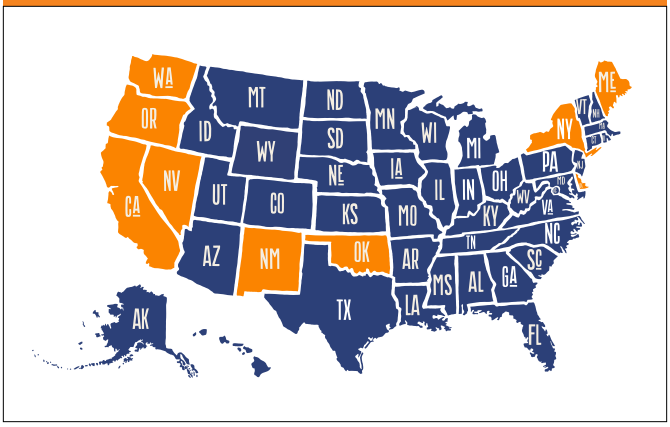
Transportation remains a major cost in rural education and can divert resources from educational programming. On average, rural districts spend $11.54 on instruction for every dollar spent on transportation. However, there is considerable variation. Alaska and Vermont have the highest ratios, spending $24.89 and $22.03, respectively, on instruction for every transportation dollar. In contrast, 29 states spend less than half that ratio. These include West Virginia ($6.78), Indiana ($8.40), Louisiana ($8.68), New York ($8.92), Virginia ($9.07), Illinois ($9.20), Arizona ($9.25), Pennsylvania ($9.25), Rhode Island ($9.37), Kentucky ($9.63), Alabama ($9.77), Delaware ($9.79), Maine ($9.85), and Nevada ($9.85).

The report also examines the percentage of instructional salaries allocated to special education teachers. Data for this indicator were unavailable for five states (Hawaii, Alaska, Utah, Delaware, and Illinois) and for Bureau of Indian Education schools. It is important to interpret this indicator carefully: a high percentage of instructional salary spent on special education may reflect appropriate investment aligned with student need, while a low percentage could signal underinvestment in services for students with disabilities. However, there are also data quality issues such as in states where a large percentage of rural districts did not report data on special education instructional salaries. For example, nearly 70% of the rural districts in Kansas did not report their spending on the instructional salaries of special education teachers, and Vermont, Oregon, North Dakota, Montana, and California all had at least 20% of their rural districts with no data on this indicator.

Another significant policy measure is the ratio of state to local funding for rural schools. This indicator highlights the balance—or imbalance—of financial responsibility between state governments and local communities. States with lower ratios rely more heavily on local tax revenue, which can exacerbate funding inequities. Nebraska reports the lowest ratio for the second consecutive edition of the report, providing just $0.30 in state funds for every $1 raised locally. Rhode Island ($0.33), Connecticut ($0.44), and New Hampshire ($0.44) also fall on the low end. On the other end of the spectrum, Vermont and Nevada provide nearly $19 in state funds for every local dollar. Nevada is an interesting case as its ratio was only $0.98 in the 2023 report. Beginning in the 2021-22 school year, Nevada began implementing the Pupil-Centered Funding Plan where state and local revenues are combined at the state level before being distributed to districts[i].

Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional full-time equivalent (FTE) continues to offer insight into rural teacher compensation, which is strongly linked to recruitment and retention. In *Why Rural Matters 2025*, adjusted rural salary expenditures range from $54,242 in Arkansas to $116,959 in New York, with a U.S. average of $83,256. The states with the lowest adjusted salaries are Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Illinois, Indiana, North Dakota, Colorado, South Dakota, South Carolina, Idaho, West Virginia, and Kansas (listed from lowest to highest). The highest adjusted rural salaries are reported in New York, Alaska, California, Connecticut, Washington, Wyoming, Ohio, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Rhode Island (listed from highest to lowest).

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES GAUGE



The Educational Outcomes gauge has long been a central component of the *Why Rural Matters* reports. In the 2025 edition, this gauge includes indicators of academic performance in reading and math, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), along with rural high school graduation rates. The ten entities with the most concerning results on this gauge are the **Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), New Mexico, Nevada, Washington, Oregon, Delaware, California, Oklahoma, New York,** and **Maine**. In contrast, the states with the least concerning results for educational outcomes include Louisiana, Ohio, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Illinois, Connecticut, Maryland, Rhode Island, and New Jersey.

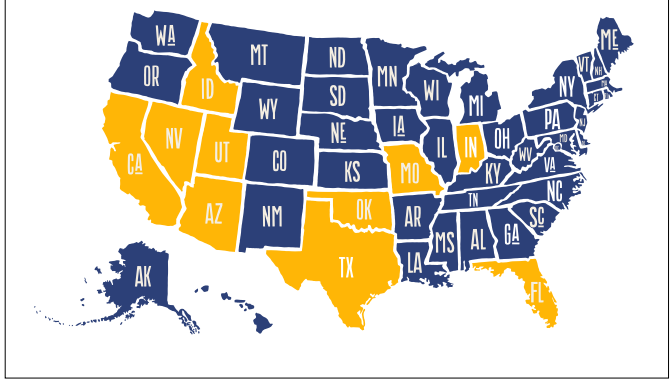
This report reveals a troubling pattern: states with high concern in *Educational Outcomes* often appear among those with the most serious concerns in *Access to Supports for Well-Being*. Similarly, states with fewer challenges in academic outcomes tend to be those where access to physical and mental health supports is more robust. These findings reinforce the close connection between student well-being and academic success.

Grade 4 reading and math performance show significant declines following the emergence of COVID-19. In reading, eight states experienced declines of more than 10 percentage points: Pennsylvania, Washington, Delaware, New York, Nebraska, Colorado, Oklahoma, and Maine. In Grade 4 math, nearly all the states with the largest reading declines also show significant losses, with Minnesota, Kansas, Connecticut, and North Carolina joining the list.

Challenges persist in Grade 8 as well. The states and school systems with the lowest average scores in Grade 8 reading include the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), New Mexico, New York, West Virginia, South Carolina, Alabama, Nevada, Texas, Florida, and Delaware. For Grade 8 math, BIE, New Mexico, West Virginia, South Carolina, and Texas remain at the top of the priority list, along with Hawaii, California, Alabama, Washington, and Oklahoma.

While rural students continue to graduate from high school at higher rates than their non-rural peers (89.4% compared to 87.6%), disparities remain. Some states and school systems report troublingly low rural graduation rates, including Nevada (76.8%), Alaska (71.2%), and BIE schools (63.9%). Conversely, the highest rural graduation rates are found in Connecticut (94.5%), Texas (93.8%), and Massachusetts (93.6%).

ACCESS TO SUPPORTS FOR WELL-BEING GAUGE



First introduced in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, the *Access to Supports* for *Well-Being* gauge reports on indicators related to students' mental and physical health and overall well-being. This gauge highlights ongoing disparities in rural students' access to mental and physical health services, revealing significant concerns in areas such as counselor availability, housing stability, health insurance coverage, preschool access, and primary care. In the 2025 *Why Rural Matters* report, the states identified as highest priority on this gauge include **Nevada**, **Idaho**, **Florida**, **Texas**, **Indiana**, **Missouri**, **California**, **Arizona**, **Oklahoma**, and **Utah**. Due to incomplete data, the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and the state of Hawaii were not assigned rankings. The states identified as least concerning include Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. However, it is important to emphasize that all states and school systems have areas of both strength and challenge when it comes to supporting student well-being.

The first indicator in this gauge measures the ratio of school psychologists and counselors to rural students. On average, rural schools report a higher ratio than non-rural schools (297:1 versus 273:1). Several states show significantly higher student-to-provider ratios, including Michigan (548:1), Nevada (468:1), Louisiana (452:1), Florida (432:1), and Minnesota (427:1). In contrast, other states demonstrate better access, such as Maine (133:1), New Hampshire (137:1), Connecticut (159:1), Vermont (169:1), New York (177:1), Rhode Island (191:1), and New Jersey (194:1).

New to the 2025 *Why Rural Matters* report is an indicator measuring the percentage of rural students who are unhoused. The status of "unhoused" refers to students who have no predictable, stable, and adequate place to stay at night and is regulated by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The Bureau of Indian Education shows the most severe concern, with 14.7% of students identified as unhoused. High rates are also reported in West Virginia (7.3%), Nevada (7.0%), Montana (6.1%), Washington (5.4%), and California (5.3%).

The percentage of rural children who lack health insurance remains a critical concern. Across the United States, 6.4% of rural children are uninsured, compared to 5.7% overall. States with the highest percentages of uninsured children include Texas (13.8%), Arizona (12.2%), Nevada (10.2%), Utah (9.8%), Florida (9.8%), Oklahoma (9.7%), Pennsylvania (9.7%), Indiana (9.4%), Idaho (9.2%), Alaska (8.7%), South Dakota (8.6%), and Delaware (8.3%).

Enrollment in public preschool plays a significant role in supporting long-term academic outcomes and identification of needs for early intervention. Public preschool enrollment varies widely across the United States. Some states report relatively high rural enrollment (e.g. Rhode Island at 92%, Nebraska at 61%, and Connecticut at 57.8%), while others serve far fewer rural children, including Montana at 20.1%, Nevada at 23.9%, and Idaho at 26.1%.

Why Rural Matters 2025 also includes a new indicator approximating the number of rural students per primary care clinician[ii]. On this new indicator, states with the highest ratios (indicating the least access) include Missouri (457:1), Texas (435:1), Georgia (416:1), and Louisiana (401:1). States with the lowest ratios and therefore better access include Maine (136:1), New Hampshire (138:1), and Vermont (163:1).

Introduction

Why Rural Matters 2025 is the 11th 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 to address rural education issues in their respective states.

While it is the 11th in a series, this report is not simply an updating of data from earlier editions. For the first time, it includes rural districts from the Bureau of Indian Education and is also the first to incorporate the new definition of rural from changes made after the 2020 Census. Because financial data lags the rest of the data releases by a couple of years, this is also the first edition where the post-COVID financial impacts can be seen. Where does rural education currently stand, and where should we focus efforts on improving it? What specific populations in rural areas should policymakers and educators pay closer attention to? Considering questions such as these, *Why Rural Matters 2025* includes new indicators related to well-being, and several topical essays on timely issues including Indigenous education, the new rural definition, rural teacher qualifications, and the impacts of charter schools on rural education. The analyses and data presented here 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.

As in previous reports, we have updated the statistical indicators and gauges to call attention to the variability and complexity of rural education. The intent is not to compare states in terms of their differing rates of progress toward an arbitrary goal. Rather, the intent is (1) to provide information and analyses that prioritize policy needs of rural public schools and the communities they serve, and (2) to describe the complexity of rural contexts to give policymakers a more complete picture of challenges experienced by their constituencies so that they might formulate policies that are responsive to those challenges.

In 2023–24, the school year corresponding to much of the data used in this report, 7,805,953 public school students were enrolled in rural school *districts*, which is the unit of analysis for most of the indicators used in the report. That is almost 17% of the total public-school enrollment in the United States. However, it's important to note that this number does not include students who attend a rural school within a district that is designated as non-rural. In the same school year, a total of 9,654,161 students[iii] (20.7%) attended a rural *school* (i.e., a school designated as rural, whether in a rural or non-rural district). Meeting the needs of nearly 10 million children is a collective challenge beyond "the rural" and a moral obligation deserving attention. Rural issues are complex, multifaceted issues requiring multiple perspectives to shape deep and accurate understandings to work together with rural schools and their communities to ensure all students succeed.

The Data

The data used for *Why Rural Matters 2025* were compiled from information collected and maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the United States Department of Education, the United States Health Resources & Services Administration, and the United States Census Bureau. All data used here are available to the general public and may be downloaded directly from the sources above for further inspection and analysis.

For this report, rural is defined using the 12-item, urban-centric 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). Versions of *Why Rural Matters* prior to the 2009 version used a combination of school-level and district-level data. Improvements in the urban-centric locale code system, specifically, assigning the district-level locale code based upon the locale where the plurality of students in the district attend school, have made it possible to be consistent

and use districts as the unit of analysis for the indicators derived from NCES data. This is particularly important because policy decisions impacting rural education (e.g., REAP funding) are made using district-level designations of rural status. Moreover, state funding is allocated at the district level and local policies to address many of the issues discussed in this report tend to be crafted at the district level. Finally, the United States has a long tradition of local control, meaning that policy implementation and resource allocation depends on legislators, local education agencies, school districts, and communities understanding these issues.

Why Rural Matters 2025 includes four topical essays that investigate timely issues as they pertain to rural areas: the new rural definition, Indigenous education in rural areas, rural teacher qualifications, and the impact of cyber charter schools on rural education.

The report only uses data submitted by regular public education agencies defined as local school districts and local school district components of supervisory unions. We exclude independent charter school-only districts and specialized state and federally directed education agencies focused primarily on vocational, special, or alternative education.

Data and Quality Control

We take care to investigate and resolve data anomalies that we observe, and we consult with experts from varied fields to assist in understanding and working with the data. For example, after noticing that Delaware's rural districts reported spending 54% of their instructional salary funding on special education salaries, we reached out to the Delaware Department of Education and each of the individual rural districts. The CFO from one rural district responded and explained that the data may be capturing all teachers who are dual certified for both special education and regular education instruction. With this in mind, we changed Delaware's data point to "N/A." Some of our consultation with experts reveals actual changes rather than errant data. When we noticed that the state dollars-to-local dollars funding ratio in Nevada had jumped from $0.98 to $18.59, we reached out to the Nevada Department of Education. Julie Wootton-Greener, Public Information Officer at the Nevada Department of Public Instruction, responded that Nevada had implemented a new funding formula called the Pupil-Centered Funding Plan in SY 2021-2022 wherein state and local revenues are combined at the state level and then dispersed to districts. In the big scheme of things, these are minor points that pale in comparison to the prospects of these comprehensive public datasets no longer existing as a result of cuts from early 2025. The work of the National Center for Education Statistics and other similar organizations has been vital to shaping a more equitable education system for all students.

We also consult with disciplinary experts in instances where nuances in the data require transformations or other adjustments to more accurately represent the underlying characteristics or contexts being measured. Although we have received insight from too many experts to mention, a few who have provided substantial support are listed below.

Careful insight from Randall Longenecker, M.D. supported the inclusion of a new indicator approximating the number of rural students per primary care clinician. Dr. Longenecker is the Assistant Dean Emeritus for Rural and Underserved Programs and Professor of Family Medicine at the Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine, Executive Director of the Rural Training Track Collaborative, Associate Project Director of the Collaborative for Rural Primary Care Research, Education and Practice, and Central Lead for the Rural Residency Planning and Development Technical Assistance Center. His lifetime of experience in the field was invaluable in navigating a new dataset to develop the indicator. For example, primary care

clinicians are estimated by the total number of MD/DOs and 0.6 times the number of physician assistants and nurse practitioners per guidance from Dr. Longenecker. The reduced percentage accounts for ones who are not available for primary care, and the multiplier of 0.6 was derived through consulting medical research literature and an iterative look at the data.

Dr. Julie Sugarman, Associate Director for K-12 Education Research at MPI's National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, has been incredibly helpful in navigating data related to multilingual learners. For example, she introduced us to a new dataset on multilingual learners when the one we had used for many reports was removed from the public access platform where it had previously been housed. Perhaps our most valuable contributor across the history of *Why Rural Matters* reports has been Dr. Douglas Geverdt, who has played prominent roles both at the United States Census Bureau and at the National Center for Education Statistics. Not only has he been available to answer an endless stream of questions with his lifetime of expertise, but he was the primary researcher responsible for developing the new locale code system in 2006 that we still use today. Dr. Annie Maselli has also played a key role in this report and in rural educational research.

Gauging Rural Education in the 50 States

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. The gauges and their component indicators are:

Rural Education Footprint Gauge

- Percent rural schools
- Percent small rural school districts
- Percent rural students
- Number of rural students
- Percent rural students in a remote rural district

Student and Family Characteristics Gauge

- Rural diversity index
- Poverty level in rural school communities
- Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty
- Percent rural multilingual learners
- Percent rural household mobility

Educational Policy Context Gauge

- Rural instructional expenditures per pupil
- Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures
- Percent instructional salaries for special education
- State revenue to schools per local dollar
- Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE (Full Time Equivalent)

Educational Outcomes Gauge

- Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score (2019 to 2024)
- Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score (2019 to 2024)
- Rural Grade 8 Reading score (2024)
- Rural Grade 8 Math score (2024)
- Rural high school graduation rate

Access to Supports for Well-Being Gauge

- Rural students per school psychologist or school counselor
- Percent rural children who are unhoused
- Percent of school-aged rural children without health insurance coverage
- Percent rural enrollment in public preschool
- Rural students per primary care clinician

Some, but not all, of the indicators used in this report are the same as in previous versions. Because many of the indicators have changed or have been replaced completely, year-by-year comparisons of state rankings are potentially misleading. While there are many options for assembling indicators to describe the context, conditions, and outcomes of rural schools and communities, the author team chose from among those with publicly available, U.S. data sets able to be disaggregated by locale code. The report aims to represent the complexity of rural education across the United States generally and of its 50 individual state systems of public education, as well as the systems of the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). We recognize that perspectives offered by the indicators used here represent only one of many good ways of understanding rural education in the United States.

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. Certain states have retained a high rural education priority ranking from year to year despite the use of different indicators and gauges from one report to the next. For these states, rural education is clearly both important and in urgent need of attention no matter the gauges used.

One final caution from earlier reports is worth repeating. Because *Why Rural Matters* reports state-level data for most indicators, the analyses may obscure substantial variation in rural contexts and conditions within states. Thus, while an indicator represents the average for a particular state, there may be rural regions within the state that differ considerably from the state average. This is especially true for indicators like diversity and poverty statistics, since these demographic characteristics tend to be distributed unevenly across a state, often concentrated variously in specific communities within the state. In the case of such indicators, the statewide average may not reflect the reality in any one specific place, with far higher rates in some places and far lower rates in others.

Consider rural West Virginia, for instance. With a diversity index of 16.8%, it had a lower rate of racial and ethnic diversity than any other state. However, West Virginia's rural district of Jefferson County had a diversity index of 44.0%. Compare this to the state of Oklahoma where – despite having the second highest level of rural racial and ethnic diversity among states (57.5%), the rural district of Optima Elementary had an index of only 14.7%. In such cases the presentation of state-averaged indicators should prompt further investigation and discussions that can lead to better understanding of all rural areas. Moreover, the indicators and gauges in the report can serve as a model for states, districts, and policymakers to examine the publicly-available data themselves and at a grain-size that allows for a more finely tuned understanding and approach to equitably addressing the true needs of all students in their state.

Changes to the Gauges in This Edition

As in the last report, the current report includes 25 indicators organized into five gauges. To refine and better reflect the contexts and characteristics of rural education, some indicators were changed and some were replaced with new indicators.

While the first three gauges largely parallel their equivalents from the previous report, there are a few small changes. After *Why Rural Matters 2023*, we ran a separate analysis on remote districts, which confirmed our suspicions that they face a set of challenges somewhat distinct from other rural districts. For this reason, we added percent rural students in a remote rural district to the *Rural Education Footprint* gauge. In the *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge, we again include the percent of rural multilingual learners returning to the report's long tradition of sharing that data point. We then revised our longstanding measure related to special education learners. Rather than simply reporting the percentage of learners identified for an individualized education plan, we report the percentage of instructional salary spent on special education teachers. The *percent instructional salaries* for special education indicator should be interpreted with care. A higher percentage may reflect an appropriate investment aligned with student needs, while a lower percentage could indicate potential underinvestment in services for students with disabilities. It is also important to note that gifted education is not defined under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and so, while some states may include gifted education teachers under the category of special education in their own staffing reports, NCES specifically instructs states not to include gifted education teacher salaries in the data source used for this indicator. These new data can be found in the *Educational Policy Context* gauge as percent instructional salaries for special education.

The *Educational Outcomes* gauge looks much different from the most recent report. Recognizing the differential impacts of COVID-19 on the rural areas of various states, we created an indicator to measure the changes in reading and math at the critical Grade 4 level before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. We also separated the NAEP composite scores for Grade 8 into math and reading, so that states can more precisely identify areas of strength and growth.

The *Access to Supports for Well-Being* gauge provides a follow-up and extension of the similar gauge from the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report gauge, *Access to Supports for Learning and Development*. The gauge offers updated measures related to school psychologist and school counselor access, insurance coverage, and public preschool enrollment rates. In addition, *Access to Supports for Well-Being* includes two new measures: *percent rural children who are unhoused* and *rural students per primary care clinician*. As with insurance coverage, these new indicators reflect rural students' access to the basic human needs of shelter and health care. We know that inequities are exacerbated by unequal access to resources outside of school.

Notes on Methodology

Readers of *Why Rural Matters* should consider the following points when reviewing this report.

First, the quartile categories used to describe a position on the continuum from 1–51 are arbitrary and are used merely as a convenient way to group states and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) into smaller units to facilitate discussion of patterns in the results. Thus, there is very little difference between the *Urgent* label assigned to Minnesota based on its ranking of 13th on the *Educational Outcomes* gauge and the *Critical* label assigned to South Carolina based on its ranking of 14th on the same gauge.

Second, we use regional terms loosely with the intent of recognizing nuances in regional identities and representing more clearly the contexts within which we discuss specific relationships between individual states and shared geographic and cultural characteristics. For example, a state like Oklahoma may be referred to as a "Southern Plains state" in some contexts and as a "Southwestern state" in others because Oklahoma is part of regional patterns that include Southern Plains states like Kansas and Colorado, but it is also part of regional patterns that include Southwestern states like New Mexico.

Third, the ranking system should not be interpreted to suggest that rural education in low priority states does not deserve attention from policymakers. Every state faces challenges in providing a high-quality education for all children. Highest priority states are presented as such because they are states where a convergence of key factors impacting the schooling process result in extreme challenges to rural schooling and therefore have the most comprehensive needs for policymakers' attention. Variation within state-level data evidences significant needs and attention in all states, including those that do not appear on the high priority list. There are urgent priorities hiding within the averages that we encourage readers to explore.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, reasonable caution should be used when interpreting data reported at the U.S. level. Although it can be helpful for examining trends and relationships, there is the potential for districts or states to misinterpret the data reporting structures.

As the goal of *Why Rural Matters* is to promote dialogue around rural issues, the data should be considered a starting point for analysis rather than any kind of "final word" on issues related to a given indicator. Assigning a priority ranking to an indicator serves as a call for attention, and if that call for attention brings dialogue that fills in the details around that indicator, the report has fulfilled its mission.

Results

The data for each state and state rankings for each indicator are presented in the charts and figures on pages 79-161. The results for each indicator are summarized and discussed below. To provide some context and to aid in making comparisons, U.S.-level results are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: U.S. RURAL STATISTICS

RURAL EDUCATION FOOTPRINT GAUGE	
Percent rural schools	**30.7%**
Percent small rural districts (fewer than 526 students)	**50.0%**
Percent rural students	**16.7%**
Number of rural students (median 94,593)	**7,805,953**
Percent rural students in a remote district	**18.7%**
STUDENT AND FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS GAUGE	
Rural diversity index	**34.3%**
Poverty level in rural school communities	**290%**
Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	**14.2%**
Percent rural multilingual learners	**5.6%**
Percent rural household mobility	**7.8%**
EDUCATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT GAUGE	
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	**$8,417**
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	**$11.54**
Percent instructional salaries for special education	**11.8%**
State revenue to rural school districts per local dollar	**$1.25**
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	**$83,256**
EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES GAUGE	
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	**-3.4**
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	**0.3**
Grade 8 rural NAEP Reading score	**257.5**
Grade 8 rural NAEP Math score	**273.7**
Rural HS graduation rate	**89.4%**
ACCESS TO SUPPORTS FOR WELL-BEING GAUGE	
Number of rural students per school psychologist or school counselor	**297**
Percent rural children who are unhoused	**2.7%**
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	**6.4%**
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	**40.2%**
Number of rural students per primary care clinician	**322**

Rural Education Footprint Gauge

Rural Education Footprint Gauge Indicators

This gauge combines absolute and relative measures of the size and scope of rural education to characterize the *Rural Education Footprint* of rural education to the well-being of the state's public education system as a whole. In this section, we define each of the indicators in the *Rural Education Footprint* gauge and summarize state and regional patterns observed in the data.

- **Percent rural schools** is the percentage of regular elementary and secondary public schools designated as rural by NCES, regardless of whether the school is part of a rural-designated school district. The higher the percent of schools, the higher the state ranks on the *Rural Education Footprint* gauge.

The U.S. average for the percent of rural schools across the states is 30.7% (up from 29.3% in the *Why Rural Matters 2023* report), but states vary a great deal from a low of 10.0% in New Jersey to a high of 77.1% in Montana. Just under 90% of all Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools are rural. Half or more of all public schools are rural in 15 states (in descending order: Montana, Vermont, South Dakota, Maine, North Dakota, Alaska, Mississippi, Oklahoma, West Virginia, New Hampshire, Nebraska, Iowa, Wyoming, Arkansas, and Kansas) and at least one-third of all schools are rural in 13 other states. In general, states with a high percentage of rural schools are those where sparse populations or challenging geography make it difficult to transport students to consolidated regional schools in non-rural areas, and those where there has been less push to consolidate or successful resistance to consolidation. Predominantly urban states on the east and west coasts have the smallest percentages of rural schools.

- **Percent small rural school districts** is the percent of rural school districts that are below the median enrollment size (526 students) for all rural school districts in the United States. The higher the percent of districts with enrollments below 526, the higher the state ranks on the *Rural Education Footprint* gauge.

In this indicator, a larger percentage of small school districts is associated with a higher rank, but school district size is a complex indicator. On one hand, small school districts provide numerous protections to students, and very large rural school districts, such as those common to but not exclusively located in the southeastern region of the United States, disproportionately enroll students identifying as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. On the other hand, states with high relative percentages of small rural school districts ranking in the top five for priority on this indicator (Montana, BIE, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska) have lower graduation rates (except for Nebraska), lower state to local funding ratios (except for North Dakota) and fall in the top half for overall priority (except for Nebraska). The school district size indicator is a particularly good example of how a priority rank is not necessarily good or bad, but rather captures differences between the context and conditions of rural education in the United States. In this instance, highlighting the prevalence of an existing organizational structure with demonstrated benefits to student achievement and well-being of students and calling attention to the need to sustain and nurture it through responsive policies. At least half of all rural districts are smaller than the U.S. rural median in 22 states. In 10 states (Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, California, Colorado, Maine, Arizona, and Alaska) and among BIE schools, at least 7 in 10 rural districts have fewer than 526 students. States with few or no small rural districts are located primarily in the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic, regions that primarily operate through consolidated, county-wide school districts. West Virginia, where more than 57% of all

public schools are located in rural communities, does not have a single small rural school district because all 55 of the state's school districts are countywide systems. Three other states (Florida, Maryland, and Delaware) also have no small rural school districts, and an additional eight states have fewer than 5% small rural school districts (Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, Louisiana, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Indiana).

- **Percent rural students** is a measure of the relative size of the rural student population and is calculated as the number of public school students enrolled in rural school districts (whether they attend a rural school or not) divided by the total number of public school students in the state. It excludes students attending rural schools located in districts that NCES designates as urban, suburban, or town. The higher the percent of rural students, the higher the state ranks on the *Rural Education Footprint* gauge.

Nearly 17% of all public-school students were enrolled in districts classified as rural in the 2023-24 school year. Three states enrolled more than half of all students in rural districts: Vermont (61.9%), Mississippi (57.5%), and Maine (52.0%). For students in BIE schools, the rate is even higher (85.5%). In nine other states (West Virginia, Montana, South Dakota, Alabama, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, North Dakota, Iowa, North Carolina), one-third or more of all students were enrolled in a rural district. Students in rural districts make up less than 10% of the total student population in 11 states.

- **Number of rural students** is an absolute, as opposed to relative, measure of the size of the rural student population. The figure given for each state represents the total number of students enrolled in public school districts designated as rural by NCES. The higher the enrollment number, the higher the state ranks on the *Rural Education Footprint* gauge.

More than half of all rural students in the United States attend school in just 12 states, including some of the most populous and urban states (in decreasing order of rural enrollment: Texas, North Carolina, Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Alabama, Indiana, Virginia, Tennessee, Michigan, and Mississippi). Texas and North Carolina alone enroll nearly 1.6 million rural students, more than the combined total of the 26 states with the fewest rural students, and the combined states of Texas, North Carolina, Georgia, and Ohio enroll nearly one in four of all rural students in the United States.

- **Percent rural students in a remote district** is a new indicator in this report and represents the proportion of rural students who are enrolled in a *remote* rural district (one of three subcategories of rural school districts in the NCES locale code system along with *fringe* and *distant*). Remote districts are those rural districts that are the furthest away from an urban area (at least 25 miles). Remoteness has been associated with operating challenges like increased costs for specialized services.

More than 7 in 10 rural students are enrolled in a remote district in five states: Alaska (100%), Utah (80.4%), Wyoming (79.0%), North Dakota (73.8%), and South Dakota (70.9%). In another 16 states plus BIE schools, more than 25% of all rural students are enrolled in a remote district (Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Idaho, Colorado, Kansas, Minnesota, Arizona, Nevada, Missouri, Iowa, Washington, Vermont, Wisconsin, Arkansas, and Mississippi). Five states have no remote rural school districts (Rhode Island, Delaware, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Jersey) and seven other states have less than 5% rural students in a remote district.

Rural Education Footprint Gauge Rankings

To capture the footprint of rural education within the overall educational system in each state, we averaged each state's ranking on the individual indicators, giving equal weight to each (see Table 2).

TABLE 2: EDUCATION FOOTPRINT GAUGE RANKINGS

These rankings represent the average of each state's score on five indicators. The higher the average ranking (i.e., the closer to ranking number 1), the more central it is to the health of the state's overall education system.

CRUCIAL		VERY IMPORTANT		IMPORTANT		NOTABLE	
MT	10.4	AR	21.2	TN	25.4	NY	31.4
BIE	11.2	NH	21.2	GA	25.6	SC	33.0
SD	11.6	WI	21.4	MI	26.4	UT	33.8
OK	13.2	KY	21.8	AZ	26.8	NV	37.2
ND	13.4	WY	22.2	IL	27.8	NJ	38.2
ME	13.6	AL	22.2	OH	27.8	CT	38.8
NE	15.4	MN	22.8	CO	28.2	MA	39.6
VT	15.6	ID	23.0	WA	28.4	FL	39.8
AK	16.4	WV	23.2	VA	29.6	DE	40.8
KS	17.4	NM	23.6	PA	30.0	MD	41.2
IA	17.4	NC	23.6	OR	30.2	RI	43.6
MO	17.8	TX	24.4	CA	31.0	HI	N/A
MS	18.0	IN	25.0	LA	31.2		

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth.

States classified as *Crucial* on this gauge are mostly located in one of two regions: Northern New England (Vermont and Maine) or a contiguous block of eight states beginning in the Rockies and stretching southeast through the Northern Plains and the Midwest to as far as the Mid-South (Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri). The two states outside these blocks are Alaska and Mississippi. See the *Rural Education Footprint* gauge map on page 131 for a visualization of these regional patterns.

The seven highest ranking states and BIE schools (which ranks 2nd on the gauge) generally score high on all the indicators except *number of rural students*, on which none of them ranks higher than 13th (Oklahoma). Of the other six states and BIE schools, all seven rank below the U.S. median and three rank in the least concerning quartile. These are states with smaller overall student enrollments, so the total number of rural students is smaller even though the percent of rural students is high.

More than half of all rural students (4.4 million, or 56%) are in states ranked in the most critical quartile for the *number of rural students indicator* but only two of those states (Oklahoma and Mississippi) are within the most critical quartile in the overall *Rural Education Footprint* gauge; three others (Texas, North Carolina, and Alabama) are in the second quartile.
Eight of the 12 states with the largest rural student populations rank below the median on the overall *Rural Education Footprint* gauge. These states—Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Indiana, Virginia,

Tennessee, and Michigan—have large urban populations that dwarf even a relatively sizable rural population. They rank low on the *Rural Education Footprint* gauge despite ranking high on the *number of rural students* indicator simply because they rank low on almost every other indicator in the gauge. For example, they average a ranking of 31st on the *percent rural schools* indicator and none of them ranks higher than 23rd on that indicator (Indiana).

See page 131 for a map showing regional patterns.

Student and Family Characteristics Gauge

Student and Family Characteristics Gauge Indicators

Each *Why Rural Matters* report has examined student diversity in rural education, focusing on sociodemographic characteristics of students and families that are widely discussed in the research literature (e.g., in terms of investigating equity in the distribution of student achievement according to differences in economic status, race and ethnicity, language acquisition, and mobility/residential stability) and acknowledged in educational policy (e.g., through state and federal funding formulas that assign weights to relevant student characteristics in order to provide additional funds for exceptional needs and/or to target historically underserved populations). In the *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge, we compare rural *student and family characteristics* across the 50 states on terms that policymakers often define as relevant to state and United States education goals. In this section, we define each of the indicators in the *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge and summarize state and regional patterns observed in the data.

- **Rural diversity index** is a measure of racial heterogeneity at the school level. Specifically, if you were to randomly choose two students attending a school in a rural district, the rural diversity index represents the percent chance that these two students would be of a different race or ethnicity. The higher the rural diversity index, the higher the ranking on the *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge.

The Rural Diversity Index made its first appearance in *Why Rural Matters 2018–2019*. How racially heterogeneous are rural districts in the United States? If you were to randomly choose two students from the same school in a rural district, your chances are better than one in three (34.3%) that the students would identify as being of different races or ethnicities, a slight increase from the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report (33.4%). The range in *rural diversity index* among states is quite large—from 12.8% in West Virginia to 62.7% in Delaware, where the odds are better than not that two randomly selected students are of different races or ethnicities. Along with Delaware, the odds are also better than fifty-fifty in Oklahoma (57.5%), North Carolina (53.8%), Nevada (53.3%), and Florida (53.2%). An additional 10 states have a rural diversity index above 40%: Georgia (49.6%), Maryland (48.5%), South Carolina (48.2%), Virginia (46.0%), Texas (45.8%), New jersey (45.3%), Louisiana (44.3%), California 44.2%), Colorado (42.3%), and Arizona (40.8%). At the district level, some of the values are much higher. Broken Bow, Oklahoma has the distinction of being the rural district with the highest diversity index (76.1%). There are also many districts with lower values. In fact, 138 rural districts have a diversity index of 0.0%, meaning that every school in those districts is racially homogeneous; this is true of only three non-rural districts. The diversity index is a better representation of diversity than previous measures that reported numbers of students identifying as of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. A school that is 98% Black is not diverse; it's homogeneous and would have a low diversity index in *Why Rural Matters*.

States with a *rural diversity index* above 33% are in a nearly contiguous block starting with Washington and extending down the Pacific Coast and across the southern half of the United States to the Atlantic Coast, where the block reaches as far north as Connecticut (see the indicator map on page 132 for a visualization of this block). The one exception outside this geographic block is Colorado (42.3%) and the one gap within the contiguous block is New Mexico (30.7%).

- **Poverty level in rural school communities** is a measure of the economic level of the school communities in rural districts. For each school, the National Center for Education Statistics collected data using the American Community Survey on the

25 nearest households with school-aged children. A weighted average of these households' incomes was then reported as a percentage of the poverty line. The lower the percentage, the greater the level of poverty within its school communities and the higher the state ranks on the *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge.

Across the United States, communities surrounding schools in rural districts have an average household income that is 2.9 times (290%) that of the federal poverty line. Although only 1 in 328 rural school communities has an average income below the poverty line, 1 in 10 has an average income at or below 185% of the poverty line (the federal cutoff for reduced price meals). In Tennessee, the poverty level in rural school communities overall is 308%, ranking above the U.S. median. This average hides the fact that three of the poorest rural school communities in the United States are in Tennessee—Trenton Middle School, Peabody High School, and Northaven Elementary School—all schools with average household incomes less than two-thirds of the poverty line.

BIE schools and New Mexico are outliers at 171% and 184% on this indicator. Other states range from 224% (Florida) to 515% (New Jersey). In total, 17 states have average rural school community incomes that are less than half that of New Jersey (in addition New Mexico and Florida, Arkansas, Kentucky, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, West Virginia, Arizona, Oklahoma, and North Carolina). States with relatively low-income rural school communities are concentrated in the Southwest, the Deep South, and Central Appalachia.

- **Percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty** represents the percent of rural children between the ages of 5 and 17 living in a household with a household income below the federal poverty line. The higher the poverty rate, the higher the state ranks on the *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge.

Poverty is consistently correlated with most educational outcomes and has been an indicator in every version of *Why Rural Matters*. In response to policy changes that limited the accuracy of using free and reduced meal rates as a proxy for poverty, beginning with the 2018-19 report, we introduced two new measures of poverty: *poverty level in rural school communities* and *percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty*. Each has its limitations, but they work together to describe the degree of poverty within each state. The main limitation of *percent of rural school-aged children* experiencing poverty is that it does not differentiate between children who attend public school and those who do not. Some children in this age group may be attending private schools, be homeschooled, or attending other alternative school settings. Others may not be attending school at all, perhaps because they haven't started school yet, have graduated, or have left school before graduating. It nevertheless serves as a useful measure of the extent to which rural children are experiencing poverty in each state.

States with the highest levels of rural child poverty form a contiguous block that includes the Southwest (Arizona [20.2%], New Mexico [30.2%], and Oklahoma [17.7%]), the Mid-South (Arkansas [19.0%] and Louisiana [21.0%]), the Southeast (Mississippi [23.0%], Alabama [17.4%], Georgia [18.0%], South Carolina [21.9%], and North Carolina [17.0%]) and Central Appalachia (Tennessee [17.8%], Kentucky [20.5%], and West Virginia [17.0%]). Other states with rural child poverty rates above 15% are Hawaii (16.9%), Florida (15.4%), California (15.3%), and Texas (15.3%). Eleven of the states ranking in the highest quartile of rural children who experience poverty also rank among the 15 states with the lowest rural school community income levels (New Mexico, Mississippi, South Carolina, Louisiana, Kentucky, Arizona, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Alabama, West Virginia, and North Carolina). Four of the states with the highest levels of rural children who experience poverty also rank in the highest quartile on

the racial and ethnic diversity index (South Carolina, Georgia, Oklahoma, and North Carolina).

The six lowest-ranking states on this indicator are all located in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic: Connecticut (3.4%), Massachusetts (4.5%), Rhode Island (5.1%), Maryland (5.8%), New Jersey (6.1%), and New Hampshire (6.7%).

- **Percent rural multilingual learners** is the number of rural students who are *developing proficiency in multiple languages* divided by the total number of students in rural districts for which sufficient data is available. The higher the percentage of multilingual learners, the higher the state ranks on the *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge.

In the United States, 5.6% of rural students are multilingual learners (MLs)—a total of 357,135 rural ML students in the 2022-2023 school year. This continues a dramatic growth trend as reflected in earlier data years analyzed for *Why Rural Matters* reports (from 251,000 [3.5%] in 2013-14 to 283,000 [3.8%] in 2016-2017 to 330,000 [4.5%] in 2021-2022). The current total enrollment of 357,135 represents a 42% increase in the rural ML population over a 10-year period.

In New Mexico, just over 3 in 10 of all rural students are MLs. In five other states (California, Alaska, Washington, Texas, and Delaware) the rate is above 10%. Three states (Vermont, Rhode Island, and West Virginia) report ML rates below 1%, and another seven states report rates below 2%.

- **Percent rural student mobility** represents the percent of households with school-age children who changed residences within the previous 12 months, per U.S. Census figures. Housing insecurity disrupts consistency in teaching and learning and impacts access to services and resources that support learning and development. The higher the mobility rate, the higher the state ranks on the *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge.

Just under 8% of rural students have changed residence in the past 12 months, ranging from a high of 15.3% in Hawaii to a low of 4.6% in Massachusetts. Apart from Hawaii, states ranking highest on this indicator are located in the Southwest and Plains/Prairie regions (Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma), the Rockies (Idaho and Montana), and the Mid-South and Southeast/Central Appalachia (Arkansas, Florida, and Tennessee). In all, 11 of the top 13 highest-mobility states are west of the Mississippi River with Florida and Tennessee being the exceptions.

Student and Family Characteristics Gauge Rankings

To gauge the characteristics of rural students and families in each state, we averaged each state's ranking on the individual indicators, giving equal weight to each indicator (Table 3).

TABLE 3: STUDENT AND FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS GAUAGE RANKINGS

These rankings represent the average of each state's score on five indicators. The higher the average ranking (i.e., the closer to ranking number 1), the more important it is for policymakers to be aware of the student and family characteristics in their state.

URGENT		CRITICAL		SERIOUS		FAIR	
NM	6.0	CO	17.2	UT	24.8	NE	35.6
FL	8.4	LA	17.4	SD	26.2	WI	36.0
AZ	9.6	OR	18.0	MI	28.0	PA	36.4
OK	10.2	MT	18.8	WY	29.0	OH	37.6
SC	11.2	KS	19.8	WV	30.2	NJ	38.4
NC	11.6	AL	20.2	MD	30.6	ND	39.0
TX	13.2	WA	20.8	IN	32.0	CT	39.8
AR	13.4	KY	21.2	IL	32.6	MA	42.6
AK	13.8	VA	21.6	IA	33.0	VT	42.8
CA	14.0	DE	22.5	ME	33.8	NH	45.4
GA	15.4	NV	22.8	NY	34.0	RI	46.3
MS	16.0	MO	24.6	MN	34.6	HI	N/A
ID	16.2	TN	24.8			BIE	N/A

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth.

States in the most concerning quartile (labeled urgent) on the *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge are mostly in a block from North Carolina on the Atlantic Coast along the southernmost states to California on the Pacific Coast. Alabama and Louisiana (both near the top of 2nd most concerning quartile) disrupt the pattern, and Idaho is a geographic outlier. Among the indicators, poverty level in rural school communities, percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty, and percent rural student mobility most closely parallel the overall gauge ranking, with 8 of 13 most concerning states for the gauge also scoring in the most concerning quartile for the underlying indicator. On two other indicators, seven of the 13 most concerning states for the gauge also score in the most concerning quartile for the underlying indicator. See page 132 for a map showing regional patterns.

To investigate the relationships among the different indicators, we ran bivariate correlation analyses among the five indicator rankings. Not surprisingly, the strongest correlation (r = .76) was between our two measures of poverty. The next strongest were a positive correlation (r = .60) between poverty level in rural school communities and percent rural student mobility. In other words, states with more rural students changing residences were also more likely to have lower average incomes in their school neighborhoods.

We also investigated the relationship between our *Student and Family Characteristics* indicators and the indicators in the other gauges. The strongest relationships identified were between poverty measures and student outcomes in reading and math. Specifically, we found correlations of r = .69 for the relationship between poverty level in rural school communities and rural instructional expenditures per pupil, r = .66 for the relationship between percent rural student mobility and rural Grade 8 NAEP math score, r = .56 for the relationship between percent of rural school-aged children experiencing poverty and rural instructional expenditures per pupil. These relationships show that the states where rural students receive the least funding tend to be the one where the most students are already experiencing the impacts of poverty due to lower household incomes.

We also identified significant relationships among the *Student and Family Characteristics* indicators and the rankings on our gauge measuring *Access to Supports for Well-Being*. Specifically, each of the five *Student and Family Characteristics* rankings was positively correlated with *Access to Supports for Well-Being*. These correlations ranged from moderate (r = .37 with rural diversity index) to moderately strong (r = .59 with poverty level in rural school communities). In other words, rural student populations with the greatest needs (e.g., children living in homes with household incomes below the poverty line, mobile students) as well as more diverse student populations are less likely to have access to supports that promote higher levels of learning, development, and overall well-being.

See page 132 for a map showing regional patterns.

Educational Policy Context Gauge

Educational Policy Context Gauge Indicators

For this gauge, we used indicators that measure and characterize aspects of the public schooling system that result from policy decisions and thus could be changed through different policy decisions. In selecting policy-driven characteristics, moreover, we focused on those that are highlighted in educational research as influencing student achievement and other measures of student well-being. Illustrating variations in state policy contexts thus can be interpreted to suggest, in relative terms, the extent to which current policies are supporting or hindering rural schools and students. In this section, we define each of the indicators in the *Educational Policy Context* gauge and summarize state and regional patterns observed in the data. Hawaii is excluded from this gauge because its organization as a statewide district makes analysis impossible, and BIE school districts are also excluded because the way data are maintained prevents us from conducting the necessary analyses. On each indicator, the higher the ranking (the closer to one), the greater the concern that the policy context is not optimal for rural education.

- **Rural instructional expenditures per pupil** represents the total current expenditures for instruction in rural public-school districts divided by the total number of students enrolled in those same districts. The lower the rural instructional expenditures per pupil, the higher the state ranks on the *Educational Policy Context* gauge and the greater the concern.

This indicator allows us to make comparisons among states regarding the amount of money spent per pupil on teaching and learning in rural schools. The U.S. average of $8,417 per rural pupil is much closer to the low end of the range ($6,071 in Idaho) than to the high end ($16,406 in New York). In addition to Idaho, nine other states spend less than $7,000 per rural pupil on instruction (in order from the next lowest spending at $6,191: Mississippi, Florida, Oklahoma, Indiana, Tennessee, Arizona, Missouri, Alabama, and Arkansas). Fourteen other states join them in spending less than half what New York spends per rural pupil on instruction.

The highest spending states are a mix of Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic urban states with a relatively small absolute number of rural students (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire) and states with low-enrolled rural districts (Alaska and Wyoming).

Results from correlation analyses show associations between the *rural instructional spending per pupil* indicator and all five of the indicators in the *Access to Supports for Well-Being* gauge. The highest was the correlation with *rural students per school psychologist or school counselor* (r = .57). The relationship between instructional spending and access to non-academic supports indicates that the states that spend less on teaching and learning for rural students are the same states where rural students and families have less access to essential non-academic supports. Conversely, the states that spend more on teaching and learning tend to offer greater access to non-academic supports—the result is a compounding effect where inequity within the classroom is exacerbated by inequity outside the school.

- **Ratio of instructional expenditures to rural transportation expenditures** is a measure of how many dollars are spent on instruction for every one dollar that is spent on transporting students—the lower the ratio, the more money being channeled toward transportation and away from teaching and learning, and the higher the ranking on this indicator.

Some of the variation in pupil transportation costs are affected by factors beyond the control of policymakers (e.g., geography and terrain), but variations also result from policies and practices related to the size and location of schools and school

districts, personnel, school closures and consolidations, and the length of students' bus rides. This indicator is an important factor in understanding how the educational policy context supports or hinders rural schools because extraordinary transportation costs shift money away from programs and resources that directly impact student learning.

On average, rural school districts across the United States spend about $11.54 on instruction for every dollar spent on transportation, but variation among states is considerable. Alaska and Vermont are outliers at $24.89 spent on instruction (Alaska) and $22.03 spent on instruction (Vermont) for every dollar spent on transportation in rural districts. Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, California, and North Carolina all spend more than $15 on instruction for every dollar spent on transportation. In all, 29 states spend less than half what Alaska spends, with the most impacted states showing no clear regional patterns: West Virginia ($6.78), Indiana ($8.40), Louisiana ($8.68), New York ($8.92), Virginia ($9.07), Illinois ($9.20), Arizona ($9.25), Pennsylvania (9.25), Rhode Island ($9.37), Kentucky ($9.63), Alabama ($9.77), Delaware ($9.79), Maine ($9.85), and Nevada ($9.85). To highlight the importance of policy decisions on this and other indicators, we note here that some states with similar geographies and terrains reveal substantial differences. South Dakota, for example, spends $2.50 more on instruction per transportation dollar than its neighbor North Dakota, and Vermont spends nearly 2.5 times as much on instruction per transportation dollar ($22.03) as its neighbor New York ($8.92). Of note is that West Virginia, the state with the lowest ratio of instructional dollars per transportation dollar, contends with some terrain challenges but is also a state with a history of large-scale consolidation resulting in regional schools serving large geographic areas and some of the longest bus rides for rural students in the United States.

- **Percent instructional salaries for special education** is a measure intended to capture the relative size of special education instruction programming within the overall scope of teaching and learning within rural school districts. Like many of our indicators, ranking instructional salaries for special education is complex. This indicator is among several that do not represent a positive or negative situation, but rather captures differences based on the data as reported by each state. The figure reported for each state is the proportion of all rural instructional salaries that goes toward salaries for special education staff. The higher the percentage, the higher the state ranking on the *Educational Policy Context* gauge and the more pressing the need for attention to the issue by policymakers and practitioners.

It is important to interpret this indicator carefully: A high percentage of instructional salary spent on special education may reflect appropriate investment aligned with student need, while a low percentage could signal underinvestment in services for students with disabilities. However, there are also data quality issues such as in states where a large percentage of rural districts did not report data on special education instructional salaries. For example, nearly 70% of the rural districts in Kansas did not report their spending on the instructional salaries of special education teachers, and Vermont, Oregon, North Dakota, Montana, and California all had at least 20% of their rural districts with no data on this indicator. Table 4 provides a complete listing of the percent of nonreporting districts in each state, as well as the discrepancy between the percent of students with a specialized education plan and the percent of instructional salary paid to special education instructors.

TABLE 4: SPECIAL EDUCATION STATISTICS BY STATE

State	Non-Reporting Districts	% Rural IEP (SY 2021-22)	% Instructional Salary to Special Education (SY 2021-22)	Discrepancy
AL	0.0%	12.8%	8.8%	-4.0%
AR	0.0%	14.9%	8.9%	-6.0%
AZ	13.8%	13.5%	9.9%	-3.6%
CA	24.8%	13.3%	9.2%	-4.1%
CO	1.7%	N/A	N/A	N/A
CT	4.7%	15.4%	14.5%	-0.9%
FL	4.3%	16.4%	17.9%	1.5%
GA	0.0%	12.9%	14.0%	1.1%
IA	0.0%	12.1%	10.7%	-1.4%
ID	11.0%	11.8%	11.5%	-0.3%
IN	6.5%	17.4%	8.8%	-8.6%
KS	69.9%	15.4%	3.8%	-11.6%
KY	0.0%	16.4%	14.3%	-2.1%
LA	0.0%	12.1%	11.4%	-0.7%
MA	0.0%	18.7%	14.1%	-4.6%
MD	0.0%	10.9%	13.1%	2.2%
ME	14.4%	18.4%	10.7%	-7.7%
MI	5.9%	13.2%	9.4%	-3.8%
MN	0.9%	16.3%	11.5%	-4.8%
MO	2.1%	13.1%	10.3%	-2.8%
MS	0.0%	15.2%	12.5%	-2.7%
MT	25.4%	12.7%	6.4%	-6.3%
NC	0.0%	13.6%	7.5%	-6.1%
ND	35.5%	12.2%	9.4%	-2.8%
NE	0.0%	13.8%	10.7%	-3.1%
NH	2.6%	17.1%	27.4%	10.3%
NJ	1.0%	18.3%	18.9%	0.6%
NM	0.0%	13.9%	10.7%	-3.2%
NV	0.0%	12.3%	12.8%	0.5%

State	Non-Reporting Districts	% Rural IEP (SY 2021-22)	% Instructional Salary to Special Education (SY 2021-22)	Discrepancy
NY	0.3%	15.8%	13.4%	-2.4%
OH	0.7%	14.2%	16.7%	2.5%
OK	3.5%	17.7%	7.6%	-10.1%
OR	24.4%	14.4%	7.2%	-7.2%
PA	2.6%	19.5%	19.0%	-0.5%
RI	0.0%	12.2%	11.6%	-0.6%
SC	2.7%	14.0%	15.6%	1.6%
SD	4.7%	14.3%	8.3%	-6.0%
TN	0.0%	12.7%	9.4%	-3.3%
TX	5.3%	12.1%	6.8%	-5.3%
VA	0.0%	13.3%	15.1%	1.8%
VT	62.5%	16.6%	7.9%	-8.7%
WA	18.8%	13.2%	6.9%	-6.3%
WI	1.5%	13.6%	18.9%	5.3%
WV	0.0%	16.9%	14.1%	-2.8%
WY	0.0%	15.0%	15.6%	0.6%

Missing data prevented us from analyzing this indicator for five states (Hawaii, Alaska, Utah, Delaware, and Illinois) in addition to BIE schools. All but one of the states with the highest percent of rural instructional salaries designated as special education are located east of the Mississippi River, where they are spread out across New England (New Hampshire and Massachusetts), the Northeast (Connecticut, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania), Central Appalachia (Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia), the Southeast (South Carolina, Florida, and Georgia), and the Great Lakes (Ohio and Wisconsin). Wyoming is the geographic outlier. A total of 10 states (mostly west of the Mississippi River) show a percent of rural instructional salaries for special education that is less than half of the percentage for those 14 states: Kansas, Montana, Texas, Washington, Colorado, Oregon, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Vermont, and South Dakota.

- **Ratio of state revenue to local revenue** is a measure of dependence on local fiscal capacity and an indirect measure of the extent to which state revenue is a significant factor in equalizing revenue per pupil across communities of varying levels of socioeconomic resources. A low ratio means a relatively small amount of state aid in relation to funding from local sources and thus an increased likelihood of inequitable funding. The lower the ratio, the higher the state scores on the indicator.

This indicator comes with an important caveat—specifically, the measure investigates the extent to which state dollars augment local dollars (and serve an equalizing function among rural districts with varying levels of need), but does not investigate whether state or local revenue is "enough" to meet the needs of schools. It is a measure of *fiscal equity* but not a measure of *fiscal adequacy*. A low ratio of state dollars to local dollars is a clear signal that the school funding system over-relies on local fiscal capacity and, whether adequate or not, is very likely inequitable. That said, a high ratio of state to local revenue may mean the funding system is equitable only in that it provides inadequate funding levels everywhere.

Across the United States, the average ratio of state to local revenue in rural school districts is $1.25, meaning state governments supply $1.25 in funding to rural districts for every dollar derived from local tax revenues. Nebraska has the lowest ratio with rural districts receiving only $0.30 of state funding for every dollar of revenue generated locally. The next three lowest states are clustered in the Northeastern United States: Rhode Island ($0.33), Connecticut ($0.44), and New Hampshire ($0.44). The situation is dramatically different for Vermont and Nevada, where rural districts receive nearly $19 from the state for $1 raised locally—the highest ratios in the United States, and more than 4.5 times the funding ratio of the next highest state, Washington ($3.89). This is especially interesting in Nevada's case, since it ranked well below the median (at $0.98 state dollars per local dollar) in *Why Rural Matters 2023*. According to the Nevada Department of Education, this is because of their new Pupil-Centered Funding Plan, under which state and local revenues are combined at the state level and then dispersed to districts.

The highest-ranking states on this indicator, the states with the lowest levels of state aid relative to local revenue, mostly fall into two distinct groups: Northeastern states with relatively low levels of rural poverty and high levels of rural property valuation (Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Maine); and Midwestern/Great Plains states with low to moderate levels of rural poverty and a largely agricultural property tax base in rural areas (Nebraska, South Dakota, Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin). Texas and Pennsylvania also rank high but fall outside these regional patterns. The group of Northeastern states includes many that spend relatively high levels per pupil on instruction in their rural schools. All but Maine are among the highest-spending quartile for the *rural instructional expenditure*

per pupil indicator and Maine is just below in the next quartile. The second group spends, on average, more than $5,000 less per pupil in their rural schools ($8,125 compared to $13,325 for the first group).

- **Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE** is used here as a proxy for average teacher salaries. For each rural district, the total dollar amount spent on instructional salaries is divided by the NCES's Comparable Wage Index for Teachers for that district, and then divided by the total number of instructional staff members (using FTE, or full-time equivalent, a measure that accounts for staff who only work part-time or who are assigned to more than one school). The lower the adjusted rural salary expenditure per FTE, the higher the state's ranking on the *Educational Policy Context* gauge and the more urgent the concern for the condition of rural education.

While many factors contribute to teacher recruitment and retention challenges for rural schools, lower teacher salaries is an important factor. For that reason, we have long included a measure of teacher salaries in *Why Rural Matters* reports. Beginning with *Why Rural Matters 2018–2019*, we adjusted teacher salaries based on the Comparable Wage Index for Teachers (CWIFT), created by the National Center for Education Statistics. This index helps adjust for geographic variations in teacher salaries by looking at Census data on salaries for other occupations in each district. For example, Knightsen Elementary, a school district in rural California has an average teacher salary of $104,519, but non-teacher occupations in that district earn 27.3% more than their peers in the same non-teacher occupations across the United States, yielding an adjusted teacher salary of $82,104 after accounting for this premium. Meanwhile, teachers in San Jon Schools in rural New Mexico earn an average of $59,313, roughly $45,000 less than the average Knightsen teacher. However, after adjusting for the 33.3% wage discount seen in other occupations, San Jon teachers earn the equivalent of $88,925—$6,000 more than the adjusted amount of the Knightsen teachers. There are limitations to this methodology (e.g., challenges with modeling for communities with the attraction of a low cost of living but other characteristics that make it difficult to attract teachers), but it does offer improvements by allowing us to compare rural districts from a more equivalent perspective.

Adjusted salary expenditure per instructional FTE in rural districts ranges from $54,242 in Arkansas to $116,959 in New York, with a U.S. average of $83,256. Compare this to the adjusted average salary expenditure per instructional FTE in town districts ($87,942), urban districts ($89,734), and suburban districts ($90,204). We have reported these disparities before, nevertheless, their persistence even after adjusting for geographic variation in wages is noteworthy and speaks to the need for action by policymakers.

States with the lowest adjusted rural salary expenditures according to this indicator are primarily in the Southeast, the Mid-South, and the Midwest/Great Plains (in ascending order from lowest salary: Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Illinois, Indiana, North Dakota, Colorado, South Dakota, South Carolina, Idaho, West Virginia, and Kansas). States with the highest adjusted rural salary expenditures are located primarily in the Northeast, the West, and the Mid-Atlantic (in descending order: New York, Alaska, California, Connecticut, Washington, Wyoming, Ohio, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Rhode Island). Ohio (ranking between Wyoming and Massachusetts) is a geographic outlier.

Educational Policy Context Gauge Rankings

To gauge the extent to which the educational policy context is favorable or unfavorable for rural schools, we averaged each state's ranking on the individual indicators, giving equal weight to each (Table 5).

TABLE 5: EDUCATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT GAUGE RANKINGS

These rankings represent the average of each state's score on five indicators. The higher the average ranking (i.e., the closer to ranking number 1), the more important it is for policymakers to address rural educational issues within that state.

CRUCIAL		VERY IMPORTANT		IMPORTANT		NOTABLE	
IL	11.3	KY	19.6	NH	24.6	DE	30.8
MO	12.4	ME	21.2	CT	24.8	NV	30.8
FL	15.2	AR	21.4	MA	24.8	MD	32.2
WV	15.4	GA	21.6	MI	25.4	NC	33.4
MS	15.4	OH	21.8	AL	26.0	NM	34.2
VA	15.6	RI	22.2	UT	26.3	KS	34.2
IN	16.2	ID	22.4	TX	26.6	CA	38.6
WI	17.0	OK	22.6	OR	26.8	WA	39.8
AZ	17.2	NJ	23.0	NY	27.2	VT	42.0
PA	17.8	ND	23.0	MT	27.2	AK	46.5
SD	18.8	TN	23.4	MN	27.8	HI	N/A
LA	19.4	CO	23.4	WY	28.0	BIE	N/A
SC	19.4	IA	24.2	NE	28.0		

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Of the five underlying indicators that contribute most to the crucial ranking of the states in the most concerning quartile for this gauge, three (*rural instructional expenditures per pupil, ratio of instructional expenditures to transportation expenditures,* and *adjusted instructional salary expenditures per FTE*) have seven states ranking in the most concerning quartile on their respective indicator rankings. The other two indicators (*percent instructional salaries for special education* and *ratio of state revenue to local revenue*) have, respectively, six and five states in the most concerning quartile for the indicator rankings. The 13 Crucial states vary most in their ranking on the rural instructional expenditures per pupil indicator, ranging from the highest priority (i.e., lowest spending) Idaho to the 48th highest priority (i.e., 2nd highest spending) New Jersey, with an average ranking of 22. States faring best on this gauge are a mixed bag geographically, with five Western/Southwestern states (Alaska, Washington, Nevada, California, and New Mexico); three East Coast states (Delaware, Maryland, and North Carolina); two Plains states (Nebraska and Kansas); and Wisconsin and Vermont.

See page 133 for a map showing regional patterns.

Educational Outcomes Gauge

This gauge includes indicators describing student academic performance on United States assessments.

Four of the five educational outcome indicators in this report are derived from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP is administered and compiled by the United States Department of Education and offers assessment data for state-by-state comparisons, including comparisons of rural school districts as a sub-group within states. The only non-NAEP indicator in this gauge is a measure of graduation rate among rural school districts in each state.

- **Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading** is intended to capture the change in reading performance among rural Grade 4 students from immediately pre-COVID (i.e., 2019) with the most recent available post-COVID performance (i.e., 2024), and was calculated by subtracting the 2019 average score from the 2024 average score. The greater the decrease over that five-year period, the more urgent the ranking.

A total of eight states experienced declines of greater than 10% in Grade 4 NAEP Reading performance among their rural students: Pennsylvania (-14.9%), Washington (-14.3%), Delaware (-14.1%), New York (-14.1%), Nebraska (-12.5%), Colorado (-10.7%), Oklahoma (-10.5%), and Maine (-10.2). These states show no discernible geographic pattern. At the other end of the spectrum, again with no clear geographic pattern, eight states showed improvement from pre-COVID to post-COVID: Louisiana (+9.3), Maryland (+6.5), Hawaii (+5.5), Florida (+4.2), Alabama (+2.5), Texas (+2.4), Arkansas (+2.0), and New Jersey (+1.5).

- **Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math** is a measure of the change in math performance among rural Grade 4 from immediately pre-COVID (i.e., 2019) with the most recent available post-COVID performance (i.e., 2024) and was calculated by subtracting the 2019 average score from the 2024 average score. The greater the decrease over that five-year period, the more urgent the ranking.

All but four of the 13 states with the largest declines for Grade 4 Reading are also in the most concerning quartile for Grade 4 Math, with Minnesota (-8.7), Kansas (-6.0), Connecticut (-4.7), and North Carolina (-4.4) joining the nine states that appear on both lists. A total of four states made gains of greater than five points (Alabama at +8.6, Louisiana at +6.5, Maryland at +6.1, and Texas at +5.2—of note, all four of these states made gains in both reading and math), and 13 other states also made gains ranging from +0.6 to +4.5 between 2019 to 2024.

- **Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading** represents the average score among rural school districts on the 2024 Grade 8 NAEP Reading test. The lower the average score, the more urgent the concern about reading performance and the higher the state ranks on the indicator.

States reporting the lowest rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading scores are located in the Southeast (Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, and Florida), the Southwest (Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas), the West (California and Nevada) and the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic (New York and Delaware). West Virginia doesn't fit into one of these regional patterns, and BIE schools are also in this category (with the lowest reported scores). States of least concern on this indicator (i.e., states with highest reported rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading performance) are located in the Northeast (New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Jersey); the Midwest (Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa) and the North Plains/Rockies (Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho).

- **Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math** represents the average score among rural school districts on the 2024 Grade 8 NAEP Math test. The lower the average score, the more urgent the concern about math performance and the higher the state ranks on the indicator.

All but four of the 13 states with the lowest rural Grade 8 Reading scores are also in the most concerning quartile for Grade 8 Math, with Hawaii, Washington, Oklahoma, and Arkansas joining the nine states that appear on both lists. States with the largest disparities in their reading versus math performance outcomes are New York (ranked 3rd highest priority for Reading and 26th highest priority for math), Nebraska (ranked 29th highest priority for Reading and 47th highest priority for math), South Dakota (ranked 15th highest priority for reading and 33rd highest priority for math), and Washington (ranked 25th highest priority for Reading and 7th highest priority for math).

- **Rural high school graduation rate** is the weighted average high school graduation rate in rural districts, calculated as the number of graduating seniors in rural school districts divided by the total number of students who started with the cohort four years earlier, adjusted for transfer students.

Historically, rural students graduate at higher rates than non-rural students, and this trend continues in the most recent data. Specifically, 89.4% of students in rural districts graduated, compared to 87.6% in non-rural districts. However, graduation rates are still concerningly low in some states. Two states graduate fewer than 8 in 10 rural high school students: Nevada at 76.8% and Alaska at 71.2%. Rates for rural students in BIE schools are even lower at 63.9%. In all, 24 other states report rural graduation rates below 90%. States in the highest priority quartile are located mostly in the West (in order starting with the lowest graduation rate: Alaska, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Idaho, and Washington); along with two Southeast states (Florida and South Carolina); Michigan; and South Dakota. States in the lowest priority quartile are located mostly in the Northeast (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey); the Great Lakes (Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Wisconsin); and the Mid-South (Arkansas, Missouri, and Kentucky). Texas, Nebraska, and Hawaii don't fit into any regional patterns.

Educational Outcomes Gauge Rankings

To calculate the educational outcomes for students attending rural districts in each state, we averaged each state's ranking on the five indicators, giving equal weight to each indicator (Table 6).

TABLE 6: EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES GAUGE RANKINGS

These rankings represent the average of each state's score on five indicators. The higher the average ranking (i.e., the closer to ranking number 1), the more important it is for policymakers to address rural educational issues within that state.

URGENT		CRITICAL		SERIOUS		FAIR	
BIE	3.2	SC	19.4	NE	27.0	LA	32.6
NM	4.8	WV	20.2	WY	27.0	OH	33.2
NV	7.3	SD	21.0	TN	27.2	NH	35.0
WA	9.4	MI	21.0	GA	27.4	WI	35.6
OR	11.8	KS	22.0	AL	27.4	MA	35.8
DE	12.0	MS	23.4	ND	28.4	IL	36.2
CA	13.0	FL	23.8	IA	28.4	CT	36.2
OK	13.0	ID	24.4	KY	28.8	MD	36.2
NY	13.6	CO	24.8	UT	29.6	RI	37.2
ME	14.8	PA	24.8	AR	30.0	NJ	42.2
AZ	17.2	HI	25.5	TX	30.2	AK	N/A
NC	17.8	MT	25.6	MO	31.0	VT	N/A
MN	18.6	VA	26.6	IN	32.4		

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth.

Rural schools in the BIE rank as the most urgent on this gauge. Half of the 12 states that received rankings in the quartile of most concern along with BIE form a contiguous block stretching from the Pacific Northwest through the Southwest (Washington, Oregon, Nevada, California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma). They are joined by four East Coast states (Maine, New York, Delaware, and North Carolina). States with the least concerning educational outcomes were concentrated in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic (New Jersey, Rhode Island, Maryland, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire), with two states in the Midwest (Nebraska and Missouri) and three in the Great Lakes (Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin). Louisiana is a geographic outlier that has not been in this group in previous reports. Louisiana was the 4th highest priority on the *Educational Outcomes* gauge in *Why Rural Matters 2023*, a dramatic shift.

As in previous versions of *Why Rural Matters*, children experiencing poverty continue to experience greater challenges on achievement testing. However, six of the ten states that received a Fair ranking, the ranking suggesting the lowest level of concern, on the

Educational Outcomes gauge also ranked Fair in the *Access to Supports for Well-Being* gauge: New Jersey, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, New Hampshire. Conversely, five states that ranked of most concern in the *Educational Outcomes* gauge also ranked of most concern in the *Access to Supports for Learning and Development* gauge: New Mexico, Nevada, California, Oklahoma, and Arizona. These patterns suggest the likelihood of a relationship between access to non-academic supports and academic outcomes, a link that has been long recognized by researchers and practitioners, and so these patterns make a compelling argument for focusing resources and opportunities on the general well-being of rural children.

Access to Supports for Well-Being Gauge

This gauge includes indicators measuring access to non-academic supports that contribute to students' learning and overall development and well-being.

- **Number of rural students per school psychologist or school counselor** is a measure of rural students' access to school-based mental health professionals. A higher number of rural students served by a single school psychologist or school counselor means a higher case load and less access. Thus, the larger the number, the higher the state ranks on the *Access to Supports for Well-Being* gauge and the more serious the concern for the policy environment.

On average, the ratio of rural students to school psychologists or school counselors in the United States is 297:1 (i.e., one school psychologist or school counselor for every 297 students in rural districts—a slight improvement from a ratio of 310:1 in *Why Rural Matters 2023*). States range from a high of 548:1 (Michigan) to a low of 133:1 (Maine). In addition to Michigan, four other states have ratios of 400:1 or higher: Nevada (468:1), Louisiana (452:1), Florida (432:1), and Minnesota (427:1). At the other end of the spectrum, six states join Maine with ratios of 200:1 or less: New Hampshire (137:1), Connecticut (159:1), Vermont (169:1), New York (177:1), Rhode Island (191:1), and New Jersey (194:1). While states providing the greatest access to school psychologists and school counselors are all clustered in the Northeast, states with the least access show no discernible regional patterns.

- **Percent rural children who are unhoused** is a newly added indicator for this report and represents the total number of students in rural districts who are officially categorized as unhoused, divided by the total number of students in rural districts for which sufficient data is available. Unhoused students not only contend with economic distress, but also profound instability and social/emotional distress. The rate of rural children who are officially counted as unhoused is a measure of the proportion of unhoused children facing these stressors. The higher the percentage of rural children who are unhoused, the higher the state ranks on this indicator.

Rural students attending BIE schools rank as the highest priority on this indicator at 14.7%, more than double the highest priority state (West Virginia at 7.3%). Along with West Virginia, four states—all located in the West—report that more than one in 20 of their rural children are unhoused: Nevada (7.0%), Montana (6.1%), Washington (5.4%), and California (5.3%). In order, from highest to lowest, other states in the highest priority quartile are Arkansas, Oregon, Oklahoma, Kentucky, New Mexico, Missouri, and Idaho. States reporting the lowest rates of unhoused rural children are located in the Northeast (Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Jersey, all at 1.2% or lower).

- **Percent of rural school-aged children** who are uninsured represents the total number of rural school-aged children who do not have health insurance, divided by the total number of rural school-aged children. In addition to medical care as a basic human need, lack of insurance is associated with lack of medical care and can have a dramatic impact on students' learning and development (e.g., lacking preventative care that can minimize time out of school for illnesses). The higher the state's percentage, the higher the state score on the indicator.

Across the United States, 6.4% of rural school-age children are uninsured; this is higher than the rate of school-age children who are uninsured across all locales (5.7%). Eight of the 12 states with the highest

rates of uninsured rural children are located west of the Mississippi: Texas (13.8%), Arizona (12.2%), Nevada (10.2%), Utah (9.8%), Oklahoma (9.7%), Idaho (9.2%), Alaska (8.7%), and South Dakota (8.6%). The exceptions are Florida (9.8%), Indiana (9.4%), Pennsylvania (9.7%), and Delaware (8.3%). States with the lowest rates of uninsured rural school-aged children (i.e., states where more rural school-aged children have health insurance) are located in the Northeast (Massachusetts, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Jersey, all at 2.0% or lower), followed by a group of states ranging 2.9% to 3.7% and showing no real regional pattern.

- **Percent rural children enrolled in public preschool** is a rough estimate of the proportion of preschool-age children enrolled in a public preschool. Access to high-quality early childhood education experiences with certified early childhood teachers is crucial to long-term development and academic success. A lower rate of rural children enrolled in public preschool suggests a lack of access to such experiences. The lower the state's percentage, the higher and more concerning the state score on the indicator.

The U.S. average for this indicator is 40.2% of rural children enrolled in public preschool, but the results for individual states vary dramatically—from slightly more than one in five (20.1%) students in Montana to more than 9 in 10 students in Rhode Island (92.0%). In addition to Oregon, nine other states with no clear geographic pattern report fewer than one in three rural children enrolled in public preschool: Nevada (23.9%), Idaho (26.1%), North Carolina (27.6%), New Hampshire (27.6%), North Dakota (28.1%), Delaware (28.6%), Virginia (30.9%), Maryland (32.2%), Mississippi (32.5%), Indiana (33.3%), Pennsylvania (33.8%), and California (33.9%). States ranking lower in priority on this indicator (i.e., states with higher rates of public preschool enrollment for rural children) are similarly varied in terms of geographic region: Nebraska (61.0%), Connecticut (67.8%), Illinois (56.6%), Iowa (54.1%), Minnesota (53.7%), Vermont (52.3%), South Dakota (52.3%), Oklahoma (52.2%), Massachusetts (51.5%), Colorado (50.4%), Kansas (49.8%), and Washington (49.0%).

- **Rural students per primary care clinician** is another newly added indicator for this report and represents the number of students in rural school districts in a county divided by the number of primary care clinicians. Primary care clinicians are estimated from the number of MD/DOs in family medicine and pediatrics primary care practice and 0.6 times the number of physician assistants and nurse practitioners (the reduced percentage accounts for ones who are not available for primary care). The state-level ratio is then weighted by how many of the state's rural district students attend school in each county. A higher ratio suggests less access and results in a higher priority ranking.

Across the United States, there is one primary care clinician for every 322 rural students. At the state level, the ratio ranges from a high of 457:1 (Missouri) to a low of 136:1 (Maine)—thus, rural students in Maine have 3.36 times greater access to a primary care clinician than do rural students in Missouri. Three other states join Missouri with ratios of 400:1 or greater: Texas (435:1), Georgia (416:1), and Louisiana (401:1). Rounding out the highest priority quartile are nine additional states with ratios above 340:1 and no clear geographic pattern: Virginia (398:1), Colorado (373:1), Alabama (372:1), Indiana (371:1), Maryland (360:1), Idaho (359:1), Utah (359:1), California (347:1), Oklahoma (341:1). States joining Maine with ratios of 200:1 or better are all on the East Coast and above the 37th parallel: New Hampshire (138:1), Vermont (163:1), Rhode Island (182:1), Massachusetts (186:1), and Delaware (188:1).

Access to Supports for Well-Being Rankings

To gauge access to learning and development supports for students attending rural districts in each state, we averaged each state's ranking on the five indicators, giving equal weight to each (Table 7).

TABLE 7: ACCESS TO SUPPORTS FOR WELL-BEING GAUGE RANKINGS

These rankings represent the average of each state's score on five indicators. The higher the average ranking (i.e., the closer to ranking number 1), the more important it is for policymakers to address rural educational issues within that state.

LEADING		MAJOR		SIGNIFICANT		NOTABLE	
NV	7.6	SC	20.8	PA	25.2	WY	31.8
ID	9.0	OH	21.0	AK	25.4	NH	33.6
FL	13.0	ND	21.0	AL	25.6	ME	34.8
TX	13.6	NC	21.2	SD	26.2	NY	35.0
IN	15.4	LA	21.4	DE	26.4	NJ	38.2
MO	15.8	MI	21.6	CO	26.6	NE	40.8
CA	16.4	AR	21.8	OR	26.8	VT	43.2
AZ	16.6	TN	22.2	WA	27.2	MA	45.0
OK	17.4	MD	22.4	WV	28.0	CT	47.5
UT	18.4	KY	22.8	KS	28.2	RI	47.6
NM	18.8	MS	23.4	MN	29.0	HI	N/A
MT	19.0	VA	24.0	IA	30.0	BIE	N/A
GA	19.2	IL	24.6	WI	30.4		

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth.

As measured by the five indicators used in this gauge, the majority of states where rural students have the least access to supports for well-being are clustered in a contiguous block of states West of the Mississippi (Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, Idaho, and Montana). Other states in the highest priority quartile are Indiana, Georgia, and Florida. There are no Northeastern states in the Urgent and Critical categories; those states are mostly ranked near the bottom in the Fair, least concerning, category.

The indicator that contributes most to the urgent ranking of the states in the most concerning quartile for this gauge is *percent of rural school-aged children who are uninsured* with 9 of 13 states in the most concerning quartile on this indicator. The 13 Urgent states vary most in their rankings on the *percent of rural school-aged children who are uninsured* and *rural students per primary care practitioner indicators*, ranging from number 1 Texas to number 42 California (with an average ranking of 22) on the first and from number 1 Missouri to number 42 Oklahoma on the latter.

See page 135 for a map showing regional patterns.

Rural Education Priority Rankings

To create priority rankings that reflect the overall status of rural education in each state, we averaged the cumulative rankings on the five gauges: *Rural Education Footprint, Student and Family Characteristics, Educational Policy Context, Educational Outcomes,* and *Access to Supports for Well-Being.* The rankings for the *Rural Education Priority* gauge are presented in Table 8.

TABLE 8: RURAL EDUCATION PRIORITY RANKINGS RANKINGS

Rankings represent the combined average ranking for each state on the five gauges: Rural Education Footprint, Student and Family Characteristics, Educational Policy Context, Educational Outcomes, and Access to Supports for Well-Being. The higher the average ranking (i.e., the closer to ranking number one), the greater the need for policymakers to address rural education issues within that state.

LEADING		MAJOR		SIGNIFICANT		NOTABLE	
OK	9.0	TX	21.2	OR	25.0	WY	30.6
AZ	12.2	WV	21.4	KS	25.2	NE	31.2
MS	14.4	CA	21.6	TN	25.4	NY	32.8
FL	15.0	ME	21.8	AL	25.4	NH	34.4
ID	15.4	KY	21.8	PA	27.2	VT	37.3
NM	16.2	IN	22.0	IL	27.4	MD	38.0
MO	16.6	NV	22.2	WA	27.8	NJ	40.4
SC	17.2	VA	22.8	IA	28.2	CT	42.2
SD	17.6	ND	23.6	MN	29.0	MA	42.2
MT	18.0	AK	23.8	UT	29.0	RI	43.0
AR	18.8	MI	24.6	WI	29.2	HI	N/A
GA	19.8	LA	24.8	OH	29.4	BIE	N/A
NC	20.2	CO	25.0	DE	29.6		

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth.

In contrast with previous reports, the list of states ranking as the highest priority in the *Leading* quartile shows noteworthy changes since the 2023 report. Six states (Florida, Idaho, New Mexico, South Dakota, Montana, and Georgia) are new additions to the *Leading* quartile since the previous report, replacing West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, Louisiana, Oregon, and Alabama. All six of the states moving into the highest priority quartile were in the 2nd highest priority quartile, *Major*, in 2023, and three (Florida, South Dakota, and Georgia) were previously in the highest priority quartile in 2019. Of the six states dropping out of the *Leading* quartile, four (West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, and Louisiana) moved to the *Major* quartile and the remaining two (Oregon and Alabama) moved to the 3rd highest *Significant* quartile.

States showing the biggest jumps in priority ranking since *Why Rural Matters 2023* are Idaho (from 23rd to 5th, moving from the third quartile, *Significant*, to the *Major* quartile) and California (from 34th to 16th, moving from the second quartile *Major* to the *Leading* quartile). In the other direction, Alabama (from 2nd to 29th), Louisiana (from 6th to 25th), and Oregon (from 13th to 26th) showed the biggest decreases in priority/level concern. For both Alabama and Louisiana,

the underlying gauge most closely associated with the change in the overall ranking was *Educational Outcomes* (with Alabama moving 4th to 40th highest priority and Louisiana moving from 7th to 30th). As a reminder, this series of reports is not designed to be a longitudinal scoreboard where an increase in priority means that something bad must have happened in the rural areas of that state over the past several years, and vice versa. It simply means that the rural areas of that state have more pressing concerns related to the indicators measured in this current report.

Ten of the 13 states in the *Leading* quartile for overall rural education priority are located in a nearly contiguous block extending from the Atlantic Coast across the Southeast to the Mid-South and Southwest (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona). Alabama and Louisiana, both of which moved out of the top quartile to the 3rd and 2nd quartiles are notable exceptions from this regional pattern. The other states making up the *Leading* quartile are located in a smaller block in the Northern Plains/Rocky Mountains: South Dakota, Montana, and Idaho.

None of the highest-ranking states on the *Rural Education Priority* gauge rank in the most concerning quartile on all five underlying gauges. The two highest-ranking states (Oklahoma and Arizona) each rank in the most concerning quartile on four of the five underlying gauges. Four more (Mississippi, Florida, New Mexico, and Missouri) rank in the most concerning quartile on three gauges. Six (Idaho, South Carolina, South Dakota, Montana, Georgia, and North Carolina) rank in the most concerning quartile on two gauges, and the remaining high-priority state (Arkansas) ranks in the most concerning quartile on only one gauge. Rankings on the *Student and Family Characteristics* gauge most closely parallel the rankings on the *Rural Education Priority* gauge, with 10 of the states in the *Leading* quartile on the *Rural Education Priority* gauge also placing in the most concerning quartile on *Student and Family Characteristics*. Eight of the *Leading* quartile states on the *Rural Education Priority* gauge placed in the most concerning quartile on the *Access to Supports for Well-Being* gauge; six placed in the most concerning quartile on the *Access to Educational Policy* gauge; five placed in the most concerning quartile on the *Rural Education Footprint* gauge; and four placed in the most concerning on the *Educational Outcomes* gauge.

In the *Notable* (lowest priority) quartile on the *Rural Education Policy Priority* gauge, no state ranked in the least concerning quartile on all five of the underlying gauges, and only four states (Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Jersey) ranked in the least concerning quartile on four of the five underlying gauges—for all four states, the *Educational Policy* gauge was the single gauge ranking for which they were not in the lowest priority quartile. A total of 36 states plus the group of BIE schools ranked in the highest-priority quartile on at least one of the five gauges. Clearly, every state has rural education issues that need to be addressed. The *Access to Supports for Well-Being* gauge most closely parallels *Notable* rankings on the *Rural Education Priority* gauge. Ten of 13 states ranking in the *Notable* quartile on the *Rural Education Priority* gauge also ranked in the least concerning quartile on the *Access to Supports for Well-Being* gauge. The takeaway from this finding is unmistakable: states that have the greatest need for attention from policymakers to address rural student and family needs—based upon the five gauges that, collectively, represent both demographic givens and contexts created and maintained through policy decisions—serve a student population with less access to non-academic supports that contribute to academic success and overall well-being than lower priority states. These states (and others) must look more broadly at education issues and marshal policy and practice to address equity issues beyond traditional schooling factors.

States that have the greatest need for attention from policymakers to address rural student and family needs serve student populations with less access to non-academic supports that contribute to academic success and overall well-being.

As in past reports, there were a few cases where states ranked very high or very low on one gauge but consistently the opposite on other gauges. Two examples: Nevada ranked 43rd on *Rural Education Footprint* but 3rd on *Educational Outcomes* and 1st on *Access to Supports for Well-Being*. Vermont, on the other hand, ranked 8th on the *Rural Education Footprint* gauge but 48th on *Educational Policy Context* and 46th on *Access to Supports for Well-Being*. So, in Nevada, rural students represent only a small proportion of the total public-school enrollment in the state, offer limited access to learning and development supports, and produce lower academic outcomes than most other states. In Vermont, rural students represent a majority of the total public-school enrollment, attend schools operating in a relatively favorable policy context, and have greater access to non-academic supports.

Conclusions and Implications

Over 7.8 million students are enrolled in rural school districts, 16.7% of all public-school students in the United States. Roughly one in seven of those rural students live in households experiencing poverty, and many have limited access to school psychologists or school counselors in their schools or primary care clinicians in their communities.

The results published in this report should communicate clearly to policymakers that they cannot dismiss or ignore the challenges experienced by rural schools and the students they serve, nor disregard what those challenges mean to state and United States-wide goals of improving achievement and increasing access to opportunities and supports for all students, especially those impacted by educational and spatial inequities. Viewed in the context of the full series of *Why Rural Matters* reports dating to 2000, the urgency of this message is even more pronounced.

Rural education tends to be less visible in many states where education policy is dominated by a focus on highly visible metropolitan problems. More than half of all rural students live in just 12 states, including states with large urban populations and high-profile urban school districts that claim the attention of the public and their elected officials (e.g., Texas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Virginia, Michigan). More than 2.5 million rural students attend school in a state where they constitute less than 20% of the public-school enrollment.

The Bottom Line

As reflected in this and the larger series of *Why Rural Matters* reports, challenges to rural schools and communities persist due to a host of issues related to educational and spatial inequities. As the *Access to Supports for Well-Being* gauge indicates, these challenges are compounded by a lack of access to resources and infrastructure that are integral to enhancing student well-being and ensuring that all children are well positioned to learn, grow, and develop. As we continue with post-pandemic recovery and address the longer-term effects of its impact, policymakers, practitioners, and community members must collaborate to define and act on what it means to provide a public education that meets the needs of students and families and prepares students for life beyond PK–12 schooling, including college and career readiness as well as engaged citizenship. These challenges and their regional patterns recur throughout the series of reports, despite changes in the specific indicators are present everywhere and especially intense in some regions (e.g., the Southeast, Southwest, and parts of Appalachia). As we have stated before, we know what the challenges are, and we know where they are felt most intensely; what is needed is the will to address them.

Topical Essays

Updates to the Definition of Rural

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This topical essay examines how the locale codes of schools and districts in the United States have been redefined by the United States Census Bureau as well as the implications of those changes for data included in this report. In particular, we note here (1) how changes have influenced the number and percent of rural districts, schools, and students; and (2) the characteristics of the districts, schools, and students that are newly designated as rural.

Changes to the definition of rural

Every 10 years, the United States conducts a constitutionally-mandated Census. Part of this process is a reevaluation of the criteria for an area to be considered urban, and changes to these criteria directly affect which areas are rural (for Census purposes, "rural" is anything that is not urban). After the 2020 Census, three main adjustments were made to the definition of urban :

- The minimum population needed to qualify as urban was raised from 2,500 to 5,000 people, with an additional possibility of meeting this threshold with 2,000 housing units.
- Density for determining urban areas is now based on housing units rather than population.
- The previous distinction between urbanized areas and urban clusters was removed.

An example of a district previously classified as rural, now as town.

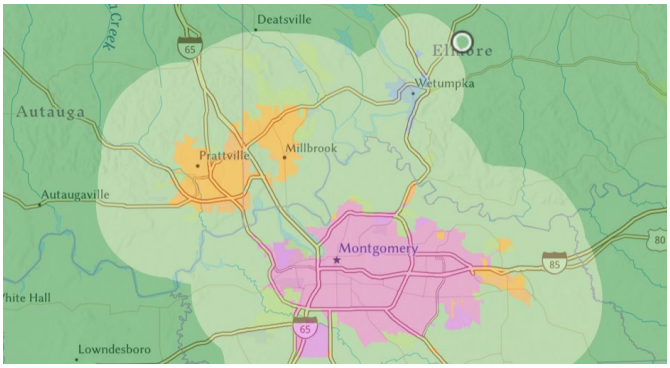
Menomonie Area School District, Wisconsin.
Menomonie is a town of about 16,000, located in the west central region of Wisconsin, about 60 miles due east of St. Paul, Minnesota. As of SY 2020-21, the Menomonie Area School District had eight schools, three of which were designated as town-distant, three as rural-fringe, and two as rural-distant. By SY 2023-24, the town boundary of Menomonie had grown to include Menomonie High School (see Figure 1). This reclassified Menomonie High from rural-fringe to town-distant, which was enough to shift the plurality of the district from rural to town, although the locale classification of the other seven schools in the district remained unchanged.

Figure 1. Locale classification of Menomonie High School in SY 2020-21 (top) and SY 2023-24 (bottom). Green represents rural, blue represents town. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/maped/LocaleLookup/

An example of a district previously classified as suburban, now as rural.

Elmore County, Alabama. In SY 2020-21, Elmore County was classified as suburban-fringe due to a plurality of their students attending school in a suburban-fringe location. Of the 16 schools in Elmore County District, 11 had the same locale classification in SY 2023-24 as they did three years prior. However, due to overcrowding at Wetumpka Middle School (in town-fringe), the district opened a new school in Fall 2022—Redland Middle School—which was located in a rural-distant area. Holtville Elementary, Holtville Middle, and Holtville High all shifted from rural-fringe to rural-distant. Coosada Elementary School, previously classified as suburban-fringe due to its proximity to Millbrook, AL was reclassified as rural-fringe when the updated Census definitions came into effect. Because of these combined factors, the plurality of the 11,820 students in Elmore County now attend school in a rural-distant location. See **Figure 2.**

Figure 2. Elmore county locales for SY 2023-24. Color ramp: green is rural, blue is town, orange is suburb, purple is urban. nces.ed.gov/programs/maped/LocaleLookup/



How do these changes impact the data on rural students?

Rather than just looking at rural vs. non-rural, we can get a more complete picture by looking at the changes between the four main locales: city, suburban, town, and rural. Table 9 breaks down the 13,401 public PK–12 districts by current locale (SY 2023-24) and the locale in which they were classified in *Why Rural Matters 2023.*

TABLE 9. CHANGES IN NUMBER OF DISTRICTS BY LOCALE FROM 2020-21 TO 2023-24

		City	Suburban	Town	Rural	Total
2020-21 Locale (# Students)	**City**	784	25	7	3	819
	Suburban	44	2,742	132	140	3,058
	Town	10	21	1,552	800	2,383
	Rural	8	104	225	6,783	7,120
		848	**2,893**	**1,918**	**7,742**	**13,401**

Cells highlighted in orange show the districts that were previously classified as rural but are now classified as a different locale (337 in all). The states with the most districts no longer classified as rural were Texas (33), Ohio (31), Michigan (21), and New York (19). Cells highlighted in pink show districts that are newly classified as rural as of this report (943 in all). States with the most districts becoming rural were TX (90), IL (66), CA (56), OH (51), OK (43), MI (40), and PA (38). In terms of percent, states where new rural districts make up the largest portion of all districts are Mississippi (17.4%), Louisiana (14.5%), Vermont (12.6%), and Utah (12.2%). The imbalance of 337 districts changed from rural to a different locale and 943 districts changed to rural is the biggest reason for the increase in over half of a million students in rural districts.

At the school level, there were also more schools that were newly classified as rural (3,875 schools) than those that are no longer rural (2,602 schools), although the shift was not quite as substantial as at the district level. School locale shifts are shown in Table 10.

TABLE 10: CHANGES IN NUMBER OF SCHOOLS BY LOCALE FROM 2020-21 TO 2023-24

		City	Suburban	Town	Rural	Total
2020-21 Locale (# Students)	City	21,594	295	54	136	22,079
	Suburban	679	25,577	785	855	27,896
	Town	118	149	8,201	2,884	11,352
	Rural	388	1,160	1,054	22,791	25,393
		22,779	**27,181**	**10,094**	**26,666**	**86,720**

Finally, we can also zoom in to the student level. Table 11 shows the number of students in each major locale in SY 2023-24 as well as the respective numbers for the same districts as reported in *Why Rural Matters 2023*. These numbers paint a much richer picture than the simple statistic that there are now 500,000 more students in rural districts. The reality is that there are actually about 1.6 million newly-classified rural students and 1.1 million students who were formerly classified as rural but no longer are.

TABLE 11. CHANGES IN NUMBER OF STUDENTS BY DISTRICT FROM 2020-21 TO 2023-24

		City	Suburban	Town	Rural	Total
2020-21 Locale (# Students)	**City**	13,636,537	238,244	23,881	32,223	13,930,885
	Suburban	641,219	18,509,136	462,368	453,148	20,065,871
	Town	63,336	102,546	3,930,242	1,113,101	5,209,225
	Rural	92,601	511,689	581,994	6,199,175	7,385,459
		14,433,693	**19,361,615**	**4,998,485**	**7,797,647**	**46,591,440**

Final Words

As this section shows, a large number of districts now have a new locale classification. While this may not change their identity or day-to-day experiences, the changes may have implications for funding qualifications, reporting measures, and research that rely on these classifications.

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Understanding the American Indian Education Landscape in the United States

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As *Why Rural Matters 2025* notes, 90% of the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools are in rural areas. For comparison, no U.S. state has even 80% of their schools in rural areas (Montana is closest, at 77%). Thus, a discussion about students from Native Nations in this rural education policy report is long overdue. In recent years the field of rural education has started making a concerted effort to acknowledge and address the overlapping and shared interests with the field of Indigenous education. This effort stems from the rising visibility and acknowledgement that historic policies of forced removal and relocations have created a geographic context in which Native Nations and their citizens are often attending schools in rural communities. With more attention on these shared rural characteristics, there is a corresponding need to deepen our collective understanding of the unique characteristics of systems of education specific to Indian Country. Specifically, it is helpful to understand the unique political status of Native Nations (i.e. tribal sovereignty, federal trust responsibility, etc.), and how this unfolds across systems. Here, I offer a primer for understanding systems of education found across Indian Country to help educators and policymakers who work with rural Native communities and Nations improve our learning environments for the benefit of all.

Generally speaking, through the treaty making process the United States of America has acknowledged the unique sovereign status of 574 federally recognized Native Nations, which in turn means that their citizens are part of a political class—not simply a race or ethnicity. Yet, simultaneously these tribal citizens are also citizens of their states and the United States. However, our educational systems at all levels have historically done little to prepare people with the foundational knowledge to understand what this means. In turn, this means that most of our teachers, educational leaders, and policymakers are often

ill-prepared to understand the complexities of what many call "Indian Education"—whether it's in rural contexts, or not.

First, while the term "education" often elicits brick and mortar schools full of classrooms with desks, projectors, and white boards, Native Nations had systems of learning to prepare their people for life in their communities long before Europeans showed up in what is now called the Americas. These systems have endured in and continue to evolve in many ways, but they are often referred to as "traditions" or "ceremonies" and often problematically considered to be "informal" education. These traditions and ceremonies are quite formal, and while historic policies were focused on assimilation and cultural erasure (e.g. boarding schools mandating English and forbidding Native languages or cultural practices), these systems of teaching and learning through traditions and ceremonies endured outside of these new Eurocentric systems. In other words, while stereotypes tend to emphasize Indigenous peoples as only people of the past, and not of the present, Native Nations continue to endure, and many cases, thrive.

Resources

- Native American Boarding School Coalition
  boardingschoolhealing.org/education/us-indian-boarding-school-history
- National Congress of the American Indians
  archive.ncai.org/about-tribes
- National Indian Education Association
  niea.org/native-education-101-1

Second, unique educational systems exist for Native Nations and their citizens because promises were made through the treaty making process, and those governmental contracts still endure. Specifically, the United States was forcibly taking the lands of Native Nations to make way for expansion for new states, and these same lands are taxed to feed U.S. systems of education. Yet, in those negotiations promises were made by the U.S. Government to provide educational services (among other things). Through a complicated legal history, this is often referred to as the *federal trust responsibility.*

The most well-known affiliated system stemming from these treaty and trust obligations is the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) in the U.S. Department of the Interior. This is a modern continuation of the old boarding school system that was focused on assimilation and cultural erasure, albeit, repurposed with a vision and mission focused on culturally relevant education. As they describe on their website:

> *Currently, there are 183 Bureau-funded elementary and secondary schools on 64 reservations in 23 states, serving approximately 40,000 Indian students. Of these, 55 are BIE-operated and 128 are tribally controlled under BIE contracts or grants. The Bureau also funds or operates off-reservation boarding schools and peripheral dormitories near reservations for public school students. The BIE also serves American Indian and Alaska Native post-secondary students through higher education scholarships and support funding for tribal colleges and universities. The BIE directly operates two post-secondary institutions: the Haskell Indian Nations University in Lawrence, Kansas, and the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico. (Para. 4)*

However, while the more well-known histories are about treaty making and removal (to rural locations), what is less understood is that in the 1950s and 60s the United States Government created policies and programs aimed at termination of tribal sovereignty, with an emphasis on urban relocation programs. During this era, the focus was on moving citizens of Native Nations away from rural reservations and blending them into the urban workforce. This resulted in a significant

demographic shift which is apparent in today's school enrollment statistics: Approximately 7% of American Indian/Alaska Native students attend BIE schools, while the other 93% attend state-run public schools. In other words, *most* of the 574 federally recognized Native Nations in the United States do not have a close affiliation with a BIE school in their community. The result is, while the BIE is a heavy direct influence on education of Indian Country with wide reach, the ongoing movements and migrations of Native peoples and families create a much more complex and dynamic set of systems, spanning diverse geographies and place-based contexts.

Sometimes American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students are attending a rural BIE school run by their Nation through 638 contracts, and sometimes a rural "border town" just off the reservation is run by the state but has 25-50% AI/AN enrollments. In other contexts, large intertribal urban Indian communities have formed over generations with individuals that move between all of the above communities for cultural sustenance (e.g., urban Indian centers formed in Minneapolis, Chicago, Phoenix, etc.). Regardless, those treaty and trust obligations remain. So, in order for the federal government to fulfill these obligations, the United States Government created unique programs that were more flexible to operate beyond simply BIE contexts.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that local school districts consult with tribal authorities across many Title programs. Most known is Title VI, Indian Education, which are formula grants for local education agencies (LEA)s that have at least 10 American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students. These programs are administered by the Office of Indian Education in the United States Department of Education (not the BIE in the DOI) and are most often funneled through LEAs. However, Indian Education consultation policies stretch beyond Title VI in ways that are often overlooked or misunderstood, particularly for districts that meet unique qualifications (see ESEA sections 1111 and 8538).

As an example, The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction does a good job of explaining how "ESSA Tribal Consultation is required by all districts receiving Title VI Indian Education Grant Awards of more than $40,000 and/or that have Native American student population of over 50% (ESEA section 1111(a)(1)(A)). Tribal consultation is required for all Title programs covered by ESSA, not solely Title VI – Indian Education." They then list the other title programs relevant to tribal consultation found in ESSA:

- Title I, Part A (Improving Basic Programs Operated by State and Local Education Agencies)
- Title I, Part C (Education of Migratory Children)
- Title I, Part D (Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth who are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk)
- Title II, Part A (Supporting Effective Instruction)
- Title III, Part A (English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act)
- Title IV, Part A (Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) Grants)
- Title IV, Part B (21st Century Community Learning Centers [21st CCLC])
- Title V, Part B, Subpart 2 (Rural and Low-Income School Program)
- Title VI, Part A, Subpart 1 (Indian Education Formula Grants to LEAs)

Additionally, Michigan Department of Education's Indigenous Education Initiative created a Tribal Consultation Guidebook, in which they also reference Title VII (Impact Aid), and Title VIII (Affected LEAs).

Furthermore, the Office of Indian Education makes it clear on their program page that the intention of these formula funds are to "Supplement-Not-Supplant". They describe:

ESEA Section 6114(c)(1) requires a grantee to use these grant funds only to supplement the funds that, in the absence of these Federal funds, such agency would make available for services described in this application, and not to supplant such funds.

Resources

- Michigan's Indigenous Education Initiative Tribal Consultation Guidebook Indigenous-education-initiative.paperturn-view.com/mde-Indigenous-education-initiative-tribal-consultation-guide-book?pid=MzU358621&p=19&v=6.4
- Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Tribal Consultation Page ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/access-opportunity-education/native-education/tribal-consultation

This unique trust relationship and political status is also why the National Indian Education Study (NIES) exists, issuing a report every 2-4 years based on research in 15 states with high AI/AN concentrations (contingent upon funding). In recent years they also have issued an important "Setting the Context" document to address oversimplified interpretations of the data. This study is also closely associated with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), but in addition to Grade 4 and Grade 8 NAEP statistics for AI/AN students, the NIES also collects survey data from the students, teachers, and school administrators to gain more context around the typical Grade 4 and Grade 8 academic performance indicators. A quick keyword search for "rural" in the latest NIES report would also reveal the high proportionality of AI/AN students in rural contexts. Additionally, while there is a PDF report issued, the Data Explorer can isolate AI/AN student statistics to see specific results related to survey responses, including BIE schools, low-density (under 25% AI/AN enrollments), and high-density (over 25% AI/AN enrollments). Overall, these overlapping programs that move between tribal, federal, state, and local agencies represent a complex network of programming that can vary widely depending on the local geographies and capacities.

But third, these systems create some confusing issues surrounding data and data infrastructures. With the rapidly evolving *data sovereignty* movement across Indian Country, there are increasing demands for Native Nations being involved in the data collection and infrastructures as they pertain to their own citizens. A deep conversation about this movement is beyond the scope of this essay, but in short, the history of data collection and research about AI/AN students has mostly been built around the priorities of the state and federal governments—not those of Native Nations. But with the variety of programming mentioned above, which has also invoked the involvement of student information systems (SIS) vendors, there are some frustrating inaccuracies related to AI/AN students' data. Specifically, issues have been found with 1) the varied definitions of AI/AN across the many programs intended to deliver education to Native students and communities (i.e. Title VI, BIE, Office of Management and Budget/Census, and Native Nations all have varied definitions of citizenship and what it means to be AI/AN); 2) there is a massive undercount of AI/AN students when considering students who are multi-racial and/or Hispanic (upwards of 70% across the United States are not typically reported); and 3) since tribal affiliation is not required in most states, most LEAs cannot readily tell local Native Nations who of their kids they have an how they are doing. Some states such as Oklahoma have recently started mandating collection of tribal affiliations, and the OMB has recently held listening sessions on this topic, creating a ripple effect of evolving conversations amongst other states and SIS vendors – but these are relatively new developments. Furthermore, this is leading to

innovations around state-tribal or tribal-LEA data sharing agreements, so that state and local entities can have a more productive relationship with their local Native Nations.

Resources

- National Indian Education Study 2019
  nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/studies/pdf/2021018.pdf
- Indigenous Education State Leaders Network Indigenous Students Count Project
  air.org/Indigenous-students-count
- WestED Tribal Data Collection and Governance Principles of Practice and Partnerships
  wested.org/resource/tribal-data-collection-and-governance-principles-of-practice-and-partnerships
- CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance
  gida-global.org/care
- University of Arizona Native Nations Institute and Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance
  nni.arizona.edu/our-work/research-policy-analysis/Indigenous-data-sovereignty-governance

In conclusion, the shared synergy developing across rural and Indigenous education is a welcome conversation and holds vast potential. As we move forward and grow new and exciting relationships across these ecosystems of professionals, it's clear that there is also a parallel need to take time to engage in the technical complexity of these systems where they overlap, so we can all more efficiently and appropriately do the good work needed to improve these systems for the benefit of all.

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Rural Schools of Choice: Virtual Charter Schools[4]

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Nearly every U.S. child experienced remote schooling during the 2020-2021 school year. This unprecedented shift in instructional delivery amplified existing spatial inequities such as food insecurity and broadband access in rural schools and communities. Schools tried their "COVID best"[xxiii] to meet children's instructional, social, and emotional needs online, while also combating food insecurity and other basic human needs. While COVID stressors were experienced across rural, suburban, and metropolitan communities, common characteristics of rural schools and communities made rural places particularly vulnerable to its negative impacts. [xxiv, xv]

Compounding existing pre-COVID and COVID-associated budgetary pressures, rural schools now report dramatic increases in cyber [xvi] charter school enrollment. The prevalence of cyber charters in rural communities, and their outsized fiscal impact on rural schools demonstrates the ways that policy does not manifest neutrally across space. The United States Department of Education defines charter schools as the following:

> A charter school is a public school that operates as a school of choice. Charter schools commit to obtaining specific educational objectives in return for a charter to operate a school. Charter schools are exempt from significant state or local regulations related to operation and management but otherwise adhere to regulations of public schools—for example, charter schools cannot charge tuition or be affiliated with a religious institution.

Charter schools operate in a variety of modalities, including as full virtual, face virtual (virtual with some face-to-face options), supplemental virtual (face-to-face with some virtual options), or not virtual. With only a small handful of exceptions, a virtual or cyber charter school is one that falls within either the full virtual or face virtual category. In the 2023-2024 school year, there were 444,628 students attending a virtual charter school. Over 50% (54.6%) of these students were enrolled in a virtual charter school in California, Ohio, Oklahoma, or Pennsylvania—all of which are top 20 states for absolute numbers of rural students. According to NCES Common Core of Data, compared to 2019-2020, an additional 175,260 students in all locales across the United States enrolled in virtual charter schools in the 2020-2021 school year. In Pennsylvania, cyber charter school enrollments increased by nearly 60% over the same year (Pennsylvania Office of the Auditor General, 2025, p. 3). According to the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, the increase in enrollment in the state's community school e-schools was 50%. Other states with significant COVID-associated charter enrollment increases include Arizona, Michigan, South Carolina, Georgia, Colorado, Indiana, and Florida. These seven states are notable for COVID-associated charter enrollment increases, but also because rural per pupil spending in these seven states ranks in the lowest half of all states in the 2025 *Why Rural Matters* report, with rural per pupil spending in Arizona, Florida, and Indiana in the bottom 10.

Rural districts are particularly vulnerable to charter-associated costs, especially in states where charter tuition is paid directly by school districts. But the extent to which state policy mitigates the impact of charter tuition stressors varies widely. For rural districts, dollars paid to charter schools are typically paid to virtual charters. For example, in 2019-2020, rural Pennsylvania districts paid 90% of charter tuition to cyber charters.

States With No Virtual Charter Schools as of 2023-2024

Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Nebraska, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wyoming

Source: United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2023–24.

Particularly in states with funding formulas favorable to charter schools, cyber-associated costs can threaten the ability of traditional rural schools to provide programming for their students and, in some cases, threaten the viability of rural districts. There is ample evidence that cyber charters are a poor return on investment. A 2025 audit of five cyber charter schools in Pennsylvania (the state with the 5th most rural students in the United States) found: "uncommon expenditures…that included spending related to staff bonuses, gift cards, vehicle payments, and fuel stipends." [xxviii] According to the United States Government Accountability Office, 31% of virtual charter schools do not require students to interact with a teacher in live-time, with programming that is fully self-paced and asynchronous. Face-to-face options including traditional schools and brick-and-mortar charter schools uniformly and persistently outperform cyber charters.

TABLE 12: PROFICIENCY RATES IN MATH AND READING 2018-2019

	Math Proficiency	Reading Proficiency
Traditional schools	46%	50%
Brick-and-mortar charters	39%	46%
Virtual charter schools	21%	41%

Source: GAO analysis of the Department of Education's EDFacts data. | GAO-22-104444

To receive a charter from an authorizing body, most commonly a local school district, university, state, or independent charter board, a charter school whether brick and mortar or cyber must identify a specific programmatic focus such as language learning, STEM, or the arts. The approved charter is essentially a performance contract between the charter school and the authorizer, [xxx, xxxi] but the likelihood and process of charter revocation varies widely among states. Cybers are publicly funded but exempt from some regulations. For example, according to the Education Commission of the States, in Wisconsin "Charter schools are exempt from most state education laws, regulations and policies unless explicitly provided." [xxxii] A common example of an exempted regulation is the internal appointment of charter school board members. No state requires charter school board public elections. Like all public schools, charter schools are required to serve children who receive special education services and supports. Likewise, every charter school has to administer state achievement tests.

Although most states require that charter schools be run by a non-profit such as a citizens group or university, this often does not preclude the option of the non-profit contracting with a for-profit management company to run the school. For-profit management companies are typically responsible for day-to-day operations, paid with public money funneled through the non-profit group. According to the United States Government Accountability Office, "virtual schools may pose increased financial risks due to challenges measuring attendance and—for charter schools, specifically—contracts with management organizations." [xxxiii] Some state laws, like Oregon explicitly allow for-profit management organizations. The Education Commission of the States describes the non-profit status of charter schools in Oregon as the following:

> *An applicant to operate a charter school must be a nonprofit organization and have applied to qualify as a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization. Charter schools, including virtual charter schools, are permitted to contract with for-profit entities to provide services or facilities.* [xxxiv, xxxv]

In contrast, the Education Commission for the States reports that Pennsylvania law [xxxvi] requires that "Charter schools may not be operated by for-profit entities." However, this does not preclude the potential for subcontracts. In cases where a charter contracts with a for-profit education management organization, as 42% of U.S. virtual charter schools do, [xxxvii] not only does public money flow to a private entity, but financial data is less accessible.

Charter law varies significantly from state to state. In some states, charter schools may not be required to spend special education-allotted tuition on the provision of special education. [xxxviii] Charters may not have to hold open school board meetings or may not be required to meet the same reporting requirements as traditional public schools. State laws also require different levels of transparency regarding expenditures, contracts, administrator salaries, and general fund balances. For example, a 2023 audit by the Pennsylvania Office of the Auditor General shows

that the five Pennsylvania cyber charter schools studied carried a combined general fund balance of $619 million, a figure described as "excessive for public school entities" in the report. [xxxix] There are 14 virtual charter schools in the state.

Indiana, ranked 19th in overall priority in *Why Rural Matters 2025*, was ranked as the most charter-friendly state by the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools in 2020. Indiana offers multiple charter authorizing bodies, high levels of state funding, and no caps on charter school growth. The same organization rates Iowa, Wyoming, Alaska, Kansas and Maryland as the least hospitable states for charters due to caps on growth, charter oversight, and state funding models. As of June 2025, only three states (Nebraska, South Dakota and Vermont) don't have charter school law: there are no charter schools, brick and mortar or virtual, in these three states. North Dakota is the most recent adopter with in-person only charter schools legalized as of Aug. 1, 2025, 33 years after Minnesota established the first charter in 1992.

States with the heaviest charter enrollment footprints as a total share of all public school students in the 2023-2024 school year can be seen in Table 13 for all locales and all charter school types. Washington DC (45.0%) and Arizona (20.7%) have the highest share, while several states have less than 1% of their students enrolled in a charter school: Alabama, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia. Across the United States, 8.0% of students attending a public school in 2023-2024 were enrolled in a charter school, up from 7.5% in 2021-2022. While the increase from 2021-2022 to 2023-2024 is relatively small, only 1.0% of students attended a charter school in 2000-2001. Over 3.8 million students attended a charter school in 2023-2024, compared to less than 450,000 students from 2000-2001—an increase of over 3.3 million students. However, charter funding policies vary widely across states and a percentage share of enrollment may not correlate with the fiscal impact in a particular state, particularly for rural schools.

TABLE 13: HIGHEST CHARTER SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL FALL ENROLLMENT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS ALL CHARTER SCHOOL TYPES, 2023-2024

State, all locales	% of total public school share
DC	45.0%
AZ	20.7%
CO	14.9%
NV	14.8%
FL	13.8%
LA	13.8%
DE	13.0%
CA	12.2%
UT	11.6%
MI	11.0%

Source: United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2023–24.

Funding formulas vary widely across states. Cyber charter schools in South Carolina, for example, are funded through the South Carolina Public Charter School District and a standard per pupil allotment is significantly less than both brick-and-mortar charters and traditional schools in the state. Thus, state monies do not pass through traditional school districts en route to cyber charters. While virtual school budgets in

South Carolina are not tied directly to traditional school district budgets, cyber schools still reduce the total share of public funds available to traditional schools. Even though funds don't pass through traditional districts, charters still receive a share of state dollars even though achievement and graduation rates lag behind both brick-and-mortar charters and traditional schools.[xl]

South Carolina's state-centric formula contrasts with policy in states like Pennsylvania. In Pennsylvania, cyber tuition is based on the per-pupil spending of each student's home district. As a consequence, every charter school receives significantly different tuition payments for its students depending on the per-pupil spending rate of their home district. For example, according to a performance audit by the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General, for a student without an IEP, tuition ranges from $6,975 per student up to $25,150. For students receiving special education services and supports, tuition varies from $18,329 to $60,166 regardless of the special education services required. [xli] This means cyber schools receive significantly more tuition from some districts than others for the same services, and in the case of special education, the cyber charter school receives the same special education tuition rate regardless of actual spending on special education. While charter tuition is partially funded via state per-pupil allocations, traditional school districts are required to make up the difference, which is a highly significant expenditure for many rural school districts in the state. Further, there is no difference in charter reimbursement rates for a brick-and-mortar traditional school and a cyber charter school. Cyber tuition is based on brick-and-mortar per-pupil spending even though cyber charters have vastly different expenses, such as facilities and transportation, than a traditional school.

As of Aug. 1, 2025, 34 states have authorized virtual charter schools. While charter schools are defined by the U.S. Department of Education as "a school of choice," cyber charters tend to be the only charter option in rural communities. Brick-and-mortar charter schools are far less common in rural communities than in suburban and metropolitan, but they exist. Pennsylvania, for example, has seven. Although KIPP Delta is an important exception, for-profit charter management organizations have demonstrated little interest in establishing brick-and-mortar schools in rural communities. Given per-pupil funding formulas, low population densities common to rural communities challenges the profitability of rural brick-and-mortar charter schools. As of the 2023-2024 school year, there were 7,722 brick and mortar charter schools. Of these, only 10.5% were rural. Rural charter participation is strongly associated with state-wide virtual cyber charter schools.

TABLE 14: HIGHEST CHARTER SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL FALL ENROLLMENT IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS ALL CHARTER SCHOOL TYPES, 2023-2024

Rural Locale	% of total public school share	Rural Percent of all Charters by Locale
Rural Fringe	500 schools	6.1 %
Rural Distant	225 schools	2.8 %
Rural Remote	131 schools	1.6 %
Total	**856**	**10.5%**

Source: United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2023–24.

Although in many states, cyber enrollments and associated costs to rural districts have dramatically increased over time, cyber charter achievement data lags behind all other school types. In many states, rural schools are experiencing increasing financial pressure of cyber charter enrollment that in many cases has reached crisis proportions. Given smaller budgets and the trend of inequitable funding for rural education, rural districts are likely to feel this increase more acutely. When two second graders in a rural class of 15 students enroll in a cyber charter school, the costs of serving the remaining 13 second graders does not reduce by two students. On the other hand, the per-pupil allotment the traditional school district formerly received does reduce. Charter school data, alongside many of the indicators of the 2025 *Why Rural Matters* report illustrates the ways that rural schools operate under different conditions than (often) larger and better funded districts. Virtual charter school policy change is critically needed in many states if policy is to equitably support challenges faced by small rural schools – especially challenges like school funding formulas that over-rely on the local tax base, and relief from increasing cyber charter tuition payments.

Recommended Citation: Eppley, K. (2025). Rural schools of choice: Virtual charter schools. In D. Showalter, S.L. Hartman, K. Eppley, J. Johnson & B. Klein. *Why rural matters 2025: People, place, and possibility* (pp. 65-70). National Rural Education Association.

Teacher Preparation: A Foundation for Rural School Success

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In response to persistent teacher shortages, especially in rural communities, nearly every state in the past five years has relaxed guidelines and requirements for teacher licensure. These policy changes are especially tricky when considered within the context of hard-to-staff positions in rural schools. Research suggests that the relaxing of standards typically circumvents rigorous, high-quality preparation programs and thus contributes to declining teacher quality and increased school. [xlii, xliii] This strategy also overlooks an important fact that holds particular relevance for rural schools: teachers who complete university-based educator preparation programs are much less likely to leave the profession than those who enter through alternative licensure pathways.[xliv, xlv, xlvi] A longstanding body of research confirms that teacher quality is the most significant in-school factor influencing both student learning and well-being. [xlvii, xlviii] Policies that dilute educator preparation standards, such as easing licensure requirements or expanding alternative pathways, risk lowering the quality of the instruction students receive, particularly in rural schools where the effects of such changes can be magnified.

At the same time, rural teacher shortages present an urgent need to serve rural students. The challenge, then, is how states can ensure access to well-prepared, high-quality teachers while also meeting immediate staffing needs? Does the urgent demand for teachers require rural schools to compromise on quality? The answer should be a resounding no. Yet for decades a range of solutions have been implemented with uneven or limited success. Teacher quality matters, and efforts that reduce funding and support for

university-based preparation programs run counter to what research reveals about attracting and retaining high-quality educators in rural schools. As legislative debates continue across the United States about how to get more teachers into classrooms, one fact must stay at the forefront: strong, comprehensive teacher preparation is not optional for rural school success—it is foundational.

The Longstanding Challenge

Persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers in rural schools have long threatened the quality and stability of education in rural communities, particularly in some key areas like special education, STEM education, world languages, career and technical education, teachers of multilingual learners, and teachers of Advanced Placement courses. [xlix, l] Rural special education teacher shortages are critical and have been for decades. [li, lii] Educators across the United States continue to leave the profession at alarming rates, with close to 30% of teachers leaving rural public schools that experience high community poverty rates. [liii] When rural teachers leave, their replacements tend to be less experienced. This is especially true for students attending schools with high levels of community poverty and for students who identify as Black, Latinx, and American Indian.[liv, lv]

Teachers report general job dissatisfaction as a primary reason for leaving, alongside lack of classroom autonomy and lack of input into decision making.[lvi, lvii] Indeed, between 2021 and 2023, 18 states passed legislation limiting how and what teachers can teach in their classrooms, a number that is likely to have increased since 2023.[lviii] Other factors include low teacher compensation, burnout, rising student needs in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, requirements for testing/accountability measures, insufficient support for students requiring additional learning resources, and even the lack of support from teachers' families in choosing teaching as a career pathway. [lxii, lxiii] For rural educators, these stressors are also compounded by issues of spatial inequity such as geographic isolation, limited access to healthcare, and fewer professional development opportunities.

Despite these challenges, teaching in rural schools offers significant benefits that also make them desirable schools for new and veteran teachers [lxiv, lxv] Research about why teachers choose to stay in rural schools finds that teacher retention is closely linked to strong relationships, particularly those connected to teachers' commitment to students, opportunities for leadership and collaboration, deep connections to communities and families, and strong professional support systems.[lxvi] Many rural schools are also known for leveraging partnership strategies to provide creative, wraparound services for students, even when financial and human resources are limited.[lxvii] Rural teachers are dedicated to the well-being of their students, yet, rural students and their communities need more than committed teachers, they deserve highly qualified and well-supported ones, too. [lxviii, lxix]

Five Troubling Trends in Teacher Licensure

The shift toward relaxed state preparation standards and expanded alternative certification options weakens the quality of teacher preparation and compromises teacher effectiveness in rural communities. These initiatives call into question dubious methods of recruiting and retaining rural teachers, methods that do not address the challenges that truly underlay the reasons individuals do not choose to enter or stay in the teaching profession. Below are examples of five state trends likely to have particularly negative impacts on rural schools. While these five states are highlighted, these policies can be seen, in part, across many states and locales, all with the potential to reduce teacher quality in rural schools.

1. **Permitting individuals to obtain teaching positions without first earning a college degree.**
   - Arizona, ranked 2nd on the last two *Why Rural Matters* reports and in the top 11 for all *Why Rural Matters* editions, passed Senate Bill 1159 in 2022 allowing anyone who is enrolled in any college in any major to serve as the teacher of record. [lxx]
   - Florida, ranked 4th on the 2025 *Why Rural Matters* highest priority list, recently enacted legislation allowing military veterans to obtain a five-year temporary teaching license without a college degree. [lxxi]
2. **Lowering the standards required for content knowledge in obtaining a teaching license.**
   - Missouri, also in the top 10 highest priority list in the last two *Why Rural Matters* reports, is lowering the required GPA for content certification from 3.0 to 2.5 (a C+ grade point average), effective for new certifications starting in July 2025. [lxxii] This change has the potential to diminish content area knowledge in areas such as history, math, literature, and science in favor of a larger, less prepared pool of teachers to fill classroom vacancies.
3. **Allowing licensure acquisition via programs that are not associated with institutions of higher education** (non-IHE affiliated programs/non-university based).
   - Texas, a state with more rural students (734,699) than any other state in *Why Rural Matters* 2025, reported over 41 non-affiliated institutions of higher education (IHE) licensure programs in 2022, accounting for 68% of enrollment in educator preparation programs in the state. [lxxiii] This number is growing in other states as well, creating significant concerns about teacher quality. Many of these programs are offered entirely online, creating additional concerns around quality clinical experiences.
4. **Collapsing licensure grade levels into large generalized bands.**
   - Ohio, which per *Why Rural Matters* 2025 has more rural students than all but three other states, recently revised its teacher licensure structure to combine primary education (preschool-Grade 5 generalist licensure) and middle childhood (Grades 4-9 licensure in two content areas) bands into a single, expansive preschool through Grade 8 license. [lxxiv] This change places an enormous burden on educator preparation programs, which are now expected to prepare candidates to effectively teach preschoolers to 8th Grade—an expectation that is deeply concerning for quality teacher preparation.
5. **Creating alternative licensure regulations for certain types of schools.**
   - Idaho, ranked 5th in highest priority in the 2025 *Why Rural Matters* report, created an alternative licensure pathway in 2022 that applies only to charter schools. [ci] The charter school teaching license cannot be transferred to employment in an Idaho public school and cannot be used for special education, calling into question why teachers would be qualified enough for a charter school but not a public school. (To learn more about charter schools, see the special section on charter schools in the 2025 *Why Rural Matters* report).

Patterns in *Why Rural Matters* 2025

A growing body of research affirms that teacher salaries play a critical role in both recruitment and retention, which directly impacts teacher quality and the long-term success of teacher preparation efforts. [lxxv, lxxvi, lxxvii] States identified as highest priority in the last two *Why Rural Matters* reports

tend to offer some of the lowest adjusted teacher salaries: Missouri, Oklahoma, Mississippi, South Dakota, and South Carolina. Low salaries have long compound difficulties facing rural schools with attracting and retaining well-prepared educators [lxxviii, lxxix] Table 15 highlights the 20 states with the lowest adjusted teacher salaries and compares them to their overall *Why Rural Matters* 2025 priority rankings.

TABLE 15: LOWEST 20 ADJUSTED TEACHER SALARIES COMPARED TO 2025 WHY RURAL MATTERS PRIORITY RANKING

State	Adjusted Teacher Salary	2025 Salary Rank	2025 WRM Rank
AR*	$ 54,242	1	11
MO*	$ 64,800	2	7
OK*	$ 70,080	3	1
MS*	$ 70,470	4	3
IL	$ 70,508	5	32
IN*	$ 71,007	6	19
ND	$ 71,454	7	22
CO	$ 71,990	8	26
SD*	$ 72,060	9	9
SC*	$ 72,510	10	8
ID*	$ 73,575	11	5
WV*	$ 73,887	12	15
KS	$ 74,472	13	28
TN	$ 76,757	14	29
WI	$ 76,823	15	37
MI	$ 78,937	16	24
OR	$ 79,039	17	26
TX*	$ 79,213	18	14
MT*	$ 80,065	19	10
FL*	$ 80,295	20	4

*Denotes states in the Top 20 highest priority state ranking

Rural Early Childhood Teachers

Teachers in birth-to-age-five settings have long received some of the lowest salaries in the profession, making it difficult to staff these positions with highly qualified, licensed educators. [lxxx] Too often, early learning teachers are professionally devalued, or their positions are viewed as temporary steppingstones to higher-paid positions teaching older students.[lxxxi, lxxxii, lxxxiii] However, decades of research emphasize the Rural Education Footprint of early childhood education in laying the foundation for long-term academic success. [lxxxiv, lxxxv, lxxxvi] Teachers in rural early childhood classrooms play a critical role in identifying children who need early learning interventions that are essential for future school success. Without well-prepared, licensed teachers in these roles, rural children's needs are more likely to go unidentified and unmet.

In both the 2023 and 2025 *Why Rural Matters* reports, the percentage of children attending public preschool has been reported in the support for learning gauge.

Public preschool teachers are typically required to be fully licensed, are paid on the same salary scale as K–12 educators, and receive the same employee benefits.[lxxxvii] Consequently, this indicator has been included to highlight the Rural Education Footprint of high-quality instruction and equitable working conditions in early childhood education. Children in public preschools are more likely to be taught by teachers who are licensed to teach preschool. Extremely low enrollment in public preschool may signal a lack of investment in early childhood education, especially when those states also have a high priority rank in *Why Rural Matters*. For example, Montana enrolls fewer children in public preschool than any other state and is among the ten highest-priority states in *Why Rural Matters* 2025. Idaho ranks third lowest in public preschool enrollment and fifth in overall priority, while Mississippi ranks eleventh in public preschool enrollment and third overall in the *Why Rural Matters* 2025 rankings. All three of these states are also among the top twenty with the lowest adjusted teacher salaries. In contrast, Connecticut enrolls almost 58% of its children in public preschool—one of the highest rates in the United States —and ranks 47th on the *Why Rural Matters* priority list. While there are varying and complex conditions behind these data points, what is clear is that rural early childhood education matters, but is not being given adequate or equitable attention in many rural communities. Teachers in rural early care settings deserve fair compensation for their expertise, and the children they serve deserve access to highly qualified, licensed educators who are well-prepared and committed to early learning.

Next Steps

Eroding the quality of teacher training intensifies inequities in rural schools by reducing students' access to high-quality learning. Potential strategies that address teacher shortages while also maintaining high standards for teacher preparation and the development of high-quality teachers are discussed below. Given significant variation from one rural community context to another, any potential strategies for the recruitment and retention of rural teachers should recognize the unique characteristics of the community and school where a strategy is to be applied.[lxxxviii] However, some strategies show general promise for recruiting teachers to rural areas, while others are more impactful in retaining rural teachers.

Alternative Schedules

Many states have explored alternative school-day schedules, most commonly shifting to a four-day school week. The outcomes of these changes are mixed. While the four-day model appears to support efforts to recruit teachers to rural schools, it has not consistently improved teacher retention over a five-year period. [lxxxix] Parents have generally responded positively to the change, with the notable exception of families with children with disabilities. From the families' perspective, children with disabilities need a five-day school week to receive needed supports and services.

Community Driven and Place-Based

Many states have embraced grow-your-own programs or residencies in partnership with accredited teacher preparation programs.[xci, xcii] These initiatives maintain the rigorous requirements of high-quality preparation programs while offering tuition assistance, financial compensation, and/or affordable housing for new teachers who choose to teach in rural schools upon the completion of their degrees. In this way, rural schools are able to both recruit and retain highly-qualified teachers in their communities.

Benefits and Compensation

Without question improving benefits and compensation are correlated with both recruiting and retaining teachers in rural schools. Unsurprisingly, compensating teachers for their expertise and responsibilities impacts their willingness to enter and remain in the profession. Several states have enacted

policies that significantly raise starting salaries while also addressing pay equity for teachers who already have many years of teaching experience. Other states are expanding access to additional benefits such as child care support, housing assistance, and educational benefits for advanced licensure (such as national board certification) and/or degree advancement.[xciv]

Classroom Support

Post Covid pandemic, across grade levels, teachers have reported ever-increasing needs for supporting students' mental health and learning needs.[xcv] Teachers report classroom behaviors that are increasingly difficult to address as the sole teacher in a classroom. Some districts are increasing intervention specialist positions as a means to meet the needs of both students and teachers. The Rural Education Footprint of this factor as it relates to teacher burnout cannot be overstated. In a time of greater and greater student learning needs, increased instructional supports are crucial to meeting the needs of both students and teachers.

Place-Based Professional Development

Both teacher preparation and school districts are embracing place-based professional development programs designed to support developing and new rural teachers. [xcvi] For new teachers, these programs are particularly impactful when they are clearly separated from high-stakes new teacher evaluations, which can diminish the intended benefits of mentorship. For both teacher candidates and new teachers, access to community-connected professional development opportunities is correlated to teachers who choose to stay in the teaching profession.[xcvii, xcviii, xcix] Given rural teachers' access to professional development is less than access in other locales, this is an important mechanism for both preparing and retaining rural teachers.

Final Thoughts

As states continue to invest in a multitude of strategies for addressing teacher shortages, they often overlook a key factor: teachers' dissatisfaction is directly connected to the recognition of their expertise and professional judgment. A growing number of states are enacting legislation that limits what and how teachers can teach, contributing significantly to teacher dissatisfaction—a leading reason many leave the profession.[c] Although strategies like increasing compensation, offering strong mentoring, and supporting grow-your-own teaching programs are important for valuing teachers and promoting equitable working conditions, they are not sufficient on their own. To truly address the teacher shortage, states must invest in strong, research-based teacher preparation programs that prepare educators to meet the diverse and complex needs of today's classrooms. Once in the classroom, teachers must be trusted and respected as professionals who are capable of making informed decisions about what is appropriate for their students and communities. Ignoring teachers' concerns about their treatment as professionals only serves to deepen disparities in teacher quality, especially in rural schools. Until these issues are addressed, teacher shortages will persist and are likely to worsen. The bottom line is that rural students deserve high-quality teachers who have earned their licensure through rigorous, research-based teacher preparation programs that fully equip them to enter and stay in the profession.

Recommended Citation: Hartman, S.L. (2025). Teacher preparation: A foundation for rural school success. In D. Showalter, S.L. Hartman, K. Eppley, J. Johnson & B. Klein. Why rural matters 2025: People, place, and possibility (pp. 71-76). National Rural Education Association.

State-by-State Results

Priority Ranking

29

Significant

Alabama

In the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, Alabama ranked 2nd in overall priority. In the current report, its ranking has increased to 29th. Over 37% of Alabama's students are rural, and only six states have more rural students. Increases in rural teachers' salaries and instructional per pupil expenditures contribute to a more favorable policy context than in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. Nevertheless, significant challenges persist. Nearly one in six rural school-aged children live in homes with incomes below the poverty line, and NAEP scores are particularly low for Grade 8 reading and math. With more than 370 rural students per primary care clinician and almost 400 students per school-based mental health professional, supports for student well-being are of critical concern.

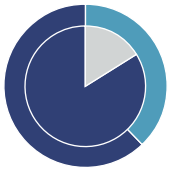
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 18

Percent rural students



AL 37.8%

US 16.7%

	AL	RANK
Percent rural schools	47.9%	17
Percent small rural districts	1.4%	46
Percent rural students	37.8%	8
Number of rural students	280,790	7
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	11.0%	33

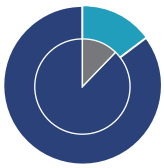
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 19

Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



AL 17.4%

US 14.2%

	AL	RANK
Rural diversity index:	39.4%	19
Poverty level in rural school communities	260%	14
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	17.4%	11
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.4%	27
Percent rural household mobility	7.3%	30

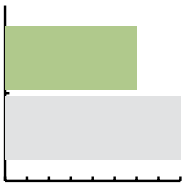
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | **IMPORTANT** | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 31

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



AL $6,455

US $8,417

	AL	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$6,455	9
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$9.77	11
Percent instructional salaries for special education	8.7%	34
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$2.32	39
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$94,854	37

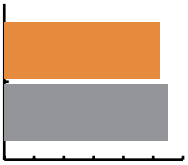
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 30

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score



AL 260.8

US 273.7

	AL	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	2.5	43
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	8.6	47
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	249.5	6
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	260.8	6
Rural high school graduation rate	91.5%	35

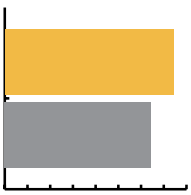
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 29

Rural students per primary care clinician



AL 372

US 322

	AL	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	390	8
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.3%	43
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	3.5%	41
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	42.9%	29
Rural students per primary care clinician	372	7

Priority Ranking

23

Major

Alaska

Nearly two-thirds of Alaska's schools are rural, and of those rural schools, all are classified as remote. Alaska's rural school communities have among the highest percent of multilingual learners in the United States and experience relatively high rates of household mobility. Rural districts in Alaska receive around $3.44 from the state for every dollar raised locally, which is among the best ratios in the United States. Alaska's teachers earn some of the highest salaries in the United States. On the other hand, Alaska's rural graduation rate is the lowest of any U.S. state, and student access to health insurance coverage is extremely low. Overall, while Alaska's Overall Priority Ranking is 23, the state has moved from the middle to the top 10 in the Rural Education Footprint and Student and Family Characteristics gauges.

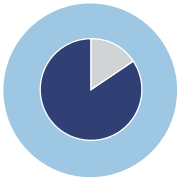
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 9

Percent rural students in a remote rural district



AK 100.0%

US 18.7%

	AK	RANK
Percent rural schools	61.8%	7
Percent small rural districts	69.8%	10
Percent rural students	25.9%	20
Number of rural students	33,875	44
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	100%	1

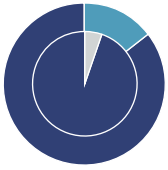
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 9

Percent rural multilingual learners



AK 17.2%

US 5.6%

	AK	RANK
Rural diversity index	31.7%	21
Poverty level in rural school communities	266%	17
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	13.6%	19
Percent rural multilingual learners	17.2%	3
Percent rural household mobility	9.3%	9

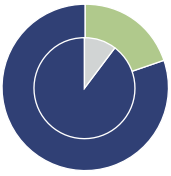
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 49

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures (rural)



AK $24.89

US $11.54

	AK	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$14,212	45
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$24.89	49
Percent instructional salaries for special education	N/A	N/A
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$3.44	45
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$115,015	47

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK N/A

Rural high school graduation rate

AK 71.2%

US 89.4%

	AK	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	N/A	N/A
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	N/A	N/A
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	N/A	N/A
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	N/A	N/A
Rural high school graduation rate	71.2%	2

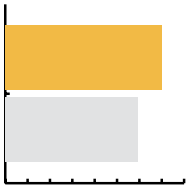
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 28

Students per psychologist/ school



AK 351

US 297

	AL	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	351	15
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.7%	37
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	8.7%	8
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	45.3%	32
Rural students per primary care clinician	268	35

Priority Ranking

2

Leading

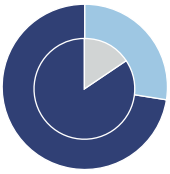
Arizona

Arizona has been ranked 2nd in overall priority in each of the last two *Why Rural Matters* reports, underscoring persistent challenges across the state and highlighting the critical need for targeted support. One in five rural school-aged children live in homes with household income below the poverty line, and 1 in 10 have changed primary residences in the past year. Only Texas has a greater percentage of rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage. The *Educational Policy Context* gauge indicates a crucial need for attention to funding. Arizona has the seventh lowest per pupil spending on instruction in rural schools among all states. Specifically, rural students receive about $2,000 on average less per student than their peers in other states. Achievement in both Grade 8 math and reading is among the lowest in the United States.

GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

Percent rural students in a remote rural district



AZ 38.2%

US 18.7%

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

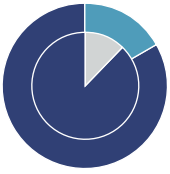
RANK 30

	AZ	RANK
Percent rural schools	22.5%	39
Percent small rural districts	70.6%	9
Percent rural students	8.7%	41
Number of rural students	76,981	31
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	38.2%	14

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



AZ 20.2%

US 14.2%

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

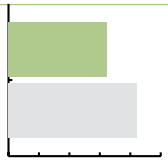
RANK 3

	AZ	RANK
Rural diversity index	40.8%	15
Poverty level in rural school communities	248%	11
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	20.2%	6
Percent rural multilingual learners	7.2%	11
Percent rural household mobility	10.5%	5

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



AZ $6,442

US $8,417

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

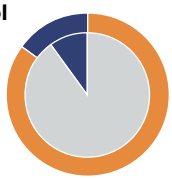
RANK 9

	AZ	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$6,442	7
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$9.25	7
Percent instructional salaries for special education	9.7%	28
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.10	19
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$83,420	25

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

Rural high school graduation rate



AZ 84.5%

US 89.4%

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

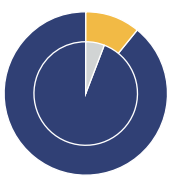
RANK 11

	AZ	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-2.8	31
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-1.7	21
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	253.8	12
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	267.8	11
Rural high school graduation rate	84.5%	11

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

Percent school-aged children without health insurance coverage



AZ 12.2%

US 6.4%

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 8

	AZ	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	374	10
Percent rural children who are unhoused	3.2%	20
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	12.2%	2
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	38.2%	20
Rural students per primary care clinician	274	31

Priority Ranking

11

Leading

Arkansas

More than half of Arkansas' schools are rural. Since the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, more children, now almost one in five, live in homes with household incomes below the poverty line. As was true in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, teachers working in Arkansas' rural schools are still paid the lowest salaries among rural teachers in the United States, making around $29,000 less than the average adjusted salary of rural teachers in other states. Salaries remain critically low even though the average rural salary in the state has increased by $3,394 since the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. Nearly 1 in 20 rural children in Arkansas are unhoused and 7% do not have health insurance. In spite of these documented needs, Arkansas' per pupil spending is very low compared to other states. On average, rural students in other states receive $2,000 more than rural students in Arkansas.

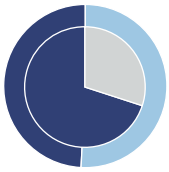
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 14

Percent rural schools



AR 50.5%

US 30.7%

	AR	RANK
Percent rural schools	50.5%	15
Percent small rural districts	26.8%	33
Percent rural students	32.3%	15
Number of rural students	147,705	22
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	27.7%	21

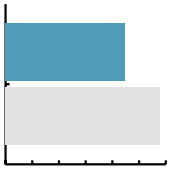
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 8

Poverty level in rural school communities



AR 224%

US 290%

	AR	RANK
Rural diversity index	28.8%	24
Poverty level in rural school communities	224%	3
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	19.0%	7
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.9%	22
Percent rural household mobility	9.0%	11

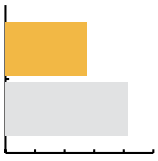
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 16

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



AR $54,242

US $83,256

	AR	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$6,484	10
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$13.17	34
Percent instructional salaries for special education	8.9%	31
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.53	31
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$54,242	1

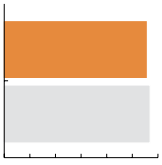
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 36

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score



AR 268.6

US 273.7

	AR	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	2.0	41
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	4.1	39
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	255.5	19
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	268.6	13
Rural high school graduation rate	91.7%	38

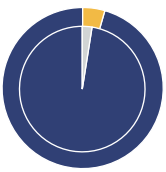
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 20

Percent rural children who are unhoused



AR 4.9%

US 2.7%

	AR	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	305	25
Percent rural children who are unhoused	4.9%	7
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	7.0%	17
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	46.3%	34
Rural students per primary care clinician	287	26

Priority Ranking

N/A

Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)

The addition of Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools is new to *Why Rural Matters.* Although not every indicator could be reported, it's clear that BIE schools face significant challenges. BIE schools are the most rural by percent rural schools (89.7%) and percent rural students (85.5%). Only five states have more remote rural districts, and 92.9% of rural districts are small. The small size of BIE schools is a clear strength, as we know that school size is particularly protective for students living in communities with high rates of school community poverty. Educational outcomes, based on NAEP data, are very low, as are graduation rates, with only 63.9% of students graduating from BIE high schools. Nearly 15% of BIE students are unhoused.

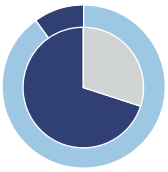
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 2

Percent rural schools



BIE 89.7%

US 30.7%

	BIE	RANK
Percent rural schools	89.7%	1
Percent small rural districts	92.9%	2
Percent rural students	85.5%	1
Number of rural students	31,444	46
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	66.5%	6

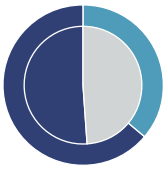
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK N/A

Poverty level in rural school communities



BIE 171%

US 290%

	BIE	RANK
Rural diversity index	N/A	N/A
Poverty level in rural school communities	171%	1
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	N/A	N/A
Percent rural multilingual learners	N/A	N/A
Percent rural household mobility	N/A	N/A

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK N/A

N/A

	BIE	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	N/A	N/A
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	N/A	N/A
Median organizational scale (x100)	N/A	N/A
State revenue to schools per local dollar	N/A	N/A
Adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	N/A	N/A

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 1

Rural high school graduation rate

BIE 63.9%

US 89.4%

	BIE	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-9.0	11
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-10.0	2
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	229.0	1
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	238.0	1
Rural high school graduation rate	63.9%	1

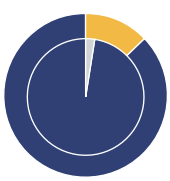
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK N/A

Percent rural children who are unhoused



BIE 14.7%

US 2.7%

	BIE	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	N/A	N/A
Percent rural children who are unhoused	14.7%	1
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	N/A	N/A
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	N/A	N/A
Rural students per primary care clinician	320	16

Priority Ranking

16

Major

California

Almost 200,000 students in California attend public school in a rural community but only 13% of all schools in the state are rural and these tend to be in relatively small districts. Small rural California districts serve diverse learners. There is a 44.2% chance that two randomly chosen students in a rural school would identify as different races or ethnicities. Only New Mexico has a higher percent of rural multilingual learners. More than three in 20 rural California students live in homes with household incomes below the poverty line. State spending on rural education is strong as a proportion of the state's total spending on education, with rural teacher pay among the highest across the United States. Yet, California is among the top ten priority states for its high number of rural children who are unhoused (1 in 20) and the high number of students per school-based mental health professional. Only three states had lower average Grade 8 NAEP Math scores.

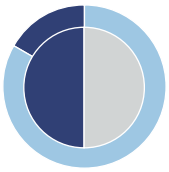
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 38

Percent small rural districts



CA 74.2%

US 50.0%

	CA	RANK
Percent rural schools	12.9%	47
Percent small rural districts	74.2%	6
Percent rural students	3.7%	49
Number of rural students	195,501	17
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	10.4%	36

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 10

Percent rural multilingual learners

CA 18.0%

US 5.6%

	CA	RANK
Rural diversity index	44.2%	13
Poverty level in rural school communities	288%	25
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	15.3%	16
Percent rural multilingual learners	18.0%	2
Percent rural household mobility	8.5%	14

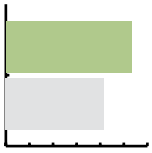
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 46

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



CA $106,286

US $83,256

	CA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$9,494	34
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$16.20	44
Percent instructional salaries for special education	8.7%	34
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.81	35
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$106,286	46

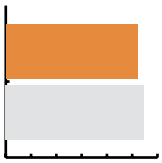
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 7

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math Score



CA 260.1

US 273.7

	CA	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	N/A	N/A
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	N/A	N/A
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	253.9	13
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	260.1	5
Rural high school graduation rate	88.2%	21

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 7

Percent rural children who are unhoused

CA 5.3%

US 2.7%

	CA	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	375	9
Percent rural children who are unhoused	5.3%	6
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	3.3%	42
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	33.9%	13
Rural students per primary care clinician	347	12

Priority Ranking

26

Major

Colorado

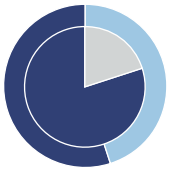
Over 50,000 students attend rural schools in Colorado. Most Colorado districts are small, and almost half are remote. Colorado's rural districts are some of the most racially and ethnically diverse in the United States. The rural districts in the state report a relatively high percentage of multilingual learners as well as a high number of students who change residences each year. Teacher salaries in the state continue to be low, though the average rural salary increased over $7,000 as compared to the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. State funding matches local funding. For every dollar raised from local tax dollars, the state contributes one dollar, which signals relatively inequitable rural school funding. The percentage of rural students who experience poverty is low relative to most other states, but one in twenty school age children in the state lack health insurance. Changes in Grade 4 NAEP Math scores are well below the U.S. average at priority ranking 19, but negative changes in reading scores are even more concerning. Only five states have a greater ratio of students to primary care clinicians, suggesting a dire need for rural healthcare providers.

GAUGE 1 Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 33

Percent rural students in a remote rural district



CO 46.3%

US 18.7%

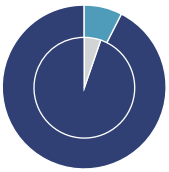
	CO	RANK
Percent rural schools	24.3%	37
Percent small rural districts	74.1%	7
Percent rural students	6.4%	46
Number of rural students	54,222	40
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	46.3%	11

GAUGE 2 Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 14

Percent rural multilingual learners



CO 8.3%

US 5.6%

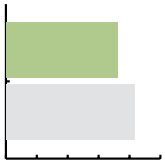
	CO	RANK
Rural diversity index	42.3%	14
Poverty level in rural school communities	287%	24
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	9.6%	35
Percent rural multilingual learners	8.3%	8
Percent rural household mobility	10.5%	5

GAUGE 3 Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 24

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



CO $71,990

US $83,256

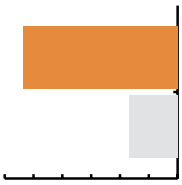
	CO	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$7,866	19
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$12.97	32
Percent instructional salaries for special education	6.9%	41
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.00	17
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$71,990	8

GAUGE 4 Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 22

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score



CO -10.7

US -3.4

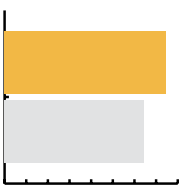
	CO	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-10.7	6
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-2.2	19
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	265.2	41
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	282.7	36
Rural high school graduation rate	88.5%	22

GAUGE 5 Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 32

Rural students per primary care clinician



CO 373

US 322

	CO	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	239	38
Percent rural children who are unhouse	2.9%	21
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	5.0%	28
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	50.4%	40
Rural students per primary care clinician	373	6

Priority Ranking

47

Notable

Connecticut

Only five states have a lower percentage of rural schools than Connecticut, and only BIE schools and seven states educate fewer rural students. More than half of Connecticut's rural school districts are small. School community poverty levels, as well as the percentage of school-aged children living in homes with household incomes below the federal poverty line are very low. Both rural per-pupil expenditures and rural teacher salaries are relatively high, and educational outcomes are relatively strong, although the decline in Grade 4 NAEP Math scores is a notable exception. In no state are rural students more likely to graduate than in Connecticut. Only Rhode Island reports better rankings on the Access to Supports for Well-Being gauge, suggesting that Connecticut's rural students have relatively good access to support for health and well-being.

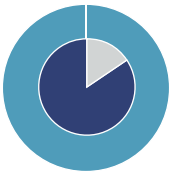
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 45

Percent rural students in a remote rural district



CT 0.0%

US 18.7%

	CT	RANK
Percent rural schools	17.0%	45
Percent small rural districts	53.1%	22
Percent rural students	10.5%	39
Number of rural students	50,176	42
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	0.0%	46

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 45

Poverty level in rural school communities

CT 486%

US 290%

	CT	RANK
Rural diversity index	36.0%	20
Poverty level in rural school communities	486%	48
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	3.4%	50
Percent rural multilingual learners	2.3%	38
Percent rural household mobility	5.7%	43

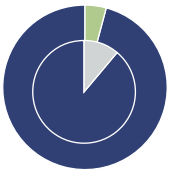
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 28

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



CT $0.44

US $1.25

	CT	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$14,379	46
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$10.54	20
Percent instructional salaries for special education	14.6%	10
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.44	3
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$99,945	45

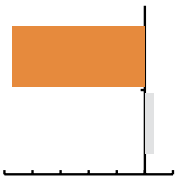
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 45

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score



CT -4.7

US 0.3

	CT	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-3.1	29
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-4.7	11
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	272.3	46
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	288.7	46
Rural high school graduation rate	94.5%	49

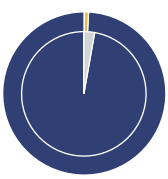
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 48

Percent rural children who are unhoused



CT 0.8%

US 2.7%

	CT	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	159	47
Percent rural children who are unhoused	0.8%	49
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	2.0%	46
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	57.8%	48
Rural students per primary care clinician	N/A	N/A

Priority Ranking

39

Significant

Delaware

Though Delaware has a relatively small number of rural students, no state had more racially and ethnically diverse rural school districts. If you were to randomly choose two students in a rural Delaware school, there is more than a 60% chance the students would identify as different races or ethnicities. Moreover, only five states have a higher relative percentage of rural multilingual learners. Delaware spends more on transportation relative to instructional spending than all but 11 states, despite its relatively average per-pupil spending and teacher salaries relative to other states. Educational outcomes represent an urgent challenge for rural Delaware schools, with only two states reporting a greater drop in Grade 4 NAEP Reading and only three states reporting a greater drop in Grade 4 NAEP Math scores. Additionally, access to public preschool and healthcare insurance are barriers to rural student well-being in Delaware.

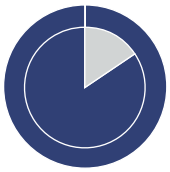
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 48

Percent rural students in a remote rural district



DE 0.0%

US 18.7%

	DE	RANK
Percent rural schools	19.7%	43
Percent small rural districts	0.0%	47
Percent rural students	25.3%	21
Number of rural students	31,241	47
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	0.0%	46

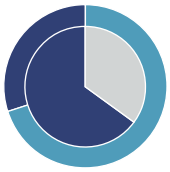
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 23

Rural diversity index



DE 62.7%

US 34.3%

	DE	RANK
Rural diversity index	62.7%	1
Poverty level in rural school communities	376%	44
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	9.1%	39
Percent rural multilingual learners	12.3%	6
Percent rural household mobility	N/A	N/A

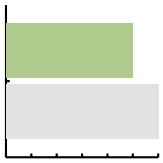
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 40

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures (rural)



DE $9.79

US $11.54

	DE	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$9,609	35
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$9.79	12
Percent instructional salaries for special education[1]	N/A	N/A
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$2.08	38
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$94,917	38

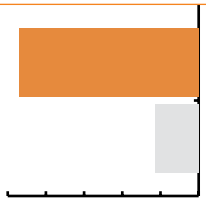
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 6

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score



DE -14.1

US -3.4

	DE	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-14.1	3
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-9.3	4
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	253.2	10
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	270.3	17
Rural high school graduation rate	89.7%	26

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 31

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool

DE 28.6%

US 40.2%

	DE	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	267	31
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.6%	38
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	8.3%	12
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	28.6%	7
Rural students per primary care clinician	188	44

[1]Delaware's data on this indicator were removed for accuracy concerns. Through communication with district financial officers, it was determined that any teacher with special education certification was counted as a special education teacher.

Priority Ranking

4

Leading

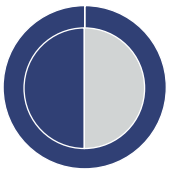
Florida

Florida has made a significant jump in overall priority compared to its ranking of 14 in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. This increase in priority is the outcome of changes in educational policy as well as diminished supports for student well-being. While only Massachusetts and New Jersey have a lower percentage of rural schools as a share of all schools in those states, Florida's rural districts are some of the most diverse in the United States. Florida's rural school communities experience high levels of rural school community poverty, and around one in nine students changes primary residence over the course of the year, a mobility rate exceeded only by Hawaii and Idaho. Florida reports extremely low per pupil spending at $6,203. Florida's rural students have less access to supports for student well-being than rural students in many other states, with a ratio of more than 400 rural students per school-based mental health professional, almost 10% of rural students uninsured, and 4% of rural students unhoused.

GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

Percent small rural districts



FL 0.0%

US 50.0%

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

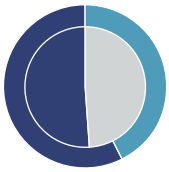
RANK 47

	FL	RANK
Percent rural schools	12.1%	49
Percent small rural districts	0.0%	47
Percent rural students	4.4%	48
Number of rural students	124,389	25
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	12.8%	30

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

Poverty level in rural school communities



FL 224%

US 290%

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

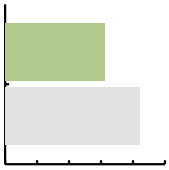
RANK 2

	FL	RANK
Rural diversity index	53.2%	5
Poverty level in rural school communities	224%	3
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	15.4%	15
Percent rural multilingual learners	4.5%	16
Percent rural household mobility	10.9%	3

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



FL $6,203

US $8,417

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

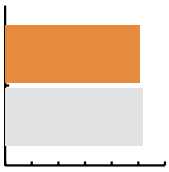
RANK 3

	FL	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$6,203	3
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$11.34	24
Percent instructional salaries for special education	17.9%	5
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.23	24
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$80,295	20

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score



FL 252.9

US 257.5

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

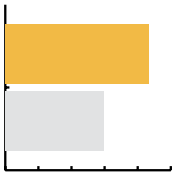
RANK 20

	FL	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	4.2	44
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	4.4	42
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	252.9	9
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	269.0	14
Rural high school graduation rate	83.4%	10

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

Rural students per psychologist/ school counselor



FL 432

US 297

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 3

	FL	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	432	4
Percent rural children who are unhoused	4.0%	14
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	9.8%	4
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	36.4%	18
Rural students per primary care clinician	288	25

Priority Ranking

12

Leading

Georgia

Georgia educates more rural students than any other state except Texas and North Carolina. Rural Georgia schools and districts are among the most diverse in the United States, and nearly one in five students live in homes with household incomes below the poverty line. Georgia teachers are paid at rates just over the average adjusted salary for rural United States teachers, and 14% of instructional salary supports special education instruction. Since the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, Georgia teacher salaries increased by an average of $10,809. The state ranks 23 in priority for state funding to rural districts per local dollar with Georgia districts receiving $1.21 from the state for every $1.00 sourced from local tax revenue. Measures of educational performance are close to the U.S. average, but rural Georgia students graduate at rates better than the rural U.S. average. Access to supports for student well-being is concerning, with 29% more students per primary care clinician than the U.S. average. Ratios of student to school-based mental health professionals are similarly high and signal a need for attention to access to supports for health and well-being.

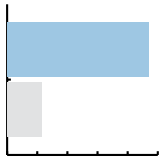
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 28

Number of rural students



GA 373,381

US 113,757 (median)

	GA	RANK
Percent rural schools	33.4%	29
Percent small rural districts	6.6%	37
Percent rural students	21.9%	27
Number of rural students	373,381	3
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	11.4%	32

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 11

Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty

GA 18.0%

US 14.2%

	GA	RANK
Rural diversity index	49.6%	6
Poverty level in rural school communities	261%	16
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	18.0%	8
Percent rural multilingual learners	4.0%	21
Percent rural household mobility	7.5%	26

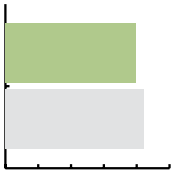
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 17

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



GA $7,946

US $8,417

	GA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$7,946	21
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$11.41	25
Percent instructional salaries for special education	14.0%	13
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.21	23
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$84,903	26

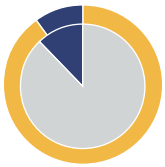
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 30

Rural high school graduation rate



GA 91.4%

US 89.4%

	GA	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-2.5	32
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-1.3	23
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	259.5	30
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	270.6	18
Rural high school graduation rate	91.4%	34

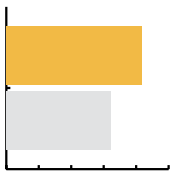
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 13

Rural students per primary care clinician



GA 416

US 322

	GA	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	357	12
Percent rural children who are unhoused	2.6%	22
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	5.6%	23
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	46.9%	36
Rural students per primary care clinician	416	3

Hawaii

Priority Ranking

N/A

N/A

There is only a single school district in Hawaii, and it is not rural, so there is no state-wide district-level data. However, more than one-quarter of Hawaii's schools are rural. Children attending Hawaii's rural schools experience some of the highest rates of poverty in the United States, and nearly one in six Hawaiian students changed primary residences in the past year—the highest in the United States. Rural NAEP scores are extremely low for Grade 8 math and very low for Grade 8 reading. Rates of rural public preschool enrollment are low, with just over one in three students attending. Due to lack of reporting for rural schools, Hawaii is excluded from four of the five gauge rankings and is thus not part of the overall priority state-by-state ranking.

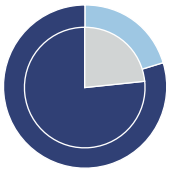
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK N/A

Percent rural schools



HI 25.8%

US 30.7%

	HI	RANK
Percent rural schools	25.8%	36
Percent small rural districts	N/A	N/A
Percent rural students	N/A	N/A
Number of rural students	N/A	N/A
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	N/A	N/A

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK N/A

Percent rural household mobility

HI 15.3%

US 7.8%

	HI	RANK
Rural diversity index	N/A	N/A
Poverty level in rural school communities	N/A	N/A
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	16.9%	14
Percent rural multilingual learners	N/A	N/A
Percent rural household mobility	15.3%	1

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK N/A

N/A

	HI	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	N/A	N/A
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	N/A	N/A
Percent instructional salaries for special education	N/A	N/A
State revenue to schools per local dollar	N/A	N/A
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	N/A	N/A

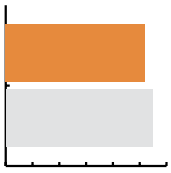
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 24

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score



HI 259.5

US 273.7

	HI	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	5.5	45
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	4.1	39
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	254.7	14
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	259.5	4
Rural high school graduation rate	N/A	N/A

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK N/A

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool

HI 34.9%

US 40.2%

	HI	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	N/A	N/A
Percent rural children who are unhoused	N/A	N/A
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	3.7%	37
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	34.9%	15
Rural students per primary care clinician	N/A	N/A

Priority Ranking

5

Leading

Idaho

In the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, Idaho ranked 23rd in overall priority, but is ranked 5th in this report. No state had a greater shift in overall priority ranking between the 2023 and 2025 reports.. Access to student supports for wellbeing is urgent for rural children in Idaho. Access to school-based mental health has improved slightly. Only 26.1% of Idaho's children are enrolled in public preschool, with neighbors Montana and Nevada being the only two states with lower rates of public preschool enrollment. Access to healthcare, including insurance and primary care clinicians is a significant challenge in the state. Educational outcomes are above average relative to other states despite having the lowest rural per pupil expenditure in the United States at $6,071, nearly 28% less than the U.S. rural average. Teacher salaries are similarly low, and rural teachers in only ten other states earn less. Rural schools in Idaho are likely to be remote, the surrounding communities are likely to have high rates of school community poverty, and communities serve students who have high levels of household mobility.

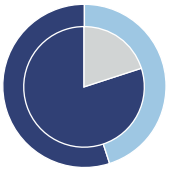
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 21

Percent rural students in a remote rural district



ID 46.4%

US 18.7%

	ID	RANK
Percent rural schools	42.6%	20
Percent small rural districts	62.2%	16
Percent rural students	20.2%	32
Number of rural students	57,586	37
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	46.4%	10

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 13

Percent rural household mobility

ID 11.1%

US 7.8%

	ID	RANK
Rural diversity index	29.6%	23
Poverty level in rural school communities	233%	5
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	8.4%	42
Percent rural multilingual learners	7.3%	9
Percent rural household mobility	11.1%	2

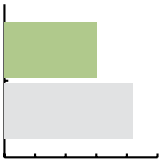
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 20

Rural instructional expenditures per pupi



ID $6,071

US $8,417

	ID	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$6,071	1
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$13.08	33
Percent instructional salaries for special education	11.4%	21
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$3.50	46
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$73,575	11

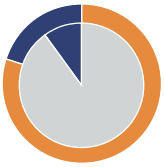
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 21

Rural high school graduation rate



ID 82.0%

US 89.4%

	ID	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-8.5	16
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-0.5	27
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	264.0	39
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	279.5	34
Rural high school graduation rate	82.0%	6

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 2

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool

ID 26.1%

US 40.2%

	ID	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	353	13
Percent rural children who are unhoused	4.1%	12
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	9.2%	7
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	26.1%	3
Rural students per primary care clinician	359	10

Priority Ranking

32

Significant

Illinois

Nearly one in four schools in Illinois is rural. Over 200,000 rural students attend rural schools in the state, accounting for one in nine of all Illinois students. Illinois ranks as the most crucial state on the educational policy context gauge. Rural Illinois teachers are paid, on average, $13,000 less than rural teachers in other states. Transportation expenditures are high relative to instructional spending, and state funding per local dollar is low. Despite this, educational outcomes are relatively strong and graduation rates are on par with the U.S. rural average. Access to student supports for well-being are problematic, with relatively high caseloads for school-based mental health professionals and primary care clinicians, and a high percentage of unhoused students.

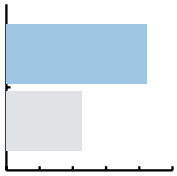
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 31

Number of rural students



IL 211,770

US 113,757 (median)

	IL	RANK
Percent rural schools	23.8%	38
Percent small rural districts	59.7%	19
Percent rural students	11.5%	38
Number of rural students	211,770	15
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	12.9%	29

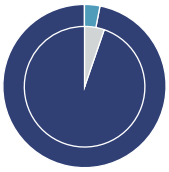
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 34

Percent rural multilingual learners



IL 3.3%

US 5.6%

	IL	RANK
Rural diversity index	23.2%	35
Poverty level in rural school communities	321%	37
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	11.3%	29
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.3%	30
Percent rural household mobility	6.9%	32

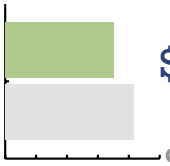
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 1

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



IL $70,508

US $83,256

	IL	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$8,575	28
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$9.20	6
Percent instructional salaries for special education	N/A	N/A
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.71	6
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$70,508	5

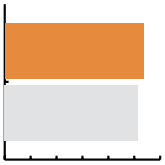
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 45

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score



IL 267.4

US 257.5

	IL	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-3.3	28
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	4.5	43
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	267.4	45
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	284.5	43
Rural high school graduation rate	88.5%	22

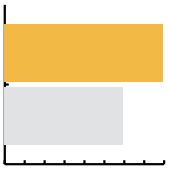
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 26

Rural students per psychologist/ school counselor



IL 397

US 297

	IL	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	397	6
Percent rural children who are unhoused	3.8%	15
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	3.6%	40
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	56.6%	47
Rural students per primary care clinician	326	15

Priority Ranking

19

Major

Indiana

More than one in four students in Indiana attends a rural school, and the state has one of the largest populations of rural students in absolute numbers. At just over $6,300 per pupil, only four states spend less to educate their rural learners. At more than $12,000 less than the U.S. rural average, Indiana's rural teacher salaries are the sixth lowest in the United States. Rural teachers make $71,007 on average, which is only $2,978 more than reported in *Why Rural Matters* 2023 when the state ranked 11th in priority on this indicator. Indiana districts' spending on transportation is high relative to instructional costs, ranking second behind only West Virginia. At rank 41 for reading and 37 for math, NAEP test scores are above average. The access to supports for well-being gauge rank is urgent, indicating inequitable access to health insurance, school-based mental health providers, and primary care clinicians. Nearly one in 12 students lacks healthcare insurance and rural primary care clinicians have caseloads more than 15% higher than average in other states.

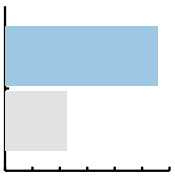
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 26

Number of rural students



IN 278,652

US 113,757 (median)

	IN	RANK
Percent rural schools	40.4%	23
Percent small rural districts	4.7%	39
Percent rural students	28.5%	16
Number of rural students	278,652	8
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	4.9%	39

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 33

Rural diversity index

IN 22.0%

US 34.3%

	IN	RANK
Rural diversity index	22.0%	39
Poverty level in rural school communities	290%	27
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	9.4%	37
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.2%	31
Percent rural household mobility	7.5%	26

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 7

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures

IN $8.40

US $11.54

	IN	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$6,385	5
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$8.40	2
Percent instructional salaries for special education	8.8%	32
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.91	36
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$71,007	6

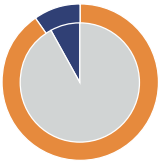
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 39

Rural high school graduation rate



IN 91.2%

US 89.4%

	IN	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-3.0	30
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-1.6	22
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	265.2	41
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	282.9	37
Rural high school graduation rate	91.2%	32

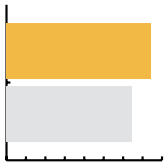
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 5

Rural students per primary care clinician



IN 371

US 322

	IN	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	368	11
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.5%	39
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	8.7%	8
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	33.3%	11
Rural students per primary care clinician	371	8

Priority Ranking

34

Significant

Iowa

Iowa moved up six places in overall priority since the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. Just over half of Iowa's schools are rural and more than a third of all of Iowa's public school students attends a rural school. The percent of Iowa children attending rural districts is more than double the U.S. average. Iowa's rural districts are some of the most racially and ethnically homogeneous in the United States, and school community and child poverty levels are relatively low in comparison to other states. The ratio of state support to local funding is one-to-one, which equals a rank of 17 in priority for that indicator. Per pupil funding for rural education is slightly below the U.S. rural average of $8,417. The state has one of the highest rural enrollments in public preschool but a concerningly high ratio of school psychologists and counselors to students (335:1), well below the U.S. median.

GAUGE 1 Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 10

Percent rural students

IA 40.4%

US 16.7%

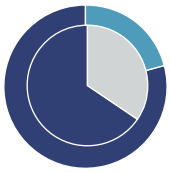
	IA	RANK
Percent rural schools	52.7%	13
Percent small rural districts	40.4%	25
Percent rural students	34.2%	12
Number of rural students	173,888	20
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	33.2%	17

GAUGE 2 Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 35

Rural diversity index



IA 21.1%

US 34.3%

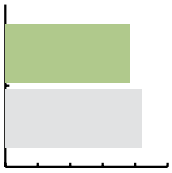
	IA	RANK
Rural diversity index	21.1%	40
Poverty level in rural school communities	315%	36
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	10.5%	32
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.8%	24
Percent rural household mobility	6.7%	33

GAUGE 3 Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 26

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



IA $7,701

US $8,417

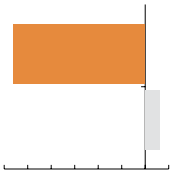
	IA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$7,701	17
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$13.45	36
Percent instructional salaries for special education	10.5%	24
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.00	17
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$86,545	27

GAUGE 4 Educational Outcomes

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 32

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score



IA -2.8

US 0.3

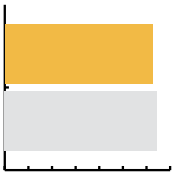
	IA	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-6.9	20
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-2.8	17
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	263.9	38
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	278.5	31
Rural high school graduation rate	91.6%	36

GAUGE 5 Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 38

Rural students per primary care clinician



IA 313

US 322

	IA	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	335	18
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.5%	39
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	4.7%	30
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	54.1%	46
Rural students per primary care clinician	313	17

Priority Ranking

28

Significant

Kansas

Over 1 in 4 students in Kansas attends a rural school and just over half of schools in Kansas are rural. Kansas' schools tend to be small and remote. Rural Kansas' schools serve students with high rates of family mobility, with nearly one in ten changing residences in the past year. 4.4% are rural multilingual learners. Rural teacher salaries continue to be a concern in the state. The 2023 *Why Rural Matters* reported the Kansas rural average teacher salary as $66,135. Although the rural average salary is now $74,472, rural Kansas teachers make on average almost $9,000 less than their rural peers in other states. Grade 4 NAEP reading and math scores decreased from 2019 to 2024, but the decrease in math scores was particularly sharp relative to other states. Access to school-based mental health services has worsened. In the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, the ratio of school psychologists and school counselors to each rural student was 254:1 and ranked 34, but that ratio is now 311:1, rising in priority to rank 22. Similarly, in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, 4.5% of rural students lacked healthcare insurance, but now 7% of rural learners lack healthcare insurance, an additional 3,200 to 4,000 uninsured students.

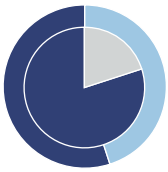
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 10

Percent rural students in a remote rural district



KS 45.9%

US 18.7%

	KS	RANK
Percent rural schools	50.4%	16
Percent small rural districts	62.0%	17
Percent rural students	26.2%	18
Number of rural students	126,421	24
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	45.9%	12

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 18

Percent rural household mobility

KS 9.6%

US 7.8%

	KS	RANK
Rural diversity index	28.2%	26
Poverty level in rural school communities	280%	21
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	11.5%	28
Percent rural multilingual learners	4.4%	17
Percent rural household mobilit	9.6%	7

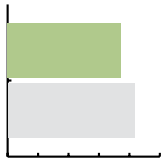
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 44

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



KS $74,472

US $83,256

	KS	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$8,809	30
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$14.37	41
Percent instructional salaries for special education	3.6%	45
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$2.62	42
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$74,472	13

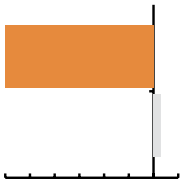
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 18

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score



KS -6.0

US 0.3

	KS	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-6.2	21
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-6.0	10
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	255.3	18
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	279.0	32
Rural high school graduation rate	90.5%	29

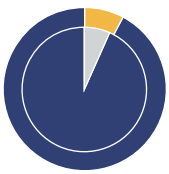
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 36

Percent school-aged children without health insurance coverage



KS 6.8%

US 6.4%

	KS	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	311	22
Percent rural children who are unhoused	2.0%	29
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	6.8%	18
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	49.8%	39
Rural students per primary care clinician	272	33

Priority Ranking

17

Major

Kentucky

Nearly one in three of Kentucky's students is rural, totaling over 213,000 students. Household income tends to be low in Kentucky's rural communities, with only three states reporting higher community poverty levels and only four states having a greater percent of students living in homes below the poverty line of $32,150 for a family of four. Kentucky spends more than $800 less per pupil than the U.S. rural median and spends fewer instructional dollars relative to dollars spent on transportation than all but nine states. About one in seven instructional dollars is allocated to special education instructional salaries. NAEP scores fall roughly in the middle of other states' scores with the exception of Grade 8 NAEP Math scores that rank 15th. Just under one in 20 rural students was unhoused during the 2022-2023 school year, and Kentucky is in the bottom half of states for preschool enrollment. One bright spot is Kentucky's exceptional rural high school graduation rate of 92.9%, which is well above the rural average of 89.4% and surpassed by only five other states.

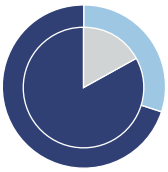
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 17

Percent rural students



KY 32.5%

US 16.7%

	KY	RANK
Percent rural schools	43.0%	19
Percent small rural districts	6.6%	37
Percent rural students	32.5%	14
Number of rural students	213,018	14
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	23.8%	25

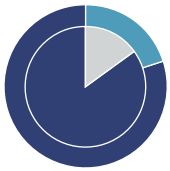
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 21

Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



KY 20.5%

US 14.2%

	KY	RANK
Rural diversity index	20.5%	41
Poverty level in rural school communities	233%	5
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	20.5%	5
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.8%	24
Percent rural household mobility	7.1%	31

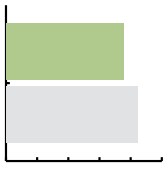
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 14

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



KY $7,569

US $8,417

	KY	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$7,569	15
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$9.63	10
Percent instructional salaries for special education	14.3%	11
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$2.43	40
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$80,700	22

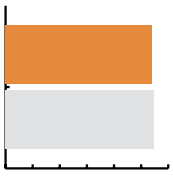
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 34

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score



KY 270.1

US 273.7

	KY	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-1.8	34
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-0.5	27
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	256.6	24
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	270.1	15
Rural high school graduation rate	92.9%	44

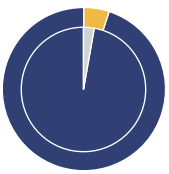
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 23

Percent rural children who are unhoused



KY 4.6%

US 2.7%

	KY	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	298	26
Percent rural children who are unhoused	4.6%	10
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	3.7%	37
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	37.6%	19
Rural students per primary care clinician	305	22

Priority Ranking

25

Major

Louisiana

Close to 40% of Louisiana's schools are rural. Louisiana's rural school districts are highly diverse, with only 11 states showing a higher likelihood of two randomly selected students in a school identifying as different races or ethnicities. Economic challenges are significant, with over one in five students living below the federal poverty line. Instructional spending is low relative to transportation, surpassed only by West Virginia and Indiana. Louisiana relies heavily on local revenue, receiving just $0.89 from the state for every dollar raised locally. Despite U.S. declines in Grade 4 NAEP Reading (down 3.4 points), Louisiana saw the largest gain in rural Grade 4 reading scores (+9.3) and a strong increase in math scores (+6.5). Access to healthcare is limited, with more students per primary care clinician in all but three other states. Only Michigan and New Mexico have higher student-to-school-psychologist and school counselor ratios.

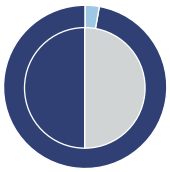
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 39

Percent small rural districts



LA 2.8%

US 50.0%

	LA	RANK
Percent rural schools	38.9%	26
Percent small rural districts	2.8%	43
Percent rural students	21.6%	29
Number of rural students	135,480	23
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	10.5%	35

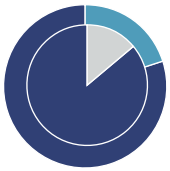
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 15

Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



LA 21.0%

US 14.2%

	LA	RANK
Rural diversity index	44.3%	12
Poverty level in rural school communities	234%	7
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	21.0%	4
Percent rural multilingual learners	1.6%	43
Percent rural household mobility	7.7%	21

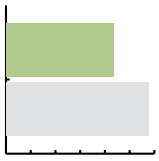
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 12

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures (rural)



LA $8.68

US $11.54

	LA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$8,184	24
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$8.68	3
Percent instructional salaries for special education	11.4%	21
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.89	14
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$92,608	35

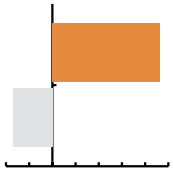
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 40

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score



LA 9.3

US -3.4

	LA	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	9.3	47
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	6.5	46
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	260.8	32
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	271.6	22
Rural high school graduation rate	86.9%	16

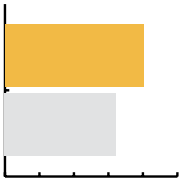
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 18

Rural students per primary care clinician



LA 401

US 322

	LA	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	452	3
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.9%	31
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	2.9%	45
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	41.7%	24
Rural students per primary care clinician	401	4

Priority Ranking

17

Major

Maine

More than half of students in Maine attend school in a rural community. Only three states and BIE schools have proportionally more rural schools. Although 68% of Maine's schools are rural, funding is proportionately very dependent on local tax bases than state funding—more so than all but nine other states. Transportation expenditures are also high relative to instructional expenditures. For every $9.85 spent on instruction, one dollar is spent on transportation. Contrast this with neighbor New Hampshire that spends $14.16 on instruction per dollar spent on transportation.

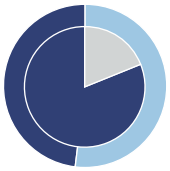
Educational outcomes across the grade span remain an ongoing challenge for the state since the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. Grade 4 NAEP scores fell sharply in both reading and math, and grade 8 scores are lower than the U.S. rural median. Rural graduation rates in Maine fall below the rural U.S. average, with only 87.3% of rural students earning a high school diploma—meaning nearly one in eight do not graduate. However, Maine provides the highest primary care clinician to student and school-based mental health professional to student ratio of any state.

GAUGE 1 Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 6

Percent rural students



ME 52.0%

US 16.7%

	ME	RANK
Percent rural schools	68.2%	5
Percent small rural districts	72.1%	8
Percent rural students	52.0%	4
Number of rural students	88,272	28
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	24.2%	23

GAUGE 2 Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 36

Rural diversity index

ME 15.2%

US 34.3%

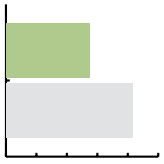
	ME	RANK
Rural diversity index	15.2%	47
Poverty level in rural school communities	302%	32
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	11.1%	31
Percent rural multilingual learners	1.3%	45
Percent rural household mobility	8.5%	14

GAUGE 3 Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 15

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



ME $0.82

US $1.25

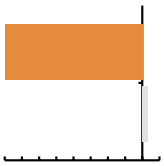
	ME	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$9,676	36
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$9.85	13
Percent instructional salaries for special education	10.7%	23
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.82	10
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$83,217	24

GAUGE 4 Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 10

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score



ME -8.0

US 0.3

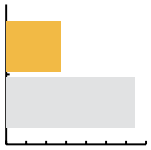
	ME	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-10.2	8
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-8.0	8
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	255.6	20
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	271.0	20
Rural high school graduation rate	87.3%	18

GAUGE 5 Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 42

Rural students per primary care clinician



ME 136

US 322

	ME	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	133	49
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.8%	35
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	5.5%	24
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	36.0%	17
Rural students per primary care clinician	136	49

Priority Ranking

45

Notable

Maryland

Maryland has one rural school for every five non-rural schools, and no rural districts that are classified as small. Its rural districts are some of the most racially and ethnically diverse in the United States, with near even odds that two rural students chosen randomly from the same school would identify as different races or ethnicities. Though poverty levels in school communities are relatively low, family mobility is high with almost 8% of rural students having moved primary residences in the past year. Per pupil spending levels are higher than most states, with levels exceeding the rural U.S. average by more than $5,000 per pupil. During a period in which Grade 4 NAEP scores either declined or were flat for rural students in many states, Maryland's scores improved by more than 90% compared to other states. The availability of school-based mental health professionals in rural Maryland schools exceeds most states, but rural children's access to primary care clinicians is a significant concern. Only eight states have more students per clinician. Public preschool enrollment for rural Maryland children is also problematic at only 32.2%. Proportionally, only eight states report fewer children enrolling in public preschool.

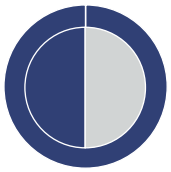
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 49

Percent small rural districts



MD 0.0%

US 50.0%

	MD	RANK
Percent rural schools	16.8%	46
Percent small rural districts	0.0%	47
Percent rural students	7.9%	42
Number of rural students	70,372	32
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	4.9%	39

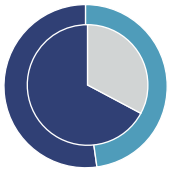
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 32

Rural diversity index



MD 48.5%

US 34.3%

	MD	RANK
Rural diversity index	48.5%	7
Poverty level in rural school communities	426%	45
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	5.8%	47
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.0%	35
Percent rural household mobility	7.9%	19

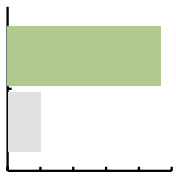
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 42

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



MD $13,881

US $8,417

	MD	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$13,881	44
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$12.22	28
Percent instructional salaries for special education	13.1%	16
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.65	33
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$96,504	40

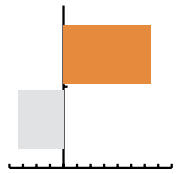
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 45

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score



MD 6.5

US -3.4

	MD	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	6.5	46
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	6.1	45
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	261.9	33
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	274.6	25
Rural high school graduation rate	91.2%	32

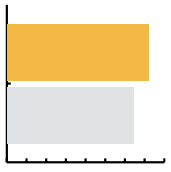
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 22

Rural students per primary care clinician



MD 360

US 322

	MD	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	244	35
Percent rural children who are unhoused	2.2%	25
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	4.0%	34
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	32.2%	9
Rural students per primary care clinician	360	9

Priority Ranking

47

Notable

Massachusetts

Although only New Jersey has fewer rural schools as a percent share of all schools, Massachusetts' rural schools serve around 67,000 students. Rates of rural school community poverty are very low, as are the percentage of children living in homes with household incomes below the poverty line. No state has a lower percentage of uninsured rural children. While NAEP scores for Grade 8 reading and math are among the highest in the United States, reading scores declined sharply. Only eight states had a steeper decline. School funding skews strongly to the local tax base with state funding per local dollar at just $0.72 (rank 9). Special education accounts for 14% of instructional salary. Rural high school graduation rates are high (93.6% of rural students graduate), and Massachusetts reports low rates of students who are unhoused and high rates of preschool enrollment.

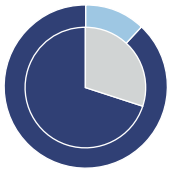
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 46

Percent rural schools



MA 11.7%

US 30.7%

	MA	RANK
Percent rural schools	11.7%	50
Percent small rural districts	39.0%	26
Percent rural students	7.8%	43
Number of rural students	67,627	33
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	0.0%	46

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 46

Rural diversity index

MA 28.1%

US 34.3%

	MA	RANK
Rural diversity index	28.1%	27
Poverty level in rural school communities	506%	49
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	4.5%	49
Percent rural multilingual learners	1.9%	40
Percent rural household mobility	4.6%	48

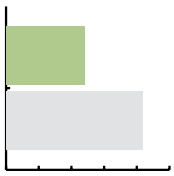
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 28

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



MA $0.72

US $1.25

	MA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$12,909	43
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$10.30	18
Percent instructional salaries for special education	14.0%	13
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.72	9
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$96,518	41

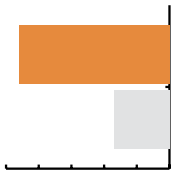
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 44

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score



MA -9.2

US -3.4

	MA	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-9.2	9
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-1.0	26
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	273.5	48
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	292.7	49
Rural high school graduation rate	93.6%	47

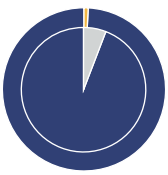
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 47

Percent school-aged children without health insurance coverage



MA 1.2%

US 6.4%

	MA	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	218	14
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.0%	48
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	1.2%	50
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	51.5%	41
Rural students per primary care clinician	186	45

Priority Ranking

24

Major

Michigan

More than 250,000 students attend rural schools in Michigan, which is more than 20% of all Michigan students. Per pupil spending and teacher salaries rank relatively low at 18 and 16. Per pupil instructional expenditures are almost 8% below the U.S. average and teacher salaries average 5% below the U.S. average. In the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, rural student access to school-based mental health professionals was the most concerning in the United States at 574 students per school psychologist. In the current report, one guidance counselor or school psychologist serves 548 students, still placing Michigan as the highest priority state for supporting rural students' mental health as measured by this indicator. Rural high school graduation rates are also concerningly low (83.1% vs. U.S. 89.4%), with only seven states graduating fewer rural students proportionally.

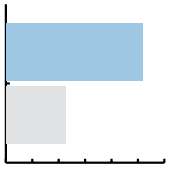
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 29

Number of rural students



MI 259,755

US 113,757 (median)

	MI	RANK
Percent rural schools	30.7%	32
Percent small rural districts	38.2%	28
Percent rural students	21.2%	30
Number of rural students	259,755	11
Percent rural students in a remote rural district: rank 31	12.2%	31

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 29

Rural diversity index

MI 24.3%

US 34.3%

	MI	RANK
Rural diversity index	24.3%	31
Poverty level in rural school communities	295%	30
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	12.6%	23
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.4%	27
Percent rural household mobility	7.4%	29

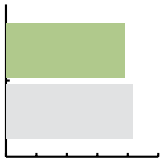
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 30

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



MI $78,937

US $83,256

	MI	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupi	$7,748	18
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$12.47	30
Percent instructional salaries for special education	9.4%	29
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.71	34
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$78,937	16

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 16

Rural high school graduation rate

MI 83.1%

US 89.4%

	MI	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-8.0	18
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	3.3	38
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	257.0	26
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	270.1	15
Rural high school graduation rate	83.1%	8

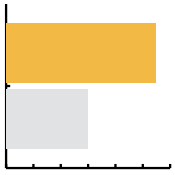
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 19

Rural students per psychologist/ school counselor:



MI 548

US 297

	MI	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	548	1
Percent rural children who are unhoused	3.6%	16
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	4.1%	33
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	42.8%	28
Rural students per primary care clinician	278	30

Priority Ranking

35

Significant

Minnesota

Just over a third of Minnesota's schools are rural, serving more than 178,000 students, almost 4% of which are multilingual learners. 53.7% of Minnesota's children come to kindergarten having attended public preschool, one of the highest rates in the United States. Measures of rural school community poverty are low, as is the percentage of the state's school-aged children who live in homes with household incomes below the poverty line. Rural Minnesota schools spend $10.05 on instruction for every dollar spent on transportation, which is significantly higher than most states.

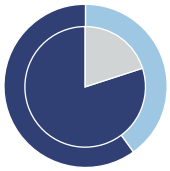
Educational outcomes data ranks in the top quartile of significance, with a drop in Grade 4 NAEP reading and math scores (-8.5/-8.7) that is more significant than the U.S. average. Minnesota's rural high school students graduate at rates just below the U.S. rural average (88.1% vs. U.S. 89.4%). Rural student access to school psychologists and school counselors is urgent with an average of 427 students for every one school-based mental health professional. Only rural students in four states have less access.

GAUGE 1 Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 20

Percent rural students in a remote rural district



MN 41.8%

US 18.7%

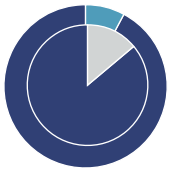
	MN	RANK
Percent rural schools	36.9%	27
Percent small rural districts	37.9%	29
Percent rural students	22.5%	26
Number of rural students	178,427	19
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	41.8%	13

GAUGE 2 Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 38

Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



MN 8.1%

US 14.2%

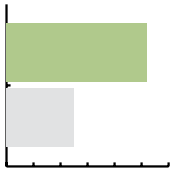
	MN	RANK
Rural diversity index	26.2%	29
Poverty level in rural school communities	344%	42
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	8.1%	43
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.9%	22
Percent rural household mobility	6.5%	37

GAUGE 3 Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | **IMPORTANT** | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 37

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



MN $2.60

US $1.25

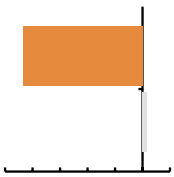
	MN	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$8,697	29
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$10.05	16
Percent instructional salaries for special education	11.5%	19
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$2.60	41
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$92,334	34

GAUGE 4 Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 13

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score



MN -8.7

US 0.3

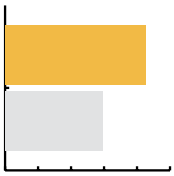
	MN	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-8.5	16
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-8.7	7
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	256.4	23
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	277.1	28
Graduation rate	88.1%	19

GAUGE 5 Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 37

Students per psychologist/ school



MN 427

US 297

	MN	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	427	5
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.5%	39
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	4.2%	32
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	53.7%	45
Rural students per primary care clinician	300	24

Priority Ranking

3

Leading

Mississippi

This report marks only the second time that Mississippi has not ranked 1st in the *Why Rural Matters* overall priority ratings. In this years' report, as in 2009, it ranks 3rd. With the changes in the U.S. Census definition of rural, 57.5% of students in the state are now rural, an increase from 50.3% in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters*. Similarly, since the 2023 report, the percent rural schools indicator rose by almost 10%. The percentage of children living in homes with household incomes below the poverty line is 23%, which is a slight increase from the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. Only New Mexico reports a greater percentage of students living in homes with household incomes below the poverty line. Mississippi spends on average $2,200 less per pupil than other states, with only one state spending less. Likewise, teacher salaries are $13,000 below the rural adjusted average. Fewer than one in three rural students in Mississippi enrolls in preschool, and the average ratio for school-based mental health support is almost 400 students to one school psychologist or school counselor. Equitable school funding remains critical in the state.

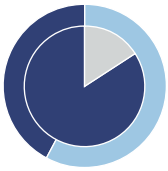
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 13

Percent rural students



MS 57.5%

US 16.7%

	MS	RANK
Percent rural schools	60.0%	8
Percent small rural districts	2.0%	45
Percent rural students	57.5%	3
Number of rural students	248,419	12
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	27.6%	22

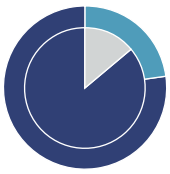
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 12

Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



MS 23.0%

US 14.2%

	MS	RANK
Rural diversity index	40.0%	16
Poverty level in rural school communities	239%	8
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	23.0%	2
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.1%	33
Percent rural household mobility	7.7%	21

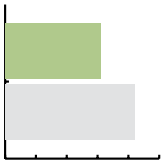
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 4

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



MS $6,191

US $8,417

	MS	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$6,191	2
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$11.33	23
Percent instructional salaries for special education	12.3%	18
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.48	30
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$70,470	4

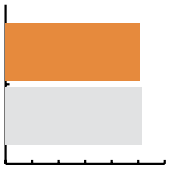
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 19

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score



MS 253.3

US 257.5

	MS	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-0.9	37
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-2.2	19
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	253.3	11
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	271.6	22
Rural high school graduation rate	90.0%	28

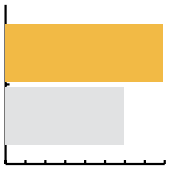
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 24

Rural students per psychologist/ school counselor



MS 395

US 297

	MS	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	395	7
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.3%	43
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	6.0%	21
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	32.5%	10
Rural students per primary care clinician	263	36

Priority Ranking

7

Leading

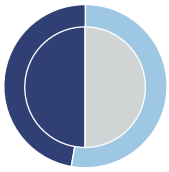
Missouri

Over 200,000 rural students attend public pk–12 schools in Missouri, representing almost a quarter of the state's school-aged children. Only seven states report higher levels of school community poverty and more than one in eight rural students live in homes with household incomes below the poverty line. One in 25 students are unhoused. Mirroring rural teacher salary data from the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, Arkansas and Missouri teachers earn average salaries less than their rural peer teachers in all other states. At $6,449, per pupil student spending is among the lowest in the United States and has risen two spots in priority to its current spot of eight since the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. Schools are disproportionately funded by local sources of revenue. Missouri funds schools $0.71 for every dollar raised by local taxes. Only five states rely more on the local tax base to fund their rural schools. Rural graduation rates in Missouri are among the highest in the United States and the Grade 8 reading and math NAEP scores are ranked 28th and 19th. With a ratio of 457 students to one primary care clinician, access to medical care is very difficult in rural Missouri communities.

GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

Percent small rural districts



MO 63.9%

US 50.0%

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

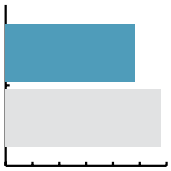
RANK 12

	MO	RANK
Percent rural schools	45.9%	18
Percent small rural districts	63.9%	15
Percent rural students	23.3%	24
Number of rural students	201,237	16
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	37.2%	16

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

Poverty level in rural school communities



MO 241%

US 290%

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

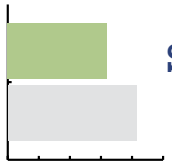
RANK 25

	MO	RANK
Rural diversity index	18.2%	44
Poverty level in rural school communities	241%	9
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	13.5%	20
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.2%	31
Percent rural household mobility	7.9%	19

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



MO $64,800

US $83,256

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

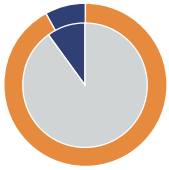
RANK 2

	MO	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil: rank 8	$6,449	8
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$10.47	19
Percent instructional salaries for special education	10.1%	27
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.71	6
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$64,800	2

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

Rural high school graduation rate



MO 92.2%

US 89.4%

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

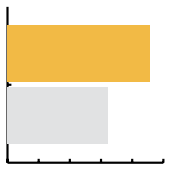
RANK 38

	MO	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-1.6	35
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	0.7	32
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	258.4	28
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	270.9	19
Rural high school graduation rate	92.2%	41

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

Rural students per primary care clinician



MO 457

US 322

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 6

	MO	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	268	30
Percent rural children who are unhoused	4.1%	12
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	7.9%	13
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	41.2%	23
Rural students per primary care clinician	457	1

Priority Ranking

10

Leading

Montana

Only BIE schools have a higher proportional share of rural schools than Montana, and no state has a higher percentage of small rural districts. Montana ranks as the most crucial state on the Footprint of Rural Education gauge, which captures the footprint of rural education in the state. Nearly one in ten students is a rural multilingual learner and the state has relatively high student mobility, with just over one in 12 students having changed primary residence in the previous year. At $.98 from the state for every local dollar, the state-to-local ratio of school funding dollars is below the U.S. rural average. Nearly 15% of Montana's rural students did not graduate from high school, which is significantly under the rural U.S. average graduation rate of 89.4%. Of critical concern, Montana has the lowest percentage of students enrolled in public preschool (just one in five), more than 6% of rural students are unhoused, and nearly 8% of rural students are uninsured.

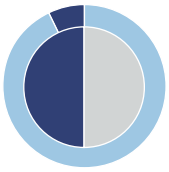
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 1

Percent small rural districts



MT 93.4%

US 50.0%

	MT	RANK
Percent rural schools	77.1%	2
Percent small rural districts	93.4%	1
Percent rural students	40.0%	6
Number of rural students	59,521	36
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	59.8%	7

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 17

Percent rural household mobility

MT 8.6%

US 7.8%

	MT	RANK
Rural diversity index	23.3%	34
Poverty level in rural school communities	270%	19
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	13.3%	21
Percent rural multilingual learners	9.9%	7
Percent rural household mobility	8.6%	13

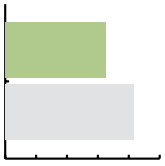
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | **IMPORTANT** | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 35

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



MT $0.98

US $1.25

	MT	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$8,842	31
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$11.49	26
Percent instructional salaries for special education	6.1%	44
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.98	16
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$80,065	19

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 25

Rural high school graduation rate

MT 85.4%

US 89.4%

	MT	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-7.4	19
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-3.7	14
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	265.3	43
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	283.1	38
Rural high school graduation rate	85.4%	14

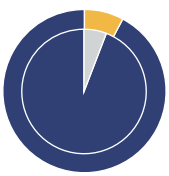
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 12

Percent school-aged children without health insurance coverage



MT 7.9%

US 6.4%

	MT	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	244	35
Percent rural children who are unhoused	6.1%	4
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	7.9%	13
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	20.1%	1
Rural students per primary care clinician	219	42

Priority Ranking

41

Notable

Nebraska

Just over half of Nebraska's schools are rural and 76.6% of school districts are small. These schools serve about 83,000 public school students with 55.5% of rural districts being remote. No other state relies as heavily on local funding to educate its rural students. At $.30 of state support to dollar of local funding, the ratio of state-to-local funding to educate rural students is critically low, although per-pupil spending and instructional salaries are near average levels for the rural United States. Only four states saw a steeper drop in Grade 4 NAEP Reading scores from 2019 to 2024, and only a dozen had steeper drops in Grade 4 NAEP Math scores. Nevertheless, Nebraska's high school graduation rate is high relative to the U.S. average (92.2% vs. U.S. 89.4%). Rates of rural school community poverty are relatively low, as is the number of students who live in homes with household incomes below the poverty line. Already comparatively strong for public preschool enrollment in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, Nebraska increased its enrollment another 3% to 61%.

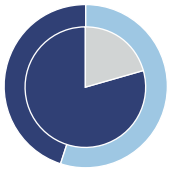
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 7

Percent rural students in a remote rural district



NE 55.5%

US 18.7%

	NE	RANK
Percent rural schools	53.5%	12
Percent small rural districts	76.6%	5
Percent rural students	25.2%	22
Number of rural students	82,967	30
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	55.5%	8

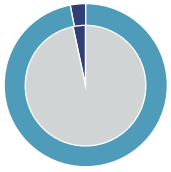
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 39

Poverty level in rural school communities



NE 291%

US 290%

	NE	RANK
Rural diversity index	22.1%	38
Poverty level in rural school communities	291%	28
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	8.8%	41
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.1%	33
Percent rural household mobility	6.4%	38

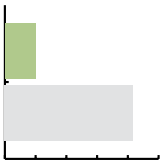
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | **IMPORTANT** | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 38

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



NE $0.30

US $1.25

	NE	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil: rank	$10,078	38
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$17.13	45
Percent instructional salaries for special education	10.3%	26
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.30	1
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$88,473	30

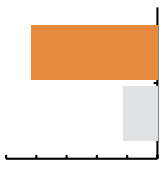
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 27

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score



NE -12.5

US -3.4

	NE	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-12.5	5
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-4.3	13
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	258.8	29
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	289.2	47
Rural high school graduation rate	92.2%	41

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 45

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool

NE 61.0%

US 40.2%

	NE	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	217	42
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.3%	43
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	3.9%	36
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	61.0%	49
Rural students per primary care clinician	271	34

Priority Ranking

20

Major

Nevada

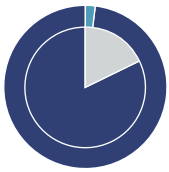
No state has a lower percentage of rural students than Nevada. However, the state's overall priority ranking falls into the major category, even with relatively few rural students. Its rural districts are some of the most racially and ethnically diverse in the United States, and 5.8% are multilingual learners. Educational outcomes are problematic, with low reading and math NAEP scores in Grade 8. At 76.8%, Nevada's rural graduation rate is well below the U.S. rural average of 89.4%. Nevada's most urgent concern is access to supports for well-being, with four of five indicators representing critical needs relative to other rural states. Nearly one in ten students does not have health insurance, and only West Virginia and BIE schools experience greater rates of students being unhoused. From the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report to the current, Nevada's state revenue to schools per local dollar school funding ratio jumped dramatically, from $0.98 to $18.59 per local dollar[2]

GAUGE 1 Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 43

Percent rural students



NV 2.3%

US 16.7%

	NV	RANK
Percent rural schools	20.1%	42
Percent small rural districts	37.5%	30
Percent rural students	2.3%	50
Number of rural students	9,757	49
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	37.9%	15

GAUGE 2 Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 24

Rural diversity index

NV 53.3%

US 34.3%

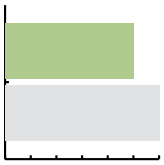
	NV	RANK
Rural diversity index	53.3%	4
Poverty level in rural school communities	297%	31
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	11.3%	29
Percent rural multilingual learners	5.8%	14
Percent rural household mobility	6.6%	36

GAUGE 3 Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 40

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures (rural)



NV $9.85

US $11.54

	NV	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$8,510	27
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$9.85	13
Percent instructional salaries for special education	12.6%	17
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$18.59	48
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	N/A	N/A

GAUGE 4 Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 3

Rural high school graduation rate

NV 76.8%

US 89.4%

	NV	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	N/A	N/A
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	N/A	N/A
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	250.5	7
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	268.1	12
Rural high school graduation rate	76.8%	3

GAUGE 5 Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 1

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool

NV 23.9%

US 40.2%

	NV	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	468	2
Percent rural children who are unhoused	7.0%	3
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	10.2%	3
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	23.9%	2
Rural students per primary care clinician	280	28

[2] Beginning in the 2021-22 school year, Nevada began implementing the Pupil-Centered Funding Plan where state and local revenues are combined at the state level before being distributed to districts.

Priority Ranking

43

Notable

New Hampshire

More than half of New Hampshire's schools are rural, and they serve 37.5% of the state's school aged students. New Hampshire's rural schools are disproportionately funded by local sources of income—only two other states rely more heavily on the local tax bases for school funding. At $14,986, per pupil instructional spending is very high, exceeded only by New York and New Jersey. School community poverty rates are low, as is the percentage of rural family mobility. Three percent of New Hampshire's children are unhoused, a number slightly higher than than the U.S. rural average of 2.7%. No state spends a higher percentage of the instructional budget on special education. Access to school psychologists and school counselors are some of the best in the United States, with one for every 137 students. Likewise, only two states have better rural access to primary care clinicians. Enrollment in public preschool is extremely low at 27.6% (rank 4 of highest priority).

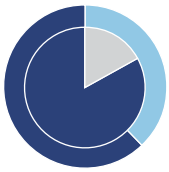
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 14

Percent rural students



NH 37.5%

US 16.7%

	NH	RANK
Percent rural schools	54.0%	11
Percent small rural districts	67.0%	14
Percent rural students	37.5%	9
Number of rural students	60,205	35
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	10.1%	37

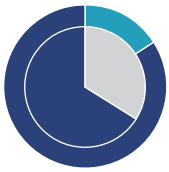
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 48

Rural diversity index



NH 16.1%

US 34.3%

	NH	RANK
Rural diversity index	16.1%	45
Poverty level in rural school communities	429%	46
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	6.7%	45
Percent rural multilingual learners	1.1%	46
Percent rural household mobility	5.4%	45

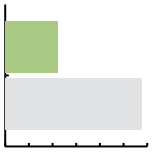
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | **IMPORTANT** | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 27

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



NH $0.44

US $1.25

	NH	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$14,986	47
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$14.16	40
Percent instructional salaries for special education	27.2%	1
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.44	3
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$88,865	32

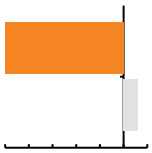
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 42

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score



NH -2.5

US 0.3

	NH	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	0.0	39
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-2.5	18
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	265.5	44
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	285.1	44
Rural high school graduation rate	90.8%	30

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 41

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool

NH 27.6%

US 40.2%

	NH	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	137	48
Percent rural children who are unhoused	2.5%	24
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	3.0%	44
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	27.6%	4
Rural students per primary care clinician	138	48

Priority Ranking

46

Notable

New Jersey

No state has a smaller percentage of rural schools, and only five states have a lower percentage of rural students. Nevertheless, educating 86,000 students attend rural schools in New Jersey. New Jersey districts are among the most diverse in the United States, and while teacher salaries fall around the middle for all states and per pupil instructional expenditures are higher than every state except New York, only five states have a school funding ratio that more heavily relies on the local tax base. Poverty levels are among the lowest in the United States, and educational outcomes are high. Relatively fewer students in New Jersey are unhoused than rural students in most other states, and rates of family mobility are very low. Not only are Grade 8 NAEP scores high, but the downward U.S. trend in NAEP scores from from 2019 to 2024 was less in New Jersey than most states.

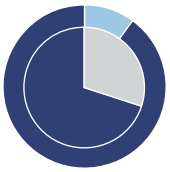
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 44

Percent rural schools



NJ 10.0%

US 30.7%

	NJ	RANK
Percent rural schools	10.0%	51
Percent small rural districts	54.3%	21
Percent rural students	6.7%	44
Number of rural students	86,683	29
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	0.0%	46

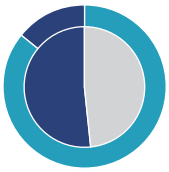
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 43

Poverty level in rural school communities



NJ 515%

US 290%

	NJ	RANK
Rural diversity index	45.3%	11
Poverty level in rural school communities	515%	50
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	6.1%	46
Percent rural multilingual learners	2.3%	38
Percent rural household mobility	5.2%	47

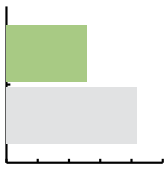
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 22

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



NJ $0.71

US $1.25

	NJ	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$15,132	48
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$13.20	35
Percent instructional salaries for special education	18.8%	3
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.71	6
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$80,819	23

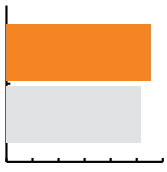
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 49

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading Score



NJ 277.0

US 257.5

	NJ	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	1.5	40
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	2.4	35
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	277.0	49
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	290.4	48
Rural high school graduation rate	91.8%	39

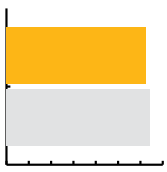
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 44

Rural students per primary care clinician



NJ 312

US 322

	NJ	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	194	43
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.2%	47
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	2.0%	46
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	47.4%	37
Rural students per primary care clinician	312	18

Priority Ranking

6

Leading

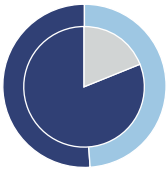
New Mexico

New Mexico's rural school districts are characterized by their small size and remoteness. At over 30%, no state has a greater percentage of children who live in homes with household incomes below the poverty line. No state has a greater percentage of rural multilingual learners. Educational outcomes are critical. Between 2019 and 2024, only two states had a greater drop in Grade 4 NAEP Math scores and the drop in Grade 4 NAEP Reading scores is 13th compared to other states. In the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, reading and math NAEP scores were the lowest of any state. This trend continues in this year's report, with New Mexico ranking second only behind the Bureau of Indian Education. One in five rural New Mexico students does not graduate from high school, and rural New Mexico schools serve a high percentage of unhoused students. New Mexico's rural students have inequitable access to school-based mental health services, with an average ratio of 353 students per school psychologist or school counselor.

GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

Percent rural students in a remote district



NM 48.5%

US 18.7%

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

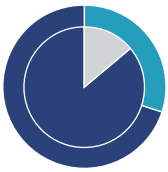
RANK 23

	NM	RANK
Percent rural schools	40.3%	24
Percent small rural districts	69.0%	12
Percent rural students	18.8%	34
Number of rural students	54,470	39
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	48.5%	9

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



NM 30.2%

US 14.2%

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

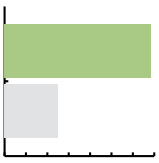
RANK 1

	NM	RANK
Rural diversity index	30.7%	22
Poverty level in rural school communities	184%	2
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	30.2%	1
Percent rural multilingual learners	30.2%	1
Percent rural household mobility	10.6%	4

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



NM $3.42

US $1.25

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

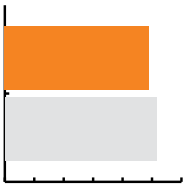
RANK 44

	NM	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$9,018	32
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$13.63	37
Percent instructional salaries for special education	10.4%	25
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$3.42	44
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$90,364	33

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score



NM 244.6

US 257.5

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

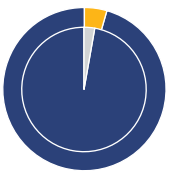
RANK 2

	NM	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-8.8	13
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-9.5	3
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	244.6	2
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	252.4	2
Rural high school graduation rate	80.0%	4

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

Percent rural children who are unhoused



NM 4.5%

US 2.7%

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 11

	NM	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor: rank 13	353	13
Percent rural children who are unhoused: rank 11	4.5%	11
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	7.3%	16
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	46.7%	35
Rural students per primary care clinician	310	19

Priority Ranking

42

Notable

New York

Although only 12.3% of students in New York attend school in a rural district, New York still has the sixth largest absolute number of rural students in the United States. Instructional spending is the highest in the United States, but rural schools spend an average of $8.92 on instruction relative to every dollar spent on transportation. Only three states have a more challenging instruction to transportation spending ratio than New York. Reading outcomes are especially problematic. First, only Washington and Pennsylvania experienced steeper drops in Grade 4 NAEP Reading scores between 2019 and 2024. Also, New York's Grade 8 NAEP Reading scores are critically low and rank 3rd in concern. The *Access to Supports for Well-Being* gauge is a clear strength, ranking 43rd overall, reflecting above average access to primary care clinicians, health insurance coverage, access to primary care clinicians, and school psychologists and school counselors.

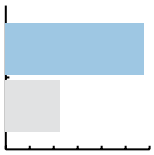
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 40

Number of rural students



NY 288,696

US 113,757 (median)

	NY	RANK
Percent rural schools	18.1%	44
Percent small rural districts	33.4%	32
Percent rural students	12.3%	36
Number of rural students	288,696	6
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	4.9%	39

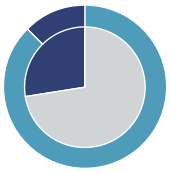
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 37

Poverty level in rural school communities



NY 350%

US 290%

	NY	RANK
Rural diversity index	24.4%	30
Poverty level in rural school communities	350%	43
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	11.6%	27
Percent rural multilingual learners	2.6%	37
Percent rural household mobility	6.7%	33

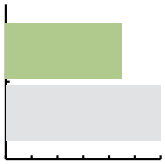
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 35

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures (rural)



NY $8.92

US $11.54

	NY	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$16,406	49
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$8.92	4
Percent instructional salaries for special education	13.3%	15
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.18	20
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$116,959	48

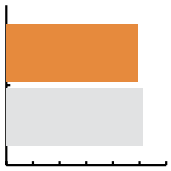
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 9

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score



NY 247.4

US 257.5

	NY	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-14.1	3
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-6.5	9
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	247.4	3
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	275.1	26
Rural high school graduation rate	89.9%	27

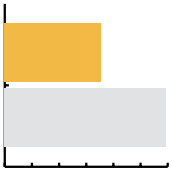
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 43

Rural students per psychologist/ school counselor



NY 177

US 297

	NY	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	177	45
Percent rural children who are unhoused	2.0%	29
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	4.0%	34
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	42.7%	26
Rural students per primary care clinician	224	41

Priority Ranking

13

Leading

North Carolina

More than one in three of North Carolina's students attends school in a rural district, which is more than 478,000 students, second only to Texas. North Carolina's rural districts are highly diverse with only Delaware and Oklahoma having a greater diversity index. There is a 53.8% chance that any two randomly selected students in a rural North Carolina school would identify as different races or ethnicities. Over 7% of North Carolina's students are rural multilingual learners. 17% of rural North Carolina students live in homes with household incomes below the poverty line. North Carolina schools receive $3.18 for every dollar raised by the local tax base, which is among the best ratios in the rural United States, but per pupil spending is relatively low at $7,633. The downward change in North Carolina NAEP scores from 2019 to 2024 is urgent. Nearly 14% of North Carolina's rural high school students did not graduate high school, which puts their rural graduation rate below the U.S. average of 89.4%. At 27.6%, only three states report lower enrollment in public preschool.

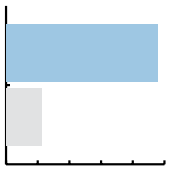
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 23

Number of rural students



NC 478,152

US 113,757

	NC	RANK
Percent rural schools	41.4%	21
Percent small rural districts	4.2%	41
Percent rural students	34.2%	12
Number of rural students	478,152	2
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	4.1%	42

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics (median)

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 6

Rural diversity index

NC 53.8%

US 34.3%

	NC	RANK
Rural diversity index	53.8%	3
Poverty level in rural school communities	255%	13
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	17.0%	12
Percent rural multilingual learners	7.1%	13
Percent rural household mobility	8.0%	17

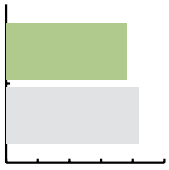
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 43

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



NC $7,633

US $8,417

	NC	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$7,633	16
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$15.23	43
Percent instructional salaries for special education	7.5%	37
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$3.18	43
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$87,396	28

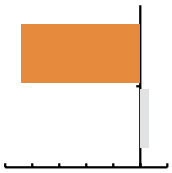
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 12

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score



NC -4.4%

US 0.3%

	NC	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-8.7	14
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-4.4	12
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	255.7	21
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	275.4	27
Rural high school graduation rate	86.3%	15

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 17

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool

NC 27.6%

US 40.2%

	NC	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	310	23
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.9%	31
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	5.4%	25
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	27.6%	4
Rural students per primary care clinician	303	23

Priority Ranking

22

Major

North Dakota

Despite having a relatively small rural student population in absolute numbers, rural students make up more than 36% of all North Dakota students. Two out of three schools in the state are located in rural areas, 86.9% of rural districts are small, and almost 74% or rural districts are remote. Teacher salaries remain very low, having improved only minimally since the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. At an average of $71,454, only six states pay teachers less. Poverty levels in rural school communities are relatively low and under 10% of students live in homes with household incomes below the poverty line, ranking 36th. Public preschool enrollment numbers have decreased from 40.9% in 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report to 28.1% in the current report. Only five states have lower public preschool enrollment than North Dakota. Over 13% of North Dakota's rural students do not graduate high school, a rate significantly lower than the U.S. rural average.

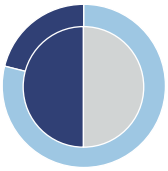
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 5

Percent small rural districts



ND 86.9%

US 50.0%

	ND	RANK
Percent rural schools	67.3%	6
Percent small rural districts	86.9%	3
Percent rural students	36.1%	11
Number of rural students	42,974	43
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	73.8%	4

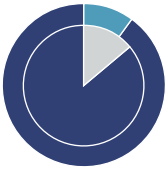
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 44

Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



ND 9.5%

US 14.2%

	ND	RANK
Rural diversity index	20.4%	42
Poverty level in rural school communities	332%	40
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	9.5%	36
Percent rural multilingual learners	2.8%	36
Percent rural household mobility	6.1%	41

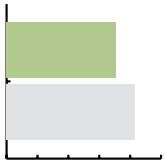
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 22

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



ND $71,454

US $83,256

	ND	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$9,265	33
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$10.03	15
Percent instructional salaries for special education	8.8%	32
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.31	28
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$71,454	7

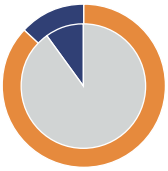
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 32

Rural high school graduation rate



ND 86.9%

US 89.4%

	ND	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-3.9	27
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	0.8	33
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	260.3	31
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	281.2	35
Rural high school graduation rate	86.9%	16

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 15

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool

ND 28.1%

US 40.2%

	ND	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	274	28
Percent rural children who are unhoused	3.3%	19
Percent school-aged children without health insurance	6.0%	21
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	28.1%	6
Rural students per primary care clinician	274	31

Priority Ranking

38

Significant

Ohio

More than 350,000 Ohio students are enrolled in rural school districts, the fourth largest absolute rural student enrollment in the United States. These students comprise 23.2% of Ohio's students. Educational policy issues remain a very important concern. Ohio's average per pupil spending and transportation costs are about average, but rural districts receive low state contributions to school funding relative to local funding ($0.94 to every local dollar spent). Most educational outcomes are above average; however, Ohio scored tenth in highest priority for change in Grade 4 NAEP Reading scores. Graduation rates in Ohio are high, with 93.3% of rural Ohio students completing high school. School psychologists and school counselors have high caseloads of 326:1 in Ohio, and the ratio of rural students to primary care physicians is also concerningly high at 339:1. Only 34.3% of rural children are enrolled in public preschool, and 1.4% of students in Ohio are unhoused.

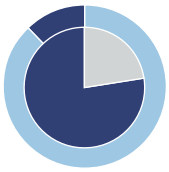
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 31

Number of rural students



OH 352,878

US 113,757 (median)

	OH	RANK
Percent rural schools	32.0%	30
Percent small rural districts	10.9%	35
Percent rural students	23.2%	25
Number of rural students	352,878	4
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	2.8%	45

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 42

Rural diversity index

OH 15.2%

US 34.3%

	OH	RANK
Rural diversity index	15.2%	47
Poverty level in rural school communities	305%	33
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	12.0%	25
Percent rural multilingual learners	1.5%	44
Percent rural household mobility	6.3%	39

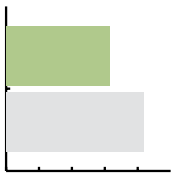
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 18

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



OH $0.94

US $1.25

	OH	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil: rank 25	$8,220	25
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$10.72	21
Percent instructional salaries for special education	16.7%	6
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.94	15
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$97,684	42

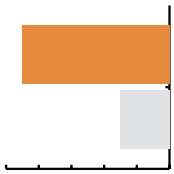
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 41

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score



OH -9.1

US -3.4

	OH	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-9.1	10
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	2.5	36
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	262.3	35
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	283.5	40
Rural high school graduation rate	93.3%	45

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 15

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool

OH 34.3%

US 40.2%

	OH	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	326	20
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.4%	42
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	7.6%	15
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	34.3%	14
Rural students per primary care clinician	339	14

Priority Ranking

1

Leading

Oklahoma

Rural education in Oklahoma is ranked as the highest overall priority, up from eighth in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. Nearly 60% of Oklahoma's schools are rural and rural students make up over 36% of the state's student population: both percentages are among the top ten among other states. Only Delaware has a more diverse rural student population. Rural school community poverty levels are among the highest in the United States, and about 1 in 10 rural students have changed primary residence in the last year. Oklahoma spends $2,200 per student less on instruction than the U.S. rural average. Rural teachers in Oklahoma are paid lower than their peers in every state other than Arkansas and Missouri. Educational outcomes show some of the steepest declines in NAEP scores between 2019 and 2024, and low scores for Grade 8 NAEP assessments in reading and math. Almost 5% of Oklahoma's rural students are unhoused, and almost 10% are uninsured. However, enrollment in public preschool is relatively robust at 52.2%, ranking 42nd.

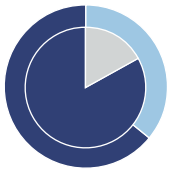
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 4

Percent rural students



OK 36.3%

US 16.7%

	OK	RANK
Percent rural schools	59.7%	9
Percent small rural districts	69.2%	11
Percent rural students	36.3%	10
Number of rural students	234,809	13
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	24.2%	23

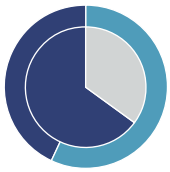
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 4

Rural diversity index



OK 57.5%

US 34.3%

	OK	RANK
Rural diversity index	57.5%	2
Poverty level in rural school communities	251%	12
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	17.7%	10
Percent rural multilingual learners	4.1%	19
Percent rural household mobility	9.4%	8

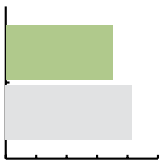
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 21

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



OK $70,080

US $83,256

	OK	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$6,262	4
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$18.88	46
Percent instructional salaries for special education	7.4%	39
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.20	21
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$70,080	3

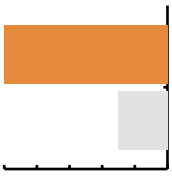
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 7

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score



OK -10.5

US -3.4

	OK	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-10.5	7
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-3.7	14
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	254.9	15
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	267.7	10
Rural high school graduation rate	88.1%	19

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 9

Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage

OK 9.7%

US 6.4%

	OK	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	336	17
Percent rural children who are unhoused	4.8%	9
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	9.7%	6
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	52.2%	42
Rural students per primary care clinician	341	13

Priority Ranking

26

Significant

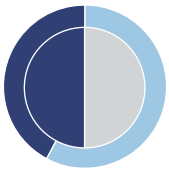
Oregon

Just over a quarter of Oregon's schools and almost 12% of its students are rural. Oregon's districts are among the top half of states for student diversity, and only ten states have a higher percentage of rural multilingual learners. Per pupil expenditures on instruction have improved by about $1,400 since *Why Rural Matters* 2023, but teacher salaries remain more than $4,000 below the U.S. rural average. Only two states reported a steeper decline in Grade 4 NAEP Math scores between 2019 and 2024. Nearly one in five rural students do not graduate high school, and almost 5% are unhoused. The percentage of rural students living in homes with household incomes below the poverty line has increased from 10.5% in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report to 12.9% in the current report. Rural student access to primary care clinicians is among the best in the United States at a ratio of 210:1 (rank 43).

GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

Percent small rural districts



OR 57.8%

US 50.0%

NOTABLE | **IMPORTANT** | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

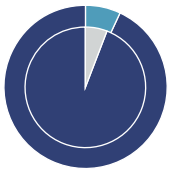
RANK 37

	OR	RANK
Percent rural schools	28.1%	34
Percent small rural districts	57.8%	20
Percent rural students	11.9%	37
Number of rural students	63,995	34
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	20.3%	26

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

Percent rural multilingual learners



OR 7.2%

US 5.6%

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

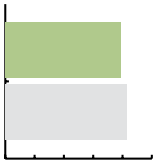
RANK 16

	OR	RANK
Rural diversity index	39.9%	18
Poverty level in rural school communities	281%	22
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	12.9%	22
Percent rural multilingual learners	7.2%	11
Percent rural household mobility	8.0%	17

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE



OR $79,039

US $83,256

NOTABLE | **IMPORTANT** | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

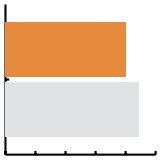
RANK 34

	OR	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$8,083	23
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$10.09	17
Percent instructional salaries for special education	7.0%	40
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.99	37
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$79,039	17

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

Rural high school graduation rate



OR 80.7%

US 89.4%

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

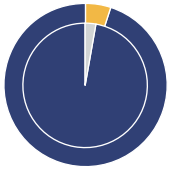
RANK 5

	OR	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-8.9	12
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-9.3	4
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	255.0	17
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	271.4	21
Rural high school graduation rate	80.7%	5

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

Percent rural children who are unhoused



OR 4.9%

US 2.7%

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 33

	OR	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	312	21
Percent rural children who are unhoused	4.9%	7
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	3.7%	37
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	42.7%	26
Rural students per primary care clinician	210	43

Priority Ranking

31

Significant

Pennsylvania

Almost 300,000 Pennsylvania students are enrolled in rural school districts, the fifth largest absolute rural student enrollment in the United States. Pennsylvania's rural districts are becoming more diverse. The chance that two randomly selected students in a rural school would identify as a different race or ethnicity was 20.4% in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, but is currently 22.7%. Instructional spending and teacher salaries are relatively high compared to other states, but only six states have lower ratios of instructional spending to transportation costs. The state of Pennsylvania provides only $0.86 of funding per local dollar; only 11 states rely more heavily on the local tax base. No state had a sharper decline in Grade 4 reading and math NAEP scores between 2019 to 2024. However, reading and math NAEP scores are relatively high at rank 37 and 45. At 92%, rural graduation rates are better than the U.S. rural average of 89.4%. Public preschool enrollment is low at 33.8%, as is the percentage of students without health insurance (8.4%).

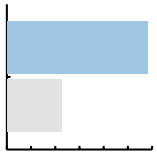
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 36

Number of rural students



PA 290,414

US 113,757 (median)

	PA	RANK
Percent rural schools	28.3%	33
Percent small rural districts	9.3%	36
Percent rural students	19.2%	33
Number of rural students	290,414	5
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	3.7%	43

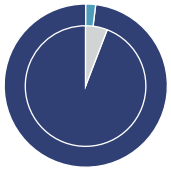
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 41

Percent rural multilingual learners



PA 1.7%

US 5.6%

	PA	RANK
Rural diversity index	22.7%	36
Poverty level in rural school communities	322%	39
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	11.8%	26
Percent rural multilingual learners	1.7%	42
Percent rural household mobility	6.3%	39

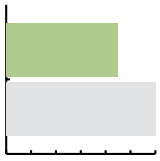
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 10

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures (rural)



PA $9.25

US $11.54

	PA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$10,923	39
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$9.25	7
Percent instructional salaries for special education	19.0%	2
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.86	12
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$88,403	29

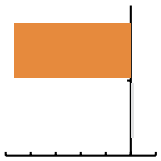
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 22

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score



PA -14.0

US 0.3

	PA	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-14.9	1
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-14.0	1
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	263.1	37
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	285.8	45
Rural high school graduation rate	92.0%	40

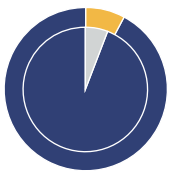
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 27

Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage



PA 8.4%

US 6.4%

	PA	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	250	33
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.9%	31
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	8.4%	11
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	33.8%	12
Rural students per primary care clinician	237	39

Priority Ranking

49

Notable

Rhode Island

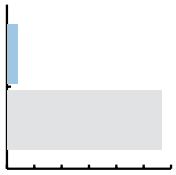
Rhode Island ranks the lowest concern of any state on four of five gauges, with the exception of educational policy context. No state has fewer rural students. School community poverty is comparatively very low, with only three states reporting lower rates. Household income in rural school communities is more than four times the federal poverty threshold of $32,150 for a family of four. Rhode Island has the lowest percentage of rural unhoused students (0.6%). Instructional spending per rural pupil and teacher salaries are well within the top half of states; however, transportation expenditures are high and only one state provides less revenue to schools per local tax dollar. Educational outcomes are strong with the exception of Grade 4 NAEP Reading scores, which dropped 8.7 points between 2019 and 2024. Access to supports for well-being are comparatively very positive, particularly public preschool enrollment. At 92%, Rhode Island reports the highest enrollment in public preschool.[3]

GAUGE 1 Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 50

Number of rural students



RI 8,205

US 113,757 median

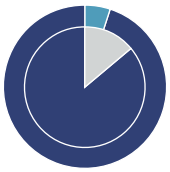
	RI	RANK
Percent rural schools	12.2%	48
Percent small rural districts	37.5%	30
Percent rural students	6.7%	44
Number of rural students	8,205	50
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	0.0%	46

GAUGE 2 Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 49

Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



RI 5.1%

US 14.2%

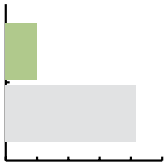
	RI	RANK
Rural diversity index	18.6%	43
Poverty level in rural school communities	442%	47
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	5.1%	48
Percent rural multilingual learners	0.9%	47
Percent rural household mobility	N/A	N/A

GAUGE 3 Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 19

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



RI $0.33

US $1.25

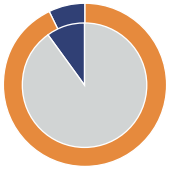
	RI	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$12,325	42
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$9.37	9
Percent instructional salaries for special education	11.5%	19
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.33	2
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$96,347	39

GAUGE 4 Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 48

Rural high school graduation rate



RI 93.3%

US 89.4%

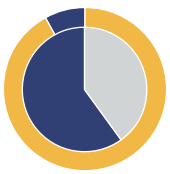
	RI	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-8.7	14
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	4.2	41
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	272.4	47
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	283.2	39
Rural high school graduation rate	93.3%	45

GAUGE 5 Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 49

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool



RI 92.0%

US 40.2%

	RI	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	191	44
Percent rural children who are unhoused	0.6%	50
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	1.9%	48
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	92.0%	50
Rural students per primary care clinician	182	46

[3] While there has been a strong push for public preschool in Rhode Island, it's likely that this estimate is somewhat inflated due to the estimation method detailed in the results section

Priority Ranking

8

Leading

South Carolina

One in five students in South Carolina is rural and two in five schools are rural. South Carolina's rural districts are some of the most diverse in the United States with a 48.2% chance that two randomly selected students in a rural school would identify as different races or ethnicities. Only Mississippi and New Mexico have higher rates of students living in homes where the household income is below the poverty line of $32,150 for a family of four. Per pupil instructional spending is $1,200 below the rural U.S. average and adjusted teacher salaries are almost $11,000 below the U.S. rural average. Rural Grade 8 NAEP scores are critically low, but the change in NAEP scores from 2019 to 2024 was less than most states. Fifteen percent of rural high school students do not graduate from high school, which is well above the U.S. rural average of 10.6%.

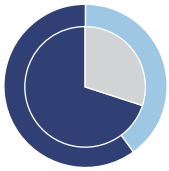
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 41

Percent rural schools



SC 39.5%

US 30.7%

	SC	RANK
Percent rural schools:	39.5%	25
Percent small rural districts	2.6%	44
Percent rural students	20.5%	31
Number of rural students	152,809	21
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	3.3%	44

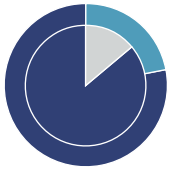
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 5

Poverty rural school-aged children experiencing poverty



SC 21.9%

US 14.2%

	SC	RANK
Rural diversity index	48.2%	8
Poverty level in rural school communities	260%	14
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	21.9%	3
Percent rural multilingual learners	5.3%	15
Percent rural household mobility	8.2%	16

GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 12

Percent instructional salaries for special education

SC 15.6%

US 11.8%

	SC	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$7,221	12
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$14.80	42
Percent instructional salaries for special education	15.6%	7
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.28	26
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$72,510	10

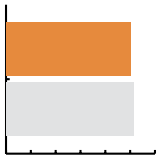
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 14

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score



SC 249.4

US 257.5

	SC	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-0.8	38
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	1.9	34
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	249.4	5
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	264.2	8
Rural high school graduation rate	85.0%	12

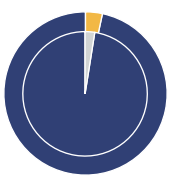
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 14

Percent rural children who are unhoused



SC 3.6%

US 2.7%

	SC	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	275	27
Percent rural children who are unhoused	3.6%	16
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	6.3%	19
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	38.4%	22
Rural students per primary care clinician	308	20

Priority Ranking

9

Leading

South Dakota

Despite a relatively small number of rural students, South Dakota data suggests a very significant rural education footprint. Almost 40% of South Dakota's students are rural and 75.4% of the state's schools are rural. Most rural school districts are remote (70.9%) and small (77.3%). South Dakota ranks in the top half of states with high rates of school community poverty levels, 14.9% of rural students live in homes with household incomes below the poverty line. Mobility rates are relatively low. At $1,200 below the rural U.S. average, per pupil spending is low. South Dakota's rural teachers make almost $11,000 less than their peers teaching in rural schools in other states. School funding from the state relative to local dollars is critically low at $0.58 (rank 5). Only four states rely more on the local tax base to fund their rural schools. At 52.3%, South Dakota enrolls rural children in public preschool at rates that are among the best in the United States, but almost 17% of South Dakota's rural high school students do not graduate, a rate well above the U.S. rural average of 10.6%.

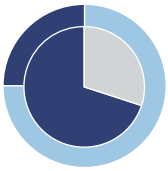
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 3

Percent rural schools



SD 75.4%

US 30.7%

	SD	RANK
Percent rural schools	75.4%	4
Percent small rural districts	77.3%	4
Percent rural students	39.3%	7
Number of rural students	55,445	38
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	70.9%	5

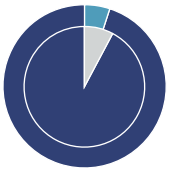
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 28

Percent rural household mobility



SD 5.5%

US 7.8%

	SD	RANK
Rural diversity index	24.0%	33
Poverty level in rural school communities	267%	18
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	14.9%	18
Percent rural multilingual learners	4.2%	18
Percent rural household mobility	5.5%	44

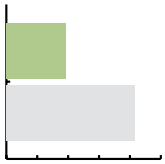
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 11

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



SD $0.58

US $1.25

	SD	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$7,288	13
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$12.53	31
Percent instructional salaries for special education	8.1%	36
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.58	5
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$72,060	9

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 16

Rural high school graduation rate

SD 83.2%

US 89.4%

	SD	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-5.8	23
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-1.1	25
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	254.9	15
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	279.4	33
Rural high school graduation rate	83.2%	9

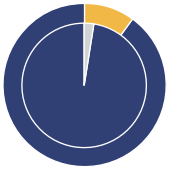
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 30

Percent of rural school aged children without health insurance



SD 8.6%

US 6.4%

	SD	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	252	32
Percent rural children who are unhoused	2.1%	26
Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance	8.6%	10
Percent rural enrollment in public preschoo	52.3%	43
Rural students per primary care clinician	308	20

Priority Ranking

29

Significant

Tennessee

In terms of absolute rural student enrollment, Tennessee's 264,953 students rank 10th in the United States, constituting just over one quarter of all of Tennessee's students. The percentage of rural school-aged children living in homes below the poverty line is very high at 17.8%, an increase from 15.7% in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. Low household income is likely further complicated by high rates of family mobility, with more 8.9% of students changing primary residence in the past 12 months, down about a percentage point from the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. At $6,395 per pupil, instructional spending is very low, with only five states spending less per student on instruction. Teacher salaries rank in the bottom third of the states, rising slightly in concern to rank 14 from rank 16 in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. Nearly matching the U.S. rural average of 89.4%, 89% of Tennessee's rural students graduate high school.

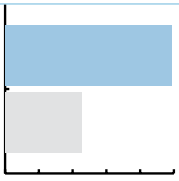
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 27

Number of rural students



TN 264,953

US 113,757 (median)

	TN	RANK
Percent rural schools	36.9%	27
Percent small rural districts	4.3%	40
Percent rural students	26.7%	17
Number of rural students	264,953	10
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	11.0%	33

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 26

Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty

TN 17.8%

US 14.2%

	TN	RANK
Rural diversity index	27.5%	28
Poverty level in rural school communities	308%	34
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	17.8%	9
Percent rural multilingual learners	1.8%	41
Percent rural household mobility	8.9%	12

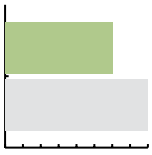
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 24

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



TN $6,395

US $8,417

	TN	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$6,395	6
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$13.89	39
Percent instructional salaries for special education	9.4%	29
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.37	29
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$76,757	14

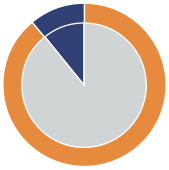
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 29

Rural high school graduation rate



TN 89.0%

US 89.4%

	TN	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-4.1	26
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-0.2	30
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	258.2	27
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	277.1	28
Rural high school graduation rate	89.0%	25

GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 21

Percent rural enrollment in public preschool

TN 35.2%

US 40.2%

	TN	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	345	16
Percent rural children who are unhoused	2.1%	26
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	5.1%	26
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	35.2%	16
Rural students per primary care clinician	282	27

Priority Ranking

14

Major

Texas

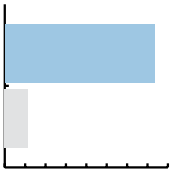
At more than 700,000 rural students, Texas has by far the largest absolute rural student enrollment of any state in the United States, though only about one in seven Texas students and 26.7% of its schools are rural. Districts are racially and ethnically diverse. If you were to randomly choose two students in a rural Texas school, there is more than a 45.8% chance that the students would identify as different races or ethnicities. Many Texas students are rural multilingual learners, and families are 9.2% likely to have changed residencies in the past year. Per pupil instructional spending is low (rank 14), but at $7,339, has improved slightly relative to other states since ranking 11th in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. Teacher salaries remain low, but have risen slightly relative to other states since the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. Rural schools receive $.0.84 to per local dollar, and only ten states have more reliance on the local tax base to fund their rural schools. Changes from 2019 to 2024 in Grade 4 NAEP scores and high school graduation rates are among the best in the U.S., but Grade 8 NAEP scores in both reading and math are very low. Texas has the highest rate of uninsured rural children in the United States (13.8%), and the ratio of students per primary care clinician is of critical concern (435:1, rank 2).

GAUGE 1 Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 25

Number of rural students



TX 734,699

US 113,757 (median)

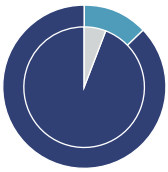
	TX	RANK
Percent rural schools	26.7%	35
Percent small rural districts	47.1%	23
Percent rural students	14.4%	35
Number of rural students	734,699	1
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	19.5%	28

GAUGE 2 Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 7

Percent multilingual learners



TX 12.7%

US 5.6%

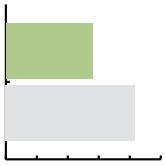
	TX	RANK
Rural diversity index	45.8%	10
Poverty level in rural school communities	289%	26
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	15.3%	16
Percent rural multilingual learners	12.7%	4
Percent rural household mobility	9.2%	10

GAUGE 3 Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | **IMPORTANT** | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 33

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



TX $0.84

US $1.25

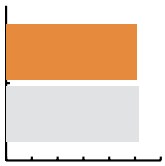
	TX	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$7,339	14
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$19.57	47
Percent instructional salaries for special education	6.5%	43
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.84	11
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$79,213	18

GAUGE 4 Educational Outcomes

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 37

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score



TX 252.7

US 257.5

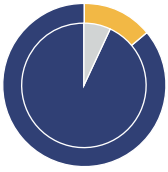
	TX	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	2.4	42
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	5.2	44
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	252.7	8
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	267.5	9
Rural high school graduation rate	93.8%	48

GAUGE 5 Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 4

Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage



TX 13.8%

US 6.4%

	TX	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	328	19
Percent rural children who are unhoused	2.1%	26
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	13.8%	1
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	38.2%	20
Rural students per primary care clinician	435	2

Priority Ranking

35

Significant

Utah

One in 20 of Utah's students are rural. Only California, Florida, and Nevada have fewer rural students as a percentage. In absolute numbers, only four states and the BIE have fewer rural students. Over 80% of Utah's rural students attend a rural remote school district. At $7,216, per pupil spending in Utah is $1,200 below the U.S. rural average. Although this is an increase of $1,071 per pupil over spending reported in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, Utah has lost ground relative to other states and is now ranked 11th. Similarly, Utah's rural teacher salaries were ranked 36th in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, but are now ranked 31st. Utah's students' Grade 8 NAEP Math scores are among the highest of rural test takers in the United States, but Grade 4 NAEP scores saw a very significant drop from 2019 to 2024. Access to primary care clinicians is critical in rural Utah (359:1), and almost 10% of rural students do not have health insurance.

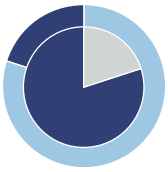
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 42

Percent rural students in a remote rural district



UT 80.4%

US 18.7%

	UT	RANK
Percent rural schools	21.5%	41
Percent small rural districts	23.5%	34
Percent rural students	5.2%	47
Number of rural students	31,993	45
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	80.4%	2

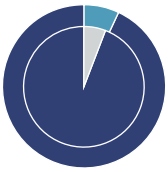
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 26

Percent rural multilingual learners



UT 7.3%

US 5.6%

	UT	RANK
Rural diversity index	28.7%	25
Poverty level in rural school communities	274%	20
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	7.9%	44
Percent rural multilingual learners	7.3%	9
Percent rural household mobility	7.5%	26

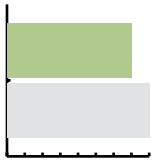
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 32

Rural instructional expenditures per pupil



UT $7,216

US $8,417

	UT	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$7,216	11
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$13.66	38
Percent instructional salaries for special education	N/A	N/A
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.27	25
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$88,816	31

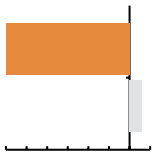
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 35

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score



UT -3.0%

US 0.3%

	UT	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-5.2	24
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-3.0	16
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	263.0	36
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	284.2	42
Rural high school graduation rate	90.8%	30

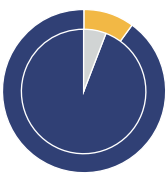
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 10

Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage



UT 9.8%

US 6.4%

	UT	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	244	35
Percent rural children who are unhoused	3.4%	18
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	9.8%	4
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	41.8%	25
Rural students per primary care clinician	359	10

Priority Ranking

44

Notable

Vermont

Vermont is among the most rural states in the U.S. More than three quarters of its schools are rural (28.9% of which are remote) and are attended by 60% of the state's students. Vermont school districts tend to be small, but at 68.3% the percentage of small rural districts is trending downward compared to the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, when 69.8% of districts were small. Per pupil spending is relatively high. Rural teacher salaries have improved significantly relative to salaries in other states. In the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report, teacher salaries were ranked 19th. In this report, salary data shows that salaries have risen relative to other states and are now ranked 36th comparatively. Only nine states spend more per pupil than Vermont, and rural schools are supported primarily by the state as opposed to local tax bases. No state has a better state-to-local funding ratio. Rural students in Vermont have some of the best access to school psychologists and school counselors at an average ratio of one school-based mental health professional for every 169 students. Only Maine and New Hampshire have lower numbers of students per primary care clinician. Educational outcomes data were unavailable.

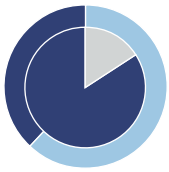
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 8

Percent rural students



VT 61.9%

US 16.7%

	VT	RANK
Percent rural schools	76.2%	3
Percent small rural districts	68.3%	13
Percent rural students	61.9%	2
Number of rural students	51,322	41
Percent rural students in a remote rural district:	28.9%	19

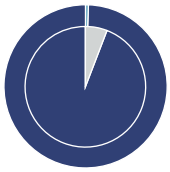
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 47

Percent rural multilingual learners



VT 0.6%

US 5.6%

	VT	RANK
Rural diversity index	15.3%	46
Poverty level in rural school communities	338%	41
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	10.2%	33
Percent rural multilingual learners	0.6%	48
Percent rural household mobility	5.3%	46

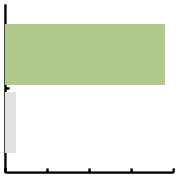
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 48

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



VT $18.81

US $1.25

	VT	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$11,686	40
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$22.03	48
Percent instructional salaries for special education	7.5%	37
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$18.81	49
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$93,885	36

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK N/A

N/A

	VT	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	N/A	N/A
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	N/A	N/A
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	N/A	N/A
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	N/A	N/A
Rural high school graduation rate	N/A	N/A

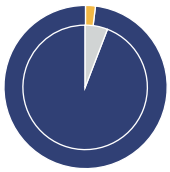
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 46

Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage



VT 1.6%

US 6.4%

	VT	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselork	169	46
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.9%	31
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	1.6%	49
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	52.3%	43
Rural students per primary care clinician	163	47

Priority Ranking

21

Major

Virginia

More than a quarter million students are enrolled in Virginia's mostly small rural school districts, representing more than one in five public school students in the state. The rural student population is among the most diverse in the United States. There is a 46% chance that two randomly chosen students in a rural school would identify as different races or ethnicities. Transportation expenditures are proportionately high, with rural Virginia schools spending $9.07 on instruction to every dollar spent on transportation. Instructional per pupil spending decreased slightly from the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report from $6,875 (rank 24) to $8,014 (rank 22). Similarly, rural teacher salaries declined proportionally from the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report from rank 26 to the current rank of 21, currently sitting slightly below the U.S. rural average. Similarly, rural high school students in Virginia are graduating at rates (88.8%) slightly under the U.S. rural average of 89.4%. Enrollment in public preschool, however, is critically low at 30.9%, only six states have lower rates of enrollment. Likewise, with a ratio of 398 rural students to one primary care clinician, only four states have higher ratios of students per clinician.

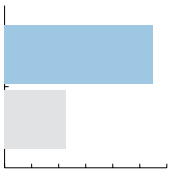
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 35

Number of rural students



VA 274,731

US 113,757 (median)

	VA	RANK
Percent rural schools	31.0%	31
Percent small rural districts	4.1%	42
Percent rural students	21.8%	28
Number of rural students	274,731	9
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	8.3%	38

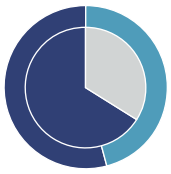
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 22

Rural diversity index



VA 46.0%

US 34.3%

	VA	RANK
Rural diversity index	46.0%	9
Poverty level in rural school communities	311%	35
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	12.5%	24
Percent rural multilingual learners	4.1%	19
Percent rural household mobility	7.7%	21

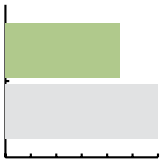
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 6

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures (rural)



VA $9.07

US $11.54

	VA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$8,014	22
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$9.07	5
Percent instructional salaries for special education	15.1%	9
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.20	21
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$80,595	21

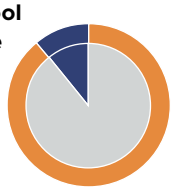
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 26

Rural high school graduation rate



VA 88.8%

US 89.4%

	VA	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-2.2	33
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	0.6	31
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	255.7	21
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	274.4	24
Rural high school graduation rate	88.8%	24

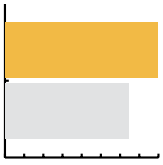
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 25

Rural students per primary care clinician



VA 398

US 322

	VA	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	249	34
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.3%	43
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	4.7%	30
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	30.9%	8
Rural students per primary care clinician	398	5

Priority Ranking

33

Significant

Washington

More than one in five schools in Washington are rural, and nearly 30% of all rural students in Washington attend a rural remote school district. If you were to randomly choose two students in a rural Washington school, there is more than a 40% chance that the students would identify as different races or ethnicities. At 12.7%, only three states have a higher percentage of rural multilingual learners than Washington. Educational policy context indicators suggest a high ratio of state-to-local funding, strong per-pupil instructional expenditures, and teacher salaries about $16,000 higher than the U.S. rural average. Educational outcomes, however, are urgent. Only Pennsylvania experienced a steeper decline in Grade 4 NAEP Reading scores from 2019 to 2024, and the Grade 8 NAEP Math scores are very low. At 82.6%, the rural high school graduation rate in Washington is significantly under the rural U.S. average of 89.4%. Only four states have a higher percentage of students who are unhoused.

GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 34

Percent small rural districts

WA 60.8%

US 50.0%

	WA	RANK
Percent rural schools	22.2%	40
Percent small rural districts	60.8%	18
Percent rural students	9.5%	40
Number of rural students	103,125	26
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	29.3%	18

GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 20

Percent rural multilingual learners

WA 12.7%

US 5.6%

	WA	RANK
Rural diversity index	40.0%	16
Poverty level in rural school communities	294%	29
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	9.9%	34
Percent rural multilingual learners	12.7%	4
Percent rural household mobility	7.7%	21

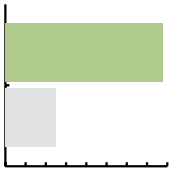
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 47

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



WA $3.89

US $1.25

	WA	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$9,821	37
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$12.23	29
Percent instructional salaries for special education	6.6%	42
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$3.89	47
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$99,249	44

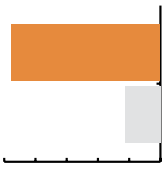
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 4

Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score



WA -14.3

US -3.4

	WA	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-14.3	2
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-8.9	6
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	256.9	25
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	262.4	7
Rural high school graduation rate	82.6%	7

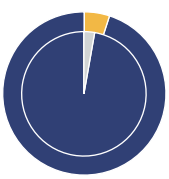
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 34

Percent rural children who are unhoused



WA 5.4%

US 2.7%

	WA	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	309	24
Percent rural children who are unhoused	5.4%	5
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	4.8%	29
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	49.0%	38
Rural students per primary care clinician	232	40

Priority Ranking

15

Major

West Virginia

With county-wide school districts, none of West Virginia's districts are small, though nearly 57.2% of schools are rural and 42% of students are rural. Rates of rural school community poverty are high with 17% of rural students living in homes with household incomes below the federal poverty line of $32,150 for a family of four. Transportation costs are significant in rural West Virginia. No state spends less on instruction relative to transportation dollars, with just $6.78 going to instruction for every dollar spent on transportation. West Virginia's teachers are paid on average almost $10,000 less than the U.S. rural average. Rural Grade 8 NAEP reading and math scores are very low, though Grade 4 math improved between 2019 and 2024. Rural high school graduation rates are above average (91.6% to U.S. 89.4%). Although access to primary care clinicians and school psychologists and school counselors is better than the U.S. average and only 3.3% of students lack health insurance, West Virginia has a critically high rate of unhoused students (7.3%, rank 2).

GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 22

Percent rural students

WV 41.6%

US 16.7%

	WV	RANK
Percent rural schools	57.2%	10
Percent small rural districts	0.0%	47
Percent rural students	41.6%	5
Number of rural students	101,541	27
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	19.7%	27

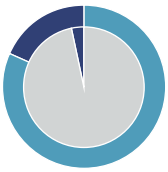
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 31

Poverty level in rural school communities



WV 245%

US 290%

	WV	RANK
Rural diversity index	12.8%	49
Poverty level in rural school communities	245%	10
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	17.0%	12
Percent rural multilingual learners	0.9%	47
Percent rural household mobility	6.7%	33

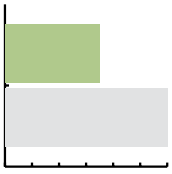
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 4

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures (rural)



WV $6.78

US $11.54

	WV	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$7,872	20
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$6.78	1
Percent instructional salaries for special education	14.1%	12
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.58	32
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$73,887	12

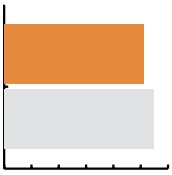
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | **CRITICAL** | URGENT

RANK 15

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score



WV 254.8

US 273.7

	WV	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-6.2	21
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	3.2	37
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	248.6	4
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	254.8	3
Rural high school graduation rate	91.6%	36

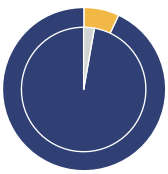
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 35

Percent rural children who are unhoused



WV 7.3%

US 2.7%

	WV	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	269	29
Percent rural children who are unhoused	7.3%	2
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	3.3%	42
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	43.5%	30
Rural students per primary care clinician	257	37

Priority Ranking

37

Significant

Wisconsin

Nearly one in four students in Wisconsin is rural, and more than 40% of schools in the state are rural, an increase from 36.6% from the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. Rural school community poverty levels in Wisconsin and rates of family mobility (6%) are lower than most other states. High school students are 92.7% likely to graduate from rural Wisconsin schools, which is above the U.S. rural rate of 89.4%. Rural teacher salaries are around $6,500 less than the U.S. rural average, and Wisconsin salaries have fallen compared to rural teachers' salary data reported in the 2023 *Why Rural Matters* report. Local funding sources make up a lower proportion of state contributions to rural education as compared to most other states, with only $0.88 coming from the state for every local dollar. Almost one in 15 students lacks health insurance; however, rural Wisconsin reports better than average access to school-based mental health professionals.

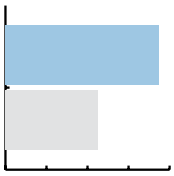
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 16

Number of rural students



WI 187,729

US 113,757 (median)

	WI	RANK
Percent rural schools	40.9%	22
Percent small rural districts	42.4%	24
Percent rural students	23.4%	23
Number of rural students	187,729	18
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	28.6%	20

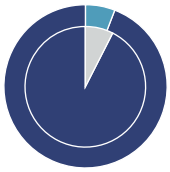
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 40

Percent rural household mobility



WI 6.0%

US 7.8%

	WI	RANK
Rural diversity index	22.6%	37
Poverty level in rural school communities	321%	37
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	9.4%	37
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.4%	27
Percent rural household mobility	6.0%	42

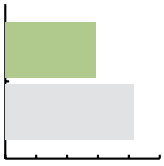
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | VERY IMPORTANT | **CRUCIAL**

RANK 8

State revenue to schools per local dollar (rural)



WI $0.88

US $1.25

	WI	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil: rank 26	$8,233	26
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$11.95	27
Percent instructional salaries for special education	18.7%	4
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$0.88	13
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$76,823	15

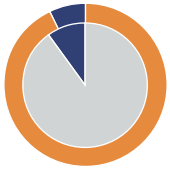
GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | **URGENT**

RANK 43

Rural high school graduation rate



WI 92.7%

US 89.4%

	WI	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-1.3	36
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-1.2	24
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	262.2	34
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	284.1	41
Rural high school graduation rate	92.7%	43

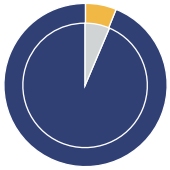
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 39

Percent of rural school-aged children without health insurance coverage



WI 6.3%

US 6.4%

	WI	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	238	39
Percent rural children who are unhoused	1.8%	35
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	6.3%	19
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	45.1%	31
Rural students per primary care clinician	280	28

Priority Ranking

40

Notable

Wyoming

More than half of Wyoming's public schools are rural, and more than one in four of the state's students attends a rural school district. Only two states have a higher percentage of rural remote districts. Rates of rural school community poverty are slightly below average, and 9.1% of children live in homes with household incomes below the poverty line (rank 39). At $12,192, per pupil spending is high (rank 41) as compared to rural districts in other states. Teacher salaries (rank 43) are also higher than average. Rural Wyoming teacher salaries are nearly $15,000 higher than the average for the rural United States. Rural Grade 8 NAEP scores are better than the U.S. average, and the decrease in NAEP scores from 2019 to 2024 is about average when compared to rural test takers in other states. High school graduation rates stand out relative to the other indicators, with just under 15% of rural students not graduating high school, a rate higher than the U.S. rural average of 10.6%. Caseloads for primary care clinicians and school-based mental health professionals are low relative to other states.

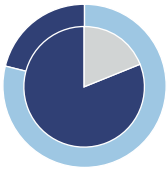
GAUGE 1

Rural Education Footprint

NOTABLE | IMPORTANT | **VERY IMPORTANT** | CRUCIAL

RANK 18

Percent rural students in a remote rural district



WY 79.0%

US 18.7%

	WY	RANK
Percent rural schools	50.6%	14
Percent small rural districts	38.7%	27
Percent rural students	26.0%	19
Number of rural students	23,556	48
Percent rural students in a remote rural district	79.0%	3

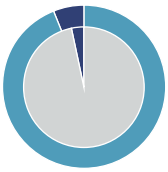
GAUGE 2

Student and Family Characteristics

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 30

Poverty level in rural school communities



WY 282%

US 290%

	WY	RANK
Rural diversity index	24.2%	32
Poverty level in rural school communities	282%	23
Percent rural school-aged children experiencing poverty	9.1%	39
Percent rural multilingual learners	3.6%	26
Percent rural household mobility	7.6%	25

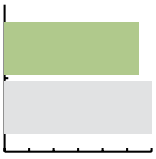
GAUGE 3

Educational Policy Context

NOTABLE | **IMPORTANT** | VERY IMPORTANT | CRUCIAL

RANK 38

Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures (rural)



WY $10.96

US $11.54

	WY	RANK
Rural instructional expenditures per pupil	$12,192	41
Ratio of instructional to transportation expenditures	$10.96	22
Percent instructional salaries for special education	15.6%	7
State revenue to schools per local dollar	$1.29	27
Rural adjusted salary expenditures per instructional FTE	$98,167	43

GAUGE 4

Educational Outcomes

FAIR | **SERIOUS** | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 27

Rural high school graduation rate

WY 85.2%

US 89.4%

	WY	RANK
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading score	-4.6	25
Change in rural Grade 4 NAEP Math score	-0.5	27
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading score	264.3	40
Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math score	278.0	30
Rural high school graduation rate	85.2%	13

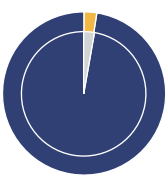
GAUGE 5

Access to Supports for Well-Being

FAIR | SERIOUS | CRITICAL | URGENT

RANK 40

Percent rural children who are unhoused

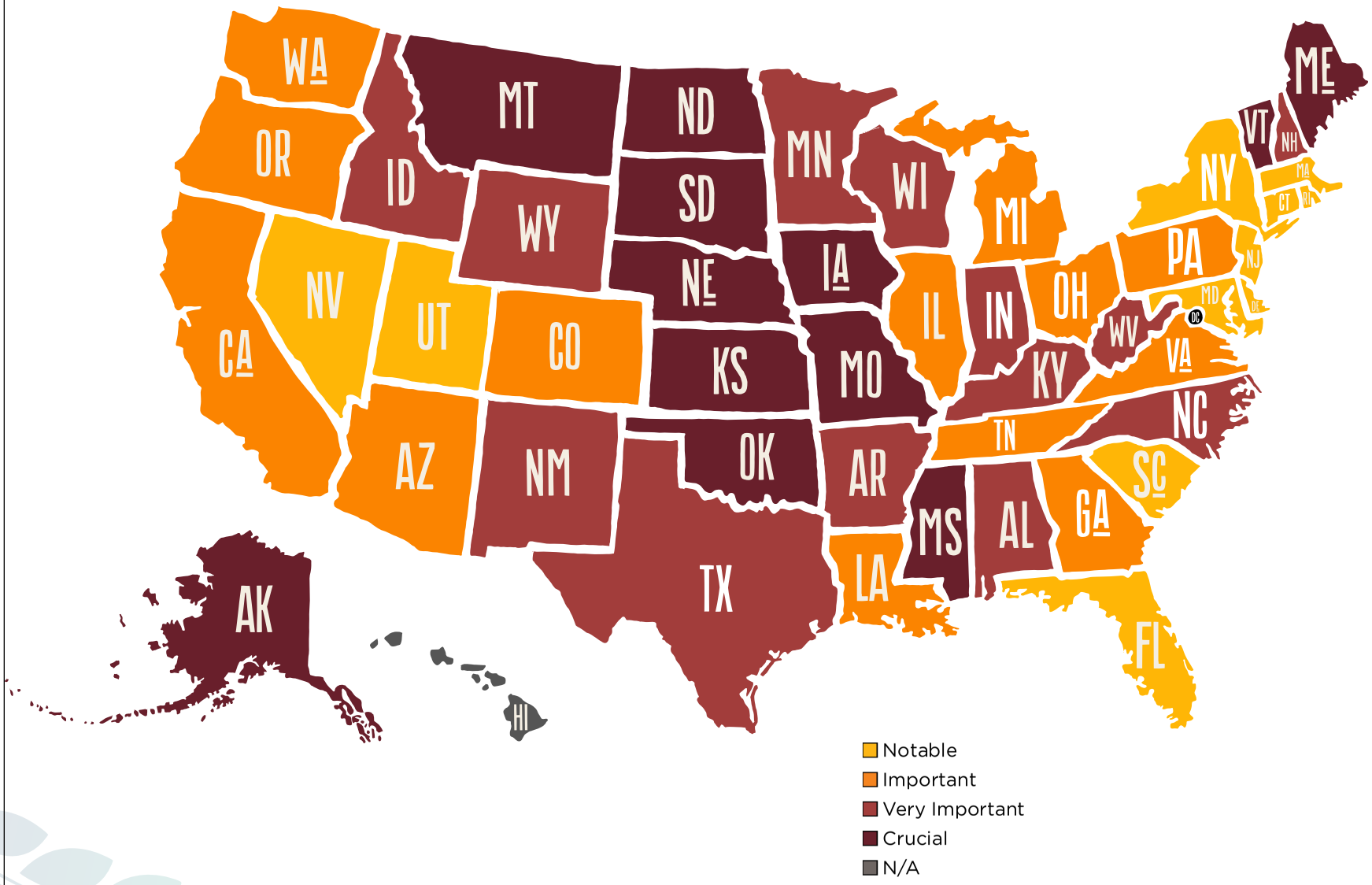


WY 2.6%

US 2.7%

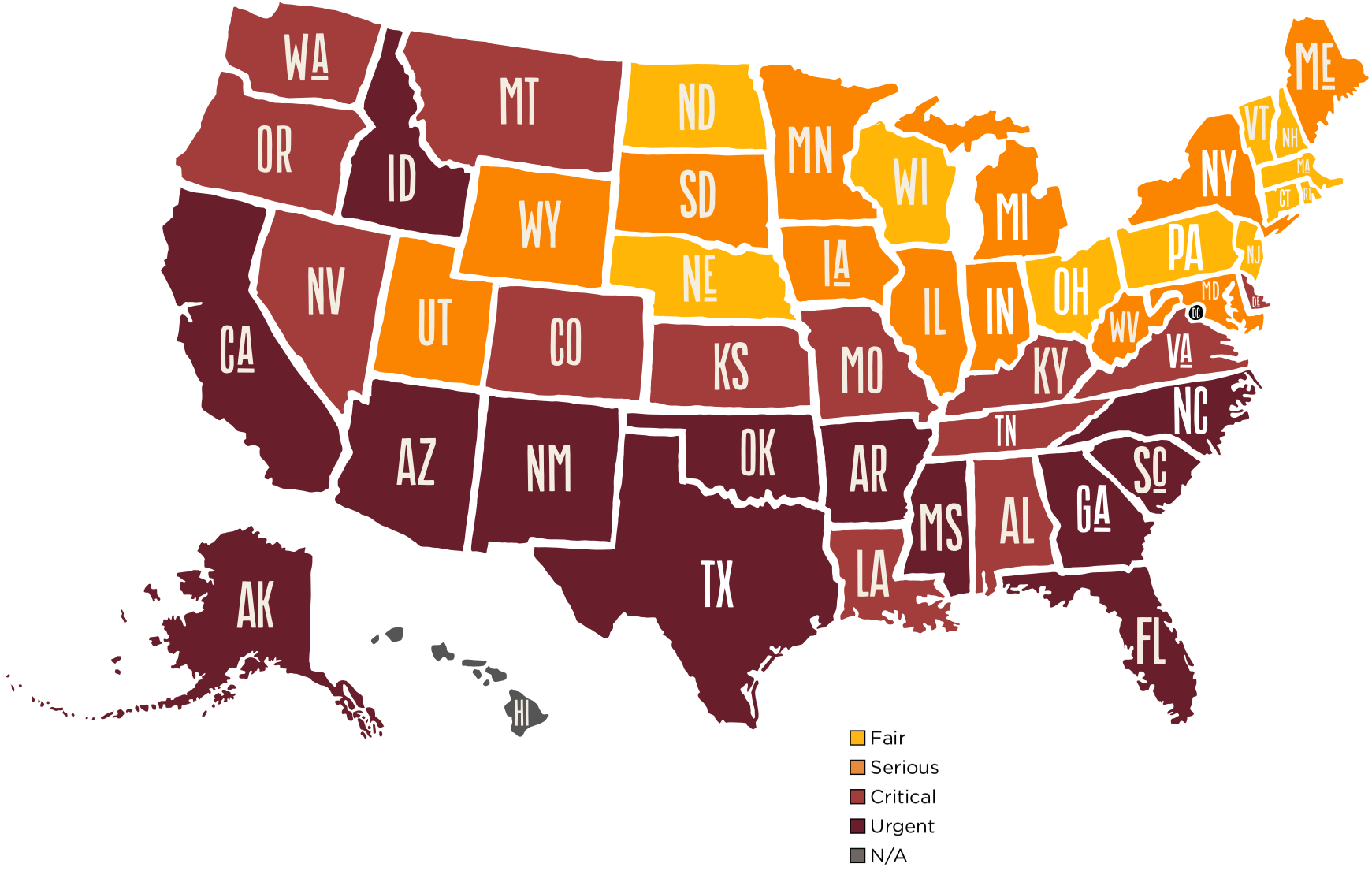
	WY	RANK
Rural students per psychologist/school counselor	228	40
Percent rural children who are unhoused	2.6%	22
Percent rural school-aged children without health insurance	5.1%	26
Percent rural enrollment in public preschool	45.4%	33
Rural students per primary care clinician	245	38

Rural Education Footprint Gauge

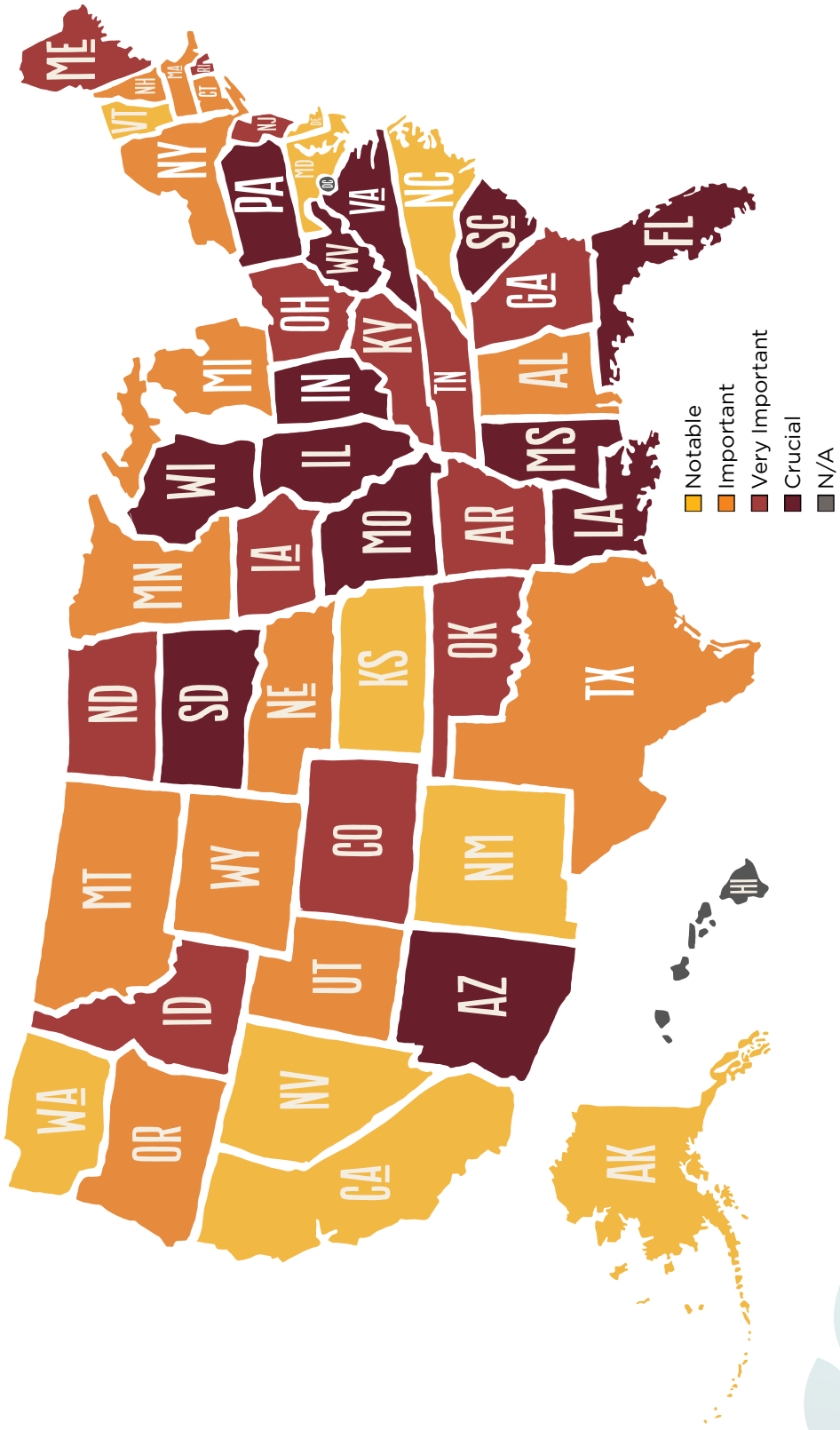


WHY rural MATTERS

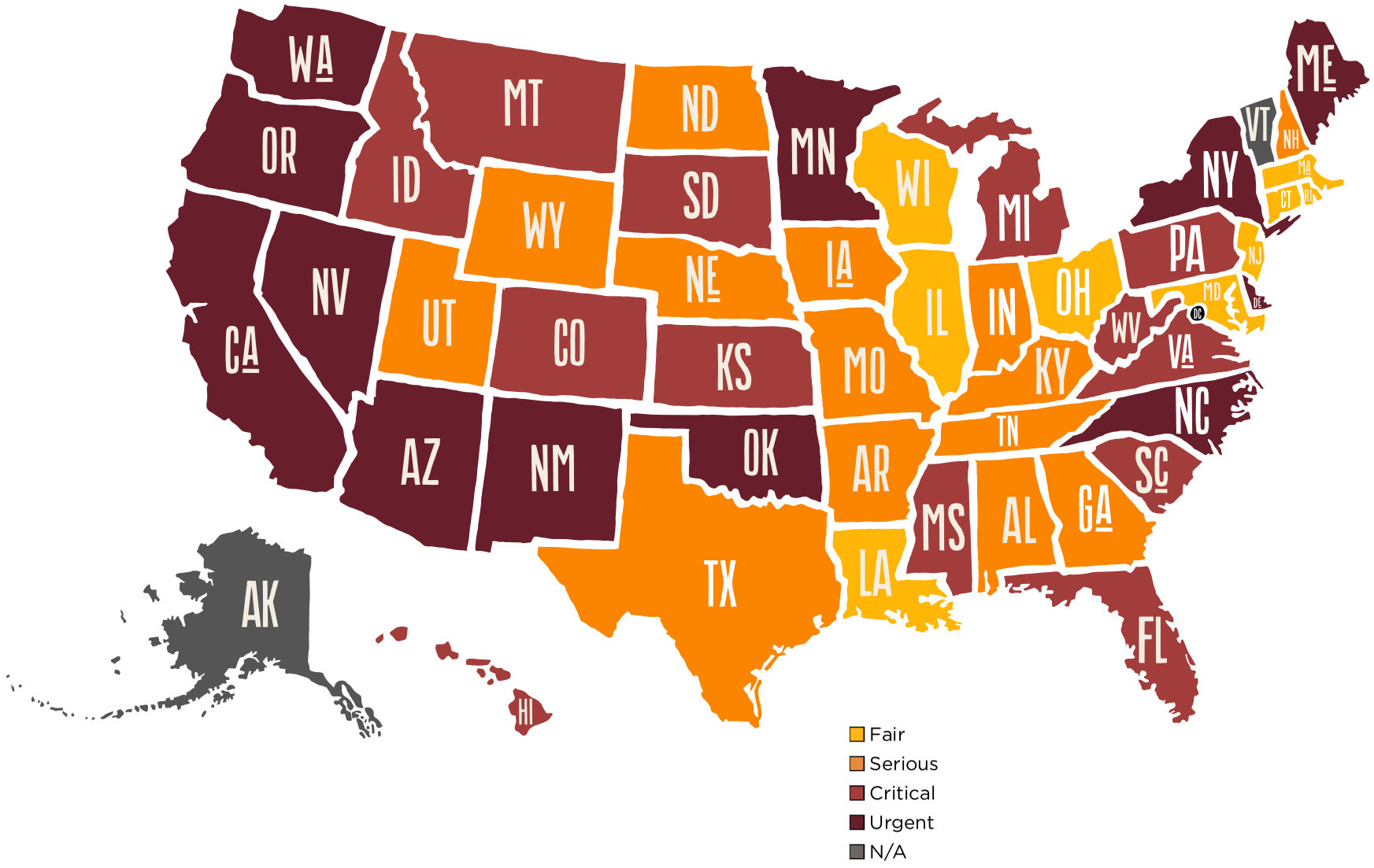
Student and Family Characteristics Gauge



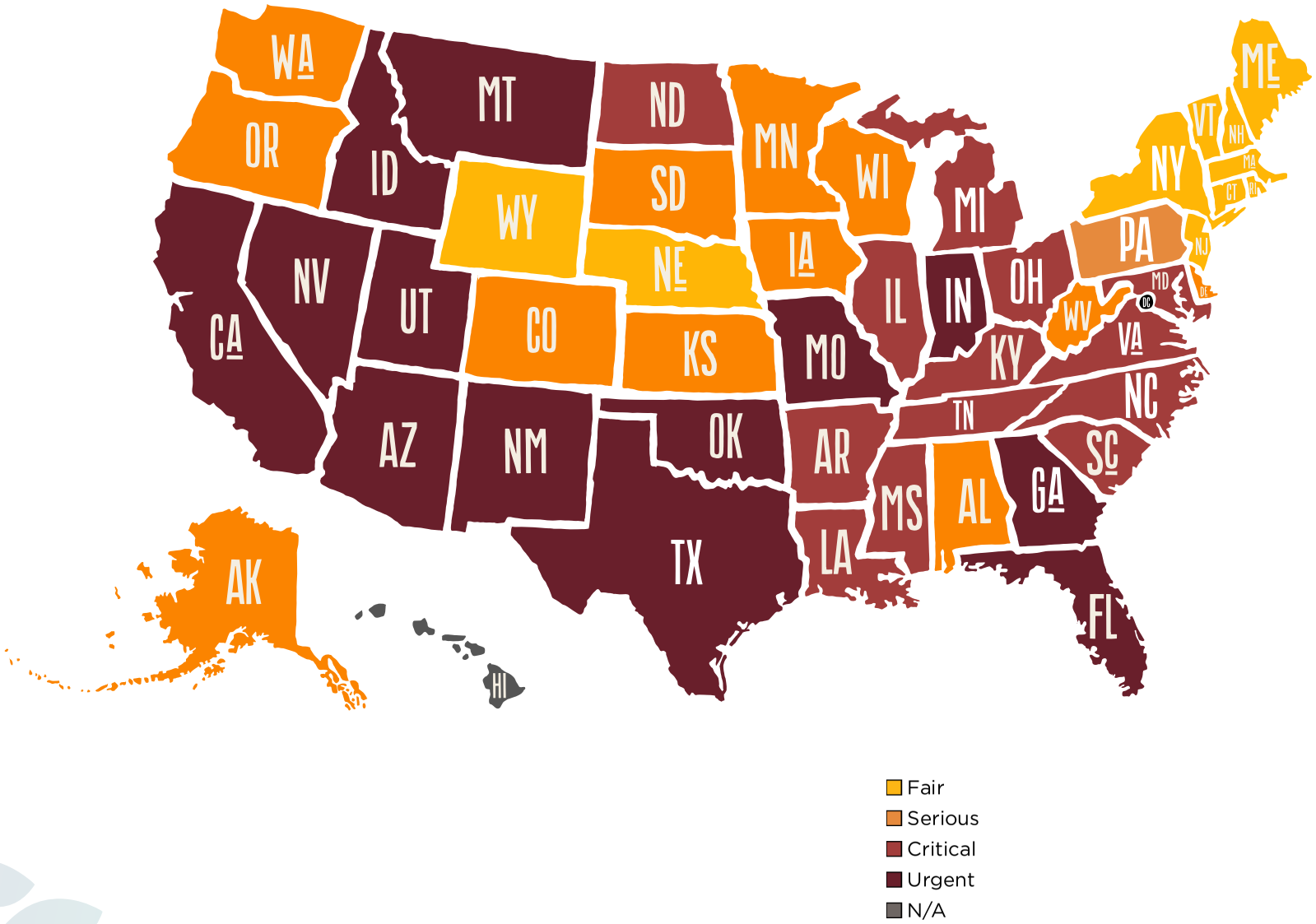
Educational Policy Context Gauge



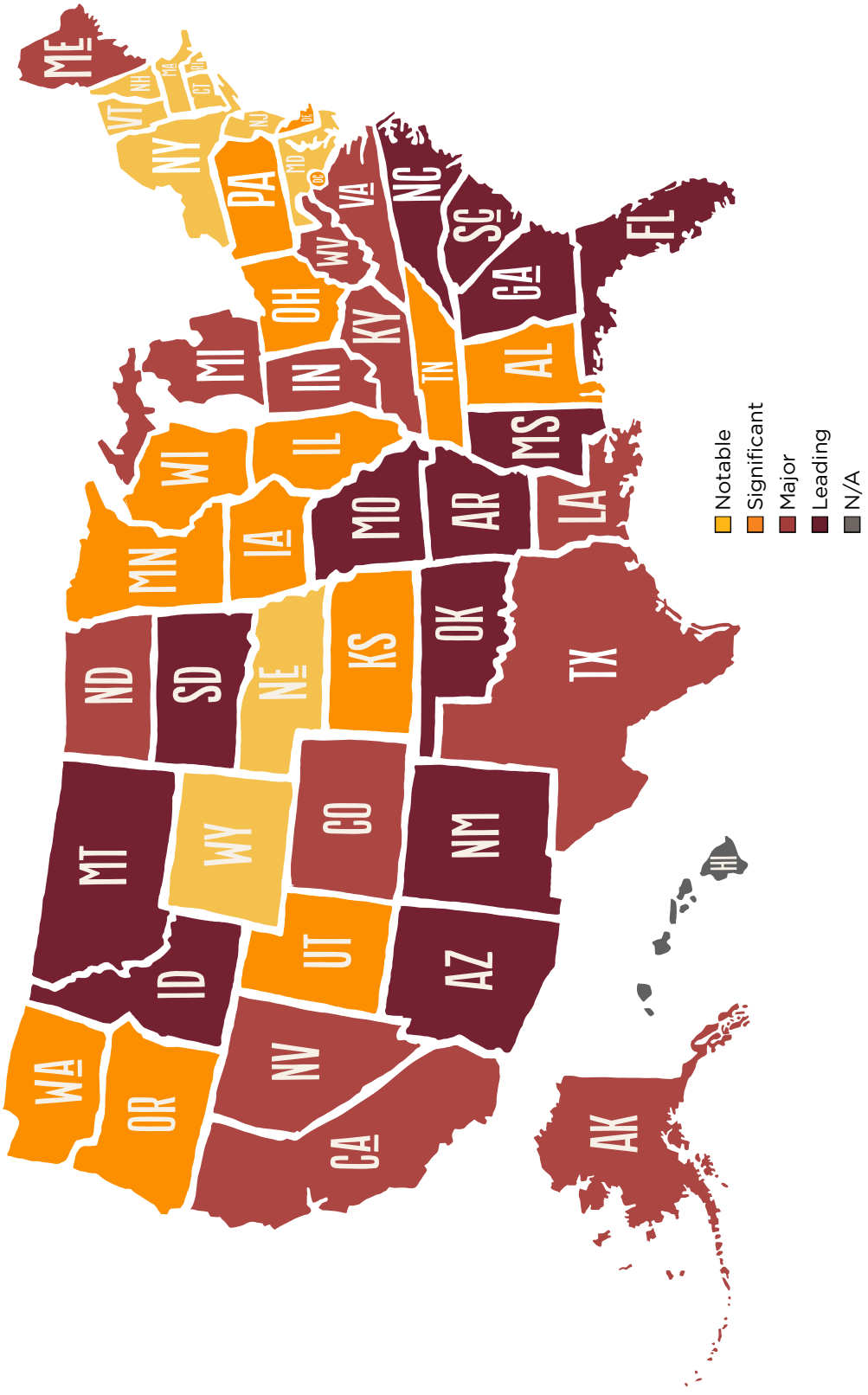
Educational Outcomes Gauge



Access to Supports for Well-Being Gauge



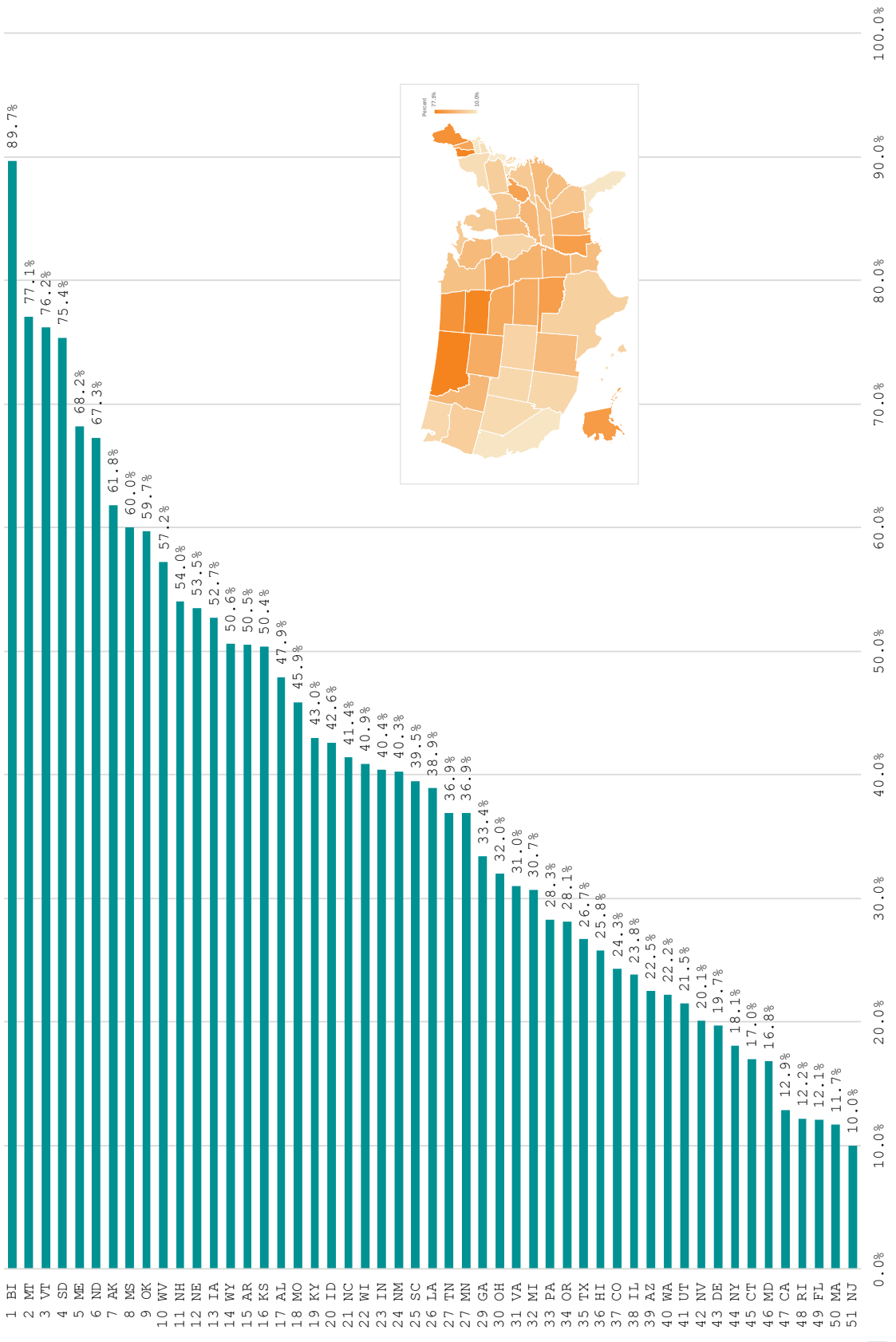
2025 Priority Rankings



WHY rural MATTERS

Percent Rural Schools

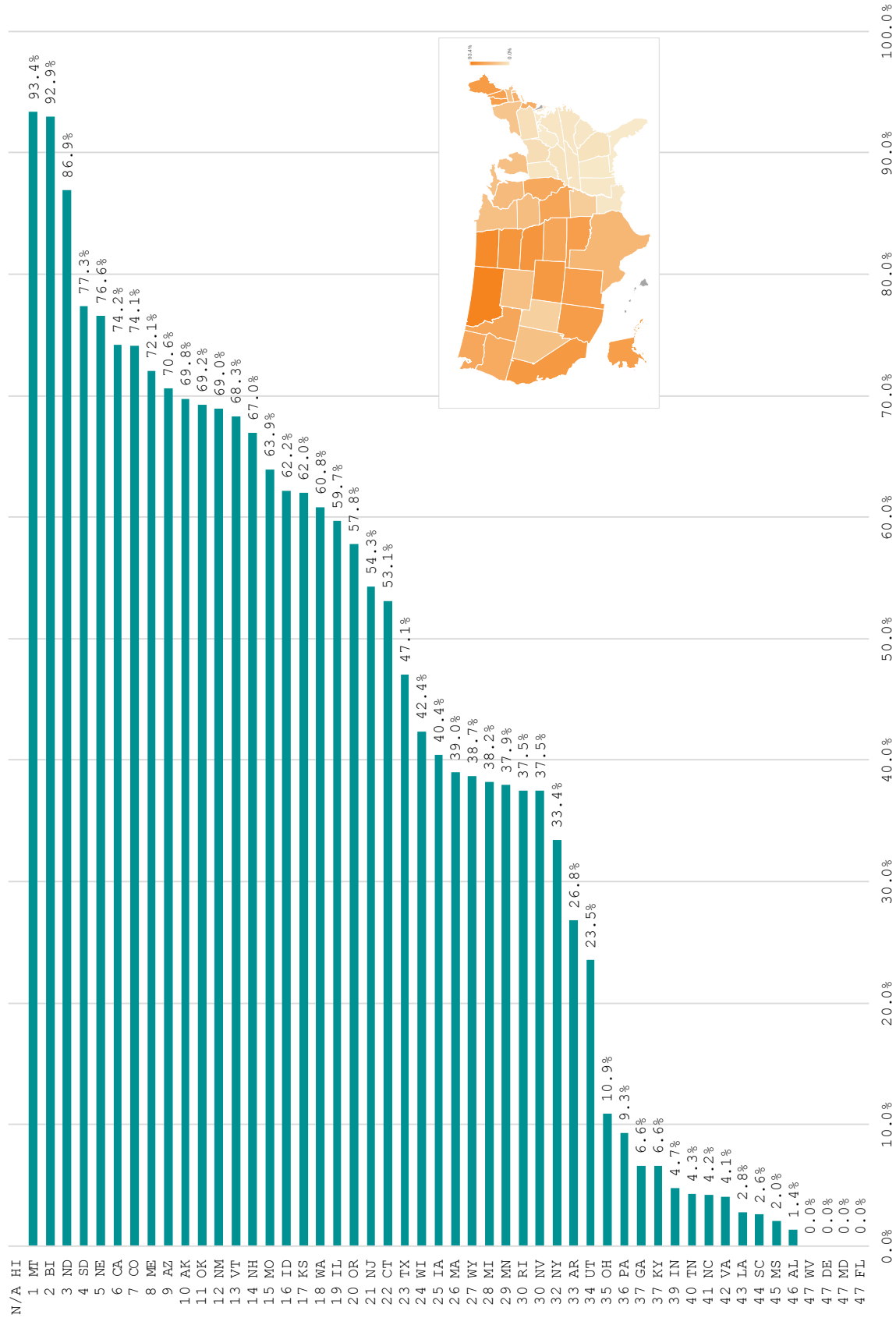
The percent of PreK12 public schools designated as rural by NCES, regardless of whether they are located in a rural-designated district. For example, a 30% means that 30% of the public schools in the state are classified as rural.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2023-2024

Percent Small Rural Districts

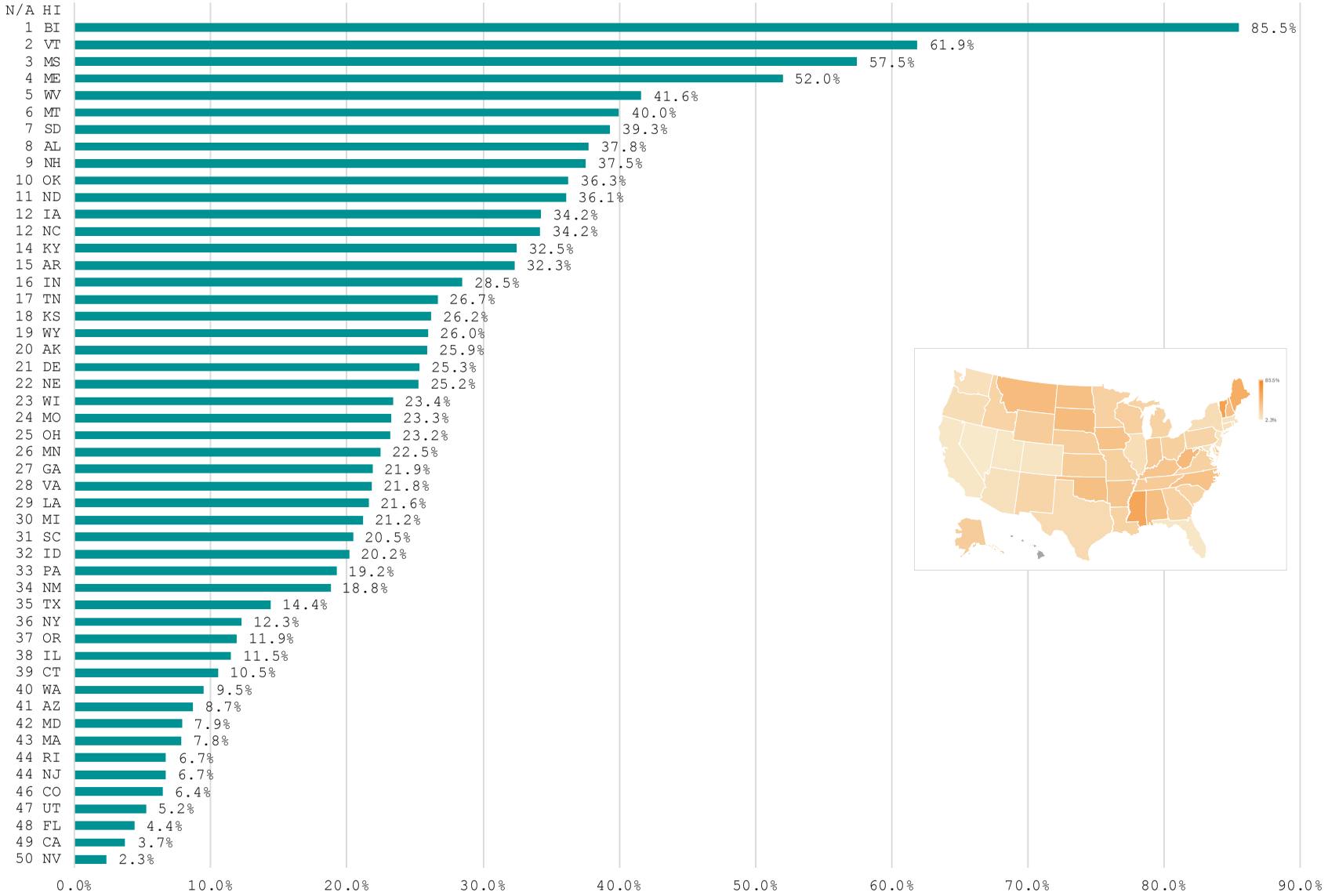
The percent of rural school districts that are below the median enrollment size for all rural school districts in the U.S. (median = 526 students).



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2023-2024

Percent Rural Students

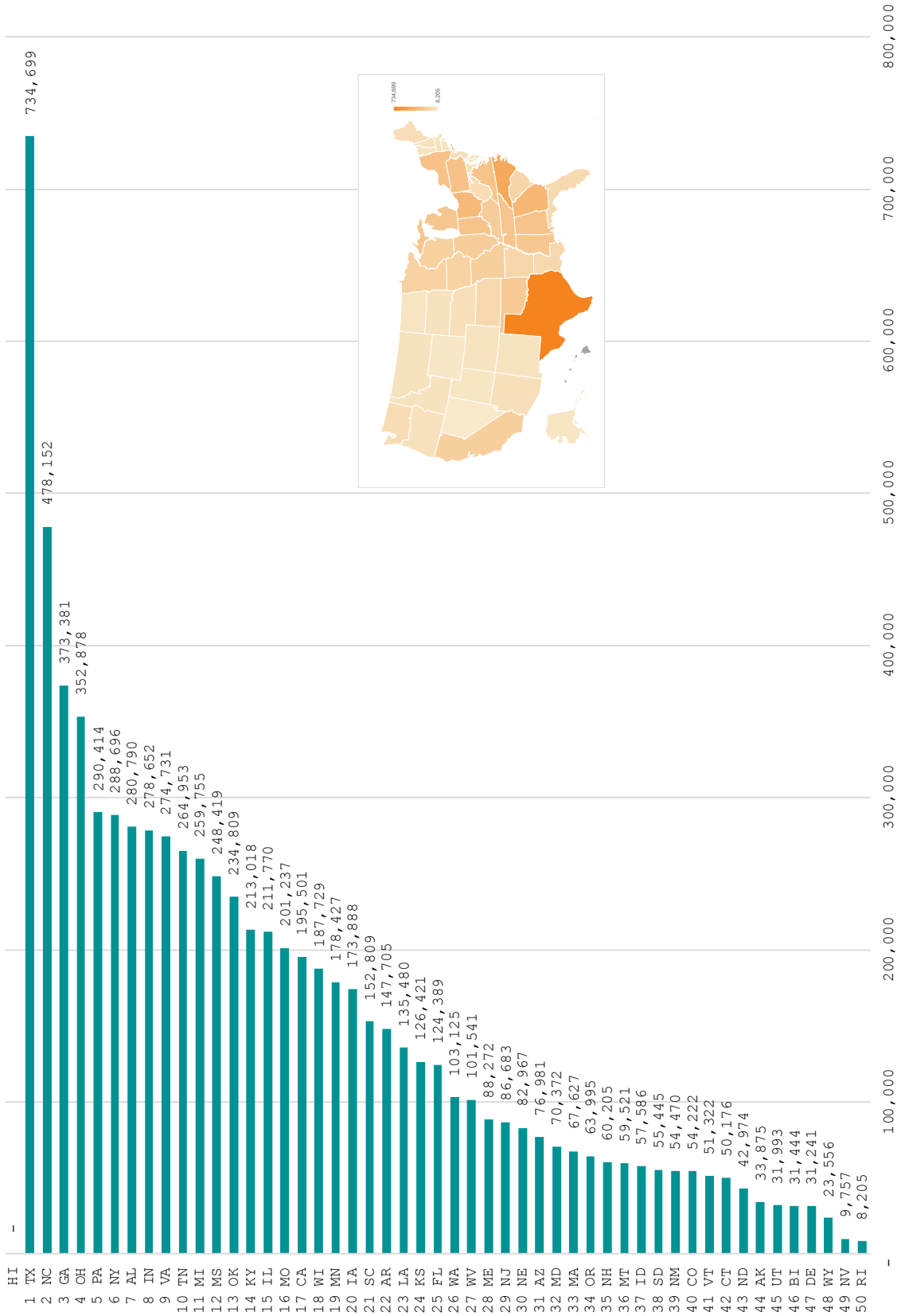
The number of public school students enrolled in rural districts, whether they attend rural schools or not, divided by the total number of public school students in the state.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2023-2024

Number of Rural Students

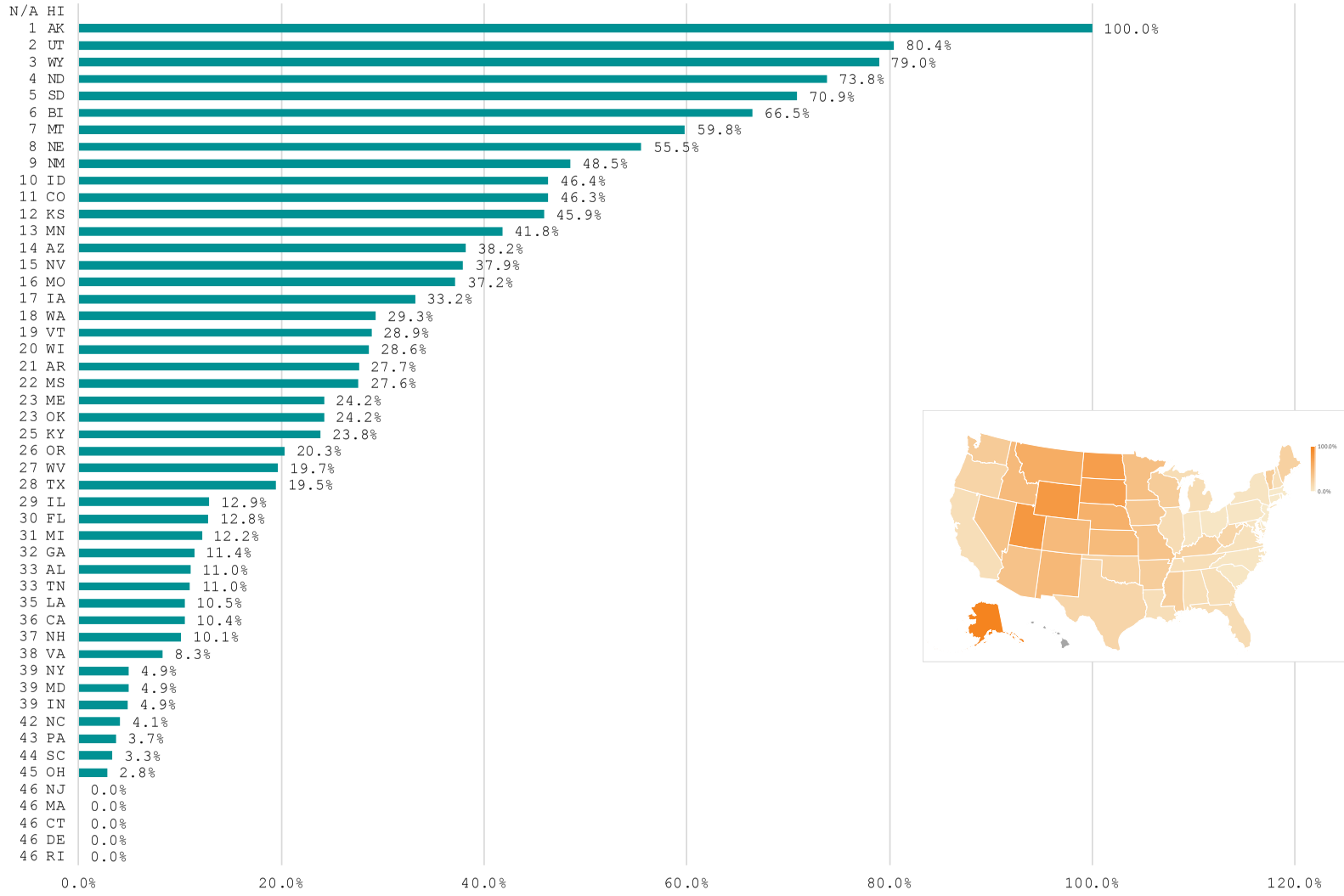
The total number of students enrolled in public school districts designated as rural by NCES.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2023-2024

Percent Rural Students in a Remote Rural District

The total number of students enrolled in public school districts designated as remote rural by NCES divided by the total number of students enrolled in public school districts designated as rural by NCES.

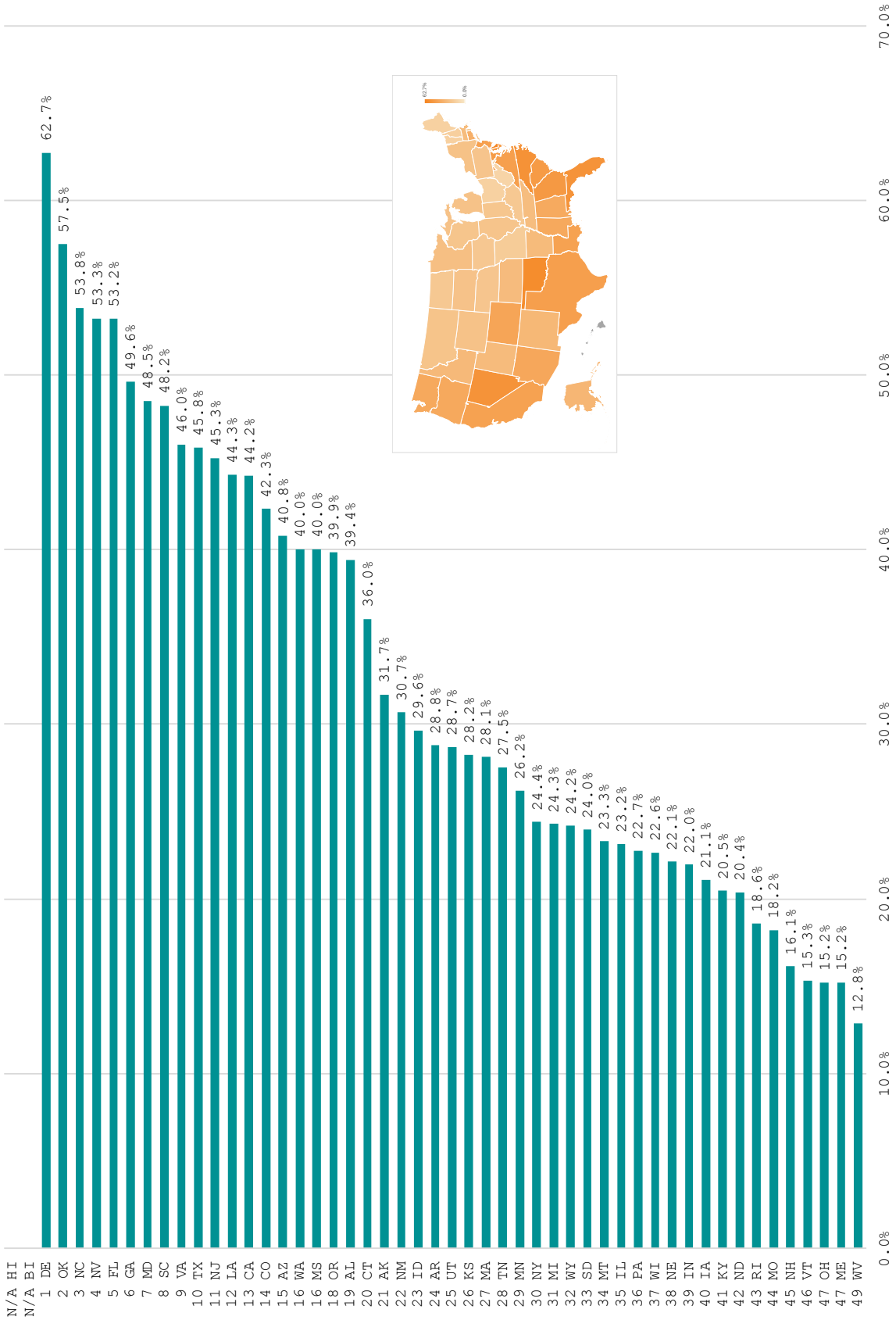


Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2023-2024

Student and Family Characteristics Gauge

Rural Diversity Index

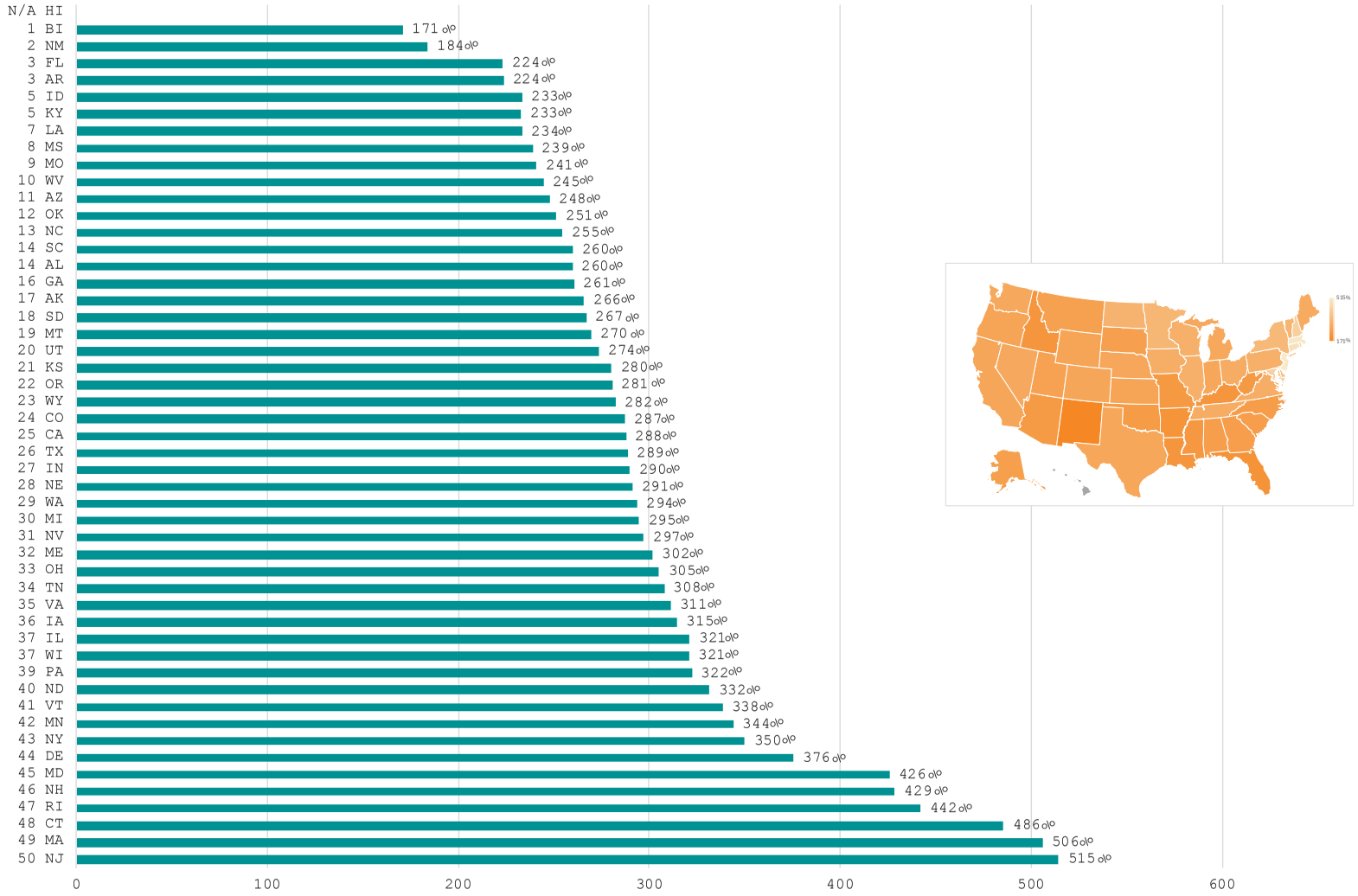
If you randomly choose a school in a rural district, then randomly select 2 students from this school, this is the chance the students would be of a different race/ethnicity (of the 7 NCES categories: (1) American Indian/Alaska Native, (2) Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, (3) Hispanic, (4) Black or African American, (5) White, (6) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, (7) Two or more races).



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2023-2024

Poverty Level in Rural School Communities

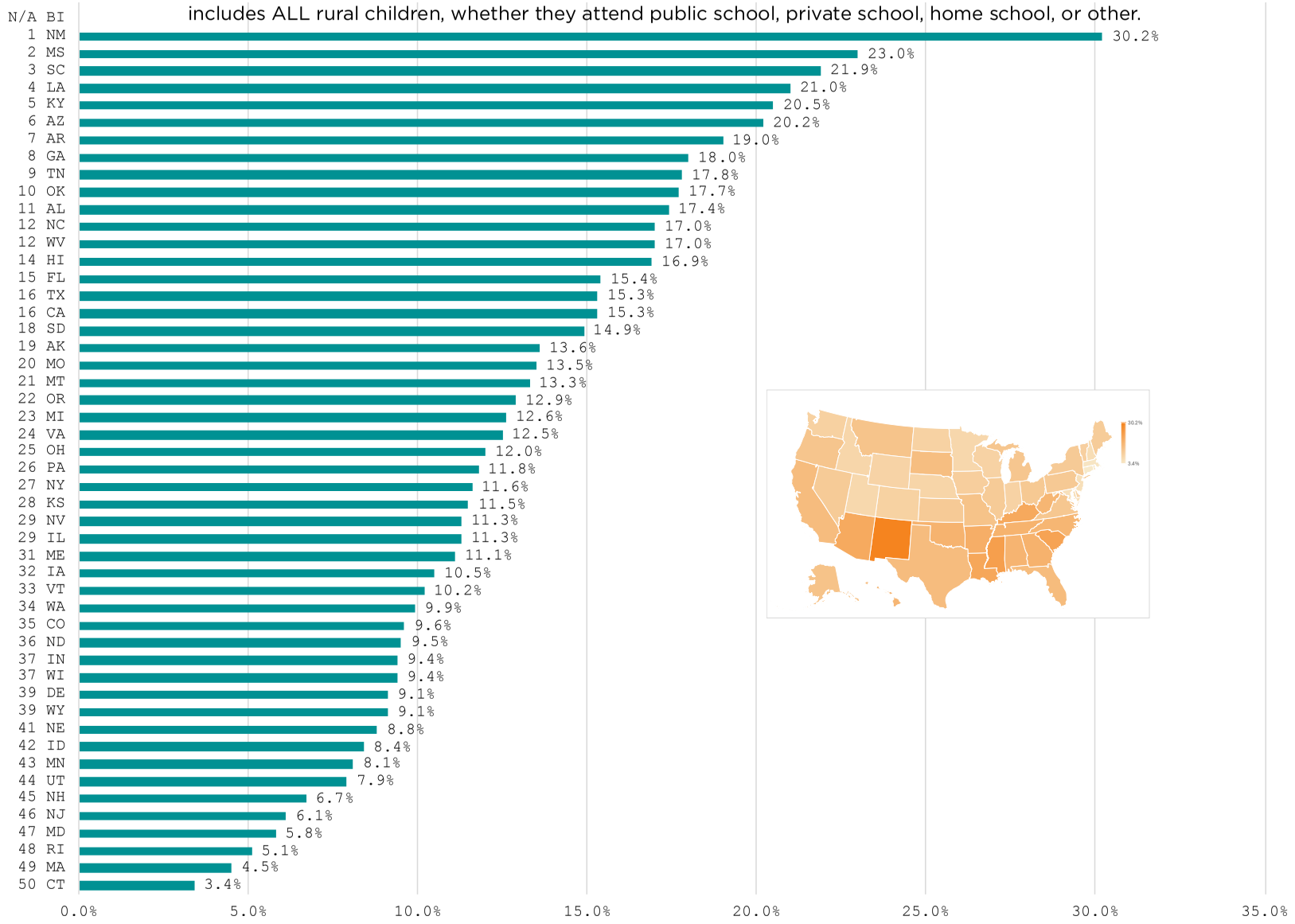
For each school, NCES collected data using the American Community Survey on the 25 nearest households with school-aged children. A weighted average of these households' incomes was then reported as a percentage of the poverty line. For example, 240% means that the average school-aged household in the neighborhoods of rural schools had an income 240% (2.4 times) that of the poverty line. Higher percentages means wealthier neighborhoods for rural schools.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2021-2022, Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates, 2021-2022

Percent Rural School-aged Children Experiencing Poverty

The percent of rural children between the ages of 5 and 17 living in a household with an income below the poverty line. Note that this includes ALL rural children, whether they attend public school, private school, home school, or other.

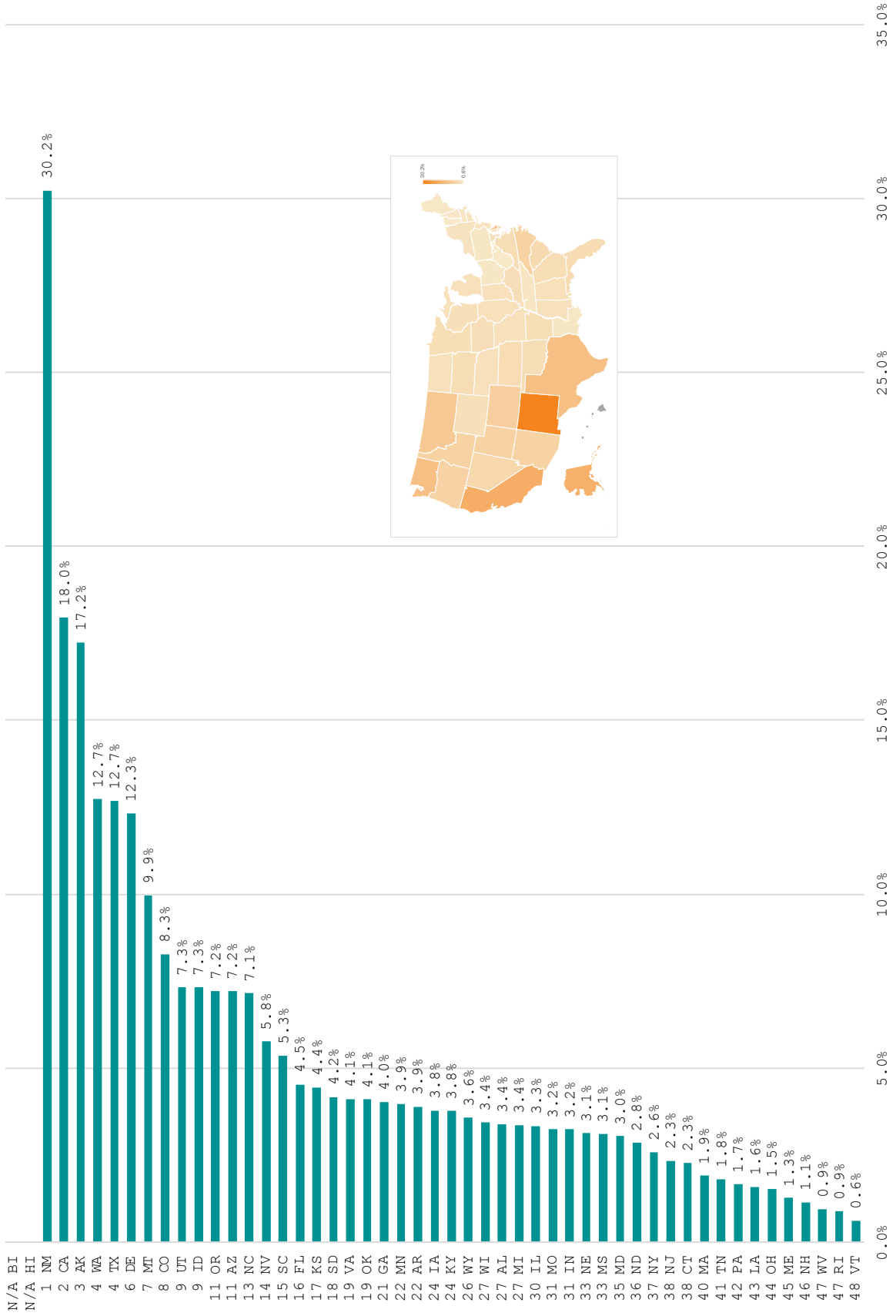


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023 (1-year estimates)

WHY rural MATTERS

Percent Rural Multilingual Learners

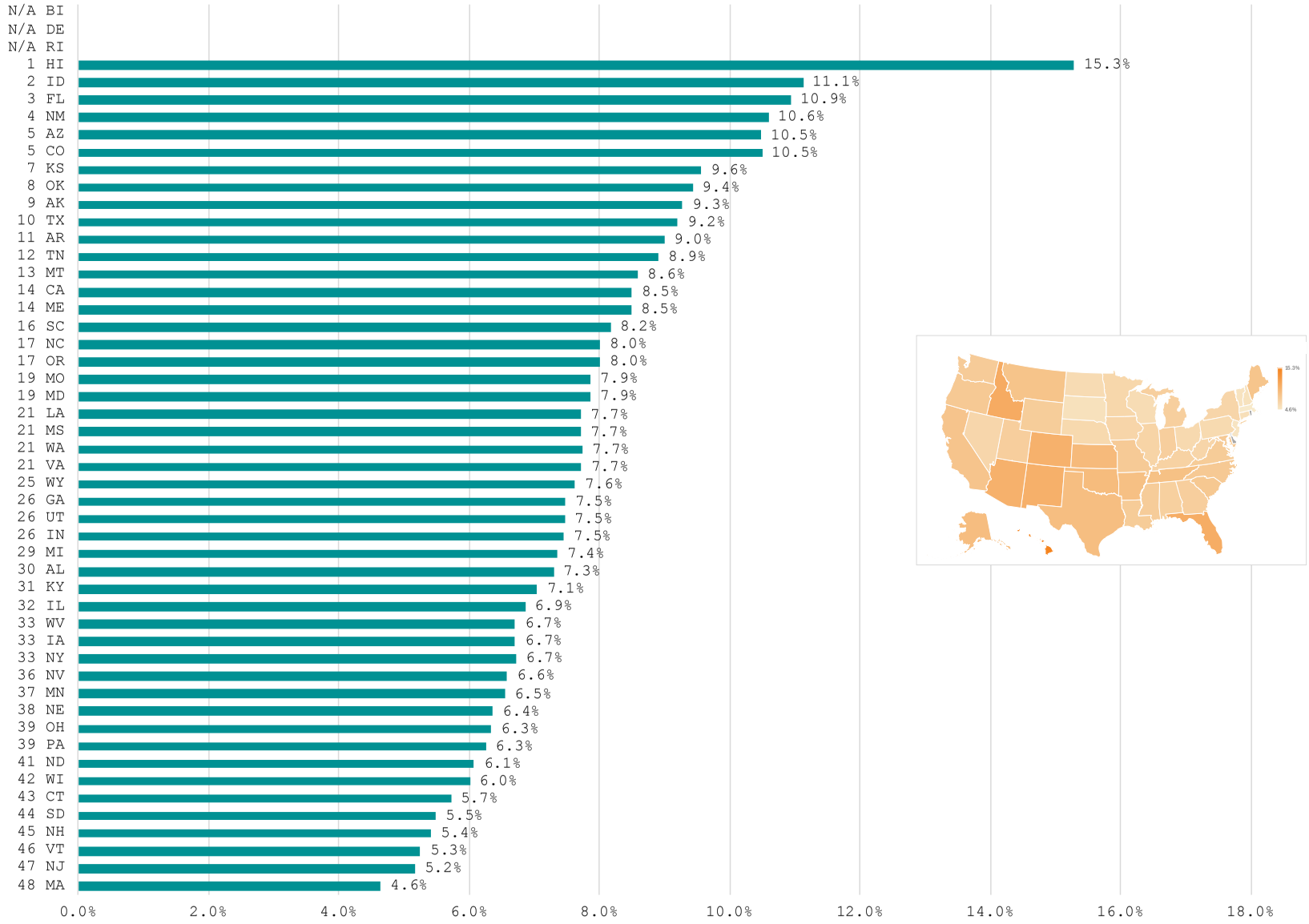
The number of students in rural districts who are categorized as multilingual learners, divided by the total number of students in rural districts for which sufficient multilingual learner data is available.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, ED Data Express, Public School Universe, 2022-2023

Percent Rural Household Mobility

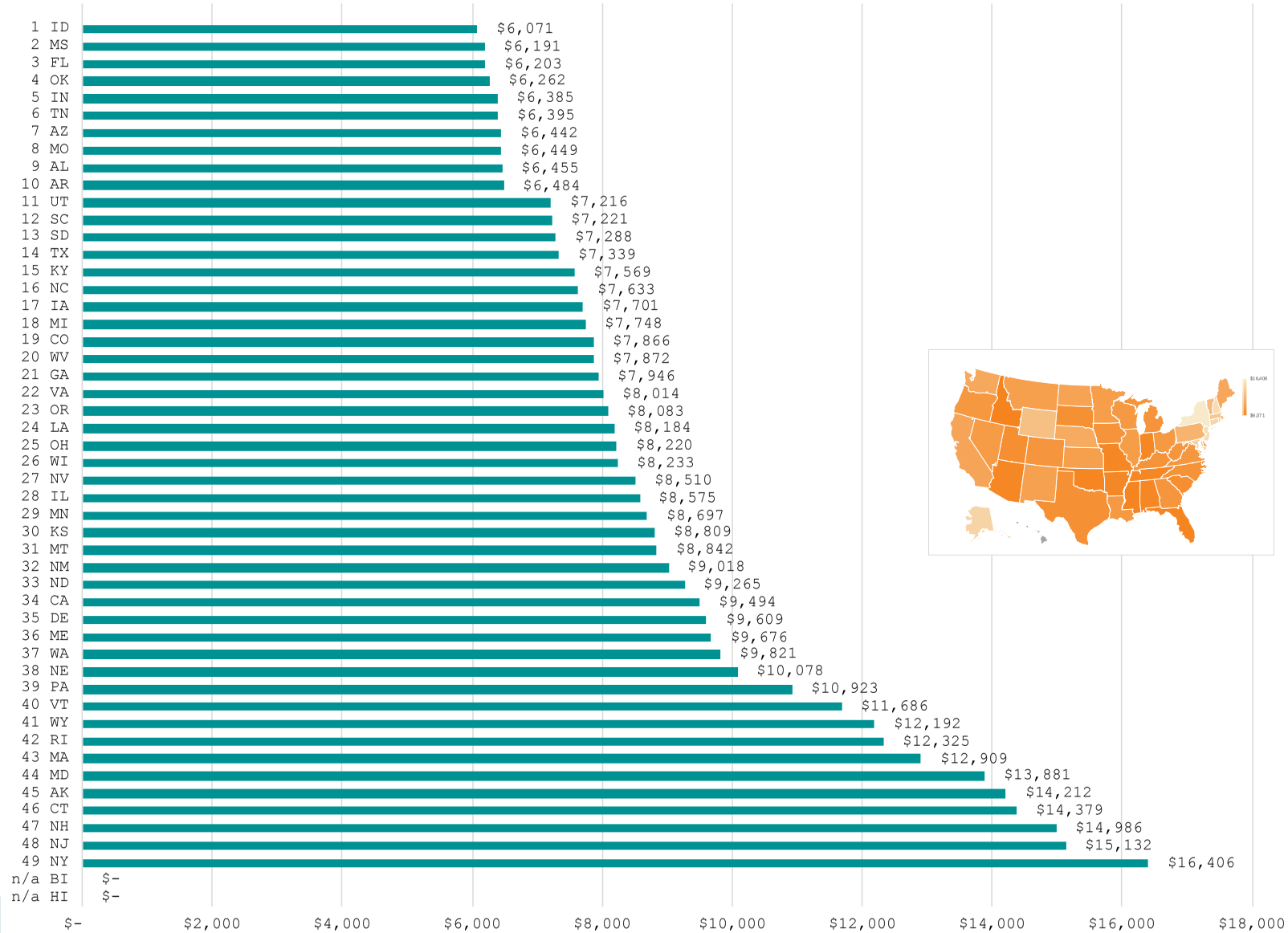
The percent of households with school-age children who changed residences within the previous 12 months, per U.S. Census figures.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023 (1-year estimates)

Rural Instructional Expenditures Per Pupil

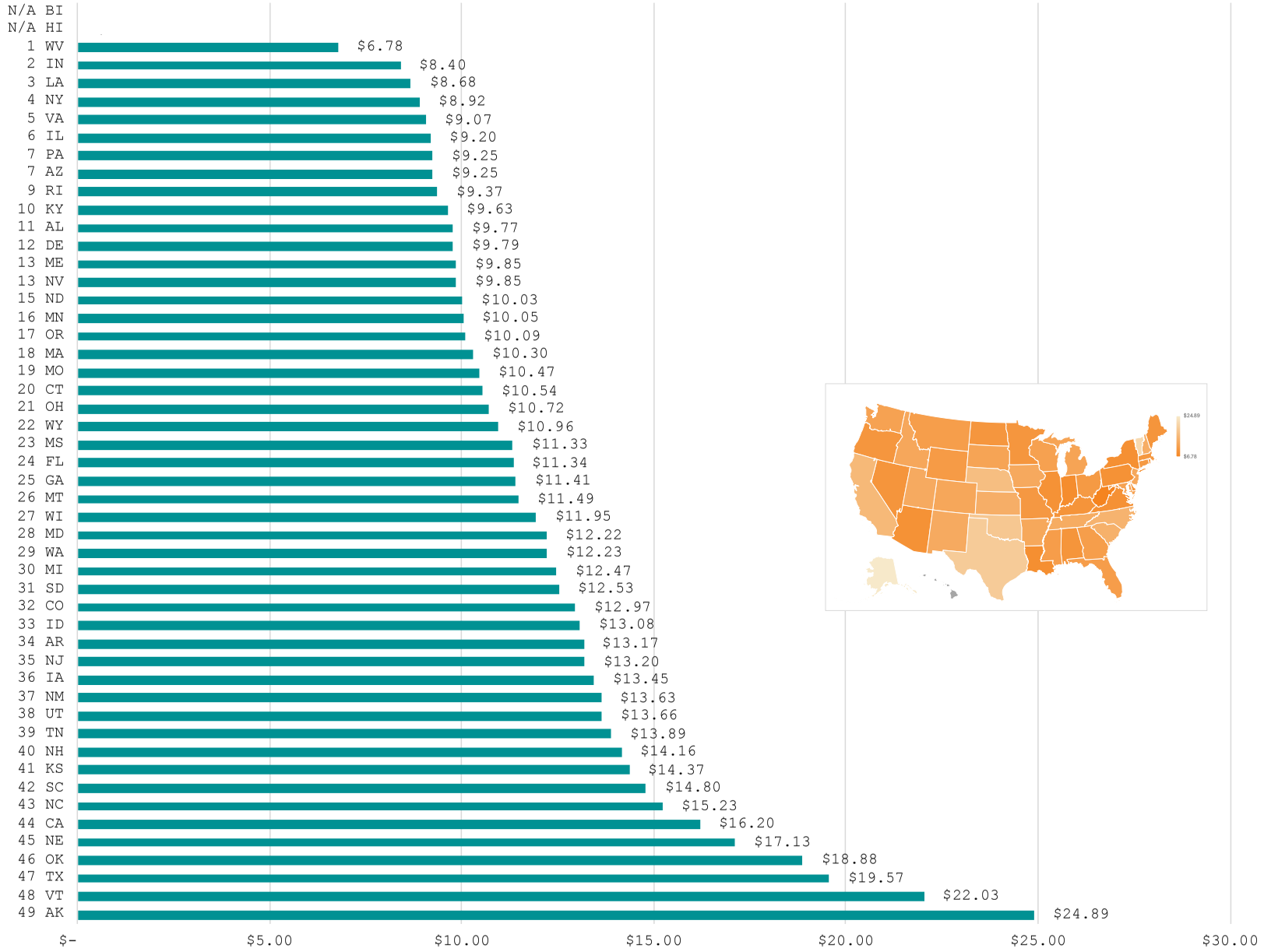
The total current expenditures for instruction in rural public school districts divided by the total number of students enrolled in those same districts.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2021-2022

Ratio of Instructional to Transportation Expenditures

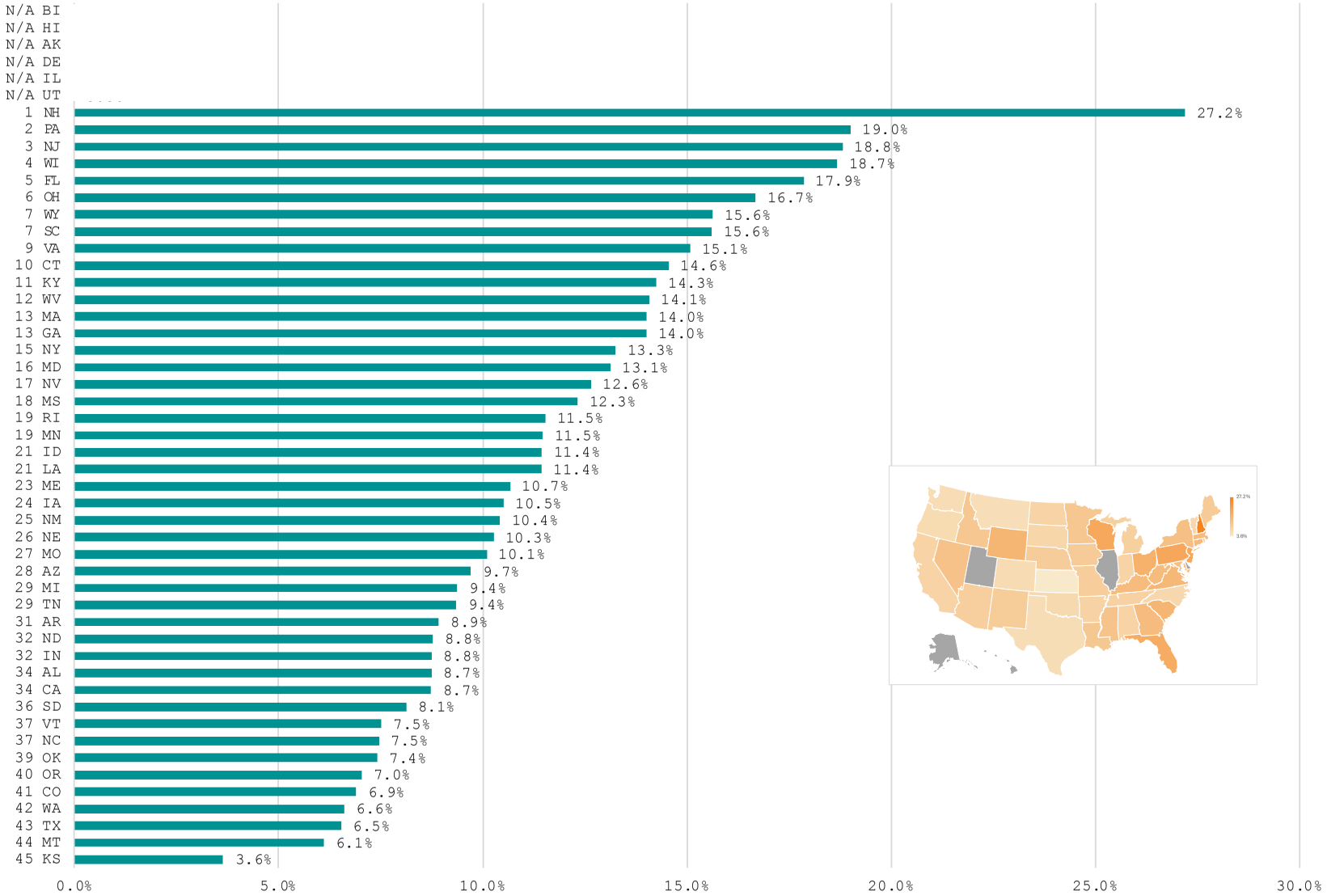
The amount of money spent on instruction for every $1 spent on transportation in the rural districts.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2021-2022

Percent Instructional Salaries for Special Education

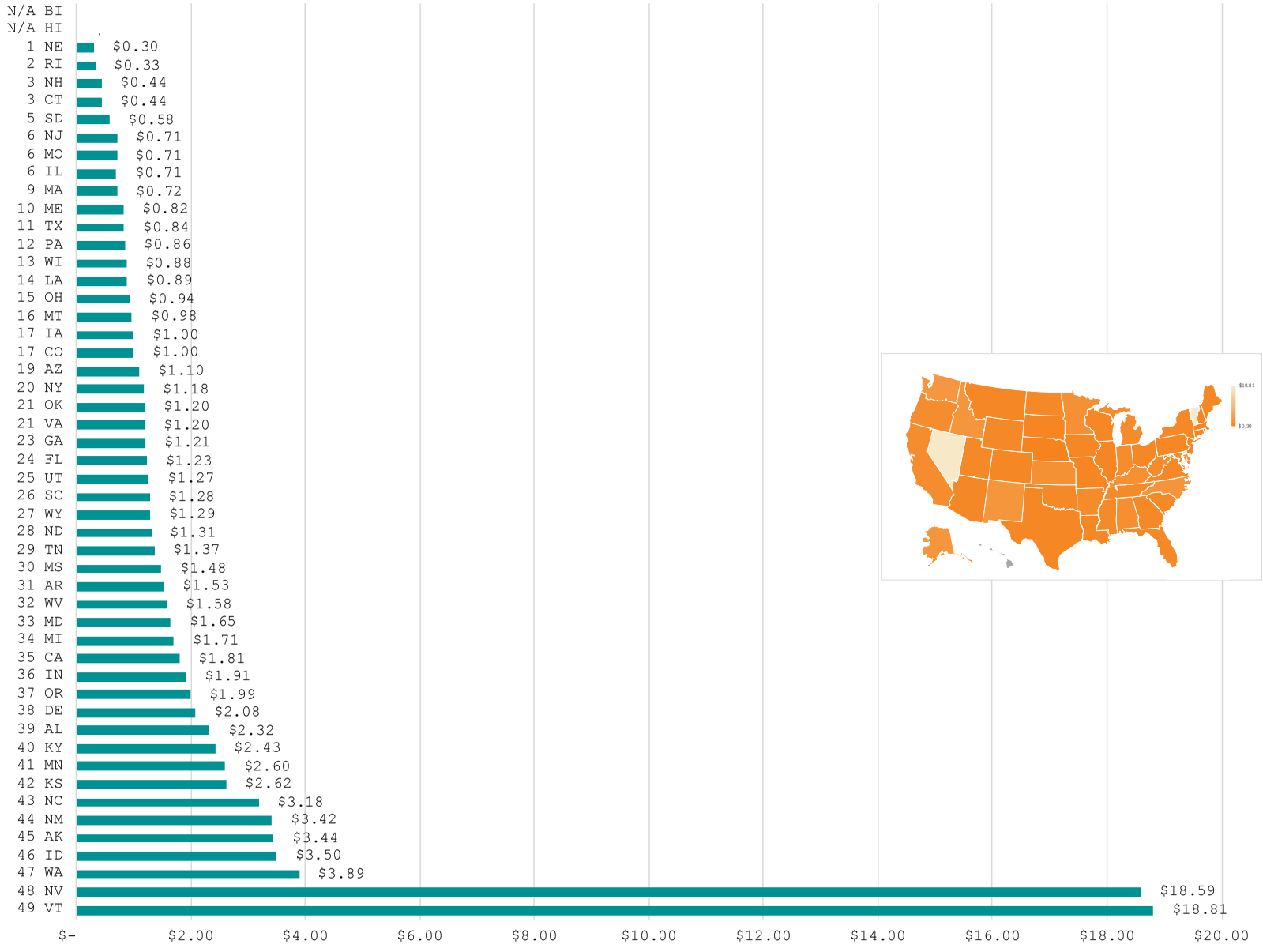
The amount of money spent on instructional salaries for special education divided by the total amount of money spent on instructional salaries.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2021-2022

State Revenue to Schools Per Local Dollar

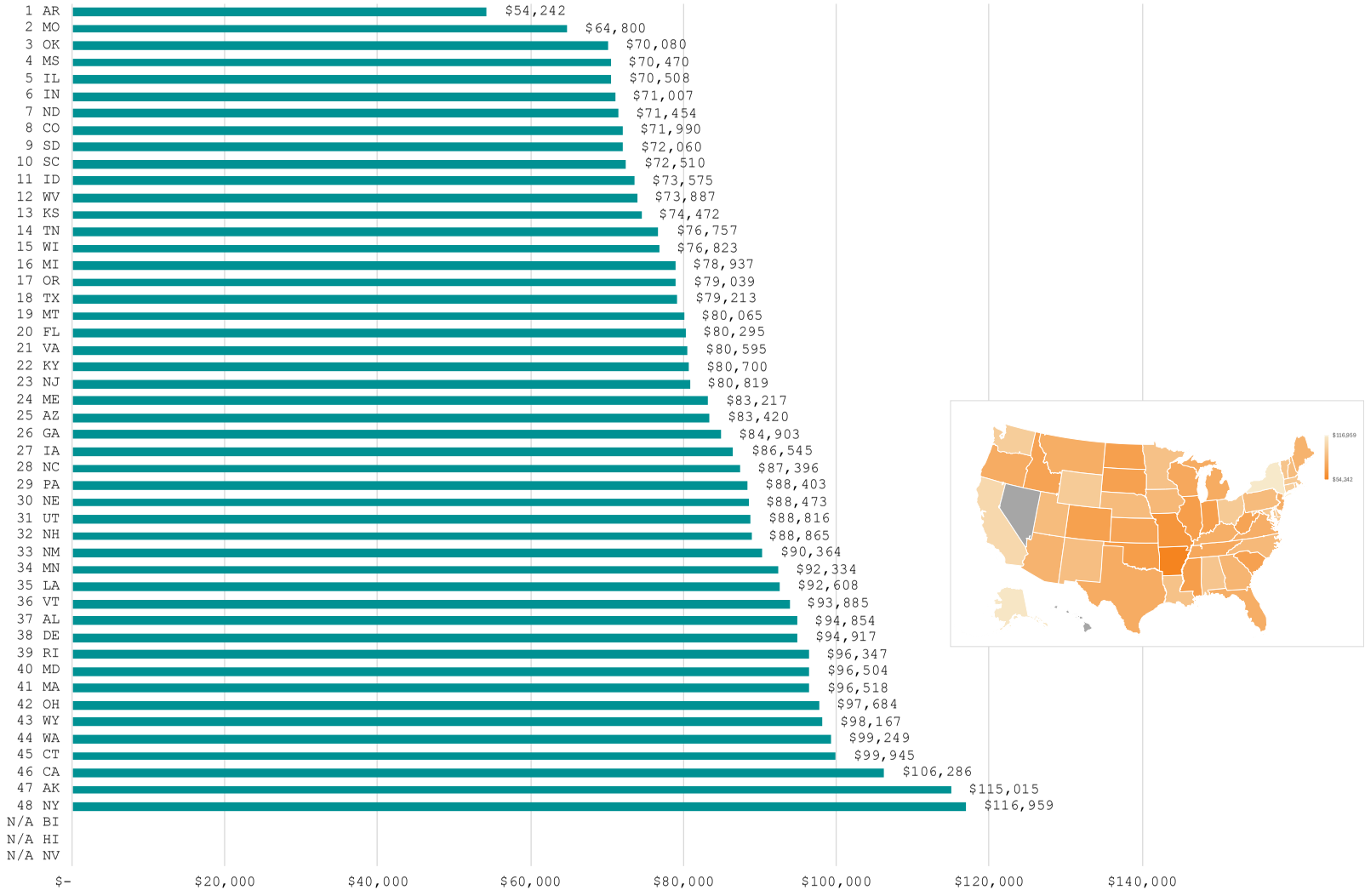
The amount of state funding to rural districts for every dollar of local funding.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2021-2022

Rural Adjusted Salary Expenditures Per Instructional FTE

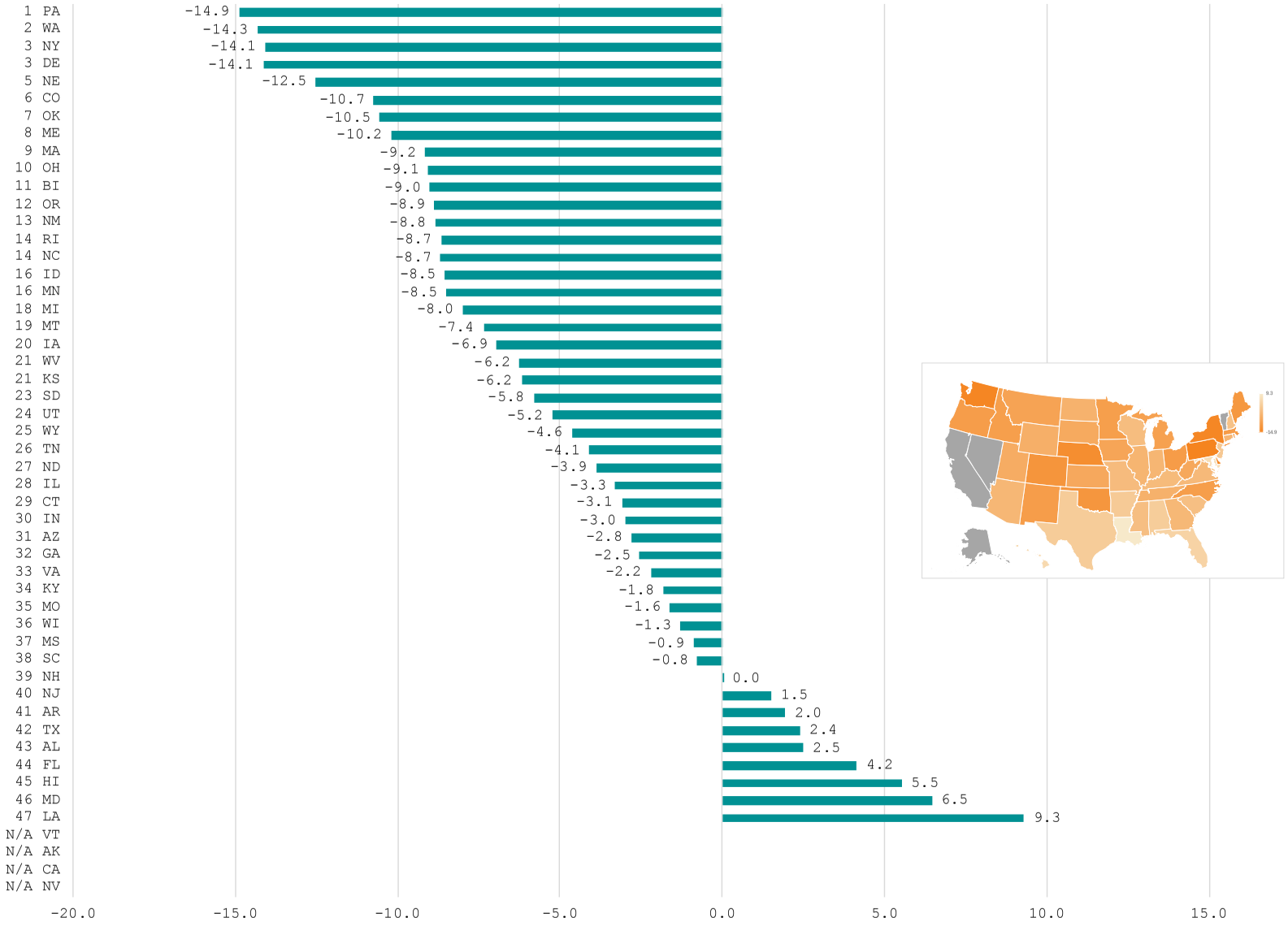
The total dollar amount spent on instructional salaries, divided by the NCES's Comparable Wage Index for Teachers for that district, divided by the total number of instructional staff members.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2021-2022, Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates, 2021-2022

Change in Rural Grade 4 NAEP Reading Score

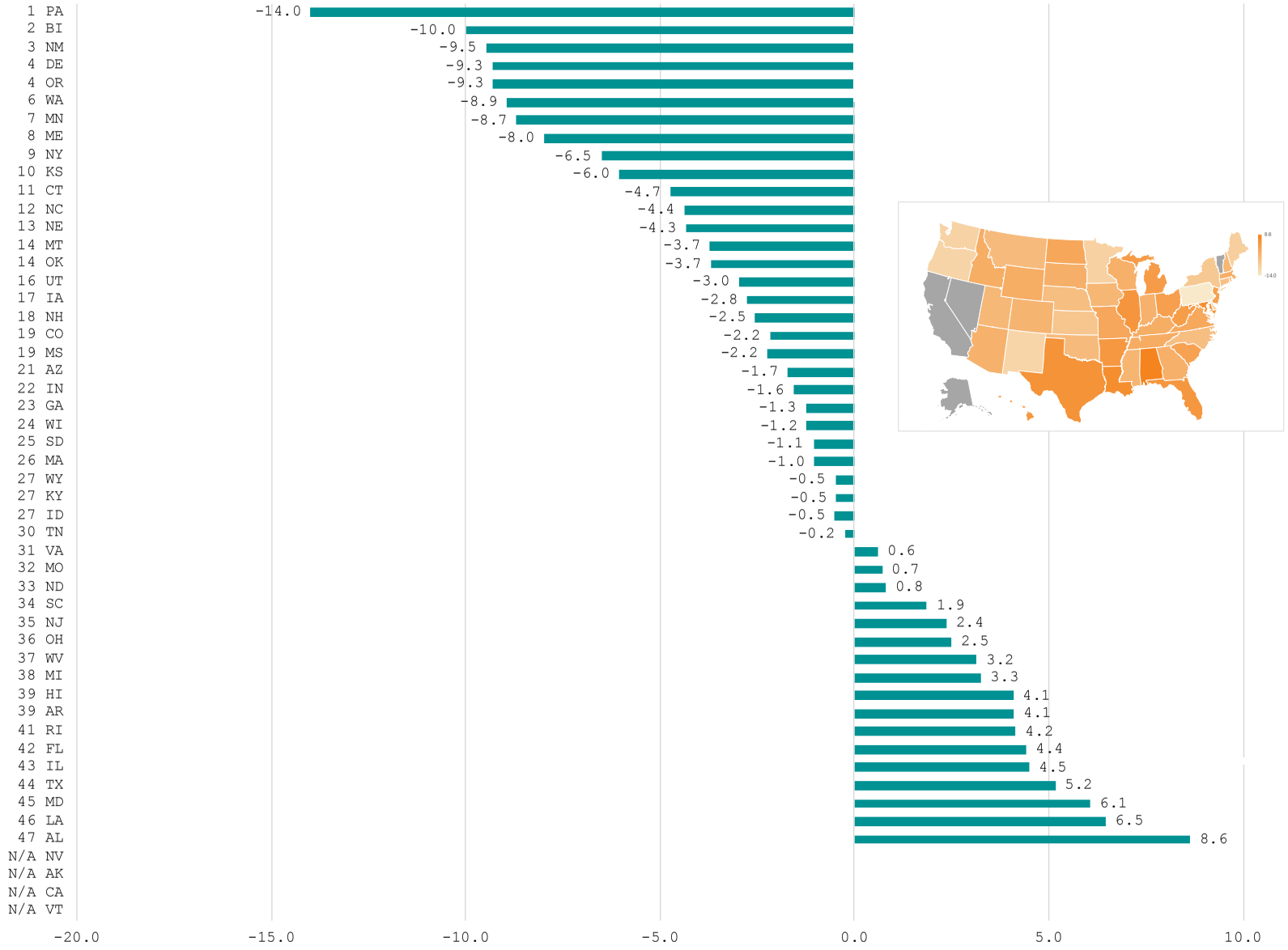
The 2024 Grade 4 NAEP Reading score for rural districts minus the 2019 Grade 4 NAEP Reading score for rural districts



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019 and 2024

Change in Rural Grade 4 NAEP Math Score

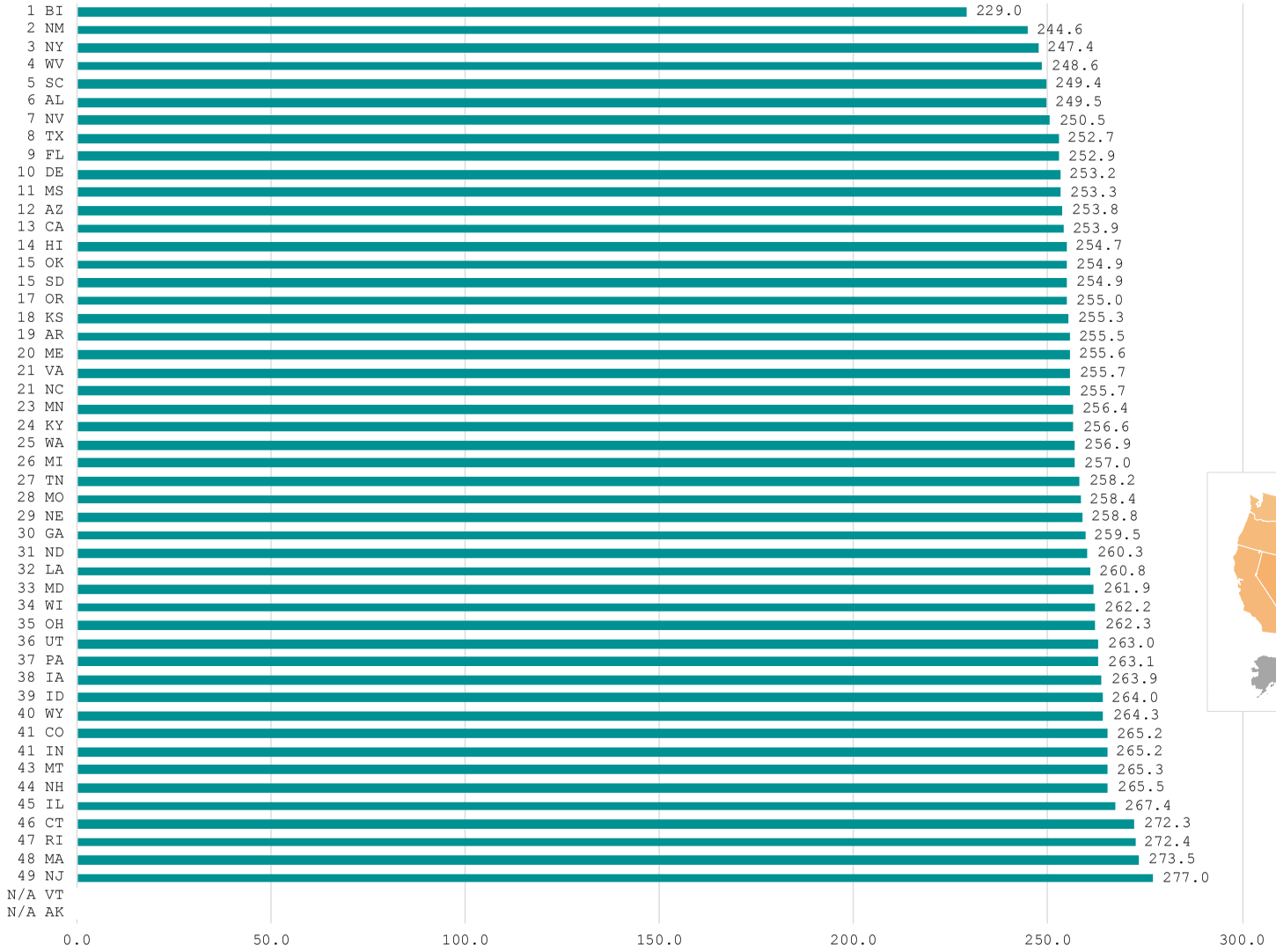
The 2024 Grade 4 NAEP Math score for rural districts minus the 2019 Grade 4 NAEP Math score for rural districts

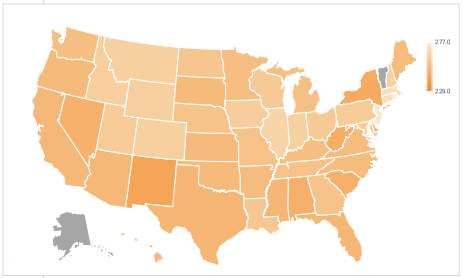


Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019 and 2024

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Reading Score

The average score in rural districts on the 2024 Grade 8 NAEP Reading test

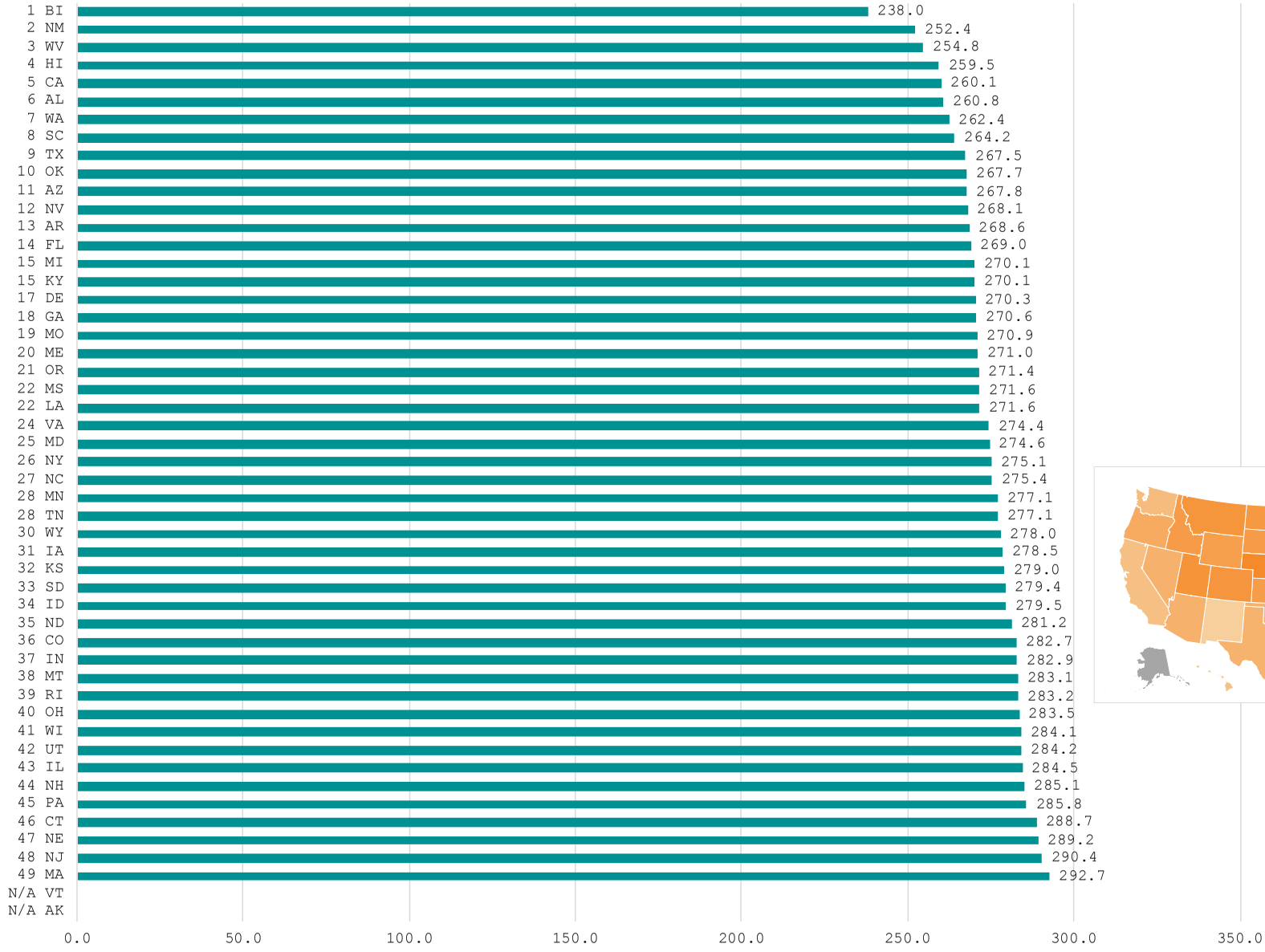


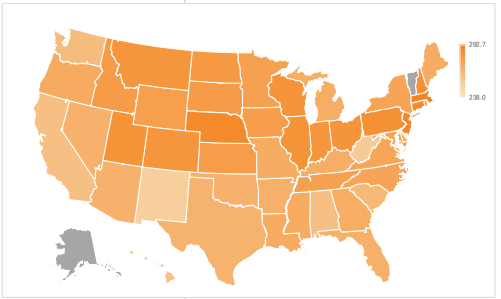


Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2024

Rural Grade 8 NAEP Math Score

The average score in rural districts on the 2024 Grade 8 NAEP Math test

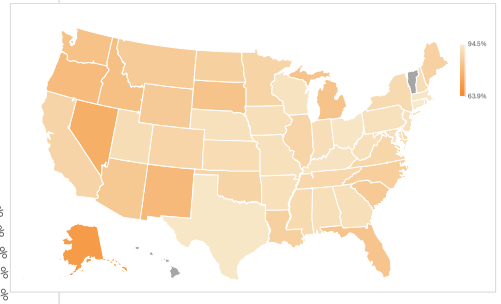




Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress 2024

Rural High School Graduation Rate

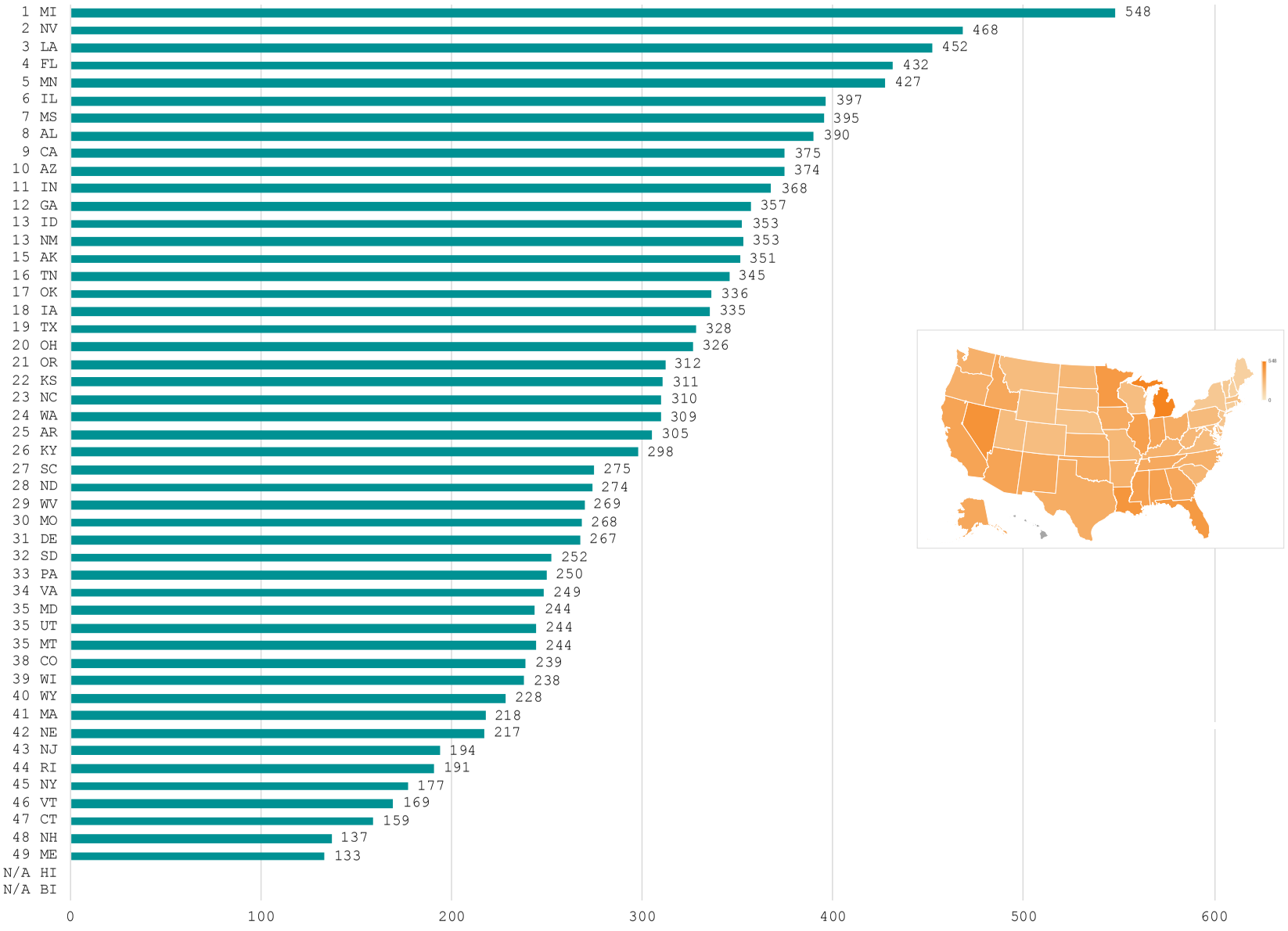
The weighted average high school graduation rate in rural districts (Note: "Graduation rate" is the number of graduating seniors in rural school districts divided by the total number of students who started with the cohort four years earlier, adjusted for transfer students.)



Source: U.S. Department of Education, EdFacts, Four-Year Adjusted-Cohort Graduation Rates, 2022-2023

Rural Students Per Psychologist/School Counselor

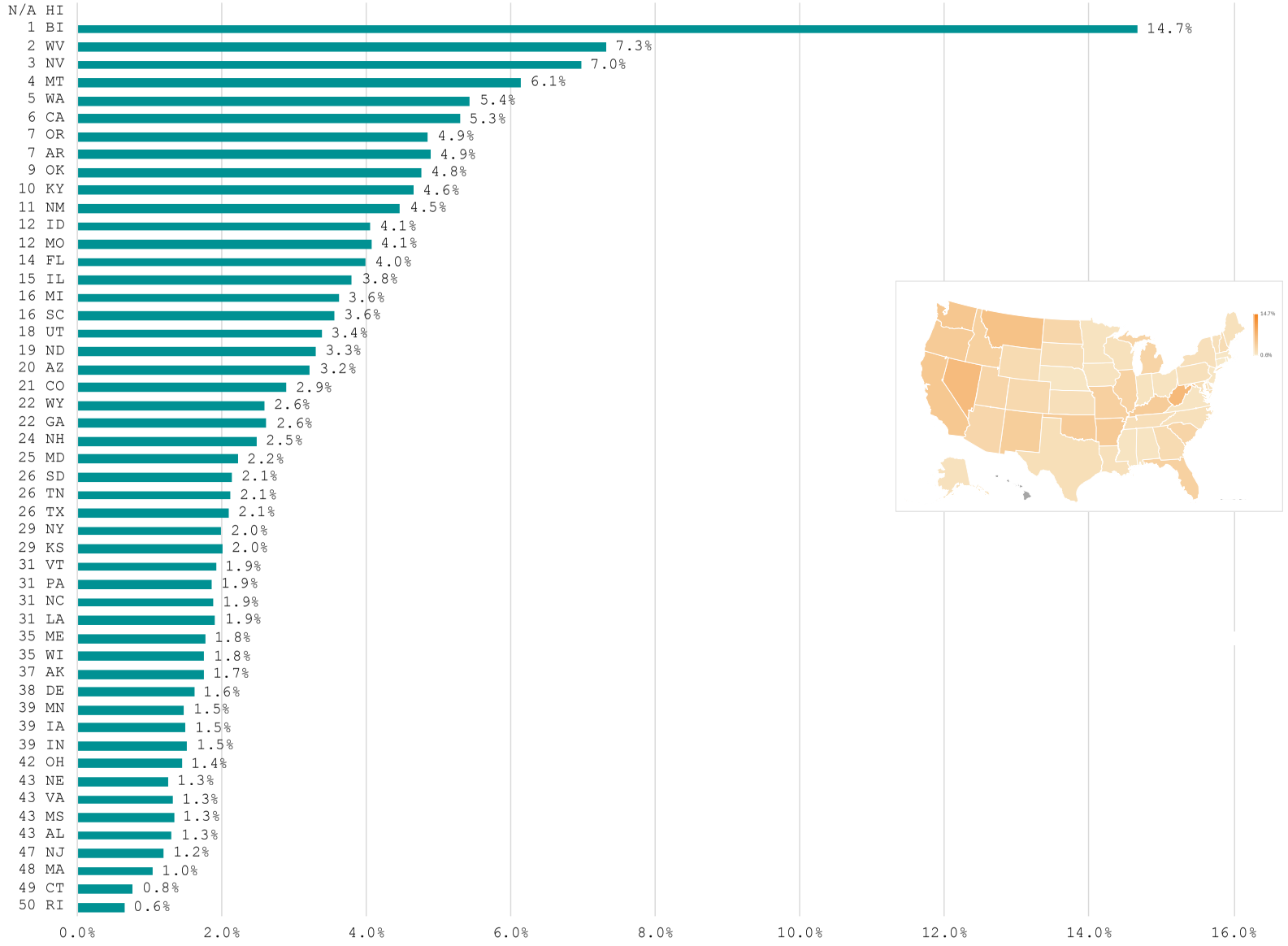
The number of students in rural districts divided by the number of psychologists and guidance counselors in those same districts.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2023-2024

Percent Rural Children Who Are Unhoused

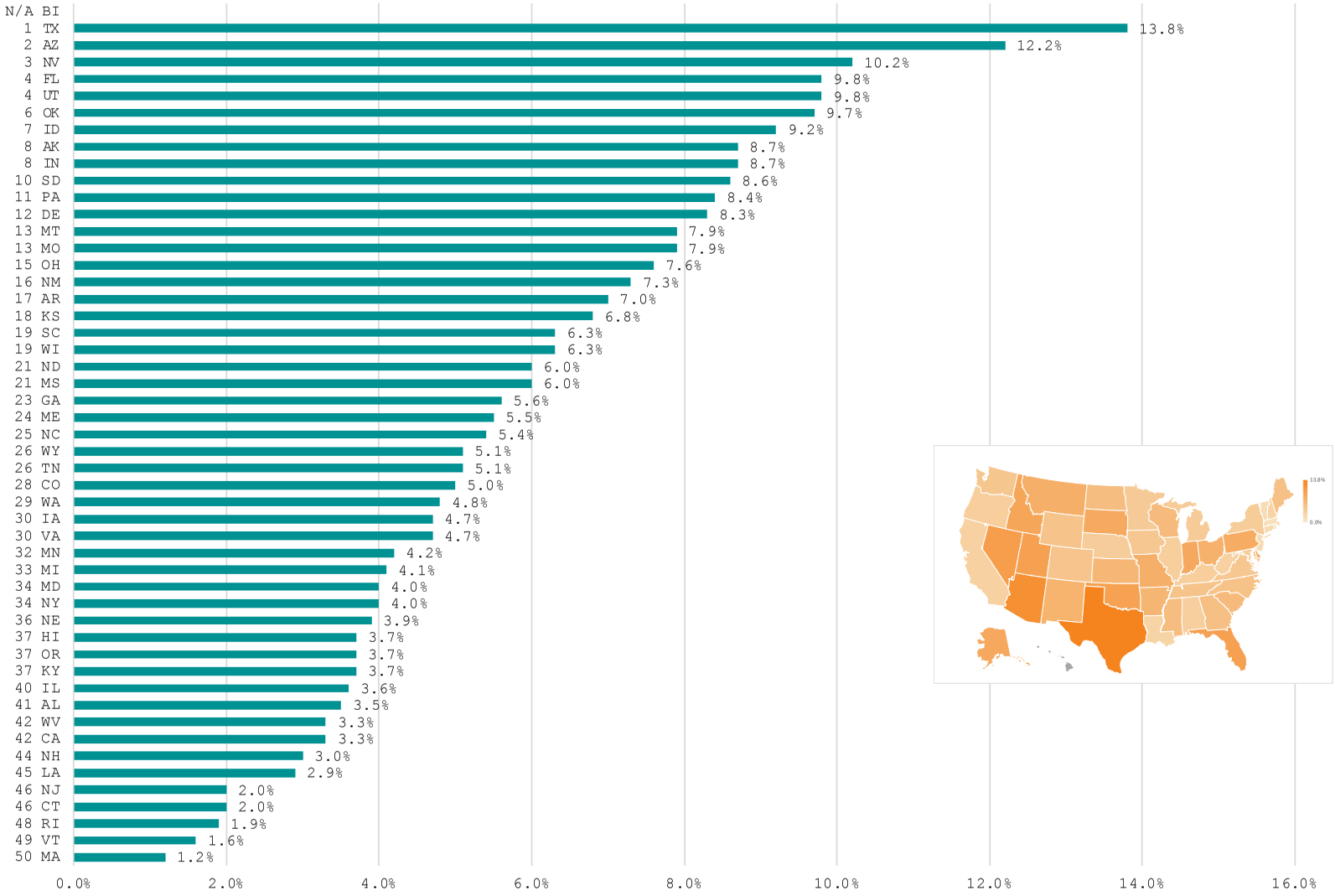
The number of students in rural districts who are categorized as "unhoused," divided by the total number of students in rural districts for which sufficient unhoused data is available.



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, ED Data Express, Public School Universe, 2022-2023

Percent Rural School-Aged Children Without Health Insurance Coverage

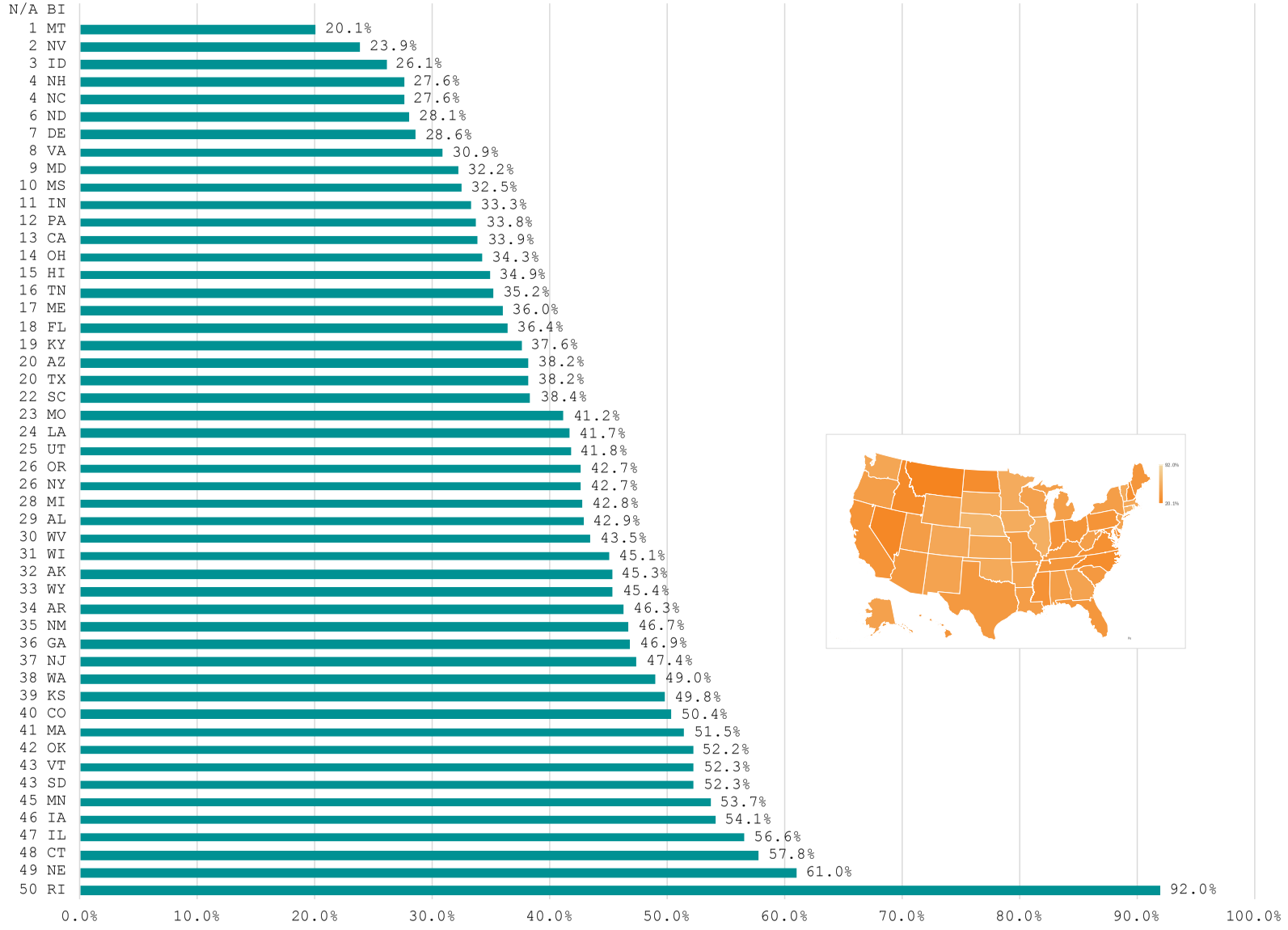
The percent of rural children age 6 to 18 who are not covered by health insurance.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023 (1-year estimates)

Percent Rural Enrollment in Public Preschool

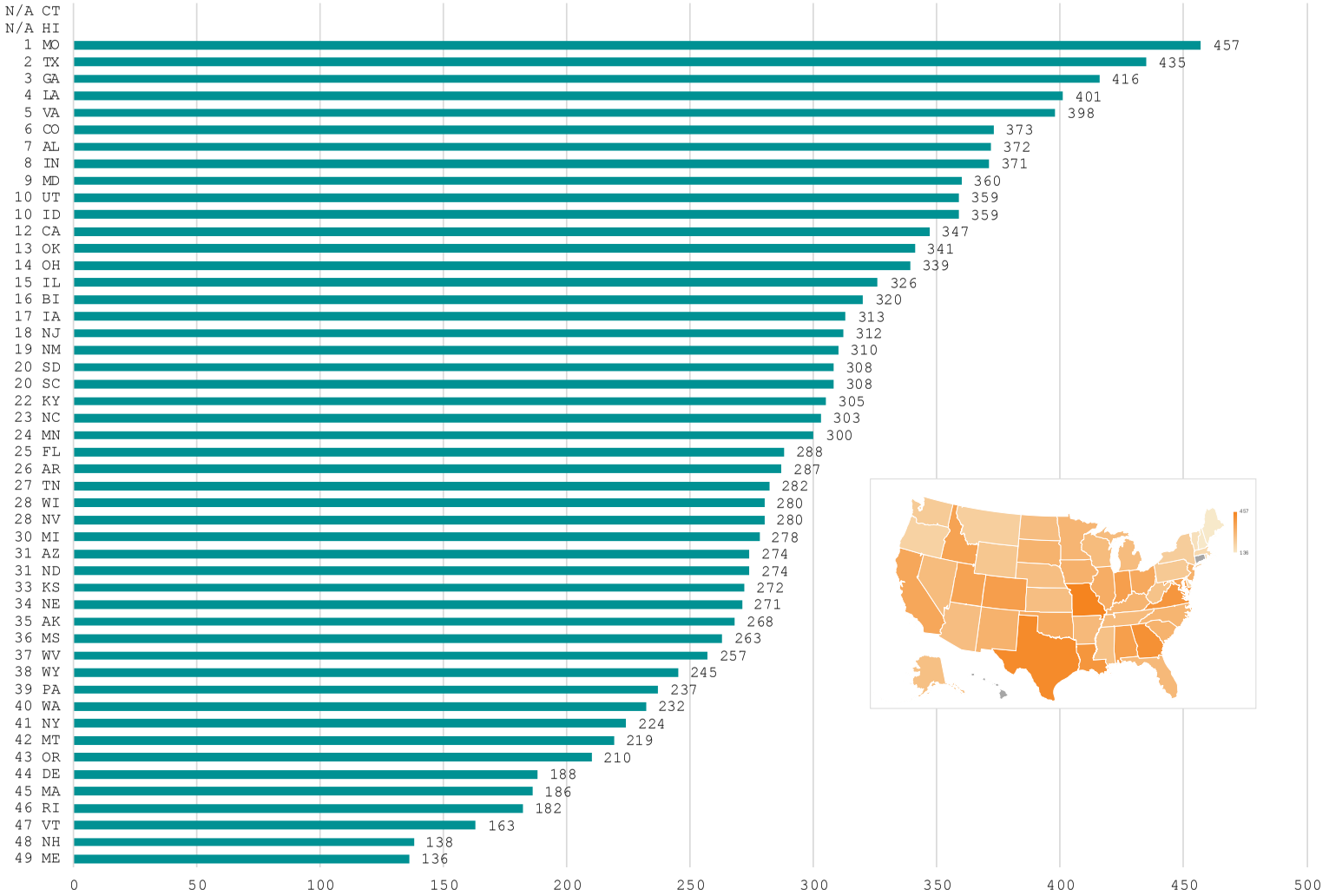
The number of students attending a public preschool in a rural area divided by 40% of the rural children age 0 to 4.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2023 (1-year estimates)

Rural Students Per Primary Care Clinician

The number of students in rural school districts in a county divided by the number of primary care clinicians. “Primary care clinicians” are estimated from the number of MD/DOs in family medicine and pediatrics primary care practice and 0.6 times the number of physician assistants and nurse practitioners (the reduced percentage accounts for ones who are not available for primary care). The state-level ratio is then weighted by how many of the state’s rural district students attend school in each county.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Health Workforce, Area Health Resources Files, 2021 data; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, Public School Universe, 2023-2024

References

[i] As per Nevada Senate Bill 543, referenced in correspondence with Dr. Julie Wootton-Greener of the Nevada Department of Education on 2/28/25.

[ii] Special thanks to Randall Longenecker, M.D., an expert in rural medicine for his guidance in developing this new indicator. Dr. Longenecker is the Assistant Dean Emeritus for Rural and Underserved Programs and Professor of Family Medicine at the Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine, Executive Director of the Rural Training Track Collaborative, Associate Project Director of the Collaborative for Rural Primary Care Research, Education and Practice, and Central Lead for the Rural Residency Planning and Development Technical Assistance Center.

[iii] For the first time, this total also includes students attending rural schools in Puerto Rico, the Bureau of Indian Education, the Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands. Note that, although there are some rural schools in Guam and American Samoa, none of these schools reported enrollment for the 2023-24 school year.

[iv] Personal communication with Julie Wootton-Greener, Public Information Officer, Nevada Department of Education, on February 28, 2025.

[v] Hawaii is excluded from most of the indicators throughout this report because its organization as a single statewide district makes district-level data unavailable for rural communities.

[vi] The majority of this report is conducted at the district level, and so school inclusion or exclusion is based on the NCES locale classification of the entire district.

[vii] Documentation and further explanation about the School Neighborhood Poverty index can be accessed on the National Center for Education Statistics' section for Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Economic/NeighborhoodPoverty

[viii] Data from Ed Data Express only provide counts for school districts that reported an enrollment of at least 3 multilingual learners. This means that the total number of multilingual learners shown here may slightly undercount the total and the percentage shown may be slightly higher than the actual percentage.

[ix] This indicator is not adjusted for geographic cost, which is significant in the case of states like Alaska. However, the teacher salary indicator is adjusted by the Comparable Wage Index for Teachers.

[x] Because the transportation expenditures are lumped together in a single sum, it is possible that some of these costs are related to extracurricular activities or field trips. Unfortunately, it is impossible to separate these out from the basic transportation costs.

[xi] See http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2043 for summary and links to a Charleston Gazette series on school consolidation that won the 2002 Education Writers Association award.

[xii] The National Center for Education Statistics provides clear details on how districts are to report financial data (https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/pdf/2023304_FY21F33_Documentation.pdf). These details specify the following in Part

[xii] "'Special education programs' refers to activities for elementary-secondary students who require assistance to accommodate specific disabilities (program 200). These programs include services related to medical, physical, mental, and psychological disabilities, such as mental retardation, orthopedic impairment, emotional disturbance, developmental delay, specific learning disabilities, hearing and visual impairments, health impairments, and speech or language impairments. Exclude from the reporting in this section programs for services not related to the accommodation of specific disabilities, such as programs for the gifted and talented, alternative/at-risk education programs, and bilingual or English language learner programs." However, this does not guarantee that every district followed these specifications.

[xiii] Some districts that provided salary information (and were thus included in this report's indicator) did not report the number of students on specialized education plans. For consistency, these districts were removed from the totals shown in this table. For this reason, some of the numbers here may be slightly different from the ones for the special education indicator.

[xiv] Personal communication with Julie Wootton-Greener, Public Information Officer, Nevada Department of Education, on February 28, 2025.

[xv] Documentation and further explanation about the Comparable Wage Index For Teachers (CWIFT) can be accessed on the National Center for Education Statistics' section for Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Economic/TeacherWage

[xvi] U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2019 and 2024 Assessments.

[xvii] To preserve confidentiality, Ed Facts only provides a range of the number of graduates instead of an exact number for small schools. In these cases, an estimated number of graduates for each school was interpolated by finding the average number of graduates in all schools for which exact numbers were reported. Because of the skewed distribution of graduation rates, this estimation method is more precise than simply taking the median number of each reported range.

[xviii] This indicator should be treated as a proxy for access to school-based mental health professionals rather than an exact measure of access. In many rural districts, school counselors and school psychologists are stretched thin and must perform a wide range of tasks in addition to those related to student mental health.

[xix] The category of "homeless" is defined in Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act as students "lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. This includes situations where individuals are: sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing or economic hardship; living in motels, hotels, or trailer parks; living in emergency or transitional shelters; or residing in places not designed for sleeping, such as cars or public spaces."

[xx] We estimated this proportion by dividing the number of students attending a public preschool in a rural area by 40% of the total rural children between the ages of 0 and 4. This assumes a roughly uniform distribution across that age range and that there are similar numbers of 3-year-old children who are not yet eligible for preschool and 5-year-old children who are.

[xxi] For rural students per primary care clinician, we worked with Randall Longenecker, M.D., an expert in rural medicine. Dr. Longenecker is the Assistant Dean Emeritus for Rural and Underserved Programs and Professor of Family Medicine at the Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine, Executive Director of the Rural Training Track Collaborative, Associate Project Director of the Collaborative for Rural Primary Care Research, Education and Practice, and Central Lead for the Rural Residency Planning and Development Technical Assistance Center. His lifetime of experience in the field was invaluable in navigating a new dataset to develop the indicator. For example, the multiplier of 0.6 was derived through consulting medical research literature and an iterative look at the data.

[xxii] Ratcliffe, M (Dec 22, 2022). Redefining the urban areas following the 2020 Census. Retrieved online from census.gov/newsroom.

[xxiii] Kirsch, J. L., Grimes, T. O., Roosma, S. K., Walters, A. D., & Blevins, S. (2025). "This is our COVID best": Investigating rural school counselors' work during the pandemic. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *41*(4). https://doi.org/10.26209/JRRE4103

[xxiv] Kirsch, J. L., Grimes, T. O., Roosma, S. K., Walters, A. D., & Blevins, S. (2025). "This is our COVID best": Investigating rural school counselors' work during the pandemic. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*,*41*(4). https://doi.org/10.26209/JRRE4103

[xxv] Monteith, L. L., Holliday, R., Brown, T. L., Brenner, L. A., & Mohatt, N. V. (2021). Preventing suicide in rural communities during the covid 19 pandemic. *The Journal of Rural Health*, *37*(1), 179–184. https://doi.org/10.1111/jrh.12448

[xxvi] Some states like Pennsylvania and Alaska use the term "cyber school." States including Florida, California, and Kansas use the word "virtual school." In Ohio, online charter schools are called e-schools. In this report the terms cyber charter school and virtual charter school are used interchangeably.

[xxvii] Brenner, D. (2021). Toward a rural critical policy analysis. In A. P. Azano, K. Eppley, & C. Biddle (Eds.), *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Rural Education in the United States* (pp. 30–42). Bloomsbury Academic.

[xxviii] Pennsylvania Office of the Auditor General. (2025, February). Performance audit of five cyber charter schools: Revenues, expenditures, and fund balances, July 1, 2020–June 30, 2023. https://www.paauditor.gov/audits/commonwealth-charter-academy-pennsylvania-leadership-charter- school-insight-pa-cyber-charter-school-pennsylvania-cyber-charter-school-and-reach-cyber-charter-school- performance-audit-for/

[xxix] Nowicki, J. M. (2022). K-12 education: Department of education should help states address student testing issues and financial risks associated with virtual schools, particularly virtual charter schools. Report to Congressional Requesters. GAO-22-104444. US Government Accountability Office.

[xxx] Adamson, F., & Galloway, M. (2019). Education privatization in the United States: Increasing saturation and segregation. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *27*(129). https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.4857

[xxxi] Wolf, K., Kalinich, M. K., & DeJarnatt, S. L. (2016). Charting school discipline. *The Urban Lawyer*, *48*(1), 1-25.

[xxxii] Wis. Stat. Ann. § 118.40

[xxxiii] Nowicki, J. M. (2022). K-12 education: Department of education should help states address student testing issues and financial risks associated with virtual schools, particularly virtual charter schools. Report to Congressional Requesters. GAO-22-104444. US Government Accountability Office.

[xxxiv] Or. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 338.115

[xxxv] Or. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 338.035

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WHY rural MATTERS 2025

PEOPLE, PLACE, & POSSIBILITY